Cultural Daily

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Portrait of a Dancer: Sarah Lamb

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, March 16th, 2016

With some exceptions, I am usually not a fan of voiceover in dance films. Dance can be such a wordless kind of poetry, so un-seize-able, and so open to interpretation, without literal or absolute definitions to accompany each movement. The shorts I see that I find myself disliking immensely seem deliberately in search of esoteric ideas that neither the dance nor text conjures up on its own. These films usually end up blending together to form a kind of hybrid that the filmmaker imagines suggests some formidable idea that almost always escapes me.

Sarah Lamb slices the air in Sarah Lamb: Portrait of a Dancer

But in **Portrait of a Dancer: Sarah Lamb**, you have the joining of at least three (tour de) forces: ballerina Sarah Lamb – principal dancer with the Royal Ballet, choreographer Wayne McGregor, and brilliant text by Virginia Woolf. And what is wonderful is that this short film is *exactly about* the frequent failure of words, and in fact seems to suggest that dance can actually step in (no pun intended) where words fall short.

In the wonderful text, which is the only surviving recording of the author's voice, Woolf says about words:

> *They are the wildest, freest, most irresponsible, most un-teachable of all things. You can catch them and sort them, and place them in alphabetical order in dictionaries. But words do not live in dictionaries they live in the mind. If you want proof of this consider how often in moments of emotion when we most need words, we find none.*

Sarah Lamb considers how words evade us

With beautiful lighting and shots that emerge out of darkness, sometimes seemingly from a great distance, to create stunningly mercurial moments, director Malcom Venville and McGregor highlight the beauty of each art form at play herein. But the short also brilliantly points out the similarities words actually have *with* dance, how – like dance – they are multi-faceted and open to interpretation:

> *It is because the truth they try to catch is many sided, and they convey it by being many sided, flashing first this way, then that. Thus they mean one thing to one*

> *person, another thing to another person.*

Considering words in Sarah Lamb: Portrait of a Dancer

It is because of the power of all these elements, the words, the dance, the choreography and the film as a whole, and their ability to compliment one another, that **Portrait of a Dancer: Sarah Lamb** becomes so meaningful and, to me, so moving.
Enjoy.
https://youtu.be/L7rNHx8Sib8

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