

## Commentary: Assignment 2 from Tracy Collier.

Explore the sense of *Space* in the pictures. In the first picture, think not only of the pathway of the woman and dog's journey but also the spatial occupation of the woman and how she relates to the dog and her spatial pathways. Play with combining these two ideas of space in your creative work.

In the second picture, think of the kinesphere – that is, the space around the body whose periphery can be easily reach by extended limbs from one static point – or the size of the woman's physical presence, and how that could change, and whether the kinesphere size is related to the presence of the cat.

From your pre-course reading, remember that space has the mental factor of attention and is related to Thinking in Jungian terms. How do the mental elements impact on the physical space? So, what are the women paying attention to, whether it be thoughts, or something else in the space around them, or to the expectation of falling under the influence of the pulling dog? Really examine the focus points of the pictures.

I am totally aware that what you are being asked to do is almost impossible! As are the next three assignments! None of the Effort factors exist in isolation. One never exists without the presence of at least one other, but it is the degree to which they are present that becomes interesting, i.e what is foregrounded.

I am a mover, so the focus of my exploration is through movement of my body. Defining movement is also an interesting point. What is it? Laban observes that we move with the same actions in ordinary /pedestrian movements such as "chopping, carrying, mending, assembling or doing any everyday activity" as we use for more symbolic movements, which are "pregnant with emotion" and which "appear in specific sequences having shapes and rhythms of their own" when in artistic form and are "the real carriers of the messages emerging from the world of silence" (Laban, 1980, p. 87). So, we could say that anything we do counts as movement. The most pedestrian action is movement. An exploration of stillness is movement. A breath, is movement, but it is the *quality of inner participation* that makes a movement symbolic or revealing of meaning because "the silent world of ideas and inner stirrings lies brooding within these actions waiting to be formed into coherent shape" (Laban, 1980, p. 88).

My first task was to go back to my initial observations and notes on what I had seen in the images relating to Space. Then, I allowed myself to respond to new observations that came to me in the moment of recreating what I saw, to give me a more immediate and bodily feel to my explorations.

Space is one of my favourite elements as it has so many faces. I think of space not only in terms of Laban's definition of the Motion Factors of Direct and Indirect and the mental factor

of *Attention*, but also the Jungian connection to the Function of Consciousness - *Thinking*. We have our own personal attitudes to the space we *occupy* in the kinesphere too: how much space we feel we need to be comfortable, how willing we are to share that space with others. How loudly do we exist in space, do we want to be visible? How economic are we with our gestures, are we narrow in the space, or wide? Where do we move in the space - high space, mid space or deep space. Where do we sense is our 'centre'? How much space are we accustomed to - does the situation we find ourselves in become a source of anxiety for us, or one of blissful change or familiar comfort?

### **My Exploration:**

As I mentioned before I needed to go back to my original observations. I also wanted to explore the *The Woman and The Cat* image first, it seemed to call my attention. It was morning and I felt my own inner energy quite low at that moment, so I felt a closer relationship to it. The sense of indulgence I witnessed first became apparent in my body when I reproduced the body position and found myself a large bowl in which I put tomatoes. No reason for tomatoes, had I had a choice it would have been peas in their shells. I get the feeling that shelling peas would be an appropriate occupation for the woman. I also chose a heavy china bowl as this I felt more appropriate to the period in which the picture had been drawn. I replicated the stance of the woman and discovered that the position of her right arm felt in my body to be an interrupted action. Interrupted I felt by the cat, which caused the woman to look directly at the cat. This is the only Direct action I found in my body throughout my exploration. I imagined that the cat made a mewling sound that drew her attention. I imagined putting my hand into the bowl to pick at the peas, an action that was also Direct in its initial motion but soon turned to Indirect to break the top off the pea and pull away the shell. A combination of smaller efforts ensuing. In fact I was simply moving the tomatoes around in the bowl in a very satisfying way, and occasionally picking one up to enjoy the roundness of it. All with a sense of Float. I even found myself popping a tomato into my mouth as my attention was not fixed with the action and so without thinking I ate the contents of my bowl. Which if my focus had been on the task I would have been concentrating more on the final destination of said tomatoes.

What I noticed most about my movement was the undulating quality of it: the way my head turned to look in the direction of the cat's gaze, as I examined the contents of my bowl, as I enjoyed the imagined sunshine on my face, and allowed my body to sway in acknowledgement of the contentment I felt. Each flexible movement following on to the next. My attention was drawn in at times, so my thoughts were allowed to wander, my emotional centre was expansive, and my centre of gravity was low. I had absolutely no desire to leave the place I was in. How glorious. My breathing was full at times, reflecting the contentment I felt, and with each big breath so my kinesphere grew. It stayed large and far reaching for quite a while afterwards, giving me a sense that I owned my space. I get the feeling that if another had tried to sit close to me on the bench, other than the cat of course, I would have been less than pleased. This was a haven of solitude.

*The Woman with the Dog*. I find it interesting that I have named the other image *The Woman and the Cat*, and the first picture *The Woman with the Dog*. This was not something I have thought about until now. There might be many reasons for this, one, that the dog and the woman are connected by the leash, or it could be the nature of cats and dogs, (I love the saying that dogs have owners and cats have staff), or indeed it might also be the implication of the pictures themselves. The cat has definitely chosen to sit near the woman, whereas we are not sure how happy the dog is to be with the woman on her journey.

In my first observations of *The Woman with the Dog*, I considered the 'where' element, the actorly quest. The where she was or where she was going are not clear from the picture. Our imaginations have their chance. Where is she going? Wherever it is, I get the impression that she is trying to do so as quickly as possible, which in terms of the Space element might suggest moving as directly as possible. The most functional use of space. There is, as I observed before, a sense of forward projection from both the woman and the dog. I am not entirely convinced that both have the same idea as to where that point of focus is. The dogs' head can be seen as looking forward to, from his perspective, the deep/left corner of the picture, or even, if I change my perspective, looking back at the woman. Either to encourage her to 'come on' or to enquire 'where next?' She looks to me to be progressing towards high/right in the picture. This gives us an interesting twist to the direction of the journey. Her body is *Direct* in it's focus and movement and the dog is too, but towards a different destination. Might this perhaps be the reason for her to be pulling the leash back to avoid the possibility that the dog will cause her to change direction, making her *Indirect*? I also considered the sense of verticality in the body as she moves forward. This causes an indirectness in and of itself as I explored it. A contra 'pull' in the body's directionality and polylinear shaping. Her kinesphere felt tight as I moved her. There is a sense of fighting the space, trying to hold it all together. The wind, that I imagine, also might have caused her to try to keep the umbrella over her head. Most of the picture has, for me, a strong desire to remain *Direct* wherever possible. As I moved her, this was with varying degrees of success.

The wearing of heels, which is suggested in the drawing of the feet, made my hips undulate quite substantially as my footsteps were small, due to the need to remain upright and in control of the dog and umbrella. I felt my attention was *scattered* as I checked around for likely diversions for the dog, that might cause it to pull me in an unwanted direction. The projection however remained forward in my inner life and was also narrow. My kinesphere was solid and quite small, as I felt the weather to be cold and hostile. My centre rose to my chest and this is where I lead from. My back being this arched didn't allow me to engage my core, and so my chest and shoulders did all the work. My emotional centre was *Direct*, my desire being to get to the end of the journey. Any *Indirectness* was totally involuntary, caused either by my shoes, the dog, the elements, or my need to keep alert. This character felt very chaotic to move. I felt no connection to the space I was occupying. I was defiantly moving through the space.

## Observations from Submissions

As was true of the last submission, the variety and imaginative input has been really interesting. I would ask if when you submit something that is may be a little abstract that you add a couple of explanatory lines, not much, but to help me see what it is you have been exploring.

There was an amazing spatial exploration in acrylics that had traced the lines and spatial tensions of both pictures which was truly striking and emotive. One contributor played with music and melody which included the searching and yearning in the Diagonals. I loved the phrase in one submission 'Space not always requiring a physical shift in location' This is absolutely how I feel with stillness, it is so full in and of itself. There was also a reference to the 'playfulness' of the picture with the Woman and the Dog. The suggestion that the viewer was 'also a part of the overlapping spaces/kinesphere of the woman and the cat' was enticing and another suggestion that 'the cat was an intruder' made me smile. As so often they are. One submission discussed the 'Invisible spatial presence' as being the focus of the work. And comparisons eloquently made between 'the closeness' of the woman and the cat, as opposed to the 'disorientating expanse' of the Figure with the dog. You note a slight change here , as one contributor suggested they thought the 'Woman' was indeed a man, so I am happy to leave this title open.

It is always interesting when our own experience comes into play. The suggestion that the Woman's focus in the drawing with the Dog was not *on* the dog but in the *distance*, came from having experienced walking a dog themselves. May be next time folk are out with their dogs, they could re-create the tensions in the body in relation to their dogs. The observation that the problem of tension was not with the dog at all but with the desire to maintain her 'uppity status' was a delicious thought and one that could invite much more exploration in the studio.

I really enjoyed the short film that one participant submitted exploring the tension between a band and the body. I am assuming that this was related to the Dog on the Leash, the shapes in space that the body made and the directional pull exerted on the body by the fixed band were quite beautiful but also telling in terms of how the body was able or not to progress on the journey.

With the next task of *Time*, please do try and isolate the element first in relation to the pictures, but then you might like to see how you can build *Time* within your exploration of *Space*. As I said at the beginning of this commentary, as we know, the elements do not exist in isolation and ultimately the melding of all of your explorations along the way will form the final submission. Thank you all, once again for the quality of submissions.