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Friday, April 13, 2018

"Labor of Love?" JComm Weighs In (Part 2)

By Lauren Wingenroth

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Next Tuesday, April 17, the Dance/NYC Junior Committee will host "Labor of Love?: A Long Table," a conversation around labor, artistic love, and monetary and social value in the dance field. To get the conversation started, we asked JComm members to weigh in on their own relationships to the term "labor of love."

Lauren Wingenroth:

I think that all too often the idea that we should do what we love and love what we do, though a seemingly innocent and even well-intentioned concept, can be used to disempower those who choose to pursue paths like the arts. (Though it's not just the arts and other under-funded fields—this kind of mindset is used to manipulate lower-level corporate employees as well.) But "choose" is the keyword. Who is able to make the choice to pursue passion over practicality, and who is not?

Is a labor of love inherently less difficult, less trying, less laborious than labor that's done solely for money? I don't think so. But as artists who don't necessarily believe in the ways that capitalism values only monetary compensation, how do we grapple with that and advocate for the compensation we need to live, to make more work?

Sherylynn Sealy:

To me, labor of love means you're zealously working with a non-egocentric purpose that will benefit others positively.

Katy Dammers:

Andrea K. Scott ended her review of Zoe Leonard's show "A Survey" as published in the New Yorker this week with a description of Leonard's piece "Strange Fruit" writing: "A work of art. A labor of love." Leonard's piece--composed of banana, orange, and other fruit peels stitched back together with embroidery thread or joined with zippers--seems to symbolize much of the role of labor in art. It is love that compels us to suture together that which has been discarded, to work at the preservation of the ineffable, to create what much of life seeks to fade and wither away.

The enactment of love is labor itself, but rarely is it a love that shows its care in return through a sharing of this labor later. While so much of art labor is rewarding, its joys are not always restorative or relational to the amount of labor put into a practice. At what point in loving yourself must one recognize the toll of this labor and recalibrate this labor of love, understanding that it is often uneven? This balance is difficult to navigate---it can be painful to love something deeply that does not, and frankly often cannot, return love in the same way.

This uneven relationship feeds into dangerous myths of the artist as one besotted with longing, troubled and tortured by his (for in these tales the artist is always male) unrequited passion for a form in which satisfaction cannot be found. I've found that acknowledging the labor of this love helps to clarify that it is work: work that needs support structures, days off, adequate compensation, and care. Love is hard. It's work.

We hope to see you at the Long Table to share your own thoughts and experiences. Register (for free)[here!](#)

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