

Hugh Conacher

### **Artistic Statement**

I have always been interested in the integration of different forms of light with live performance.

My work, the foundation of which is 34 years as a lighting designer, straddles the worlds of lighting design, new media technologies, projection and photography, blurring the lines between disciplines, using whichever media form best serves the vision of my current project. I take the static space of the stage and turn it into an immersive environment with light and projection created specifically for the project. From light and projection I develop form – form that living bodies interact with. I may also build physical objects, electronics, practical light sources, gobos and special effects. I bring together the ephemeral medium of light, including projection, with living bodies and new technologies in a conversation, the collective result of which is more than its individual parts.

As visual artist Wanda Koop says, “Hugh Conacher is a true hybrid artist – he crosses boundaries in his work. In our collaborations, he has helped create poignancy that would not have been there otherwise.”

My multi-disciplinary process has grown from many years of experience experimenting with light, and expanding those experiments to include new possibilities across artistic mediums, embracing new technologies, culminating in the production of cutting edge work.

Years ago, for example, I developed an unconventional method of using slide projectors as a lighting source in dance and designed several works around that concept. Around the same time, I began to tour all over the world – early on with Margie Gillis in Spain, Italy and India, where technical facilities were limited, and much more recently with Freya Olafson’s AVATAR throughout Canada, the US and Ecuador, every venue with different technical capabilities and spatial configurations. Learning to tour these works required distilling the complex concepts of each work to its essentials and reinventing the visual presentation so that it was true to these essentials. This enabled us to adapt to any physical and technical obstacle presented.

I have collaborated in hundreds of dance, theatre, music, and visual art works around the world in venues large and small. I approach each project as an individual work of art. Some of the notable creators I have collaborated with are: Denise Clarke, Robert Desrosiers, Wanda Koop, Larry Lewis, Charles Moulton, Arvo Pärt, Peter Quanz, Tedd Robinson, Richard Rose, Reva Stone, Lynne Taylor-Corbett and Diana Thorneycroft. I also enjoy the many opportunities I have to mentor emerging theatre artists.

In 2009, I received a Manitoba Arts Council grant to attend a workshop in New York with notable multi-media artist Mark Coniglio, the inventor of Isadora software, and choreographer Dawn Stoppiello, the artistic director of Troika Ranch. This workshop was based around the concepts of the artistic use of multi-media/multi-disciplinary tools in live performance and also gave me the technical skills to use the software. It has been the foundation for all the multi-media work that I have done since and has been key to my growth as an artist.

Technology has developed to the point where it is possible to achieve a true integration of still and moving imagery and live performance through the use of sophisticated software tools and video. My desire is to grow in a practice where this type of work becomes an integral part of live performance. In the same way that a set is considered a “normal” part of any theatrical production, I have worked to develop my multi-media practice so that it has become a “normal” part of my lighting design for dance, theatre and other live performance. This approach is unique. As far as I know, I am the only design artist practicing the integration of these elements in this way. I am ready to address a larger artistic question at this stage in my career - how do I redefine what visual storytelling is in the theatrical context?