

Take Them Disappearing 1/22/13 3:31 PM

DanceBeat

Deborah Jowitt on bodies in motion



Amanda Loulaki laboring in her *Untitled*. Photo: Paula Court

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February 15, 2012 by [Deborah Jowitt](#)

What are we seeing? We're seeing a woman kneel beside a large potted tree, and root around in its soil; she is nicely dressed in black pants, a ruched white top held up by tiny black straps, and high-heeled, little brown boots. That was an easy question. But, wait. How are we seeing it and through how many possible layers of meaning? (Is she cultivating the soil a bit, hunting for something—maybe a lost ring, or a memory?) How will this relate to other actions she may perform?

Or consider this. A man, clearly the choreographer, tells a solitary dancer to perform some of the stuff they worked on that isn't in the piece that we're watching. Except that now it is. What is he showing us? That the dancer is game, good-humored? That memory is fallible? Yes. But he's also making us think about the traditional performer-audience relationship, and about process becoming performance. That may be why shortly after his piece begins, he stands awkwardly in front of a microphone and, after a few moments, says softly, "It's scary up here."

The woman with the tree is Amanda Loulaki performing her new solo, *Untitled*. The unpredictable choreographer is Levi Gonzalez, and he is performing his premiere, *Counterfeit Scenario*, with Natalie Green. Different though they are, their shared program at The Kitchen (February 9 through 11) is rife with provocatively equivocal images and apparent contradictions. What indeed are we seeing? And what has been left out?

The tree is not the only object that shares the stage with Loulaki (visual context and costume by Joanna Seitz). In a far corner of the black-box theater, an assemblage of gray concrete blocks forms a four-step staircase (I assume they're lightweight look-alikes until I see the stage crew lugging them away afterward). Their sole function is to hold a large bottle of water; part way through the piece, Loulaki opens the bottle and carefully positions it so that the water will drip steadily and resonantly into a shiny steel basin placed on another couple of blocks.

Her actions suggest that she is recreating memories—not depicting them, but recollecting how she felt about them and images associated with them. (Two trees, not so incidentally, appeared in her 2007 *Delirium*). How we view what we are seeing becomes mind-boggling in the first moments of *Untitled*. Loulaki gets down on all fours so close to the front row that only those seated there can see her. The rest of us have to wait until her excruciatingly laborious backward crawl brings her into view, as a rumble and low, throbbing tone begin in Georgios Kontos's sound score. Her head is hanging, and her rump is higher. How long can she keep doing this? When she stops and starts shifting her hips, it's as if she has *become* her torso—that long, writhing slant from her neck to past her buttocks. When she stretches one leg to the side, it seems unconnected to the rest of her; her other leg behaves like a groping hand. The image is of a woman disassembled.

Everything she does is arduous. She twists and rolls and reaches out. Is she trying to turn over, sit up, wake up? Next to impossible. Standing, she wrenches her body from side to side. She pushes the tree to a new spot. Her body is a controlled disaster zone,

but the voice she delivers into a hand-held mic is soft. "Have you ever seen a peacock try to cross the street?" she asks. "I watched him walk," she says a few minutes later. She mentions a palace, a man whose fingers smell of tobacco: "I find that disgusting." Scraps of music, nasal singing voices feed into the score. Joe Levasseur's subtle lighting alters the emotional climate. As the stage finally dims, Loulaki is slowly pushing a large lamp toward the tree. By the time she gets where she's going, it'll be too dark to see where that is.



Amanda Loulaki collapsed in memories. Photo: Paula Court