

# MARGIE GILLIS

## biographical notes

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At the forefront of modern dance for nearly 50 years, internationally acclaimed dance Artist Margie Gillis is one of the most influential Canadian choreographers/dancers of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Margie Gillis was born on July 9th, 1953 in Montreal, Quebec, into a family of athletes where corporeal experience and physical prowess were essential aspects of daily life. In 1981, she founded the Margie Gillis Dance Foundation in Montreal. Over the decades, Margie has created a rich repertoire of more than one hundred and fifty creations, solos, duets, and group works, which have been performed around the globe. Establishing herself as an innovative choreographer, she built her career as a solo dancer, distinguishing herself with her naturalistic style and inimitable stage presence, and her iconic long cascading hair. She developed a new form of movement in her unique artistic voice that has influenced generations of choreographers and dancers. She continues to this day to shape the art of movement, earning public and critical recognition for the beauty, authenticity and emotional expression of her creations. Infused with political, social, and cultural themes, Margie Gillis' philosophy explores the notions of humanity, inner landscape, and our intrinsic relationship to nature, revealing the intimacies of the human psyche. Her repertoire covers a wide array of topics including the feminine consciousness, the natural world, and the transformative process, all merging in a profound and powerful expression of humanism and emotion.

In parallel to her solo work, Margie Gillis collaborates on projects initiated by her peers. She participated in the creation of two of Martha Clarke's major pieces in which she danced principal roles. She has performed with and choreographed for The Paul Taylor Dance Company with the work *Rewilding* created in 2019. With Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, she danced the role of Miss Lucy in James Kudelka's *Dracula*. She has also been a guest artist with the National Ballet of Canada, Ballet British Columbia and American companies such as Momix and The Bruce Wood Dance Company. She has worked with many other important artists in the world of dance, most notably with John Butler, Paul-André Fortier, Pauline Koner, Peggy Baker, Robbie LaFosse, Joao Mauricio, Tedd Robinson, Rina Schenfeld, Paola Styron, Rex Harrington, Risa Steinberg, Veronica Tennant and Emily Molnar. In Canada, she has shared the stage with Quebec soprano, Suzie Leblanc. She toured in *Sacred Ellington* with the late celebrated opera singer, Jessye Norman.

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Margie Gillis has been seen on television and in film on several occasions. Her life and art have been the subjects of several documentary films, the most notable being Veronica Tennant's *Wild Hearts in Strange Times* (1996). For her participation in this film, Margie Gillis was awarded the 1998 Gemini Prize for Best Performing Artist on Film. Among other collaborations in film and television, Margie Gillis choreographed the Delilah sequence for John Turturro's film *Romance and Cigarettes* (2005) and danced the principal role in José Navas' choreographic film *Adela, mi amor*. In 2020, she choreographed and danced in *A Shared Solitude*, the virtual edition of Guillaume Côté's Festival des Arts de Saint-Sauveur.

Margie Gillis also creates for other performing artists. She has choreographed works for companies such as Coleman Lemieux & Company, The Bruce Wood Dance Company and the Alberta Ballet Company. In 2006, the Cirque du Soleil commissioned her for two solos for the Las Vegas production of *LOVE*, a tribute to the legendary Beatles. The world premiere of *M.Body.7*, a group piece Margie Gillis created to celebrate her 35th anniversary season, was performed in January 2008, at the Festival Montréal en lumière.

Teaching, mentoring and passing on her legacy to emerging artists are an integral part of her vision. Responding to an overwhelming demand from the dance community, Margie Gillis curated the Legacy Project to share her unique creative history and ensure the continuity of her contribution to modern dance. From there, was born the Margie Gillis – Legacy Project Dance Company, which is now touring with repertoire pieces and new creations: *Evolutions* (2017) and *Literature of the Body* (in creation).

With her unique approach to teaching, *Dancing from the Inside Out*, she offers workshops for dance professionals and students alike. As a socially engaged artist, Margie Gillis believes that dance can contribute to positive transformation. She lectures and teaches on the power of movement as a means of problem solving, highlighting the political dimension of dance and art within societies, especially in her work with conflict transformation and reclaiming the body.

Embracing new challenges and opportunities, she has been the spokesperson for OXFAM, the Planned Parenthood Foundation, and a number of organizations

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dedicated to the fight against AIDS. Margie is also an active defender of environmental causes.

Unwaveringly, she continues to develop her craft through experimenting, teaching, creation, innovation and performance.

She has received numerous awards including Officer of the Order of Canada, Chevalier de l'Ordre du Québec, the Distinguished Artist Award (Dancer/Choreographer) International Society for the Performing Arts (ISPA), the Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award from the Governor General's Performing Arts Award Foundation, the Walter Carsen Prize for Excellence in the Performing Arts, the American Dance Guild Award, and more. Unwaveringly, she continues to develop her craft through experimenting, teaching, creation, innovation and performance. In 2020, she was the recipient of an Honorary Degree from Concordia University.

In 2018, the Margie Gillis Dance Foundation launched the St. Mark's Arts Project in Acton Vale. The town and the St. Mark's Church are very dear to Margie's heart: a family heirloom, a sacred and peaceful space, a place of gathering, inspiration and creation. The mission of the St. Mark's Arts Project is to support extraordinary artistic endeavours curated by the Margie Gillis Dance Foundation, with a focus on creation, reflection and humanitarian vision, through dance, theatre, and music.

In 2023, Margie Gillis will be celebrating her 50th career anniversary: 50 years of creation, love, and dance.

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