

## Press Release

April 2021

We are happy to share that May Productions has been awarded £77,641 for new project, **remodelling Soma**, which will run from April 2021 to June 2022.

Our year long programme of practice, participation and research will explore the ways in which we connect to our bodies, to each other and to the environment around us. Combining somatic-based dance practices and immersive multi-person Virtual Reality, we will explore pathways for these connections in our senses, and investigate how our relationships and sense of embodied agency within these interior and exterior, physical and virtual worlds, are mediated by technologies. The project will take place through online and in-person residencies and participatory events across three areas of activity.



Image by Silvia Carderelli-Gronau

Wearing a VR headset and sensing in Virtual Reality



Image © Leticia Valverdes

Holding delicate metallic strings in hand to connect our bodies with the environment

Working with a focus group of visually impaired participants, dance artist **Holly Thomas**, researcher **Harsha Balasubramanian**, access consultants, and sound technologists **Tom Mitchell and Jo Hyde**, we will develop new sound features for VR participatory performance **Soma**. This work will form part of a showcase of performances at the **Bloomsbury Theatre** in May 2022 with dancers: **Will Dickie, Laila Diallo, Ben McEwen, Ania Varez, Anne-Gaelle Thiriot**, and **Bryn Thomas**. **Soma** will be available for touring from Summer 2022 onwards.

Secondly, we are planning the creation of a one-year online community: **In-Body**, an invitation to tune in, sense and move with The Soma Project. Beginning in June 2021, the dancers will create and share monthly invitations to signed-up members, offering simple movement practices through writing, sound and moving image. Each invitation will be a chance to engage with your body in different ways and to explore environments - at home and locally as well as in the context of virtual bodies and environments created or mediated by technology. These invitations will become an online resource of material, and will be particularly designed with, in mind, those people who have had experiences of sheilding or being 'house-bound', and people with 'zoom fatigue', through excessive engagement with visual technology. This material will culminate in a walk-through public installation alongside live performance and VR prototype experiences at Bloomsbury Theatre in May 2022.

The third phase of this project is research and development into creating a new interactive performance work - **My Octopus Body**. Working with Bristol VR Lab at UWE Bristol, **Rife Magazine** and researchers from the **University of Bristol**, we will co-host a Grow-Your-Own-Avatar competition for 16-24yrs in Bristol. From their creative submissions, selected young people will be invited as co-collaborators to journey with us in our tests and experiments with creative technologist **Clarice Hilton**. We will combine dance practices with VR technologies to imagine future bodies as virtual avatars; exploring issues of body image, identity, and the ethics of online social interaction.



We are very pleased to support remodelling Soma through our National Lottery Project Grants funding programme. As the national development agency for creativity and culture, we're excited to see artists, like May Productions, combine more traditional artistic practices with new technologies, including Virtual Reality, and we look forward to seeing the outcomes of the project.

**Phil Gibby**  
Area Director, South West, Arts Council England

Throughout this year we will be working with a team of artists, technicians, academics and industry partners. Supporting this journey will be Creative Producers **Katherine Hall** and **Pilar Santelices**, Mentor **June Gamble**, Production Manager **Jay Kerry**, and accountancy support from **Bebhinn Cronin**. We are also working with film-makers **Razaka Firmager** and **Nina Ross** to document the process and create audio-visual journeys. We are pleased to be working with and supported by all of our project partners: **Arts Council England**, **Theatre Bristol**, **Pervasive Media Studios**, **Bristol VR Lab at UWE Bristol**, **Bristol Digital Futures Institute**, **Kaleider**, **Arnolfini**, **Studio Wayne McGregor**, University of Bristol, **UWE**, and **Bloomsbury Theatre**.

May Productions is also supported through advisory board members: **Tom Morris**, **Verity McIntosh**, **Chris Lewis-Smith**, **Suneeta Sellers** and **Lucie Spurr**.



I am thrilled to have been awarded Arts Council England funding and I can't wait to begin the journey this support will enable. I am excited that, through this funded activity, there will be the opportunity to explore and practice together through a mix of approaches, from connecting together in physical places to hosting online experiences. These shared activities, between performers and participants, will open up new and interesting pathways for flexible models of participation in performance. I am very excited about the creative journey we will take with the young people, finding out about their ideas and aspirations for 'virtual bodies' and notions of embodiment for the future. I very much look forward to engaging with the project collaborators, partners and funders and to welcoming new participants, and opening up conversations with them about their experiences, interactions and responses to the invitations that we make.

**Lisa May Thomas**  
Artistic Director of May Productions

For more information please contact [info@may-productions.co.uk](mailto:info@may-productions.co.uk) or visit our website [www.soma-project.co.uk](http://www.soma-project.co.uk)



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The Soma Project

#TheSomaProject #SomaVR #InBody

This work is only made possible thanks to public funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England.



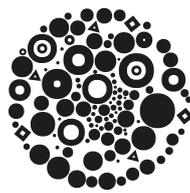
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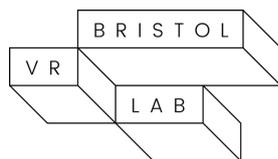
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