

ELIZA LADD SCHWARZ IN THE PRESS

DANCE REVIEW: Fuzión at the Dalí

By Carrie Seidman , Herald-Tribune
Saturday, January 24, 2015

Thousands of people have walked through the "Picasso/Dalí Dalí/Picasso" exhibit at the Dalí Museum in St. Petersburg since it opened in November and — predicting by the mob there this weekend — thousands more will see this unprecedented exhibition of 90 works by two of the 20th centuries greatest modern artists before it closes Feb. 22.

But only a select 100 were privy to an intriguing one-time only performance at the museum Saturday by Fuzión Dance Artists that loosely interpreted the artists' work in movement and sound.

If that sounds unlikely, or at least unusual, it was. There was no narrative, no music and not a single traditional dance step. But, much as Cubism and Surrealism both enthralled and befuddled initial viewers, this was a performance that beguiled even as it bewildered, ultimately leaving enduring emotions and images.

Performed in the round, with the audience on three sides and, on the fourth, alternately a series of dropped black panels or the triangular windows of the building, it was a mix of choreographed and improvisational interpretation derived from recurring themes and approaches within the artists' work.

Nine dancers dressed in monotone gray moved inside and through the central dance floor, as well as down four radiating aisles and the space outside of all the seating, sometimes crawling, sometimes running hell bent. Often they wielded an assortment of unrelated objects — a metal bucket, a bamboo pole, a bowl, a skateboard — which became elements in the imagery and the movement.

While there was never a moment you could say, "Oh, that's Dalí's 'The Persistence of Memory!' or 'It's Picasso's 'Guernica!'" there were plenty of evocations of the art displayed upstairs. Ensemble poses that echoed still lives. Bodies contorted or combined haphazardly to resemble Cubist dis-assembling. Moments of stillness and speed hinted at Dalí's bending of time. And a long section involving water, towels and scrubbing called to mind both painters' use of bathers as a subject.

But the element of the performance I found most fascinating was one that I, as a dance critic focused on bodies and movement, sometimes neglect — the sound. True, there was no "music" to speak of. But throughout the hour-long display, the dancers contributed a soundtrack of their own with their voices, feet and fingers which I found every bit as mesmerizing as the action.

It began with eerily primitive cries, like a band of jungle animals, and moved from barely perceptible murmurs and indistinguishable words, to wild shrieks and gasping sighs. The objects the dancers manipulated contributed a melody of their own — the clank of the bucket, the swoosh of a towel scrubbing the floor, the crumpling or tearing of paper, the crack of a rope on the floor, the splashing of water.

Fuzión, never afraid to step outside the box, excels at this kind of performance but under the combined creative forces of its director, Leymis Bolaños-Wilmott, and Eliza Ladd, the Asolo Conservatory movement coach who co-directed this work, the dancers were stretched to a new level of daring. They embraced the risks, never with less than full commitment and gusto, whether it was an animalistic shriek or an odd upside-down and unflattering pose.

Much as viewers reacted to the art of Picasso and Dalí originally, this work was startling and unconventional and provoked surprise, delight and mystery. It did what great art is meant to do: evoke a strong reaction. If Fuzión ever reprises the piece, you ought not to miss it.