

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## DANCING IN AIR: THE MULTIGRAVITATIONAL GROUP

By Barbara Rose - Festival d'Automne, Paris, 10/13 - 11/19/72

Virtually none of the dancing of the Multigravitational Group is done on the ground, a fact which, in itself, distinguishes this young company from any other modern dance group. Part of the new desire to integrate the various arts within a synthetic experience incorporating elements of the visual arts, music, and theater, the Multigravitational Group achieves its unique statement through the practice of a strict discipline. For an extraordinary degree of training and control is necessary for the dancers to work in the air, suspended from a variety of structures including inflated tires, nets, and plastic tubing, all hung from a large steel scaffold constructed especially for the group.

One's initial reaction to the work of the Multigravitational Group is that it is related to circus aerial acts; and undoubtedly such a popular source far afield from the high art traditions of dance accounts for the vitality and freshness of their movements. Psychological factors, too, are important in their statement, although the psychodrama popularized by expressionist choreographers working out of the Graham tradition is rejected in favor of less literary forms of expression. As the dancers assume precarious positions in mid-air, the expression of danger, risk, imminence and mutual aid become real rather than metaphoric.

That we see the body from below as well as in the familiar positions of facing or turning away from the audience is especially significant in the work of the Multigravitational Group. That the dancers are suspended above us, twisting, turning, linking themselves into human chains, and performing all manner of elaborate actions in mid-air is an essential part of the originality of Stephanie Evanitsky's concept. Air dancing simultaneously frees the body from gravity and conventional choreography. Thus their configurations are more static and structural than normal dance arrangements and bring to mind sculpture in-the-round as much as dance. The effect of such a union of the arts is very much in keeping with current efforts to combine the several arts, to draw new energy from fresh combinations arriving from mixing elements borrowed from one art with another.

The kind of continuous movement punctuated with passages of frozen poses characteristic of the group reminds us of the contrast between the moving picture and the still; and there is certainly a strong cinematic element in the work. This cinematic quality has become increasingly pronounced in newer works such as Silver Scream Idols, designed as a kind of agon between Miss Evanitsky as a Marilyn Monroe type sex symbol -- whose artificial smile and stylized movements mask any inner feeling -- and Linda Shillito as a Janis Joplin type of victim of pure Dionysiac abandon. In Altarground, we are reminded of the slow floating movements of astronauts whose space walks recorded on film suggested a whole new vocabulary of movement. Certainly space travel and the new conception of the human body as it floats, free of gravity, has inspired the work of the Multigravitational Group. Indeed their conception of movement was unimaginable before the mind had assimilated the possibilities of space travel.

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Two other aspects of their work are worth remarking: the affinity of their actions with ritual and spectacle, both occasions for community identification. Through ritual and spectacle, the young dancers of the Multigravitational Group have freed themselves from the hermeticism of the avant-garde to create an art more immediately accessible to an uninitiated public sure to be excited by the sheer drama, originality and contemporaneity of their statement.

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