

The New York Times

October 10, 2005

Dance Review | 'Rules of Engagement'

A HORSE AND DANCERS IN AN ODE TO INTERSPECIES TIES

By JENNIFER DUNNING

JoAnna Mendl Shaw's new "Rules of Engagement," performed on Saturday at the Claremont Riding Academy, juxtaposes the rigid repetition of videotaped horses running fast and hard on a treadmill with interaction between a live horse and three humans in an atmospheric stable. There is also a hint of commentary on the wildness of nature in this 45-minute collaboration with Janet Biggs, a video artist. Ms. Biggs's images of thundering hooves, an eagle, ice floes and swimmers are sharp and clear. And there is one terrific performer in the cast. But somehow the ingredients never quite mix in "Rules of Engagement."

Ms. Shaw has worked with ice dancers, in-line skaters and gymnasts, but she is probably best known these days for her interest in pieces that use live horses, with an emphasis not on what tricks they can do but how they interact with humans. In "Rules of Engagement," the two female dancers (Gina Paolillo and MaryAlice White) at times clench into the pose of rearing horses, but for the most part they and Blake Pearson, who completes the human cast, suggest angst and seduction in calmer ways.

At the start, there is a suggestion of the sensual attraction between species in Peter Shaffer's play "Equus" as one of the women lies on the dirt floor and spreads her legs as the horse approaches. But Navajo, a show-stealing appaloosa ridden by Blair Griesmeyer, goes through his paces throughout the piece with such gentle bemusement that such effects do not quite work. Ms. Shaw's choreography is the weakest element in "Rules of Engagement," and the humans are no match anyway for Navajo.

Steve White composed the score. The lighting is by Phil Sandstrom.

"Rules of Engagement" continues on Saturday and Sunday at the Claremont Riding Academy, 175 West 89th Street, between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues, (800) 595-4849 or www.dancingwithhorses.org.

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ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT: CONTEMPORARY CONTEMPLATIONS ON ADOLESCENCE AND YOUTH'

BY D. DOMINICK LOMBARDI

This exhibition, curated by Susan M. Canning, reveals, through the creative works of painters, photographers, sculptors, animators and videographers, the overriding factors that influence youth. It is also about, among other things, how artists continue to wrestle with the so-called growing pains of the past.

Karen Yasinsky's video "No Place Like Home"(1998), which begins with a clay animation doll clicking its ruby slippers in a nod to Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz," elevates the power of suggestion to a new level. In it, a young girl on the verge of early womanhood goes through three, very disturbing scenarios that, at times, might make viewers uncomfortable.

Janet Biggs's video installation "Ritalin" (2000) is an extraordinary commentary on the controlling effect of drugs on creativity driven by adrenaline. Joyce Pensato's painting "Dancing to Cesaria" (2001), which features rapidly painted renderings of Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse, effectively combines high and low art.

In the painting "PostBjork" (2000) by Michael Bevilacqua, youth and a designer label-oriented world are shown as confused and desensitized.

The most potent pieces in the exhibition are Deborah Mesa-Pelly's "Black Hole" (1999) and "Crawl Space" (1998). Both photographs show young women as they find mysterious portals in walls and in floors that lead to creepy other-worlds. What happens next is in the mind of the beholder.