

**Sonia York-Pryce, Dr Visual Arts**, (Griffith University, Australia),

Ba. Digital Media, (Honours; (Griffith University), Ba. Visual Arts (Southern Cross University, Australia), dancer, photographer, videographer, and interdisciplinary artist. From the 1960s to the present-day Sonia has trained and danced extensively in ballet and contemporary dance, initially in the UK then settling in Australia in 1994. She studied classical ballet at Elmhurst Ballet School, the Royal Ballet School, the London School of Contemporary Dance, and the Laban Centre, in London, UK.

Sonia's doctoral research, "Ageism and the Mature Dancer" examined how senior professional dancers, aged over 40, still performing, navigate the dance-by-date perpetuated within Western dance and consumer culture's obsession with youth. Across a survey conducted through interviews and by email to over 35 participants, based nationally and internationally, York-Pryce discovered what drives these dancers to continue, and how they maintain their bodies. Interviews with dancers Gérard Lemaître (1936-2015), and Sabine Kupferberg, founder members of Jirí Kylián's ground-breaking mature dance company, NDT3, (1991-2006), were informative about a time when aging was addressed, due to his passion to keep dancers over 40 performing. Kylián knew dancers embodied vast knowledge and experience and this was being wasted due to early retirement; he observed, "they have history in their bodies."<sup>1</sup>

Times are slowly beginning to change but ageing within a dance context is still a contentious topic. Lawyer Madeline Ritter and former dancer Ricarda Herre of Bureau Ritter inspired by the success of Kylián's NDT3, decided to make a difference in 2015 by creating Berlin's first mature dance company, Dance On Ensemble. The company is showing the way forward regarding 'dance and ageing' with DOE now on its second iteration, fully funded by the German Government. Indeed, choreographers of repute have embraced the opportunity to work with these dancers. The Ensemble was also part of the joint European initiative, Dance On, Pass On, Dream On (2016-19) composed of nine companies aimed at, "generating a European strategy for a sustainable dance praxis valuing age and embodied knowledge on stage and in society."<sup>2</sup> This stance further demonstrates the need for senior dancers to have a more prominent and stable place in the current dance world, highlighting the necessity to talk about age, experience, and dance, and to inform audiences that ageism does exist, but the initiative is to educate and change current attitudes within the field of dance.

As is known, identity is foremost for a dancer; it is intertwined with who they are and what they do. The ingrained dance-by-date takes away a dancer's career, identity is erased, they become invisible, surplus to use. Diversity and inclusion are issues that need to be initiated into Western dance culture, allowing dancers to exceed beyond set boundaries and continue to dance. Considering the styles of Spanish Flamenco, and Japanese Butoh and Noa, where respect for experience, ageing and longevity are integral to these dance styles, in classical ballet and contemporary dance 'growing old' is yet to be, valued or respected. Transformations need to emerge from the grassroots and within dance institutions to understand that broadening dance horizons to match today's Western society, gives representation of all ages, and develops bold steps in ending ageism. To see older people in society represented on our stages would empower visibility for these marginalised dancers and create a much-needed balance. For the culture of dance to become ageless a danced dialogue that champions their lived experience of

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<sup>1</sup> Sulcas, Roslyn. "Dancing Past Forty: Bodies of Knowledge." *Dance Magazine* (dance article), May 1998, 58-61.

<http://search.proquest.com/libraryproxy.griffith.edu.au/docview/223474030?accountid=14543>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.creativeeuropeuk.eu/funded-projects/dance-pass-dream>

dance is needed to recognise the importance of diversity and inclusivity. These senior professional dancers prove, “that their embodied practice rather than their age, defines them.”

Featuring her own body as the ‘object’ in her dancefilms has been an interesting investigation to highlight the subject of aging. Seeing older women in film continues to be rare let alone in dancefilm projects. By creating these dancefilms it is a demonstration to feature “age on the body”<sup>3</sup> as described by age studies scholar Margaret Morgenroth-Gullette. This issue is doubly loaded for women and mirrored for older dancers; but it is also a means to exhibit that aging can be viewed positively on screen as opposed to being negatively compared as “symbols of decline”.<sup>4</sup> As suggested by feminist Peggy Phelan, “under-represented communities can be empowered by an enhanced visibility”<sup>5</sup> and York-Pryce uses film as a way to highlight the subject of aging, not to affront an audience but to empower and enhance appreciation of the lived experience of an older dancer.

Sonia has discussed her research on ‘dance and aging’ at numerous international conferences and her dancefilms have been screened at conferences, festivals, and online platforms. She has enjoyed two artist residencies (2012, 2016), with Red Gate Gallery, Beijing China, photographing Beijing LDTX Contemporary Dance Company; and an interdisciplinary residency with [Hospitalfield House, Arbroath Scotland](#). As a photographer she has photographed London Studio Centre's Images Ballet Company, Cloud Dance Festival Lacuna, London; #Resolution 2016 at The Place London, Charlotta Öfverholm graduates of Balettakademien Stockholm, 2017.

## Published articles and presentations

2023 Chapter featured, in *Dance On! Dancing through Life*, Eds. Stephanie Burrige, Charlotte Svendler Nielsen, Routledge, UK.

“Too Old to Dance! Says Who? Senior Professional Dancers Defying Ageism”

2022 “Terrain: A conversation in dance film between self and the Australian Outback landscape”.

The Journal of Dance, Movement & Spiritualities (JDM&S) (2022).

Currently awaiting publication date and url.

2022 “Memory, Dance and Archive: How an Archived Performance Inspired the Creation of a Dance film Does the Dancing Have to Stop?”

International Journal of Screendance (IJS) (2022)

<https://screendancejournal.org/index.php/screendance/article/view/9123>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18061/ijds.v13i1.9123>

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<sup>3</sup> Gullette, Margaret, M. "Acting Age on Stage: Age-Appropriate Casting, the Default Body, and Valuing a Property of Having an Age." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 18, no. 1 (2003): 7-28.

<sup>4</sup> Markson, Elizabeth W. "The Female Aging Body through Film." Chap. 3 In *Aging Bodies: Images and Everyday Experience*, edited by Christopher A Faircloth, 77-102. Walnut Creek, Lanham, New York, Oxford: Altamira Press, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Phelan, Peggy. "Broken Symmetries: Memory, Sight, Love." Chap. 1 In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 1-33. London & New York: Routledge, 2001.

2022 Virtual Presentation ENAS/NANAS Conference: Narratives and Counter-Narratives of Aging and Old Age: Reflexivity in Aging Studies at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania.

September 28th - October 1st, 2022.

“Inappropriate Behavior: older professional dancers defy aesthetics and age discrimination to continue to perform”

<https://enas.comunicare.ro/conference-programme/>

<https://enas.comunicare.ro/book-of-abstracts-2/>

2021 Viora, A., Evangelista, A., York-Pryce, S., Vionnet, C., Dramé, A., Scally, W. D., & Agaronov, A. (2021). Six Illuminated Videos. *Journal of Embodied Research*, 4(2), 2 (31:25). DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/jer.91>

2021 Virtual Presentation Choreography & Corporeality Working Group, IFTR Online Conference, Theatre Ecologies: Environment Sustainability and Politics. 2021 Galway.

Paper presented: “Corporeality: The Politics of an Ageing Body.”

<https://iftr.org/working-groups/choreography-and-corporeality/reminder-cfp-galway-online-conference-202>

2020 “Ageism and the Mature Dancer, doctoral thesis, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University.

<https://doi.org/10.25904/1912/3928>

2020 A Body of Work, *Journal of Dance, Movement & Spiritualities*, Volume 6 Nos 1 & 2,

[https://doi.org/10.1386/dmas\\_00007\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/dmas_00007_1)

2020 “Widening the Boundaries”, Sonia York-Pryce.

<https://www.delvingintodance.com/dwords/widening-the-boundaries>

2020 “Musings on the older professional female dancer” Critical Path, Sydney, Sonia York-Pryce, featured in MARCH DANCE <https://www.marchdance.com/publication-launch-womens-work>

2019 Presentation and screening at the “Cultural, Intercultural and Transnational Dialogues in Dance and Spirituality Conference”, Cheltenham, UK. <https://www.movingsoma.co.uk/the-journal-of-dance-movement--spiritualities.html>

2018 “Re-directing the lens”, conference paper Sonia York-Pryce.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333417115\\_Re-directing\\_the\\_lens](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333417115_Re-directing_the_lens)

2018 Presentation at the Creative Ageing Forum, Ausdance NSW, Sydney Australia.

2017 Invited International Speaker, Charlotta Öfverholm’s *Age on Stage 2 International Meeting Point*, Compagnie Jus de la Vie, Stockholm Sweden.

<http://new.jusdelavie.org/?p=2238>

2017 Presentation *Ageism and the Mature Dancer*, at World Dance Alliance Global Summit, “Dancing from the Grassroots”, St John’s University, Newfoundland Canada.

<https://www.wda-americas.net/2017-global-summit/>

2016 “Dancers and Technology, a collaboration celebrating corporeal difference”, conference paper Sonia York-Pryce.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313845083\\_Dancers\\_Technology\\_a\\_collaboration\\_celebrating\\_corporeal\\_difference](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313845083_Dancers_Technology_a_collaboration_celebrating_corporeal_difference)

2016 Keynote Speaker at HOST Moved & Be Moved 2016, Dance East, Ipswich UK.  
<https://www.danceeast.co.uk/workshops/hostsummer16/>

2015 “Valuing the older dancer through digital technology”, conference paper Sonia York-Pryce  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298787266\\_Valuing\\_the\\_Older\\_Dancer\\_through\\_Digital\\_Technology](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298787266_Valuing_the_Older_Dancer_through_Digital_Technology)

2014 “Ageism and the Mature Dancer”, conference paper Sonia York-Pryce  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298787187\\_Ageism\\_and\\_the\\_Mature\\_Dancer](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298787187_Ageism_and_the_Mature_Dancer)

## Dancefilms:

*Terrain: Dancing on Stolen Land* (2022), performed, filmed, edited by Sonia York-Pryce.  
<https://vimeo.com/745881539>

*āj* (2019) filmed by Kelly McIlvenny, edited by Sonia York-Pryce.  
<https://vimeo.com/327238742>

*Utterly (in)appropriate* (2017) performed, filmed, edited by Sonia York-Pryce.  
<https://vimeo.com/233604194>

2015 Gold Award Winner, *Joie de Vivre* Dance film competition hosted by Pavilion Dance Southwest UK for *Intèrprete/Inappropriate Behaviour*  
<http://www.pdsw.org.uk/dance-development/dance-for-health/dance-for-older-people/joie-de-vivre-dance-film-competition-2/joie-de-vivre-dance-film-competition-2015/>

*Interprète/Inappropriate Behaviour* (2015), filmed, edited by Sonia York-Pryce.  
<https://vimeo.com/136466421>

*Does the Dancing Have to Stop?* (2013) performed and edited by Sonia York-Pryce, Filmed by Kelly McIlvenny  
<https://vimeo.com/78251127>

## Dancefilm screenings

TIRO Arts Foundation, Tyre Lebanon. (2021).  
Blue Elephant Festival, London UK. (2020).  
CFP International Conference: Dance and Spirituality, Cheltenham UK. (2019).  
Host, Dance East, UK. (2016, 2019).  
Bold Festival, ACT, Australia. (2017, 2019).  
Ageless Festival, UK. (2019).  
Supercell Festival of Dance, Brisbane, Australia. (2017, 2018).  
Stockholm’s Dance Film Festival, Sweden. (2016, 2017).

The Elixir Festival, London UK. (2017).  
The World Dance Alliance Global Summit, Newfoundland, Canada. (2017).  
FRAME, Dance Screen, London UK. (2016).  
ITAC3, The Third International Teaching Artist Conference, Edinburgh, UK. (2016).  
Mature Moves, Tasmania Performs, Hobart, Australia. (2016).  
DanScience, Brisbane, Australia. (2015).  
Pavilion Dance South-West, UK. (2015).

Further details here:

<https://soniayork-pryce.wixsite.com/mysite>

<https://vimeo.com/user5257143>

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sonia\\_York-Pryce](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sonia_York-Pryce)

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