LiveArts at The Met

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin

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LiveArts at The Met

THE MET

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Director's Note

The Met is and always has been a museum for all cultures across time and for all forms of art as well, including performance, which today is an integral component of our engagement with artists and audiences alike, whether in our galleries or online. Throughout the twentieth century The Met was a popular venue for the performing arts and hosted a wide range of world-renowned musicians, composers, and dancers, from Nina Simone and Merce Cunningham to Leonard Bernstein and Twyla Tharp. The majority of these historical performances took place in our galleries and, beginning in the mid-1950s, the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium. Building on that established legacy, in the summer of 2020 The Met created the Department of Live Arts, which is dedicated to exploring performance and the performing arts in a museum setting—the only such department of its kind in the museum world. This *Bulletin* offers an overview of its activities and ambitions, including recollections from artists who created major performances for us and who share how their engagements with The Met influenced their work.

Performance offers the Museum a unique opportunity to connect with diverse audiences and to nurture relationships with visitors around the world. It also allows The Met to extend its commitment to engage with living artists through presentations of new works of music, movement, sound, and other hybrid genres commissioned by Live Arts, which typically encourage artists to work outside the comfortable margins of their usual practices. At the same time, these commissions challenge audiences to encounter and embrace new types of performances in unexpected venues—such as The Met Cloisters, in many ways an ideal venue for groundbreaking performances—and they open up the Museum itself to interpretation by artists who are introducing untested modes of creativity.

Under the leadership of Limor Tomer, Lulu C. and Anthony W. Wang General Manager of Live Arts, over the past decade The Met has invited an artist (or artist collective) to take part in year-long residencies, which have yielded influential and significant new work, beginning in 2012–13 with Paul D. Miller, aka DJ Spooky That Subliminal Kid, and continuing with the new music collective Alarm Will Sound (2013–14), investigative theater collective The Civilians (2014–15), pianist/composer Vijay Iyer (2015–16), podcaster Nate DiMeo (2016–17), choreographer Andrea Miller (2017–18), soprano Julia Bullock (2018–19), performance artist Nikhil Chopra (2019–20), and, most recently, dancer/choreographer Bijayini Satpathy (2021–22). During the pandemic, as The Met, like all museums around the globe, sought new ways to communicate with audiences at home, the Department of Live Arts was a key component of our virtual engagement, delighting and offering connections to art and community to millions through our digital platforms.

I want to thank Limor Tomer and the entire Live Arts team as well as all the curators, conservators, and collection managers who have collaborated on these complex performance projects through the years. I also wish to thank the generous donors who are dedicated to the Department's work, including Adrienne Arsht, Jody and John Arnhold, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF), Cynthia Hazen Polsky and Leon B. Polsky, Sarah Billinghurst Solomon, Ann G. Tenenbaum and Thomas H. Lee, Anthony W. and Lulu C. Wang, and many more. For their support of the Artist in Residency programs, we acknowledge The Arnhold Fund for Dance Innovation at The Met, the Bagri Foundation, the Chester Dale Fund, Sunil Kant Munjal and the Serendipity Arts Foundation, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF), and Cynthia Hazen Polsky and Leon B. Polsky.

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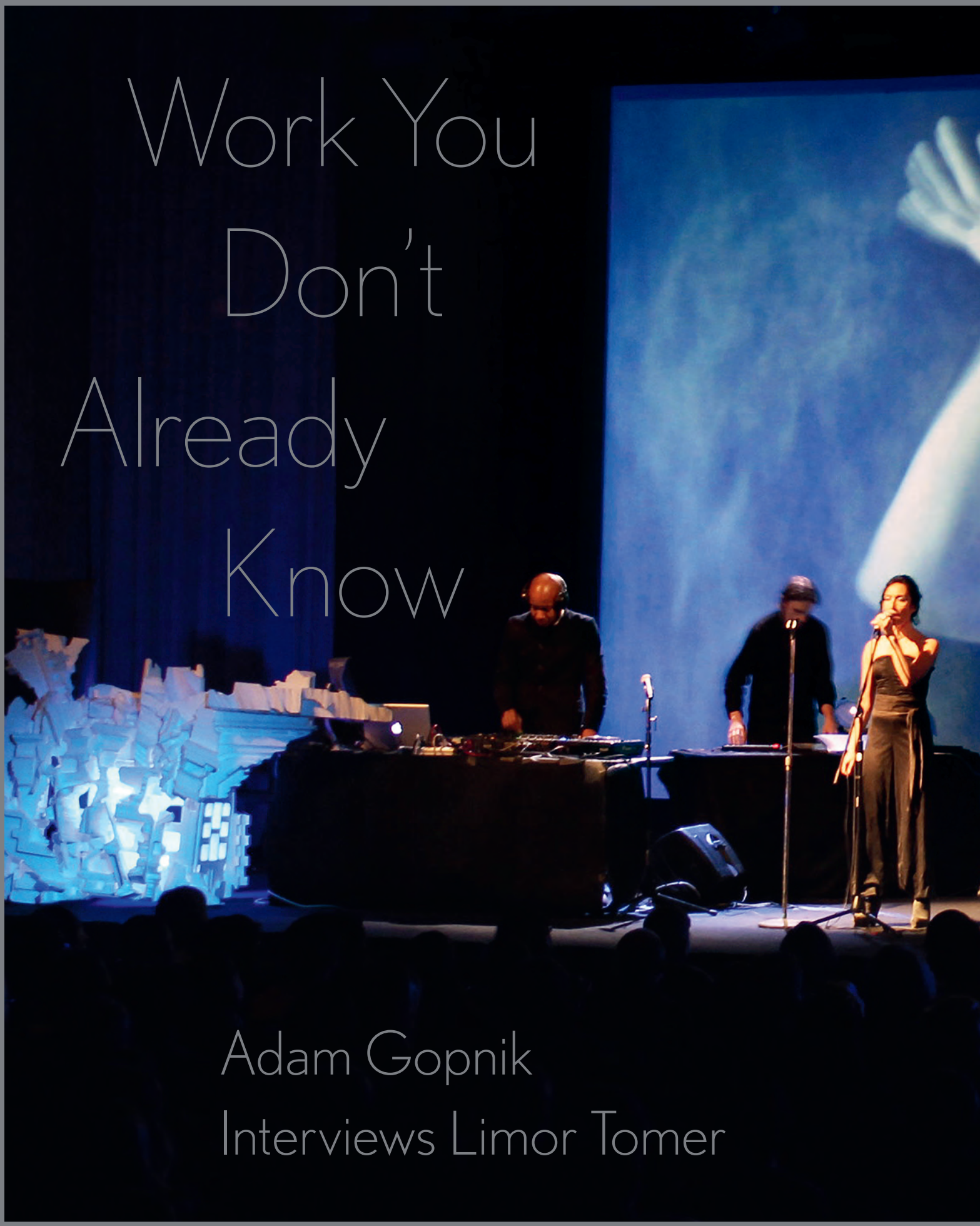
Max Hollein
Marina Kellen French Director
The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Work You Don't Already Know

Adam Gopnik
Interviews Limor Tomer

Limor Tomer came to The Met a decade ago, after a childhood in Israel, training as a concert pianist and then an apprenticeship among the avant-gardists Harvey Lichtenstein, Joseph V. Melillo, and Mikki Shepard at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM). Since her surprising appointment to be the head of Concerts & Lectures (now the Department of Live Arts), she has utterly transformed the department in ways that sometimes brought controversy, more often brought praise — and promised, and delivered, never a dull or thoughtless moment. Longtime friends and collaborators, we reviewed her first ten years outdoors at a café on Fifth Avenue, not far from the Museum. AG

AG: When you came to The Met, what was your understanding of what you were being asked to do? And what were the obstacles that were in the way of doing it?

LT: I went highly reluctantly, because I didn't know why The Met would want someone like me.

AG: Someone like you, an avant-gardist? A performance-committed person?

LT: Someone who's more interested in what is not known and what hasn't happened yet — who the *next* Beethoven is living among us. As opposed to studying the past.

AG: Just to review, The Met had a distinguished history, a conservative history, in lectures and concerts. It was sold-out programs of Olivier Bernier, Rosamond Bernier talking about eighteenth-century French art, nineteenth-century French art — or programs of chamber music.

LT: That was how it had been since the days when I was a student at Juilliard in the 1980s and '90s, taking the crosstown bus to the Museum. When I came in, it was as the head of Concerts & Lectures. I inherited the lecture series, which I had less experience with. There was a desire to prioritize Met curators over outside speakers. So, we did that, overnight: we galvanized the curators to give the lectures.

On the concert side, I stopped a lot of the Christmas concerts, the resident chamber ensembles — all that was put on "sunset." So first we had to live through the couple of years of "The Met killed classical music." And guess what, classical music is tougher than anybody. Nothing can kill it, not even me. We no longer did the Christmas concerts around the tree, but we replaced them with David Lang's *Little Match Girl Passion*. We still did classical music and chamber music, but it was Stockhausen's *Klang*. We still did a Beethoven quartet cycle, but we did it with an ensemble that is not a household name.

AG: Did you not meet resistance from The Met audience who were accustomed to something else? And how did you handle that?

LT: There was a lot of resistance. And how did I handle it? I realized, *I just have to show them. They'll adapt, they're New Yorkers, they can figure out how to deal with it*.

AG: But then how did you reach those people? How did they come to know that there was something on the map that was good for them?

LT: What you do is establish something that has some gravitas. I said, I'm going to have an artist in residence, is everybody cool with that? It was like putting a stake in the ground. And so, I selected DJ Spooky (Paul D. Miller) to be the first ever artist in residence at The Met. That was in 2012–13.

AG: Be honest: did you know what a provocative thing it was when you did it? Or was it more provocative than you would have liked?

LT: Honestly, I did not know that I had just rolled a grenade. I thought it was going to be kind of, Whoa, fun, different. From then I continued to take these steps, which, in hindsight, I think contributed to The Met's growing appetite for taking artistic risks, for doing things when we don't know exactly how they're going to end, work you don't already know. This had not been a Met thing.

AG: So, you arrive, and the first big thing is DJ Spooky.

LT: Paul connected with a lot of curators around the building. We had him speaking to Photography, the American Wing, the Asian department. I very quickly figured out where the appetite was to do things, and I just went with that. It had to do with the personality of the head of the department or the individual curators. I knew that I was going to live or die by the partnerships and the collaborations that I could make. So, I started building partnerships.

AG: Oliver Beer's *Vessel Orchestra* in 2019 was an unquestioned triumph. An orchestra of Met objects,

Nico Muhly (top), Kenny Wolleson (bottom left), and Matana Roberts (bottom right) with Oliver Beer's *Vessel Orchestra*, The Met Breuer, 2019

Kristen Choi as Lady Murasaki in Michi Wiancko and Deborah Brevoort's *Murasaki's Moon*, Astor Chinese Garden Court, 2019

new and ancient, resonating together. I even wrote about it for the *New Yorker*. Talk a little bit about the diplomacy that went into enabling and empowering Oliver Beer to dig into so many parts of the collection for so many different options for vessels. With the understanding that he was actually going to use them, not just display them.

LT: I want to say on the record that the first place people go to is the logistics of how hard it is to do what I do. But it's the least interesting thing. More interesting to me is to work with an artist who understands The Met's collection and understands how to create a new work of art that can happen only with this specific collection. Good ideas generate their own gravitational force. And if the idea is strong enough – there are plenty of great ideas that don't come to fruition – but an idea that is really strong can bring people along.

So, I really just took it step by step. It was a stretch to expect curators and conservators to allow us to insert tiny microphones into precious objects. I worked with multiple departments and I said, "Look, tell me what I need to do in order to get you to say 'yes.' What do I need to do?" Do you want to know about the technology? Great. Do you want us to go into your storeroom and you'll give me the second example, not the first example? Great, we'll do that. Do you need another year, because the mounters need an extra year to build the mounts? Great. OK, we'll take another year, I'm in no rush. This idea is strong enough, it can survive an extra year. Do you need to vet the people? Do you need to vet the equipment? Do you want your conservator to check everything out? Only your conservator will touch the art.

AG: So you were willing to wait out the uncertainties?

LT: Yes. But the most *fun* part of that project was auditioning the vessels. We had two weeks of auditions. We would go in with our equipment, the little microphones. Each department would have twenty or thirty objects, and Oliver and the recording engineer would record the tone of the pot. It had to be a specific pitch for Oliver's keyboard, and it had to be pitched perfectly. And they had to have a certain look. He is a visual artist, and he didn't want to have all ceramic or all metal objects. So, it had materiality concerns. I think we ended up with too many E-flats and then we had to make a decision: which E-flat are we going to keep?

AG: *Vessel Orchestra* was certainly a success. But – what *didn't* work? Something always doesn't work.

LT: It takes time to metabolize new ideas. A good example of this was [Monica Bill Barnes & Company's] *Museum Workout* (2016–17). That was difficult for everyone. The artist's conceit was that it was going to look like an exercise class. And she did too good a job, so it looked like an exercise class. But it was really a dance performance, a conceptual performance, where the dance company was made up of the audience. The choreographic language – because it was the general public – was the language of the workout. Everyone can make those moves, and they're not frightening. But it was incredibly subversive.

The Museum Workout really was about the experience of having your body with you when you go to the museum. Usually, you're expected to just bring your head. You're a little bit hungry, you're a little bit dazed, a little bit tired. You're a little bit lost. The idea was to push against all of that and have a completely different experience of being in a museum, one with your endorphins up, with your heartbeat elevated, with music.

AG: Your body's fully engaged in a kinetic experience.

LT: Many people didn't know what to expect, but they signed up. And then about twenty minutes in you could see the penny drop – you really could see it. And by the time they were in the [Charles] Engelhard Court lying on the floor, looking up at the ceiling, the tears would come, because it was all so much and so unexpected.

But it was hard for the curatorial team; it was hard for the security team; it was hard for the conservators; it was hard for everyone. And a lot of the press miscast it. There were a lot of pieces, from *Vogue* to NY1 – and it was all about how exciting it is that there's something with exercise at The Met. Most of the press also missed the nuance with it.

AG: I suppose everybody just read, "Now they're doing exercise classes at The Met!" Another surprising project – and another hit – was the hip-hop battle in armor.

LT: The head of the Arms and Armor Department, Pierre Terjanian, said to me, This is the problem: our collection is frozen, and in order to interpret it – in order to actually understand it – it has to move. It articulates everywhere, you can actually *dance* in it. So, we had many, many conversations distilling it until we came to hip-hop dance culture. Pierre filled it in: the armor that we see is ceremonial, it was not used in battle. Hip-hop is also ceremonial.

AG: We're no longer killing each other. A rap battle is symbolic warfare.

LT: Exactly. We're battling with who has the best moves and the best bling and the best gear. We connected on that, and then we took it from there. I reached out to a nascent dance company called It's Showtime NYC!, from a Bronx organization called Dancing in the Streets. They became a home for subway dancers. I asked them, Would you agree

Monica Bill Barnes and Anna Bass rehearsing *Museum Workout*, Carroll and Milton Petrie European Sculpture Court, 2016

Anthony "Laiden" John and Christopher "Venxm" Brathwaite of It's Showtime NYC performing *Battle! Hip Hop in Armor*, Emma and Georgina Bloomberg Arms and Armor Court, 2018

to let us host the weekly rehearsals? Instead of in the Bronx or at Mark Morris Dance Group, would you allow us to host the rehearsals in our auditorium?

The dancers came, and we talked about armor. I compiled a lot of information about the history of hip-hop dance in New York and break dancing and its history and scholarship. It was two hundred pages, which I gave to Pierre to read. And then he took the dancers into the storerooms, into the research center, and to the foundry where they do the armor restoration — he spent a ton of time with them. They rehearsed on the stage and then they rehearsed in the Arms and Armor Court and then we had performances. We hired a costume designer, and then — the armor itself!

AG: I was about to say, presumably you couldn't use the actual antique armor?

LT: Pierre suggested that we acquire the finest replica armor that there is, made by someone in the Czech Republic or France or wherever they make high-end replica armor. So, we assembled a full complement of breastplates and helmets and gauntlets, full armor. This stuff was bought by The Met, and It's Showtime NYC! can borrow it now that they are touring with the work, to Jacob's Pillow, to various presenters around the country.

AG: What would be the other projects you would single out?

LT: Nikhil Chopra's production *Lands, Waters, and Skies* in September 2019. Nikhil is a visual artist based in Goa; his practice is mostly drawing and painting. But he's trained in theater, and he has a well-developed performance aspect to his practice. I got to go to his studio in Goa and spend a few days to talk about The Met, talk about what his vision would be. Then he came on a research trip to The Met, he spent ten days. And out of that whole thing came this idea that he developed: he was going to basically "get trapped" in The Met for twelve days around the clock. As the nomad, the refugee, a brown person that no one notices, even though he's sitting in the middle of the Great Hall, and on top of all of his suitcases.

The piece starts outside on the [David H. Koch] Plaza, and he slowly comes into the Museum. It takes him all day, because he brings all of his stuff: he has suitcases, and he has backpacks, and he has a fifty-foot canvas that he's bringing in, which is going to be his house, his domicile, his tent, his work of art.

That was really interesting to try to do. It was a lot of problem solving. You know, where's he going to sleep? Well, I know one place that I can control all the variables, that's the stage. So, he'll sleep on the stage. Well, how are we going to know that he's not going to leave the stage? Have a CCTV camera on and watch him all night. How's he going to shower?

Qian Yi (center), Ao Li, Joseph Dennis, and John Holiday in Jennifer Wen Ma and Huang Ruo's *Paradise Interrupted*, Temple of Dendur, 2015

Dubfire performs in the Pontaut Chapter House as part of the Sonic Cloisters series, 2021

I found a shower on the fifth floor. Where's he going to eat? Well, the staff cafeteria opens at eight. I was just problem solving, problem solving, problem solving.

AG: So: the shutdown? What did your department do?

LT: We got busy immediately. We came out with two projects right away. One was the Digital Premieres series. Every month we would premiere a production online: we had been creating these gorgeous multicamera videos of all our performances. And then those videos would go and just be in a holding pen. There really wasn't a place on The Met's website to put them, and it wasn't anybody's priority and nobody owned it. But we had it all ready to go. Now we could do a world premiere of a piece we had done a year before, in 2019, Hans Werner Henze's opera *El Cimarrón*, starring Davóne Tines. The first one we streamed was The MetLiveArts production of *The Mother of Us All,* from early 2020.

AG: What was the other thing?

LT: We took the chamber music series from the Balcony Bar and just pivoted. We started a Friday night series, down-and-dirty twenty minutes of music, recorded on people's cellphones, called Balcony Bar from Home. We could continue to pay artists, which is a big deal, and do things we could never do before, like, with artists in Europe or artists we would never, ever get on the Balcony Bar.

AG: Were you getting global audiences? One of the things that's been a hard readjustment for many is that people were getting global audiences when they were streaming. So, for them, for relatively small audiences, they suddenly got much bigger audiences doing a concert. Suddenly the concert was bigger, rather than smaller. Is that true?

LT: Yes, and that segues to this other thing that we did during the pandemic, a series at The Cloisters called Sonic Cloisters, which is made for the camera. It's not made for live audiences. It's built in such a way that as we continue doing these concerts, they will morph into a hybrid format. There will be a small live audience, but the main presence will still be online.

When the pandemic started, I was thinking about contagion and hysteria and the emergence of new forms of music and how electronic music, DJs, are sort of reminiscent of the Middle Ages. Electronic music is still a little bit suspect, there are a lot of altering substances involved, it's a form of music that still hasn't been codified – there is no written language for it. It's about people moving internationally, a pandemic, general darkness, and fear of science. We work with artists who have an appetite for experimentation, who are not signed into doing the big festivals. They spend a lot of time with the curators, they learn about the collection, they learn about different areas. That's where we get a huge international audience from all over the world. We've done four Sonic Cloisters so far.

AG: So, what's coming next?

LT: Post-Covid, I'm even more convinced that we really need to do only those things that require whatever it is that The Met has, and that speak to whatever The Met is or can be – the questions that need to be asked. So, I think the next ten years are going to be a little bit different. Working with artists who are coming more from a visual art perspective rather than from a performing art perspective. Maybe more performance interventions. I'm much more interested in working in galleries, without any tickets or start times: you walk in and you're surprised. You walk in and it's just *there*, like *Sonic Blossom*, Lee Mingwei's piece that just happens in the galleries all day, every day, for days.

AG: Years ago, I was at El Bulli, the great experimental molecular cuisine restaurant in Spain. And I was talking to Ferran and Albert Adrià, the brothers who ran it. And I said to them, Is there any dream you two have had that you've never been able to pull off? And they looked at each other, and instantly, they said – very seriously – hot ice cream!

So, what's your hot ice cream? What's the thing you would dream of doing?

LT: I would like to commission a piece, a performance, that is so obviously relevant and important to The Met that The Met will acquire it. The Met does have a collection of video art, but we have not yet acquired a performance.

AG: That's your hot ice cream?

LT: Yes! That it would be so obvious – of course we have to acquire this thing. Not me begging and pleading and raising the money and bringing the donor to the table. Just "Yes"!

I first visited The Met in the late 1970s before immigrating to the United States from Taiwan. Artifacts from China, Japan, and Oceanian cultures made me feel proud of what my ancestors had produced. After I graduated from Yale University with a master of fine arts degree, The Met became a place of possibility and imagination.

Preparing to present two projects at The Met, I began to see myself as collaborating with my creative predecessors, although we live in very different times and places. Under the roof of The Met, we share our gifts with one another in a process of exchange that started millennia ago and will continue far into the future. Each work I encounter is a mirror reflecting my own desires, fears, and ideals, and I find my own works profoundly changed by their very presence. I realize my creations are not just for the visitors who experience them now, but also for the spirits of the artists and works of art that occupy the same space, and for all who will come to experience them in the years ahead.

Our Labyrinth (2020) was performed over three weeks in three galleries. In the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Asian Art, the dancers carried out their careful movements between two colossal Tang dynasty Buddhas. The Buddhas became receivers of the dances and sound, with the dancers both giving a gift to, and receiving one from, these deities. It was particularly moving to see each dancer, with their different cultural and personal histories, become equal participants in exchange with the deities.

Without the gifts and creations of the artists who came before me, I would not be able to produce my own works. I am happy to know that in such a great institution as The Met, my work can be part of the mosaic that makes up the Museum.

Brian "HallowDreamz" Henry performing in Lee Mingwei and Bill T. Jones's *Our Labyrinth*, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 2020

Lee Mingwei


Bijayini
Satpathy

Bijayini Satpathy in *Nrityagram: Samhara Revisited*, Temple of Dendur, 2018

As The MetLiveArts artist in residence for 2021–22, I arrived at the Museum for research in May 2021. This was my first getaway, my first travel, and my first meetings in person after a year of isolation in my rural Bangalore home. I was already ecstatic to be returning to my beloved New York, but this seed-gathering journey was especially meaningful. I had been to The Met before. In January 2015, with the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble, I performed in the Temple of Dendur to an audience that filled every inch of the space. We returned to the Temple in 2018, with the Chitrasena Dance Company of Sri Lanka. Later that year, I came to The Met as a visitor. But the luxurious tours I received in May 2021 with curators, including Navina Haidar, Seán Hemingway, Griffith Mann, and Sheena Wagstaff, exceeded my previous experiences. These visits were designed around the idea of "movement" and took place on days with no public visitors. It felt as though I had the entire Museum to myself.

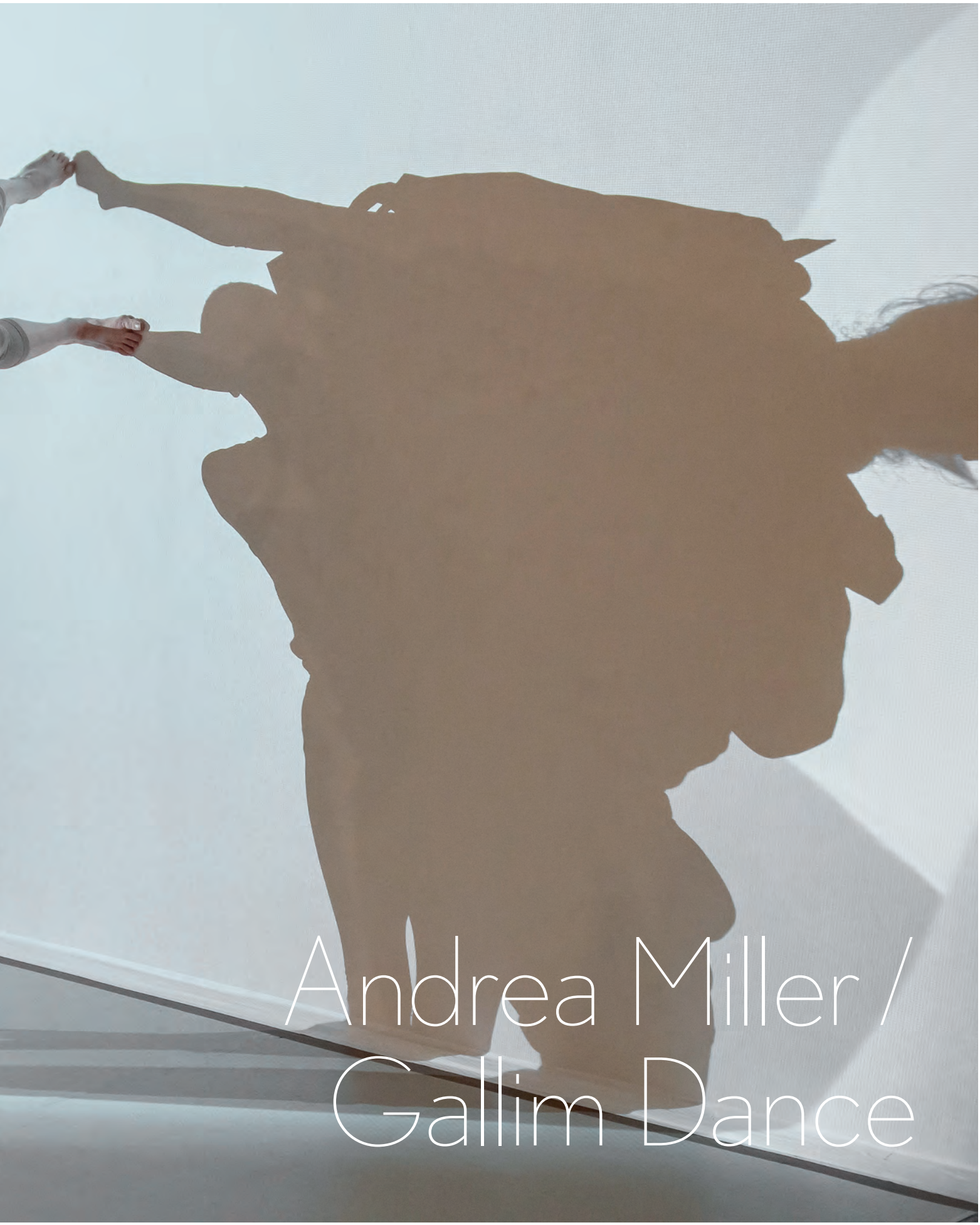
As an Odissi dancer, I carry in my body memories of ancient spaces — the sanctum sanctorum of a temple, royal courts, dance platforms, and spaces of communal celebrations. The movements, gestures, and expressions I embody are embedded with stories, legends, and excerpts of history as well as imagined mythology, which extend beyond their space and time in choreography. I am excited by how my dance — such a historically specific and culturally rooted form, precise in its structures and parameters — reveals itself in the galleries of other times, worlds, and cultures, ancient and modern. As I built a team of collaborators, including a young composer based in southern India, a scholar and teacher of Greek and Latin literature in New York, and a French-Indian textile expert in western India, I realized that this Met residency would be my most adventurous journey as a traditional Indian dancer.

Walking through the Museum, Limor Tomer asked me, "What do you want to make?" I thought: *Record the shadows that fall from the windows in the Petrie European Sculpture Court? Fill the Astor Chinese Garden Court with Styrofoam balls and have the dancers' backs, faces, and knees emerge and disappear like the koi in the corner? Maybe a roller-skating party around the fountains on the [David H. Koch] Plaza?* Eventually I brought Limor two projects and a desire to cross an artistic boundary, creating a "before The Met" and an "after The Met" conception in my integration of movement and dance outside the theater. My collaborations with The Met's curators, visitors, works of art, and spaces are still expansive for me years later.

Stone Skipping (2017) was a choreographic conversation with the Temple of Dendur, which made a millennia-long journey from the Nile to share a soaring gallery space with visitors in the Museum at the edge of Central Park. It was a movement narrative about the bliss of human survival through time and the accelerated environmental degradation of our Anthropocene.

(C)arbon (2018), made with filmmaker Ben Stamper and composer Will Epstein, explored the conviction that there are ambiguous yet essential elements of our humanity that we can access only through our physical experience. I created an installation spanning the entire fifth floor of The Met Breuer. The durational performance, with six dancers, sculpture, live music, and film—and in conversation with the exhibition "Like Life: Sculpture, Color, and the Body (1300–Now)"—focused on human behavior when alone, in relationships, and en masse. In this way, *(C)arbon* created a path to inquire about the body's complex existence.

Members of Gallim in Andrea Miller's *(C)arbon*, The Met Breuer, 2018



Andrea Miller / Gallim Dance


Silas Farley

Rachel Hutsell and Taylor Stanley in Silas Farley's *Songs from the Spirit*, Great Hall Balcony, 2019

As a teenage ballet student, I received the gift of a Met membership from a generous patron. Frequent visits to the Museum became a key component of my artistic education. In The Met's collection, I observed the same concepts I was seeking to embody as a dancer — line, shape, and rigorous technique that yield boundless expression — rendered in inanimate, though no less potent, form. Choreographing *Songs from the Spirit* in 2019, I drew upon this familiarity with The Met by devising each of the ballet's sections in dialogue with a particular space in the Museum, with both the performers and audiences journeying from one space to the next.

Act 1, "Lamentation," began with grief-saturated music and movement within the severity of the Assyrian Sculpture Court. Next came "Interlude," with the Great Hall Balcony serving as the runway for a processional dance leading the audience toward the Asian Art galleries. Act 2, "Contemplation," took place in the tranquility of the Astor Chinese Garden Court, granting the audience and performers time to reflect. Act 3, "Celebration," concluded the ballet in the soaring Charles Engelhard Court in the American Wing with musical and choreographic manifestations of a joy that comes only after profound suffering. This sequence conveyed the progression of the ballet's themes: from bondage to freedom, darkness to light, exile to home, in concert with the messages of traditional spirituals performed live by opera singers and recordings of newly written spirituals by incarcerated musicians from San Quentin State Prison.

The process of creating *Songs from the Spirit* was irrigated with insights from curators. On a preliminary tour of the Astor Chinese Garden Court, Mike Hearn showed us long scroll paintings in which the viewer can look at, above, and through an object all at once. His comment that "these artists were not limited by a one-point perspective" ultimately encapsulated the spirit of the ballet. At The Met, audiences could surround the performers in a manner not possible in ballet's traditional proscenium, making them witnesses and participants in a shared experience of justice and beauty.

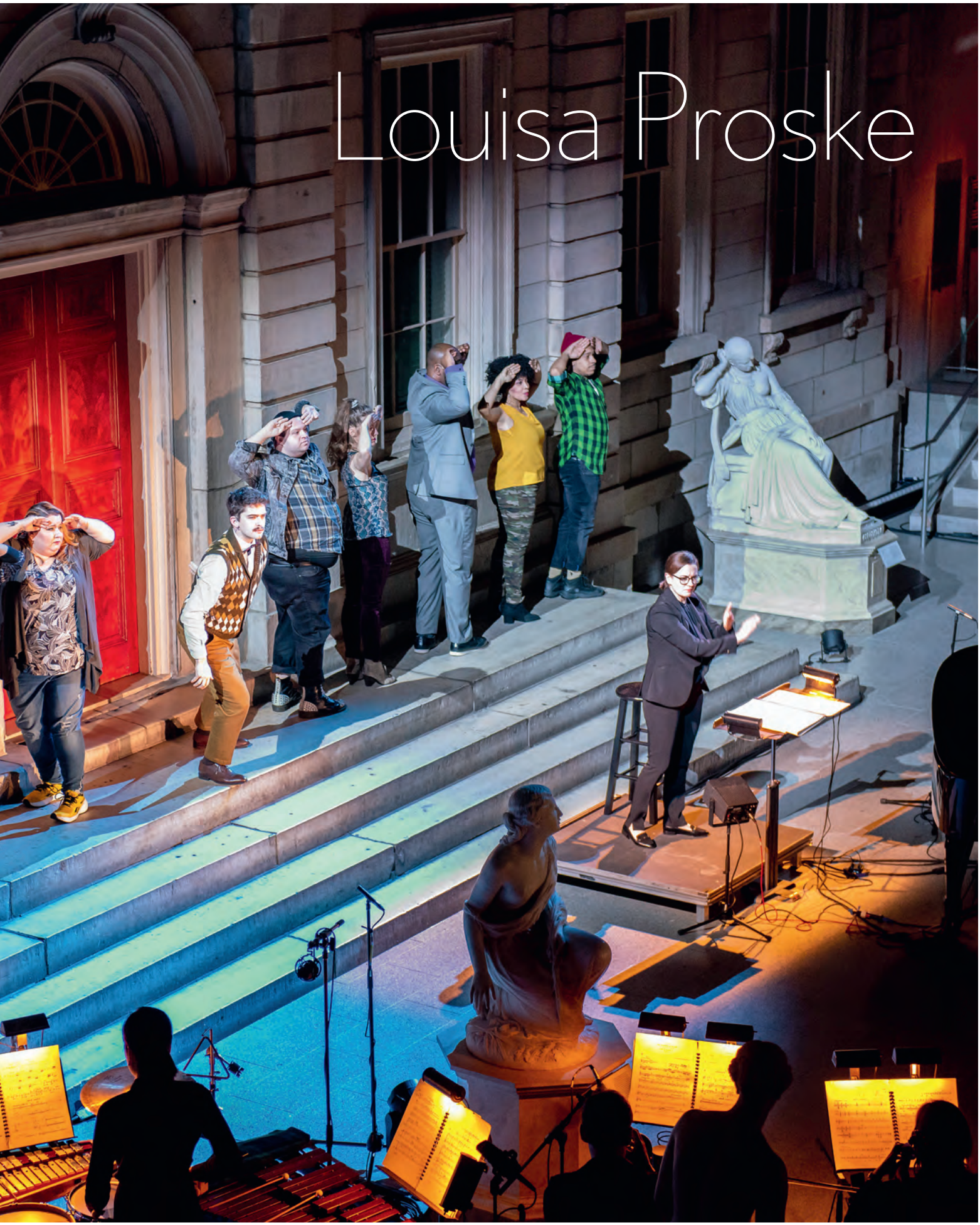
For *The Mother of Us All*, Virgil Thomson's opera from Gertrude Stein's libretto, I was given two prompts. The production would take place in the cavernous Charles Engelhard Court in the American Wing, and it would reference a work (or group of works) in the American collection of the Museum. Not only was the vast court a daunting space to focus a piece of theater, but also it was full of the kind of art that modernist Gertrude Stein was pushing against – American sculptures that looked back at the European nineteenth century rather than toward new, uniquely American forms. The other great challenge was Stein's libretto, a dense and enigmatic text that does not yield its secrets easily. It is at once playful and full of dangerous, inconvenient political propositions. The focus often changes abruptly, non sequiturs abound, and the question "What holds this together?" is not easy to answer.

As I spent days reading Stein's libretto, often aloud, trying to find my way in, I also discovered The Met's magnificent quilt collection. These fragile textiles (rarely on view) span centuries, classes, regions, and denominations. But they are united as women's work, the product of long, patient hours, at once beautiful and intensely practical. Some are abstract, some figurative, and some contain recognizable snippets from the real world. They led me to think more deeply about suffrage, which is also women's work, frequently uncredited, oh-so-patient, intensely collaborative – a kind of quilting across history. Susan B. Anthony, the heroine of our opera, was a collaborator, a coalition builder. She had a profound understanding of political movements, which, like quilts, are made of disparate patches held together by a greater design.

And then something clicked: Wasn't *The Mother of Us All* an intricate quilt, woven collaboratively by Stein and Thomson? It is history, reinvented. Not linear narrative, but dealing, like quilts, in patterns and repetitions, combining abstract patches with bits and bobs found, borrowed, quoted, remembered, invented. This was an immensely freeing realization for me and my team, allowing us to toss out constraints of conventional narrative and invent a new set of aesthetics based on quilting. We looked at each scene as a quilt and tried to determine its pattern. How many patches were there, and were they simple solid colors or prints? How did they fit into the overall design? The quilts became colorful, rebellious maps that I could lay over the cold, hard marble of the Charles Engelhard Court, disrupting its genteel uniformity. The powerful quilts became our guiding image, unlocking the piece on all different levels. I am still under their spell and influence.

Singers from the Juilliard School's Marcus Institute for Vocal Arts and conductor Daniela Candillari in Virgil Thomson's *The Mother of Us All*, Charles Engelhard Court, 2020

Louisa Proske



When I was invited to be The MetLiveArts artist in residence for the 2015–16 season, The Met Breuer was just opening. We occupied it for a month.

Rather than feature my own music, I wanted to showcase the treasured, hard-won bonds of affiliation and belonging that have made me the artist I am. I sought to channel the insurgent energy of the moment (the spirit of the Occupy movement was never far away for us) and mount a Museum takeover by people not typically represented in that space.

Relation: A Performance Residency grew to an almost embarrassing abundance of content. It was overwhelming to organize, unwieldy to manage, and nearly impossible to promote. Instead of the usual New York music audiences, I was seeking to reach the average museumgoer – schoolkids and young couples, foreign tourists and local retirees – and give them something much more than they expected. My working mantras are "Gentle ambush"; "Exceed any and all frames"; and "What's more than too much?" It was an attempt to elevate the act of creating music and elevate each other to that exalted level reserved for art on a wall.

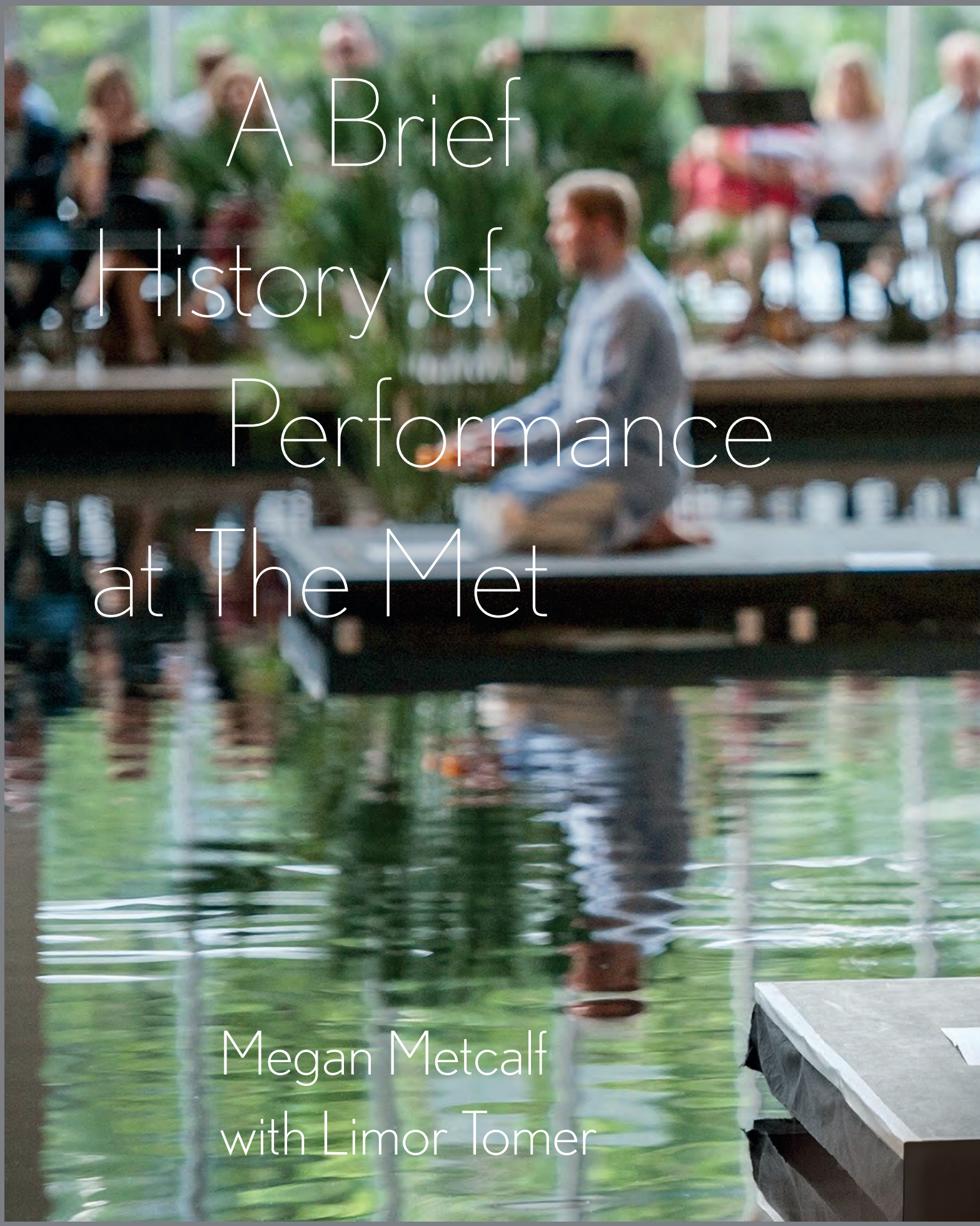
We had a curtained-off room on the ground floor where we put on about one hundred performances (I played in about half of them), reaching thousands of visitors. The participants in *Relation* included dozens of influential, cherished artists – Tyshawn Sorey, Aja Monet, Jennifer Koh, Becca Stevens, Mark Turner, Linda May Han Oh, Rajna Swaminathan, Ganavya Doraiswamy, Marcus Gilmore, Stephan Crump, Graham Haynes, Hprizm, Elena Pinderhughes, Adam O'Farrill, Val Jeanty, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Imani Uzuri, Liberty Ellman, Reiko Yamada, Hans Tutschku, Patricia Brennan, Prasanna, Nitin Mitta, Mark Shim, Steve Lehman, Grégoire Maret, and many others.

I will never forget the delirium of four consecutive duo sets with Craig Taborn, or the daylong durational performance by Michelle Boulé and Okkyung Lee. There were Tirtha's exuberant reunion and the irreverent swagger of THUMS UP with Himanshu Suri, Kassa Overall, and Rafiq Bhatia. We also hosted Kris Davis's stunning solo piano landscapes and Vicky Chow's jaw-dropping performances of Tristan Perich's stroboscopic piece *Surface Image*. Many new projects were hatched: my duo collaboration with Wadada Leo Smith, *A Cosmic Rhythm with Each Stroke*, inspired by Nasreen Mohamedi's drawings; a cycle of live performances built around Teju Cole's book *Blind Spot*; and the rattle and hum of Mendi and Keith Obadikes' sound installation, *Fit (The Battle of Jericho)*, in which a set of embedded transducers shook the walls.

The year indelibly changed me. I carry now the joyful vibrations that we brought into The Met Breuer, our monthlong storm of collective presence, our immersive sonic incursion.

Vijay Iyer

Vijay Iyer performing at The Met Breuer, 2016



A Brief History of Performance at The Met

Megan Metcalf
with Limor Tomer

It is September 2021, and I am making my first trip to The Met since the Museum reopened to the public in August 2020. I enter the Great Hall, grab a map, and make my way over to the American Wing, where I climb a set of marble stairs up to an eighteenth-century ballroom transplanted from Alexandria, Virginia, and lined with gleaming wood furniture. I plug my headphones into my phone, pull up a recording in my podcast app, and press play. The narrator, Nate DiMeo, urges me to step into the middle of the room, look around and past the tables and chairs, and imagine the parties, laughter, rivalries, and love that animated this room more than two centuries ago. His voice and the accompanying music carry me back to a time of full skirts and the wooden heels of dancers swirling through the space as George Washington looked on. I feel slightly flush, almost like I've had a little too much to drink. The narrator invites me to dance, and with a burst of music, my eyes fill and my feet move.

This brief, intimate encounter in the American Wing underscored the movement and life we can find in old, seemingly inert things if we take a moment to access them. In fact, Nate DiMeo's piece, "If You Have to Be a Floor," insists on the vitality and spirit of every object and every space at The Met, however grand or modest — a goal, it might be said, of The Met's Live Arts programming overall.

Recently established as an independent department, Live Arts has been commissioning some of the most contemporary art found at The Met, performances addressing the building and its collections as well as urgent social themes. In DiMeo's case, "If You Have to Be a Floor" was one of a series of stories responding to a variety of works in The Met's collection: a case of glass bottles in the American Wing, a painted panorama that was nearly lost to history, and Jules Tavernier's *Dance in a Subterranean Roundhouse at Clear Lake, California* (1878), among others. As an artist in residence hosted by Live Arts, DiMeo had access to the entirety of The Met, its collection, and its experts for researching and producing his project, which was an extension of his popular *Memory Palace* podcast. The Met recordings reveal magic and mystery in all manner of objects, opening up an expansive, inclusive version of art history in the process.

DiMeo's residency and recordings exemplify a number of ideals of the Department of Live Arts as a whole. The name "Live Arts" signals the department's capacious view of performance, a form increasingly popular in museums over the past two decades. At The Met, Live Arts programming includes music, dance, and theater traditionally encompassed by the performing arts; commissions by visual artists coming from a performance-art background; and even chefs, writers, illustrators, and cultural historians who create novel live experiences for museum audiences. The audience itself, and its relationship with The Met's collection, has also been tapped as a source of liveness, as in DiMeo's project.

Live Arts's offerings are frequently interdisciplinary, bringing together media such as sound, movement, narrative, and visual art to create something greater than the sum of its parts. This programming, which has increased in scale and ambition over the past ten years, continues some long traditions at the Museum while also setting new standards in museum-based performance. In fact, the Live Arts Department and its programming are singular among historical or so-called encyclopedic museums, particularly among those with the scale and influence of The Met. This essay discusses some of the most distinctive and characteristic productions by the Department of Live Arts since 2012 in order to provide an overview of The Met's new program, which consolidates the energy of experiments that took place on the Museum's stages and in galleries in earlier years.

Toppling Old Forms, Inventing New Ones

DiMeo's recordings reveal The Met as a place for innovating on standard-issue museum formats such as the gallery audio guide and inventing sophisticated new forms of live address. These multisensory experiences redefine the nature of spectatorship as well as museumgoing: DiMeo's series recovering the

1. Members of STREB EXTREME ACTION in TEDxMet, Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium, 2013

emotional aspects of tiny bits of history—like the exhilaration of anonymous dancers or the bright glow of a brief love affair—invited visitors to hear and feel in addition to look at works of art. In 2013 and 2015, Live Arts department head Limor Tomer took up the popular TEDx model to expand on The Met's conventional hourlong lecture delivered by experts on the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium stage.[1] In a full-day thematic program, choreographer Elizabeth Streb's intense and acrobatic work *Tip*, for example, explored the theme "Icons" in dialogue with multimedia presentations by Met curators, contemporary musicians, and visual artists (fig. 1).

More recently, artist Suzanne Bocanegra's performance *Honor, an Artist Lecture by Suzanne Bocanegra Starring Lili Taylor* (2022) used the premise of the museum lecture as the organizing principle for a subversive theatrical performance. Part cultural history, part personal essay, the performance was an idiosyncratic take on the sixteenth-century Netherlandish tapestry titled *Honor*, one of the largest tapestries in The Met. Bocanegra sat onstage and delivered her lecture, not directly to the audience, but into a monitor in actor Lili Taylor's ear. Taylor then performed Bocanegra's text for the audience, creating an effect that was virtuosic and unsettling, and which raised questions about identity, authenticity, and the meaning of performance itself.

A series of meals staged in conjunction with Met exhibitions in 2016–19 invited audiences to fully engage their senses and sociality as part of their visit to the Museum. For *Feast of Jerusalem*, chef and author Yotam Ottolenghi devised thirteen dishes and two drinks to accompany the exhibition "Jerusalem 1000–1400: Every People Under Heaven," which explored the city's unique confluence of languages, cultures, and religions through material culture such as texts, paintings, and jewelry. Ottolenghi adapted medieval recipes to introduce visitors to the unique flavor profiles of the period that are no longer prevalent today. As they ate at long communal tables, Ottolenghi narrated the history of the region as it was transmitted through food, the smells and tastes conveying Jerusalem's sedimented past in a manner similar to the artifacts in the exhibition.

Building on this success, Ottolenghi designed three more meals in conjunction with exhibitions. His *Feast of India* (2017) explored Indian street food on the occasion of the exhibition "Modernism on the Ganges: Raghubir Singh Photographs" at The Met Breuer; *Feast of Colmar* (2019) examined the little-known Jewish roots of food in the Alsace winemaking region in dialogue with The Cloisters exhibition "The Colmar Treasure: A Medieval Jewish Legacy." The most celebrated of these meals is perhaps *Feast of Versailles* (2018), documented in the film *Ottolenghi and the Cakes of Versailles* (2020). For this event, Ottolenghi evoked the culinary experimentation of the Louis XIV court, inviting six of the world's top pastry chefs to imagine what they might produce in the spirit of the spectacular feasts at Versailles. After Ottolenghi's discussion of the period's cuisine with food historian Deborah L. Krohn and the organizers of "Visitors to Versailles: From Louis XIV to the French Revolution," the chefs unveiled their

2. La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela in the Dream House, installed in The Met in 1971

magnificent edible creations: marbled marzipan molded into abstract shapes, a swirling alcoholic fountain, cream puffs made into swans. The audience swarmed the tables—and when it was all over, the ruins resembled nothing so much as the toppled ancien régime. The elaborate desserts and their quick destruction provided additional commentary on the exhibition's themes, pointing out the excess and waste that often accompany luxury and beauty.

An important precedent for The Met's fostering new forms of performance and new sensory experiences in the Museum can be found in its 1971 presentation of La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela's Dream House (fig. 2). This installation featured electronic music, light projections, vocals, and a variety of instruments, and emerged out of experimentation with the group the Theatre of Eternal Music dating back to 1962.[2] Met visitors took off their shoes and entered an empty, darkened gallery to experience slowly changing lights and sound. Intensely amplified, the music and lights shifted almost imperceptibly over an extended duration, with elements dropping away and others joining in to create something that was at once visual, sonic, and bodily. One reviewer of a presentation of Young and Zazeela's work in 1966 insisted that it was "not just music but the culmination of Antonin Artaud's theater, particularly in its ability to move you with 'the force of the plague'—its ability to inspire catharsis without violence."[3] This communicates the impact of the experience but also the novelty of the Dream House, which took shape before installation or performance art were described and historicized in contemporary art history later in the 1970s and 1980s. *New York Times* critic Grace Glueck raved about the Museum's role in this presentation: "The Met . . . deserves a bow for its heroic efforts to accommodate the Youngs and company. . . . At first the museum offered Young the usual one-night stand. But the composer . . . argued that a week was needed, so important was time to the work's psychological impact. The museum finally acquiesced, and went to considerable trouble over the installation."[4] Then, as now, the Museum encouraged the latest developments in music and visual art, signaling what is possible at the leading edge of interdisciplinary performance.

Expanding the Canon

In 2012–13, in one of Tomer's first major initiatives, multidisciplinary artist Paul D. Miller (DJ Spooky That Subliminal Kid) inaugurated the contemporary artist-in-residence program. For the whole season, Miller "remixed" The Met's collection and exhibitions, producing gallery talks, lectures, musical performances, and an iPhone app for museumgoers to "DJ" their own mixes of The Met's prodigious holdings. The experiment, which proposed that a living artist could generate fresh insight into the Museum and its collection, succeeded, becoming a cornerstone of the Live Arts programming today.

Fifty years earlier, in 1963, the Ford Foundation Program for Concert Soloists established the precedent for commissioning new performance works at The Met. In the short-lived initiative, thirteen musicians and singers received funds for new works by American composers that they performed in the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium. The pairs included Betty Allen, a mezzo-soprano, who collaborated on a song cycle with Virgil Thomson. Bethany Beardslee, another soprano, performed music by electronic composer Milton Babbitt, accompanied by synthesizer and recordings of her own voice, which the *New York Times* likened to a "sorceress weaving spells."[5] The program promoted the emergence of new musical forms as well as new performers; although it would come to be considered a mainstream music venue later, The Met's position at the time as an alternative to a traditional concert hall facilitated such experimentation. Similarly, the Young Artists series initiated in 1956 promoted musicians at the beginning of their careers. The most famous among them was legendary pianist Glenn Gould, who appeared in the first series.

Soprano Julia Bullock used her 2018–19 Live Arts residency at The Met not just to experiment musically but also to collaborate with an array of artists to bring hidden histories and untold stories into the current moment. The series of five programs highlighted the ability of the human voice to make important experiences and truths known: Bullock's extraordinary vision and musicianship animated the oral histories of so-called outsider artists, the poems of Langston Hughes, and the 1867 anthology *Slave Songs of the United States*, among other potent source material. *Perle Noire: Meditations for Joséphine*, performed on the grand staircase in the Great Hall, presented the story of expatriate dancer and singer Josephine Baker, a Black artist too often caricatured by racial stereotypes (fig. 3). *El Cimarrón* featured another powerful singer,

3. Julia Bullock and Tyshawn Sorey in *Perle Noire: Meditations for Joséphine*, Great Hall, 2019

4. Davóne Tines in *El Cimarrón*, Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium, 2019

Davóne Tines, who performed composer Hans Werner Henze's 1970 setting of Esteban Montejo's autobiography in an inventive production that enabled the Cuban's narrative of enslavement and escape to erupt center stage in the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium (fig. 4).

Bullock's series gave voice to figures in Black history, emphasizing performance's special access to the past. Music in particular, with its returns and repetitions, carries history forward into the present moment, with songs sometimes enduring over centuries through oral tradition alone. Performance theorist Diana Taylor's model of "the archive and the repertoire" outlines how music, dance, ritual, and storytelling are no less important for the continuity of culture than "supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)."[6] Handed down from generation to generation, embodied practices persist in individuals and communities rather than in libraries, archives, and museums. Moreover, in Black American history and culture, songs like those in *Slave Songs of the United States* are the documents of a history obscured and a culture repressed. Bullock's performance gave them the capacity to reach us today with their stories of oppression, violence, freedom, and grace. As The Met expands its traditional focus on the physical materials of the "archive" and creates space for performance of the "repertoire," it acknowledges the value of this realm of knowledge.

In fact, on the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium stage, Bullock channeled The Met's history of providing groundbreaking Black singers a platform for their musical activism. In January 1969, Nina Simone gave a concert at The Met that filled not just the seats but also the stage and standing room in the auditorium. Although it has been called the first jazz concert at The Met (it wasn't), Simone's performance nonetheless indicated the Museum's willingness to experiment, connect with diverse audiences, and participate in a broader cultural landscape. The Museum was just then partnering with the Whitney and the Guggenheim on a regular "museum night," which would, among other things, "attract downtown Manhattan working people, who are unable to spare the time-consuming trip uptown

at lunch time."[7] Music was an essential part of this initiative, offering local residents entertainment as well as air-conditioning on hot summer nights. The *New York Times* previewed the Whitney's brand-new Composers' Showcase series and The Met's first jazz series together, which both featured Black singers, Betty Allen and Nina Simone, although the music they performed could not have been more different.[8]

Even more crucial context for Simone's concert was the controversial "Harlem on My Mind: The Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968" exhibition at The Met, which the jazz series accompanied.[9] The exhibition was criticized for several reasons, including for featuring photographs of Harlem residents and celebrities — many of them taken by white people outside the Harlem community — rather than examples of painting or sculpture by Black artists. It is difficult to know what Simone truly thought of "Harlem on My Mind," but she nonetheless agreed to play at The Met, despite extensive media coverage of the exhibition's denunciation by Black New York activists and intellectuals. Her sold-out concert took place less than a month after radically different groups picketed the opening of "Harlem on My Mind" and less than two weeks after the exhibition's catalogue was censored at Mayor John Lindsay's insistence. In its review of Simone's concert, the *New York Times* reported that the "hornet's nest stirred up by the 'Harlem on My Mind' exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was not reflected in any way last night."[10] But the *Time* profile of Simone that followed a few weeks later made sure to mention her singing the "bitter message" of Langston Hughes's poem "Backlash Blues" at The Met and reprinted the lyrics of Billy Taylor's "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free": "I wish I knew how it would feel to be free. I wish I could break all the chains holding me."[11]

We will also likely never know the precise order of priorities of the organizers of Simone's event at The Met. Was it bringing Black audiences to the Museum? (The 1969 *Time* article made this objective of the "Harlem on My Mind" exhibition explicit, as did the Museum's director, Thomas Hoving.[12]) Was it demonstrating that the Museum was hip to the music of the times? Was it smoothing over the serious social tensions reflected in the "Harlem on My Mind" controversy with the spurious idea that jazz can dissolve racial tensions? Whatever the case, might the organizers have known that Simone could take an activist stance about racism and inequality that the Museum could not, at least not at that point? This historical performance at The Met adds complexity to the "Harlem on My Mind" episode, which remains especially relevant to the Museum today as it addresses issues of whom the Museum serves and how. In theater folklore and scholarship, stages are always haunted by those who have performed there before; when a museum acts as a stage, it is haunted by its performances, too.

Not a Lot of Neutral Space

"We have a lot of space," Tomer tells artists on their initial walk-throughs of The Met, "but not a lot of *neutral* space." For some artists this is a drawback or a hindrance of working at The Met — but ideally it drives the creative process and becomes a defining feature of their original work. With this model, The Met's collection and spaces are not just "expensive backdrops," as Tomer has put it, but rather a catalyst for giving both the performance and The Met's works of art new meaning.

In the history of music commissions at The Met, the Museum's alternative to a conventional music venue nurtured a spirit of experimentation, a role its galleries have played as well. In 1945, filmmaker Maya Deren and choreographer-dancer Talley Beatty used a now-demolished gallery at The Met to explore the possibilities of dance on camera.[13] In *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945), Beatty's lyrical yet explosive dancing moves seamlessly across several different environments, including the large space lined with East Asian sculpture (fig. 5). The study was a breakthrough work for Deren, which "fully realized her vision of freeing the human body from the confines of theatrical — and actual — space."[14] In the film, the Museum provided a contrast to expansive nature settings and an intimate domestic interior, while its

5. Maya Deren and Talley Beatty, *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945)

collection of monumental statues emphasized the agile, fleeting presence of the human dancer. Within The Met's frame (and outside the theater), both the film and the dance it contains achieved parity with – or even exceeded – the other arts, namely visual art and architecture.

A synergistic relationship between the performing and other arts was again on view when celebrated actor Jenny Egan staged the brief Eugène Ionesco play *Maid to Marry* in the Morgan Wing (currently the Arms and Armor galleries) in 1967. The *New York Times* preview of the "experiment" underscored the theatricality of the gallery space, while its review noted how like tired museumgoers the actors on a bench in front of Adolph Gottlieb's black-and-red abstract painting *Thrust* (1959) appeared.[15] The Met insisted in its press release that the play and the paintings reflected "a similar distortion and distrust of traditional values" in that moment: the staging reinforced the "impact of both artistic statements and [made] a more pointed comment on contemporary life."[16] This reciprocal relationship is fostered and sustained by the Department of Live Arts in its current programming.

In the Arms and Armor galleries in 2014, for example, Gotham Chamber Opera's production of Monteverdi's *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* (1624) breathed new life into The Met's ceremonial armor (fig. 6). As the singers' voices filled the space and the opera's fighters – later revealed to be lovers – circled each other in the darkened room, they returned lived experience and affect to the frozen metal specimens. In return, the decorative, highly polished suits of armor stood as a warning against forgetting the true purpose of all its ceremony: love and loss. If one considered Monteverdi's opera (or even opera in general) as stuck in time, the production set it again in motion.[17] Similarly, in 2016, the sixteenth-century Vélez Blanco Patio offered more than a space that suited the music in *La Dolce Morte*, the story of artist Michelangelo's love for a much younger man. The intimate Renaissance-era Spanish courtyard held together fantasy and desire as countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo sang

6. Members of Gotham Chamber Opera in *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, Emma and Georgina Bloomberg Arms and Armor Court, 2014

7. Anthony Roth Costanzo in *La Dolce Morte*, Vélez Blanco Patio, 2016

lyrics drawn from Michelangelo's poetry (fig. 7). Contrasting with the youth frozen in time in the text and in the sculptures distributed throughout the patio, the living presence of the singer and musicians enabled the queer love story to find expression and live on today. In *La Dolce Morte*, video projections writing out Michelangelo's poetry high on the gallery walls showed the lyrics Costanzo was singing and made the Museum into a palimpsest, a site where texts have been layered over time.

In 2014–15, The Civilians became the first artist-in-residence theater company at The Met and set about challenging what its members viewed as charged spaces. The company's tenure included multiple performances as well as informal engagements with visitors and staff. The central piece of the residency was a new Live Arts commission, *The Way They Live*, which takes its title from an 1879 painting by Thomas Anshutz depicting a post–Civil War scene of an African American woman and two children tending a garden. Using its trademark investigative theater process, The Civilians team spent months in the American Wing, interviewing visitors and Met staff, including guards, and then transcribing their words and crafting them into an affecting theatrical portrait of the galleries. The resulting work cast an interrogative light on the collection, revealing not only the power of the works of art, but also the imperfections, missing narratives, and unconscious assumptions that figure into this area of The Met that focuses on the United States from the colonial period to the early twentieth century. They posed the provocative, complex question "What does it mean to be an American?" In a way, the most important audience for this work was The Met staff, and while the work drew accolades from the general public, the reviews from the staff were decidedly mixed. The process of using theater as a means to question the choices and decisions – conscious and unconscious – that a museum makes each day was powerful and destabilizing.

To realize this project, The Civilians assembled a large team of scholars, writers, dramaturges, researchers, and performers from a broad range of backgrounds. This approach organically amplified voices and narratives that are often missing from the official Museum story – Black laborers, the displacement of Native Americans from their ancestral lands, and even the very founding of the American Wing in 1924 to acculturate newly arrived immigrants. Theater, in this context, was an agent provocateur, a mode by which The Met could take an honest, unflinching look at its assumptions, collection, and its relationship to its visitors.

Performance can reveal even the most liminal and seemingly neutral spaces – stairwells, lobbies, courtyards – as socially and ideologically charged. For instance, by 2016, David Lang's *Little Match Girl Passion* (2007) had become a Christmas tradition, staged in prior years in both the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium and the Medieval Sculpture Hall at The Met. But the contemporary choral work,

which is based on the Hans Christian Andersen story of a young girl selling matches on the street on New Year's Eve, achieved new poignancy when it was presented that year in The Met Breuer lobby (fig. 8). Diners on their way to Flora Bar, the upscale restaurant on the lower level, needed to pass through the production in progress to make it to their reserved tables. Unwittingly placed in the performance, they became the unsympathetic passersby in the narrative. More than just adding moving scenery, the staging created a charged encounter in which performers, spectators, and diners alike negotiated social inequality in real time. In this context the performance produced additional commentary, pointing out the illusion of any kind of "neutrality."

The "white cube" of the gallery, as artist and critic Brian O'Doherty put it, is especially laden with associations, despite its white walls.[18] It has been criticized by artists since the late 1960s as symbolic of the art market and the tendency of museums to isolate and flatten works of art as products definitively separate from their makers.[19] In one of the most famous examples of museum-based performance, choreographer Trisha Brown restored the idea of art as a living process that contains contingency and chance as well as vitality. Her 1971 performance at the Whitney Museum of American Art *Walking on the Wall* used ladders and rigging to enable dancers to walk back and forth where paintings were typically hung (fig. 9). In its repetitive form and the circumstances of its production, Brown's dance was directly in dialogue with the minimalist and postminimalist sculpture, performance art, and conceptual work by artists such as Robert Morris, Richard Serra, Bruce Nauman, and Sol LeWitt. *Walking on the Wall* made visible some of the bodies and individuals who inspired the new visual art forms emerging in the late 1960s and early 1970s — and insisted on dance's place in the museum, too.[20]

Andrea Miller's *(C)arbon* (2018), performed in the same building, evoked Brown's precedent at key points in the choreography when two dancers lifted a third so that her feet touched the wall. Holding her perpendicular to the floor, they provided a support so that she could walk across the surface (see pp. 24–25). As it recalled the specific history of The Met Breuer space, previously the Whitney Museum, Miller's dance configured the gallery as anything but empty and art as anything but static. Live Arts programming thus draws from the layers of signification supplied by the Museum's works of art and galleries and inscribes new meaning, multiplying The Met's possibilities without acquiring a thing.

Taking on The Met as a Whole and Museums in General

Live Arts's most ambitious productions have engaged with the entirety of The Met and some of the ways it stands in for "*the* museum," as Nate DiMeo put it in 2016, meaning museums in general.[21] In *Lands, Waters, and Skies* (2019), Nikhil Chopra, a visual artist based in Goa, India, posed questions about what it might mean to inhabit — to *occupy* — a museum in order to unfix some of its traditions and assumptions (fig. 10). Chopra's nine-day performance disrupted the narrative of progress offered by the "universal survey museum," which envisions art history as a developmental sequence that culminates in Euro-American painting and sculpture. As theorized by Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, this museum — pioneered by the Louvre and realized in the United States by The Met and the National Gallery of Art — is a ceremonial architecture laden with colonial ideology.[22] It was designed to create a sense of belonging for groups such as the wealthy and the middle class as well as to instruct the public on proper modes of behavior, like keeping quiet and refraining from touching works of art and cultural heritage.

Chopra's contemporary postcolonial subject carved an alternate path through The Met, avoiding the classical antiquity and European parts of the collection and using live performance to evoke new possibilities for its spaces. The odd activities and alternative temporality of this iconoclastic Met visitor refused to stay in line with established norms for viewing art. The Great Hall became a busy train station for a recently arrived immigrant; a corridor became a studio for a messy artist, the marble floor a vast expanse for an otherworldly being. Chopra's dancing, wanderings, and naps on the ground attracted curious stares — and sometimes no notice at all. Eventually Chopra hung his completed canvas around the court in the Robert Lehman Wing, a space dedicated to artists who had themselves once been only adjacent to the Old Master painters. Donning a regal mail-like gown and fantastical headdress, he made his way barefoot from the rear to the front of The Met and fell at the foot of the imposing main staircase. The closing moment of the performance suggested that he might never be assimilated into an orderly narrative. Chopra's activities were opaque and strange, recalling the origins of museums in the sacred spaces of medieval cathedrals and private cabinets of curiosity rather than the rationalizing forces of the Enlightenment. Yet the ephemeral form of the performance looked forward, proposing how the institution of the museum can be reimagined.

8. David Lang's *The Little Match Girl Passion*, staged by Rachel Chavkin and performed by the Ekmeles ensemble, The Met Breuer, 2016

9. Peter Moore (1932–1993), *Rehearsal of "Walking on the Wall" by Trisha Brown Company, Whitney Museum of American Art*, 1971. Gelatin silver print, 6 7/8 x 9 1/2 in. (17.4 x 24.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase, The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation Gift, through Joyce and Robert Menschel, 2001 (2001.667)

10. Nikhil Chopra performing *Lands, Waters, and Skies* in the Great Hall, 2019

While Chopra took on the symbolic architecture of The Met and the discursive functions of museums more generally, Monica Bill Barnes & Company's *Museum Workout* (2016–17) reimagined museum visitors, insisting that full embodiment is an essential aspect of the museum experience (see pp. 12–13). As the audience-performers engaged in movements like lunges, jogging, and jumping jacks all over The Met, they listened to a voiceover by illustrator Maira Kalman encouraging curiosity and wonder in their museumgoing. At the end of the early morning exercise, everyone lay down on the marble floor to reflect on how The Met's spaces and objects interacted with the body throughout their journey. *The Museum Workout* thus used the entire sensorium to propose ways audiences can meet museums anew, not just at The Met but as they visit any art institution.

As performance in museums has increased in frequency and visibility in recent decades, so have the attempts to historicize and theorize it. One popular line of reasoning is that the phenomenon is new, with performance's liveness counteracting the disembodied nature of our digital age. But performance in museums may extend a tradition and ambitions as old as The Met itself. Musical instrument historian Eric de Visscher noted in 2018, "even the classical model of the museum, born in the eighteenth century and consolidated in the nineteenth, already had a strong dimension of theatricality."[23] The observation suggests that a paradigm for the museum that separates the performing from the visual arts and art from artifacts – while insisting on the silence and seriousness of the museum (and the viewer) – may have been only a temporary set of ideals. The performance promoted by Live Arts at The Met recalls the theatrical dimensions often repressed in museum history. Its productions also make visiting a museum so much more than looking and demonstrate in real time how artworks accrue meaning as they are considered and reconsidered over time. Because it is live, performance evokes all the living bodies and ephemeral moments that have passed through the Museum's spaces, insisting on the importance of the people in the institution as well as its objects.

Notes

1. When Tomer took the role of General Manager of Concerts & Lectures in 2011 (which became Live Arts in 2017 and the Department of Live Arts in 2020), she inherited a tradition of experimenting with events in the museum. Her predecessor, Hilde Limondjian, The Met's first full-time staff member devoted to performance (appointed in 1968), had introduced small but significant changes to the concert recital format: she created programs of classical music organized around specific themes, for example, and invited musicians to speak about the music and composers that they played, which ultimately distinguished The Met in music and museum education in New York.

2. The Theatre of Eternal Music included now-famous musicians Tony Conrad and John Cale. The Dream House has manifested in several locations in New York City since 1971 and still exists in a loft in downtown New York, founded with Zazeela in 1993.

3. Richard Kostelanetz, "The Discovery of Alternative Theater: Notes on Art Performances in New York City in the 1960s and 1970s," *Perspectives of New Music* 27, no. 1 (Winter 1989), p. 169.

4. Grace Glueck, "Art Notes: No More Ta-Rum, Ta-Rum," *New York Times*, October 24, 1971, p. D20.

5. Howard Klein, "Miss Beardslee Sings 'Philomel': Babbitt Work Given in Ford Series at Met Museum," *New York Times*, February 22, 1964, p. 15.

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7. Whitney Museum of American Art press release, "Whitney Museum to Open Tuesday Evenings," February 13, [1968], Publicity 1968 folder, Series 2: Tuesday Nights at the Whitney, Whitney Museum of American Art Performance Series Archives 1968–1997, Whitney Museum of American Art Archives, New York.

8. "In the Museums, Modern Music," *New York Times*, February 2, 1969, p. D15. The *Times* indicated Allen would perform works by Virgil Thomson and Ned Rorem in a program that also included Aaron Copland.

9. See Thomas Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), pp. 164–66, and Aruna D'Souza, "Act 3: *Harlem on My Mind*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1969," in *Whitewalling: Art, Race, and Protest in 3 Acts* (New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2018), pp. 104–46.

10. John S. Wilson, "Museums in Tune with Nina Simone: Enthusiastic Audience Hails Singer and Her Ensemble," *New York Times*, February 5, 1969, p. 37.

11. "Singers: More than an Entertainer," *Time*, February 21, 1969, p. 63.

12. See Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, pp. 164–66, and D'Souza, "Act 3: *Harlem on My Mind*," pp. 104–46.

13. This space, which served as the Arms and Armor galleries until the 1940s, has been identified with respect to Deren's work as "Egyptian Hall," likely because it housed Egyptian art before it was demolished in the 1960s; the work of art on view in the film is East Asian. Thank you to Stephanie Post and James Moske for help with these details.

14. Steven Higgins, *Still Moving: The Film and Media Collections of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2006), p. 199.

15. Richard F. Shepard, "Metropolitan Museum to Offer Brief Dramas in Art Settings," *New York Times*, June 1, 1967, p. 52, and Dan Sullivan, "Lively Art Added at Metropolitan: Museum Galleries Become Stages for Drama, Poetry," *New York Times*, June 6, 1967, p. 52.

16. Press release, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Metropolitan Museum Offers Free Theater in Its Galleries of Medieval and Contemporary Art," [June 5, 1967], Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York; https://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16028coll12/id/1661/rec/10.

17. *Il Combattimento* was one of the earliest-known theatrical performances at The Met, in 1943, in conjunction with a five-day symposium on the history of theater there. Program in box 70, folder 13, "Metropolitan Museum of Art 1938–1943," Angna Enters Papers, (S)*MGZMD 158. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York.

18. Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica, Calif., and San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1976).

19. See Daniel Buren, "The Function of the Museum," *Artforum* 12, no. 1 (September 1973), p. 68. Also discussed in Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 11–26.

20. In 2010, Tomer restaged Brown's landmark work in her role as adjunct curator of performing arts at the Whitney.

21. Joshua Barone, "A Podcast Finds a Home: Delving into Met History," *New York Times*, October 27, 2016, p. C3.

22. Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History* 3, no. 4 (December 1980), pp. 448–69.

23. Eric de Visscher, "Museums as Theatre: What about Musical Instruments?," *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* 44 (2018), p. 26.


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Front and back cover: members of Gallim in Andrea Miller's *Stone Skipping*, Temple of Dendur, 2017. Inside covers: Ryoji Ikeda's *superposition*, Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium, 2014. Pages 2–3: Members of David Dorfman Dance perform *Re-*, commissioned for the opening of The Met Breuer, 2016. Page 4: Leila Josefowicz performing in the galleries of the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, 2021. Pages 6–7: Paul D. Miller performing *Of Water and Ice*, Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium, 2013. Pages 32–33: members of Alarm Will Sound performing in Kate Soper and Nigel Maister's *I Was Here I Was I*, Temple of Dendur, June 2014. Pages 46–47: Curtis Bannister and Kelly Griffin in Heartbeat Opera's *Fidelio*, Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium, 2022.

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