

Abandoning the Ivory Tower

By Deborah Jowitz

WALLEFLOWER ORDER DANCE COLLECTIVE. At Larry Richardson's Dance Gallery (December 8 to 10).

Susan Rethorst's *Life of the Wasp* is a different sort of political statement. Designed for the art audience, performed at the Kitchen, bearing the patina of "neutrality," the low-keyed, blurry-around-the-edges look that proclaims it part of the post-modern mainstream, it deals, nevertheless with W.A.S.P. and not wasp, and perhaps with the cool gentility, virtuousness, and affluence W.A.S.P. dreams are supposed to be made of.

The dance has a mysterious, slightly impenetrable surface. For the most part, the 16 women who dance it play down the fact of performing. They look often like sleepwalkers. In the beginning we see only Rethorst, Paula Kellinger, and Pam Hagen. Each works close to one of the Kitchen's white pillars. Each does the same slow, unemphatic passage of stretching, leaning, rolling, but each is placed differently in relation to "her" pillar, so that Rethorst, balancing on two hands and one foot, can nuzzle the pillar with her cheek, while Hagen's upraised foot touches the pillar, but her cheek grazes only air. This idea of different people connecting to the same action differently is repeated later when the same three women plus a fourth do a leaning, half-falling dance in which two of the women work together, while the other two duplicate their movements, but isolated in space from each other. Hagen slumps onto nothing, while 10 feet away, Rethorst catches a heavy piece of air.

In between these two sections is one in which Rethorst and Hagen dance in unison, separated by a long diagonal screen of women who quietly lean together, sit, wait, rise, turn, walk. Rethorst's (she was the soloist on my side) moves are larger, but also pensive. The way she'll hunch a shoulder or drop her chin or lean the way you don't expect her to give her the awkward, slightly vulnerable look of a young animal, or makes her appear to be trying out stances that felt odd to her.

Maybe this was the case, because late the women leave and re-enter with various colorful outfits, some with makeup. They form a kind of patchwork of progress across the floor and out the other door. Patchwork, because there seems to be a vocabulary of gestures they all use, some of which have to do with their bodies—gestures derived perhaps from scratching, holding in, undressing—others which suggest waiting, looking, confiding in each other. Is this an abstraction of the W.A.S.P. world—its behavior without its motives or adversaries, lovers or events?

When the women entered for this section, they let \$20 bills fall from their hands; coins clinked on the floor from their sleeves, from under their skirts. A shocking thing to see them really dive themselves like this. Afterwards, the audience was frozen. Many people appeared unable to move until the money was swept up. One man carefully picked up a handful of bills and walked out. Next day, I'm told, he returned the money. Was this his political reaction to a political action? Was he outraged that something as hard and concrete as money should drop on the polished floor of art?

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