

Valerie Green/Dance Entropy Celebrates Ten Years at Green Space

Stewardship Report

March 17th, 2016

By Courtney Escoyne



Jonathan Matthews and Hana Ginsburg Tirosh in *Impermanent Landscape*.

Queens, N.Y. A low murmur greets the audience, five dancers speaking quiet snatches of phrases as they construct and deconstruct patterns with squares of material on the floor. On the walls, pastel cutouts of anonymous buildings form a delicate and colorful cityscape—an installation by Priscilla Stadler fittingly titled *Fragile City*. Words and phrases, “Unified chaos, guide me, safety in numbers, leave my memory here, it will tremble...” are heard, in no apparent order or relation to one another, as

audience members trickle in and seat themselves on all four sides at the edges of the rehearsal/performance venue known as Green Space.



Jonathan Matthews and Hana Ginsburg Tirosh in *Impermanent Landscape*

This is how Valerie Green’s *Impermanent Landscape* introduces itself, the dancers creating pathways for themselves and each other by shifting squares on the floor, movement almost imperceptibly shivering up from their feet as they are carefully placed. From the beginning, the performers, members of Dance Entropy, get the audience to lean in, as though perhaps if they look closer or listen hard enough the meaning of the work will crystallize.

Impermanent Landscape, however, is not so easily deciphered. Were it so, in fact, it would have missed the mark completely. The work is described as “part of a larger project centered on the concept of changing the external visual art environment to shift the perception and context of how one views the work.” As such, each audience member is asked, at least once in the course of the performance, to change to a seat in a different part of the space to afford him or her a different view. The environment under consideration is an ever-shifting one, the dancers helpfully creating structures for the others to play inside of one moment and launching into smoothly ecstatic bursts of technique the next, the mood withdrawn into abstraction only to burst into self-deprecating humor a beat later.



Jonathan Matthews in *Impermanent Landscape*.

Out of words almost indifferently uttered as the performers carefully clear the space comes the first movement, the group striding purposefully in an abrupt break from the internalized, careful motions of the introduction. Breathy suspensions escalate into a solo for Jonathan Matthews, opening the space as he tips his head back in an extended balance before fleeting footwork leads him to eliminate his own footing, spiraling into the floor and back up again in what feels like a single, slow

exhale. Frank Leone stirs the air with a beautiful turn in *arabesque* before pulling himself into the floor, alternating between weighted attack and an airy ease. The three women in the work take it in turns to support each other’s weight, two serving as the base for the third’s apparent flight.



Impermanent Landscape

Flying—or the attempt to do so—is an image that repeatedly comes to mind throughout the piece. At one point, Jonathan Matthews asks an audience member to give him a slight push towards the other dancers onstage. He tumbles backwards and seems to float onto their backs, their support of him apparently effortless. At another, Hana Ginsburg Tirosh scales the bodies of her fellow dancers, traversing the entire space above ground with a delighted smile and the same composure that marks her exacting execution of solo phrasework.

There is an alternation between an incandescent, floating quality, as though the dancers are only stirring the air so much as the wings of a butterfly might, and a focused yet effervescent preciseness to the unexpectedly rhythmic movement. Each of the performers has a calm and efficient technical prowess that largely reveals itself in the apparent ease with which they complete Green's demanding, near-continuous movement.

The care with which the dancers treat each other is absolute. Sometimes this translates to moments of humanity. Yayoi Suzuki traces an invisible body on the floor, naming its parts with a small smile until, finished, the group pulls the unseen figure to its feet and leads it to sit in an empty chair. At others this makes them into highly responsive fragments of a support structure that then dissolves into individuals. Kristin Licata was an unassuming standout throughout, a palpable joy for the movement itself informing every step and occasionally rescuing the work from emotional indifference.



Kristin Licata in *Impermanent Landscape*.

Considering the work as a whole, the word that comes to mind is, unexpectedly, architectural. Not in the way that you are likely thinking, all functional structures and linearity with an indifference towards the humanity of the dancers. Rather, it is in the work's three-dimensionality, in the way it relates equally to each surface of empty space as it does the floor, in how the shapes and movements cycle through emotions slowly and with the subtlety that marks any wonderful piece of architecture.

I found myself impressed with how well Green handled the challenge of making a piece in the round. Particularly in dance, there is always the risk of accidentally designating a “front” or of blocking one part of the audience from seeing enough to understand what is happening, but Green's awareness of the possibilities of a three-dimensional art form made for work that was interesting and accessible from any angle. Specific visual focus was choreographed into the movement, serving to keep the performers—and therefore the audience—engaged. Audience participation is built into the work, almost always arriving at a moment when a palate cleanse is needed, but I found myself surprised that the room was not asked to shift more often—I, for one, would have enjoyed exploring another vantage point or two.



Hana Ginsburg Tirosh in Impermanent Landscape

In the introduction, one of the phrases that jumps out is, “Join the process, join the dance, safety in numbers.” I would encourage anyone reading this to do exactly that: grab a friend, head over to Green Space, and see what you see.

Impermanent Landscape is at Green Space March 17th-20th. Tickets [here](#).

All images by Stephen Delas Heras. Courtesy Valerie Green/Dance Entropy.