

## STREET SCENE

# Urbanity Dance is projecting pop-up dance videos, powered by car battery, onto Boston buildings

By **Karen Campbell** Globe Correspondent, Updated May 13, 2020, 3:03 p.m.



A man who was passing by leans on a street sign as he watches a dance video projected onto the side of a downtown Chelsea building by members of Urbanity Dance. JIM DAVIS/GLOBE STAFF

Over the next three weeks, an intriguing marriage of movement, music, video, and artificial intelligence will dance on the sides of buildings in neighborhoods across Greater Boston. A collaboration between Urbanity Dance and the multidisciplinary collective MASARY Studios, the new “Refractive Choreographies” is designed to bring some light to

areas deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The work, originally planned for Urbanity Dance's season finale, features choreography by company artistic associate Meg Anderson and AI technology by her partner and fiancé, media artist Jeremy Stewart, with music by composer Ryan Edwards.

Anderson and Stewart conceived the work as a way to integrate AI into live dance, and eight dancers began rehearsing in early March. When the live concert was canceled because of COVID-19, the creative process went virtual. The dancers used cellphones and computers to film movement phrases in their individual living rooms and bedrooms, as well as outdoors. Anderson curated the footage, which became raw material for Stewart, who programmed artificial intelligence software to learn the movement and produce digital representations to integrate into the final video. Each showing of the project features a unique iteration of dance and AI elements.

With social distancing in mind, showings are presented "pop-up" style. There's no advance notice on times and locations, and no elaborate set-up. Sound and projection are powered by car battery. The first showings May 6 were in the South End, where, according to Anderson, roughly a dozen adults and kids stopped walking to watch the film, "... in awe of the beautiful lights, motion, and music," she says. "I actually cried. It was a really beautiful moment to be able to see this vision come together, to bring dance and art to the community." Tuesday night's presentation was in Chelsea, and three more are planned between now and June 3.



A dance video was projected onto the side of a downtown Chelsea building by members of Urbanity Dance on Tuesday evening. Photographer Aram Boghosian's face is illuminated by light from the projector as the video is about to start. JIM DAVIS/GLOBE STAFF

For those lucky enough to chance upon the event, the experience will be short and sweet — each wall dance lasts roughly 3½ minutes. But on every pop-up night, a dance will be projected two or three times in one spot, then shown in four to five other locations around the neighborhood. To reach even more viewers, videographer Rob Eckel is filming each event for Urbanity Dance’s and MASARY Studios’s social media platforms.

“When we are all in this lockdown situation, finding extraordinary little moments of fleeting joy and beauty adds something special for those who happen upon it,” Anderson says. “This is giving us a platform to bring some hope, joy, and inspiration to people.”

Look for the videos at [www.instagram.com/urbanitydance](https://www.instagram.com/urbanitydance) or [www.instagram.com/masary\\_studios](https://www.instagram.com/masary_studios).

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