



Inter-relation of Visual and Performing Arts

(Academic Script)

Hello everyone!!!

I welcome you all to a stimulating episode that focuses on the “**Inter-relation of Visual and Performing Arts**”.

Art can be defined as a wide range of human activities and the products of those activities. While there are various different categories of art, two of the popularly known categories are the Fine Arts and the Performing Arts.

In this lesson we will first define and understand **Visual Arts** and the **Performing Arts** after which we will proceed to explore the relationship between these two categories—the similarities and the differences; the position of the artist and the place of the ‘artwork’ produced.

The highlight of this episode is the focus on **Performance Art**—a specialized form of Visual art in which the artists *perform* their work live to an audience.

This lesson is prepared by Abha Sheth, who is an Art Historian based in Vadodara, Gujarat. Her area of research has been varied; ranging from Ancient and Medieval Indian Sculpture and Architecture to Popular Art Forms and Contemporary Visual Art practices. She has a vast teaching experience at academic institutions as well as at several other non-academic teaching platforms.

Defining Visual and Performing Arts

First of all let us define Visual and Performing arts.

Visual arts can be understood as an extension of Fine arts and are a type of art that have been created to be Visually and aesthetically appealing. The



term 'Performing arts' is an umbrella concept and majorly includes theatre, music, and dance.

The Visual arts are a way of expressing feeling, emotion, opinion, or taste through varied Visual art forms which are either two-dimensional or three-dimensional like painting, printmaking, sculpture, ceramics, drawing, and architecture. However, this definition of Visual arts was considered to be very limiting, and has since expanded to incorporate film, photography, conceptual art, video, and literature.

In Visual arts artists use various materials which can be moulded or transformed to create and/or produce physical or static art-objects, which others look at and appreciate. Today, though, Visual arts do overlap with Performing arts, where a Visual art piece or an art installation may incorporate aspects of drama, poetry and dance.

The term 'Performing arts' first appeared in the English language in the year 1711. Performing arts are a form of art in which artists use their voices and/or their bodies, often in relation to other objects, to convey artistic expression.

Performing arts, thus, are ways to express opinion, emotion, feeling, or taste by means of 'performance' such as theatre, music, dance, film, and musical theatre. It also incorporates art forms such as magic and/or illusion, mime, spoken-word, puppetry, circus, recitation, and public speaking/speech.

Either individual people perform separately or they perform together, but their own body, face, and presence are required for the performance.

Artists who participate in Performing arts in front of an audience are called 'performers' including actors, musicians, singers, dancers, comedians, and magicians. Performing arts are also supported by workers in related fields, such as songwriting and stagecraft. In fact, Performing arts include several disciplines but everything requires to be performed in front of live audiences.

There are art forms which are a little more ambiguous, and not as easily classified, and there are artistic experiences which can be both Performing and Visual, for e.g., a painter filming his painting in progress is engaging in a Performing art which produces a piece of Visual art.



There is also a specialized form of fine art in which the artists *perform* their work live to an audience. This is called **Performance Art**.

Contrasting Visual Arts and Performing Arts

Visual and Performing art is a strange pair to start with. Together they cover most art forms, leaving mainly architecture and literature aside.

The main difference between Visual and Performing art is that the latter is meant to be performed and viewed at the same time, whereas a Visual artwork is created first and then viewed.

Though, a dichotomy based on ‘creation’ and ‘Performing’ is rarely used today—with the exception of classical music perhaps—let us still study the differences between the Visual and Performing arts for our present purposes:

1. **Visual art media tends to be inanimate**, for e.g., paint/ clay/ wood/ metal/ glass/ fabric/ etc., whereas, **Performing art media tends to be animate**, for e.g., actors/ players/ singers/ dancers/ etc. In a sense, a stage play involves both, Performing art, i.e. the actors, and Visual art, i.e. costumes, props, sets, stage lighting, physical aesthetics/atmosphere of the theater etc.
2. **Visual arts tend to be static; Performing arts tend to be dynamic.**
3. **Visual arts are usually either single- or dual-sensory**, i.e. sight and touch; **Performing arts are often multi-sensory**, i.e. sight; sound; occasionally smell; rarely but occasionally taste and touch.
4. **Visual arts are more representational**, i.e. allusive and symbolic; **Performing arts are more illustrative**, for e.g. demonstrating or re-enacting.
5. **Visual arts can be permanently and repeatedly experienced; Performing arts have traditionally been event-limited**—prior to recording technologies—and generally **require time to experience the unfolding performance.**



6. The **notion of context and infrastructure differs** in both Visual and performance arts.
7. **Visual art**, historically, is about the **creation of objects**—paintings, sculptures, photographs etc.—that can be sold. Since Visual art has historically been about the creation of objects for sale, there is a massive infrastructure in place to create value around objects—museums, galleries, academics, journals, etc. Artists create with an accompanying intellectual framework and put their art into the marketplace where it is contextualized by critics, academics and curators. This helps create perceived value.

The Performing arts, on the contrary, is **'Time-Based Art'** with its origins in dance and theater and is more frequently predicated on the creation of a subjective field of experience. The aesthetic challenges of integrating light, sound, Visual representation and embodied presence—sometimes even text—are undertaken not to create an 'art object' but to **create a 'shared experience'**.

So while both Visual and Performing art contexts rely on the vision of an artist, the path to the desired end result is different. The **Visual artist comes from an object-making context and approaches their work under that influence**, whether by embracing or rejecting that paradigm. **Contemporary Performing art-forms actively acknowledge and celebrate the essential ephemerality of the form.** The artwork exists only in the moment in which it is perceived, the audience has a role in the creation of the work itself; each performance and expression is unique depending on who is there to experience it. No two performance events are ever alike and that is part of the beauty of it.

8. The **practice of art-making in Visual arts versus Performing arts is reflective of the object v/s. experience framework.** **Performance**, even from the most dictatorial choreographer or theater maker, **is essentially a collaborative process.** In order to bring a performance to life one requires the collaboration of directors, writers, composers, dramaturges, actors, lighting designers, set designers, technicians, programmers, videographers, choreographers, dancers, etc.



Visual art making is less frequently like that. **Traditional Visual arts practice is that of an artist alone in the studio** or a master artist overseeing poorly paid laborers hired to fabricate objects under their direction. In fact, it is safe to suggest that Visual art's obsession with authenticity has less to do with respecting an artist's original intent and more to do with an inherited predisposition towards protecting ownership.

Despite these differences neither of the art forms is "superior" to one another. While the immediacy of the experience and the raging fire of performance art impresses us; the hidden, glowing embers of slower-burning Visual arts can elicit ageless, timeless, universal insights and offer profound metaphorical depths.

Performing arts and "Performance art"

At this juncture, let us focus upon the term "**Performance art**".

The term "Performance Art" comes as a loaded and convoluted one these days, something as confusing as it is fascinating. In its foundations, performance art refers to an artwork dependent on the presence of the artist his-self or her-self, rather than an artifact made by him or her. But there's also something outside of what conventional notions of theater or other performance imply. There is a sense of the artist's autonomy in composition and endurance in performance. The "performance" work's social critique and the difficulty to replicate the action in presence and effect are few markers of a great work of performance art.

Performance art is where an action or series of actions becomes the artwork. It is sometimes carefully planned and scripted but can also be spontaneous and random. Although it often takes place in front of an audience and may involve audience participation—or the orchestration of other participants by the artist—it can also be an action performed privately by the artist.

Performance art has origins in Futurism and Dada, but became a major phenomenon in the 1960s and 1970s and can be seen as a branch of Conceptual art.



It is important to engage with the “**Performance art**” and concentrate on the differences and similarities with the Performing arts.

There is in fact little difference between the Performance art and the Performing arts. At first glance, many would consider them to be one and the same thing; certainly the uninitiated would presume that these two terms are interchangeable.

But they are definitely not. And on reflection the similarities and the differences actively complicate and confuse the distinction. But are they part of one long continuum as some of the academics of Performance Studies seem to believe or do they only share a few similar letters? Are their differences functional, necessary, or intentional? Are the similarities entirely accidental?

What is the essential difference?

1. Performing artists usually belong to the acting, dancing and music world, the world of the conservatoires and traditional performance spaces. Performance art has its roots in the world of the art school, an extension of the Visual arts, and often takes place in galleries, found spaces, and in site specific locations.
2. A Performing arts product could be a theatre production, a musical recital, or a dance piece. A Performance art product could be chatting with the artist (as herself) in a part of an art gallery made to look like her front room.
3. Performing arts are primarily skills based whereas Performance art is primarily concept based. Yet, Performance artists can be incredibly skilled, just as they can work around conceptual stimulus.
4. In the Performing arts, the message is often presented to an audience via the performers, in Performance art, the art is often the performer themselves as much as their message.
5. The Performing artist often performs in the concert hall, opera house or theatre space; the Performance artist is often the site of their performance regardless of the environment in which they perform.



6. The Performing artist does not by necessity make something. Actor, musician and dancer are traditionally skilled interpreters of third parties' efforts. The Performance artist is often creator, performer and performance in one.
7. Like the Visual arts, Performance art demands the audience/viewer/spectator to engage. In the Performing arts, the interactivity is kept to a bare minimum.
8. Performance art is often entirely non-narrative, traditional Performing arts are narrative by nature; they tell stories. Performance artists can tell stories, but then the method by which these stories are delivered is often different too.
9. Performing arts are collaborative by nature, Performance art can be collaborative, but often revolves around an individual artist, although ensembles of Performance artists are possible too. Of course, Performing arts can revolve around one person too, but a writer can act in and stage their own material.
10. Performance artists do not usually attempt to embody something other than themselves, but some Performing artists do attempt to embody something other than themselves. Though, their training teaches and encourages the actors to be themselves—with certain limitations, restrictions and observances—nonetheless, the wish is that the audience perceives them as the 'characters'. Performance artists do not often wish the audience to perceive them as a fictional entity.

The Present of Visual and Performing Arts

Visual art is a shifting category. Sometimes it is used for fine arts only—painting, sculpture, graphic art etc. Sometimes it is used as a broader category including crafts and Visual culture.

As mentioned ahead, the term 'Performing arts' is an umbrella concept and majorly includes theatre, music, and dance.

Art as inquiry is more common within Visual art, whereas technical and interpretative skills are in focus within classical music and dance. The task of producing an original contribution to knowledge and understanding



sounds familiar to contemporary Visual artists, while articulating tacit knowledge from within an existing practice would seem more familiar to practitioners of Performing arts.

In Performing arts, 'art' often describes a sub-genre or is used as a term of quality—like art films—not for the field as a whole.

Traditionally performers—actors, musicians, dancers—have concentrated on acquiring mastery in specific conventionalised skills and sensitivity in applying them in live situations.

Traditional differences between Visual arts and Performing arts concern the division of labour—solitary work or group work; distribution—producing objects for investment; ephemeral events or repeated performances; and impact—creating a canon versus immediate audience response. However, areas of shared interest and the blurring of boundaries are many, like installation art, scenography, lighting design, video art, screen dance, audio art, site-specific practices and so on. Performance art—body art and action art—and Live Art practices form an in-between zone, which can be looked at from a Visual arts perspective or from a Performing arts approach.

Other traditional classifications—besides Visual and Performing arts—include the division into temporal and spatial arts. **Music and literature work with time, as do film, dance and theatre.** Time-based works exist within Visual art as well, but the procedures of display are founded on spatial, immobile forms with extension in space rather than time.

Another dividing line is between Visual art and applied arts, which has been strong within Visual culture, creating divisions into different academies for painting and sculpture, or architecture, industrial design, photography, ceramics, textiles etc.

In Performing arts this dichotomy is not so prominent as in some sense all Performing arts could be called applied arts since they are very audience-oriented. In music a strict dichotomy prevails between classical music and popular music, which is alive and well despite years of post-modern proclamations to the contrary.

Within Visual arts the technique based divisions into painting, sculpture, graphics, etc. have faded in importance together with modernism.



However, the worlds of music, dance, theatre and film—though overlapping in many instances—still retain their cultural institutions, legacies, practices and research traditions, as can be seen in disciplines like musicology, art history, theatre research, film studies, etc. In art universities the legacies of specific art forms are often emphasised; they are the institutional conservers of tradition. Teaching in universities is based on research and this could ideally be the case in art universities as well. Research is important to help articulate the tradition and for developing a discourse within institutions, which have developed from a conservatoire type of vocational approach. This is especially so in Performing arts, which are often ephemeral in character, and thus tend to be either overtly conservative—like *Bharatnatyam*—in order to maintain a tradition or more or less a-historical, always starting anew—like experimental theatre.

Arts 'centred on vision' can be juxtaposed with arts 'centred on sound', like music, though many works today are audio-Visual. To complicate matters, audio art or sound art is a genre within contemporary Visual art; and dance, theatre and film are all visual. Compared to this, Performing arts have traditionally been juxtaposed with creative arts, and still are regarded so—at times demanding extreme virtuosity.

There can sometimes be greater differences between forms of performing arts, like say music and film, than between Performing and Visual art.

The relationship between a film and its script is usually different from a musical score and its performance. The script is a plan for a particular film, a composition is supposed to be interpreted and played again and again. There is a difference between a painterly and a musical sensibility beyond vision and sound; the idea that a composition can be played by somebody else differs from the idea that the work is singular and signed like a painting.

Contrasting rather than combining creative and Performing arts has had its strongest impact within classical music. The composer is thought to be engaged in creative arts, whereas the musician is engaged in performing arts or 'executing' arts.

The same distinction is sometimes made in classical theatre; the playwright is the author, the creative artist, whereas the director and the actors are interpreting and performing the work.



Today this distinction is rarely emphasised. In contemporary theatre the director is usually the author, using texts or material produced by the performers in much the same ways as contemporary choreographers work with dancers. And a performance artist creates and performs her own work, with or without a written score.

Nowadays a word like 'Creative industries' probably covers most cultural activities.

From a Visual art perspective Performing arts are supposed to be time-based, embodied and 'Performing' in the sense of having a live audience. However, installations, community projects, time-based work and 'live' practices are increasingly common in contemporary art. The temporal and embodied quality of most Performing arts has stimulated debates around the ephemeral non-reproducible quality of the performance event, issues of 'liveness', and importance of the energy exchange between performer and spectator and a demand for the valorisation and study of the repertory along with the archive. An ambivalent relationship to documentation prevails, although areas like music and film have developed huge industries based on the reproducible documentation of performances.

Art and humanities have many things in common, but sometimes artists come closer to scientists than historians since they engage in experimentation, and sometimes they have more in common with philosophers than social scientists, since they question the nature of reality.

Research is a normal part of artistic work in many areas of contemporary art—as exploration, investigation, trial and error—though only rarely developed as formal inquiry. We could even consider artistic research as the latest trend in contemporary art. There is a demand for research 'from the inside' arts practices, but various art forms need time to formulate key issues and develop their own methods. Many artists are ambitious and artistic research in Performing arts can provide a place for challenging experiments. For those critically inclined research can offer a site to question some of the assumptions of the art world. For those conservatively minded, research can provide a means to articulate and document the tacit knowledge in the field.



Position of the Artist

The position of the individual artist is different in Visual arts or contemporary art and in Performing arts like theatre, dance, film and most forms of music. Generally the artist in Performing arts is subordinated to conventions and production demands. In Visual arts, the artist is more independent or self-directed, at times though, tied to demands of creating a 'brand' of their works. The so-called freedom of the artist is most effectively propagated and defended in Visual arts. In Performing arts and also Applied arts the individual artist is in principle part of the production team and dependent on the customer or the public and all the specificities of the moment.

Performance art and to some extent Live Art are exceptions, or perhaps illuminating intermediaries. They can be approached from a Visual art context and from a dance or theatre context. The position of the artist is taken from Visual arts with the legacy of important performance artworks, rather than from the entertainment industry.

Place of the Artwork

The idea of what is an artwork is different in contemporary Visual arts and Performing arts. Some Performing artists—like improvising dancers and musicians—prefer to understand their art as an ongoing practice rather than as singular artworks. Traditionally the relationship to reproduction has been a significant issue.

On the contrary, a painting or sculpture is one signed work. A photograph or print can be multiplied, a film or video can be copied—if digital, endlessly; a choreographed dance performance can be re-staged; a musical score can be reprinted; a musical performance recorded and distributed; a play can be interpreted ever anew and a performed poem can be performed again, even translated.

In Performance art—in contrast to Performing arts—the ephemeral, intangible and unique performance event has been fetishized, and reproduction and repetition resisted, though the status of individual performance artworks in the canon is often based on striking documentation. Contemporary Visual art can also be site-specific and ephemeral. Installations are often both unique and temporary, though they



too can be re-installed. In Live Art, the artwork is a more or less context dependent event.

Conclusion

In searching for **Inter-relation of Visual and Performing Arts**, this lesson diverted from a linear approach of defining, comparing and contrasting these two art forms. Instead, after providing the basic, working definitions of Visual art and Performing art, the lesson not only focused on the differences between the two; but also elaborated on the differences between “Performing arts” and “Performance Art”—a genre of Visual art.