



laboratory for  
**artistic  
intelligence**

Reimagining an Institution:  
Dancemakers and Beyond

**August 2023**

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# Introduction

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At the end of 2021, the Board of Directors for Dancemakers engaged the Laboratory for Artistic Intelligence to help determine the future of the organization's resources. Together, the Board and Artistic Intelligence decided **to engage artists in creative residencies to research and develop the future direction** of Dancemakers, including a long-term leadership strategy.

The services provided by Artistic Intelligence included:

1. Working with Dancemaker's new Artistic Producer to develop an interim programming strategy, including drafting two calls for proposals and guest curators;
2. Recruiting artist-researchers based on Dancemaker's *Values in Transformation* (p.4);
3. Developing research residencies to inform Dancemakers' organizational development;
4. Designing and leading 'The Garden,' a leadership residency to look at the perspectives of executives on challenges and crucial shifts for contemporary institutions;
5. Supporting the artist-researchers in their work over a period of 6-8 months;
6. Planning a series of culminating research activities as public presentations;
7. Submitting a final report and recommendations for the Board (this document).

As part of the final report, the public presentation deck ("**Reimagining an Institution: Dancemakers**"), **The Garden residency** materials, and the **Interim Update** to the Board are enclosed in the Appendix.

# Context

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## **Excerpts from the Dancemakers website:**

On February 1st 2021 the then-serving board of Dancemakers (Hari Krishnan, Andrea Roberts, Louis-Michel Taillefer and Rick Wolfe) stepped down and elected the following individuals to the board of directors: Robert Abubo, Kate Hilliard, Sebastian Mena and Simon Rossiter and Brodie Stevenson. This re-population of the board was in response to a letter signed by over 280 community members concerned by the announcement of Dancemakers' closure by July 2021. While this community action and the conversations which followed led to this board transition, the five people who stepped forward to serve on the board were not the initiators of this action.

This new working board consists of a group of professionals from the dance industry who share a belief that Dancemakers could continue—in some form—to be a meeting place for artistic creation, dissemination, and activity. The Board is committed to initiating an inclusive and equitable community consultation process that will allow for a diverse spectrum of voices to shape the future of Dancemakers by gathering perspectives on what dance communities might need and how Dancemakers can serve those needs.

The five current board members stepped forward out of a common desire to navigate possible futures for Dancemakers as an organization that serves dance performance and creative practice. We are cognizant that we, collectively, represent overlapping and common points of view. We are calling for and encouraging diverse voices of interest to participate in this re-envisioning of Dancemakers.

**It is fundamental to this board that, whatever our actions may be on behalf of Dancemakers, we will endeavor to do so in a transparent and equitable manner and in consultation with the needs of the broader ecology of dance in this city.**

# Research Values

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The organizational research activities were guided from the start by the following **Values of Transformation** developed by Dancemaker's Board:

- Decentralized, transparent, collaborative, and committee-based decision making.
- Actively inclusive with particular care towards reconciling the historic harms and exclusion faced by Black, Indigenous, and POC artists at Dancemakers.
- Participatory community involvement and accountability.
- Artist and dance community centered.
- Bold, outside-the-box thinking to challenge the status quo.
- Dancemakers will be a "centre" for creation without a physical base. We will continue to explore what this means.

In an important directional shift, Dancemakers will distance itself from the word "contemporary" and its Euro-centric implications of form - we're interested in a broadly defined exploration of form and practice that focuses on innovation and deep inquiry across diverse communities of practice and genre.

The values above had been published on the Dancemaker's website (<https://dancemakers.org/artistic-mission-values>) and were listed as the criteria for acceptance in the contract between Dancemakers and Artistic Intelligence.

## Interim Programs

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As the work began, the Board requested that Artistic Intelligence and the new Artistic Producer, Cara Spooner, optimize some spending in year 1 of the work so as to show to funders that work is progressing and the organization was resuming regular activities again.

Accordingly, Artistic Intelligence worked with the new Artistic Producer for the first several months in 2022 to develop the initial calls for curators and expressions of interests in working with Dancemakers. These calls for participation were designed with multiple ends in mind:

- Inviting diverse, underrepresented, and innovative dance artists to make themselves known to Dancemakers, as well as inviting the community to nominate peers that they believe Dancemakers should invite to consider being a Guest Curator;
- Getting a sense of who is interested in working with Dancemakers;
- Ensuring that Dancemakers' operating funds would be circulating in dance communities and help support people's livelihoods in the midst of the pandemic;
- Signalling to the community that the new Board of Dancemakers has re-established operations and the company is alive, listening, and looking out;
- Working out the new logistics of working with curators and artists after the closure of Dancemakers' permanent theatre and studio spaces;
- Sketching out a new artistic community relations approach that is expansive, inclusive, and meaningful.

The process also gave the Artistic Producer and Artistic Intelligence broad exposure to dance intelligence - current impulses, new articulations, and different values and preoccupations in circulation in the dance communities.

# Leadership Residency

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With interim programming underway, and to inform the progressive stance outlined in the new Values of Transformation and better understand the challenges that contemporary cultural leaders were facing, a leadership residency was organized.

**The Garden** was framed as a creative residency for organizational leaders - a chance to be with a few others in playful, inventive ways, to deconstruct and reimagine what it means to be a progressive cultural institution today. Over 4 days in the summer of 2022, six cultural executives gathered in a semi-synchronous format through shared voice notes.

In the last few years, the bar for equity, diversity and inclusion has been raised in our personal desires, in our relations, and in the public eye. Artists and colleagues are more explicit and confident in their expectations of organizations and leaders.

Leaders leading live, living systems -- actively growing, dying, nourishing, blooming, weedy, over / under watered.... What is on your mind? What is the work?

How do you repair, reimagine and restructure a car while driving it at the same time? And while it is full of other people?

What became clear in this fluid space of leaders reflecting on their roles, was that enacting inclusion by looking at who we 'call' to participate, and how we program, is *only the baseline* (the minimum starting point); it is not the end. The Garden residency ultimately articulated the guiding research question for Dancemakers: **What is a 'next generation' dance institution?**

## Leadership Residency CONT'D

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The artistic disciplines represented were diverse, no two organizations were alike. In this peer-to-peer space, observations about the challenges for contemporary leadership emerged:

- Questioning how to operate with courage and from one's best values rather than in fear
- What support looks like for organizations and leaders being scrutinized
- Noting the fear of getting things wrong
- The pressure to get things right
- The pressure to show up "well"
- "It's so difficult it doesn't get talked about"
- "If folks aren't empathetic to your experience as a human trying, they will really judge you and it can stop or freeze you."
- Meeting people in the room, not what they didn't know or what they didn't do before
- Needing younger mentors and older mentors
- Making space for everyone's intertextuality in lived experience
- "Where do we meet people when we are not in rage or in action?"
- Everyone including oneself is responsible for one's safety

## Research Activities: Artist Residencies

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To deepen the question of ‘the contemporary progressive institution,’ four artist-researchers were invited to work with Artistic Intelligence in a series of separate but linked residencies:

- **Ravyn Wngz**, dance artist, Black and trans activist
- **Pam Tzeng**, dance/interdisciplinary artist, transformative justice practitioner-in-training
- **Ange Loft**, Kanien'kehá:ka artist, community engagement specialist
- **Shaista Latif**, theatre/interdisciplinary artist, equity consultant

Their biographies are included in the Appendix.

The artists were invited to develop research that would advance their own artistic interests, and help inform how Dancemakers could best enact its mission in alignment with its new progressive values.

# Research Design

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To mitigate harm from doing ‘equity, diversity and inclusion’ work, to produce useful outcomes while protecting space for artistic inquiry and expression, the research residencies were designed according to Artistic Intelligence’s working principles:

- 1. Artistic research is led by the artist’s impulses.** The creative brief is created with Artistic Intelligence. But the artist ultimately decides and is expected to frame, filter and follow their impulses. It wouldn’t be artistic research otherwise.
- 2. The artist agrees that this is shared research.** As with any other artistic project, they retain the right to decide what and how much they share. But they acknowledge and accept the responsibility of sharing intentions, progress, observations and outcomes with Artistic Intelligence as this is the research activity for which they are being engaged.
- 3. The responsibility of interpreting the research for the client lies with Artistic Intelligence.** To make space for the artist and the research to *do what they need to do and go where it needs to go*, it is the responsibility of Artistic Intelligence to listen, understand, analyze, interpret and derive insights for Dancemakers. The artist-researcher is free to make their research as legible or useful as they wish. They are free to interface with Dancemakers staff directly. But the responsibility of ‘meeting expectations’ or providing actionable recommendations lies with Artistic Intelligence. This creates freedom for artists to lead with artistic impulses, which is the type of insights and perspectives we are interested in.

## Artist-Researcher: Ravyn Wngz

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Ravyn Wngz delved into her experiences of racism and transphobia in dance training and professional dance spaces, and how that led to her co-creating the *Right to Dance* project with artists kumari giles and Sze-Yang Ade-Lam.

Ravyn emphasized the need to understand Dancemaker's position in the Ontario dance milieu. The organization may be smaller in comparison with other cultural giants, and it lacks a repertoire, but Dancemakers has left influential legacies. With Dancemakers on their CV, artists and artistic leaders have gone on to shape not only the definition of dance excellence, but dance training and dance thinking.

Ravyn pointed to the importance of leadership being able to name and describe stories of inequity, discrimination, and exclusion within their organization and/or practices, in order to be equipped to change them. If you can't see it, if you can't describe it, how can you change it? When we know something ourselves, in our bodies, whether it's because we were told a story that we can recall, or because it is a story that has happened to us, that embodied knowledge allows us to be wise, to be creative, and to be helpful.

Ravyn's research also offered the metaphor of the Underground Railroad to frame the work of abolition, inclusion, and institutional change: There is risk. Each person does what is appropriate for them in their being and in their context. While one person's offering may be water and bread, another's role in the liberation movement may be to bring someone over a long and difficult border. Still another's role may be to overturn a legal ruling. Liberation, community, and social transformation are achieved through many actions, large and small.

Among her many prompts for organizational leaders, Ravyn asks:

*What values and ideas do I hold and how are they held in my body and social location? How does this generate and limit my understanding and actions?*

*As I begin to hold new values and different ideas, how do I hold them in my body and how do they interact with my social location?*

## Artist-Researcher: Shaista Latif

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Shaista Latif conducted their research through the creation of a new Working Class Lab. Applicants were recruited through Dancemaker's newsletter, social media, and word-of-mouth. Shaista received over 120 applications, which she personally reviewed. She then met individually with 50 shortlisted applicants for 1-hour each. This took tremendous strength, care, labour, time and skill, as "talking about class can be awfully activating."

Meanwhile Shaista also undertook the labour of self-advocating for an increase to her research budget to allow the Working Class Lab to create 8 spots in the inaugural cohort (up from the previously envisioned 6). Cara Spooner, Dancemakers Artistic Producer, was able to meet that request for additional funds which enabled Shaista to curate a more diverse first cohort of Working Class Lab participants.

Shaista's work makes clear that artistic spaces are not safe for working class people to speak to their needs. There is so much fear, shame, uncertainty, trauma, and wariness of how and if things can change. The Working Class Lab was the first time that participants (and applicants) were invited and able to speak to their situations, share stories, unpack and make sense of their experiences.

Shaista points to how artistic spaces, including funding bodies, invite people to signal their gender, sexuality, and cultural background, but not economic means. And yet, class and money underpin so many of our choices, limitations, opportunities, and resources. Might class be the canary in the coalmine? The ability to speak honestly about power and opportunities is made meaningful by being willing to talk plainly about money (and one's family's money).

The Working Class Lab has been a private space for working class artists to speak to one another. By all accounts, this was the first time that they were asked and felt they could honestly unpack questions about class and money:

*Can you afford to say no? When was the last time you were seduced by greed? How do shame and guilt play a role in maintaining capitalism? When did you first become aware of your class position? What do you wish people would understand about your identity as a working class person? What does money represent for you?*

## Artist-Researcher: Pam Tzeng

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Pam Tzeng came to the work of conflict transformation through a journey of healing after experiencing harm in a white-led dance organization. Her work has been motivated by what she sees as “pain rooted in not being able to meet conflict: To see it and experience it in a generative way [the old adage of ‘every challenge is an opportunity’] because the pedagogy of western colonial dance shapes one’s bodies and embodiment in specific ways.”

Pam points to ballet, modern, contemporary or concert dance training generally in how they instill an ethic and aesthetic of surrender and silence. Dancers are professionalized in a culture of appeasement. As dance artists, Pam asks, “how do we empower our bodies to feel able and safe enough to exercise choice, agency, and to have more collective intervention (prevention) capacity? How do we practice becoming skilful so that we may meet conflict with more ease?” Referring back to The Garden Residency, how do we unfreeze, how do we not become locked into an unbalanced dynamic? When risk, conflict, and crises arise, how do we proceed not from fear but from our better values, from a generative imagination?

Contracts are a critical components of how any organization enacts its values. All the artist-researchers suggest, contracts are under-developed and under-used in their imaginative, creative, generative and liberatory potential. We can consciously articulate agreements, Pam advises, not for policing or control, but for accountability and to describe our aspirations.

In this residency, Pam brought in learnings from her ongoing collaboration with Bianca Guimarães de Manuel and their research focused on developing embodied, anti-oppressive ways of making and relating through praxis. Pam offered artists a score to think through how to develop working agreements between artists and collaborators. This offering is rooted in peer-to-peer agreements, but can be extrapolated and expanded on to develop agreements between individuals and the institution. Her ongoing research asks:

*How does an organization meet an artist where they are at? In the face of organizational pressures, what agreements, language, reference points and values need to be present to act in right relations with artists?*

## Artist-Researcher: Ange Loft

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Ange Loft joined the research cohort to research and propose some ways that institutions like Dancemakers might decolonize their organizational structures and processes from an Indigenous and ecological perspective. Ange's research began with a review of literature about Dancemakers for context. Ange also drew inspiration from a guidebook published by Dr. Max Liboiron's Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR), an interdisciplinary natural and social science lab space dedicated to good land relations.

In her research, Ange chose to focus on seasons and cycles for anchor institutions. Drawing from her other practices, Ange created a land-based research process to help organizations understand how, where, and when to situate the work of outreach, planning, development, production, presentation, reflection and re-seeding. In this work, she contrasts natural time (events and activities because it's that time of the year in nature), ceremonial time (events and activities that are symbolic for communities), personal time (events and activities that are important for personal reasons) and capital production time (events and activities that make and exchange money/capital). The cyclical arts-based research process includes walking through the Kanien'kehá:ka Cycle of Ceremonies, and investigating the rhythms, rituals, and energies of diverse dance makers.

It's a way to approach planning that considers the whole person, and positions organizations to be in right relations with people and the land. When the natural, ceremonial, personal and capital production cycles are (better) aligned, we experience wellness. We feel in balance. Anchor organizations have the capacity to influence the rhythm of work (and life) cycles in communities. Like large rocks or power boats in a river, activities (e.g. seasonal programs, festivals, calls for submissions) by anchor organizations change the flow of energies for many people.

Ultimately, Ange's research asks: *What is the diversity of work, positionalities, and obligations that let us "stand with" one another as we pursue good land relations? What would make Dancemakers a better settler-run organization, host and neighbour? Do you have suggestions for Dancemakers to show Reciprocity?*

## Common Values

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Looking at the work of the Guest Curators and the diverse artists and programming they had elected to introduce to Dancemakers, the following values were emphasized:

Care, pleasure, comfort	Surprises	Looking at the practices that sustain patriarchal ideations	In a liberal, capitalist, and settler colonial society
Critical feminist perspectives	The longest way round is the shortest way home	Healing wisdoms	Making visible
Ethical creation that responds to the current moment	The politics of reproduction	Harm reduction	Recognizing how the body is a frequent site of violence & erasure
A product of my environment	The vibration of dancers	A structure that can move through time	Activating spaces
How to hold different lenses	Communal spaces where music and people are as one	How culturally-specific dance styles are curated alongside western dance	
Invigorate each other's work	Repertoire	Reminding the public that what dance gives can also be received	

# Community Recommendations

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In conversation with community and in consultation with the artist-researchers and Guest Curators, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Beyond equity, diversity and inclusion, we value a Dancemakers that is decolonizing, abolitionist, embodied, artistic, joyful, supportive, decentralizing and socially, ecologically and historically conscious.
2. The Board must reflect the plurality desired on stage, backstage, in artistic development and in audiences, including people of diverse racial and socio-economic backgrounds and living with disabilities.
3. This work must be embodied and carried out by bodies of colour and disabled bodies.
4. We affirm that the approach of working with a small changing group of diverse curators is the best way we currently know to be able to respond to diversity in dance.
5. The new Dancemakers reduces silos and supports dance outside of Toronto, especially connecting artists and audiences beyond the downtown core.
6. Curation should be mindful of social events, the planet, and histories.
7. Dancemakers needs to support different approaches to dance.
8. The definition of contemporary dance is evolving, including interdisciplinarity, dance made by different bodies, and 'sited' or situationist work (non-traditional spaces and contexts).
9. The goal for audiences is that people feel excited for the people and work that Dancemakers presents.
10. The goal is for dance makers to feel supported and joyful in their work.

# Community Feedback

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Community research, including conversations with previous staff and Board members, yielded important insights on crucial challenges for Dancemakers - indeed, all cultural institutions in Canada - to overcome:

- 1. Power imbalances create deep seismic disturbances. Institutions need skilled people and mechanisms (respected processes) for addressing issues fairly, productively and progressively.** Over many years, the dance community has noted the lack of transparency in Dancemakers' decisions, particularly when When people with (perceived) power are doing wrong or badly, what recourse do people with less (perceived) power have to be heard, and for wrongdoings or bad choices to be addressed? To whom is leadership morally bound to listen when they can't see or don't understand? If the Board governs executive staff, who governs the Board? Drawing on the models of fair and equitable peer-to-peer working agreements that artist researcher Pam Tzeng has presented, what kinds of new frameworks and working agreements are needed between staff, community and governance?
- 2. The inequitable burden of being responsive to communities needs to be addressed (re-distributed, re-collectivized): For white-founded downtown cultural institutions, community responsibility tends to refer to responsibility to 'the artistic community.' For IBPOC-founded organizations, community means community populations, including artists *and* the old, the young, the people who live beyond the downtown core, the vulnerable and the systemically oppressed.** It is a privilege to be able to emphasize art without considering community populations – to favour the few over the collective many. It is *white* privilege, and *class* privilege, to be able to do this unabashedly. Among IBPOC organizations, there are many exemplars of small institutions that support artistic excellence, community development, and public engagement *simultaneously*. This vibrancy produces vigour. It's systems thinking at its best. In this process of re-design, how does a contemporary institution like Dancemakers consciously choose the communities to whom it presents dance, and with whom they create dance?

## Community Feedback CONT'D

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3. **Institutions continue to treat equity, diversity and inclusion as outreach and public relations rather than structural change and deep individual *and* collective social conditioning that have to be actively identified, reorganized, and re-shaped.** Remarkably, Dancemakers has committed itself to transparency and community accountability. The values of transformation that the Board adopted form a good, solid starting point. And yet, at the same time, Dancemakers has made problematic choices. From the start, and still throughout the two years of this research process, Dancemakers has referred to this work as outreach and public relations. How do we model a transparent *practice* of observing to peers and institutions the behaviours, choices and language that make it hard to trust them? How do staff and institutions model the effective humility and responsive *practice* that make engagement, trust and vulnerability worthwhile? Artist-researcher Shaista Latif \_\_\_\_\_. We propose that just as we've become more practiced in mindfully raising humans, calling in sexist microaggressions, or modeling what to do when we are told we've misaddressed someone with incorrect pronouns, there are ways to be pro-active and humanize the experience for everyone.
4. **Many cultural institutions no longer know how to bring in large audiences consistently, and meaningfully, in accordance with their level of annual public funding.** Unlike many other dance organizations serving comparable audiences and artistic communities, Dancemakers receives stable annual operating funding, and higher funding levels overall. There is no reason to continue support cultural institutions if they remain irrelevant to contemporary audiences and population demographics. Helping artists bring work to a public is a core element of Dancemakers mission and reason for their public funding support. To maintain their public support, cultural institutions have to actively re-centre the role of audiences and community populations in their work. If pound for pound, they are not doing it better, public funding should be re-distributed to those who do serve the public.

## Community Feedback CONT'D

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- 5. Where are the shows that the public look forward to every year?** Artist-researcher Ravyn Wngz points to Alvin Ailey's legacy of repertoires that are performed year after year to packed houses. Artist-researcher Ange Loft points to the need for annual activities that return again and again ("at least 7 years") for them to gain presence and to become a fixture in communities and in people's lives. Is dance in Toronto destined to be fragmented forever? "Ailey's repertoire," explains Ravyn, "attracts conservative Black people, avant-garde Black people, young people, older retired people, middle-aged people – a truly diverse public, because there's something for everyone in Ailey's offerings." Looking at Toronto's dance scene, Ravyn reflects, "Dancemakers is a legacy organization; it should pack the Meridian Hall every year. In Toronto, we don't really have repertoire that gets repeated. We have *The Nutcracker* every winter at the National Ballet, and Toronto Dance Theatre has *The Four Towers* which it's sold to the School of TDT to do now. That's it."
- 6. What are the events that the artistic dance community gathers around every year?** Participants in Ange Loft's research process noted a lack of events in the dance calendar. The Canada Dance Festival, Kalanidhi International Festival of Indian Dance, Sooryu Dance Festival, CanAsian Dance, and many others were joyful moments in the Ontario dance community's calendars. Not only were they culminating moments for dance presentation, these gatherings were also occasions for dance colleagues and friends to re-convene and catch up. Audiences would recognize these 'brands' and look forward to the events every year. New festivals and presentation series have been surfacing. Are culture-specific dance forms appropriately represented in these new curatorial contexts? Will these new presentation events become fixtures for the public and go on for 15+ years like their predecessors?

The productive tension of holding onto a radical, real, and deep vision while engaging in the messy daily practice is the feminist praxis: the work of everyday people to try, to build, to make. And this requires collectivity. Always.

- *Abolition. Feminism. Now.*, Angela Y. Davis et al, 2022.

## Final Thought

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*“What is the diversity of work, positionalities, and obligations that cultural institutions can choose to undertake to pursue good land relations, to actively engage in Reconciliation?”*

Returning to Ange Loft’s question, what actions, positions, and responsibilities does Dancemakers choose to embody today to pursue good land relations – to be in right relations? What is Dancemaker’s position on the funding it receives, knowing that Canada’s wealth has been built on the resource extraction of Indigenous lands and the oppression of non-white non-able bodied peoples? How do cultural institutions enact right relations in how they allocate funding resources?

As a parting reflection, the following excerpt from a recent news article is offered for inspiration:

Jane Rabinowicz, McConnell’s acting CEO, says a key factor driving the foundation’s decision to transfer \$30 million to Indigenous-led foundations is that her board is “genuinely committed” to the issue of reconciliation — a commitment that has grown over two decades.

McConnell Foundation’s gift is the largest the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund has received in their campaign to raise a \$250 million endowment — and the largest known capital transfer by a foundation in Canada within the past five years to an equity-seeking organization.

Several other foundations — including Inspirit, the Laidlaw Foundation, MLSE and the Sprott Foundation — have made similar announcements in recent years. What does this mean for redistribution in Canada?

Will [others] follow?

- [FutureofGood.co](https://FutureofGood.co)

# Appendix

# About Dancemakers

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## VISION

Dancemakers is a decentralized community-led dance organization that focuses on the research and development of dance makers to deepen, revitalize, or transform their practice and form. Through residencies and partnerships with other dance organizations, Dancemakers provides a range of resources to creators, working across genres of dance, seeking innovation in their practice towards the development of new performance works. Curatorial decisions are made by a rotating committee of dance practitioners to ensure that the broadest community of dancers and choreographers are being served. Dancemakers engages with the public through a variety of activities aimed at illuminating dance practice and form through the creative process of the dance maker.

## VALUES IN TRANSFORMATION

- Decentralized, transparent, collaborative, and committee-based decision making.
- Actively inclusive with particular care towards reconciling the historic harms and exclusion faced by Black, Indigenous, and POC artists at Dancemakers.
- Participatory community involvement and accountability.
- Artist and dance community centered.
- Bold, outside-the-box thinking to challenge the status quo.
- Dancemakers will be a “centre” for creation without a physical base. We will continue to explore what this means.

# Bios

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## **Shaista Latif, Artist-Researcher**

Shaista Latif is a working-class, queer, Afghan creator, performer, writer and facilitator. Her touring performance works *The Archivist* and *How I Learned to Serve Tea* have been presented by various presenting partners and festivals. She is a published playwright and has acted in a number of film and tv projects. In 2019/ 2020 she created and advocated for a salaried artist residency in collaboration with Why Not Theatre and Koffler Centre of the Arts. Latif is currently serving on the Third Party Review Committee at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre to help plan community consultations and events to highlight the need for labour protections. Shaista has worked with over 70 organizations teaching workshops.

## **Ange Loft, Artist-Researcher**

(Kanien'kehá:ka, from Kahnawà:ke, QC, Canada; lives in Toronto, ON, Canada) is an interdisciplinary performing artist. Her collaborations use arts based research, voice, wearable sculpture, theatrical co-creation and Haudenosaunee history to facilitate workshops and community-engaged spectacle. As a performer, Ange has graced international stages with musical act Yamantaka//Sonic Titan and as an interpreter of Indigenous lead theatrical narrative, experimental composition and performance.

## **Pam Tzen, Artist-Researcher**

Pam Tzeng 曾小桐 (she/they) is a second-generation Taiwanese-Canadian choreographer, performer, arts worker based in Mohkínstsis / Calgary, Treaty 7 Territory. Pam is committed to holding space for her own and others healing from white body supremacy. Pam does this through the magic of performance, teaching therapeutic movement, community organizing and change work consulting in the arts and cultural sector. Pam brings a trauma-informed, anti-oppression and transformative justice lens to all that she does.

## Biographies CONT'D

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### **Ravyn Wngz, Artist-Researcher**

Ravyn Wngz AKA The Black Widow of Burlesque has a vision to create work/art/conversations that open the minds and the hearts of all people, the goal is to encourage self reflection, and empathy that will ultimately create fundamental change and inclusion. As an Empowerment Movement Storyteller Wngz aims to challenge mainstream arts and dance spaces by sharing her stories as a Tanzanian, Bermudian, Queer, 2 Spirit, Transcendent, Mohawk individual. She aims to create opportunities, positive representations and platforms for marginalized LGBTTIQQ2S communities with a focus on Black Indigenous and people of color.

### **Helen Yung, Lead Consultant**

Helen Yung leads the Laboratory for Artistic Intelligence, which is an artistic and social research group that brings artists and artistic methods into parts of society where more imagination is needed.

Helen brings deep expertise in arts and culture, cross-cultural, transdisciplinary, and multisectoral experiments, strategic initiatives, organizational development, and alternative models for leadership and community engagement. She prompts deep structural shifts in people and organizations through time-limited activities with artistic intelligence.

Helen previously held roles with Little Pear Garden Collective, Canadian Dance Assembly, Canadian Arts Coalition, Culture Days, and the Canada Council for the Arts. Helen has been a research member with the Culture of Cities Centre, a Salzburg Global Fellow, a CPAMO steering committee member, and a Board member for a number of organizations including hub14, Social Innovation Canada and the Centre for Social Innovation. As an advisory committee member, she also helped the Ontario Nonprofit Network develop a sector-wide Evaluation Strategy.

# About The Lab

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The Laboratory for Artistic Intelligence specializes in research and development led by artists and artistic methods to frame, train for, and model alternatives and new paradigms.

The Lab brings a wealth of experience:

- Engaging in real-time with pluralist bodies of knowledge, embodied, translated, formed, transformed and transmitted by people with diverse lived experiences
- Deriving insights from artistic and cultural practice and articulating how the global wisdoms that these practices represent can inform our present decision-making.
- Stewarding equity-seeking groups to form new relationships with(in) colonial institutions.
- Synthesizing complex, diverse inputs into major resource-intensive projects requiring multi-stakeholder collaboration and atypical governance models.
- Translating artistic insights and critiques into credible, actionable strategies.

The Lab's research has been supported through funding from groups such as Canada Council for the Arts, Humber College, University of Toronto, Compute Ontario, Kresge Foundation, as well as partnerships with the Centre for Social Innovation, University of Arizona, Canadian Mental Health Association, the University College of Santa Cruz, among others.

Clients include groups such as the Atlantic Filmmakers Coop, X University, University of Toronto Scarborough, Canadian Public Arts Funders, Metcalf Foundation, Toronto Arts Foundation, StagePage, Myseum of Toronto, and Flourish Wellness Research Collective.

The Lab's current areas of engagement include immigration, health and wellness, impact evaluation, the future of independent performance, and decolonizing research data management.

# Our Methodologies

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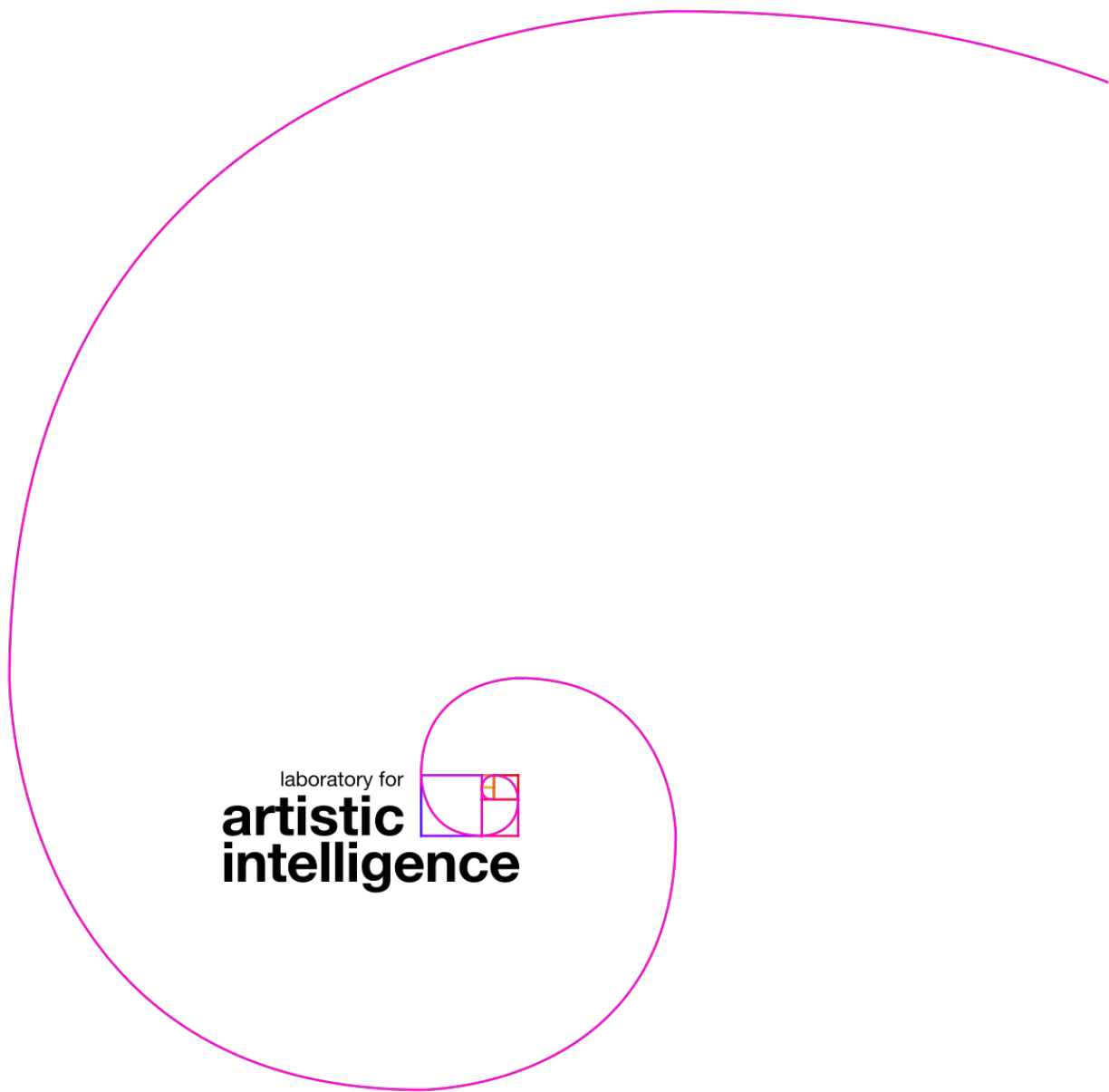
We draw together strategies and methods designed to consider your context and meet the situation's needs. Our research and consulting methodology is hybrid — reflecting how human understanding includes diverse ways of knowing.

The approach always rooted in Appreciative Inquiry, which views systems as socially-constructed phenomena that can be changed through purposeful re-imagination, and conscious choices by the people that populate it. Systems thinking and artistic intelligence are two other perspectives that inform our work.

Systems thinking is the theory and practice of examining the links and interactions between components of systems. We look for leverage points in systems, places where “a small change could lead to a large shift” in the behaviour of the system. Which way to push a lever for the desired effect(s) can often be counterintuitive.

Artistic intelligence is a term we use to refer to ways of knowing and understanding that artistic practice furthers. Artistic intelligence can meet a problem head-on, and has indirect, human-centred ways of working through considerations, rerouting, and arriving at desired ends.

Applied research in the arts works differently from theory-building research in the social sciences. It's often not economically possible to reach saturation — the point in the research where you stop hearing or reading new things. We balance this constraint by looking at where your organization has strong voices and understanding, then selectively seeking out an array of perspectives that can offer counterpoint, expanded awareness, and granularity.



laboratory for  
**artistic  
intelligence**

