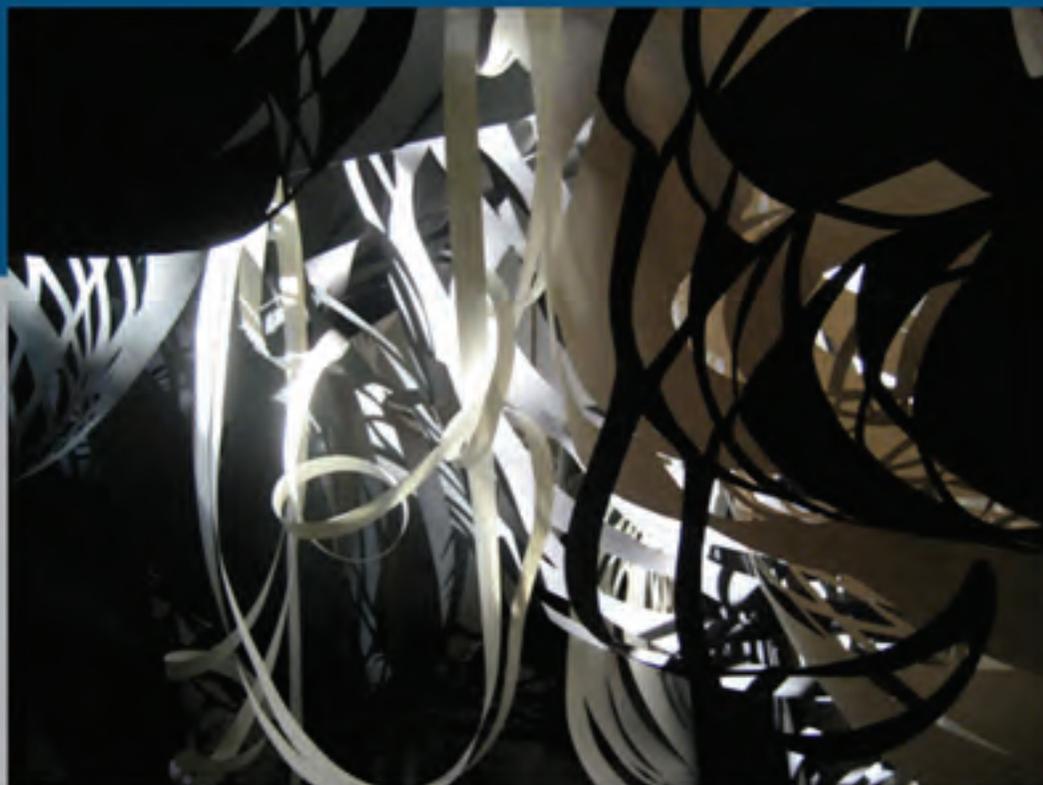


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*The Art of Wonder
and the Magnificence
of Dance*

Bill Zuk

- **Featured Artists:**
Christine Kim
David Rayfield

*Over the Fence:
Art
in the Tijuana - San Diego
Border Region*

Natalia Delgado Avila

*Differentiated Instruction
in the Elementary Art Classroom*

Kathleen Schmaltz





figure 1

THE ART OF WONDER AND THE MAGNIFICENCE OF DANCE

By: Bill Zuk

On Art and Wonder

Wonder transforms us; it suspends our disbelief, leaving us enthralled, awed and even mesmerized. Where the modern world is sometimes defined by an attitude of doubt, artists often share, with the ancient Greeks (Madigan, 1986), a sense of wonder at all there is to know about the world. It is an important aspect of aesthetic experience that should never be discounted. One of the most memorable moments of wonder I recall was on a visit to Chartres Cathedral in France. The building was a marvelous edifice and its interior was a sight to behold. Vaulted ceilings and a set of grand stained windows graced the wall areas. The windows glowed in the soft mellow light of the afternoon. As I stood in an aisle, tiny illuminated patterns from the divisions of stained glass showered my body in a glowing spectacle of light; it was as if I had been covered with small jewels. It took several moments to absorb this wondrous experience. Minutes passed before I could utter a word about the magnificence of the occasion to my partner.

Introduction

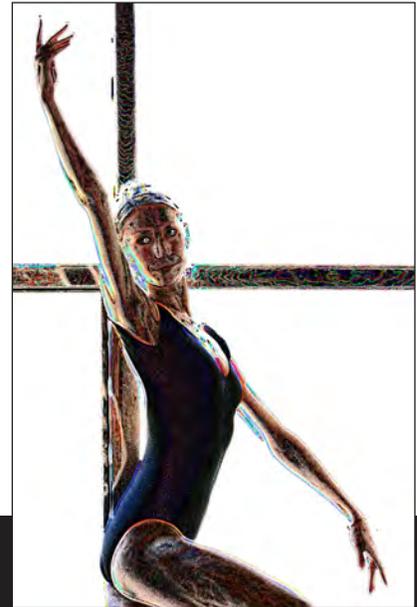
The excitement was palpable. We gathered together for the first time as a group of artists to explore the wonder and magnificence of dance with Ballet Victoria and other contemporary dancers, many with international reputations. Dancers spread across the large floor in their rumpled leggings and warm-up tights. Some chatted, others stretched; a few sat in quiet repose, catching their breath as they recovered from a vigorous routine. (figures 1 & 2)

figure 4



Sometimes wonder comes as a surprise. Other times it has to be actively sought out. Considerable negotiation and organization went into creating this opportunity for our group of five visual artists (including a photographer, a printmaker/sculptor, a video artist, and two painters) to work in the rehearsal studio with members of the Victoria Ballet. Paul Destroyer, accomplished Director and lead dancer, was there to welcome us and make us feel at home. Herman Surkis, a professional photographer from within our group, had made arrangements for us to attend workouts and rehearsals anytime we wished. His previous collaboration with Maria Miranda Lawrence, a figurative painter, had set a successful precedent. They had worked with a former dancer of the National Ballet of Canada who is an established dance teacher in Victoria. Those experiences interpreting various genres of dance resulted in an exhibition at a local art gallery the previous year. Herman felt it was important to widen the circle of artists and extend the range of creative expertise, particularly if more exhibitions were to be held in other art galleries.

figure 3



Dancing with Light

A few dancers moved onto the well-lit central area of the studio. Spotlights illuminated, the black backdrop of drapery while natural light from side windows cast a soft, warm glow on the hardwood floor. Strong backlighting from partitioned windows enabled us to capture contrasts and silhouettes of the dancers (figure 3). Lance Gilson videoed us as we photographed the dancers; capturing us crouching, clicking shutters, and intently moving closer and closer to the scene of action (figure 4). Lance maintained that his experience of dance as a videographer is like creating with a paintbrush where he brings other artist's work to life in a new form.



figure 2

If lighting from one of the world's most renowned cathedrals evokes a sense of wonder, what is inherent about dance that astonishes us, awakens our sensibilities and emotions, or lifts our spirits? Is it an exquisitely positioned foot daintily touching the dance floor (figure 5)? The arching curve of a dancer held in a sensuous embrace by her partner? Or the synchronous balance and unity as one dancer lifts his partner smoothly and confidently (Figure 6)? There are moments in our lives that are spellbinding and enchanting; they may be fleeting but they are nonetheless significant and aesthetically enriching. With this collaboration, photography and intense sketching served as important bridges between the tempo of the dance and the responses of the visual artists.



figure 5



figure 6



figure 7



figure 8



figure 9

Wonder and Shared Forms

A dancer moved swiftly across the floor with a long, wide strand of sheer material; it wavered and floated in space like a leaf being carried in an autumn breeze. Each time the dancer turned or twisted, it left a beautiful ephemeral trail. The dancer's figure and movement, shrouded in this diaphanous material created an extended moment of wonder that was later reflected in a variety of artworks, including Lance's video production 'Exotica: An interpretive celebration of dance' (Figure 7) and in an experimental artwork with gauze covering an oil painted background by Maria Miranda Lawrence (Figure 8).

I quickly grabbed my sketchbook thinking: "The best way to capture the movement and rhythm of dance is with a simplicity of line". The dancer spun onto the floor like a whirling dervish; her movements subsided only when she ran out of breath and flung herself into a widening spiral far from where she began. I intuitively turned the lines on my sketchbook page into a pattern of spirals

Spiral shapes dominate my thinking; they represent a powerful evolutionary force in Nature that explains the birth of galaxies, the formation of whirlpools and even the dreaded twisting of hurricanes and tornados. In dance, spirals represent a central force, a core of energy, readily visible and deeply felt as performers send their partners into dizzying whirls and torrid spins.

Later, in my studio, I used scissors to cut spirals, angled cuts and zigzags out of heavy card material that to me represent the basic elements of dance movement. The paper creations are often bent, folded and twisted in various ways, then displayed as free-standing sculptures (Figure 9). Next, I photograph the three-dimensional forms in strong sunlight and from a variety of angles to dramatize contrasts of light and shadow. The resulting images are digitally manipulated and transformed into luminous, jewel-like background compositions of colour. Finally, solarized dance figures are introduced to the illuminated environments to enhance the dream or fantasy quality of images shown in Figures 10 and 11. Figure 12 is a lightbox with dancers ascending in a cosmic background. Working back and forth between two and three-dimensional art forms and experimenting with a variety of ideas, materials and technologies gives me deeper insight to the nature of dance and ways of exploring its simplicity and essence.

Another special moment occurred as a dancer responded to a piece of music. Her intensive movements were wonderfully adapted to the melody. A thick mist rose from the floor and slowly enveloped her body. She swayed back and forth reaching sinuously into the smoky atmosphere as if she were a creature being captured one moment and then released the next. Lance Gilson (Figure 13 and 14) and Clement Kwan, an expressive realist painter, captured the ghostly, mystical effects of the dance scene (Figure 15).

Artists Inspired by Dance

What have master artists from past generations expressed about the wonder and magnificence of dance? As the pages are turned back in time, we note several artists who were greatly inspired by dance; they expressed their ideas in experimental, eloquent, and diverse ways. The compelling artistry of Edgar Degas, a superb draftsman, painter, printmaker, and sculptor at the beginning of the modern art era has greatly expanded our knowledge about impressionistic light and informal moments behind the scenes; the contributions of Henri Matisse, a superb painter, designer and collagist brought us insights about expressing ideas in pure, simple, and elegant form. As a contemporary dance photographer, Lois Greenfield also revealed things about the wondrous nature of dance that involved collaboration with dancers and inventive ways of showing how her subjects appear to fly freely through space.

Edgar Degas

I try to imagine the presence of Edgar Degas in our midst. His interest in dance stemmed from a lifelong interest in music and the opera. He would have enjoyed attending the workouts at Ballet Victoria but not necessarily in the company of a collaborative group because he was very reclusive. Degas was always looking for new ways of expressing his ideas (<http://www.mezzo-mode.com/edgardegas>). He was keen on using the graphic techniques of Japanese art to revitalize his own. This involved incorporating elevated viewpoints, and unusual or truncated perspectives seen from a theatre stage, balcony or orchestra pit. This is noted in Arnason's (n.d.) reproduction called *A ballet seen from an opera box* (p.31). Degas' work also has a great deal to inform us about lighting and its effects. Although he is credited as the founder of Impressionism, whose practice by French painters involved depicting natural appearances and lighting by means of dabs, flecks and strokes of bold colour, Degas' ballet theme was more interested in capturing the dramatic effects of artificial light depicted in Janson's (1968) *Prima ballerina* (p.493). Some of his most elegant studies of dancers feature pastel layering techniques on previously created monotype prints. Sometimes he would use powdered pastels or water mixtures applied with a brush which was then worked into the paper to achieve a layered effect depicted in Hartt's (1993) *Rehearsal on stage* (p.930). He always gave painstaking attention to detail, muscular tension and dynamics of movement. Much of Degas' sculptural work was not seen by the public although he created a substantial body. His incredible observation and attention to detail are portrayed in an 1881 Impressionist exhibition piece called *The little fourteen year old dancer* (<http://www.metmuseum.org/edgardegas>). The sculpture was lauded for its unique use of materials which included a real bodice, stockings, shoes, tulle skirt, and horsehair wig with satin ribbon.

There was maturity and a mysterious power in Degas' later work that is echoed in his quote:

It is one thing to copy what one sees but it's much better to draw what can be seen in one's memory. It's a transformation during which the imagination collaborates with the memory...then your recollections and fantasies are freed from the tyranny executed by nature. (<http://www.mezzo-mode.com/edgardegas>)

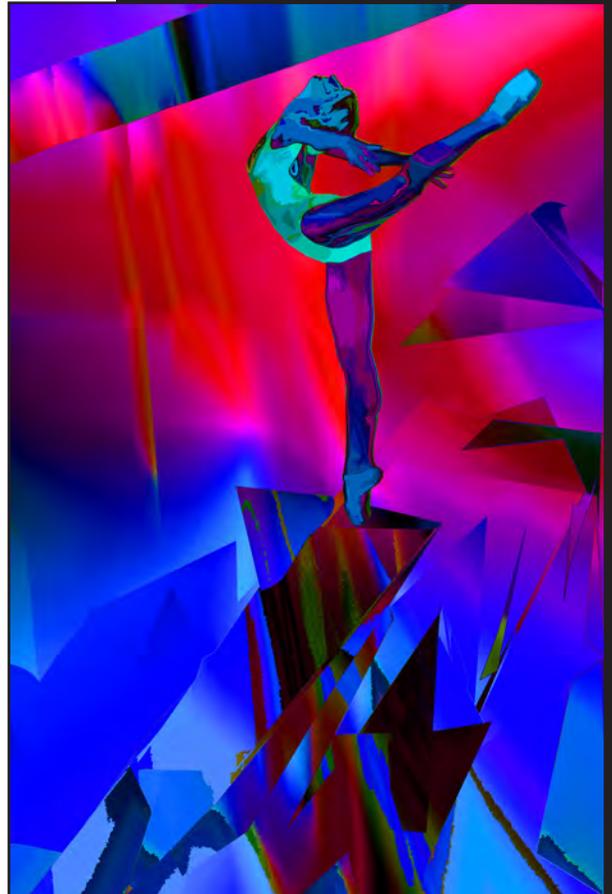


figure 10



figure 11

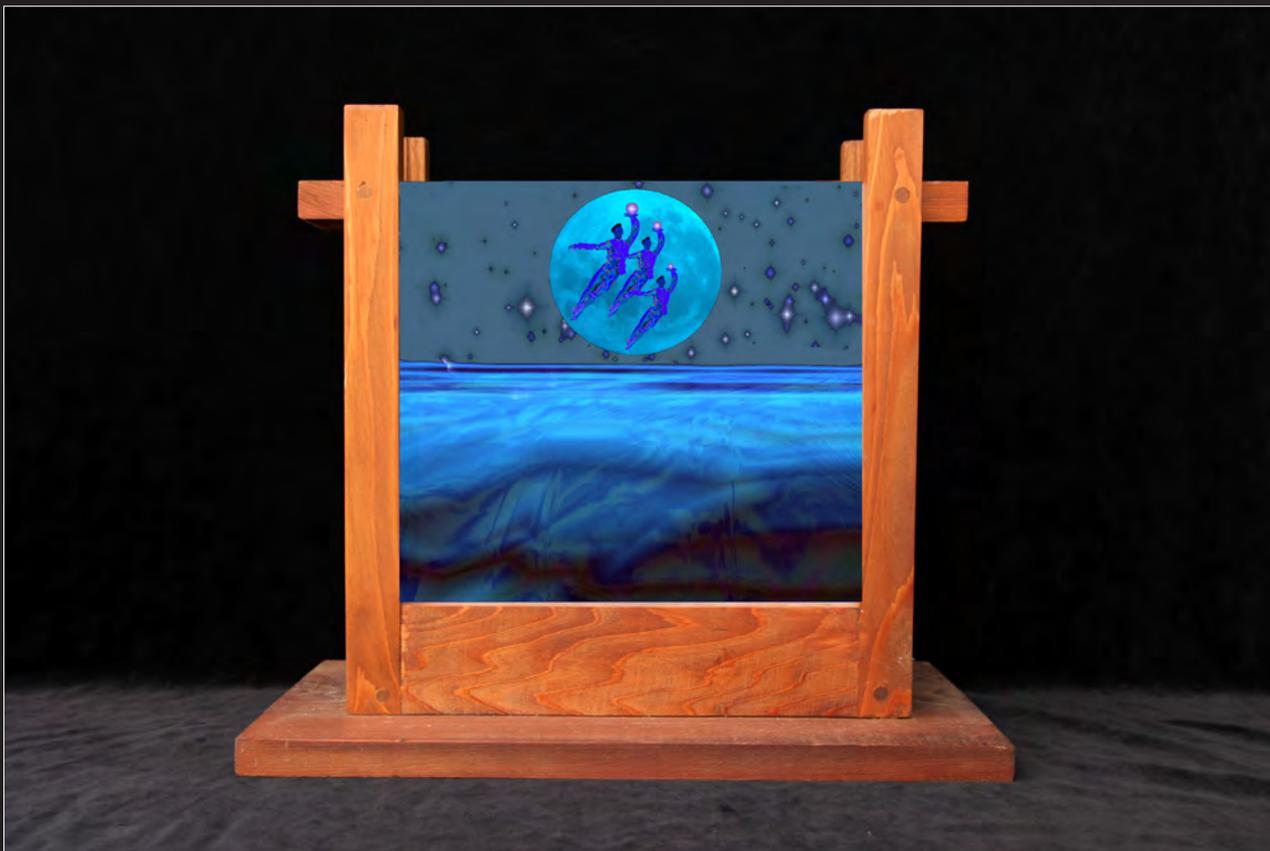


figure 12

Henri Matisse

What would it be like to have Henri Matisse share his ideas with us? Matisse is hailed as a master painter who handled colour and form in a pure and simple fashion. He was a leader of the Fauvist movement whose work expressed emotion with wild discordant colours. He completed a series of large murals between 1909 and 1910 called *Dance* noted in (Selz, 1981, p. 101), one of which used pure vermilion colour for the dancers, saturated greens for the hills, and an intense, vibrant blue for the sky. Matisse's dance compositions were harmonious and balanced as evidenced in the interplay of positive and negative shapes (Russell, 1979).

In addition to his skill as a painter, Matisse was a master designer, using his versatility to illustrate books, magazine covers, stained glass windows, and ceramic tile murals. He was preoccupied with the figure and this led him to refine the effortless flowing movement of the human body using cut paper images that are regarded as symbols of absolute purity and clarity. Hartt (1993) summarizes what Matisse had to say about composition:

The whole arrangement of my pictures is expressive. The place occupied by figures or objects, the empty spaces around them, the proportions, everything plays a part. What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter. (p.962)

As a master of cut paper design, Matisse developed his ideas long into his senior years, even when he was wheelchair bound and bed ridden. The publication of *Jazz* (Hawkes, 1993), a collection of abstracted colour cutouts, resulted from a synthesis of memories depicting circus, folktales and travel. The wonder of these images lies in their simple and direct expression of ideas; they contain startling contrasts of colour, and lively dynamic, silhouette figures that push, pull, tumble, kick up their heels, and fling their arms with wild abandon. In the introduction to *Jazz*, Riva Castleman, sums up Matisse's achievements in generating collages: "The dark rhythms, roiling counterpoint, happy staccato, and jolting dissonances....will sound forever. Matisse has taught the eye to hear"(p. xvi).



figure 13



figure 14

Lois Greenfield

What can we learn from Lois Greenfield, a contemporary dance photographer, if she were in our midst (Greenfield, 2010)? Her work is described by Ewing (1998) as having a dynamism, precision, and breathtaking illusionism where the human figure appears to fly or float effortlessly in space. Her photography is not restrained by the bounds of choreography; she encourages dancers to experiment, take risks and explore the limits of their potential. This is a very different approach to early dance photography described by (Ewing, 1992) where dancers were supported by cables and other attachments, holding them securely and still enough for their picture to be taken. In later photography, dancers were asked to assume poses and hold them for long periods of time resulting in stiff or awkward results. Artificial lighting including strobes helped to change the way pictures were taken but dancers still appeared to be frozen in motion.

Greenfield ushered in a new era of dance photography where small groups of dancers or dance companies were invited to her studio to collaborate with her; she would say: “leave your choreography at the door”. Her studio is a playground of opportunity with numerous accessories such as balls, boxes, cubes, and climbing apparatus. Greenfield encourages dancers to use hats, masks, and draperies as they interact with materials and with one another to create events that would never be seen on stage. She is inventive in her direction of dancers but allows for a great deal of free expression. Her photography is never reworked or digitally manipulated and altered. Greenfield’s experimentation, skill and collaboration with others has had a significant impact on the evolution of dance photography history.

Poetry and Dance

The wonders and magnificence of dance are also captured by 18th century poet, Fredrich von Schiller (famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets.html). Captivated by the beauty of dance, he penned the following poem:

The Dance

See how, like lighted waves of play, the airy dancers fleet;
 And scarcely feels the floor the wings of those harmonious feet.
 Or are they flying shadows from their native forms set free?
 Or phantoms in the fairy ring that summer moonbeams see?
 As, by the gentle zephyr blown, some light mist flees in air,
 As skiffs that skim adown the tide, when silver waves are fair,
 So sports the docile footstep to the heave of that sweet measure,
 As music wafts the form aloft at its melodious pleasure,
 Now breaking through the woven chain of the entangled dance,
 From where the ranks the thickest press, a bolder pair advance,
 The path they leave behind them lost—wide open the path beyond,
 The way unfolds or closes up as by a magic wand.



Successful Collaboration and Future Considerations

figure 15

There are many definitions of collaboration and many ways in which it can engage us. Collaboration involves the sharing and exchange of ideas which supported apprenticeships and craft guilds over many centuries in Italy and other European countries. Master artists often had assistants to help them. In turn, the novices received guidance and mentoring. Collaboration promoted productivity and helped a new generation of emerging artists acquire knowledge and skills (Zuk, 2008).

While our dance project does not involve an apprenticeship system, it enjoys competent leadership, strong organization and effective communication. Mutual respect for each other's professional competency encourages a free exchange of ideas; it is relatively easy to lead discussions about experimentation, digital processes and curatorial matters. Strong organization comes from our knowledge and ability to act cohesively to promote our cause - obtaining news coverage, arranging interviews or exhibition promotions (Figure 16). Information is always communicated with each participant in an open and transparent manner whether it involves reviewing plans, editing materials or sharing announcements about events in the dance community.

We are relative novices in this venture. As we move forward, learning from one another and developing new ideas in the spirit of innovation, the opportunity for strengthening our collaborative aspirations will become even more refined and developed.

Our ideas for expanding a celebration and visual interpretation of dance have been influenced by television programs such as *So You Think You Can Dance*, re-runs of Olympic caliber ice dance skating, and attendance at a workshop by internationally renowned choreographer, Ellen Bromberg who dealt with the topic, 'Dance for the Camera'. Opportunities for exploring dance ideas are numerous in Victoria; we are examining several new directions: the expression of dance by the very young and very old, the handicapped, Aboriginal nations as well as other cultural groups. The doors are wide open to continue our journey into what makes dance wondrous and magnificent.

Wonder in the Classroom

There should be a place in every art classroom for introducing opportunities related to wonder. The experience of dancers and image makers sharing their art suggests that being ready for wonder involves a willingness to embrace and celebrate each other's creativity and take advantage of collaborations where there is a place for each artist to share their ideas, inspire others and do what they do best. Whether this is realized as a classroom plan, a trip to a special place or having artists who have been part of successful collaborations interact with students, creative insight and imagination can make wonder an integral part of the curriculum.

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figure 16

List of Artwork

- figure 1. Herman Surkis. Photograph
 figure 2. Herman Surkis. Photograph
 figure 3. Herman Surkis. Photograph
 figure 4. Lance Gilson. Video
 figure 5. Herman Surkis. Photograph
 figure 6. Maria Miranda Lawrence. Oil painting
 figure 7. Lance Gilson. Video
 figure 8. Maria Miranda Lawrence. Gauze over oil painting
 figure 9. Bill Zuk. Sculpture
 figure 10. Bill Zuk. Print
 figure 11. Bill Zuk. Print
 figure 12. Bill Zuk. Light box
 figure 13. Lance Gilson. Video
 figure 14. Lance Gilson. Video
 figure 15. Clement Kwan. Oil painting
 figure 16. Herman Surkis. Design

Bill Zuk is Professor Emeritus in art education at the University of Victoria.