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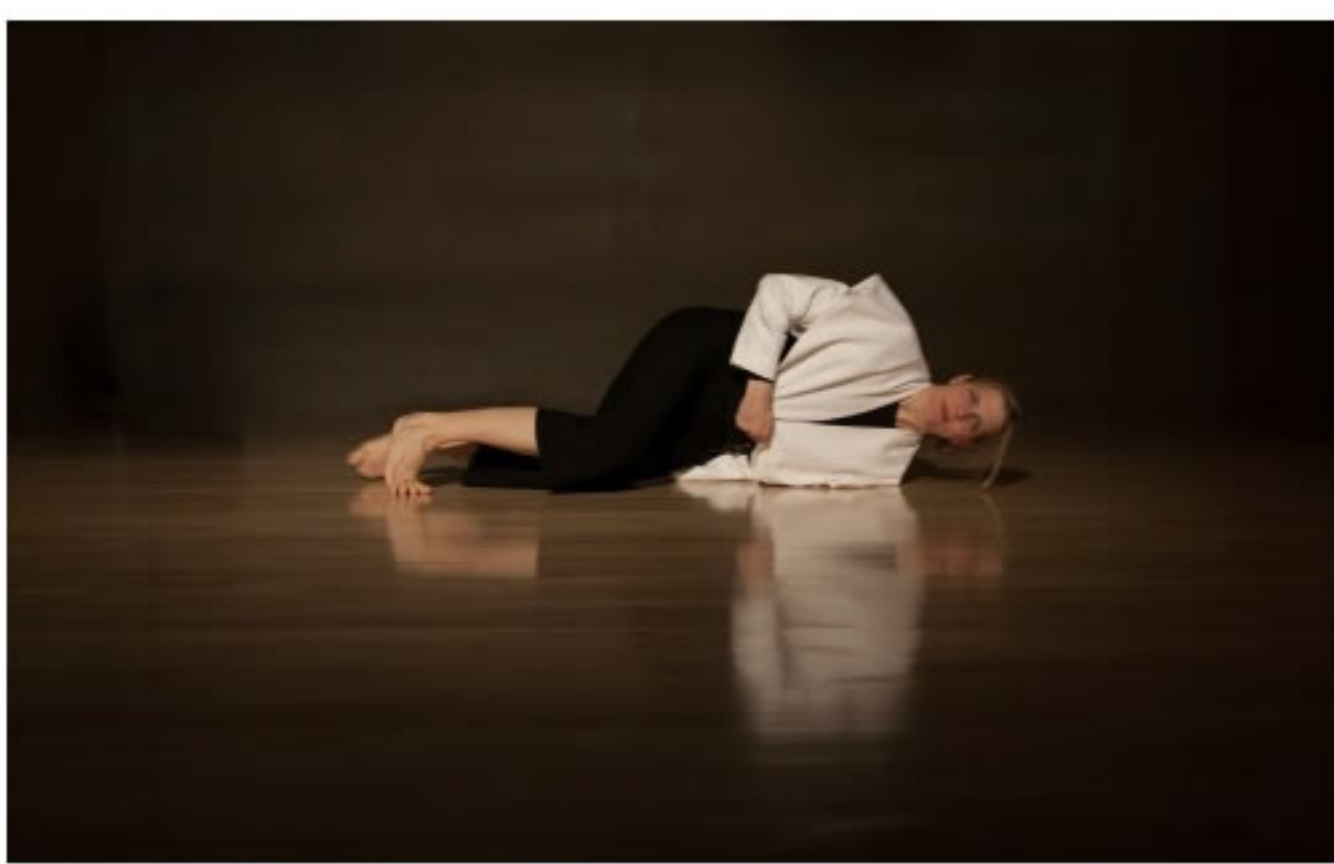


DANCE

Dancing to the how and why of 'It'

Katherine Longstreth and Christy Funsch find a beautiful way to the heart of women

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Katherine Longstreth in "O Where." Photo: Marv Johnson

By MARTHA ULLMAN WEST

What is the "it" in "The How and the Why of It," the title that Katherine Longstreth and San Francisco choreographer Christy Funsch bestowed on their new show, which opened in [Studio 2 at Zoomtopia](#) on Thursday night?

In the highly detailed, beautifully clear movement of Longstreth and Funsch, as well as New York-based dancer and filmmaker Kelly Bartnik, "it" reveals itself as a "way" — the way women think, the way they move, the way they cope, the way they love, the way they find strength, the way they suffer, the way they take all of the above and make it into art.

The show begins with "Reins," a film made by Geoffrey Ehrlich and Bartnik, that has been screened at a number of festivals, and sets the evening's introspective mood. Bartnik walks down a city street, has a glass of wine, encounters some bones arranged at the center of what might be a mandala, goes to a ladies' room, sits on the toilet, watches projections of her dancing self (Doppelgangers, they're called in the program), looks at herself in the mirror, goes up to the building's roof. I am urban, I am human, I am an artist, this film seems to be saying.

In "O What," a solo choreographed by Longstreth, Funsch — after playing with a flashlight, shining it around the darkened space to the strains of "O What a Beautiful Mornin," — rises slowly from a bed of artificial turf, a fluffy crinoline at one end, stretching her arms, seeing if they function, moving one shoulder in a small circle, shrugging at one point with considerable elegance. Some of the movement is finely detailed, and much of it is expansive, although there is little traveling, as Funsch thinks about the day ahead of her, then returns to the turf, gets down on all fours and rests her chin on the scratchy stuff. The day might not be so beautiful, after all.

There is an immediate bleed into "O Where" and Longstreth's gorgeous performance of her own choreography. It starts with a slow, musical walk, to Dvorak, fingers flowing like sea anemones, her movement self-contained and gentle. Then she sinks to the floor, rolls, pushes herself against the floor on one side, is on her feet, performing a deep arabesque, her black-clad legs seeming endless. She removes the white tailcoat she's wearing and folds it, slowly, precisely, the way flags are folded at military funerals. Throughout the piece she uses her face as well as her body in a performance that is simultaneously theatrical and introverted.

Funsch, who has been working with Longstreth since they met in graduate school in the early 1990s at Arizona State, next performed her solo, "Moving Still(s)." The two have a shared aesthetic sensibility, and both are gorgeous dancers, but Funsch's style in this piece is quite different. It begins with her standing with her arms raised, her elbows over her ears, then she slowly puts her hands over her eyes — something terrible has happened. The music (a soundscape of music by several composers, designed by Alex Keitel) becomes jittery as all get-out. So does Funsch's dancing: fingers shake, hips jerk, she falls to the floor. As the sound gets jazzy, so does she, dancing with the only real playfulness in the show, noodling around as if she's alone in the studio, then scooting along the studio floor on her bottom, reminding me of Eliot's lines in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" — "I should have been a pair of ragged claws, Scuttling across the floors of silent seas." The solo is in many ways a tour de force, a meticulously detailed performance, in which Funsch seems completely unaware of the audience, but nevertheless connects.



Christy Funsch. Photo: Lydia Daniller

Longstreth's "Narrative Medicine" ends the show on a fascinating, poignant note. It will resonate with anyone who has been through the diagnostic process themselves, or with someone they love, and speaks volumes as well about the friendship of women, perhaps because it is danced by two women, Bartnik and the choreographer. It begins with the two dancers on opposite sides of the stage, holding big wooden spools (originally for electrical cable), props that are integral to the choreography. Each, rolling a spool, walks toward the center of the space in silence, where they meet, place the spools on their sides and sit on them, facing each other. They use their hands to communicate, in a rhythmic, elegant little dance. Next, Longstreth walks to the front of the space to read something on a cloth rectangle suspended from the ceiling, probably an X-ray, using a pencil light, which she then uses to "examine" Bartnik, who is now lying on the two spools — like, thank you Mr. Eliot, "a patient etherised upon a table." Then suddenly, to some ominous music, the two are again on opposite sides of the space, shoving the spools at each other extremely aggressively. Bartnik pulls strings from Longstreth's costume, and hangs onto them. Then they link hands and pull each other around in jumping, heaving movement, every jump and every heave imploring, Do not leave me. It's a stunning expression of helplessness and vulnerability. And affirmation.

Jeff Forbes' lights, Rochelle Waldie's costumes, and for the last piece, the textile design by Jen Hurley, all contributed to a highly theatrical, polished show.

NOTE:

There are two more chances to see this show, Friday and Saturday nights (May 17-18), before it goes to San Francisco the end of the month. Ticket information is [here](#).

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