

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: George Alley

QUEER SCHOOL in Session

by Ellen Chenoweth

9:45 – GENDER 301 – CLASSROOM – instructor: SMITH

Do you think gender is more of a kinesphere than a 'spectrum'? Gender 301 is an interactive performance lecture, built to suit. It is for people who already know that gender is not only a social construct but is a performance that is contextual. This fake lecture will include break-out groups, pop quizzes, and brief nudity.

Prerequisite: Leaving your assumption[s] at the door.

This sample offering from the [Collage Festival website](#) lists a prerequisite that is good advice for attending any part of the festival. Collage is a freewheeling and scrappy annual event where even the organizers aren't entirely sure what will bubble up from the mix of art and artists brought under the same festival tent. Joy Mariama Smith, one of the festival's founders and curators, revels in this unpredictability: "One way I measure success is by being surprised. If I knew what was going to happen, I don't think I would do it."

Collage is the brainchild of Philip Moore (aka Toby Celery) and Joy Mariama Smith. Friends since 5th grade, Moore and Smith created the festival with the intention of creating an artist-friendly, affordable, and accessible event, partially responding to changing priorities of other festivals in the city. The multi-disciplinary arts festival that features dance, video, installation art, and hybrid forms is celebrating its fifth year, and this year the party location is Headlong Studios. Each year the festival happens at a different Philadelphia venue, highlighting the neighborhood and the surrounding community, and also encouraging a migratory fan base. "We have no interest in being insular," Smith points out.

This year's theme is "QUEER SCHOOL!" a site-responsive nod to the Headlong Performance Institute that riffs off the idea of education. The theme situates "the art show as a site of knowledge production," and Moore stresses that the festival-goers are a key part of that

production: “we subscribe to the [Maurizio Cattelan](#) school of thought which basically suggests that the art is completed by the audience.” The QUEER SCHOOL! theme leads to all kinds of cleverness: performer bios are listed as faculty bios, and the performance schedule becomes a ‘queer school course catalog.’ It reads like sexy summer camp crossed with artistic anarchist merrymaking: there are assemblies, zine-making, nudity, and a Family Feud-style game show co-hosted by quintessential Philadelphia flâneur Jorge Alberto Navarrete.

With events stretching out over three days, and a \$5 daily entry fee, Collage encourages casual sampling. Some chaos and confusion comes with the territory of a collage, and audience members are encouraged to keep an open mind. Collage Festival's QUEER SCHOOL! is an experiential learning experience, and, just as in more traditional educational settings, what you get out of it often depends on what you put in. Classes start on Thursday; those who attend all three days of the festival will be eligible for graduation on Saturday.

Collage Festival, multiple artists, Headlong Studios, May 7-9, 7pm, collagefestival.com

By Ellen Chenoweth
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