

Emily Johnson in *The Ways We Love And The Ways We Love Better, Monumental Movement*
Toward Being Future Beings. Lensapeaking, 2020. Photo by Scott Lynch

2022/23 Season

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Learning Guide

Emily Johnson in *The Ways We Love And The Ways We Love Better, Monumental Movement Toward Being Future Beings*. Lenapehoking, 2020. Photo by Scott Lynch



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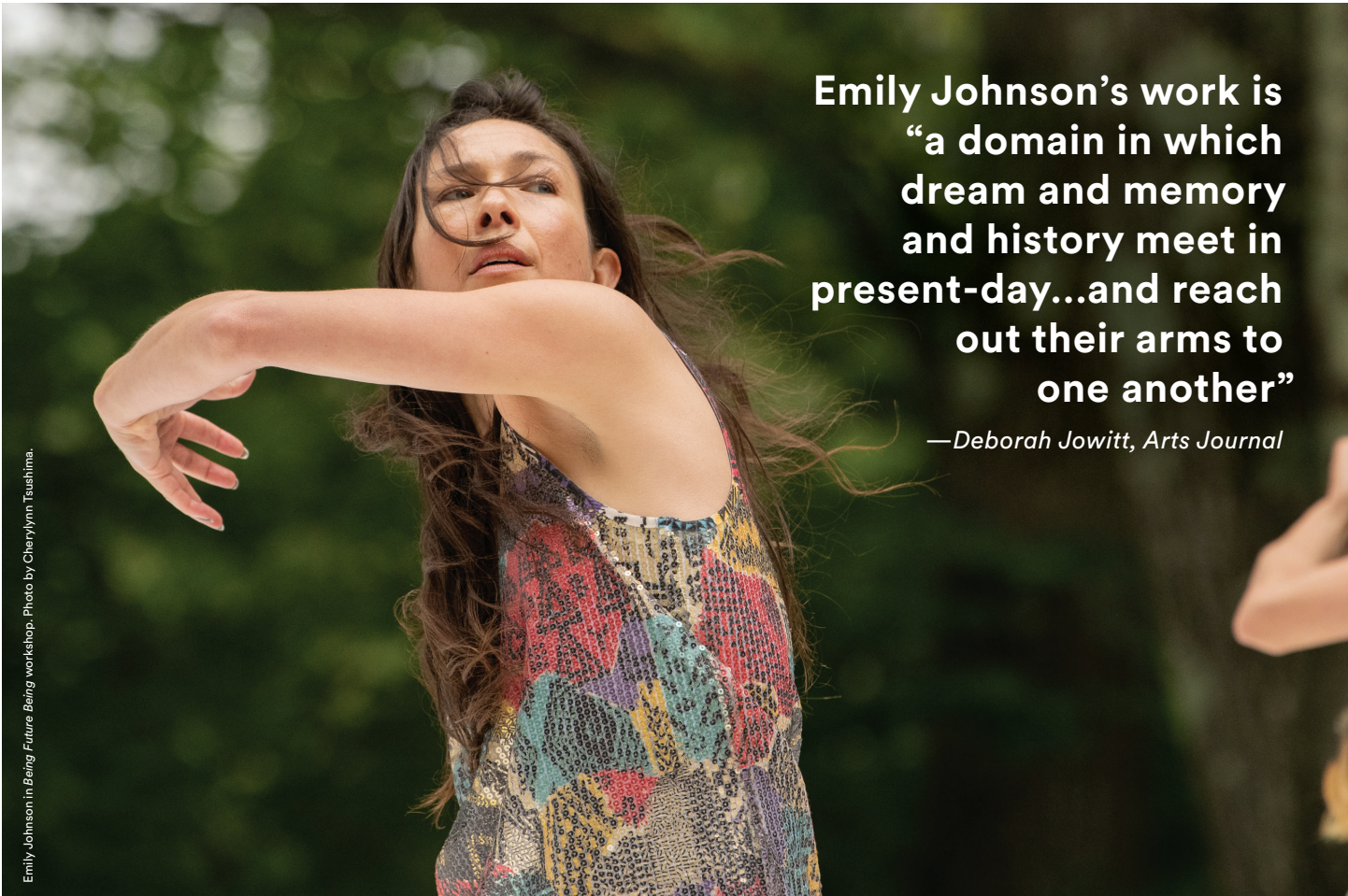
1310 11th St., Santa Monica, CA 90401 BroadStage.org **2**

Inspiration

Emily Johnson is an artist from the Yup'ik Nation and an **Indigenous Futurist**. As a dance-maker inspired by collaborating with **more-than-human kin** to define and create futures that we can enjoy in the present, Emily wants to create a world in which performance is an integral part of life, connecting us to each other, to our environment, to our stories, and our collective imaginings. Every new beginning has a creation story, or origin story, and for Emily this means having a future creation story, one that will help to develop this future world. This is why her work as a land and water protector takes place alongside and intertwined with her award-winning artistic achievements. Emily uses dance as a portal through which the audience experiences space and time and, potentially, engages with a process that may change the way we relate to ourselves, our environment and to the human and more-than-human kin of our world. To further support this process, the **Decolonization Rider** that accompanies her work motivates immediate institutional culture change through discussion and guided action (see Resources)

Emily Johnson’s work is
 “a domain in which
 dream and memory
 and history meet in
 present-day...and reach
 out their arms to
 one another”

—Deborah Jowitt, *Arts Journal*



Emily Johnson in Being Future Being workshop. Photo by Cherylynn Tsushima.



Investigation

“One day, civil rights and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples will be recognized in relation to land. Power imbalance and extraction will not be the default relationship in our working lives. Theft of, abuses on, and lack of recognition of Indigenous land and water will not be tolerated”

—Emily Johnson, *Inaugural Lecture Series, The Open Society University Network’s Center for Human Rights and the Arts at Bard College*

Why a Land Acknowledgement?

All over the world and for thousands of years, people have developed cultures that are interwoven with the elements of the land, including water sources, both essential for life. These connections are the basis for cultural identity and **worldview**. Over time, however, colonialism has displaced and dispossessed people from the homelands, greatly disrupting these vital connections.

“An Indigenous Land or Territorial Acknowledgement is a statement that recognizes the Indigenous peoples who have been dispossessed from the homelands and territories upon which an institution was built and currently occupies and operates in.”

— Felicia Garcia (Chumash), M.A. *Museum Studies, New York University, 2018, Guide to Indigenous Land and Territorial Acknowledgments for Cultural Institutions.*

The cultural identity of a group of Indigenous people, Nations, and communities is deeply rooted within the land and water of their ancestors. As an example, for the Nations of the Pacific Northwest Coast and the Columbia Plateau whose ancestral lands include the Columbia River, fishing for salmon is an integral part of culture. More than just a food, salmon has shaped their worldview, cultural practices and economies. Ceremonies held in honor of the sacred First Foods continue to take place - as they have for thousands of years by the Columbia River. This region of the Pacific Salmon extends north to Yup'ik lands that are currently known as Alaska.

Throughout history and to the present day, Indigenous people, Nations and communities around the world are displaced from their ancestral lands by broken **treaties, genocide** and the ongoing impact of colonialism to an extent that is not always fully acknowledged. In what is currently called the United States, this part of Native American, Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, and Native Hawaiian lived experience has been hidden for a long time, resulting in a form of ‘invisibility’, a harmful erasure, as if Indigenous people no longer exist. In actuality, there are an estimated 4-7 million Indigenous people living in what is currently called the United States, with the state of California having the largest Indigenous population.

As a practice, or protocol, a Land Acknowledgement is a way to express gratitude and respect toward those whose ancestral land we are on when we gather. Recently, in what is currently called the United States, as social injustices have been increasingly highlighted, more people are becoming familiar with Land Acknowledgements. For some, writing or hearing a land acknowledgement may be the first step in learning a history previously unknown to them, that may even be their own. For others, this may serve as a way to initiate a difficult, but essential conversation. In either case, a Land Acknowledgement is only a first step that needs to be followed by decisions and actions that support the intent of this initial statement.



Emily Johnson and participants in *SHORE: Community Action*, in partnership with Rockaway Waterfront Alliance. Rockaways, Lenapehoking, 2015. Photo by Ian Douglas

“Whenever we try to envision a world without war, without violence, without prisons, without capitalism, we are engaging in an exercise of speculative fiction.”

—Walidah Imarisha, Educator, Writer, Editor of *Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*

How Can The Future Be In The Present?

If you have seen a science fiction movie, then you know what it means to imagine the future. Now, take that envisioned future, or at least parts of it, and believe that it already exists, in the present. Include positive representations of Indigenous people, events, cultural practices and beliefs and that is what Indigenous Futurisms is about - Indigenous people with ancient knowledge in a futuristic setting - or in the **multiverse!**

Indigenous Futurisms, a term coined by Professor Grace Dillon in 2003, describes an **artistic movement** that includes various fields: art, literature, games and other forms of media that express Indigenous perspectives on the past, present, and future. The term was inspired by Afrofuturism, another artistic movement, one that centers on the African **diaspora**. Dr. Dillon was specifically inspired by Alondra Nelson’s 2002 *Social Text* issue on Afrofuturism. Both Indigenous Futurisms and Afrofuturism use technology and science fiction to address themes and concerns related to the specific experiences of each group.

Many science fiction movies, such as H.G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds* (1898) and James Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009), are based on **colonialism**, which we tend to think of as occurring in the past when in actuality, the effects and processes of colonialism are ongoing.

Indigenous Futurisms and Afrofuturism both involve ways to forward a process of decolonization. As Prof. Dillon of the Anishinaabe Nation states, “all forms of Indigenous Futurisms are narratives of *biskaabiiyang*, an Anishinaabemowin word that refers to the process of ‘returning to ourselves,’ which involves discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world.”

Being Future Being leads the audience through dance portals, delving into the power of future creation stories involving more-than-human kin in the present and transforming our ways of being with all our relations.



Exploration

This land is a poem

This land is a poem of ochre and burnt sand I
could never write,

unless paper were the sacrament of sky, and ink
the broken line of

wild horses staggering the horizon several miles
away. Even then,

does anything written ever matter to the earth,
wind, and sky?

Source: Joy Harjo, Muscogee (Creek) Nation,
23rd Poet Laureate of the United States 2019-2022

Try This

SHORT-TERM TIME CAPSULE

When you think about the future, it seems far away, but the future is constantly happening from this moment to the next! Who will you be in the future? Who will you be in a week, in a month, a year? What would you or could you accomplish in a week, in a month, a year? What would you want to take with you from the past into your future? What will the world around you look like? What do you want in the future for the well-being of your family, friends, the world?

Get creative! Write a letter to yourself, thinking about the questions above, that you will read 2 weeks into the future. Include what you would like to see at that time. Gather small items or photos that are important to you now and put the letter and the items in a shoe box or other small container. Place a 'Date To Be Opened' label on the box and keep it where you will be sure to remember. Notice your thoughts and feelings when you finally open it! What changed? What didn't change?

TRACE THE TREE CROWN

Emily Johnson has collaborated with many trees, or more-than-human kin, as she creates her performances. See what you might create following these steps. As you play or walk in a park or anywhere where there are trees, find a tree and move yourself quietly in a circle around its trunk. Do this with 2 or 3 different trees. With which one of the trees do you feel most comfortable? Circle its tree trunk once more as you touch the bark of the tree. What did you feel? What do you smell? Listen closely, if that is available to you, what do you hear? Place your back on the trunk and move away until you are underneath the end of the longest tree branch.

Notice how far you are from the tree's trunk and look up or feel upwards to notice that same space reflected above you. Now bring your focus down to the earth and imagine the tree's roots underneath you. Did you know that the roots of a tree mirror the crown, or upper part, of the tree? Follow the edge of the branches as you move yourself around the tree once more, this time knowing that you are also moving on the edge of the tree's extensive underground root network. Next time, do this with your friends or start a tree diary!

DID YOU KNOW?

TIME TWISTS The idea of what time is can vary among people around the world. For the Aymara people of the Andes in South America, the past is in front and the future is behind. Why? The past has happened, so you can remember it and 'see' it with your mind as it actually happened. The future, however, has not happened, so although you can imagine what it might be, you cannot remember it or 'see' it - because it is behind you!

TREE KIN Scientific research has now proven what many Indigenous people already knew. The forest ecosystem is collaborative, trees not only communicate with each other, but they also help each other in times of need. The mycorrhizal networks, or underground fungi, serve as a communication pathway between trees. Older trees share resources with their kin, or relatives, at important times during a young tree's development including when a tree is sick. A tree that is dying, which is a process that may take decades, will disperse carbon and other nutrients to its neighboring trees, passing on its strength and vitality to the next generation.

Vocabulary



Performers and tree during *SHORE in Naarm*. Photo by Bryony Jackson

ARTISTIC MOVEMENT A tendency or a style of art with a particularly specified objective and philosophy that is adopted and followed by a group of artists during a specific time period.

COLONIALISM Domination of a people or area by a foreign state or nation. The practice of extending and maintaining a nation’s political and economic control over another people or area.

DECOLONIZATION RIDER A rider is a set of requests or requirements that a performer provides as a standard for the hosting venue to meet. This rider focuses on decolonization, which means that the host venue will take steps in a process to eliminate the internal colonial oppression in order for Indigenous people to become self-governing or independent, and able to reclaim cultural, psychological, and economic freedom.

DIASPORA People settled far from their ancestral homelands.

GENOCIDE The deliberate killing of a large number of people from a particular nation or ethnic group with the aim of destroying that nation or group.

INDIGENOUS Of or relating to the earliest known inhabitants of a place and especially a place that was colonized by a now-dominant group.

LAND AND WATER PROTECTOR An activist or person who protects the land and water from destruction, extraction, pollution or commodification. Distinguished from other environmental activists by the philosophy and approach based in an Indigenous cultural view that water and land are sacred.

MORE-THAN-HUMAN KIN Non-human relatives including landscapes, animals, and plants.

MULTIVERSE A theoretical reality that includes a possibly infinite number of parallel universes.

TREATIES An agreement or arrangement made by negotiation between two or more authorities, such as a state or a self governing nation.

WORLDVIEW A collection of values and beliefs about life and the universe held by an individual or a group of people and that informs thought and action; a way of seeing and understanding the world.



Resources

Suggested CA State Standards

EIGHTH GRADE STANDARDS

CA VAPA Dance 8. 1.4 Analyze gestures and movements viewed in live or recorded professional dance performances and apply that knowledge to dance activities.

CA VAPA Dance 8. 1.5 Identify and analyze the variety of ways in which a dancer can move, using space, time, and force/energy vocabulary.

CA VAPA Dance 8. 3.0 Students analyze the function and development of dance in past and present cultures throughout the world, noting human diversity as it relates to dance and dancers.

CA HSS 8. 5.3 Outline the major treaties with American Indian nations during the administrations of the first four presidents and the varying outcomes of those treaties.

CA HSS 8. 8.2 Describe the purpose, challenges, and economic incentives associated with westward expansion, including the concept of Manifest Destiny (e.g. the Lewis and Clark expedition, accounts of the removal of Indians, the Cherokees' "trail of Tears," settlement of the Great Plains) and the territorial acquisitions that spanned numerous decades.

CA HSS 8. 8.4 Examine the importance of the great rivers and the struggle over water rights.

CCSS ELA Writing 8.3.a,b,c,d,e Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS ELA Writing 8.9.a Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. Apply grade 8 Reading standards to literature (e.g. "Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new").

CCSS ELA WHST 6-8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

SOCIAL JUSTICE STANDARDS

ID.6-8.2 I know about my family history and culture and how I am connected to the collective history and culture of other people in my identity groups.

JU.6-8.15 I know about some of the people, groups and events in social justice history and about the beliefs and ideas that influenced them.

AC.6-8.19 I will speak up or take action when I see unfairness, even if those around me do not, and I will not let others convince me to go along with injustice.

SEL COMPETENCIES

Social Awareness: Perspective-taking, Empathy, Appreciating Diversity, Respect for Others

Responsible Decision-Making: Identifying Problems, Analyzing Situations, Solving Problems, Evaluating, Reflecting, Ethical Responsibility



Resources

Website and Research Links

REVEAL: Being Future Being Conversation with Emily Johnson and BroadStage's Artistic and Executive Director Rob Bailis about making *Being Future Being*

Beyond Land Acknowledgement

Guide to Indigenous Land and Territorial Acknowledgements for Cultural Institutions

Native Land Map

What is Decolonization?

Emily Johnson / Catalyst Decolonization Rider

To Be Visible Julia Bogany, Tongva Tribal Elder and Tribal Cultural Consultant

Invisibility, Disappearance, and the Native American Future
Professor David Treur

Repairing the Past: Returning Native Land
Dr. Ibram X. Kendi in Conversation with David Treur (Ojibwe)

Does time work differently in different languages?

Taking the Fiction Out of Science Fiction: A Conversation about Indigenous Futurisms

Indigenous Futurism Ushers in New Perspectives of Past, Present and Future

Indigenous Futurism

Once-ignored Indigenous knowledge of nature now shaping science

Trees Talk To Each Other. 'Mother Tree' Ecologist Hears Lessons For People, Too

Indigenous Peoples Update Finds "Persistent Invisibility" in Official Statistics

UConn Reads: Good Relations

Post-Apocalyptic Theatre on Native Land