

# Dance and Immigration

A Symposium Beyond Boundaries



New York Public  
Library for the  
Performing Arts

# Welcome



On behalf of the the staff of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division I would like to welcome you all to today's symposium, which celebrates the culmination of the work completed by our fifth cohort of Dance Research Fellows. Neither the fellowship nor the symposium look like they have in the past, but the spirit of creative and intellectual inquiry of our fellows remains as fervent as ever.

The theme of this year's symposium is dance and immigration. As a non-verbal artform dance has enshrined and protected the unique and special cultural modes of expression of different communities and has also expanded and adapted its vocabulary across centuries to redefine our sense of self through the intersectionality of multiple cultures. Equally though, these unique cultural markers have historically been appropriated, leading to the erasure of an important range of diverse voices and the flawed logic that significant dance movements originate from singular creative points rather than an awareness of the communal and generational contributions that have pushed the field forward. The presentations today run the gamut in exploring various sides of this complex subject and I hope that they will inspire further research and reflection.

Our building has been closed to the public since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 so the structure of the fellowship had

to be reconfigured with remote work in mind. Each fellow partnered with a dance librarian who shepherded them through the six months of virtual research. I would like to take this opportunity to formally acknowledge Jennifer Eberhardt, Phil Karg, Cassie Mey, Daisy Pommer, Erik Stolarski and Arlene Yu for all of their efforts.

The reality of the Dance Research Fellowship relies on the generosity of our donors and I am incredibly grateful to our longtime partners at the Geraldine Stutz Trust, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and the Frederick Loewe Foundation for their continued support. I would additionally like to express my gratitude to the Nash Family Foundation for their contribution and also to Allen Greenberg for his gift. And, as ever, I am indebted to the Committee for the Jerome Robbins Dance Division for their vision and advocacy of this program.

Wherever you are today I hope that you are safe and please know that we cannot wait for the opportunity to safely welcome you back to the Library. In the interim rest assured that our work will not stop. The history of dance is our particular charge and we will always steward and cherish it.

**Linda Murray**  
**Curator, Jerome Robbins Dance Division**

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The 2020 Dance Research Fellowships were made possible through the generosity of the Geraldine Stutz Trust, Allen Greenberg, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Frederick Loewe Foundation, the Nash Family Foundation, and the Committee for the Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

*Front and back cover photos: La Argentinita in a gypsy dance, 1940. Photo by Carl Van Vechten. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.*



Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Committee for the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, I am once again thrilled to welcome you to this Dance Division symposium, where our fifth cohort of Fellows will present their scholarship and work drawn from research in the collection housed here at the The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

In the early days of the shutdown precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Linda Murray, Allen Greenberg, and I had a call to discuss the viability of undertaking the 2020 fellowship with no physical access to the collections. Linda felt strongly and spoke persuasively about the division's ability to pivot to virtual access. She also stressed that the uncertainty before us made the continuation of the program even more important in light of the stipendiary support it would provide the selected Fellows in the absence of other sources of income. As we will see today, Linda and her team are to be commended for the work that they did to facilitate the research of the Fellows and bring us to this virtual symposium. While challenging by every measure, they have made it look easy.

The Fellows Program is an initiative of the Committee that arose from a desire to shed light upon and enhance awareness of one of the world's leading collections related to dance. By so doing, we aspired to encourage greater use. In a few short years, not only have we achieved our initial goals, but we have also experienced enhanced exposure across a vast array of traditional and social

media platforms alongside increased usage through the NYPL website. Fellows have or are in the process of publishing articles and books based on their work. Others have been called upon to speak about their scholarship to a wide range of audiences. The Fellows Program has accomplished something beyond our wildest aspirations.

With all that has challenged our nation and the world over the last four years, the topics for this and the next cohort of Fellows could not be more prescient. Dance, along with all the performing arts and culture, will be critical to healing us individually and as a nation. It will once again remind us how much unites us in comparison to what divides us. It will also shine light, as we will see today, on how blurred the boundaries are that define nationalities, heritage and difference. We are a nation of immigrants knit together by that very fact. As is inscribed on the Great Seal of the United States, "*E pluribus unum*"; *Out of many, one*.

I am sure that you will find this symposium rich in content, new scholarship and new thinking. I encourage each of you to think of people who should apply for our next cohort of Fellows. Please spread the word in advance of the online application deadline which will go live in April.

With my best wishes,

**William H. Wright II**  
**Vice Chair, Committee for the**  
**Jerome Robbins Dance Division**

# Schedule

## 10 – 10:45 AM

Ninotchka Bennahum

Border Crossings: Encarnación López Júlvez, Léonide Massine Studies in Transnationalism, Self-Exile, and Art, 1930 – 1945

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## 11 – 11:45 AM

Phil Chan

Dreams of the Orient

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## 12 – 1 PM

Sergey Konaev

Teaching to Survive: Immigrant Female Dance Schools and Classes in the 1930s-1950s (France and USA)

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## 1 – 2 PM

Lunch Break

## 2 – 3 PM

Kiri Avelar

Descubriendo Latinx: The Hidden Text in American Modern Dance

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## 3 – 4 PM

Yusha-Marie Sorzano & Ferne Louanne Regis

Investigating Process: An Immigrant Choreographer's Journey to Discovery

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## 4 – 5 PM

Pam Tanowitz

everything is true

# Ninotchka Bennahum



## **Border Crossings: Encarnación López Júlvez, Léonide Massine Studies in Transnationalism, Self-Exile, and Art, 1930 – 1945**

Bennahum's starting point is the Spanish Civil War (1936 – 1939) and the rise of fascism in Western and Eastern Europe that threatened the lives of millions, in particular those deemed “valuable individuals,” i.e., artists and intellectuals who escaped, oftentimes under cover of night. Some were forced to adopt temporary, émigré status. For the great majority, permanent exile and loss of homeland forced a reckoning with new national identities and, consequently new frameworks in which to experiment with exilic modernist experience. This was a life on the run, even if and when one returned “home,” as home was now changed and one's prewar artistic ties no longer existed.

An inextricable bond existed between the noted Leftist and anti-fascist Spanish dance artist La Argentinita and Russian émigré modernist Léonide Massine. Their artistry, a decade-long that flourished between 1935 and 1945, refocuses and deepens our critical understanding of Spanish modernism as embedded in their choreographic process. How exile shaped these artistic processes and the effect it had in shaping the contemporary trajectory of their aesthetic alliance into global forms of contemporary ballet and Roma-Flamenco is at the heart of Bennahum's research.

American dance was shaped profoundly by the brutality of the twentieth century. The inextricable link between immigration – border crossings – and exilic experience produced some of the most important moments in American contemporary performance. Bennahum's central premise – physical crossings – resonates with the most basic principles of contemporary ballet: spatiality, temporality, and resistant acts of performance. The conditions of modernity – movement, transfer, displacement, fracture – are etched into the wartime choreography of La Argentinita and Léonide Massine.

# Phil Chan



## **Dreams of the Orient**

With *Dreams of the Orient*, arts educator and advocate Phil Chan explores how “the Orient” has been portrayed on the ballet stage from 1600 – 2020 within a larger geo-political context, while highlighting the problems today with presenting an outdated and exclusively Eurocentric view of Asia and Asians in classical ballet for a diverse American audience. In the absence of choreographers of Asian descent, the imaginations of ballet choreographers with limited knowledge produced dancing images of Asia filled with exquisite harem spectacles, romantic Hindu temple dancing girls, demure geishas, dramatic suicides, unbridled sexuality, savage barbarism, opium fantasies, shirtless men, and heathen mysticism that defied Christian logic — in a dynamic that exists to this day. In practice, this scholarship informs larger racial equity work in the field: Chan’s sophomore book on the subject with a survey of over 80 orientalist ballets (projected early 2021 release), a dynamic timeline outlining orientalism in ballet hosted at [www.yellowface.org](http://www.yellowface.org) as a free digital resource for educators, scholars, advocates, and dance lovers, and the launch of an Asian American choreographic incubator, aimed at providing commissions, resources, and visibility for emerging Asian American dance artists to tell their own stories.

# Sergey Konaev



## **Teaching to Survive: Immigrant Female Dance Schools and Classes in the 1930s-1950s (France and USA)**

Sergey Konaev's project documents the teaching activities of prominent immigrant female dancers as part of the broader women's struggle for self-determination following their retirement from the stage. Between the 1930s and 1960s, the female performers who faced the harshest post-retirement realities came from the Russian Imperial Theaters. They were pushed out of Russia following the 1917 Revolution. At the end of their dancing careers, many of these artists fell from high-paid international stardom into the lower depths of refugee existence — often without the needed language skills, financial aid, and access to social or legal services. For some of them, the hopes not only to find a safe new home but to become a founder of the national ballet were destroyed in 1930s because of the outbreak of World War II. The situation was especially dire for progressive female artists — those who did not want to sacrifice themselves to patriarchal patronage. To survive, immigrant artists taught privately, opened dance schools, and advertised private lessons in newspapers. The huge impact of this activity on the development of Western ballet is reflected in the biographies of the most significant choreographers and dancers of the second half of the 20th century, but the fact is that their imminent immigrant teachers, mostly women, are still invisible. The project aims for the publication of key archival documents with an introduction and commentary.

# Kiri Avelar



## **Descubriendo Latinx: The Hidden Text in American Modern Dance**

Kiri Avelar's work positions the invisibilized presence of Latinx in the early American modern dance canon as central to the retelling of our absented dance histories. Avelar's project identifies specific works by pioneers of early American modern dance that pulled on the cultural practices of the Latinx diaspora, and investigates through research and creative practice how those seeds and appropriations continue to be generative and foundational to modern dance. Specifically, she examines choreographic works that Doris Humphrey, Martha Graham, and Lester Horton created in their post-Denishawn careers, which continued a Denishawn legacy of pulling from the indigenous, Mexican, and Spanish artistic traditions. In conversation with Humphrey, Graham, and Horton, Avelar also examines the specific choreographic works of pioneers José Limón and Katherine Dunham that investigated hybrid identity and the diversity within the Latinx diaspora. Avelar further explores how Limón and Dunham themselves created from a space of simultaneous cultural traditions that expertly infused the beginnings of modern dance in America and *las Américas* with myriad styles. As an interdisciplinary artist, educator, and scholar, Avelar focuses her work around collaborative community expression designed to further provoke thought around the artistic, physical, and cultural borderless experience of Latinx artists in America. Her work immerses audiences in unique spaces to explore themes of *ruido*, *Mestiza Consciousness*, intersectionality, migration, and *Latinidades* through film, embodied oral history performances, interactive screendance, and soundscapes.

# Yusha-Marie Sorzano & Ferne Louanne Regis



## **Investigating Process: An Immigrant Choreographer's Journey to Discovery**

With specific focus on the period 1960-2020, Yusha-Marie Sorzano and Ferne Louanne Regis peruse the staged work of selected choreographers with the intent to chronicle the iconography and movement employed when themes of hierarchy, rebellion, and/or hope as they are presented in relation to minority and immigrant groups. Sorzano and Regis map these representations in an effort to determine whether a common standard exists or whether nuanced variations persist throughout the period under examination. These findings will be used as a point of entry into Sorzano's interpretation of said themes as she continues to craft *Threat*, her newest work-in-development.

# Pam Tanowitz



## everything is true

Pam Tanowitz investigates three distinct tracks in researching for her next dance, *Song of Songs*. The first track is a study of Jewish folk dances. Learning various dances from archival records and sharing them with her dancers, Tanowitz and her company absorb the steps and patterns into their bodies. She examines these dances outside of their political and geographic context, investigating the culture embedded within the dances. By reducing the steps to their base aesthetic, she reveals how they communicate with ballet and her own movement ideas, giving her the ability to reweave them into a contemporary context.

The second aspect is research into Jewish choreographers and how they relate to their Jewish identity in their work. Examining the dances of Anna Sokolow — including her *Song of Songs* — David Gordon's *My Folks*, along with dances of Anna Halprin and Hanya Holm; reading books by Fred Berk, Dvora Lapson, *Dancing Jewish* by Rebecca Rossen, *How to Do Things with Dance* by Rebekah Kowal, the personal papers of Fred Berk, Jerome Robbins, and Hanya Holm.

At this midway point in the research process, Tanowitz is still deciphering the personal importance of this information. And the third and final tract for Tanowitz is introspective — processing all this research and considering what it all has to do with her. How, ultimately, will she express her Jewish identity?

# Schedule a virtual class visit to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts!



## We offer

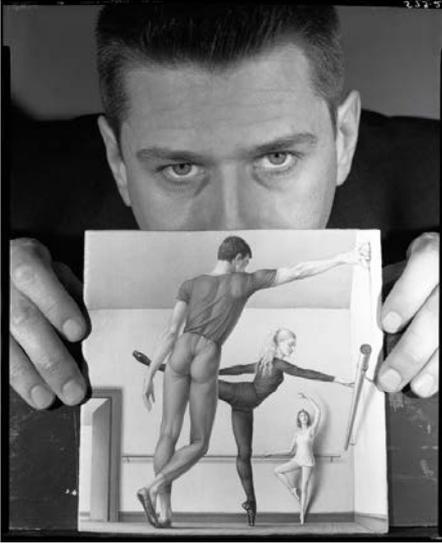
- Research assistance and catalog instruction
- Curriculum guides
- Virtual class visits, including use of moving image and audio materials, to complement classroom or studio learning
- Online exhibition tours with an emphasis on project-based learning

## Contact

Kathleen Leary  
Education Coordinator  
[kathleenleary@nypl.org](mailto:kathleenleary@nypl.org)  
[nypl.org/lpa](http://nypl.org/lpa)

# Upcoming Virtual Dance Programs

The Library for the Performing Arts is proud to offer free public programming. Due to COVID-19, all programs are currently virtual. Once registered for an event, you will receive further instructions about attending closer to the date. All events are closed-captioned and/or offer real-time transcription.



*Transmissions*: Nick Mauss in conversation with Hilton Als, Emily Coates, and Marci Kwon

**Thurs, Feb 18 | 5:30 PM**

On the occasion of the publication of Nick Mauss' *Transmissions*, based on his exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Mauss is joined by author, critic, and curator Hilton Als, dancer, choreographer, and writer Emily Coates, and art historian Marci Kwon to discuss *Transmissions*, and the construction of histories through processes of writing, performance, and exhibition-making.

## A Memorial for Sally Banes

**Fri, Feb 26 | 2 – 6 PM**

Please join the Dance Division in celebrating the life and work of the singular Sally Banes with tributes from her fellow dance writers and scholars as well as family and friends.



*Image: Sally Banes at the Society of Dance History Scholars conference, 2000. Photographer unknown. Jerome Robbins Dance Division*

# Upcoming Virtual Dance Programs

## The Centennial of Alicia Alonso: A Conversation on Cuban Ballet Past, Present, and Future

**Mon, Apr 19 | 5:30 PM**

To mark the centennial year of Cuban prima ballerina assoluta Alicia Alonso (born December 21, 1920) the Dance Division will gather an esteemed panel to discuss her life and legacy as well as the future of Cuban ballet.



*Image: Alicia Alonso as Odette in Swan Lake, 1940.  
Photo by Maurice Seymour. Jerome Robbins Dance Division.*

Visit us online at [nysl.org/lpa](https://nysl.org/lpa) or call  
917-ASK-NYPL for more detailed information.

### Ongoing Film Series



## David Vaughan's The Dance Historian Is In

**Last Wednesday of the Month | 1 PM**

David Vaughan was the archivist of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and author of *Merce Cunningham/65 Years* and *Frederick Ashton and His Ballets*. From 2012-2017, Vaughan held monthly screenings of his favorite dance films and videos from our collection. Vaughan passed away in October 2017, and the Jerome Robbins Dance Division continues screenings in his honor with guest hosts.

**Feb 24 | Triwi Harjito**

**Mar 24 | Dante Puleio**

**Apr 28 | Dean Moss**

**May 26 | Sachiyo Ito**

**June 30 | Ballet Hispánico**

*Image: Pauline Koner and José Limón in  
"Moor's Pavane," 1957. Photo by Roger Wood.  
Jerome Robbins Dance Division.*



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