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Spring 2015

# Spark and ruin : a story of re-beginning (The Flint project)

Alexandra Jennings Bush  
*University of Iowa*

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SPARK AND RUIN: A STORY OF RE-BEGINNING  
(THE FLINT PROJECT)

by

Alexandra Jennings Bush

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts  
degree in Dance in the  
Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2015

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Rebekah J. Kowal

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTER'S THESIS

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Alexandra Jennings Bush

has been approved by the Examining Committee for  
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree  
in Dance at the May 2015 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

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Rebekah J. Kowal, Thesis Supervisor

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Armando Duarte

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David McGraw

To the people of Flint, Michigan

America is a thousand Flints.

Carl Crow

Buick Division of General Motors (1945)

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

*Spark and Ruin: a Story of Re-beginning* is a multi-media concert dance work that addresses empathy as a physical and cognitive reactionary state, and utilizes dancing bodies as agents to facilitate this empathic experience. This work developed out of *The Flint Project*, which investigates Flint, Michigan, “the most violent city in America,” and a community characterized by racial tension and severe distinctions in class and social standing. This post-industrial, urban community serves as a microcosm through which we can examine how racial, social, and cultural politics intersect to establish systematic practices that challenge the possibility of the “American Dream.”

*The Flint Project* is a vehicle for creative research that investigates these systems and develops the material into a live performed event, *Spark and Ruin: a Story of Re-beginning*. This performance includes installations featuring live performers and also various forms of media (including photography, film, and interactive “stations”). All of this material is constructed to contextualize the material for the viewer in a proscenium-style full-length dance performance. The objective of this piece is to establish a space for viewers to empathize with the material—to create an experience that will evolve into inquiry of systematic inequality as well as self-reflection of perception and bias. In facilitating this level of questioning, I aim to move viewers with compassion and heightened awareness of social inequity, as well as opportunities to challenge the systems that enforce it.

## CONCERT PROGRAM

Title: *Spark and Ruin: a Story of Re-beginning*

Concept and Direction: Alexandra Bush

Choreographer: Alexandra Bush in collaboration with the dancers

Concert Performance Dates: April 2-4, 2015, 8:00 PM

Concert Venue: Space Place Theatre, University of Iowa North Hall

Music: Max Richter, Jason Palamara, Glenn Miller, Hauschka, Mama Sol and the N.U.T.S., The Old 97s; edited and arranged by Alex Bush and Jason Palamara

Text: Alexandra Bush in collaboration with the dancers, with contributions from the audience and clips from NBC News 25 Flint

Video Design: Alexandra Bush, compilation of original footage and material from *Master Hands* (1936) and the Home Owners Loan Corporation

Dancers: Dot Armstrong, Rebekah Chappell, Tyler Clark, Hannah Gross, Tyler Nemmers, Courtney Paulsen, Dana Powers-Klooster, Brooke Robinson, Amy Simonson, Melanie Swihart