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**thank you** PDP Director and OCAHP Project Manager, wish to extend their sincere gratitude and appreciation to everyone who has helped us in this Discovery adventure, including our attentive and insightful Project Team; all the Interviewees, with a special shout out to Harriet Knopman, Sigmund Kaye, John La Font, David Deakin, Helen Jones, Tom Moore and Mark Campbell for contributing their troves of ephemera; Charles Grumbling, connector; Keith Ragone, Keith Ragone Studio; Job Itzkowitz, Executive Director of the Old City District; Christine Kemp and Alan Powell, Media & Communication Dept at Arcadia University; Margery Sly, Director of the Special Collections Research Center Temple University Libraries; Ian Litwin, Central District Planner, City of Philadelphia Planning Commission; Jeremy Sanchez, The 215 Guys; Joanna Long and Muhammed Wahid of WHYY, Inc; Debbie Fleischman, Publicist; Carmella Vassor Johnson, Videographer; Lynn Buono, Feast Your Eyes; Brad Gibson and Sophie Ragone, Volunteers; and all the supportive staff at the Pew Center for the Arts & Heritage: Bill Adair, Laura Koloski, Kelly Shindler, Neiressa Croom, Angela Nace, Megan Wendell, and Adam Clair.

[philadanceprojects.org](http://philadanceprojects.org)

above: Old City streetscape, 1976. Photograph by Helen Jones

cover: North Third Street, looking south (detail), 1976. Photograph by Helen Jones

cover inset: OCA's A Walk in Public, 1977. Photograph by John LeFont



Support for the research and development of The Old City Arts History Project has been provided by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage

# old city **ARTS** 1975–1980

**A HISTORY PROJECT:**  
*how artists shaped a neighborhood*



**symposium + reception**  
Saturday, February 23, 2019

philadelphia**dance**projects



Lerner's Cafeteria and the Continental Diner on Market Street (detail), 1978.  
 Photograph by David Deakin



**Old City Arts History Project** looks at a Philadelphia neighborhood that was crucial to an emerging generation of artists where they created a center for cross-disciplinary arts activities, epitomized by a collection of watershed public events that took place from 1975 through 1980.

Today's symposium will be video documented by Carmella Vassor Johnson. In addition to recording the program, we are seeking to record attendees' recollections of their experience of the arts in Old City. During the reception, please see designated area to have her video you and your comments.

philadelphia**dance**projects

## symposium program

Saturday, February 23, 2019 @ 2PM

WHYY Dorrance H. Hamilton Public Media Commons

- Introduction  
Terry Fox, Director Philadelphia Dance Projects
- Project Findings  
Jeff Cain, Project Manager, Old City Arts History Project
- Website Preview  
Developed by The 215 Guys
- Panel Discussion Audience Conversation  
David Deakin, Barbara Dufty, Charles Guarino, Ishmael Houston-Jones
- Reception



top: Wood Street Fire Escape , 1976.  
 Photograph by Sam Nocella, *The Sunday Bulletin*

right: Abe Rothblatt in his studio, 1976. Photograph Helen Jones

## reflections on the discovery process

**Jeff Cain**, Project Manager

The **Old City Arts History Project** takes an unconventional look at how artists shaped a neighborhood, and how that unlikely neighborhood returned the favor. Part investigation, part reflection, part scavenger hunt—a look through the wrong end of a telescope, across more than forty years. And what we see is an unfettered community of “emerging artists”, filled with vitality and ingenuity, thrown together in a nearly forgotten corner of a changing downtown urban landscape.

It was here that artists shared work, exchanged ideas, took risks and encouraged one another’s aspirations—with inspired results.

In conversations with some of those who had shared their experiences, we heard a consistent refrain that was echoed through many of their impressions. “That was an amazing time—what was that and how did it happen?”

The work was adventurous and uncanny, often breaking boundaries and challenging audiences. It was a community that celebrated independence and was infused with curiosity, humor, acceptance and a true dedication to the creative spirit.

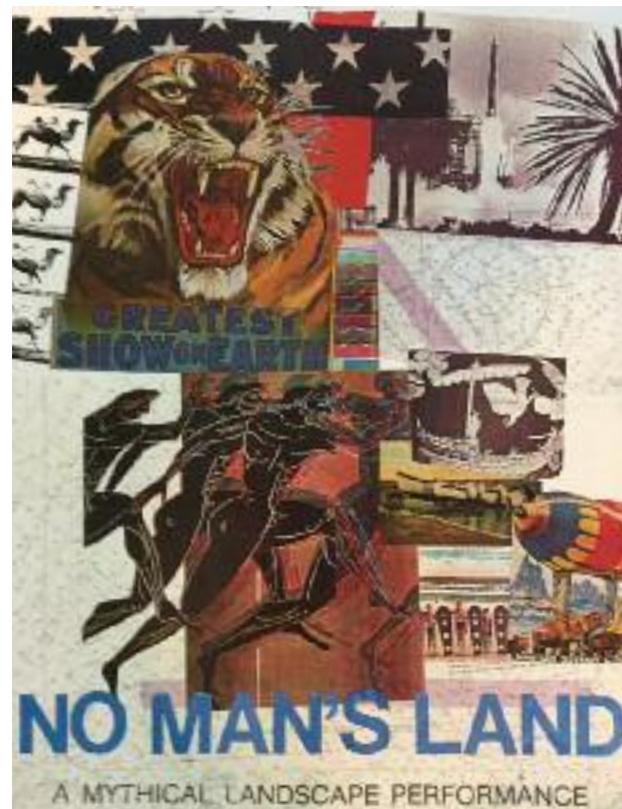
How is it that ETAGE set out in 1975, dedicated to “provide artists and performers with an alternative space and a sympathetic atmosphere to create and present their work?” How were they joined by pioneering collaborations such as Bricolage, the Clay Studio, Wilma Theater, the dance studio at 217 Church Street, Bread Street Studio, Alley Friends, Woofy Bubbles, Bird and the Dirt, Ghostwriters and a host of small galleries? Add to that mix an array of focused and independent artists and performers who lived and worked in Old City.

In that five-year span, there was an ordered chaos to everything that took place there. Large-scaled innovative and self-curated collaborations sprung to life, utilizing the surrounding environs with ease and confidence. The artists instinctively dovetailed with their surroundings, connecting with business owners and the plight of enduring but dwindling numbers of residents that had come before them.

The neighborhood itself served as a primary muse to the creative process. From the wondrous scale of a looming iconic bridge to the juxtaposition of architecture and lively sidewalk interplay, Old City has always been an inspiring creative haunt.

It was almost as if there were some invisible magnet that had drawn together so many artists to work and live in the area. Their activities and antics were followed closely by ever-growing numbers of believers, supporters and audiences who were prompted to share in their coin of the realm.

The essential idea of this initiative is to capture the legacy and history of artists and their activities during this era. Their presence and contribution sparked a physical, social and cultural transformation that helped to reinvent Old City. Within a compressed window of time, this sleepy district of small industry and casual history had begun to shake off its “old world” roles to head into a new and uncharted future as a creative hub that continues to reverberate throughout the cultural life of Philadelphia today.



right: *No Man's Land* (detail), 1979. Poster design by Keith Ragone  
above far right: *No Man's Land* in performance, 1979. Photograph by Keith Ragone



**Terry Fox**, Director Philadelphia Dance Projects

Memories can be elusive and inexact. It’s not that some alleys are blind and don’t go anywhere, they are in of themselves full of detail and information. But on this revisiting of this particular time and place, there was the expectation that alleys would open into streets that connect to other streets that empty into avenues of understanding and revelations. To some extent this is now happening as a critical mass of information has been collected through the Old City Arts History Project, though the gathering is not complete.

A certain consensus is being reinforced around the experience of community as expressed by the interviewees. Old City in the late 70’s into the 80’s was exceedingly dynamic. Activities generated by and through Old City Arts contributed to not only building community, but hallmarking that community as a place for artists to try out ideas and show their work.

“It was really stone soup at that time.... It was amazing what OCA got done on just individual initiative without institutional support.” —Linda Blackaby

“What seemed to be an empty neighborhood suddenly in one of the slices of time there were a lot of personalities in your life.... The feeling of being isolated was going. This community was emerging with people coming and going and some staying.” —Mark Campbell

“What organizational effort could show was the ability that a diverse crowd could come together and pull all that off. The festivals that pulled artists out of their studios but also out of their minds. Everyone was pushing everyone else.” —David Deakin

This relationship was not insular only among artists. As Thomas Hine noted in an article for the *Inquirer* in 1979: “Diversity is this area’s most prized quality. But it is not so much a matter of disparate individuals, Old City is an amalgam of different groups—wholesalers discounters, artists—dependent on having others of their kind around,” (He neglected to add that there were pockets of long time residents also within that special amalgam). This copasetic interaction with all the players was integral to creating a pattern that would be pursued later by other communities and artists elsewhere throughout the city. There is much to be articulated about Old City Arts and I hope that we can continue to bring this story forward to broaden the history of our city, as well as demonstrate its relevance to a contemporary audience.

But in reflection of my investigative experience as both historiographer and also a primary source participant in the Project, I would like to briefly touch on how I perceive the experience of a dancer shapes an interaction with an urban environment. The natural inclination of a dancer is to sense their body moving in space. This orientation is not confined to traditional stage space or only in “practice” in the studio. The post-modern sensibility of the 70’s which looked outward to influences beyond traditional dance techniques, drew strongly on observations of everyday life. Conversely sociologists, cultural critics and humanist geographers have used dance metaphors in their writings. In the 60’s, Jane Jacobs wrote *Death and Life of Great American Cities* in which she describes her own neighborhood sidewalk traffic as a dance.... “The ballet of the good city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place and in any one place is always replete with improvisations.”

This sense of improvisation, observation and exploration of their neighborhood experience very much informed the practice of this segment of the Philadelphia dance community who lived or presented their work in Old City at the time. It is no accident then, that dancers were at the creative core of collaborative works like *Wear White At Nite* and organizing festivals that enlivened the complete topology of Old City, interior, exterior and the interface between those places. To this urban stage all the artists contributed their own interpretations of their experience of what dance artists’ work with—time and place—both as soloist but with other people in choreographic ensemble.

## the symposium panelists

**David Deakin**, History Muhlenberg College  
 Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts art history  
 Philadelphia paintings Deakin+DeBruin Art Framers  
 Marion Locks Gallery Old City Arts organizer  
 community activist San Francisco carpenter balloon bags  
 Hartmann Display Studio display technician draftsman  
 San Francisco City College architectural technology  
 Butler Armsden Architects job captain project manager  
 human resources Deakin+Vanzozi Garden Design  
 Sonoma County Bucks County assemblages  
 digital images videos



**Barbara Dufty**, a leader in non-profit management, development, and the international performing arts field for more than thirty-five years, joined Trisha Brown Dance Company in 2008. In addition to directing all program activities, she spearheaded the creation of the Trisha Brown Archive, and is finalizing its placement in a major repository.

As Executive Director of Meredith Monk/The House Foundation, Dufty produced internationally recognized Meredith Monk's major works, managed the recordings of Monk's music released worldwide by ECM records and was Executive Producer of Monk's feature-length film, *Book of Days*. She secured the placement of Monk's Archive at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, directed the transfer of the materials and supervised the restoration of all 35mm and 16mm works.

As a Management Consultant, Dufty served as Interim Executive Director of Doug Varone and Dancers and Artsgenesis. Recipient of the Susan E. Kennedy Award in Arts Management, Dufty has been a panelist most recently at the New York State Council on the Arts. She graduated from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia.

**Charles Guarino** has worked at *Artforum* Magazine since 1984, and has served as its Publisher for over 20 years. He is a principal founder of *Bookforum* Magazine, artforum.com, and bookforum.com. In 2002, he conceived and launched artguide, *Artforum's* guide to exhibitions and events worldwide. In 2006 he founded artforum.com.cn, opening an office in Beijing to deliver original content in Mandarin to a Chinese audience. Prior to *Artforum*, he was a founding member of Bricolage, a group of performing artists based in Philadelphia and supported by The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, The New York State Council on the Arts, and with fellowships from The Pew Charitable Trusts and The National Endowment for the Arts.

**Ishmael Houston-Jones** is choreographer, author, performer, teacher, and curator. His improvised dance and text work have been performed in New York, across the US, and in Europe, Canada, Australia, and Latin America. Drawn to collaborations as a way to move beyond boundaries and the known, Houston-Jones celebrates the political aspect of cooperation. He and Fred Holland shared a New York Dance and Performance "Bessie" Award for *Cowboys, Dreams and Ladders*, which reintroduced the erased narrative of the Black cowboy back into the mythology of the American West. He was awarded his second "Bessie" Award for the 2010 revival of *THEM*, his 1985/86 collaboration with writer Dennis Cooper and composer Chris Cochrane. In 2017 he received a third "Bessie" for *Variations on Themes from Lost and Found: Scenes from a Life and other Works by John Bernd*.

As an author Houston-Jones' essays, fiction, interviews, and performance texts have been published in several anthologies. His work has also appeared in the magazines: *PAJ*, *Movement Research Performance Journal*, *Bomb*, and *Contact Quarterly*.

Houston-Jones curated Platform 2012: *Parallels* which focused on choreographers from the African diaspora and postmodernism and co-curated with Will Rawls *Platform 2016: Lost & Found, dance, New York, HIV/AIDS then and now*. He has received a 2016 Herb Alpert, a 2015 Doris Duke Impact, and a 2013 Foundation for Contemporary Arts awards.

above left: *Two Men Dancing*, Michael Biello & Ishmael Houston-Jones, 1976. Photograph by Thomas Moore

top right: Charles Grumbling posting OCA flyer, 1978. Photograph David Rosenberg

far right: *Hand-to-Hand Fighting*, Bricolage, 1979. Poster design artist unknown

far right, bottom: *Stickmen Jams*, 1978. Poster design by Pete Baker



**Old City District** is the Business Improvement District (BID) for the Old City neighborhood of Philadelphia. OCD's mission is to supplement City services to benefit the business community, with a focus on Clean & Safe, Marketing, Economic Development & Streetscape Improvement programs. Our service area includes the 22 square blocks bounded by Front Street to the East, 6th Street to the West, Walnut & Dock Street to the South and Florist Street to the North.

Old City is home to an incomparable set of U.S. historical assets. Here in America's "most historic square mile", Independence National Historical Park is an international destination, attracting 3.6 million visitors annually. Important culturally and economically, Old City is also home to world-class museums, theaters and art galleries. The neighborhood offers excellent hotels, a wide range of dining and nightlife establishments, independent retailers and a diverse mix of technology, media, professional and service organizations. Old City employers range from major institutions to solo entrepreneurs, together representing a significant segment of the regional economy.

[www.oldcitydistrict.org](http://www.oldcitydistrict.org)

**Philadelphia Dance Projects** has a mission to support contemporary dance through Projects that encourage artists and audiences to more fully participate and engage in the experience and pursuit of dance as an evolving form.

Philadelphia Dance Projects (PDP) was begun as a three year mentoring project (1993-95) under the aegis of Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival. In 1996 we transitioned out of that mentoring program with The Pillow and established our independence as a non-profit organization. PDP's core program has been informed by our experience of what Projects were most effective and most needed in our community. Today, Philadelphia Dance Projects serves the regional dance and performance community. Through PDP presentations, a general audience of all ages can delve into the artist's world, often seeing a range of contemporary styles.

[philadanceprojects.org](http://philadanceprojects.org)

## the discovery project team

**Terry Fox**, Philadelphia Dance Project Director is a former choreographer/dancer. Concurrently she serves on the Faculty for the MA in Theatre Arts Administration Program at Rowan University, and for the Dance Program of the Boyer College of Music & Dance at Temple University.

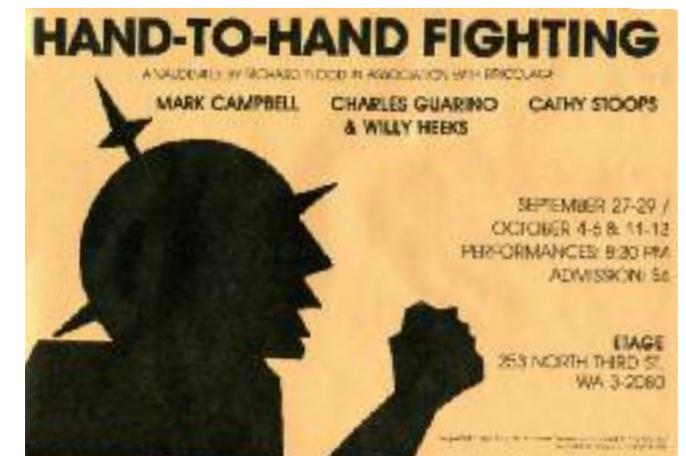
**Jeff Cain**, Project Manager, has work expertise in Communications and Brand Strategy. He continues his artistic work as writer, visual artist and musician.

**Brett Mapp**, Community Liaison is Director of Operations for the Old City District

**Ishmael Houston-Jones**, Thinking Partner is Faculty ETW at NYU and at UArts and is Curator at Danspace.

**Melissa Rachleff-Burt**, Thinking Partner, is Steinhardt Faculty at NYU and Co-Curator, Exit Art.

**Margaret Winslow**, Thinking Partner, is Curator of Contemporary Art at Delaware Art Museum.



## the interviews

**Linda Blackaby**, founding director of Neighborhood Film Project and the Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema, independent film curator living in San Francisco

"First impression upon arriving to Philly was that it was a dark and private town and segregated at night. It was mean, because it was Rizzo [Mayor Frank Rizzo] time.... Times were polarized, Viet Nam War, Nixon, Carter. Reagan defunding the arts. Late 70's and 80's a lot of what we were doing was never able to really flourish. It was amazing what OCA got done on just individual initiative without institutional support."

**David Deakin**, visual artist

"It was, then, a political kind of engagement. Political activism was an undercurrent that translated into how I look at the life of visual artist. It completely transformed how I viewed my life/work as an artist.

Through the course of my time there I was thinking of art in an entirely different way...performance art, mail art—conceptually it was an eye-opener."

**Jimmy Clark**, ceramic artist

"In Old City I performed at Bread Street, ETAGE and Painted Bride on Vine St. WILMA Project was managed by Chris Hayes. I started a group in 1974 called Imagination Theater...and we merged with Manning St. Theater.... We did a production called 'Kaspar Hauser' in Old City. Our group dissolved...and then we merged with WILMA Project. After attending a workshop with Richard Schechner we started working with real life material.... So we dropped Project and just called ourselves WILMA."



above: Cathy Stoops and Richard Flood in rehearsal, 1979.

right: Sigmund Kaye at the Lite-Bite, 1979. Photographs by Harriet Knopman

**Rick & Miriam Camitta**, founders and active members of Franklin Bridge Neighbors North

The street they lived on during the 70's, North Lawrence Street, was one of the oldest in the neighborhood built at the same time as Elfreths Alley. Though they unsuccessfully fought the Vine Street Expressway coming through their neighborhood, they did succeed in creating a landscaped buffer zone for residents living adjacent to the expressway. Rick's family has owned and operated a business in Old City since the turn of the 20th century. Camitta Brothers, Inc in wholesale footwear is still in operation at 411 Vine Street.

Miriam Camitta, is a writer and folklorist with research interests in folk art, literacy, women's community studies, the environment and politics. As a consultant contributed to the Vine Street Expressway Environmental Impact Statement. Her documentary film about the failed Crosstown Expressway, *Crosstown*, was nominated best independent documentary at the 2001 Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema and broadcast on WYBE-TV. She currently teaches literature and creative writing in the Non-Credit Division of Temple University, is fiction editor at *Cleaver Magazine*, and is writing a novel about urban renewal and highway planning in Philadelphia.

"It was a wonderful constellation of space and time and history in the city, that allowed also the arts to flourish here and to do its work. I think the landscape had so much to do with that. Of course the city had a lot to do with it—the economics and their ideas about development. Like South Street they had let it run down. It was a backdrop for life and for art." —MC

"I remember helping artist Jody Pinto. She did a piece 'Tall Chairs' which she presented at ICA. I went over to the highway area with my chainsaw and cut down some trees for her.... The area is very different now. We don't live here. But we revitalized the community organization.

It is a very wealthy area. The people who are in the organization live here and own their properties, mostly condominiums.... Now you see a lot of people on the street which was not the case through the 60's 70' and 80's." —RC



**Mark Campbell**, interdisciplinary artist

Campbell works primarily in three-dimensional media and photography. He was a founding member of Bricolage, an experimental theater collective based in Philadelphia and New York. He has received two Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Fellowships, a National Endowment for the Arts Project Grant and has twice been a Pew Fellowship Discipline Award Winner. Academic appointments at University of the Arts include: Dean, College of Art, Media and Design; Director, School of Art; Co-chair Foundation program.

"When I think about the big narrative arc. I think of our role as a noble one. Because the city emptied out, lost its manufacturing base. The core was effected before the neighborhoods. Then the neighborhoods were effected.... So when you would come into town...the city felt a little empty and scary. But the few that remained built a life. You communicated the possibility and potential of the life here. We didn't leave. We stayed at that time. There was energy, activity and life around what we were doing which eventually led to the re-population of the city. It's an important part of the narrative. The reverse pioneer spirit, of those that stayed while others left. Cultural life of the city in its continuum, it waxes and wanes. But at a very low period there was a lot of energy optimism and spirit coming out of our areas."

### The Clay Studio:

**Jill Bonovitz, Kathie Daltzell, Claire Rodgers**, ceramic artists

"Nothing much going on. [The Neighborhood] had always been industrial. We thought that was cool. It was pretty much all businesses—cooking things, plastics, etc."

**Ken Vavrek**, ceramic artist

"It really is true that we started much more humbly and self-serving, and the Clay Studio came about because so many other people came in to this effort. Then funders really helped get the organization stabilized. Without all that it wouldn't have happened. So many people over the years have participated, especially people who have taken classes and expressed how that experience changed their lives. The Clay Mobile is an example of a wonderful way to reach people with this kind of hands on art experience. Now the capital campaign is underway to make this continue to happen. The more we have, the more vibrant the city is. We will see what happens in Old City as things shift northward."

**Richard Flood**, director of Special Projects & Curator-at-large at the New Museum

Prior to the New Museum he was the Chief Curator at the Walker Art Center for nine years. In Philadelphia during the 70's he was journalist, playwright and co-founder/editor of *The Arts Exchange* a journal on the arts.

"Wear White at Nite was magical. To me the most important thing was the fact that all of sudden we realized we were neighborhood, and that we were neighbors who were all working toward the same end. That's all so thrilling when it happens, because there was no elite there. It was like topsy, it just grew and nobody bought it. Everybody wanted it to happen. From the beginning it was also because people had been living there in such adversity that they were proud that they had survived and stayed and put their heart and soul into the re-imagining of that place."

**Charles Grumbling**, a central figure in the artistic community of Old City in the 70's and 80's

Grumbling was a painter, a resident and gallery owner who also worked at his family's printing company located at 2nd & Race Streets. He was a member/founder of the Old City Business Association and also for a time, Treasurer and President of Old City Arts. His printing company did a considerable amount of printing of many high quality posters and collateral materials for artists, performers and events during this era.

"You could also argue that given how the development has rolled out in Old City, it has been fairly slow. There are still creative people there so it was not dramatically disrupted."

**Charles Guarino**, publisher *Artforum Magazine*

"Everything was possible. Nothing stopped us. We just did whatever we wanted, however we wanted to do it. And we had a square mile of real estate to do it in. Old City was just derelict, and we had it. It was all ours.... I don't think we knew what we had, but it was surely rich.... Philadelphia reveals itself as a closed community. That's why the time that we had was so rare. So rare. Just prior to that when I graduated HS in 1971, it was closed—if you didn't go to PCA, then you were in the Tyler crowd or you ran with the Academy group—and they were all closed social circuits. Over in Old City it was like free Democracy. It was like Grenada."

**H. Daehler Hayes**, former Minister of the Old First Reformed Church in Old City 1971–1983

Daehler was a community activist and advocate for artists in Old City during that time. Currently he is retired and teaches Philosophy at the University of Rhode Island.

**Helen Jones**, photographer [www.helenjonesphotos.com](http://www.helenjonesphotos.com)

“Photographing Old City circa 1973-76 was a self-initiated project. I was interested in the impending gentrification which would force artists out of Old City. I had been living in DC where all but two of thirteen studios had disappeared due to gentrification development in my neighborhood. Another reason I was interested was because my Dad used to take me to Old City. It was a resource for him in his woodturning hobby, where he got abrasives, etc. I was always intrigued as a kid.”

**Ishmael Houston-Jones**, dance artist, curator, writer

“Going back to Two Men Dancing, I thought there was an incredible amount of acceptance and freedom to be whoever you were in Old City at that time, as opposed to the culture at large. We were doing a piece with two men that had gay themes. No one batted any eyelash. It was sort of non-issue. Where as we did the later pieces at Penn it was segregated in to a Gay Festival. The context was this, a gay piece and vessel for gay people. These were just two people working together. I felt that was weirdly different.... I thought gender and gender expression was wide open, without being exceptional or spot lit. I felt really comfortable here.”

**Sigmund Kaye**, founder ETAGE Environmental Theater And Gallery Experiment at 253 N. 3rd Street.

“I directed several productions at the Bride on South Street... They had tin cans for lighting and it was small space with low ceilings. I always had to wait on get a booking. I got it into my head to do something on my own.... [at ETAGE] I started living in the basement but there were rats, so I lived upstairs in the loft. The loft kept getting cut back until it was a tiny tech booth. I ate out everyday; Lite Bite for breakfast and/or lunch and then dinner at the Continental. The rent at ETAGE was \$200/mo. + utilities. I wished I had bought it for \$17,000 but I instead bought \$10,000 worth of lighting equipment. Much later I bought this building in Northern Liberties.”

**Harriet Knopman**, visual artist

“We were all a diverse group of talented artists living in Philadelphia who migrated to Old City, trying to find working space in the 70’s. We grew up together creating and presenting many shows, exhibits and events there. I was instrumental in coordinating and implementing many community events and displaying my own work. I learned new skills. I dedicated a lot of time to the local experimental theater at ETAGE, working in production and stage management. At the same time I was working at the local restaurant in Old City which became a place for gathering for a lot of us. I always worked to keep our spirit and enthusiasm alive!! I am still painting in my home studio, and those years of camaraderie and friendship have been a profound and positive addition to my life.”

**Anne-Marie Mulgrew**, dancer and award-winning choreographer, director and educator

Mulgrew with her sister Eileen moved into a warehouse space in Old City where she was exposed to innovative ideas and revolutionary artists in all mediums. In 1986, she founded Anne-Marie Mulgrew and Dancers Co. Currently she serves as an Education Consultant for Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts. [www.annemariemulgrewdancersco.org](http://www.annemariemulgrewdancersco.org)

“Art and Life were intimate, because living space was art making space. There was a lot of social interaction as well. And somehow the artistic happened during the social. It was all part of the artistic process. There was a lot of sharing.”

**Eileen Mulgrew**, “still dancing—Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian, occasionally providing production support. Working as an engineering geologist for the last 30 years at the California Environmental Protection Agency. Still missing the thrill of OCA! Science is no substitute for the Arts.”

“That neighborhood could have been something—but we were too late already. I remember the meeting of OCA when Denise Scott Brown [from the team doing the feasibility study] came to talk to us about development. She stood on a little chair like a princess, to be above us. She wanted to convince us to tell her everything about the way we were living, how much it costs and whether there were fire escapes and all of that.... So they could speculate essentially on what could happen there. That was the death knell when she came to talk with us. It was already over that fast.”

**Larry Becker & Heidi Nivling**, founding directors Larry Becker Contemporary Art in Old City in 1988

“We lived on north Broad Street near Tyler. The building had five apartments with artists and it was jumping. We used to come down to Old City. Our connection was Willy Heeks. I remember Wear White at Nite and events with Bricolage and ETAGE. Willy performed in some of these.... A natural chemistry is what happened here; those with this kind of energy.... Community makes people get together. This is not just about coming to openings. It’s about the in between times, the convergence of people getting together, hanging out, exchange of ideas and talk and conversations. It’s the people-ness of it.” –LB

“The whole thing about Old City and the arts that were happening was that everyone was pretty much a self-starter. People just did stuff they didn’t sit around and wait for a grant, or wait for the city in order to do stuff. Things were done with whatever means they had, which were usually very sparse. It was harder to overlap with the pockets of art activities that were going on in different parts of the cities. But eventually the network got thicker and thicker and things got connected.” –HN

**Mary Nomecos**, visual artist

Nomecos’ professional career has been highlighted by representation in major Philadelphia galleries. Over a continuous period of forty years she has had seventeen one-woman exhibitions and been in numerous group exhibitions throughout the Delaware Valley.

“I moved into Old City in 1974. It was very very important to me that that was there. There was a group of people, of artists already together. I knew Keith Ragone and Terry Kreuzer who moved into the neighborhood after graduating the from PAFA in 1976. I got a job at Marion Locks Gallery, uptown, around 1975. David Deakin and David DeBruin were framing for her in the one side of our building’s first floor and the other was her gallery, Marion Locks East...there were public artistic spaces which lent to an environment that things were possible for artists there.”



**Stanley Taraila**, architect and developer

Taraila led the team that conducted the Old City Study in 1977-78. At the time, he was working for the architectural firm of Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown. He noted that members of the team working on the study were architects Stanford Hughes and James Timberlake who also lived in Old City. Their mission was to evaluate Old City and make recommendations on the mixed-use phenomenon that was taking place. This study made a number of recommendations related to the artists presence in the community, residential development of loft buildings and commercial development throughout the neighborhood.

“I did the Developer’s guide. [We] got every conceivable piece of data on the Old City.... We were in transition between cultures. There was the warehouse district and there were two or three types of warehouses of historic interest In those days you could buy a building cheaply \$10/a foot, now it’s over \$100.”

above: Bricolage Taking Tiger Mountain during Wear White At Nite, 1977  
Photographer unknown