

realtime 84

April-May 2008 **dance**

dynamic duets

keith gallasch enthralled by de quincey & snow, khan & guillem

TIME STANDS STILL IN THE MOST INTERESTING WAYS IN EMBRACE: GUILT FRAME. BECAUSE THE PERFORMANCE BALANCES ON A PIVOT OF STILLNESS AND EXTREMELY SLOW MOVEMENT, THERE'S INEVITABLY A PICTURE-LIKE QUALITY TO THE WORK ENHANCED BY THE ACTION BEING RESTRICTED TO A SMALL GILT FRAME THAT LIMITS OUR VIEW TO THE HEADS AND UPPER TORSOS OF TESS DE QUINCEY AND PETER SNOW. IT'S THE TIME OF THE ART GALLERY, EXCEPT THAT YOU CAN'T MOVE ON AFTER A FEW MINUTES OF VIEWING. YOU STAY STILL; THE PICTURE KEEPS CHANGING FOR SOME 50 MINUTES.

What we see pictured remains persistently enigmatic, always suggestive, of individual emotional and physical states, possible relationships, the history of painting even—such is lighting designer Travis Hodgson's subtle texturing and profiling, his shifts in depth of field, evoking Carravagio, Vermeer, Rembrandt and more.

De Quincey and Snow work their way through a set of states common to The Natyashastra (an ancient Indian text) and Body Weather (the contemporary Japanese movement discipline; see RealTime 83, page 45 for an interview with De Quincey) but never literalise them. A smile is a smile, a grimace a grimace beneath which might be ecstasy or anger. But it's the slow unfolding of these states that compels one to look for complexities, tensions, shared pleasures, changes in mood. Humans enjoy peering at portraits, painted or photographed, as if endlessly rehearsing primordial encounters with strangers in our evolutionary development. Embrace: guilt frame allows us to read faces with a rare intensity, registering tiny details, forming impressions, re-evaluating, never resolving. It's a peculiar pleasure made palpable by disciplined performers who ease themselves into a temporal state slower than our own and invite us in.

But there's more to embrace: guilt frame than faces—radical if slow changes in perspective, supple tonal shifts and endless evocations. There are moments when the performers lean out of the frame towards us, or recede into its deep dark interior; a moment when de Quincey turns ever so slowly, low in the frame, only her head, its back to us, providing support—it looks simple but must require great strength. There are moments that appear Gothic—the prolonged shudder in the residue of a laugh, Snow's shaded face appearing to fatten with anger. There's the suggestion of a grim puppet show—de Quincey's head lolling like a fallen Punch. There's a rare moment of touch, electric when it happens, other moments of apparent adoration or deep suspicion that suggest a relationship dancing in and out of sync.

Composer Michael Toisuta's score operates at another level, a reminder with its persistent pulse of time manufactured and multiplied. Inspired by Ligeti's Symphonic Poem for 100 Metronomes (1962) this surround sound creation is enveloping and some of its more dramatic changes in pace sharply re-shape the mood of the performance. There's no sense, however, that de Quincey and Snow perform to it; it's simply there with them; its time is not theirs.

Embrace: guilt frame is a small, intense work by skilled performers in a tiny theatrical frame that enlarges both our sense of time and of how driven we are by our visual curiosity.

Sydney Theatre Company, Wharf2Loud, embrace: Guilt Frame, created and performed by Tess de Quincey and Peter Snow, original concept Tess de Quincey, set designers Russell Emerson, Steve Howarth, construction by erth, lighting designer Travis Hodgson, sound designer Michael Toisuta; Richard Wherrett Studio, Sydney Theatre, Feb 27-March 9 Sacred Monsters, artistic director, choreographer Akram Khan, dancers Akram Khan, additional choreography Lin Hwai Min for Guillem, Gauri Sharam Tripathi for Khan, composer Philip Shephard, lighting Mikki Kunttu, set design Shizuka Hariu, costumes Kei Ho; Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House