

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

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REORDERING BORDERS OF ILLUSION AND REALITY

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The choreographer Christine Elmo has described her work as “performance that hyper-accentuates the fourth wall.” In her one-off dance “This is the end,” Wednesday night at the Kate Werble Gallery, Ms. Elmo’s witty representation was dead on. In this nontraditional space she manipulated the sensation of order and chaos, using audience members to fill in the borders of the performance area like a frame, or demanding that they go elsewhere.

It wasn’t as annoying as it sounds. Ms. Elmo’s method of ruling a stage is funny, wise and just a touch wry. (In the work she wore a blond wig and was credited as Janet, or “a concept living inside a human being.”) Ms. Elmo, an intriguing combination of tough and pretty, gets away with being a bully.

All of the dancers in “This is the end” are easy on the eyes; along with Ms. Elmo’s Janet, the cast included Laurie Berg, Megan Byrne, Jessica Cook and Elle Erdman, wearing scraps from American Apparel — the kind you find secondhand at Beacon’s Closet instead of fresh from the store.

The women started out huddling in a corner of the gallery and gradually moved toward its front windows in a cluster. Small shuffling steps were followed by birdlike shifts of the head, as their eyes, darting in different directions, seemed to see nothing. They may have been from another dimension. Ms. Elmo, who has a fantastical imagination, stated in press notes that the dance was created on the premise that “authenticity is an illusion rather than a reality.”

Throughout “This is the end” there was a merging between real and make-believe. Dancers, shaking and thrusting their hips or writhing on the floor, performed sexualized movement with a desexualized purposefulness. They disappeared and reappeared wearing wigs. The highlight was a turbulent, heroic fencing match between Ms. Berg and Ms. Erdman: you saw nothing but could sense it all — ripped flesh, blood, the clatter of blades and finally death.

Ms. Elmo likes to refer to her work as ever evolving, and that idea was evident in “This is the end,” which started about 15 minutes early. It was a trick beginning that allowed the dance to start in the middle (just as it ended in the middle of a song). It seems that Ms. Elmo is fond of the continuing saga where, despite the title, there is no end in sight.

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