GCSC Seminar Series

Tuesday, March 17, 2020
4:00-5:00 PM

Jessica Grindstaff
Founder & Director, Phantom Limb Dance Co.
“Storytelling, Imagism and Empathy: Awakening an Audience”

Phantom Limb Company has literally gone to the ends of the earth from Antarctica to Fukushima to research stories that would be turned into emotionally hybrid theatre pieces about human relationship to nature and environmental change in hopes that they could awaken a viewer’s perception of their own power to create change.
Abstract
In 2007 Phantom Limb embarked on a process that took over a decade to begin to communicate and engage with the public about climate change through poetic storytelling. They felt that all of the information available was didactic or fear mongering and people were tuned out to the majority of the messaging available to them on the topic. At the time only 30% of Americans believed that humans had anything to do with climate change.

Phantom Limb believed that if people could have emotional access to the issues before them, they may be able to start to act- if one allowed themself to deeply feel the change, the loss and the future ahead of them, perhaps they could also see their role within it. Puppetry requires individual investment from the viewer in order to have a figure come to life for someone- empathy is a key to experiencing puppetry and it is also a key to thinking globally.

Over the years and creation process of the Environmental Trilogy, large populations around the globe have had their lives drastically altered by climate change and the numbers have flipped- now 60-70% agree that climate change is caused by human activity and dependence on fossil fuels. The company has evolved with this cultural evolution and has come to the conclusion that hope is essential to create change in our lives, communities and the environment.

Bio
Phantom Limb Company (PLC), New York City-based, is known for its work with marionette-puppetry and focus on collaborative, multi-media theatrical storytelling and design. Co-founded in 2007 by artist, director and set designer Jessica Grindstaff and composer and puppet maker Erik Sanko, Phantom Limb has been lauded for its unconventional approach combining the body, movement and puppetry. All of their works are original devised pieces committed to looking into the truth and heart of matters that loom large for us all, though they are best known for The Environmental Trilogy. Over the course of the past decade, PLC developed a trilogy of works for Brooklyn Academy of Music that grappled with human relationship to nature and climate change through several different lenses. The first, 69˚S. (2011) was inspired by Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1914 Trans-Antarctic Expedition. The second, entitled Memory Rings (2016) focuses on the world’s oldest living tree, the Methuselah and the stories that have emerged over the course of its lifetime (almost 5000 years). The final piece, Falling Out (2019) is a cross-cultural collaboration with butoh dancer Dai Matsuoka that endeavors to learn from the residents of the Fukushima region of Japan from their stories of loss and hope.

They are currently at work on an epilogue, an adaptation of Reginald Rose’s 12 Angry Men, a dark comedy entitled 12 Angry Animals wherein masked performers representing 12 endangered species debate the innocence or guilt of the last surviving human in a future dystopia using language and dream movements.