Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Afloat

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, July 13th, 2016

I was first introduced to the work of Celia Rowlson Hall after seeing (and writing about) the remarkable film *The Fits*, for which she served as a movement consultant. In investigating her further, I discovered a unique aesthetic and sensibility that is remarkably quirky and unpredictable. In nearly everything I have seen that she has directed – both in terms of choreography and only slightly more traditional narrative shorts – I cannot imagine what to expect from one moment to the other, or how she arrived at her decisions, an experience I completely enjoy.

Xavier Days flexes impossibly in “Afloat”

Rowlson Hall seems to do quite a bit of work with the American fashion designer Derek Lam as part of a series of short films that are not traditional commercials for clothing so much as shorts that exist on their own terms while advertising his name in a producing capacity. One such film is **Afloat,** which as per the liner notes follows two men leaving a subway train with “a broken heart and a full heart, side by side”. Featuring a small cameo of Rowlson Hall herself as what might be the sad man’s doomed love interest early on in the subway, what I love is that the men’s sensibilities and approaches to life are apparent in their clothes, expressions, and most especially, etched into their every movement.

Jason Kittleberger stumbles down a city street in “Afloat”

It is in the latter arena that this film is most striking. As one man – the painter – begins to traditionally descend a steep subway staircase he suddenly slumps backwards and surrenders to gravity, seemingly defeated by life, while the other – a street dancer – carves the air with his hands and floats through it while flexing his elbows with impossible ease. We see the painter stumble and fall through a variety of locations – a city street, a football field – only finally gaining some control at the latter, while the street dancer seems to respond easily and organically to each location he finds himself in.

Afloat is extremely well shot, intersecting choreography and camera against New York’s urban landscape by Andrew Droz Palermo, with wonderful editing by Iva Radivojevic and Dave Russo. The choreography is emotionally riveting, delivering at once a sense of story and the pathos of the human condition, and is beautifully performed by Jason Kittleberger and Xavier Days.

Check it out and *enjoy*.

https://vimeo.com/160758802

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