

Review: Human Landscape Dance and Code f.a.d. Company at Dance Place

(Jennifer Mueller) - Human Landscape Dance, directed by Malcolm Shute.



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The pairing of two companies on different levels was in-your-face clear Saturday at Dance Place. Local company Human Landscape Dance explored the underbelly of myths and folk tales with ingenious choreography and staging by founder Malcolm Shute. In comparison, Raleigh, N.C.-based Code f.a.d. Company's exploration of fashion designers as new gods killed an interesting theme with banal choreography.

Human Landscape Dance is grounded in contact improvisation. Shute put this to good use in "Aurora's Dream," which revealed what Sleeping Beauty was dreaming about all those years. The dream looked a cross between Disneyland and Hieronymus Bosch. The prince was a deviant for having crept into her bedroom. Bad fairies threatened her safety.

In a separate piece, Amanda Abrams was brilliant as the long-suffering Penelope weaving away as she waited years for her husband, Odysseus, to return. For most of "Penelope and Odysseus/Waiting," Abrams remained in a chair, almost magically defying the limits of scale and reach that this imposed. Her arms spoke volumes. In her hands, repetition became a powerful force. What a riveting mover she was.

Shute's final tour de force was the disembodied head of Medusa, performed by Heather Doyle, using eyes, eyebrows and soundlessly moving mouth to convey wonderment at all that she no longer had to bother with now, like painting her toenails. It was delightfully humorous and weird.

In contrast, Cade f.a.d.'s premiere of "Fashion Briefs," created by company director Autumn Mist Belk, skimmed the potential of using film, art and dance (the acronym f.a.d.) to criticize ideal images refashioned annually by worshipped fashion models and godlike designers. The theme has a wealth of imagery from which to draw and an abundance of material with which to work, but the dancers were confined to a great deal of vacuous staring and posing with one hip thrust out. The untouchable "gods" that Belk created proved far less powerful subjects than the vulnerable gods and princesses that Shute exposed.

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