



**Cornish
— College
of the Arts**

HENRY
ART
GALLERY



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UPDATE March 22, 2019

Contacts:

UW Department of Dance: Lisa Kwak | lisakwak@uw.edu | dance.washington.edu | [Facebook Page](#)

Cornish Dance Department: Anne Derieux | aderieux@cornish.edu | cornish.edu/dance | [Facebook Page](#)

Exploring the Creative Legacy of Merce Cunningham

Celebrating 100 Years of Influence of Iconic Choreographer Merce Cunningham (1919–2009)

Public Events at the Henry Art Gallery:

April 11, 2019, 7pm, Seattle Film Premiere: “If the Dancer Dances”

April 13, 2pm, Informal Performance: *Exploring the Creative Legacy of Merce Cunningham*

Events are free; RSVPs are requested: <https://henryart.org/programs/all>

::

UPDATE: We are thrilled to announce that Merce Cunningham Dance Company alumnae and celebrated choreographer Douglas Dunn will now be joining us for this residency! (Silas Riener will no longer be participating.)

Douglas Dunn danced in Merce Cunningham's company from 1969–1973. He also danced in Yvonne Rainer's company for 1968–70 and was a member of Grand Union from 1970–1976. Douglas Dunn and Dancers started in 1976 and has performed and been commissioned worldwide. douglasdunndance.com

[Read a March 8, 2019 New York Times article featuring Dunn.](#)

::

As part of the international Merce Cunningham Centennial, and in collaboration with the Merce Cunningham Trust, the dance departments of Cornish College of the Arts and University of Washington present the fruits of a two-week immersion in Cunningham’s innovative and influential practices in chance operations. The residency acknowledges his formative training at Cornish, where he met composer John Cage and formed a partnership that has influenced countless artists in various disciplines.

Merce Cunningham Dance Company alumnae Douglas Dunn and Holley Farmer (also a UW and Cornish alum) and dance students will present **an informal performance of works-in-progress** generated using Cunningham’s tools of chance procedures and indeterminacy. This new generation of dancers will present their own creative work developed in response to the legendary choreographer’s groundbreaking contributions to the field, revealing the possibilities that emerge through his experiments. This showing culminates Dunn and Farmer’s two-week teaching residency in the Cornish and UW dance departments. Brian Lawson, a UW MFA student, will also be teaching at Cornish and UW during the residency.

In addition, audiences are invited to **the Seattle premiere of “If the Dancer Dances”** (2018), a documentary by former MCDC company member Lise Friedman and Maia Wechsler about the re-staging of Cunningham’s



**Cornish
— College
of the Arts**

**HENRY
ART
GALLERY**



iconic *RainForest* (1968) on the Stephen Petronio Company. With limited distribution, this will be one of only a few chances to see this film on the big screen.

“The beauty and tender and amazing thing about dance is that it gets passed from one body and one soul to another.” —Stephen Petronio

Exploring the Creative Legacy of Merce Cunningham, Informal Performance: April 13, 2019, 2pm, Henry Art Gallery, Free

The two-week Cornish/UW residency and culminating informal performance looks to the future, with young artists from across creative disciplines experimenting with Cunningham’s formulation of of chance operations as a tool for creating art grounded in their own experiences. Students from Cornish and UW’s dance composition courses will collaborate for the first time since since the 2004 setting of Trisha Brown’s *Floor of the Forest* (1970) at the Henry.

The informal performance will demonstrate how Cunningham’s brilliant processes have the potential for creating surprising and engaging dance works. Traditional residencies usually involve company members setting already-created dance works on students—unique to this residency is that students will be exploring some of Cunningham’s most innovative and famous dance-making structures, investigating first-hand his genius in devising methods that generate compelling and unexpected dances in the moment. Far beyond just offering dance technique classes, the residency includes workshops on Cunningham’s legacy in costume design, choreographer/composer collaboration, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Chance operations workshops will also be offered to students in Cornish’s Visual Arts, Interior Architecture, Film, and Performance Production departments.

“If The Dancer Dances,” Seattle Film Premiere: April 11, 2019, 7pm, Henry Art Gallery, Free

If a dance is not danced, it vanishes. “If the Dancer Dances,” a new documentary by former MCDC member Lise Friedman and Maia Wechsler, confronts one of the most urgent issues facing the dance world today: how do we prevent the loss of masterworks to time? The film invites viewers into the intimate world of the dance studio. Stephen Petronio, one of today’s leading dance-makers, is determined to help his dancers breathe new life into Cunningham’s iconic *RainForest* (1968). With help from former MCDC members, the film tracks Petronio’s dancers as they strive to re-stage this great work, revealing what it takes to keep a dance—and a legacy—alive. “If the Dancer Dances” is the first documentary on Cunningham’s work since his passing in 2009.

“By focusing on the difficulties and challenges of this gestation period...this film makes both Cunningham’s and Petronio’s styles remarkably vivid. The leading Petronio dancer Gino Grenek, learning Cunningham’s own role without ever feeling at home in it, emerges with an exceptional nobility (he has such quiet authority that you see why Petronio was right to insist on casting him); and Petronio, so warm in his welcoming of Cunningham outsiders and in his encouragement of his own dancers to embrace alien stimuli, is the other hero of the movie. Toogood, a brilliant Cunningham dancer of his final years who joined the Petronio troupe for this season, speaks of Cunningham with memorable emotion; Davalois Fearon goes through a process similar to Grenek’s, finding it hard to find herself in Cunningham. Members of the original “RainForest” cast...speak vividly; Cunningham alumni involved in the staging—Meg Harper, Andrea Weber (who allows herself to be seen as almost comically over-perfectionist and anxious), Rashaun Mitchell—are vivid contributors. The title comes from a [Cunningham] quotation that appears at the end. ‘If the dancer dances, everything is there’...By the time it appears, you have been through such an arc of experience that you read these words with a large lump in your throat.” —**Alastair MacCaulay**, *New York Times*



**Cornish
— College
of the Arts**

HENRY
ART
GALLERY

Merce Cunningham
CENTENNIAL

This residency is part of the Cunningham Centennial Community Programs, which are supported by a major grant from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. It is also supported by the Bossak Heilbron Foundation and the Floyd and Dolores Jones Endowed Chair in the Arts. For more information about the Centennial, please visit <https://www.mercecunningham.org/activities/centennial/>.

:: :: ::

Images:

- *3 Inventories of Casey Jones*, Cornish College of the Arts, c. 1930. [l to r] Merce Cunningham, Bonnie Bird, Syvilla Fort, Dorothy Herrmann. Choreography by Bird, musical direction by John Cage. Photo: Phyllis Dearborn. Courtesy: Bonnie Bird Collection at Trinity Laban Conservatoire.
- Holley Farmer teaching at Hunter College. Photos: Julie Lemberger.
- “If the Dancer Dances” film stills.
- Douglas Dunn in *Forest Fever*, 1981. Photo: Susan Dunn.
- Douglas Dunn and Dancers company members in *Crag*, 2019. Photo: Boyd Hagan.

High-resolution photos available on request.