



**Dancing beyond memories: Armenian cultural heritage & corporeality**  
**South Caucasian approaches to creative practices**  
Organized by **Aline Derderian** (Université Rennes 2)

April 6<sup>th</sup> 2021  
10:00 a.m Paris local time

In which measures can visual arts, dance and movement practices be envisioned as social/political tools for dance & performance practitioners in regions such as Armenia, where cultures, aesthetics and institutional programmes are patriarchally led, geographically excentered? Looking at visual arts, dance & performance studies from a decentralized perspective how can the moving body be a material of contest, liberation or a place of celebration for inherited culture?

This digital conference will be held in English and gather female as well as non-binary identified creatives and scholars from South Caucasus, in diaspora or somehow related to the region with a dance, performance, visual art practice or academic agenda whom for the body is central to their work and who look at interrogating their sexuality, identity, corporeality in mirror to their cultural heritage in order to either transmit, protest, transcend it yet simultaneously acknowledging their singularity and how their roots impacted their artistic journeys.

In the aim of unveiling unrepresented Armenian and South Caucasian personalities, this project focuses on contemporary art and how the complex, worldwide majorly undiscussed political, religious, economical histories most often remains a barrier for them to deploy their work locally or internationally.

## PROGRAMME

10:00-10:15: Aline Derderian Introduction

### **Part 1. Decentralized culture: Survival, celebration, diffusion**

Introduction and chairing: Valeria Della Valle

10:15-11:15: **Hasmik Tangyan** in conversation with **Aline Derderian** (Yerevan, AR)

Hasmik Tangyan is a performer, choreographer and dance therapist based in Yerevan, Armenia. In 2011 she founded the Art Therapy Centre in Yerevan, where she works as a dance therapist with children and adults with different abilities (Autism, CP, ADHD). Together with Harutyun Alpetyan, in 2018, Hasmik co-founded the Contemporary Choreography Lab (CoChoLab Armenia), where she is currently running the Contemporary Dance School.

11:15-11:45: Screening of *Forget me not*, (2021) a film by **Margot de Kerangat & Oscar Viguiet** (Followed by a recorded interview with the artists with English subtitles)

Margot de Kerangat grew up near the Atlantic Ocean. She is a film director and video artist based in Paris. Oscar Viguiet is a photographer and photography director. Together, they collaborate through various creations in the quest of capturing the sensible, exploring movement and lighting. Their work look at creatively portraying, embodying their vision of the world simultaneously poetic and brutal.

11:45-12:15: **Theia Maldoom** (London, UK)

*In-between*

Théia's work with yarn started soon after her trip to Armenia and has come to hold many of the themes of her thoughts regarding her family's Armenian identity and her relationship with Armenia. Théia's presentation will look at sharing her work, expand upon her theoretical research and consider how her dance, improvisation and somatic practices have informed her experience and the process of making the works.

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### **Part 2. Choreographing memories: Research & transmission**

Introduction and chairing: Azza Ben Chaabane

12:45-13:15: **Xuân-Lan Bui Khac** (Ecole Nationale Supérieure Paris, FR)

Marguerite Yourcenar (known as one of the greatest French female authors of the 20th century) wrote in 1938 a collection of short stories entitled *Nouvelles orientales* (Eastern Short Stories). The question is: what does « Eastern » designates and how are these short stories entitled to be qualified as « Eastern »? They indeed take place in various countries from Greece to Japan. Apparently there is no link between such extremes, and most of the people growing up in Europe nowadays would not think of Grece as an Eastern country. This work invites us to think about the pseudo frontier between Europe and Asia, and question through collective imaginary, myths and tales, the construction of our perceptions and fantasies about what's Eastern. If Yourcenar's literature is accurate, it means there is a lot more in common between Aline Derderian's Armenian heritage and my own Vietnamese, even if none of us has a deep knowledge of each other's culture. Is this common ground a fantasy or could it be relevant? I then suggest a cross-referenced interpretation between Aline's piece *Kanayk'* (2018) and Yourcenar's heroines. I don't call it a comparative reading because it is not focused on text analysis, but on how collective imaginaries

are built, shaping our perceptions and understandings of the so-called Eastern female body. Yourcenar allows me to introduce what Eastern means, and how Aline Derderian's work echoes my own experience as an Asian woman born and raised in a Western country.

13:15-13:45: **Christina Gillinger-Correa Vivar** (University of Salzburg, AT)

*Self-conscious Challenging of the Image of the 'Orient': The Modern Expressionist Dancer Armen Ohanian*

The dancer Armen Ohanian (1986-1976) arrived in the 'civilized world' (in London) in 1911 after having fled the anti-Armenian pogroms in Baku and lived in Persia, Turkey, Greece and Egypt. Her career as a dancer and poet led her through various cities in Europe and the USA until she finally settled in Mexico City where she died in 1976. Drawing on her own writing (published and unpublished), secondary literature of the time as well as press coverage, I will demonstrate that Armen Ohanian deliberately exoticized herself as an oriental dancer in order to exploit the craze for the exotic of the time and at the same time to make a living. These seem to be rather trivial motives, but her complex biography shows that she was a modern, well-educated woman with a very strong and self-determined view on politics, gender-roles and the relation between the orient and the occident (which she called 'civilized', using this term in an ironic way).

13:45-14:15: **Iris Karayan** in conversation with **Ioanna Bili** (Athens, GR)

Iris Karayan is a dancer, choreographer and teacher based in Athens, Greece. She studied dance at the Greek State School of Dance (2001) and completed a Master of Arts in Performance and Culture (2007) at Goldsmiths College, UK. She is also a graduate from The American College of Greece, Deree College and holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (1997). She has taught choreography and improvisation at the Greek State School of Dance from 2007 to 2018, at Rallou Manou School of Dance from 2016 to 2018, and at the School of Fine Arts (Nafplio), University of Peloponnese from 2009 to 2010. Since 2013, she has been leading movement and improvisation workshops for people with and without visual impairment, at the educational program of the Onassis Stegi. Her works have been presented in European festivals and venues. *Mothers* (2012) was selected by the dance network Aerowaves 2013 and the Dansnät Sverige in 2014 for touring in Sweden. *Alaska* (2016), commissioned by the Onassis Stegi, premiered in Athens and was presented in Le Quartz Scène Nationale de Brest during *DañsFabrik*, and at the 24th Kalamata International Dance Festival. *Unauthorised* (2018) has been selected by Aerowaves 2020. She has received support and funding from the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, the Athens and Epidaurus Festival, the Onassis Stegi, and the J. F. Costopoulos Foundation. In 2010, she was awarded the 1st prize of the Jarmila Jeřábková Award in Prague for her works *A Time to Mourn* and *Legacy*. In 2017, she was a resident artist in SAARI, Finland, supported by the Kone Foundation. In 2018, she was awarded a Fulbright Foundation Artist Grant for artistic research in New York City, USA. In 2020, she was awarded a fellowship of the Bogliasco Foundation, completing an artistic residency in Italy. Currently, she organizes and teaches movement improvisation workshops exploring areas of her research. She is planning to pursue an artistic research PhD.

14:30-15:00: **Alisha Sofia** in conversation with **Valeria Della Valle** (Los Angeles, California, US)

In *Queens of the Caucasus*, Alisha Sofia draws from Byzantine masks, Greco-Roman sculptures, and living faces encountered in the Caucasus region. She gathered raw pigments, powdering and mixing them in the studio to create her palette. Terra cotta, rhyolite, greywacke, and charcoal create the silver necklaces, cypress, dates, and sea buckthorn adorning her subjects. These forms, often romanticized and sanitized for a Western audience, are revitalized through Sofia's insight as an Armenian American. Her heritage allows her to peer behind the traditional structured aesthetic to uncover a deeper understanding of the pagan roots of the region. Alisha Sofia b. 1987, Los Angeles) attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, completing her degree at Art Center College of Design in 2009. She currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

15:00-15:30: **Ani Javian** (Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts, New York, US)

*The earth is old, we are ancient*

*The earth is old, we are ancient* is a solo multi-media video work that creates dedicated space to recognize and honor ancestral trauma. Utilizing narratives from the artist's grandparent's immigration documents, field recordings from a recent research trip to Yerevan, Armenia, and family interviews, photos, and heirlooms, the work asks, "In what ways do I hold ancestral memories, knowledge and stories in my body?" The work brings the past into the present and is the latest iteration of Javian's recent creative research that explicitly explores her Armenian heritage. Javian aims to make work to contextualize personal experiences – to create a space or place in which they can exist, become magnified, turned upside down, and illuminated – so that we, as viewers, may interpret the world differently, if only for one moment.

15:30-16:00: Collective conversation and Conclusion by Aline Derderian