



DANCE

**BELOW:** *Dance, Interactive performance.*

The soft textured apple mask moves around and rattles as the performer moves backward.

**FOLLOWING:** Colourfully woven Xylophone – a tool for diverse interactions, with sound that is accompanied by vivid colours and textures.





## **DANCE 2013**

The Jackson Bella Room,  
National Centre for Creative Learning, MCA.

### **DANCE OF THE SYNAPSE**

“As an artist I have a strong and on-going interest in the active role of visual and performative arts in supporting brain development. My approach in creating *Dance* has been a consultative one, working with people who have expertise in the intersection of art, science and brain development. My investigations have focused on how various aspects of art engagement – visual, performative, participatory and environmental – can support and effect emotional development for young people with specific needs, their families and extended support communities.”

- Hiromi Tango, 2013

Many people have been consulted in the development of *Dance*, sharing their expertise and stories in support of the quest to create a safe and stimulating arts experience for young people from all backgrounds. The research for *Dance* included inquiries into how different sensory stimuli - such as textured surfaces, geometric patterns, lighting, sound, movement and colour - might impact on young people with specific needs.

Needless to say, designing a work to engage young people with diverse specific needs is a complex endeavour, and while it is simply not possible to address every possible variation in sensory experiences, the work aims to provide an engaging creative learning environment for a broad range of people. Some of the people who have contributed their knowledge have kindly written articles about how arts engagement



benefits young people with specific needs, as well as members of the broader community. Included in this publication are writings by Dancer Sally Chance, Dr. Jing Sun, a Researcher with a special interest in the health benefits of arts engagement, and Educator and Psychologist Helen Carney. Each of these contributors has considered *Dance* from different perspectives, exploring aspects such as the way that immersive arts experiences can enhance learning through creating a safe environment and stimulating all of the senses, the influence of colour in learning environments, and how arts engagement can support emotional healing.



## HELD IN DANCE

Sally Chance

“All that is important is this one moment in movement. Make the moment important, vital, and worth living. Do not let it slip away unnoticed and unused.”

- Martha Graham

I first came across the work of Hiromi Tango in June 2012 when I experienced *Pistil*, Hiromi’s extraordinary nest of chromosomes, made by hundreds of community-based participants and woven by Hiromi into an embracing and comforting installation. In my own research I have learned that “we learn best if we stimulate several senses at once”, and “the more elaborately we encode a memory during its initial moments, the stronger it will be” (John Medina, *Brain Rules*, Scribe Publications 2011). Particularly as my own work is in dance with young children, it has been my pleasure to delve into the elaborate and immersive world of Dance, woven, collected and transcribed by Hiromi from the familiar and everyday.

The intimacy and warmth of Hiromi’s hand-stitched space pays equal attention to its psychological and aesthetic impact. Neurology and art sit side by side to inform the space, which invites the children to use all of their senses to interact with and within it. *Dance* is a wonderfully effective example of the kind of rich aesthetic engagement that is created especially for children because it invites a dialogue with them, holding them safely within the experience and encouraging the powerfully necessary process for them of creating and re-creating, testing their own agency and playing with ways of being.

Early years education pioneer and the visionary behind the Reggio Emilia approach to pre-school education, Loris Malaguzzi said that “Teachers – like children and everyone else – ... feel a need to make predictions, to try things out, and to interpret them... Teachers must learn to interpret ongoing processes rather than wait to evaluate results.”

While brain development research has to predict and evaluate in order to open up a fascinating range of new certainties, it is the job of artists to embrace the uncertainty of an ongoing artistic process and to make manifest the possibilities for the children experiencing it, all scaffolded with gentleness and care by their significant adults – parents and teachers.

In a post leading up to the 2012 national arts and education symposium, *Connecting the Dots*, Professor Judith Mclean wrote: “Both brain development and quality arts education experience rely on quality social relationships to be able to thrive. Just as brains are co-constructed through significant relationships, making sense of arts experiences happens with others. It is the relationship of parent and child that literally builds a brain through the development of the neurological networks.”

*Dance* offers what psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott might call a ‘holding place,’ where an aspect of wider society meets the child by re-creating or extrapolating from the child’s earliest experiences of themselves in the world, gleaned as a kind of blueprint from their earliest relationships.

In a sense *Dance* holds the holding place of the relationship, with its five soft sculptural poles, representing the supporters in the lives of the children, its carefully selected colours and the spaces within the space, literally and metaphorically reflecting the children back to themselves and allowing memory and emotion to surface in a way that is personal to everyone

experiencing the space whether child or adult.

Of course the sense may reveal itself later and so Hiromi has paid attention to this with the chance to create and take home a fragment of *Dance*, which, like all of life in a single drop of water, is replete with the entirety of the experience.

Hiromi calls these art seeds. I know that they will continue to grow for the children who visit *Dance*.

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## References

- ‘Brain Rules’ by John Medina, Scribe Publications 2011 ([www.brainrules.net](http://www.brainrules.net))
- Loris Malaguzzi, Reggio Emilia and The Hundred Languages of Children ([www.reggiochildren.it](http://www.reggiochildren.it))
- Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange ([www.reaie.org.au](http://www.reaie.org.au))
- Professor Judith Mclean was the Scholar in Residence at the 2012 Out of the Box Festival for Children. Her residency was part of a QUT/QPAC initiative promoting learning through aesthetic education, entrepreneurialism, creativity and innovation.
- ‘Winnicott on the Child’ is a selection of essays by D.W. Winnicott.

## ABOUT SALLY CHANCE

Sally Chance is a dance artist working at the interface between art form and community cultural development. She uses dance and movement to work in health and education settings as well as to make performance works which meet particular populations.

“The art of wrapping is an essential aspect of my art practice, and one that I have shared through community engagement workshops over several years. The idea of ‘wrapped memory’ in a protective covering, and then further wrapping them with colour categorised/organised yarns and fabric has developed organically.”

Hiromi Tango Artist Statement, *Dance*, 2013



**RIGHT:** *Dance*, Interactive performance.  
Serious and funny interactions assist with emotional development.

## ARTS ENGAGEMENT AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Jing Sun

The meditative approach to creating the soft sculptural works in *Dance* is significant. All of Hiromi's recent projects have included extensive community participation through workshops where she encourages participants to bring objects and fabrics/wrapping materials to use. Participants are taught to wrap their objects so that they become art objects and are incorporated as part of a larger structure.

Participants often report that the process of wrapping objects and releasing them to become part of a greater whole is quite therapeutic. For many, this may be a means of working through a painful memory such as loss of a loved one, or a failed relationship.

From a neuropsychological perspective, the act of planning a sequence of actions, which requires one to hold information in the working memory, inhibits obsessive behaviour that stimulates the frontal lobe of the brain. This can produce healing effects, as the creative process is intriguing and stimulating.

Arts activities in general are both cognitive and social experiences; they involve the individual act of creating, acting, or observing and receiving the communal act of sharing with others. The opportunity to create, act and share with other intensifies the experience and serves as a valuable event to express feeling, to actively participate in a social activity, to treat anxiety and depression, to promote brain functioning and neural activities, and to develop a sense of social connectedness and trust. Whether this involves reliving moments from singing a favourite song, or from acting drama, reflecting on reading a new book, storytelling through using narratives, or discussing the progress of one's own work, such creative

processes and acts help people to explore the experience more deeply and to benefit from different perspectives. The frequency of the participation is a key indicator of the importance people place on the arts activities they pursue.

One of the main avenues for addressing health issues in a range of populations including people with disabilities, dementia, Parkinsons disease, and chronic diseases is to create opportunities for participation, social support, development of connectedness and a sense of belonging to the community, and promoting trust in community. Mason<sup>1</sup> suggests that art and culture programs can assist people with special health care needs in identifying their cultural beliefs and values and this may have a significant impact on reducing mental health problems and chronic disease.

In addition, art gives these people opportunities to express fear and confusion without having to talk about these things<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, arts, music and singing, dancing, and playing a music instrument may be used as appropriate interventions. Performance and creative arts are universal languages that cross cultures and age groups. In addition to providing a range of health benefits<sup>3</sup>, they have been used to alleviate emotional issues and psychological trauma, and improve brain functioning with moderate to large positive effects<sup>2</sup>.

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### References

O 1 Mason S. Art therapy. In: Dudgeon P, Garvey D, Pickett H, editors. Working with Indigenous Australians: A handbook for psychologists Perth: Gunada Press; 2000. p. 431-8.

○ 2 Sun J, Buys N. Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians' Wellbeing Using Participatory Community Singing Approach. *International Journal of Disability and Human Development* 2012; Advanced Access Published Online: 02/11/2012; DOI 10.1515/ijdh-2012-0108.

○ 3 Cliff S, Morrison I. Group singing fosters mental health and wellbeing: findings from the East Kent "singing for health" network project. *Mental Health and Social Inclusion* 2011;15(2):88-97.

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## ABOUT DR. JING SUN

Dr. Jing Sun is a Researcher and Lecturer at Griffith University School of Public Health. In recent years, her research has focused increasingly on the health impacts of choral singing on at-risk populations, both in Australia and overseas. Dr. Sun's research considers many aspects of physical and emotional well-being, and the potential for arts engagement to effect positive change for a range of people with specific needs.



**ABOVE:** Young *Dance* visitors interacting with sound, texture, colour and tactile elements of the installation.

**RIGHT:** *Dance*, community workshop, 7th February 2013.  
MCA National Centre for Creative Learning, Sydney, 2013.



## DANCING WITH COLOURS

Helen Carney

*Imagine a world without colour all is black, not even white or shades of grey.*

Colours are the most influential aspect of our lives. Without colour we cannot differentiate and learn associations that are vital for survival, such as recognising red and green traffic signals. Colour supports our ability to classify and remember things. Colour is part of the tapestry of our individual experience that adds a new or another dimension to our sensory relationship with whatever we see.

In itself colour has no tactile (or textural) aspect when we touch, no specific aroma or taste and makes no sound to hear, but colour inevitably provides greater meaning and conveys an emotive and cognitive stimulus to all our senses. Colour brings our world to life when the sun kisses the earth with light each day and the myriad of colours emerge, giving us the most amazing gift to enhance all our senses and stimulate our cognitive, emotional and physiological growth and well-being. The potential to imagine and create and extend our intellectual and artistic being are encouraged, and given the opportunity to flourish.

In a world where the rate of change is increasing, requiring each person to adapt more often, the potential for feelings of uneasiness, anxiety and stress are more likely to occur. It is essential that we take time to relax and process sensory feedback. Each age group responds to colour differently when creating a stimulating educational environment. Preschool and early elementary years respond best to a warm, brightly coloured environment while cooler colours focus older children's ability to concentrate.

Through the provision of materials and experiences that provide the opportunity to explore and use our senses, each individual can have a unique and engaging encounter with a new range of feelings, emotions and memories. Colour is an inseparable part of our life and is part of everything we perceive. It has a strong impact on emotions and feelings, which in turn plays a pivotal role in our cognitive development and level of engagement.

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## ABOUT HELEN CARNEY

Helen Carney has been the Director of Aacooloma Preschool in Castle Hill for seventeen years, and has an extensive background in psychology including the use of colour to influence human behaviour. Helen has very kindly provided her insights into the role of colour in creating a safe and stimulating environment for young people with specific needs, which has been an important consideration in the development of *Dance*.







#### PREVIOUS

*Dance*, installation view, detail.

The touch screen itouch makes colour-specific sound that responds to touch with colour-specific scents – e.g. yellow / orange colour scent is orange / camomile.

#### ABOVE LEFT & MIDDLE

Community workshop, 7th February, 2013.

Five colour-coded workstations – Red, Yellow, Green, Blue, Purple – were categorized to allow the participants create freely and focus on specific colours.

#### RIGHT

*Dance* installation view, detail.

The touch screen embedded in the nest structure represents exploration in the safety of a comfortable and joyful learning environment.

“The use of colour and circular shapes are also integral to the work, strategically placed in the room to engage visitors as part of the performance. For instance, the circular mat in the centre of the room becomes a stage, with all of the colours of the spectrum dancing throughout the space as the viewer looks up.”

**Hiromi Tango** Artist Statement, *Dance*, 2013



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Dance* is dedicated to Belinda, Beany and Cynthia, being such powerful influences for many lives.

Many people have contributed to this work, through community workshops that were held at the MCA in early 2013. Workshop participants played a very important role in helping to create the support structure for *Dance*, wrapping the structure in materials such as yarn and fabric, connecting the various elements of *Dance* to create an immersive environment.

I would especially like to acknowledge the 2012 Bella Dinner supporters, the MCA, the National Centre for Creative Learning team, Bella program Artist Educators and workshop participants in the creation of *Dance*. I further thank and acknowledge the Visual Arts Board and the Australia Council for the Arts for their development and support provided through a New Work Grant.

*Dance* has been developed in consultation with many people, including health and brain development specialists, disability sector representatives and educators, as well as families of children with specific needs.

I would like to thank Kon Gouriotis and Tony Nolan from the Australian Centre for Photography, The Junctionworks, Autism Spectrum Australia, the Horizon Foundation and Dr. Jing Sun from Griffith University; each has provided encouragement, support and guidance in research for this project.

I would like to thank my collaborative team: Helen Miller (Masks and Costume), Steve Thomasson (Software Development), Sally Chance (Writing - Dancer), Helen Corney (Writing - Kindergarten Director, Psychologist), Dr. Jing Sun (Researcher and Lecturer at Griffith University School of Public Health), Christine Bagley-Jones (Psychologist), Beany Palmer (Knitted Toys), Tom Chapman (Drafting), Donna Stokes

(Aromatherapy), Sachiko Gardener (Artist Assistant), Karen Hall, John Stafford and Jodie Cox (Management), Wendy Mansell (Editorial), Kitty Taube (Graphic Design), Jane Fisher, Craig Walsh and everyone who has supported *Dance*.

*Dance* has been commissioned by the MCA for the Jackson Bella Room, 2013.

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### Image Credits

- Craig Walsh - front, back & inside cover, pgs 1, 7 (above), 10, 11.
- Alex Davies - pgs 2, 3, 9.
- Keir Winesmith - pg 7 (below).
- Leo Bonne Photography - pg 5, 12



**ABOVE:** *Dance* Launch 3rd April, 2013.

Workshop participants in the Colour Purple. Once artwork was completed, it was added to the installation. The *Dance* installation will continue to evolve over twelve months, with regular workshops held by educators.

## ABOUT THE MCA BELLA PROGRAM - for students with specific needs.

The establishment of the *Jackson Bella Room* in 2012, as a dedicated, interactive space for people of all ages with specific needs, has provided an exciting expansion to the *Bella Program* – a pioneering program since 1993 that aims to increase access to contemporary art and remove barriers to participation in the arts through the provision of free, dynamic learning experiences. In 2013 the *Bella Program* will be inclusive of all ages including under 5s, students from 5-18 and adults of all ages.

The MCA *Bella* programs were established in 1993 through the generosity of longstanding MCA patrons, Dr Edward Jackson AM and Mrs Cynthia Jackson AM, and the Jackson family, in memory of their late daughter and sister Belinda.

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Museum of  
Contemporary  
Art Australia

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