

SOMATIC ART
AS RESPONSE TO, IN DIALOG WITH, AND AS EVOLUTION OF ABSTRACTION AND
CONCEPTUALISM IN ART

*What Is Your Body Felt Experience With The Art,
And How Does It Feel, In The Body, To Notice That?*

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April 2024
Initial Sections—Draft

1. What is Somatic? Existing Definitions.

“Of, relating to, or affecting the body.”

“Relating to the body, especially as distinct from the mind.”

“Of the body, physical, as distinguished from the mind.”

(From the Greek, *somatikos*, ‘body.’)

In American English, Somatic is an adjective originating in the late 18th century that did not become widely used until the 1960s.

2. What Is ‘Somatic Art’? Some Initial Senses:

For an artist:

“What is my body felt experience that is in, or made, this piece?”

“And how does it feel, in my body, to notice that?”

For a viewer, listener, or reader:

“What is my body felt experience in receiving this piece?”

“And how does it feel, in my body, to notice that?”

Distinct from mind and thought, distinct from heart and emotions, bodily sense: Is there something else that may compel the artist to create a piece, or something else that an artist conveys through a piece, perhaps through awareness, and openness, and noticing, rather than by inspiration or intent?

3. How Does The Artist ‘Make’ Somatic Art? – And How Does a Viewer ‘Receive’ It?

Suppose an oversimplification about how anything creative (be it visual, music, literature, etc.) is made and received:

- a. It’s created and received in the head (intentional engagement of the mind; thought); or
- b. It’s created and received in the heart (inspirational aesthetic engagement of emotions, feelings).

- c. And sometimes a bit of both.

What if there are artists who are creating not in the head or heart, but in the body? Such as a felt experience in the body, something that is not fleeting, something that can be noticed, something different than feeling and thought?

And what if there are viewers, listeners, readers who receive this way, not in the head or heart, but in the body?

It makes you wonder if there is another way to be with art—not just thoughtfully, not just aesthetically, not just emotionally, not just intangibly and indescribably—but maybe also through a bodily felt experience that maybe causes the art, manifests in the art, is receivable from the art, a felt experience sent by the artist or composer or writer that may give rise to a felt experience in the receiver, maybe of the same quality, maybe not.

Whether it be the artistic creator or the receiver of the artistic piece:

“What is your felt experience in relation to this creative work?”; and

“How does it feel, in the body, to notice that?”

4. Possible Relationships—Creators And Receivers And Their Bodily Felt Experiences—Through Art

It's beyond the scope of this initial draft, but these appear to be some of the ways to look at the possible ways that artists might create through (and of) their bodily felt experiences; and possible ways that recipients might receive the artist's felt experience—or that recipients might have their own bodily felt experiences, not necessarily the same as the artist's.

- a. Means of creation, means of engagement, means of receipt;
- b. Creator as having intent, creator as having inspiration, creator as documenting felt experience;
- c. Receiver as interpreting, receiver as feeling, receiver as noticing their own felt experience;

5. In Relation To Art Histories And Art Movements—Somatic Art As A Response, An Evolution, A Dialogue

An oversimplified look at Somatic Art in relation to art histories and art movements to date suggests that somatic art would not be a critique of any particular art movement or art history today, but rather that it would be an evolution, a response, a dialogue with movements that are primarily head or heart, and not body, including: Romanticism, Realism, Abstract Art, Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism, Conceptualism, Post-Conceptualism, Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, Modernism, Post-Modernism, and Street and Graffiti Art. (It's not really clear at this point the relationship, if any, between somatic art and protest art, activist art, or appropriation art.)

6. In Relation to Mediums, Disciplines, and Materials—Somatic Art As Amenable To Some More Than Others?

An oversimplified look at somatic art in relation to mediums, disciplines, and materials suggests that some would be more compatible than others: More likely to be compatible with, say, gestural painting, action painting, and graffiti art—applying materials onto a substrate (as to visual art); performance and plays (performance art and theatre); musical compositions and lyrics (music, song, vocal, instrumental); written compositions (literature, poetry), and similar. Perhaps somatic art might be less well expressed through photographic and digital methods and mediums.

7. In relation to Art Theories and Theories of Interpretation (Part 1)

This initial draft identifies two theorists (so far) who may have come closest to exploring things possibly similar to the bodily-felt-experience of somatic art.

John Dewey, in "Art as Experience" appears to theorize about just that, art as experience, but, so far, it seems that he's really talking about art as engaging and evoking emotion (the heart, and maybe also the head). But apparently not the body or felt experience, notwithstanding his title.

Susan Sontag, in "Against Interpretation" appears to theorize about (and advocate for) an experiential reception of art (that is, the receiving side, not the creation side)—and appears to go beyond both the cognitive and emotional reception to discuss the physical response that artistic works can give rise to in a viewer or listener or reader. Is her discussion of the physical related to what we're discussing here—bodily felt experience? It's not yet clear; stay tuned for as this draft expands. It will be interesting if Sontag was discussing the somatic, even if by other words; and it will be interesting why Sontag placed it only within the context of a receiver's interpretation, and not also an artist's act of creation.

8. Does Somatic Art Mean That The Body Itself Creates The Art?

It's beyond the scope of this first draft, but a question seems to arise: On the creative side, the artist's side, what exactly does it mean for art to be the artist's bodily felt experience?

- a. Does this mean that artists use their physical bodies as the implement to, say, put paint on canvas?
- b. Does this mean the artist uses bodily felt experience to be inspired?
- c. Does this mean the artist is just a vessel, or vehicle, to document felt experience, or perform it?
- d. All of the above?

Is it somatic art if a person puts ink on their body and paints with that? Is fingerpainting somatic art? Is it somatic art if a person puts into music their feelings, but then calls it 'somatic art'? Is it somatic art if a

person lets their bodily felt experience take over, such that the person just tries to let that felt experience pass through them, onto a canvas, or into a performance, or into a musical instrument? Can it be all of these?

9. More About Somatic Art In Relation To Other Art Movements—Is It ‘After’? Or Does It Integrate?

This section briefly wonders what somatic art might be ‘after’ in terms of substance and meaning—and it wonders if, instead, somatic art not about ‘after,’ but rather about ‘integrating,’ or complementing. For now, this section speculates not about the ‘after,’ but about the ‘integration,’ or the ‘complementing,’ as follows . . . what if there was . . .

Conceptual Somatic Art that moves beyond the purely idea-based nature of Conceptual Art to include the physical process of art-making as an integral part of the concept. Artists may create works that necessitate physical engagement or are the result of a bodily process, making the artist's physical action as significant as the idea behind it.

Post-Conceptual Somatic Art that integrates the mind-thought of Conceptual Art with a complementary focus on not the mind's wisdom, or intellectual wisdom, but rather the body's wisdom. This could lead to art that not only intellectually critiques societal norms and/or advances ideas on one level, but also, on another level, viscerally engages with and expresses these through physical embodiment and the documenting or capturing, say on canvas, sensory experiences.

Somatic Minimalism that, in contrast with Minimalism's often-seen austerity, and focus on form, is complemented by, or integrated with, introducing formal elements that engage the viewer's body more directly. This could possibly mean sculptures, installations, performance art, plays, and musical compositions that not only occupy space and time in some formal or structural way, in minimalism simplicity, but also at the same time invite bodily interaction, or bodily felt experience, or that otherwise evoke a physical response through their scale, materiality, or physical or musical or performative energy.

Post-Minimalist Somatic Art that expands on Post-Minimalism's inclusion of more personal and textured forms by explicitly engaging the body as medium—perhaps even the body as vehicle, or vessel. Artworks might involve the creation process as a performance of bodily endurance or interaction, or spontaneity, emphasizing the artist's and viewer's physical presence and energy in relation to each other. As may be seen from these works, this interaction between post-minimalism and the somatic is not as clear as some of the others discussed in this section; stay tuned for further thoughts on this.

Somatic Abstract Expressionism Art that continues past aesthetic and intuition into a new facet of Abstract Expressionism's focus on the spontaneous --- bodily felt experience in addition to, complementary to, abstract expressionism's emotional expression. This could manifest by emphasizing the physicality of the paint application process: perhaps it is that the felt experience of an artist, and the felt experience of the viewer, in the body, can be left, and picked up, through indicia of how the body itself left the paint on the canvas. Would this make it gestural painting? Action painting? It's unclear. For now, consider the interplay between traditional abstract expressionism and the bodily-felt-experience relating to the artist's fingers, hands, arms, and body engaging with the materiality of the paint and the substrate—the medium and the surface.

10. Given All This, Are There Potential Definitions Of ‘Somatic Art’—For Purposes Of Discussion and Theory?

To briefly sum up so far, the proposed notion of "somatic" art is deeply intertwined with the experience and wisdom of the body, diverging from more traditional intellectual or emotional approaches to art.

"Somatic" comes from the Greek word "sōma," meaning body, and in the context of art, it emphasizes an exploration of bodily sensations, movements, and the lived experience of being in a body.

This can manifest across various art forms, including visual art, performance, dance, music, and literature, each medium offering unique avenues for exploring somatic themes.

Here are five possible working definitions of Somatic Art, each focused on a core aspect of it:

Embodied Experience: Somatic art prioritizes the physical sensations and experiences of the body. It's not representing the body in art, but rather about engaging the viewer's or performer's body in a way that stimulates a deep, visceral response beyond the mind, beyond the heart, in a body-felt-experience.

Non-Verbal Expression: Somatic art transcends language, expressing experiences that words cannot fully capture (but that we have to put words to, in order to communicate them or, even, to self-understand them). It communicates through the language of body-sense, body movement, and spatial engagement, tapping into the intuitive understanding we have of our bodies in relation to, arguably, not just space and material (making a painting) but also time (performing a performative work, or a play, or spoken word poetry, or playing a piece of music, or singing).

Mind-Body Connection: While not disregarding the mind or the heart entirely, somatic art explores the interconnectedness of mind and body, and the heart and the body, highlighting how our physical states—and an ability to notice our physical states, past thoughts and feelings—influence our mental states, our emotions—and how our mind and heart can mask or make structures that hide or blur our physical states, and what they are communicating to us, if we listen. Perhaps this means that somatic art can challenge traditional views in the West (and other cultures) regarding dualistic thinking that separates the physical body from the psychological, the psyche, and maybe even things that our psyches and egos might construct, like labels, identities, and similar.

Presence and Awareness: It could also be said that somatic art involves a heightened state of presence and awareness, both in the creation and reception of art. For artists, it means being fully present and awake with the material and physical act of creation; for viewers or participants, it means engaging with art in a way that brings them into a more conscious relationship with their own bodies, or, as described in this paper, able to notice their body-felt-experience when interacting with a creative piece, be it visual art or music or writing.

11. Who Might Be Making Somatic Art—Practitioners of Somatic Art, Even If Not Labeled As Such?

If we take it that the notion of "somatic" in the context of art refers to a focus on the body and its sensory experiences, rather than the intellectual (head) or emotional or aesthetic (heart) dimensions traditionally emphasized in many forms of art across cultures in times, then maybe it follows that somatic art involves an artist's possibly unusually acute awareness of their bodily physical sensations—what their body is

telling them—what their body-felt-experience is—in the moment of creation, or the moments of execution, or both.

And maybe this ‘embodied’ experience still speaks to the thought-mind, and the feeling-emotional-aesthetic heart, but from a different source—from the core of the body, consistent with the teachings of spiritual traditions across cultures and times.

If this is so—and we are just considering it for the moment—then maybe it’s fair to say that this approach has, from time to time, already been heard, or seen, across various art forms, including visual art, dance, performance art, and even certain practices in music and literature.

Here are just a few examples showing up in my research so far (as of April 2024). For your consideration as to all this:

Yves Klein: Particularly with his "Anthropometries" series, he used the human body as a paintbrush, engaging directly with the physicality of the body to create artwork. This process emphasized the body's role in the artistic process, moving beyond traditional painting techniques. Query whether this speaks to body-as-implement, which may be different than body-as-vessel-or-vehicle for body-felt-experience. A body being used as a paint brush or paint knife might not be somatic art. Stay tuned for more thoughts on that.

Marina Abramović: Her performance pieces often explore the limits of the body and the potential for transcending physical and mental barriers. Abramović's work, such as "The Artist Is Present," engages with somatic themes by focusing on presence, endurance, and the physicality of space and time.

Anna Halprin: A pioneer in the field of dance and healing, Halprin's work emphasizes the body's capacity for expression and healing. Through movement, she explores the connection between emotional and physical health, demonstrating the somatic principles of art as a tool for personal and collective healing processes.

Charlotte Moorman: Known for her avant-garde cello performances, Moorman often incorporated her body into her work in unconventional ways, challenging classical music's norms and highlighting the somatic connection between musician and instrument.

Merle Ukeles: In her "Maintenance Art" projects, Ukeles transforms everyday activities like cleaning and caregiving into performance art, highlighting the physical labor and bodily engagement inherent in these tasks, thereby elevating the somatic experience of mundane routines to the level of art.

Ana Mendieta - Used her body directly in nature to create "earth-body" sculptures, emphasizing a primal connection between the human form and the earth.

Matthew Barney - In his "Cremaster Cycle," Barney explores creation and bodily processes through visually striking, physically demanding performances.

Carolee Schneemann - Known for her exploration of the body, sexuality, and gender, her work often involves the physical participation of her own body.

Meredith Monk - An American composer, performer, and singer, Monk uses her voice and body to create new vocal techniques that transcend traditional singing, emphasizing the somatic experience of sound.

John Cage - Cage's experimental approach to music, including his prepared piano pieces, often involves a deep engagement with the physicality of musical instruments.

Alvin Lucier - His work "I Am Sitting in a Room" explores the physical properties of sound and its interaction with environment, emphasizing a bodily experience of listening.

Laurie Anderson - Known for her multimedia performances, Anderson integrates technology to explore voice and sound, focusing on how they physically affect both performer and audience.

James Joyce - Though not a somatic artist in the strict sense, Joyce's stream-of-consciousness technique in works like "Ulysses" captures the flow of bodily sensations and internal thoughts in a way that resonates with somatic principles.

E.E. Cummings - His poetry often plays with the visual layout of words on the page, creating a physical experience for the reader that complements the textual meaning.

Pina Bausch - A choreographer whose work in dance theater deeply explores emotional and physical experiences, blending movement, sound, and stage design to create immersive somatic experiences.

Bill T. Jones - A dancer and choreographer who incorporates the themes of life, death, and the human condition, focusing on the body as a principal medium of expression.

Steve Paxton - Known for developing the dance form "Contact Improvisation," which emphasizes a kinetic and physical dialogue between dancers, exploring gravity, momentum, and the physical sensations of touch and movement.

Mary Oliver - Her poetry frequently celebrates the physical world and the bodily experience of nature, emphasizing a deep, somatic engagement with the environment.

Sylvia Plath - Plath's vivid, sensory-laden poetry often delves into the physicality of emotions and the embodied experience of the self.

Walt Whitman - His expansive, celebratory verse in "Leaves of Grass" revels in the bodily existence and the sensual experience of life, resonating with somatic themes.

Antony Gormley - A sculptor whose work with the human form explores the relationship between body and space, often inviting viewers to engage physically with his installations.

Olafur Eliasson - Creates large-scale installations that frequently involve sensory experiences, such as temperature, light, and moisture, emphasizing the viewer's physical and emotional engagement with the work.

Anish Kapoor - Kapoor's sculptural works often engage both conceptual themes and the physical, sensory experience of the viewer.

Cornelia Parker - Parker's installations and sculptures create poetic narratives from conceptual processes, embodying a blend of idea and experience.

Do Ho Suh - Suh's fabric sculptures and installations explore identity, memory, and space in ways that are deeply conceptual yet profoundly experiential.

Janine Antoni - Antoni's work in performance and sculpture deeply integrates concept with physical engagement, often using her body as part of her artistic process.

Ernesto Neto - His installations invite physical interaction, emphasizing tactile experiences and the sensory qualities of materials, aligning with Neo-Sensory Constructivism.

Sarah Sze - Sze's intricate installations balance the minimalist aesthetic with a complex, sensory engagement with space and materials.

Jessica Stockholder - Stockholder combines vibrant color and diverse materials in installations that break from Minimalism's austerity, offering rich sensory experiences.

Tara Donovan - Her large-scale installations transform everyday materials into sensory landscapes, encouraging viewers to engage with texture and form in new ways.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer - Lozano-Hemmer's interactive installations use technology to create sensory environments that respond to the participants' movements and sounds.

Mark Bradford - Bradford's textured, multi-layered works incorporate elements of abstraction and materiality, reflecting a deep emotional and physical engagement.

Gerhard Richter - Though known for a wide range of styles, Richter's abstract works can arguably be seen as a bridge between emotional gestural painting and a more structured, though still deeply felt, approach.

Agnes Denes - With her iconic work, "Wheatfield - A Confrontation," Denes transformed a Manhattan landfill into a two-acre wheat field, marrying environmental activism with art, and can be seen as a precursor to Sustainable Integration Art.

Andy Goldsworthy - Goldsworthy's site-specific installations using natural materials directly engage with the environment, emphasizing sustainability and the transient beauty of nature.

Maya Lin - Known for her memorials and environmental artworks, Lin integrates landscapes and built environments in ways that provoke not just thought but arguably a body-response-due-to-scale about the natural world and human impact on it.

Here's an expanded discussion of a few of these creative practitioners that especially caught my eye during my research to date, with a bit of extra analysis:

Music Artists

Meredith Monk

How and Why: Meredith Monk uses her voice and body as instruments to explore new dimensions of vocal sound and movement. Her compositions often bypass traditional language, instead employing a range of vocalizations that evoke a primal connection to sound, making her work a profound exploration of the somatic potential of music.

Somatic Musical Artwork: Pieces like "Dolmen Music" exemplify somatic art through their use of the human voice to create a physical experience of sound, engaging listeners in a way that transcends intellectual understanding and speaks directly to the body.

Steve Reich

How and Why: Reich's minimalist music, with its emphasis on phasing, repetition, and subtle variations, invites listeners into a deep, meditative engagement with sound. This repetitive, textured approach creates a somatic experience, as the subtle shifts and patterns of his compositions affect listeners on a bodily, resonant level.

Somatic Musical Artwork: Works such as "Music for 18 Musicians" exemplify how Reich's minimalist approach can induce a physical response in the listener, as the interlocking patterns and rhythms engage the body's own rhythms in a deeply immersive listening experience.

Literary Artists

James Joyce

How and Why: In "Ulysses," Joyce's stream-of-consciousness technique captures the flow of thoughts and sensations in a way that resonates with somatic principles. The text engages readers not just intellectually but also viscerally, as it mimics the nonlinear, sensory way in which we experience the world through our bodies.

Somatic Literary Artwork: "Ulysses" can be seen as a somatic work in literature, as it invites readers to navigate the physical city of Dublin through its characters' movements and sensory experiences, blending the mental, physical, and emotional in a rich tapestry of bodily existence.

Toni Morrison

How and Why: Morrison's novels are rich in sensory detail and emotional depth, grounding readers in the physical and spiritual experiences of her characters. Her use of language evokes a palpable sense of place and body, making the act of reading a somatic experience.

Somatic Literary Artwork: "Beloved" is exemplary of Morrison's somatic approach, as it delves into the haunting physical and emotional legacies of slavery, embodied in the characters' experiences and the very atmosphere of the novel's setting.

These artists and authors engage with the somatic in ways that transcend the conventional boundaries of their respective mediums, inviting audiences and readers into deep, embodied experiences that challenge and enrich our understanding of art, music, and literature.

Visual and Performance Artists --- possibly somatic art practitioners, possibly not; more research pending:

Bill Viola - Viola's video and sound installations often explore fundamental human experiences such as birth, death, and the passage of time, inviting deep, somatic contemplation.

Bruce Nauman - His exploration of body, space, language, and sound in various media challenges viewers to become more aware of their physical and psychological experiences.

Tania Bruguera - A performance artist whose politically charged works often require physical participation from the audience, prompting a direct engagement with the themes of power and control.

Rebecca Horn - Horn creates body extensions and installation art that explore the intersection of the human body with the mechanical, extending and transforming the body's capabilities and sensations.

Trisha Brown - A pioneering figure in postmodern dance, Brown's choreography emphasizes natural movement and improvisation, engaging the somatic understanding of both performers and viewers.

Lygia Clark - Clark's participatory sculptures, called "Bichos," and her therapeutic "Sensorial Gloves" invite tactile interaction, dissolving the boundaries between art object, artist, and audience in a shared somatic experience.

Francis Alÿs - His performative walks, often involving simple but symbolically loaded actions in public spaces, engage the body in motion to comment on social and political realities.

Doris Salcedo - Salcedo's installations and sculptures embody somatic responses to trauma, memory, and loss, often invoking a physical presence or absence within the body of the viewer.

Chris Burden - Known for his early works of endurance performance art, Burden explored the limits of his body and the potential for art to physically and emotionally engage the audience.

Vito Acconci - Acconci's performances often involved intense physical ordeals or interactions with the audience, exploring the body's capabilities and the relationship between personal and public space.
Heather Cassils - Cassils uses their body as a sculptural medium in performances that address themes of resistance, power, and the history of violence against LGBTQ+ bodies.

Carsten Höller - Höller's installations are immersive environments that often provoke physical reactions from viewers, engaging their senses and perceptions in unconventional ways.

Mariko Mori - Mori's works incorporate digital media to explore transcendent experiences, often blurring the boundaries between the human body, technology, and spirituality.

Matthew Barney - Through his drawing restraint series and the Cremaster Cycle, Barney explores the body in various states of transformation, engaging with themes of biology, mythology, and the limits of physicality.

Spencer Tunick - Known for his large-scale nude installations, Tunick's work gathers hundreds or thousands of participants to create compositions that explore the human body in relation to space and landscape.

Nick Cave - Cave's "Soundsuits" are wearable fabric sculptures that camouflage the body, creating a second skin that hides race, gender, and class, to be experienced both visually and through movement.

Marina Rosenfeld - A sound artist and composer known for her large-scale performances that often involve orchestras or choirs in public spaces, challenging traditional boundaries between performers and audiences.

Sophie Calle - Calle's works blend photography, narrative, and performance, often involving her own life as a subject to explore personal and interpersonal dynamics.

Oleg Kulik - Kulik's performance art, often involving his transformation into an animal state, directly confronts viewers with primal, bodily behaviors, challenging societal norms.

Janet Cardiff - Known for her audio walks, Cardiff's work creates immersive, physical experiences that engage the listener's body and senses as they move through space, blending reality with fiction.

Ana Prvački - Prvački uses performance and video to explore etiquette and daily rituals, focusing on subtle body language and movements to highlight interpersonal connections and disconnections.

James Turrell - An artist who works with light and space, Turrell's installations are experiential, requiring the viewer's bodily presence and creating profound sensory and perceptual experiences.

Gabriel Orozco - Orozco's conceptual and installation work often encourages physical engagement or reflects on the everyday, drawing attention to the unnoticed details of our physical environment.

Eija-Liisa Ahtila - Ahtila's video installations create immersive narratives that explore human psychology, emphasizing the physical and emotional experiences of her subjects and viewers alike.

Allora & Calzadilla - This collaborative duo creates performance-based work that often involves physical challenges or tasks, exploring the relationship between bodies, objects, and the environment.

Jennifer Rubell - Rubell creates interactive food-based installations that engage participants in communal meals or actions, directly involving the body and senses in a shared experience.

Marie Cool Fabio Balducci - Through simple, repetitive actions with everyday objects, their performance work focuses on the body in space, emphasizing the physicality of minimal gestures and the tension between movement and stillness.

Ragnar Kjartansson - Kjartansson's endurance performances and video installations often involve repetition and music, creating emotionally resonant experiences that explore the physicality of performance.

Shaun Gladwell - Gladwell's video works often depict bodies in motion within landscapes, focusing on the physicality of skateboarding, BMX biking, and other forms of movement.

Pipilotti Rist - Rist's video installations are immersive environments that envelop the viewer in vivid, dreamlike scenes, engaging the body and senses in a deeply personal exploration of female identity and sexuality.

Laurie Simmons - Simmons uses photography and film to explore archetypal gender roles, creating staged environments that invite viewers to project themselves into the scenes, engaging with the work on a bodily and emotional level.

Tino Sehgal - Sehgal's constructed situations involve interactions between performers and visitors, creating ephemeral experiences that exist only in the moment and in the memory of the participants, emphasizing the physical and social dynamics of engagement.

Ann Hamilton - Hamilton creates large-scale multimedia installations that often require physical interaction, focusing on the tactile and the sensory to explore memory, history, and the experience of time.

Joan Jonas - An early pioneer of video and performance art, Jonas' work explores the body in relation to landscape, mythology, and technology, often incorporating live performance with video and drawing.

Mona Hatoum - Hatoum's work in sculpture, video, and installation often deals with themes of home, displacement, and the body, creating visceral experiences that provoke viewers to consider their own physicality and vulnerability.

Zhang Huan - Known for his performance art that tests physical limits, Zhang's work often addresses themes of spirituality, politics, and cultural identity through the engagement of his own body.

Bruce Nauman (also discussed above) - Nauman's exploration of the body, space, and language through a variety of media invites viewers to become acutely aware of their own physical presence and psychological state in relation to his work.

These artists exemplify a wide range of approaches to engaging the body and the senses within the context of visual and performance art. Their work underscores the importance of somatic experiences in contemporary art practice, offering viewers and participants opportunities for physical and emotional connection through art.

12. Can The Somatic And the Intellectual And Heart-Emotional-Aesthetic Be Brought Together?

Suppose for a moment a visual artist who spends days or weeks or months, or even a year or more, both thinking and feeling about something, sometimes with intention, sometimes subconsciously, and then suddenly, in seconds, or minutes, on a giant canvas, say ten feet tall by five feet wide, using fast mediums, like oil sticks and charcoals, scrawls or scribbles with raw energy and various speeds and pressures both comprehensible and free-flowing texts, overlapping and overlaying in dozens of layers, such that it is a physical act, a performative act of creating a visual piece that is giant, and it comes out of the artist's body, through arm movements, hands, blisters, sweat, partly in inspiration, partly in intellectual culmination, and partly in some overwhelming body-felt-experience, coming through the artist, in some ways making the artist the vehicle, the vessel, as the body-felt-experience comes through the body, past the heart, past the mind, passing through them, then out through the arm, as the body moves to keep up as it comes out across the giant canvas ... would this be an example of somatic art, or some hybrid?

Here's what the research so far would suggest:

Such an artist would arguably embody one or more things that seems to be the essence of somatic art, primarily as seen through their particular process and the physicality of their artistic creation.

The hypothetical described approach—spending extended periods in contemplation at various levels of active consciousness and also subconsciousness, both feeling and thinking, and apparently even body-felt-experience-sensing, and then rapidly executing a large-scale work in a manner that's both physical and performative—this would seem to capture, reflect, and transmit onto a canvas a deep integration of mental, emotional, and bodily processes—thought, heart, aesthetic, emotional, feeling—and body-feeling, or body-sensing.

If we take the hypothetical described approach as a given, the method seems to fit with somatic principles, including by emphasizing the artist's bodily engagement and the physical act of creation as central elements of the artwork—just as central as the emotional and intellectual components. Arguably, there's evidence of some level of fusion taking place.

How It Fits with Somatic Art:

Embodied Creation: The artist's process of internalizing thoughts and emotions over time and then expressing them physically on a large canvas reflects a direct transfer of somatic experience into visual form. The act of scrawling text in a performative manner underscores the embodied nature of the artwork, where the creation process itself is as significant as the final piece.

Performative Process: The rapid, intense act of creating the artwork mirrors somatic and performance art's emphasis on the body's role in artistic expression. This performative aspect, where the creation is an energetic and physical outpouring, underscores the connection between the artist's internal state and the physical act of making art.

Query whether this is true of an artist who might create like this: The described artist's approach is inherently somatic, emphasizing the integral role of the body and physical sensation—felt experience in the body—in the creation and experience of, in this case, visual somatic art.

13. What Are Some Of The Shortcomings Of Considering Certain Art Practices as Creating Somatic Art?

So far, the research indicates that the absence of a formally recognized "somatic art" movement (or genre, or school, etc.) can be attributed to several factors, reflecting both the nature of contemporary art movements and the specific characteristics of somatic practices. Here are ten possible reasons for this absence, along with speculation on the future emergence of such a movement:

1. Broad Interdisciplinary Application

Somatic practices encompass a wide range of disciplines, including dance, therapy, and performance art. This breadth makes it challenging to unify these practices under a single art movement banner.

2. Focus on Experience Over Form

Somatic art prioritizes bodily experience and awareness over aesthetic form or conceptual content. This emphasis on the ephemeral and personal experience resists the traditional categorization of art movements, which often focus on stylistic or thematic cohesion.

3. Lack of Formal Recognition

Art movements are often recognized and named in retrospect, or through the collective action of a group of artists. The diverse and individualized nature of somatic practices makes it less likely for practitioners to form a cohesive group that seeks formal recognition.

4. Evolving Definition of Art

The definition of what constitutes "art" is continually evolving. Practices that focus on the somatic experience might not have been considered art in traditional senses but are increasingly recognized as part of the contemporary art world.

5. Integration Rather Than Segregation

Somatic principles are often integrated into other art forms and movements rather than being segregated into their own category. This integration demonstrates the influence of somatic ideas across disciplines without necessitating a separate movement.

6. The Rise of Performance Art

Performance art, which often incorporates somatic elements, has become a significant category within contemporary art. The success and recognition of performance art might reduce the need for a separate somatic art movement.

7. Changing Art World Dynamics

The contemporary art world is characterized by fluidity and the blurring of boundaries between different disciplines and practices. This dynamic makes the emergence of new, clearly defined movements less common than in the past.

8. Digital and Technological Influence

The increasing influence of digital technology and virtual experiences in art may overshadow practices focused on the physical, bodily experience, making it harder for a purely somatic art movement to emerge.

9. Individualized Practices

Somatic art is often deeply personal, rooted in the individual's bodily experience. This focus on personal experience can make it challenging to create the collective identity necessary for an art movement.

10. Cultural and Historical Specificity

The recognition and naming of art movements are often influenced by cultural, historical, and geographic factors. The global and diverse nature of somatic practices may defy easy categorization within specific cultural or historical narratives.

14. Sidebar: Somatic Art In Relation to Material, Process, Space, and Presence

Somatic Art seems plausibly to be particularly in intersection with the following: The artist's exploration of materials, tactile engagement, process over product, and non-verbal expression in art—such as sound, space, presence, and even silence—core aspects of what could be considered elements of, or attributes of, somatic art.

Taking this as a given for a moment, these appear to have been pivotal to several influential artists across different movements and periods.

1. Tactility and Materiality

Anni Albers: Known for her pioneering work in textile art, Albers explored the tactile and material properties of threads and fabrics, integrating them as fundamental components of modern art and design.

Richard Serra: An American artist known for his large-scale steel sculptures, Serra's work engages deeply with the materiality of metal, focusing on its texture, weight, and the way it occupies space.

2. Space and Presence

Marina Abramović: Through her performance art, Abramović uses her body to explore the relationship between performer and audience, the limits of the body, and the possibilities of the mind, emphasizing physical presence and space.

Yayoi Kusama: Kusama's immersive installations and expansive "Infinity Rooms" play with the concept of space and presence, inviting the viewer to experience a sense of infinitude and personal disorientation.

3. Process Over Product

Jackson Pollock: Famous for his drip paintings, Pollock's emphasis was on the act of painting itself. His process—allowing paint to drip and splatter on the canvas—became as important as the finished artwork, if not more so.

Eva Hesse: Hesse's work with materials like latex, fiberglass, and plastic was highly experimental, focusing on the process of creation and the ephemeral nature of her chosen media.

4. Non-verbal Expression

Kazuo Shiraga: A member of the Gutai group, Shiraga was known for using his body to paint, often working with his feet, which emphasized the physical action and non-verbal expression over traditional painting techniques.

Lygia Clark: Brazilian artist Clark explored the therapeutic potential of art through her interactive pieces, engaging viewers in sensorial experiences that communicate beyond language.

Update April 2024: Here are some additional artists relevant to this part of the research:

1. Tactility and Materiality

Louise Bourgeois: Renowned for her intricate sculptures and installations, Bourgeois used a variety of materials, from fabric to metal and wood, to explore themes of memory, trauma, and repair, often invoking deep tactile engagement.

Magdalena Abakanowicz: Known for her large-scale, tactile works using textiles and fibers, Abakanowicz's work often reflected on the human condition, war, and collective memory, emphasizing the materiality and texture of her chosen mediums.

2. Process Over Product

Cy Twombly: Twombly's paintings and drawings, characterized by scribbles, graffiti-like marks, and abstract forms, emphasize the physical act of making art. His work foregrounds the process and gesture over the final appearance.

Rebecca Horn: Horn's body extensions and performance pieces explore the extension of the human body into space. Her work often documents the process of interaction between the body and her kinetic sculptures, emphasizing the experience over the object.

3. Non-verbal Expression

Carolee Schneemann: A pioneering figure in performance art, Schneemann's work explored the body, sexuality, and gender politics through non-verbal expressions, using her own body as a primary medium.

Francis Alÿs: Alÿs uses performative walks and public interventions as a form of non-verbal expression, engaging with social and political narratives through subtle, often poetic actions that communicate beyond words.

15. Initial Conclusions And Questions For Further Research and Thought

[pending April or May 2024 . . . stay tuned . . .]