

Cathy Weis

by Rita Felciano

Cathy Weis Projects

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Choreographers aplenty use video in their works; few of them, however, approach this slippery medium with the straightforwardness, grace, and sophistication that Cathy Weis does. Unlike a circus magician who hides the tricks of her trade, Weis puts most of them in plain sight. The whiff of big-tent air that bubbles up from these playful essays is among their most delightful assets. Weis manages to be both witty and thoughtful. On the program were the 2001 *A Bad Spot Hurts Like Mad*, a on-off relationship duet for Scott Heron and Jennie Liu, and a seven-part world premiere, *Electric Haiku: Calm as Custard*.

Weis' quirky imagination is most intriguing when she plays around with abstraction and reality. One would assume that the body's physical presence onstage is always more affecting than a two-dimensional object. Not so, proves Weis. Often, the video delivers the emotional punch. While the spastic explosiveness of the live movement in *Bad Spot* clearly speaks to the relationship's turbulence, it is the image of Liu falling into an Alice of Wonderland rabbit hole that makes you gasp. In *Haiku*, the toy airplane that dive-bombs at Heron onstage is just that, a toy. Onscreen it acquires a frightening quasi-Hitchcockian reality. And not a trace of narrative colors dancer Diane Madden's carefully placed movement gestures, yet the screen reveals an intense drama: Madden and her onscreen self approach and part, never once looking at each other, and you ask yourself who these shadowy creatures are. Huddling in a corner, the live dancer almost disappears. In other sections of *Haiku*, a painterly quality enlivens the interaction of camera and dancer. Dressed in luscious red formal gowns, Weis and Jennifer Miller (in a beard to boot) push cameras around like shopping carts, transforming their everyday environment into a sea of swirling turbulence. At another point, a wildly swerving and swooping Heron onstage, holding a 2 x 4 with a camera attached to it, becomes the stable eye of a tornado onscreen.

Weis risks resorting to gimmickry in her work, but for the most part she nimbly skirts around it. The scolding dialogue between herself and her face on a TV screen, and the final tableau of *Haiku*'s circus performers caught on a highway to nowhere, however, come close.