

There were two workshops. One for BIPOC (Nov. 2, 2021) and one for everyone else (Nov. 4, 2021). The first one was led by Ishmael Houston-Jones, Jose Abad, and Snowflake Calvert with live music by Gabriel Nuñez de Arco and the second was led by Keith Hennessy, Ishmael Houston-Jones, and Kevin O'Connor with live music by Gabriel Nuñez de Arco. These workshops/practice labs took place on Ramaytush Ohlone territory, specifically those of the Yelamu people at an art space called The Lab. What follows is a poetic embrace of the two workshops.

Try, Try, Try Something Else Again

or Follow the Foam...

By Ryanaustin Dennis

It doesn't always stick does it? When you try something for the first time. Be it our first steps of a new dance, our budding discovery of self-possession, or finding our ancestral history. One can be tried, as in "you've tried my last nerve," and there are things that should not be tried. In the meantime...

Just look for the spiral and a good omen.
Blow to stoke a fire.

A question that hovered over me. Can I call myself a dancer? I had performed before and with others, but the location of this question dissolved throughout the practice lab. It wasn't about how the "I" as a dancer expresses itself in neutral space. What ended up happening was an experience of knowing how to co-create in charged space. I didn't feel safer in the BIPOC practice lab, but I did feel what constituted the "us" in the room led us to pursue a different set of questions.

"Where do you want to gather?" Ishmael asks.

Around the ancestors in the room of course!

A Welcome Song from Snowflake. A gathering where we call into the round our legacies and lineages. Stories of family healers, warriors, and poets. We sit in a circle with the traces of our family—I choose not to share. I rub my back and ligaments on the floor with a tennis ball rubbing the fascia.

I think, how would I describe a place with a dance?

A participant says that they come from River people, they must have a dance within them. I offer them a poem...

At first you find the soil

pinch a piece of it, to find your river or

I take it from the high grass

But why keep myself to just the bend?

The floating oil and first you find it

Calling out to spill a joy dance

In the next exercise, the person whose ancestors come from the river people became my partner. We have our eyes closed, slowly inching towards each other. We had to feel for each other. Lost in complete darkness moment to moment. Careful not rub against a wooden floor with split nails. I got lost trying to find my partner's ancestors, the thread was so thin. Why didn't I share more of myself earlier? I could feel our mutual reticence at where we could touch each other.

Eventually it was either Jose or Ishmael who said, "Find your solo."

I didn't want to. I wanted to rewind my body. I couldn't find my partner who came from River people. I couldn't find them in the dark. I didn't want a solo. The ceiling of the Lab is leaking and the droplets splash into a bucket, carving out rhythms with Gabriel's mix.

Before art there was culture and we are all sharing the air in the room against our body's gooey fascia. There's something powerful about not fleeing while being in another's imagination. In one exercise we created quiet entanglements in which we triangulated our movements with far flung partners.

What are you inviting into the space and how are you writing that invitation?

I stepped out of the moving membrane in order to write down my thoughts. I want to be moved by others. We were at the free dance part of the workshop. You could feel the membrane of everyone and join in. There was so much to be moved by. And within this membrane one participant had foam on their eyelash. For me the piece of foam on their eyelash became the thread line of dance, negation, and potential. And as we inched closer in movement with each other swirling in that connection, it was in that profound moment they asked "May I touch you?" It was an ecstatic "Yes!" to experience of us becoming bubbles.

Follow the Foam