

Statement of Creative Work and Research Philosophy  
Marla Burkholder

My formative experiences as an artist and individual have been rooted in the peace-seeking culture of my Mennonite upbringing. I first decided to pursue performing arts as a career in the midst of Mennonite education experiences that took me to the Middle East to learn about religion-based conflict, to Washington D.C. for an internship at an experimental theater company dedicated to engaging African American and Latin-x children, and around North America with choirs that collaborated with artists from Europe, Africa and Asia. I was offered a big world perspective from a very small world vantage point, and I found art to be the only satisfying frame that could hold all of those tensions.

I came of age as an artist in Philadelphia at an inflection point in the city's arts and cultural evolution. Because of its relative affordability vis-a-vis New York, Philadelphia became a haven for artists of all kinds wanting to make their own work. The city's theater community, composed for a long time of a few prized, established institutions, began to fill in at the roots with young companies making devised, physical, idiosyncratic, edgy, challenging, collaborative performances.

In that incubator, I developed a personal creative ethos that continues to evolve with my artistic practice. I am moved by the language and stories of the ages – Shakespeare, Greek mythology, global folk tales. I love to be challenged by questions that have pricked at the human spirit forever, and to connect through time with seekers who were also trying to contain worlds within a self-made frame. But I am equally moved by silence, image, the movement of bodies in space, and non-linear conceptions of humanity that rise out of intensive investigation and experimentation in contemporary devised work.

As a voice and speech specialist, I am particularly drawn to exploring communication across visible and invisible divides. What are the filaments that can connect the chasm between different languages, different cultures, different ideas? How can we find the art inside of the sounds of language apart from the meaning assigned? What is the sound of self and how do we draw boundaries and open doors that affirm that selfhood?

As an actor I have both lived inside worlds created largely by other artists, and been co-creator of art worlds. As an artistic director, I have also been both the visionary and the re-visionary. My ten-year tenure as founding Artistic Director for Shakespeare in Clark Park (SCP), a professional theater venture rooted in the diverse community of West Philly, was an immersive learning experience in creating public art, a channel for developing my own artistic vision, and a building ground for collaborative community partnerships. Our ground-breaking 2014 production of *Henry IV: Your Prince and Mine* with Team Sunshine Performance Corporation cast 100 community members from 30 neighborhoods across Philadelphia in a choreographed physical collage of war. In taking on the role of Artistic Director for Intercultural Journeys, I bring those public-art sensibilities to creating intimate performances that ask audiences to find the large world within their city and within themselves.

The interdisciplinary nature of theater-making has allowed me to collaborate with and appreciate the work of a diverse range of artists who specialize in music, dance, visual art, design, writing, photography, and fabric arts. I seek out projects that cross disciplines and challenge me to work within new modalities. I am deeply interested in the intersection of art and community life, in particular the potential of the arts to affect social change and promote holistic development within and between diverse groups of people.

I have chosen to live in Philadelphia and embrace the challenge of making art in a diverse urban environment. I understand first-hand the difficulties and rewards of curating and creating art with a multitude of voices in the room. I am committed to being present in the work of making learning and art-making environments sanctuaries of anti-oppressive practices, and seeking wholeness for artists as the ground of being under everything I help to make.