

THE KITCHEN VIDEO MUSIC DANCE PERFORMANCE FILM

512 West 19th St. (Btwn 10th & 11th Aves) New York, NY 10011

Reservations: 255-5793

Fred Holland
The Kitchen
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Fred Holland's visual performance work *What I Like About Us*... was inspired by the insular world created by a pair of non-speaking twins—June and Jennifer Gibson. In re-creating this private reality for the stage, Holland (in collaboration with performer Robbie McCauley, composer Lawrence D. "Butch" Morris, video artist Cathy Weis, and lighting designer Carol McDowell) has provided lots of atmosphere but no new insights or titillating tidbits to make the hour special.

What I Like About Us... has no real beginning or ending. Morris's pre-performance background music continues uninterrupted into the performance; it sounds a lot like the music in Indian restaurants. The houselights dim almost imperceptibly while the stage lights remain shadowy and secretive throughout the evening.

Six or seven discrete performing areas are filled with an artful clutter of tables, chairs, candles, a standing screen, a small carpet, boxes of balls, bowls, and knives, glasses, a pitcher of water, rocks, a slanted, transparent platform lit from below, broken plaster casts of body parts, and a table containing a miniature village.

The two performers, Holland and McCauley (who is female), appear identically and androgynously dressed in black-and-white checked culottes and white shirts. They silently sneak into the cluttered space, crawling through or behind a large box in the back, to emerge giggling and silhouetted against the standing screen.

A water ritual is perhaps the most memorable and compelling of their silent exchanges. The two stand behind a table, Holland with a carafe of water on his side, McCauley with a rock on hers, both with glasses of water. After they drink, Holland refills his glass, they switch, he refills the second glass, and they drink again. Slowly, the ritual is repeated. The audience is aware of but not privy to an unhealthy struggle for control.

Water and fire play important parts in rituals that are cleverly disguised as child's play. At one point Holland sets a fire in a bowl. Under a table he touches McCauley's face with lighted candles and sprinkles her with water. The two set fire to one of the miniature houses and watch it burn, rubbing their hands feverishly over their thighs, chests, and necks. The intensity of the work is frightening and from a psychological point of view successful.

As in previous works—such as the 1986 boxing piece *Shade Dehn Eyes* or the 1984 *Cowboys, Dreams and Ladders*, in collaboration with Ishmael Houston-Jones—the visual details, both live and filmed, are rich and evocative, but in the end *What I Like About Us*... is a well-designed, ingeniously crafted work that stops short of satisfaction.

Jullinda Lewis