

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Courtesy of OhOK

Together, Yet Still Alone

by Kristen Shahverdian

I love duets. There is intimacy built into witnessing a relationship. But what if the togetherness never happened?

OhOK's Whitney Casal and Britt Davis, along with drummer David Guy, created *Do mirrors burn?*, a film adaptation of what was originally a live performance at SOUNDANCE Festival Berlin 2020. Guy's music provides a strong framework for the piece; the dancers ride on the drums' tempo and volume with torsos shaking, strong limbs reaching, and stillness. I am grateful that the relationship between music and movement is not a mirror image. I see and hear both because of their independence.

As the initial dancer enters the space and walks in a circle, my eyes take in place. The dancer is in a field; a constant breeze moves the stalks of wheat, and in the distance a building dots the skyline in this black and white film. Each dancer has solo moments, with sinewing spines juxtaposed with strong arms reaching out. A pushup—then the dancer melts into the field and disappears. Their movements do not reveal who they are or why they are here, but the artists state on the website that they wanted physicality to take precedent, and it does.

As the dancers' arms arc around each other, my eyes adjust so my brain can catch up. What would normally be touch now looks like hands absorbing one another. Their full torsos dissolve together for just a moment, but then they separate again. It could become gimmicky, but it is not. If they are each other's mirror, I feel the mirror liquify and shapeshift; they become something else because of this new form of contact. The connection lasts for a moment and then the original body reappears, and boundaries return.

In the end, both dancers lean back together, in unison. One rises and while thrusting her arms and hips forward she almost leaves the screen, only to drop down out of view in the stalks of wheat. For a moment we are left with one again—although that was all we ever had.

[*Do mirrors burn?*](#), OhOK Performance Group (Whitney Casal, Britt Davis), 2020 Fringe Festival, Sept. 10—Oct. 4.

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