



Pardo's 'Flat' has imagination, strength

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TROY -- On Saturday night at the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the stage was packed with people -- not performers, but spectators. Audience members were encouraged to lay flat on the floor (padding was provided) to watch the unfolding of Rodrigo Pardo's "Flat."

With the stage crowded, one may wonder where the show unfolded. On the upstage wall, of course.

All kidding aside, Pardo, with his acrobatic performer Yves Fachon, obviously wanted to shift audience perspective. He achieved that in his work-in-progress that fascinated as much as it provoked questions about our view of the world and reality. And while the idea was not a novel one, (think Trisha Brown dancers in 1970 walking perpendicularly down the granite wall of the Whitney Museum), Pardo's piece combined text, video and music, taking it beyond daring circus act.

The evening began with the audience shifting into position. Fachon, already rigged in his harness and seated on a large white square that protruded from the wall, sat motionless, watching. When the lights finally dimmed, Fachon stood and tip-toed like a tight-rope walker across the top edge of the box. When he came to the corner, he dropped, stepping horizontally down its side. Gravity was suspended as his steely abs and back kept him completely parallel to the floor below.

Fachon's strength is amazing. But more amazing was the imagination Pardo poured into "Flat." Fachon scaled across the center of the box, which was equipped with other geometric shapes that jutted out beyond the main box. With the aide of clever lighting and video projections, by Murielle Felix, the shapes configured a flat or apartment. There was a bed, sink, table, chair and a tiled floor. Fachon sat down -- remember his face was looking directly into the faces of those lying below -- and contemplated this odd sensation that he was having, mainly that everything, including his thoughts, was falling away.

In a voice-over written by Pardo, the audience heard the inner dialogue that dealt with his dreams, thoughts of his childhood and questions of what is true. This portion of the dance could be developed further, but it's unclear if Pardo will do that as Fachon might not be able to hold out on gravity for an extended period of time. But by now, the bungee cord-like harness that held him up was essentially invisible as the audience was focused on this curious man.

As Fachon's character mused, his apartment melted away and in its place was a swirl of white flakes, like a snowstorm. He swung his body around, upright and upside down, overcome by the blizzard. As the pattern built, Fachon stopped and then was lifted off and away.

Too bad "Flat" was a one-nighter. This is one dance that could be seen again and again, as its mystery was more potent than its meaning.

The free performance was part of EMPAC's "Tethered: Vertical Performance," which also featured Barbara Foulkes' "Flota."

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