

Complex Simple: Seductive lessons in perusing a fleeting world

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Trisha Brown's solo, *If You Couldn't See Me*, arrived in 1994, bearing questions. Of course we could see her, just not her face. And we knew her by the mobile spine revealed by Robert Rauschenberg's costume and by her fluid precision. Now, watching Leah Morrison perform the solo very beautifully, with Rauschenberg's softly chiming music falling around her and Jennifer Tipton's lighting modeling her tall body, I imagine this woman performing for an invisible audience onstage of her. Those spectators see her face. Maybe we can compare notes after the show.



Montclair State University/Mike Peters

Now-you-see-it-now-you-don't has been an element of Brown's style since the mid-'70s. In *Foray Forêt*, reconstructed from its 1990 identity, the dancers flash on and off the stage, and Rauschenberg's gleaming gold and silver costumes and Tipton's lighting enhance the image of sunlight tampered with by windblown trees. The nine performers are amazing—deerlike in their alertness, speed, and sensitivity, yet always serene. Our eyes have to move to capture their fleet transactions. For a while, Judith Sanchez Ruiz holds down an area of space with calm, deliberate moves. Suddenly Melinda Myers races on with two men, the three snag on one another, the men dash away, and Myers drops into perfect synch with Ruiz. When Myers exits, Tony Orrico replaces her. Several times, Brown presents us with sudden partnerships and seemingly unplanned unity.

Helping hands launch performers onto the stage and yank them off it. People lean out from the wings as if

over an alluring but intimidating pond. The accompaniment—a marching band doing its stuff—flirts with our ears in a different way; the musicians begin maybe a block away, invade the lobby, then fade into the distance. When Diane Madden enters to render with magnificent thoughtfulness the final solo that Brown made for herself, her colleagues lurk in the wings, slipping now a hand, now some other body part into sight. Madden no longer dances regularly with the company, and these fleeting images seem like memories that linger temptingly at the edges of her consciousness.

Brown thinks of *Foray Forêt* as initiating what she calls her "Back to Zero" series—a pulling away from the complexity of her earlier "Unstable Molecular Structures" and the muscular pieces in her "Valiant" cycle into simplicity and delicacy. Although she planted some easy-to-read, two-part counterpoint in her 2007 *I Love My Robots*, her simple is most people's complex. In the grave opening solo that Todd Lawrence Stone performs so wonderfully, his movements collapse in smooth increments, die away, and spurt through new pathways in his body, even though he takes time to observe his hand against the floor, to hoist his knee by biting the pant leg of Elizabeth Cannon's soft-edged costume. Buoyed by the honeyed voices, fluttering cello, and lightly pattering percussion that bubble up in Laurie Anderson's score, he dances into close contact with Myers, inaugurating a spate of brilliant, peaceable tangling by these two and Hyun-Jin Jung.

The robots take the audience by surprise. Kenjiro Okazaki's two tall cardboard tubes on small, wheeled platforms look more like perambulating hat racks. Functioning as moving scenery, they glide here and there, framing and re-framing the action. After a while I begin to think of them as paying attention or tactfully standing aside and watching. Sometimes they make high chattering sounds. Brown reinforces their anthropomorphism and her title by entering at the end for a bit of improvised play with them. Finally, she says, "I hear my mother calling me to come home and take a nap. See you tomorrow." A whimsical, curiously touching envoy to a quite serious adventure.