

NEEDLE DANCE BY MAKIKO HARRIS

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Words by Sarah Lapinsky.

I arrived to **Art'otel Hoxton** on the 21st of February for a private viewing of *Needle Dance*, a new dance film by Japanese-American, interdisciplinary artist, **Makiko Harris**. Walking down the stairs from the chic hotel lobby, I pass one of the sculptures depicting a thick red thread adorned with chains and small red scrolls braided between two large metal needles. The exhibition space was bustling with eager guests mingling beneath the large projections of dancers gracefully wading through red thread floating around them. Awaiting entrance to the cinema, I took in the needle sculptures hanging on the wall – the impetus for this event. Originally inspired by a sewing box passed to her from her late grandmother, Harris amplifies the power of the needle by increasing the size so they can defy their domestic connotation and serve as weapons of self-expression referencing the feminist legacy of textile arts. Further influenced by the Japanese legend of a fated connection of two people bound by red thread, a narrative that sets the stage for the movement work.

The five-minute film serves as a sort of exposition or elaboration of the sculptures as two performers (**Sabrina Wong and Duane Nasis**) completely submerged underwater brandish the needles as they intertwine and untangle in the large red thread surrounding them. The water imbues the dancers' movement with a sense of resistance (resisting fate?) as they appear weightless, suspended in space and time.

With striking *épaulement*, they catch the minimal light piercing the water as we see one dancer, the other and then both of them together as the driving composition by Carlos Basilico and Harris plays underscores the stakes. There seems to be no specific narrative in the order of the clips nor any obvious emotional engagement in the performers' movements, which leaves the abstract film very much up to interpretation with influence from the programme notes.





Images by Ben Pipe.

In the dancers' movements, the work questions agency as the dancers, inextricably linked, navigate the waters of their fated connection. It is a question of whether the dancers can do anything about their fated connection, but also what that connection might mean. I found clarity later in the evening as I was reflecting on the last image [SPOILER ALERT] showing the dancers' hands slowly pulling apart from gripped on the wrists. It was intriguing that the final image does not show the needles or the thread, but I came to my conclusion that this was perhaps a surrendering to or acceptance of the fate, whatever it is. Thinking upon it now, I wonder what it would be like to see that with the thread or needle...

The needles contain expansive symbolism as does the red cord that adorns the performers' costumes created by Deborah Milner; these were also on display in the exhibit and show the careful thought in drawing inspiration from climbing for the male's costume or the traditional lacing of the female corset. In the behind-the-scenes shown after the film, Harris explains that she originally felt the needles were weapons of feminist power but later on evolved to hold the needles' ability to also repair and unify. I spoke with Sabrina Wong, performer and movement director, after the showing about her interpretation of the needles and the project and she explained how she related to the needles as something that can synthesise identity.

Overall, the event demonstrated an interesting new take on what dance, art and movement can mean in a collaboration like this. I would look forward to seeing more evenings with this design as there is something incredibly special about collaboration and the work it generates. Removing any one creator from this project would have great implications for what the work would look like. The needle sculptures, in all of their symbolism, do their part in weaving this work together and connecting these artists (perhaps, as fate destined).

The exhibition will be showing at Art'otel Hoxton from 17 February through 2 March. Visit [here](#) for more info.



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