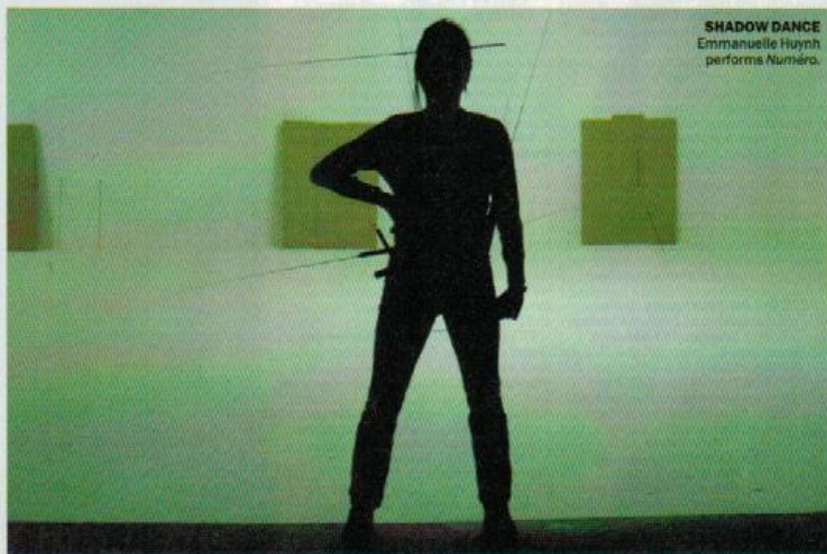


Dance

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SHADOW DANCE
 Emmanuelle Huynh performs *Numéro*.

And now for a trick up her sleeve...

Emmanuelle Huynh finds the magic in the simple.
 By Gia Kourlas

In *Numéro*, the French choreographer Emmanuelle Huynh, working with artist Nicolas Floch, looks at space in terms of light and line. Spare and exacting, the piece utilizes simple ingredients to create a finely spun magical moment in which fluorescent arrows fly through the dark, delicate rods are poked through a cardboard box, and a game of pickup sticks takes on human dimensions. Huynh, speaking from Tokyo via Skype (she was presenting her latest piece, *Shinbat, the theft of soul*, a collaboration with Seiho Okudaira that explores ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arrangement), is particularly busy: She is also the director of the National Centre for Contemporary Dance in Angers, France's only school devoted to the dance genre. Huynh talked about *Numéro*, which is part of Trajal Harrell's Platform at Danspace Project, "certain difficulties, certain joy." Clearly, there is joy in architecture.

How did you come up with *Numéro*?

How should I start? Because I'm dancing something that is not far

from this in Japan, but I should not talk about it in the same way. [Laughs] Actually, I started with Nicolas Floch; we were in Japan together in 2001 and as he was a sailor before being an artist, he was interested in fishing tools. We started to work with these funny objects. We already had two collaborations where he was doing sets for me, and at that time we thought that we should work in a more equal and stable way so that we

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would be together onstage with no specificity—like I'm not specifically a dancer and he is not specifically a visual artist making the set, but that we both are building and moving images. It was our way of exchanging and joking and playing like kids with these objects that made us start like this. Then, when we started to experiment with those fishing tools it was like in a circus. In French, it's *tour de magie* ["magic trick"]. [It was as if] I was the

assistant of the magician, and he was kind of playing the magician—or at certain moments I was thinking of killing him. We played with this imagination.

You also play a game like pickup sticks too, right?

Yes. The piece is very simple. I think we made it in ten days; usually, I'm so slow, and this time it was very nice. Nicolas had the idea also with building the space with arrows and lights.

How did you meet?

At a party. [Laughs] But the thing is that I have always been very nourished by visual artists' works; when I met him I didn't know him before, but I was already having ten-year relationships with known artists or completely unknown artists or students. The fact is that my food in dance has almost never been dance itself, but philosophy, poetry or visual arts and recently, let's say, cinema a bit. I like trying to understand the process of other disciplines. It's like what I'm doing at the moment in Tokyo with Seiho Okudaira, an ikebana master. The fact of understanding or not understanding the process always interests me. So I think I met Nicolas through this way: just being curious.

What do you remember about the original response to *Numéro*? Are you surprised that it's lasted this long?

I cannot really remember because it was 2002. [Laughs] I remember that some very good friends of mine told me, "I think it is the piece of yours that I prefer." I was like, Oh my God! When I am making strong efforts, they don't like it. [Laughs] I think I was not surprised, but very happy by the response, which was direct and immediate—so maybe that's why Trajal also really wanted to show it. Because it is direct. Maybe it was also important for me to understand that I could work freely and light and fast and in a humorous mood.

When did you meet Trajal?

I was performing two years ago in St. Mark's Church in Deborah Hay's *O, O*. After the performance, we had dinner; he had gone to France during that period, and I think I had immediate sympathy and I wanted to talk to him because he was writing and organizing things and I'm doing those kinds of things in France. I never really meet people like that in New York, who take care of the context for the others and who are making their own work and who also write, so I liked him immediately.

How do you balance all of your artistic projects, which of course include directing the National Centre for Contemporary Dance in Angers?

That's always a kind of crisis. When I applied [for the job], I was 40. It was the right moment: I felt really nourished by many years of dance work and I felt that I was also ready to provide context for others. I'm the first child of six children, and I think I have this taste of sharing, of organizing for others, of being happy when others are happy, so it was the right moment, but it's crazy. I think I have pleasure in it because I like working a lot, but it's often a crisis in my head. I'm always like, Oh my God, what am I doing? I'm interested in working on my own things, which is maybe the most difficult part. For other things, people call me and say, "Let's do that" but for my own work, no one is telling me. "Do it now." But I have to say I've had lots of time over the years to think and to travel, to be alone. [Laughs] While I want to have time for me, just thinking of myself all the time doesn't interest me at all.

Emmanuelle Huynh with Nicolas Floch presents *Numéro* at Danspace Project Oct 14–16.