Dance Studies Panel

Women's Corporealities and Choreographies of Authority: From Antiquity's Learned Ladies to Entrepreneurial Modern Ballerinas

“Dancing Bodies, Learned Ladies, and Elastic Moralities in Ancient Rome”
(Zoa Alonso Fernández, Harvard University)

“International Transmigration of Ballet: American Matriarchs Awaken Sleeping Beauty”
(Laura Katz, Temple University)

Wed. Apr. 6, 4:15 - 5:45 p.m.
Neilson Library Browsing Room
Smith College

Open to the public

Sponsors: The Lecture Committee, Departments of Dance, Department of Classical Languages and Literature, Program in the Study of Women and Gender, Five College Dance Department

Taking into account Latin elegiac poems and satiric epigrams as well as funerary inscriptions from the Early Imperial Period, Zoa Alonso Fernández argues that dance constituted a space for female intellectual discourse in Ancient Rome. However, the association of dancing with lax morality complicated women's channels of intellectual authority in dance. Alonso Fernández interrogates the poetic figure of the docta puella ('learned girl') as both a model of actual female agency and a literary ideal that embodied the patriarchal discourse of Roman male imagination.

Many believe that ballet is a regressive art form that assigns the influential role of choreographer to male artists such as Marius Petipa and George Balanchine, while confining the ballerina to the position of inspiring muse and clay to be molded by these male authors. Laura Katz's scholarship counters this narrative by examining three twentieth-century American productions of "Sleeping Beauty." In each of these productions, entrepreneurial women were at the center of the creative process not just as ballerinas but also as re-stagers, pedagogues and artistic directors. Katz, thus, intervenes in an ongoing debate about women’s underrepresentation in ballet history texts and positions of leadership in the field.