

## **Andrea Miller Blurs the Line Between Artist and Human**

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Movement may be what has solidified Andrea Miller as a force in the dance world, but that same eloquence and connectivity she explores through her body is translated into every sentence she speaks. Her gentle, inquisitive spirit can be felt through every medium, whether it's during performance, in the studio or through a Zoom screen, separated by distance but never by humanness. It's rare to find someone who makes a video call feel so personable—almost as if you're traveling through their space with them—but Miller does have a bit of experience.

Like many others, Covid-19 forced her to move virtual. In response, Miller created a weekly 30-minute movement series, Jam & Toast, on Instagram Live. Every Monday morning she hops on the livestream, eager to start a new week with dance and connection within the body and with others. A typical Jam & Toast class finds Miller moving before she even begins instructing. The level of attention and care she gives her body is apparent in the gentle rocks and sways she entertains as she speaks. With her dark brown hair often pulled back into a low ponytail, Miller begins each class with an introspective exercise, asking participants to trust their instincts and ground themselves emotionally and physically. Not only has this healing movement found itself a home on social media, her company classes and rehearsals are equally as transformative.

Since its founding in 2006, Gallim—a multi-disciplinary production and dance company based out of New York City—has established itself as a creative force in the dance industry. The company is under the artistic direction of Miller, whose choreography has been commissioned for a number of different settings including stages, museums, gallery spaces, film and fashion. Miller's boundless approach to dance is reflected in her ability to adapt to fit a variety of spaces and concepts. "I like to approach dance making as a question-based practice," she said about her creative process. "I'm not always interested in answering things, just being tossed around by interesting questions." Gallim was born out of this very principle, exploring themes of human behavior and

existence through stage, film and site-specific work in collaboration with company members. “Andrea often incorporates material generated by the dancers, typically created in response to vast amounts of improvisational research,” said Allysen Hooks, who has been dancing with Gallim since 2012. “Often [we] are offered prompts that ask us to visit and listen to a heightened emotionality.”

A multi-disciplinary visionary, Miller was the first person to be named Artist in Residence at The Metropolitan Museum of Art—choreographing a string of works set in various exhibitions in the museum—and has co-directed seven of her companies dance films. Though her repertoire is vast, she finds it difficult to name a specific source of inspiration to her work. “I try to make inspiration an infinite part of life,” Miller said. She credits philosophy with expanding her creative mind and helping her connect with her artistic inclinations. “I think philosophy feels like a state of being as opposed to a cannon of information.” Miller’s creative vision is highly sought after, with some of her notable achievements being an editorial feature in *Forbes*, movement coaching for *Vogue Diaries* and, most recently, the New York City Ballet’s 2021 Fall Fashion Gala, where she was one of only two commissioned choreographers.

This was the first time I had seen one of Miller’s works firsthand, and it did not disappoint. She combined her intimate artistry with elaborate fashion, the dancers gliding and lifting each other across the stage in serene harmony. She has a way of transporting the audience not into another dimension, but into themselves. Her pieces are made with the intention of their viewers feeling present, as if in a trance. “I want people to feel carried by the work,” said Miller. “And only when the piece is over, it releases its grip.”

Born in Salt Lake City, Miller discovered dance at three years old. She first studied at Virginia Tanner Children’s Dance Theatre, which she credits with introducing her to a more uninhibited movement style. “I was lucky to start in a school that was more about creativity than rigid training,” Miller recounts. After moving to her current home state of Connecticut at age nine, she continued her movement exploration, training in Doris

Humphrey and Charles Weidman technique under the guidance of Ernestine Stodelle (who studied under—and performed with—Humphrey and is considered a pioneer in the world of modern dance) for 10 years before earning her BFA in dance at The Julliard School. As a child, she was inquisitive and bold, finding joy in all forms of art. “When I heard music, I ran to find it and dance to it.” This is a trait she seems to have passed on to her children—or at least one of them.

We were in the middle of discussing Miller’s choreographic process when a small voice interrupted the conversation. “Mommy give me the phone, I want to watch something!” Her daughter Noah appeared on the screen with a smile so genuine I could tell she rarely took it off, her hair braided with pink beads. She made it clear that she was six and a half—an impressive age. As a mother of two, Miller is met with the demands of both work and parenthood, an often invisible part of her profession. “I’ve had to sacrifice some parts of my career and parts of my time with my children,” said Miller. With the help of her husband, Miller balances the two harmoniously in a way that only she can. “I’m always impressed with the way she loves her career and children and how she nurtures both of those,” said Stephanie Saywell, artistic administrative assistant at Gallim. “I don’t think she ever puts Gallim away. It’s always very much at the heart of who she is.”

Like her unconventional approach to movement, Miller has a way of speaking that distinguishes her from any other artist I’ve interacted with. She approached each question of mine with a particular pensiveness, frequently gazing over my shoulder in thought, poring over the perfect combination of words which never fail to translate exactly what she intends. She describes life, movement and the body with a meticulous eye, using analogies and metaphors to bring life to her words and provide a clear vision of her consciousness.

Miller may be an artist of abiding innovation, but what stays consistent is her inquisitive and genuine disposition, reflected in her work and her personal life. “Her diligence and

curiosity are ever-present motors propelling the room forward,” said Hooks. As a choreographer, Miller is known for her keen eye towards dancers’ individual’ movement and expression and how they meld to create a final product that mirrors her creative vision. “When she’s working on a commission or project, her whole self is in it,” said Saywell. “I know she it’s not just job for her.” Miller takes this same approach to her role as a leader, bringing a level of personability to her company environment. “She remembers everyone’s partners and pets names,” Saywell adds. In this way, Miller is a human first and artist second.

Whether it’s on stage, in a museum or through a computer screen, she has a quiet way of commanding attention with gentle conviction, effortlessly combining intentional movement and words with interpretive meaning. “I really try to be listening all the time to life,” said Miller following a long, thoughtful silence which mimics the same intimacy she brings to dance. And that’s just the thing about Miller, about her words and her movement: they hold a certain ambiguous familiarity that leaves you wanting more.