

# thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Morgan Gregory

## Whimsy and Childlike Nostalgia in “Indigo in October”

by Rachel DeForrest Repinz

At the culminating showing of the Mark Morris Dance Center’s SharedSpace program, Sumayyah Smith’s *Indigo in October* delivers a delightfully quirky performance bursting with colorful odes to childhood and eccentric, technically accomplished, choreography. Blending nostalgic themes with vibrant design, *Indigo* grabs the audience by the hand, inviting us to be immersed in Sumayyah’s colorful world.

Beginning with her face hidden behind a vibrant green book with the word “BIRDING” in bold white lettering across the cover, Sumayyah invites us to be curious. I lean in, at first trying to read the title of the book, then examining the ephemera that adorns a small white table to her right. A child’s voice introduces the work, guiding us through a playful orchestra of woodwinds, percussion, and brass. Sumayyah is seated on a small stool, framed by fellow dancers Madi O’Halloran and Alexis Vinzons. As the music begins, a story of nostalgia and adolescence unfolds. A stubborn Sumayyah contorts her body, quickly shuffling through slumped, proud, and twisted postures behind Alexis’ back while Madi kneels beside her, staring off into the distance. Sumayyah drops her head into her lap, hunching forward, before quickly shooting a flexed leg out and snapping her hand up to her head. Turning around, Alexis reshapes Sumayyah into a poised posture with legs crossed. However, with a subtle tap on the thigh from Madi, Sumayyah quickly unravels again and again, each time being reshaped by a diligent Alexis.

Heavily doused in Wes Anderson-inspired design, *Indigo in October* indulges the audience in a playful story realized through theatrical gestures, colorful props, and coyly exaggerated facial expressions. Balletic phrasework cuts through moments of gesture and characterization, interspersed with post-modern approaches to movement. A soaring grand allegro is sprinkled with trembling upper bodies, collapsing limbs, and gyrating pelvises. The trio has a relaxed, tender chemistry with one another, luxuriating in moments of quotidian intimacy before quickly jumping back into a well-rehearsed phrase. Uninhibitedly delicate, yet meticulous.

Madi gently braids Alexis’ hair, while Sumayyah hastily flings brightly colored clothing from a wicker basket into the air (only to

unenthusiastically fold and return the clothes to their basket moments later). This distinctively whimsical back-and-forth defines the work, moving quickly from one moment to the next without hesitation. Flicking, sliding, quivering, and collapsing, the dancers' commitment to unpredictability keeps me on the edge of my seat.

Sumayyah emphasizes the collaborative nature of the work in a brief talkback that follows the performance, facilitated by Yara Travieso. Not only does she point to how her fellow dancers, and rehearsal director Morgan Gregory, contribute to the artistic landscape of the work, she also speaks about the influence that the "energy of observation" has on the dancers. The presence of the audience, according to Sumayyah, allows the dancers to sink their teeth more deeply into their characters. With a playfully sarcastic smile, Sumayyah jokes about her character's defiant, youthful, confidence. "Yeah, I know what happens next," she says with a bobbing head and hand affixed to her hip. She eggs on the audience's curiosity while simultaneously convincing us to trust her as she guides us through the work – and we do. She embodies the overt confidence of a child who uses their youthful fearlessness to easily influence their peers, regardless of if that confidence is feigned or genuine.

The performance ends with an unyielding Sumayyah as she drops back down to her original seat and fervently reopens her book, as Madi and Alexis slither offstage. Sumayyah's reflection on the performance experience during the talkback parallels my feeling as an audience member, "I feel like I just read chapter one of a book... and I'm ready to read chapter two." I left the theater eager to see where her work lands next.

*Indigo in October*, [Spring SharedSpace 2024](#), Sumayyah Smith, Mark Morris Dance Center, June 6th.

Homepage Image : Three dancers lay with their backs against the black marley floor donning gentle smiles. They have lowered eyes and wear delicate, lacy, feminine tops. The dancer in the middle holds a bunch of red, orange, yellow, and white tulips against their chest.

Article Image: Three dancers rehearse in a dance studio with white walls, black marley flooring, and sunlight pouring in from the windows behind them. The leftmost dancer dons wavy shoulder-length hair and a delicate floral top. They wear an apathetic facial expression while kneeling. The center dancer sit atop a small stool, covering their face with a green book. The rightmost dancer has their back turned to the others, wearing a delicate yellow floral top and holding a bunch of multicolored tulips. To the far left of the dancers sits a wicker basket and small white table.

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