

the village

VOICE

DANCE

TRANSFORMING SPIRITS

BY DEBORAH JOWITT



WOMAN ON THE EDGE: LUCINDA CHILDS AT THE KITCHEN, THROUGH APRIL 20

» Several Lucinda Childses grace her elegant solo program at the Kitchen through April 20: the dancer, the actress, and the dancer's younger self. In an excerpt from her *Dance*, Childs treads lightly through Philip Glass's score behind her own image from the film *Sol LeWitt* created for the work's 1979 premiere. Sometimes we see only her austere beautiful black-and-white alter ego, shot from different distances, sometimes looming over us; then Pat Dignan's lighting reveals the equally glamorous flesh-and-blood Childs, now 23 years older, tracing the same springy patterns.

A transformed Kitchen matches the fastidiousness of Childs's work. Black carpet eliminates distracting reflections and, in *Underwater*, an excerpt from the Glass-Robert Wilson opera *White Raven*, intensifies the blue-lit backdrop, the huge compass needle that swings down across it, and Childs in her royal-blue suit. She looks cool as Garbo as she speaks of blue—its science, its energy, its mystique. But her voice is an urgent, witchy whisper, and her gestures seem to push invisible menaces away, while nearby a sea monster festooned with black seaweed (Johanna Hegenscheidt) watches. Childs finally passes through the audience and climbs a ladder behind us. She burns every second into our brains.

She moves sparingly in *Description of a Description* (2000), on a high, tilted white platform, flanked by black curtains that slowly descend, isolating her even more perilously. (Hans Peter Kuhn created both set—with Mathias Hofman—and score.) She looks fine in stylish black pants and shirt by Gabriel Berry, but she is not fine. The eloquent words she speaks, written by Susan Sontag in 1987, gradually position her as a woman in distress. On a small-town street, a man falls; she helps him up; she learns he got out of prison three weeks ago. But as she meditates exhaustively on this event—her voice coming now from her, now from various speakers positioned around the space—we understand a deeper dilemma. "Is it true we were happy once?" she asks over and over. When she collapses, it isn't just the man in the street we see.

April 16, 2002