
SOPH CARDINAL ARTIST STATEMENT

THEY/THEM/THEIRS

Belonging. Selfhood. Identity. When asked to address who I am as an artist and creator, these three terms continuously arise as the foundational attributes that illustrate who I am and what I say with my work. These terms are intersectional, recognizing that my relationship to selfhood and identity cannot coexist without a sensation of belonging within my body and the physical spaces I occupy. As a queer and non-binary choreographer, my relationship to dance and creative process, specifically in my adolescent and early adult years, was tainted by an inability to find a sense of belonging within my movement practices. Existing within a body that was physically disconnected from my sense of self while operating in institutionally binary spaces that omit the recognition of personal identity inhibited me from experiencing the state of belonging that I yearned for in dance and creative practices. The years of feeling that I could not bring who I am into how I explore movement became the driving impetus of my work now to use my role as an artist to create trustworthy spaces where who we were, who we are, and where we want to go is innately intertwined with the choreographic works I create.

During this time of feeling disconnected in belonging and self, I was drawn to dance forms outside of Westernized movement vocabulary, particularly urban street forms such as Hip Hop. While studying these forms, I discovered that embracing my multifaceted identities could drive my movement rather than attempting to fit into a system not designed for me. The impact of these forms is heavily seen in my personalized movement vocabulary today - a hybridity of style that relies on isolation and articulation, reverb, and a sense of grounding in the body. While honing the "Soph-ism's" that make up my movement style, I began to recognize how my sense of self can impact my movement choices and create a co-collaborative space where all the bodies and identities I am working with are supported, seen, and understood within my movement creation.

Contextualizing how belonging, selfhood, and identity exist within my choreographic process, I rely heavily on guided improvisation, writing prompts, and discussion-based practices. Conceptually, my choreographic works derive from sociopolitical climates and the nuanced complexities of identity and the human experience. Tackling such topics inherently requires a great degree of trust from myself and the artists involved in my process. I utilize these writing and improvisational prompts to create trustworthy spaces for myself and the artists to get to the core of who we are, alongside how our identities, biases, and intersectionalities relate physically and emotionally to the piece's concept. These exercises lead to a co-collaborative creative practice, where all artists create phrase work that feels authentic to their movement style within the boundaries of the guided prompts I have presented. These phrases are then paired with my movement vocabulary and transformed alongside it in space, timing, and dynamics for the voices of all of us to be rooted in the work itself. This allows my work to feel deeply interconnected with mind, physicality, and self, recognizing the role of identity, selfhood, and belonging within choreographic spaces.

Existing in a trans body as a dancer and choreographer creating work in traditionally binary systems that devalue the sense of self has often felt draining. In those moments, I find myself grounded in my consistent use of these three terms. I use my choreographic process to provide space for my dancers to transparently and vulnerably unearth their multifaceted identities while also engaging in healing work that allows my identities that have often felt sheltered to be intertwined with my movement creation. Belonging. Selfhood. Identity. Through these three words, I have come to understand my role as an artist and a creator. By engaging in processes that embed these terms in their foundation and execute them in praxis, we can create spaces as artists where authenticity and humanness are rooted within our work.