

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Courtesy of Nichole Canuso Dance Company

"I am with you, but also, not with you."

by Christina Catanese

I admit a healthy skepticism of experiences that purport to offer true intimacy or community-building on the Zoom platform, but [Nichole Canuso Dance Company's](#) *Being/With* project caught me off guard with a rich and satisfying vehicle to connect with other humans from a distance. Though not originally developed for the coronavirus pandemic, *Being/With* is well suited to this era, exploring connection across space and time, themes of presence and absence, and holding the stories of strangers. It felt native to the digital space, not at all like an adaptation of something that was [supposed to happen in real life](#).

Being/With currently offers two complimentary components: an experience for two participants, and a workshop for 12 people. For both, participants are asked to come with an object that holds meaning for them that they feel comfortable talking about. I brought a piece of wood from a backpacking trip in the (currently wildfire-ridden) Cascades; others brought family photographs, a childhood stuffed animal, a potted plant, a piece of jewelry, and various objects from nature.

The guides for the experience (Canuso and [Jennifer Turnbull](#) in *Workshop*, unseen and unnamed voices in *Home*) set a tone of care and generosity that participants matched. We were led to tune into our spaces and how our bodies inhabit them in new ways, bringing intention and curiosity to our perception and elevating our intuitive movements to dances without the need to name them such. We listened to the stories of each others' objects and reflected what we heard back in movement and words.

For me, *Being/With: Workshop* was the more moving of the two experiences. In a story circle when the group reflected my story back to me from their homes, I felt seen in many different ways through all their lenses. In *Home's* one-on-one version, the stakes and intensity felt higher, being the sole holder of my partner's stories. The multiplicity of the group version built a branching web of tenderness; the duet, a caring bridge between two places.

The experiences left a taste in my mouth akin to that of chance meaningful encounters in public space (remember those?) that leave us vibrating with the power of happenstance. The tiny but deep slices of the lives of those strangers with whom I experienced *Being/With* are precious objects I'm carrying in my mind's pocket, running over their grooves in my thoughts as I do the same with the Oregonian wood in my hand.

[Being/With: Home](#) and [Being/With: Workshop](#), Nichole Canuso Dance Company, FringeArts online, September 10-October 3.

By Christina Catanese

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