

MARIA HASSABI: PREMIERE



Choreographer Maria Hassabi is joined by four other dancers as they redefine the relationship between audience and performer in *PREMIERE* (photo © Paula Court)

In the November 2011 premiere of Maria Hassabi's *Show* at the Kitchen, the audience stood or sat on the black floor as the Cyprus-born, New York-based choreographer and regular cohort Hristoula Harakas weaved ever so slowly through the crowd to a soundtrack that incorporated the audience's preshow chatter. Hassabi has redefined the relationship between performer and audience once again in *Premiere*, which premiered at the Kitchen on November 6 and continues through Saturday. When the doors open, Hassabi, Harakas, Robert Steijn, Biba Bell, and Andros Zins-Browne are already carefully positioned on the floor, three sitting, two standing, facing the empty seats as ticket holders enter and walk around them to sit down. Blazing lights on either side illuminate the stock-still performers, who are soon bracketed by semicircles of fresh shoe prints. Once everyone is seated, the doors are closed, and for the next eighty minutes, the five performers, wearing different-colored denim pants, tucked-in button-down shirts with minute but strange extra details, and black shoes or boots, eventually begin moving nearly imperceptibly, slow enough to make Butoh look like the *Indy 500*. The only sounds are the squeaks made by hands and feet pressing against the floor, except for occasional electronic noise coming out of the speakers (as well as every stomach grumble, cough, and shift from the audience). Never making contact with one another, Hassabi, Harakas, Steijn, Bell, and Zins-Browne perform deeply pensive and carefully choreographed simultaneous solos, fiercely focused, never smiling or breaking concentration, creating a nervous energy between audience and dancer, filled with both trepidation and anticipation. Once you figure out how the performance will end, sheer elation takes over. And then, indeed, it comes to a close, and the audience exits much as it entered. A copresentation of Performa 13, *Premiere* is another fabulously creative, involving, and challenging piece by Hassabi in her continuing exploration of movement, expectation, personal connection, the nature of performance itself, and the endless intricacies of the human mind and body.