

DANCE REVIEW

Artwork on Foot Attracts New Vantage Points

In MoMA's '20 Dancers for the XX Century,' Intimacy Reigns



Ruby Washington/The New York Times

20 Dancers for the XX Century Gus Solomons Jr. performing at the Museum of Modern Art.

By BRIAN SEIBERT

At the Museum of Modern Art on Friday, I turned a corner and ran into a man well over six feet tall dressed as Martha Graham. This was the dancer Richard Move, celebrated for his impersonations of that modernist choreographer. For a while, he wandered like any other visitor, looking at the art. But Mr. Move also was the art. The Graham choreography he performed was an exhibit, yet so was he: a dancer as a living archive of dance.

Such was the concept behind “20 Dancers for the XX Century,” the first installment in [Musée de la Danse: Three Collective Gestures](#), a three-weekend series conceived by the French choreographer Boris Charmatz. In “XX Century,” which ran Friday through Sunday from noon to 5 p.m., Mr. Move and 19 other distinguished dancers inhabited spaces all through the building, from high-traffic areas to cul-de-sacs. As an experimental answer to the modish question of the place of dance in museums, the project was messy but fascinating and worthwhile.

There was no program, no map. You could meander, relying on serendipity, or search with a purpose. You could stroll by a dancer or linger for as long as you liked. You could follow one as he moved between spots, carrying a boombox like a busker. You could stay put in the atrium, as dancers cycled through, or you could climb levels and gaze down on the performers from new and revelatory perspectives.

There was no program, but there were docents — the dancers. This was art that explained itself, or tried to. The dancers identified the 20th-century works they were performing, pieces they had selected themselves, performed (if not originally conceived) as solos. They gave mini-lectures, answered questions, suggested connections, explained how they weren't the street performers or crazy people they sometimes resembled. Each participant fulfilled the assignment a little differently.

Magali Caillet-Gajan, dancing wonderfully as she insisted that an injury prevented her from dancing, told the story of her career, her life. Less explicitly, most of the other participants were doing something similar — excavating their memories. With veterans like Valda Setterfield, that memory was very long.

Many dancers performed pieces that had been in their bodies for decades, winningly explaining where memory was failing and which parts they could never quite do. Others presented appropriations from YouTube or the fruits of historical research. Though most were also choreographers, Meg Stuart was the only one I saw doing her own work.

The resulting range was capacious, if tilted toward France and postmodernism. As a collection to match the museum's in comprehensiveness and quality, there were holes, but the project was not intended as such. It would have been nice, still, to have had a map as an option and for the juxtapositions between the dances and MoMA's collection to have been less haphazard.

Apart from the meaning of the location, the encounters with dancers functioned best as intimate studio visits, up-close looks at engrossing details, the equivalents of brushwork. I was greatly taken by Shelley Senter's supple lecture-demonstration of Trisha Brown material and nearly convinced by her assertion that "it might be Trisha's work, but it's my biography, and I own it."

After performing Yvonne Rainer's "Trio A" as Ms. Rainer watched, Ms. Senter seemed less certain about authorship. But while she was dancing, I do believe that Ms. Senter owned it.

The Musée de la Danse: Three Collective Gestures series runs through Nov. 3 at the Museum of Modern Art; (212) 708-9400, moma .org.