

Elisa Monte Dance 32nd Season at the Ailey Citigroup Theater

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Elisa Monte Dance in Joe Celej's Portals and Passageways, Photo: Matthew Murphy (left)

Elisa Monte never fails to surprise me and the surprise for this year's performance at the Ailey Citigroup Theater was *Unstable Ground*. When *Unstable Ground* premiered in 2012, I thought it an interesting work, it was good, but not as good as what I knew Ms. Monte is capable of creating.

But that was a year ago. When a choreographer creates and premieres a new work it is done for more than the audience to witness. The first performances are the testing, the evaluating, it is when the choreographer sits back and sees the work in full performance. In essence, when a new work is premiered it is not till a year later that you truly get the finished work.



Clymene Baugher & Prentice Whitlow in Elisa Monte's *Unstable Ground*, Photo: Matthew Murphy (above:right)

Well, *Unstable Ground* was a year old and what a difference that year made. *Unstable Ground* has the emotional depth and intelligence that has been a hallmark of Ms. Monte's works since the creation of *Treading* in 1979.

Lois V. Vierk's *Red Shift* is used as the score; with its sliding tones of one off the other it immediately lends a sense of movement, a sense of shifting transitions. *Unstable Ground*, explores the feeling of universal instability permeating the world due to unexpected shifts in our environment and economy.



Elisa Monte Dance in Elisa Monte's *Terra Firma*, Photo: Matthew Murphy

The movement of *Unstable Ground* reflects just that, a constant shifting of the body's weight in space and questing limbs reaching out. Dancers come together and join into complex knots, always moving, always seeking a way out only to become entangled again. It is an outstanding work that explores not just movement but also the transitions into those movements. A year can make a lot of difference after a new work is premiered and this evidenced by the growth and maturity of *Unstable Ground*.

Ms. Monte latest work, *Terra Firma* also looks at shifts and transitions but in a slightly different manner. Working with composer Rubin Kodheli whose score was inspired by the music of Meredith Monk, *Terra Firma* is a requiem to the many friends and colleagues who have passed on but are still present in Ms. Monte's accumulated memories.

While *Terra Firma* does have a certain darkness to it there are also moments of hope and intimacy. The male quartet performed by Prentice Whitlow, Joe Celej, Ricardo Battaglia and Justin Lynch was one of the many highlights of the evening. Couples both male-female and same-sex would come together with a blend of passion and tenderness that spilled over the stage.



Elisa Monte Dance in Tiffany Rae-Fisher's *Identity*, Photo: Matthew Murphy

Tiffany Rae-Fisher's *Identity* featured new music by Kevin Keller and explores the many aspects of who we are as opposed to how we are perceived by others. Lisa Peluso has a fluidity and strength of movement that makes her every moment of stage memorable. She is at the center of a group of dancers who alter, prohibit or seek to entangle her moves. She remains separate from them and their attempts, keeping true to who she is as opposed to who they seem to perceive her as.



Elisa Monte Dance in Joe Celej's *Portals and Passageways*, Photo: Matthew Murphy

Joe Celej's *Portals and Passageways*, with music by Amina, proposes that memories are like ghosts, distorted and haunting, and ever so gradually fading away. Clymene Baugher was beautiful as she moved through a series of dreamlike scenes, independent in her choices and confident in choosing her own fate.

The Elisa Monte Dance Company has again shown New York City why it is in such high demand in the dance venues around the world. The company's work is always solid and each dancer in the company stands out as a soloist in their own right.