

# THE KITCHEN

VIDEO  
MUSIC  
PERFORMANCE  
DANCE

## Ballet News Feb. 1983

□ "The dancer obeys the law of the body as well as the law of space; he follows his sense of himself as well as his sense of embracing space," said Oskar Schlemmer, painter, sculptor, designer and choreographer of the Bauhaus, a school of design and an aesthetic movement headed by Walter Gropius during Germany's Weimar Republic. The Bauhaus was dedicated to the unification of art and technology, and the merging of the mechanical with the human was one of Schlemmer's prime goals. The seven dances reconstructed by Debra McCall and presented by the Kitchen (Oct. 30, 31 and Nov. 6, 7) fall into two categories; in both, Schlemmer attained his goal.

The first type of dance is one that explores the formal elements of space such as line and direction. In each of these pieces, however, the human figure is as evident as the abstract elements. *Figure in Space*, for example, focuses on the dancer's manner of walking as carefully as it delin-

eates the rectangles and diagonals of the stage. In *Hoop Dance* and *Pole Dance*, the circles and lines create spare but elegant designs while framing and extending the body. In fact, these otherwise simple configurations become interesting because they are created by the movement of props held by or attached to the body.

The second kind of dance is one that comments on social relations. *Gesture Dance* satirizes cocktail party conversation, and *Block Dance* pokes fun at the overzealous efforts of 1920s architects. In these pieces, human movements are distilled to their simplest lines and angles.

The two kinds of dances mirror each other. In the formal pieces, geometric designs are constructed to explore the human form as it occupies space; in the social pieces, human motions are pared down to their geometric skeletons for the same reason. Regardless of the starting point, Schlemmer arrived at a similar balance between human and formal elements, between the "Dionysian" quality of dance, as he called it, and the "Apollonian" quality of space.

Though all this sounds a bit elaborate, even pedantic, Schlemmer's work is never dry. It seems clear from the dances themselves that he did not develop his ideas and tenaciously adhere to them merely for the sake of a consistent theory; he held to his ideas because he believed they would produce wondrous and exciting choreography. Again, he succeeded.

Schlemmer's work has the sense of re-discovery that the best of minimalist art has; it makes us see and appreciate anatomical and spatial relations that we tend to take for granted, especially when viewing technically complicated dance performed by trained bodies. Like the finest minimalist work, it has wit and whimsy, albeit of a simple nature. And like the finest among any of the visual arts, its composition, though basic, is beautiful.

It is true that the kinetic element of traditional dance is absent in Schlemmer's pieces, but they are short and charming enough so that the physical energy is not missed. His work may be too simple to be called "a modern architectonic . . . all-embracing in its scope," the aim of the Bauhaus movement, but he did find a way to explore the basic elements of human beings in space that is still interesting after fifty-five years. Schlemmer's work is like the architectural equivalent of the bon mot. MARCIA PALLY

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