

Fabric Animal

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June 18,
2019



“Movement itself is the weaving, gathering threads into fabric, they dive into each other, a pool of pools, swimming through to remember, like roots through soil that is really the decomposition of other roots.” Sebastian Grubb

“Fabric Animal” is an organic osmosis of relational movement between longtime collaborators Sonsheree Giles and Sebastian Grubb. The choreography emerges from the passage of time, from their long personal history as dancers and choreographers, an acute sensitivity to internal rhythm, a discriminating sense of space, and their relationship to the natural world—to their environment. The overlay of technique to this pulsation, this ripple effect, is subtle and their skill as dancers naturally astute. They stage their dance in a natural woodland’s setting, a few tree stumps strategically placed on a pinewood stage as spear-thin tree trunks suspend from overhead (Giles and M.W. Guthrie set design.) The staged is washed with a consistency of clean warm daylight; center stage filled with video projections of grey and discolored images, water lapping or reeds swaying within a body of water. We hear the water lapping, the cry of birds, and the deep stillness in between.

To this environment and the initial primordial movement of Giles and Grubb, Caroline Penwarden’s sophisticated and elaborate original score builds layer upon layer—at times galloping at other moments introducing haunting female vocals, the sounds of whales, the

howling of wolves—driving the sounds of nature with a rhythmic beat and occasionally classical music. This robust score, composed and performed by several talented musicians, grows in scale, at times crushing the slowly evolving contact movement of the dancers, making them appear even smaller, as they stick close to the floor in the opening segments

Giles' idiosyncratic often-quirky costumes and the changing of them denote the different segments of this performance. The most intriguing being a shirt with fabric ribbons suggesting wings and the final segment, sweaters that both dancers wear that are connected to each other also by ribbons of fabric—making literal the symbiotic relationship between the two. When John Carnahan's grainy film of Giles and Grubb dancing on mudflats along the edge of the bay, interrupts the live dancing and consumes the stage, it generates a dynamic rhythm of its own. The choreography in the footage is also more daring and unexpected, as the sound of dancers landing on gravel creates an edgy quality, with Grubb entering from out of frame, abruptly lifting and suspending Giles, and then quickly exiting the frame. The edits create a new dimension within the choreography, transforming it from a two-dimensional, internalized process to multidimensional entertainment. Yet, even on film the dance maintains its deep intimacy, holding up its form and style within its larger environment. This intriguing segment is smartly followed another, when the dancers—now on top of a large 5'x5' cube—are videoed from overhead, their image projected behind them, just to their side. Now there are four of them, each presenting different angles and views.

“Fabric Animal” is held in place both by the genuine movement of Giles and Grubb and by a saturating aesthetic that ties it altogether, transforming something very organic into a captivating hour-long dance-theater-performance—where lighting, sound, and staging all contribute to its gestalt. The piece ends a few minutes past several climactic moments, all of which could have created a sharp ending with a strong visual element—but instead dwindles back to the dancers subtle undulating like ebbing water where it began, or perhaps they are just tethered to the length of Penwarden's score.