

DEVALS

Biography

I experimented with movement events in relation to objects. I then altered and extended these events in time and space, connecting them in a specific sequence until a kind of logic emerged which indicated a necessary design for the dance.

— Lucinda Childs¹

Lucinda Childs is one of the most influential figures in American postmodern dance. Since the early 1960s, she has developed a singular body of work that has profoundly transformed the relationship between movement, space, time and musical composition. Working across choreography, performance, drawing, film, opera and theatre, she has established an artistic language distinguished by formal rigour, spatial clarity and an exacting attention to the structures through which movement is organized and perceived. Her practice, which emerged from the experimental milieu of downtown New York, has evolved continuously over more than six decades.

Childs began her artistic training with piano before studying dance with Hanya Holm, Helen Tamiris and Mia Slavenska. While attending Sarah Lawrence College, where she initially pursued an interest in theatre, she encountered choreographer Bessie Schönberg, Merce Cunningham and Judith Dunn. Through Dunn, she was introduced to the composition classes of Robert Dunn, whose approach encouraged dancers to reconsider choreography through structures, processes and formal decisions rather than inherited principles of expression and virtuosity. These encounters led her into the orbit of the Judson Dance Theater, the experimental collective that emerged in the early 1960s around Judson Memorial Church in Manhattan. Alongside artists including Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown and Steve Paxton, Childs became part of a generation that fundamentally challenged the conventions of modern dance.



Fig. 1 Lucinda Childs. Portrait by George Etheredge for The New York Times, 2018
Courtesy Lucinda Childs

¹ Childs, Lucinda. "Lucinda Childs: a portfolio." *Artforum* 11 (1973): 50-56.

Her early work was marked by a radical questioning of what could constitute dance. Between 1962 and 1966, she created thirteen pieces that departed from established choreographic vocabularies and theatrical hierarchies. Rather than relying on narrative, psychological characterization or expressive gesture, she explored the potential of simple actions and unexpected materials, treating the body as a site of investigation. *Pastime* (1963), *Carnation* (1964) and *Museum Piece* (1965) established a foundational principle of her practice: movement can become the subject of a work through its duration, organization and relation to the space in which it occurs.

After a period away from choreography, during which she completed graduate studies in education and worked as a schoolteacher, Childs gradually returned to dance with a renewed understanding of movement and physical discipline. Her subsequent engagement with the Alexander Technique accompanied a decisive change in her artistic direction. By the early 1970s, she had begun to describe her work in terms of minimalism, developing a choreographic language in which walking, running, changes of direction and variations in speed became the key elements of composition. Repetition, displacement and permutation became structural tools through which a limited 'vocabulary' could generate an extensive range of configurations.²

In 1973, Childs founded her own dance company, establishing an independent context for the development and presentation of this research. Her choreographies of the period treat the stage as a field of precise spatial relationships, within which dancers follow trajectories that can be understood almost as geometric propositions. Diagonals, circles, crossings and changes of direction organize the movement, while repetition produces subtle variations in rhythm and perception.



Fig. 2 Lucinda Childs, *Calico Mingling*, 1973

Courtesy Lucinda Childs, Babette Mangolte. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery 1602, New York.

² Lucinda Childs refused to consider that her works had a particular 'vocabulary' per se as each composition brought a different set of parameters generating their own structures.

Radial Courses (1976) is a defining work of this period. Constructed without music, it organizes continuous movement through circular trajectories and recurring patterns, allowing the dancers' paths to establish the work's internal rhythm. Through the accumulation and recombination of relatively simple actions, Childs creates a composition in which spatial relationships become the principal subject of attention.

The same year, Childs collaborated with Robert Wilson and Philip Glass on *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), a landmark of experimental opera that brought together choreography, music, theatre and visual composition on an unprecedented scale. Her participation in the production expanded the context of her work, demonstrating how her precise movement vocabulary could operate within a larger interdisciplinary structure. The collaboration also initiated a sustained artistic dialogue with Glass, whose repetitive musical processes offered a particularly compelling counterpart to her own investigations of duration, pattern and variation.

This relationship reached a defining point with *Dance* (1979), one of Childs's most celebrated works. Combining her choreography with a score by Glass and a film by Sol LeWitt, the piece establishes a complex relationship between live performance and its recorded image. Projected onto suspended screens, LeWitt's film reproduces the choreography from different perspectives, creating an additional visual plane that overlaps with the dancers performing on stage. The filmed and live movements appear simultaneously, producing subtle displacements between image, body and time. Rather than simply documenting the choreography, the film becomes an active component of the work, transforming the spectator's perception of movement and complicating the relationship between an event and its representation.

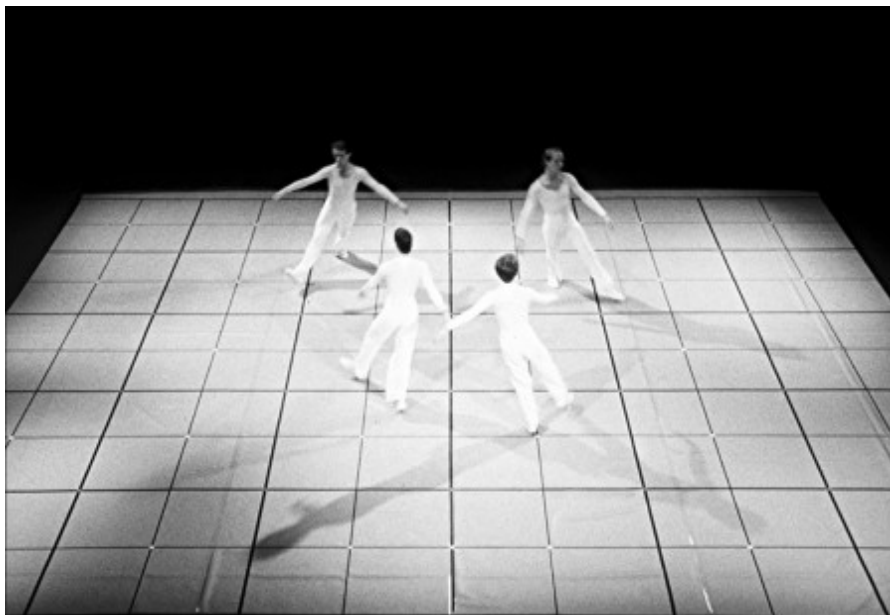


Fig. 3 *Dance* by Lucinda Childs, Philip Glass and Sol LeWitt, Brooklyn Academy of Music in December 1979

Courtesy Brooklyn Academy of Music

The collaboration with LeWitt is particularly significant within Childs's broader artistic practice. Both artists share an interest in systematic procedures, geometric organization and the generative potential of a restricted set of formal elements. Yet *Dance* is not merely an illustration of minimalism through movement. Its multiple visual layers produce a perceptual complexity that exceeds the apparent austerity of its underlying structure. Glass's music reinforces the continuity of the movement while introducing its own patterns of repetition and rhythmic transformation. Choreography, sound and image remain distinct, yet interdependent, creating a composition in which the spectator continually negotiates different temporal and spatial registers.

Childs's interest in collaboration extends beyond these landmark works. Her engagement with composers and visual artists has consistently expanded the possibilities of choreography without dissolving the specificity of her own language. In *Available Light* (1983), created with architect Frank Gehry and composer John Adams, the relationship between movement, architecture and music becomes a further site of investigation. Throughout her career, she has worked with a broad range of composers, including Henryk Górecki, François-Bernard Mâche and others, adapting her choreographic methods to different musical structures while maintaining a distinctive approach to spatial composition.

Drawing constitutes another essential dimension of Childs's practice. Throughout the development of her choreographies, she has produced graphic scores that map the movement of dancers through space, recording trajectories, directions and relationships between performers. These drawings offer a two-dimensional overview of structures that unfold in time, translating the complexity of performance into a system of graphic notation. As Childs has explained, the drawings develop progressively during rehearsals, allowing her to observe the dancers' relationships to the music, to the stage and to one another. They function both as practical instruments of composition and as analytical records of the choreographic process.



Fig. 3 *Available Light* by Lucinda Childs, John Adams and Frank Gehry, 2015
Courtesy Lucinda Childs, John Adams and Frank Gehry, Photo Craig T. Mathew

Presented and preserved independently of the performances they document, these scores reveal the graphic intelligence underlying her work. They make visible the principles through which movement is organized, while also demonstrating the limits and possibilities of translating a temporal experience into a spatial representation. Their donation to the Centre national de la danse in 2016 further established their significance as part of her artistic legacy. Rather than being secondary documents, they provide insight into the procedures through which Childs constructs, revises and transmits her choreographies.

From the 1990s onward, Childs increasingly explored a more elaborate movement vocabulary, incorporating gestures and phrases associated with classical dance while retaining the structural precision that had defined her earlier work. Pieces such as *Variété de variété* (2000) and *Description (of a description)* (2000) demonstrate a renewed interest in technical complexity and physical nuance. Her choreographies for Mikhail Baryshnikov, including *Largo* (2001) and *Opus One* (2003), further reveal her capacity to engage with the virtuosity of individual performers without abandoning her attention to form, rhythm and spatial organization. This evolution does not represent a departure from minimalism so much as an expansion of its possibilities: a more intricate movement vocabulary becomes subject to the same principles of composition, repetition and formal control.

Childs has also developed an extensive practice in opera and large-scale theatrical production, creating choreography for major ballet companies and opera houses internationally. Her work includes productions of *Daphnis et Chloé* (2003), *Parsifal* (2004), *Le Mandarin merveilleux* (2004), *Le Rossignol* (2007) and *Œdipus Rex* (2007). These projects place her choreographic language in dialogue with established theatrical and musical repertoires, requiring her to negotiate the narrative, dramatic and architectural dimensions of the stage. Across these contexts, she has demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt her methods to different artistic frameworks while preserving the clarity of her spatial thinking.

Her subsequent works continue to investigate the relationship between movement, music and visual perception. *Kilar* (2013), created for the Dutch company Introdans to music by Wojciech Kilar, explores the interplay of bodies, shadows and light through a sharply defined visual language. Such works reveal the continuing evolution of Childs's practice: although the vocabulary and theatrical contexts may change, the underlying attention to composition remains constant. Movement is conceived not as an isolated gesture but as part of a larger configuration in which bodies, sounds, images and architectural space interact.

Her achievements have been recognized internationally. She was named an Officer of France's Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 1996 and subsequently received the rank of Commandeur. In 2017, she was awarded the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale and the Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award. She has also been inducted into the Hall of Fame of the National Museum of Dance in Saratoga Springs, New York, received an honorary doctorate from Université Côte d'Azur in 2021, and was honored with the Dance Magazine Award in 2022.

Childs continues to create, perform and revisit her repertory internationally. Projects such as *Lucinda Childs x 100* (2023), developed with the Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse de Paris, and *Four New Works* (2024) bring new choreography into dialogue with earlier material. In 2026, she began a five-year appointment as Resident Choreographer of Gibney Company, encompassing new creation, repertory, education and the transmission of her work to new generations of dancers. Her continuing engagement with Glass's music, including the project *Another Look*, extends an artistic conversation that began with *Einstein on the Beach* half a century earlier.