

Denise Cerniglia • June 16th, 2013

Slow controlled movements created dreamlike scenes at the opening of the American Dance Festival featuring Shen Wei Dance Arts on June 13 at the Durham Performing Arts Center. The company presented *Near the Terrace*, which premiered at ADF in 2000 and an ADF commissioned world premiere, *Collective Measures*.

In *Near the Terrace*, A dark figure marbled in black paint danced alone in the beginning, only visible in the dark because of the oil-like sheen coating him from head to toe. He was a strong visual contrast with the rest of the company who entered dressed in white under stark lighting. The women, with skirts that trailed onto the floor draped around their waists, and with their movements that dipped and curved, were like mermaids. The whole scene, slow moving but never stopping, was mysterious and unpredictable like a deep underwater scene. A pair of dancers, leaning together and lifting each other, would captivate me so I couldn't look away. When I did finally manage to look away, I found a whole new scene had formed around them each time.

The dance, like a moving painting itself, was inspired by paintings of Paul Delvaux.



Collective Measures was equally captivating. Bursts of fast movement felt like a release from tension that had grown unnoticed during the company's signature slow motion. Themes from *Limited States*, premiered at ADF in 2011, (which hooked me as a Shen Wei fan for life) were revisited – “movement possibilities within confined realms,” and “boundaries between body and image.” When the dancers came together into a single form, their subtle motion appeared to have been initiated by a gentle wave.

Shen Wei Dance Arts has shown itself to be a company of dancers with the strength and grace to maintain non-stop slow and controlled movement for more than thirty minutes, creating intriguing visual scenes that evolve out of movement.

The costuming by Shen Wei and **Austin Scarlett** is delicate and blends seamlessly with bodies and movement. Combined with genius lighting design by Shen Wei and **Matthew F. Lewandowski II**, what we get are live scenes with surreal visual effects you might expect to see only in photo editing — soft matte with images blending into each other, and stark contrasts between objects that are close together.