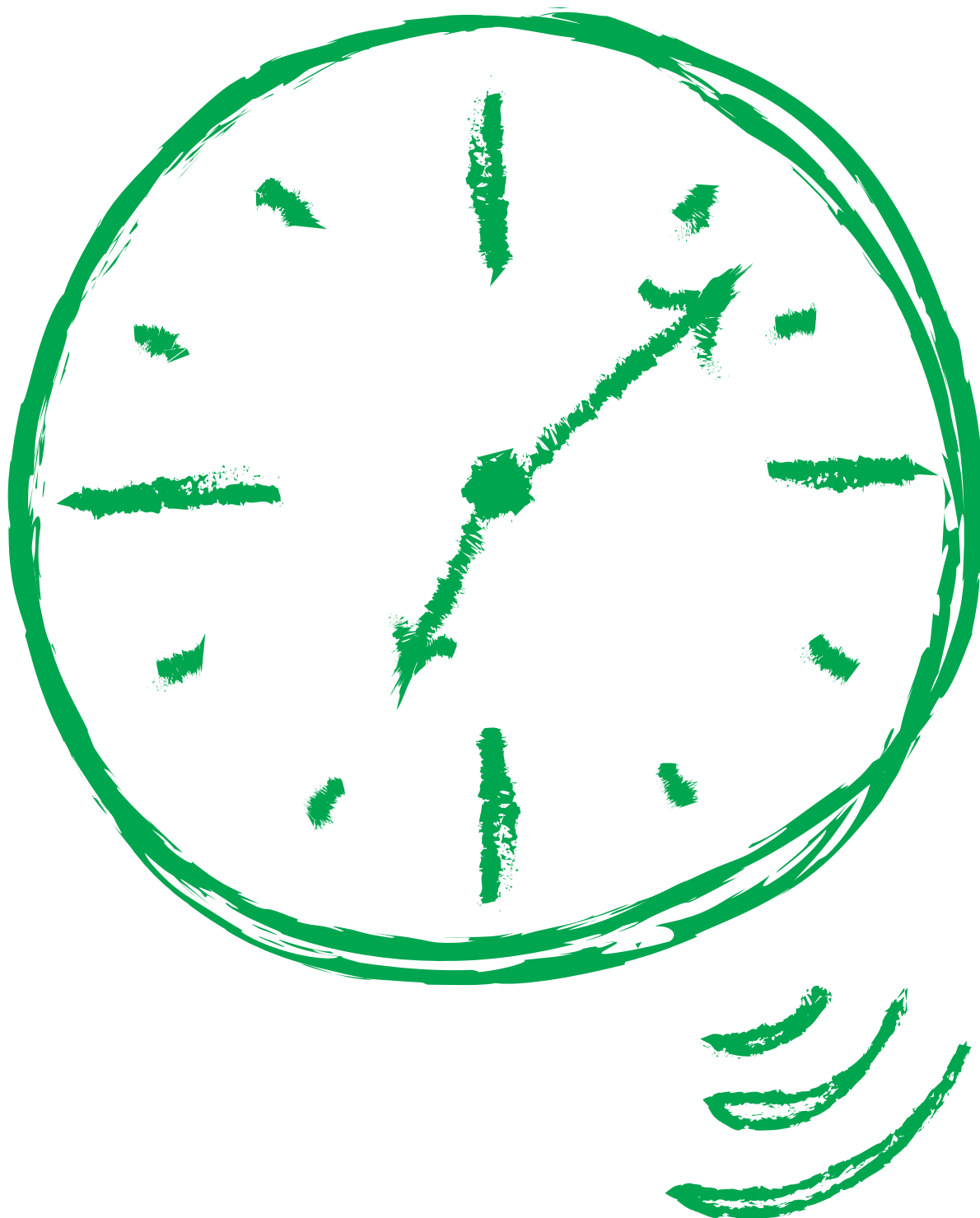


Perth Institute of
Contemporary Arts



About Time!

Interpretation of Time-based Art

Time-based art has had a huge impact on contemporary art. This type of art focuses on time as an important element of the artwork.

Time-based Art Terminology

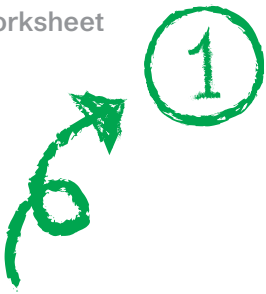
'Temporal' is a word used to describe anything that has a time-related part to it and is often used to talk about time-based art. Temporal art unfolds, changes and evolves in dynamic ways over time, unlike traditional artforms such as painting or sculpture which are static or unchanging.

Time-based art often creates 'immersive' experiences for people – transporting them outside of their normal day to day environment and engaging multiple senses including vision, sound and touch. Audiences can often get involved and interact with time-based artworks and are not limited to just observing as a viewer.

Time-based art takes on various forms, including Video Art, Performance Art, Sound Art, Installation Art, Digital and New Media art.

- **Video Art** uses moving images (that are dynamic rather than static) and is typically displayed on monitors, screens or projections. Multiple screens or projections in video installations can create an immersive experience. Video artists work with time by editing, pacing and sequencing to create a visual narrative or story. Techniques like time-lapse and slow motion can be used to change or manipulate time. Time-lapse shows events at an accelerated faster pace, while slow motion emphasises and lengthens specific moments of time.
- **Performance Art** involves artists using their bodies, actions, voices and sometimes objects to share a message or experience with people. It draws on theatre, dance and visual art. Often the experience of performance art unfolds in real-time for a live audience. But people can also experience it through recordings or documentation (e.g. video, photography, audio recordings) of past actions that have already taken place.

- **Sound Art** focuses on the experience of listening. Sound artists create musical compositions, installations or performances that explore sound and hearing over time. This can involve recorded or live sounds, as well ambient background noise (e.g. traffic, birds) or even silence.
- **Installation Art** can be time-based when it has parts that change over time. This might include moving parts like kinetic sculptural features, changing lighting conditions, moving image or interactive elements that respond to the audience or environment.
- **Digital and New Media Art** takes advantage of new technologies, allowing artists to explore time in digital environments. This includes virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and interactive digital experiences that unfold over time.



A.K. Burns *Untitled (eclipse)*, 2019



Image: A.K. Burns, *Untitled (eclipse)*, 2019, single-channel 16mm film transfer to HD video. Installation view, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), 2024. Photo: Dan McCabe

This silent film by American artist A.K. Burns was recorded in Nebraska, USA. It shows the movement of our sun as it is gradually eclipsed by the moon and is superimposed onto the desert landscape where it was filmed. As the moon blocks the sun, midday momentarily becomes midnight, and the sun is transformed from a source of life into a void. The video shows a rare fleeting moment, heightening our awareness that the world is constantly changing.

Burns often creates video installations inspired by science fiction that represent the relationship between the body and its environment. Burns explores the body as a space where contentious social, political and cultural issues are debated from a feminist trans perspective.

Analogue and Digital Technologies

The natural phenomenon of the eclipse was recorded by Burns using analogue camera technology. Unlike digital technologies that convert sound and light from electronic sensors to data, the analogue format uses chemical processes and physical materials. In Burns' work traces of sunlight reacted with the photosensitive surface of the 16mm film they used to record the eclipse.

Introduced in the 1920s, 16mm film transformed the way moving image were recorded and shared. There's a long history of it being used by artists, journalists, movie directors and amateur filmmakers alike. 16mm film has distinctive characteristics, including a grainy texture that is visually noticeable in playback and the rhythmic clatter that is audible from the moving parts in the film projectors.

Composition, Elements & Principles

During the brief phase of the total solar eclipse, the colours in the film shift from light to dark, changing from high key to low key in value and from high contrast to low contrast. In the darkness, we lose our sense of depth or distance, and our eye is no longer drawn to a focal point in the composition. This shifts our attention from the environment to the 16mm film itself as a material – its grain, texture, rhythm and luminosity.

Critical Analysis — STICI Framework

Subject

What are the key features of *Untitled (eclipse)*?
What do you notice first? Is the subject matter imagined, remembered or observed?

Technique

What materials, skills and processes have been used to make this artwork? What effects have been achieved as a result?

Influences

What may have influenced A.K. Burns to make this work? Are there any other artists or art styles referenced in the artwork? Has social, cultural or historical contexts influenced the work?

Composition

Describe how the artist has used the following elements:

→ Space

→ Texture

→ Colour

→ Value(tone)

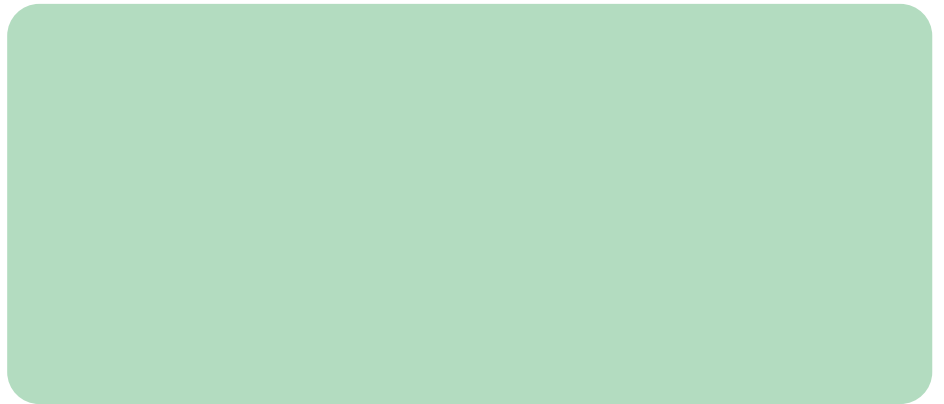
Describe how the artist has used the following principles:

→ Contrast

→ Emphasis

Intention

What do you think is the purpose of the artwork? What mood, feeling or atmosphere is created? How might the environment during a solar eclipse say something about the body? Do you think the artist has successfully communicated a meaning?



Joan Jonas, *Songdelay*, 1973



Image: Joan Jonas, *Songdelay*, 1973. Installation view, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), 2024. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York. Photo: Dan McCabe

Filmed on a vacant lot in Lower Manhattan using 16mm film, this video shows one of Joan Jonas' so-called 'outdoor performances'. A group of performers including Jonas, the artist Gordon Matta-Clark and choreographer Steve Paxton carry out actions. They perform with props such as masks, mirrors and blocks of wood to create motifs such as circles and lines, and to make sounds.

Social, Cultural and Historical Context

Joan Jonas is an iconic American artist who has influenced generations of artists. She is known for her work in performance art, video and installation. In fact, she was one of the first people to use video technology in art, pioneering the use of cameras, TV monitors and live video feeds in her artwork. Jonas paved the way for artists today by exploring how live action can be recorded and shown in galleries.

Jonas began experimenting with video after a trip to Japan 1970 where she purchased her first hand-held video camera, a Portapak. Launched in the late 60s by Japanese electronics company, Sony Corporation, this portable video recorder was inexpensive, easy to operate and accessible to the public.

Many technological innovations emerged from Japan around this time, opening the door to new forms of art. Before this, video recording required professional technical crews and lighting specialists, and was only used in motion pictures and TV broadcasts. This meant that artists could work with video independently in their own studios for the first time and could experiment with documenting time-based art. Examples of this are Andy Warhol and Nam June Paik.

In the 1960s and 70s Jonas lived and worked in New York City. It was an exciting and creative place which became a new home for artists and people who moved there from all over the world, emerging as an artistic centre with an economy on the rise. Many European avant-garde artists relocated to America in response to World War II and its aftermath – either escaping the Nazi regime’s persecution of “Degenerate” art, or from post-war trauma. This includes Marcel Duchamp, André Breton, Max Ernst, Marc Chagall, Piet Mondrian and Salvador Dali.

Artists in the city were trying new things and breaking the rules about what art was supposed to be. The New York art scene changed the way we think about art, leading the way to new art styles including Performance Art, Installation Art, Land Art, Pop Art, Neo-Dadaism, Conceptual Art, Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism.

Sound and Movement in Performance Art

In *Songdelay*, Joan Jonas explores sound and how it changes outdoors over distance. In this recording, performers make sounds by clapping blocks of wood together while standing at different distances from the camera. Jonas plays with the time delay between seeing the performers' action and hearing its sound. Sound takes time to travel through the air. The further you are from where the sound was made the longer it takes to reach your ear and be heard. Jonas describes the way we hear sounds and see images from distant places as receiving 'signals'.

Songdelay reflects the pioneering experiments of artists, choreographers and music composers in New York at the time it was made. Performance artists used their bodies, movement and voices to act, dance and make music. Their actions and movements were often unusual, sometimes interacting with sculptures or everyday objects, or in public spaces instead of on stage. They often performed in front of a live audience who were sometimes asked to join in.

Choreographers of the period started working with ordinary body movements (like sitting, walking and kneeling) instead of the traditional dance techniques of ballet or folk. Music composers used all kinds of sounds, not just the usual music notes, such as birds singing, traffic noises and raindrops – even silence – to draw the audience's attention to sounds of the environment around them. Sometimes surprise performances were put on in the city. These were called 'Happenings' and were events where unexpected and often funny things would happen.

Land and Environmental Art

Songdelay reveals Jonas' lifelong interest in the environment and the influence of other movements of the time, such as Site-Specific Art, Land Art and the Environmental Movement. During this period people became more concerned about pollution and the health of the planet. Adding to this, art no longer had to be presented inside museums or galleries. Artists started working outdoors using materials found in the environment to make art about specific locations or 'sites'.

Like many of Jonas' videos, *Songdelay* brings the environment into the gallery for audiences to connect with. She tells stories with landscapes, animals and plants - showing outdoor scenes, such as beaches and urban or industrial areas. Her early works explored parts of New York that were dangerously polluted and looked like ruins, such as the docks along the Hudson River. The landscapes in Jonas' videos are so important that she even describes them as 'characters' in her story.

Adapting Earlier Work

Jonas often revisits and adapts her earlier works and performances to create new installations. In *Songdelay*, she revisits her earlier performance *Delay Delay* (1972) that was first performed by the Hudson River in New York and then on the banks of the River Tiber in Rome. *Delay Delay* involved performers signalling to each other and an audience seated above on a roof, using similar actions. It was based on her first outdoor performance, *Jones Beach Piece* (1970), which was staged in Long Island with performers positioned at different distances from the audience.

Critical Analysis — Four Frames

Subjective / Personal Frame

Describe your personal response to Joan Jonas' *Songdelay*.
What emotions does it make you feel? What does it remind you of?
How do you think other people react to the work?

Describe the sensory experience created by the artist for the audience. What is the impact of sound in the work?

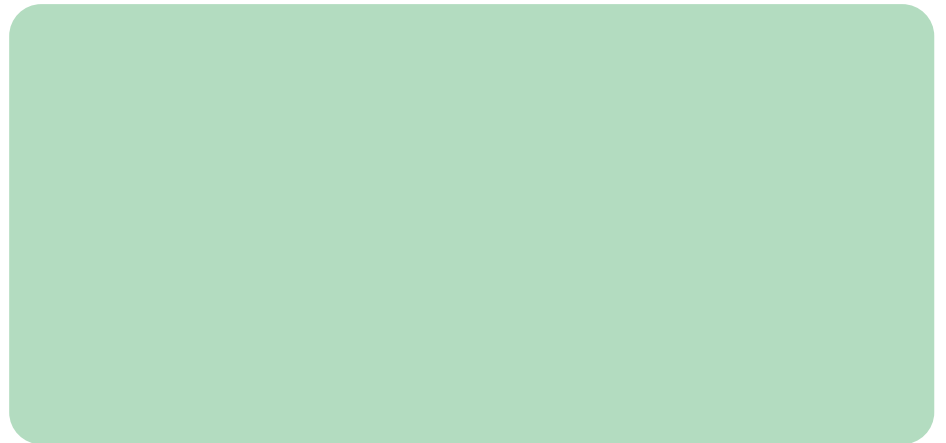
Describe how the work reflects the experiences of the artist. What individual experiences have inspired Jonas or informed her artwork?

Structural Frame

Describe the materials in *Songdelay*. What are the props made from and how are they used? How do these materials contribute to the meaning of the work?



Describe the techniques in the artwork. How and where was it filmed? What were the performers doing and why? How has it been presented to an audience? Does the work fit into a style or movement?



Describe the visual language of the artwork. How has the artist used the following principles and elements:

→ Shape



→ Space



→ Line

→ Repetition

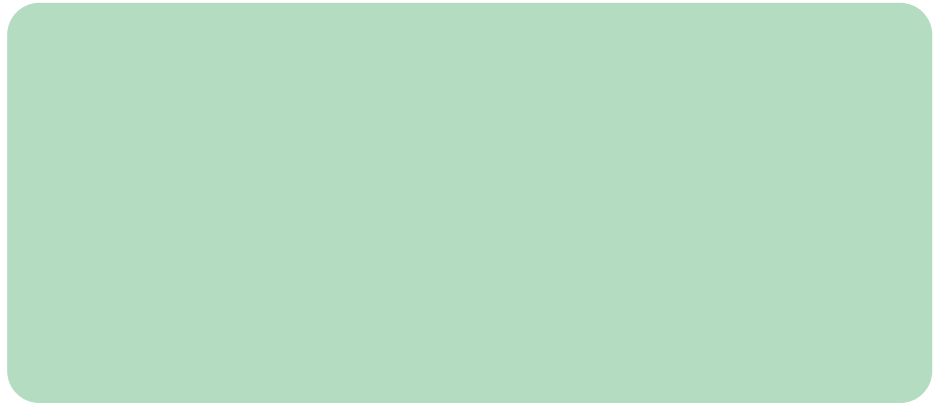
→ Contrast

Cultural Frame

Describe how culture has influenced the work. What culture does the work come from? What stylistic influences can you identify?

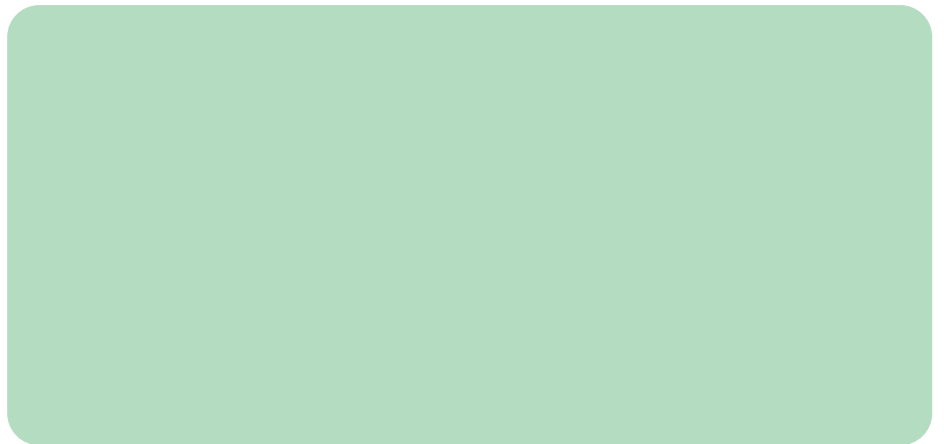
Describe how time or place is reflected in the work. Is this artwork about a particular place? What period is the work from? How does it relate to historical events?

Describe how the artwork responds to political issues. For example, how does it explore human relationships with the environment?

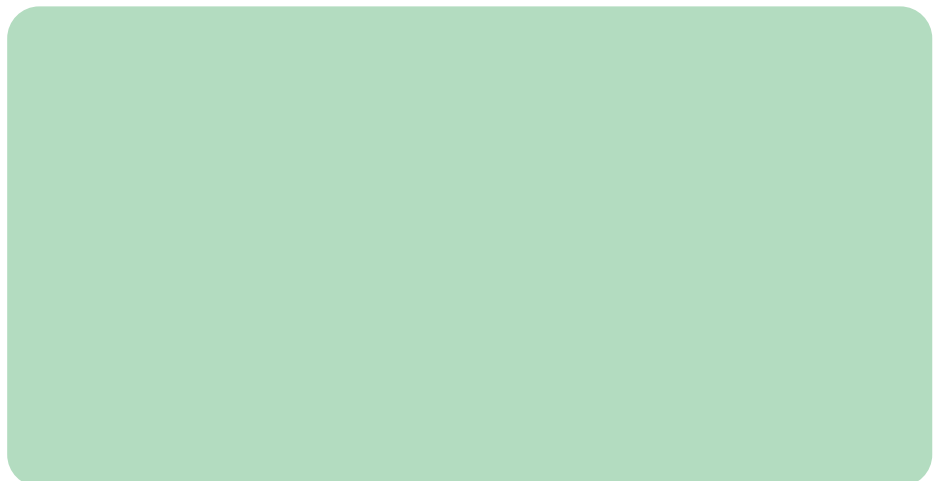


Postmodern/ Contemporary Frame

Describe how the artwork references other artworks or ideas. How does this impact the work's meaning?



Describe how the artwork reflects new technologies or trends. What technology has been used - both in the work's original making and how it is presented at PICA? How does the artwork challenge the rules or traditions of art or society? Why might the artist have chosen to do this?



Describe how *Songdelay* as an artwork from a past time might be interpreted with a contemporary point of view. How has the meaning or value of the work changed over time?





Diana Baker Smith, *Falling Towards Another (A Score for the Void)*, 2024



Dancers: Sofie Burgoyne, Emma Fishwick, Isabella Stone
 Choreography: Diana Baker Smith, Sofie Burgoyne
 Costume design: Leah Giblin
 Design assistance: Zoe Gojnich & Kait Polkinghorne
 Clothing: Kowtow

Image: Diana Baker Smith, *Falling Towards Another (A Score for the Void)*, 2024. Judy Wheeler Commission, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), 2024. Photo: Daniel James Grant

This artwork features a graphic score painted across PICA's balcony walls and a live dance performance conceived by Gadigal (Sydney)-based artist Diana Baker Smith. The work responds to the history and architecture of the PICA 'site' where it is presented – it is a site-specific work. *Falling Towards Another (A Score for the Void)* draws the audiences' attention to elements such as space, movement and time.

Graphic Scores and Performance Art

Graphic scores are used by artists, composers and choreographers to visually share their ideas with performers. Actions or movements are explained to performers using signs and symbols made of different elements like line, colour, shape and space. Performers have more freedom to interpret graphic scores than traditional music notation. Graphic scores are a guide to inspire a performance – they are not precise instructions or based on the conventional five-lined musical stave.

Developed in the mid-20th century, an important pioneer of graphic scores was the composer John Cage. He worked at the forefront of Performance Art in New York as a leading figure of the Post-War Avant-Garde. The graphics used by Cage in his scores indicate different styles of singing or playing instruments. They also indicate the inclusion of ‘non-musical’ or ambient sounds from the environment (e.g. birds, traffic) which become noticeable when the performers are silent.

Guided by Baker Smith’s graphic score, two dancers move around the interior of PICA during a live performance on the balcony, looking over the open space below or ‘void’. The audience is invited to consider the history of the building and the ways they move through it.

Research-based Art

Baker Smith’s artwork was developed through archival research. Archives are historical documents, records, photographs and oral histories about people, institutions or places. Her art practice explores the relationship between art history and its institutions through a feminist perspective. *Falling Towards Another (A Score for the Void)* draws on architectural plans and old photographs of the PICA building, which was refurbished as a contemporary art space in 1991 and modified after decades as a technical college and boys’ high school. Some decorative features remain inside the building such as the ceiling plasterwork, arched windows and stained glass. But as revealed by the archives, many original features were removed.

Site-Specific Art

Falling Towards Another (A Score for the Void) uses shape, line and colour to indicate the original location of architectural features that were lost when the school building was changed to accommodate PICA. Highlighting these features reminds the audience of the history of the site as a space of art and education.

Three dots (ellipses) show where doorways and windows once were – their light blue colour references the blue tint of existing windows. Straight lines stand for handrails and wall panelling depicted in the red of the bricks they were once attached to. Broken lines refer to the movement of time, with the past shaping the present and is echoed in the dark blue of the dancers' costumes.

Like other Site-Specific art, *Falling Towards Another (A Score for the Void)* is made for, and about, one specific location. It is intended to become a part of its surroundings. Site-specific artists, such as Baker Smith, are inspired by what already exists in a chosen place, paying close attention to its history, landscape and buildings.

Falling Towards Another (A Score for the Void) is the second artwork in an annual series of site-specific commissions known as the Judy Wheeler Commission, which is made possible by the generosity of the Simpson family. Each commission responds to PICA's architecture and history, and is installed for a year in the spaces that people move through when they visit the building, such as the entrance lobby, foyer, stairwells and balcony mezzanine.

Meanjin (Brisbane)-based artist, Elizabeth Willing, created the first commission in this series installed throughout 2023. Titled *Roost*, the work referenced the PICA's wrought iron gates and the scents encountered in the area surrounding the building.

Critical Analysis — Taylor's Framework

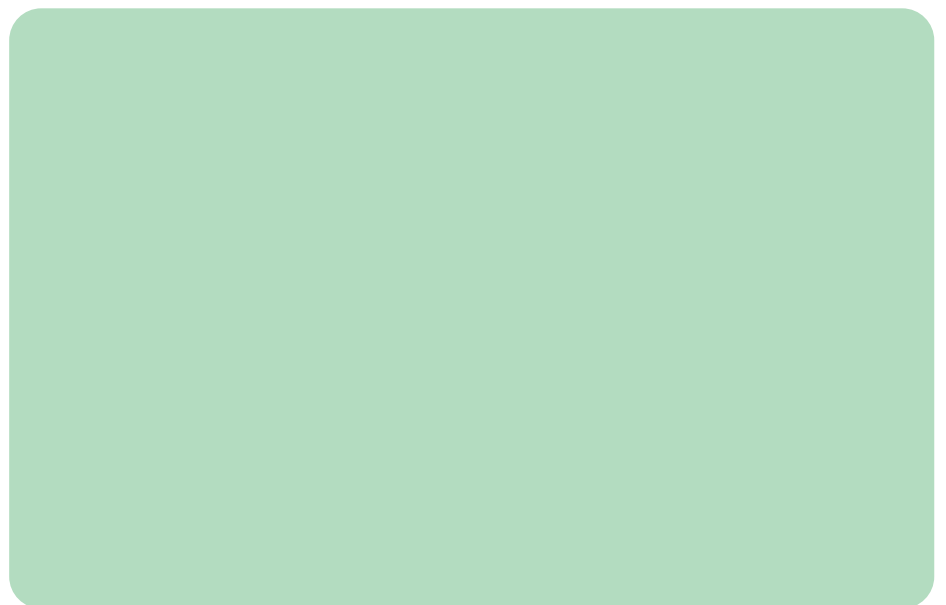
Mood

Describe the atmosphere of *Falling Towards Another (A Score for the Void)*. Does it make you feel a certain mood? Does it remind you of something you've felt before? Is it quiet or loud, comforting or troubling, joyful or gloomy? How do you imagine the artist felt while making this work?



Content

Describe the content or subject matter of *Falling Towards Another (A Score for the Void)*. Is the subject imagined, remembered or observed? Does the work make commentary about social, political or cultural issues? What is the purpose of the artwork? Who was it made for?



Describe how the content has been interpreted by the artist. Is the content presented representationally or is it abstracted or distorted? Is the subject matter meant to be taken at face value or are there hidden meanings through symbol, analogy or metaphor? Why do you think the artist chose to interpret the content this way?

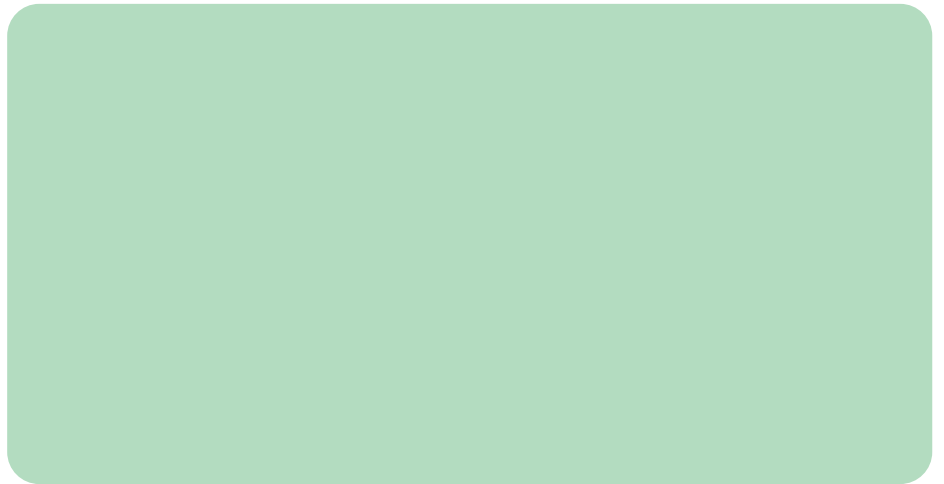
Form

Describe the visual elements of the artwork. What colour scheme has been used? Is it harmonious or contrasting, subtle or vivid? Does one colour dominate? Are there recurring shapes, lines, rhythms or forms? Does this create a pattern? Do the visual elements support or contradict the meaning of the artwork?

Describe how the visual elements are arranged together. Is there a main overall shape or is there a series of shapes? How does the overall arrangement use verticals, horizontals, diagonals and curves? What effect does this have? Is the arrangement balanced and symmetrical?

Process

Describe how the artwork was made. What materials, equipment or tools were used? How were the materials applied? What skills did the artist need to produce this work?



Describe the stages the artist went through to complete the work. What different stages were involved? How do you think the artist got ideas and gathered information? Do you think the work was created quickly or did it develop little by little overtime?

