

December 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 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 artistic and curatorial practice.

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 to 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 refresh and revisit 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. Supporting them throughout their academic journey and personal growth has been incredibly fulfilling. I strive to assist them in processing their educational goals and connecting them to the college's support services, including mental and physical health resources, access and accommodations, library services, and the learning commons. Supporting their academic and professional growth is a central focus of my work as a Don.

Some examples of their achievements over the past two years include a student who proposed, developed, and presented a devised play titled *The Autistic Monologues* in the Theatre Program during their second year. Collaborating with fellow neurodiverse actors, writers, and designers, they created a powerful and inclusive performance. A second student, exploring a potential PhD in Performance Studies, was accepted as an undergraduate cohort representative to attend the ASTR (American Society for Theatre Research) conference in Seattle. A third student has excelled in several internships across design, illustration, and gaming, building professional networks and practical experience. The opportunity to support an FYS cohort 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. 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. Since the podcast's inception, the students have produced five seasons, totaling 26 podcasts. This year, I have also established a collaboration with La MaMa in the East Village, hosting our workshops at their rehearsal spaces and facilitating student visits to the city three times per semester.

I have consistently taught "Embodied Thesis." The component guides second-year MFA students through the essential graduated stages of research, experimentation, refinement, and production for their thesis performances. In 2023, I worked with staff to enhance the support framework for these projects, leading to notably more successful outcomes than in previous years. The students also gained a better understanding of the creation and production process.

To help augment the theatre history, survey, and theory components in the curriculum, I teach a component for graduate and undergraduate students that surveys current topics in the field called "Performance Research." The component is concentrated on contemporary strategies and frameworks for theatre/performance focused on Care, Social Engagement, Participatory, Post-Internet, Copresence, and Speculative Futures. I have also updated and revised the "Digital Devising" undergraduate 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.

In addition to my undergraduate donning, I also advised MFA Theatre students, with a rotating roster of 11-22 MFA students a year for the past four years. 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. Alums from the past four years are already teaching at the university level, touring nationally and internationally, presenting original work at festivals in NYC, working in the arts not-for-profit sector, producing industrials, and successfully receiving residencies and commissions.

Service

Since my renewal, I have had the opportunity to join a second search committee. 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 service. 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. The search outcome was a success, and we welcomed an outstanding new member to our faculty.

As the director of both the undergraduate and graduate theatre programs, I participate in the undergraduate chair's and graduate director's meetings. The monthly meetings have been invaluable for understanding how each department and program aligns with the college's goals. These meetings provide a platform to collaborate and brainstorm new ways to overcome common obstacles. Informed by chair committee discussions about campus climate surveys that highlighted a need for greater connection and engagement in 23/24, this autumn, I developed and led a new interdisciplinary initiative in the Theatre program, Theatre Festival Weekends.

We structured the festivals as weekend events that include Theatre program productions, independent theater group performances, student group activities, speakers, preshow activities, panels, and late-night community-building entertainment. To ensure robust coordination and curricular integration, I collaborated with Heather Drastal to develop a new Theatrical Producing component, which organizes and curates the festivals. Through streamlined technical setups and strategic promotions via newsletters, social media, barkerboards, colorful PAC window signage, and community outreach, the festivals highlight the diverse collaborative efforts across the college with the goal of fostering cross-disciplinary engagement and a cohesive, dynamic college-wide experience. This initiative is a testament to how committee meetings inform and enhance my work, allowing me to respond creatively to the needs of the broader college community.

Just this fall, the Theatrical Producing class has connected, collaborated, and presented in the festival weekends Residential Life, Green Rights Organization for the World (GROW), Treble in Paradise, Planned Parenthood Generation Action, DJ Union, Democracy Matters, Musical Theatre Ensemble, Campus Safety, HUB, Shrews Naked Shakespeare, Director of Spiritual Life, Call Westlands, Rocky Horror, D3 Improv, and Drag Union to name a few.

Additionally, joining the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Committee in the fall of 2023 as a substitute for a faculty member on leave and again this fall has been a profoundly enriching experience. It offered a great chance to work with the college governing committees to achieve greater belonging and accessibility in our community. It was enriching to participate in discussions about our accountability, the development of a land acknowledgment, and policies in sustainability. Working on the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Committee underscored the importance of these initiatives and our collective responsibility to support an inclusive and equitable education and workplace.

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.

In addition to my performance and curating projects, I have contributed to the field through publications of essays, interviews, and critical work in prominent U.S. and European platforms. These writings explore the intersections of technology and performance, aligning with the core ideas I bring into my teaching and artistic practice. My performance work has also been reviewed in newspapers and written about in academic journals. This fall, my project *OPACITY* was the focus of an essay in *Modern Drama* by Miriam Felton-Dansky and Jacob Gallagher-Ross, "Interface Theatre: Watching Ourselves Disappear." Additionally, Big Art Group is a focus of chapter 3 in the forthcoming French book publication *Un siècle d'avant-garde (A Century Of The Avant-Garde: Essay On Us Theatre)*. It will be published by l'université de Toulouse - Jean-Jaurès in January 2025. Jemma Nelson, Jacob Gallagher-Ross, and I have a book proposal for the "Big Art Book" under review by Routledge. It critically explores Big Art Group's 25-year history, essays on mediated and post-internet performance, and a series of teaching tools for mediated theatre.

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 aims to present artists annually during the Association of Performing Arts Presenters Conference in January in NYC. We focus on presenting LGBTQIA+, POC, women, and non-binary artists, giving a platform for exciting, inclusive, genre-breaking work and voices. Fortunately, the project began 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 2022. My performance projects with Big Art Group were on pandemic hold until the summer of 2022.

In Spring 2020, I created the SLC Performance Lab Podcast as part of the MFA Theatre Program's Performance Lab component, where students work with guest artists and develop performance experiments. The podcast features student-led interviews with visiting artists and is produced in partnership with ContemporaryPerformance.com. The goals of the podcast are to share these conversations with the program, campus, and broader field and position the students as thought leaders. The podcast has additionally generated interest from prospective applicants and strengthened the MFA Theatre Program's presence in the theater and performance community. We have produced and distributed 5 seasons with 26 artists, including Nile Harris, Kaneza Schall, Machine Dazzle, Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, Tina Satter, and Emily Johnson.

My touring schedule restarted with the de-escalation of pandemic protocols and the return of performances and festivals in late 2022. 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 lead a residency with Big Art Group in Rome at Mattatoio Roma from June 14 - 19, 2022. The tour finished with a teaching invitation at Biennale College in Venice from June 27 to July 3, 2022, teaching some of the same work I share in my class, *Beyond The Proscenium*.

Since then, I restarted the SFX Festival and, this year invited a recent alumnus to curate an evening during this January festival week. I have had several works presented in 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 work has continued to travel and was recently presented in June 2024 at the Volksbühne Videothek in Berlin, Germany, and bb15 in Linz, Austria, in November.

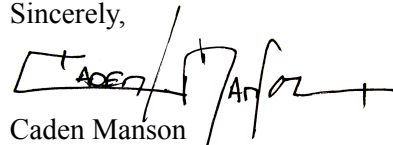
SOS/Realness Liberation Front, my two-channel installation, was curated into the group exhibition “Make Me Feel Mighty Real: Drag/Tech and the Queer Avatar” at the Los Angeles gallery Honor Fraser in March-May 2023. The exhibition assembled an intergenerational group of visual artists, avant-garde performers, 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 by the National Theatre of Veneto and the Port Authority of Venice. *THE RENDER* delved into the complex challenges climate change presents to humanity and the natural world. We worked with the recent Accademia Teatrale Carlo Goldoni graduates and local climate scientists. I also hired a recent SLC Theatre MFA graduate to oversee and operate the video system during the performances. We rehearsed for four weeks, and the production ran for two weeks in the Venice Port Authority Arterminal.

Big Art Group has returned to our production schedule of a new original work every two years, intermittently organizing 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. *TROUBLE* amalgamates site-specific, socially engaged, and documentary practices with AI-driven text, show control, and machine learning critique from past Big Art Group research. This December, I will lead a workshop for my class, Performance Lab, during Big Art Group’s residency at CultureHub in NYC.

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. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to continue developing and presenting my work nationally and internationally and sharing these experiences with my students and peers. I am also thankful for the meaningful time spent collaborating with fellow faculty on committees, groups, and searches. I look forward to continuing my commitment to the college and contributing to its future successes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caden Manson', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Caden Manson