

FRAMED MOVEMENTS

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Intermission by Maria Hassabi (2013)
Photo: Robertas Narkas

Framed Movements brings together new and recent work by Australian and international artists who use choreography as a critical tool in their practice. Broadly understood, choreography is a movement-based approach to the occupation of time and space, and these artists employ choreographic tools — such as devised movement, sequencing, notation, improvisation and scores — to orchestrate movement within their works. Presented across a range of platforms, both temporal and material, the exhibition demonstrates the ways in which today's artists are using these methods to engage and challenge the vernaculars of various sites, behaviours and artistic disciplines.

Framed Movements is part of a larger dialogue in which recent exhibitions and publications have considered the historical relationship between the visual arts and dance, and, more specifically, the contemporary return to choreography.¹ It takes place at a time when audiences for contemporary performance festivals are growing and diversifying, and visual art institutions are including more live works in their programs, even in their collections. However, this

exhibition does not prioritise the performance encounter nor seek to add to the spectacle of the experience economy — a criticism of much contemporary performance and participatory art presented in museums.² Instead it uses the frame of the exhibition structure, intermittently activated through a series of performances and demonstrations, to provide a space for analytical and philosophical considerations of the ways in which artists adopt established choreographic devices.

The exhibiting artists have come to employ choreographic techniques, not through an interest in dance, its history or tropes specifically, but through investigations central to their visual practice. In pursuit of ideas concerning the body, technology, architecture and representation (among other things) they use choreographic tools as generative principles through which to address movement more directly in their work.

Movement can be defined as the actions and gestures happening in,

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around and between us; movement happens in relation to objects, structures, environments; it is both conscious and unconscious; and it occurs through time. Dance can be broadly understood as a disciplinary language applied to movement, which uses its own complex grammar to filter movement through a history of structures and contexts to engage the performer and audience in an embodied experience. Movement and dance are in no way oppositional to each other, but movement is always occurring, with or without us. Dance is premeditated and exists as an important discipline of movement, but as

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only one of many disciplines. Choreography sits somewhere in between, offering a conscious way of framing — observing, considering and ordering — the movement occurring around us to bring it to a point of focus.³

This emphasis on movement marks a subtle shift in the ongoing relationship between the visual arts and dance — a relationship widely analysed and dissected in recent times. Dance and the visual arts have had a symbiotic relationship - from the early 20th-century costume and set designs of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes to the sculptural costumes of constructivist theatre and the Bauhaus, from Merce Cunningham's 1950s' interdisciplinary collaborations with Robert Rauschenberg to Robert Morris's performance of minimalist sculpture, from Anna Halprin's visual scores to Simone Forti's pioneering transgressions of public and private space, from the multimedia works of William Forsyth to Mark Leckey's iconic postmodern portrait of dance's relationship to subculture.⁴

This relationship has moved from the scenic to the spatial, from the structural to the philosophical, and from the collective to the collaborative. Now, however, artists are extracting choreography from its conventional home to consider modes of movement more broadly, just as choreographers borrow from the visual languages of artists to address aesthetic elements in their work. In its conception, *Framed Movements* acknowledges this shift. It asserts choreography is no longer confined to dance but is practised across the realm of contemporary art.

In his 2012 anthology, *Dance*, academic André Lepecki accounts for the visual arts' current interest in the choreographic. He believes this interest is based on the ability of dance's main constitutive qualities (ephemerality, corporeality, precariousness, scoring and performativity) to 'harness and activate critical and compositional elements crucial to the fusion of politics and aesthetics that

characterises so much of the contemporary art scene and sensibility'.⁵ At a more elemental level, Tate contemporary art-performance curator, Catherine Wood, understands it as, 'the simplest and most economical meeting point between behaviour and aesthetics'.⁶ The reasoning is as diverse as the artistic approaches undertaken, but at a fundamental level the current focus on movement through choreography can be attributed to the body's instinctive need for agency, economy and engagement in the contemporary developed world.

At a time when the physical body risks being undermined by the virtual mobility of the internet, by screen culture and by shifting labour conditions, the need to challenge the spatial absences and limitations associated with these technologies and to position the body as a tangible and empowered site is pressing. Bodies are seeking out other bodies and points of connection between physical beings rather than data and commerce.

Artists are also responding to the growing entertainment economy and thinking through ways in which to position their work — not in resistance to our growing desire for interaction and participation, but in recognition that attention spans and the ability for sustained contemplation are becoming shorter as the world around us grows larger. Significantly, artists are returning to the body as a site of economy, just as they did in the 1960s.⁷ Working with the body enables mobility, self-reliance and a fiscal reality that is appealing in a period of economic instability and continuing questions about the art market. A focus on movement requires minimal means with the potential for elaborate outcomes, both conceptual and physical. The elemental nature of the body's movements also allows for a shared sensitivity between high and low cultures; it speaks across divides and it unites.

Parallels can be drawn between curatorial and choreographic methodologies. Both seek to observe, distil, arrange and present significant information from the world around them. The choreographer's medium may historically have been the body, just as the curator's was the collection and exhibition; but both practices have extended into wider applications, far beyond their original remit.⁸ *Framed Movements* does not seek to position itself within this specific reflexive context, though its curation has undoubtedly been informed by some of the meta-conventions of the choreographic: gesture, time, space, audience and document.⁹ The audience is not consciously positioned as 'dancer', and yet it could be argued that the exhibition layout determines a path of movement, points of material engagement and conceptual texture that may act as trigger points for the viewer's physical and cerebral response. While experienced in time and space, *Framed Movements* adheres to the conventions of the gallery in its presentation format, temporal framework and mode of audience engagement.

This catalogue contains two commissioned pieces of writing that

elucidate the historical and contemporary terrain in which *Framed Movements* locates itself. Dance academic Sally Gardner's text charts the development of choreography from the early 20th century to the present day, positioning the notion of choreography as it exists within the world of dance. She pays particular attention to the impact of modern dance on the development of choreography, before charting the path of postmodern dance and its relationship to visual art. Coming from the other end, Anneke Jaspers' text begins by focusing on the return to the artistic strategies and concerns of the 1960s, citing passive consumption, social alienation and ubiquitous spectacle as enduring conditions. She identifies the postmodern practice of choreographer Yvonne Rainer as the most significant bridge between dance and post-war art, and discusses its lasting impact on the cross-pollination between these two disciplines. Jaspers' text provides an argument about the uncoupling that has occurred between

choreography and dance, and the rise of choreographic concerns and approaches into the work of art more broadly.

The works in *Framed Movements* have been drawn together somewhat intuitively, and this perhaps reflects the resounding significance of simple movement in our lives. The ability of the body to be both minimal and elaborate empowers it to be perhaps our most important means of receiving and acting upon the world around us. The terrain covered by Gardner and Jaspers has left space for a focused discussion of the works themselves and in the following pages they are considered through the framing devices of some of choreography's central concerns. Through these frames the presence of the choreographic within contemporary visual practice is made apparent. Through these frames the importance of movement is made material.

1 *Dance Your Life: Dance and the Visual Arts in the 20th and 21st Centuries*, Centre Pompidou, 23 November – 2 April 2012; *Dance/Draw*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 7 October 2011 – 16 January 2012; *MOVE: Choreographing You*, Hayward, London, 13 October 2010 – 9 January 2011; *While Bodies Get Mirrored: An Exhibition about Movement, Formalism and Space*, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, 6 March – 30 May 2010; *Dance with Camera*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 11 September 2009 – 21 March 2010; *What I Think About When I Think About Dancing*, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney, 16 November 2009 – 2 January 2010. In 2012, Tate London developed an online performance space called *BMW Tate Live*: 'a series of performances commissioned and conceived exclusively for the online space, and the first artistic program created purely for live web broadcast'. See <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/eventseries/bmw-tate-live-2014>. In 2014 Para Site, a contemporary art organisation in Hong Kong, convened *Is the Living Body the Last Thing Left Alive*, a three day conference to address the concerns and tensions raised by presenting and collecting live works within institutions generally geared towards presenting visual artworks.

2 See Andy Horwitz, 'Visual art performance vs. contemporary performance', 25 November 2011; accessed at <http://www.culturebot.org/2011/11/11663/visual-art-performance-vs-contemporary-performance/>.

3 The framing of these ideas has been developed in conversation with a number of choreographers, artists and dancers, in particular Shelley Lasica and Agatha Gothe-Snape.

4 This selection of examples is illustrated in the following works: *Parade* (1917) a Ballet Russes performance with costumes and sets designed by Pablo Picasso; *Triadisches Ballett* (1922) a ballet developed by Bauhaus painter, sculpture, designer and choreographer Oskar Schlemmer; Merce Cunningham's dance work *Minutiae* (1954), with assemblages by Robert Rauschenberg; *Bodyspacemotionthings* (1971), an installation by Robert Morris of objects for audience activation that was first installed at the Tate London and had to be closed after four days due to the unexpected and over enthusiastic response of the audience; Anna Halprin's *RSVP Cycle* scoring process — developed in collaboration with her architect husband Lawrence Halprin, this visual scoring system relied on the following tenets: [R] identifying human and material resources that form the basis for an action, [S] scoring the process and instructions that direct actions, [V] 'valuation', testing and evaluating possible actions and, finally, [P] the performance of the score; Simone Forti's task-orientated dance work *Huddle* (1961) was among the first to be presented

in galleries, private houses and on the street; William Forsyth's *Scattered Crowd* (2002), is one of many of his installations that use choreography as an organisational practice combined with design, architecture and art historical references. Since the 1990s, visual artist have also used dance more explicitly in their work, such as Gillian Wearing's *Dancing in Peckham* (1994) and Mark Leckie's *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999). A more recent example is Tino Sehgal's exhibition of choreographed performances at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London (2003), which perhaps marks the beginning of the current return to the choreographic in contemporary visual art practice.

5 André Lepecki (ed.), *Dance*, Whitechapel Gallery, London & The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2012, pp. 15–16.

6 Catherine Wood, *Yvonne Rainer: The Mind Is a Muscle*, Afterall, London, 2007, p. 1.

7 While *Framed Movements* is part of a broader dialogue between dance and the visual arts, it also extends certain considerations of my exhibition *Power to the People: Contemporary Conceptualism and the Object in Art*, presented at ACCA in partnership with the 2011 Melbourne Festival. *Power to the People* traced the lineage of 1960s' conceptual art and its relationship to contemporary notions of art-making. *Framed Movements* further reflects on the influence of the historic mid-century period where challenges to the status quo and the advent of the happening, performance and installation art inaugurated to expand a practice that brought artists, dancers, sound artists and others together to create works that stretched beyond the boundaries of artistic disciplines towards society and the audience. *Framed Movements* is particularly concerned with the expanded notion of the choreographic formulated during this time and its influence on contemporary practice.

8 In 2008, French curator Mathieu Copeland made a landmark exhibition entitled *Choreographing the Exhibition* that was based on a series of movements composed by eight visual artists and executed by three dancers over the two-month period of the show. This project has recently been published in a book that takes shape as both manifest and anthology, providing an overview of the relation between choreography and exhibitions through five perspectives: score, space, time, the body, and memory. To date it is the most strident example of the shared methodological terrain between the curatorial and choreographic practice.

9 The exception to this position is the work of Melbourne choreographer Lee Serle, which was conceived while undertaking a residency at ACCA and directly addressing the spatial and cultural context of ACCA as a site for dance.