

Performing Arts - Alexandra James

The artists represented in the category of dance were broad and diverse in range, artistic perspective, intention, and together, painted a lovely landscape that I really enjoyed getting to know. I was curious what themes might arise from the pool, how Utah dance artists are impacted by place and space, and how varied lived experiences are responding to their needs, and the calls to and from the field more broadly. In evaluating, I considered applicants through three frames: (1) The rigor of research, (2) the (written) articulation of work, process, and practice, which revealed to me generally, (3) the excellence of their work. I found these elements not only demonstrated the artist's current level of expertise and commitment, but also the potential for future development and contribution to the field of dance in Utah and beyond.

Excellence, we can affirm, is subjective, often framed/upheld by institutional contexts which can perpetuate and reinforce exclusivity, particularly when tied to criteria that favor Eurocentric forms of practice and knowledge, or achievements upheld by institutional hierarchies. What constitutes excellence can be heavily influenced by those who already hold power, limiting access to institutional support for emerging artists, or practitioners who exist (by choice or otherwise) outside the canon, who are making beyond existing structures of excellence.

The work I uplifted for this award range in dance practices dealing with improvisation, technology, experimentation, risk taking, foundation of practice, and research across multiple forms and processes. Each awardee clearly articulated their work, and demonstrated significant skill in its manifestation.

Rooted in social experimentation and the investigation of community, effort and personal mining, and the belief that dance and movement can affect the wellbeing of society, is **Halie Bahr's** choreographic inquiry. Her work has a clear and direct relationship to her written narratives and teaching practice, demonstrating a throughline of inquiry from research to choreographic fruition and community engagement.

Breakin', founded at an intersection of marginalization; positive & innovative physicality and joy, is at the heart of **Bryan Boyer's** work. Here, the choreographic eye and acumen is rooted in improvisation, fast paced call and response skill, and a uniquely honed style. Hip Hop, and its first physical manifestation, Breakin', is rooted in social spaces and as a practice, requires dedication and deep training and the ability to transform, transmute and (re)define itself time after time. I see Bryan's effort

and persistence in making/performing in each battle (performance & freestyle choreography).

In the work of **Ya-Ya Fairley**, we listen and witness their necessity to be seen, to be considered, to be visible and protected. The work demonstrates clear embodiment of thought and research through different adaptations and performance modes. Their making has an arc, as we see a responsiveness to the pandemic, technology, and adaptation as a highly politicized body navigating their intersectionality relating to race, gender and sexuality. Their written work is well articulated, and the through line to the work is demonstrable.

Jyothsna Sainath works within the tradition of Bharatanatyam, thinking through what contemporary thought and research can shift in classical, deeply historical precedents of cultural identity and practice. Jyothsna uplifts self expression and asks questions about gender and evolution, carrying forward technique and rigor.

The theatrical elements and craft of **Shelby Taylor's** work was considered and well wrought. The use of technology and choreography to consider gaze, narrative and movement invention demonstrates research and consideration. She narrates clear commitment to community and home-making for Dance artists in Utah that feels driven by empathy and thought.

The depth of a work is often seen in its layers of meaning, the complexity of its themes, and its capacity to challenge, move, or transform the artists themselves, their immediate communities and the Field more broadly. I was moved by the work of these five artists, and feel privileged to have experienced them.