

MAGAZINE DANCE

Shen Wei Dance Arts

Connect Transfer II



Judson Memorial Church, NYC

December 3, 5–7, 2008

Reviewed by Emily Macel

As the audience surrounded the white canvas-covered sanctuary, a quartet of string players sat, one per corner of the square stage, so the music would play towards the dancers, and towards the other musicians. When the members of Shen Wei Dance Arts first entered the space, one at a time, they found unique and angular poses of resting—bodies slipped into what looked like Picasso's take on the traditional odalisque recline. The movement sprang from this stillness. There was a sort of slow motion fluidity, the kind we've come to expect from films—a bullet in slow motion, a body falling from a ledge. Here, it was poetic in its tangibility. One could imagine their bodies creating strokes of paint on the canvas with large sweeps of the legs and arms. Then, the real painting began. One dancer entered the space and fell to the ground. Her hand was covered in a paint-soaked sock, and as she danced horizontally around the stage, she created beautiful spiraling circles of black paint, a human calligraphy pen.

At one point, the dancers stood close to the altar of the church. They used their bodies to move each other—a head connected with a shoulder, transferring energy to that shoulder's torso, which transferred to another hip. The dancers became amorphous and amoebic. Shen Wei, who does not usually perform with his company, danced a solo to piano accompaniment. The rolling scales of the piano seemed to partner his own movements, which are both flowing and defined. Shen's precision reveals his Chinese training, but his Western influences are evident in his contemporary aesthetic. The Chinese-born choreographer, who left his home in Guangzhou 15 years ago, returned to China last August to present a version of this work at the Olympics. *Connect Transfer* originally premiered at the American Dance Festival in 2004.

There were stand out performances by several other dancers in Shen's company: Hou Ying's dizzying barrel rolls were entrancing and acted as a stark contrast to the slow momentum of much of the dancing in the piece. Brooke Broussard emerged from the wings covered completely in black ink, her body glistening like she had fallen into an oil well. She moved with ease and grace, not at all inhibited by the viscous paint.

A once bare canvas quickly became an abstract portrait. Streaks and strokes appeared from dancers on the edge, moving paint with their feet; a line of dancers with bright red paint on their stomachs and backs hit the floor, adding color to the stark black and white. At the end, rather than a traditional curtain call, the dancer returned to the canvas one at a time from off stage, each with their own color—red, green, teal, blue, yellow—a collective signature to the work of art.

Photo by Mark Murray, courtesy Shen Wei Dance Arts.

"The dancers found unique and angular poses of resting—bodies slipped into what looked like Picasso's take on the traditional odalisque recline."