

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Steven Hoffman

Sculpture in Motion

by Rhonda Moore

One of the best perks of the Fringe Festival is discovering unlikely performance venues that bring all kinds of art into the city's nooks and crannies. As I pulled into the parking lot of Tracey, Incorporated, I realized I'd walked past this building for more than two years, five days a week, while taking my then 9- and 12-year-old boys to and from Kearney Elementary School. The building carried the same name as the school crossing guard, and became my trigger for avoiding a generic goodbye after our daily chats.

Yesterday, the Tracey Furniture Company hosted *Mirrors*, with former PA Ballet company member Alessandra Mullin dancing in its vast showroom. With visual artist Clete Shields' sculptures and drawings framing the walls, a single, serpentine row of seating emphasized a play of contrast evident throughout the entire piece, both in Mullin's dancing and Shields' artwork.

Mirrors begins with Mullin standing in first position. The dance's development is simple—*port de bras* gradually moves her outward in a circular pattern. Classical movement phrases shift the dancer closer to Shields' curious sculptures and designs. A bench at three-quarter mark beckons her to sit, her reverie reminding us that we are both the observer and the observed. The juxtaposition of romantic classicism in movement with industrial, minimalist surroundings make Ms. Mullin a space writer, legs and arms creating beautiful, ephemeral calligraphy. The dancing is fierce, yet delicate and elegant. A sparse, melancholic piano and violin tune underline the dance's intimacy and the space's magnitude, creating pleasurable tension.

Contradiction lies also in Mullin's physicality. She is small, yet muscular, petite but solid. Her thigh-length sleeveless shift, bare legs, and unabashedly present dancing hide nothing, and the final effect is one of open vulnerability. Mullin is sculpture in motion, bringing into the space no more and no less than what is needed.

Large and small works by the self-taught Shields scatter the room's perimeter. Enigmatic, some are comic-grotesque, some pensive,

others whimsical. The refined earthiness of both artists makes the pairing a good one—honest, straightforward, and well crafted.

Mirrors, Alessandra Mullin & Clete Shields, Tracey, Incorporated, Philadelphia, fringearts.com/event/mirrors-3

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