

Dean Moss Spooky Action at a Distance

Reviewed by Lisa Jo Sagolla

*Presented by and at The Kitchen,
512 W. 19th St., NYC, March 17-20.*

Gifted choreographer Dean Moss has forgotten the age-old wisdom "less is more." The more stuff he introduced into his new work "Spooky Action at a Distance," premiered recently at The Kitchen, the less engaging it became. The heart of the piece is the spell-binding choreography Moss concocts by cunningly manipulating popular dance clichés, ranging from vaudeville to MTV. His masterful use of rhythm, accents, pauses, and facial expressions turns hackneyed steps

into eerie movement phrases that feel remarkably original.

The multi-media work, which comments on racial stereotyping and the science of bodies in motion, conveys its themes most convincingly through the dancing, expertly performed by Moss and the superb actor-dancers **Kacie Chang** and **Marcelo Coutinho**. Particularly effective were the strikingly well-executed opening sequence of unison, slowly tilting, angular shapes, and an inventively arhythmic solo that Chang performed with an enthralling vacuousness. The work's technological components, however—the projections, props, recordings, and film clips—scatter the focus to such a degree that, as the piece progresses, its messages grow increasingly opaque. The one exception is a metal sculpture suspended from the ceiling; the presence of this reclining voyeur watching the "spooky action" from his "distance" provocatively frames the piece.

Moss concluded his program by performing "Tale Telling Telling," a solo theatrical journey through his personal genealogical history. It begins with an engaging monologue about his ancestors, which Moss delivers in pedagogical fashion, cleverly illustrating his points by drawing large chalk diagrams on the stage floor. As he charges about the space delineating rectangles, circles, arrows, grids, and algebraic equations, his family tales—including his African-American father's disturbing decisions to "pass" as white—are smartly told through visual symbols. He responds to his stories with an anguished dance built of conventional vocabulary. Yet, Moss' movement style is so natural and unstudied that the familiar steps—even the most pointedly artificial ballet posturings—flow out of his body with an easy spontaneity. While it's sometimes difficult to decipher everything he's saying, Moss offers a piquant performance of a winning work.