



Tension  
+  
Equilibrium  
=  
**Mummenschanz**  
The Musicians of Silence



Friday, November 30, 2015

Zellerbach Hall, University of California Berkeley

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*The Cal Performances Mummenschanz Engagement Guide* was written, edited and designed by Rica Anderson, Jeff Raz, Julie Douglas and Sabrina Klein.

# How to use this Engagement Guide

If you have photos or lesson plans to share, please let us know! Use #mummenschanz@cal

We invite you to challenge yourself and your students to think with the curiosity and passion of the arts. This engagement guide is organized around 4 key artistic practices (as identified by the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards at <http://nccas.wikispaces.com/>)

**Investigating:** Questioning, exploring and challenging.

**Imagining:** Opening the door to what's possible, and even to what seems impossible.

**Creating:** Making artistic choices with a work of art in mind.

**Connecting:** Reflecting on both process and product and making connections to other aspects of life and study.

You'll be able to link on specific subjects that you or your students may want more information about. The body of the Engagement Guide invites exploration before and after the performance, giving each student tools to make personal and meaningful connections during the show.

We've included a pre-performance engagement activity and a post-performance activity for artistic practice and reflection. By no means should you feel limited by these suggestions! Go, make art, learn more...and share your experiences where you can.

**Artistic Literacy:** Having the skills and knowledge you need to connect meaningfully with works of art—that's what we mean by artistic literacy. We think that means something different than knowing the names of all the different instruments musicians might play, or being able to reproduce the exact melodies you might hear during a show. To us at Cal Performances, it means you and your students will have a significant glimpse into the artistic process and will have a chance to try to solve the problems the artists aim to solve creatively. It means that the next time you see a performance, you'll be able to use these same insights to connect with a work of art through the artist's process and that this will deepen your experience as an audience member.

The artistically literate student audiences comes to understand that every artist draws from a core set of concepts skillfully chosen and applied in performance to create a work of art both unique to the artist, and connected to other works of art.

And along the way, we hope that students of all ages—and their teachers and adult mentors—will be inspired to experiment with artistic decision-making and creativity themselves.

**Enjoy the show!**

# Your ★ STARRING Role in the Theater



As an audience member, you are a STAR, too! You play an important role in the performance community. The artists need YOU in order to give you their best work.

## S.T.A.R. Audiences

**S = Support** the artists by being attentive and focusing on the performers.

**T = Tune in:** listen and watch for understanding (and for Mummenschanz, watch for how the artists use tension and equilibrium when bringing their characters to life, and in the ways their characters interact.)

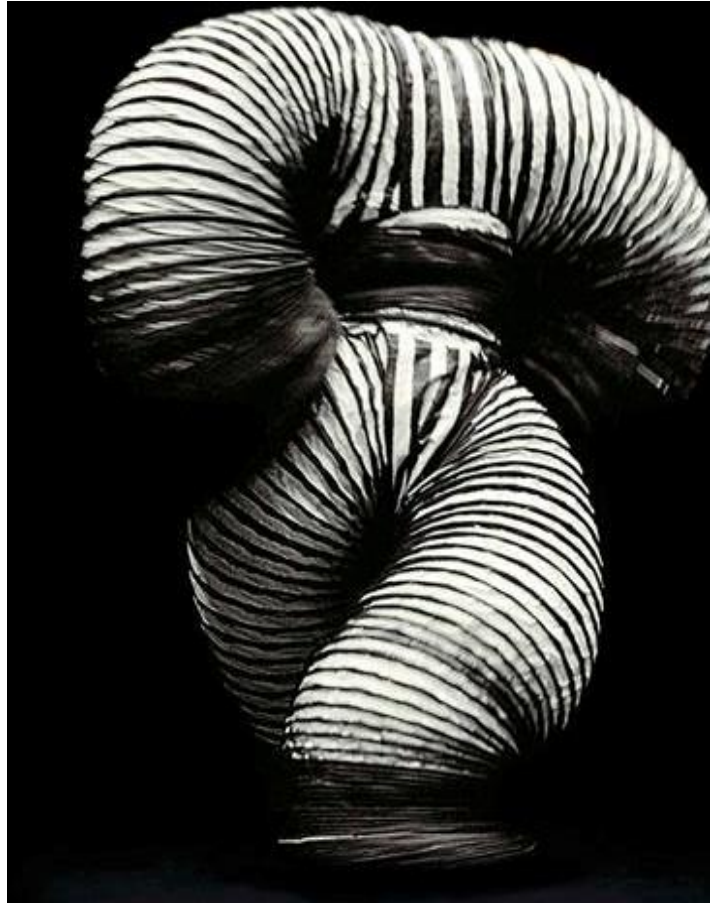
**A = Appreciate** the performers by clapping at the right time. For example, when a scene or dance ends, or when the stage lights fade to dark.

**R = Respect** the performers and other audience members. At a performance, you, the others in the audience and the artists are sharing this experience together and are part of a performance community. Think about ways you can best support the community's performance experience.

We know you will be a STAR today and will help you classmates shine too!

# About Mummenschanz

For more than four decades, the Swiss performance troupe Mummenschanz has captivated audiences worldwide with its groundbreaking non-verbal theater of movement and transformation. In the surreal, comic, wordless universe of Mummenschanz, everyday objects like toilet paper, wires, tubes, and boxes spring to life to become fantastical characters, and abstract forms and ordinary shapes interact in surprising ways to reveal timeless truths about human connections and relationships. The troupe creates a playful and uniquely memorable experience through an inventive use of forms, shadow and light and creative manipulation of sculptural, expressive masks. The result is a visually stunning spectacle of family entertainment that sparks the imagination and transcends cultural barriers.



Performing without words means the artists are free to imagine any conversation they can think of, and it frees the audience in the same way. The performer brings to the stage the strange and beautiful world of dreams and the fantastic life of the imagination. Things that shouldn't go together do, so we are surprised into feeling and thinking about things we didn't expect. Dressed in fascinating materials, many of which we recognize from everyday life, the artists roll, climb and move around stage as if the objects and materials had a life of their own.

You'll often hear "aahh" during a Mummenschanz show, at those moments when the objects act in a way that feels familiar to us. The tension in the objects settles into an equilibrium, a moment in which we recognize something human happening even though there isn't a recognizable person on stage.

## Artistic Concept: Tension and Equilibrium (release from tension)

### ***How do the Mummenschanz artists use tension and equilibrium with objects to explore human relationships?***

This engagement guide provides some classroom activities to help heighten your and your students' awareness of the various ways we see tension and equilibrium in our daily lives (and in literature, science and PE classes too!) And when you come see the Mummenschanz performers on stage, you and they will be able to notice not just that you are surprised and delighted, but how the artists made that happen for you—by using tension and creating suspense in our expectations and resolving into something recognizable and familiar.



**Tension** is one aspect of life that most of us could do without. In art, however, tension is a creative force that invites audiences into the work of art in a powerful way. We're not talking creative tension where artists are in conflict with one another, but tension as an artistic concept that shows up on stage for the audience to engage with. Tension occurs between the artist and the audience, and is resolved or released when balance or equilibrium is established.



In the physical world, **tension is the act or process of stretching something tight**. It's often described as a force which tends to stretch or elongate something. Often it is experienced as the stretching of an object in opposite directions, as in the rope that is used in a game of tug-of-war.

In the performing arts, **tension is akin to a feeling of suspense, a kind of uncertainty about and interest in the outcome of certain actions**. Most of us have observed an artist twisting a balloon into the shape of something we recognize—a sword, an animal, a crown. The tension here happens literally, as we observe air filling the latex of the balloon until it tightens and stretches. It also happens as we watch the twisting of the balloon and hear the squeaky stresses that the twisting puts on the balloon itself. We ourselves are also in a mild state of suspension and tension: we're waiting to see if the balloon will burst from the tension it's undergoing, to see if we can guess what shape the final thing will take, and to compare what the final product is to our guess about what we thought it would be. Our satisfaction comes when the tension is resolved into equilibrium: an undamaged shape that reflects something we recognize.

### **How do artists use tension creatively?**

Well, in Mummenschanz they sometimes do it physically, just stretching and twisting and shaping material and objects that at first we don't recognize. But they also do it dramatically, by playing on, expanding upon or violating our sense of expectation. And they also show us tension in relationships as the characters react and respond to each other in sometimes unexpected, but often familiarly human, ways.



### **Tension occurs when you as audience**

think you know exactly what's going to happen next, but there's a delay or odd progression in that happening. Or you think you know exactly what's going to happen next, but it doesn't happen that way at all—the outcome is unexpected, surprising, even sometimes disturbing. Tension also occurs when you have no clue what's going to happen next, so you're in a suspended state of not knowing. The artists in Mummenschanz use all these ways of creating tension, and then resolve or release that tension when they find equilibrium, a moment when we recognize what we see on stage and can match it to our human experience.

# Engagement Activities

## Engagement Activity #1 (Pre-performance)

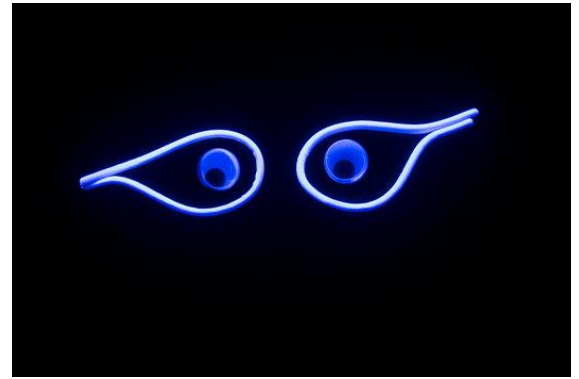
### TENSION AND EQUILIBRIUM: Artistic Exploration

#### Guiding Questions

How can we create tension playfully with our bodies?

What is the interaction between tension and equilibrium?

What are ways objects can be animated to evoke human characteristics?



#### Artistic Literacy Tool Box

Attentive listening. Balance. Tension. Equilibrium. Animation.

#### Overview

**Time needed: 20-30 minutes** (can be extended with layers of exploration).

Students will explore tension and equilibrium in their own bodies, with a partner, and when creating imaginary creatures from ordinary everyday objects.

#### Supplies and Prep

- Open space for students to stand and move around a bit (no large dance movements required).
- Supply of everyday objects (these are usually present in any learning environment, so no special prep is usually needed).
- Writing materials for students (journal, paper, writing implements)

#### Instructions

**Step 1** Start with everyone standing, preferably in a circle if there's room. **Ask students to stand in a balanced position:** with their feet planted firmly on the floor about shoulder's width apart, back straight, arms down to the side and relaxed. Notice how you are balanced. (If accommodation is needed, ask students to find whatever position they can be in that feels as balanced as possible.)

**Step 2** Now gently take yourself off balance (*coach if needed: Lift one foot and the opposite arm. Stick your bottom out as far as you can without falling over. Bend your knees then go on tip-toe.*)

How do you have to hold your body to keep from falling over?

Notice where there is tension in your body.

Come back to a balanced position (equilibrium), and find a new way to be gently off-balance.

Where is the tension now?



Come back to equilibrium.

**Step 3**

Discuss: where did you feel tension in your body when you were off-balance?

What felt different when you were balanced?

How did you know you were off-balance?

**Step 4**

**Work with a partner to explore tension and equilibrium together.**



a) Choose a student to demonstrate with. Ask everyone to turn to a partner. Demonstrate facing a partner and grasping one another gently but firmly around both wrists.

b) Demonstrate carefully leaning away from one another, holding firmly and finding balance as you move. Be sure not to move any faster than your partner. Stick together and find balance. Then come back to equilibrium and find a new position to balance each other.

c) Following the demo, encourage students to explore finding balance with different positions. Coach them to notice where they have tension in their bodies.

d) They can talk quietly with one another as they figure out how to balance each other. Laughter is to be expected, but don't let go of your partner! Stay together.

e) **Come back to the circle. Discuss** what you noticed about tension and balance while working with a partner.

**Step 5**

Let's discover some tension and equilibrium in an ordinary object. (You may choose to demonstrate this first, as one set of instructions, or demonstrate each step as you go should students need the encouragement. Usually, once given permission to play this way, students get the concept right away.)

a) Pick up any ordinary object in your classroom (a pen, a book, an eraser, a Lego piece, a key). Choose an ordinary object that isn't already shaped like a living being—not a stuffed animal or puppet, but a daily thing with a purpose.

b) Hold it in your hands. Ask yourself, "What is this used for? What is it made to do? What is it supposed to be used for?"

c) Now ask, "What else can I do with this? What can I imagine/pretend if could be doing?" Move it around, see how heavy it is. Drop it and explore gravity with it. Lift it. Try moving it around on different surfaces. How does it move in the air? On the ground?

d) Now explore: "What could this become? What kind of creature could it be?"

- a. How does it breathe? Decide where it breathes in and out and have it move as it breathes.
  - b. Where are its eyes? How does it see?
  - c. Let its eyes lead it around. How does it move? (Smooth? Flying? Swimming? Sharp?)
  - d. What is its energy like? (Quick? Slow?)
- e) As you move it around, have it “see” things and react quietly to them.
- a. When it sees something that scares it, where does it get tense?
  - b. Does it want to run away when it’s scared, or stay and get tough?
  - c. What does it want to eat and how does it eat?
  - d. What wants to eat it?
- f) Consider your creature’s energy and “spirit” as it continues its explorations.
- a. Does it tire quickly or is it like the Energizer bunny?
  - b. When it gets sleepy does it move slower and slower until it stops, or does it suddenly and unexpectedly drop into sleep? How does it wake up, bright and raring to go, or stumbling sleepily into motion?
  - c. How might your creature die? Would it move jerkily and fight for its last breaths? Would it gently fall down and curl up?
  - d. How might it come back to life and begin breathing and moving again?
  - e. Now that you’ve seen your creature have a variety of experiences, what kind of personality do you think it has? How does it show that personality in the ways it reacts and moves?

#### Step 6

**Creature Parade:** Everyone get in a line holding your creatures.

Start a creature parade around the class. How does your creature move and show itself off during this parade?

Make a desk in front of the class the “parade grandstand” and as the creatures parade past each one has to stop at the desk for 5 seconds and introduce itself. (You don’t have to use words or give your creature a name, although you can.) How would your creature introduce itself through movement? Would it bow, shake itself proudly, or nervously stop and look at the crowd?

#### Step 7

**Time to meet another creature!**

Move your creature toward another and have your creatures meet.

- a. How does it approach the other creature? Is it shy or cautious at first or eager and friendly?
- b. What does it want from the other creature? (Does it want to play? Is it looking for a partner? Does it think the other creature is food or a predator?) As the creatures “converse”, remember to take time to “listen” to each other. When one is “talking” the other should pause, listen, and then respond or react. Conversations aren’t very fun or interesting when everyone’s talking at the same time!

*Options:*

- Younger students might try a mirroring activity before jumping into creature conversations. Students take turns leading: one creature moves and the other creature “mirrors” or copies that movement as it happens.
- After mirroring, students could play, “What would you do if I do this?” One creature does an action and the other creature pauses to “listen” or take in that action, then responds to that action with its own action.

As the creatures get to know each other more, how does their interaction change and grow?

- c. What kind of relationship do they create together?
- d. Notice as you interact where there might be moments of tension and when or how that tension is resolved.

**Step 8**

**Conduct Group Reflection**

Students may first **journal** about their experience, then reflect together as a group.

**Discuss:** what did you notice about how your creature developed? About how it interacted with another creature? What surprised you? Where did you see tension? How was that tension resolved?

**Final note to your class:** This is what the Mummenschanz artists do—they use tension and equilibrium (resolving the tension) to surprise us or to help us recognize something that is part of our lives. (If you like, use the photo below, or other photos in this guide, to ask students where they see physical tension, where they see equilibrium/balance, what do they recognize and how do the artists make that recognition possible?)



## Engagement Activity #2 (Post-Performance)

### TENSION AND EQUILIBRIUM IN MUMMENSCHANZ: Reflection & Artistic Exploration

#### Guiding Questions

How do Mummenschanz artists use the artistic tool of tension and equilibrium?

Where did we see tension and equilibrium in individual creatures and in their relationships?

What are some ways performing artists can show tension and equilibrium when imagining creatures and their interactions?

#### Artistic Literacy Tool Box

Attentive listening and responding. Tension.

Equilibrium. Point of View.

Animation.

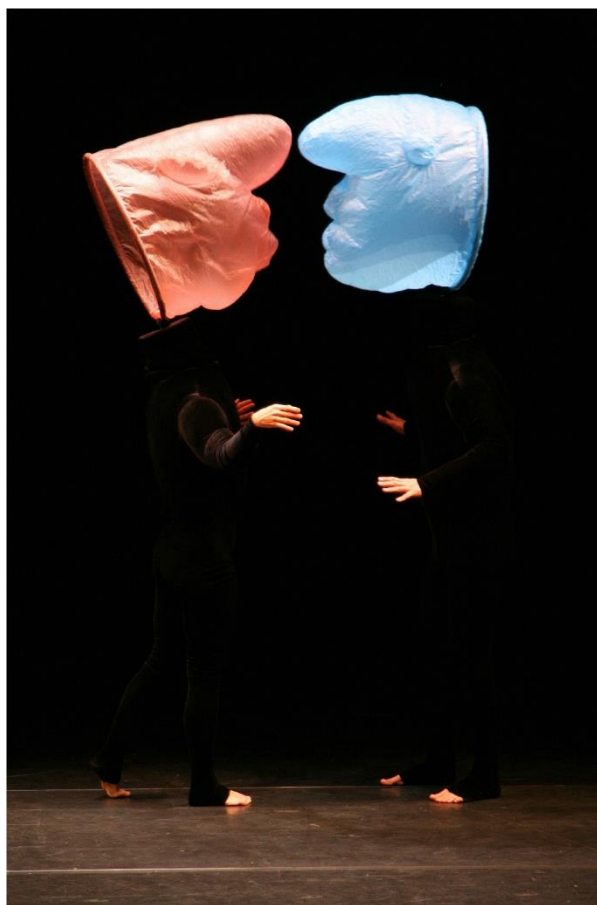
#### Overview

**Time needed: 20-30 minutes** (can be extended with layers of exploration).

Students will reflect on the Mummenschanz performance in kinesthetic and interpersonal ways. They will explore using the creative tools of tension and equilibrium through their own creature design and interacting with a partner's creativity.

#### Supplies and Prep

- Open space for students to stand and move around a bit (no large movements required).
- Writing materials for students (journal, paper, writing implements)



#### Instructions

##### Step 1

**At their desks, ask students to think back** to the Mummenschanz performance and jot or sketch some of their memories of the performance.

- a) Where did you see tension and the release of that tension in how Mummenschanz characters came into focus?
- b) Where did you see tension and equilibrium in how the Mummenschanz characters related to one another?
- c) What human relationships did you think of when the objects interacted?
- d) What did their conversations mean to you?

- e) What did you want to say to the objects on stage?
- f) Ask to students share what was most memorable to them.

**Step 2**

**Have everyone come to a standing circle.**

Ask students to think of the creatures from Mummenschanz and how they moved. Go around the circle as each student demonstrates how one of the Mummenschanz creatures moved. After a student shows a creature's movement, the whole group repeats the movement.

**Step 3**

**Find a partner and together recreate a Mummenschanz character.**

With your partner, choose one of the characters from Mummenschanz. Try to recreate that character with both of your bodies.

What movements can you make that bring the character most clearly to mind? As you make the character together, is there tension in how you have to hold your bodies?

When you're moving together notice the moments where there's tension and when that tension shifts to equilibrium.

**Observe** each other's recreated Mummenschanz characters.

**Discuss as a group:** What was the experience of recreating a Mummenschanz character like? How did you work with your partner? When you recreated these characters in your pairs, where did you experience tension and equilibrium?

**Step 4**

**Character conversations**

Remind students that the characters in Mummenschanz interact without words, and we see tension when:

- we don't know how the characters will react to one another.
- we expect a character to respond in a certain way, and they react differently than we imagined.
- the character suspends their reaction for a time and we're waiting to see how they'll respond. (Sometimes a longer wait has us anticipating a more dramatic reaction.)

- a. With your partner, recreate your Mummenschanz character with your bodies. Figure out how your creature walks and moves. Explore moving together slowly and safely.
- b. Move toward another character made by a partner pair.
- c. Begin an interaction between the characters.
  - i. Approach another pair-character and check them out.
  - ii. Decide without words if your characters can be friends or if they might want to eat each other.

- iii. Hang out for a minute if you're going to be friends or leave quickly, if not.
- iv. You can use sounds during this interaction, but no words.
- d. Practice this a couple of times. Then, choose from what you like best in your interactions and put these together in a scene. Each pair shows the group their scene.
- e. **Discuss and reflect as a group:** In your scene how did you use tension to be creative? How was the tension resolved? What was it like to make these scenes? What was it like to watch these scenes?

**Step 5**      **Use** any of the discussion questions as journaling prompts.

You might consider seeking curricular connections in physical science, math or literature. If you design a lesson that you'd like to share, please let us know! We'd like to include it on our blog or in future workshops for teachers...





# Resources

**Mummenschanz web site:** <http://www.mummenschanz.com/en/home>

## **Video Clips of Mummenschanz**

<http://www.squidoo.com/mummenschanz>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3eazq\\_8jCOg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3eazq_8jCOg)

## **Books**

*Mummenschanz* by Michel Bühner 128 pages with more than 150 pictures. Order online at:

[http://www.mummenschanz.com/index.asp?topic\\_id=111&m=81&g=13#](http://www.mummenschanz.com/index.asp?topic_id=111&m=81&g=13#)

*Mummenschanz 1972 - 1997* by Flor Garduño & Guyette Lyr 120 pages with 80 photos, 24 x 28 cm, hardcover, limited. Order online at:

[http://www.mummenschanz.com/index.asp?topic\\_id=111&m=81&g=13#](http://www.mummenschanz.com/index.asp?topic_id=111&m=81&g=13#)

## **DVDs**

Order online at: [http://www.mummenschanz.com/index.asp?topic\\_id=114&m=108&g=13](http://www.mummenschanz.com/index.asp?topic_id=114&m=108&g=13)

*The Story of Mummenschanz*

Interactive. Told by Floriana Frassetto and Bernie Schurch.

Click through the “Best of Performances”!

*Die Virtuosen der Stille / The musicians of silence / Les musiciens du silence*

Film by Kamal Musale.

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*Mummenschanz 1972 – 2000*

A portrait on Mummenschanz by Magdalena Kauz.

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For information on supporting our Education and Community Programs, contact Sarah Sobey.  
Phone: 510.643.7053 / Email: [ssobey@calperformances.org](mailto:ssobey@calperformances.org)

## **About Cal Performances and the Cal Performances Classroom**

The mission of Cal Performances is to produce and present performances of the highest artistic quality, enhanced by programs that explore compelling intersections of education and the performing arts. Cal Performances celebrates over 100 years on the UC Berkeley Campus.

### **What is a Cal Performances Classroom?**

*Your classroom, of course!*

The arts are an endlessly replenishable resource for a lifelong love affair with thinking, learning and feeling across disciplines and cultures. They connect fluidly with curriculum throughout the school years, and – perhaps with more endurance – they connect us to ideas and reflection on human experience that can't be easily expressed any other way.

Each season at Cal Performance, you will find a menu of compelling performances and classroom opportunities for any age. You can create your Cal Performances classroom through any or all of our artistic literacy programs for grades K-12.

Cal Performances holds artistic literacy on a par with language and numerical literacy. Those who are artistically literate hold the keys to a lifelong engagement with the arts, able to unlock and make personal connections to any work of art, regardless of level of familiarity with the work and the artists.

Artistic literacy skills are developed in the Cal Performances classroom as students and teachers are engaged in the artist's process. These skills are embedded in everything we do, from pre-performance talks to community conversations to teacher workshops and artist visits to the classroom.