



**College of Fine Arts**

Women & Masks: An Arts-Based Research Conference



## **CONFERENCE OVERVIEW**

This conference emerged from Felice Amato's abiding interest in women's experiences and the conditions of their lives globally as explored and expressed through the arts. She is particularly interested in embodied experiences and specifically how material performance, such as the use of masks, costumes, and puppets, illuminates aspects of the

private and social body (and the symbiosis of the two). Amato developed her interest in the interplay of the materially constructed and female body in her dissertation work on women, dolls, and performance. Since then, she has gone on to include masks in her inquiries, having experienced their power to generate a sense of bewilderment at one's taken-for-granted body when a mask is worn. The use of the mask as a lens or a frame for inquiry also provided new insights across a range of circumstances. The impulse to pull together a rich conversation that would cross multiple fields led Amato to propose this conference to the Boston University Center for the Humanities, which supported the proposal with a grant to initiate a series of events. The conference has since expanded to a series of four symposia. There is still a small team of organizers and modest funds. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm for the topic and the possibility of embracing the virtual moment to share ideas globally in real-time has allowed the conference to reach far and wide. The activities are free and open and designed to include a broad range of contributions to the topic through invitations and the call for submissions. Despite the virtual nature of the conference, efforts are being made to include a range of modalities that place the body at the center of the research and inspire cross-over between fields and practices. The conference intends to invite people into the topic by providing entry points into new experiences and frameworks. This inaugural conference cannot include every topic or represent even a fraction of cultures and circumstances. Hopefully, it will plant the seed for an ongoing conversation and generate new investigations into the theme of women and masks—and perhaps future conferences in which people can gather in person.

Read the [conference abstract](#).

## **ABOUT THE CONFERENCE DIRECTOR**

Felice Amato works at the intersection of the fields of visual arts, art education, and theater. She has a particular passion for puppetry, masks, and object performance, which integrate the body and the element of time into a narrative and cross the boundaries between disciplines. Amato is an Assistant Professor of Art Education at Boston University in the College

of Fine Arts. In addition to teaching and research, Amato approaches scholarship through practice as an arts researcher. She has performed short works in various venues, including the Ballard Institute at U-CONN and Open Eye Figure Theater in Minneapolis. She has received numerous awards for her artistic work, including a Jerome Foundation grant and two Minnesota State Arts Board grants. She has published in *Puppetry International* and *the Journal of Mother Studies* and presented at a2ru (The Alliance for the Arts at Research Universities), USSEA (United States Society for Education through Art), NAEA (the National Art Educators Association), the CAA (College Arts Association), and Puppeteers of America. Amato currently serves on the Board of UNIMA-USA (Union Internationale de la Marionnette). Her interest in puppets and masks and their connection to the female body, as well as her focus on using object performance to explore the abstract and the theoretical, developed during her doctoral work at UW-Madison, where she began working at the intersection of creative investigation and scholarship through arts-based and embodied research methods. She was chosen as an emerging artist for the Eugene O'Neill Center's National Puppetry Conference in 2018, where she created a puppet piece based on Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 work, *The Second Sex*. Last year, Amato convened a panel at the College Art Association entitled "*Unmasking Complexities: The Mask in Global Contemporary Art*," which laid the grounds for proposing this year's conference.



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This conference could not have come into being without the vision and labor of many people. A core impetus for the project came from an ongoing conversation with my collaborator Alexandra Simpson on the topic of women and masks. Alex's work on the conference has been invaluable. She will be presenting and facilitating throughout the year. Our shared

interest in this theme emerged during a month-long mask workshop with Paola Piizi and Sarah Sartori in Italy in 2019. In awe of the insights, skill, and history this mother-daughter team possessed, we were specifically intrigued by their evolving roles in the male-dominated world of traditional mask-making, which came about after the death of Donato Sartori. With the goals of highlighting their and other women's work and creating more opportunities for women of all backgrounds to experience the power of the mask, we began to develop a new project. In the spring of 2022 (after a two-year delay due to COVID), we will return to the Centro Maschere e Strutture Gestuali in Abano Terme for a collaborative exploration of women and masks with Paola Piizi and Sarah Sartori, funded in part by a Canada Arts Council Grant.

I want to acknowledge Elsa Wiehe, who has played a key role in shaping the conference—specifically the February events. As the K–16 Education Program Manager for BU's federally funded African Studies Center, she has collaborated with me on many arts initiatives. The February weekend will focus on global masking and, specifically, on African masks and masquerade. Saturday's activities will be geared towards educators who wish to become more versed in African culture and best practices for including African content.

Paula Mans, a Master's candidate in the Department of Art Education, has developed the conference website and social media campaigns. She is a gifted mask maker, and in February of 2022, she will present a curriculum unit she developed.

Deb Bell has authored two important books on masks and has been a supporter, connector, and resource throughout the planning. During the conference, she will be presenting on her current interests and adding context through her years of mask research. I would also like to thank Deborah Foster and Claudia Orenstein for agreeing to review submissions and contributing to the sessions.

I would like to specifically acknowledge Dana Clancy, the Director of the School of Visual Arts; Susan Mickey, Director of the School of Theatre; Ty Furman of the Provost's Arts Initiative; and the Dean of the College of Fine Arts, Harvey Young—all of whom have been instrumental in their support, encouragement, and guidance. This conference is also made possible

through funding from the following Boston University programs, entities, and initiatives: The Center for the Humanities, the College of Fine Arts, the School of Theatre, the School of Visual Arts, the Online Masters in Art Education, the Arts Initiative's Indigenous Voices Series, the African Studies Center, the Kilachand Honors College, and Cinem'Afriq.

Finally, I want to thank all the women who responded with enthusiasm and interest to this concept, helping to energize and re-energize me throughout the process.

In gratitude,

Felice

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## CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

**Women and Masks** is an international, web-based arts-research conference hosted by Boston University. It is free and open to anyone and attendees can register for single or multiple events. The conference, which will take place across four

weekends during the 2021–2022 academic year, explores the myriad intersections of the subjects masks and women. The pairing is intended to create a thematic, yet open-ended framing, giving rise to juxtapositions and rapprochements, generating unexpected insights. These insights are expected to lead to a rich inquiry into the significance of masking practices as they connect to women.

The mask, interpreted in its broadest sense, is one of the most ubiquitous objects across cultures. Women, a complex and diverse category of people, have specific histories and realities with masks and masquerade. The mask's powerful and intimate association with the face and the body—as well as the psyche and the soul—crosses cultures, places, and times, revealing aspects of the private and the public body. Positioning the mask as the interstice between the internal and the external world raises questions across fields as diverse as psychology, politics, folklore, religion and ritual, medicine, activism, and play. Opportunities for making and animating masks within the conference are imperative, as they open modes of inquiry and engage embodied and arts-research methods.



The mask takes many forms—physically, psychologically, and culturally. It is best understood as a multifaceted phenomenon and not simply as a material object. Masks suggest, and

then resist, a taken-for-granted quality (particularly as we emerge from a period of unprecedented global masking of a specific kind). When closely examined, a complex phenomenon unfolds in even the simplest act of covering the face. Masks invite (or even demand) nuance, complexity, and ambiguity. For the mask is a paradox; it both hides and reveals. Masks can fragment the self and distinguish the self from the “other.” They frequently engage concepts of alterity and transgression.

The rhizomatic interconnections of the mask generate unexpected resonances. When paired with the concept of *women*, masks can have nearly infinite meanings, all suggesting rich lines of layered inquiry. For example, women have often been effectively excluded from the use of masks in traditional rituals, theater, and masquerade. There are many examples across cultures of the use of masks by men to impersonate, animate, ridicule, instruct, and represent women—although sometimes paying homage. Yet, women have also developed and appropriated masks for agentive strategies that enable creative inventions and interventions. These have included masking as activism, challenging barriers, and reinventing male-dominated ritual and theatrical masquerade. Women frequently contribute to the handiwork and labor of mask fabrication, such as during the COVID pandemic, innovating within the interlocking dimensions of design, form and function, and aesthetics. Women have drawn upon the power of masks and mask imagery to shape-shift and explore the psyche’s realms, other possible worlds, and the archetypal. We see the power of the mask in the work of modernist surrealists Leonor Fini and Leonora Carrington, as well as contemporary artists like Saya Woolfalk, who expands on the masks’ potential for world-making. Like moving décor, masks integrate into a virtual chimeric world. Veiling, in its many circumstances, might also be examined as a form of masking. The mask-like apparatuses of Rebecca Horn echo the metal scold’s bridle and a variety of devices that protect, punish, and control via the face. In addition, women’s interactions with cosmetic, surgical, and digital manipulations transform the face and raise further complex and ambiguous questions about agency and empowerment.

This inaugural conference cannot include every topic or be representative of even a fraction of cultures and circumstances. Hopefully, it will plant the seed for an ongoing conversation and generate new investigations into the

theme of women and masks.

Please visit [this page](#) for more information about conference events or send an email to [wmmasks@bu.edu](mailto:wmmasks@bu.edu).

This conference is made possible by the following **Boston University** programs, entities, and initiatives: The Center for the Humanities, the College of Fine Arts, the School of Theatre, the School of Visual Arts, the Online Masters in Art Education, the Arts Initiative's Indigenous Voices Series, the African Studies Center, the Kilachand Honors College, and Cinem'Afriq. We are grateful for their support.

**IMAGE: JORGE FROM THE SHOW "FLORA'S DANCE." LATEX MASK AND PERFORMANCE BY [ORIT LEIBOVITZ NOVITCH \(אורית ליבוביץ נוביץ\)](#). PHOTO BY YOHAN SEGEV.**



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## **CONFERENCE TEAM**

**FELICE AMATO, *CONFERENCE DIRECTOR***





**Felice Amato**/ MFA, PhD,  
Assistant Professor of Art  
Education, College of Fine  
Arts, Boston University

Felice Amato works at the intersection of the fields of visual arts, art education, and theater. She has a particular passion for puppetry, masks, and object performance, which integrate the body and the element of time into a narrative and cross the boundaries between disciplines. Amato is an Assistant Professor of Art Education at Boston University in the College of Fine Arts. In addition to teaching and research, Amato approaches scholarship through practice as an arts researcher. She has performed short works in various venues, including the Ballard Institute at U-CONN and Open Eye Figure Theater in Minneapolis. She has received numerous awards for her artistic work, including a Jerome Foundation grant and two Minnesota State Arts Board grants. She has published in *Puppetry International* and the *Journal of Mother Studies* and presented at a2ru (The Alliance for the Arts at Research Universities), USSEA (United States Society for Education through Art), NAEA (the National Art Educators Association), the CAA (College Arts Association), and Puppeteers of America. Amato currently serves on the Board of UNIMA-USA (Union Internationale de la Marionnette). Her interest in puppets and masks and their connection to the female body, as well as her focus on using object performance

to explore the abstract and the theoretical, developed during her doctoral work at UW-Madison, where she began working at the intersection of creative investigation and scholarship through arts-based and embodied research methods. She was chosen as an emerging artist for the Eugene O'Neill Center's National Puppetry Conference in 2018, where she created a puppet piece based on Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 work, *The Second Sex*. Last year, Amato convened a panel at the College Art Association entitled "Unmasking Complexities: The Mask in Global Contemporary Art," which laid the grounds for proposing this year's conference.

## **PAULA MANS, *CONFERENCE MANAGER***



**Paula Mans** / Master's  
Candidate in Art  
Education, Boston  
University & [Visual Artist](#)

Paula Mans is a former Reggio Emilia-inspired early childhood teacher based in Washington, DC. While Paula is a DC native, she spent many of her formative years living abroad in Tanzania, Mozambique, and Eswatini. Her experiences abroad led her to foster an interest in learning how various masking traditions have impacted the practices of

contemporary visual artists throughout the continent and the African diaspora. Paula Mans is an experienced researcher. As an undergraduate student, Paula Mans was granted the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship to study the works of Afro-Argentine poet, Horacio Mendizábal. Following college, Paula was granted the Fulbright research award to conduct a case study at a non-profit school for girls from low income neighborhoods in Salvador, Brazil. Paula is currently pursuing a Master's in Art Education at Boston University.

## **ALEXANDRA SIMPSON, *CONFERENCE COMMITTEE***



**Alexandra Simpson/** PhD  
Candidate in  
Environmental Studies at  
York University & Co-  
Artistic Leader of the  
[Animacy Theatre  
Collective](#)

Alexandra Simpson (she/her) is a Toronto-based theatre artist, community organiser, and PhD candidate at York

University in the Faculty of Environmental Studies. She holds a BFA in Performance Acting and an MFA in Documentary Media from Ryerson University, and an MA in Performance and Environmental Studies from the University of Toronto. Alexandra's doctoral research plays in the intersections of performance studies, decolonial and feminist theory, and the energy humanities, and investigates (un)masking as a performance strategy used both by anti-pipeline and Indigenous activists, as well as industry and governments. She is the co-artistic leader of Animacy Theatre Collective (ATC, [animacytheatrecollective.com](http://animacytheatrecollective.com)). ATC uses physical theatre (mask and clown), play writing, and multimedia to create research-based and devised plays. Recent co-creator and performer credits with ATC include *Upstream Downtown* (UPCOMING Theatre Direct 2021; Toronto Fringe, Toronto Clown Festival, Evergreen Brick Works, Scarborough Salmon Festival, 2018), *In Search Of* (Next Stage Festival, 2021); and *Pest Me Pet Me* (Theatre Passe Muraille, 2019). In 2019, Alexandra received the Ontario Arts Council Chalmers Professional Development Fund to study mask building at the Sartori International Workshop in the Art of Commedia dell'arte in Abano Terme, Italy, and in the Spring of 2022, with collaborator Felice Amato, and mentors Sarah Sartori and Paola Piizi, will return to Abano Terme with the support of the Canada Arts Council Artistic Residencies grant for an international collaboration that further explores the relationship between women and masks. Alexandra could not be more excited to be part of the organising team for the Women and Mask Conference at Boston University and is looking forward to a year of creative and intellectual exploration with other artists and thinkers who are as enchanted by masks as she is.

The land on which I live, work and play is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Toronto is in the '[Dish With One Spoon Territory](#)', a treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee that bound them to share the territory and protect the land. Subsequent Indigenous Nations and peoples, Europeans and all newcomers have been invited into this treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship and respect. I also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by the [Toronto Purchase, Treaty 13](#), signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the [Williams Treaty](#) signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

## **DEBORAH BELL, *CONFERENCE COMMITTEE***



**Deborah Bell**, Professor—  
Costume Design  
University of North Carolina at  
Greensboro

Deborah Bell has designed costumes for theatre, musicals, dance, and opera and recently retired as Professor of Costume Design at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she taught for forty-one years. During her career she lectured at universities in Japan, South Korea, Italy, Estonia, and the United States. A member of United Scenic Artists since 1977, Bell exhibited design work at the Prague Quadrennial and received the American College Theatre Festival's Faculty Recognition Award as well as the Southeast USITT Founders' Award for Outstanding Educator. In 2006 she

received the Herbert D. Greggs Award for her article, “The Mask Maker’s Magic.” Her book, *Mask Makers and Their Craft: An Illustrated Worldwide Study* (McFarland, 2010 – reprinted in 2014) became a best-seller in the Pop Culture category and is the culmination of interviews with mask makers in Mexico, Trinidad, Brazil, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Bali, Sweden, Italy, Nigeria, Malawi, and both coasts of the United States. She edited *Masquerade: Essays on Tradition and Innovation Worldwide* (McFarland, 2015).

In Nigeria she explored the work of mask makers influenced by Yoruba traditions, and in Malawi she studied sacred masks created for *Gule Wamkulu* (the Great Dance). She was especially fascinated with carnival designs in Trinidad and Mexican Day of the Dead masks, as well as the masks created by Balinese mask makers for sacred rituals. These special interests became the inspiration for *Designing Weddings and Other Ceremonies*, the course she developed and taught for several years. This course examined the cultural impetus of theatrical spectacle underlying sacred and non-sacred ceremonies and their rituals worldwide.

## **ELSA WIEHE, CONFERENCE COMMITTEE**



**Elsa Wiehe/** African  
Studies Center K-16  
Education Program  
Manager, Boston  
University

Elsa Wiehe currently leads the African Studies Center K-16 Education Outreach program at Boston University which has one central mission – to promote the study of Africa in U.S. schools through curriculum and professional development events. Elsa is a multilingual Mauritian and licensed K-6 teacher who taught English and French in elementary and secondary schools and worked as an educational consultant in West and Southern African countries. Her work as an educator is driven by a commitment to global educational justice through culturally responsive teaching in both pedagogical processes and the advancement of critical interdisciplinary content centered on African voices and knowledge. Elsa supports a number of struggles for class, racial and linguistic justice in her home of Mauritius. She holds an Ed.D. in Language, Literacy and Culture from Umass Amherst, where she also earned an M.Ed. in Multicultural, Bilingual and E.S.L. Education. Her research focuses on teacher discourse and place-based education in Mauritius, supporting English Language Learners and linguistic justice in policy and practice, and anti-racist teaching practices in teacher preparation.

**EMELY TORRES SELMO, *FALL CONFERENCE INTERN***





**Emely Torres**

**Selmo/**

Undergraduate  
Student, Boston  
University

Emely Torres is an undergraduate student majoring in Chinese Language and Literature at Boston University. The topic of this particular art conference appealed to her because of the prominence of masks as a result of the pandemic. In her free time, she likes to read, watch anything Pedro Pascal is in, and go on walks in hopes of running into dogs.

## **TENGYAO ZENG, *SPRING CONFERENCE INTERN***



**Tengyao Zeng**/ Undergraduate Student, Boston University

Tengyao Zeng is an undergraduate student majoring in sociology and minoring in applied human development. She was a think tank research fellow based in China, Shanghai. She conducted a field research project that examined how education impacts young women in Kenya and published an article in China Africa Project Journal. She is interested in the topic of this conference because it combines arts with education, women empowerment, and social issues together, which can create many meaningful and insightful conversations.

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## **DISABILITIES AND ACCOMMODATIONS**

Boston University strives to be accessible, inclusive, and diverse in our facilities, programming and academic offerings. Your experience in this event is important to us. If you have a disability (including but not limited to learning or attention, mental health, concussion, vision, mobility, hearing, physical or other health-related), require communication access

services for the deaf or hard of hearing, or believe that you require a reasonable accommodation for another reason, please contact [wmmasks@bu.edu](mailto:wmmasks@bu.edu) **3 weeks** prior to the event to discuss your needs.

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## **FAQS**



[Joan Schirle](#) in Second Skin

## **Q. HOW DO I REGISTER?**

**A.** Sign up to be on the [mailing list](#) to be notified about schedule updates and registration. You will receive a link in the

email notification when registration opens for a specific event or day. That link will take you to the registration for each event. While this may involve several steps, it helps to keep the conference contained and free of disruptions.

### **Q. IS THERE A COST?**

**A.** No, the conference is completely free. See [acknowledgements](#) for information on our funders.

### **Q. WHO CAN ATTEND?**

**A.** The conference is open to anyone who would like to attend. A few events may limit the number attendees. Any events held on the BU campus in conjunction with the conference are subject to the BU visitor policies at that time.

### **Q. DO I HAVE TO AND/OR CAN I REGISTER FOR EVERYTHING? OR IS THERE A LIMIT?**

**A.** Participants can choose single or multiple virtual events and some registration may cover a series of events on a single day. Some events may have a limited number of attendees and access isn't guaranteed.

### **Q. WHAT IF I MISS AN EVENT OR CAN'T ATTEND? WILL THERE BE A RECORDING?**

**A.** We will endeavor to record and make sessions available for a month. In some cases, presenters and/or organizers may choose to not make a recording available. Also, there can be technical difficulties or user error that interferes with recording. We will provide information about accessing missed sessions when recordings are available.

### **Q. IS IT JUST THE FOUR WEEKENDS?**

**A.** There may be additional sponsored events outside of the four weekends. Those on the mailing list will be notified.

### **Q. WHAT IF I DO NOT WANT TO REGISTER FOR THE MAILING LIST?**

**A.** The website will be updated regularly but the only way to receive links to register is through the mailing list.

### **Q. WHAT LANGUAGE IS THE CONFERENCE IN?**

**A.** The conference will be in English, for the most part. Many presenters are from non-English speaking countries and we will attempt to provide translation to facilitate their participation. We can try but in no way guarantee presenter translation to other languages at this time. Some people have had luck using a Google.

### **Q. WHAT TIME ZONE IS THE CONFERENCE IN?**

**A.** The conference times are based on Boston time (EST).

### **Q. WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCESSIBILITY OR NEED ACCOMMODATIONS?**

**A.** For questions about physical accessibility or to request a communication-related accommodation ( e.g. ASL Interpreters, Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART); assistive listening devices; hearing or induction loops),

please contact [wmmasks@bu.edu](mailto:wmmasks@bu.edu). Please submit requests for accommodations as soon as possible, ideally no later than 3 weeks prior to the event.

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