**This Woman’s Work: Ellis Wood by Tara O’Con**

***Editor's Note:*** *Besides being an accomplished performer,* ***Tara O'Con*** *is a talented young writer who participated in my first* **Writing on Dance** *group this spring at* ***Dance Theater Workshop****. She contributes this piece, an appreciation of dancer-choreographer* ***Ellis Wood****.*


(Ellis Wood, leading her company in *Flat Affect*,
Dance New Amsterdam, April 2007. Photo: Steven Schreiber)
 **This Woman’s Work: Reflections on a conversation with Ellis Wood, Artistic Director of Ellis Wood Dance

By Tara O’Con**

To inhabit the world that Ellis Wood creates through dance is to experience the complexities of life--its struggles, confrontations and celebrations, governed only by the senses. The porous line between pleasure and pain, sexy and grotesque, tenderness and violence, is blurred; pushed just beyond the reaches of cognition. This world is navigable only by one’s gut and piloted by the body. According to Wood, this is her work at its most pure and desired state. Like a drug, to move in such an honest, primal and unabashed way is a high. For herself, and for her dancers, communicating from within this hyper-real, hyper-physical ecosystem allows them to get euphorically close to their true selves. For audience members, should they choose to accept the invitation, a profound visceral experience awaits.

Visually, that which informs Wood’s creations is articulated by riding the fine line between control and freedom in movement. Wood however, is quick to explain that her goal is not to blindly explode and express. This may have been the case years ago, when at 3AM, she would find herself dancing around her apartment alone to crazy music in order to satiate the bubbling urge for uninhibited raw self-expression. Now, twelve years into directing her accomplished dance company--she is a 2007 recipient of the coveted BUILD grant, awarded to dance companies by the New York Foundation for the Arts for infrastructure development--that same potent creative expression is honed by a constant self-awareness session comprised of three artistic goals: take personal risks, stay true to herself and examine the way each work is crafted in order to best serve the clear articulation of her ideas. Each goal comes with its own set of struggles, confrontations and celebrations--the criteria of which have been, and will continue to, change over time. For instance, what was once a personal risk at age 30 is no longer a risk at age 42. Such is life. Consequently, such is the mirror through which this woman’s work is reflected.

The need for assessment and re-assessment of these goals comes head to head with the id of creative expression--a scenario Wood likens to a never-ending drama that occupies every part of life and synonymously, ever part of dance. Why put does she put herself through this daily grind? (Feel free to stop here and re-read the first paragraph to this article.) The pure exhilaration and endless possibilities sparked by sheer physical intensity serves as both bedrock for ultimate personal truth, and the enticement to keep going. As Wood puts it, “the body drives the work.” From a director’s standpoint, when Wood is on the outside looking at her work and feels what is happening is not genuine, she will step in, next to her dancers, and live in it for herself until it gets it to that raw place.

Everyone has their element--something that they can live in and, for that moment, feel completely at home with themselves; their infectious energy in some way touching everyone around them. For some people it could be finance, cooking, teaching, etc. For Ellis Wood, it's dance.

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