

## Maria Hassabi

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Reviewed by Eva Yaa Asantewaa

Maria Hassabi and Hristoula Harakas—two of the most exciting contemporary dance artists in New York—exist alone together in *Gloria*, Hassabi's latest work. Originally conceived as a trio of solos (with David Adamo), the piece unfolds as two physically separate but temporally overlapping solos in a theater stripped raw. Houselights remain up until the piece's finale. Both dancers and viewers endure harsh exposure.

*Sic transit gloria?* Hassabi's opening section is a long string of limber, absurd, sometimes tawdry poses held for anywhere from eight to sixteen seconds, set against a plain backdrop and performed with the kind of stunned, trauma-victim deadness common to high fashion photos. Her spread-legged sprawls seem less pornographic than forensic. This woman is a mobile crime scene.

The brilliant score—designed by Jody Elf from a real-time recording by Hassabi—is the oppressive roar of highway traffic occasionally haunted by wisps of music. This easily conjures a context: warehouse on the seedy side of town. You can almost smell the pollution.

Hassabi's solo continues as Harakas quietly slips into the space. In contrast to Hassabi's pink stirrup tights and undershirt, she's dressed in peek-a-boo black tights and top. Holding to one side of the space and keeping her back to the audience, Harakas slowly shifts her hips and rolls her shoulders as she approaches a separate backdrop. A long time passes before she idly turns to the audience, unseeing eyes skimming over everyone's face as she twirls a lock of hair before drifting away. Hassabi now races through her poses while Harakas takes things at a syrupy pace, but both manage to look like big felines in cages. A snippet of someone's version of Eurythmics's "Sweet Dreams," a melancholy swelling of movie music, a cellphone's ringtone—these sounds hazily float through the score and evaporate like spurts of consciousness, doomed.

Harakas' performance is particularly stunning. Her face, at rest, evokes a goddess out of classical myth, the kind you don't mess with. And when, plastered against her distant backdrop, she lets a few facial muscles tug a small, heartless smile into place for no reason at all, it's devastating.

Lighting designer Joe Levasseur—like Harakas and other members of the creative team, a longtime Hassabi collaborator—has outdone himself. Can you imagine a dance in which both performers suddenly quit the space and, in their unnerving absence, lighting takes center stage, dramatically dimming as the soundscape intensifies? Thus ends *Gloria*. *Sic transit*.