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**DANCE/DRAW** At: Institute of Contemporary Art. Through Jan. 16. 617-478-3100, [www.icaboston.com](http://www.icaboston.com)

Something funny happened to drawing on its way into the 21st century. After centuries of being the backbone, the building blocks, what Ingres rousingly called the “probity” of art, it suddenly transformed itself into being - well, anything.

The process began, you could say, with artists turning inward, trying harder to draw what was inside their heads. New ideas about the unconscious, for instance, inspired Surrealists, along with the likes of Willem de Kooning, to start drawing with their eyes literally closed. The point? To unlearn imaginative habits. Or better yet, simply to see what would happen.

Pretty soon - as the entrancing first room of “Dance/Draw” at the Institute of Contemporary Art shows us - artists took to drawing with their feet (the dancer and choreographer Trisha Brown), with bouncing basketballs (David Hammons), with hair (Mona Hatoum), and even with snails (**Daniel Ranalli**).

All this was intriguing. But the new what-the-heck spirit was by no means confined to art. Similar experiments started happening in dance, as rigid old pieties gave way to an urge to connect choreography with new freedoms, with everyday existence, with the workings of chance.

These links make “Dance/Draw” an inspired idea for a group show. But it’s more than just a good idea: The show delivers, at a time when interest in the connections between dance and art is surging worldwide. Organized by the ICA’s chief curator, Helen Molesworth, in her debut effort for the ICA, the result is a category-busting compilation that’s jam-packed with delights. (And in a convention-breaking turn, just over half the artists included are women, mirroring the population at large.)

Extending beyond mere experimentation into zones of high feeling and humor, it fizzes with ideas about the purposes and possibilities of both drawing and dance. Better yet, for those who, like me, love contemporary dance but feel woefully ignorant about its key figures and moments, the show functions as a brisk introduction to the art form. All this has been done without the boorish pedagogy that so often strangles group shows built around smart themes. (If you want pedagogy pleasantly delivered, mind you, step into the ICA's Poss Family Mediatheque. There, beneath a suspended installation by Cecilia Vicuña that answers succinctly to the mesmerizing view of water below, touch screens show clips of key moments in contemporary dance, from Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham to Brown and Bill T. Jones.)

Although it doesn't have quite the same ring to it, the show might easily have been called "Dance/Draw/Sculpt." It is about two-dimensional lines extending into space, then moving in relation to the limits of that space. The results, in whatever medium, are works that function as a kind of choreographic notation.

Two works - one near the start of the show, the other near the end, both involving public transport - give a good sense of how the show transforms as you move through it. The first is a series of drawings by William Anastasi. As the products of Anastasi's actual hand, they stand out in this first gallery, because everything else is a drawing made by other means. Check out, in particular, Janine Antoni's exquisite "Butterfly Kisses," made by blinking her mascara-coated eyelashes against paper (a kind of dance of flirtation, strenuously committed to paper) and **Ranalli's "Snail Drawings"** - before-and-after photos of snails wandering out of the configurations in which he has placed them.

Anastasi's "Subway Drawings," being handmade, are different - but not so very. On his weekly subway trip in New York to go play chess with John Cage (the influential composer obsessed with the workings of chance), Anastasi would sit with his eyes closed, noise-reducing headphones on his ears, pencil in one hand, and paper on his lap. Forgoing control, he would then let the paper register all the rhythmic and lurching movements of the subway car.

The second work is a hilarious video called "Paralyzed" by the Swedish artist Klara Lidén. In a tram carriage occupied by a smattering of fellow passengers, Lidén is filmed getting up from her seat and embarking on an amateurish dance routine. She strips off a layer or two of clothing, swings from the poles, climbs up into the luggage rack, and performs somersaults and vigorous leaps up and down the aisle. It could almost be a reality TV stunt, but it's somehow much stranger, much funnier, much more beguiling.

If Anastasi's subway drawings are a Zen-like exercise in forfeiting control - suppressing the artist's will and surrendering to chance - Lidén's public transit performance, which takes drawing off the page and into a highly charged space, is a quixotic, clumsy, yet deliciously uninhibited attempt to reclaim that control.

There are so many works in the show that stand out and deepen the theme. In the second room, subtitled "The Line in Space," look out for Eva Hesse's exquisite "Ennead" - a breathtakingly compressed study in entropy - and Ruth Asawa's hanging sculptures made from crocheted copper and brass wire.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Asawa - age 16 and an American citizen - was sent to an internment camp. In 1946, she went to Black Mountain College, where she studied with Josef Albers, Merce Cunningham, and Buckminster Fuller, and was influenced by the movements of dancers. The following year, she made a second trip to Mexico, where she learned the crocheting techniques she would use to such exquisite effect in her hanging sculptures. These works, like various others in this gallery, not only take up three-dimensional space but leave linear shadows on walls and floors; Molesworth calls them "a secret second drawing."

The show's third section takes us explicitly into the realm of dance, with photos and videos of influential avant-garde choreographers - notably Lucinda Childs, Yvonne Rainer, and Brown (whose massive dance prop for the performance "Floor of the Forest" dominates the room). All three were members of the influential Judson Dance Theater, an informal group with indirect links to Cage, which performed at the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village in the early '60s. Part of Judson's legacy was to take dance off the stage and into public spaces. The force of that legacy is evident everywhere in recent art, which has seen a boom in performances that respond to public spaces, be they museums, offices, or sidewalks.

In fact, the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum's fall show, "Temporary Structures: Performing Architecture in Contemporary Art," addresses just this phenomenon, and is in many ways the perfect complement to "Dance/Draw." Both shows feature prominently the work of the dance duo robbinschilds (Layla Childs and Sonya Robbins). In "Dance/Draw" robbinschilds have collaborated with artists A.L. Steiner and A.J. Blandford to produce a video of the duo dancing and prancing their way through various urban and natural environments in outfits color-coded to match their locations. The work, called "C.L.U.E. (color location ultimate experience)," has a driving soundtrack and is described by the artists as a "gateway to experiencing the ultimate in any surrounding."

The same phrase could almost be applied to a superb 3-D film by the trio Openended Group. Their work, "After Ghostcatching," uses motion capturing and digital rendering to evoke the movements of dancer and choreographer Bill T. Jones. It's brilliant.

The show's final section returns us to drawing, but in a new state of mind - alert, receptive, playful. Whatever you do, don't miss Sadie Benning's 20-minute animation, "Play Pause." It's like an updated and illustrated take on Joyce's "Ulysses," with a mesmerizing soundtrack and one sublime touch after another.

There's something riveting, in this final section, about watching choreographer William Forsythe explain - and demonstrate - the new grammar of dance in his film, "Lectures from Improvisation Technologies." Pay close attention, too, to Amy Sillman's outstanding drawings of reconfigured body parts - for me, the best drawings in the show.

Since "Dance/Draw" is about drawing exploding off the page and into space, it's fitting that the show itself bursts beyond the boundaries of its own galleries: There's a rich accompanying program of dance performances choreographed by the likes of the Trisha Brown Dance Company and Jérôme Bel, as well as a collaboration between dancer-choreographer Trajal Harrell and artist Sarah Sze.