

Art from Art: A Possible Collaborative Documentation

Eszter Gál

*... From movement to lines
from sensation to colors
from palpable to abstract
from meta-teaching to meta-communication
from space to paper
from ephemeral to tactile
from moving to moving...*
— Eszter Gál

*... great inspiration
calligraphy by human bodies
distillation of the essence of moving...*
— Anna Holló



— Drawing by Anna Holló, Movement technique class, Studio Co.
Symptoms Budapest, February 2017

Ever since I became a co-founder and an active participant of project IDOCDE, I have been trying to discover my relationship to documentation – particularly my way of documenting the process of teaching dance. I came to two important conclusions with regard to my contribution to Mind the Dance: Firstly I am a person who operates well when working and collaborating with others. Secondly my focus and interest are more on the process than on the product. Naturally, when we talk about documentation, we know

that there must be a product of some kind at the end. It was a significant factor for me that the result or product of the documentation had to be alive and dynamic.

In order to contextualize my work Bertha Bermúdez Pascual made an interview with me, and based on that conversation I introduce and give insights about my research choice here. It is followed by an interview I have made with Anna Holló, the graphic designer to share our collaborative documentation process. Furthermore there are examples of drawings of her accompanied by brief descriptions of my class material.

Dancing My Way to Documentation

ENTRANCE INTO THE DANCING

I was a gymnast from age 6. I loved moving and gymnastics gave me a sense of being. I started dancing after finishing gymnastics and took many different styles of dance classes: jazz dance, ballet, contemporary, modern, tap dance, etc. I danced with a company for 2 years after graduating from the University of Physical Education.¹ At the age of 24 I went to study dance at *CNDO* later named *EDDC*² in Arnhem, Holland. Although I was dancing, performing and teaching dance I was searching for what dance meant to me and what kind of a dancer I was. Studying in Arnhem changed me and gave me the dancer, thinker, and creator I am today.

In Arnhem I discovered **knowing the body from within, the magic container, the artist self**. Through dancing I could express my thoughts and interests for communicating what moved me. At EDDC I studied many different body awareness methods and somatic works. The release work, specifically the Skinner Releasing Technique had a big influence on my dancing, creating, and teaching. As I had the curiosity to know more about its pedagogy, 3 years after graduation I went to study with Joan Skinner³ and became a certified Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT)⁴ teacher. Although I danced in a few projects and started choreographing, teaching was and still is the core activity of my work.

TEACHING

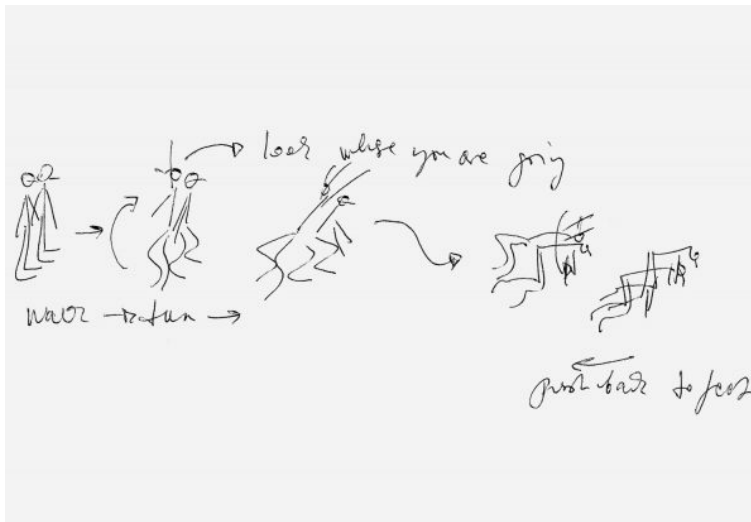
In 1995 a year after graduation at EDDC I was asked to teach the morning practice classes, later Contact Improvisation, composition, and also improvisation at EDDC. During those years at EDDC I developed my way of teaching, and I found a language and a method for sharing my interest of the moving body. Besides teaching in Holland I was regularly invited to Budapest to pass on my experiences in my home country. Currently, I teach somatic based movement technique at the University of Theatre and Film Arts in Budapest. I also teach improvisation, Contact Improvisation, and at times, composition and acrobatics.

CONTACT WITH VISUAL ARTS

My grandfather was a sculptor, he had a small workshop in his house full of small and quite large stone and marble figures, and I used to watch him hew out his sculptures. In high school, our literature teacher taught us to see 'inside' paintings, and thoughtfully guided us to let our imagination flow and talk as freely as possible about art. In Arnhem there was a fine interlace of students from the different art disciplines, and interaction

was easy. At EDDC there was a practice of using different means to express what happened inside while dancing, what resonated in us after moving. At times we reflected in writing, other times we made drawings with a pencil, or a pen, or a crayon or charcoal. It was done spontaneously – without much preparation, many times with eyes closed. **In the act of writing and drawing or painting I could connect the inner movements (my thoughts, sensations, emotions) with my body moving.** Writing and drawing gave me an added kinesthetic sense. Visual responses and lines of thoughts appeared. A visual image often can tell more than words. Making visual reflections of our experiences was to learn to be non-judgmental. **Making drawings became a practical tool for me to understand what ‘being non-judgmental’ meant.**

Another way of making drawings of movements comes from my studies at the University of Physical Education. I studied and practiced how to draw the gymnastic exercises with little line figures, which is a system of theirs. I used this system to remember phrases, exercises and dances I learnt. I have also been using it for planning my classes. Making a class plan with the line figure drawings is practical, fast, easy, and clear. For example, a drawing of a Contact exercise tells me what the exercise is. There is no need for using many words to describe it.



— Exercise plan for a CI class by Eszter Gál

Going back to my studies in Arnhem: most of the training and techniques were based on working with an image. An image could be anatomical, poetic, it could relate to nature or could arise from the sensation of moving. In this regard, Joan Skinner's technique is very specific as her images are metaphors for movement ideas. When I dance images come constantly. An image can move me. Many times I can visualize a sensation or even a thought. This helps me verbalizing my experiences. From sensing to moving to visualizing to verbalizing is my pathway from body to thought and back. But I am also concerned about the form or shape that the body takes while moving. Form is always there and it needs careful attention as we tend to take it for granted. It is important, for me, to spend time in exploring, diving into forms and going beyond them. In SRT we are seen as a network of energies, we are a unified whole – connected to the energies around us. **I'm interested in what makes the form fall into its place. I learned to trust that when sensation and initiation is followed, the form can just be ‘right’, unique and, each time, new.** How to translate and document this ‘forming’ process is a challenging question. I could describe it, but it is more intriguing to do that in capturing the essence of this path.

I like talking about teaching and looking at a class from the point of creation. I can see a dance class as an artistic process, where we can create something ‘bigger’ or ‘more’. We work in an environment that is formed together with the participants, with the material. When dancing together I can think of it as art making. For me a class itself can also become art as well as the teaching. I also like to think of the action, the being in the movement, being together in the moving, and the process of happenings as transformative. It ‘speaks’. It becomes something: together, collectively, with the body, through the body, through the whole self. Art becomes art in the process of receiving. In the studio we participants are the receivers. **So a class can possibly be a multiplied, multilayered art-making process.**

DOCUMENTING BY MAKING DRAWINGS

The choice of inviting Anna to my classes to document was based on her reflective drawings she made at the end of the SRT classes she took with me. After a few classes I noticed that her drawings captured something of the classes in a peculiar way. I got a sense of her journey, and a bit more. Something was visible from the processes, although she was drawing her experience and not the class. We started to dialogue and she came regularly to my classes at the University and to my open workshops. **I was interested in a simultaneous teaching and documenting process.** What kind of documentation is that? What is the result or outcome? What and how can it be used? What and how does it reflect, or give back from the teaching?

Anna was present in the classes with her whole being. She had a pencil or other drawing tool in her hand. She was sitting in front of a piece of paper, listening, watching, feeling the movements of the dancers, and she moved and drew in response: the documentation happened. So the movement of the documenter was essential. I asked her to engage and gave her freedom of how to be in the class. I had an awareness of her presence, and the kind of transformation that was there in the space. She was one with what was ‘out there’ and what was ‘inside of her’. She talks about sensing movements, in the interview that I made with her, as a way to get interested and dive into the making. She also has a relationship and interest in what and how I teach. This was important to us. This way our work is a dialogue, a duet. The documenting happens as an exchange. It is a process and we can look at the results, the drawings. Then the drawings can be given away.

The outcome then leaves the studio – taking what was there into the ‘world’, perhaps into an exhibition place. The pictures can have their own lives and the cycle goes on in a different way. People look at them, they might perceive the dance or not. It does not really matter, but art happens...

DRAWING AS A TOOL FOR REFLECTION AND SUPPORT

I found especially in the University that it is very useful to have drawings as feedback for building a different memory of what happened. It can also inspire the students towards making work. It is a useful learning tool that supports their understanding of their dance as well as giving value to their work.

Anna visited many of the classes at the University of Theatre and Film Arts. For those students studying movement, embodying form, and learning to see what is beyond form is essential. **I noticed that learning could really happen in the moment of reflecting and discussing the images.** It is also a secret trigger to get them excited about their movements and to motivate them to practice. It also keeps them in the process. It does not end with the class ending. The work with Anna also has no end. This documentation process also has no end, or one particular result or goal.

We never prepared for the classes with Anna, although discussed a few times if we should change our rather open process. But finally we decided to keep being open and meet with no preparation at all. I, only a few times, suggested her to take more time with creating one image and to allow herself to flow with the class, in order to enable her to be on her own artistic journey and really paint freely. Just use what was there, having the teaching as a compass for creating her art. I was curious to see, whether documenting this way, if the outcome would reflect the process differently. In those classes she used only watercolor and black ink, larger paper that had a different texture. The paper could soak in and blur the lines of the black ink. These pictures do have a different appearance. The images became even more abstract, had a different nature but we were still able to recognize which class it was and to see its focus, the dance, and the exercise.



— Painting by Anna Holló, Contact Improvisation class, Studio Co., Symptoms Budapest, June 2016

I also can talk about the dances that are portrayed. For example in the picture above: I see a trio dance where a duet and a solo are happening. In the duet the dancers are in physical contact, and I can see the direction of an arm, and a round shape that was kind of directed towards the solo person who is a bit smaller, so maybe the soloist is behind the duet. It could be a trio score: a contact duet where one of the dancers relating to the solo dancer. Perhaps, it is a play. You can see it or not.

Once she came to an ensemble improvisation class and made one drawing during a '15 minute improvisation' and another one towards the end. The first had many lines, curves and colors reflecting the many phases of the dance. It was rather chaotic (Drawing 1). The last was a clear, quiet, figurative drawing made with black pencil. Calmness, easiness, and peacefulness were there. We could see that something was transformed by the end of that dance (Drawing 2). But I think it is impossible to document an improvisation dance by drawing it, and yet it can still say something of that dance in a very open way. **The drawing speaks through a channel, through a language that was invented in the moment.**



— Drawing 1 by Anna Holló, Improvisation class, University of Theatre and Film Arts Budapest, May 2016



— Drawing 2 by Anna Holló, Improvisation class, University of Theatre and Film Arts Budapest, May 2016

DANCING DOCUMENTING – DOCUMENTING DANCING

When documenting in this way I like to refer to dance as a metaphor and this has two lines of thinking. One refers to looking at the documentation process as dance. The other is a dance that happens within us and with the space between Anna and me. There is ‘movement’ from me to Anna, and through her onto the paper, and from the paper to me, and it moves on. It is about us. So when I think about this as a dance, the documentation is a process rather than a product. For me the drawings of dances contain essences of the actions, sensations, energies in a way nothing else can. Having Anna documenting the classes gave space and room for interpretations. **I relate to Anna’s drawings as dance, because she is moving inside.**

Distillation of Essences:

Interview with Anna Holló by Eszter Gál

Eszter Gál: Could you introduce yourself briefly?

Anna Holló: My name is Anna Holló. I graduated from the University of Fine Arts in Budapest as a graphic designer, currently I am working in a family business manufacturing painted furniture and souvenirs while I also draw and illustrate books. I began dancing by taking 5Rhythm® classes 3,5 years ago. Since then I regularly draw and dance. I met you when I took your Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT) classes.

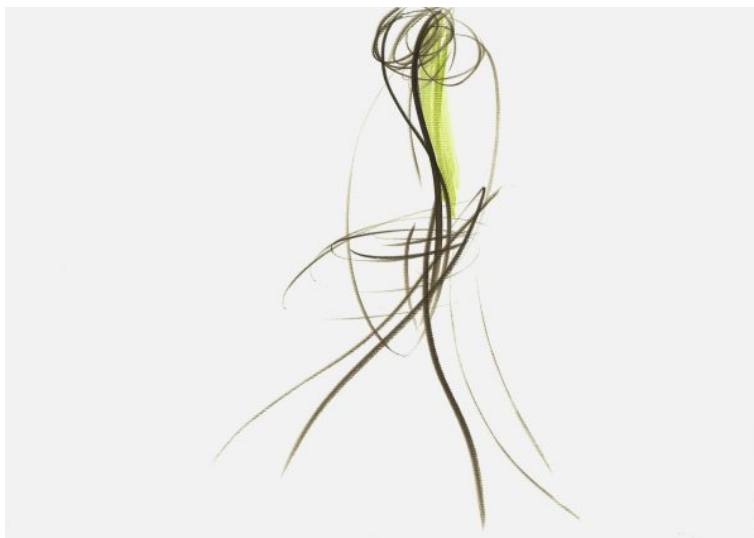
Eszter: Have you ever had the experience of your drawings directly relating to movement before this project?

Anna: No. There was no such level of connection between drawing and movement as in this project. It was the first time at the end of the SRT classes that I became aware of the connection between drawing and movement. I noticed how movement influenced the drawings, the lines and the shapes.

Eszter: As a graphic and visual artist you draw and paint. Has this project had an impact on your work?

Anna: Yes, I noticed its influence in my illustrations. I usually make small figurative pieces. Recently **I had the experience that the picture draws itself**. When I'm in an inspired state my experience is that the thing is just happening. Usually I like to let it happen what needs to happen.

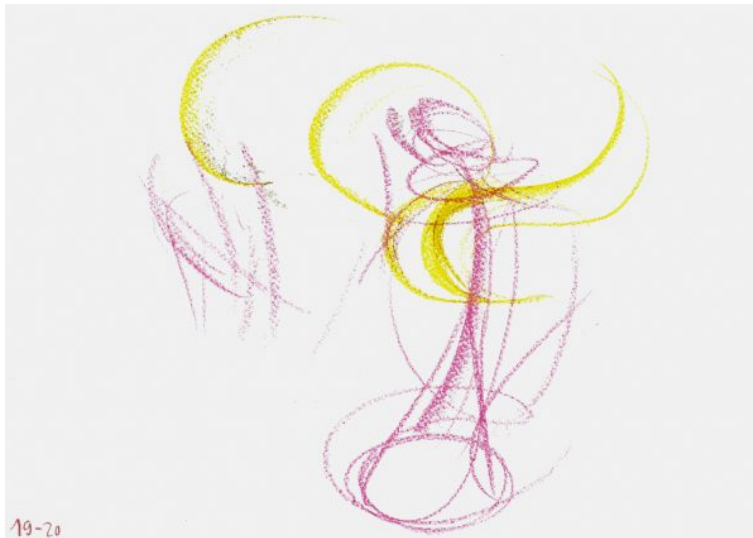
Eszter: I invited you to my contemporary dance classes to document by making drawings and paintings. Did the knowledge that your drawings would serve as documentation influenced your work?



Anna: I think it did and fortunately in the best way! Maybe when I was younger, this task would have frustrated me, but knowing you and our several conversations about my drawings following your SRT classes made me curious about this project. I felt such mutual trust and freedom in your invitation. You gave me the opportunity to experiment and the ‘we will see what comes out’ was encouraging. It was also obvious that I would not depict characters with anatomical accuracy, which was not even possible due to the flow of movement that activated a completely different area of the brain. I simply followed what was going on and allowed my hand to move on the paper. I really did not know what was going to appear and had a go with curiosity and joy. It was also important that we had a longer process not just one occasion. I became committed to this research, and **I was aware that the findings would unfold from the process.**

Eszter: To what extent are your drawings documenting what happened in the class? What and how do they reflect the class?

Anna: Looking at the drawings together, after the classes, was very useful to me. From your feedback I have learned how much they were understandable or traceable. I do my best to capture something. But it’s a bit like a singer singing in a language she does not perfectly understand. I question whether what I do can be used or not. How a picture looks is completely different from watching human movement. We can think about it aesthetically but when the drawing is documenting an action, it is important that it has a meaning of some kind. Knowing that you understood and saw behind the lines, and that it conveyed something to you was supportive and necessary.



— Drawing by Anna Holló, Movement technique class, University of Theatre and Film Arts Budapest, May 2016

By now, I can switch to a mode where the focus is not on the figures or on the details for the depicting of movement, but I can connect with the flow of the class, follow it, and the rest happens. This is definitely the fruit of knowledge and comes from experience. There were situations when I had more time and space to draw the characters, gestures of the participants, or even their personality – for example during a discussion or verbal sharing.

Eszter: Has all this experience brought any change in your work as a visual artist?

Anna: I did notice that, in some of the drawings I have made during the classes, certain motifs appeared that I knew I had already done before. It was a strange feeling: as if those lines existed in the ‘outside world’ and there were people who danced them.

Eszter: As if the sensations you experienced in the classes would redraw those lines?

Anna: Yes, it is a very strange feeling that raises the question whether these drawings truly document the class or they reflect my own internal world. I think the truth is somewhere in between. There were certain situations in the classes when the movements were so intense and complex, and the actions were multilayered (e.g.: a scored duet, or partner work, or improvisation) that it was more than I could take in. So what ends up appearing on the paper would definitely be a **distillation of the actions through my creative world**. But if I look at the drawings by keeping a distance from my creative world I can see what was going on in class and remember the exercise or the given focus. Therefore, I think, regardless of me they might retain whatever happened in the classroom. But of course there are many confusing drawings that simply do not talk to me, and I cannot recall anything of that moment in the class. This may be due to tiredness or difficulty of connecting. But even that feels right and exciting. I think the drawings do document the dance classes. Making them is a creative, artistic process. I think I wouldn’t have developed my creative skills in this direction by my own personality or interest. In addition, yours and the participants dedicated involvement in the creative process humbled my artistic ‘ego’. **As motion gives me a visual experience, the visual gives a kinetic experience.** It’s exciting to observe what can be generated in me, by the movement of others, and what kind of drawings appear. All of this makes the movement and the drawing a whole.

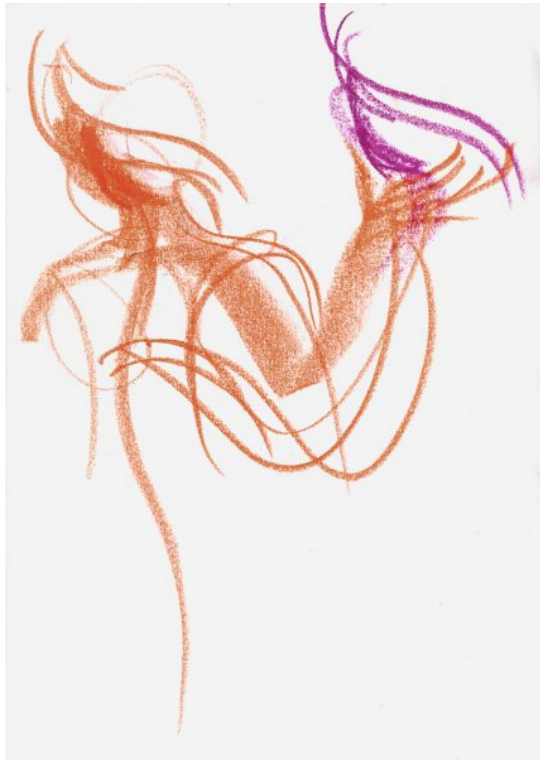
Eszter: What do you actually draw in the classes? How can you visualize the teaching?



— Drawing by Anna Holló, Movement technique class, Studio Co. Symptoms Budapest, February 2017

Anna: It has been changing and the direction has always been given by the situation. When there was a discussion or partner work, resting, or a warm-down with not much moving, then I could slow down and be affected by the more tangible forms. The position of the body, the details of the person influenced me, and it was obvious what I drew. In other cases your words, instructions, and the way you told them led my hand.

For example, if you named a part of the body, it would be in my focus and it could be the essence of the drawing.



— Drawing by Anna Holló, Movement technique class, University of Theatre and Film Arts Budapest, April 2016

For example, when one of the dancers supported the base of skull of the other, it made me draw that part of the body with a thicker line. I was also experimenting with ‘line phase drawings’ which could reflect longer movement sequences. These lines have an effect like a flip book animation. I often watched the body parts that were emphasized. Other times when you used a metaphor, attribute, or an image (e.g. long limbs or threads connecting the fingertips and the vertebrae as they travel through the front of the torso), I followed those and in my pictures exaggerated them. When you mentioned roundness it also appeared in my drawings.



— Drawing by Anna Holló, Movement technique class, University of Theatre and Film Arts Budapest, April 2016

Often I was driven by the images, the sensations you gave to the dancers to support their movement exploration, and the experimenting was what I wished to include. I cannot document the work of the joints, the tension, the movement, or the biological action of the muscles. The cells remember, they ‘document’. **I can visualize the perception, the focus of attention, energy, the space, and the direction of the connections.**

Eszter: You mentioned sensation and perception. Did the movement of the dancers give you kinesthetic sensations? If so, how did it help or support your process?

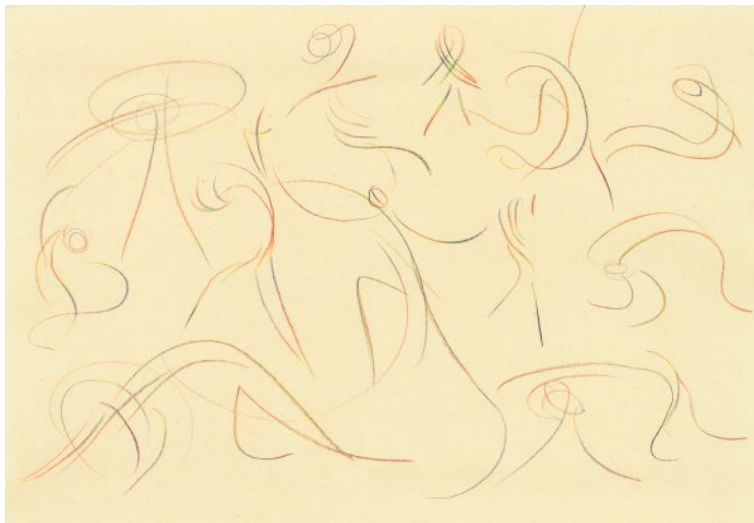
Anna: Yes. Often I did feel the movement inside, specifically when the dancers were moving from sensation. I could dive into the moving and draw from there. **But when a movement completely unknown to me was practiced, it was almost impossible to give it back.** To reflect visually such specific, formally determined movements requires knowledge of forms and anatomy at a rather high level. However I am interested in how to best retain this in drawing a particular movement sequence.

What also concerns me is how to catch the essence of a quality or a completely grotesque situation. How can I follow the course of a movement and portray it when there is almost no time to think? Sometimes the head or limbs are shown or indicated but the picture reflects something else. The question is: how can I get the most out of the least and display the essence? Sometimes I succeed, especially when the dancers completely surrender themselves to the dance. In these cases, for me, it is a multi-artwork that appears in the space. It is in these situations you, as the teacher, are the conductor who holds the space, drives the attention, gives inspiration for the dance to happen and dancers to create freely. Then something actually moves in space, just as the space itself is moving, and that’s what moves me too.

Eszter: The shapes created by the bodies, the space between them, and the condensation and opening of space, all these could become visible. I saw in your drawings that my intentions were mirrored, although they were never shared in advance.

Anna: I felt the exciting possibility of how the drawings could serve as a useful guide. The interpretation of drawings, what the students observed and detected could be a tool for learning, and might even give intellectual inspiration. This form of documentation

might be a different reminiscence of experience than a description or photo or video, and the body also remembers differently.



— Drawing by Anna Holló, Movement technique class, University of Theatre and Film Arts Budapest, May 2016

Eszter: Yes, what appears on the paper is a result of a transformation. Many drawings create a world with an underlying content that can be freely interpreted. The drawings are being made in the process of a class. The ‘product’ is the imprint of the ephemeral dance born in time and space.

Anna: The image that appears is the ‘distillation’ of the dance that happens – even if I have no intention to display it. This is simply an occurrence. My intention is to return to the process itself or to the essence of the process.

Eszter: Do you think these drawings can be considered as stand-alone works of art?

Anna: At times it was interesting to look at the drawings as Fine Art work apart from where and how they were created. Sometimes **I can see the drawings as gesture calligraphy that arouses sensation by themselves.** I think, it is noticeable, that some of the drawings are displaying a dance. Or when it is not a dance, certainly an energy flow created by some kind of movement can be felt. An exciting next step would be to show these to people who are interested and ask them to express their feelings and ideas.

Eszter: Documentation and/or work of art?

Anna: I think both.



— Painting by Anna Holló, Contact Improvisation class, Studio Co.Symptoms Budapest, June 2016

Eszter: Artistic creation while documenting the process.

Anna: I can imagine that it will hold my interest for a long time and I will continue this kind of ‘recording’. Whether it’s art or documentation, it remains for posterity.

NOTES

1. University of Physical Education in Budapest, Hungary (studies in PE pedagogy and Physiotherapy 1985-89).
2. CNDO – Center for New Dance Development, EDDC – European Dance Development Center, Arnhem, NL.
3. Joan Skinner has a lifetime of achievement in the worlds of dance performance and pedagogical innovation. What we now know as Skinner Releasing Technique took shape from the early 1970s, as she refined and codified the material and approaches she was developing.
www.skinnerreleasingnetwork.org/about-joan-skinner
4. Skinner Releasing Technique: www.skinnerreleasing.com