

Dance in the Gallery

Here's some ideas and terms to help you interpret dance performances and choreography in a gallery setting.

Spatial - is a word used to talk about anything to do with space - areas or places. It describes how we understand and use the space around us. When we think about where things are, how far apart they are and how they fit together we are thinking spatially. This includes thinking about our bodies in relationship to our surroundings. Just like drawing a map that shows where different places are.

Temporal - describes anything that has to do with time and how we understand and use it. Thinking about when things happen, how long they take and the order in which they happen is an example of thinking temporally. Just like a story with a beginning, middle and an ending.

Context - where and when art is created or displayed can influence how we interpret its meaning and respond to it. Lighting, space and layout highlight specific details of artworks, create mood and influence the audience's viewpoint. The surrounding artworks and the overall theme of an exhibition also shape how a piece is understood.

Displaying art in a different environment to usual can change its meaning and reach new audiences. Who gets to see an artwork often depends on the venue it's in. More diverse audiences can access art in public spaces because they don't have to pay for entrance or tickets. Different venues might also give audiences more opportunity to move around and interact with artworks.

Institutional critique - Artists might create 'interventions' or stage performances to draw our attention to the places or where art is displayed and how they work. This type of art often questions the power and influence of art institutions, like museums or galleries.

Agency - means being able to make choices and do things on your own, by taking charge of your own actions and decisions.

Performers make choices about how they express themselves which can influence the direction and outcome of the performance. The amount of agency they have changes in different types of performances. Take for example scripted plays compared to improvised theatre or interactive works where the audience gets involved in the action.

When watching a performance on stage, the audience has some agency to choose:

- What they pay attention to by looking or listening closely.
- How they respond emotionally and physically through applause, laughter or silence.
- How they find their own meaning in it based on their personal experiences.

Audiences of traditional stage performances usually must follow common guidelines or 'conditions of entry' which limit their choices and make sure they:

- Have a ticket to enter the venue and sit in a specific seat.
- Remained seated and experience the performance from one viewpoint.
- Can not see backstage areas or performers during costume changes.
- Turn off mobile phones and not record the performance.
- Arrive and leave at set times to avoid disrupting the performance.

Dance performances in a gallery can give the audience more agency to make choices:

- Where to stand or sit, and how far away to be from the performers.
- To move around, making their own path through the space and experiencing multiple viewpoints.
- See what is usually 'behind the scenes' like costume changes.
- Use mobile phone and cameras to record the performance.
- When to arrive and leave during open hours, and to return later to see how the performance has changed.