

CORNELL UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF PERFORMING AND MEDIA ARTS

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Contact: Lindsey White, Communications Manager

Email: ldw56@cornell.edu

Phone: 607-254-2702

Facebook event

[Promotional photos]

[Full schedule]

What can the history of women's performance teach us about feminism?

ITHACA, NY —

On March 15-16, 2019, the Department of Performing and Media Arts will host an interdisciplinary symposium titled "Feminist Directions: Performance, Power, and Leadership." Over the course of the symposium internationally acclaimed artists Tisa Chang (Pan Asian Repertory Theatre), Holly Hughes (University of Michigan), Leigh Fondakowski (Tectonic Theatre Project), Rhodessa Jones (Cultural Odyssey), Peggy Shaw (Split Britches), and Lois Weaver (Queen Mary University of London) will join local artists, scholars, and activists for a free, multi-day event at the Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts.

The history of feminist performance is one of radical storytelling, of showing how the personal is political and of carving out spaces in which women can feel, in the words of Holly Hughes, "at last, fully human." Feminist performance offers a critical lens into the sex and gendered dynamics of power, a lens that can challenge – or reinforce – racist, classist, and transphobic embodiments. For Rhodessa Jones, feminist performance is an act of "creative survival" in which we rehearse different ways of being with each other. Whether employing anarchic tactics or what Lois Weaver terms "familiar domestic forms," feminist performance conjures new worlds. What can the history of women's performance teach us about the future of feminism? In these precarious times, how can we use performance to reflect the changes we want to see?

During the symposium attendees will have the opportunity to explore these questions through interactive lectures, performances, and workshops. On Friday March 15th, the symposium kicks off with a tour of Cornell University's Human Sexuality Collection in the Division of Rare and Manuscripts Collection, guided by Brenda Marston. Rhodessa Jones will then lead a workshop on feminist methods for work with community theatre groups. Following Jones' workshop will be an opening reception and Bad and Nasty Cabaret featuring feminist performances from the community.

"While curating this symposium, the question that enlivens me is: What does it mean to perform feminism, and why is it important for such performance to have direction? While these questions lend themselves immediately to a theatrical context, they also apply to necessity of doing feminism in any

number of environments. I hope this symposium creates a physical space for feminist actors, broadly defined, to come together and encounter possibilities of action and direction previously unimagined, ignited by contact.” - Co-Organizer, Kelly Richmond

On the morning of Saturday March 16th, local theater practitioners, activists, and scholars will gather for “Mentors, Methods, and Mutations: A Workshop on Feminist Cross-Pollination,” where invited participants will discuss how their feminist mentors have shaped their current practices – additional audience members are welcome. Following lunch will be a roundtable on feminist directing, featuring the symposium’s four keynote directors along with Bevin O’Gara (Kitchen Theatre Company) and Sue Perlgut (It’s All Right To Be Woman Theatre, Senior Citizen Theatre Troupe). Following the roundtable, Tisa Chang will facilitate a directing master class in approaching culturally specific work. Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw will conclude the symposium with Weaver’s highly regarded work, *The Long Table*, which combines theatricality with models of public engagement into a highly stylized, non-hierarchical dinner table discussion.

“The idea of this symposium has been brewing for over three years. As a theater director and scholar studying the work of women theater-makers, it is very exciting to meet and learn from these prolific artists who have not only made a huge imprint on our current theatrical landscape but have paved the way for other women in artistic leadership positions.” – Jayme Kilburn, Co-Organizer

“Feminist Directions: Performance, Power, and Leadership” is co-sponsored by Cornell’s American Studies Department, Cornell Council for the Arts, Department of Anthropology, Department of English, Engaged Cornell, Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Graduate and Professional Student Assembly Financial Council, Graduate and Professional Student Programming Board, Graduate School Office of Inclusion & Student Engagement, Human Sexuality Collection, LGBT Studies, the President’s Council of Cornell Women, Rhodes Professorship Fund, the Society for the Humanities, and The History of Art and Visual Studies.

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