

Li Chiao-Ping's hopeful vision

"Armature: Bodies of Hope" is a powerful testament to dance innovation

by **KATIE REISER**
MARCH 30, 2015



NARAYAN MAHON

Rachel Krinsky performs "Grafting"

Li Chiao-Ping Dance celebrated 20 years of performances in Dane County with *Armature: Bodies of Hope*, which ran March 26-28, at Memorial Union's Fredric March Play Circle.

The performance began with "Grafting," a highly personal solo commissioned soon after Li's devastating 1999 car accident in which she nearly lost her foot. It was performed by Rachel Krinsky, who danced in front of videos of x-ray images and was confined in a square of long tubes of fluorescent light. At first she lulled us into a trance as her arms slid through space while her lower body was static. She began to sway, hinged at her hips. Later her mouth formed a silent howl, and her arms carved a tunnel that she appeared to dive into.

Excerpts from "Venous Flow: States of Grace" provided another look at Li's accident and recovery. Her company dancers appeared in severe black dresses, danced in unison



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and created a chain of support, linked hand to elbow. Li appeared, her legs shrouded in voluminous white fabric, as words were projected onto her bare back. They were later joined by community dancers of all ages. The most moving section had the company dancers spilling leaves onto the stage, dancing powerfully as the leaves scattered and crunched while Li shared an impressionistic account of her trauma. Liz Sexe vaulted into her cast mates' arms and suddenly dropped back to the ground, again and again.

"Tendrils," which premiered at the Overture Center's 10th anniversary celebration this fall, showcased Janelle Bentley, with layers of black tulle billowing around her. Bentley was always an eye-catching performer when she was a UW- Madison dance major; now her technique has developed exponentially and her presence has become more nuanced and mature.

In "Bonesetting," six dancers currently studying in the dance department were seemingly prim and proper in gray ruffles, pantaloons and hoop skirts. They shed layers to reveal they were actually warrior women.

Closing the program was the premiere of "Bodies of Hope," Li's musings on transformation, hope and resilience. The piece began with the company dancers clad in flirty tartan miniskirts accompanied by Verdi. The music shifted dramatically and performers reflected on their own bodies. Hildy Feen was particularly charming and candid. Later, young Emma Skloot was passed along the line of dancers as though they were wishing her well and sharing their wisdom

Li appears to have an endless supply of innovative and compelling ideas, but sometimes I worry that the impact of her work can get diluted by the non-dance extras. That said, sometimes it is those elements — like video, spoken word, quirky costuming and the inclusion of community dancers— that characterizes her work as uniquely her own. In "Venous Flow," we hear the words "I find grace in the human experience," and I believe Li truly lives and creates with this in mind.

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