

DANCE REVIEW

Theatrics, dance mesh in Hassabi's 'STAGED?'



THOMAS PORAVAS/FILE

Dancers lie on the floor in a scene from a "STAGED?" performance.

By **Thea Singer** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 19, 2017

In Maria Hassabi's slow, meticulously articulated theater piece "STAGED?," texture begets emotion and seemingly inadvertent placements — a tousled head near a shoulder here, a hand on a thigh there — can carry the weight of ages. Presented by the Institute of Contemporary Art Friday and Saturday night, the 75-minute work is a journey through the intricacies of connecting (and not), revealed in almost achingly deliberate movements — and stillnesses — wrought by Hassabi and her three dancers.

From the beginning, "STAGED?," with its elongation of time, is disconcerting: It rattles you awake. The audience enters directly on the stage — covered in red carpet that later fades to pink — to take their seats on risers surrounding the dancers, who lie like linked puzzle pieces in the center of the space. Oisín Monaghan, facing front in denim pants and colorful shirt, blinks. You wonder: Who are the watchers and who are the watched?

Indeed, we quickly realize we, too, are part of the performance: me scribbling notes, a man checking his glowing texts, people leaving early, the exit door clanging behind them.

Eyes play as large a role as limbs and torsos in this slow-motion scene of connections and separations, starts and stops. The performers never stand; rather, neck tendons strain and parts of bodies distort and twist, extend and tremble, laying bare the Herculean muscular control necessary to move with such intention.

Jessie Gold, enunciating a curve, slips to the floor, vertebra by vertebra. Hristoula Harakas, with her feet and back on the ground, raises her pelvis so high the sheer physics of the move turn her sideways. Hassabi, her yellow nailpolish a pinpoint, nuzzles her head, then also her chest into Harakas. The stage is a sea of color: Victoria Bartlett's outfits vibrate with shapes in red, green, orange, gold, black, white, and more. Images of Gustav Klimt's "The Kiss" flit before me. As time passes, the dancers shape-shift from a clump to a diagonal line, with elbows, knees, and heads forming peaks and valleys. The transformation has been so subtle, you've missed how they got from here to there.

Composer Marina Rosenfeld's score — cracklings and subtle thrumming lit by individual notes — operates like a leitmotif. It enters and exits your consciousness, underlining the now-you-see-it, now-you-don't ephemerality of not just "STAGED?" but dance in general.

Hassabi's is a world of "living" sculptures. Her preoccupations are not new: The rebels of the Judson Dance Theater of the 1960s, among them Yvonne Rainer, Lucinda Childs, and Steve Paxton, strove before her to plumb the meaning of what "dance" is. Hassabi's interpretation, however, is all her own: a confluence of visual art, movement, sound, and dramatic lighting with fashion and, yes, theatricality part of the mix.

STAGED?

By choreographer Maria Hassabi

At the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, March 17 and 18

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