

MARC Interviews

Fanni Ijäs in residency February 2021



MARC's 2021 programme has begun in earnest. Currently, we are proud to welcome **Fanni Ijäs**, who joins us for a two-week mentorship residency coordinated in conjunction with **SITE**. Fanni Ijäs is a Finnish dancer, dance teacher, and choreographer based in Stockholm, Sweden. Her work centers around house dance and club culture. She is inspired by street dance styles' social and cultural context and how that can be used as a starting point when working on stage or in pedagogic field. She has a BA in Dance Pedagogy from University of Dance and Circus (Stockholm) and has studied at Ecole des Sables (Toubab Dialaw). She is also the founding member of house dance collective De La Vibe.

Her mentor is **Frédéric Gies**, who says "it has been very interesting to have the role of a mentor in the frame of this residence programme, as it was very different than having this role in the frame of an educational programme. In this frame, it was more about having an artist-to-artist conversation, and not about fulfilling an educational and institutional agenda, which can be very limiting. It has also been a pleasure to see Fanni bringing bits of the dance floor into the studio, in times when dance floors are painfully absent from our lives."

Fanni Ijäs spoke with MARC's Alex Fisher about her residency, her artistic priorities, and her sense of place within a club culture comprising many attitudes, expressions, and forms.

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Can you introduce yourself and your practice?

I come from the street dance field—a big field with many different styles. In the past, I have concentrated on house dance and the club culture connected to this dance practice. That is what defines me as an artist—my background and what I want to come across on stage.

The inspiration for me has been: what do I need to do or how do I need to manipulate the stage so that it serves the purpose of the dance style I am doing, rather than making the house dance fit in to the stage world. In a bigger picture, I am compelled by how different dance styles enter the stage or performing arts field and make space.

Club culture often happens in industrial spaces, turning these sites into contexts for free expression. How does that legacy or tendency translate into a building like the shoe factory where MARC is based?

This space is optimal for the club experience—it's part of the magic. While clubbing, the people, the lights, and the music create something—you wouldn't necessarily recognize the vibe of the room during the day. This space creates that type of atmosphere—that it can transform into something else. It triggers that sense of potential.

What are you working on now?

I had an open theme I was thinking about for this residency. How can I create a new space to serve my purpose — the art that I want to do. Since there isn't a long tradition of house dance on the stage, I am trying to pinpoint what it is that I do. Because there is so much to do. There is not an exhaustive canon of work already done, so I have been inspired to address versatility—what could happen at a club and how that is pinpointed in movement. In doing so, I am also reflecting on how clubs function as this place of creating identity.

There is an individualism to the club experience, but there is also this collective body of a mass of people in a compacted place where everyone feeds into one another. How does this simultaneity shape your thinking?

Of course since I am working by myself, the only body is mine. I am representing the individual you are talking about. But, at the same time, I have been working a lot with having pauses, just letting the music be in the space as a kind of invitation for people to move. You can't create a club by yourself; you need others to participate too.

On your website, you describe yourself first as a dancer, second as a dance teacher, and third as a choreographer. This is the order you create. Could you speak briefly about what pedagogy means to you?

I work with a social folk dance style originating from black and brown queer culture, and I feel a responsibility to own the reality of being a bearer of tradition, situating that as a starting point in everything I do. I can't take myself out of a lineage. Subsequently, the teaching part is active in everything I do because the context is so important—it is woven in the movement. I don't want to be separate from the social tradition. I want to be part of it, as that is where the power and the empowerment of the form is.

How was your performance last Saturday, as part of Möt MARC-UP?

It was rich in contrasts—performing on this container in a place where house dance may not be so familiar. I enjoyed introducing myself to Knislinge with my dance. Here I am in your home and this is what I do.

Your residency is organized as part of MARC's ongoing partnership with SITE (Stockholm) dedicated to mentorship. From your perspective, what does mentorship mean

to you and how is it going working with Frédéric so far? I know it is a work in progress, and always will be.

Since I am working by myself, it has been nice to have another person in the process. Frédéric and I have found this organic way of working together and being in the studio. Both of us have a background in the club culture, albeit from different points of view. For us, it has been a lot of Frédéric watching me followed by discussions about what I am working on, but also, in general, talking about, well, politics.

We have spoken a lot about what happens around dance, and what I do, but also in the world and how I can find connections. For me, this has helped me formulate myself better with regards to the questions I am concentrating on.

Club culture is not monolithic. There is almost infinite variation and abundant entry points—notions of identity, beats per minute, etc. How do you see your practice engaging with this beautiful multiplicity?

In a way, that is easy to answer since I come from the house dance tradition; it is a certain music style I am working with. I am inspired by the club scene in New York and generally in the U.S., which is really the birthplace of this movement. I am likewise drawn to those who don't necessarily identify as house dancers, but have this practice of going to clubs and dancing to house music. I am interested in tapping into how the dance style is formed through that process.

As Frédéric and I have been talking, it has reinforced that there are so many parallels between house and other club cultures. I think the biggest is the world-making: creating your identity, feeling free, experimenting, and finding pleasure.