

# FINANCIAL TIMES

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## Tere O'Connor, The Kitchen, New York — 'Everybody is a somebody'

Apollinaire Scherr



Tere O'Connor's 'The Goodbye Studies'. Photo: Paula Court

Until recently Tere O'Connor was like most financially challenged, downtown choreographers in keeping his ensemble small. His handful of dancers complemented rather than resembled one another, each enjoying their own kingdom of eccentricities. But for *The Goodbye Studies* O'Connor wanted a crowd — “everyone replacing someone as subject”, he noted in the programme. With a cast of 12, he got the crowd but miraculously without sacrificing the individual. Everybody in this dance is a somebody.

O'Connor has one staccato phrase interrupt another until we abandon all hope of dramatic development or even that special dance illusion of hive mind, in which intention seems to travel through the group like gossip. The mind behind everything here is the choreographer's: editing, orchestrating, arranging. And yet the movement is so theatrical — a whole stage of dancers freezing in a cartoonish expression of angst, or collapsing to the floor to be rescued or abandoned, or settling in pastoral clusters as if at a hippy picnic — that it begs for at least the ghost of a story. In their idiosyncratic take on O'Connor's directives, the dancers supplied it.

The common theme, as you might expect from dancers, was “me and my body”. For some this was a happy affair; for others, a battle, a mystery, or unrequited love. And how



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they felt about presenting themselves was, of course, intimately bound up in what they thought of us as their audience.

Simon Courchel, for example, patiently and lovingly dug into the movement before unearthing it for us. He was exploratory and calm even when falling backwards to the floor. Lily Gold was happily defiant, her chin up, her shoulders squared: a stance towards the world. The rest of her body, chin down, hardly registered.

In this era of large-scale exodus and protest, *The Goodbye Studies* offers a compelling vision of mass movement. Its movers share a common goal but for individual reasons. They unite with others to become more themselves.