

Ghostcatching

Ghostcatching is a virtual dance collaboration created by digital artists Paul Kaiser and Shelley Eshkar in collaboration with dancer/choreographer Bill T. Jones. Kaiser and Eshkar made the visual and sound composition; Jones choreographed and performed the dance. In addition, Michael Girard and Susan Amkraut (authors of the Character Studio software) corrected the motion capture data and contributed to the choreographic composition.

Artists' Statement:

"*Ghostcatching* finds its place in the unexpected intersection of dance, drawing, and computer composition. The work is made possible by advances in motion capture, a technology that tracks sensors attached to a moving body. The resulting data files reflect the position and rotation of the body in motion, without preserving the performer's mass or musculature. Thus, movement is extracted from the performer's body.

"Captured phrases become the building blocks for the virtual composition. As data, the phrases are edited, re-choreographed, and staged for a digital performance in the 3D space of the computer.

"Here, the body of Bill T. Jones is multiplied into many dancers, who perform as three-dimensional drawings. Their anatomies are intertwinings of drawn strokes, which are in fact painstakingly modeled as geometry on the computer -- never drawn on paper.

"So, we may ask: What is human movement in the absence of the body? Can the drawn line carry the rhythm, weight, and intent of physical movement? What kind of dance do we conceive in this ghostly place, where enclosures, entanglements, and reflections vie with the will to break free?"

- Bill T. Jones, Paul Kaiser, Shelley Eshkar

Technical Comments:

The project was created with Character Studio and 3D Studio Max on Compaq NT workstations. Motion capture was performed at Biovision (San Francisco), Futurelight (Los Angeles), and Modern Uprising (New York) from 1997-99. Rendering was done at a Compaq renderfarm in Houston. Sound recording was done at Harvestworks and MacKenzie/Cutler (New York).

Ghostcatching will be re-rendered prior to Ars Electronica, with motions and transitions recomputed with a new build of Character Studio and with titles added. It will be delivered to Ars Electronica in Beta SP format.

Artists' Biographies

Paul Kaiser and Shelley Eshkar, Digital Artists

Paul Kaiser and Shelley Eshkar are the principal artists at Riverbed, a multimedia art studio in New York. For their creative collaborations, they have received an award from the Performance Art Foundation and have been made Fellows at the Cooper Union. Articles about their work have appeared in *Newsweek*, *Wired*, *The New York Times*, *The New York Times Online*, *Metropolis*, *Time Digital*, *Computer Graphics World*, and many other places.

Hand-drawn Spaces, their first virtual dance installation, was a collaboration with legendary choreographer Merce Cunningham. It headlined at the SIGGRAPH 98 Electronic Theater and is currently on a museum tour in Europe.

Ghostcatching is a collaboration with dancer/choreographer Bill T. Jones. It opened at Cooper Union in New York in January 1999 and is soon to be exhibited in Denmark and the new Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, with further stops on the tour still in discussion.

Currently Kaiser and Eshkar are once again collaborating with Merce Cunningham, this time for projections to accompany a 45 minute live dance on stage. Entitled BIPED, this piece will premiere in Berkeley in April before opening at the State Theater of Lincoln Center in July.

Kaiser received his B.A. from Wesleyan University in 1978, where he was summa cum laude and a Phi Beta Kappa, and his Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Special Education from American University in 1983. His early work was in experimental filmmaking and performance audio tapes. Kaiser later spent ten years teaching students with severe learning disabilities, with whom he collaborated on making multimedia depictions of their own minds. This work earned him a Computer World/Smithsonian Award in 1991. In 1994, Kaiser founded Riverbed to create cultural and art-oriented interactive projects. In 1996, Kaiser became the first interactive artist to receive a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship. Kaiser is a visiting lecturer at the Multimedia Studios Program of San Francisco State University.

Eshkar is a multimedia artist and experimental animator who began collaborating with Kaiser at Riverbed in 1995. He received a B.F.A. from the Cooper Union School of Art in 1993, pursuing a multidisciplinary fine arts education. Eshkar's innovations in three-dimensional figural drawing and animation have aroused considerable attention in the fields of computer graphics, dance and architecture. He has lectured to such diverse groups as SIGGRAPH, the East Coast Digital Consortium, the Congress of Research in Dance, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Berkeley's CalPerformances, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and Harvard University's Graduate School of Design.

Bill T. Jones, Dancer/Choreographer

Bill T. Jones, a 1994 recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, began his dance training at the State University of New York at Binghamton (SUNY), where he studied classical ballet and modern dance. After living in Amsterdam, Mr. Jones returned to SUNY, where he became co-founder of the American Dance Asylum in 1973. Before forming Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company (then called Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane & Company) in 1982, Mr. Jones choreographed and performed nationally and internationally as a soloist and duet company with his late partner, Arnie Zane. In addition to creating over 50 works for his own company, Mr. Jones has received many commissions to create works for modern and ballet companies including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Boston Ballet, Lyon Opera Ballet, Berkshire Ballet, Berlin Opera Ballet and Diversions Dance Company, among others. In July 1995, Mr. Jones directed and performed in a collaborative work with Toni Morrison and Max Roach, *Degga*, at Alice Tully Hall, commissioned by Lincoln Center's Serious Fun Festival.

In addition to the MacArthur Fellowship, Mr. Jones has received several other prestigious awards. In 1979, Mr. Jones was granted the Creative Artists Public Service Award in Choreography, and in 1980, 1981 and 1982, he was the recipient of Choreographic Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 1986, Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane were awarded a New York Dance and Performance ("Bessie") Award for their Joyce Theater season, and in 1989, Mr. Jones was awarded another "Bessie" for his work, *D-Man in the Waters*. Mr. Jones, along with his collaborators Rhodessa Jones and Idris Ackamoor received an "Izzy" Award for *Perfect Courage* in 1990. Mr. Jones was honored with the Dorothy B. Chandler Performing Arts Award for his innovative contributions to performing arts in 1991. In 1993, Mr. Jones was presented with the Dance Magazine Award. Mr. Jones received an honorary doctorate from Bard College in 1996. In 1998, Mr. Jones received the S.U.N.Y. Binghamton Distinguished Alumni Award, an honorary doctorate from Chicago School of the Arts and was named a 1998/99 Robert Gwathmey Chair in Art & Architecture at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Art and Science.

Mr. Jones' memoirs, *Last Night on Earth*, were published by Pantheon Books in September 1995. An in-depth look at the work of Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane can be found in *Body Against Body: The Dance and Other Collaborations of Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane*, published by Station Hill Press. Mr. Jones is also proud to have contributed to the foreword of Philip Trager's book of photographs entitled, *Dancers. Dance*, a children's book by Bill T. Jones and photographer Susan Kuklin, was published by Hyperion Books in the fall of 1998. Mr. Jones was featured in a Blackside documentary, "I'll Make Me a World: A Century of African-American Arts and Artists" which aired in February 1999. *How!Do!We!Do!*, a collaboration with Jessye Norman produced by Great Performers at Lincoln Center will premiere on May 24, 1999.