

July 01, 2024

Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to submit my Tenure Package for your consideration and review. I am grateful to reflect on the two years since my reappointment at Sarah Lawrence College. Working with the students, staff, faculty, and administration has been a joy. We have had the opportunity to continue to rise to unprecedented challenges and discover ways for the college to thrive and grow. I am excited to share the recent strategies, accomplishments, and evolution of my teaching, advising, and service. As a working artist, I will also share my continuing experience in creating and presenting contemporary performance on the national and international stage and how I contribute to enriching our student's learning with the benefit of my professional experience.

Teaching and Donning

Theater and performance are collaborative art forms, and collaboration is at the core of my artistic practice and teaching. My 25 years working in the field are a driving force behind developing a unique set of syllabi that prepare students for a life in the arts with a grounded foundation and the skills to lead the future. I encourage my students to be interdisciplinary explorers of the contemporary landscape of theater, performance, dance, music, visual arts, film, code, and literature.

My goal as an educator in theater is to develop critical thinkers, innovative artists, and thought leaders. Since I arrived, I have focused my teaching on stepping into and refining the MFA program's core components taught by the Director, "Performance Lab" and "Embodied Thesis." I have also augmented the undergraduate program with a contemporary theatre and performance survey, "Performance Research," and shared my research and practice in multimedia theatre with the component "Beyond the Proscenium: Radical Acting, Directing, and Design in the Post-Internet Age."

In 2022, I had my first opportunity to teach an FYS course. I created the class "The Creative Spark - Making Theatre and Performance Now" as a hybrid FYS. The first-year students took my class and one or two other components to create a theatre third. In the first semester, we surveyed the many roles of making work as a director, designer, dramaturg, performer, organizer, and generator to undo any harmful practices learned in high school and develop consent-based and trauma-informed approaches to making theatre now. In the second semester, we investigated and rehearsed expanded theatrical approaches of care-based practices, immersive theatre techniques, and strategies for incorporating post-internet aesthetics into their work.

Over the past two years, I have enjoyed working with my FYS cohort. It has been particularly fulfilling to support them throughout their academic journey and personal growth. I strive to assist them in processing

their academic goals and connect them to the college's support services, including mental and physical health resources, access and accommodations, library services, and the learning commons. The opportunity to support this FYS cohort and witness their emotional and intellectual development is a true gift that Sarah Lawrence College offers to both its students and faculty.

"Performance Lab" is a vital component of the MFA program that engages students across both years through thematic creation cycles culminating in research and performance showings. Also, as part of the component, I organize guest artist workshops, complemented by student-led podcasts, produced and shared through the MFA Theatre Program and Contemporary Performance Network. This year, I established a collaboration with La MaMa in the East Village, hosting these workshops at their rehearsal spaces and facilitating student visits to the city three times per semester. Since its podcast inception, the students have produced five seasons, totaling 26 podcasts.

I have consistently taught the "Embodied Thesis" component, which guides second-year MFA students through the graduated stages of research, experimentation, refinement, and production essential for crafting their thesis performances. Over the past year, I collaborated with staff to enhance the support framework for these thesis projects, leading to notably more successful outcomes than in previous years. The students developed a clearer understanding of the production process. They felt well-supported by the program, enabling them to present their thesis projects with significantly less stress while better fulfilling their artistic visions and goals.

I have also updated and revised the "Digital Devising" component, now titled "Beyond the Proscenium: Radical Acting, Directing, and Design in the Post-Internet Age." The component is designed for students who seek to push the boundaries of theater and embrace the bold world of post-internet aesthetics and multimedia, where theatre and performance meet digital and networked methods. The students investigate innovative approaches to contemporary theater, exploring new ways of storytelling that embrace technology's boundless possibilities and reflect our media-embedded lives.

For the past three years, I have been the advisor for the graduate students with a rotating roster of around 11-22 MFA students. My graduate and undergraduate donning are some of the most fulfilling work with students. It is a holistic process of support and reflection integral to their education and post-graduation pathways. I work with each graduate student to build a daily practice, expand their creative foundations, invest in future-forward skills, and fortify their professional development.

Service

Since my renewal, I have had the opportunity to join another search committee and, as the director of both the undergraduate and graduate theatre programs, participate in the undergraduate chair and graduate director's meetings. Being part of the search committee for a new tenure-track professor in Filmmaking and Moving Image Arts was one of the highlights of my academic career. The organization of the search and the collaborative spirit of the faculty involved were superb, and it was wonderful to gain a deeper understanding of the FMIA program. My monthly meetings with the undergraduate chairs group and graduate directors group have been invaluable for understanding how each department and program aligns with the college's goals. These meetings provide a platform to brainstorm new ways to overcome common obstacles.

Additionally, joining the Diversity Committee in the fall of 2023 as a substitute for a faculty member on leave was a profoundly enriching experience. It offered a great chance to hear how the college is working towards greater belonging and accessibility in our community. Participating in discussions about our accountability, the development of a land acknowledgment, and policies in sustainability was deeply moving. It underscored the importance of these initiatives and our collective responsibility to foster an inclusive and equitable environment.

Practice

In my artistic practice, I create and direct performance works that tour internationally and nationally with my company Big Art Group; I am a founder and curator of the Special Effects Festival in NYC; I am the founder and editor of the online network and publisher, Contemporary Performance Network, with 7600 members from 81 countries; I am a writer with critical essays, plays, and interviews published in the US and Europe; and I have been a mentor with the Queer Arts Mentorship NYC. I use all these experiences in my teaching and directorship.

I arrived at Sarah Lawrence in the Fall of 2019 with several projects underway with my company, Big Art Group, and plans for my annual curatorial project, SFX Festival, in January 2020. Since 2014, I have co-curated the SFX Festival. The festival's mission is to present artists during the Annual Association of Performing Arts Presenters Conference in January in NYC annually. We focus on presenting LGBTQIA+, POC, women, and non-binary artists, giving a platform for exciting, inclusive, genre-breaking work and voices. Luckily, this was just before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we presented the artists Kristin Worrall, Sauda Aziza Jackson, Braulio Cruz, Rachel Karp, Joseph Amodei, Joey Weiss, and Kate Benson to the last full houses I would be a part of until now. Needless to say, my projects with Big Art Group were on hold until the summer of 2022.

With the de-escalation of pandemic protocols and the return of performances and festivals, I was invited to remount and present Big Art Group's production of *Broke House* at La Biennale di Venezia Teatro on June 26 & 27, 2022, in Venice, Italy. I was also invited to be in residence with Big Art Group in Rome at Mattatoio Roma from June 14 - 19, 2022. The tour finished with a teaching residency at Biennale College in Venice from June 27 to July 3, 2022, teaching some of the same work I share in *Digital Devising*.

Since then, I have had several works presented in a number of venues across mediums and contexts, both nationally and internationally. My 4-channel video, *SOS/Animals/Action*, was presented in two consecutive Hungry Eyes Film Festivals in Gessen, Germany. The first time in 2022, it was in the general curation, and the second time in 2023, it was curated in a "best of" series. The video has continued to travel and was recently presented in June 2024 at the Volksbühne Videothek in Berlin, Germany, and will be seen at bb15 in Linz, Austria, in November.

SOS/Realness Liberation Front, my two-channel installation, was curated into the group exhibition "Make Me Feel Mighty Real: Drag/Tech and the Queer Avatar" at the Los Angeles gallery Honor Fraser in March-May 2023. The exhibition assembled an intergenerational group of visual artists, avant-garde performers, nightlife celebrities, grassroots archivists, DIY publishers, and experimental technologists,

emphasizing how technology is used to transcend traditional boundaries of gender, sex, biology, and human subjectivity to celebrate adaptability and resilience in the face of oppression.

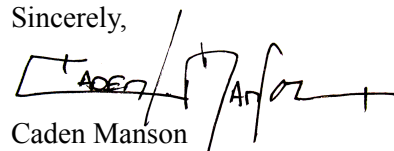
In the fall of 2023, my company and I were commissioned to create an immersive performance installation by the National Theatre of Veneto and the Port Authority of Venice. *THE RENDER* delved into the complex challenges that climate change presents to humanity and the natural world. Situated in Venice's Arterminal, the installation-performance space was layered with cameras, projections, bodies, and sound, and examined behaviors within and across community networks, and exploring strategies for realigning actions towards homes, locations, ecologies, and communities. We worked with the recent Accademia Teatrale Carlo Goldoni graduates, and I hired a recent SLC Theatre MFA graduate to oversee the video system and operate it during the performances. We rehearsed for four weeks, and the production ran for two weeks.

Big Art Group has returned to our production schedule of a new original work every two years, intermittently giving short tours of produced works. We are raising funds, writing grants, and developing a new large-scale work titled *TROUBLE* to be presented in 2025/26. Trouble blends Big Art Group's queer theatrics with the "troubled" possibilities engendered by AI, computer vision, and hyper-materiality. The work interrogates and undoes the structures of the Western theatrical canon, fostering a form where multiplicity and marginalized narratives flourish. Utilizing a machine learning corpus infused with decolonized discourse, counter-textual historical, contemporary documentary analyses, and queer theory, the project employs machine learning algorithms to anatomize and reconfigure canonical Western plays. Trouble amalgamates site-specific, socially engaged, and documentary practices with AI-driven text, show control, and machine learning critique from past Big Art research. It is further enriched by the company's pioneering real-time film methodologies.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the recent past and the challenges we have faced as we emerge from the brunt of the pandemic, I am inspired by the unwavering commitment of our students, staff, and faculty. I am grateful to be part of this period of renewal and growth. I have found great fulfillment in my teaching and service, and I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to continue developing and presenting my work both nationally and internationally, sharing these experiences with my students and peer faculty. Hiring recent graduates has been particularly rewarding, providing them with a valuable boost in their careers. I am also thankful for the meaningful time spent collaborating with fellow faculty on committees, groups, and searches. I look forward to continuing my dedication to the college and contributing to its future successes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caden Manson', written over a rectangular box. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Caden Manson