

THE BERKLEE INSTITUTE'S LEADERSHIP NETWORK FOR ACCESSIBLE ARTS EDUCATION

Meeting Summary, January 18, 2024 4:00-6:00 pm

Meeting Objectives:

- Establish shared understanding
- Get a better perspective from the inside out about living with disability and the issues that surround it through the documentary lens of Christopher Unpppezverde
 - Núñez and narration of Krishna Washburn.
- Connect with other members
- Announce our next meeting's learning session speaker.

Reminders:

- Audio description
- ASL interpreter
- Meeting not recorded to maintain safe space for discussion

Attendees:

- **Krishna Washburn** (Steering Committee, Founding Director of Darkroom Ballet, hostess for today's presentation)
- **Alejandra Ospina** (Darkroom Ballet, Administrator)
- **Suzanne Joyal** (LNAAE Steering Committee, Senior Program Coordinator, NeuroArts Blueprint Project, Science behind Arts)
- **Dr.Elise Sobol** (LNAAE, Steering Committee, Arts Advocate and Educator), notetaker, timekeeper
- **Dr. Rhoda Bernard** (Founding Managing Director of BIAAE, host of network, Asst Chair Music Ed)
- **Morgahne Huntress** (Darkroom Community)
- **Hannah Berube** (K-2 Eastlawn Meadow, Smith and Clark University, Keynote Speaker for 2024 ABLE Assembly)
- **Kristin Long** (Bethesda, MD, Learning Session guest on accessible arts education for March 28, member of Darkroom Community)
- **Andre Zelden** (Darkroom Community, NYC, NY)
- **Kevin Droe** (U of Northern, Cedar Falls, Iowa Music Education)
- **Christy Smith** (Darkroom Community, Washington, D.C.)
- **Erin Clark** (Darkroom Community Aerialist, Ontario)
- **Dr. Sheila Scott** (Chair Music Education, Manitoba, CAN)

- **Elisabeth Staal** (LNAEE, Steering Committee, Division of Specialized Instruction, Central Office, Washington D.C. Public Schools providing equitable services to some students with disabilities)
- **Elisabeth R** (Darkroom Community)
- **Rachel Repinz**(Brooklyn, excited to support this work)
- **Madora Ebersole** (Education and Community Programs Manager, Center for Performing Arts -Education Specialist, Penn State)
- **Mehdi Raoufi,**
- **Natalie Schultz-Kahwaty** (Director PD, NeuroDivergent Dance Classes Rutgers University)
- **Lisa** (Darkroom Community)
- **Sheila Burke** (Teach Dance Adaptive PE, San Francisco Unified School District and part of Darkroom Community)
- **Dr. Meagen Dissinger** (accessible arts educator, U.S. Virgin Islands)
- **Michelle Matione** (dancer, audio-describer).
- **Facilitator:** Rotating between Elise, Elisabeth, Suzanne, Krishna

Summary

Elise Sobol welcomed attendees, introduced steering committee members and facilitated introductions of network members and Darkroom Ballet community guests. Then she turned the program over to Steering Committee member, Krishna Washburn to introduce the screening of the film YO OBSOLETE.

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Dance Art for the Blind Audience: Christopher “Unpezverde” Nunez’s YO OBSOLETE

“I’m very proud to be able to share one of my favorite films by one of my favorite artists with you all today, Christopher “Unpezverde” Nunez’s YO OBSOLETE. Christopher is a visually impaired choreographer, filmmaker, educator, and dancer and one of my closest friends. The wonderful Suzanne Joyal found the following description of the film, and of Christopher, which I’ll share now:

Yo Obsolete is from the series “Memories of a disabled child: the real, the imaginary and the misunderstood,” 2021. (<https://unpezverde.com/yo-obsolete-3/>)A voiceover accompanies the dance. It has a narrative that doubles as prompts for the dancers, but also bleeds into the realm of description. The film also offers a separate, live audio description track conceived specifically for blind audiences.

Christopher Unpezverde Núñez is a Visually Impaired choreographer, dramaturg, educator and Disability advocate based in NYC. He was born and raised in Costa Rica, and is a descendant of the Miskito people. Núñez is currently a fellow at Princeton University.

My first exposure to *YO OBSOLETE* was a work-in-progress live performance in December 2019, those fascinating, late pre-pandemic days before we knew that the world was about to change forever. Some of you will know my colleagues at Dark Room Ballet, Alejandra Ospina and Michelle Mantione, who are both disabled performers and audio describers. They worked in collaboration with Christopher for this performance, and provided tag-team style audio description directly into my ear and the ear of another visually impaired dance colleague, lele Paloumpis in New York City. New York City is a world unto itself in many ways, and we are so fortunate to have access to one another as friends and colleagues. Both Christopher and I are visually impaired artists who had performed in predominantly non-described performances, and we had already bonded with one another over this shared experience. We talked about the sadness that comes from knowing that if we were in the audience of our own performances, we would not know what was happening, we would be excluded from our own work. As he started to work on *YO OBSOLETE*, he told me that he wanted to create art for himself and people like himself, and that he didn't want the audio description to feel like a concession, he wanted it to be the art itself.

I loved that original live performance of *YO OBSOLETE*, including and especially the ritual laying down of the perimeter that any blind dancer will need before starting to perform, and my rapport with Alejandra and Michelle as they whispered to me, but *YO OBSOLETE* the film brought me to tears. I knew that this was the very first dance film I'd ever watched that was made for me, made for blind and visually impaired people like Christopher and myself. How did I know this?

Pay very close attention to the narration that Christopher uses to self-audio describe his art. He **de-centers sight** as the starting point for his description. In fact, the visual is touched upon only very occasionally. Instead, we are welcomed inside Christopher's physical body, how it feels when he moves, his emotions, his memories. It is a deeply visceral experience, it's raw and it's honest, and what can or cannot be seen is deprioritized. However, I come away from this film knowing Christopher as an artist, knowing the purpose of his art, and feeling welcomed into his world, his *umwelt*, and I know that there is nothing I have not understood.

I am going to give a content warning about this film; there is discussion of child abuse and mental illness in this film, but it is an honest invitation to know the truth rather than exploitation. This is Christopher's truth, and it became my own truth through his art.

When you are a disabled person, the art and media surrounding you rarely acknowledges you as a desired audience, and that even includes art made by other disabled people. Ableism tells even disabled artists that art should be made for the interests and approval of a non-disabled audience. It is rare and powerful when a disabled artist makes the choice to create for other disabled people. As educators, when we choose to share art with our students, even art that was made by disabled artists, it is crucial that we ask ourselves: **who was the intended audience for this art?** Were the experiences and interests of disabled people considered when making this art? Can I even tell? This is the reason why I wanted to share *YO OBSOLETE* with you all today, even though it might not be appropriate for young art students: this is the most explicit

and clear example of dance art made for blind people that I have ever encountered in my life. Notice how the audio description does not sound like the audio description track you can turn on with your Netflix subscription. Notice how the art de-centers sight. Notice the invitation into the visceral body of the artist. When I watch *YO OBSOLETE*, I dance inside Christopher's body with him the entire time.

And with that, let's get on with the show: this is *YO OBSOLETE*. This is art for blind people."

Narrative by Krishna Washburn©2024 All Rights Reserved Used with permission and for our ASL interpreters.

Group reflection of *YO OBSOLETE* with Krishna moderating and responding.

Very impressed, touched and hope that we can collectively embrace and understand the acknowledgement of our disability. ABLEism promotes stigma. We should not be afraid of each other. Numerous people expressed how grateful they were to experience this depth of audio description and also to know that LNAAE is a growing community which embraces the disability community and everything this community has to offer. Discussion of how a blind person experiencing the film since there were no visual descriptions, only descriptions of feelings. That was exhilarating, affirming, brilliant, really inspired to see how Christopher educates and uses audio description to inform the entirety of the work. Art was so raw and real and compelling. Forever changed from the experience of the art without asking any sighted person what was going on. [For further information about showing *YO OBSOLETE* to your respective organizations please contact Candace Feldman at queenc@interimcorp.art].

Next meeting & Learning Session on Thursday, March 28, 4-6 p.m.

Our Learning Session Guest Speaker will be **Kristin Long** (see attached bio and photo below) a multifaceted arts dance and French language educator from the disability community with extensive experience with working students with and without disabilities in diverse school settings. Ms. Long recently led an Accessibility Affinity group at the Mid-Atlantic Flute Convention and will be offering us the following topics in her learning session:

- The power of employment for people with disabilities in the arts.
- Utilizing the arts to differentiate learning for students with intellectual and learning disabilities.
- Blind/visually impaired children/adults can sing, dance, and play musical instruments, too.
- Establishing mentors/role models who are visible in the disabled community.
- *Mermaids Can Ride Bikes, Too!* Kristin will close her learning session on access and inclusion with a brief book talk about her new book which she hopes to publish in the near future."

Closing Reminder, all meeting dates on webpage

<https://college.berklee.edu/BIAAE/leadership-network-for-accessible-arts-education>

Upcoming Events

- ABLE Assembly Conference, Boston, April 19-21, 2024 <https://college.berklee.edu/able>.

Meeting Adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

Summary Notes by Elise Sobol, completed 3.2.24

Steering Committee members; Suzanne Joyal suzannejoyal00@gmail.com, Elise Sobol elisesobol232@gmail.com, Elisabeth Staal estaal15@gmail.com, Krishna Washburn krishnawashburn@yahoo.com, under the auspices of Rhoda Bernard rbernard@berklee.edu

KRISTIN LONG, Brief Biography



Kristin Long is a native of Colorado and currently resides in the Washington D.C. area of the United States. Ms. Long received her B.A. from Hollins College, Roanoke, VA. in French and dance. Ms. Long lived, studied and worked in Paris, France, for a couple of years. Highlights of her residence in France include interning and working as an English conversational assistant at the Institut National Des Jeunes Aveugles, studying at the University de la Sorbonne Paris III and IV and

assimilating into French culture. Ms. Long also enjoyed interning with Le Regard du Cygne, a theater/dance company in Paris. Ms. Long has spent most of her career in the education field working with disabled and non disabled children and adults alike. Ms. Long spent several years working as a French librarian and French language support specialist at a partial immersion French/Spanish elementary school in Washington D.C. During her time at the charter school Ms. Long also served as the liaison for the French Alliance of Washington, which allowed for several scholars of the school to attend the summer children's camps at the French Alliance on full scholarship. Other highlights of Ms. Long's career include interpreting for master faculty of the Paris Opera Ballet School at the Vail International Dance Festival and interning in American Ballet Theatre's education department. Ms. Long also participated in a documentary on blind and visually impaired dancers.

Ms. Long is currently hoping to make a career transition from education to a career promoting inclusion in the arts, especially dance and music for all abilities with a focus on visually impaired and blind students. In her free time Ms. Long enjoys playing the flute, taking ballet class, tandem bike riding, writing poetry, reading and taking long walks. She has also written a children's book which she hopes to eventually publish.

March, 2024