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# Dance



**BIRD OF PARADISE** Gill gets ready to take off.

## Look before you leap

Beth Gill feels her way through a new two-part work that starts with stillness and ends with dancing. **By Gia Kourlas**

When Beth Gill first started thinking about her latest work, *what it looks like, what it feels like*, she was interested in really dealing with "dance." (The quotation marks are important.) "I think my intention was to address dance in a way that felt particular to now," she explains in a Chelsea café. "I encounter this dilemma all the time when I go out into the world and am asked, 'What do you do?' Telling them, 'I'm a choreographer, a dancer' is so unclear to most people, and it's not always clear to me, either. So I really wanted to make a work to describe what I do in a more intuitive sense. What I've crafted feels really particular to my own gaze."

For Gill, who began studying ballet at the age of three, the monster subject of dance is tricky. Like many experimental choreographers, she has traded traditional vocabulary for something more in sync with

abstraction, performance presence and a deliberate sense of time; in her particular case, she is questioning the tension between her rigorous training and how she views dance today. Gill began addressing such ideas in her last work, the luminous *Eleanor & Eleanor*, which included a postmodern dance as seen through the eyes of a contemporary choreographer.

In *what it looks like*, her first full-length production, to be performed this weekend at the Kitchen, Gill structures the dance in two parts or, as she puts it, directions. "I feel like I have a very familiar way of working with the body, an aesthetic that I feel ownership over," she says. "The other interest is about dealing with the body in motion. In this piece, I set out to let myself work in both places."

To help maintain a certain focus throughout the process, Gill began by setting up physical parameters: The piece is built inside of a 24-by-24-foot square, which takes on two different designs. In part one, the square piece of mirror-like Plexiglas is covered by a grid. In part two, the Plexiglas is removed and the dancers perform on a grid taped to the floor.

"The issue with Plexiglas is that it

has bend to it, and it was really critical that the reflection was not warped at all, that it was as close to a mirror as possible—essentially perfect," Gill says. In *Eleanor & Eleanor*, there was a scene in which dancers performed as if facing a mirror; in the new work, two dancers' roles are to maintain a mirrored

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relationship. "So the whole piece as a mirror exists on top of this mirror," she adds. "It looks like a lake at night. It's a reflective surface in this box of black."

In lieu of an intermission, Gill has choreographed the removal of the mirror. "My sense is that it would be such a beautiful thing to watch," she explains. "And functionally it will be a way of transitioning a kind of gaze, a way of looking between the two sections. I'm thinking of it as something that will help." In part

two, Gill explores unison through the dancing body; in each, she adheres to a strict sense of formalism.

Midway through her choreographic process, Gill (who normally doesn't appear in her group works) decided to join the cast of *what it looks like*, along with five others including Jillian Peta, who was badly injured in a car accident in August. "Jillian does appear, and when she does," Gill says with a smile, "it feels very important and particular to me." But in *what it looks like*, Gill is also considering her relationship with the audience. "When I started making this work, I wrote something to remind myself about what I was trying to do," she says. "One thing I wrote was 'make this a generous act.' I'm always very conscious and aware that there will be an audience, but this was kind of the first time that I felt I was making a thing for other people as well as for myself. I know that going into this project, I wanted to make something that felt new to me. I think I did that, but it took a very different shape. It became a new way of looking."

Beth Gill is at the Kitchen *Thu 20–Sat 22*.