

THE ODYSSEY OF THESE DAYS

Local artists create collaborative memorial

In the summer of 2015, Wes Hurd was in a melancholy place.

"My mom and dad had passed away, and artistically, I wanted to work on some fresh territory," says the visual artist.

Hurd decided to challenge himself with a series of large, abstract paintings, each with the same size — 51 by 47 inches — and a unifying palette of black, white and gray.

"Through these works, which are process-oriented, I was working through grief and sadness," Hurd says. "I'd finished five paintings and was pretty happy with them. Then the shooting happened."

On Oct. 1, 2015, a gunman opened fire inside a Snyder Hall writing class on the Umpqua Community College campus, killing nine people and wounding another eight before turning the gun on himself.

"The last two paintings in the series are a direct response to the shooting," Hurd says.

Composer and musician Eliot Grasso was also moved to reflect on the events that unfolded that day, too close to home.

"I first saw Wes's paintings online and they inspired me to create solo flute sketches in reaction," Graso says. "But to see the paintings in person — the texture, depth, the shadows — we met and we both thought, 'What can we do?'"

Grasso, who plays the uilleann pipes — like an Irish bagpipe — and Hurd began an artistic collaboration, to-

gether seeking to explore and interpret the intertwining emotional rivulets of tragedy and hope.

This weekend at the Hult Center, the pair presents *The Odyssey of These Days*, featuring a visual-art installation by Hurd, presented with Grasso's composition, played by Dréos — a quintet featuring uilleann pipes, violin and Hardanger fiddle, vielle à roué, cello and double bass.

"I think of art as a social language, a special voice, that we call on to speak to each other and to ourselves when ordinary language doesn't carry the import and gravity of what we want to say," Hurd says.

We may turn to art as a lantern to light our way through senselessness.

"There are three parts to the narrative," Graso says. "Part one is the impact, the news and what it does to someone. Part two is the struggling — an ongoing mental fog — like your mind is slammed around in your head; it just exhausts you."

Grasso's second movement vibrates with piercing violin repetitions, "an ostinato to represent the mind spinning," he says.

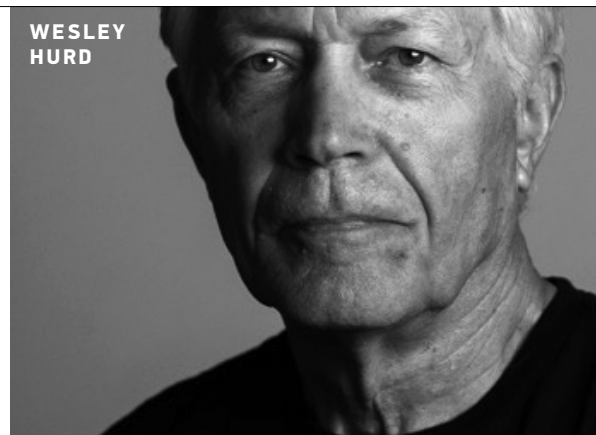
"Finally, part three is like a resignation — graveside, in the rain, umbrella out, watching a real person lowered into the earth. It's a state of recognition and acknowledgment," Grasso says.

For the performances on March 3 and 4, the program in the Hult Center's Studio will begin at 6 pm with an opportunity to experience the visual art, freestanding on steel frames, in a nave-like half-circle in the space.

At 7 pm, Grasso and the musicians will play, followed by a narrative talk by Hurd and Grasso, as well as a chance for Q&A.

The artists say the performance cost about \$17,000 to produce. Grasso received some funding for the project through the Oregon Arts Commission and Hurd has support from companies like GloryBee and Andersen Construction, which fabricated and donated the collapsible

WESLEY HURD



steel frames on which the canvases are displayed.

In Hurd's downtown studio, the 10 paintings unfold in close harmony with Grasso's music. Even in this informal setting, the music and visual art combine to create an arresting emotional effect. Hurd works with texture, often drawing out rhythm, shape and form using natural materials instead of brushes.

Themes flow throughout the paintings, which have a lustrous feel like a late fall day in the Southern Willamette Valley, when muted sky and wood smoke and fog mingle. Though it can't be seen, we know the sun is just behind the cold and gray.

Hurd's progression of paintings invites inquiry; matched by Grasso's music, the pair's accomplishment speaks with a voice that transcends time.

One painting, *Document*, the eighth in the series, features a ribbon of lead running vertically and nine dots, each blackened and dark but filled with real gold.

"They're not bullet holes," Hurd says. "They're intended to be the fact of a life."

Limited tickets for the 7 pm Friday, March 3, opening of The Odyssey of These Days at the Hult Center are \$55; general admission tickets for 7 pm Saturday, March 4, are \$15. Tickets available at hultcenter.org. Doors open at 6 pm both nights.

The SPIN

WHO'S WHO AND WHAT'S
WHAT IN DANCE THIS MONTH

BY RACHAEL CARNES



BALLET FANTASTIQUE'S
CROUCHING TIGER,
HIDDEN DRAGON

PHOTO BY STEPHANIE URSO

We hear University of Oregon professor of dance and Dance in Dialogue co-founder **Shannon Mockli** recently participated in an open showing at Seattle's renowned center for contemporary performance **On the Boards** (OtB).

"It was an informal showing, so I had to really pare down my work, *Finding a Way of Being*, to fit within a short time-frame," Mockli says. "It is so good to show work elsewhere, among a community that doesn't know you. There is no back history and that means I have to consider new ways in."

Mockli and dancers performed in OtB's black box studio theater, an intimate space. "Being able to see faces as you perform is something I enjoy, but also something that is quite intimidating."

Another intimate performance opportunity, **Dance in Dialogue** offers *D.I.D. #12*, an informal, inquiry-based performance from 6-8 pm Thursday, March 2. **Cynthia Gutierrez-Garner** explores timely poems by Emma Lazarus and Langston Hughes, **Brittani Holland** investigates the personal and political, and **Jessica Rose Taylor** relates to the body and identity using found objects; the performance is at the Friend's Meeting House, 2274 Onyx Street.

And Lane Community College presents **Collaborations 2017** at 7:30 pm Thursday through Saturday, March 2-4, on the LCC main campus. The performance features new works by **Bonnie Simoa**, **Sarah Nemecek**, **Jackie Thelen**, **Hannah Downs** and **Mariah Melson**, as well as members of the **Eugene Youth Ballet** presenting choreography by **Sarah Ebert**.

Ballet Fantastique premieres the much-anticipated *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* with cellist **DaXun Zhang** and the **Oregon Mozart Players** as well as a reprisal of five short ballets from BFan's 2014 *Tales from the Floating World*, featuring koto player **Mitsuki Dazai**, 7:30 pm Friday and Saturday, March 3-4, and 2:30 pm Sunday, March 5, in the Hult's Soreng Theater.

Up I-5, Portland's **WhiteBird Dance** offers Montreal's **Seven Fingers' Cuisine & Confessions** March 2-4 featuring circus, dance, music and food in this kooky combo of on-stage baking and acrobatic arts, perfect for all ages. Also on tap, **Companhia Urbana de Dança**, a Brazilian hip-hop company, hits town March 9-11. Both performances are at the Newmark Theatre.

And the Hult Center brings back Kansas City's **Quixotic Fusion** on March 28. The group was last here in 2015, in conjunction with the *[Sub]urban Projections* project. If it's "acro-rhythmic cirque" you seek, you'll go home happy. (And I'll keep a candle lit for the potential return of touring contemporary dance as part of the Hult Presents series.)

In local independent arts nonprofit news, the **West African Cultural Arts Institute** has been able to offer an afterschool **Drum and Dance Club at Fairfield Elementary**, made possible by the Oregon Community Foundation's Fred W. Fields Fund. Kudos!

In studio news, **Dancing for Life**, a dance class specifically for people with Parkinsons or other movement disorders, is offered at 1 pm Sundays at the Campbell Senior Center. More information at 541-510-4629 or pcballer@comcastnet.

We hear **Makayla Rice**, a 15-year-old who trains with **All That! Dance**, was recently awarded a scholarship by **NUVO Dance Convention** to continue her dance studies. And All That! Dance will share its work at the Wildish Theater on March 18.

DanceAbility International has added a Monday afterschool creative movement class, open to children with mental or physical disabilities; ages 5 and up. Scholarships and registration information are available at danceability.com and enrollment is ongoing.

And **Ballet Fantastique Academy** presents the next session of Adult Absolute Beginner Ballet Workshop on Wednesdays 6:30-8 pm through April 5; \$90.

Got a scoop on the local dance scene? Email Rachael Carnes at eugeneweeklydance@gmail.com