

DANCE REVIEW

## 'Waters' is a premiere to remember

By Karen Campbell, Globe Correspondent | July 14, 2006

This week at Jacob's Pillow, dancer-choreographer Tania Pérez-Salas turns the stage of the Ted Shawn Theatre into a shallow pool for the US premiere of a stunningly gorgeous work called "Waters of Forgetfulness." Inspired by a book by philosopher/polymath Ivan Illich, Pérez-Salas's work for seven dancers is not only visually arresting but unabashedly sensual, subliminally erotic, and achingly human.

With each kick, each curve of the arms through space or flick of the head, vivid spumes of water catch the light, tracing sparkling arcs and splashes. But this is no freeform frolic. Pérez-Salas uses the 500-gallon pool as a symbol of life's elemental forces. Imagery evokes birth, death, cleansing, and coupling. At the work's end, all gather beneath a curtain of falling sand, as if finally arising out of the water to embrace the earth.

"Waters of Forgetfulness" was one of three works the Mexico City-based Pérez-Salas, 30, and her superb company brought to the Pillow this week in only their second US engagement. Pérez-Salas's movement aesthetic is grounded in the clean lines and formal clarity of ballet. Virtuoso moves are tossed off with an easy, unforced athleticism, often with a saucy edge or a jazzy inflection. Yet they can just as quickly dissolve into puddles of molten steel, quivering, oozing, and sliding.

But what's most distinctive about Pérez-Salas's work is its imaginative, extravagant theatricality. Exquisite lighting and provocative visual design characterize each piece, and it is the imagery that stays with the viewer long after the movement fades. At its best, as in the singularly focused "Waters of Forgetfulness," Pérez-Salas's work has a searing brilliance. In the other two pieces, however, theatrical gimmickry sometimes threatens to overwhelm the dance.

"Anabiosis," the evening's other US premiere, has a raw sensuality at its core, exemplified by flamboyant partnering and a lot of writhing on the floor, ranging from the erotic to the grotesque. But what remain in the memory are the multileveled "windows" through which we catch glimpses of nude and semi-nude figures, making us unwitting voyeurs.

"The Hours," inspired by Michael Cunningham's book, suggests female kinship and growth. Two women inside a glowing, rotating circus wheel suggest the passage of time. Another in a giant hoop skirt moves only her upper torso, as if to hint at the societal strictures of days gone by. But underneath, she hides three others connected by the cloth of their own abbreviated skirts. Their playful trio seems to poke fun at the prim postures of convention.

Then Pérez-Salas lets theatricality get the better of cohesion. She brings out video projections, two blood-red frames of cloth against which two dancers seem to writhe in midair, and ropes on which five other women swing, spin, and dangle as if ensnared. It's provocative and alluring, but it feels like too many disparate ideas for one piece. ■