



Deer Dancer, Warrior, film still

DEER DANCER

Two-channel film & sound installation, 9 mins 24 sec (looped), 2019

Costumes, various materials, 2019

Print works series, blind deboss and emboss with gold foil, 111 x 77.5cm, 2019

Live performance, 8 hours, 2021



Deer Dancer, Monarch (above), Young Buck (below), film stills

Deer Dancer is a cross-artform project investigating deer mimesis, specifically, representations within dance from across cultures. The work examines how the imitation of deer behaviour constructs 'wilderness' as the site for the cultivation of hetero-masculinity and how hunting mythologies shape and impact real ecologies. Premiering at Edinburgh Art Festival 2019, *Deer Dancer* was presented as a two-channel film and sound installation featuring music and costumed choreography, alongside the costumes and series of visual score print works.

The project grew out of research into three traditional dances, their ecological roots and associated mytho-poetic and cultural contexts: the *Deer Dance* of the indigenous Yaqui of Sonora, Mexico, and their Pascua Yaqui descendants in Arizona, USA; the *Highland Fling* of the Scottish Highlands; and the *Abbots Bromley Horn Dance* of Staffordshire, England. This was further informed by experiential research into hunting practices – deer stalking and animal tracking – and by direct observation of deer in their habitat. Additionally, the archaeological discovery at *Star Carr* – a Mesolithic site in North Yorkshire – of a number of red deer frontlets worn as ritual headdresses, offers an interesting prehistoric parallel to these dances practiced today. As traces of hunting rites, how are these dances to be understood within a contemporary context? How does the mimesis of male deer behaviours, from the capering fawn, to the bravado, display and aggression of the rutting stag, inform a 'performance' of masculinity by male dancers? What are the implications of these gendered performances in society today?

Exploring the tacit and cultural knowledge embodied in the three dances, Tuulikki created a suite of visual scores, tracking the steps of the dancers, replacing human footprints with deer hoofprints: red deer for the Highland Fling steps, white-tailed deer for the Yaqui Deer Dance steps, and reindeer for the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance. This blend of dance notation with animal tracks forms the basis of a choreography that features within her film, delineated in gold foil on the visual scores. At the heart of this are five hybrid stag-men characters, each performed by Tuulikki: the Monarch, Warrior, Young Buck, Fool and Old Sage.



Deer Dancer, Fool (above), Old Sage (below), film stills

Crosscutting between two screens, intricate costumes and props appear piece by piece on Tuulikki's body, in a queer assemblage, challenging human:animal and male:female binaries. Soundtracked by a multi-layered vocal composition, she utilises technology to extend her vocal range into 'male' and 'stag' pitches. We then encounter the five characters in an imaginary *wilderness world*: the Monarch asserts his dominance, bellowing and displaying his sixteen-tine crown; the Warrior, highly alert, tracks and hunts, defending himself on attack with antlered spears; the Young Buck, lustful, cocksure and trigger-happy, challenges anyone in his close proximity; the conflicted Fool wrestles with his hobby stag, which appears to push and pull him into battle; and the Old Sage, spirit of the wild hart and ghost of a man, tends the land with hooves and hands. One by one they take a bow and the *deer dance* commences. With movements that signify both the deer rut and a pre-hunt ritual, the characters face one another, performing their dance, drawing their weapons. In a perpetual loop of learned behaviour and appropriation, the stag-men are condemned to self-destruct. Exploring the interconnections between the crisis of ecology and the crisis of masculinity, *Deer Dancer* is an explicit contemporary life-crisis ritual for a damaged planet.

Link to film (one screen version): <https://vimeo.com/345922486> (Password: deer)

"...a thought-provoking study of how ritual can reinforce culture."

– Frieze magazine, Seven Highlights from Edinburgh Art Festival

"There's something undeniably amusing about a tiny woman posturing in various mad fake beards and codpieces... it highlights the absurd weight we give to ideas of maleness. Tuulikki takes this stuff seriously for sure, but there's always an undercurrent of elegant wit that stops her work short of being po-faced."

– ★★★★★ Nancy Durrant, The Times

"Deer Dancer challenges binary thinking. Instead of nature and culture; male and female; human and animal, the artwork suggests that perhaps it is time to soften these categories and allow for greater movement."

– Anna Fleming, Caught By The River



Edinburgh Printmakers, Deer Dancer costumes, installation image



Edinburgh Printmakers, Deer Dancer visual score detail



In 2021, *Deer Dancer* was developed into an eight-hour durational live(streamed) performance, featuring movement, composition and live voice with an ensemble of female-identifying performers, premiering at *Take Me Somewhere Festival* in Glasgow's Tramway in May 2021: <https://takemesomewhere.co.uk/hanna-tuulikki>

"Hanna Tuulikki's knotty, playful durational piece *Deer Dancer* is kind of genius, and almost certainly bonkers. Performed and devised by Tuulikki herself, alongside Nic Green, Jo Hellier, Simone Kenyan and Fabiola Santana, it seems faintly frivolous at first—after all, there is a solo with a sweeping brush, and costumes that are pure Hail, Caesar! Tucked underneath the ridiculous stick-on beards and props though, is a really important notion: that the contrived, performative nature of gender is as useless as fixed ideas about it, and the earth itself. Every living thing evolves, in terms of consciousness and growth. New ideas about adapting beyond societal norms are all to the good, when they reject power and oneupmanship."
— Lorna Irvine, Fjord Review



Deer Dancer, livestream performance, Take Me Somewhere festival, Tramway, 2021

DEER DANCER

Exhibition history:

2019 Hanna Tuulikki: Deer Dancer, Edinburgh Printmakers

Film screening history:

2020 *Deer Dancer*, performance lecture & screening, BALTIC online

Performance history:

2021 Livestreamed performance Take Me Somewhere Festival,
Tramway, Glasgow

Film (2019) credits:

Performed & directed by Hanna Tuulikki

Character development and choreography by Will Dickie, Peter McMaster and Hanna Tuulikki

Dramaturgy by Peter McMaster

Movement direction by Will Dickie

Sound composed and recorded by Hanna Tuulikki

Sound mixed with Pete Smith

Director of photography by Andrew Begg

Edited by Laura Carreira

Costume fabrication assistance and wardrobe management by Lydia Honeybone

Production management by Amy Porteous

Costumes and print works by Hanna Tuulikki

Developed through conversations and interviews with tradition bearers and academics, Felipe Molina (Yaqui tradition bearer/ translator), Larry Evers (American Indian Studies, The University of Arizona), Jack Brown (Abbots Bromley Horn Dance tradition bearer/ historian), Doug and Joyce Gilbert (Trees for Life); by observing a number of dances and participating in rituals, including the Yaqui Deer Dance (Pascua Yaqui Easter ceremonies, Old Pascua, Tucson, Arizona, March 2018), Abbots Bromley Horn Dance (Abbots Bromley, September 2017/2018); and direct learning with Sandra Robertson (Highland Fling), Indalecio 'Carlos' Moreno Matuz (Yaqui Deer Dance), Gary Faulkenberry (animal tracking, March, July 2018), Allan Common (deer stalking at Trees for Life, Dundreggan, autumn 2017/2018).

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Livestreamed performance (2021) credits:

Lead Artist: Hanna Tuulikki

Performer-Devisers: Nic Green, Jo Hellier, Simone Kenyon, Fabiola Santana & Hanna Tuulikki

Dramaturg: Peter McMaster

Movement Director: Will Dickie

Composer: Hanna Tuulikki

Sound Designer & Sound Operator: Kim Moore

Sound Engineer: Kenny MacLeod

Costume Fabricator & Wardrobe Manager: Lydia Honeybone

Producer: Siân Baxter

Production Manager: Nick Millar

Director of Photography: Andrew Begg

Access Editor: Carrie Skinner

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