

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Wang Ramirez on the Borderline: An Interview

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, April 9th, 2014

The more work I see, the more I think that the most powerful dance defies categorization and leaves an audience simply moved, without a clear idea of what they just saw or the need to categorize or define it. In fact, I am beginning to believe that this is actually a prerequisite for performance or art work of any kind to succeed or become great, especially at a time when people in most developed countries are exposed to as much stimuli in a single day as the average Victorian was in a lifetime.

So when I saw ***Borderline*** by the Bessie Award-winning Company Sebastien Ramirez of the duo Wang Ramirez – a short film that is really more promo and documentation of a stage work than a dance film (but still very well shot) – I could see very clearly that they were exploring new territory not only for hip hop, but for stage work of any genre. The work is set apart by a rigging apparatus that allows the dancers to fly. And while the notion of flying in performance is not new by any means (remember *Peter Pan*, anyone?), it seemed to me that it was happening in a very new context with this work, with the kind of movement and imagery they were exploring. I was so excited to recognize ideas, themes that I grapple with in my own work – sculptural costume design, scale, gravity – that I sat down with Honji Wang and Sebastien Ramirez to discuss this and their work as a whole over the vast 5,781 mile distance separating Berlin and LA via Skype.

“We are kind of obliged to categorize or label it, but it’s a complicated question,” Honji explained about their work, given that their company materials describe them as “known for their emotional and powerful blend of contemporary and hip hop dance”. She went on to say that they were very new to and careful in categorizing their work as being part of the “contemporary scene.” In the beginning they had not seen a lot of contemporary work, and while they didn’t want to categorize or limit their work to being just called hip-hop, it was exciting to broaden the horizons of what is expected from that form.

Honji: “At the same time it (hip-hop) opened up possibilities and we are very proud of that work. You can see a difference of flavor and style... The French have a particular style, Americans have their particular style. It started in and came from US, but I think the Europeans, especially the French, took it and developed it in their own way. Each style reflects the culture in which you are living. French is more dirty style, a bit more rough. Asian style is more clean, with clean lines. A lot of the French who started to dance to English lyrics did not understand the lyrics but they understood the flow. (It’s) so mixed up because of the internet... Everybody gets inspired by everybody! Before it was clear: dirty style, European style, Asian style... Now it’s more mixed up.”

*“We are just starting to watch now,” Sebastien went on to say about seeing contemporary work. “Before we were much more focused in our bubble. I grew up B-boying. I was all the time so busy with the work. I had not so much knowledge of contemporary.”*

H: *“Before I was a bit judging it too fast. I saw a couple of contemporary works but I found it too boring. But the contemporary is so much bigger than the hip-hop dance scene! Now I am seeing a lot of great work... There are moments in almost every performance where I see things that I am inspired by.”*

I asked what impulse **Borderline** began with. Was it a visual image? A concept? Some movement?

S: *“It comes from laboratory. We meet some dancers we want to work with. Our stories come out of each person. We try to get inspired by the dancers. We isolate work with the dancers, and we work in a team as well, with a stage designer, composer, dramaturge. The impulse with Borderline was this rigging particularly. We would have loved to spend more time to develop it, but we have a lot of time constraints.”*

H: *“He had the dream of working with wires and rigging for 4 years. The way he moved in the rigging system inspired the riggers.”*



Honji flies in **Borderline**

S: *“In the beginning when we were exploring the rigging we were testing everything. But in **Borderline** our approach was to use the rigging in a very subtle way... Even though you see some big movements we were not constantly into wires and jumping around.”*

While **Borderline** is not actually a dance made specifically for camera, it certainly lends itself to the medium. When I asked the duo if they have aspirations to create another dance film, they explained that Company Sebastien Ramirez is focused specifically on theater, and Wang Ramirez more on museum installations, fashion, and in particular on film, which Sebastien is anxious to dive further into as a director.

S: *“I’d like to produce more of this work. We love this combination of film & dance and you can do so much with it. Film is a great tool to put your choreography and attach the emotion you want. You can make just the right moments.”*

On the day I spoke to them, Honji and Sebastien were supposed to have been performing with Company Sebastien Ramirez at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., but because of visa clearance issues were unable to go. With their work now touring internationally and teetering on the borderline between hip-hop and contemporary, I am excited to see how they continue to navigate the divide, defy categorization, and burst open new forms.

S: *“It’s art work, with a deep meaning behind it. Built to touch and bring emotions and to be global with our story. To move people is our goal.”*

Enjoy and be moved.

[embedvideo id=”8DM-pBWVx9A” website=”youtube”]

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