

Review by Mojca Kumerdej

Mala Kline: Bliss; Production by Mercedes Klein

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In the words of Mala Kline, the starting point of the Bliss dance theatre performance is a question about art and the artist, about the driving force that propels creativity, about art's position in the world, its (in)capacity to interfere with social and political context, and the (non-)encounter between the artist and the audience. Although this is a rather general and fairly popular topic in modern art, the author and the performer of the concept, together with her team of dancers, performers and actors, executes it splendidly. The almost ninety minutes of Bliss begin with an introduction by Mike Winter in the role of a banker, who has taken up dancing to attract female attention. Winter develops his character through (self-)irony; in one of the subsequent scenes he thus transforms from a mawkishly obliging performer to a frustrated male chauvinist in only a few minutes. The virtue of the author's conceptualisation lies in the fact that she does not approach the questions on "the meaning of art" directly, but through a discursive, motional and symbolic unveiling and illumination of different, also intimate, levels, thus creating a dialectic between the general conceptualisation and its particular contents, including some interesting peripety. When the banker explains his enthusiasm for dance with an illustration of how him running on stage nude is considered art, but the same action would be perceived as insanity at the bank, and then unclothed, with explicitly sexual intentions, entices one of the female spectators to go on a date with him, his colleague (Massimiliano Cuccaro) asks him why he does not put it as it is – what he really wants is not sex, but love. The performance is distinguished by a fluid passage through different stage realities, in some scenes palimpsestly layered in the form of monologues and dialogues (also with the audience), dream scenes with Vania Rovisco in a rabbit costume, which could be interpreted as a lack of intimate relationship, while Leja Jurišič, sexily dressed, changes into different mute characters of vamps and divas – also in the reconstruction of Marilyn Monroe's My Heart Belongs to Daddy Marilyn Monroe, the video of which is projected in the background. Mala Kline's approach to performance as a medium of identity articulation is especially well-seen in the witty psychotherapeutic scene with a transvestite patient (Massimiliano Cuccaro) and his therapist (Mike Winter), as well as in the central part of the show with reversible reconstructions of an event, in which Vania Rovisco "directs" the performing artists. An artist's faith in their creativity is portrayed by Cuccaro attempting to walk on the water surface. This poetic scene is then shaded into intentional ambivalent intimacy between two nude female bodies, which Mike Winter contemplates aloud in the last scene – as well as the show and its message –, this time as a spectator recumbent on a sofa before falling into sleep. With an outstanding team of performers, Mala Kline has succeeded to stage a complexly structured dance theatre performance, in which she thoughtfully deals with ways of representation, and, on the content level, cracks of subjectivity, with which she also gives particular answers to the initial question on the purpose of art.