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Dance

DANCE REVIEW

Feminine Beauty Is a Thing With Feathers



Liz Ligon

Celeste Hastings in "Hesperornis Regalis (Seabird)," part of Richard Move's "Hostile Takeover" at South Street Seaport.

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I'm not sure what a hostile takeover of the South Street Seaport's Pier 17 mall might look like. But the picture that springs to mind features swarms of men in black, tossing aside little kids' ice cream cones and confiscating their parents' fanny packs.

Richard Move has other ideas, judging by "Hesperornis Regalis (Seabird)," the first installment of his weeklong "Hostile Takeover" installation. Seen Monday evening on the mall's third-floor outside balcony, the dance was presented by the

Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Sitalines series as part of the River to River Festival.

The program explained that Mr. Move, a performance artist most known for his Martha Graham impersonations, is putting "feminine beauty upon a pedestal (literally) in the midst of the male-dominated world of high finance." Well, I didn't notice any denizens of high-finance land skulking about the boardwalk. But seagulls, eat your hearts out; you'll never have feathers to match Celeste Hastings's costume.

Designed by Teatro del Odio and Gia Grosso, Ms. Hastings's getup, black with iridescent highlights, featured a deliciously frothy, layered skirt — short of course — and a barely there top binding her chest. And then there were the feathers: peacock and ostrich, sprouting from her back, tucked under an anklet strap, radiating from her breasts and fanning out from a headdress that would make any diva proud. Even Martha.

But Ms. Hastings, a New York choreographer and performer deeply influenced by the Japanese dance form Butoh, wasn't there to vamp, gorgeous fake eyelashes or no. Instead she offered a deeply internalized, 50-minute solo that began with her clinging to one of the viewing posts and soon gravitated to a small black pedestal adorned with a pair of large eggs and a mad-looking, handmade mechanical bird. (More on that later.)

Ms. Hastings has marvelous muscular control and a soulful mien, and it was fascinating, for a while, to watch her arch, stretch and contort her body into poses that morphed from heroic to voluptuous to abject. Disparate performance worlds came to mind, including Butoh's storied drag-queen tradition and "Swan Lake." What would Odile make of this wild creature with her fluttering eyes and mouth?

But Mr. Move did not give Ms. Hastings enough to do, particularly in terms of interacting with the space. Once on the platform, there she stayed, and you got the feeling that the spot was chosen mainly for its fabulous East River views. It wasn't until Ms. Hastings picked up the bird, bringing its fast beating wings and sparkling beady eyes close to her head, that "Hesperornis Regalis" came fully to its strange life. And then it was over.