

## ABSTRACT

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*In/And/Of/Through* was a thesis concert performed March 8-9, 2012 at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center in partial fulfillment of an M.F.A. in Dance through the University of Maryland. *In/And/Of/Through* contemplates man's relationship to art and the embodiment of visual art through application of basic dance principles espoused by pioneering modern dancer Isadora Duncan to aesthetics from Asian artwork in the Smithsonian's Freer Gallery of Art. This paper is a written account of the choreographic investigations and creative processes that formed the concert, including foundational concepts of Duncan dance technique, research on Asian artworks, and explorations into the cycle of visual art inspiration and physical embodiment. Included is a detailed account of how the concert re-conceptualized Duncan's classical repertoire, fashioned contemporary choreographies from historical resources, and incorporated a community of diverse dancers, live onstage painting, and an abstract gallery setting to explore different effects art has on the human spirit.

IN | AND | OF | THROUGH

By

Valerie Lee Durham

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts  
2012

Advisory Committee:  
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## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to a line of mothers, including my own mother Jo Ann Skousen, who paved my way by teaching a love of art and learning, my grandmothers Dorothy Mae Saunders and Helen McCarthy Skousen, who loved reading, nature and beauty, as well as my artistic mother, Isadora Duncan.

## Acknowledgements

I consider myself beyond fortunate for the support, love, patience and encouragement given me by my incredibly creative and brilliant husband James Durham and amazing son Luke Orion Durham, who were with me for the long hours, debates, discoveries and moments of frustration and elation in this process. Thank you forever for helping me through this.

My wonderful parents, Mark and Jo Ann Skousen, and siblings Tim, Lesley, Todd and Hayley, encouraged me with their belief in my passion for dance, as well as their own inspiring example of pursuing their passions and talents with gusto. I greatly appreciate my in-laws, Dr. James and Nelida Durham, for their immeasurable encouragement and support.

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I will hold in my heart forever the lovely, profound, generous dancers and artists involved in this project: Gregory David, Adrian Galvin, Margaret Johnson, Dane Juliano, Dawn Meadows, Daniel Shin, Claire Smith, Laura Tipton, Candace Tucker, Pamela White, David Yates, and Kristen Yeung. Without their unique personalities and contributions, this project would not have been the same.

I am also grateful for the support and inspiration of the staff at the Freer Gallery of Art, Lee Glazer, Joanna Pecore and Elizabeth Benskin, for proposing the first rounds of choreographic projects with art from the Freer Gallery's American Art collection, and thank the Smithsonian for allowing me to reproduce selected images from the Freer collections as part of my thesis and performance.

My career and artistic vision have been shaped by the voices and work of some beautiful and profound people. I would like to acknowledge the gifts of knowledge, experience and support from my Duncan Dance teachers and colleagues: Jill Sonke, Lori Belilove, Jeanne Bresciani, Hortense Kooluris, Julia Levin, Barbara Kane, Cherlyn Smith and Sima Leake, as well as Jennifer Sprowl, Carrie Tron, Marie Carstens, Roberta Hoffman, Cynthia Word and Ingrid Zimmer.

Thank you to all dancers who have come before me, who have informed and inspired us all with your passions, your minds, your lives, and your dances.

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## Overview: In | And | Of | Through

*“We spent most of our time in the British Museum, where Raymond made sketches of all the Greek vases and bas-reliefs, and I tried to express them to whatever music seemed to me in harmony with the rhythm of the feet and Dionysiac set of the head, and the tossing of the thyris.”* – Isadora Duncan, *My Life*, 1899

What effect does art have upon the individual and society? How is that effect embodied in the movement of a person or the interaction of people?

This concert project *In/And/Of/Through* contemplates man’s relationship to art, the cycle of inspiration and embodiment of visual art to choreography and the value of the individual in artistic expression. The dance project drew inspiration from artwork in the Asian Art collections of the Smithsonian’s Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and the principles and philosophies of dance espoused by 20<sup>th</sup> century dance pioneer, Isadora Duncan, considered by many as the “mother of modern dance.”

Performed in the Shared MFA Thesis Concert with fellow candidate, Florian Rouiller, whose work *Profundeur Inconnue* also looked to sculptural art as inspiration for movement creation, on March 8-9, 2012 in the Dance Theater at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland in College Park, Maryland, *In/And/Of/Through* featured a community of 12 diverse dancers in terms of heritage,

age, training and gender, a live visual artist, new music composition, the historical repertory of Isadora Duncan, restaged and re-conceptualized for the project, and new choreographies based upon Freer Gallery artwork from ancient Egypt, India, Japan and the 19th century American Japonisme movement. The dance project reexamined some of the basic tenants, techniques and choreographic aesthetics of the pioneering modern dancer, Isadora Duncan, placing them in a contemporary choreographic context, to investigate different effects that art has on the human spirit.

Indicating the highly personal and profound contemplation of the self in relation to art, and how that relationship might be embodied and expressed, the dancers interacted with the abstract gallery setting as well as the artwork itself through the choreographies. Grand floor-to-ceiling white panels bearing divers empty white frames were manipulated to create varying contexts for each dance piece. Assorted white costumes with flairs of intertwined sashes in blues, greens and soft red supported the diversity of personality in the cast and in the choreographies, while classical, world and electronica music created a rich bed of soundscape for the investigation between visual art and physical embodiment.

In the lobby, images of selected artwork for each of the dance pieces, used with the Smithsonian's permission, hung for audience members to absorb before proceeding into the theater, with the intention to create a lingering reference for the audience during the performance. The thesis concert incorporated the creation of an onstage visual art piece during the final dance, with the visual artist taking for his inspiration

the au courant movements and energies of the dancers as they performed a culminating dance piece representing an amalgamation of the explorations and discoveries from the preceding dances, as well as their own personal journeys through the creation of this thesis concert. Overall, the dance project presented the idea of a cycle of art: that visual art can lead to personal and physical manifestations which can lead back into the interpretation of life through visual art. The concert speaks to the nature of humanity as a creative global community.

In pursuing this dance project, I had two fundamental interests. First, I wished to investigate the relationship between art and the individual human experience of inspiration and interpretation through physical and personal embodiment. The second investigation involved challenging the notion of Isadora Duncan's purely historical relevancy in the dance community, and whether her philosophies and techniques could be effectively utilized in more modern choreographic structures and ideas.

This paper serves as a documentation of the development of *In/And/Of/Through* as a dance project, including the overall investigative interests, fundamental concepts, sources of inspiration, choreographic process, challenges, and experiences that formed the artistic journey. Chapter 1 addresses the fundamental concepts, such as the tenants of Isadora's Duncan technique and philosophy, as well as existing knowledge and experiences which led to the development of the overall vision for the project. Chapter 2 elucidates on the initial research and collaborative factors, such as specific pieces of artwork from the Freer Gallery and process of selecting a community of

dancers, which I conducted and brought together to inform the larger vision. Chapter 3 describes the structure, process and characteristics of each dance piece and performance components while Chapter 4 addresses issues of production and practical execution of the project. Finally, Chapter 5 analyzes the discoveries in meaning and essence of the dance project.

## Chapter 1: In | Foundational Concepts of Art and Isadora

As humans, we uniquely manifest a concept of “art.” While many creatures on this earth produce “beauty” – the butterfly, the spider, birds in formation – we humans alone create *art*, which bears an intentionality and awareness, to express ourselves, understand ourselves, elevate ourselves, reproach ourselves and ultimately strive for the greatest within us.

What is our relationship to art? How is the art *in* us? How do we understand ourselves *and* art? How are we *of* the art? How does the art move *through* us?

I have always thought it fascinating that the first evidence of humans as artists came from the earliest periods of civilization, and that subsequent and diverse global cultures have each held their own unique developments and processes in the evolution of art, whether painting and drawing, sculpture, drama, literature and poetry, or music and dance. Imbued in each manifestation of artistic creation is the essence for that culture and its values. The arts “function to focus a culture’s values and beliefs in such a way that they are reinforced and continue” [Dark 1978:37-38]. This presence of diversity also begs a question of aesthetics and beauty, for the definition of beauty varies from culture to culture [Dark 1978:35] and throughout the ages. The long necks and lifted knees of the body postures in Japanese Edo Period silk screens do not

match the *contrapposto*<sup>1</sup> and roundedness of the human body representations in ancient Greek statuary and bas reliefs. Yet, are not each beautiful? What can I learn as a student of art and life from the study of art around the world, in different eras?

### **Isadora Duncan: An Artist Inspired by Art**

I have been a proponent, long-time student and teacher of the modern dance technique pioneered by the revolutionary Isadora Duncan for 20 years because I resonate with her rich and intriguing style of dance and remarkable approach to life and art. In her, I find a well-spring of inspiration for my own artistic vision. To formulate the concepts for *In/And/Of/Through*, I looked to her techniques and philosophy of dance, as well as her process of finding inspiration from art in order to create art, which developed directly out of her profound life experiences.

Isadora Duncan, the great American dance-artist and revolutionary, came onto the scene in America and Western Europe during the 19th century, a time of significant cultural and artistic upheaval and development. The vast and influential Romanticism movement was trickling to an end, and the bold Modernist era was just yearning to be born. Isadora Duncan was a bridge between the two, a child of the Romantic and an artist of the Modern [Durham 2006].

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<sup>1</sup> The term *contrapposto* is from the Italian, and means a curving or asymmetrical arrangement of the human figure with the shoulders, hips, and legs in different planes. Greek, Roman and Renaissance artists commonly used *contrapposto* in painting and sculpture.



Born into a poverty-stricken, unusual but inspiring childhood in Oakland, California in 1877, Isadora Duncan became an international artist, living and performing in Europe, Greece, North Africa, Russia, the United States, South America, and elsewhere. She became a voice for all humanity through her vision of an elevated status for “the Dance”<sup>2</sup> as a full-bodied, expressive art form on par with classical music, painting, literature and drama [Duncan 1977:90]. At a time when a career in dance in America and Europe was viewed socially as just above that of a prostitute, Duncan’s investigation and association with Greek, Roman and Renaissance art not only helped to establish her dancing at a high cultural value among society elites [Daly 1995:110], it was also the cradle through which Isadora sincerely found the archetypal seat of the most mythic, profound and essential form of body movement and aesthetic for performance and teaching [Bresciani 2000:49].

Duncan posited that she had great teachers of the Dance, though none of them in the traditional sense. The ocean waves and the wind, the Greek muse of dance Terpsichore, the master classical composers, Greek, Roman and Renaissance art, Nietzsche, Darwin, and the body itself, these were Isadora’s self-proclaimed teachers and co-discoverers of this new Dance. “I spent long days and nights in the studio seeking that dance which might be the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of the body’s movement” [Duncan 1977:136].

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<sup>2</sup> “The Dance” is a term Isadora Duncan often used to indicate her view that dance is a “high” art form and a practice tied to an elevated sense of dance beyond physical movements but also connecting with a spiritual plane of experience and meaning. While “dance” may refer to many expressions of physical movements and practices, for Isadora, “the Dance” was a form of ultimate “Truth and Beauty” with very particular practices, attributes, and aesthetics.

Isadora studied elements she believed to be sources of great truth, which led her to develop her philosophy and technique that all expressive movement initiates from the breath and solar plexus. In her childhood, she studied the ocean waves and the wind by dancing along the seashore when she should have been in school [Duncan 1995:10]. Her early life had also included exposure to Romantic Era and classical music through her mother’s piano, as well as the writings of Shakespeare, Keats and Blake among others through plays and recitals conducted and performed with her siblings [Duncan 1995:18-20]. Upon arriving in England for the first time in 1899, she spent her time in the British Museum “where Raymond [Isadora’s brother] made sketches of all the Greek vases and bas-reliefs, and I tried to express them to whatever music seemed to me to be in harmony with the rhythms of the feet and Dionysiac set of the head...” [Duncan 1995:54-5].

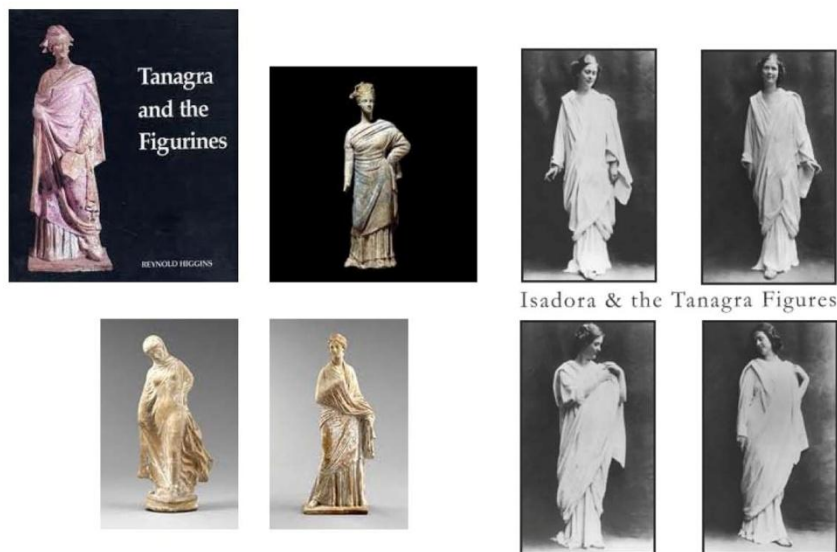


Figure 1. Images of the Tanagra Figures from the British Museum and photographs of Isadora Duncan in the poses from her choreographic study “Tanagra Figures.”

As a result of this study, many of her early and mid-career choreographies were representations of myths and mythological figures, such as Flora, Narcissus, the Three Graces, the Furies and so forth. For example, Duncan created the “Tanagra Figures,” a series of posture-based movements rooted in her study of miniature terra cotta figurines excavated in Tanagra, Greece, and exhibited in the British Museum. She created this choreographed series by intensely studying the body stances and positions in the figurines, and contemplating what the frozen figure might have been doing, if mobile, to get into that position, and what they might have done next. As she unlocked the figurative motions of each immovable statuette, she linked these together into a series meant to instill the Greek aesthetic and body stance in real human bodies. Though based on unmoving poses, these slow moving studies still maintain a sense of breath and flow, while shifting into and out of the poses.

As her career progressed, Duncan began reading Nietzsche and corresponding with the likes of Darwinist Ernest Haeckel and other scientific and artistic luminaries of her day. Duncan exemplified her ideal of a dancer, “the highest intelligence in the freest body,” and her ideal philosophy of humanity, “to rediscover the beautiful, rhythmical motions of the human body, to call back to life again that ideal movement which should be in harmony with highest physical type, and to awaken once more an art which has slept for two thousand years” [Duncan 1977:63;132].

Later in her career, Duncan was drawn to working with more contemporary composers, such as Scriabin and Wagner, and with more contemporary subject

matters, such as politics, creating choreographies in the newly formed Soviet Union addressing Russian peasant or proletariat conditions [Duncan 1995].

I appreciated the range of Isadora Duncan's interests and subjects of research from which to create dance art, from the ancient to the immediate. Her work to create dances based on archetypal figures of Greek mythology as well as the struggle of the Russian peasant at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in her own time, spoke to me of the potential universality of her dance concepts in relation to *In/And/Of/Through*.

### **A Relevancy for Today**

Duncan's work laid the foundation for future modern dancers, as well as for the progression of modern society, through her rebellion against the rigidity of 19<sup>th</sup> century ballet, her rejection of conventional social mores in fashion, children's education and women's rights, and her elevation of the Dance as an art form that could be freely expressive, abstract and universal [Jowitt 1988:102].

Over time, her groundbreaking work in tunic-clad, barefoot, free-flowing body movement to music and subject matter of her choosing began to seem passé to subsequent generations of artists and dancers. While Duncan's protégés faithfully carried on and preserved her repertory, technique and philosophies after her untimely death in 1927 [Nahumck 1994: 523], the rest of the modern dance world, particularly future choreographers such as Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Merce Cunningham and many others, worked to break new boundaries in dance-making in terms of

practice, process, structure and content [Au 2002]. Many came to view Duncan's style of dance as quaint and historical, relevant for its place in the evolution of dance, but relatively immaterial in a contemporary context [Needham 1996:331-2].

My own training in the Isadora Duncan technique began while an undergraduate at the University of Florida, studying with Jill Sonke. Later my path led to Lori Belilove, a third-generation Duncan Dancer in New York City, founder of the Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation, who studied with Irma and Anna Duncan (two of Duncan's adopted daughters), and Hortense Kooluris and Julia Levien (second generation Duncan Dancers<sup>3</sup>), and performed in the 1977 Isadora Duncan Centenary Dance Company [Nahumck 1994:152;523].

Coming from a ballet, jazz and tap dance background, I was immediately smitten with the tenets of Duncan Dance<sup>4</sup>. For me, I found it had all the grace and musicality of ballet, but without the demand for virtuosic and superhuman technique, extension and body type. Rather it seemed to require an inner virtuosity of expressiveness and responsiveness. It harkened back to my experiences as a child, improvising in the living room to Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* or a movement from Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto*. As I learned more of the philosophy of the dance which

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<sup>3</sup> "Duncan Dancers" are practitioners with years of study and performance experience in the Isadora Duncan tradition of dance and repertory. The community acknowledges a lineage of training according to "generations." For example, Isadora's first students and adopted daughters the Isadorables are "first generation Duncan Dancers," their students were "second generation" and so forth. As a community we are now into the fourth and fifth generation of Duncan Dancers. I would be considered a fourth generation Duncan Dancer.

<sup>4</sup> "Duncan Dance" is the term to refer to the style of dance in the pure Isadora Duncan tradition, indicating use of the Greek aesthetic, natural movement vocabulary, tunic and scarf costuming, classical music and a free expressive performance quality, among other characteristics.

incorporated classical music, art and nature, I fell in love more deeply with the work, and felt that I could express myself more fully in this style than any previous experience. It was a life-changing experience for me, and the greatest life affirmation I have had beyond the birth of my child.

I studied with Belilove in New York City and performed with her prestigious company, Lori Belilove & Company, first as an apprentice and later as a company member and soloist. Through extensive classes, workshops and master classes at the Isadora Duncan Foundation, rehearsals and repertory coaching, archival video viewings, reading of books and articles, including Isadora's own *My Life* and *The Art of the Dance*, I delved into the world and culture of Duncan Dance.

The experience not only taught me the principles of Duncan's philosophy and technique, but also helped me to understand the interaction between art, dance and the individual that she espoused. And it is this interaction that ultimately is at the heart of *In/And/Of/Through* as a dance project.

### **The Essence of Isadora Duncan**

Upon entering the graduate program at the University of Maryland, one of my most significant research interests surrounded the analysis of the essence of Duncan Dance. What made a dancer "Duncan?" Why did Duncan Dancers that I had met with from different Duncan Dance lineages and different areas in the world still have the "Duncan-ness" in their dancing I could recognize? In a research proposal in my

DANC600 Introduction to Graduate Studies course with Professor Miriam Phillips, I identified several potential characteristics at the center of Duncan Dance. In preparation for *In/And/Of/Through*, I selected four basic principles of Duncan technique and philosophy, which I considered hallmarks of her art form, including breath and solar plexus initiation, endless flow of movement, a Duncan sense of musicality and personal expression.



Figure 2. Images of Isadora Duncan dancing. From top left clockwise: “Dernière Vision” by José Clara; photo by Arnold Genthe; photo in the Theatre of Dionysus by Raymond Duncan; sketch by Abraham Walkowitz.

*The Breath and the Solar Plexus*

At the foundation of every movement executed in all Duncan Dance is the use of breath initiation and support. Movements that expand outward or upward are supported and initiated with a full inhalation of breath. All movements that release or move downward are impelled by an exhalation of breath. Though Isadora writes very little about breath specifically in her autobiography, articles or

lectures, all Duncan Dancers practice this type of breath initiation and support universally as a fundamental impetus of the Duncan technique.

Likewise, while the solar plexus is mentioned only briefly in Isadora's writing, it is explicitly and abundantly visible in the ample drawings, paintings, photographs and sculptures of Isadora, as well as in the real world practice of the technique. The uplift and sink of the chest, the arms well supported from the core, the swing of the legs from the torso, all demonstrate the notion of movement coming from the solar plexus.

Isadora described her discovery of this initiation in her autobiography: "For hours I would stand quite still, my two hands folded between my breasts, covering the solar plexus...I was seeking and finally discovered the central spring of all movement, the crater of motor power, the unity from which all diversities of movement are born, the mirror of vision for the creation of the dance" [Duncan 1977:136].

I wished to create movement in this thesis project which would initiate from the breath, which I expected to be feasible. However, I was not sure that the body postures I might investigate from visual art would support the use of the solar plexus in the same way as Duncan did with Greco-Roman and Renaissance aesthetics.

### *Endless Movement, Like a Wave*

Isadora claimed that her first dance teacher was the sea and that her "first idea of movement, of the dance, certainly came from the rhythm of the waves" [Duncan



1995:13]. This understanding of the endlessness of movement in nature, that wind may blow more or less but never completely stops, is something Duncan incorporated into her philosophy of movement. Also as part of her rejection of the posing and “held” positions of 19th century ballet, Duncan worked with the idea that the end of one movement is only the beginning of another.

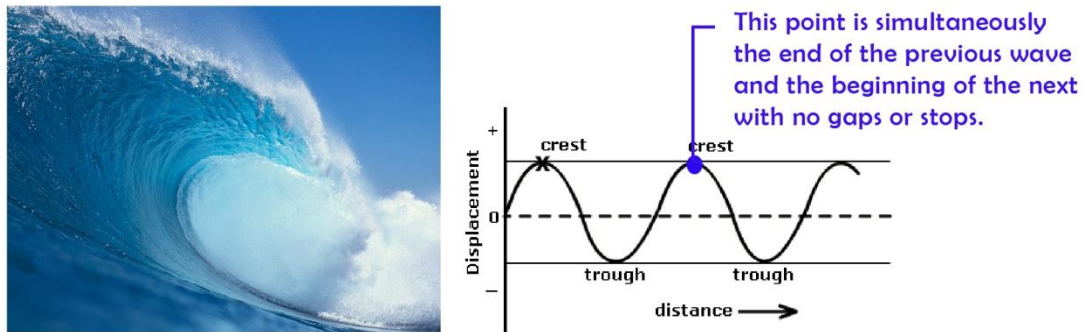


Figure 3. An image of a wave, from which Isadora Duncan studied a philosophical concept of movement. A graph of a wave, from which one can see the continuity of movement on a theoretical, scientific level.

In a practical sense, this means that movements are never held, but have a continual sense of evolution. A Duncan Dancer rides the apex of a movement or gesture, allowing it to expand to its fullest expression and then dynamically ushers that movement into the one that follows, usually a declination or oppositional direction. For example, arms that have lifted from the front to overhead with inhalation and a sense of energizing will either open to the sides with a sense of relaxation or drop back forward with an exhale.

### *Musicality*

A Duncan Dancer listens to and then reacts to the music. “If anything, be late” [Kooluris 1998]. The spontaneous quality for which Isadora Duncan was famous

comes from this principle of reacting to the music, as if hearing it for the first time and allowing the body to respond accordingly, as well as from her practice of using an intentional, direct and engaged eye focus. In truth, it is both a part of the technique and a real part of the experience. Duncan Dancers are trained to dance even established choreography as if hearing it for the first time and spontaneously responding. They are trained to really see the surrounding space and the audience. However, at the same time, there truly is an inherent experience where the dancer actively is listening to the music and having an extemporaneous and visceral response to the music that results in dance.

Isadora Duncan was one of the first of the early modern dancers to use concert music for her choreography, rather than music specifically written for dance as was done for ballroom, vaudeville and even ballet. This practice was one of her most lasting contributions to dance in the 20th century [Daly 1994:140]. Duncan explains, by her own account, that:

“I have taken as my guide the rhythms of the great Masters; not because I thought I could express the beauty of their works, but because, in surrendering my body unresistingly to their rhythms I have hoped to recover the natural cadences of human movements which have been lost for centuries” [Duncan 1977:90].

Dance historian Ann Daly has also suggested that Duncan cleverly aligned her dance with the revered concert music of the great composers, like Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, and the like, as a way of elevating the status of dance in society [Daly 1994:143].

I believe Isadora's use of music was both sincerely philosophical and necessarily practical. She did find greatest artistic sympathy when, in essence, she collaborated with the great composers through their music. Likewise, her deep passion to restore dance as a "high" art form required an association of dance with the cultural high arts of the day: concert music, literature, poetry and fine visual art. Isadora combined all of these in the creation of her dance art [Duncan 1977:84].

### *Personal Expression*

There is a strong emphasis on personal expression in Duncan Dance that gives the dancing a spontaneous, reactive, free-spirited quality. Duncan Dancers have the freedom to make choices within the act of dancing that involve changes of focus, facial expressions, head tilts, timing and placement of the arms and torso, which make each dance performance unique within the established choreographic structure.

The concept of "personal expression" goes beyond just this spontaneous quality. The freedom to express the self within the dance was a key to Isadora's transformation of Dance as an art form. While in ballet the prima ballerina was portraying a character (princess, fairy, nymph, spirit, witch) and the corps de ballet were an anonymous presentation of dance (no single dancer "mattered" as an individual, but rather as a body in space that could effectively execute unison combinations of choreography), Duncan cultivated the notion of the individual artist in the dance. For Duncan, it mattered whether she or someone else was performing the dance. It made a difference because the individual was different. Duncan hoped for the development of a

humanity that honored the highest in the mind, in the heart and in the body and that valued this individuality (a very American concept) ... again, “the highest intelligence in the freest body!” [Duncan 1977:63].

This belief that the quality of the particular individual brings unique expression to each dance led to some important practices. First, restrictions of body type, nationality, and physical ability (other than the ability to move and dance to your own fullest expressiveness) were removed. The Duncan Dancer can be slim or voluptuous, muscular or lithe, male or female, grounded or lifted, angular or rounded. What is important is the connection the person has in generating movements to the music with expressiveness. In the Duncan tradition, it is honored and expected that one dancer will not do the dance in the exact same way as another, since people are not the same. Yet, there is a cohesiveness found in the Greek aesthetic, musical sympathy, breath and solar plexus initiation, flow of movement and personal expression that brings these diverse dancers together under the umbrella of “Duncan Dance.”

Of these four elements – breath and solar plexus initiation, endless flow of movement, musicality and personal expression – I hoped that the first two elements would help influence the movement vocabulary and “bring to life” the artwork I would study as part of *In/And/Of/Through*. I hoped musicality would be present in the choreographic structures and phrasings, and I hoped that personal expression would manifest itself in the performance quality of each dancer.

## **Investigating an Alternative Aesthetic**

The *In/And/Of/Through* project was intimately connected to an ongoing relationship I have had with the Freer Gallery of Art, part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., as well as my general appreciation for visual art.

My first project with the Freer Gallery, described below, involved choreography for a single dance to a single piece of artwork in support of a current Freer Gallery exhibit, and performance of that resulting dance with other Duncan repertoire in 2009. The second project was a proposed two-day festival entailing additional new dances based on multiple pieces of artwork from various collections at the Freer Gallery. This second project was also the genesis for *In/And/Of/Through*.

The first project, which gave me my first real experience of choreographing a new dance based directly on a piece of visual artwork, came about when Freer Gallery educational program directors commissioned me to develop a dance in the Duncan style, based upon an art piece in their permanent American Art collection. The Freer Gallery houses the Asian Art collection of the Smithsonian, and was established in 1923 after industrialist and art collector Charles Lang Freer bequeathed the building and his extensive art collection in Asian and American Art from the Japonisme movement to the Smithsonian. The museum has extended its collection since that time to include works from China, Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, and Ancient Egypt, among others [Freer 2010].

The artwork selected for this project was *The Four Sylvan Sounds*, a four wood panel painting in the style of Japanese silk screens by Thomas Wilmer Dewing (1851-1938) in 1897 (see Figure 4, page 21). It provided an excellent source of inspiration for a new choreography that brought together the natural classicism of Duncan Dance, imagery from the American Japonisme movement, and the music of Amy Cheney Beach (1867-1944), who was a contemporary of Dewing's and investigated similar themes of nature through her music. The natural environment and classical poses of the four female figures were ideal connections to the principles of nature and romantic aesthetics found in the Duncan dance form.

My choreography, entitled "Sylvan Sounds," was performed in the McEvoy Auditorium at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., on September 9, 2009 as part of the educational program event, JUMPArt. The performance included a lecture about Isadora Duncan as well as her original historical repertory, performed by a variety of Duncan Dancers from Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Chicago, Illinois, and projected images of the painting onto the stage.

The process of working from artwork to create choreography is exactly in keeping with the Duncan tradition. I followed her same process of creating choreography, as demonstrated in the example of her "Tanagra Figures," looking to artwork and investigating an abstract, human, universal concept or subject matter in doing so. It also stimulated an idea about using the Duncan-style of movement to a wider range of aesthetics. If Duncan Dance could be successfully applied to the inspiration of visual

artwork from the American Japonisme movement, could it be relevant in other aesthetic contexts as well?



Figure 4. Above: *The Four Sylvan Sounds*, Thomas Wilmer Dewing, 1896-7. Below: Images from “Sylvan Sounds,” choreography by Valerie Durham, performance premiere at the McEvoy Auditorium, National Portrait Gallery, September 9, 2009.

The success of “Sylvan Sounds” as a choreography led to a follow-up project proposal from the Freer Gallery Education Department. In the Fall of 2010, the Freer Gallery assistant curator, Lee Glazer, and educational program directors, Joanna

Pecore and Elizabeth Benskin, met with me to discuss the possibility of a two-day festival in the museum, with a tailored art exhibit, dance performances with an expanded repertory of new choreographies based on artwork in the Freer's permanent collections, artist-participant workshops, docent tours and much more.



Figure 5. From left to right: *Courtesan* (1796-8) by Katsushika; *Oiran with fireflies* (19<sup>th</sup> Century) by Hosoda; *A Courtesan tying her sash in the wind* (18th-19th Century) by Katsukawa; *Courtesan beneath a mosquito net* (1855) by Utagawa. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

The idea of applying Isadora Duncan's principles of dance and movement to non-Western aesthetics intrigued me. Duncan had founded her ideas for the Dance on the bedrock of Western civilization and culture, the Greeks. Could her principles of movement have been possible if she had never known about ancient Greek art and culture? What if she had used artwork from the Edo Period in Japan, for example, which was as much a renaissance for Japan as the Renaissance in Western Europe?



In preparation for the proposed two-day festival, I explored this question within the context of the DANC719 Research-based Choreography course led by adjunct professor Adrienne Clancy in Fall 2010. I sought to use the Duncan Dance elements discussed above but substitute the classical Greek aesthetic for an alternative one.

The ample collection of art at the Freer Gallery provided many options. After reviewing the Freer Gallery collections through museum visits, online viewing of images and research in museum publications, I found that I was drawn to the silk screens of the Edo Period Japan.

I premiered “Oiran: The Scroll is Danced” in the Fall 2010 semester. It was a solo, performed behind transparent white curtains to indicate the secluded world of the *oiran*, or Japanese courtesans, combining body poses from the selected silk screen paintings from the Freer Gallery, and linking them using Duncan Dance principles. Ultimately, this solo choreography gave me a confirmation that my idea of studying visual artwork, even from an alternative aesthetic, and applying Duncan movement principles could result in an effective, meaningful and respectful dance piece. I looked forward to creating more works within this construct for my larger thesis project and the Freer Gallery festival.

### **Is It Cultural Appropriation?**

In pursuing this project, I had a significant concern over the problem of “cultural appropriation,” a term which indicates the adoption of certain elements of one culture

by another in a manner which changes the significance or meaning of that element. There is also a connotation of the culture being “used” by another. In my investigation of applying an alternative aesthetic to Isadora Duncan dance principles, I did not wish to be inconsiderate or degrading to the originating culture.

My concern partially stemmed from my knowledge of Ruth St. Denis, a contemporary of Isadora Duncan, who is also acknowledged as helping to form the modern dance movement in the United States through her Denishawn school and dance company with husband Ted Shawn. St. Denis created dances based on non-Western cultures in presentations that purported to *be* a dance from a particular culture, or to be her own *interpretations* of what that dance form was. Her fascination with the “Orient” led her to develop dances such as “Nautch,” which was named after an existing dance form in India, but her choreography was based upon her own stereotypical and little-researched understanding of the authentic form. While Western audiences of the time greatly enjoyed these presentations because of their prevalent and persistent interest in exoticism, St. Denis is now often accused of participating in “cultural appropriation” because she used dances, gestures and practices from non-Western cultures to her own ends, without significant regard for the alterations in meaning from the originating culture [Au 2002:94].

Isadora Duncan did not fall into this type of criticism because of her obvious reliance on Greco-Roman aesthetics, which is inherently acknowledged as the foundation for Western civilization, which was her own heritage as an American. One could

question, however, her idealized interpretation of the Greek aesthetic as a pure representation of the “natural” in dance, which she claimed for herself.

As I prepared to look into the application of Japanese aesthetics to my own choreography based on Duncan movement principles, I wondered if my work would be seen as “culturally appropriating” that of the Japanese art. As a white, American, modern-dance trained woman, did I have the right to investigate and “use” Japanese art for my own artistic purposes?

I felt I needed to find a way of approaching this work that would keep me within the bonds of good practice. I researched the concept of “*kosmopolitis*,” which is to say “I am a citizen of the world,” first proposed by Greek philosopher and Plato contemporary Diogenes the Cynic (413-327 B.C.E.), [Hughes 2003:106-7]. While not espousing an overarching, one-nation political structure, Diogenes’ concept of a world community is more about one person’s “allegiance and orientation to fellow humans” and the creation of a community that is about a common understanding and mutual shared appreciation and honoring of values [Hughes 2003:108].

I valued this perspective of *kosmopolitis* as a way to approach this dance project. If I looked on my investigations of the artwork from various Asian cultures as part of both the Freer Gallery commission and thesis concert project as a way to learn about, respect and honor the different cultures shared by one humanity, then perhaps the resulting work in *In/And/Of/Through* could entail a more significant “bringing

together” of the commonalities of humanity and the importance of individuals within complete acceptance of the difference between various human cultures.

Second, I informally surveyed students at the University of Maryland about this issue in general as it related to dance. Inevitably, this diverse group of young adults would see the interaction of “other” cultures as a way to learn about and understand those cultures, bringing society together, rather than as a way of denigrating or disrespecting that culture, as long as the interaction was seen as an opportunity for learning and understanding, and not an initiative of alteration. (Discussions of how any interaction inevitably results in alteration will be reserved for another paper).

Third, I restricted myself to a study of the artwork itself, gleaning what I could from intense observation of the subject matter, body postures, and composition of each work of art. To build essential context, I also researched the time periods, cultural developments, mythologies and artists to also understand, to the extent possible, the perspective of the originating culture as it related to the artwork itself. I did not study or rely on the *dance forms* from the originating cultures to create my choreography. For example, though I watched a few examples of Kabuki dance, I did not use any movements I saw in those videos in the creation of any parts of my choreography, “Oiran: The Scroll is Danced.” I wanted the choreography to reflect the visual artwork, not the dance forms of those cultures. In performing the dance, I was not an “*oiran*,” I was myself, exploring the inner life and existence of an *oiran* from human history through the legacy of artwork left behind. I felt to do otherwise would be an

attempt to copy the dances, a la Ruth St. Denis. And to paraphrase Denishawn dancer Charles Weidman, obviously people from an originating culture trained in that dance form would dance it better than whatever I could attempt to copy [Brooks 1990].

### **A Dancing Community**

For me, the concept of *kosmopolitis*, in addition to connecting with an issue of cultural appropriation, also related to the Duncan value of community. This value stems from several factors, including Duncan's focus on the importance of the individual in dance, personal expression, authentic connection among dancers while dancing in groups or with the audience while dancing solo, and her overarching mission to open schools of dance. Just as she wished to see the Dance return to a "high art" form, she also wished for the Dance to become a vehicle for personal knowledge and education for all humanity [Duncan Life 1927]. I felt a strong affinity with Isadora's passion for this issue.

I wished to include a sense of community and personal development in the dance project, *In/And/Of/Through*. Since the University of Maryland dance graduate program focuses on developing the "teaching artist,"<sup>5</sup> I was determined to use the opportunity of this dance project to teach principles of dance and performance, and to cultivate a larger learning experience for personal knowledge and the development of relationships and community. Ultimately, I believed this kind of learning and

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<sup>5</sup> The term "teaching artist" has been adopted by organizations such as the Kennedy Center to identify artists who use their art form in conjunction with educational experiences, both to help elucidate the academic lessons through art, and to teach principles of the art form itself.

community-building would create an environment for a more successful performance, especially considering the personal nature of the transformative power of art.

These foundational elements – Isadora Duncan, her basic principles of dance technique and connection to visual art from the ancient Greek and Renaissance eras, as well as an interest in investigating alternative aesthetics for a greater understanding of humanity – greatly connected to my other important interest, the relationship between the individual and art. With these foundational elements in place, I looked to foster the collaborative components including the specific pieces of artwork, the cast of dancers and conceptual material for *In/And/Of/Through*.

## Chapter 2: And | Concepts and Collaborative Elements

There were three important components to the next phase of creating *In/And/Of/Through*. The first was creating a contextual setting and range of conceptual ideas for a dance project that would involve such seemingly disparate elements as Isadora Duncan, Asian artwork, and a consideration of art, the individual and humanity. The second component involved accumulating a community of collaborators, especially the dancers. The third was conducting the research into the artwork itself, to find substantive and generative pieces that sparked ideas for movements in keeping with the Duncan philosophy.

### **Concepts of Experiencing Art in the Gallery**

I have been fortunate to visit many museums in my life. Raised by parents whose work included global travel, and who greatly valued culture and art, I visited the great museums of the world – the Smithsonian, the British, the Louvre, the Hermitage, the Uffizi, the Prado, and many others – throughout my youth. I continue that practice. Each time I visit a museum there is always some work of art, in some exhibit or in some gallery, which captures my interest. It draws me in from across the space, and I drink in its redolent attributes of color, shape, composition, or subject, whatever element it has that has caught my imagination.

Invariably, I feel somehow “different” when I leave the museum, having ingested the beauty, provocation, and animus of a piece of art. I breathe differently, walk with

more ease or more enthusiasm; my eyes feel more bright and active. Am I alone in this experience?

I believe part of the reason people spend their time engaging with art is because of its transformative ability. It can affect our thinking, raise our consciousness, and evoke our feelings. I wondered can it also change our movements and our physical actions?

Isadora Duncan certainly allowed her study of visual art – painting and sculpture – to affect not only her movement, but her entire life. She dressed like the Greek sculptures she studied, danced like the Renaissance paintings she observed, and lived according to the free Dionysian art she loved. At the same time, many artists were inspired by Isadora and her dancing. August Rodin called her “the greatest woman who ever lived,” and created several sculptures based on her dancing. Antoine Bourdelle, Abraham Walkowitz, Leon Bakst and José Clara, among many others, all found Isadora’s dancing an inspiration for the creation of their own artwork [Duncan 1995]. And even before the time of Isadora Duncan, French realist Edgar Degas (who, like Isadora, was a fan of French Romanticist Delacroix, and interestingly, owned a large collection of Japanese prints) was famous for his studies of dancers in the Paris Opera in the 1870s [Johnson 2003:589-590]. The practice of allowing dance and human movement to inspire visual art has a long history. And on the opposite end, Isadora, and other dance-artists as well, likewise studied visual arts to find their own inspirations for movement.



This cycle of life and movement inspiring visual art and then visual art inspiring dance and movement was extremely thought-provoking to me as a structural component for *In/And/Of/Through*.

Because I was working with the visual artwork from the Freer Gallery and wished to investigate the transformative quality of art on a human being, my concept for *In/And/Of/Through* surrounded the idea of setting it in a museum or gallery space. I imagined projecting the images of the Freer Gallery artwork onto panels in the stage space to allow both the dancers and the audience members to respond directly to the artwork in the dance movements, performed and witnessed respectively. I imagined presenting the dancers as everyday members of the community (as opposed to “performers”) to manifest the real-world-derived process of personal observation, absorption and embodiment from the museum experience I hoped to explore on stage.

In keeping with my interest in the idea of a cycle of inspiration and interpretation between movement and visual art, I thought to culminate the performance with some sort of onstage visual art creation, like painting, using audience participation. As the dancers began as “real” people who demonstrated their transformation by art through movement, likewise the “real people” of the audience would demonstrate their interpretation of the movement back into visual art. I was interested in how audience members might respond to the kinesthetic energy of choreographed movements around them, and allow that to influence their strokes of paint on a blank canvas.

Further, this notion of “creating something for the *now*, ” as indicated with the live visual art creation at the end, seemed important for the more contemporary context I wished to develop for the historical dances, historical technique and historical artwork within the dance project. I imagined the finale of the dance project to not only involve live visual art, created onstage in that moment, but an original musical composition written specifically for the dance project, and a dance choreography crafted from the very process of the dance project itself, bringing together the transformation, the learning, the people and the art, all in one moment.

### **A Choreographer’s Canvas: the Dancers**

Once some general concepts were in place, I felt I must begin with the dancers who would bring the choreography to life and whose personalities would infuse the entire project with the required openness, consciousness and sense of community I wanted. I determined that I would dance in the project myself to represent the in-depth training needed to anchor the presence of the Duncan principles in the choreography.

The question was how to find the “right” people. My experience in many years of teaching Duncan Dance has been that some people are uncomfortable with the technique because it requires a significant level of personal introspection and expressiveness. In order to work with people in the Duncan style, you must have dancers who are willing to be very personal and even spiritual in some senses. Additionally, since *In/And/Of/Through* was to contemplate the real experience of personal transformation from the consideration of a piece of art, I wanted an element

of that transformative reaction to be “real” for the dancers as people through the process of participating in the project. Therefore, I felt it would be important to find dancers for the project through a process “self-selection.”

Rather than auditioning dancers in a conventional sense and selecting them based upon some demonstrated prowess, I chose to announce my project openly to the public via email messages, website posting, word of mouth and fliers. Anyone who was willing to commit to classes and rehearsals for the entire dance project would perform and participate in it.

As a result, the project gained about 12 female dancers, who were quite diverse in ages, backgrounds, and levels and types of training, but who were all united in a commitment to participating in this project. Later, because I wished to present diversity as part of the project, I chose to add male dancers. This required a more targeted process of selection due to the low numbers of male dancers in the University of Maryland dance program, and in the D.C. area in general. I identified potential male dancers in my university technique classes, and from performances with other choreographers and faculty, and invited them to join the project.

Although there were cast changes in the year and half long development period, with some dancers having to drop out due to changes in work commitments or injury, and others coming in later, the ultimate cast was one that fit the diversity and commitment bill. I had hoped for a bit more racial diversity within the female dancers (we only

had one female dancer of identifiable minority descent) and perhaps a bit less within the male dancers (all the male dancers were of minority descent). However, looking across the various categories of age (21-62 years), body type (tall, thin, muscular, voluptuous, plump), training (none, Duncan, hip hop, breakdance, modern and ballet), experience (none to semi-professional), gender and race, we did have a diverse cast.

The dancers were required to attend one to two rehearsals per week from Fall 2010 through the early March 2012 performances. Each rehearsal included a dance class in the Duncan technique as well as repertory coaching, choreography creation, improvisation studies, and dance run-throughs. Later in the process, I had private and semi-private meetings with each dancer to help with individual issues and needs. We also had a weekend intensive in January 2012 to work in depth on one of the major choreographies in the piece, Isadora's classic repertory piece, her "Ode to Apollo."

It was both a challenge and a joy to hold a class for such a diverse community of dancers. I had dancers with significant physical issues (one dancer had suffered a broken back in a horse-riding accident two years before, for example) or with little dance training in the same class with dancers with lifelong dance training in very vigorous styles, dancers with extensive Duncan training, as well as male and female dancers together. Much of the Duncan technique comes across as essentially "feminine," so part of the challenge was to make the dance movements appropriate for males as well. Also, I had to take into consideration the balance of making things "easy" enough for the untrained, older or physically-challenged dancers, and yet

challenging enough for the highly-trained, athletic dancers. The class had to be Duncan enough to be Duncan, and yet contemporary enough for the younger dancers for whom the Duncan aspect was not the first appeal of participating in the piece.

As a result, I combined several elements to make a class that could satisfy the diverse group. Our class included a floor warm-up with Bartenieff Fundamentals<sup>6</sup> related to the Duncan technique such as dynamic alignment, weight transference, initiation and sequencing, and breath and core support; a sitting warm-up from the Duncan tradition with some conventional dance stretches; and a standing warm-up with yoga positions, classical stretch combinations and Duncan exercises. The *barre* and across-the-floor work were Duncanesque in movement vocabulary, but I used contemporary music from Coldplay, Radiohead, Ellie Golding, Foster the People, Adele and others to balance its classicism. Regular improvisation sessions allowed dancers to move in their own ways, integrate Duncan movements and connect with each other. This process of holding a technique class, though it took time “away” from rehearsal, was critical to establishing a common style of movement for the performance and for building community. I believe this unity shone through in the final performance.

### **A Visual Artist in Our Midst**

As mentioned above, my original concept for the project was to include some form of audience participation in a final onstage visual art project to bring the cycle of art

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<sup>6</sup> “Bartenieff Fundamentals” are a series of exercises and principles developed by Irmgard Bartenieff based on Rudolf Laban’s movement theory and the physical/kinesiological functioning of the human body.

inspiration, interpretation and creation full circle. Various iterations of the implementation of this idea were discussed, including:

- having all audience members come onto the stage to make their own marks (using charcoal, paint or ink) on a large canvas across the back of the stage;
- having audience members create their own visual responses with paper and art utensils provided upon entering the theater house which could be posted on the stage or out in the lobby;
- using iPads, distributed to various audience members, to electronically create artwork that could be projected on the stage;
- combining a trained visual artist and either the dancers to help make the art as they danced or select audience members to participate on stage.

Because I had not created a work using audience participation or live visual art at this level before, I consulted several people on the efficacy of these ideas, including Sara Pearson and Patrik Widrig (PearsonWidrig DanceTheater), Sharon Mansur (improvisation/performance art expert), Erin Glasspatrick (production) and visual art students Kristin Yeung and Adrian Galvin among others. Based upon budget, performance time, and logistical production constraints, the above possibilities were honed to a single visual artist to capture the essence of movement in the choreography that the audience was simultaneously witnessing.

At this time in the process, there was a fourth male member of the cast, Adrian Galvin, who was also a visual artist and student. We had an initial conversation during which we discussed the possibilities for handling the visual art portion of the concert. The idea of involving both the onstage visual art and the audience greatly appealed to Galvin and his own artistic philosophy. I invited him to expand his role so

that he would dance the entire concert and then “come out of the dance” during the finale to become the visual artist.

Galvin suggested the use of contemporary Chinese calligraphy due to its focus on the *process* of painting, rather than purely the end result, which would be important given the 10-minute timeframe Galvin would have to paint. At this time, we were still contemplating that his efforts would be joined by members of the audience as well.

Galvin’s suggestion of contemporary Chinese calligraphy was the ideal genre for this project. As he described in a later written response about his participation:

“Valerie asked me to participate in live art creation for the culminating moment of her thesis; the obvious key question was, what meaningful visual artwork could I create in such a radically short period of time? Because painting is a record of movement, it need not be viewed live while it is being created. This gives the painter ample time to carefully craft their work as they see fit. In order to find a connection between these two time scales, I turned to the Chinese ink painting tradition which places high value on focused, dynamic *execution*. In other words, the art is the *process of creation*, not the finished product as in Western painting traditions. By inverting the standard Western paradigm, I was able to deliver a performance that fit in the necessary time frame, and made strong abstract connections to Valerie’s movement vocabulary” [Galvin 2012:1].

Due to an injury sustained in December 2011, Galvin could not participate as a dancer but was able to continue as the visual artist in the finale. As such, Galvin saw himself as an intermediary between the dancers and the audience, providing the artistic manifestation of what the audience members might create if they had indeed been given the paper and ink themselves. He saw himself as part of the dance.



Figure 6. Example of Galvin artwork, *Untitled*, 2010.

From his written response: “For me, dance and painting are fundamentally inseparable, but are received through different filters: audience members view the movement of dance directly with the eyes, and they view the movement of painting through the filtered record on canvas” [Galvin 2012:2]. My hope was that Galvin would be able to capture some of the energetic essence coming directly from the dancers in the finale, which choreographically was

conceived to represent all the preceding dance investigations and experiences. I also hoped it would create a contemporized, forward-looking ending in a dance project that was drawing heavily on ancient and historical artwork and traditions.

### **Original Music to Place Us in the *Now***

Much of the music for the dance project would come from existing and historical sources, such as the composition from the 19<sup>th</sup> century for “Sylvan Sounds.” I wanted to work with a contemporary composer to create an original composition, specifically for this project, to represent the forward-looking message at the end. I wanted music that would resonate with and feel relevant to the audience, and bring together all previous musical elements if possible.



My husband James Durham is an award-winning multimedia artist, author and composer with whom I have collaborated many times over my dance career, creating choreographies on his existing music as well as commissioning him to create music for my choreographic projects. In working with him on this project, I asked for a piece of music that would both bring together the musical elements of the rest of the dance piece, and would represent the *now*. I wanted music that had a sense of looking forward, based upon what we have learned from examining the past. He was completely free to create any type of music in terms of time structure, melody, arrangement, or instrumentation. I was open to his artistic interpretation of what a culminating contemporary musical composition would be in response to the rest of the music and dances. I also was contemplating the possible need for transitional music that would link one piece to the next and could foreshadow the entire new music piece for the finale section.

Throughout the process, I shared music, rehearsal video clips and images with him to keep him apprised of the dance project as it progressed through each dance piece, until we had the entire program choreographed, and would finish the process with the development of this finale dance piece based on his musical composition.

### **Existing Choreographies, A Place to Start**

As I mentioned earlier, the two-day Freer Gallery festival proposal was influential in the formation of my concepts for *In/And/Of/Through*. For example, the Freer Gallery staff was interested in the inclusion of original Duncan repertory as part of the two-

day festival project, in addition to the new choreographies I would create from artwork in the collections. I felt this would also be appropriate for my thesis dance project as well, since I was interested in using Isadora Duncan technique in new ways, why not also use her existing choreographies in new ways as well?

As I reviewed the possible repertory pieces, I was drawn to some of the symphonic works as this would be a fabulous opportunity to do one of these larger group pieces, something that is often hard to accomplish due to constraints of space, casting or cost. With the support of the University of Maryland through the thesis process, and the Smithsonian through this festival, I knew I might be able to gather together a large enough cast to support the performance of one of Isadora's symphonic dances.

One of my favorites is Isadora Duncan's choreography to Franz Schubert's *Great Symphony*. Each movement was an ode to a different Greek god: the *Andante* to Apollo, the *Scherzo* to Dionysus and the *Finale* to Artemis [Belilove 2001].

Choreographically, the *Andante*, or Isadora's "Ode to Apollo," has continuous motifs of a rising sun. Therefore, I thought this could be re-envisioned as an "Ode to the Rising Sun." This provided a symbolic connection between the work of an American dance-artist and artwork from the American Japonisme movement and Japan.

In addition, the Freer Gallery staff requested the "Sylvan Sounds" choreography from the previous 2009 performance at the National Portrait Gallery. This was already a perfect match for use in *In/And/Of/Through*, because it used the Duncan style and the

inspiration of a Freer Gallery art piece. We hoped to expand the piece by choreographing to the second Amy Beach musical composition, *Hermit Thrush at Morn*, to pair with the *Hermit Thrush at Eve* and the “Sylvan Sounds” choreography, to additional Dewing paintings.

Lastly, I had a dance choreographed in 2005 entitled “Night Fight” to the music of Tan Dun from the movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. An energetic pyrrhic dance with martial arts motifs, I believed it would fit the context of the project with a boost of energy and contrast in the arc of the program.

### **Co-Collaborators: The Artwork**

With the exception of “Sylvan Sounds,” I needed to find Freer Gallery artwork that would validate the inclusion of my existing dances in the project. Additionally, I needed artwork to serve as the inspiration the dance pieces that did not yet exist, but were needed for a full thesis dance project of 45 minutes or more. I began purely by perusing the entire collection, and then began to hone in on pieces of art that caught my interest for their subject matter, body shapes, or composition. In general, I was looking for pieces of art that contained the human figure, and in particular, pieces that showed the human figure in dynamic poses that promised the potential for movement.

#### *Works from the American Art Collection*

As mentioned earlier, I had been commissioned to choreograph a dance based upon Dewing’s *The Four Sylvan Sounds*. The four female figures dressed in flowing,

golden-colored gowns, pose classically in a lush green environment, holding various instruments. Each instrument represents a different sound of the forest: The xylophone as the sound of the burbling brook; the drum as the sound of the woodpecker; the lyre as the sound of the wind through the trees; the flute as the sound of the hermit thrush. Dewing was a tonalist who produced a large number of his works at the Cornish Art Colony in New Hampshire, where composer Amy Cheney Beach, who composed *Hermit Thrush at Eve* and *Hermit Thrush at Morn*, also spent summers surrounded by nature for inspiration [Freer 2009].

Because the existing choreography of “Sylvan Sounds” occupied only one of the two songs in the suite Beach composed, I was interested in choreographing the second song, *Hermit Thrush at Morn*, using other Dewing paintings.



Figure 7. *The Four Sylvan Sounds*, 1986-7, Thomas Wilmer Dewing. Freer Gallery, Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.

Works such as *The Lute* and *After Sunset* had similar values of lush green landscape with classically posed and dressed female figures as the subject matter. In particular



Figure 8. *Girl with Lute*, 1904-5, by Thomas Wilmer Dewing, Freer Gallery.

though, I was drawn to the solo figure in *Girl with Lute* because of the contrast of the lone beautiful, dejected figure in an interior setting, as opposed to the grouping of four serene beauties in *The Four Sylvan Sounds*. It made me consider the possibility that the new companion choreography would be a solo for me, allowing other dancers to take the existing roles in “Sylvan Sounds.”

This painting is more typical of Dewing’s later career, when he often painted women with musical instruments in interior settings, reminding viewers of the connection between art and music. His softening of the strong lines of carpet on the floor against a neutral background bathes the female figure in a soft glow [Freer website 2012].

#### *Works from the Japanese Collection*

As discussed in Chapter 1, my research-based choreography project in Fall 2010 had already led me to an investigation of the Edo Period in Japan (1603-1868), a time of fantastic growth and progress in Japanese art and social history. I was fascinated to learn that during this time, the foundational elements of Japanese aesthetics were

solidified into a classical form, and the social, economic and educational advances there were similar to the Renaissance in Western civilization. I felt this was important because it was the Western European Renaissance artwork that was a tremendous influence and inspiration for the Isadora Duncan dance technique. Likewise, the Edo period in Japan had a resonating sense of nature, beauty, human idealism, quality and social structure, making this connection between Japanese aesthetics and Duncan Dance technique seem more appropriate and fulfilling [Mason 1993:243-245].

Artists of this time were fascinated by the *ukiyo* or “floating world,” a sub-culture dominated by pleasure, beauty, fashion, and social refinement, led by the *oiran*, or courtesans, in walled, secluded districts in Edo (modern day Tokyo). The artists painted these celebrated figures in glamorous poses, but also in every day pursuits, such as writing, playing the *shamisen*, fixing hair and so forth [Neuer 1979:23;44].

The Freer Gallery holds a plethora of the beautiful silk screens from Edo Period Japan (1603-1868) featuring actors, dancers, courtesans and other participants in the “floating world” [Benskin 2005]. Artwork of this period is also characterized by images of place and landscape. Artwork featured dramatic shapes and angles, along with flat planes, strongly vertical or horizontal compositions and clear linear outlines. Many paintings also included calligraphy with lines of associated poetry to accompany the subject matter of the works [Mason 1993:245]. All these features would be interesting considerations for use in choreographic investigation.

I reviewed at least 100 images in the Freer’s Japanese collection online, in published sources, or on display. Ultimately, I choose 13 pieces of artwork to craft the original choreography, linking the poses and gestures I saw with principles of breath, solar plexus initiation and flow of movement.



Image of Selected Artwork	Title and Notes from Choreographic Process and Choices
	<p><i>Oiran and fireflies</i>, Hosoda, 19th century:  The simple composition of the single figure along with the graceful swirls of calligraphy and dotted placement of fireflies in a diagonal line across the top of the vertical form captured my imagination and interest. I was interested in capturing both the motion of creating calligraphy, as well as investigating the shapes and pathways in the marks of calligraphy themselves.</p>
	<p><i>Shamisen player</i>, Kitagawa, late 18th-early 19th century:  In addition to their sexual services, the <i>oiran</i> provided other forms of entertainment for their clients, including music. Although the title does not specifically reference an <i>oiran</i> or courtesan, the strumming gesture presented informs the way the <i>shamisen</i> was played.</p>

Table 1. Images of selected artwork from Edo Period Japanese silk screens, with titles, artists, date and choreographic notes. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.

As I studied these silk screens, I was excited by the apparent overlaps between the presentation of the *oiran* figures in the Japanese silk screens with the figures in Greek statuary, such as the Tanagra figurines, and Renaissance paintings, such as the Boticelli's *Birth of Venus*, both of which were inspirational for Isadora.

For example, I saw the *contrapposto*, with its characteristic knees falling inward mirrored in the connected knee bend in the Japanese figures, and a release through the chest that indicated an activation of the solar plexus in complementary reverse of Isadora's famous chest lift.

#### *More to Discover in the Japanese Collection*

I discovered the appropriate art references for the dance "Night Fight" from within the Japanese collection. When performing the "Sylvan Sounds" for a Docent Appreciation Evening at the Freer Gallery in 2010, I was struck by the two large wooden *Nō* guardian statues at each end of the wrap-around corridors of the gallery. Their fierce expressions, dramatically angled body stances and aggressiveness would make excellent choreographic fodder I thought, imagining a vigorous warrior dance that would take place in the corridor between the two towering figures.

Later I discovered the four riveting *Shitennō* temple guardian statues. The figures, each representing a different compass direction – east, south, north, west – were used in temples as guardians to protect against any threats to Buddhism with their fierce facial expressions, objects of weaponry and knowledge as well as their warrior-like



dress and stances. The four guardians were meant to be presented frontally as an entire ensemble. These particular guardians also have figures of the Japanese demons, or *oni*, literally underfoot. These highly muscular demons, nude and exaggerated in body proportions and expressions, are representatives of mischief, corruption and evil spirits.



Figure 9. Images of *Shitennō* Temple Guardians and demons. From upper left, clockwise: Jikoku-ten (east), Zocho-ten (south), Komoku-ten (west), and Tamon-ten (north), Kamakura Period, Japan.

According to the placard on the display, “these lithe, animated figures are excellent examples of a hyperrealistic style that came to prominence in Japanese Buddhist sculpture in the 13th and 14th centuries” [Freer placard 2012].

I was intrigued by the fierce faces and nobility of the guardians against the contortions and chaotic expressions of the demons. I felt this contrast could make an interesting component for a dance, and would explore the various aspects of Apollonian and Dionysian dancing in one piece. Many Isadora Duncan works are either Apollonian or Dionysian in nature. What could be elucidated with the exploration of both dynamic poles at the same time in the same dance?

### *Relics of the Ancient Egyptian Collections*

Isadora went back to the ancient Greek civilization for her search for the “truth” of embodied beauty. I was interested in how her principles of flow and solar plexus mobility might fit within an ancient Egyptian cultural aesthetic that valued verticality, symmetry, two-dimensionality, and highly geometric shapes in its hieroglyphic paintings and murals, sculptures, and small pieces of jewelry, pottery and artifacts.

Charles Lang Freer was particularly drawn to the glazed pottery of ancient Egypt, and as a result much of the Freer Gallery’s ancient Egyptian collections contain many pottery and glass pieces without human figures present. Freer did also acquire some of the amulets, shrines and small statuary that did have depictions of humans, gods and goddesses. The geometric block nature of most of these artifacts transmits a sense

of strength, shape and weight, as well as very interesting body shapes created by the angles of knees and elbows [Freer website 2012].



Images of Selected Artwork	Title and Notes
	<p><i>Menat depicting the god Nefertum, unknown artist, ca. 1075-656 B.C.E.:</i> I was very taken with the angles in this sidewise crouched position. It makes the body seem very contained, yet the way the arms or rays extend out from the figure to the edges of the amulet also give it a sense of expanse. I felt this could make an interesting pose from which to begin a series of movements.</p>
	<p><i>Amulet of the god Thoth, unknown artist, ca. 1075-525 B.C.E:</i> The vertical downward pull of this walking figure was very captivating. The held rigidity of the upper body against the oppositional positions of the walking legs below created an interesting dynamic within the body that was very different from the Botticelli/Duncan style <i>contrapposto</i>. I wondered if this type of body stance could be incorporated with the other Duncan principles of movement, especially in the act of locomoting.</p>

Table 2. Images of selected artwork from the ancient Egyptian art collection, including titles, dates and choreographic notes. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.

I selected four main art pieces, two of which are shown above, from the collection that I felt could lead to effective choreography based upon their dynamics and resonance for me as burgeoning sources of movement.

*Diversity in the Indian Art Collection*

The diversity of culture and religion in India has led to many different genres of art which form the whole of Indian culture, separate from each other yet in some cases overlapping or interacting with each other. Art from Hindu traditions, art from Buddhist religious influences and art from the Mughal court rule each has its own aesthetic and symbolic values and purposes.



Figure 10. *Eight Medicine Buddhas*, unknown artist, 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Much of the Freer Gallery collection of South Asian and Himalayan art, including that of India, featured quite an extensive sample of Buddhist art pieces. The compositional framework for many of the paintings included a central figure of a large Buddha, surrounded in a circular expanse with *bodhisatvas*<sup>7</sup>, each a different embodiment of personality and spiritual qualities. I was drawn to the composition of these paintings as a choreographic structure in terms of

spatial positioning. The *Eight Medicine Buddhas*, an 18<sup>th</sup> century watercolor on canvas, served as my main source of information in terms of spatial choreographic

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<sup>7</sup> “Bodhisatvas” are enlightened beings or an enlightened existence in the Buddhist religious tradition, something akin to Christian saints, who are frequently depicted in Buddhist artwork in their attempts to embody moral characteristics such as self-sacrifice and charity.

structure. However, I used additional artwork from other time periods and cultural aspects in India to form other portions of the choreographic concept, including body stances, sequencing and subject matter.

To help understand the aesthetic of the body from this South Asian and Himalayan collection, I searched for more artwork that featured human figures in more “real world” contexts, rather than the meditative poses of the Buddha and disciples in these paintings. The Freer collection featured several images of rulers and other people from the Mughal period, which I felt held an interesting sense of the Indian aesthetic evident in the body stance, as I understood it, in various kneeling and standing positions. The collection also had several statues from the Hindu tradition, including the god *Shiva Nataraja*, known as the “Lord of the Dance.”

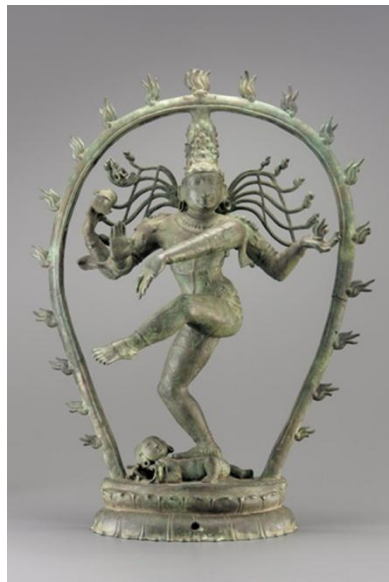


Figure 11. Images from the Freer Gallery, South Asian and Himalayan collection. Left: *A Girl Carrying a Basket on her Head*, early 18th century, Mughal dynasty. Right: *Shiva Nataraja*, unidentified, ca. 990, Chola dynasty.

This is a classic image representing the Hindu value of dance as symbol of the creation and destruction of the universe [Larousse 1973:224]. This inherent acknowledgement of the importance of dance within the Hindu religious mythology, and its place in the endless cycle of the creation and destruction of life, inspired my first ideas of the possible experiential and structural context of the dance. This cyclical theme also reminded me of the circular compositional nature and meditative quality I had perceived in the earlier Buddhist painting. And both of these “cycles” strengthened a larger theme in the dance project, the cycle of art in inspiring movement and movement interpreting art.

The relationship of painting and sculpture, and the arts in general, to dance is already a significant part of Indian culture and aesthetics. According to Kapila Vatsyayan in *Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts*, “the figures of Indian sculpture and painting are the gods of Indian literature and dancing; they are cosmic beings, embodiments of an abstract idea, of an inmost psychical significance; and the human form is the vehicle of communication of this soul state. In both sculpture and dancing the human form is the instrument of expression and everything in the figure, the face, the hands, the posture of the limbs, the pose and turn of the body, each accessory has to be imbued with an inner meaning...” [Vatsyayan 1977:262].

This quote confirmed the three parts of inspiration I gained from the study of the three aspects of Indian art. The Buddhist art informed ideas about spatial

arrangement; the Mughal art informed ideas about body postures and gesture; and the Hindu art informed ideas about choreographic meaning and structure.

My investigation for inspiration from the Freer Gallery Asian Art collections ultimately led me through various artworks from Japan, Ancient Egypt, India and the American Japonisme movement, each with fascinating qualities and insights into the beauty of the human figure in visual art.

With all the collaborators in place – conceptual ideas of setting, onstage visual art creation and new original music, personal transformation from visual art through dance; the dancers; and the pieces of artwork themselves – the next step lay in further study, not only through reading and observation, but through physical exploration. This would lead to the development of choreography for several individual dance pieces, each of which would learn from its related artwork, the Duncan basic principles of dance, and the inherent human interaction between art and embodiment.

## Chapter 3: Of | The Choreographies and Process

Three distinct categories of dances comprised the entire dance project. First, those choreographies which already existed and needed only to be amended to work appropriately within the project; second, new choreographies which needed to be created based on artwork from the Freer Gallery collections, discussed previously; and, third, a new finale choreography that would aggregate all the essential elements of the previous dances into a new vision of dance which would be used to create the live art element.

As I looked to create the new choreographies, I had a few clear delimitations in my mind. First, the poses I selected from the artwork had to lend themselves to the principles of Duncan Dance I had identified, in particular breath and solar plexus initiation and ability to flow the poses through movement. There had to be some burgeoning evidence of impending movement in the selected poses and body shapes from the artwork. Secondly, I wished to avoid poses which could be seen as stereotypical or clichéd from a Western popular culture perspective. If a particular pose had been used to allude to a culture in popular vernacular previously, I did not wish to use it. For example, I already knew we would not “walk like a Egyptian” as Steve Martin did in *Saturday Night Live* skits or pop-group The Bangles in their 1986 music video, nor would we press our hands together and bow, which had been seen in too many movies as symbol of “being in harmony” with peacefulness, or Buddhism, or martial arts, or other Asian traditions.



By way of overall rehearsal and choreographic process, I planned to begin rehearsing the existing choreographies first, giving the dancers material to learn while I was simultaneously working on the new pieces separately. By the time we were done learning and setting the “Andante, Ode to Apollo,” “Sylvan Sounds” and “Night Fight,” I hoped to have enough material for the new dances to start working on those productively.

The one exception to this was “Oiran.” My DANC719 Research-based Choreography course required an adaptation of my original solo version of “Oiran: The Scroll is Danced,” so I chose to start working with the female dancers to create a group version of the dance before my thesis project had even been officially proposed or accepted.

<b>Semester</b>	<b>Plan for Choreography, Rehearsal and Other Work</b>
Fall 2010	CAST REHEARSALS: Choreography and rehearsals for group version “Oiran” PERSONAL WORK: Research into other artwork, thesis project proposal
Spring 2011	CAST REHEARSALS: Existing choreographies: “Andante, Ode to Apollo,” “Sylvan Sounds,” “Oiran,” “Night Fight” PERSONAL WORK: Create movement and choreography for planned Egyptian and Indian dance; Additional art research, music selection, conceptualizing
Summer 2011	PERSONAL WORK: Choreography and research for new dances, music selection and editing
Fall 2011	CAST REHEARSALS: New choreographies: Egyptian (“Isis & Hathor”), Indian (“Eternal Cycle”), “Night Fight” (“Guardians”) with adding male dancers and reworking of “Andante, Ode to Apollo” (“Abstracting Andante”) PERSONAL WORK: Working with production team on set, lighting, costume, live art element and original and edited music
Winter/Spring 2012	CAST REHEARSALS: Completion of “Abstracting Andante,” polishing of all other dances, individual coaching and creation of finale dance and transitions PERSONAL WORK: Creation of finale dance structure and movements and all transitions with panels

Table 3. Planned work schedule for choreography, research, rehearsal, production and other work elements.

*Program Order: Creating the Artistic Arc*

Many factors entered into the determination of a program order for *In/And/Of/Through*. On the aesthetic side, I felt the performance had to flow well, making “sense” as it developed, reaching climaxes and respites at appropriate times, and achieving a satisfying sense of completion. On the practical side, I had to consider issues of who was dancing what when, and making sure the dancing could physically be done, as well as issues of costuming and other production elements. As a result, I investigated several concepts of “making sense” in the program order.

I developed the program order in November 2011, after all the artwork had been selected and all the dances had been choreographed, except the finale, from the following dances, listed in the order in which they were developed in rehearsal:

<b>Dance Title</b>	<b>Notes</b>
“Andante: Ode to Apollo” (later “Abstracting Andante”)	Historical Duncan repertory Andante movement, 9 <sup>th</sup> Symphony by Schubert Greek artwork
“Oiran”	New choreography “Passage of Life” by Kitaro, Japanese Edo Period silk screens
“Sylvan Sounds”	Durham choreography from 2009 “Hermit Thrush at Eve” by Beach <i>The Four Sylvan Sounds</i> by Dewing
“Night Fight” (later “Guardians”)	Durham choreography from 2005 “Night Fight” by Tan Dun <i>Shitennō</i> temple guardians in Japan
“Looking”	New choreography “Hermit Thrush at Morn” by Beach <i>Girl with Lute</i> by Dewing
“Eternal Cycle”	New choreography “Hindu Rapture” by Maturo Indian artwork (Buddhist, Hindu and Mughal)
“Isis & Hathor”	New choreography “Terirem” by Thomas Ancient Egyptian relics

Table 4. List of dances based on order of development in rehearsal, with brief descriptions of associated music and artwork used to create the program order in November 2011.

The first concept of program order was based on the relative age of the source material artwork in the dances. With this concept, the ancient Egyptian-based dance would have been first, followed by the ancient Greek-based “Ode to Apollo,” then 12<sup>th</sup> century Japan-era “Guardians,” and so forth up to the finale, which would be a culmination of all the dances.

The second concept was based on geography, starting close to “home” – Western civilization and American – and moving steadily “East.” In this scenario, the project would start with “Looking” and “Sylvan Sounds” (created in Maryland on artwork created by an American), then “Abstracting Andante” (created in Maryland, based on choreography and artwork created in Europe), then “Isis & Hathor” (Egyptian) and “Eternal Cycle” (Indian), “Oiran” and “Guardians” (Japan). The program would conclude with a finale, created as close to home as possible – in the theater itself.

The third concept involved a combination of supporting the “into the gallery/embodying the artwork” framework, along with varying the energy, structure and number of dancers in each dance piece. This concept seemed to be the most supportive of an effective program order when I compiled it in this way:

1. “Looking” (solo, pensive and simple)
2. “Abstracting Andante” (ensemble, flowing and dramatic)
3. “Isis & Hathor” (duet, without ensemble walking at the time, strong and geometric)
4. “Guardians” (group of eight at the time, very vigorous)
5. “Oiran” (group of nine, elegant)

6. “Sylvan Sounds” (quartet, flowing and otherworldly)
7. “Eternal Cycle” (ensemble, meditative)
8. “Finale” (ensemble, fast moving and dynamic)

This program order offered a satisfying manner for entering the “world” of the project, had an ebb and flow with quality of the individual dances and range of dancers used and also offered a mix of musical styles so that not all the classical music was at the beginning and suddenly electronic music showed up only at the end. We tested this program order at the December 10, 2011 departmental showing, and found that the order worked well on all levels. I will discuss each dance piece in this program order, giving a sense of how the performance progressed as a final entity.

### *“Looking”*

As mentioned in Chapter 2, I originally planned to create a suite of dances out of the Amy Beach *Hermit Thrush at Morn* and *Hermit Thrush at Eve* music in conjunction with the already choreographed “Sylvan Sounds,” and perform them one after the other to explore similar themes of individuality, collaboration and relationship. I selected the painting *Girl with Lute* (see Figure 8, page 43) as an inspirational source for the creation of a solo to accompany the quartet of dancers in “Sylvan Sounds.”

Upon looking at the issues around program order, I realized that separating the two pieces might be a wonderful way to connect the entire program musically as both pieces of music are extremely similar in melody and tonal quality. I also started to

imagine a correspondence between the way the woman was staring out from her seated position in the painting with the way a museum visitor might slump exhausted onto a bench and stare out at a piece of artwork after a long day in a museum. Additionally, Professor Karen Bradley, one of my committee members, had asked me after a showing, “Who is the audience?” At first I did not know the answer to this excellent question, but the ideas forming from *Girl with Lute* helped me. Since the entire project was taking place in an abstract gallery surrounded by imagined artwork, could not the fourth wall be another invisible yet symbolically present painting? Could not the audience be the artwork as well?

With these ideas in mind, I constructed a solo dance to introduce the notions of the gallery, observing and reacting to art through movement, and the audience as part of the artwork and therefore part of the inspiration. My first choreography session was done entirely with a cup of coffee in my hand, to help me maintain a pedestrian quality for the dance. Sitting down, shifting forward, sipping, crossing my legs, leaning back, this became the movement vocabulary. Then I expanded it to find a shape from the *Girl with Lute* painting, as if seeing the shape in the imaginary artwork in the fourth wall. I crafted a rounded shape in my arm while slightly leaning back, to represent the curve of the lute in the figure’s lap, then came out of it into a pedestrian observational pose with my chin on my thumb and forefinger. Then I re-entered the curved lute pose, this time deepening it so that it was unmistakably un-pedestrian, with a subtle changing of my ankles crossing, as if to be trying to find the exact position in the invisible painting.

The rest of the dance was largely created in an improvisation while presenting the general idea for the solo at a showing in December 2011. Using a shortened version of the music (as an introductory dance, it did not need to be a full five minutes long), I performed the seated phrase as I had choreographed it, and then largely improvised the rest of my plan, standing, coming closer to the “painting,” exploring the curved shape, leading into just a touch of aesthetic dancing as a way to establish the pure Duncan way of dancing – breath, lift of the solar plexus, flowing movement, musicality and personal expression – before the rest of the program applied alternative aesthetics. The solo ended with pedestrian observation and a “wandering away” as if being drawn to other pieces of art in the room, and into the room beyond. I left the stage before the music was finished, which is a break from Duncan tradition. This improvised version of the dance, performed so that the committee could see my intention for the piece, was so successful in communicating my intent that I used the showing video to study and set this dance, “Looking,” for the performance version.

*The Andante, an Ode to Apollo and the Rising Sun*

I approached the prospect of staging one of Isadora’s great symphonic works, the *Andante*, her “Ode to Apollo,” from the Schubert 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony, known as the *Great Symphony*, with excitement and a sense of responsibility and duty. The traditional choreography is beautiful by itself, and any changes I made still had to respect the mastery of the original choreography in my opinion.

Musically, the *Andante* movement has a lovely and gentle melodic line, swelling and rolling easily, with moments of accent and crescendo and then moments of tranquil ease. The choreography follows the musical structure precisely. Movement phrases created for each musical section are likewise repeated whenever it is repeated in the musical structure, as is the case with most of Duncan's repertory. The challenge then in both staging and performing such choreography is to build in enough variation in direction, groupings and expression of the movements that the choreography has a sense of building in its repetition, rather than becoming stale. Of course, this sense of variation and development in the music is a concern for the composer as well.

Teaching such a nuanced and refined Duncan choreography, which requires a better capability for the underlying technique more than the other choreographies in the project, took nearly the entire year and half of rehearsals. To begin, I explained the structure of the entire symphonic piece, which includes odes to Apollo (*Andante* movement), Dionysus (*Scherzo* movement) and Artemis (*Finale* movement). We discussed the nature of each of these Greek mythology figures, and Apollo in particular. We identified him as the god of light and the sun, of medicine and healing, order, harmony and truth, as well as music and dance. We discussed how Apollo played the golden lyre and was in charge of raising the sun each morning by driving his chariot of fiery steeds across the sky, and that he was the most beautiful of the gods [Hamilton 1989:30].



Inspiration Images	Title and Notes
	<p><i>Apollo Belvedere</i>, ca. 120-140, after the style of Leochares, Vatican Museums:  Because the Freer Gallery holds only Asian and Asian-inspired art, it does not have any classical Greek or Renaissance art with which to coordinate the Duncan choreography, the <i>Andante</i>, “Ode to Apollo,” that I had selected to include in the program. Therefore, I used appropriate sources of inspiration from alternative sources, such as this statue of Apollo in the Vatican. The position of the arms alludes to the “torch” movement which begins the piece and is repeated throughout the entire work.</p>
	<p>Olympic Torchbearer, photograph, 2004, in Athens, Greece:  In the complete choreography, there are two walking or processional sections, each of which includes an offering gesture. In this dance gesture, the hands bear an imaginary bowl of offering, the wrists close together, palms cupped, elbows pulling apart and open. The chest lifts and the eyes look out beyond the offering to the object of delivery: the “Sun-God” himself.</p>
	<p><i>Phoebus Apollo and his Chariot</i>, R. Crane, date unknown:  This image captures the more punctuated and energetic moments in the dance, including a bursting skip that charges across the stage in diagonals with the arms reaching out as if releasing the rays of the sun. The “dog star” runs have a sense of charging like the fiery steeds and the “sun salutation” circle also highlights the radiating of sun rays, like the halo around Apollo’s head in this illustration.</p>

Table 5. Inspirational images for movements and motifs from Duncan’s choreography, the *Andante*, her “Ode to Apollo” which is all about the rising of the sun.



We looked at extensive images of Apollo, as well as of the sun and other images that supported the iconic gestures found in the dance choreography (see Table 5 above).

In Isadora's choreography, the dancers represent the priestesses of Apollo, who are preparing the sun for its daily ecliptic journey. I shared emotional states and descriptive terms such as duty, joy, dignity, reverence, weight of responsibility, serenity, sincerity, exuberance and elation for the dancers to project as they performed the dance movements.

I began teaching the dance as I had learned it while a company member with Lori Belilove & Company in 2001. I planned to set the ensemble work on the female dancers and fill the solo role myself. We explored the basic movement motifs: the "torch," the "swirl," the "palms," and the "burst." Each phrase included many repetitions of alternating the motif from side to side. For example, the torch phrase had five torch motifs – right, left, right, left, right – then one or two swirls (depending on the music) and a "run away." Sometimes the phrases ended with two swirls, sometimes with one. Sometimes the bursting skips had two "bursts" (a phrase of eight skips with opening arms) interrupted by two swirls; sometimes the bursting skips had three "bursts" with no swirls until the end. Other times the end of bursting section would lead directly into the "sun salutation" circle, while other times it would have a backing up lunge before rushing in to make the circle. All this variety within the repetition, in addition with the variation in groups – sometimes a solo, sometimes a duet, sometimes a larger group – plus knowing one's one place within those groups

– this time I torch alone, the next time I palm with these three others, the final time, I torch the second phrase with two other people – all led to a challenging experience of setting and staging the choreography, particularly for those dancers who did not have extensive dance training or performance experience.

<b>First Full Section of “Andante, Ode to Apollo” Choreography:</b>		
<i>Phrase One:</i>	<i>Phrase Two:</i>	<i>Phrase Three:</i>
Torch Phrase with 2 swirls	Torch Phrase with 1 swirl	Torch Phrase with 2 swirls
Torch Phrase with 1 swirl	Palm Phrase with 1 swirl	Torch Phrase with 1 swirl
Palms Phrase with 1 swirl	3 Bursting Skips with 2 swirls at very end	Palms Phrase with 1 swirl
2 Bursting Skips with 2 swirls at end of each	Four steps back into lunge, rush into circle	Walking Processional
Sun Salutation with 4 skips to back	Sun Salutation with 4 skips to back	

Table 6. Choreographic structure of first section of the “Andante, Ode to Apollo,” through first processional walking.

Teaching the dance took the entire Spring 2011 semester due to the complicated nature of the repetitions and nuanced underlying Duncan technique. By the showing in late May, the dancers were able to perform the dance, but still needed enhanced quality of performance and technique, especially breath, lift of the chest, and connecting movements with flow. They were executing a series of perfunctory movements rather than a flowing expression of the emotional states I had described to them. I knew I would have to work with them in the coming rehearsals to improve the quality of their performance and understanding of the technique in the dance.

*“Abstracting Andante”*

During the summer break, when we were not meeting as a cast in rehearsal, I was working on my own on concepts, production elements and choreographic ideas, and I started to rethink the presentation of the “Ode to Apollo.” Several factors led to this.

First, through my work in an independent study on abstraction and conceptualization with University of Maryland Theatre program faculty member Izumi Ashizawa, I became further interested in the process of contemporizing historical work, like Duncan's repertory, through abstraction or conceptual re-referencing, i.e. giving an historical work new life and relevancy by changing some essential element to give it a new context or meaning. I had seen this type of re-conceptualization done with such works as Shakespeare of course, such as a recent Broadway production of *Macbeth* with Patrick Stewart set in World War II. Ashizawa herself had just completed a production of the Minotaur myth story set in the meat-packing plants of Chicago in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to great effect at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. I wished to probe Duncan's historical choreography by rejecting a conventional presentation and applying a new lens to give "Ode to Apollo" a fresh germaneness.

Secondly, I was dealing with conceptual issues for the entire piece, such as how to manifest the central theatrical conceit of the dancers as every-day patrons visiting a gallery at the beginning, and their metamorphosis into dancing embodiments of art and creativity by the end. I contemplated using a costuming device where dancers would wear pedestrian clothes throughout the performance, or start in pedestrian clothes and remove them to reveal Greek tunics or other "dance clothes." Ultimately, I felt it was important for the dancing itself to hold the story of the transformation.

I recalled an early solo work entitled *P.L.I.E. (Please Leave In Everything)*, which I created in my first choreography class in the MFA program with faculty members

Sara Pearson and Patrik Widrig. In that process, Pearson and Widrig encouraged me to be willing to “break up” movement, so that choreography did not have to be as continuous or as “logical” as I had previously used it. Dance movement could exist in space on its own, a concept identified as originating with composer John Cage. Likewise, my increased knowledge of the works of later postmodern dancers Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer helped me to conceive of a dance that did not have to happen continuously in the same body and in the same space, but could happen across bodies, across space and across time. Adding to that my sincere interest in the process of observation and embodiment of visual art, and I created the basic idea for a new version of “Ode to Apollo,” now entitled “Abstracting Andante.”

This new version of the dance would incorporate pedestrian experiences and presentations by the dancers, coupled with the execution of the full dance phrase, but across various dancers’ bodies. As the dancers in the space “looked at” various pieces of artwork, they would be “inspired” to move, would execute a particular fragment of the choreography, at the correct moment musically, and depending on the “strength” of the inspiration, at some point would return to a place of pedestrianism. In this way, we the audience would see the full dance phrase – five torches, two swirls, run away – but instead of seeing it continuously in one person’s body moving diagonally across the stage, alternating the torches on the right and left and doing both swirls before running off to upstage right, the dance phrase would be “broken up” across three, four, five, six dancers and would “pop up” at unexpected points across the stage.

I explored the effectiveness of this idea at our first rehearsals in Fall 2011. After explaining the concept to the dancers (which only included the female dancers at this time), and assigning phrase fragments to each, we attempted the opening phrase. To my delight, it worked. The magic of the dance appearing spontaneously here, there, over, yon, was entrancing, and the transitions between pedestrian into elated dance and back was profound. I planned for the dance to become more and more cohesive as a “dance” as we progressed, suggesting the idea of the dancers becoming fully immersed in their role of embodying the artwork for the rest of the concert.

This meant that a complicated choreography became even more complicated. Instead of dancers doing one single phrase (all of the palms phrase, for example) as a solo or with some grouping with other dancers, each dancer had multiple assignments in many locations with more people. I tried to keep the implementation as improvised as possible, knowing that if we had to add in exact pathways and blocking on top of this staging, it could take a full year just to complete! So general rules were developed, such as maintaining adequate spatial distances, utilizing all directions (not just front), and distributing ourselves in all parts of the space (no clumping in corners). Even still, we had to develop a spreadsheet to keep track of the added complication within so many variations and repetitions. Below is a sample of our spreadsheet for the first full phrase of the “Andante, Ode to Apollo.” The complete spreadsheet for the entire dance was 22 columns, 188 rows and 10 pages. The dancers often found it difficult to remember when they were supposed to execute a movement, and often requested to review our spreadsheet before a run through of the dance.

<b>“Abstracting Andante”</b>									
	Movement -- Phrase 1								
Dancer	Intro	Torch 1	Torch 2	Torch 3	Torch 4	Torch 5	Swirl 1	Swirl 2	Run Away
Dawn		x					x		
Dane			x	x				x	
Pamela				x	x				
Candace			x				x	x	
Laura									
Claire									
Margaret									
Kristen				x	x				
Valerie									
David						x			
Greg									
Danny						x			

Table 7. Example of spreadsheet to organize all assignments for “Abstracting Andante” choreography staging.

The difficulty in remembering the assignments was due to the relative inexperience of many of the dancers, as well as the fact that most of the dancers were not used to really hearing the music and then anticipating and responding to the musical phrasing, instead of relying a sequential progression of movement or counts in order to know when to execute a particular movement. This definitely contributed to a longer rehearsal process than may have been necessary with more trained dancers.

Once the female cast members started to get a hold of the dance, the male members of the cast joined the dance. Originally, I had not planned to have the male dancers dance in the “Andante, Ode to Apollo” but given that it was now the entrance into the entire project, showing the transformation of the dancers from pedestrians into dancers, I knew that the male dancers had to be included. Trying to bring them into the choreography, the underlying technique and the staging all at once and in a short time frame (mid-October to early December) was very challenging, and by the end of

the Fall 2011 semester, we were only through the abstraction process to the point of the first walking processional. It was at that point that I arranged for an intensive weekend rehearsal in January 2012 to work out “Abstracting Andante.” I also decided to shorten the dance, removing the first processional and several of the repeated phrases in the music, to make the dance more manageable to organize and set. As a result, the dance went from 15:44 minutes to 10:23 minutes.

The subsequent weekend intensive served as not only an effective way to complete the entire “Abstracting Andante” piece, it also served to bring together the cast as a community. For a Friday evening, and all day Saturday and Sunday, January 20-22, 2012, we met and worked together, lunched together, talked and even shared hotel rooms together in some cases, rehearsing in the Dance Theater at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. This created a cohesive connectedness, especially with the newer male members of the cast, which was highly important to the overall success of the project. I had invited a colleague, Jennifer Sprowl of Duncan Dance Chicago, to join the intensive to give extra coaching to help realize the Duncan technique and principles in the dance. Her presence helped to make the time feel special. It took the bulk of the time to work through the whole dance with the blocking, teach the ending to the male dancers and be able to run through the entire dance from start to finish. However, once the dance was set, I knew we would be able to move forward with polishing, refining and deepening the performance quality, and that we had a meaningful entrance into the project through this fresh approach to the choreography.

*“Isis & Hathor”*

I felt that with such a large cast, I needed to find ways to have variety among the dance pieces. Changes in energy level, number of dancers on stage, choreographic structures, musical style and other factors help not only maintain audience interest, but also help create an overall developmental arc, giving points of contrast and reference to heighten meaning-making for each dance.

An amulet fragment in the Freer Gallery collection, which showed two overlapping human figures, gave me the initial idea to make the Egyptian dance a duet. This would provide a nice break from many of the other large ensemble dances like “Abstracting Andante,” “Oiran” and the “Finale,” which would also have a considerable amount of flow dynamic. My original vision for this dance from Egyptian artwork was to create a very fast dance with many changes in facings as well as lifts and partnering to create new body shapes that would reflect the geometry found in the Egyptian artwork. I cast two of the younger, more athletic and highly trained dancers, who were similar in height and body shape, Candace Tucker and Kristen Yeung, for the roles. I worked on my own first to create many combinations and phrases based upon my study of selected ancient Egyptian artwork (see Table 2, page 49), and then worked extensively in rehearsal with Tucker and Yeung to layer the phrases and develop those phrases into weight-bearing partnering. This dance went through many stages, with entire phrases being worked out and then later deleted. Ultimately we found that the dance looked best when performed in unison



with the dancers in a slight forefront/background configuration, reminiscent of the amulet fragment in the selected artwork, as well as in hieroglyphic paintings.

The music I selected for this piece provided a nice contrast to some of the other melodic and symphonic music in the program. Entitled “Terirem,” a composition from *Byzantronik* by Thomas featuring Johnny Angel, the music provided a deep, resonant pulse with electronic instrumentation that melodically elucidated echoes of Egyptian music. As I listened to the music, I saw in my imagination a strong, heavy walk on the pulse of that music, along with fast, precise movement combinations. Originally, I had the duet dancers walking in on that pulse and as they came together, starting the fast unison portion of the dance. This evolved to include the entire cast walking on the pulse, an endless procession, with the duet coming out of the walk.

My original walking pathway had the two walking groups crossing each other, passing in lines downstage, requiring the audience to see through the crisscrossing

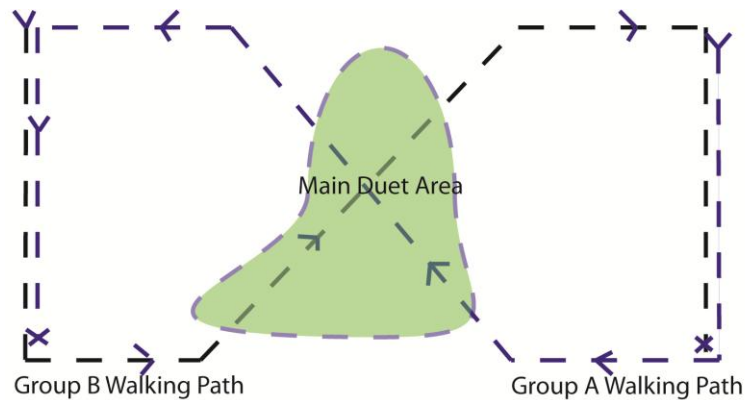


Illustration 1. Diagram of floor pattern of walking in “Isis & Hathor” and area where the duet was positioned.

figures to the duet behind. I also wished to create a contrast of the slow heavy walk against the quick precise duet phrases. To give the duet more compositional focus, we changed the walking pattern to start across downstage, then turn diagonally toward the opposite upstage corner, follow the upstage line to the sides of the dance space and come down directly in front of the sidelights. Then the dancers held at the sides, facing in toward each other, and sequentially started walking directly across the space, starting first with the two lead dancers at the most downstage point, then the second dancers and up to the last dancers. This created an interlaced “X-marks-the-spot” arrangement that mimicked the first part of the walking floor pattern.

The walk itself was taken directly from the *Amulet of Thoth* (see Table 2, page 49) in the selected artwork, featuring a strongly held, upright torso, straight ahead focus, arms pressed against the body with flat hands while walking directly toward downstage, and then twisting open with the upstage arm in front in a low diagonal and the downstage arm behind in a low diagonal while walking side to side or diagonally. In the lower body, the legs were apart, in parallel, with both heels on the floor, forming a type of triangle. On the first pulse of music, the back heel pressed up, pushing the weight of the upper body slightly forward. On the second pulse, the back leg slid forward until the foot was back flat on the floor, now in front. This created a pyramid shape in the legs, which was mirrored in the upper body when the arms were open during side-to-side or diagonal walking pathways. It was critical to maintain a sense of counter-tension in the upper body as well as an energized, renewed heaviness

with every step, and to keep the body from reverberating or wobbling at any point. Lastly, the unison aspect was very important. At certain points in the music, the underlying pulse was difficult to distinguish, and the dancers would lose their cohesion. To assist with this difficulty, and to create enough music to allow the duet dancers to get into position, I asked the composer to add a series of pulses at the beginning of the piece which continued throughout the music through to the end. This helped the dancers maintain this important unison execution that lent credence to the idea that these dancers were all part of a massive Egyptian hieroglyph.

The two duet dancers were excellent in their execution of this piece, garnering spontaneous applause. They honed in on each other's timing beautifully, especially in moments of suspension when the shapes were held to break up the flow of the dance. The dance repeated the main combination twice, with a bridge of kneeling and lunging work. Each repetition played with different facings and changes in poses to be held or suspended before continuing. We put in place moments of pause at the wide open "pyramid" stance and the "cups" pose in first iteration, and in the lower arm diagonal pose and bent over elbow to knee pose in the next. The direction changes and speed did not become as frequent or as quick as I had envisioned, but the combination and layering we did create seemed to have a power of its own.

In the course of rehearsing this choreography, the two main dancers initially had difficulty performing the dance with a strong performance quality. While their technical ability and sense of timing was excellent, the dance came across as simply a

series of movements. Therefore, we took time in several rehearsals to investigate the nature of the two goddesses, Isis and Hathor. In this research together, we found fascinating correlations to the choreography we had already created. Isis, the mother of Horus and wife to Osiris, was the goddess of nature and magic, figure of ideal motherhood, and protector of the dead and children [Lorenz 2010:290]. Her name means “Throne” and she is associated with the power of the pharaoh. She is also called “Queen of Heaven,” “Mother of the Gods,” and “The Brilliant One in the Sky.” [Witt 1997]. Hathor was the goddess personified by love, beauty, music, motherhood and joy. She was one of the most important and popular deities throughout the history of Ancient Egypt, symbolized by the cow. Also a goddess of music, dance, foreign lands and fertility who helped women in childbirth, Hathor was worshiped by Royalty and common people alike in whose tombs she is depicted as "Mistress of the West," welcoming the dead into the next life [Larousse 1973:26, 40].

Interestingly, while the two goddesses shared some attributes such as motherhood in their separate roles, the Egyptians later came to join the two goddesses into one figure, known as Isis-Hathor. And subsequent civilizations, including the Greeks, adopted attributes of both Egyptian goddesses into their concept of both Aphrodite and Demeter [Larousse 1973:42, 47]. This correlated to the established layered structure of the duet in that assigning each dancer the character of one of the goddesses, the discovered overlap between the goddesses mythologically created a beautiful connection and context for the layering and presence of the piece as a duet. The quality of performance developed a richness and gravity after this research.

*“Guardians”*

My choreography called “Night Fight” has gone through a series of revisions whenever performed. First it was a solo, and then it was expanded to a duet. Some sections are extremely set, while other sections, like the entrance music, the leaping section and the fighting section at the end, have had near constant changes and are almost improvisational in nature.

I included “Night Fight,” choreographed in 2005 to the rhythmic drumming music “Night Fight” by Tan Dun on the *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* soundtrack, in this project because it already had a relationship to Asian cultures in the music and movement vocabulary. I knew it would bring needed energy to the program. After finding the *Shitennō* guardians in the Freer Gallery to validate the choreography in the project, I cast myself and the three younger highly-trained dancers, Candace Tucker, Kristen Yeung and Claire Smith, in the roles of the four guardians and altered the opening of the dance to honor the stances, expressions and positioning of the four figures in the artwork (see Figure 9, page 47). In seeing the demon figures under the guardians’ feet, I had the idea to include male dancers, and in particular, male dancers with breakdancing, hip hop or modern dance training emphasizing floorwork and inversions. Accordingly, I reached out to members of local breakdancing and hip hop dance crews who had recently taken introductory modern dance classes at the University of Maryland, as well as male dancers in the dance program who had the kind of physical abilities I needed for the demon roles.

The choreography itself featured lunges, wheels, punching motions, low runs and quick leaps for the guardians, and rolling, contorted freezes, crawling, leaps and runs for the demons, in six sections: the entrance, the patrol/infiltration section, the pursuit section, the leaping section, the fighting section and the final battle. I based these sections on variations in the rhythmical phrasing which I perceived in the music.

To help the dancers find the appropriate performance quality, we did some Internet research into the mythologies and cultural values behind the both the temple guardians and the demons. Through this research, we were able to find attributes to which we could connect, thereby making the dancing more effective in execution. For example, we found that the four temple guardians, representing each of the four directions on the compass, also had their own personalities, colors and seasons.

Name of Temple Guardian	Attributes
Jikokuten 特国天	Spring Green/Blue (white = India/China) Water Kingdom Keeper
Zōchōten 增長天	South Summer Red (blue = India/China) Fire Lord of Spiritual Growth
Kōmokuten 廣目天	West Fall White (red = India/China) Metal Lord of Expansive Vision
Tamonten 多聞天	North Winter Black (yellow = India/China) Earth Wealth; All Knowing

Table 8. Attributes of *Shitennō* Temple Guardians. Source: Buddhist-Artwork.com.

We knew the identity of each guardian from our study of the positioning of the four figures on display at the Freer Gallery, and therefore we could assign each dancer the appropriate attributes for the guardian they were representing. My own figure turned out to be Tamonten, the “All Knowing!”

We did a similar study of the Japanese *oni*, or demons, which were not as specifically identified as the guardians, but still held a range of attributes from which the male dancers could choose to embody. One dancer selected “mischievousness,” another chose “unskillful emotions” and the last adopted the aspect of “corruption.” The more we developed this understanding of what we were portraying, the more interesting and effective the choreography and performance became.

I thought it would be interesting for the female dancers to take the roles of the authoritarian guardians who would be strong, warrior-like and victorious, while the male dancers would be the chaotic, devious and vanquished creatures underfoot. I hoped this might also avoid an appearance of chauvinism or misogyny if the roles were reversed. Originally, the male dancers included a more diverse mix of races, including white, Polynesian/Hispanic, Asian and African American. After a series of cast changes, the male dancers ended up being representatives of minority groups with one Asian American and two African Americans dancers. The other male performer, the live artist, was white, but did not appear in this dance. This combination caused me some concern, as I hoped our dance would not now come across as racially domineering.

Because of that concern, we made some changes choreographically. For example, in the pursuit section, I originally had the demons rolling on the ground being pushed by the guardians. I felt that this might come across as referential to racist attacks or perturbation with the male dancers on the ground and the female (mostly white) dancers above them pushing them around, literally. As a result, we brought the demon figures up to stay on their feet, and balanced the attack of the guardians with a counter-attack by the demons. Additionally, I never actually had the guardians put their feet on the demons in the choreography, although that is their position in the artwork, as I felt this might be too demeaning and subjugating when performed in actuality. Instead, we had the demons find contorted floor positions directly in front of the guardians, to create the same effect.

Although there may still have been some racial implications in the resultant casting, I hoped that these changes to the choreography would mitigate that element, as the dance was more about the mythological figures we were representing in the artwork rather than the interaction of these particular dancers as people of various races.

### *“Oiran”*

As discussed earlier, the choreographic exploration based upon the *oiran* images from the silk screens of Edo Period Japan was my first attempt to marry the Duncan principles of breath and solar plexus initiation, flow of movement, personal expression and musicality to an alternative aesthetic. After the Freer Gallery curator



and program directors proposed the idea of a festival with new choreographies based on artwork from their collections, the *oiran* artwork first attracted me.

The first version, which formed the basis of the ultimate version performed in *In/And/Of/Through*, was a solo dance which embodied various poses and gestures from a collection of 13 selected pieces of artwork (see Figure 5 and Table 1 on pages 22 and 45), and mirrored the vertical nature of the silk screens. I imagined the stage as if it were a trio of vertical screens laying flat. The dance moved from downstage right to upstage right, moved over to upstage center and came down to downstage center, and completed the structure by moving over to downstage left and to upstage left. The final pathway acknowledged the borders that accompanied many of the silk screens by moving around the periphery of the stage.

For the original solo version, I selected a musical composition entitled “The Scroll is Read” by legendary Japanese composer Masanori Takahashi, known as Kitaro, who is well known for his hybrid of Japanese and Western musical elements. I felt that his mixing of Eastern and Western musical styles would support my mixing of Japanese aesthetic and classical modern dance principles. I also added a spoken word element since many of the silk screens featured poetry written in calligraphy. I recorded Japanese poems, both in Japanese and English, interweaved as a way of translation, at the end of the piece. For costuming, I created a hybrid of a Japanese hanging sleeve, in a traditional pink and red embroidered fabric, with a conventional modern dance black body suit, with a hint of a Duncan scarf underneath the Japanese fabric. The

final component included the hanging of white transparent curtains from the catwalks which slightly occluded the view the audience had of my dance, in the same way that the *oiran* lived secluded from the general public in the floating world.

I felt that for the Freer Gallery festival performance and for the thesis dance project, I wished to include all the female dancers to make “Oiran” a large group dance. I began by teaching the entire choreography from the solo version to all the dancers, and then arranging the nine dancers into rows of threes. Rather than mimicking the solitary existence feeling of the solo version of the dance, I felt that this group iteration was more about the training process the *oiran* experienced. I imagined a class of young *maikos* entering a house of a professional courtesan to be trained in all the refined arts of tea, calligraphy, *shamisen* playing, dancing and pleasure. Each new apprentice would begin with the same lessons, and would follow the same path of training. This structural concept led to a marvelous layering of the gestures and poses, sometimes in unison, sometimes in canon, sometimes in contrast.

As a total of three groups in three processions of training, the dance coalesces fully in two moments. The first is in a series of alternating lines performing “knee-pull walks,” in which the dancers energetically pulled their knees up into a forced arch, and then with a twist of the upper body and the knees to the other direction, released their wrists and walked forward to the other side to repeat the knee pull, twist and walk. The other moment of compelling unison occurs near the end of the piece, when all nine dancers recline on the floor and begin a calligraphic scrolling as they rise to

their knees, then slowly reduce the gesture into a pose of placing the calligraphy brush in an inkpot on one side, while putting the hand on the hip and looking out with an extreme stretch of the neck to the other side.

When I began working on the group version, I used a different piece of Kitaro music, entitled “Passage of Life” from his album, *Essential Kitaro*. Musically, it was more lush, dramatic and upbeat than “Scroll is Read,” but also was less consistent and clear in its musical phrasing, which later evoked challenges in finding the unison moments based on musical cues. It also began with a water sound that I questioned because there were no other “natural” sounds being used in the rest of the program. As a result, I edited the water sounds out by fading in the introductory section of music and adding the Japanese poems, this time spoken entirely in Japanese, by a native-speaker, Erisu Jo, who had at one time been part of the cast as a dancer.

<i>Poem No. 18, Fujiwara no Toshiyuki:</i>	<i>Poem No. 15, Koko Tenno:</i>
The waves are gathered	It is for your sake
On the shore of Sumi Bay,	That I walk the fields in spring,
And in the gathered night,	Gathering green herbs,
When in dreams I go to you,	While my garment’s hanging sleeves
I hide from people’s eyes.	Are speckled with falling snow.

Source: *Ogura Hyakunin Issha (100 Poems by 100 Poets)*, 13th Century.

We had several repeating motifs emerge as important linking elements. In fact, each movement in this dance had a very specific name. The first combination included the following named gestures and movements:

“Oiran” Phrase One:

Kneel with hidden eyes – Slide out – Kneel with hidden eyes and one hand lift up – Slide out turned to back – Kneel with single hidden eye – Handkerchief – Pipe – Spiral – Lantern alternating sides with five heel-toe walks



Figure 12. *Indoor Occupations*, unidentified artist, 1568-1615, Japan. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.

The first four movements of this phrase – slide out, handkerchief, pipe and lantern – came from the figures on the left panels of the painted screen, *Indoor Occupations*.

Other important gestures included: “Fan” which was a standing position, slightly leaning back with the downstage arm bent at the elbow, hand flat with fingers together and the other hand holding under the elbow; “Obi” which was a walk with an exaggerated heel-toe pacing and both arms dripping up away from the front of the body, over the curve at the top and back down closer to the front of the body (as if curving over the top of an obi belt at the front of the body); and “Cheek” which was a reclining position with ankles crossed, body leaning slightly back, elbows bent across the body and cheek resting on the back of the top hand. These names made

communication about each movement much more clear. All the dancers understood each of the components of these complex poses with a single word or phrase after the position had been taught.

Of course, with such exactitude in the positions and movements, along with the unison nature of the piece, more and more refinement was necessary. Exact placement of the eyes and focus, fingers and hands, angles of the body and number of footsteps were all critical in supporting the harmony of the piece, but also the attention to detail inherent in the *oiran* training and Edo Period aesthetics and values.

I believe the shaping and floor patterns created in this dance were extremely satisfying, and in keeping with the lifestyles of the *oiran* and the selected artwork from the Freer Gallery. The dancers often commented in rehearsal that this was one of their favorite dances to rehearse which I believe was due to its gentle flow, connectedness to the other dancers, and the harmony of the composition. While as dancers and as a choreographer we tried to find a sense of breath and solar plexus connection for the transition from one pose to another, I do feel that the choreography was more “pose-oriented” than anything Isadora Duncan would have espoused or created, with the exception of her “Tanagra Figures,” as discussed in Chapter 1. I believe the “Oiran” choreography I created, which was very much like the “Tanagra Figures” in concept, could have developed even more “breathiness” in the moments of relative stillness, rather than looking quite as much like held poses as resulted.

I believe my hesitation in making the positions found in the artwork really move came from a few different concerns. The first was my limited experience with the Japanese aesthetic and body positions. Since this way of standing and moving was not clearly and naturally in my body as the Greek and modern dance style, I did not want to stray too far from what was demonstrated so clearly in the artwork. I also was concerned about the issues of appropriation. I did not want to take the beauty of the artwork and move it or abstract it so much that its essence was obscured and somehow lessened or demeaned. I wanted to be sure my choreography honored the beauty of the artwork, rather than using it with impunity to my own ends. Lastly, the limitation in the training process, teaching the dancers to become proficient breath-initiating dancers in the pure Duncan style, led to less vibrancy in the gestures than I would have wished.

*“Sylvan Sounds”*

In the case of *The Four Sylvan Sounds*, painter Thomas Dewing relied upon principles of Japanese art composition and painting technique to create the work, while the actual subject matter, including the body posture and appearance of the four female figures, was more in keeping with the 19th century American interest in classicalism, Greek revivalism and Romanticism [Johnson 2003:561].

This foundation made my work in developing an Isadora-Duncan-style choreography around the artwork quite feasible, as the aesthetics and subject matter were extremely compatible. The opportunity still allowed me to create a new dance work that

investigated new ideas about the nature of human life. In this case, the dance was “about” the concept that as individuals we each have our own internal “heart song,” a personal drumbeat to which we live our lives. At times, we find collaborators and partnerships that create harmonies and beautiful moments with our internal vibrations. Too often, those collaborations end, and we return to our own solo voice.

Although I wished to dance some significant portions of my thesis concert, such as the solo role in the “Andante, Ode to Apollo,” I also wanted it to be an opportunity for others to take on featured roles. In previous performances of “Sylvan Sounds,” I had taken the fourth role of the hermit thrush or flute figure, whose rebellious character is a major catalyst for much of the dance action and story in the dance. However, I planned to stay out of this dance, and give the roles to other dancers in the cast who were Duncan-trained, such as Dawn Meadows, Laura Tipton and Dane Juliano. I gave Juliano my previous role, as an opportunity for her to grow and develop as a dancer. At the time, we had another of my company members, Lisa Smith, with the cast who would have been included in this piece. Due to Smith’s work commitments, she had to leave the project, and I took over her role (the burbling brook or xylophone figure), rather than replacing Juliano in my normal role. This gave me a wonderful opportunity to let someone else lead, as well as to experience a different aspect of the dance.

In general, many dance works are flexible or unfixed in structure or choreography, and choreographers make changes and alterations every time those dances are

performed. As a piece of choreography, the “Sylvan Sounds” is set and complete in my mind. I feel it says exactly what I want it to say. Other than coaching each dancer in their role, and some clarification around the more diffuse “twining” section toward the end of the piece in which the dancers are weaving, twisting and moving around each other in a loose line upstage, this dance was very straightforward to teach and rehearse. The dance also is a joy to perform, as it has an otherworldly, mesmerizing effect. The choreography is very responsive to the thoughtfully melodic piano music, especially as each figure enters the dance, mimicking the playing of her particular instrument. Waltzing steps with sways and turns lead into partnering duet moments, first between the second (woodpecker/drum) and third (brook/xylophone) figures in a joining of hands for a push/pull then into a small circle with both hands joined that lifts up with the breath, inverts and a reluctant pulling away. Later, the fourth figure (hermit thrush/flute) partners with the first figure (wind/lyre) in a circling duet with arms wrapped around each other’s waist, and then pulls away, using flute playing gestures to “call” all the dancers, who respond as if an echo has awakened them from their meditations. This leads into a group section with a grand swirling circle with all the figures joining hands, then dropping their heads and upper chests and circling them around to the side and back, creating the momentum of the circling. The circle moves upstage left and then breaks with a swooping “bubble run” where the arms open overhead and lower to the side as the dancers run together diagonally to downstage right and then across downstage to gather into a frieze of all four figures, playing their instruments, forming a “band” at center stage. The band sways together, weaves closely, and finally the fourth figure breaks away, forcing all the figures to



separate and return to their original poses, sitting on benches, in the positions from the original artwork.

This dance is often received with applause, even in a continuous program, which I think bears witness to the palpable magic and satisfying resolution within it.

*“Eternal Cycle”*

My approach to represent the art of India was the most contrary to my “normal” approach to choreography. My standard choreographic process involves an intense study of the music, allowing it to create images of movement in my mind and to develop a sense of structure and story (whether literal or abstract), then working on actual movement phrases which I then teach to the dancers in rehearsal as a starting place. I do not tend to use rehearsal as a time to generate choreography, unless we find that something I prepared beforehand is not working once we have tried it.

In thinking about various dance structures I wished for the thesis dance project, one included a dance of internal process and even spirituality. I hoped to create a dance of implied stillness, which would find its profundity through a pure radiance of personal energy and intent. This had been a part of Isadora’s interest and philosophy as well.

In *Myth & Image*, a dissertation by Duncan expert Jeanne Bresciani, it states: “For Duncan, dance was the expression of creative impulse. It was a non-vocal manifestation of the human psyche and an affirmation of the human spirit” [Bresciani 2000:13]. And Isadora herself commends the internal aspect of dance, especially in

response to ancient mythology and traditions when she exclaimed, “To bring life again to the ancient ideal! I do not mean to say, copy it, imitate it; but to breathe its life, to recreate it in one’s self, with personal inspiration: to start from its beauty and the go toward the future” [Duncan 1997:96].

I felt the meditative subject matter in the Buddhist paintings and the cyclical representation of birth and death through dance in the *Shiva Nataraja* statue created a symbiosis between my ideas for a personal dance of internal intent with Indian art. Therefore, we used rehearsal time to explore this concept through practice. We would use silence, nature sounds, meditation bells and selections of music, and I would instruct the dancers to find a place of stillness, to think of their energy radiating out, and only to move if truly finding an inspiration to do so – from an internal urge, an impulse of breath or a stimulation of the music or sound. These subtle improvisations were very beautiful, with the dancers spread out across the space, and produced very personal, individualized and separate movements, shapes and poses that taken as a whole, created alternating moments of significant contrast and harmony.

Most of all, I wished for the dancers to find a true internal connection to themselves and the inner impulse that drives movement sincerely. Later, I added instructions to include specific poses at some point in their improvisation, initially the body shape held in the dancing figure of *Shiva Nataraja* (see Figure 11, page 51). There were two problems with this practice. The first was that the artificiality of applying a body shape that was not culturally developed in any of the dancers pulled them out of their

own energetic and sympathetic connection. The second was the clichéd appearance of the Shiva stance. As noted earlier, I was hoping to avoid both use of “stereotyped” body positions or movements from existing cultural dance forms. Therefore, I had a dilemma, whether to make the dance a pure abstract representation of the internal energy and personal inspiration toward movement and forgo any specific overture to the Indian artwork, or to give the dance much more construct so that the influence of the Indian artwork could be included, and the dancers could find their inspiration and energetic connection within that construct. Ultimately, I decided to give the dance piece more structure so that we could also explore the beautiful poses and shapes presented in the Indian artwork. The visual aesthetics of the artwork compelled me to explore further.

A chapter on Indian mythology in the Larousse *World Mythology* book helped me synthesize my concept for the dance. The chapter title, “India: The Eternal Cycle,” galvanized both my concept for the individual energized nature of the dance, as well as the possibility of including specific references to the selected Indian artwork [Larousse 1973:207]. A cycle of movements, taking each dancer through a personalized experience of a kind of *asana*<sup>8</sup> coming from the artwork, rather than from an existing yogic or dancing form, could provide the dancer with the opportunity to find inner impulse, to radiate energy, and to experience and portray the body stances in the artwork. The Indian culture accepts dance as a vital element in the embodiment of the universal and cosmic within the confines of the individual

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<sup>8</sup> The Sanskrit term “*asana*” comes from the Indian tradition of yoga practice and loosely translates as a “pose held with ease.” Some yoga traditions, such as Hatha Yoga, link the *asana* through breath into a flowing series.

[Vatsyayan 1977:262], while both “Indian sculpture and Indian dancing treat the human form and the movements of the different parts of the human form with an identical purpose of suggesting a state of being, a soul’s state” [Vatsyayan 1977:268].

We began with five positions, which dancers would find a continuous sense of flow and movement.

<b>Movement</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Kneeling, facing forward, hands on lap with fingers together, focused on floor beyond the knees
2	Laying down with elbows and forearms on the floor next to the upper chest and shoulders, forehead on the floor
3	Kneeling gesture based upon a piece of Indian artwork, at least one knee up with flat foot, arms open in space with bent elbows and wrists, focus changed to look horizontal to one side or other
4	Standing position based upon a piece of Indian artwork, knees bent, feet slightly turned out, weight shifted to one leg or the other, arms also in a bent elbow and wrist position, focus horizontal to one side or the other
5	Standing position with one arm reaching directly overhead, fingers together, head and chest lifting up, legs together in parallel

Table 9. Description of five main positions in the “Eternal Cycle” choreographic structure.

The choreographic structure was open enough that the dancers could find their own impulse for movement, simple enough to find space for an energetic connection and cohesive enough to come together as a dance and representation of the artwork.

Each dancer adopted their own unique kneeling position (#3) and unique standing position (#4) from artwork from the Mughal period at the Freer Gallery. Because of the limited selection of such images there, we augmented our sources of inspiration

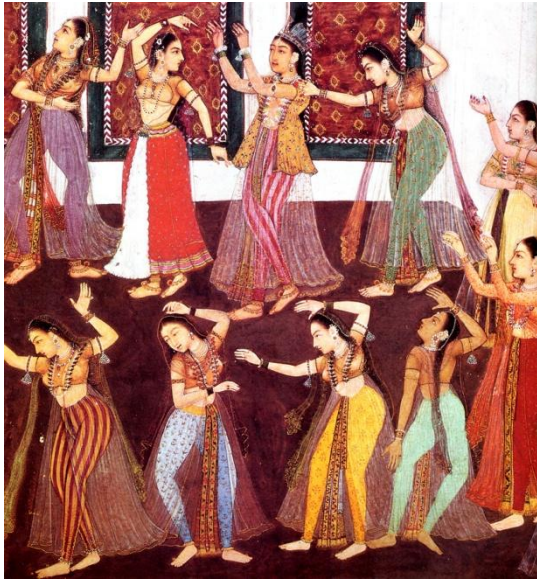


Figure 13. Close up of dancing portion of *Celebration of the New Year at the Court of Shah Jahan*, Mughal period, India. From *A Second Paradise*.

from a book called *A Second Paradise: Indian Court Life, 1590-1947*, which offered a broad selection of paintings. One of our most significant images from this source was *Celebration of the New Year at the Court of Shah Jahan* which featured a group of dancers, each in a different dancing position. This provided ample diversity for each dancer to select a different standing body pose [Metropolitan 1985:60].

The individualized kneeling poses also came from the broad examples from *A Second Paradise* such as *Raja Jai Singh of Sawar with Female Musicians*, *Holi Festival* and *Some of the King's Women* [Metropolitan 1985:90-1;65;77].

Once we each found our own individualized poses, we created a basic sequence of movements: 1 → 2 → 1 → 3 → 4 → 5 → 3 → 1 → repeating. The performance of this series created a forward-back/up-down cycle (known in Laban Movement Analysis terms as the “wheel plane”), moving forward when lying down and moving back while moving up. Many of the other dances had featured cycles in the up-down/side-side plane (or “door plane”), such as the wheels and lunges in “Guardians,” so this

provided a nice balance in the overall project. The cycle also presented a sense of narrow verticality at one end (#5) against the horizontal proneness of position #1.

The dance resided on the music “Hindu Rapture,” an electronic piece with tones and melodic element reminiscent of Indian music, from *Sanctuary* by Maturo. The music had three main sections which helped craft the structure of the dance. Section 1 held the execution of the full cycle, up to two times, slowly and directly to the front. Section 2 was a breathing section while sitting in position #1. Section 3 was a repeat of the cycling series, but faster with as many as six repetitions, and in changing directions: front, back, left or right, but no diagonals.

The dancers were instructed to flow from one movement to the next and to start the entire cycle only when they truly felt inspired to do so by some internal message or impulse. As a result, the dance was a spontaneous and almost “ad-libbed” choreography that changed every time it was performed. However, the inherent “lava lamp” effect of the various poses mixing against each other always created surprising and beautiful moments of harmony and contrast. In particular, the cascade of lying down or prostration, which had a melting, slinking, lengthening quality to it, was very pleasing, and could repeat many times in my opinion. To help increase the variety of the overlapping poses and to find more overlap of the lying down, I varied the overall sequence by creating two groups with two different sequences.

To maintain randomness, I selected groups by the presence of the letter “D” in the dancers’ first names. If the dancers’ first names had a “D” in it, their sequence became 1→2→3→1→2→3→4→5→3→1→repeating and the dancers without a “D” in their first names had the sequence 1→2→1→2→3→4→5→3→1→repeating. Likewise, after the unison breathing section when the dancers would return to the cycle, I did not want to repeat the “down-ness” of the first section, and so altered the cycle for the third faster, multi-directional section. The group with a “D” was assigned 1→3→4→5→3→1→2→1→ repeating and the group without a “D” was assigned 1→2→1→3→4→5→3→1→repeating. This variety in the cycle still allowed the dancers to find their inner impulse and energetic cycling and ensured that the dance could have the needed variety and harmony within the improvisation.

The final two elements for the structure of the dance included adding myself as a central figure of relative stillness to provide contrast to the flow of movement from the other dancers and to represent the spatial arrangement in relation to the *Eight Medicine Buddhas* (see Figure 10, page 50) with a central figure and surrounding smaller figures. I used the entire four and a half minutes to perform the entire cycle once. Lastly, both as symbol of the energetic container and as a respite from the meditative and repetitive nature of the choreography, two dancers performed a running circle, rushing in a low run with arms streaming behind around the dancers and back to kneel in their original places during the breathing section of the dance.

Challenges in the performance of this dance included finding the breath to initiate each movement, critical to my larger investigative concept referencing Isadora's principles, maintaining the internal consciousness to radiate energy and find sincere impulse without resorting to perfunctory execution of positions, and making sure that we did not enter into an arbitrary usage of the artwork without honoring the culture from which it came. We addressed these challenges through an awareness of the choreography in rehearsal, and discussion of the sacred nature of the space and the practice of this version as a reverence or even oblation.

However, my concern about cultural appropriation as an issue was most heightened for this dance. Perhaps it was because Ruth St. Denis' first and most famous early choreographies drew directly on dances from India that made me so apprehensive. Perhaps it was the coming into and out of Indian artwork inspired poses to more neutral modern dance poses (like the skyward reach in #5) that made me wonder if we were being too superficial with the investigation of the positions, although it may have been similar enough to *tāḍāsana* (mountain pose) with overhead arms in yoga that the separation was less stark than I feared. Yet, this concern was heightened with the feedback from Professor Miriam Phillips, chair of my committee and a dance ethnologist with considerable knowledge of Indian dance and culture, when she pointed out the missing element of *tribhāṅga*, the angling of the hips with the weight shift to create distinct zones of the body: head, torso (to navel), and lower limbs, which can then be manipulated and used in the dance [Vatsyayan 1973:266]. This feedback both concerned and delighted me.



My concern was over the fact that I missed this important element in my observation of the artwork. I immediately reviewed the art pieces already identified as sources, and I returned to the Sackler Gallery, companion museum to the Freer, to observe its collection of Indian statuary on exhibit. With my awareness heightened, I was definitely able to see the *tribhāṅga* in use in the human figures in artwork from Hindu religious traditions. However, I also recognized that the particular pieces of artwork available in the Freer, and in *A Second Paradise*, from the Mughul period, did not use the *tribhāṅga* in the same way as the Hindu artwork, which is what may have allowed me to miss its presence and significance. In fact, in the main resource from the Freer, *A Girl Carrying a Basket on her Head* (see Figure 11, page 51), any presence of an angled hip is so subtle as to be virtually indiscernible, and while the statuette of *Shiva Nataraja* does exhibit the *tribhāṅga*, the lift of the leg obscured its presence for me. Additionally, the influence of Persian art aesthetic in the Mughal art, which tends toward more verticality than Hindu art traditions, may have also minimized the use of *tribhāṅga*. This was obviously one of the challenges in looking at artwork from the different aspect of culture within India.

The revelation of the *tribhāṅga* as a principle of body stance in Indian artwork was also delightful because of its plausible correlation with the *contrapposto* in the Greek aesthetic and therefore in Duncan Dance as well. I felt that this could become a source of deepening the understanding and the connection within the themes I was bringing together in this project. The dancers and I worked in the next rehearsals to

incorporate the *tribhanga* into the standing position #4, which helped to enhance the significance and quality of the entire choreography.

In performing the final version of the dance, the individuality yet group connection was palpable. The dancers had complete control over their expression of the cycle, through timing and individualized postures in positions #3 and #4. Yet within that individuality was a shared experience of connecting through intent and awareness.

*Finale: In/And/Of/Through*

My vision for the finale was for a dance not based on any specific artwork, but rather on the culminating effects of all the elements of the project – the personalities of the dancers in the piece, the lessons learned from the different artwork, the relationships formed, the concepts explored and the Duncan principles underlying it all.

My greatest hope was that the finale would be a fine representation of an emergence out of the historical for Duncan Dance, with an expanded vocabulary to a completely current piece of music. I also wanted this dance piece to have a virtual deluge of movement from all the gestures and poses of the preceding dance pieces. I imagined a rolling tide of motion, using Isadora's favorite pathway, upstage left to downstage right, that never stopped, but kept coming with more and more dynamic phrases to represent the lessons from the earlier dances, the personalities and uniqueness of each dancer and an homage to the historical that lives with us ever-present in the now.

Because I saw it as a culminating piece, I felt I needed to wait until all the other choreographic elements were in place before we could begin work on it. I reserved the Winter/Spring semesters through early March 2012 to work on the finale. I also needed to wait until the musical composition was complete, in early January 2012.

Upon receiving the finale music at that time, I started listening to the music repeatedly to understand its structure, developmental arc and melodic phrasing. The music began with a slow, intense adagio section, with dissonant chords and piano, which mirrored the piano music of the introductory solo, “Looking.” Ever increasing dissonant strings broke into a pulsing, rhythmic 4/4 section of dance, lasting about two and a half minutes. This transitioned into the first of two 3/4 sections, with a bright, uplifting melody in a major key. The music returned to the 4/4 motif for about two minutes before concluding with a rousing, repeating, rising section of the 3/4 music. I perceived the five sections as outlined in this table:

Table 10. Planned choreographic structure for finale dance based upon musical composition and thesis concepts.

Section	Description of Planned Choreographic Structure
1 – Dissonant Introduction	Artist begins live art painting; I enter exploring movements and gestures from entirety of all dances with abstraction; begin interaction with artist; other dancers creating a revolving bas relief, with each dancer finding a pose from an earlier dance in front of a panel (upstage, in dim light)
2- Driving 4/4 Motif	Strong, dynamic movement phrases, moving diagonally through the space from upstage left to downstage right, in solo, duet, trio and quartet groupings with movements that reference the dancers’ “home-base” training and preferred styles, previous dances, and newly choreographed Duncan phrases; dancers would walk upstage right and across to upstage left, passing the visual artist, to continue more dance phrases along the diagonal again

3 – Liling 3/4 Motif	A bas relief of poses from previous dances positioned in a line downstage while I performed a solo interacting with the artist at center stage; the other dancers would start to find phrases that connected, such as partnered skips and circling spins, breaking out of the bas relief; panels would spin and move across the stage
4 – Repeat 4/4 Motif	Return to strong diagonal movement phrases, this time with the concept of partnering and layering different styles
5 – Repeat 3/4 Motif with ending	All dancers coming together for a unison combination, with a weaving leading into a large circle, dancers separate to look at artist and, taking a gesture from a paint stroke, exiting with the resultant dance gesture leading them away; I would stay on, responding to the live artwork with dance as the lights fade

Our first experience with the finale choreography and music occurred during our January 2012 weekend intensive, which was devoted to completing the “Abstracting Andante” choreography. However, at the very end of the last day, we did a run through of all dances, and ended with a grand improvisation to the finale music. I wanted to introduce the music to the dancers, and also hoped to get an idea of whether my idea of a layering of different dancers doing different phrases in different styles might work. It also seemed like an excellent way to wrap up the weekend intensive, building our feeling of community.

I instructed the dancers first to improvise in any style they wished, coming across the diagonal one by one. After a while, I changed the instruction to encourage the dancers to come across two by two, still in a style of their own choosing, but being aware of and responding to each other. I videotaped the entire improvisation, and was astounded by not only the wealth of movements being created, but also the beauty of

the juxtaposition of a Duncan Dancer dancing with a breakdancer or a modern dancer with a hip hop dancer. The layering of styles was meaningful and rich.

I also improvised to the finale music in the studio to create many Duncan-based phrases for it. I taught these phrases to the dancers once regular rehearsals resumed at the end of January. Some of the phrases were very quick and complicated, and it was a struggle for many of the dancers, especially those with little conventional dance studio training. I wanted these Duncan-based phrases, which included various types of skips, turns, runs, twists, and sways, to provide a container against the variety of phrases in other styles, like modern, contemporary/lyrical, hip hop, and breakdance, so that the finale still fit within the spirit of the entire program and did not come across as a completely unrelated to the preceding explorations.

Dancers also used rehearsal time to work on their own phrase, in their own “home-base” style of dance, with one proviso – that the phrase include at least one gesture or pose from an earlier dance. I left it up to each dancer to select the pose they wanted to include and how to include it, although I did watch the phrases after the dancers had created them and helped to make adjustments as needed.

I allowed each dancer to select a preferred pose from one of the dance pieces to create a revolving bas relief or evolving exhibit, in front of the upstage fixed panel, during the slow introductory portion of the dance. I wanted the dancers to have the opportunity to demonstrate their personalities and preferences in this part of the

project. Occasionally I would request a change or suggest an edit if a pose was too similar to another or did not read well. The dancers would walk out from the stage left wings, adopt their selected pose in front of the upstage left panel, hold it for two seconds, then walk behind the panel as the next dancer came into place, stand and wait behind the panel, then exit to the back of the line offstage as the following dancer came behind the panel.

In the rehearsal, when we were only using air, tape or a costume rack to represent the panel, it was very lovely to see the dancer in a pose in the foreground with the previous dancer standing neutrally behind them. I considered changing their neutral standing locations in the final version, so that contrast could be seen by the audience, once the panel was opaque instead of see-through.

Once all these various phrases were in our tool belt, we went to work layering and combining them. I would assign various groups of dancers a varying combination of phrases with a variety of timings. Then I would introduce one of the individual phrases created by the dancers in their own styles and reflecting their own personalities as a punctuation mark against the general flow of the Duncan-based phrases, and as a statement of the value of individuality against a whole.

The second section, which changed meter to 3/4, involved the creation of a downstage line of bas relief, created by each dancer again selecting a pose of their choosing, with some help in editing, while I danced a brief solo upstage, upstage of

the bas relief. At certain musical cues, different combinations of dancers emerged from the bas relief to perform Duncan-based phrases not seen in the 4/4 section, such as a phrase we called “Duncan Friends” (a hand-holding skip that lead into two-hand-hold circle spin then back into the skip), another called the “Scoop Skip” (a large Duncan-style lifted knee skip with the opposite arm curving up skyward) and the “Scoop Skip Turn” (two “Scoop Skips” between alternating inside and outside wrap turns). It was during this section that I also hoped to make the scenic panels, which were an abstraction of the art with which we’d been collaborating for the entire project, dance with us by spinning and swishing across the stage from side to side.

A return of the 4/4 music in the fourth section marked a return to the strong diagonal movement phrases, this time with more dynamic Duncan-based phrases and partnered movement phrases that the dancers generated themselves. During rehearsal, after the individual phrases had been created, I asked the dancers to find a partner with a different “home-base” dance style. We ended up with the following pairings:

- Danny (breakdance) with Claire (modern)
- Candace (modern/ballet) with Laura (Duncan)
- Dane (Duncan) with Kristen (modern/ballet)
- David (self-taught/modern) with Pamela (Duncan)
- Margaret (Duncan) and Dawn (Duncan) with Greg (hip hop)

Interestingly, while there were some beautiful moments in these various phrases, their attempt to formalize their dancing into a phrase lacked the spontaneous beauty

present in earlier improvisations in rehearsals and showings. With basic editing and alterations, we moved ahead with combining these phrases with the more vigorous Duncan-based phrases I had created. It was impossible to include everyone's phrases in the two minute repeat of the 4/4 motif, but we included as many as possible.

After setting up all three of these sections, I also then worked myself into the combinations, filling in empty spaces in the pacing of the movements on the diagonal for example. Additionally, every time I walked to upstage right to head back to the upstage left corner, I worked in a series of movements around the space the live artist would be occupying, hoping that would be an opportunity to respond to his brush strokes, and also to give him more movement closer to him, to help vary his available sources of inspiration from the movement.

The final section was to bring us all together. The phrase came to me quite quickly one day during a choreography session on my own. In listening to the music, I felt guided into a series of weight shifts, crouches and lifts, along with directional turns to face front or back. The scooping up gesture, the crouch down with stepping back and then the rippling up through the body and lifting the arm as the weight shifted to the back leg mimicked the idea of breath and release. I broke up the pattern with quick syncopated movements and then later quick footsteps on *relevé* with a large leg *rond de jambe en l'air* with bent knee and arms circling in the opposite direction. The unison uplift of this dance was glorious, but was quick and specific, and therefore challenging for many of the dancers – myself included! It was very easy to make



mistakes in the quickness and variation of facings and embellishments, and to misunderstand the correct placement of the arms, focus or weight shifts in the phrase.

Performed in three horizontal parallel lines of four dancers each, the middle line slightly offset, the unison phrase proceeded into a series of intricate, extemporaneously chosen poses with a large uplift of the arms and chest, which faced different directions – front to the audience, facing a fellow dancer to one side and another, sending the gesture across the entire group (See Figure 18, page 142). Once we all faced front again, a few dancers began to weave through each of the lines which led to a collecting of all the dancers which evolved into a full group circle that swirled underneath individually and then lifted up with arms and chest into the center of the circle. In the first version of the ending, each swirl led to dancers peeling away to view a panel of imaginary artwork, then to move to the live art panel, and then to observe some brush stroke in that painting that they generated into a movement that would usher them offstage to exit. Ultimately, this concept of the ending would change, as would this entire concept of the finale as a dance.

In planning the work schedule for the entire dance project, I had left both the finale dance and the transitions between dances for the last major work period (January through early March 2012) so that the choreography in the finale would reflect everything that the other dances were, and so that the transitions would be built on the dances' finalized endings, beginnings and program order.

Unfortunately, that amount of time was not sufficient for the completion of this finale dance. While I was happy with the structure we created by the time of the last departmental showing on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, the dance needed extensive crafting – time spent looking intently at each moment and making changes to refine the effect of each layering, timing and phrase, for maximum meaning and visual appeal – and practice in rehearsal. I estimate that the dance needed at least eight additional rehearsals at the minimum, and as a cast we only had one more complete group rehearsal before tech rehearsals would begin on March 4<sup>th</sup>. In hindsight, I should have started work on the finale dance earlier in the process, and brought the male dancers in earlier as well. Several of the male dancers were busy with other performance commitments, so we did not start working with the men until the middle of the Fall 2011 semester. I also should have scheduled more group rehearsals in the week leading up to the tech rehearsal, but as I had both full-time students and community dancers who worked full time and lived as far away as Annapolis and Alexandria, Virginia, I was hesitant to schedule too many rehearsals in one week, especially when the tech week of rehearsals and the performances immediately following would require the dancers to attend rehearsals every evening for six days in a row. I felt I had to be mindful of the other responsibilities that these volunteer participants had. These issues led to the lack of significant rehearsal time in the week before tech week and performances.

Therefore, I had a significant decision to make on February 22<sup>nd</sup> after the final departmental showing. With only one more full rehearsal before tech week, I had to make firm and “sure-fire” decisions on how to change the finale so that it would work

effectively as an ending, but also could be restaged and rehearsed in that single Saturday rehearsal, during which we also needed to address some other important issues, which will be discussed Chapter 4. It was Professors Alvin Mayes, a member of my committee, and Sara Pearson who offered feedback that helped me find the solution. Professor Mayes mentioned that he appreciated how the randomness and individuality of “Eternal Cycle” was a nice contrast against the grid-like unison of the final section in the finale. He suggested the two dances be performed one after the other. Professor Pearson believed that the entire project should end as it began, with a solo performance. She was extremely supportive of my abilities as a soloist, and felt that a solo would provide a meaningful balance for the end of the project.

Of course this would mean significant changes in the music, as well as a disappointment to the dancers who had been looking forward to performing the finale, and a reconsideration of the context of the ending to the project. Could the composer make the required changes by Saturday morning? Would the dancers face such a dramatic change to the finale with dejection or disillusionment for the project, considering that I had been promising them this opportunity to dance “full-out” at the end? Would the ending be meaningful and fulfill my artistic intent to create a “cycle” of inspiration and embodiment? And lastly, could I give the visual artist enough time in this edited version of the finale ending to actually still be able to create a painting?

Colleague and fellow MFA Candidate in Dance at the University of Maryland, Nathan Andary, agreed to meet with me to help me work out my ideas on the Friday

afternoon before the final rehearsal. For four hours, we looked at every possibility and which helped me to finally come up with a workable solution.

First, the visual artist would begin painting during “Eternal Cycle.” Since the artist’s plan was to begin with gentle washes of paint first, it seemed to fit the meditative quality of the dance. Second, the end of “Eternal Cycle” would transition into the fifth section of the finale, which we came to call “Community.” In this transition, the dancers would take time to connect with one another and to walk into place for a joyful performance of the “Community” dance. Third, “Community” would end with the dancers peeling away to assume their poses originally planned for the revolving bas relief in the introductory section, this time spread out around the space in front of all the various panels, making solo, duet and trio groupings. Fourth, I would perform my solo, linking and abstracting various motifs from the preceding dances, and my interaction with the live art. I asked the composer to rearrange the music, build transition music between “Eternal Cycle” and the final section of his composition, slightly change the ending of the introductory section, which was now the ending, so that the final notes, which had previously been dissonantly building to lead into the pulsing 4/4 motif, could end with a more peaceful or “uplifting” phrase. Lastly, after my solo and interaction with the artist’s extemporaneous painting, I would sit to watch Galvin’s painting as the lights faded on all of us.

While I believe the dance I originally planned was strong conceptually, it was not ready for “primetime.” It may be a dance that I want to revisit at a later time to give it

the crafting and refinement it deserves. However, the necessity of the changes to the ending also led to a more meaningful ending in my opinion. I was very happy with the bookending of the two solos, the inversion of starting with an invisible, imagined painting and ending with the very real visible painting, and also with the presence of all the dancers on-stage together with the visual artist as the final image of the project.

### *Transitions*

From the beginning, I knew that the transitions between individual dance pieces would be critical in creating a context or through-line for the entire performance. There were many ideas initially to produce the idea of consistent transitions.

The first was around costuming. As we would be contemplating various aesthetics from different cultures, I wondered an alterable costume could be created so that the costume could reference the culture of origin for each piece. I imagined that the process of re-wrapping the costume could be the transition. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, I also thought of using musical interludes which would foreshadow the original musical composition of the finale as the transitional links. The final idea involved the manipulation of the set, to create new “exhibits” for each piece.

In the end, the alteration of the set became the transition mechanism, although we kept the option open for transitional music as well, if needed to mask the noise of moving the set panels or to support the length of time to make the transitions.

Once we determined that the moving of the panels would be the through-line of the entire project, an important decision surrounded who would move the set. The possibilities included: the stage crew, the visual artist, and/or the dancers. I felt that the movable set could not be a separate element from the meaning of the piece. The fact that the panels were moving had to be an integral part of the experience.

If the stage crew was to move the panels, they needed to be dressed as and filling the role of gallery curators. This seemed workable, but a bit gimmicky, and I was concerned I would not have sufficient time to work with the stage crew during tech week to help them perform the transitions with the appropriate qualities.

If the visual artist was to move all the panels, it would be as if he were considering all the art from his own perspective which would thus have an effect on the dancers' experience. This seemed quite appropriate, but given the number of set elements, the transitions would be quite lengthy with only one person making all the changes.

If the dancers moved the panels, it would be as if the dancers were transforming their own environments, demonstrating some control and interest in their experience with the art. This seemed interesting, given that gallery patrons are almost never permitted to touch a piece of art in a museum, much less set up an exhibit to their liking. This solution would also allow me to work with the transitions much earlier in the rehearsal process, and have access to up to 12 people to move the various set pieces. However, I questioned whether this added responsibility would be taxing on the dancers, taking away from their ability to dance as effectively, especially for the less

experienced dancers in the cast. Ultimately we built the transitions with the dancers after the program order and dances had been established.

### *Incorporating the Visual Artist*

After the role of the artist was reworked from being one of the dancers to being a separate entity when Galvin was injured, I felt it would be important to incorporate the artist character into the entire program: first to provide an interesting counterpoint to the dance-transition-dance-transition pattern of the performance; second to avoid a “*deus ex machina*” moment at the end if the visual artist appeared suddenly to paint onstage at the end of the performance, never having been seen previously.

Therefore, we weaved a few opportunities for the artist to participate in the sequence of the performance. He appeared with me during my opening solo, with his back to the audience, as if there to sketch from the masterpieces in the museum. He appeared again in the transition between “Guardians” and “Oiran,” as if repositioning a piece of artwork for better lighting or enhanced setting. Next he appeared sitting downstage on the floor with a sketch book to actually sketch the dance motions of “Sylvan Sounds” and he remained onstage from the end of that dance by walking to the large upstage panel, where he and the crew set up a tarp and his painting supplies, and then painted directly on the panel through the end of the performance. This subtle inclusion of the artist into the entire progression of the performance solidified the idea of a relationship between life and art, and the continual influence they have on the other.

The elements of the individual dance pieces, from historical Duncan repertory re-conceptualized in “Abstracting Andante,” existing choreographies already based on Freer Gallery artwork in “Sylvan Sounds” and “Oiran,” and new choreographies based on other artwork in the Freer Gallery collection, were beautifully supported in the conceptual framework for the dance project. The ideas for the setting in a gallery space, the visual artist and onstage painting, original music composition, transitions, a community of diverse dancers and the exploration of the individual response to art inspiration would place the historical elements from the Duncan technique and the artwork and place it into a contemporary relevancy in *In/And/Of/Through*.



## **Chapter 4: Through | Production Elements and Process**

Once the concepts for the dance project were established and the choreographies created, the process of supporting those concepts within the production elements began. This chapter outlines how production factors such as set design, costuming, lighting and the technical rehearsal process brought all the artistic elements together in a way that brought context, meaning and rationale to the project.

### **The Dance and Its Environment: Set, Costume and Lighting Design**

I was extremely fortunate to have as my production collaborators some extremely creative and skilled designers, including Collin Ranney, Helen Hayes award nominee and MFA Candidate in Scenic Design; Laree Lentz, MFA Candidate in Costume Design and fine artist; and, Sarah Tundermann, MFA Candidate in Lighting Design. Throughout the process these three artists consistently demonstrated the highest standards in design as well as the most impressive display of commitment, going the extra mile to guarantee that all aspects of these three areas were produced as well as possible. I believe that the ultimate success of *In/And/Of/Through* was significantly due to their wonderful ideas and execution of their designs.

#### *Set Design: A Movable Gallery*

In our first production meeting, I expressed my interest in the relationship of human beings to art, and my intent to investigate the partnership of one art form, Isadora Duncan Dance, with the visual artwork of diverse cultures and time periods, as

discussed in previous chapters. Ranney was immediately supportive of the idea of creating a gallery in which the dance could take place. At the time we were still contemplating the possibility of projecting the artwork into the space, and Ranney brought up the idea of large blank canvases upon which projections might be made.

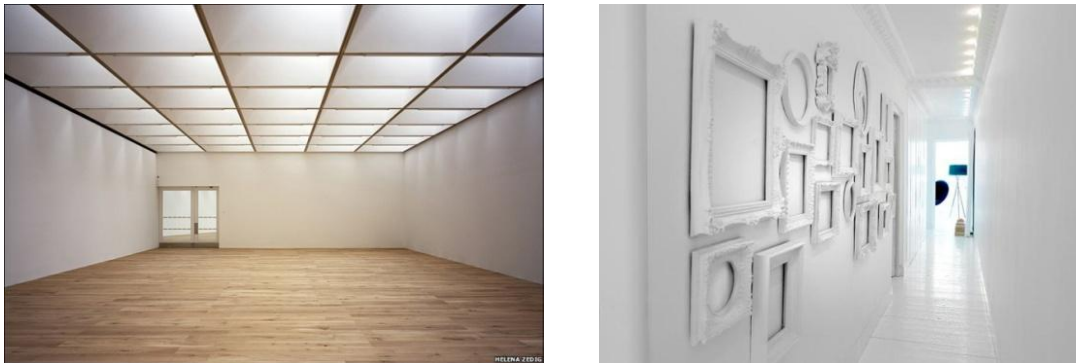


Figure 14. Research images for set design referencing an art gallery.

Ranney's proposal for the space included five movable panels, tracking where the downstage and mid-stage legs normally hang, with three panels on the mid-stage track and two panels on the downstage track. The panels were proposed as white, opaque, floor-to-ceiling, approximately 16' high and 6' wide. The panels would be able to move side to side as well as rotate from center pivot point on the track. Two additional panels were to be fixed upstage, one stage right that would be approximately 16' x 10' and the other stage left, approximately 16' x 6.' The panels would have an assortment of empty white frames hanging from them. Ranney further suggested removing all soft goods in the theater space, revealing the fixtures such as the sidelights as a type of sculpture in a gallery. Lastly, based upon my suggestion, he proposed removing the black marley to bare the blond wood floor underneath, much more in keeping with the idea of a gallery. As I much prefer dancing on wood, and wanted to avoid a conventional dance theater space, I was in favor of this proposal.

Ranney surprised me however, when he recommended the removal of the video projections in the space, instead allowing the dance choreography to carry the entire message of the artwork. He indicated that often video projections distract the audience away from the dancing, and that the audience would not need such a literal representation to make the connection between the artwork and the choreography.

I felt I wanted to let the audience in on the relationship between the artwork and the embodiment of it through dance. Perhaps I also feared that my choreography would not adequately honor the artwork, and hoped that projecting it in the space would make up for any omissions. Beyond which, the artwork is just incredibly beautiful!

We found a solution when we came upon the idea of hanging images of the selected artwork in the lobby in white frames so that audience members could see them before they entered the theater, giving them an opportunity to see the genesis of the choreography. I contacted the Smithsonian Rights and Reproductions department and received permission to hang the images in the lobby for the March concert.

#### *Costumes: Individuality and Diversity*

My original vision for the costumes in this project involved a flowing, one-unit piece that would be able to transform to reflect the cultural aesthetics of each dance piece. I wanted the costumes to have the flow of motion as the Duncan tunics do, have colors and patterns that indicated a global context without being specific to any particular culture, and also be flattering to the different body types of the cast. We considered a

pedestrian look for the dancers, as if they really were regular people visiting a museum who happened to start dancing. Lentz developed a wonderful palette of research images to find the most effective costume for the piece.

Research Image for Costumes	Notes
	<p>These wrap dresses would provide a wide variety in style, color, pattern, allusion to various cultures. With the correct fabric, they would also have the sense of flow. However, it could also come across as busy and disharmonious.</p>
	<p>These dance costumes, with white bases and colored “tails” which could be wrapped in a variety of ways, satisfied my desire for variety in style, but concerned me initially because of their “danciness” and white base. Would they fade into the white panels of the set? Would they override the presentation of the dancers as gallery patrons?</p>
	<p>I preferred the version of the male dance costume on the right because I saw it as more masculine, as opposed to the bare chest or the tied scarf around the hips of the costume on the left. Lentz worked to find styles and sash configurations that would appropriately masculine.</p>

Table 11. Initial costume sketches based on research for wrapped, flowing costumes that could reference the idea of various cultures and styles.

After selecting the white costumes with the colored wrap-able tails as the costume for the piece, I was still concerned about the cast looking too much like performers,

especially at the beginning. Lentz and I discussed at length the possibility of adding a pedestrian piece to each costume – a jacket, a vest, a wrap skirt, perhaps even shoes – that could be removed at some point early in the program as the cast members made their transitions into embodiments of art through dance. With such a large cast, the budget was already very tight, and though Lentz was very willing to work with me on this, I decided to try it without any added pedestrian pieces. Ultimately, the idea of the “one pedestrian piece” did make it into the performance, but not until the very final stages of tech week.

The final mix of costumes was very flattering to the entire cast, and also provided a variety not just across personalities and across cultures, but also across time. Some looks were very classical, others very romantic, others very athletic and still others very modern. The final color palette in the tails was in coordinated tones of deep ocean blue, muted jungle green and rosy raspberry.

There were four cast members in each color, which allowed for an interesting, unplanned and surprising combination of colors in the various dances. In “Sylvan Sounds” the opening and closing formations seated on the benches were costumed: Figure 1 – blue, Figure 2 – raspberry, Figure 3 – raspberry, Figure 4 – green. In “Guardians” the four figures were costumed: East – blue, West – green, North – raspberry, South – green. Then somehow, in “Oiran” we had nearly perfect combining of the costumes with one entire group of three in raspberry, and the other two groups of three in a blue-green-blue/green-blue-green combination.

It was also a wise choice to forgo the concept of re-wrapping or altering the costumes for each piece. With the changes in music, choreographic structures, motifs and set positions in every piece, changes in costuming as well would have been too much.



Figure 15. The visual artist's more pedestrian costume in white provided a coordinated contrast to the dancers' white costumes with colored sashes.

The costume for the visual artist was a simple outfit, in white, with a more pedestrian quality, including a cargo-style pant and button-down shirt. Lentz arranged for two versions of the costume, and we did not worry about Galvin dripping paint on the costume,

determining that this natural effect would be very meaningful in the piece.

### *Lighting: Creating Drama*

My concept of dance lighting completely changed with two events in graduate school.

The first was watching Jiří Kylián's *Fallen Angels* in which the lighting plays a dramatic role in highlighting the exquisite choreography of the piece. The second experience was a collaboration project between the students in the graduate choreography class with the students in the graduate lighting design class in the Spring 2010 semester. This experiment, conducted in the light lab in Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, allowed choreographers to bring prepared movements into the space for the lighting designers to light, and then allowed the lighting designers to

show prepared lighting designs for the choreographers to respond to with movement. The drama that was created in those experiments taught me never to be satisfied with simple color washes on a cyclorama ever again.

Therefore, I encouraged Tundermann to use as much dramatic, extreme and dynamic lighting as she could for *In/And/Of/Through*. I really wanted the lighting to have a profound effect on the way the audience would perceive the dances. In my mind, the lighting would partner with the choreography, culling forth aspects and highlights that could not be seen in normal lighting. I wanted to see the effect of shadow, of strong angles. I wanted to see silhouettes, outlines, and the glow of body parts.

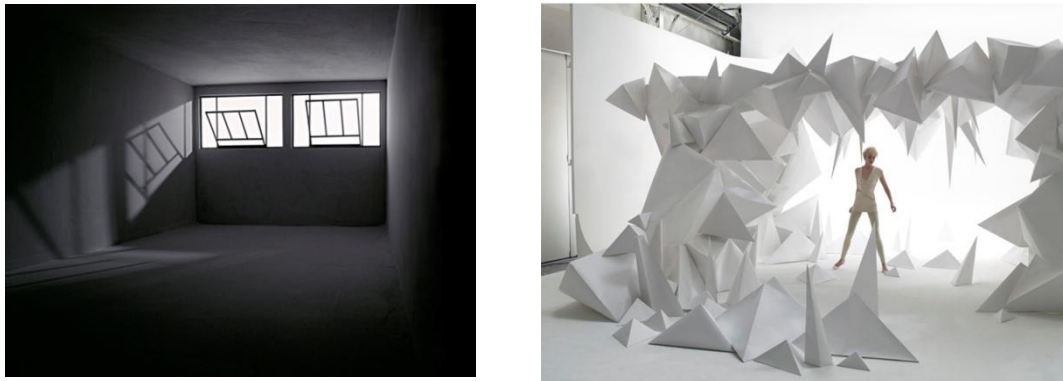


Figure 16. Research images for proposed lighting design including strong diagonals, play of shadows, highlighting the body and creating drama.

To my delight, Tundermann delivered. She created lighting plans that evoked special environments, such as the way she lit areas of the stage during “Oiran” just as the dancers moved into them, almost like compartments. Another example was her dramatic side lighting during “Eternal Cycle,” coming all from stage left, outlining the bodies and casting shadows off the panels on stage right.

The sum of the products – choreographies, transitions, set design, costumes, lighting, music and dancers – all stood ready for the ultimate test, when they would be combined together on stage as one cohesive piece. I felt confident in each of the elements separately. Would they find a harmony together or fight against each other? Would the set panels obscure the dancing in a way that would intrigue and provoke or would they be a source of frustration, preventing the choreography's effectiveness?

The true impact of a piece of art cannot be known until, at the very earliest, the moment all the elements come together and are displayed for an audience for the first time. Until that moment, it is all theoretical and all conjectural, based upon the hope that all the various little decisions leading up to the integration will culminate in a piece that “works.”

### **Rapprochement: Bringing Together All the Pieces into Harmonious Oneness**

The most challenging aspect of the rapprochement in terms of elements for this dance project was the movable set with its five pivoting, sliding, enormous white panels. Until the actual panels were installed in the stage space, which began the last week of February 2012, we just did not know how the panels would function. So I was apprehensive and excited to see the panels installed for the performance.

The immense sense of scale of the panels when we first walked into the stage space was inspiring and alarming. My immediate questions included whether these large opaque panels would block too much of the dance or create intriguing moments of disappearance and revelation? Would the size create a sense of scale and drama for



the dancers, or overwhelm them? And on a practical level, would the panels move in a way that would match the flow of the dances, or would they be a source of cumbersome, halting difficulty?

The first issue with the panels as a production element in conjunction with the choreographies came at the final departmental showing on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Until that time, we had been using imagination, taped lines on the floor and five costume racks to represent the position and movement of the panels. These, plus the four cube-shaped benches used in “Looking” and “Sylvan Sounds” as well as transitional elements in the piece, comprised nine movable elements of the set which needed to be altered for each dance to create both the required functionality (keeping needed floor space clear for example) and desired setting (such as creating interesting configurations to highlight the dances).

In rehearsal, after we had established the program order, we developed the looks that we wanted and felt would create an appropriate configuration for each dance piece. We then developed a transitional plan for moving all the elements into the next dance. We had to figure out how the particular dance ended – where all the set pieces were positioned and where all the dancers ended the piece – and how the next would begin – where the set pieces needed to be and who could most conveniently move each element. The costume racks were fairly easy to move and manipulate, which encouraged us to make dramatic changes, and to execute them quickly and with a sense of flow. This even encouraged us to use the panels as if they could dance with

us, particularly in the finale dance. However, I knew that we would not really know what would work with the panels until we were working with the real thing.

Yet a major change to the planned transitions came even before we got into the stage space with the actual panels. At the final departmental showing, both the set and lighting designers expressed concern that the configurations I had selected for many of the individual dances blocked almost all the lighting, particularly the use of sidelights. I had many configurations using diagonal and perpendicular positions, which would not allow the light an unobstructed pathway to the center of the stage.

After discovering this problem, and knowing the impact it would have on the transitions if almost all configurations had to change, added to the knowledge that I only had one more full group rehearsal before tech week, I needed to reevaluate all the configurations, and plan out the transitions so that I could give quick, clear instructions to all the dancers at the rehearsal and get through a full run through to be prepared for the first tech rehearsal. I was somewhat frustrated that it had not been clearer that I needed to be so mindful of light paths in the basic set layouts and mock-ups provided. In my previous experience choreographing and producing performances, I had never worked with a large imposing set before, and so I wasn't as aware of this issue as I perhaps should have been. I also wondered why a "movable set" was so limited in the amount of moving it could actually do.

However, I was very grateful that the stage manager Erin Glasspatrick, production assistant Kayla Wright, and the designers were willing to meet with me that Friday afternoon to work through all the set configurations to maximum lighting potential and to minimize the number of transitions needed. We worked to streamline the position of the panels and benches to simplify each transition.

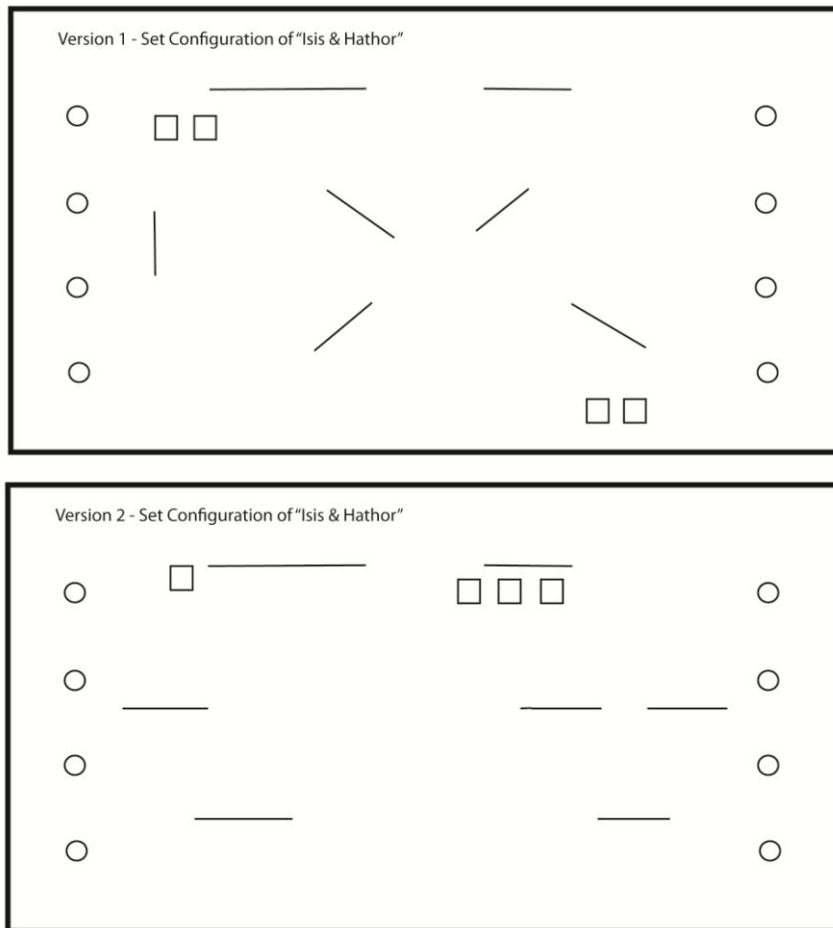


Illustration 2. Examples of panel positions for “Isis & Hathor.” The first image shows my original configuration which I learned would block the light; the second image shows the alternative version that would provide clear light paths.

Later that evening, I assembled an actual transition plan using the new configuration templates for each dance, the program order, and video from rehearsal run-throughs to develop a concise schematic of which dancer would do which transition action

based upon where they finished one dance and began another and the location and direction a set piece needed to move. We put this plan into action at the February 25<sup>th</sup> rehearsal, the last full rehearsal before the technical rehearsals began one week later. I asked each dancer to write down their transition responsibilities as if writing a script, which I also asked them to rehearse on their own throughout the week. I recommended mental exercises such as: “After ‘Oiran’ I am at center stage, I wait until the ‘Sylvan Sounds’ dancers move, then I head to stage left, turn the downstage panel to an internal diagonal and wait stage left to begin “Eternal Cycle,” for every transition throughout the entire performance piece. We also ran through “tops and tails” in every subsequent rehearsal, even if the entire cast was not present, based upon the assumption that the more prepared each person was as an individual, the more the entire project would be helped.

The final part of working with the panels was learning to actually move them in space. The panels were tall and wide, 16’ x 6’, and only about 2” deep. Several of the panels had extremely large frames attached which partially extended beyond the panel itself, creating a series of intriguing see-through features, which would be able to frame real dancers as they moved past the framed area. These protruding frames were made of Styrofoam which meant that they were appropriately light enough to move, but also delicate, easily damaged if grasped to try to move the panels. The rehearsals on Tuesday (February 28) and Saturday (March 2) before tech rehearsal week were largely spent learning how to effectively move the panels.

The panels had a central pivot point on the track at the top, and a layer of carpeting underneath. This carpeting helped maintain an even contact with the floor (which was not always even), and enough flow and enough friction for effective movement across the floor. The difficulty came in maintaining the proper alignment of the bottom contact with the floor to match the pivot point and tracking up above. It was very easy for the bottom portion of the panel to pivot at one end or the other, rather than the center, to get caught on an elevation in the floor, or to drift one direction or another. All of these conditions resulted in a twisting of the panel that not only lessened the aesthetics of its positioning and its ability to move, but also seemed dangerous. Occasionally the panels would crack, twist precariously, or even drop bolts and magnets from above. We quickly learned the following lessons:

1. Panels could only be moved if “horizontal” (parallel to the audience)
2. Panels should only be rotated to “vertical” (perpendicular to audience) or diagonal once in its desired position
3. Panels could be pushed by one person
4. Panels could only be rotated by two people, one on each side, with one hand on the edge of the panel (not the protruding frame) and if possible another hand anchoring the center of panel to provide a correlating central pivot point
5. Panels could not be moved or rotated too quickly

This again altered our plan for transitions, though not as dramatically as after the previous showing. During the Sunday March 4<sup>th</sup> initial tech rehearsal, we spent much of the time figuring out specific locations for each panel in each dance, marking those positions with tape, and making amendments to the panel movement assignments as needed for effective manipulation of the panels. We also streamlined the set

configurations even further, removing the benches between the end of “Isis & Hathor” and the beginning of “Sylvan Sounds,” and keeping some panels in the same location for more than one dance. For example, we kept the downstage left panel in place rather than pushing it stage right for “Eternal Cycle” and then pushing it back stage left for the finale and ending, which seemed busy and unnecessary.

By the Tuesday March 6<sup>th</sup> dress rehearsal we had all transitions in place, including one transition by the visual artist (moving the middle upstage panel after “Guardians”) and one transition by the stage crew (dressed in white, placing the benches for “Sylvan Sounds”). The stage crew and visual artist also set up the tarp and painting supplies at the beginning of “Eternal Cycle.” I coached the stage crew on carrying the benches onto the stage so they did not appear like a group of moving men, hefting boxes onto the van! I suggested they carry the benches with long straight arms, away from their bodies, and walk quickly and evenly, facing the audience to put the benches down. This issue of moving benches was addressed with the dancers as well, so the audience did not see too much “rear end” during the transitions.

### *Getting the “Look”*

Another critical element that came together in the last week before the live performances was the addition of a pedestrian article of clothing to go over my costume in “Looking.” Harkening back to an early idea that the dancers would be dressed in pedestrian clothing rather than dance costumes, the suggestion was made

that I would wear a pedestrian piece over my costume, thereby indicating the element into the project, but without outfitting the entire cast.

The difficulty lay in a) finding the correct article of pedestrian clothing and b) finding the best moment to remove it, so it would be subtle and effective rather than distracting. I spent the time outside of rehearsals ransacking my own closet, friends' closets and local clothing stores to find the right piece. We never did find "it." The pieces were too short to cover the costume, the wrong color for the overall aesthetics, too cumbersome to remove easily, or unflattering. We tried a wrap dress and various versions of jackets, sweaters and vests. Each night we tried a different possibility.

By the official dress rehearsal on Wednesday March 7<sup>th</sup>, we had not yet found the "perfect piece," and costume designer Lentz suggested we go without. However, I wanted to use the idea of using the pedestrian clothing piece not only as a mechanism to enter the piece, but also as a device to end it by putting it back on during my final solo, before sitting down to observe Galvin's painting as the lights faded. Therefore, I wore the best choice at the time, a dark gray jacket with an open neckline, tie belt and a few large black buttons. I feel that this costuming device was very effective in containing the entire performance as one cohesive work.

#### *Odds and Ends: Just a Few More Changes*

In bringing the entire piece together in the days leading up to the performances, a few additional changes were needed. The lighting was almost completely ready as

designed, with just a few adjustments to make sure areas, especially downstage left and upstage right, were lit sufficiently in dances “Guardians” and “Oiran.” I felt that the light levels were a bit low overall, and asked that Tundermann boost the light levels for “Abstracting Andante” and “Community” in particular. Otherwise, Tundermann had created a beautiful lighting design that truly magnified the effect of each dance. A few of my favorite moments included the dappled leaf light effect at the end of “Sylvan Sounds” and the only use of color, a kaleidoscopic sparkle of multiple colors against the white panels during “Community” in the finale. The dark drama of “Guardians” was a perfect match to the spirit of the dancing as well.

In the end, the composer and I determined that transitional music was not necessary as the panels were not unpleasantly loud, nor did it take too much time to move them. In fact, in some ways, the silence and functional sounds of the panels were a pleasing respite between the strong musical elements in each dance piece.

The final element was the onstage painting. Originally the set designer had planned to place a large frame on the wide upstage right panel, where the artist would be painting. Thick water-media art paper would be adhered to the back panel within the frame. A single sheet of this paper was only approximately 65” squared. This seemed much too small to have a significant visual impact so far upstage, especially with the dancing between it and the audience. Because the artist was using a Chinese calligraphy approach, we both felt that a frame would be inappropriate, since such artwork is normally done on large swaths of paper with a sense of expansiveness.



First, we tried removing the frame and adhering a double width of the paper, providing the artist with an acceptable medium to handle the ink he would apply and more real estate for the painting. Visually, however, the paper looked wrinkled, warped and messy, rather like a child's kindergarten art project taped to a refrigerator. Luckily, the incredibly supportive production team agreed to allow the artist to paint directly on the panel, without paper of any kind, and offered to then repaint the panel every night with a matte white paint to handle the ink and water without just dripping right down the panel, though there was a fair amount of dripping and spray of ink anyway. The ultimate configuration for the onstage painting allowed the visual artist Adrian Galvin to use a large expansive canvas to create a piece of art that read well from the audience, and balanced all the dancing going on in front of it.

#### *In/And/Of/Through as One Piece*

Running at approximately 45 minutes, all the elements – set, lighting, costumes, choreography, transitions, live art, music, dancing, performance – all solidified and settled into a piece that felt harmonious and was a joy to perform. It had a beginning that invited people to join us. It had a middle that investigated different ideas and took the witnesses on a journey. It had an ending that brought all those investigations together and created meaning. *In/And/Of/Through* developed its own voice from all the vibrations and songs of each element that came together.

It is always shocking to me how much work can go into something that will only last a period of 45 minutes. As a performer, you wait backstage for the curtain to yield

and the first note to ring out, and then all of a sudden, the piece is over. Two years of work, hours of time in research and rehearsal, over in just two performances of 45 minutes each. And yet of course the work also lives on, in the memories of those who witness and perform it, and in the effect it has upon people after experiencing it. It was very gratifying that our piece received standing ovations each night it was performed, and that audience members generally reacted very positively to the piece.

I had wanted to create a performance that would inspire people and bring them together. Not only in the cast and crew but in a small way for humanity, at least the people who would see this, to be affected by it and take it forward into their lives. Perhaps it would inspire people to think, to act and to move differently, just as we allowed the visual artwork to change and move us as people and as dancers.

## Chapter 5: Beyond | Essential Meaning in the Cycle of Art

Through diverse elements such as historical modern dance practices from American dance pioneer Isadora Duncan, diverse artwork from the Asian Art collections of the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., collaborators of dancers, an onstage visual artist and composer, and dramatic production elements, *In/And/Of/Through* moved beyond any specific component to fulfill a more significant investigation into the nature of art and its relationship to the individual and society. Visual artwork from long ago was brought to life in dancers who themselves were transformed by the power of beauty and aesthetics from each culture, historical period and individual pieces of art. New choreographic and visual artwork was created from the dynamic expression of that transformation. Through it all, the abstract setting of a gallery provided the context for the dancers, through the choreographies, to explore their own responses to art from around the world and through time, and help the audience to reflect on their own understanding of art and humanity as well.

I was interested in how the reaction of the live audience would affect the cycle of inspiration and embodiment I was investigating as a final component of the project. I also looked forward to evaluating the presence of community and personal growth in the dancers and visual artist, and analyzing the commonalities among the cultural aesthetics explored in the project.

## **Completing the Cycle: Audience Response, Challenges and Feedback**

*In/And/Of/Through* used the concept of the transformative effect of art on the individual to demonstrate the cyclical nature of art in the human community. Art may be created based on inspiration from movement and life, and then people who observe that art may absorb that inspiration and find that it changes them in some mental, emotional or physical manner. In the dance project itself, this happened specifically when the dancers modulated between pedestrian and dancer modes in “Abstracting Andante” as well as when they explored various body stances from the artwork. This process was also manifested in the onstage painting in the dance project. The visual artist relied on the inspiration of those embodied expressions in the dancing to generate his impetus for brush strokes. This represented the way human movement can inspire visual art. The final component of this cycle included the audience reaction. How did the audience sense this cycle of inspiration and embodiment?

There were many audience members who said they felt inspired by *In/And/Of/Through*. One student, a senior dance major, greeted me in the lobby after the Thursday March 8<sup>th</sup> performance literally jumping up and down, remarking how she has never appreciated Duncan Dance, and had come to the performance fully prepared to dislike *In/And/Of/Through*. She instead had the opposite experience, feeling enraptured and elated by *In/And/Of/Through*. I believe that in her case, the mix of multiple aesthetics, postmodernism like the pedestrian elements, and the personal expressiveness of the dancers themselves helped her to have this experience.

Likewise, the piece seemed to have a similar effect on other audience members, particularly people who claimed not to normally enjoy dance concerts in general, but found to their surprise that they greatly enjoyed *In/And/Of/Through*. Other audience members shared that they were affected by “Oiran” or the “Sylvan Sounds” to the point of tears. I believe this was related to the beauty of the artwork and the legacy of cultural aesthetics behind both dances. By far, the favorite dance, based upon comments, was “Isis & Hathor,” which received spontaneous applause each time it was performed. The simplicity of the heavy walk against the precise unison duet seemed to captivate people’s interest in the Egyptian aesthetics in a new way. Finally, the ending of the entire performance also seemed to be very satisfying for many people. Several commented in discussions directly after the performance and throughout the week following, that the return to wearing the gray jacket, as well as a return to looking at artwork, but this time visible artwork being actively created in the space, created a lot of closure and meaning for them. This had been an important factor for me in creating the arc of the program, that the audience would both sense the beauty of the artwork that inspired the choreography and appreciate the cyclical investigation of the art as inspiration, embodiment and interpreted visual creation.

Several other colleagues in the dance field, including other dance graduate students and faculty members, mentioned with interest that “Abstracting Andante” had a “flash mob” spirit to it, as if I had taken the notion of the flash mob back from the real world, and put it onto the stage. While this had never entered my mind as an intention for this dance, I was very pleased with this idea, as it mirrored the cyclical nature of

the art creation – art inspiration – art creation I was presenting in *In/And/Of/Through*. If flash mobs are about taking the dance out of the studios and theaters and into the streets, I was taking that idea and putting it back on the stage, so that it might inspire someone else in another way. In fact, as a cast, we are hoping to perform “Abstracting Andante” as a flash mob in the promenade at L’Enfant Plaza in Washington, D.C before the end of this semester. The cycle continues.

Many people felt a connection to their own feelings about visual art and the way both Florian Rouiller (whose piece *Profundeur Inconnue* was also inspired by artwork) and I studied and represented the art through our choreography. Another University of Maryland student states in a concert response paper:

“It seemed like Valerie utilized my way of connecting with visual art... Her choreography seemed more focused on body placement, shape and creating the images and forms portrayed in the artwork she was inspired by. In many of the dances Valerie choreographed, I could identify some of the human forms that might have been present in the artwork she was looking at that stood out in each piece. For example, in “Isis & Hathor,” the shape of the body that all of the dancers were making as they walked around the stage was very reminiscent of ancient Egyptian artwork and hieroglyphics. Also in “Sylvan Sounds” it seemed like the four dancers were moving in and out of the poses in the artwork that it was drawing from. This technique for analyzing and applying visual art as inspiration seems very similar in concept to how I would apply visual art to choreography because I am so shape and space oriented” [Burke 2012:2].

Of course, there were people for whom *In/And/Of/Through* was not an effective project. One dance major remarked in a paper: “The process of personalization, or ‘making it my own’ is the primary way I engage with art. Valerie and Florian have both made their respective art forms “their own” yet I feel that they both still cling

very tightly to the structures that they have been educated in, and that their artistic potential may be limited by this” [Voss 2012:2]. In response to this idea, I believe that all creative artists have some kind of structure or process which helps them create. While this structure or process can be limiting, it can also evolve over time and is also what gives the artist his or her own distinctive and recognizable voice. Furthermore, I think this illusion of limitation can also depend upon the magnification of the lens of understanding with which one is working. Within the structure of Duncan Dance, I was making significant artistic developments and changes. While this may not be as apparent to someone less familiar with the details and intricacies of a particular art form, I believe an insider to the Duncan style would immediately see how much I was actually deviating from established practices.

This student also indicated surprise that my work did not have the same kind of flow and constancy of movement that he would have expected from choreography based upon the Isadora Duncan technique. As I mentioned earlier, I do acknowledge that many of the choreographies have more stillness in poses than I originally expected to create, perhaps because of my hesitation to abstract or alter the body shapes in ways that would possibly degrade or obscure the original aesthetics.

Another audience member commented that she felt the choreography and the concept of the piece presented the artwork in too literal a presentation. For her, there was not enough abstraction to calculate her own meaningfulness. I am in partial agreement with her. Because of concerns with issues of cultural appropriation as well as my

desire to show the beauty of these exquisite pieces of visual art, my choreographies adhered much more closely to the literal embodiment of the art. Perhaps later investigations into this process of relating to art will explore more abstract representations, which could also have the potential to actually lessen the possibility of cultural appropriation. For now, I am pleased that I was overall successful in marrying basic Duncan Dance principles with so many different aesthetic qualities.

I greatly appreciated the variety of audience responses, that some people were moved to the point of tears, others questioned my approach while others found personal connections to their own concepts of art. Still others were provoked to question the art in the dance project, pushing them to consider their own viewpoints and feelings on art. I felt that this element was a critical factor in completing the cycle of art transformation instigated in the dance project.

### **Life into Art, Art as Life**

Visual artist Adrian Galvin, both a dance and visual art student at the University of Maryland, provided some insight into this in a response paper from one of his classes, which he shared with me. In it, he explains some of his perspective on the nature of art, that all art creation involves body movement, and is a form of self discovery. “I find that every work of art that I create brings me closer to an understanding of who and what I am as a conscious being. I am also a strong believer in postmodernism, in the idea that progress and understanding come from the breaking down of barriers and definitions” [Galvin 2012:2].



One audience member shared with me that she found she watched Galvin's acts of painting entirely through the end of the performance. She lamented that the painting was "too interesting" and that it competed with the dancing with the result that the painting won! What she may not have realized was that I found that completely



Figure 17. Image of Adrian Galvin's live artwork after creation in *In/And/Of/Through* on the Tuesday, March 7, 2012 dress rehearsal.

acceptable. Since Galvin was finding his inspiration for painting from the dance itself, this audience member was simply watching the abstract record of the dance, rather than watching the live version.

Art is an abstracted representation of life. We are seeing an artist's interpretive representation of something that *is*. When Galvin states that "dance and painting are fundamentally inseparable," I agree that each are created as the result of intentional body movement, generated from some form of inspiration. Whether the audience member was looking at the painter forming strokes through his body movement or at the dancers moving their own bodies through space, she was looking at the same art.

I appreciated collaborating with Galvin in this process, and felt his perspective, though based in postmodernism, was highly sympathetic to Isadora's notions of the importance of art in the essence of the human being. And in a postmodern tradition, I was breaking down many barriers and challenging several ideas with this thesis

project. The first challenge was the notion that Isadora's dance principles were only relevant in a historical context. A second challenge was the traditional Duncan practice that all Duncan Dance-informed choreographies had to be implemented in a nature-based, Greek aesthetic, using classical music. A further challenge included production elements that obscured portions of the choreography as well as onstage painting within the dance performance challenged the conventional presentation of Duncan-style choreography. Lastly, the insertion of pedestrian elements, a highly postmodern practice, was a breakthrough in a Duncan Dance-based project.

### **Community, the Individual in the Group**

Isadora Duncan's notion of dance did not apply purely to highly trained professionals performing for society elites. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Isadora wanted dance to be regarded once again as a "high" art form, she also wanted it to be for all people. Therefore, she used the universal movements of humanity – walking, kneeling, reclining, running – as the basis for her movement vocabulary. "From the beginning I conceived the dance as a chorus or community expression," she declares in her autobiography, *My Life* [Duncan 1995:103].

Part of my goal in this project was to make this a valuable experience for each member of the cast and to build a strong community together. I wanted more than people coming together to fill their dance roles in rehearsal and then separating again without a real connection to each other. Therefore, perhaps unbeknownst to the dancers, each rehearsal included some subtle community building component such as

a group warm up, class and improvisation to begin, time to chat, lunch breaks together, positive and friendly email communications, and times to joke together. One time, a dancer asked how I was so patient with the cast when they were often “goofing off” and seemed out of control. I replied with a knowing smile “Oh no, I am in total control.” What I meant was that I was highly aware of the dual purpose to each rehearsal, both productive choreographic work and physical rehearsing, and just as important, community-building through casual social interaction. I rode a careful balance not to let either component take over. The rehearsals couldn’t become too heavy on work alone, nor could it devolve into pure gab fests. There needed to be room for personalities, sharing, and friendship, in addition to work and productivity.

To my delight, our community did form strong bonds. Cast members began to meet as friends outside of rehearsal, greeted each other with hugs, and shared food, advice and personal stories. A 58-year-old female horseback riding guide and 25-year-old female statistician were just as friendly together as the 62-year-old female photo researcher and 24-year-old male fire protection engineer.

One cast member was a bit more withdrawn from the group and displayed awkwardness at any kind of physical touch, even during dances themselves. This changed dramatically however, after I arranged and paid for her to have a hotel room during the weekend intensive rehearsal. “This is the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me!” she exclaimed as I checked her in that Friday evening. It was also her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, which we had celebrated with flowers and cupcakes. After that gift of hotel

room and small birthday celebration, her demeanor completely changed for the remainder of the project. She was warm, friendly and approachable, as well as willing to miss more work, and drive more often, to attend more rehearsals.

Each evening of the dress rehearsal and performances, I gathered the cast together for a group warm-up, discussion of notes and reminders, and a run-through of trouble spots. I also had a little gift to give each night. Part of the discussion included asking the cast a question for each to answer. I wanted to further bring them together as a cast, bring the importance of the dance as a work of art to their minds, and to glean information from them about their thoughts and experiences with the entire project.

Wednesday night, the official dress rehearsal, I presented a laminated picture of Isadora, with a personal message from Jeanne Bresciani addressed to each dancer, which she had sent as a lovely surprise gift of support. That evening I asked: “Tell something you learned about the person on your right and on your left, during this project.” There were often tears as the dancers shared lovely things about each other.

Thursday night, the first live performance, when the dancers each received a bouquet of flowers and a personal thank you on a card depicting artwork from the Freer Gallery, I asked “What is the most important thing you learned about yourself through this project?” More than half the dancers responded that they learned about breath and moving from an internal place of consciousness. Others spoke of joy, the importance of movement for happiness, finding voluminous movement and exceeding

one’s perceived limits. Their responses indicated some of the essence of the Duncan, namely the real internal, personal experience of it, had drifted into their awareness.

The final night’s question, when I gave them *In/And/Of/Through* commemorative t-shirts and bundles of notecards from the Freer Gallery, I asked “What do you want to take forward with you from this piece and this experience?” Each response was very moving, and telling of the effect the project had on each person:

<b>Dancer</b>	<b>Response</b>
Dawn	“community”
Kristen	“friends,” “ability to breathe”
Claire	“community,” “introspection with movement,” “inner initiation”
Danny	“being able to look and see other dancers on stage,” “the <i>Andante</i> has changed me,” “being lifted, looking out”
Greg	“breath,” “moving for a reason,” “being lifted,” “the concept of the hands looking at the earth”
Dane	“joy and having more of it,” “pushing out the darkness of life”
Margaret	“adrenaline of experience and more of it”
Valerie	“the importance of the people you work with,” “having confidence in an idea”
Adrian	“keeping historical perspective,” “common human experience,” “finding what’s still meaningful today”
Laura	“people who do this work are special”
Candace	“whole body connection” “highly renewed love of dance”
Pamela	“taking the beauty of the experience to reduce life stress,” “taking the memory of this experience for the rest of my life”

Table 12. Examples of dancer responses to questions about impact of the project on their sensibilities of self and dance.

The deeply personal and experiential nature of the lessons each dancer shared was highly gratifying, for they indicated a real-life transformative effect through the inspiration of the art-making in this dance project.

### **In|And|Of|Through: Connecting with Art**

The most profound challenge and opportunity for me was testing Isadora's technique and philosophic viability beyond her highly recognizable Greek aesthetic. If her ideas of breath and solar plexus initiation, flow of movement, musicality and personal expression could find effective relevancy in alternative aesthetics from different cultures, then her language of dance would have much greater fluency for use in the contemporary dance field.

As one of my greatest wishes is that the Duncan Dance style finds greater applicability in contemporary dance creation, I was delighted to discover that I could create meaningful dances using these principles. The dances that I choreographed using these principles were perceived as uplifting, emotional, personally meaningful, dynamic and strong in much the same way Isadora's choreographies are. The dances also tolerated a wide range of musical styles, dancing ability, expression, movement vocabulary and visual aesthetics. To me, this points to the Duncan philosophy as a deeply and profoundly viable technique for dance and choreography today.

Isadora herself encouraged dancers to find their own voice, especially when she called for the "dancer of the future" [Duncan 1997: 96], which in her view would be a

dancer that would find her own inner meaning and express that to the world through dance. Isadora was rarely interested in other dancers mimicking her style of dance [Duncan 1995]. My belief is that if Isadora were alive today, she would have continued to find new ways to develop dance, using contemporary music, expanded movement vocabulary and present-day subject matter and concepts. She was first and foremost a visionary and innovator, helping the Dance evolve as a complete art form.

Furthermore, the Duncan technique and approach to the individual in dance, as well as my own developments in regard to community perhaps, helped each of the dancers develop personally. Some overcame social shyness to join the community of the cast, others established a renewed love of dance itself, still others enhanced their dance abilities by extending range, memory, performance quality and skills, and others yet overcame personal challenges of life-threatening accidents, years of self-doubt, divorce and grief over the death of family members. I know that each member of the *In/And/Of/Through* cast, including myself, developed as dancers, performers and people as a result of this process. In our own ways, we became aware of new opportunities in life, as well as the confidence to engage in those opportunities. We learned the value of our own individual personalities as the piece would not have been what it was if a single one of us was different or missing. And we learned the value of the group, as none of this could have been possible without all of us working together. The Duncan technique and philosophy required the dancers to look inward, bring out the fullest expression of themselves and to fully engage with each other. In “Abstracting Andante,” we had our first moment of emotional connection when we

entered the full walking circle. We took that opportunity to really look at each other and connect over the experience of artistic inspiration and embodiment we were embarking upon together, literally and figuratively. That connection was revisited in the transition between “Eternal Cycle,” a dance of individual impulse and energy, and “Community,” a dance of unison celebration. In that transition, our eyes found each other, and we began to smile at one another, leading us into our dance of community.



Figure 18. Image from the “Community” dance during the ending of *In/And/Of/Through*, March 7, 2012.

I discovered many overlaps in the aesthetics of the Duncan traditional style and the artwork of the diverse cultures explored in this dance project. Iterations of the *contrapposto*, found in Greek, Roman and Renaissance art, were found in the *tribhanga* of Indian art, the sloping torso and bent knees of the Japanese art in the Edo period and the angled hips in the Buddhist art in Japan. Each indicated that artists



from across cultures and across time periods had discovered a shared notion of the beauty of the human body when presented in asymmetrical body stance.

Likewise, concepts of mythology permeated many of the pieces of artwork, such as Apollo as the god of light for the Greeks in the “Andante, Ode to Apollo,” the *Shitennō* temple guardians as protectors of the Buddhist religion for the Japanese in “Guardians,” and Isis and Hathor as goddesses of motherhood, love, beauty and resurrection in amulets by the Egyptians in “Isis & Hathor.”

Lastly, there was a pervading interest in nature and the human being as a source of beauty in pieces of art such as Dewing’s American tonalist and Japonisme paintings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, silk screens of Edo period Japan and depictions of life at court from the Mughal period in India. All of these works presented the human body in a way that the originating culture found beautiful, and also incorporated elements of nature and elegance from their perspective as well. The Dewing paintings were set in lush green environments of the forest, the Japanese silk screens often featured natural elements like fireflies, trees and flowers, as did the Mughal period paintings.

This overlap of sensibilities toward art, nature, belief and the human figure resonated with my belief in the ideal oneness of humanity. The more I explored the “differences” in cultural aesthetics, the more commonality I found. This is one reason that the dance project was able to coalesce as one complete work, despite its inclusion

of many different aesthetics. The fact that such rich cultures and values existed through the presence of aesthetics was testament to the values of all humanity.

I like to think of our cast, our community of dancers, as a microcosm of that humanity. Are we not all diverse in our various cultures across humanity as we are diverse as individuals in a cast for a dance project? By interacting with each other, we learn more deeply about who we are as ourselves, and who we all are as a vast community of human beings. In choreographing and dancing the “Oiran,” I felt the value of formality, exactness, refinement, responsibility and the elegance of every day pursuits. I had moments when I could almost understand what life was like for such women – glittering, exciting, solitary, desolate. Likewise in my development of “Isis & Hathor,” I came to understand through the layering of the choreography the poly-dynamic nature of ancient Egyptian values through their overlapping personas in all their deities and mythology. I did not investigate and adopt these qualities and aesthetics to change them or make them my own, but to let them inform me of my greater humanity, my role in the *kosmopolitis*.

As humans, we create art because it allows us to express who we are individually, and also to understand who we are collectively. This is the essence of *kosmopolitis*, the human community. Art is not meant to be kept separate; it is meant to be shared so that it may inspire, communicate and connect us all. Dance is just one way to share that connection. Life is not meant to be merely lived; it is meant to be *danced*.

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