

THE APOLOGY PROJECT



The Apology Project, a new interdisciplinary installation by Canadian choreographer/performer Gerry Trentham and American visual artist Kaersten Colvin-Woodruff, is an investigation of the falling body, the falling nation from triumph, and the shame of both the oppressed and the oppressor. This work is a collaboration with Toronto filmmaker Valerie Buhagiar, Toronto dancer Kevin Ormsby, NYC doc filmmaker Jesse Deganis Librera, set/projection designer Conor Moore, Toronto lighting designer Simon Rossiter and with the dramaturgical assistance of renowned Butoh artist Denise Fujiwara and director, dramaturge and cultural animator Diane Roberts.

Images by Kaija Siirala, Kaersten Colvin-Woodruff, Jesse Deganis-Librera, Bekah Alviani and Jessa Agilo

The Apology Project is a collision of performance, visual and media art examining shame, falling and oppression from multiple perspectives. It has transpired as a moving, scripted visual art piece where performers Gerry Trentham and Kevin Ormsby become a sequence of visual and auditory artworks that move within a world of Kaersten Colvin-Woodruff's visual art and filmmaker Valerie Buhagiar's projected images. With contributions from documentary filmmaker Jesse Deganis-Librera, lighting designer Simon Rossiter, set/projection designer Conor Moore, Butoh artist Denise Fujiwara and director, dramaturge and cultural animator Diane Roberts, the project has become a research lab beyond the work itself. It has challenged definitions of classical/contemporary art forms and their presentation and curation. It has engaged multiple disciplines of study to establish a dialogue that is actually part of the performed work. The work can be installed in a variety of contexts, galleries, and/or theaters, and as a bi-national collaboration discusses ideas and metaphors of "falling" – both as individual and as nation. The work responds unapologetically to a stream of complex current issues around the nature and usefulness of apology. It wonders what it might take to afford unity in a politely and/or violently divisive North American environment.

The artists continue to rework the content of each installation to respond with immediacy to current issues. It has been installed in various locations - CCDT in Toronto, Clarion University in Pennsylvania, Buffalo Art Studio, Silo City in Buffalo NY - each chapter of the work, five in all, are called Silos and are each designed as full works. Each production is installed to reflect the silos that best suit that environment. Each physical space asks for varied versions and a specific sequence of Silos to fully appreciate the location - from the traditional theatre space to a back alley. Each time the work is named after what its location evokes.

In the newest creation/production for a premiere in Toronto the work has been refined into a duet with Gerry Trentham and Kevin Ormsby in a work that asks real questions about the nature of an apology that can change a landscape and create a renewed relationship.

Sources

The vision of this work began as Trentham crossed paths with the artwork of Colvin-Woodruff; as they discussed and experienced the new Frank Gehry design of the staircase at the Art Gallery of Ontario; read Mary Swan's *Boys in the Trees* and James Gilford's *Glances Backward*, a startling collection of early



colonial letters and writings on gay and native oppression in America. These experiences reached into personal memories for Trentham growing up gay in rural Alberta and for Colvin-Woodruff growing up in a primarily white neighborhood in New Jersey, resonating with the current climate of oppression, although not always overt, ever-present.

They discussed how an ancient fear of 'other' seemed to be finding roots once again. As a culture climbs to power and domination, does the fear of an inevitable fall set in? Is fear or shame the root of an oppressor's tyranny – resulting in humiliation, injury, or genocide? Does nationhood play a role? In Greek mythology, the goddess Aidos – the goddess of shame - was thrown out of heaven because the gods did not want to live with the concept of shame. As Swan suggests in *Boys in the Trees*, "Shame and disgrace cause most violent passions, and bitter pangs." Ben Lerner defines shame as "a really intense form of the internalization of the social. Shame doesn't require cogitation, it is just the sense of being exposed." These ideas and texts source the investigation and synthesis of visual and performed art.



Gerry Trentham, Artistic Statement

My dance-based art bridges with advanced study of theatre voice and direction and has slowly morphed to embrace performance/visual art that integrates written/spoken poetic text, dance, human gesture, sound, music, visual and media art. Rooted deeply in the body, my creation process is a negotiation, a peace-inducing exchange between seemingly disparate parts of human "being" – the primal, physical, ancient, and emotional; the rural, a-cultured, civilized, and intellectual; the contemporary, sexual, urban, and spiritual; resonating deeply within and in between the human body's intelligence, aliveness, majesty, prowess and mystery tethered to its real connection to the environment, at times a brutish, scarce, chaotic, violent life and death. I note desires and intentions and how they inform action (both doing and being).

Installation Requirements: The visual art/performance installation is designed to be adaptable to various spaces with seating scattered in the round. The ideal presents as a gallery space rather than a theatre. Visual art and performers (at times) hang from a space at least 20 feet in height. The work is best when it uses a variation of heights. In Buffalo's Silo City the art objects were hung from between 10 and 140 feet in grain silos. The work is best performed in a full evening of sequences called Silos (chapters) but can be performed as excerpts. Video projections and specific lighting requirement can vary with the proposed space but are essential to the work.

Work in Progress: Installations | Buffalo – Toronto - Clarion, PA – Silo City: After a lengthy research period where Colvin-Woodruff and Trentham toured galleries in Buffalo, Montreal, Toronto, and New York to see how African and Native American art was presented within classical western cultural institutions and contexts, in November 2010, in residence at Toronto's hub14, the team captured and experimented with filmic projections acting as personal "shames" projected or "written" onto the body. Colvin-Woodruff integrated art objects and body casts as physical embodiments of shame and Trentham worked with Butoh artist Denise Fujiwara to research movement that illuminated falling, the role of the oppressor and the fear of the other.

At Buffalo Arts Studio the team honed projected content, angles and scale, shot footage including images of falling down stairs while Colvin-Woodruff integrated casted pieces of the bronze "armor" and installed hanging talismans and plumb bobs. On January 19 and 20, 2013 at Buffalo Arts Studio's Joanna Angie Gallery a work in progress showing tested the relationship of visual art and performance and received very positive feedback from the audience. In Toronto, at CCDT an further installation in progress was presented on April 19 and 20, 2013 with further Colvin-Woodruff casts and a full "chandelier" of talismans. Trentham and Buhagiar experimented with a sound score from a body mic so that all sounds and images would emanate from Trentham's body.

After a further residency and showing at Clarion University that brought visual art and theatre departments together, the team headed to Silo City in Buffalo, New York to research and present an Installation in progress to American supporters and presenters. The Apology Project added dancer Kevin Ormsby and associate director, dramaturge and cultural animator Diane Roberts to the team to further investigate how disturbingly imperative the racial content and bi-national context of the work had become. The work goes into its final creation and final in-progress showing at Bathurst 918 in Toronto on April 13 and 14, 2017 in preparation for its premiere at Next Steps, Harbourfront Theatre Centre, Toronto, in September 2017 and back to Silo City for the American premier in July 2018.

Responses included: "The artwork became a part of you even though you didn't always touch it". "Images felt like a part of the work, were involved in how you were moving." "Everything was essential." "Found pleasure in the fullness of the space." "Felt pain, desperation for you, armor and plumb lines were terrible, felt terrible." "The line you said -the tragedy of language - really stuck with me." "Loved the sound of your breath and words you repeated." "There was surprise throughout." "Sublime suggestion." "I liked the fuck you and the humour."

Kaersten Colvin-Woodruff, Artistic Statement

I create mixed media three dimensional works constructed from a combination of organic and industrial materials. My artwork is fueled by my interest and studies in African-American, Euro-American, and American Indian folk medicine, folklore, and folk magic. The works are not literal or narrative interpretation of these cultural practices; rather, I use combinations of materials such as human hair, bees' wax, vintage handwritten letters and documents, and traditional techniques such as casting, forging, and fabricating base metals to suggest or echo American folkways. Some elements in the work are deceptive in their display. What might appear purely mechanical, domestic or industrial at first glance soon becomes sacred, magical, or ritualistic in character. The shift between these contexts holds my interest, and encourages me to explore more ways of creating works that evoke feelings that are two- or threefold in nature.



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For Work In Progress Residencies:
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Buffalo Arts Studio, Buffalo, New York
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<https://vimeo.com/188087158> password AP2016
<https://vimeo.com/77239414> - Toronto work in progress showing - excerpts
<https://vimeo.com/58753076> - Buffalo work in progress showing -- excerpts

lbs/sq"
Gerry Trentham | Artistic Director

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