



[Dance](#)

ADF Journal: A look back at Shen Wei's "delicious" American Dance Festival opening

By [Linda Haac](#)

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- photo by Briana Blasko / courtesy of ADF

[Shen Wei Dance Arts](#)

Thursday, June 11

Durham Performing Arts Center

In this case, we're not talking about food or sex when we say "delicious." We're describing the dance works of Chinese-born choreographer Shen Wei. He presented *Untitled No. 12-2* and the reconstructed *Map* for the kick-off of the American Dance Festival on Thursday, June 11, at the Durham Performing Arts Center, and both works were not only highly pleasing to the senses but also delightful.

This deliciousness is why the choreographer and painter has risen to such heights: Shen Wei Dance Arts has garnered enough awards to impress even the most casual observer. Shen Wei was the lead choreographer for the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, among the world's most amazing spectacles. He also won a MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship as well as a Guggenheim, and is about to return to the Metropolitan Art Museum with his company for a second time with another site-specific work.

A liquid quality exists in Shen Wei's body as well as his dances and paintings. It allows him to draw space, whether with dancers' bodies or a black-inked paintbrush or the unconstructed clothes that he wears. This undulating, flowing quality extends to how he creates and dissolves forms. As Shen Wei told ADF students Friday afternoon after his show, he's interested in lines and brush strokes and how movement "tells the space."

Shen Wei also told these students how "I'm still trying to understand human bodies." As for the inspiration for his "Natural Body Development Technique," as he calls it, he gave a nod to yoga, Chinese opera, classical training and modern-dance artists such as Paul Taylor and Martha Clarke. The technique, Shen Wei confided, is what allows his dancers to do the crazy movements that ADF audiences saw in *Map*, where dancers engaged in ceaseless action, including somersaults and rolls with no pauses. "It doesn't really damage your body," he explained.

In the past, Shen Wei has created his own sets, costumes and video. He likes to test the boundaries of dance and art based on what, as he explains, are the experiences of his own body. Among the most delicious moments on ADF's opening night was simply how Shen Wei's dancers walked across the stage, extending this pedestrian act into the realm of art—pure delight.