

# Stretching Limits



ANNIE BUCKLEY TALKS WITH YOGA INSTRUCTOR SEANE CORN ABOUT HER CONSCIOUS REVOLUTION

*"As we continue to seek inward, we must choose also to reach outward and consider not just how can yoga change me, but instead, how can I, through this powerful practice, help change the world?"—Seane Corn*

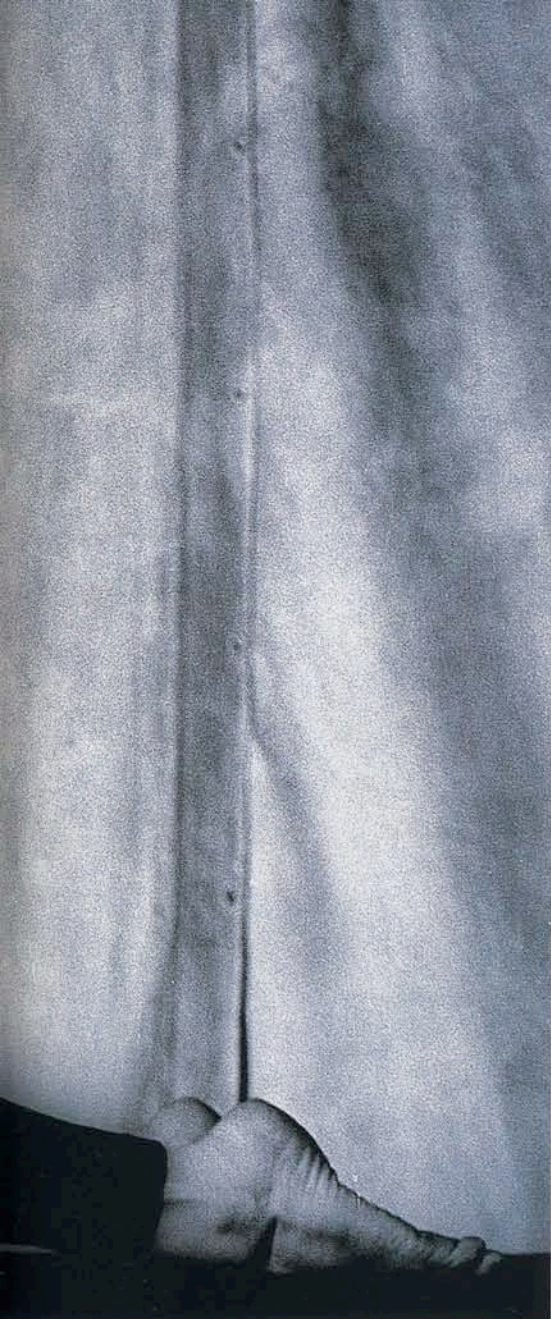
If anyone is going to rally the vast and diverse yoga community around a cause, this petite powerhouse with a mane of golden curls is the one to do it—Seane Corn began teaching yoga in Los Angeles in 1995, shortly after yoga fever hit the States and to hear her tell it, she rode the wave as yoga gained in popularity. But this teacher's rise from novice instructor to being the "yoga face" of Nike owes far more to good teaching than good timing. Seane's dedication and compassion, combined with abundant enthusiasm and a refreshingly candid approach, have made her one of the most sought after teachers in the country.

Over the course of the last decade, yoga has morphed from an

ancient Indian spiritual discipline into a multibillion dollar American industry and, sure, the spiritual part is still vital, but how and to what extent business has changed the practice is a much-debated yoga quandary. Rather than deliberate the pros and cons of the marketplace, Seane decided to take action. In 2005, she founded Off the Mat, Into the World, an initiative with the goal of mobilizing yoga businesses, teachers, and practitioners to donate funds and energy to YouthAIDS, the HIV/AIDS education and prevention initiative of Population Services International (PSI) aimed at motivating kids between the ages of fifteen to twenty-four to get educated, get tested, and get involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Committed to the spiritual principles of compassion and service, Seane wanted to find a way for the explosion of the yoga marketplace to function as a bridge, rather than a hindrance, to spirit-minded community action. "The yoga community has never as a whole ever rallied around something," Seane says, and to harness that energy, "I thought, I wonder what would happen if I was able to use the plat-

B&W PHOTOS BY NORMAN SEEFF; OFF THE MAT PHOTO BY JAMES WINNER



what-if? Seane is exuberant about the support she has received for this idea from the yoga community since and estimates the donations for 2006 at \$300,000, adding that, “to me, it’s just a beginning.”

With a packed teaching schedule that has her away from home forty-two weekends each year, Seane still finds time to raise funds and raise awareness. And in addition to her trainings, classes, and retreats, Seane created a new kind of workshop called Spiritual Activism. The key to all of these dynamic classes is to remain true to the spiritual roots of yoga, encouraging students to honor their breath and body, as well as to find ways to carry the bliss of yoga into their everyday lives. Spiritual Activism takes this concept to the next level, guiding students how to apply the patience, strength, and humility of yoga to helping others. Wondering where to begin? Seane offers this tip from her own experience, “Wherever your biggest shadow is, that could be your biggest light.”

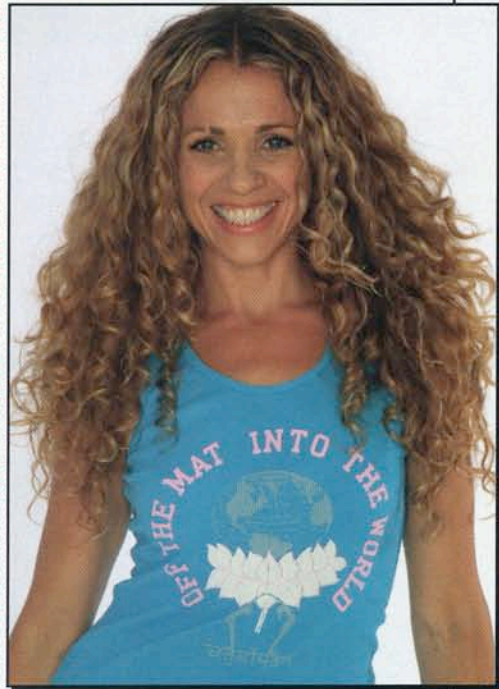
When she found that her own yoga practice had created a happier and more centered feeling in her own life, she started to look for ways to share that experience with others. “I was passionate about high-risk youth because I had experienced that, so I had empathy.” Despite fear that she would experience the pain of recognition in the faces of her young students, in 1999 Seane began a successful yoga program at Children of the Night youth shelter. She left home herself at seventeen and could relate to their concerns but says that, “I didn’t know how transformative this experience would be.”

Teaching at the shelter, Seane soon realized that there were a high number of cases of HIV/AIDS among the teens. She had educated herself about the pandemic two decades earlier; her first job away from home was at Heaven, a gay sex club in Manhattan, and when many of her friends there became sick with HIV/AIDS, she quickly

learned the facts about transmission to dispel rumors.

At the shelter, she discovered that her students had access to the medication necessary to live full and healthy lives. But when friend and yoga student, Ashley Judd, a Global Ambassador to YouthAIDS, explained the plight of millions of children and teens worldwide, Seane was stunned to realize how few had access to medication and knew immediately that she wanted to contribute in some way. She founded Off the Mat, Into the World shortly thereafter, and has served as the National Yoga Ambassador for YouthAIDS since 2005, building aware-

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form that I have to be an effective way to raise awareness. A lot of companies in the yoga community will come to me and want me to wear their product, but I’ve always been resistant to that. So I thought, what if I went to a company and I said, I’ll wear your product, and I’ll support your company, but the money from this particular product, we’ll funnel it over here to YouthAIDS.”

The first company Seane approached, Gaiam, was “incredibly supportive” and worked with her to create a 100 percent organic T-shirt with the YouthAIDS logo. The T-shirt, together with additional fundraising, including musical concerts, helped Off the Mat, Into the World raise \$65,000 in the first year—not bad for a

ness of the AIDS pandemic—and conscious action—among the yoga community. As Seane puts it, “why just stretch when we can reach?” And she has the experience to back it up.

For more information on Seane Corn, log on to [www.seanecorn.com](http://www.seanecorn.com). For more information on YouthAIDS, visit: <http://projects.psi.org>.

Annie Buckley is a freelance writer and artist based in Los Angeles, California. Visit her Web site at: [www.anniebuckley.com](http://www.anniebuckley.com).