



core

D A N C E

BEG INN INGS

"We had to create our own company because no one else was making dance in this way."

SUE SCHROEDER, FOUNDER

Front Cover: simon gentry, *Carrying Water to the Sea*, National Water Dance 2018, Rose Shields, PhaeMonae Brooks

Left Photo: Juanita Winn Lindley and Kathy Schroeder Russell in *Ashtabula Rag*, 1985

Right Photo: Sue Schroeder in *and the earth cries inside*, 1993. Photo by Jeff Smith



A Life in Houston: In her first year at Houston's High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, a young Sue Schroeder was recruited into the Beverly Cook Dance Company. There she danced for a decade until Ms. Cook disbanded the company.

Schroeder then danced with another company for a year, but soon became restless. Her older sister, Kathy, had also been a member of Beverly Cook, and both wondered how best to pursue their muse. It wasn't long before they decided to start their own company.

"After nine or ten years of making art in a particular way, from a particular perspective, and with a particular aesthetic, that's what called to us," said Schroeder. "We had to create our own company because that's what interested us, and no one else was making dance in this way."

Christening the new company "Several" to signify the continuation of Cook's art-making process – the last piece the company performed was called *Several* – the Schroeder sisters, along with two other former Cook dancers, christened their first performance space at a

loft studio at 3221 Milam in Houston. The year was 1980.

Dual Homes: By 1985, falling oil prices impacted Houston and Core Dance's landlord did not renew the lease. Its next studio space, DiverseWorks, burned down, and the one after that was an old office, complete with carpet and desks. Then a college friend – an Atlanta native who had returned to her hometown – called Schroeder and offered her the company's current location in Decatur. Since then, Core Dance has operated in both cities.

Global Citizens: A defining characteristic of Core Dance is that it tours.

Touring started as an artifact of collaboration.

In the mid-80s, Core Dance was contacted by the Goethe Institute in Munich, Germany. They wanted to present German contemporary dance and asked Schroeder for assistance. In exchange, the company traveled to Berlin, Germany in 1988 as part of Berlin's designation as Cultural Capital of Europe. Word quickly spread about the cultural alliances forming with and through Core Dance and other international organizations and Consulates joined in. Core Dance has since performed in 16 states in the US and traveled to 15 other countries.

Professional Artists: Core Dance has long been a professional dance organization. Dance Artists started receiving salaries in 1986, administrative staff was added in 1990, and full benefits for all were added in 2011.



Dance companies are frequently named after their founding choreographers; e.g. Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, and Alwin Nikolais. They are, after all, vehicles for their founders' visions.

The same can be said of Core Dance: cofounded by Sue Schroeder and Kathy Schroeder Russell. And in that name is the vision.

"When we formed, the natural order in dance was that choreographers, most of whom were white males, were masters, and dancers were subordinates," said Schroeder, who cofounded Core Dance at the age of 23. "There was a great deal of abuse going on in the dance world, and it was simply accepted as the norm."

But Schroeder wouldn't have it. "Core Dance" refers to an artistic partnership, and partners have included the company Dance Artists, other choreographers, composers, musicians, visual artists, set designers, lighting designers, et al.; Schroeder believes that art is always made richer through collaboration.

"Success in art making, to me, comes down to truly collaborating, which only happens when you genuinely value people, give them a voice, and give them a seat at the table," said Schroeder. "When people are valued,

they connect more deeply with the work."

A COLLABORATION FRAMEWORK

It's one thing to decry the model of artistic dictator and pronounce yourself a collaborator, but it's something else entirely to develop collaboration into a Core Dance competency.

"Can you uphold personal values at work?" asked Schroeder. "It can be challenging, but for me, it's much harder to live my work life differently from my private life."

To strengthen the practice of collaboration, Schroeder developed a "Core Dance Manifesto". As a tangible way to define the cultural practice of Core Dance, inclusive of all aspects of the organization including the artistic and business sides of the organization, the Manifesto draws from five components:

- Don Miguel Ruiz's Four Agreements
- Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process
- The Field's Fieldwork Method for Feedback
- Marlene Johnson's Guidelines for Cooperative Living
- The Formal Consensus Process

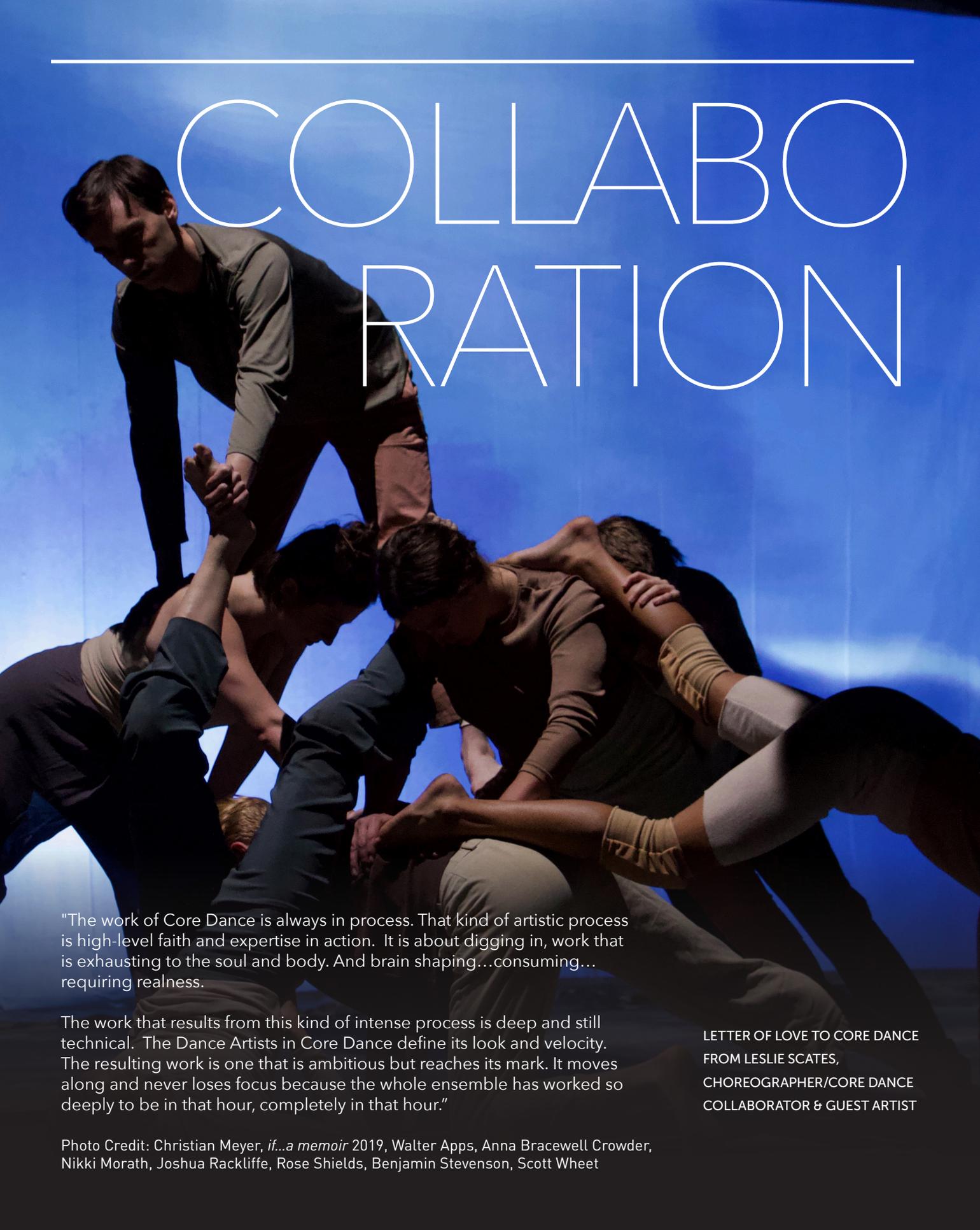
The practice aims to foster quality work and protect relationships. "We value mutual respect and want to offer

feedback and communication that is meaningful," said Schroeder. "We activate these tools every day to support these aspirations."

Although Schroeder had informally applied the framework for years, it wasn't until she reached burnout in 2004 that the practice organically formalized.

"It got to the point that I could no longer handle the volume of my workload," said Schroeder. "So out of that moment we developed a shared leadership model. Core Dance needed to lead in the same manner that art was made in the studio – collaboratively, sharing power, and creating true organizational health."

COLLABORATION

A group of dancers in a huddle, performing a collaborative dance piece. The dancers are wearing dark, long-sleeved shirts and dark pants. They are in a circular formation, with some standing and some crouching or lying on the floor. The background is a bright blue sky with a white horizon line. The title 'COLLABORATION' is written in large, white, outlined letters across the top of the image.

"The work of Core Dance is always in process. That kind of artistic process is high-level faith and expertise in action. It is about digging in, work that is exhausting to the soul and body. And brain shaping...consuming... requiring realness.

The work that results from this kind of intense process is deep and still technical. The Dance Artists in Core Dance define its look and velocity. The resulting work is one that is ambitious but reaches its mark. It moves along and never loses focus because the whole ensemble has worked so deeply to be in that hour, completely in that hour."

LETTER OF LOVE TO CORE DANCE
FROM LESLIE SCATES,
CHOREOGRAPHER/CORE DANCE
COLLABORATOR & GUEST ARTIST

Photo Credit: Christian Meyer, *if...a memoir* 2019, Walter Apps, Anna Bracewell Crowder, Nikki Morath, Joshua Rackliffe, Rose Shields, Benjamin Stevenson, Scott Wheet

4 decades. 135 original works. What sets Core Dance apart? Artistic research & social conscience.

ARTISTIC RESEARCH

Innovation in dance arises from constantly investigating and experimenting with what's possible with human bodies in motion.

Core Dance cofounder and artistic director Sue Schroeder and the Dance Artists in the company may spend months investigating how to wordlessly express a single human impulse; Schroeder is always seeking new ways to stimulate movement possibilities beyond one's comfort zone.

"Our work is process-based," explained Schroeder. "The end product is not the principal focus. We are concerned with the actual doing and how actions can arrive at or inform an actual work of art. We're discovering art as it's being made. Seeking the inherent motivation and intention within human movement, our work is truly a creative journey."

A SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

An immersive performance developed out of artistic questioning, Core Dance's 2019, *if...a memoir* is an exploration into the inseparable connection between our

humanity, the earth and our future. A performance literature that is bold, straightforward, expressive and timeless, the Core Dance Artists and Collaborators engage with the audiences to create a collective act to address our perilous times.

Core Dance's 2017 *Human Landscapes* seeks to express the endless movement which migrants across the globe experience on their way to a safe haven. Addressing immigration, exile, and the current refugee crisis, it is one of many socially-conscious Core Dance works.

"This is what artists do," said Schroeder. "Art activates empathy. We are catalysts for re-envisioning the future."

Why so much attention to social issues? Schroeder points to her mother. "At 89 years old she continued to drive to nursing homes to volunteer," said Schroeder. "Giving back runs strong in our family culture."

From a home of compassion into a profession where domination and abuse were prevalent, the combination of collaboration, community orientation, and a belief that the arts can heal has brought Core Dance to a place where creating socially-conscious work isn't a privilege, it's a mandate.

SITE-SPECIFIC AND MUSEUM WORK

Core Dance did not seek site-specific work, site-specific and museum work found Core Dance.

Schroeder frames site-specific choreography as inspired and informed by the physical properties and/or the history of the space in which the work is developed and performed. Her approach to museum work is to create a kinesthetic entry point into an exhibition by physicalizing the visual artist's intent. An example of a site-specific work is *Carrying Water to the Sea* for the National Water Dance 2018 performance at Driftwood Beach on Jekyll Island, Georgia.

Core Dance's drive to innovate and engage is satisfied by working in non-traditional performance venues including museums. Core Dance instigates partnerships with site representatives to create a shared vision. "We are interested in connecting our art-making to our audiences," said Schroeder. And an example of museum work is *19th Century (wo)Man: A Contemporary Intervention* in conjunction with the works from the permanent exhibition at The National Gallery Prague: 1796–1918: ART OF THE LONG CENTURY.

CHOR EOG RAPHY

Photo Credit: simon gentry, *Carrying Water to the Sea*, National Water Dance 2018,
Indya Childs, Rose Kazanowski, Rose Shields



CULTIVATION

Photo Credit: Photo Credit: simon gentry,
Fieldwork Showcase, Sydney Burrows

In the early years, Sue Schroeder found it difficult to garner support from the Houston art establishment; the elders were resistant to share the wisdom and knowledge that could help her.

“It was a time when the scarcity mentality ran strong,” said Schroeder. “They saw only one pie and a limited number of pieces. I decided I would go the other direction and pay it forward.”

For Schroeder, it’s a spiritual practice to “unteach the starving artist mentality to most of the artists that have come through Core Dance. We’re artists. We create. It’s our passion and our career. The uniqueness of our creative contribution deserves celebration. In this way, we become catalysts for more – more art-making, more support, larger audiences, increased recognition. In this way we promote dance and art as valid professions.”

Today, Core Dance offers four programs that advance the making of art: the Teacher Training Institute (TTI), DIG Summer Intensive, CoreoLab, and Fieldwork. While Fieldwork and the Teacher Training Institute welcome all artistic disciplines, DIG and CoreoLab are focused on dance professionals.

These programs – along with

Core Dance’s practice of producing works by non-Core Dance artists – make Core Dance a dynamic center for dance.

“Dance thrives in communities where opportunities for creative and professional development are part of the landscape,” said Schroeder. “We envision Core Dance as a stimulus for the dynamic evolution of dance at home and abroad, with the knowledge that dance as art-making is an essential element of the fabric of our human experience, connecting us to each other.”

TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTE

The Teacher Training Institute (TTI) was developed in 2001 by a consortium of Atlanta dance organizations now led by Core Dance. It develops qualified instructors to teach art, dance, and kinetic learning in community enrichment programs, a unique approach and methodology not often found in the education and arts education programs at the college level. TTI imparts learning techniques and tools that develop skills in children and adults who are challenged by traditional cognitive learning models.

DIG: VITAL PHYSICAL RESEARCH

DIG is Core Dance’s summer

intensive for professional dance artists. Artists investigate the dance/art-making process, tune their creative voice and gain tools in technique, methodologies for movement invention, composition and performance studies. Led by art-makers from around the world, participants experience a rigorous investigation of the body in space and the connection towards one another while expanding their artistic and movement research practices.

FIELDWORK

Honed by artists around the world for over 30 years, Fieldwork continues to be a powerful tool in the creative process. Fieldwork is a unique facilitated forum for artists of all genres to share developing works and exchange peer feedback. With incisive and stimulating non-directorial feedback through a ‘test audience’ structure, Fieldwork provides a safe and rigorous space for creative exploration. Developed by The Field in New York City, Fieldwork has been offered by Core Dance in Atlanta and Houston annually for the last 30 years.

COREOLAB

CoreoLab is a resource designed for individual artists to take creative risks and support innovative ideas that redefine artistic boundaries. While

reshaping the conversation about art and experience, CoreoLab provides access to studio time, studio space as well as the Dance Artists of Core Dance. Alongside local and regional guest artists, movement is researched and explored without the expectation of producing work for performance or the stage.

All of these Core Dance activities – conscious collaboration, innovative and site-specific choreography, and cultivation of the art of making art – share two characteristics: they are deeply engaging and they involve artistic collaboration.

But Core Dance's impulse to engage deeply extends beyond fellow dance artists and art makers to audience members and members of the community at large.

Core Dance initiates conversations with its audience via Lunchtime in the Studio, Salon, and Artist Conversations. Interactive in nature, these events invite participants to share their thoughts, interpretations, and viewpoints while providing glimpses into the language of dance and the creative process. These opportunities for audience engagement have been fixtures in Core Dance's activities since 2002.

Sue Schroeder, explained the why behind the programs: "There's a difference between actively and passively watching work. To awaken the human spirit even

for just a moment, to be fully present, to feel real emotions, to relate to a real human being... these things are essential."

Dynamic X-Change Healing Arts Program (DXC), is Core Dance's signature community outreach program. Since 1993, DXC has worked in support of those living in challenging situations and oftentimes isolated because of their circumstances – dealing with abuse, homelessness, language barriers, refugee status, aging, AIDS. DXC offers dance as a tool to teach, to connect, to heal, and to inspire. Working in partnership with and in service to our communities, this connection of movement and energy cultivates the spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical well-being of people of all ages. Careful attention to human needs, years of teaching experience, and a finely tuned sense of the stories our bodies have to tell informs and guides the process. What results for the participants – community members and Core Dance Artists - is change in their lives that is grounded in their bodies and derived from creative interpretation of life and its array of experiences through movement. The substance and depth inherent in working with and alongside our community provides unfeigned inspiration and supports Core Dance's art making processes in increasingly authentic and relevant ways.

T I M E L I N E

1980



1980: Core Dance is founded in Houston by Kathy and Sue Schroeder

1982: DiverseWorks residency, Houston

1985: Atlanta becomes Core Dance's second home

1986: Dance Artists start receiving salaries



1987: First performance at Miller Outdoor Theater, Houston

1988: First international tour, Germany

1988: Core Dance joins Alternate ROOTS

1989: First year as National Performance Network (NPN) presenter

1990

1990: Core Dance adds paid administrative staff



1990: Choreography: *Spirit of Passion*, Sue Schroeder, Lead Artist

1992: First year as National Black Arts Festival presenter

Fieldwork program initiated

1993: Initiates Dynamic X-Change program

1994: Choreography: *The Grasp of Unreason*, Sue Schroeder, Lead Artist, marking the 30th Anniversary of Flannery O'Connor's death



1995: Choreography: *Aria for Endangered Species* in collaboration with Ellen Bromberg and Yoko Ono



1997: First performance at Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

2000

2000: Choreography: *Messiah*, Sue Schroeder, Lead Artist, with Antoine Plante and Mercury

2002: First performance at Bayou City Art Festival, Houston

2004: Formally adopted five cultural practices

2006: Choreography: *Corazón Abriendo: Heart Opening*, Sue Schroeder and Susan M. Prins, Lead Artists

2009: First performance at University of Central Arkansas, Conway

2010

2011: Moving Towards Health residency, Conway, AR



2012: First performance at The High Museum of Art, Atlanta



2013: First performance at Menil Collection, Houston

First performance at Flux Projects, Atlanta

2014: Choreography: *Je Suis/I Am* co-created with Association Manifeste/France

2015: Choreography: *Life Interrupted*, Sue Schroeder, Lead Artist, commissioned by the National Park Service/U.S. Department of the Interior to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the closing of the Japanese American Internment Camps

2016: Choreography: *American Playground* Niv Sheinfeld and Oren Laor, Lead Artists

2017: Choreography: *Human Landscapes* Germana Civera, Lead Artist, *Civil Twilight* by Core Dance in collaboration with the Writeous Poets to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Integration of Central High School, Little Rock, AR

2018: Choreography: *As the Shadows Grow Longer*, D. Patton White, Lead Artist

2019: Choreography: *if...a memoir*, Sue Schroeder, Lead Artist



2020

Core Dance's 40th Anniversary

Choreography: *Shall Not Be Denied!* in collaboration with Sharon Loudon, celebrating 100 Years of Women's Right to Vote

Our work, an ever-flowing stream of conscious and conscientious collaboration in the service of art making in general and contemporary dance in particular, is made possible through the generous support of individuals and institutions big and small.

To share time, talent, funds, or for more information about Core Dance, please contact us at info@CoreDance.org. To make a donation immediately, visit [*Core Dance.org/support*](https://CoreDance.org/support)



Photo Credit: simon gentry, *Carrying Water to the Sea*,
National Water Dance 2018, Sue Schroeder

LET US HEAR FROM YOU!

Core Dance, a contemporary dance organization, creates, performs, and produces compelling original dance that ignites the creative spirit and actively encourages participation and conversation by and with the community. Creating a context for dance that is relevant at home and around the globe, Core Dance uses dance to illuminate, educate and question. Internationally recognized for its artistically driven research practices, the underlying authenticity of the individual Dance Artists and its socially relevant dance creations, Core Dance is an artistic incubator and convener.

core
DANCE

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