

u n i o n

On the 18th of December 2022 I joined to see dance artist Nitsan Margaliot's triple bill "Foresigns" at Kunstquartier Bethanien. In the three works, I experienced a common thread handling issues and approaches to the question of union. Specifically, union in the understanding of "the growing together of severed parts." (Merriam Webster) The three works performed in the evening, were "A visit" a collaboration of Margaliot with musician Mari Sawada, where the narrative thread seemed to be that of the union with another. With the second work, "En Moon", performer Scott Jennings, seemed to dance about the union with the self. And the third and the concluding work "Returning" with Margaliot and Boram Lie talked to me about the union of difference.

A visit / Union with another

I arrive at the studio2 at Kunstquartier Bethanien and get seated. I observe two structures placed in the space: a standing rectangular metal frame and a circular frame covered in a cloth; on it multiple contours of palms are embroidered. I hear a rattling sound, Sawada's violin playing, coming from inside of it. A friend who is seated next to me offers me a mint, which in turn rattles inside my mouth. My mouth and this rattling "tent" conjoin as a cave, as a womb: as wet acoustic spaces. The technician who is standing at my periphery begins a track of wind accentuating my already inner tuning further by its rhythmicity reminding me of an arising and then exiting breath.

Slowly a pair of legs extend out and under the cloth, wearing a pair of golden boots. The choreographer and performer Nitsan Margaliot is the owner of those legs and gradually he rests his body, leaning and caressing the floor. His eyes are closed, and with arms stretched outwards I receive a sense of blindness, of careful listening to his co-performer Mari Sawada strutting in high heels. I feel them both focusing on an imaginative space, that lies outside my perception. Their hands protrude out from their head like antlers, sensing this invisible space. On the backside of the t-shirt Margaliot is wearing it says "follow me to the..." To where? It is left as an open question.

The performers meet at the rectangular metallic frame and begin rotating it steadfast, now opening their eyes and looking at one another. Their bodies are mirroring and imitating one another, they are becoming of the other.

En Moon / Union with the self

The second work begins with the performer Scott Jennings facing the audience. His torso gradually shifts his body to "fall into" the space. He jumps through the space like jumping through cobble stones, balancing, and rotating his body. His hands make gestures and spells in the space, weaving the air and his face. His effort increases and his voice breaks out in muffles. His body falls and slams into the floor. He repeats movements. And he is still. Did he find his place? I see a conflict becoming visible between his inner body/reality and that of his outer body/reality.



Margaliot and Sawada in movement @Marieke de Graaff

He steps to the side of the space to change his clothes. He returns to touch his face in front of us. And I find myself wondering how to confront privacy. His body falls through the space until he returns to where he started from. It feels that the heart needs to be heavy the lighter the body, or the space is. Inside of him I feel there is a sense of home.

He steps aside to take his shoes and socks off. A soft and tender piano music enters, with him taking a walk. His face portrays seriousness. He walks as if he is walking on a tight rope - one must be exact not to fall. Gradually he possesses a tender control over his body and its ability to shift, rotate, lift, swing, and fall. He suspends his body and I start to pay attention to a third space: a space that is in-between his inner body and the outer space. The t-shirt he is wearing is of colour grey and it starts to melt in my vision to the grey colour of the floor. In colour theory grey is the colour of in-between and the only colour that is not a colour, as it offers an even tension, a sense of balance, to the eye's receptors.

He has less and less energy in his body. And he seems more and more precise in his movements. Now this movement, then this, and now this. He witnesses his own movements calmly, bearing his own bareness. He is now able to stand on one leg without falling.



Scott Jennings in movement @Marieke de Graaff

Returning / Union with difference

For the final work of the evening Margaliot returns holding a skin in his hands to the space with cellist Boram Lie. The skin is plastic making the front and the backside of a torso. The cellist begins to play and Margaliot begins to rotate his body - leaving the skin on the floor.

The disregarded skin on the floor, arises questions of what it can be to be outside of one's own skin. To be vulnerable and exposed, and perhaps more ready to meet with and be affected by another. Margaliot's body seems broken, as do the discord notes played by Lie. When the cello quietens, the dancing body starts to feel heavy, falling to the floor. As the cellist begins to tap rhythms onto the body of the cello, the performer's body begins to rhythmically lose its control. I start to notice the union between these two different mediums. The body seems to follow the lower and the upper tones of the cello in whether to direct itself down or up; when more pressure is applied onto the strings, the tension in the body increases. Both the music and the dance seem autonomous, yet there is a deep sense of togetherness and sameness, hand in hand like the heart and the voice. The performer breaks out into a walk - hitting his heart with the palm of his hand, and the cellist slaps her bow on to the strings of the cello. They both return to where they started from, rotating. There is a solemn taste in the air, and I feel humility in my bones. Margaliot kneels and places the skin on his knees. It lays there like a corpse, hanging and sagging, skinned. The cello goes on, growing in volume, only to stop abruptly.

The evening ends leaving me with questions of the different bodies we all carry whether it be our literal skin (Returning), our emotional body (En moon), or our dreaming self (A visit). The three works successfully approached in their own way externalizing the inner life and internalizing the external life. Perhaps the rich approaches I witnessed brought in me the sense of a union, or its search, whether it was an intended thematic thread or not. Returning to the name “Foresigns” given to the shared evening, I notice its accuracy in comparison to foresight – a hint not to look at union from afar, from distance. Rather the usage of the word “sign” with the performing bodies marks union skin deep, into a visceral experience, and in effect proximal.



Black and white capture of Margaliot and Lie in movement
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