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Movement in still form

Exploring the intimate moments of dance creation with
photographer Camilla Greenwell



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Movement in still form



When we think about dance, we think about movement. The body in motion, a piece of choreography as its own unique but universal language.

In photography, dance lives and breathes in a different way. Capturing movement in still form is a fascinating contradiction. How can it help us to see dance differently?

Sadler's Wells is a world-leading creative organisation, which exists to make and share dance that inspires us all.

This collection of photographs by Camilla Greenwell gives us access to behind the scenes moments of the creative process: artists coming together to make the dance we eventually see in performance. These are moments that audience members don't usually get to see, and moments that artists are ready to experience again in a post-pandemic world.

Front page image: Charlie Morrissey & Katye Coe for Wild Card: Katye Coe – Preparation. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler's Wells, London (2015).

Front page image description: A close up of two dancers, both on the floor: Katye lies on her side, facing us, her eyes closed. One arm rests on the floor, the other is lifted, elbow high, hand stretching down in a diagonal towards Charlie, on the left. He lies face down, the top of his head towards us, one hand threaded under his body to cup Katye's brow, supporting her head just above the floor.



Image: Yinka Esi Graves, Noemí Luz and Magdalena Mannion for Wild Card: dotdotdot dance. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler's Wells, London (2016).

Image description: Three dancers standing in a line hold a ruffled flamenco skirt above their heads. The two at the back are hidden beneath it. At the front, Yinka faces us, her bent arms lifted into a diamond shape. Her expression is serious, her head slightly bowed, her gaze off to one side.



Camilla Greenwell has been photographing dance for 10 years



Collaborating with artists from a range of different dance backgrounds – including flamenco, hip hop, contemporary and Indian classical dance – she captures some of the most intimate moments of creation, the process of a dance work coming to life.

Image: Verena Schneider, Fernando Balsera, Stephen Moynihan & Sophie Arstall for Wild Card: Hagit Yakira. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler’s Wells, London (2016).

Image description: Four dancers work together. In the centre is Stephen, with his back to us is lifted above the group, supporting himself on the shoulders of two women. Verena, the dancer nearest to us reaches up to support him, her fingers spreading across his shoulder blade.



"I think a good photograph is all about how it makes you feel, what it makes you remember, or what it reveals to you, rather than something that is technically perfect – which is also how I feel about dance itself."

Camilla Greenwell

Image: Stefan Jovanović, Charlie Cattrall & Pau Aran Gimeno for Wild Card: Stefan Jovanovic – Constellations. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler's Wells, London (2019).

Image description: Three male dancers work together. In the centre, Charlie, a bearded white man, leans towards us, folding from the waist, eyes closed. He rests his right arm on Stefan's bent back, while his left arm hangs relaxed. Pau supports or perhaps manipulates Charlie: holding the top of his head and his arm near the wrist.



“The attempt to capture movement in a still image opens up this space to see a glimpse of something else happening. Often, dance moves so fast, so you may take in the whole visual experience in front of you, but you will undoubtedly miss individual moments. When I shoot dance, I tend to hone in on these moments, rather than capturing a wide scene.”

Camilla Greenwell

Image: Simone Damberg Würtz & Stephen Quildan for Kim Brandstrup – Life is a Dream by Rambert. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Rambert, London (2018).

Image description: His back to us, Stephen leans in towards Simone, resting his head on her shoulder. She rounds her back as she cradles his head with one hand, the other reaching down to clasp his hand. She is in profile, her eyes closed, her mouth slightly open.



"It's a special place, being in the studio. Having the expression to just make work, and work with other people, has always been a kind of blessing."

Botis Seva

Image: Botis Seva for Far From the Norm – BLKDOG. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler's Wells, London (2018).

Image description: Botis throws back his head, eyes closed, mouth open as if in song or a shout. One hand is folded in a fist against his chest, while the other hand, below, is open, with the fingertips extending towards us.



“My favourite shots are when you see the dancers’ facial expressions. You get a window into what they are feeling as they perform. You will never be able to fully replicate what’s happening in front of you, but that’s not the point, and I think this allows for a lot of creative freedom and interpretation.”

Camilla Greenwell

Image: Shangomola Edunjobi for Far From the Norm – BLKDOG.
Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler’s Wells, London (2018).

Image description: Shangomola, a Black dancer with a flat-top Afro and goatee beard, stands with his gaze directed downward, eyes closed, one arm extended in tension, as if supporting the weight of the unseen dancer at floor level whose arm reaches up from below to touch Shangomola’s chest, two fingers pulling at the neckline of his t-shirt.



Image: Joshua Nash for Far From the Norm – BLKDOG. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler’s Wells, London (2018).

Image description: Joshua is turned away from us, head tipped up towards the ceiling, brow furrowed. His arms are lifted, hands relaxed as if he is allowing himself to fall backwards towards us. He wears a black t-shirt emblazoned with the word ARTIST.



Image: Jordan Douglas & Ezra Owen for Far From the Norm – BLKDOG. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler's Wells, London (2018).

Image description: Jordan stands behind Ezra, grips his shoulder with both hands. Ezra's head is down, one arm thrown out to the side for balance. His other arm wraps under Jordan's leg, lifting it up, making it unclear whether Jordan is pushing Ezra down or leaning on him for support.



Transcript: Botis Seva reflects on what time in the studio means to him personally, and as a dance artist

It's a special place being in the studio, you know. Having the expression to just, make work and work with other people has always been kind of a blessing.

It's been something that I've had, I've been lucky enough to have the opportunity to allow my emotions to come out in that space because a lot of the times as creatives you carry the things that are in your heart or in your mind when you're, kind of, walking into a studio.

So, you know, there's a lot of things you, for me anyway, I can't really let go of. You know, one being a dad, a father, also a partner. Also, someone that kind of, leads people and helps and tries to help other people.

All of those can feel, they can feel overwhelming at times, and they're not just things that I do, I'll just walk in the studio and be like 'Ok, I'll forget these things.'

There's some of those traits that still sit in me 'cause they still sit in me even when I'm making work. Those thoughts and those feelings do come out at times. But, yeah, it's a very special, being in the studio's a very special place.

I call it a sacred place because it's a therapeutic space, again, which allows you to bring out all of those emotions that I'm feeling. Also, helping people in those spaces because you see, you know it's a mirror, you see the reflection of yourself, kind of, in that space.

Kind of, trying to better yourself, trying to be, almost, a better person every time you leave that space or after you leave a creation period, which is a beautiful thing.



Image: Olivia Edginton, Nicolas Vendange, Tanja Erhart, Laura Patay & Mickaella Dantas for Hetain Patel – Let’s Talk About Dis by Candoco Dance Company. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Aspire National Training Centre, Stanmore (2018).

Image description: In the foreground, Olivia is mid-leap, bare feet pointing towards the floor, right arm extended straight up, the wrist bent as if posting a letter high overhead. She wears a black, long-sleeved top and wide white trousers, her stretch exposing a triangle of midriff. In the background, four dancers watch her, sitting comfortably on chairs. One has a pair of crutches.



Image: Mickaella Dantas for Hetain Patel – Let’s Talk About Dis by Candoco Dance Company. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Aspire National Training Centre, Stanmore (2018).

Image description: Mickaella stands relaxed in front of a row of empty chairs, smiling at someone out of view to the right. Her dark curly hair is loose and she wears a print blouse tucked into shorts. She has one prosthetic leg and her other foot is bare. Garments are spread on the floor in front of her.



Image: Flora Wellesley Wesley for Nora invites Deborah Hay – Where Home Is. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Dance4, Nottingham (2019).

Image description: Flora looks away from us, into the back right corner of the space. Her arms are open along a diagonal – the far arm outstretched, the palm raised as if to hold back something or someone. The arm nearer us is bent at the elbow, the palm raised and open towards us, as if in surrender.



Transcript: Flora Wellesley Wesley reflects on what time in the studio means to her as a dance artist

I find, having space and entering the studio can be a bit daunting sometimes because time in the studio is finite.

It's a precious resource in London and of course, it's a space that's full of potential.

You can go deep and do very intimate work, if the atmosphere is conducive to that.

And if the environment in the studio, and the context, and the people in the building are, you know, good, it feels healthy and supportive, it can create quite a sense of a cocoon actually.

Where, somewhere to concentrate and take care of the ways that you're engaging in your practice.

We spend less time on stage than we do in the studio, so we need to look after the quality of the time in the studio because that feeds directly into the show.

You know, it kind of leaks, the audience pickup on the affect. So what's gone on, and the ethos in the studio, you know, all of that does matter.



Image: Stephanie McMann for Nora invites Deborah Hay – Where Home Is. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Dance4, Nottingham (2019).

Image description: Stephanie's limbs reach to the corners of the image: her feet are out of sight but evidently planted wide apart, knees bent, and arms outstretched and lifted above shoulder level. In bold print shirt and shorts, she could be surfing or skateboarding.



Image: Eleanor Sikorski for Nora invites Deborah Hay – Where Home Is. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Dance4, Nottingham (2019).

Image description: Eleanor faces to the right, arms outstretched in the same direction, one palm facing up, the other facing down. Wearing glasses and geometric print leggings, she gazes off to the right and down.



Image: Fernando Balsera, Stephen Moynihan & Verena Schneider for Wild Card: Hagit Yakira. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler's Wells, London (2016).

Image description: Three dancers form a tight knot. Stephen, facing us, is the highest point of the group. He has one knee hooked over Fernando's shoulder, one arm wrapped around the back of his head, the other hugging his back. Fernando, his back to us, supports Stephen with one hand, while Verena, standing to the right, joins her hands to the group.



Wild Card

Wild Card is an artist development initiative launched by Sadler's Wells in 2013. It invites the next generation of artists to curate an evening of work for a live audience to broaden ideas about dance as it's being made today.

Over the years, the scale and ambition of Wild Card has grown, as artists including Botis Seva, Katye Coe, and Stefan Jovanović curate experiences which provoke and excite audiences, offering fresh perspectives on dance.



Camilla's photography practice has developed alongside the artists she photographs. Key to her practice is understanding different artists' languages and how to translate them visually.

Image: Stefan Jovanović, Katye Coe & Pau Aran Gimeno for Wild Card: Stefan Jovanovic – Constellations. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler's Wells, London (2019).

Image description: Three dancers make contact on the floor. In the centre, Katye leans back onto Stefan's shoulder, while he clasps her waist. With her left hand, she reaches upwards, joining palms with Pau who kneels up, higher than the other two. All three have eyes closed.



This trust allows for experimentation, an opportunity to focus on moments that as audience members, we might not see or notice when a work is on the stage.

Image: Katye Coe, Pau Aran Gimeno & Stefan Jovanović for Wild Card: Stefan Jovanovic – Constellations. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler’s Wells, London (2019).

Image description: Three dancers move in different directions: Katye sits on the floor, squarely facing us, arms open to the sides. Her head is tipped up to the ceiling, as if pulled back by Pau, his fingers on her chin as he steps away from us. On all fours, between them, Stefan seems to head to the right, staring at the floor.



"Artists often place themselves in a very vulnerable state during rehearsals, so to be sensitive to that, and be able to get the shots you need, can be a challenge. I think what helps is that I'm incredibly shy, so I like to be quiet and observe."

Camilla Greenwell

Image: Charlie Morrissey & Katy Coe for Wild Card: Katy Coe – Preparation. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler's Wells, London (2015).

Image description: A close up of two dancers, both on the floor: Katy lies on her side, facing us, her eyes closed. One arm rests on the floor, the other is lifted, elbow high, hand stretching down in a diagonal towards Charlie, on the left. He lies face down, the top of his head towards us, one hand threaded under his body to cup Katy's brow, supporting her head just above the floor.



Transcript: Katy Coe reflects on the co-creation between a dance artist and photographer

In my experience so far, the best photographic images, but also the most positive experiences I've had in working alongside a photographer while practicing dancing or performing dancing, have had a sense of co-creation and co-journeying. Most of which have happened in the studio rather than actually in performance itself, not always but mainly.

A photographer can be present in a really generative way, for me, when they can be with me and be witness to me moving. And for that to happen, there's a certain space necessary, there has to be time made, and attunement given so that the moments that are caught can be kind of given back.

And they can be given ways in two ways, one in the form of photographs, as kind of, imprints of moments in the practice that I can then literally see back. But also, number two, and importantly is in my knowing while I'm dancing, that they are with me and that they are alongside me in a particular role. And if that happens, they can act as a bridge between my experience of moving and their perception of me moving.

And that presence, I'm thinking about Camilla's presence and I'm thinking about another photographer called Christian Kipp and others.

They can act as, yeah that presence is really particular and does not even involve the photographs themselves, it's the intention to photograph and the particular attuned presence that generates this co-creation or generates this co-journeying. It's really supportive.



Image: Pepa Ubera for Wild Card: Pepa Ubera – The Palest Light. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler’s Wells, London (2016).

Image description: Pepa lies on the floor on her side, her head to the right of the image, her legs extending out of view to the left. She holds her clenched fists level with her chin, and her head is aligned with her spine, some ten centimetres above the shiny, reflective floor, giving the impression that she’s floating.



"I like photographs that provoke questions more than they provide answers, and I love to capture people in the space they inhabit which lies somewhere between performing and reality."

Camilla Greenwell

Image: Seeta Patel for Wild Card: Seeta Patel – Something Then, Something Now. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler's Wells, London (2014).

Image description: Brightly lit against a dark wall, Seeta gazes off to the right, while her arms are crossed at the wrist. The first finger and thumb of each hand are joined, with the other fingers extended, in a mudra from the tradition of Indian classical dance.



"Life is full of uncanny, surreal moments which performance often echoes, and I like images which explore that. I also think that images which provide a window onto another world, someone else's life, or a place we could never go, are really interesting."

Camilla Greenwell

Image: Seeta Patel for Wild Card: Seeta Patel – Something Then, Something Now. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler's Wells, London (2014).

Image description: Seeta leans towards us, bending from the waist, a slight frown between her eyebrows. Her hands are lifted to the level of her face, each finger extended in a different direction.



Image: Joel Brown & Olivia Edginton for Hetain Patel – Let’s Talk About Dis by Candoco Dance Company. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Theatre Royal, Winchester (2018).

Image description: Joel, a muscular man with a shaven head, tilts his wheelchair onto the rear wheels, the seat at 45 degrees. Olivia stands on tiptoe in arabesque – one hand thrown back to meet her foot, the other holding onto the wheelchair, the two dancers in counterbalance.



Image: Welly O'Brien & Victoria Fox for in creation for Caroline Bowditch – Dedicated To... by Candoco Dance Company. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at The Studio, Brighton (2017).

Image description: Victoria stands on a wooden bench, knees slightly bent as she lifts Welly under her arms, holding her close. Welly is curled up, her back rounded into Victoria's body. Her arms hang down, relaxed, head bent towards her chest, one knee lifted to meet her head, toes pointing to the floor.



Image: Toke Broni Strandby for Hetain Patel – Let’s Talk About Dis by Candoco Dance Company. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Aspire National Training Centre, Stanmore (2018).

Image description: Toke, a white man with short blonde hair, stands facing us, slightly turned to the left. His right hand is on his hip; his left arm ends just below the elbow. His intent gaze is focused beyond us, off to the left.



Image: Ali Goldsmith & Rhys Dennis for James Cousins Company – Epilogues. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Studio Wayne McGregor, London supported by the FreeSpace programme (2018).

Image description: Two men form a single, interlocking shape, arms wrapped tightly around each other: Rhys stands with feet together, facing left. Ali clings to his torso, both legs lifted into the air, one knee bent. Rhys bends his head tenderly over Ali; Ali buries his face in the crook of Rhys's arm.



Collaboration

Collaboration is often at the heart of dance making. While every artist's practice is different, what happens in rehearsals – the physical dialogue, how a piece of choreography might change and evolve with a dancer's individual style – lays the foundations for the work we later see on stage.



“Dance obviously lends itself so well to being captured, as a photographer it’s really a dream situation to work with all these incredible performers and lighting and set designers. You are never short of something beautiful or interesting to shoot.”

Camilla Greenwell

Image: Chihiro Kawasaki & Jemima Brown for James Cousins Company – Epilogues. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Studio Wayne McGregor, London supported by the FreeSpace programme (2018).

Image description: Chihiro stands behind Jemima in a hug that makes them doubles: their pale faces framed with black hair are at the same angle, looking down to the left, and their arms fold at the same angle: Jemima’s hands meeting under her chin, Chihiro cupping Jemima’s head.



"I've found those I've worked with in the dance world to be incredibly open, intuitive, creatively charged people who are very collaborative by nature – it makes the whole process very special and different from the other types of photography I do."

Camilla Greenwell

Image: Ali Goldsmith & Rhys Dennis for James Cousins Company – Epilogues. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Studio Wayne McGregor, London supported by the FreeSpace programme (2018).

Image description: Ali stands behind Rhys, pillowing his head in the crook of his left arm, holding his forearm with his other hand. The folds in Rhys's t-shirt reveal a spiral movement of the torso. Both have closed eyes.



An artform that connects us



Dance has always been a way for people to share stories and emotions, to investigate what it means to be human.

During the pandemic, when many artists, audiences and communities could no longer come together in person to make and share dance, we have felt the need for this type of connection more than ever.

Image: Victoria Shulungu for Far From the Norm – BLKDOG.
Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler’s Wells, London (2019).

Image description: Victoria, a Black woman with short braids gathered behind her head, presses her palms together in prayer position, hands raised to eye level. She looks upwards and beyond her fingertips.



These photographs of intimate rehearsal room moments make us grateful for time spent working together in person. These are moments so many of us are craving to get back to.

They also remind us of the time, energy and craft that goes into making dance, and of the many people who collaborate to bring a performance to life – the lighting, set and costume designers, stage managers, technicians, dancers, choreographers and audiences.

Image: Yinka Esi Graves for Wild Card: dotdotdot dance. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler’s Wells, London (2016).

Image description: Yinka claps her hands above her head, flamenco style, palms meeting, fingers extended but soft. She gazes up and into the distance.



As we emerge from a year like no other, these photographs remind us that despite all that has changed, the capacity of dance artists and professionals to inspire us, human to human, remains undiminished.

Image: Botis Seva for Far From the Norm – BLKDOG. Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler’s Wells, London (2018).

Image description: Botis stands at rest, his elbows winging back as his hands push up his sweatshirt at the waist. He gazes intently with a slight smile, as if listening to an unseen person. Light streams in from a high window behind his head.



“With thanks to all the incredible artists who have welcomed me into the studio and trusted me to tell their stories. My practise has developed because of your generosity and collaboration, and I feel so grateful to be able to work in this way with such wonderful humans.”

Camilla Greenwell

Image: Shangomola Edunjobi for Far From the Norm – BLKDOG.
Photographed by Camilla Greenwell at Sadler’s Wells, London (2018).

Image description: Shangomola throws back his head with a broad smile on his face. One hand wriggles into the collar of his hoodie, as if massaging a sore shoulder.

All photography © Camilla Greenwell