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DANCE REVIEW | 'SLOW DANCING'

A Lens That Captures Dance's Every Facet: Grace, Muscles and Even Cellulite

By CLAUDIA LA ROCCO

Overheard at Thursday night's premiere of "Slow Dancing":

"He looks like God!"

"Every one of them is its own little poem."

"He should be wincing, looking at that."

"It's not poetry in motion. It's absolute and merciless exposure."

"She moved. She don't move. They move slowly. Look, look, look, look!"

Like much public art, "Slow Dancing," David Michalek's multichannel video installation of 43 dancers at the [Lincoln Center Festival](#), is as much about the experience of watching (read: commenting) with your fellow man as it is about the work itself. And because, in this case, each roughly 10-minute video depicts the unfolding of a five-second movement phrase, in solo performances hovering eerily between still photography and slow motion, there is plenty of time to both sink into and dissect each portrait.

Mr. Michalek used a high-definition, high-speed camera, shooting at 1,000 frames per second and sometimes slowing the action even further. Everything is caught on the three 50-foot screens attached to the State Theater's facade: the perfectly taut, rigidly extended leg of the Taiwanese dancer Wu Hsing-Kuo sweeping upward toward his fiercely concentrating face, along with others' flaws in form and expanses of cellulite-pocked limbs, highlighted against black backgrounds.

On Thursday, a good chunk of the silent installation overlapped with a typically festive session of Midsummer Night Swing. The juxtaposition produced several serendipitous moments, as when Trisha Brown landed on the ground from a floating leap to hearty applause for the band. It also highlighted the wonderfully central place social dancing holds in American life, as opposed to the marginality suffered by the art form; as the swingers jostled merrily in the bustling plaza, some of dance's most important performers and choreographers hovered above like rarefied, mournful ghosts.

The groupings were largely random. But it's no surprise that Wendy Whelan, the [New York City Ballet](#) star who is married to Mr. Michalek, was in the first trio on Thursday, her typically spooky magic augmented to almost frightening levels. Ms. Whelan stuck out the entire two-hour-plus cycle, though, watching with a few

dozen observers as many of the other dancers, amusingly, disappeared soon after their videos had faded into black.

Perhaps, as one dancer muttered, it was “just too much” to stick around after such epic self-encounters. The best performers are both exalted and vulnerable, offering audiences amplified versions of themselves; in revealing their characters, they reveal those of their watchers, too.

For this reason, the artists this watcher knew best were the ones who made the most compelling portraits. They were like lovers, or children, caught in moments of complete inward concentration, from the blissful, effort-laden smile on Holley Farmer’s face as she executed [Merce Cunningham](#)’s odd, tilting balances to Eiko and Koma — captured and shown separately, they seemed even more a singular pair, their slow-motion portraits largely indistinguishable from their glacially paced live performances.

Still, portraits distort as much as they divulge, and there is something sinister to the captured beauty on display in “Slow Dancing.” True, pinned butterflies are easier to study. But study is no substitute for seeing them move through the world.

“Slow Dancing” runs nightly through July 29 from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. on the facade of the New York State Theater, Lincoln Center.