

Las Fridas: A Movement Installation and Offering

*"What if Frida Kahlo lived
beyond her 40s?"*



MARK
DeGARMO
Dance



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COMPANY PROFILE

Mark DeGarmo Dance is a New York based transcultural, transdisciplinary, dance-theater company with an international corps of accomplished performers. Passionate and innovative, DeGarmo's work does not recognize, crosses, and breaks boundaries among performance forms. His work startles with its emotional immediacy and theatrical images, which reveal the inner lives of its subjects while resonating viscerally with audience members.

New York critics heralded *Las Fridas*, his 60-minute duet inspired by the life and work of Mexican painter and revolutionary Frida Kahlo, as "brilliant" and "mesmerizing." Audiences called DeGarmo's work "fearless," "genius," and "in a way, frightening, the way great art always should be." The piece is "not scared to push the audience right up to the edge that the performers are living on" and "wonderfully in your face, both literally and metaphorically." Audience members noted that his finely crafted, meticulously detailed works are "brilliant in composition and execution," and "do nothing, while doing everything."

Mark DeGarmo's work has been performed worldwide. Commissions include: Binational Peruvian U.S. Cultural Center, Peru; Glaxo/France, New York City; The National Center for the Arts, Mexico; The National Dance Company, Ecuador; The National Theater, El Salvador; and Tribeca Performing Arts Center, New York City. Two Russian exhibitions featured photographs of his performance work at the A.A. Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum in Moscow (2015, 2012), then toured the USA and internationally. He has produced over 100 works and performed in New York at Battery Dance Festival at World Trade Center, Pete Seeger's Bronxfest on the Harlem River, Celebrate Brooklyn!, The Clemente Soto Véléz

Center, Dancespace, Jazz at Lincoln Center, New York Hilton Hotel Grand Ballroom, New York Public Library, Performance Space 122, Saint Peter's Church, Soho Dance Festival, Tribeca Performing Arts Center, and 92Y. Mark DeGarmo Dance has toured Europe; North, Central, and South America; and Russia.

Mark DeGarmo Dance also provides arts education and outreach. Mark DeGarmo Dance annually works with up to 1,000 New York City public elementary school students living under the USA poverty level. The National Endowment for the Arts called "Partnerships in Learning through Dance and Creativity," Mark DeGarmo Dance's signature in-school dance program, "a national model." Johns Hopkins University School of Education research published by Roisin P. Corcoran in *Teaching and Teacher Education* journal deems DeGarmo's program, involving principles of embodied cognition drawn from cognitive neuroscience, an "evidence-based" educational intervention with "statistically significant" improvement in Grades 3 to 4 high-stakes state reading scores.

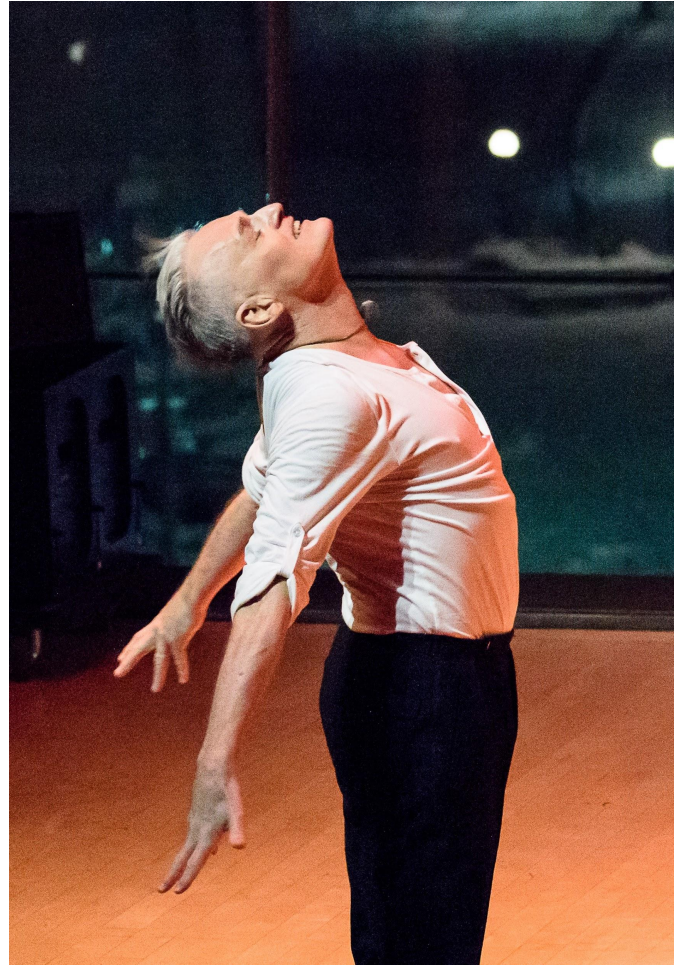


MARK DEGARMO

Mark DeGarmo, born November 2 on Mexico's Day of the Dead and All Souls Day, is exemplary for combining a notable career as an innovative dancer/performer, choreographer, writer and researcher with the founding of a highly respected and impactful dance education program based on transdisciplinary scholarship. He created over 100 dance/theater works based on transcultural social issues that were performed in multiple international tours.

Founder, Executive & Artistic Director of Mark DeGarmo Dance, DeGarmo is an artist/scholar with Creative Agency in Australia and Dance Director of Tlacopac International Artist Residency in Mexico City. Honors and awards include a Fulbright Senior Scholar Fellowship (Peru); American Cultural Specialist Award from the U.S. Department of State (Ecuador); USA representative and lecturer, Volgograd International Dance Festival, supported by the Trust for Mutual Understanding (Russia); National Finalist in Dance, Millennium Artist Program, an Official Project of the White House Millennium Council, supported by the National Endowment for the Arts; Martha Hill Dance Fund Mid-Career Award; and subject of Dance Teacher Magazine's cover feature article June 2017 and Dance Informa Magazine American Edition's feature article May 2019.

DeGarmo credits the example of his mother for his path less traveled, including his Juilliard dance degree, Ph.D., and over 30 years leading a nonprofit arts organization in NYC. A renowned national motivational speaker for Chicago's Field Enterprises World Book Encyclopedia in the 1970s, she brought up 5 children as a single woman in New York's Mid-Hudson Valley after the death of 2 husbands at age 31.



DeGarmo has presented for conferences of American Educational Research Association; An Education Conference in the Hudson Valley; COMEXUS Mexico-U.S. Fulbright; Empire State Partnerships Project; Imagination, Inquiry, and Innovation Institute; National Dance Education Organization; Queens College Equity Studies Research Center; TEDxDUMBO; University of New York at Buffalo; and World Dance Alliance General Assembly of the Americas Center. DeGarmo's article, "Transdisciplinary Performative Improvisation," appeared in the textbook *Teaching Choreographic Composition from a Transdisciplinary Approach*, published in Spanish in 2020 by the University of Colima, Mexico.



"A 'Movement Installation' [That] Goes Beyond Frida Kitsch."

— **Kavitha Surana, Bedford + Bowery**

"More than solely existing in the dance sphere, the work plunges into a transcultural, transdisciplinary art space that is also theatrical and visual (. . .) With Marie Baker-Lee playing the role of Dark Frida at the evening performances and Luis Gabriel Zaragoza stepping in for the matinees, the shuffling of gender roles challenges audiences to embrace the many little-known sides of Kahlo, beyond the charming 'Fridita' [little Frida] the public knew her to be."

— **BWW News Desk, BroadwayWorld.com**

'Las Fridas' is a new form. It combines theater, movement and dance, performance art, visual art, and music, including the performers own vocalizations. We are still at the threshold of transgenerative awareness and fluid identity shifting and self-identification, which opens new realms of possibility for the individual and the collective across cultures around the world."

— **Barnett Serchuk, BroadwayWorld.com**

"Marie Baker-Lee, dancing the role of Frida Kahlo, was mesmerizing. Each slow motion turn of the head, each simple step forward was fraught with joy, pain or fear (. . .) [DeGarmo and Baker-Lee's] performance brings the focus of this work to the aging body, as well as to the aging of relationships with other people and the self. In imagining Kahlo's continuing relationship with herself into old age, DeGarmo succeeds in reflecting the human condition when it comes to aging."

— **Melanie Brown, StageBuddy.com**

"Like the painting 'The Two Fridas', the structure of the [installation] forms a two-part symmetry (. . .) 'Las Fridas' was performed brilliantly."

— **Judith Sainte Croix, Sonora House**

"An experienced leader with groups of every kind (. . .) Mark brought his physical skill, fearlessness and generosity, gathering this varied group of professionals to the process."

— **Joan Arnold, Alexander Technique Specialist**

"[DeGarmo is] a gladiator in various arenas."

— **Melanie Brown, StageBuddy.com**

TOURING PROGRAM

“LAS FRIDAS: A MOVEMENT INSTALLATION AND OFFERING”

“What if Kahlo had lived beyond her 40s?”

Las Fridas: A Movement Installation and Offering (Las Fridas) is a 60-minute, 16-section duet. The work’s 2 parts are “Innocence: The Blue House” and “Experience: Ribbon around a Bomb.” This work evinces a transcultural, transdisciplinary form. In development for 6 years and dealing with a subject who died 60 years ago, *Las Fridas* is relevant and timely.

DeGarmo created the movement installation for 2 dancers over 60. Due to the sudden illness of one of the women performing 1 week before the December 2015 NYC previews, DeGarmo assumed the role. This introduced gender fluidity to the casting and exploded previous assumptions. Currently, 3 casts perform— female/female, female/male, and male/male. The 6 living performers across 3 casts, as well as the 2 living and 2 deceased ex-voto performers per installation, further evoke Kahlo’s dualities and multiplicities.

Las Fridas does not recognize boundaries, barriers, borders, and disciplinary walls between dance, theater, visual arts, music, performance art, video, and nationalities. Rather, it meshes them. In doing so, it interprets Kahlo’s life and work through a nonlinear, at times surrealist, narrative. The work invites audience members to imagine themselves as a multiplicity of “Fridas.”

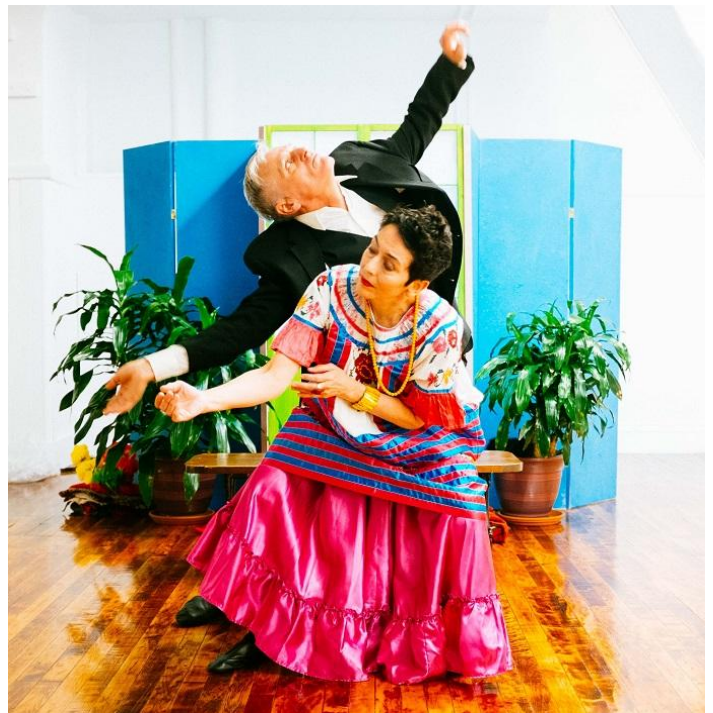
The living installation presents a *retablo* (a miniature household icon ubiquitous in Latin America). It is an intimate, emotionally charged portrait of a great artist’s internal and external struggles, pain, creative explosions/implosions, and life story. Two performers appear in front of a miniature set representing Mexican Frida Kahlo’s Blue House/*Casa Azul* where she was born, lived, painted, fought, and died. Videos of the hands and feet of 2 iconic octogenarian and nonagenarian U.S. cultural figures project onto the

windows of the set.

Mark DeGarmo Dance engages communities with *Las Fridas* by collaborating with local artists, architects, and designers to create the set. *Las Fridas* was originally projected to be performed in intimate gatherings, but its operatic scale also makes it suitable for larger venues. These formal and informal spaces include: small opera house, black box, museum, cultural center, library, gallery, and studio.

Part of the choreographer’s intention is to remember who Kahlo, the cultural revolutionary, feminist, and artistic iconoclast was, not who she became in the commercialization of her story. The production design integrates Mexican music, sound and imagery to frame the magical realism in Kahlo’s life and art. The projected flames at the finale reflect the crematorium where her remains were burned. *Las Fridas* is composed of 16 sections in 2 parts, creating a Mesoamerican mandala structure. Duality of sun and moon, mother and child, sacred and secular, ancient and current appear throughout Kahlo’s indigenous and *mestizo*, naïve and experienced imagery. In keeping with Kahlo’s imagery, the sections are paired across the work’s 2 parts to create internal and external structural dyads.

European- and Mexican-American performers encourage multiple Rashomon-like reinterpretations of the actions, images, characters, history, explanations and stories.

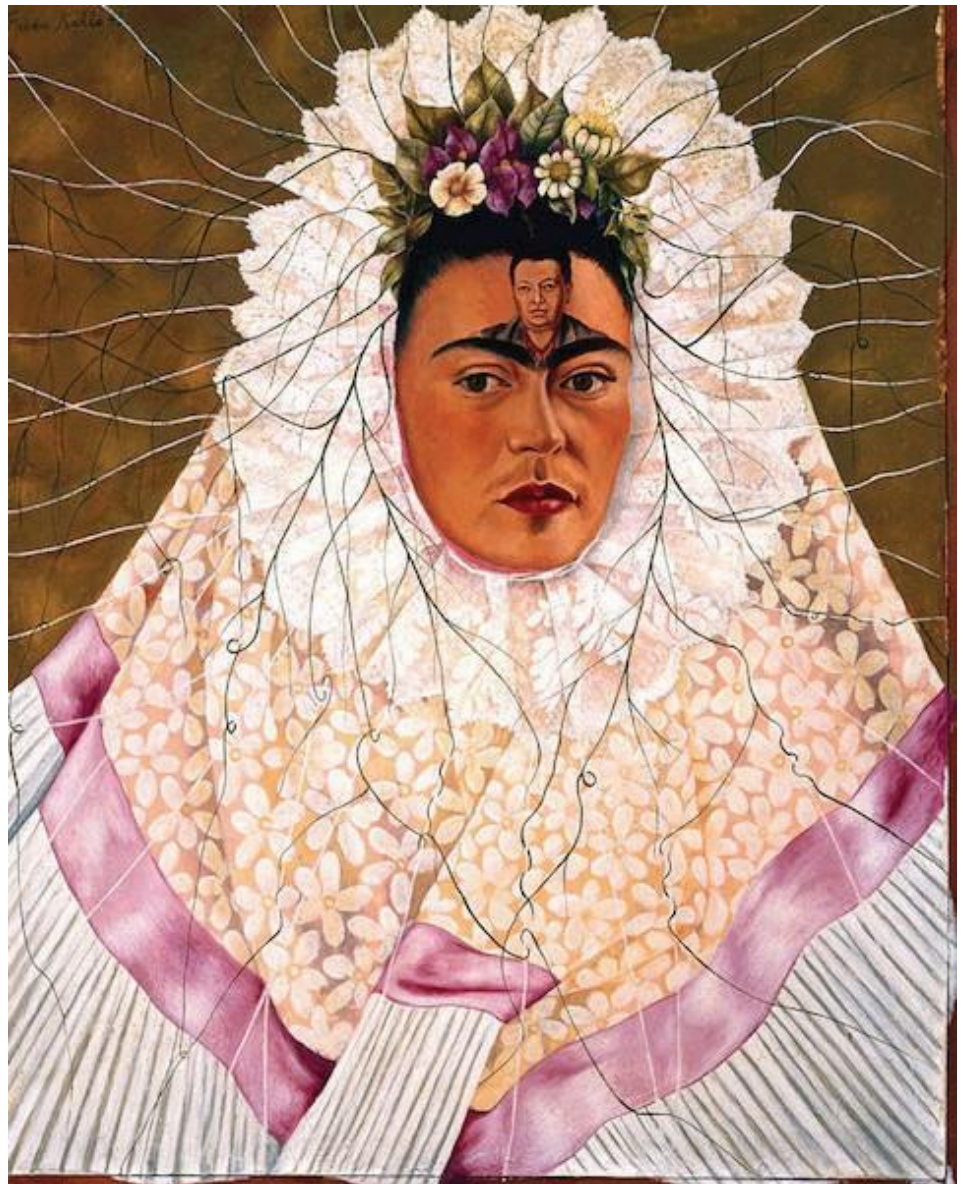


WHO IS FRIDA KAHLO?

Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) was a Mexican painter and self-portraitist who experienced a horrific, life altering accident at age 18 when a trolley collided with a bus and a metal pole impaled her pelvis. She suffered lifelong illnesses, pain, ongoing operations, body casts, and a leg amputation due to this accident. She lived in the midst of Mexico's post-revolutionary fervor. Her relationship with her husband, national and international muralist Diego Rivera, was passionate, stormy, and brutal. Mexican culture is *mestizo*—a fusion of Spanish and indigenous peoples and cultures. Kahlo's work reflects Mexican culture and cosmology. Duality of sun and moon, mother and child, sacred and secular, ancient and current appear throughout Kahlo's shocking and multi-layered imagery.

Frida Kahlo, on the cover of Paris Vogue at age 30, was claimed by the European Surrealists. French Surrealist founder André Breton called her "a ribbon around a bomb" after viewing her art. She rejected the surrealist label, claiming she painted her reality, not her dreams. She is also claimed by feminists for her portrayal of the female

experience and form. She was lovers with Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky. She confronted Henry Ford in Detroit for his anti-Semitism (her German father was Jewish) and John D. Rockefeller's capitalism in New York. She created a body of extraordinary paintings portraying her life and what it was to be Mexican, a fusion of ancient, contemporary, and personally meaningful intercultural icons and images. She was born and died in the Blue House in Coyoacán, an elegant colonial village now part of Mexico City.





Videotaped ex-votos (votive offerings to divinities or saints displayed in churches to fulfill vows in gratitude or devotion and placed where the worshipper seeks grace or gives thanks; in this case to Frida Kahlo, a secular saint) are projected in the windows of The Blue House. A 93-year-old woman's hands are projected in Part 1: Innocence. An 88-year-old woman's feet appear in Part 2: Experience. Both women are historically significant to world arts and culture, philosophy, theater, and social action. They participated in DeGarmo's movement installation and offering to Frida Kahlo, because Kahlo's life and work spoke directly to them and their artistic and social imaginations as U.S. iconoclasts.

Maxine Greene (Hands, Part 1: Innocence), (1917-2014), educational philosopher and theorist and social activist, was the William F. Russell Professor in the Foundations of Education (emerita) at Teachers College, Philosopher-in-Residence of the Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education from 1976 to 2012, and founder of the Maxine Greene

Foundation for Social Imagination, the Arts, and Education in 2003. Mark DeGarmo Dance awarded Dr. Greene its 2013 "Educational Visionary" Lifetime Achievement Award.

Judith Malina (Feet: Part 2: Experience), (1926-2015), actor, writer, and director, was Co-Founder of The Living Theatre, the oldest experimental theater group still existing in the United States. In addition to her work with The Living Theatre, Ms. Malina's credits include numerous film appearances, including roles in "Dog Day Afternoon," "The Addams Family," and "Households Saints." Mark DeGarmo Dance awarded Ms. Malina its 2014 "Educational Visionary" Lifetime Achievement Award. Academy Award-winning actress Olympia Dukakis read letters from celebrities Al Pacino and Anjelica Huston before she presented Ms. Malina the DeGarmo award. Ms. Malina performed the ex-voto video projection for *Las Fridas*, directed by DeGarmo, 3 weeks before her death.

ARTIST STATEMENT

MARK DEGARMO: MY CONNECTIONS WITH MEXICO, MEXICAN CULTURE, AND FRIDA KAHLO

"Las Fridas" is my love letter to Mexico, offering to Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), and homage to the women in my life, particularly those over 60. In offering this work for public witness, I am channeling my mothers, grandmothers, mentors, and friends. The fierceness of their lives and advices provides me fuel for my soul's work, my body's thinking, and my life's journey. Thank you for loving me, teaching me to love myself and others, and to pursue my dreams with rigor, generosity, and kindness to benefit others. This work derives from Kahlo's life's story, as well as my own: a Day of the Dead birthday, losing through death 4 fathers and father figures from ages 4 to 18, and my Mexican family and indigenous mother who brought me home to them.



I fell in love with Mexico through a family who made my spouse and me part of them. Their love of us and all things Mexican helped familiarize me with Mexico's artistic, artisanal, intellectual and spiritual heritages across art forms and historical movements. My first national teaching in Mexico in 1985 deepened my exposure to Mexico's historical and anthropological diversity and its dance, music, and visual arts treasures.





Mark DeGarmo designs, conducts, and evaluates outreach and residencies as a transcultural transdisciplinary artist and scholar-in-residence. He has worked in colleges and universities; museums; historic homes and gardens; cultural and community centers; corporations; theaters; churches, religious, and retreat centers; dance and theater schools; and alternative spaces. His expertise crosses fields, disciplines and domains, including: arts, aesthetic and dance education; dance, dance-theater, performance art; bricolage, improvisation, embodied imagination; creativity, creative process, experiential education; reflection, reflective practice; social and emotional learning; and transcultural transdisciplinary studies.

Dr. DeGarmo has worked with over 600 rural,

urban, and suburban schools and school districts in the USA and England; the Congress of the Republic of Peru; as well as colleges, universities, and cultural centers in the USA and internationally. He develops innovative residencies and programs responsive to the needs of the cities and cultural and educational communities he advises.

He served on the New York faculties of the José Limón Institute and Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts under the direction of Dr. Maxine Greene, Philosopher-in-Residence. He was a consultant to the New York City Department of Education, the largest school system in the USA with 1.1 million students and 1,800 schools, in creating the *Blueprints for Teaching and Learning in The Arts*.

PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Mark DeGarmo Dance's international performance, lecture, research, and teaching tours include 12 countries: Argentina, Canada, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, England, France, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Russia, and Slovenia.

UNITED STATES

Arts Center Old Forge, Old Forge, New York
Battery Dance Festival at World Trade Center, New York City
BronxFest on the Harlem River, Bronx, New York City
Celebrate Brooklyn!, Brooklyn, New York City
The Clemente: *Abrazo Interno* Gallery, Flamboyán Theater & LES Gallery, New York City
Columbia County Arts Festival, Ghent, New York
Crandall Public Library, Glens Falls, New York
Cutlog Paris Art Fair, The Clemente, New York City
Dancespace at Saint Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, New York City
Dutchess County Arts Festival, Poughkeepsie, New York
Eagle Monument, Battery Park, New York City
El Camino Community College, Torrance, California
Friends Meeting House, Hudson, New York
Friends Seminary, New York City
Greenwich Junior High School, Greenwich, Connecticut
Hubbard Hall, Cambridge, New York
Hudson Opera House, Hudson, New York
Inroads Multimedia Arts Center, New York City
Jazz at Lincoln Center, New York City
The Jewish Museum, New York City
Joyce Weinstein Salon, Ancram, New York
Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City
Mark DeGarmo Dance Studios 310 & 517, New York City
Middle Collegiate Church, New York City
New York City Center Studios, New York City
New York Public Library, Manhattan and Staten Island, New York City
The Neuberger Museum - State University of New York, Purchase, New York
Northfield Mount Hermon School, Mount Hermon, Massachusetts
Poole Hill Harvest Equinox Festival, Ancram, New York
Poughkeepsie High School, Poughkeepsie, New York
P.S. 122, New York City
Saint Peter's Church, New York City
Soho Arts Festival, New York City
Stissing House, Pine Plains, New York

Teatro La Tea, New York City
Tribeca Performing Arts Center, New York City
Usdan Center for the Performing Arts, Hempstead, New York
Windover, Rockport, Massachusetts
Woodbridge Center, Woodbridge, New Jersey
Woodstock Byrdcliffe Guild, Woodstock, New York
92Y Dance Center, Buittenweiser Hall, New York City

INTERNATIONAL

A.A. Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum, Moscow, Russia
Autumn Festival of the State of Mexico, Mexico
Café de la Danse, Paris, France
Cankarjev Dom Cultural and Congress Centre, Ljubljana, Slovenia
Derngate, Northampton, England
Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano/ Binational Peruvian US Cultural Center Miraflores, Lima, Peru
International Classical Ballet Festival, Municipal Theater, Trujillo, Peru
International Traditional and Modern Dance Festival de Grupo Cultural Uk'Ux Pop Wuj, Chichicastenango, Guatemala
Municipal Theater, Arequipa, Peru
National Center of the Arts, Mexico City, Mexico
National Congress, Lima, Peru
National Museum, Lima, Peru
National Professional School of Ballet, Lima, Peru
National School of Classical Ballet and Contemporary Dance, Mexico City, Mexico
National School of Dance, San Salvador, El Salvador
The National Theater, San Salvador, El Salvador
The National Theater, Santa Ana, El Salvador
Southern Peru Copper Corporation, Ilo, Peru
Los Talleres Cultural Center, Coyoacán, Mexico City, Mexico
Theater of The National Dance Company of Ecuador, Quito, Ecuador
Yutsil Center, Toluca, Mexico

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PHOTO MANDALA MONTAGE

INNOCENCE: THE BLUE HOUSE



PHOTO MANDALA MONTAGE

EXPERIENCE: RIBBON AROUND A BOMB

