

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Lauren Mandilian Huot

Absolution in the Witness, in the First Breath

by Kat Sullivan

When I enter Mascher's studio, Lauren Mandilian Huot is sitting quietly, the hem of her lavender wrap dress arranged carefully over her crossed knees. A single burst of color across a backdrop of white sheets, she methodically crochets a long, yellow curl out of yarn. Moving closer, I see the curl extends down Huot's legs, past her feet and all the way across the stage, encircling a stool and then winding back, creating multiple folds of yellow knitted helices. The far end connects to a small female doll, also crocheted, sitting atop the stool opposite Huot. This one knitted piece of her larger performance, *And At Last I See The Light*, must have taken her months.

Huot is the first artist of a new residency program created by Zornitsa Stoyanova* called Moms Make Art. A mother and artist herself, Stoyanova knows firsthand how difficult it can be to carve out time for said practice while raising children. As slim as the opportunities are for artist residency programs, fewer still in the United States offer childcare subsidies. More information about Stoyanova's program can be found on her [website](#).

For Huot, the Moms Make Art residency was not just a space to reconnect to the act of creating something artistic, but also to delve into the difficult and complex emotions she has experienced as a mother of children with special needs. As she crochets, Huot's voiceover tells us of her premature delivery of twin girls after being hospitalized for weeks; how the words "cerebral palsy" didn't come up at all in the initial conversations she and her husband had with the doctors regarding one of their daughters; how Huot always had a vision of what pregnancy and motherhood would be like and, though she loves her girls more than anything, this isn't exactly what she had in mind.

Huot's work is chest-heavily honest; she steadies a leg that trembles as she dances, then the other, then a hand. The movement is lyrical and sweet, and her lavender skirt billows around her and across her shins, as she rolls down to the floor and swings a leg to the side. When Huot next sits in a chair, she divulges a deep sense of guilt for having secretly hoped she would not give birth to an autistic

child before getting pregnant with the twins. Somehow, she feels it is her fault that one of her girls was born with special needs, that she is being punished. I think this is what I mean by “chest-heaving”: I sense that Huot doesn’t share this with us for sympathy or reassurance, but rather to relinquish the doubt and pain the thought holds over her, to stop carrying it around.

In addition to being a fluid and evocative mover, Huot is a skilled media artist. Onto the white sheets behind her she occasionally projects roving moments of her daughters laughing, playing, and learning to walk. These film clips form a subtle montage, conveying the passage of time with a heightened sense of intimacy.

At the very end, as the lights dim, Huot clasps a pair of scissors and walks down the winding rows of crocheted curls. Tenderly and firmly, she cuts the yellow tendrils at the base of the doll’s neck, bringing to mind an umbilical cord. Perhaps she sets her daughters, her expectations of motherhood, and her piece free into the world, all beautiful and brave and strong.

*Stoyanova is a thINKingDANCE writer.

And At Last I See The Light, Lauren Mandilian Huot, Mascher Space Co-Op, October 14, <http://www.wherevent.com/detail/Lauren-Mandilian-Huot-And-At-Last-I-See-the-Light>

By Kat J. Sullivan

November 18, 2017