

THE KITCHEN

CENTER FOR
VIDEO, MUSIC,
DANCE AND
PERFORMANCE

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By Deborah Jowitz

INTUITIVE MOMENTUM. At Brooklyn Academy of Music's Carey Playhouse (February 24 to 27). By Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane in collaboration with Max Roach and Connie Crothers.

MARY OVERLIE. At the Kitchen (February 24 to 27). *History; Hero; Wallpaper; Painter's Dream.*

ELLIS ISLAND. A film by Meredith Monk, broadcast on Channel 13.

DANCE

Mary Overlie walks into the Kitchen to begin her new solo, *History*. She's wearing a short dark blue dress, fancy, with a red scarf (costume: Morgane LeFay). Don Christensen's music has a solid beat, but Overlie doesn't heed it. Pressing her palms against a white wall, she essays a plié, warily, an attitude, moves along the wall, does it again. She looks frail, uncertain. Suddenly, surprisingly, one of her attitudes tilts, veers, and her lifted leg pulls her out a door and out of our sight. She returns through another door. As she dances with thoughtful care, I ponder her references to ballet poses and moves—not classically pure ones, but eccentric “modernized” ones. Overlie's very selective: her performing manner, the sparseness of her composition mark off each small gesture as meaningful. Here's a plié entered into by stages. Here's a brisk skip, one leg doubled under her, one stuck out in front. As she slides into a lunge close to the audience, I notice the strength of her calves and arms and wonder why she chooses to dance so delicately, never yielding her weight to a step. I think of Overlie as a woman who can move and likes to move, yet here she looks cautious and inelastic.

Then I go home and read the press release. And I find that this spare, meticulous, carefully performed solo is a kind of homage to Diaghilev's *Les Ballet Russes*, to the innovative ideas of Massine, Nijinsky, Nijinska. Oh. Okay, so maybe the delicacy is a by-product of memory—time paling all the sensuousness of those choreographers' creations and preserving them in dimly lit photographs. If I'd read the press release first, would I have watched the dance, thrilled by Overlie's sensitivity to history? The issue is an interesting one. Overlie seems to be working with increasing dryness, offering a sketch, an outline, a single iconic gesture. Into these she has packed a wealth of ideas, but—unless we study her first—will we be able to supply the fluid that will make these freeze-dried images expand and become juicy?

Sometimes I can. I often find her work very resonant, but let me be just a little tired and I can't do the headwork. I found her group piece *Hero* (1979) very moving when I first saw it performed in silence. Now—with an intriguing score by Laurie Anderson, fleshed out by Don Christensen

esen, and unbecoming costumes (a lot of orange plaid) by Kim Druse—the work seemed more opaque even though I admired Overlie's sensitive use of a large group against a trio and a jaunty, sporadic tap dancer (new addition).

She's very interested in gesture. The person who stands, hand pressed to brow, who bends forward and grimaces slightly, as if to ease a stiff back. *Wallpaper* (1979) is a carefully worked assemblage of such gestures performed by nine dancers. They walk, pose, group, walk, regroup. They stand in a line and, in twos and threes, lean toward each other for quiet, pleasant conversations. That's nice—the formality/informality. They're all sitting laughing when the lights go out. They are like wallpaper: human gestures and expressions abstracted and repeated in orderly fashion. They might also be background for a more vivid drama that we don't see.

At the beginning of *Painter's Dream* (1978), Overlie whirls through in the gloom, and she's thrilling. She is, (was?) interested in movement. And once, in this dance, Wendell Beavers jumps backward thumping the floor in a kind of stoic, awkward tantrum of steps. *Painter's Dream* contains some lovely moments: Overlie, Beavers, and Janissa Wenk “sleeping” in oblongs of light against the wall. The three of them walking around the kitchen, scrutinizing its pillars and walls, while David Warrilow, standing in a white suit and hat amid the debris of an improperly spread picnic, delivers silent fragments of what appears to be a peevish, disappointed monologue. Tony Giannetti's lighting enhances the dreamlike pictorial beauty of each polished incident.