

Take note: this choreographer is creating exceptional things

In “Waterfalls”, her debut piece, Nina Traub is able to create a new language, that is already shaping out to be profound and intriguing.

Ran Brown

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“Waterfalls”, Nina Traub’s debut work, expresses precise, mature artistic language, exceptional among young Israeli dance artists. The piece opens with an eerie, uneasy atmosphere. The stage is flanked on both sides by two waterfalls of wavy, jet black fabric, joining gushing river that defines and delimits the area Traub is about to enter. Even before her black-clad figure appears, short, high pitched screeches are heard, like seagulls or praying birds, echoing throughout the room as Traub comes forward slowly, with her head tilted back, fully covered with her hands, that are spread with her thumbs and fingers creating a diamond centered on her wide-open mouth. When Traub nears the front of the stage, it is revealed that it is she herself who screams, but the voice does not come directly from her mouth, but rather from a speaker hidden beneath her shirt, amplifying and reverberating the sounds captured by the microphone attached to her head. This is a cry from the inside - but artificially reworked, mediated.

This feeling of strangeness, of defamiliarization is entwined throughout the piece, replacing the “natural” with the unnatural, restraining the expressive qualities of the moving body with formal reins of meticulously structured choreography. Traub is

joined by two other dancers, Meshi Olinky and Carmel Ben Asher, wearing like her a long-haired wig, with their legs shod with strange, blocky boots as they slowly move as if they were wearing slabs of concrete and not shoes made of sponge. Lying on their sides, with heels closely clenched and looking like tailfins, the three appear to be mermaids, and with the sound coming from the speakers attached to their bodies, they become sirens, those mythological creatures whose enchanting singing lured sailors to their deaths. Throughout the dance, the dancers remain alienated from themselves, even as they lay on their sides with their knees constantly banging, or as their legs are rooted to the ground with their arms circling in the air again and again, as if trying unsuccessfully to rise upward. The remote performance seems to imply a formalistic piece, centered on the structures created by the three, the synchronization between them, the movements for themselves. However it is indeed the strict order, precision and repetitiveness that expose the need of all these as means to reach the depths, the subterranean rapids of the emotions which are the root and cause of the work and poke through the speakers in the voice of the dancers carrying them.

Traub is able to create a world with a distinctive visual language, a unique sound palette and a well-defined range of movement - a significant excitement for any artist, and especially for a debut work. In much of the piece, the dancers move in unison, echoing each other, reflecting through movement the sound emanating from their bodies, also duplicated. The well-synchronized execution repeats throughout, weaving measured, precise angular hand movements with small gestures of a head on its axis or eyelashes flickering in an artificial manner. Some parts of the choreography are too long or end for no apparent reason, but this does not diminish from the full experience of the whole, which is also assisted by the sincere and dedicated performance of the exceptional dancers. Traub's language is new and requires another work or two to become more refined, and then more comprehensible to the audience, but it is already clear now that this new language is profound and intriguing.

A key moment of the dance involves a doubling of the happenings on the stage - an artistic ruse called *myse en abyme*, when the "internal" part reflects the work it is embedded in (like a story within a story, or a film within a film). Traub is at the back of the stage, opening a hidden box in the wall, which is discovered to be a small, greenish stage, and she enters it after taking off her shoes. Standing in the middle of the small stage, which itself is in the middle of the big stage, she turns her back to the audience and a guitar is strumming in the background. Traub's voice joins the music, starting with choking sobs, that become clearer and clearer - but also more orderly, musical. The cry becomes a song. This moment encapsulates the work's underlying essence - the pain becomes a source of art, and this art, as Traub express it, can create beauty from darkness. In this sense, Traub's song is not siren-like, but rather belongs to another mythological hero - Orpheus.

Orpheus, a musician and singer (that even silenced the sirens with his voice in one of his voyages), descended to the underworld in order to save his wife Eurydice, but could not obey the rule set by the gods and looked back at her, too early, before they left the underworld. "Writing starts with the gaze of Orpheus", wrote Maurice Blanchot, the French writer and philosopher. Therefore writing, or all act of creation, starts at the moment of looking into the underworld, the void, the darkness. With the

materials they drew from this darkness, artists weave their creations. The poet Yona Wallach suggested constructing a large dam next to the springs of pain. Traub turns the black waterfalls into the wellsprings of her art. Just like Orpheus, using song and movement she offers the audience redemption and consolation, expressing more and more possibilities of beauty, but without climax - as, like Yona Wallach wrote, this pain is but an infinite reservoir, life itself.

In the closing moment of the work, the three dancers lay on their backs. Now their voices come from the depths of their bellies, in a deep low tone squeezing out from the diaphragm. They drag themselves across the stage in terrifying growls, roaring - this is the voice of art directed at its audience, a gut wrenching scream - but it is not immediate. On the contrary, it is indirect - it is not only amplified by the speakers, it is also processed electronically, as this is not only about the voice of art, but also about its power - how it enables the sublime, giving things new form, creating life through metamorphosis.

Waterfalls | Nina Traub at the Jerusalem International Dance Week (10.12.2019)