

Nettles:

How to Disagree?

**A co-creative practice initiated by artists
Jo Fong and Sonia Hughes**



Image: Nettles... at Montreal OFFTA 2025. Photo by David Wong

PROMOTERS PACK 2025/26

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Photo by: Claudel Doucet

ABOUT THE SHOW

A co-creative practice initiated by artists Jo Fong and Sonia Hughes.

“It feels like this moment requires new languages or to unearth the ancient. We have been huddling trying to find our way out of the mess. We’ve tried long talking, walking, dancing, swimming, cooking, listening, mending, making, stretching, gardening our way out of it. We’ve tried together. We invited other people. Here and there. This is how far we’ve got:

Courage is a matter of the heart
This is progress
It’s not going to be solved in our lifetime
An ongoing conversation

We’d now like to invite people to join the conversation. If you want to come, you’re invited.”

Jo, Sonia, Marilou and Spicey



Photo by Jacinte Armstrong

For nearly two years, at the invitation of LA SERRE and in partnership with Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff, four artists from Wales and Quebec have come together to reflect on how we connect and form relationships. Through conversations, residencies conducted between the two territories, and the use of various performative scores, they explore notions of dissensus, hospitality, uncertainty, and wisdom, seeking pathways toward a harmonious polyphony while blurring the boundaries between performance and encounter. OFFTA presented the outcome of their experiments across different spaces in the city, engaging with community and cultural partners, as well as their neighbours.

The artists presented three performances of the same work, each followed by an activity in response to the environment that hosts it.

Nettles... is a direct descendant of the works 'Neither Here Nor There', 'Ways of Being Together', 'How Shall We Begin Again', 'The Sun Has Come Out'. We have been gathering artists and people who would not always describe themselves as artists, people who each embody (maybe differently) skills and strategies for bringing people together, deeply, lightly with grace.



Photo by David Wong

What Happens?

We are making a clearing.

An action.

Nettles... is a process based work about making time, hearing one another, listening. It is about creating the conditions for ease, unguarded spaces, undefending bodies, voices, being and in our small way something shifts.

We are gathering people, Artists, Racialised artists, Tired artists, Activist artists, Tricky artists, Leaders, "difficult" women / non-binary people, awkward artists or "artists", Disabused artistic folks and People who are good at bringing people together.

Dismantling the master's clock,
unlearning,

It is safe?

the value of a whole person,

the logistics of invulnerable

This moment

the outsider

the other

Experience involve walking, dancing, moving, eating, swimming, co-listening, co-composition and conversation.

There is alchemy in the spending time together

A PERFORMANCE FOR A VARIETY OF SPACES

The work adapts to new localities or budgets and we would discuss with programmers and presenters how this can work at its best in your locality. Here is an example:

Hosting and re-creating

- Jo and Sonia work with the local producers online to identify two suitable local core artists to join them.
- As a collective of four we then come together online for 2 hour sessions
- The collective comes together for an in-person residency, anything from 5 days or 3 weeks. The more time we have the more we can do.
- Together, We invite between 3-10 paid guests to join for afternoon studio sessions.
- We would need a studio/private work space with windows/natural light and a sound system. Ideally an afternoon to work in the performance space helps with planning and artistic choices.

At the end of each residency there are public performances, during which the core team are joined by the guests. Usually performances take place in the daytime or early evening

Public events

Previously performances have happened in studios, village halls and community centres, art centre cafes, again with windows/natural lighting is preferable.



Photos by Marilou Craft

We create an altar, a shrine,

A ritual, there are recorded sounds as the audience arrive and take their seats..

Within this setting a live composition of multiple voices and lives takes place. The audience are not excluded and very often audience members contribute to the performance.

This is followed music and by a social event with the audience.

Some examples of how this can happen:

- Perf 1 Community hub followed by a walk
- Perf 2 Pavillion in a park followed by a meal together on the veranda
- Perf 3 Library followed by a wild swim together in the river

Capacity - Up to 40 audience members

Ticketing - So far all of our performances have been free or pay what you like events

How long is the event? Up to 2 hours

Language - Our lead language is English.

Nettles... incorporates the idea that Jo and Sonia would be passing on the practice to the local artists and then they are also free to perform Nettles... in the future in a local language

Previous performances:

OFFTA (Montreal, CAN) and Chapter (Cardiff, Wales) supported the gathering of four artists Jo Fong (Wales, UK), Sonia Hughes (England, UK), Marilou Craft (Montreal, CAN), Alexandra “Spicey” Landé (Montreal, CAN). Last Spring the artists came together in Cardiff and then later returned to Montreal to continue the development of the work, share and present at OFFTA 2025.

We are currently talking to various UK and International festivals and venues about the next iterations of Nettles...

Prior to this research for Nettles... took place at SE Dance, SPILL, G39, ArtsAdmin and The Place (Newport).



Photos by Marilou Craft and Murielle “TRULY” Bien-Aimé

A message from Claudel Doucet - Artistic Director/Co-General Manager of OFFTA

"What we loved about hosting this project was how it created alternative forms of meeting and sharing by softly blurring lines or expectations between an artistic performance and a community gathering. It felt like it completely embraced the experimental artistic vision of our festival and yet created an invitation that was generously thoughtful of audiences that might not be familiar or appreciative of avant-garde artistic propositions. The thoughtful details, not to be confused with simplicity, formed an experience where people came in as participants rather than spectators, making space for profound dialogue across generations and communities, including some who are too often left out of conversations and events like OFFTA. By developing partnerships with community centers and organisations and by combining performance with shared gestures like walking, talking, eating, listening, and swimming, Nettles offered a new kind of invitation, one that embodied concrete experiences of delicate communion by activating intimate togetherness. Staying wisely away from any pretense of universalism, it offered a practice of trust, curiosity, and collective contemplation of various voices. For us, it was a way to expand what a festival can be: not just a series of shows, but a chance to build meaning-making and experience other forms of relationships between presenters, artists and community."

A message from Hannah Firth - Artistic Director/Co-Director of Chapter

"'Nettles: How to Disagree?', was generative and generous and longer term, has profoundly shifted our organisational thinking about how we, as an arts institution, hold and nurture the creative process for artists, for each other and for audiences; how we disrupt the power dynamics at work; and how we might intentionally dismantle the entrenched and unconscious 'ideals' that are historically connected to ownership, engagement and authorship."



Photo by Jo Fong

Performances in 2025: For a full list of upcoming performances [click here](#).

AMBITIONS FOR NETTLES

Nettles: How to Disagree? is an action

With each iteration more people get to experience the practice of this and by working closely with local artists and passing on the practice, our hope is after the initial events, the work continues to happen locally, re-connecting through further gatherings and encounters. The work is necessary, transformative and anti-racist. It is intimate, joyful and connects people in ways that counter something called “minority stress”. Being in community is empowering, the work is therapeutic, not therapy.

Potentially this relationship building creates a movement in your local area

From an audience perspective, we have worked for a number of years to create spaces where this unlearning work and knowledge building practice can be shared safely and warmly within a public setting.

We have planted a seed and hope that in a few years from now, all those who have been a part of the project can congregate in one place for a final shared residency and performances. We are yet to decide where or when but Some place, where Nettles is needed.

OPEN STUDIO SESSIONS

This work requires us to meet people

In the past we have hosted kitchen table conversations, studio based embodied moving and dancing sessions, group walks, one-to one conversations, non-hierarchical cooking, dinners, coffees and we’ve invited people to swim with us.

Maybe some of the above is relevant to your festival/venue or local community. These sessions can be made available for invited participants or public events

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR SHOW

Pre show Set up - minimum 2 hours

The core team arranges the altar and 50 chairs.

Set up a coat rail / somewhere to put bags in the room.

Light - we prefer venues with natural light and if necessary we generally switch what is there on and lift it a little where possible - welcoming / inviting / warm - not too dark or moody.

Sound system adequate for the size of the space - we need someone to operate the sound for the end of the conversation part of the show.

Each seated performance ends in either a walk, a meal or a wild swim so locations are key.

For the walk

Ideally - a short walk from the venue that gets people out of the urban to nature and water

For the meal

We work with festival staff to source locally grown organic foods (menus vary depending on the locality and the season)

A kitchen is useful for: utensils, cutlery, plates, glasses, serving plates, washing up and preparing food.

There are no hot dishes.

We create a long (or u-shaped) table using available tables and covering with a tablecloth

The chairs from the conversation and the setting of the table are rearranged by the audience seating up to 50 (40 audience plus artists and guests, note capacity depends on available space and tables)

In past performances, a local chef has volunteered to prepare the dishes on the day.

Example menu: Bread and olive oil, wild leaves, eggs, radish and strawberries, cheese and apple and mangoes.

In this example for the final course the artists cut the mangoes at the table using knives and cutting boards.

The meal itself is served by festival staff and volunteers at timed moments.



Photos by Murielle "TRULY" Bien-Aimé and Jo Fong

For the wild swimming

The location of the conversation needs to be a short walk to the river, lake or sea. Ideally somewhere that not everyone knows about, but it is accessible and safe to swim.

Archive

During the research people who have been involved in the process have contributed documentation including written pieces, images, sound recordings and video.

This part of the project collates voices, moments, breakthroughs, sensations and newness. The activist work of Nettles will not be completed in our lifetimes.

The website will go live in October 2025 and we hope this record of encounters serves as a library for Global Majority people and a live signpost for the progression of the work.

COSTS

This is the ideal, if we are doing 3 performances, with 2 local artists for a 2 week residency plus 3 guest artists who visit us twice and attend 2 performances.

4 artists x 2 weeks @ £600	£4800
3 guest artists x 2 sessions @ £100	£600
3 performances x 4 artists @ £200	£2400
Guest artist performance attendance x 6 @ £100	£600
Documentation from guest artist x 3 @ £100	£300
Pre-residency online meetings 4 artists x 2 @ £100	£800
FEES TOTAL	£9500

There are other associated costs which we assume will be covered by the presenter:

- Travel (Jo and Sonia are based in South Wales and the North of England)
- Accommodation, Per Diem, Hire of rehearsal space
- Hire of event spaces.
- Cost of food

FURTHER INFORMATION

jofong.com/portfolios/nettles-how-to-disagree

MARKETING LINKS

[Photos](#)

Social media

Jo

- Facebook [@JoFong](#)
- Instagram [@fong.jo](#)
- X [@JoFong](#)

Sonia

- Instagram [@soniahughes192](#)

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Jo Fong and Sonia Hughes have been working together since 2011. They met whilst working on several projects with Quarantine including Wallflower and Entitled.

Later they collaborated on Ways of Being Together and The Kitchen Table research as part of Jo's Creative Wales Award Project 2017. Jo and Sonia contributed to

National Theatre Wales' and Quarantine's co-production for Festival of Voice.

In 2018 they created Neither Here Nor There which toured UK, international festival and was supported by British Council.

"Neither Here Nor There is unexpected in all the right ways; it is brilliant and loving, it is nourishment for the soul, it is the absolute best of what humanity is." – Nathan Zou

"A rare experience" – Art Scene in Wales

Neither Here Nor There is also available to book now. [Click here](#) for more details.

During 2020/21 Jo and Sonia devised a number of digital projects The Sun's Come Out, Our Land, What will people need? and seven films for Dublin Theatre Festival called To Tell You The Truth.

Research for Nettles: How To Disagree? began online and later in residence with OFFTA (Montreal), The Place (Newport), SE Dance (Brighton), SPILL (Ipswich), Chapter (Cardiff) and Theatr Genedlaethol (Wales). *Photo by Kate Daley*



Jo Fong is a director, choreographer and performer working in dance, film, theatre, opera, spoken word and live art.

Jo lives in Wales and her creative work reflects the need in these times for people to come together. Her artistic practice is an evolving, collaborative approach which puts ideas around belonging or forming community in the forefront.

She began her career creating and performing with DV8 Physical Theatre, Rosas (Belgium) and Rambert Dance Company. Recent collaborations include working with Wendy Houstoun, Deborah Light, Luca Rutherford, Ira Brand, Unfinished Business, Anushiye Yarnell, Skye

Reynolds, Battersea Arts Centre, National Theatre Wales, National Dance Company Wales, Welsh National Opera, Wales Millenium Centre, Hull Dance and Quarantine.

As an independent artist she has presented performances throughout the UK and at international festivals. Her work has been recognised and awarded by the Critic's Circle National Dance Awards, UK Theatre Awards, Creative Wales Award, OFFIE Award, British Council and Wales Theatre Awards.

Current performances and events include: *A Brief History of Difference* with Das Clarks, *Marathon of Intimacies* with artist Anushiye Yarnell and research with Luca Rutherford, Ira Brand and ICoDaCo. *The Rest of Our Lives*, created with circus maker and clown George Orange, continues to tour locally and internationally; it will be heading to Indonesia supported by British Council's Connections Through Culture, Latvia's Homo Novus Festival and Belfast International Arts Festival.

jofong.com Photo by Jo Fong



Sonia Hughes is an artist, writer and performer.

She has been touring *I Am From Reykjavik* internationally since 2021 including LIFT (London), FTA (Montreal), NAF (South Africa), SPRING (Utrecht). Collaborations have been with dancers, directors and visual artists Darren Pritchard, Mark Whitelaw, Mem Morrison, Max Webster, Humberto Velez, Fiona Wright and Eggs Collective. Her extensive work with Quarantine as writer includes the award-winning Susan and Darren, the epic *Summer. Autumn. Winter. Spring* and the award-winning *What is the City, But the People?* for Manchester International Festival 2017. Sonia lives in the North of England. Photo by Murielle "TRULY" Bien-Aimé

OTHER AVAILABLE WORKS by Jo Fong and Sonia Hughes 2025 – 2027



Neither Here Nor There

Created and performed by Sonia Hughes and Jo Fong

“Change begins inside of us, and in the spaces between us.” – Ben Kulvichit for Exeunt.

“A leap of faith” – CCQ Magazine

Promoters pack: bit.ly/NHNTpack

Photo by Benjamin J Borley

I am from Reykjavik

By Sonia Hughes

“This is the best work I’ve seen in the festival (FTA) this year – her inquiry is deeply moving as it activates the essence of empowerment and resilience without didacticism.

Fundamentally, it’s a look at humanity and the stamp of one woman moving in the world.” – Phillip Szporer for Dance Current

Dance Current

www.iamfromreykjavik.com



The Rest of Our Lives

Created and performed by Jo Fong and George Orange

OFFIE (Off Broadway) Performance Award winner 2025

UK Theatre Awards 2023 nominee for Achievement in Dance

“Life is too short not to live like this.” – The Scotsman

More info: [Therestofourlives](https://therestofourlives.com)

Photo by Catriona James

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Photos by Murielle "TRULY" Bien-Aimé

CHAPTER

LA SERRE
ARTS
VIVANTS