



Zaccho Dance Theatre

Ghost Architecture, a performance installation
Yerba Buena Center for the Arts
San Francisco, California
February 20-22, 24-29, 2004

Reviewed by Rita Felciano

Maybe rituals cannot be created; maybe they have to grow the way oak trees do: slowly, sinking their roots deeply, standing up against the winds. Joanna Haigood's site-specific works come pretty close to being rituals. Her pieces draw sustenance from their physical environment and connect to those who have gone before us.

Ghost Architecture is smaller in scope than Haigood's recent large-scale projects. It's also one of her quietest, most focused, and haunting evocations of past and present wrapped into one.

Haigood situated *Ghost Architecture* inside the Forum, Yerba Buena Performing Arts Center's multi-purpose performance space, built on a site previously occupied in part by the single-room occupancy West Hotel.

In earlier works, historic architecture--a military fort, a Civil War barn, a grain silo, a canning factory--had triggered Haigood's imagination. Since no physical traces of the old hotel were left, sculptor Wayne Campbell built a three-story approximation on top of its original footprints inside the Forum. The rooms looked like washed out photographs, the white furniture like bleached bones. Haigood filled the empty spaces with life.

Ghost comprised two independent, simultaneously performed, movement scores, which two dancers at a time took turns realizing. Over the course of a week--the show ran non-stop every day from 11

AM to 5 PM--I saw four of the five dancers: Suzanne Gallo, Robert Henry Johnson, José Navarrete and Shakiri. (Sheila Lopez was the fifth.) Since the hotel occupants had been male, all the dancers performed as elderly men. Presented as an installation, *Ghost's* audience was free to come and leave at will.

The choreography was task-oriented and precisely timed. The performer of the first score walked down a clattering hallway, climbed and descended stairs, peered out a window, re-arranged a chair. Each dancer had a different take; Shakiri ambled through her paces like a lost soul; Navarrete was the image of a caged tiger, and Johnson lived inside the tinny radio's music. At one point they climbed on top of a bed. Shakiri listened intently to something from the non-existent floor above; Navarrete contemplated attacking the ceiling, and Johnson didn't seem to remember why he had climbed onto the cot.

If the first score conveyed a sense of restless expectation, the second suggested life as memory. Gallo, stooped over, was immobile for what seemed an eternity. When she finally dragged herself halfway onto the table to pull the string on the single bulb, it felt like life had ended.

Enhancing *Ghost's* penumbral poetry was a mysterious, richly suggestive sound score by Gregory T. Kuhn. Jack Carpenter's shifting patterns of light imposed their own sense of blurred time onto these living ghosts.

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