

# William Forsythe: Choreographic Objects

## Teacher Resource Sheet

October 31, 2018—February 21, 2019



### About the Exhibition

William Forsythe (b. 1949, New York) is a choreographer with over four decades of international artistic experience. Trained in classical ballet, Forsythe's choreographic approaches have brought a contemporary sensibility to the stage.

In addition to his stage work, Forsythe has been creating instructions, installations, sculptures, and films called *Choreographic Objects* since the 1990's. [William Forsythe: Choreographic Objects](#) is the first comprehensive museum exhibition of Forsythe's *Choreographic Objects* in the United States. Included in the exhibition are a selection of participatory kinetic sculptures, videos featuring the body as a sculptural element, and architectural environments.

Many of the included works invite visitor participation, bringing choreographic fundamentals to non-dancers. Interactive works include specific instructions developed by the artist that ask the visitor to consider their own physical capabilities and limitations. Learning through trial and error is essential to the experience. Coinciding with the ICA's exhibition is Forsythe's multi-year partnership with Boston Ballet, where he will premiere "Full on Forsythe" in 2019.



↑ William Forsythe, *The Fact of Matter*, 2009. Installation view, *William Forsythe: The Fact of Matter*, Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 2015. Photo by Dominik Mentzos. Copyright William Forsythe.

↓ William Forsythe, *Towards the Diagnostic Gaze*, 2013. Feather duster, locally sourced stone, and instructions (engraved) 2 x 31 1/2 x 17 3/4 inches (5 x 80 x 45 cm). Photo by Dominik Mentzos. Copyright William Forsythe.

## Discuss

**1**  
Forsythe believes “The body is a thinking tool.”<sup>1</sup> How does your body act as a “thinking tool” during your typical daily routines? After engaging—or viewing others engage—with Forsythe’s *Choreographic Objects*, how did your body—or the bodies of others—act as “thinking tool(s)”?

**2**  
When asked about how the arts and other fields of study are connected, Forsythe said “I think many fields require curiosity...I’ve had a number of different discussions with scientists, and the role of curiosity in experimentation is very important. Every good dance is, in a sense, a well-designed experiment.”<sup>2</sup> Based on what you have seen or experienced, in what ways do curiosity and experimentation play roles in Forsythe’s *Choreographic Objects*? How have curiosity and experimentation been essential to other artists, scientists, or historical figures? What roles do curiosity and experimentation play in your life?



**3**  
In Forsythe’s *Nowhere and Everywhere at the Same Time, No. 3* (2015) visitors are invited to traverse the gallery space filled with a grid of 80 suspended pendulums with the artist’s direction to “Please enter, avoiding any contact with the pendulums.” How does the work’s title—*Nowhere and Everywhere at the Same Time*—connect with the experience of navigating through the gallery space while following the artist’s instructions? What other types of situations or experiences, real or fictional, could connect with this title?

**4**  
Forsythe says his *Choreographic Objects* “serve as surrogates for real-life interactions with the human environment: stepping off the curb, running to catch a bus, avoiding a swinging door, and so on...What I often attempt to do is to isolate phenomena that are so fully integrated into our unconscious physical selves they are invisible to us.”<sup>3</sup> After engaging—or viewing others engage—with Forsythe’s *Choreographic Objects*, what other “real-life interactions” are comparable to the physical actions used to engage with the *Choreographic Objects*? How else do artists use their artistic practice to remind their audiences to be more attentive to everyday experiences? Why might this be important to these artists?

← William Forsythe, *Nowhere and Everywhere at the Same Time, No. 3*, 2015. Installation view, *William Forsythe: The Fact of Matter*, Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 2015. Photo by Dominik Mentzos, 2015. Copyright William Forsythe.

## Visit the ICA

The ICA offers guided museum tours for preK–12 groups year-round.

Group leaders may also choose to complement their guided tour with an optional hands-on workshop in the Bank of America Art Lab.

Self-guided visits to the ICA are offered for grades 9–12. For more information about group visits to the ICA, visit [www.icaboston.org/tours](http://www.icaboston.org/tours) or email [tours@icaboston.org](mailto:tours@icaboston.org)

## We Want Your Feedback

Help inform future ICA educator resources and be entered to win an ICA prize package!

Are you a K–12 educator? Please take a brief online survey about this Teacher Resource Sheet by February 25, 2019 and be entered to win an ICA prize package.

[www.surveymonkey.com/r/ICAteachersheet](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ICAteachersheet)

## Connect

### English Language Arts

Forsythe's misunderstanding of gravity as a young child inspired the title for his video work *Antipodes I / II* (2006). Explore myths from various ancient cultures and their roots as a means for those cultures to better explain natural phenomena such as gravity.

### History & Social Studies

When explaining *Towards the Diagnostic Gaze* (2013), Forsythe says "The fact that you cannot hold the feather duster still is like a vanitas, a reminder of your unique status that you are human and you are mortal."<sup>4</sup> Study the role of vanitas, the use of symbols of death as a reminder of human mortality, in the history of art and literature.

### Math

Consider the role of mathematics in Forsythe's artistic practice, specifically spatial understanding and three-dimensional geometry, in works such as *A Volume, within which it is not Possible for Certain Classes of Actions to Arise* (2015) and *Lectures from Improvisation Technologies* (2011).

### Performing Arts

Explore Forsythe's work as a choreographer, and the connections between his stage work with professional dancers as compared with the *Choreographic Objects* which have been created for the non-dancer to experience.

### Science

Connect movement in space—as people traverse through Forsythe's architectural environments as in *The Fact of Matter* (2009)—to the study of physics.

## Read, Watch & Listen

### FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS

Beaty, Andrea. *Rosie Revere, Engineer*. Illustrated by David Roberts, Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2013. *Young Rosie learns lessons of perseverance and the importance of learning from mistakes.*

Howe, James. *Brontorina*. Illustrated by Randy Cecil, Candlewick Press, 2010. *Brontorina is determined to overcome obstacles to fulfill her dream of becoming a dancer.*

### FOR OLDER STUDENTS & EDUCATORS

Boston Ballet, William Forsythe → <https://bit.ly/2ReW8Kx>

ICA Video + Audio → [www.icaboston.org/video-audio](http://www.icaboston.org/video-audio)

Neri, Louise, and Eva Respini. *William Forsythe: Choreographic Objects*. The Institute of Contemporary Art/ Boston and Prestel Publishing / DelMonico Books, 2018. → <https://bit.ly/2O6I3g8>

The Talks, William Forsythe (January 24, 2018) → <http://the-talks.com/interview/william-forsythe/>

William Forsythe → [www.williamforsythe.com](http://www.williamforsythe.com)

William Forsythe's *Choreographic Objects* → <https://bit.ly/2CFXsSL>

<sup>1</sup> William Forsythe, in "The John Tusa Interviews," BBC Radio 3 website, February 2, 2003, <http://www.bbc.co.uk>

<sup>2</sup> "Little Lectures: William Forsythe on Connection through Curiosity," USC Gloria Kaufman School of Dance, <https://kaufman.usc.edu/9962-2/>

<sup>3</sup> Forsythe, William, and Emilio Monteideo. "Choreographic Objects: William Forsythe." *Mousse Magazine*, <http://moussomagazine.it/choreographic-objects-william-forsythe/>

<sup>4</sup> "NOW: William Forsythe: *Choreographic Objects*." YouTube, uploaded by Gagosian, 23 October 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgQYc5xJc5w>

*William Forsythe: Choreographic Objects* is sponsored by First Republic Bank and Saks Fifth Avenue.

Additional support is generously provided by Edward Berman and Kathleen McDonough and Paul and Catherine Buttenwieser.