

*Improvisations by Simone Forti and Pooh Kaye. 2nd Annual Festival of Women Improvisers, Kraine Gallery, New York City, October 10, 1987.*

*Blood on the Saddle. Choreographed by Jennifer Monson in collaboration with Zeena Parkins. Danspace, New York City, November 7, 1987.*

*Active Graphics II and Tangled Graphics. Choreographed by Pooh Kaye. Performed by Eccentric Motions. The Kitchen, New York City, December 5, 1987.*

There is a finish on most people's dancing these days. Highly aerobic, polished and preened, bodies flash across the stage and then are gone—finished. Watching this kind of spectacle may be visually exciting to some, but it rarely moves me. What *did* move me last fall and winter was a handful of performances by a three-generation lineage of dancer/choreographers.

There is something powerful and sensuous about the open, raw physicality of Simone Forti, Pooh Kaye and Jennifer Monson. Historically, these women share a branch on the family tree of postmodern dance. Pooh Kaye studied with Simone Forti from 1973-1978 and Jennifer Monson danced with Pooh Kaye for two years. While they now work separately as soloists, or in collaboration with others, these women's work continues to be linked by a commitment to improvisation as a movement source. By allowing for non-technique-oriented movement, improvisation celebrates an idiosyncratic investigation of dancing possibilities. Although their movement personalities are radically distinct, Kaye, Forti and Monson are all skilled in the wit, risk-taking, playfulness and willingness to feel awkward, that are central to improvising.

Jennifer Monson's concert (a collaboration with Zeena Parkins at St. Mark's Danspace) was provocatively titled *Blood on the Saddle*. The audience entered through the performing space in which a line of nine people, shrouded in white sheets, slowly turned from facing backwards to forwards. "Who are they?" I asked, trying to connect their draped costumes to the Arabic music playing over the loudspeakers. This was the first of several tableaux whose juxtaposition of imagery and events were charged with strange, often unconnected, meanings. The evening was segmented by such divergent performances as the unison, upbeat Jackson-Five dancing of the ensemble, or the entr'actes performed by Jackie Shue and Jennifer Miller.

Miller juggled with vaudevillian wit; she seemed to conspire with the audience. Shue's entr'acte was stark and compelling: she was rolled into the center of the space on a neon surrealistic door. Framed by this glittering mosaic of lights and trash, dressed in a makeshift white ballgown and white gloves, she calmly opened a pomegranate and, with increasing ferocity, devoured it. As she ate, her face, dress and gloves became smeared with the blood-red juice of the fruit. A second before the lights surrounding her blacked out, she looked up with an astonished expression as if she didn't know what had just come over her.

Softening the effect of these disturbing tableaux was the very human physicality of Monson's dancing. Engaged and enlivened by the experience of dancing with one another, she and her partners swept through a staggering display of hungry lunges,

another dancer, and then another like her, she darts through a hopscotch of changing lights that are never quite able to catch up with her.

As I watch the dances of Forti, Kaye and Monson, I feel as if I am watching women move in a manner that escapes traditional representations of dancing women. Working close to and with the floor, using any part of their bodies (arms, shoulders, chests) to hold weight, moving at times with a great deal of momentum, these dancer/choreographers rarely use typically inscribed dance gestures such as an arabesque. Like the soloist in *Active*

diving chest rolls and floor spins, surfacing from this deluge of movement to acknowledge each other's presence before dropping back into its current. While their body types and dancing styles differed drastically, the performers stayed connected through a sympathetic physical synchrony. Even when Monson was the only dancer, weaving her furious bull-like head thrusts and lyrical back arches into a probing, poetic solo that vacillated between wilfulness and vulnerability, Monson partnered the music, drifting in and out of the musician's space and the rhythm of her playing.

Pooh Kaye's recent choreography for her company Eccentric Motions is characterized by an avalanche of backbends, handsprings and tumbling floor work that are fast becoming the company's trademark. In *Active Graphics II* and its sequel, *Tangled Graphics*, although the movement is set and perfected in rehearsals, there is a raw edge to this dancing that harkens back to some of Simone Forti's structured improvisations of the seventies. In those, the movement task was so difficult to accomplish that all of the performer's energy was concentrated on getting it done.

*Active Graphics II* opens with a solo within a slender rectangle of light. Slipping her body in and out of the lighted space, a dancer wavers at first, but then dives into the lighted arena. She could be plunged in another substance—water, for instance—for her movements seem to defy earthly rules in their rolling, tumbling procession. Framed—but not contained—by the lit rectangle, she slips in and out of its edges, spreading her energy out beyond its boundaries. Joined by

*Graphics II* they slip out of conventional frames. Perfecting a gesture, finding out the effect of momentum in a leg whip, or what it's like to fall while running, Forti, Kaye and Monson discover who they are as dancers. Their performing, then, allows them to exult in movements which most fully represent their desires and experiences. Hovering on the outside of conventional dancing, they whisper to the audience, beckoning us to follow them outside the frame, letting us see what goes on beyond the spotlight.