

act your age



the art of growing older
actyourage.eu

2012 & 2013

"The ratio between ^{your} ~~your~~ power
changes when you get older"

every car or leg; ^{power} changed
the routine.

This year I started beding a get
fair

larger ^{occupied}

The memory ^[of the moments] is still there
but I cannot do it anymore

I can't jump in the way I did.
But: who can?

Act Your Age: an introduction

One of the greatest challenges most European societies face today, is the growth of the elderly population. Despite the fact that over-65s will take up almost a quarter of the population in less than thirty years', seniors seem to be excluded rather than included in our modern societies that increasingly focus on youth. With dance, an art form predominantly working with young bodies, we decided to change that. Our ambitions were high. We wanted to create an intergenerational dialogue and raise awareness of the value of such a dialogue. We wanted to produce performances in which the elderly body was presented on stage. We wanted to generate ideas on how to deal with challenges societies are facing. Most of all, we wanted to undermine the one-dimensional image of either the fragile older person or the happy pensioner, by creating a diversity of images. You might say we wanted to emancipate the concept of aging by stating the obvious: aging is a topic that concerns us all.

Our ambitions were realized. Artists, both young and old, swam in the Mediterranean Sea together with the elderly community of Cyprus, in elderly homes choreographers talked and worked with the inhabitants, the dance floor was shared in ballroom classes, and performances were made with both professional and amateur dancers of all ages.

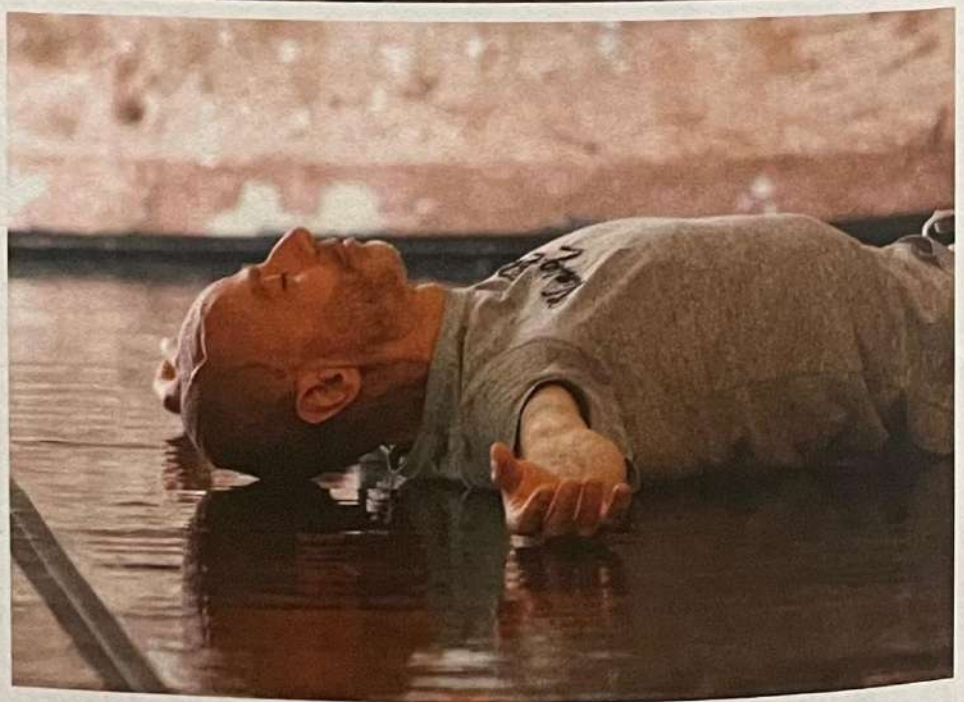
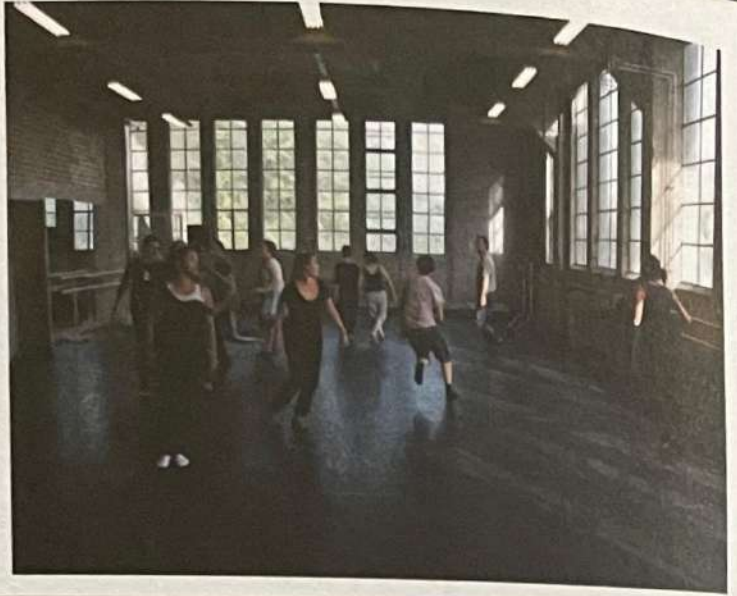
The various activities culminated in the festival Act Your Age in December 2013 in Maastricht. A festival which provided different perspectives on ageing and the older body through different methods – performances, lectures, dialogues and informal encounters. A festival in which artists, policy makers, researchers and audiences met, and truly shared and generated ideas, thoughts and experiences.

For now, the two-year project has come to an end. But its influence stretches into the future. Not only has it affected our own festivals programming and the work methods of the participating choreographers, but it has also provided input into the fields of policy, research and care for the elderly. We'll continue our mission to create a diverse and humane perspective on ageing. In the meantime, we would like to invite you to read this collection of articles reflecting on the project and to have a look at the resulting films made.

Peggy Ollislaegers / director Dutch Dance Festival / Nederlandse Dansdagen / www.nederlandsedansdagen.nl

Roberto Casarotto / artistic director at Operaestate Festival Veneto / www.operaestate.it

Natasa Georgiou / executive director Dance House Lemosos / www.dancehouselemosos.com



Shifting and Sharing/ Cross-pollination at Act Your Age

Merel Heering 1986/ the Netherlands/ works as a freelance dance dramaturge, text writer and moderator. As one of the dramaturges involved in Act Your Age, she interviewed three participants of the Act Your Age festival. She has worked in an elderly home for two years herself.

At the dance workshop for elderly people with Parkinson's at the **Act Your Age festival**, we see something peculiar happening. During the workshop participants move freely, like real dancers, both seated in their chairs and traversing the workshop space. But as soon as the class has finished movement becomes difficult again: walking to the door, putting on one's coat. The contrast is striking.

After the workshop, participants talk to Antoinette de Bont, Associate Professor at the institute of Health Policy & Management at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. One participant asks her: 'Can't you do a research study to prove that we can dance, even though we can't walk?' De Bont is surprised. 'But that's obvious, isn't it? Why do I need to put in black and white what we can clearly see to be true.' I realize the truth of De Bont's words. How strange that we have stopped considering our physical observations and experiences as being true. Anyone who has dared to fully engage with his body during sport, sex, dance or meditation, knows how intense this experience of sinking into one's skin and examining one's body from the inside can be. It can result in wonderful discoveries, or confront us with things about ourselves we would rather not face. But one thing is certain: we become aware, and we learn.

Choreographer Andrea Leine, who led a workshop for both professional and amateur dancers at the Act Your Age festival, also propagates a deeper, personal knowledge of the body. Having gone through a revalidation process herself, due to a virus infection affecting her nerve system, she has become aware of the importance of this embodied knowledge to medical professionals as well. 'Once your body doesn't perform autonomously and automatically anymore you gain a different knowledge of your body.' Leine initiated a dialogue about her treatment with her doctors and let medical practitioners experience the complex reality of patients like herself. Her interest in the personal differences in expressiveness of individual bodies grew. It is an interest she wants to share with and incite in others.

Happy to have regained most of her former mobility, Leine enjoys passing on her love of moving. In her workshop she lets people experience what it means to be inside one's body, and demonstrates the possibilities of movement as a means of communication. 'What impressed me during the workshop, was seeing participants who did not know each other and for whom dance is not a part of their daily activity, show such freedom of movement and openness to the possibilities of the body.' Working with a diversity of trained and untrained bodies made the workshop even more interesting for her: dancers-in-training and people who had never danced before shared the floor, pushing each other to great heights.

It is this exchange, this cross-pollination between all these different bodies, which is so typical for Act Your Age. In the dance field it is unusual for professional and amateur dancers to share the floor together, but this is exactly what happens in Act Your Age. Not just because it is fun, but also because it addresses some very important issues. In dance the acceptance of deviating bodies is still not common practice. In society too there is still much ado about appearances. Skin colour and weight are but two examples of external characteristics by

Performance, Age and Gender / Brief Anthropological Reflections

Yiannis Papadakis 1964/ Cyprus/ is Associate Professor of Social Anthropology at the Department of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Cyprus. He participated in the residency month in Cyprus and in the Act Your Age festival in Maastricht.

From the start I liked the title **Act Your Age** because it encapsulates a number of important themes related to gender, performance and ageing. Ageing has become a significant demographic and economic issue, and so the focus on this topic provides a useful wake-up call to face these issues squarely. In 'traditional' societies elsewhere and in the past described as 'age-class systems' by anthropologists, such as those of the American Indians, old age was revered, linked to power and knowledge, and the control of tradition included dances. In present day, where capitalism is characterised by mobility, age is often treated as a disadvantage as one incurs more obligations and less flexibility due to serious relationships with partners or families, or due to set habits. Age is now coming to be treated as a burden, as waste even, while youth is venerated.

The contemporary western-driven emphasis on youth and beauty, or rather on beauty as youth, raises pressing questions both in relation to gender and dance. Gender-related, given that women are encouraged, if not forced, to embark from a fairly young age on a constant battle against ageing (with a multitude of products advertised as 'combatting age'), a battle re-enacted each time a woman looks at herself in a mirror. Ironically, young women are often eager to 'perform maturity' through make-up, body language and clothes, but as they age, they feel that what they should perform is youth. While men have faced rather less pressure (not surprising given the largely androcentric power relations of many societies), lately the problem of ageing and bodyism seems to be affecting men in western societies as well. The rise of men's magazines has been already linked to the rise of male anorexia. Dance has been perhaps the cruellest expression of this predicament, since it has provided a platform on which, more than in any other art form or social expression (barring modelling), the youthful body has been literally and metaphorically elevated and revered, with dancers becoming particularly fearful of age.

The concept of embodiment provides an interesting means for reflecting on these issues. It is uncanny to see how children may 'perform' their parents through body language (and it raises various questions related to individualism, another revered notion of modernity). Yet, embodiment is not only acquired through those closest to us. The western media has a worldwide impact by presenting powerful sexualised images. Teenagers in many societies, as well as grown-ups, come to embody those images, knowingly or unknowingly.

Sociological discussions of performing oneself in daily life, beginning with the seminal work of the American sociologist Erving Goffman, show how individuals constantly play 'roles' in their daily interactions and in different social setting or 'stages'. Yet women, who tend to be judged more relentlessly for their looks (both by men and by other women), may be forced to 'perform' more than men. As professor Marjorie Garber points out: 'the woman constructed by culture is already an impersonation. Womanliness is mimicry, is masquerade.'

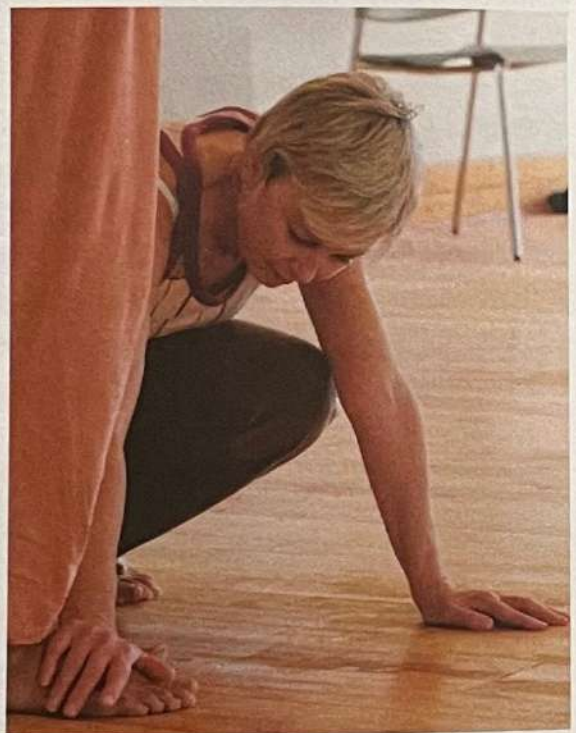
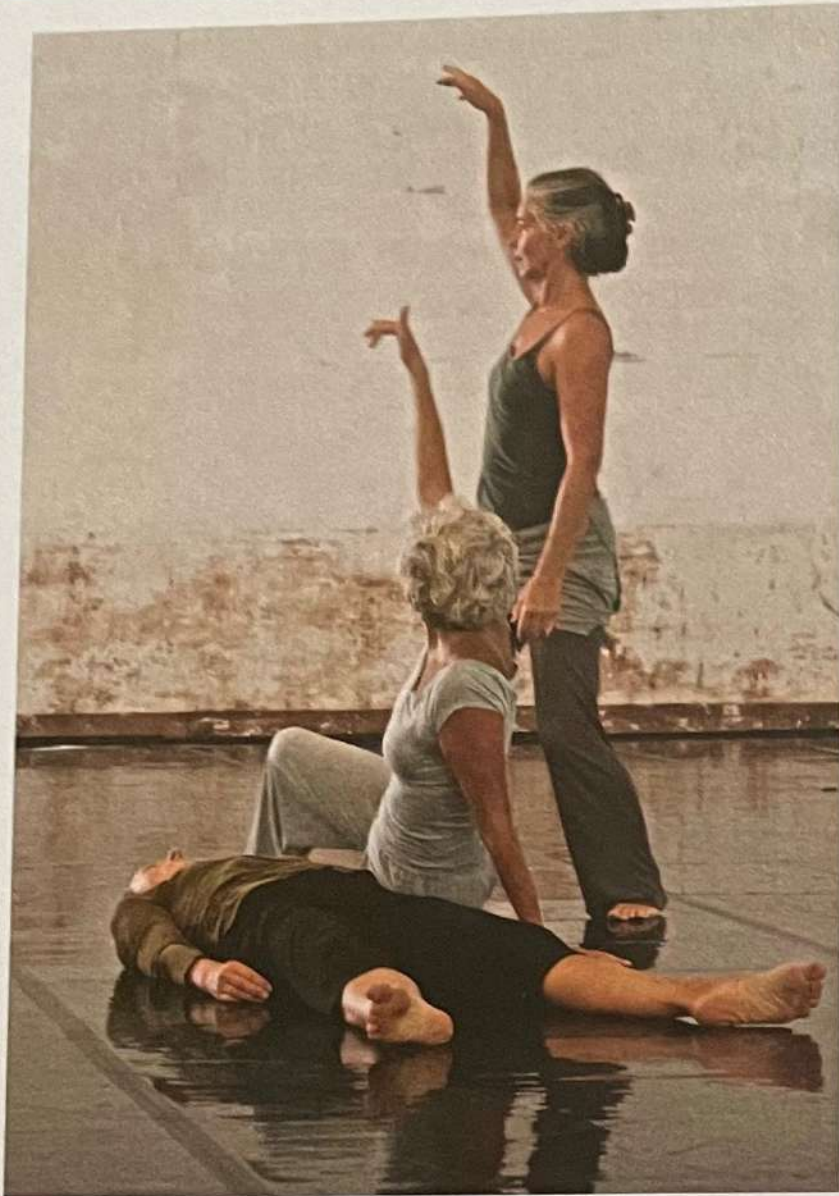
As a social anthropologist used to a different kind of events, my participation in the Act Your Age project was a source of new insights and possibilities. In Cyprus, I was asked to engage

in discussions with artists and audiences after the performances; an invitation you rarely see in dance, or in the artistic scene as a whole. In this respect, I felt that locally this event broke new ground in creating a dialogue between academia, artists and audience members. My own contribution was to offer some academic views on issues related to gender, performance and ageing. The discussions took place in an honest spirit of constructive criticism. New ground was also broken in another way, through workshops such as **From Limits to Possibilities** led by Giulio D'Anna. Together with his father, who suffers from Parkinson's disease, D'Anna created the performance **Parkin'son**. Based on this work he involved people with Parkinson and their families, psychologists and dance therapists in the workshop, giving art a practical and applied social content.

Some of the issues I raised above were negotiated in individual ways in performances I saw, both in Cyprus and in Maastricht: Lia Haraki's **Changing Skin** explored the biographies of older dancers, as well as the practical difficulties of working with them. Silvia Gribaudo's **What Age are you Acting?** presented a stark confrontation with the issue of the naked body for a man and a woman. In **Blind Date** the two older dancers Arthur Rosenfeld and Liz King performed the predicaments of internet dating above 60, and demonstrated the possibilities of mature dancers, both in terms of thoughtfulness and of bodily expression. In other words, their performance did not only highlight the expressiveness that comes with a long experience in dance, but also demonstrated how intellectual maturity can provide a solid base for creating art.

The final presentation of the project in Maastricht I thus found interesting and challenging, because it facilitated a dialogue between artists, academics, audiences, and policy-makers and offered public workshops tailored to various groups, film screenings, a photographic exhibition and more, scattered all over the city. In the past, I often felt a disturbing divide between art performances and a wider, public, socio-political interaction, but by the broad variety of the programme and through inviting encounters to take place, Act Your Age gave art a welcome social grounding and orientation.





Changing Lives

Roberto Casarotto 1969/ Italy/ is artistic director at Operaestate Festival Veneto and director of the dance projects at Comune di Bassano del Grappa. As artistic project leader of Act Your Age Italy he participated in all Act Your Age events.

Whom do we work for? Whom do we work with? In Bassano del Grappa, Italy, these two questions have been very present and relevant in the process of articulating ideas and projects about dance. As the director of the dance projects at **Comune di Bassano del Grappa**, I have become increasingly aware of our responsibility to connect what we propose, initiate, research and create to our community, and to the specific social, cultural, political and artistic contexts we live in. I have also become more aware of the power dance projects can bring to society and of their potential value for society.

Through the **Act Your Age** project contemporary dance became more known, accessible, available, appreciated and in demand in the city of Bassano. The project invited inhabitants to be directly involved in performances and workshops. Dance came to inhabit new spaces and locations in the city where it had never been seen before, dialogues between generations were initiated and facilitated, and the performances, workshops and encounters reached new audiences by breaking the dominant presumptions that are often confined in cultural and conceptual ghettos.

I want to highlight one project that became important to me, to the Act Your Age project and to the city of Bassano. A project that started with an encounter in Maastricht, the Netherlands, during the **Dutch Dance Festival** (Nederlandse Dansdagen). There I met Marc Vlemmix and Andrew Greenwood, founders of Dance for Health, an organization offering dance classes to people with physical diseases like Parkinson's, and their partners. They inspired me to initiate dance classes for people with Parkinson's disease in Bassano del Grappa as well.

Worldwide there is a growing interest among people living with Parkinson's in attending dance classes. Alongside there has been a small, but growing number of research studies examining the benefit of dancing for people with Parkinson's. The effects of engaging in a physical art practice, as distinct from a physical exercise class, have demonstrated that dance has the potential to offer an increased quality of life and self-efficacy. Dancers and choreographers are experts at controlling movement, at the observation of the inner dimension of movement, at the fragmentation of movement sequences and at the development of organic movement phrases. They can contribute to the research of movement disorders and enter lively dialogues with people with Parkinson's, bringing art and the practice of art into their lives.

The particular approach developed by Marc, Andrew and their team in The Netherlands inspired the Municipality of Bassano of engaging in a pilot involving the Hospital of Bassano, professional dance teachers, people with Parkinson's disease and members of the city's elderly community. A training program for dance teachers in Italy and the Netherlands was developed, and from October 2013, Comune di Bassano del Grappa started offering dance classes twice a week. The classes take place in the inspiring space of partner Museo Civico, the city's home of the arts, and can be attended for free. Every month they are led by a different teacher. They attract a broad range of participants from different age groups, with different experiences. Some suffer from Parkinson's, some do not, some are professional dancers, while others

are dancing for the first time in their lives. Nearly 70 people attend the classes on a regular basis and define themselves as dancers. They are the best ambassadors for dance in society. The tool of dance is the body, and as an art form, dance requires a body to be practiced. The specific approach developed by Dance for Health focuses on the body's potential, rather than on the limitations generated by age or disease. This approach stimulates a flow that takes people to a place where they can forget about their limits and discover the joy of the possibilities they still have. A flow that reaches beyond the dance class into the daily life of the participants and teachers, bringing them freedom. Freedom to forget about the disease, freedom to create, and freedom to search for a new definition of beauty, beyond ages and illnesses.

'During this journey I found clear answers to some of my questions, ideas and feelings related to life, aging and illness. Dance allows me to see and feel beauty in every body.'

Cristina Bacilleri Pulga, Parkinson's dance teacher

Some of the participants with Parkinson's used to lead isolated lives, afraid to expose themselves in public and to interact with others. Now, they have found a place and time to reconnect with their body, with their life and with others.

'When you dance, you quickly discover a universe inside and outside of you. It allows you to connect with space and with others in a natural and harmonic way. Dance is an antidepressant, a tonic, natural and creative physiotherapy.'

Eva Boarotto, dancer with Parkinson's

Very quickly, the initiative was co-owned by the Municipality of Bassano, its community and all the participants. A shared sense of responsibility to maintain the Parkinson's dance classes arose, as well as a strong sense of artistic and social integrity.

Through projects like Act Your Age and Dance for Health, dance is pioneering new ways to connect with society by creating active participation, inclusion and involvement. Now, in Bassano del Grappa we can say: dance can change people's life.



2 years, 3 partners,
3 research weeks,
3 residency months,
9 participating
choreographers,
26 artistic contributors,
9 created performances,
3 satellite partners,
3 festival days,
57 lectures, workshops and
discussions,
7800 audience members,
countless shared thoughts,
enlightened moments and
unforgettable encounters.

Participating choreographers

The Netherlands



Mor Shani 1985

Research week Cyprus/

Residency month the Netherlands

From his personal need to reconnect to the community, freelance choreographer Mor Shani developed his long-term trajectory

Love-ism. In his research he takes a closer look at the human experience of intimacy. During Act Your Age, together with video artist Paul Sixta, he developed the video **Love-ism/ It will end with tears** about love beyond gender and age.

'With this project, I want to spread new light on what is considered to be ugly. And I want to know what distinguishes one kind of love from another.'

www.love-ism.nl



Arthur Rosenfeld 1952

Research week Italy/ Residency month Italy/

Presentation **Blind Date**

at Act Your Age festival

Throughout his already long-lasting career, Arthur Rosenfeld has felt a great urge to use his penetrating, contagious humour and straightforward honesty to connect with a diversity of audiences. Working with different ages is appealing to him because it brings different kinds of characters and bodies to the stage. With **Blind Date**, a duet with Liz King about internet dating above 60, he showed that love, dating and all the accompanying insecurities are not limited by age.

'We can't do what we did when we were younger, but we can do other things. We can certainly speak with a different authority and show a different side of ourselves.'

www.maastd.nl



Giulio D'Anna 1980

Research week the Netherlands/

Residency month the Netherlands

While creating the work **Parkin'son** with his father suffering from this disease, Giulio D'Anna got even more curious about the broad variety of possible connections and relationships between people. In Act Your Age, he worked with a mother and daughter on **M'AMA** in an attempt to unravel the endless ties between them, their past and their future.

'By observing generations, you start to recognize the patterns of humanity.'

www.giuliodanna.com

Italy



Marco D'Agostin 1987

Research week Cyprus/ Residency month

Italy/ Presentation **Last Day of All**

at Act Your Age festival

For the first time in his life, Marco D'Agostin worked with people outside his own age group. To understand what this means, he went into the community and taught workshops to people ranging from 9 to 99. Five of them, ranging from 15 till 75, stayed with him to dive into the concept of 'last times': the last time of speaking to somebody, the last time of dancing. It resulted in **Last Day of All**.

'There was a moment in which I understood:
it was just a meeting between people.'
www.marcodagostin.it



Silvia Gribaudo 1974

Research week the Netherlands/Residency
month Italy/ Presentation **What age are you
acting?** at Act Your Age festival

Silvia Gribaudo values the body as being
politic. Politic in the sense of raising ques-
tions or offering alternative perspectives, but
also politic in the potential connection it can
create and the humanity it can show. **What
age are you acting?**, created with 66-year-
old Domenico Santonicola and with drama-
turge Giulia Galvan, tears down stereotypes
of beauty by offering fragility.

'You are rarely congratulated with looking
your age. But what is wrong about being the
age we are? We are beautiful, our skin starts
to have a map.'

www.silviagribaudo.com



Chiara Frigo 1977

Research week Italy/ Residency month
Cyprus/ Workshop **Show Your Age**
at Act Your Age festival

In her wish to connect with local communi-
ties and having people connect with each
other, Chiara Frigo used the social space of a
ballroom to make her wish come true. Here,
people of all ages and backgrounds came
together to create, talk, share and dance
together. Within Act Your Age, she developed
West End as well as **Ballroom**.

'Act Your Age triggered the desire to do what
I had never done before. I found new ways

to communicate and to tune in to what I feel
around me.'

www.chiarafriego.com

Cyprus



Lia Haraki 1975

Research week the Netherlands/ Residency
month Cyprus/ Research presentation
Changing Skin at Act Your Age festival

As a warming up, Lia Haraki usually lets her
dancers swim in the ocean. This already
demonstrates her interest in a different kind
of aesthetic. Together with two 50+ dancers,
she playfully explores what it means to be
really free in **Changing Skin**, at any age,
beyond social connotations and notions of
appropriate behaviour. Are bodies vessels or
obstacles to reaching freedom?

'What I really enjoy about getting older, is that
experience becomes knowledge and that
you become generous with sharing.'

www.liaharaki.com



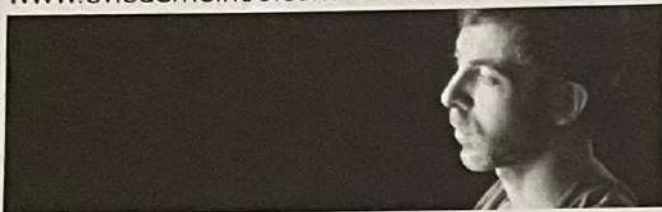
Evie Demetriou 1975

Research week Cyprus/ Residency month
Cyprus/ Exhibition **My Mountain**
at Act Your Age festival

In every new piece of work, Evie Demetriou
challenges her own limits as well as the
spectators' by creating a space of interaction
and communication, and of humor, intimacy,
risk and surprise. During Act Your Age she
worked with filmmaker Lucy Cash on **My
Mountain**, a video installation that explores
the barriers and bridges between people of
distant generations.

'Through working with an 89-year-old great-grandmother, a 74-year-old grandmother and a 4-year-old child, we were given an insight into lives in which love, lust for life and questions of death were very much present.'

www.eviemetriou.com



Alexis Vassiliou 1978

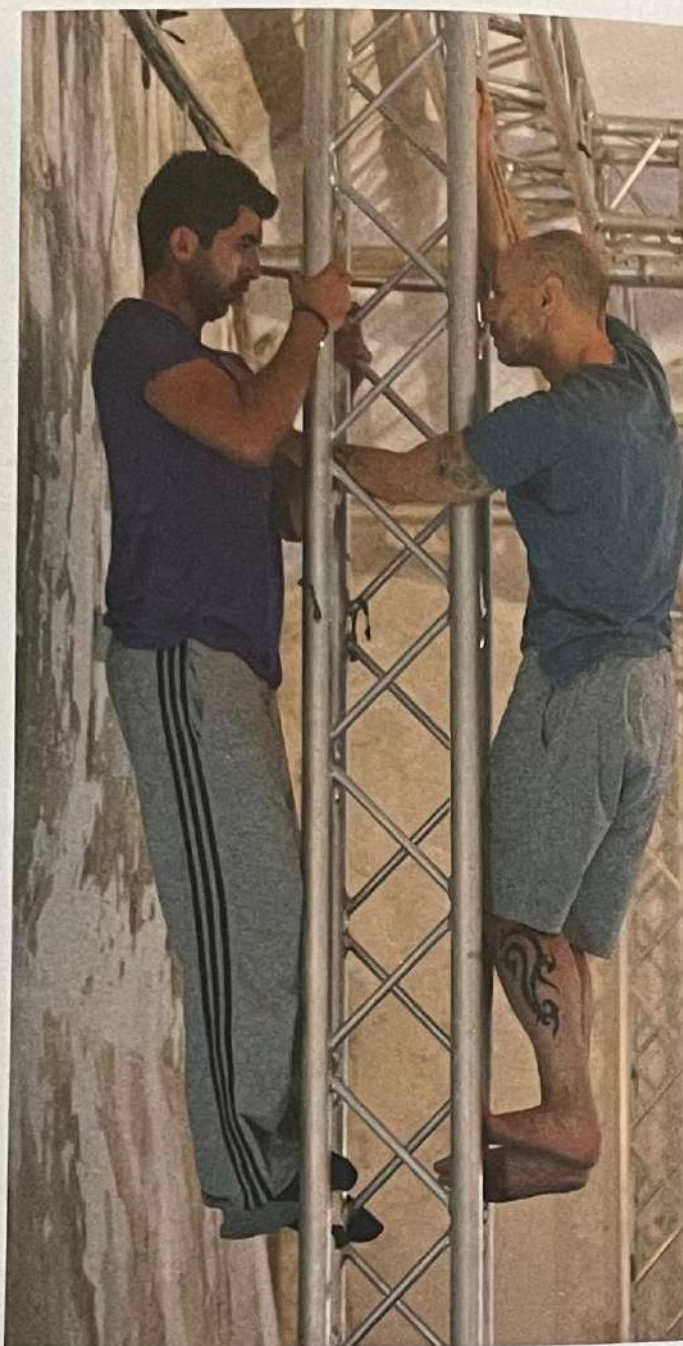
Research week Italy/ Residency month the Netherlands/ Presentation

Please be Gentle at Act Your Age festival

The work of Alexis Vassiliou addresses human conceptions like intimacy and bliss, embarrassment and (dis)ability. For Act Your Age he brought together two men with seemingly alike bodies: one in his thirties, the other in his fifties. By making them shiver, a physical explosion of happiness, sadness and anxiety, Vassiliou makes them overcome their age difference. In the shivering both bodies are vivid and connected, and show what it means to be alive.

'Getting older is inherent to being human. I wish for people to stay connected with their youthfulness, whatever age they are.'

www.alexisvassiliou.com



Colophon

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translation and final text correction/ Colleen Scheepers

design/ Esther Noyons in collaboration with Serena Kloet

photography/ Vincent Wijnhuizen, Robert Küppers,

Lorenzo Scalfarro

print/ Zwaan Printmedia



Culture Programme

This publication has been funded with support from the European Commission and reflects only the views of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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Dutch Dance Festival

Initiators Act Your Age

Dutch Dance Festival / de Nederlandse Dansdagen

(NL) is the most important festival for Dutch dance. It celebrates the history, present and future of dance with work by promising young choreographers as well as from leading dance companies.

Centro per la Scena Contemporanea in Bassano del Grappa (IT) is a dynamic dance house, dedicated to developing the culture of contemporary dance and creation. Its several yearly festivals provide an important platform for international and national work.

Dance House Lemesos (CY) is the first and only space in Cyprus to contribute to and develop professional contemporary dance. It has become a meeting point for local and international dance artists and a place of creativity and exchange.

2012/ 19 – 27 July/

Research week in Bassano del Grappa, Italy. 19 September – 26 September/ Research week in Lemesos, Cyprus.

1 – 10 October/ Research week in Maastricht, the Netherlands.

2013/ 23 June – 31 July/

Residency month in Bassano del Grappa, Italy. 25 August – 30 September/ Residency month in Lemesos, Cyprus.

5 September – 6 October/

Residency month in Maastricht, the Netherlands.

12 – 14 December/

Act Your Age festival in Maastricht, the Netherlands.



Clips of Act Your Age festival



Blind Date



Parkinson and Dance



Generations



The Older Body



Hope



Last Day of All



Dance and work
with the Elderly



Let's Dance

Interviews with choreographers



A Taste of Act Your Age
with **Alexis Vassiliou**



A Taste of Act Your Age
with **Arthur Rosenfeld**



A Taste of Act Your Age
with **Chiara Frigo**



A Taste of Act Your Age
with **Evie Demetriou**



A Taste of Act Your Age
with **Giulio D'Anna**



A Taste of Act Your Age
with **Lia Haraki**



A Taste of Act Your Age
with **Marco D'Agostin**



A Taste of Act Your Age
with **Mor Shani**



A Taste of Act Your Age
with **Silvia Gribaudo**



Bassano del Grappa

The clips of the Act Your Age festival have been made possible by the Gravin van Bylandt Foundation and Foundation Zabawas.

The Act Your Age Festival Maastricht, the Netherlands, was also supported by, among others/ Gemeente Maastricht, Provincie Limburg, RCOAK Foundation, Fonds Sluyterman van Loo, Elisabeth Strouven Foundation, Theater aan het Vrijthof, Fonds Cultuurparticipatie, Maastricht VIA2018 and Leyden Academy on Vitality and Ageing.

**We all
get older,
but
no-one
wants
to be old**