

Dance

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A double image of two intrepid dancers

by Deborah Jowitt

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The woman is wearing a hot pink tank top and tights. Her costume supports the ambiguity of the positions she assumes and holds for varying lengths of time—as if this were an exhibition of statue-posing and we were supposed to offer interpretations. “Your yoga class?” “A dance move you once performed?” “A photo session for a centerfold?” The woman is Maria Hassabi, and this is one half of her *Gloria*.

She occupies only the right-hand strip of P.S. 122's larger space (we sit along one of the short ends of the rectangle, so her territory is deep and narrow). After a while, Hristoula Harakas takes over the left half. Each woman has her own “wall” at the back to lean against, and the two perform their separate solos without contacting each other.

Although I flippantly referred to the 18th and 19th-century fad of statue-posing, it's clear that Hassabi wants to divest the poses of some of their more obvious associations, so that we can view them more objectively and possibly construct multiple meanings. The row of small, round, stand-up light bulbs that constitute Scott Lyall's set and contribute to Joe Levasseur's lighting is positioned like footlights, but doesn't resemble them, and the row hanging vertically at our left is too asymmetrical for conventional theater. Hassabi, on her knees, may arch her back and stick her rump in the air like a cat in heat, but her matter-of-fact demeanor belies the sex-club resonance of the stance. She and her colleague aren't accompanied by music (except for a song in German and other tuneful snatches that slip in almost incidentally); Jody Elff and George Helidonakis have built their sound design on the street noises that filtered into a studio in downtown Athens where Hassabi was rehearsing.

The two women are not at all alike. Hassabi is lean and rangy. Even her curviest moves look angular; she's all knees and elbows and ankles. Harakas, on the other hand, is plusher and very strong. Her gleaming outfit is made of black Lycra, and several large, revealing gashes are cut into her tights (costumes by ThreeAsFour). Whether she grabs one leg and points it at the ceiling, stands fiddling with her hair, or lounges on the floor, head thrown back, your gaze travels smoothly around her body. If these women were sculptures, two very dissimilar artists would have made them—say Brancusi (Harakas) and Giacommetti (Hassabi).

*Gloria*—which has been performed by the choreographer as a solo, and by her, Harakas, and David Adamo as a trio—mightn't work in a large theater. The movements, chosen with care and put together with imagination, invite us to take in the activities on both sides of the room simultaneously, if we so wish. But, seated at close range, we can also focus on one dancer at a time, sighting the other only peripherally. The performers are arresting to watch, and *Gloria*, lasting under an hour, is a small, stylish pleasure.



That's Hristoula Harakas in the foreground and Maria Hassabi in the back.

photo by Rachel Roberts

Maria Hassabi  
Performance Space 122  
November 7 through 10