

Drawn to Dance

Art may be set in stone or hang upon a wall, but it's never lifeless.

Dancers are particularly aware of the dynamic and fluid nature of art. That's what propelled two students to partner with the Weatherspoon Art Museum to create a program where art inspires dancers, and dance inspires artists.

Liz Anderson and Tiffany Moss Hale are the brains behind "Drawn to Dance," a series of free public events at the museum where UNCG dance students improvise performances for art students to sketch or film. The successful events launched in the fall of 2023.

"As a dance artist, I am a collaborator at heart," says Anderson. "One of our goals is to make dance and art less removed from each other."

UNCG Dance Director Lee Walton says this is the kind of activity the school is seeking to promote. "We want to turn the school inside out, so that it becomes more accessible, and the public become collaborators in our research."

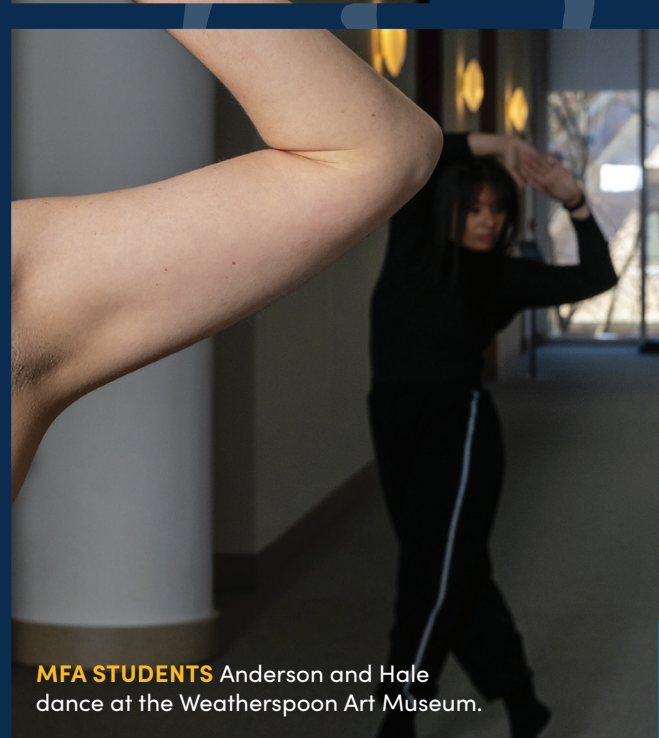
ART BEGETS ART

Anderson and Hale's work began in the first year of their master of fine arts program, as part of a graduate assistantship aimed at developing new dance programming with the Weatherspoon. Anderson had seen a program where dance companies held practices at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia, and they decided they wanted to bring a similar experience to Greensboro.

"Liz and Tiffany had a vision of the museum as a place for not only exhibiting art, but for the practice and creation of art," says Mei Méndez, the Weatherspoon's assistant director for strategic engagement.

At the museum events, guests that pass through the atrium or the second-story overlook can watch the dancers and the artists creating alongside them. Paper and pencils are available for any guests who wish to join in.

Hale was particularly touched to see a little girl sitting down to draw alongside the UNCG student artists at a fall event. "We gave



MFA STUDENTS Anderson and Hale dance at the Weatherspoon Art Museum.

people a way to see dance that isn't just on the proscenium stage that they're used to."

She says the exhibits also encourage the dancers to improvise. "I would look at the mural on the wall in the atrium and mimic the lines within it. Dancers would interact with the sculptures in the courtyard and let them influence their movement."

"The art students were fascinated with how the dance students interacted with the space," adds Walton, who is also a professor of art. "They got to see all the things they were learning in art – line, tension, rhythm, pattern – embodied in their performances."

ROOM TO GROW

This is not the first time the Weatherspoon has partnered with UNCG dance, but Walton hopes to foster even more of these collaborations and others across UNCG's College of Visual and Performing Arts – especially in ways that increase public access to art. "Communities benefit from the college making art, artists, and research accessible," he says. "And our students and faculty benefit greatly from the expertise within our communities."

Walton was proud to see first-year students work alongside graduate students in "Drawn to Dance." "Within their first semester, they were performing publicly. We were inspired to see them take that chance, to know that they felt supported."

This spring, Anderson and Hale secured funding from the Sue Stinson Enrichment Endowment, created by Dance Professor Emerita Sue Stinson to promote dance within a context of social justice. They're using it to develop a program they call "The Dance Lab," to create more mobile, interactive events for dance students and the public.

Anderson says it will make dance students more comfortable with letting an audience in on the process and imperfections. "In the School of Dance, we say, 'we're not afraid to fail,'" she says. "What you make may not look great initially, but you get some nuggets of fantastic material that you can develop."

A DRAW FOR STUDENTS

Hale, who is from Rock Hill in South Carolina, and Anderson, who is from Covington in Georgia, say they were drawn to UNCG for the chance to study a diverse array of movement styles, its rigorous academic opportunities, and the stellar faculty. "I came here for mentorship, guidance, and to become a better teacher," says Anderson.

Walton says it's important for programs like these to be student-led, balancing experience with fresh perspectives. "There's so much that students learn from the process of collaborations and project development," Walton says. "They discover they have the skillsets to do important, impactful work."

Méndez hopes more dance students will look to the Weatherspoon for inspiration. "We want to be a place where students feel welcome to collaborate with us and propose new museum programs that capitalize on their experiences and interests."



by Janet Imrick

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EXPLORING AI FOR CHILD SAFETY

Dr. Hamid Nemati, professor of information systems and supply chain management, has been studying artificial intelligence, or AI, for longer than most. He did his doctoral research on AI methods to optimize flows of items across networks. His interest in AI has only grown stronger as advances in AI technologies, including ChatGPT, have made them more widely used.

One project his team has been excited about is the use of AI methods to mitigate child abuse and maltreatment.

Hamid and Bryan alums Dr. Minoo Modaresnezhad and Dr. Yuzhang Han – his past doctoral students – tasked themselves with developing a robust AI system that could help predict child abuse when given information from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System.

The data, which the government began collecting in the 1990s, includes detailed information about child abuse reports down to the zip code. Hamid says those in the AI space have a high interest in the use of this type of structured, detailed data collected over a prolonged period.

The prototype system their team developed could predict recurrence of child maltreatment better than any previously proposed systems. The results appear in the prestigious journal Knowledge-Based Systems.

The next steps are testing and feedback from different agencies – a tough ask when agencies are already overburdened. "What we're trying to get is a better sense of how these systems can become part of the daily routine for child protective agencies."



An extended version of this story appears in the Fall 2023 Bryan Business Report. Visit bryanbusinessreport.uncg.edu to read it and to catch up on recent research on tourism, fashion, alcohol, and the workplace.