

On Dance

A Mind's Eye Opener

Kathy Duncan

It's commonplace these days for a dance company most people have never heard of to surface and produce a thoroughly professional concert with polished dancers performing choreography that, while not by any means revolutionary, is certainly not slavishly imitative. Last week the New Kinetic Consort and Bowyer/Bruggeman/Schulkind were among these groups. There's so much happening it's hopeless to try to see it all. And I hope things keep on that way.

But I'm in a typical New York satiation point--only the most original minds really have an impact. A couple of weeks ago, one of those mind-opening experiences happened at The Kitchen, Robert Kushner's *The Persian Line*. The fact that one could wonder, in these post-neo-Dada times, how this work fits into the general field of dance says something about its freshness. But the question is really academic. Kushner is concerned with the human body, with revealing it and covering it. And as a natural counterpart he's concerned with fabrics—their sculptural qualities and their kinetic qualities—their weight and flow.

It's tempting to regard Kushner as little more than a good copy for a gossip columnist, because his work is not only sensational in some respects, but related to pop culture. (He achieved some notoriety a few years ago with *Bob Kushner and Friends Eat Their Clothes*.) In his recent show, *The Persian Line*, Kushner creates his own kind of fashion show—not a parody of fashion shows or fashions. On the contrary, Kushner seems fond of the human propensity for conceiving ever-new ways of adorning the body. But he's carried it into a pure fantasy level, an art realm where you don't need to worry about whether you can wear it in the



K. Landman

From Kushner's "Persian Line."

street without freezing or getting arrested. What he has created is as delightfully whimsical as it is pregnant with implications.

The performance as a whole is rich in dualities. The sensuousness of the work combines with a pure formal structure—a long series of variations on a theme. The main theme is the chador, repeated in every form imaginable and unimaginable. Some are hand-painted with voluptuous, flowering plant life. Some flow from strange ornate hats. There are even a couple of double ones—chadors large enough for two people to wear. There's a "Rain Coat" made of Slick material. Several made of quilts. "Homage to France" is a chador with a beret. The sophistication of some of these inventions is rendered in a crude hand-sewn look.

The models enter the performing area completely nude, don their chadors and one

by one walk down a narrow path through the audience, turning and posing much the way models on Seventh Avenue do (I guess). Then, taking the sides of the material in their teeth they stretch their arms wide and allow the material to billow and float as they breeze like airplanes from one end of the runway to the other.

The bodies are innocent before being covered by fabric, yet at times Kushner points up their sexuality. There's a blue garment with holes cut out for breasts, and a variation on Zurkhane pants that covers the face and upper torso, leaving the pubic hair exposed. The sexualness culminated in Ellen Saltonstall's belly dance to the Middle Eastern music that had been playing throughout the program.

As the program progressed, it was possible to see how the

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models' whole appearances seemed to change with the different garments. The last group, dressy chadors for evening, were graceful and made people look mysterious. One was a black chiffon garment that could be stretched over the front of the body or over the back, according to one's whim.

The performers were properly dignified and distant, yet in most cases there was a hint of insecurity about why they were there. Kushner himself made more sense to me, for he always seemed to be concerned simply with showing the garment. The other models, at least from close range, seemed more concerned with how *they* looked, and the garment became secondary. ■