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**January 16, 2010****DANCE REVIEW**

## Reliving the '60s, on Screen and Live

By [CLAUDIA LA ROCCO](#)

If life made sense, Simone Forti's name would be writ large, along with the other Judson Dance Theater artists who shattered conventional notions of performance in the 1960s. As it is, even those who are deeply invested in this history too seldom get a chance to see Ms. Forti's work from this period and hear her charming, astute contextualization for it.

On Thursday night a sell-out crowd assembled in one of the [Baryshnikov Arts Center's](#) studios for the first New York showing of "Simone Forti: An Evening of Dance Constructions," an ArtPix documentary featuring a 2004 performance at the [Museum of Contemporary Art](#) in Los Angeles. Lucky Angelinos, to get all that stuff live.

But we at least got a question-and-answer session with Ms. Forti and a couple of short performances, including her "Huddle," by an ad hoc group of dancers. (And bravo to ArtPix, a group that documents contemporary work, for its archival efforts.)

"I would suggest," Ms. Forti advised, "that you be ready to be choreographed by the situation."

This situation was an open space with two big screens arranged roughly cater-cornered and only a smattering of seats. Soon enough the studio was covered with reclining bodies, evoking accounts of Judson-era arrangements. Ms. Forti sat as well, her knees clasped toward her slim frame; how surreal, and lovely, to see her regal, weathered face gazing up at recorded images of her performing self.

These constructions hover somewhere within the borders of dance, performance art and Minimalist sculpture. Almost all made in 1961 at the invitation of the composer La Monte Young, they often involved the repetition of simple tasks, meaning that they don't translate even as well as some other types of performance. The live event, as Ms. Forti later said, "is smaller and more delicate."

All have elements of play. "Huddle" is something like a rugby scrum, only a cooperative one. The performers plant their feet wide and lace their arms around one another's backs and hips as they take turns clambering to the top of the pile.

It's slow, simple yet intricate. You have time to take in one woman's anklet as she pivots, the hunch of a man's shoulders as a foot comes close to his neck. You have time to think about how fragile this whole human situation is, how sometimes you just have to withstand burdens and trust others to be careful with you (the foot near that man's neck reconsidered in favor of less vulnerable flesh).

Ms. Forti's work often deals with intimate relationships. In "See-Saw" two people balance on a plank, their movements sometimes causing a noise-making toy to utter silly little moos.

"It's a domestic situation," Ms. Forti said. "Every move you make affects the other person."

Her domestic situation at the time wasn't so great, so she threw in a hard-luck song about death and nonsense in the desert, which she sang in the recording.

In other moments her work invites you to relax into your surroundings. In the recording of "Accompaniment for La Monte's '2 sounds' and La Monte's '2 sounds,'" those sounds being loud and screeching, Ms. Forti stepped onto a suspended loop of rope. There she stayed, balanced and contemplative. Utterly in her body, she invited her audience to be the same.

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