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Dance Review | Maria Hassabi
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Playing Connect the Dots, From Aphrodite to Lil' Kim

By GIA KOURLAS



Photo by: Chester Higgins, Jr./The New York Times

The choreographer Maria Hassabi performing "SoloShow," the second of a set of two pieces.

In "SoloShow," the second half of a diptych of solos, the choreographer Maria Hassabi plays with contrasting viewpoints so subtly that at first it's difficult to see what has changed since the first piece. There are some cosmetic alterations: instead of the compact first-floor theater at Performance Space 122, where the first work, "Solo," was presented in September as part of the Crossing the Line festival, the new dance takes place in the larger upstairs theater. A Persian rug is replaced by an austere platform stage, and gradually it's apparent that the mood has painstakingly shifted from warm to cool.

While Ms. Hassabi performed "SoloShow" on Thursday night and will again on Saturday at 8 p.m., the remaining shows (Saturday at 10 p.m. and Sunday at 6 p.m.) will

feature Hristoula Harakas. Though the movement material will be the same, the work, part of the festival Performa 09, reveals much about the individual performer; when Ms. Harakas adds her interpretation, the diptych could very well turn into a triptych.

If "Solo" was about the development of a landscape, "SoloShow" is about the art of display. Ms. Hassabi incorporates a similar approach, moving through a series of mind-boggling poses that she holds for extended periods before twisting into other contortions, her body trembling with strain.

Dressed in sleek beige jeans (though the fabric seems more plush than denim) and a sleeveless top by the threeASFOUR design collective, Ms. Hassabi is once again inspired by the female form. Her research involved collecting and studying 300 images, from sculptures to film stills, and interpreting them with her own body, shifting within the positions to show how little difference there is — if you look long and hard enough — between Aphrodite and Lil' Kim.

In many moments Ms. Hassabi casts her dark eyes down. She is as remote as a figure in a 200-year-old painting, but her attitude is more matter-of-fact modern. Joe Levasseur's lighting, which starts bright and closes in sequentially and finally bathes the entire audience in a white glow, emphasizes Ms. Hassabi's relationship to the space as if the space itself were a character.

Ms. Hassabi's solo explorations, alone or in tandem, are for the body — and the moments, no matter how bewitching, struggle to live up to a choreographic whole. It's best to let your imagination fill in the blanks: when she finally topples off the back of the platform, even though her fall through the air isn't visible, Ms. Hassabi could have been Odette, throwing herself off a cliff in "Swan Lake."

"SoloShow" continues through Sunday at Performance Space 122, 150 First Avenue, at Ninth Street, East Village; (212) 352-3101 or ps122.org.