

Judy Cole — Artist's Statement

As a dancer, movement artist, teacher and choreographer (and a designer of gardens) my practice is simple but clear: to help wake things up – myself, others, the environment.

The first way of doing this is to work with – and move beyond – habitual, unthought-through attitudes that tend to lock us into preconceptions and restrict possibilities.

One of these preconceptions is our colonising attitude which tries to *impose* a vision, ambition or ideal on a piece of art, a garden or on any other context — so that the needs of the ‘creator’ or ‘viewer/visitor’ take priority over the conditions within which they find themselves. This habit tends to prioritise our individual needs over those of other humans, and our collective human needs over those of the natural world. This invariably puts each of us at the centre of things, rather than in amongst them. In a gallery context, it tends to amplify the visitor’s sense of being a consumer, looking for what each of us can take or get, asking ‘what’s in it for me?’.

This colonising attitude has significantly contributed to divisions and divides in society and has also contributed to the climate and ecological emergency in which we find ourselves.

My work in the garden or the gallery, whether in dialogue with nature or with human creativity, helps to put me back on a more equal footing with everything/everyone around me, so that all have equal presence. Moving in a ‘conversation’ with a sculpture or artwork, I can become aware of the piece in its context and I can help others to do the same, to find their equal footing with everything around them.

The second way I try to 'wake things up' as an artist arises from my curiosity and desire to understand the other. In moving with another person or sculpture, with a painting or just moving in nature, I become informed, literally, by the listening and the 'conversation' that occurs within these environments. This 'movement conversation' may take the form of a live staging, a live work of art, with and alongside a sculpture or artwork. It is of that time and space specifically and is imbued with its own feeling, texture, atmosphere and presence. It can never be repeated.

My movement can help to give viewers the time and space to pause and receive the artwork more deeply — to find new perspectives beyond the opinions they bring with them. It can help widen their view and see (the artwork) in a more informed way — bringing more curiosity and imagination, making the viewer an informed witness, seeing other potential and possibilities, engaging with what is provoked in themselves. I may enable them to move from the typical habit of having opinions about 'how good' a piece of art is or whether they 'like it' to a more creative response.

Judy Cole, August 2021