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Hassabi's collage

By Eva Yaa Asantewaa

When the audience enters Performance Space 122's theater, dancer Maria Hassabi is already in action--well, maybe not in action, since SoloShow is so much about the collaging of a series of static images--"the history of female representation...pulled from art history, pop culture and everyday life." But she's there, amid James Lo's recording of what sounds like a large, bustling audience assembling for a performance.

Wearing a cream-colored, sleeveless top and pants clinging to her ballerina-skinny frame, she occupies one corner of a large platform, shifting from pose to pose. We don't often see her expression. When we do, it's like a thunderclap; she suddenly pivots towards us with that haunted, big-eyed face and legs splayed in tremulous, claw-like rigidity. Soon, though, she tilts her head back so far that her torso appears beheaded. Although the soundtrack's roar subsides, the severe tension of her pose increases. Joe Levasseur's overhead lighting blasts her, but she appears to take to it, willingly, like a lizard adjusting and drying itself under desert sun.

Sometimes she drapes herself over the platform's edge, neck straining, blood pooling in her face. Often, she will turn her body into brittle sculpture on the featureless, ungiving platform. The work lasts about an hour of clock time--quite a testament to Hassabi's vigor and determination--but you might find yourself completely losing track of time.

I regret missing Hassabi's Solo--conceived as an autonomous half of a diptych and premiered at PS 122 last month as part of FIAF's Crossing the Line festival--and I also haven't seen her SoloShow alternate, Hristoula Harakas.