

Integral Bodies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

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 **Ngahiraka Mason** | [Follow](#)
Art Curator at Independent C...

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Why you should check this out! <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/liveonstage/trailer-for-integral-bodies/> I went to the opening-night performance and was compelled to write a review.

Integral Bodies: Facing Inclusion and Exclusion

The blind leading the blind is not double blindness. It is just another way of seeing. Boaventura de Sousa Santos

I was born near-sighted, unaware of 20/20 vision. Hard edges and strong contrasts did not exist in my visual world. I interpreted shapes, outlines and movement in soft focus — in the manner of a rainbow drawn-out across the sky, animated by rain, sun, and cloud.

The limited season work, *Integral Bodies* opened mainstage at Kennedy Theatre 5 April at University of Hawaii, at Manoa. Director Peiling Kao is also the choreographer, along with cast members. The Assistant Director is Keola Simpson and the Dramaturg is Dr Marcus Wessendorf. A point of focus while waiting for the show to begin was the curtain drop of abstracted imagery in soft-focus. The public also had the full view of a ramp in front of the stage, that disappeared behind black curtains and also met a dead-end.

I admit I was apprehensive at the costuming of the performers. In my brain I was seeing the United Colors of Benneton cast bedecked in primary colors within a frame of modernist sculpture found in public spaces throughout the US. Then I recalled I had visited the homeland of the Taiwanese Director Kao where strong color is part of the cultural lexicon, and possibly the costume palette carried a deeper meaning, intended to inspire solidarity.

Integral Bodies openly stares down the lesser talked about privilege afforded to Western dance traditions and trained dancers, by speaking directly to inclusion and exclusion in our contemporary existences that politically isolate and platform race, prejudice and disability. In the performance, I recognized the dance languages of ballet, and experimental practice. It requires courage to pair these movement types with classical music, and experimental contemporary vibe music and voice, sometimes sounding to my ears like Laurie Anderson chanting. A recurring motif of action in the piece performed from a sitting position was a powerful caterpillar-move across the theatre floor.

The program brochure states, the work is a dramaturg-- a project with a narrative and a teaching moment framed in an open process of collaboration, a recalibration of the dance discipline, with probings into our human conditioning. Exposing empathy, asserting non-neutrality, pointing to relational aesthetics, deconstructing social conditioning are lofty aspirations and are super-high benchmarks, achieved by *Integral Bodies*.

Frankly, I cried and laughed out loud at how this production sparked in me an unprecedented level of tenderness for the basic idea of inclusive dance-making, extracting and seeing something new, without having to fully 'know' it. It reminded me of standing in front of Leonardo de Vinci's Mona Lisa at the Louvre in Paris for the first time. When de Vinci painted this work, and for many years after, the piece was considered to be 'unproven' in the canon of historical fine art painting.

The pace of the dance piece and the music drove the sequences which I witnessed excite and move the disabled audience to clap, cheers and shout out loud. Their responses were highly nuanced, unpredictable to me, and more especially, compelling. This community had secret-insights to the performance. When was the last time you attending theatre and dance that inspired this reaction?

This production did not skirt around the idea of inclusive dance-making. It wasn't even that able-dance-performers took the lead, rather the disabled dancers owned the stage to show how they inhabit their dance bodies. As well, directors don't always give successful cameo performances, but Kao did with her head-turning surprising spot, which I related to as a metaphor for her strong belief in the project.... butting up against prejudice, yet undeterred. I replayed this sequence in my mind over and over. I was also reminded of the place of cameo in creative projects, and I'm thinking of film director Taika Waititi Marvel Comic movie Thor Raganok where he is a strong rock character Kronan Krog. Priceless!

My field is contemporary art, I am a visual historian and critic, inspired to say something about what I experienced of dance performance-- which is a pared-back high-end art and dance performance that hit outstanding and exquisite notes. This project is of international quality and significance and should be seen at large art festival events. Dance performance can be a protagonist, and *Integral Bodies* provides this seeing.

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 **Ngahiraka Mason**
Art Curator at Independent Curat...

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Integral Bodies is a must-see innovative dance performance on now at Mainstage, Kennedy Theater, the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Congratulations to the artistic team, the cast and production staff!

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