

CASCADIA **DAILY** NEWS



LIVING
Dance

Kuntz and Company's 'Dialog(s)'

Art at the intersection of community, curiosity and well-being

March 9, 2022 at 9:00 a.m.



"Dialog(s)" recently took place at Whatcom Museum's Lightcatcher Building in the "Up Close & Personal: The Body in Contemporary Art" exhibit (which closed at the end of February). *(Photo courtesy of Kuntz and Co.)*



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I sit across from a stranger, noticing the tightness in my shoulders; my hands send a ripple into the space between us. There are no words in my duet with Caitlin Schafte. But I feel seen and “heard” as we gaze and

gesture, balance and stand in the space on and between two opposing cafe chairs at the Firehouse Arts and Events Center during Kuntz and Company's second iteration of "Dialog(s)."

"Dialog(s)" is a physical conversation. Community members are invited to initiate a connection with a seated individual by raising an eyebrow or a hand or wiggling their ears. "Dialog(s)" is part of "Emerging Suite," a trio of community dance pieces conceived by Pam Kuntz, Artistic Director of Kuntz and Company, exploring the healing power of movement and what it means to move together.

"The individuals that I have invited and am inviting to be in the seated role are people who know how to pay attention and respond to what they have seen with their whole selves," Kuntz said. "Everyone can do this. Just not everyone has done this, so they don't know."



Pam Kuntz plans to use "Dialog(s)" as a jumping-off point for a piece that will be developed in the spring. *(Photo courtesy of Kuntz and Co.)*

Playful is the word most often used by Kuntz and her collaborators to describe this work. Dancers Vanessa Daines and Kate Stevenson, among others, take a participant's physical "comment" and "solve it, respond to it, be curious with it, and turn it into a question back at them." I can attest to the disarming quality of this empathetic give-and-take. It's fun and invites a renewed perspective.

"It's not this gut-wrenching, reveal-yourself kind of thing," Kuntz said. "Maybe because you don't have to put words to it."

The inspiration for "Emerging Suite" came when Kuntz was invited by Hafthor Yngvason, director of Western Washington University's Western Gallery, to create a work for the "Skyviewing" sculpture by the late Isamu Noguchi. (The Western Gallery will be holding a Noguchi Symposium October 23-24.)

Kuntz imagines "Passage" as a slow and intentional walk that will proceed through the sculpture on at least one occasion. "Murmuration" is the third piece of the puzzle and serves as a celebration of community togetherness.

Aside from the iconic Noguchi sculpture itself, which seems to ascend from the bricks at Western's Red Square, Kuntz cites Butoh (Japanese dance theater), performance artist Marina Abramovic, and Canadian dance company Kaeja d'Dance's "Flock Landing" as inspirations for her latest project.

The challenge with this kind of work is enlisting a group of people who are free and open enough to participate. Kuntz firmly believes that this "audience" is out there. And once they show up, she can get them into the chair across from her (or walking slowly through a field).

Kuntz sees "Dialog(s)" as a kind of self-care and is interested in seeing unlikely pairs of people together in conversation. She'd love to bring "Dialog(s)" to a school or hospital setting.



Community members are invited to initiate a connection with another seated individual at Kuntz and Company "Dialog(s)" events at locales throughout Bellingham. *(Photo courtesy of Kuntz and Co.)*

"Is there a company or an organization that would want Dialog(s) for its employees?" Kuntz mused. "Who are the people who would want to do a slow walk?"

Kuntz holds space for her projects to evolve. She can see herself doing a screen-dance version of "Passage," and she plans to use "Dialog(s)" as a jumping-off point for a piece that will be developed in the spring on Western students involving the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in collaboration with visual artist Linda Ost.

The next "Dialog(s)" will take place outdoors in mid-March and will offer the opportunity to observe as well as participate.

At the Firehouse event there was no audience. Fortunately, I dropped in on "Dialog(s)" on Feb. 4 in conjunction with the recently closed exhibit "Up Close & Personal: The Body in Contemporary Art" at the Whatcom Museum's Lightcatcher Building. It was a joy to see dancers and community members conjure images of threads, meal prep, telescopes, boxes and children at play.

When I asked Kuntz if she feels extra pressure as an artist these days, she said, "I want to make sure that whatever I'm inviting is safe." Kuntz is worried that we are all a little too comfortable with the convenience of

virtual connection, even as we move out of isolation.

“Our culture is toying with the idea that showing up in body may not be necessary,” Kuntz said. “And I wholeheartedly disagree. I think that is something as an artist I want to show somehow — that showing up in body is actually essential for our health and well-being and community.”

“Emerging Suite” takes place at various times and locations in Whatcom County. The next “Dialog(s)” will take place outdoors in mid-March. Check for updates on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter with the username @kuntzandcompany. Find out more at [kuntzandco.org](https://www.kuntzandco.org).

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