



The New York Times |

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DANCE

# Relationships and Patterns, Ever Shifting

By **BRIAN SEIBERT** FEB. 20, 2012

The relationship between a dance and its title can be deceptively straightforward. Take Jen Rosenblit's "In Mouth," her part of a shared run with Vanessa Anspaugh at New York Live Arts that began on Wednesday. It begins with the entrance of Ms. Rosenblit's longtime colleague Addys Gonzalez. He has something stuffed in his mouth.

That explains the title. But it only raises more questions about the dance. The something is a long strip of fabric that hangs from Mr. Gonzalez's mouth like a pharaoh's beard. It's an extension of his body, and like a train of fabric that's later tied around his waist, it trails his motions, alters his shape. He stuffs a second piece of fabric down the front of his pants, and it bulges.

Ms. Rosenblit spends much of the duet topless, in gym shorts, on all fours or swatting the air as if to defend herself against imaginary flies. In one of the dance's many disconnected images, she stands with her face veiled next to Mr. Gonzalez, and the duet does seem to address a kind of marriage. He steps forward to connect with the audience; she is focused only on him.

They are together and not, two soloists who periodically sync up and hold hands and lean on each other in odd ways. The theatrical elements are dramatic but stark: shifting sources of light, a score of needling voices and hammering sounds, a curtain that sweeps in to obscure. This is a private affair, and we are only partly invited.

Ms. Anspaugh's "Armed Guard Garden" draws the viewer in immediately and never lets go. In silence, the lights dawn slowly. We make out a figure — no, two. Like sentries, they patrol the perimeter of the stage and define its diagonals. Three more pour flour onto the floor to define concentric boxes. They make lines on the rear wall in chalk. None of these borders will last.

In a recent interview Ms. Anspaugh said that casting was 75 percent of the piece, and here you see what she means. Although Emily Roysdon has dressed everyone in the same outfit — mesh shells over construction-orange tops and pink pants —there's nothing uniform about them. Aretha Aoki, Molly Lieber, Lydia Okrent, Mary Read and Niall Noel Jones: just throwing them onstage together might be enough.

Ms. Anspaugh's choreography, however, makes them more vivid. She is continually dividing them: one plus four, two plus three. As a consequence, there's almost always more than one interesting interaction demanding your attention, and the groupings keep suggesting relationships: leader and followers, clique and outcast, couples, ménage à trois.

Ms. Anspaugh traffics here in many of the clichés of contemporary dance. The dancers put on fake smiles and expose their bellies. Near the end she reaches for that ubiquitous *deus ex machina*, the ironically intended pop song. It doesn't matter. This choreographer and this cast and the deadpan tone of their bizarre behavior somehow make everything garden-fresh.

Jen Rosenblit and Vanessa Anspaugh perform through Saturday at New York Live Arts, 219 West 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 924-0077, [newyorklivearts.org](http://newyorklivearts.org).