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A Multitasking Couple Create Dance and Digital-Art Performance in Vermont

State of the Arts

By Megan James [03.02.11]

Choreographer **Pauline Jennings** and digital artist **Sean Clute** were ready for a lifestyle change. They just didn't expect it to happen so suddenly. The couple lived in San Francisco, where they codirected a dance company called [Double Vision](#) [1], each working several jobs apiece. Aching for some balance, Clute applied for multiple teaching jobs, one of them an assistant-professor position at Johnson State College.

Last summer, Clute, 35, found out he got the job — just “two weeks before our New York season,” says Jennings, 33. It was “right in the middle of a completely chaotic performance period.” The two had a week to pack up their lives in California and fly to New York with their dancers. They performed for a week at the Merce Cunningham Studio, then flew back to San Francisco, got married and hit the road for Vermont.

“It was a complete blur,” Jennings says.

And what of that bucolic, rural lifestyle they were looking for? Well, they haven't found it yet. “We had this idea that, living in Vermont, we'd have a lot more free time,” admits Clute, whose solo show, a digital-art installation called [“Recursive Things,”](#) [2] opens at Johnson's **Julian Scott Memorial Gallery** next week. “Now it's just as busy as when we left, if not more.”

For starters, they're still directing Double Vision — from their home in Johnson. Jennings sets choreography with her San Francisco dancers over iChat. For the first few months here, she says, “I was still very much in California. I was rehearsing online and I was doing my day job online.”

As day jobs go, Jennings' is pretty awesome — not to mention apt for a choreographer. At home, she illustrates and records the movement of insects and lizards — from photographs and animal replicas — for a lab at the University of California-Berkeley that studies the locomotion of many-legged animals. Discoveries in the lab have provided inspiration for the design of polypedal robots, artificial muscles and animated movies such as *A Bug's Life*.

Studying the many legs of geckos and cockroaches has its benefits for a choreographer — it has definitely informed her movement style, says Jennings. Still, for the first few months in Vermont, all that time on the computer made her feel increasingly isolated. “That's been slowly transitioning,” she says.

Over the last few months Jennings has been working — in the flesh — with some local dancers. This weekend she'll debut the results, an interactive installation piece called “Veritable Vicissitudes,” with **Hanna Satterlee**, **Lida Winfield** and **Ellen Smith Ahern** at Montpelier's **Contemporary Dance and**

Fitness Studio. In May, Double Vision will become the studio's first company-in-residence. And in the summer, Winfield and Smith Ahern will join Jennings and Clute for six weeks of performances throughout Europe. They're calling it the [Recession Special Tour](#) [3].

In Montpelier, they'll transform the performance space into a maze through which audience members can travel and interact with the dancers, hanging placards — with phrases such as “Rewind,” “Fast-forward” or “Pause” — around the performers' necks that instruct them how to move. Clute and Vermont artist and interactive-exhibit designer **Sherlock Terry** will create live sound; California-based artist Jessica Gomula will provide a video element.

Additionally, southern Vermont dancers [Emily Sweeney](#) [4] and **Jamie Gehring** will perform “Experiments in Synkinesia,” an improvised score with Sweeney's collaborative partner, sound artist **William Bilwa Costa**.

Jennings will also perform the piece she's been choreographing for Double Vision dancer Jennifer Mellor over iChat, a solo-in-progress called “Duplexity.” Jennings and Mellor had a chance to work on it in person last week at a residency in Pennsylvania run by the New York City-based organization [DanceNOW](#) [5].

When Jennings and Mellor first got into the Pennsylvania studio together, they had some spatial adjusting to do. “We went to do something that we've seen each other do, over and over, for months on the computer screen — we can actually see the whole body now — and it was kind of like, *Are you really there?*”

When the woman checking in the dancers at the residency asked where they were from, they suddenly realized how displaced they have been. Jennings and Clute explained that they were based in Vermont but that Mellor was based in California, about to move to New York.

“It's kind of like we don't have a home right now, even though the home is Vermont,” says Jennings. That's not a bad thing. Thanks to technology, even a physical art form like dance isn't limited by geography these days. “It doesn't matter so much anymore where you are,” she says.

“It's not that it doesn't matter anymore,” Clute clarifies, “It's that this is what you have to do to survive [as an artist]. You have to be able to adapt and evolve to this new world that we live in.”

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Links:

- [1] <http://www.double-vision.biz/>
- [2] <http://www.seanclute.com/upcoming/>
- [3] http://double-vision.biz/RecessionSpecialTour/?page_id=116
- [4] <http://perpetualmvmtsnd.org/>
- [5] <http://www.dancenownyc.org/silo.php>