

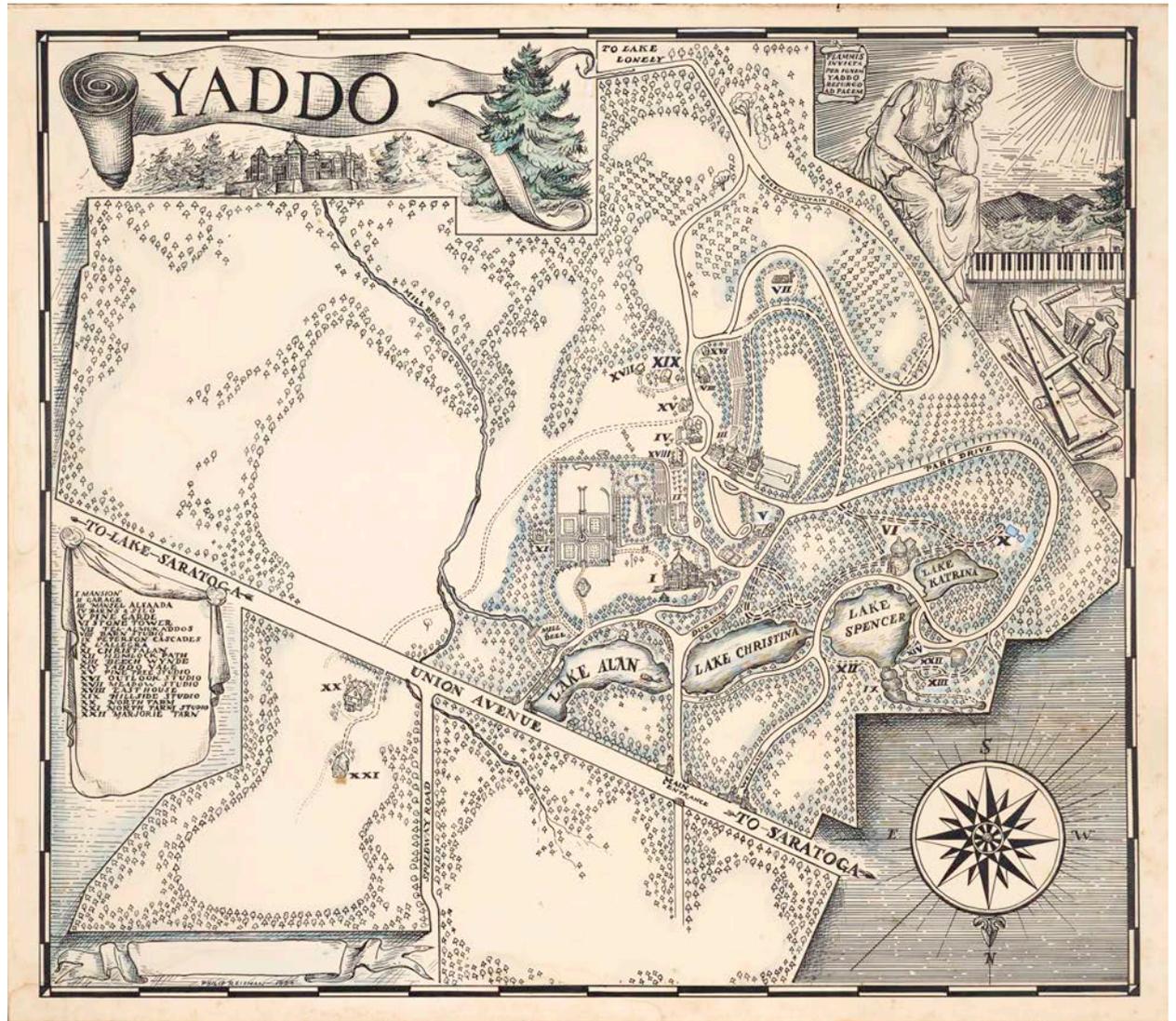
**NEWS FROM
THE JEROME
ROBBINS
FOUNDATION**

VOL. 9, NO. 2 (2022)

Jerome Robbins

Sarah Marlin is a NYC-based creative. She is the Communications and Development Assistant at Yaddo. Her writing has been featured in *The New York Times* Tiny Love Stories. She's interested in theater, film, music, and Jewish culture.

There's a Place for Us Dance and Performance at Yaddo by Sarah Marlin



The Jerome Robbins Foundation was established to support dance, theater, and their associative arts. An important component of that mission is the Foundation's shared philosophy with, and financial support of, the various centers of artistic and creative exploration that offer space, freedom, and inspiration to dancers and choreographers in the form of residencies. In this issue, we focus on Yaddo, a renowned retreat for artists in Saratoga Springs, New York, and discovering what it offers to artists of the dance.

When Katrina and Spencer Trask founded Yaddo in Saratoga Springs, New York in 1900, they had a clear and simple mission in mind—to provide the gift of space and time to artists at no cost. As importantly, they had a profound understanding of why the founding of Yaddo was urgent and necessary. They shared an anxiety about social conditions, as well as the rise of fascism and concomitant wars. Katrina referred to it as the “hardening of man’s soul, and a growing deafness to the cries of the many and the wisdom of the artist.” Yaddo was to be the antidote. It was to offer working writers and artists sanctuary—a respite from urbanization, income inequality, the demands of the marketplace, noise, and political and economic upheaval.

In the 122 years since the Trasks inaugurated Yaddo, these factors have intensified, and the need for artists to have a place of retreat to dive deeply into their work is more necessary than ever. Artists look to Yaddo as a refuge and an incubator, a place for artists to focus on their projects and to immerse themselves fully, without disruption, in the creative process. While at Yaddo, residents may tackle the most complicated matters of our day. Offering a safe space to explore dangerous ideas is in Yaddo’s DNA.

Since its inception, Yaddo has hosted over 7,500 artists, including: Hannah Arendt, James Baldwin, Leonard Bernstein, Truman Capote, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Aaron Copland, Philip Guston, Langston Hughes, Ted Hughes, Grace Lumpkin, Carmen Maria Machado, Carson McCullers, Flannery O’Connor, Dorothy Parker, Sylvia Plath, Mario Puzo, Ned Rorem, Philip Roth, Clyfford Still, Virgil Thomson, Lionel Trilling, David Foster Wallace, and Eudora Welty.

Yaddo’s residency is legendary not only because of its roster of celebrated artists, but because of its superb original design. It was specifically developed to enhance the creative process. The wooded acres of tranquil, protected nature preserve are fertile ground for innovation. Yaddo’s live-work studios are designed to eliminate distractions, fostering full immersion and uninterrupted concentration. Contemplative walks in the woods provide the proven benefits of time spent in nature, while evening gatherings and shared meals foster an ongoing exchange of ideas with interdisciplinary artists at the leading edge of their fields. The five artistic disciplines represented at Yaddo include Literature, Visual Art, Music Composition, Film & Video, and Performance.

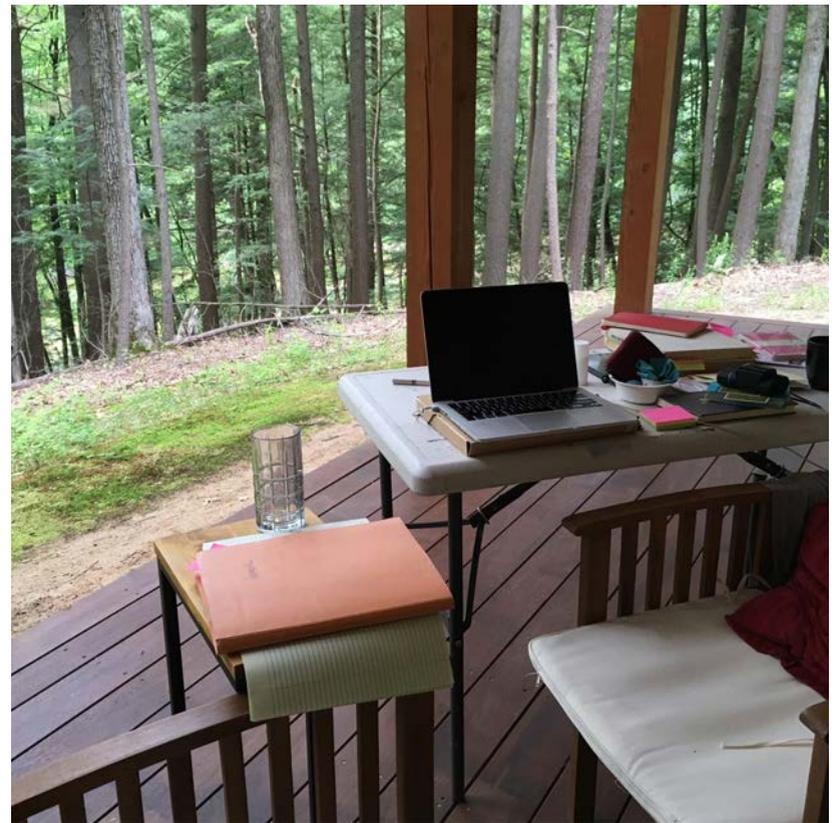
Yaddo and Performance

Since the late 1990s, Yaddo has welcomed and supported artists whose work is rooted in dance and performance. Yaddo’s support of these artists has grown tremendously in the last 30 years. Prior to its official recognition as a discipline at Yaddo, performance-based artists were accepted under a named “non-traditional” panel. As both the interest and number of applications grew, the board instilled a media and performance committee, with artist Susan Unterberg as its first chair. Later, the panel split into two separate discipline categories enabling Performance to stand as its own discipline.

When eminent performance and visual artist John Kelly—who has embodied figures from Egon Schiele to Caravaggio to Joni Mitchell in four decades on the New York cultural scene—first came to Yaddo in 1994, Performance was still yet to formally exist as a discipline. Kelly pointed out that before the construction of today’s Green House studio—equipped with mirrors and more suitable flooring—Yaddo placed marley on studio floors and a barre in the room to support performance-based artists-in-residence. An instrumental figure in bolstering Yaddo’s commitment to supporting performance-based artists, Kelly went on to chair the admissions panel for Performance for several years through the mid-2000s. Through his own artistic circle, and by direct invitation, Kelly assisted in laying the groundwork for today’s robust performance community at Yaddo. Yaddo has since hosted choreographers, performance artists, multi-media artists, writers, artists whose collaborative works incorporate live performance, and others involved in dance.



John Kelly in Yaddo's Greenhouse Studio, in front of a set piece he worked on at Yaddo in 2019, for his production "Underneath the Skin" at NYU Skirball. There will be a 3-week restaging of this piece at La Mamma, December 1–18, 2022. Photos courtesy of John Kelly.



Front deck of Studio 2 at Yaddo, overlooking the Lakes, 2021. Photo courtesy of Kyle deCamp.

Yaddo Artists Reflect

For this article, we reached out to ten Yaddo artists whose work is rooted in dance and performance: **Hadar Ahuvia** (2018), **Mike Albo** (2003, 2020), **Sidra Bell** (2022), **Kyle deCamp** (1997, 2021), **Heidi Duckler** (2007), **Molissa Fenley** (2015), **John Kelly** (1994, 2019), **Sam Kim** (2015), **Brian Rogers** (2016), and **Christopher Williams** (2005, 2019). [The year(s) these artists were in residence at Yaddo is listed next to their name. If in residence at Yaddo more than once, their first and most recent year of residency is included.] In residence during different seasons of the year and different stages of their careers, we asked them to reflect upon their time at Yaddo.

Why were you inspired to apply to Yaddo?

Fenley I needed some uninterrupted time in the studio to work on a new piece.

Williams Amazingly, I've been awarded creative residencies at Yaddo four times...when I was still quite a young choreographer looking for the time and space to develop one of my larger new ideas, John Kelly, an artist whom I greatly admire (with a scope of vision similar to mine) suggested that I apply. When I first understood the breadth and impact of Yaddo's wonderful history and mission, the romantic mystique of the place enveloped me instantly hand in hand with a keen sense of its potential usefulness and practicality.

Bell As a dance maker, I have participated in many residencies that were in community with my collaborators. These were typically focused on developing a work for performance, technical production research and honing in on company culture. My time at Yaddo was unique and singularly focused on reflecting on my solo practice. I was intent on refining ideas in relation to pedagogy, language and methodology.

Albo I was initially invited to attend by the extraordinary performer and Yaddo board member John Kelly...After that first trip, I knew I had found a place that would continue to inspire me. Yaddo has become as embracing, inspiring, and haunting as an old family home.

What did you work on during your residency?

Kelly Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, which was presented by Lincoln Center Great Performers New Visions at the New Victory Theater...I did a lot of conceptual work and organization, so when I finally came to New York and got to

the dance studio, I knew what needed to happen...When I've worked on performance stuff at Yaddo, it has mostly been conception, development, research, blocking, some choreography. If it was ensemble work, I would try to troubleshoot as much as I [could] before I had to deal with other bodies in the room...

Fenley I started researching for a new piece. One of my main sources for the inspiration of movement vocabulary is the body as seen in Etruscan/Roman/Greek ancient sculpture and frescoes. The Library at Yaddo had several books that I borrowed for use in the studio.

Rogers I applied as an interdisciplinary artist because at the time I was working on a feature film, *Screamers*. So, I mainly edited that. The feature film finally premiered in 2018.

Williams During my very first residency at Yaddo, I was able to work in collaboration with composer Peter Kirn on my dance *Ursula and the 11,000 Virgins* (2005)—a work consisting of 11 "dance portraits" of female virgin martyr saints set to extant music in praise of each chosen saint, as well as newly composed music for some of the more obscure saints among them. To my surprise and delight, this early work in my career—on which I had worked so intensely on at Yaddo—garnered me a New York Dance & Performance "Bessie" Award.

Bell Spending time in a live/workspace that was seamless formed the way I structured my workdays. The staff gave us a lot of care and the space felt like a sanctuary. I spent time moving and improvising ideas as well as translating those ideas to written form and film. The writings I started at Yaddo will form into a book entitled *INSIDE | FORM* that I hope to release in two to three years, in combination with a larger gallery showing at Gibney Dance Center (possibly in 2025).

Duckler The residency at Yaddo was focused on how to turn an ancient poem into a future world...During my residency, I had a beautiful private studio in the woods. My sister would come visit me laden with notebooks and her secret arsenal—piles of Post-its! We would cover the walls with Post-its and spend the days scribbling timelines, ideas of the moment, our research, ideas for movements, musical inspirations, visual references, personal memories, dreams, questions, connections, character and behavior, anything really!

Ahuvia I read a lot—*Undoing Master* by Julietta Singh, and my grandparents journals. I translated them and created a triptych solo from that research. I also developed a morning movement practice that is still with me...As is the way with process, the specific material I made at Yaddo ended up on the cutting room floor but was a part of the process I shared with collaborators who joined me in NYC.



Sidra Bell in the Yaddo Mansion, 2022. Photo by Rory Golden.



Sidra Bell performing "Subjective Subject" at Yaddo, 2022. Photo and garment by Rory Golden.

What is Yaddo time? Did time change meaning for you at Yaddo? Did your patterns change?

deCamp The time/space of the Yaddo residency is a generous embrace that can hold and concentrate whatever you bring into it, build, and discover there – and keep it in play – 24 hours a day.

Williams As a young artist granted a huge space of time that I would not normally have, I went into hyperdrive during my first residency and methodically created almost all of the choreographic material I needed for each part for each dancer in what would become my Bessie Award-winning work. Time both expanded and flew by. Subsequent residencies have been similar. Knowing that I'll be able to get a lot more done during this magical "Yaddo time" than I would in my regular urban life's schedule, I aim to be productive and prolific, and somehow succeed every time.

Ahuvia Yaddo instilled in me an honoring of the structure and support it takes to nourish creative practice. I developed a regular routine.

Bell Time felt rich at Yaddo. Not every day had to be filled with productivity or output, yet time felt like it was blooming with discovery and newness. I feel now that I can slow down a bit more without guilt and enjoy what's around me both in the studio and beyond.

Kim Residencies are the freest container to make stuff...getting dropped into that environment with no obligations to produce anything, especially in this capitalist culture... You have the authority to figure out what you need at this time for the whole self and process.

Rogers You're just in this studio, you're by yourself for the majority of the day, and you can just do whatever. For me it took about four or five days to even accept that that was the reality. Time kind of disappeared and I just got so much done.... That someone is preparing all of your meals for you is lifechanging. Having a studio to work in and no expectations and, if you choose, no internet, all of those things are really helpful.

Albo I think part of Yaddo's immense effectiveness is strange and simple: time bends there. There are no schedule requirements except to arrive at 6:30 for dinner, which ends up being a perfect tentpole of reality for me, because I do my weirdest work at night and then spend the next day trying to make sense of the tangled wig of words I left on the floor.

How did the natural environment affect your work process?

Ahuvia I took a walk in the woods every day. I looked at the landscape outside my studio window, and often opened the doors to the studio, which made it feel like I was outdoors. I was looking for a more sustainable way of making, and a relationship to the landscape and the earth and other beings – trees, pinecones, and grasses all helped me develop a different sense of time, effort, and drive.

Rogers Totally. 100%. The history of the place, the people who have been there...there's this haunted quality that's generative and interesting too.

Fenley I started each day enjoying the lovely breakfast and then would go on a walk around the grounds. There are trails nearby, and the daily walk in nature was very lovely. Listening to the sounds of nature, to birds, to the wind. These morning walks and thinking times were a preparation for the work to come later...the nature around Yaddo was crucial in my thinking.

Williams The sheer stillness of the natural world at that time afforded me the perfect conditions to escape into my own private world in the studio. I'd rush huffing and puffing to dinner each night having spent every moment I could working, crafting, dreaming up new material in my little cabin in the frozen woods. I'd read, nestled in bed during the cold, dark nights. Immersion in the natural setting of Yaddo at these times freed me up for a purer, unfettered, focused, yet almost carefree, approach to the creation process.

Many of these artists and those in the dance community that live and work in New York City and other urban centers find that a residency at Yaddo is a refuge, not only for work, but for rest and space as well. In the pine forest and quiet rolling hills of Yaddo's historic estate, city-based artists can escape the claustrophobic confines of small urban apartments and the limitations of restrictive workspaces.

Rogers With the ecosystem for dance in NYC and the economic challenges of it all, I think it's pretty rare for a dance maker to carve out time for themselves, because everything becomes about the cost of studio space and having to maximize that ... then at Yaddo you can be unplugged from those needs. It's so different from any experience you would have living in the city. It's comfortable to have that experience with your own work and your own time. There's always noise and distraction and other people and there is really something calming about the experience of going to a place like that. It's incredibly valuable.

Albo Another important aspect of my time at Yaddo has been SPACE...It's been so fruitful to just place your papers and ideas and notes out on a big table (instead of crammed in a NYC apartment)...and then just having room to move your body around, to get up and roll on the floor or find a character's voice or give a project a "station" somewhere in the room helps build a creative work's strength like its a toddler on a playground.

There's really no place better for concentration than at Yaddo. For many artists who work in collaboration with others, or keep busy schedules, a residency at Yaddo is a chance to focus on their own work and individual practice. However, many artists also enjoy the benefits of the communal aspects that arise from this unique space and community.

Fenley It is wonderful to be around other artists and writers. So great to see what other people are doing. At Yaddo, there is a constant come-and-go with new people arriving and people who have quickly become friends leaving. A community is built. There are people that I met at Yaddo that I am still in touch with.

Albo I have made truly important lifelong connections there and been inspired by so many other artists' work entirely different than my own.

Bell [In residence] I also spent time collaborating with another artist, Rory Golden, on photography, fashion, book design, and site-based dance. We are continuing our collaboration into the installation of a gallery of objects of my past works that will be exhibited at Gibney Dance Center [October, 2022]...It was fortuitous to meet a like-minded person in Golden, and I look forward to continuing the work with him...The dinners were a ritual that was important to me. It was an opportunity to interface with others and dialogue about the various ways our artistic processes intersected and diverged.

Duckler I loved sharing work and hearing from the group in the central space. There was no pressure. It just unfolded organically. Sharing felt like sitting in a big lap. There is so much benefit to being a part of this community. You have the privacy to work, but also the opportunity to share and be part of a beautiful community.



"Lunch Painting" by Amitava Kumar, 2019. From the artist: "I had a writing residency at Yaddo, and during lunch, after I had eaten all my carrot sticks, I would make a daily drawing. This one was a remembered map of Yaddo with imaginary dots."

What was beneficial about being at Yaddo?

Bell Yaddo allowed me space and time to synthesize materials and generate new ideas. There was a freedom to the experience that allowed for work in solitude but to also connect with other accomplished artists in myriad disciplines. I made some beautiful friendships and learned so much from my fellow artists. I left feeling inspired and rejuvenated as I moved into other projects. The reverberations of the process at Yaddo will continue for years to come. I was able to recalibrate my lens and sharpen my approach to research.

Ahuvia It was wonderful to connect with other artists, writers, musicians, visual artists, and sense connections across media. My performance work includes a lot of text, and it was meaningful to share and get feedback from writers about my translations. Being surrounded by other artists helped me keep in the context of my work.

Williams Yaddo allows an artist to delve deeper into the artistic process. It holds a mirror up to the lone self and demands a reckoning of sorts. For me, the conditions there have always been right. Interesting cohorts of fellow artists to meet, natural surroundings that heal, and the invaluable gift of unrestricted time. Like an alchemist finding the missing ingredient in some universal elixir, I have somehow been able to access a surprise inner creativity that felt magical, flowing from within.

deCamp Residency at Yaddo is an invaluable resource for artists whose research and process benefits from a private studio with 24/7 access, a diverse artist community, lovely nature, and great food.

Would you recommend a residency at Yaddo to the dance and performance community?

Fenley Absolutely yes!! The studio space is beautiful.

Kim Yes. Always. Even if someone doesn't know what the value of that is, they will figure it out. It's the best and it will shake up their process radically. I love Yaddo. I love it...The position it holds, these are the values we uphold—have some time, some total freedom, get weird, do what you do, don't do what you don't do...I think that's the ultimate sign of respect in this culture for art which seems to be so dwindling.

Williams I highly recommend that any dance and performance artist for whom creating material while alone is part of their process take advantage of this incredible historic place and opportunity.

deCamp For multidisciplinary performance-based folk, it's a great way to focus and charge up your research and preparations for collaborations and work with groups.

Bell I would absolutely recommend a residency at Yaddo for artists in performance and, specifically, dance.

Rogers My time there was great, and I hope to return some day if I am lucky enough. I know it's had a huge, positive impact on the world that I am part of. So many artists that I have worked with have been able to go to Yaddo, and it's always transformational for them, without exceptions.

Ahuvia I would absolutely recommend a stay at Yaddo. I would come back in a heartbeat. It was expansive, supportive, and nourishing.

Duckler Writing this makes me want to return. ■

Yaddo's mission is nurturing the creative process at our 400-acre retreat in upstate, New York, protecting the essential privacy of artists, and offering an opportunity to work without interruption in a supportive environment.

We offer residencies to professional creative artists from all nations and backgrounds. You may apply individually or as members of collaborative teams of up to three artists. Peer review is the key-stone of our selection process, with different panelists each season. Residencies last from two weeks to two months and include room, board, and a studio. There is no fee to come to Yaddo, and we have access grants to help offset the costs of attending a residency.

All artists are encouraged to apply! Generally, those who qualify for Yaddo residencies are either working at the professional level in their fields or are emerging artists whose work shows great professional promise. An abiding principle at Yaddo is that applications for residency are judged solely on the quality of the work. There are no publication, exhibition, or performance requirements if granted a residency.

If you are interested in applying or know an artist who would benefit from a residency at Yaddo, please go to our website, Yaddo.org, for further information about the application process. The next application deadline is January 5, 2023.