

# Emerged Nation: A New Dance Performance by the Elisa Monte Company

By **Meagan J. Meehan** - November 5, 2019

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"Emerged Nation" is a new performance piece by the famed Elisa Monte Dance Company set to be staged from November 21 to November 24 at New York City's Flea Theater.

Comprised of three movements that were directly inspired by, and symbolic of, the shifts in America's civil and social mores, the piece delves into the complex emotional landscape that has been created by today's climate of immigration, cultural acclimation and diversity. The performance features a cast of multi-national dancers and the company prides itself on exemplifying diversity in the field of dance.

Artistic Director Tiffany Rea-Fisher recently discussed this piece and more via an exclusive interview.

**Meagan Meehan (MM):** How long have you been with the company and what are the biggest challenges in your role?

**Tiffany Rea-Fisher (TRF):** I've been with the Elisa Monte Dance for 15 years. This is my fourth as Artistic Director. I think the biggest challenge is trying to manage the expectations of all the roles that I have. There is a lot of administrative work that goes into being the Artistic Director, which is a completely different skill set than what I use when creating a new piece for the company. So being able to switch from my creative mind to my analytical mind quickly is a must. It requires using soft skills with my dancers and staff, but also being able to close a deal or project. All of it requires being a confident, determined type of leader while finding balance and harmony.

**MM:** How did you come up with the choreography for "Emerged Nation"?

**TRF:** "Emerged Nation" is three different movements. For the first movement, *Tilted Arc*, it is inspired by a sculpture of the same name. I had the visual of the physical sculpture itself so that was helpful but empathy and sympathy also played a major role. I wanted to create something visually beautiful to articulate the technical beauty of dance but that was a little more emotional than my previous work has been. This was an investigation of immigration and what migration looks like over the globe.

*Emerged Nation* came from a purely visceral place. I worked very closely with the composer of this section so with every measure and every sound I could feel a drum beat within me and then I rode that wave. It was a very different process than that of *Tilted Arc*.

For the last piece, *Kinetic Kinship*, I wanted the movement to be more pedestrian and somewhat casual. This score is a soundscape rather than a musical score. I wanted to show the beauty and care that New Yorkers show each other daily even when the city can seem so crazy. New York gets a bad rap as aggressive and not caring, but I see something as simple as a subway ride, getting people getting from point A to B without problems as amazing, and wanted to bring these small gestures of caring to the forefront.

**MM:** What were the biggest challenges in staging this production?

**TRF:** We have an augmented reality portion of the show that I'm not going to really know how successful it will be until our opening night audience tries to download and interact with the App. Honestly, this production has been one of the easiest to put together because it just feels so right. Any time you go outside your comfort zone it's always a little scary. However, the excitement overwhelms any fears I have.

**MM:** What are your favorite scenes in this dance and why?

**TRF:** I don't know that I have a favorite scene, how they all piece together is really exciting for me. For *Kinetic Kinship*, there's a male duet that I really love. I think in the media you don't often see two Black males caring for one another. The media tends to show more aggressive imagery. There's another duet that happens in *Tilted Arc* and in the restaging of that movement, I switched the genders of the dancers, which has brought new life to the piece even though it was danced beautifully by the original cast. It's nice to see what that variation does. *Emerged Nation* feels most like me, so I love that I'm being reflected back at me through so many different bodies that aren't mine.

**MM:** How much did real life influence this piece and what do you hope people take away from it?

**TRF:** Real life influenced all of it 100%. I can't separate myself from my work. It's my own experience and everything is seen through my eyes or felt through my feelings and experienced through my body. You must have extreme empathy and sympathy to be a choreographer because you are imagining situations you haven't been in and are bringing to life that actual event or feeling. For "Emerged Nation," my original concept was around being able to understand that without our First Nations people none of us would be here. It led me to look at the connection between Black culture and Native culture. This led me to spiral into how native culture has influenced rock and roll because I'm a total metal head, and then down the rabbit hole I went. This kind of deep dive is necessary for me to make sure I'm not going on a tangent and I am staying true to my original concept.

I hope the audience takes away a sense of community and pride in their shared New Yorker-ness. I hope they find the evening enjoyable and that they feel engaged and part of the process. This is my gift to them and I want them to enjoy it. I thought about all of this with the audience in mind. I know that they're coming and I'm excited they're coming and I hope they feel considered.

**MM:** You work with dancers from all over the world, so how does that diversity influence your productions?

**TRF:** That is part of the company's mission and something I'm really proud of. Speaking to that audience piece, I think it's important for that audience to see themselves reflected on stage. My company is like New York City, there are a lot of differences and a lot of similarities. When I audition dancers, I'm looking for the whole person, not empty vessels to be filled with my creativity. I expect all their past experiences to be in the room. I force myself to ask how the work is going to be perceived if I were from Thailand or a state that isn't coastal, or wasn't a native English speaker it pushes me to be more mindful and clearer in my messaging and how I move through the world in general.

*Artistic Director Tiffany Rea-Fisher.*

**MM:** What are your ultimate career goals and what additional projects are on the horizon for you?

**TRF:** My ultimate career goal is to continue creating while centering myself around joy; that's the main thing for me. There's no one job or one thing that I want to do more than what I'm currently doing. I've been happy in all different positions because it always felt like I was exactly where I was supposed to be. I want to continue to be my most creative self, creating joy, art and beauty for myself and others. That idea/goal is what motivates and drives me.

In terms of what's on the horizon:

- I am the Creative Director for Music from the Sole's new show via Lincoln Center Education which will be presented Dec 3-9th, 2019 at the Clark Studio Theater
- I am choreographing a *Christmas Carol in Harlem* for Classical Theater of Harlem which will be presented at Aaron Davis Hall Dec. 7th-21st
- I was commissioned by Harlem Stage as part of their Harlem Renaissance Centennial Celebration and will be creating a full evening-length work inspired by 1920's playwrights Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Mary Powell Burrill and Angelina Weld Grimké which will premiere April 30-May 2nd, 2020
- I curate the Bryant Park Dance festival which runs mid-June-mid-July every Friday from 6-8pm
- In July 2020 I will be choreographing the Classical Theater of Harlem summer show at Marcus Garvey Park
- Last but not least I will be creating a new work for Dance Theatre of Harlem based off the life of Hazel Scott that will premiere in winter of 2020

**MM:** Is there anything else that you would like to mention or discuss?

**TRF:** I'm really excited about this show at Flea Theater. I know we should be excited about every show but this one does feel different and special and I want to share it with as many people as possible. When I bring people into rehearsal, they get excited about it. It really feels like I'm onto something. The company goes into our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year and I didn't want this year's 39<sup>th</sup> year to feel like were laying low until 40. I'm really energized and excited about the work.

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Elisa Monte Dance will celebrate their 39<sup>th</sup> anniversary season at The Flea Theater in NYC from November 21-24, 2019. Tickets range from \$10 to \$25 and can be purchased online at [www.TheFlea.org](http://www.TheFlea.org) For the most up-to-date schedule for all Elisa Monte Dance programming, follow via the below links and visit [www.elisamontedance.org](http://www.elisamontedance.org). To learn more about Tiffany, visit the [Elisa Monte Dance website](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#) and her [Instagram](#).

Meagan J. Meehan is a published author, poet, cartoonist, and produced playwright. She pens columns for the Great South Bay Magazine, Blasting News, KidskinthaBlog, and Entertainment Vine. She is also a stop-motion animator and an award-winning abstract artist. Meagan holds a Bachelors in English Literature, a Masters in Communication, and is currently pursuing a PhD in Educational Psychology. She is an animal advocate and a fledgling toy, game, and shoe designer.

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