

Engaging audiences with museum exhibits through dance performances

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The dialogue between dance and the museum traces back to the end of the nineteenth century, when the first live attractions were introduced within the collections of Barnum's American Museum in New York (Hayes 5). During the twentieth century, dance artists such as Isadora Duncan, Merce Cunningham, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti and Anna Halprin contributed to the creation of a museum context that promoted the coexistence of art disciplines, allowing dance to offer new models for engaging with objects and, at the same time, to reinvent itself as the art of movement (Lepecki 155). This relation between dance and the museum holds firm in the twenty-first century. In particular, in our century, the quest for new and creative strategies that enhance and expand the possibilities of how people perceive art has increased and, thus, the role of dance and performance in the museum has become even more present and important. In the last two decades in particular, dominant museums such as the MET, MoMA, Louvre, National Gallery in London, Tate Modern, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and WIELS have started to reconsider the museum's object-centric framework and to participate in projects that incorporate dance in the museum experience.

This article explores the engaging power of the dancing body in embodied modes of cognition in the museum context. Based on theoretical concepts that support the activation of all the senses inside the museum and consider the aesthetic appreciation of art as a highly personal and embodied experience, it examines diverse dance projects in the museum, such as the exhibition "Pearls" at the Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden (2012–2013), the seventh residency of the project "Dancing Museums" at the National Gallery, London (2016), "The Museum Workout" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2016–2017) as well as the first residency of the "Dancing Museums" project at the Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa (2015). The above projects introduce the insertion of the live body in the museum in a way that celebrates the embodied nature of the appreciation of art and aims to evoke visitors' physical activity. However, the reason why I chose to deal with these particular cases is their common focus on the role of dance artists as facilitators who create participatory dance acts and intend to make visitors aware of their bodies, of the space around them as well as

of the exhibited art. This paper will not deal with the artistic value of the choreographies as artworks, as this constitutes another subject for discussion. The analysis of my research question will be conducted along three axes that act simultaneously: the museum space, the bodies of the dancers and the bodies of the visitors. In particular, it focuses on how the intervention of dance in the museum is able to redefine the space, how dance artists move and use their bodies and, of course, in which ways the visitors' bodies and senses are activated.

Evoking visitors' physical activity

"Pearls in the Arts, Nature & Dance" was an exhibition of Museum De Lakenhal in Leiden, the Netherlands, curated by a guest curator, dancer and choreographer, Karin Post. "Pearls" linked natural history, cultural history and contemporary art, with contemporary dance occupying centre stage. The heart of the exhibition was an audio play – a dramatic narrative which guided visitors through the rooms of the museum. The exhibition narrated the story of a little girl on the Pacific coast who found a pearl and travelled through history, from the traditional cultures of the South Seas, to the materialistic culture of the West (Knol 5). Artists from different disciplines – visual artists, composers, authors, choreographers, dancers and filmmakers – were invited to create artworks inspired by the story, developing an interdisciplinary project which occupied all the rooms of the Museum De Lakenhal, creating a conversation with parts of its permanent collection. The exhibition also incorporated artworks by Post, mainly short films and computer animations.¹

"Pearls" constituted an intriguing paradigm of a multisensory museum experience, and I specifically chose to discuss it because choreography played a crucial role in the exhibition. The concept of the multisensory museum describes the ideal museum space that attempts to facilitate a dialogue between the exhibits and the visitors through the activation of their senses. According to this concept, a museum experience should have an existential, multisensory and embodied nature, as the aim of an exhibition is to become a personal experience based on embodied sensation instead of offering intellectualised information or just visual stimuli (Pallasmaa 240–241). "Pearls" transformed the museum into a platform for dance, giving visitors the opportunity to experience how the visual arts, film and music can relate to movement (De Vries 13). This exhibition, characterised by the director of the museum as an innovative museological choreography, permitted a broader application of the concept of choreography, which was transformed from classic performative dance expression to spatial motion arrangements in the wider context of contemporary art (Knol 5, 7). This idea

could be linked to Mathieu Copeland's definition of choreography. "Exhibition (...) noun – a material, textual, textural, visceral, visual ... choreographed polyphony" (Copeland 19). Copeland equates choreography with the result of curating and organizing materials, bodies, space and temporal frameworks (Brannigan 12). He talks about the multisensorial dimension of any exhibition and compares it to choreography; "choreography is something that could happen everywhere, at all times, with and for everyone" (Copeland 23). Without being restricted to the concept of dance choreography, "Pearls" formed an exhibition with a multisensorial dimension which represented a concept of a composition for living bodies.

It is important to examine how this exhibition was integrated into the space of a city museum that had not experimented with such an interdisciplinary project before; how the rooms of the museum were redefined and connected to the exhibition. An important component of "Pearls" was that it was not actualised in a white cube environment but in the rooms of the museum's permanent collection. The dominance of the white cube as an ideal exhibition for the art museum reflects a distinct psychological and sociological understanding of the institution of art and carries a refusal to consider this spatial, corporeal, and temporal context of the experience of art (O'Neill 40). To the contrary, "Pearls" constituted an interesting experimentation with the museum collection, enforcing the idea of the physical engagement with the arts and, in this situation, with historical objects and paintings, whose display usually stays "untouched".

In particular, Post used a colour palette designed by Peter Struycken as a very effective tool, in order to include the paintings that were on the walls of the museum in her presentation. All the exhibition rooms were coloured in twelve shades of blue according to that palette, creating the atmosphere that she needed in order to transform the museum space with the choreography into a space of experimentation and imagination (De Vries 16). Installations were constructed and films were projected on the walls of the museum, aiming at a meaningful interaction between the narration, movement and permanent exhibits. An example of this interaction could be Peter Delpout's commission to make a film in dialogue with David Bailly's 1651 painting *Vanitas met portret van een jonge schilder*, which belongs to the museum's collection. In collaboration with the choreographer-duo LeineRoebana and the fashion designer Aziz Bekkaoui, Delpout shot a film about three generations of women who meet in dance in the museum rooms (De Vries 19).

It is important to note that in the context of this exhibition, the art of dance was present through videos and installations and not through live performances, with an exception at the opening and on a few more dates. Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe that performance dance videos also have the potential to offer embodied experiences. For example, there are videos with an instructional character that ask the audience to move or respond to certain prompts, creating a live and lived experience. In addition, videos can provide a very intimate experience of the body through extreme close-ups that allow the spectators to experience their body in a different way.² In the case of the Lakenhal museum, dance videos and installations, in combination with the audio narration, were able to lead the visitors through the exhibition space, which was actually the whole museum. We could say that this transformation of the museum's rooms highlighted the idea of the museum as an object and encouraged the intrigued visitors to explore and to experience the building differently.

Dance outside the theatre space, and brought into the museum in a live or in a recorded way, is always a challenge for artists, museum professionals as well as visitors. "Pearls" was a project that permitted the realisation of the concept of the multisensory museum, combining audio (narration and music), drawings, sculptures, animation, filmed dance performances and, exceptionally, live dance. Even though no evaluation outcome has been published, the discussion with Nicole Roepers permitted me to delve into the responses of the visitors and the way that their body was activated in the context of this exhibition.³ It seems that the way that these different mediums and disciplines were combined created an overwhelming experience that sometimes did not have the expected results on the part of the visitors' response. In particular, the exhibition was conceived as a very complex experience for the visitors, as all their senses were activated and working all the time. Some of them chose to stop listening to the narration on the audio guide and, thus, to experience the visual part of the exhibition without the audio. As Roepers describes, most of them listened to the audio narrative later, in peace and quiet, in the museum café, and possibly did a small tour again. The particularity of such a multidisciplinary exhibition elicited extreme reactions of love or hate towards the project. There were no in-between reactions. How can we explain this fact?

To start with, it seems that "Pearls" was conceived as a very experimental project. One of the reasons why this multisensory project was characterised as experimental could be because it was actualised in a city museum full of historical objects and not in a museum of contemporary art; this parameter of the

unexpected resulted in different kinds of reaction. The fact that almost all the different rooms of the museum were used for this exhibition offered a completely new experience, not only to people who had not visited the museum before but especially to those who knew the museum quite well. According to Roepers, most of the people who did not like the exhibition were those who were visiting the museum for its collection; they were uncomfortable at being confronted with the lights, audio and movement spread throughout the museum space.

Other aspects of the project that made some people feel uncomfortable were the live dancing performances, even though they were limited. For example, during a performance where dancers rolled down the stairs of the museum, some people were annoyed because they had to wait before they could enter a specific room. The uncomfortable responses to the element of movement and dance that the project contained were not limited to visitors but also to employees of the museum and, in particular, to people who were responsible for the security of the building and of the objects of the permanent collection. In particular, they did not like the movement and the excitement that the exhibition brought to the museum because of the potential danger to the objects of the collection. This was one of the reasons why the whole project was not really positively evaluated by the museum staff, according to Roepers.⁴ In addition, apart from a section of visitors that did not expect this kind of concept in the Museum De Lakenhal, some of the press related to the visual arts did not welcome this innovation or chose not to even review the exhibition. In particular, as stated by Roepers, magazines or online websites dedicated to the visual arts did not review the exhibition probably because they deemed it was more a project of dancers and choreographers and less of the visual artists. All the reviews of the exhibition were from the perspective of theatre and were very positive.⁵

Even though there were a few negative reactions to the exhibition, one should bear in mind that this specific project was realised in 2012, at a time when visitors were perhaps not as used to engaging with and facing these kinds of experiments as they are now, after an increasing number of choreographic experiments have taken place within museums. The analyses of more recent projects that follow will allow me to make more accurate conclusions on the public and its attitude towards projects that introduce movement to the museum space. Nevertheless, it is important to note that after this exhibition, the Lakenhal museum recognised the importance of a multisensory museum environment as well as the need for movement in the galleries. The argument that dance surprised a part of the audience and gave rise to mixed feelings did not dissuade the museum from

incorporating performance spaces after its renovation.

The Museum De Lakenhal is planning to reopen in June 2019 after a renovation which will also result in two new exhibition rooms where projects related to performance art may be actualised. In addition, the museum's new programme will be based on a multisensory approach in order to facilitate its educational role. The plan for the new museum is to focus more on the different senses of the visitors during their museum experience. In addition, the explanatory texts in the museum rooms will be limited. There will be small texts of 100 words at the most, accompanied by a personal multimedia player which will provide visitors with extra information such as music, films, and photographs.⁶

Since this dance-based multisensory project at Leiden city museum in 2012, there have been some very interesting developments; museums have hosted projects that bring movement to gallery spaces through live dance experiments. In the context of the EU partnership project "Dancing Museums" and its seventh artist's residency in London, in November 2016 the National Gallery hosted projects led by British dance artist Lucy Suggate, with collaborating EU dance artists, curators, education professionals and academics.⁷ On 12–13 November, dance artists and choreographers experimented in five rooms of the gallery, developing their ideas on how live dance performance could aid understanding and engagement in the visual arts, thus contributing to the gallery's educational programme ("Dancing Museums"). For the analysis of this case study, I used the audio-visual documentation of the project, a video made by Hugo Glendinning and Suggate that reflects on the performances of those two days. In the video, the latter narrates her thoughts on the project in the background (see endnote 2).

The axis of space in a museum could be redefined by the intervention of dance but it initially defines what kind of concepts can be realised. This depends on the size of the rooms and the way that the objects are exhibited, given the security restrictions concerning the exhibits of a museum. The dance artists who intervened in the National Gallery made the most of the fact that they had at their disposal rooms 30 to 34 on the second level. These five spaces, according to the map of the space, include some of the biggest rooms on this floor, namely room 30 (Spain 1600-1700), 32 (Italy 1600-1700) and 34 (Great Britain 1750-1850).⁸ In addition, another spatial factor that allowed the dancers to conduct live dance experiments with the involvement of visitors was that these rooms exhibited paintings on the walls, leaving enough space for the dancers to perform around them, without risking the safety of the artworks.

While dealing with the axis of the artist's body and the way he/she is able to use it in order to intervene in the gallery space and to activate the visitors' bodies, I encountered many questions that initially concerned Lucy Suggate, the lead dancer of the project. "How do we dance in the museum? Why place dance in the museum? What does it mean to be exhibited as a performer? How can we find the crossover between performance space and exhibition space? How do I behave as a dancer around these precious objects? How does the dancing body coexist with that art form and not falling to the trap of illustrating?" (Suggate). In particular, how to approach paintings and reflect on them through movement in an appropriate and sensitive way represented a challenging process for the dancers. The question of what kind of skills or embodied knowledge they should transmit in order to encourage a new way of thinking was really intriguing for the involved artists. Suggate, referring to her way of dealing with that question, said: "I often think about the artist; the physical act of painting, mixing color, transferring their imagination into marks. Having spent time with the paintings, I begin to see paint as their material as the body is my material" (Hart, A 82). In the following paragraphs, I will delve into the dancers' work and the way that they chose to reflect on the exhibits with the aim to evoke the physical activity of visitors.

One kind of experiment that the dancers made at the National Gallery was to provide visitors with one-on-one experiences. For example, the dancer Fabio Novembrini asked visitors to look at a painting while he physically supported them. He decided from which angle his partners would look at the artworks while he moved and guided their bodies. The aim of the experiment was to make people "see" through the body, inviting them to sense the atmosphere in the gallery, to feel the artworks while he exerted force on them (Suggate). Dante Murillo and Tatiana Julien realised a similar concept, which included more physical effort. In particular, they formed couples with visitors, and while exerting physical pressure on them they discussed the artwork that they were looking at. They asked their partner to describe what he/she was seeing in the painting while they requested him/her to push them as hard as possible. So, the visitor, in addition to being pushed, also had to push. Through this concept, they researched how the quiet contemplation that usually takes place in a museum can be interrupted when touch becomes more vigorous and the visitor accelerates, breathes more quickly, takes in more oxygen (Suggate).



Dante Murillo in *Dancing Museums*, The National Gallery, London (2016). “Marco Peri - DÉTOUR, Laboratorio Performance”



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This experiment could give rise to an intense experience for the participants and could create doubts about whether the visitors enjoyed it as it required a lot of physical activity, something unexpected in the gallery space. While the reactions of the people in the video of the interventions of the dancers seem positive, this cannot be taken as evidence of the success of the experiment. However, a member of the audience who experienced the project did upload a video containing a very positive reflection/review on YouTube (see endnote 2).

The aim and process of these exercises in the context of engaging visitor participation in the museum space could be connected to the exercises introduced by Augusto Boal in the theory of the Theatre of the Oppressed. The main objective of the poetics of the oppressed is to transform people from passive spectators into active participants, by considering theatre as a language, capable of being utilised by any person, allowing him/her to express himself/herself and discover new concepts through an embodied experience (Boal 97). The poetics of the oppressed focuses on the action of the spectator, who acquires a leading role regarding the dramatic action (98). Boal describes this process of transformation in four stages (102), which include a series of exercises that aim to get one to know one's body, its limitations, possibilities, social distortions as well as possibilities of rehabilitation, and a series of games that aim to make one abandon the common forms of expression and express themselves through their body, instead of verbally (102). In addition, in the context of these stages, the spectators are challenged to intervene indirectly in the dramatic action by proposing themes or solutions and by correcting the words or the actions of the actors, as well as by actually acting (102). Accordingly, at the National Gallery, visitors had the chance to experience the dynamics of bodily communication through experiments that aimed to make their body more expressive. Similar to the logic behind Boal's exercises, which focus on the action of the spectator, the most effective way to achieve that was through their intervention in the dance projects and, more specifically, through their participation in the experiments, which required intense bodily movement and close physical proximity with the artists.

Focusing on the idea that touch enables a different perspective, the dancers tried to test how the hierarchy of the visitors' senses could be flattened out by being touched by the dancers (Suggate). These experiments are consistent with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception, in which the notion of perception enables the human body to operate as a medium through which meaning is discovered (Steeves 374). According to Merleau-Ponty, an important characteristic of perception is that it is synaesthetic. In the context of the

museum, this means that the perception process of an artwork, like that of a still life painting, involves recognising various aspects of the artwork, such as colour, texture and others (Joy, Sherry 264).

Since the perception is synesthetic, a picture of a tulip may invoke its perfume (nose), a sound (ear), and even a type of feel (touch): The flower may smell fresh, sound like a tinkle, and feel soft as a caress. When the focus is on vision, the remaining senses remain in the background as a quasi-presence. However, when the viewing subject shifts her focus to the perfume of the tulip (olfactory sense), the background now becomes the foreground, while all the remaining senses recede into the background. The process can be replicated for all the remaining senses the tulip summons. (Joy, Sherry 264)

Based on the above, it is clear that each object evokes a receding background of sensation which exists in parallel with the appearing foreground of sense qualities. In order to comprehend the entire structure of the perceptual object, the perceiver must engage with both receding and appearing foregrounds, placing imagination and embodiment at the heart of perception (Joy, Sherry 264–265). In the context of the “Dancing Museums” experiments, flattening out the hierarchy of the senses meant that visitors were encouraged to engage with the receding background of sensation of the painting that they were looking at. In particular, while looking at a painting and, at the same time, applying physical pressure on their partner, they were able to shift their focus from the sense of vision to the sense of touch, allowing this background sense to become a foreground one. Accordingly, the same could happen with the sense of hearing, as during these participatory experiments visitors embarked on a dialogue with the artists, as described above.

Marisa Hayes, who was present during the residency of the project at the National Gallery, discussed her impression of these experiments as a member of the audience.⁹ Referring to Dante Murillo’s exercise of huddling very close with a member of the audience, she noted that there were moments that the couple was looking only at each other; their surroundings disappeared and this intense physical experience allowed for a new way of experiencing the works of art afterwards. In particular, she stated: “After this intense and intimate moment, the embrace would be released and suddenly the space would open up. The question was, what would happen to the way we see a painting or work of art after this very closed and intense physical experience. From what I witnessed, the release was a

breath, a large exhalation that allowed one to see the work of art with new eyes. This 'freshness' seemed to me an alternative to the fatigue of viewing numerous art works in a museum and perhaps not truly 'seeing' them." It is interesting to think that a possible way to avoid the fatigue of a museum experience, according to Hayes, is through the activation of the body and the intense physical involvement of the visitor in the appreciation of the works of art. This idea, firstly, seems like a paradox. How can people avoid fatigue through the physical effort of the body? The project offered an answer and showed how the activation of the body can liberate the mind and to offer relief from the overload of unprocessed information that could result from a museum visit.

Returning to the dancers' experiments, the dancer Dante Murillo made a performance in reflection of *Whistlejacket*, a 1762 painting by George Stubbs which constitutes a portrait of a real horse ("Whistlejacket"). The dancer brought the painting to life with his performance, as he jumped/moved through the gallery room, changing positions and imitating the sound and the movement of a trotting horse. He stressed another way of looking at the painting, through the body (Suggate). This experiment aimed to encourage visitors to demolish the established way of being in a museum in order to inhabit the space of sensing and feeling. There is something quite sensual about paintings, and through contemporary dance and the moving body people can enter this area of sense and feel things more; feel the texture of the cloth, the depth of the painting, believe that there is a real landscape (Suggate).

In considering the above projects, we can observe, as Gill Hart, head of education at the National Gallery, indicated, that encouraging visitors to engage with the dance artists, to think less about how the artists were responding to the paintings and more about their own body, was a great challenge (Hayes, Interview). Therefore, it is important to discuss the responses of the visitors to the project, even though, as mentioned above, no official evaluation of the project has been published. However, during her talk at the final conference of the "Dancing Museums" project in March 2017, Hart referred to the responses of visitors to the idea of choreography as an alternative to written or verbal explanations for an artwork. In particular, she mentioned that the reaction of audience members of the Dancing Museums residencies was positive, with 83% agreeing that it was an interesting idea. This high percentage demonstrates that the presence of dance artists was not perceived negatively; people were excited and intrigued by the experience. Even though this was not an official survey, it provided some justification to continue to explore more experimental models of interpretation

and communication.¹⁰ It also showed that in 2016 people embraced the idea of dance in the museum space much more than in the previously discussed case from 2012.

The last category of examples to be discussed in this article concerns choreographed guided tours. How can choreographed museum tours function as a way to encourage visitors to be active bodily in a museum space? Two different paradigms will be examined: applied in different kind of museums, both of them constitute good examples of how performing arts have been integrated into the guided tours of museum galleries, turning gesture and theatre play into educational tools. The first case is the “Museum Workout” – part gallery tour, part dance performance, part workout – especially created for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.¹¹ The second project is the choreographed guided tour at the Museo Civico in Bassano del Grappa in the context of the first residency of the “Dancing Museums” project.¹²

The “Museum Workout”, introduced in 2016 by the Met, comprised a 45-minute physical journey that spanned two miles of the museum before it opened for the day. It was an event commissioned by MetLiveArts and was scheduled to run at the MET until December 2017 (Cheung).¹³ The workout was choreographed by Monica Bill Barnes & Company, the narration and route was created by Maira Kalman, and at the MET residency the event was instructed by Monica Bill Barnes and Anna Bass (“The Museum Workout”). During the workout, the participants were not allowed to talk but they were encouraged to dance, march, trot or speed-walk, side by side, following their instructors in their tour of the museum (Cheung). According to the recorded instructions given by Kalman at the beginning of the workout: “There is no obligation to understand or to know anything, you are just observing, which is the best part of taking a walk. That way you are free to feel a million different feelings and there is no judgement” (“The Museum Workout”). The project considered each participant as an individual that starts from a different cognitive framework, creates his/her own personal and unique understandings on the basis of an interaction between what he/she already knows and believes and information with which he/she comes into contact (Richardson 1624).

Monica Bill Barnes stated that as a dance company, they wanted to create an experience that would cover the space of the whole museum, and their hypothesis was that elevating the heart rate and moving at a different pace in a museum would allow the visitors to have a different experience of perceiving. This project

(as the one at the National Gallery) highlights the notion of perception as an explorative activity. Based on an embodied perspective that considers the brain, body and sensed environment to be one dynamical system, it puts the spotlight on humans' capacity for cognition and emotions which extend beyond the brain. In particular, cognition is constituted by bodily experiences embedded in the surrounding environment. People explore the environment using their knowledge of the way that their own movements give rise to sensory change. They learn to make sense of these patterns of change on movement, which are called sensorimotor contingencies, by constantly negotiating, manipulating the spaces they occupy with others, whether the others are there or not (Nordhjem, Klug, Otten 28; Leach, Delahunta 466). In this sense, aesthetic appreciation is also an act of awareness that involves the notion of body. One could argue that the project actualised the second sense of aesthetic embodiment introduced by Arnold Berleant. The notion of embodiment in aesthetics can take on two different meanings. Firstly, embodiment could mean "to put into a body", to invest a spirit with a body. This sense of embodiment could be present in music that depicts the direct physical experience of an action, an event or a narrative. This is achieved through melodic figures, rhythmic patterns and other ways (Berleant 85). The second sense of embodiment means to cause or to become part of a body, to unite into a body. This sense of embodiment occurs when, during the process of the aesthetic appreciation of art, the appreciator participates physically, in other words, the human body is actively present during the appreciative experience (84–85). This sense of embodiment took place when the human bodies were actively present, doing physical exercise, undergoing the appreciative experience.

Based on the above, one could argue that the aim of this project was to deconstruct the behaviour codes of a museum and to encourage visitors to activate their bodies and to perceive and experience the tour with all their senses. It is important to clarify that deconstructing the behaviour rules of the museum does not mean disrespecting the space or the exhibits. To the contrary, it signifies the liberation of the visitor's body and mind, aiming at an active engagement with the exhibits as well as a critical point of view which is crucial in the context of a constructivist model of learning that considers learning as a continuous, highly personal process.

The second example of a choreographed museum tour is that of the Museo Civico in Bassano. From 15-30 August 2015, visitors had the opportunity to experience a fifteen-minute experiential tour choreographed and performed by

Lucy Suggate and Tatiana Julien. The artists made a tour through three galleries of the museum and in each one they focused on a different aspect of the exhibited artworks; a theme, a colour and a hand gesture, respectively. Another example of a guided tour in Bassano is that of Connor Schumacher, who led the audience inside and outside the museum space, pointing out elements like the great curtains or the sound boxes rather than the artworks, in order to make them aware of the space around them and, thus, aware of their own bodies. Through the creativity and the imagination of their original guides, audiences were encouraged to acquire awareness of all the elements around them as well as self-awareness through the use of their bodies (Hart 79).

In drawing some conclusions from these two different choreographed guided tours, I would say that concerning the axis of space both choreographed guided tours constituted physical journeys in the spaces of a museum. Nevertheless, through the use of imagination and dance, the artists aimed to transform the spaces and to make the visitors experience them from a new standpoint. In particular, even though the idea of a guided tour seems conventional, the choreographed ones managed to surprise the visitors due to the way they were delivered and the fact that they disrupted an ordinary model of engagement in a museum/gallery environment, without requiring any physical activity on the part of the audience. In that way, they proposed a new way of acquiring spatial awareness. Gill Hart admitted that this approach of guided tours could be incorporated into mainstream educational programming. This argument is crucial for the future of dance in museum projects as, coming from a globally renowned institution such as the National Gallery, it constitutes an acknowledgement of the significance and the meaning of these kind of projects.¹⁴

Turning to the axes of the dancers' and the visitors' bodies and, more specifically, to how the dance artists used their bodies and, of course, the ways the visitors' bodies and senses were activated, I would like to arrange the above cases in two categories, based on a division made by Marisa Hayes.¹⁵ In some groups of guided tours, only the facilitator was dancing and moving for the group, creating a human link to the work of art. On the other hand, in other tours movement was proposed for the entire group. As Hayes commented: "I think both have value and create different experiences, dimensions to a work of art: concretely notions of space and perspective, how the body sees and in what state the body is in for viewing (is the body tense, flexible and relaxed? How does that change our viewing habits?). How do we relate the movement and gestures found in a work of art to our own bodies?"



Guided tour by dancers Lucy Suggate and Tatiana Julien in *Dancing Museums*, Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa (2015). “Lara Crippa - ABCDance - dancingmuseums Bassano IT 2015-2017”



Guided tour by dancer Connor Schumacher in *Dancing Museums*, Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa (2015). “Lara Crippa - ABCDance - dancingmuseums Bassano IT 2015-2017”

Both kinds of choreographed guided tours in the museum space could create interesting outcomes concerning the way that visitors would experience the works of art. In categorising the examples discussed in this chapter, I would say that the guided tours in Bassano were tours where only the facilitators were dancing, while the “Museum Workout” required the intense movement of the entire group of participants. However, it is important to note that in both examples, the museum visitors were transformed into active participants as they followed the facilitators of the tours through the museum space.

Conclusions

Overall, all of the case studies analysed in this article support the concept of aesthetic engagement as an embodied experience and indicate how dance could work as model of embodiment, capable of evoking visitors’ physical activity and, thus, facilitating their active engagement with museum exhibits. The dance artists of the projects under discussion introduced different ways of intervening in the museum space and of interacting with visitors. They could be categorised into three groups. First was the group of artists who mainly focused on activating the imagination of the visitors. A characteristic example was the dancers who intervened in the National Gallery by providing one-on-one experiences to the audience, requiring intense movement. In addition, the artists of the choreographed guided tours in Bassano sparked the creativity and the imagination of the audience by focusing on unusual elements that were present in the museum space. The second group of artists worked as mediators between the artworks and the visitors, focusing on illustrating images with their bodies. The recorded dance pieces that were presented in the context of the exhibition “Pearls”, as well as Dante Murillo’s experiment with the painting *Whistlejacket*, could be considered as different ways of connecting with and reflecting on a narrated story and/or a museum exhibit. Finally, the last group of dancers focused on the ability of physical exercise to liberate the visitor’s body from the behaviour rules of the museum, something that was very clear in the context of the “Museum Workout” at the MET.

In conclusion, the analysis of these case studies, which was focused on the axes of space, the artist’s body and the visitor’s body, presents interesting results. In particular, the outcomes of the “Pearls” exhibition at the Lakenhal museum indicated how dance can narrate a story throughout the museum space and create multisensory experiences, with movement occupying a central role. These experiences encouraged visitors to move and explore the space around them, which was transformed by the intervention of recorded as well as live dance. The

project aimed to activate their bodies and inspire them to experience the museum with all their senses. In addition, the analysis of the seventh residency of the “Dancing Museums” project at the National Gallery showed how active physical proximity between a dance artist and an audience member can activate multiple senses and provide a different kind of looking at works of art, releasing at the same time the sensuality of the artworks. The cases of the choreographed guided tours indicated how dance in the museum space can energise visitors from the possible fatigue of a museum visit as well as deconstruct the behaviour codes which dominate in a museum. Making people aware of the space around them, as well as of their own body, appeared to introduce them to a new, embodied way of engagement with the exhibits.

The role of the dance artists who participated in the above projects went far beyond movement and technique. It demanded great communicational skills as it was based on a social interaction with the public. There may be those who doubt the importance and value of facilitating people’s engagement with art. They might ask if turning a museum visit into an exploration through the visitor’s body movements, sensory experiences, associations, recollections, and imaginations can result in something more than a pleasant experience. An answer to this question could be found in the inspiring words of Barend van Heusden, who argues that art imitates and reflects upon life, representing it as a live experience; it mirrors our experience of the world, giving it perceivable forms such as sounds, movements, objects, language and, in that way, permits us to relive experiences and gain better insight into ourselves and others (van Heusden, Gielen 159–60). Engaging audiences with museum exhibits is a matter of great significance for our society as art constitutes one of the most important forms of cultural and self-consciousness, qualities that shape the way humans act.

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¹ “Pearls”, Museum De Lakenhal

Relevant images: *Pearls (1), Dutch National Ballet, Pearls (2) & Performance during the Exhibition Pearls in the Arts, Nature & Dance*, 12/09/2012-13/01/2013, Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden: <http://www.lakenhal.nl/en/story/pearls>

² Based on the email interview with Marisa Hayes, Chief Editor of the French journal *Repères, cahier de danse* on 25 April 2017.

³ Personal interview with Nicole Roepers, curator of the Lakenhal museum and project manager of the exhibition on 20 April 2017.

⁴ Personal interview with Nicole Roepers on 20 April 2017.

⁵ Unfortunately, I was not in a position to analyse the existing reviews as they are in Dutch.

⁶ Personal interview with Nicole Roepers on 20 April 2017.

⁷ “Dancing Museums” – National Gallery, London

More information about the project on: <http://www.dancingmuseums.com/residence-7.html>

Relevant images on: <http://www.marcoperi.it/detour.html>

Relevant videos:

Dancing Museums: Seventh Residency at The National Gallery: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFbnzapPCRY>

Performance of the dancer Fabio Novembrini during the project Dancing Museums, 7/11/2016-13/11/2016, The National Gallery, London: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFbnzapPCRY>

National Gallery, Dancing museums review: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNn7SG6-K5U>

Performance of the dancer Dante Murillo during the project Dancing Museums, 7-13 November 2016, The National Gallery, London: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFbnzapPCRY>

⁸ See more on <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/visiting/floorplans/level-2>

⁹ Interview with Marisa Hayes on 25 April 2017.

¹⁰ Based on an email interview with Gill Hart on 18 April 2017.

¹¹ “The Museum Workout”, MET

More information about the project on: <http://www.metmuseum.org/events/programs/met-live-arts/museum-workout>

Relevant video: *Guests work out amidst masterpieces at the Metropolitan Museum*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIVS3OcqAqo>

¹² “Dancing Museums” – Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa

More information about the project on: <http://www.dancingmuseums.com/residence-1.html>

Relevant images: *Guided tour by the dancers Lucy Suggate and Tatiana Julien during the project Dancing Museums, 23/08/2015*, Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa: <http://www.abcdance.eu/dancing-museums-at-museo-civico-bassano/>

¹³ It is also currently presented in partnership with the Philadelphia Museum of Art. See more on <http://fringearts.com/event/the-museum-workout/>

¹⁴ Email interview with Gill Hart on 18 April 2017.

¹⁵ Interview with Marisa Hayes on 25 April 2017.