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## Emotions Physical Theatre Presents SMASHWORKS DANCE – REFUSING TO BE DISPOSED (EXCERPT) Review – Women, Defiant

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Posted on October 25, 2018 by **Bob Dreyfuss**



A buzz of uneasy anticipation ran through the audience at Brooklyn's Actors Fund Arts Center as stagehands unfurled a room-sized sheet of plastic, placing it center stage and taping down its edges. As the performance began, it quickly became clear why: two dancers, *Laurie Deziel* and *Ashley McQueen*, would soon be wrestling with a huge American flag and dripping with, well, what exactly? Blood? Paint? Oil? It was all part of a powerful and engaging excerpt of *Refusing To Be Disposed*, an allegory of women's struggle and resistance, performed as part of evening of dance on October 21.



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## Review

As the lights dimmed, the dancers took the stage against a video montage of early twentieth century suffragette marches, the 2017 women's march on Washington, D.C., and the #MeToo movement. At center stage, one woman (McQueen) stood draped in what turned out to be an elongated, American flag-like "leash," and soon she was wrestling with the flag, seemingly trapped inside it and struggling to free herself. The flag itself was soggy, wet, dripping with what appeared to be blood, and the dancer was soon drenched. Meanwhile, a second dancer



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(Deziel) – also, like the first, clad in either a two-piece bathing outfit or workout clothes – strode purposefully across the plastic, carrying one at a time what appeared to be paint trays, carefully setting down each one of the four corners of the plastic sheeting.

## Women, Defiant

As the piece unfolded, the first dancer managed to free herself from the flag entanglement, and she then used it to engage in a muscular tug-of-war with an (offstage) partner. The second dancer, whose movements seemed to signify pain, struggle, and enormous effort, contorted her



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body while spreading red, white, and blue paint across the floor. To a score marked by jarring, often abstract musical accompaniment, the dancers struck poses that alternated between oppressed, angry, and supremely defiant. At the piece's finish, both dancers were literally painted from head to toe in multi-hued colors, survivors and triumphant.

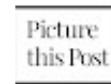
The presentation of *Refusing To Be Disposed* was an excerpt from a much longer piece, part of a master's thesis by Ashley McQueen, the choreographer and artistic director of *Smashworks Dance*, which calls itself "a New York-based group of movers



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advocating for  
human rights  
through arts  
activism.” In an  
interview  
with *Picture  
This Post*,  
McQueen said  
that the full-  
length work is  
backed by a  
sixty-page,  
footnoted  
research paper  
into all aspects  
of how women  
and women’s  
roles have been  
treated  
historically and  
in the current  
political  
moment. It is,  
she said,  
“designed to  
make people  
uncomfortable”  
– just the  
desecration of  
the American  
flag alone could  
do that for many  
– and to  
“performatively  
redefine my role  
as a woman.”  
The  
objectification of  
women’s bodies,  
the “spectacle of  
femininity,” the  
“notion of the  
disposability of

# Film Reviews

women's bodies,"  
and the struggle  
of women to free  
themselves from  
the boundaries  
and constraints  
imposed by a  
patriarchal  
society are all  
reflected in the  
piece, she said.

The company,  
Smashworks  
Dance, is  
explicitly  
political. "We  
dance to  
advocate for  
human rights  
issues through  
education  
outreach and  
performing  
arts," says the  
company's  
website. "Our  
artistic work  
reflects and  
responds to  
current societal  
challenges and  
provides an  
alternative  
platform for  
peaceful  
dialogue. We are  
a multi-faceted,  
international  
group of artists  
and activists  
dedicated to

promoting  
inclusiveness  
and diversity  
within our  
community.”

Recently, it has  
focused on the  
immigration  
and refugee  
crisis, and  
they’ve explicitly  
advocated for  
get-out-the-vote  
efforts in 2018.

### **Emotions Physical Theatre Presents 11 Dances**

The October 21 performance was the final set in a series of eleven dances, curated and presented by *Shawn Rawls* of *Emotions Physical Theatre*, part of An Evening of Contemporary Dance. Among the performances, a standout, in this writer’s view, was *Wabisabi* by Komorebi Collab, in which one dancer (Sofie Nappi, who choreographed the piece) appeared as a loose-limbed, puppet-like figure who was soon dancing with two others (Elias Rosa, Joey Picciotti). In one sequence, one of the male dancers seemed at first to be the puppet-master, but as their movements began to mimic each other, it was hard to tell which one was the puppet and which the master.

**Dancers:**

Laurie Deziel, Ashley McQueen

**Choreography:**

Ashley McQueen

**Production Manager:**

Janette Rawls

**Presented by:**

Shawn Rawls

**Music:**

“Suffering Suffragettes” from

SchoolHouseRock

Ozel AB

A Tape Full of Mistakes

Andy Stott

Deep Watch

Smashworks Dance will premiere an evening length political satire FOR WHICH IT STANDS and Ashley McQueen's REFUSING TO BE DISPOSED at Satori, An Artist Space, in downtown St. Louis, Missouri. Presented by ANNONYArts, from November 1-3 at 8 pm and November 4 at 2:30 pm. For tickets visit **ANNONYArts.**

For more information on Smashworks Dance please visit the **Smashworks dance** website.

Photos by Ashley McQueen, unless otherwise indicated



Bob Dreyfuss is an independent journalist based in New York City and Cape May, New Jersey, who has written extensively for Rolling Stone, The Nation, The New Republic, Mother Jones, and many other magazines. He has served as a member of the board of directors for Cape May Stage, an equity theatre in New Jersey, where he profiled dozen of actors for the company's weekly newsletter. He currently serves on the board of The Upstart Creatures, a New York theatre company. Onstage, he has appeared as Egeus in A Midsummer Night's Dream and as Delivery Man in Barefoot in the Park, and he is currently writing a full-length play about the late Senator John McCain. He has appeared on numerous radio and television programs, including the PBS Newshour, Fox News, Democracy Now!, and MSNBC's "Morning Joe," and has traveled widely, including reporting from Iran, Vietnam, China, and Tanzania.

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