

香港舞蹈概述

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香港舞蹈概述2017

Hong Kong Dance Overview 2017

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What is the ‘x’ When We Talk about ‘Visual Arts x Dance’?

Lee Hoi-yin Joanna
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After ‘ART HK’ was acquired by the ‘Art Basel’ in 2012, its 2014 edition was staged in a new location right after the blockbuster first edition of ‘Art Basel Hong Kong’. Since then, the two large-scale art expos, accompanied by numerous other ‘art events’ around the same period, have been creating what looks like a vibrant cultural hub every March in Hong Kong. Previously, the active art market had been more or less segregated from the locals, but since 2014 ‘art’ quickly has become a popular leisure activity, evidenced by the bloom in printed media coverage completed with ‘exhibition-goers’ survival guides.¹ Alongside Art Basel came the setting up of Hong Kong offices of many overseas galleries which regularly hold free public exhibitions. From 2014 to 2017, there were 1,095 to 1,391 visual arts exhibitions on record every year, averaging three to four per day.² The sheer number of shows means that it became a priority for galleries to create buzz and draw eyeballs onto their exhibitions.

In 2017, there was an obvious increase in local dance practitioners’ participation in events held in traditional visual art venues such as museums and galleries. Whether there was a direct link between the trend and the exhibition scene described above is still an open research topic, yet it is crucial to recognise their spatial and temporal coexistence. In order to gauge dancers’ experiences, I invited practitioners through Facebook to provide information about visual/interdisciplinary events that they performed in 2017. The responses were compiled into the 14 entries below:

Organiser	Event	Venue	Date and Title (if any) of Performance	Artistic personnel
Ivy Tsui	<i>Used to Mud...</i> Dance x Visual x Music	tgt Gallery	13-25 January 2017	Resident creators: Ivy Tsui, Hamchuk and musicians
Wing Platform and Enoch Cheng	<i>The Lost of a Yellow Striped Shirt</i> —a performance as a convergence of cinema, sculpture, installation, fashion, photography, dance, performance and music	Wing Platform	25 March 2017	Choreographer: Enoch Cheng Performers: Enoch Cheng, Tsang Wing-fai, Wayson Poon
Oi!, Leisure and Cultural Services Department	<i>Sparkle! When Will I See You Again</i>	Oi!	23 June to 17 September 2017 (1 hour every weekday) <i>A Performance...</i>	Curator: Enoch Cheng Creator: Scarlet Yu Performers: Cai Ying, Sarah Xiao, Pak Wei-ming, Jennifer Mok, Bobbi Chen, Gia Yu, Lily Tsai
Art Promotion Office	<i>Hi! Houses—Jaffa Lam x Sam Tung Uk Museum</i> opening and closing events	Sam Tung Uk Museum	July, 2017	Co-creators and performers: Jaffa Lam, Ong Yonglock and other artists
Art Promotion Office	<i>Hi! Houses</i> closing event	Dr Sun Yat- Sen Museum	9 July 2017 <i>Bye! Houses</i>	Performers: Pak Wei-ming, Sudhee Liao
Para Site	<i>In Search of Miss Ruthless</i> exhibition public event	Spring Workshop	12 August 2017 Disposed To Add	Director: Jes Fan Performers: Joseph Lee, Kingsan Lo
K11 chi art space	<i>The Garden</i> exhibition opening	chi art space (Clear Water Bay)	2 September 2017	Choreographer: Enoch Cheng Performers: Ronald Lam, Leung Tin-chak, Frankie Ho, Leung Sau-yin Jo
Endeavour	<i>Rootless, To be forgotten in a fleeting moment</i> Fused Media Installation opening performance	Videotage	23 September 2017 <i>Urban Tribe</i>	Choreographer: Ho Ming-yan Performers: Ho Ming-yan, Tiffani Chiu
4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art	<i>Art Central 2017</i>	Art Central	20-25 October 2017 <i>Fair Gestures</i>	Choreographer: Enoch Cheng Performers: Enoch Cheng, Tsang Wing-fai, Wayson Poon
Wing Platform, Andrew Luk, Sudhee Liao	<i>White Cell</i> interactive movement performance	Wing Platform	11 November 2017	Co-creators: Andrew Luk, Sudhee Liao Performers: Cally Yu, Mimi Lo, Cliff Wong
Leisure and Cultural Services Department	<i>Sparkle! Room for a Book</i> exhibition special event	Oi!	18 November 2017 <i>The Walk of the Rose—The Writing and Improvisatory Dance of Cally Yu</i>	Participating artists: Joseph Ngan and others
Altermodernists	<i>Dusk Rat Run</i> —A Night of Back Alleys in Between the Industrial Buildings in Kwun Tong (curator: Yip Kai-chun)	Kwun Tong Industrial Area	25 November 2017	Choreographer and Performer: Allen Lam
M+	Zheng Chongbin <i>'Another State of Man'</i> exhibition public event	M+ Pavilion	9-10 December, 2017	
Para Site	<i>Movements at an Exhibition</i> Artist: Manuel Pelmuş Curator: Cosmin Costinaş	Para Site	9 December 2017 to 18 February, 2018	8 professional dancers (The performers and Manuel Pelmuş agreed not to publish performers' names. One of them, Carman Li, was an interviewee for this paper who consents to be named)

Perhaps bound by my 'dance critic' identity and the size and makeup of my Facebook 'friends', most of the responses came from those who were practising dancers. Inevitably, there are also obvious omissions of inter-disciplinary performances in 2017, such as *Claustrophobia* by orleanlaiprojects, which simply was not mentioned by any respondents.

Instead of enlarging the sampling size, to focus the discussion only on the responses collected is because how practitioners responded in itself somewhat reflected dancers' perception of 'visual arts' and 'crossing-over', or the 'convergence of art forms'. Precisely the curiosity on such perception is what drives this paper. It also serves to note that, taking reference of my own experience in the field, I have two definitions here: 'performance' are behaviours with onsite audience and clear signs of beginning and end; while 'theatre' is defined as a venue with stage facilities and audience sitting area. Those without such facilities are considered 'non-theatres'. There are no prerequisites for technical specifications and degree of expertise for 'dance'; it is instead a general term for practices involving the use of the body. The above judgements were made.

The 14 performances for the 12 art projects can be classified into two categories according to the context of production. In the first category, while dancers were not amongst the core creators, dance was one of the components of the whole project, and it was performed by both performing artists and visual artists. In the second category, the dance performances were 'add-ons' (typically one-off) to the main projects, and

the lead creators did not necessarily participate in the dance part. The question here is whether the crossing-over happens in the presentation of the dance, or in the making process? To answer this question, I intend to clarify the diverse ideas and actions presented by practitioners, who have different backgrounds, when they took part in projects that converged different art forms. The more descriptive term 'convergence of art forms' is used here instead of 'crossing-over', the definition of which is still highly controversial.

Imaginations: 'Site', 'Performance' and 'Convergence of Art forms'

From the art institutions' perspective, introducing events such as dance into visual art projects creates an occasion to draw attention to and launch exhibits into the market, as well as increase their value to media. The events are yet another selling point for potential visitors during the exhibitions and frames the interpretation of the works with bodily practices. Sometimes it is out of something much more practical, as Amandine Hervey, the then gallery manager of the Mur Nomade (closed) puts it, 'There was a need to guide visitor (to the South Island Art Day) from one exhibition venue to another.'

Compared to the institutions' no-fuss, non-artistic considerations, there are more nuanced drivers for artists to involve themselves in the convergence of art forms. As early as the 1960s, the idea of choreography already existed in non-performing works such as paintings, sculptures, and installations by the likes of Jackson Pollock, Bruce Nauman and Simone Forti. In Hong Kong, Leung Ping-kwan and Sunny Pang

introduced poetry recital and dance respectively to dialogue with Choi Yan-chi's paintings³ in 1986; on 8-10 July 1988, the performance *As Slow As Possible: An Evening of Music Art Dance* was held in the exhibition hall of Shatin Town Hall.⁴ Whether 'crossing-over' still exists in the context of 2020 contemporary art is debatable. However, there remain significant differences between how keywords like 'site', 'performance', 'convergence of art forms' are understood in visual arts and dance. Below I shall use these keywords as entry points in elaborating participating artists' views and experiences. If one may classify the four interviewees according to the art forms they represented in the projects, Carman Li and Ivy Tsui were from dance while Jaffa Lam and Enoch Cheng were from visual arts.

'Site'

Except for industrial buildings, all the venues in the list were 'non-theatre' art and culture spaces, e.g. museums, art galleries, heritage sites. Those from the dance circle would be familiar with the history that by the 1960s dancers like Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton started exploring the possibility for dance in spaces outside theatres—the Judson Memorial Church. Carman Li and Ivy Tsui both pointed out that they expected 'something different to happen' in galleries.

When Li agreed to perform in 'Movement at an Exhibition', she had never seen the works of Manuel Delgado. She also knew very little about her role in the project. But she imagined that gallery visitors would be more forgiving towards dancing techniques, 'I danced in whatever manner I

wanted. If that had happened in theatre, the audiences would “cut the chairs” (vandalising seats to vent dissatisfaction).’

Tsui was not happy with her first performance of *Morning Glory* in theatre in 2016 and had since been looking for opportunities to redo it. As she had never performed her own work in a gallery, she accepted Amandine Hervey’s invitation to perform during the South Island Art Day.⁵ With continued curiosity for the gallery space, she did a durational performance in 2017 in tgt Gallery in Mong Kok. She found that ‘galleries have a more “open” style than studios.’ ‘Dance created in studios tends to adhere to certain formats. With mirrors and audio equipment, it felt that if one doesn’t get all sweaty one is being lazy; yet the space has to return to the condition before the rehearsal. Traces of the process was not allowed. Galleries accumulates (the traces) better.’

In retrospect, Tsui realises that she did not consider the idea of ‘white cube’ in the context of contemporary art ecosystem. ‘I did not think about what “gallery” stands for, its values and standards, and treated it as purely a venue. I went to the gallery as if I were setting up a stage and jumped right into technical aspects such as lighting and paths of movement. When I attended Christian Rizzo’s⁶ workshop and learned about his nuanced contextual thinking; I realised mine was shallow. He taught me that no space is neutral, no space can be approached out of context.’

Buildings certainly carry marks of the humans who built and did things in it. It just takes historical studies. With *Hi! Houses—Jaffa Lam x Sam*

Tung Uk Museum, what Jaffa Lam did was precisely to invite artists from different fields to tell the stories of the site from diversified viewpoints. 'Sam Tung Uk consists of three adjacent buildings: the entrance, assembly and ancestral halls. I knew I would put a bowl of water on the axis to signify the bloodline. One day at the site I felt a strong need for movement.' So, she started recruiting dancers to materialise imaginations for 'movements'. She shared her research in great detail with Ong Yonglock. 'Ong, like me, came to Hong Kong as a teenager, so he deeply shares how migration scars me. I was looking for a collaborator who could enter the context. Dance technique was not the primary concern.'

To Enoch Cheng, the creator of *Fair Gestures*, the 'site' was not the Art Central venue, but the eyeball economy championed by art fairs. 'I wanted to test how long I could keep the audience's attention throughout eight hours of non-stop dancing.' Throughout the process, at least two people among Wayson Poon, Tsang Wing-fai and himself were dancing at the same time. The choreographic concept was the visual impressions from newspapers that day. In his curation of *Sparkle! When Will I See You Again*, he asked Scarlet Yu to choreograph *A Performance....* What the dancers roamed on was both the exhibition space, that is Oi!, as well as the visual art exhibition about 'seeing you again'. How shall one pin down the meaning of the encounter between dancers and audiences in the site? Yu required that all dancers call her after every encounter to discuss nuances of the process, leaving it to the dancers to confirm the value of 'see you again' that may never repeat.

'Performance'

There are well-established spectatorial protocols in theatres, and the ticket acts as the pact between performers and audiences. Agreed patterns of behaviour delineate a comfortable zone of attention. For the performers who are accustomed to being on the stage, they believe that once they start doing their act, audiences just naturally watch. Carman Li found it 'cost-ineffective for several dancers to perform for, at times, only one member of the audience and wondered why the audiences were not grouped into timeslots.' The gaps between performances when there were no visitors were frustrating and boring. 'Some visitors were like tourists; all they did was to "check-in" (took selfies for marking their presence at the location on social media) and then they would leave.' The experience that the performing self is not necessarily seen was at first confusing to her, but later thought-provoking. 'Our "dance" was to re-enact movements from historical archives, but frankly in the beginning I could not relate to the past events. And then I grew to be curious about where the protagonists in the photos have gone. What exactly are we doing right now? Will people in the future know about this?' Some audiences got up close or imitated her movements. She was uneasy at first but resolved into a more relaxed attitude and let go of the rights and wrongs in dancing technique.

Ivy Tsui took part in several exhibition launch performances for commercial galleries. In 2017, she conducted the performance *Used to Mud...*, which had no fixed form, for two consecutive weekends in a family-run gallery in Mong Kok. Contrasting the two types of experiences,

Tsui is more comfortable with performances within an 'event' setting. While she is not sure if there are fundamental differences between performances in theatres and in galleries, she finds the experiences with audiences in galleries generally positive. 'With the audience less judgmental on techniques, I danced more freely. Proximity with the audience made me more aware of their different styles, including those who were not aware of me. Some of them would look at me through the handphone monitors even when they were really close. I found that both weird and curious.'

In one of the three performances in the *Hi! Houses Jaffa Lam x Sam Tung Uk Museum*, Ong Yonglock poured boiling water onto clothes before putting them on; in another, he wrapped himself uptight with a lot of fabric and invited Jaffa Lam to perform together. 'He had the freedom to interpret the context I set out. We did not talk about how to "perform". My job was to trust him.' Can dancers also be the 'interpreter', not just the performer? Enoch Cheng expected his 'score' for the opening of the exhibition 'The Garden' to be interpreted instead of executed: performers would pick a target audience and make a sound to draw his/her attention, and then converged on him/her until he/she showed unease. Dancers would then direct him/her towards an artwork on bacterial movements and danced for three minutes, based on the 'movements' described by the audience. Enoch Cheng was taking the opportunity to ask a question. 'Performers must find their personal ways of approaching the performance. They have to justify their presence even in the absence of audience. Stage performers assume that the audience will always look at

them, but this cannot be taken for granted in an exhibition. What I am interested in is the fluid boundary of “performance”, despite that it may create friction between dancers.’

‘Convergence of Art forms’

While distinctions between art forms are less rigid in contemporary arts, in Hong Kong the vast contrast between realities of visual arts and performing arts—in terms of education, ecosystem, social circles and audience—means that there are much more to be crossed over than just the medium. Still, what are the lure and frustrations between the promises and practices of ‘convergence of art forms’?

When Carman Li and Ivy Tsui mentioned that ‘there is more freedom in galleries’, their remarks reflect the reality of dance in Hong Kong. One must climb the ladder of institutional subsidy for a dance to be staged. Constrained to the high cost of production and limited venue, local artists have very little room for a breakthrough of the subsidy ladder except relying on commercial parties. Therefore, one can only imagine how attractive the proposition of venue and opportunity to perform in visual art exhibitions is (especially) to young dancers. It is of course also about the glamour of ‘contemporary arts’ and the aura created by the art market for commercial purposes. Li and Tsui participated in the above projects, driven by their curiosity of other art disciplines’ creative processes; do they understand it better now? How can visual arts and dance talk to each other? Due to time constraint, finding a common language is not always practical, and power inequalities may prevail between art disciplines.

Li is still interested to perform again in galleries, but 'expect to be a collaborator rather than just a co-operator'. In the previous performance, she felt that Manuel Pelmuş already had a plan and was not really willing to jam with local dancers.

Tsui reflects on her experience of performing at several exhibition opening receptions. 'In one of the opening performances, which was in the evening, I didn't see the exhibits until that afternoon. Was the performance "consuming" the dancers? Had I noticed the motives earlier, I would have given it more thoughts rather than just treating it as a job. It is also about my trust for the gallery owner or the curator. Some dance merely aims to "activate" the exhibits, but even so it is also a craft that involves personal artistic choices that I make in front of the audience. It is difficult to achieve fair dialogue at the moment. Should dance producers be equipped to communicate with visual arts people too?'

For Enoch Cheng, his project was to 'make dance with a different way of contemplating dance'. More than crossing over, he would like the dancers to perform their interpretations from the same departure point as he does. He finds that in visual arts training, art form provides vocabularies for contextual reading and analysis; while for dancers, it is the contemporary artworks' presentations that matter. When they become the exhibits instead of the performers, a crevasse opens between the need for clear directions and the interpretation that visual arts encourages. He looks forward to a stronger experimental mentality in dance; while in Tsui's experience, 'dance students are doing it "right" only when someone

else endorses it'.

Jaffa Lam repeated 'respect' during the interview, which she considers the method to successful convergence of art forms. By approaching the same story from different perspectives with the deployment of various media, a whole is constructed. 'But I know nothing about dance and music languages, so my job is to explain the context the best I can. I can only respect how other artists interpret and present. I do not take part in that decision, instead I celebrate how multiple art languages enrich the creation.'

Unleash Imaginations So It May Transcend

The interviews show that art training background plays a huge part in forming imaginations on 'site', 'performance' and 'convergence of art forms', even for artists coming from the same city, speaking the same language. To navigate and thrive in the contemporary art, which is not constrained by the boundaries between different media, more imagination is required for unencumbered traversing:

1. There is no logical relationship between 'site' and 'convergence of art forms'. Performing in exhibitions does not automatically imply collaboration between art forms. One does not have to be in certain sites to think 'convergence'. All buildings reflect the architects and users' cultural backgrounds through its physicality. Given aesthetics as experience, the audiences' perception of the site impacts their assessment of the value of that experience.
2. Are there fundamental similarities between the medium in different

art forms? Can we transcend the barriers posted by the jargons used in different fields? Is the body an entity in space and time before it dances? Is sculpture an entity in space and time before its material and form? The American sculptor Richard Serra said after he watched Yvonne Rainer's dance that, 'the body's movement not being predicated totally on image or sight or optical awareness, but on physical awareness in relation to space, place, time, movement.'⁷

3. Contemporary art emphasises research on historical and social context of the creative initiation. While traditional dance training considers the body a self-contained system, the body is indeed open and in constant exchange with the outside world; dance training itself is inculturation. With the body as the method, the ultimate concerns of visual arts and dance are the same.

In *Radical Museology* (2013),⁸ Professor Claire Bishop from NYU noted that among the phenomena in Western museums, she has been most fascinated with the obsession with dance. 'Dance exhibition' became trendy around 2008, when visual artists started employing dancers to appear in exhibition spaces on the one hand, and choreographers edited their works so that they are fit for performing in museums on the other.⁹ Bishop identifies three critical distinctions between pieces presented in the museum by visual artists and choreographers:

- While museums would develop dedicated spaces for dance/performance and contemplate ways to collect them, choreographers are more interested in the encounter with new (random) audiences and the social choreography of audience behaviour.

- Choreographed pieces in the museum setting are highly professionalized and rarely critical of this environment.
- The concurrent social media boom. Both the museum and the camera phone are apparatuses that steer attention and behaviour (just like the theatre), and the fact that they were arising in tandem with each other seems very indicative of the proximity and distance that is so characteristic of our era.

In 2017, the main period of interest of this paper, auction houses Sotheby's, Christie's and Poly totalled over HKD 8 billion (USD 1.03 billion) at the autumn sales, recording a 25% increase from 2016.¹⁰ As of 2018, Hong Kong was the third largest artwork market in the world, after New York and London. The large number of commercial exhibitions nevertheless provided opportunities for Hong Kong to stay close to the latest developments in contemporary art. While Bishop's analysis applies to some in the list of dances at the beginning of this essay, all in all it is premature for comparative studies in Hong Kong. One of the reasons being that the number of similar projects did not rise much after 2017, while there were even fewer performances in exhibitions led by dance. How should the dance circle benefit from the 'performance turn' in the visual arts field? In the 1950s, formalism became the vogue in the New York art scene, and it gained much power of discourse thanks to art sales. In the 1960s and 1970s, artists and academics rose against formalism's suppression of senses and the value of the body to much success. The choreographer William Forsythe's 'Choreographic Objects' can be described as 'objects that guide the body to move'. He reframes the act of approaching artworks from visual-based watching to corporeal

experience-based perceiving, as 'an alternative site for the understanding of potential instigation and organisation of action to reside'.¹¹ In view of contact and collaboration with other art disciplines, dance needs deeper and more intellectual dialogues with contemporary art and to establish its own position in the contemporary context, taking advantage of fluid boundaries between media.

Endnotes

- ¹ A case in point is the feature story titled 'Hipster for a Day—Media Light Shows Perfect for Social Media with the Perfumary Organ Project' in the popular magazine *Holiday*, 13 October 2017. Web version see HolidaySmart, <https://holiday.presslogic.com/2017/10/13/article/44045>.
- ² For details of the information of visual arts exhibitions in Hong Kong, please refer to *Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook*, <http://hkvisualartsyearbook.org/>.
- ³ See Asia Art Archive, 'Paintings by Choi Yan Chi and Works of Art in Dialogue with Poetry and Dance (Poems by Leung Ping Kwan, Dance by Sunny Pang)'. <https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/event-database/paintings-by-choi-yan-chi-and-works-of-art-in-dialogue-with-poetry-and-dance-poems-by-leung-ping-kwan-dance-by-sunny-pang>.
- ⁴ See Asia Art Archive, 'As Slow As Possible: An Evening of Music Art Dance', <https://aaa.org.hk/tc/collection/search/library/as-slow-as-possible-an-evening-of-music-art-dance>.
- ⁵ Closing performance for 'The Sun Also Rises', solo exhibition of Nastaran Shahbazi, at 5 pm, 24 September 2016; dancer: Ivy Tsui; musician: Lego Shum.
- ⁶ Christian Rizzo: choreographer, dancer, rock musician and fashion designer. Appointed Artistic Director of ICI-CCN Montpellier in 2015. For further details see: <https://www.westkwoon.hk/tc/whats-on/past-events/choreographic-landscapes>.
- ⁷ Richard Serra, 'Interview with Lynne Cooke and Michael Govan,' in Richard Serra: *Torqued Ellipses*, ed. Lynne Cooke (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1997), 28.
- ⁸ Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology, or, What's Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (London: Koenig Books, 2013).
- ⁹ Marisa Hayes, 'Recherche sur la danse au musée--entretien avec Claire Bishop', in *Repères, Cahier de danse* 38 +39 (March 2017), ed. La Briqueterie and National Choreographic Development Center of Val-de-Marne.
- ¹⁰ 'Art Sales 2018: Market Review and Forecasts', in *CAPITAL*, 23 March 2018. <https://www.capital-hk.com/2018/03/23/2018%e8%97%9d%e8%a1%93%e4%ba%a4%e6%98%93%e5%b8%82%e5%a0%b4-%e5%9b%9e%e9%a1%a7%e8%88%87%e5%89%8d%e7%9e%bb/>.
- ¹¹ William Forsythe, *Choreographic Objects*, p.7, quoted by Stephanie Rosenthal in 'Choreographing YOU-choreographies in the visual arts,' in *Move: Choreographing You* (London: Hayward Publishing, 2011).