

NADINE HELSTROFFER

VAJRA REALM

A Dance Pilgrimage in Tibet

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I moved from Paris to New York in 1978. After completing a doctorate of philosophy about Merce Cunningham's innovation in dance, I devoted myself exclusively to the experience of movement. I found in dance a sense of wholeness that eluded me in academic studies. In New York I had the fortune to meet inspiring Buddhist teachers. My inquiry into the dance realm, as a choreographer, dancer and teacher, reflects the unfolding map of this path. Dance became pilgrimage.

When choreographing I am interested in bringing forth elements of inter-connectedness and resonance between the dancers - elements that may yield an intimate look at our shared humanity while distilling a touching yet exuberant understanding of impermanence.

What attracts me within the creation of a dance film is the unpredictability of the moment-to-moment process. For instance, for the film SHIMMER, the setting of the location, the color of the season, the flow of the dancers, the play of light, the touch of the wind and the stepping of passers-by all permeate each other in a moment that can never be duplicated. We are overlapping environments, on the verge of rising and dissolving.

The play of reflections - like the ones of a dancer on water, ice or a glass façade - forms an essential component in our dance films. Blurring the distinction between the source of the image and its reflection emphasizes the impossibility to grasp what is constantly shifting. Reflections suggest a world of reverberation where something is always offering itself in the moment, yet also eludes us.

The body is the place of awakening. The resonance pulsating inside our body, connecting us with our environment, lays at the core of my search in movement. I seek a dance that welcomes the drifting boundaries between self and non-self. A world where the body returns as a current within the merging rivers of life.



NADINE HELSTROFFER

VAJRA REALM

A Dance Pilgrimage in Tibet

BIOGRAPHY

Nadine Helstroffer, French-born, has been presenting her choreography in the U.S., Canada and France since 1981. Her work includes CLOCK LOCK, THRESHOLD and EARTHBOUND. She has taught dance and directed workshops in France, Canada, Korea and the U.S. Since 1998 she has been leading the "BodyResonance Workshop" which explores the link between meditation and movement. She has been presenting her workshop at the Zen Center of NYC, the New School University, NY Insight Meditation Society and Bowling Green State University, Ohio.

Ms. Helstroffer obtained a doctorate in philosophy under the direction of Daniel Charles (Subject: An Innovative Approach to Dance) at Nanterre University/Paris-X, Paris, France, in 1980. Her academic interests in Eastern philosophies and her exposure to the East through her dance career have guided her toward an integration of Eastern philosophies and Western movements. She collaborated with composers Yas Kaz from Sankai Juku Company, Philip Fraser, devotee of Shri, Shri Ravi Shankar and David Hykes, founder of the Harmonic Choir.

In New York the Rubin Museum of Art commissioned her 30-minute solo piece ABSENCE PRESENCE performed on the gallery floor of the exhibition "Handprints and Footprints in Buddhist Art" in 2005 and filmed by John Bush. The Museum also invited her to join as a choreographer/dancer the musical ensemble, Harmonic Choir, lead by David Hykes. In collaboration with filmmaker John Bush, she is preparing the feature-length dance film, SHIMMER, shot entirely outdoors in New York. An excerpt, PORTAL, has been screened at Galapagos Art Space, curated by the experimental film group Ocularis, and as a special screening at the 2006 High Falls Film Festival. VAJRA REALM, a dance pilgrimage with Nadine Helstroffer filmed in Central Tibet, was released in January 2007 as a special feature on the dvd VAJRA SKY OVER TIBET, the third film of the Yatra Trilogy by John Bush.





She collaborated three times with choreographer Caryn Heilman and painter Jim Teschner for the presentation of "The 12 stations of the Cross" at Park Avenue Church. In collaboration with Minister Allen at the Park Avenue Church, she organized a church service on three occasions and integrated dance into the service by presenting a solo and inviting the audience to partake in the ritual. She took part in various benefits including the Children Hope Foundation at the American Indian Community House, was invited by Eva Yaa Asantewaa to dance at the NY Open Center. The dance was the introduction to the workshop "The Intuitive Arts," as part of the womanspirit Journey Program, founded and directed by Susan Merrie Hellerer. She also collaborated with Eva Yaa Asantewaa at the Gay and Lesbian Services Community Center for the Spirit Crossroads' Inside Out Conference.' The piece was called "Alter-altars" we hold divine space within our bodies."

In New York her work has been produced by the Rubin Museum of Art, St. Mark's Church, Laban Institute of Movement, RAPP Arts Center, The Field, PS 122, Viridian Gallery, Columbia University, Bryant Park, BACA Downtown, Port Authority, Oversights, and Aglaia, among others. In France she presented her choreography at Centre Culturel des Beaux-Arts, Theatre Maurice Ravel, Eurocentre, and Espace Marais in Paris, and she directed dance workshops in St. Avold and Bourges. In Canada, she was produced by Tangente (Montreal) and Entrechat (Quebec) and directed outdoor performances.

As a dancer, Ms. Helstroffer has toured and taught workshops in Japan, Korea, China and the U.S. with Sin Cha Hong's Laughing Stone Dance Theater Company, represented the American Pavilion at the 1992 Seville World Fair and took part in the 1994 Colorado Dance Festival. In New York she also performed with Amy Rosen, Frey Faust and Celeste Hastings (the Butoh Rockettes). She has studied with Cindy Green, Trisha Brown's company and the teachers at the Cunningham Studio. She has been practicing yoga for the last ten years.

She was the recipient of a five-year grant in Philosophy at Nanterre University Paris-X, France and was awarded a two-year grant in dance from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While she was performing with Laughing Stone in 1986, the company was nominated Best Dance Company in Korea. She received The Field's 1991 Pagnano Memorial Fund grant.

EXCERPTS OF REVIEWS ON NADINE HELSTROFFER'S CHOREOGRAPHY

Helstroffer's choreography expresses a mystical exploration of the inner workings of life and nature. She has superb hypnotic concentration and dances with passion and skill."

-Eva Yaa Ansetawaa, Dance Critic for Village Voice, Dance Magazine, Soho News

MIGRATION

Miss Helstroffer, a member of Sin Cha-Hong's Laughing Stone company, is a French choreographer who has worked in New York since 1981. She has her own dreamlike way of creating atmosphere, and there was plenty of that in "Migration." .."Migration" was a compelling evening of theater and dance."

-Jennifer Dunning, The New York Times

RIPPLE

"Glimpses of a Secret World. If one watched intently, these meticulously detailed works did give up some of their secrets. Both visible and unseen forces bound people in two older dances. In "Clock Lock," one wondered if Ms. Helstroffer represented someone who felt imprisoned by or yearned to transcend the passage of time. Ambiguities like these made Ms. Helstroffer's choreographic miniatures rich in implications."

-Jack Anderson, The New York Times

EARTHBOUND

"The movements of Earth and Water. Ms. Helstroffer's "Earthbound" opened with a solo for Ms. Heilman that was magical... Ms. Heilman looked like a carefully chosen ornamental rock in a Japanese garden and at others like a series of shifting Calderesque shapes."

-Jennifer Dunning, The New York Times

SANDDIAL

"A fluid study in serenity. One had time to savor even the slightest movement. Sanddial resembled a set of choreographic meditations. Watching Sanddial was like attending a service in a house of worship with a totally unfamiliar liturgy."

-Jack Anderson, The New York Times



EXCERPTS OF REVIEWS ON NADINE HELSTROFFER'S CHOREOGRAPHY

THRESHOLD

"Nadine Helstroffer's fascinating "Threshold" hints at mysterious rituals. Poignant. Every gesture with intensity? We watch a small crowd in rumpled white clothes roll very gradually toward the edge of the stage. Some slide inertly down a steep ramp; others simply drop. We watch and wait; who is next? Plop. Inevitable as water sliding off a roof..."

-Deborah Jowitt, Village Voice (For complete review see next page)

"Interesting for its dreamlike images. Pictorial beauty. Excellent trapeze artists. In addition to the scenes of love and introspection on the trapeze, the production's striking effects included episodes in which dancers slid down a ramp, dangled from ropes and posed against a construction resembling a giant web. Three people on chairs featured as if they were the monkeys whose hand positions indicate that they see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil. And "Threshold" came to an eerie conclusion as dancers stood humming and sighing on the shadowy stage while their faces glowed with luminescent mask like makeup."

-Jack Anderson, The New York Times



TIDE

"Motion of the elements. Nadine Helstroffer's appears to be inspired by winds and waves. The dances were filled with gusts and eddies of movement."

-Jack Anderson, The New York Times

CLOCK LOCK

"Helstroffer is a fiercely concentrated performer, pulling all motion into the heated center of herself."

-Sally Sommer, The Village Voice

"As chimes resounded in a score by David Simons, Ms. Helstroffer swayed slightly and extended her arms outward. The growing intensity of the chimes occasionally caused her to raise her heels and even an entire foot from the floor. She resembled an exquisite clockwork figure, and she always held the attention in this solo that consisted of increasingly complex variations upon a few simple movements."

-Jack Anderson, The New York Times

ORDEALS WE CRAVE
By Deborah Jowitt, Village Voice

THRESHOLD
At Rapp Arts Center

Nadine Helstroffer, French-born, has worked here with Sin Cha Hong, and like many of Hong's dances, her fascinating Threshold hints at mysterious rituals whose purpose we can't know. After a brief glimpse of three people bouncing up and down like agitated monkeys on a black shelf high above the stage, we watch a small crowd in rumpled white clothes roll very gradually toward the edge of the stage. Some slide inertly down a steep ramp to the performing area in front of the stage; others simply drop. We watch and wait; who is next? Plop. Inevitable as water sliding off a roof.

Blackouts separate discrete primal events: dancers (eight in all) erupt into the air, crash to the floor (Britt Whitton is astonishing; I imagine a gale blowing him into the steps); three people thrust their heads and arms through a hole in a cargo net hanging onstage; Helstroffer and Christine Zaepfel move in unison with wary, awkward grace-staring towards us. Philip Vercruyssen turns slowly on a high trapeze; later in the dance, he pulls Laura Bartolomeo up by the wrists to join him. Their duet is cramped, poignant. Her presence on the trapeze restricts the space, entails more danger, she looks less like an acrobat than a woman determined to come through an ordeal with honor. Philip Fraser's variegated music sensitively shadows the changes in atmosphere, as does Susanne Poulin's lighting design. Near the end of the dance, Bartolomeo, Whitton, and Barbara Thatcher perform an expanded version of the opening monkey dance: perching on chairs close to us, toppling off, making the chairs jump and bang together, they reiterate in unruly ways the hear-see-speak-no-evil gestures we could barely discern during the opening.

These people (Caryn Heilman, Myunk Oak Rubin, and Dominique Vernin are the others) perform every gesture with intensity, whether is crumpling down, leaping up, or, on rare occasions, shooting a straight leg out into the air. However strange or disparate their actions seem to us, their absorption and their gravity make us believe that these rites may hold their curious world together, or prepare them for another.

