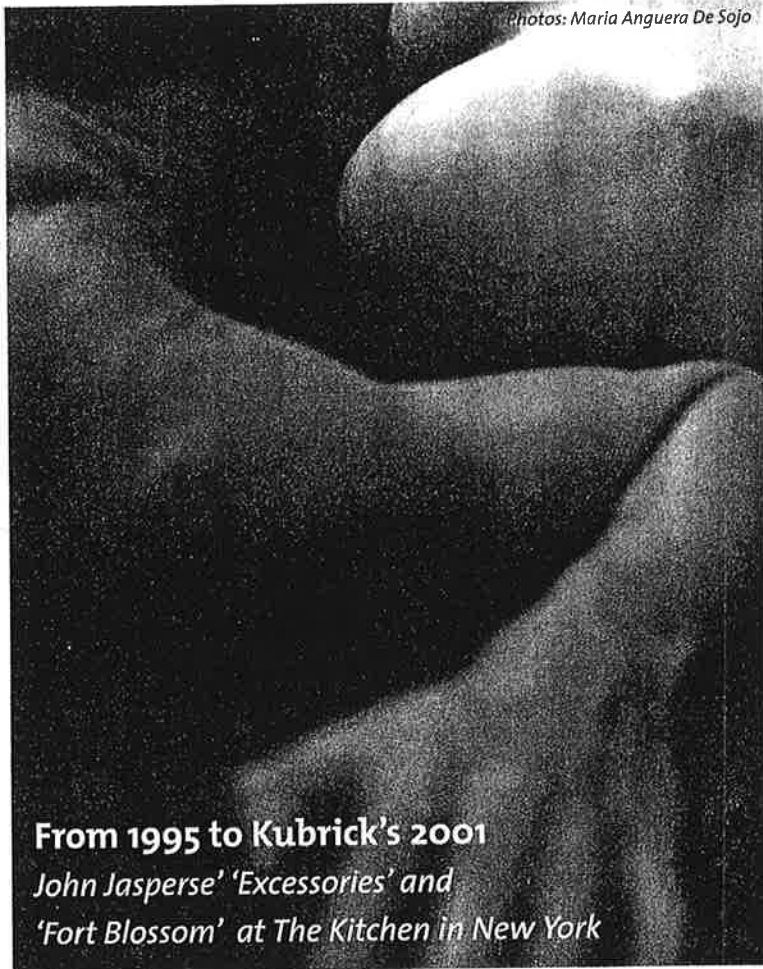


ballet tanz

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From 1995 to Kubrick's 2001
John Jasperse' 'Excessories' and
'Fort Blossom' at The Kitchen in New York

John Jasperse is courageous to present 'Excessories,' his signature piece from 1995, on the same bill as his brand new work, 'Fort Blossom.' But courage is not a virtue he lacks. Overcoming their own discomfort in 'Excessories' – a notorious "genital ballet" – the two women and three men manipulate each other's breasts and penises in a comical pas de cinq performed to a folksy tune. In 'Fort Blossom,' Jasperse and Miguel Gutierrez are naked from beginning to end, while the female dancers, Parker Lutz and Juliette Mapp, wear plain, red-orange dresses, rendering the men's nudity even more striking. Both pieces are intimate and sensual, yet the different levels of inti-

macy make Jasperse's artistic path evident and his decision to set these two works against each other a self-reflective, retrospective choice: 'Excessories' is a cynical investigation of the human body, styles of dressing and sexual powerplay. Last year's 'Madison As I Imagine It' and now, 'Fort Blossom,' have demonstrated a departure from this explicitness and striving for clarity: Jasperse feels he does not have to explain things any longer, and the aggressive mode of 'Excessories' has yielded to a cryptic, almost meditative and otherworldly atmosphere that reminded me of Kubrick's '2001: A Space Odyssey'.

Trying to recall a performance of 'Excessories' I had seen in 1996, I did

not remember Phil Sandström's exquisite lighting that etches out the dancers' smallest physical detail, but also sculpts the bare stage into a dressing room, a dungeon or a cabaret platform. I was also surprised by the virtuosic group sequences, a not-so-released, updated and sleek version of contact improvisation. I did remember, and enjoyed seeing again Jasperse's witty theatricality at work: Mapp opens a suitcase, takes out an attaché case from which she takes a fancy handbag that contains a wrapped pair of scissors. She uses the scissors to cut open Larry Keigwin's shirt so that his back is neatly exposed, then proceeds to slap his back till the skin turns red and the speakers take on the sound of her hands slapping. Mapp leaves, while the slapping goes on acoustically, being the accompaniment for the next sequence. Jasperse's capacity to bring the distinct movement sections in tune with his clever theatrical staging, complemented by a soundscore (James Lo) and lighting that are true accomplices in this dark-humoured conspiracy, makes 'Excessories' a masterpiece.

In 'Fort Blossom' the lanky, naked Jasperse walks on stage and lies face down on the beige floor that covers the left half of the stage. Like a caterpillar, he crouches across the stage into the black half while the other three performers who have collaborated with Jasperse in the creation of 'Fort Blossom'

enter. Gutierrez drops a huge, translucent, box-like inflatable on Jasperse back and throws himself on top of it. This odd sandwich crouches on for a while; then we notice how the air escaping from the inflatable, and how Gutierrez very slowly sinks onto Jasperse's back, bringing the couple into an unambiguous copulating position. The two women, meanwhile, perform an alien duet in unison on the beige floor. Steered as if by remote control, by orange air cushions fastened on their backs, they eventually drop face down in an upstage corner. After slipping from the emptied inflatable like a used condom, the men start a post-coital, tender duet. When the minimal electronic sound turns into a tacky pop song, the women get up and start spinning the inflatables, hitting the men who bounce off like inanimate robots. The ensuing quartet that uses shivaesque imagery develops into a non-ending, when the performers just stop, and bow. After having choreographed for high-profile companies such as Baryshnikov's *White Oak Dance Project* and Israel's *Beheva Dance Company*, Jasperse sees 'Fort Blossom' as a welcome opportunity to return to a more experimental mode with his own group. The work is soft but cool, mellow aesthetics that well anticipate how we will one day look back into this dark and excessive 21st century.

Frank Wer

