

# Unstable Ground: Elisa Monte Dance at the Ailey Citigroup Theater

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NYC Dance Stuff

*Dance in New York City by Darrell Wood*



Photo by Tim Townsend Photography

The 2012 season at [The Ailey Citigroup Theatre](#) of the [Elisa Monte Dance](#) was the company's 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary season. The performances offered the world premieres of three new pieces, "[Unstable Ground](#)," with commissioned music by [Lois Vierk](#); "[In Absentia](#)" featuring new music by [Kevin Keller](#); and "[Outside In](#)" with original music by [Ben Doyle](#), as well the revival of "[Pigs and Fishes](#)" (1982) and an excerpt from "[Amor Fait](#)" (1999).

Seeing "[Pigs and Fishes](#)" again was like seeing an old friend unexpectedly, you do not realize how much you missed them till you see them. First commissioned by [Alvin Ailey](#) for his company in 1982, it has become, along with [Treading](#), a signature work of Ms. Monte. Set to the music of [Glenn Branca](#), it is a testament to Ms. Monte's commitment to innovation in movement.

[Lisa Peluso](#) was superb; with [Glenn Branca's](#) pulsating score as her guide she commanded the stage. With one arm moving from side to side, her body undulating as she stepped first forward and then back, she clasps her hands over her head and spins only to repeat the movements again. Ms. Peluso seemed to pull the music into her body and then exploring it with her soul. [Pigs and Fishes](#) is one of the great hallmarks of contemporary dance in America.

Early in her career Ms. Monte was encouraged and mentored by both [Alvin Ailey](#) and [Martha Graham](#), and in that mode of encouragement and mentorship she is "*strongly committed to identifying and nurturing new talent*". [Joe Celej](#) and [Tiffany Rea-Fisher](#) are both fortunate recipients of Ms. Monte's commitment.

*Outside In*, choreographed by company member *Joe Celej* with original music by *Ben Doyle* is a work for three dancers, *Clymene Baugher*, *Liz Beres* and *Prentice Winslow*. The stage opens and it is subtly lit and slightly foggy, Mr. Winslow is seated as he cradles Ms. Beres and Ms. Baugher with great intimacy. It is a dance that is tender and gentle. The three dancers are always touching; if one separates they are pulled back as if the three were and always will be a whole. The work is a sculptural and intimate exploration of our relationships with one another.

The dancers' movements are mirrored by real time video that is being projected on the screen behind them. The video is fuzzy, lacking the ability to determine features, but still there is brightness to the imagery. It's as if there are ghosts dancing in the background, it is a startling and brilliant effect.

*In Absentia* choreographed by the company's Associate Artistic Director *Tiffany Rae-Fisher* is the exploration of romantic relationship and timing. It expounds upon the quote "'If I never met you, I wouldn't like you. If I didn't like you, I wouldn't love you. If I didn't love you, I wouldn't miss you. But I

There is social commentary here, people looking for a connection to another. It is a work for six dancers with *Joe Celej* and *Clymene Baugher* as the central couple. They are two lovers who at times seemed to have trouble communicating, not always seeing eye to eye, but still remembering they love each other. The three couples try to resolve their differences, they separate but still move in sync; seeking the moment they can move as one again. In the end, Ms. Baugher leaps into Mr. Celej's arms remembering what is at the core of their relationship.

The premiers of both Mr. Celej's and Ms. Rae-Fisher's works were made possible by the commission of *Carolyn Dilworth* and the *Junior Board of Elisa Monte Dance* through their *New Choreographers Fund*, which seems to promise the work of young choreographers into the company's future repertory.

*Unstable Ground*, *Elisa Monte*'s newest work "explores the feeling of universal instability permeating the world due to unexpected shifts in our environment and economy". The work is centered on its use of the floor, *Chivas Merchant-Buckman* lies on stage, Mr. Celej rolls on to meet him and they begin a duet that is both somber and beautiful.

As one dancer rolls on stage the other dancers as a unit roll towards them and they are absorbed into the group that has become a wreathing knot of movement. They move as if they are a single entity, shifting across the stage. Standing they separate into pairs, the women being lifted or climbing on the men as the dance builds in intensity, the movements growing larger.

We see the dancers' shadows projected on the back wall, giving the work greater depth. Occasionally a dancer seems as if they are in conflict and try to break away from the group only to meet resistance by the others.

*Unstable Ground*, with original music by *Lois Vierk*, highlights our dependency on structures, both natural and manmade, that no longer may be able to help sustain our current way of life.

*Elisa Monte* utilizes her movement vocabulary to search for deeper understanding of the human experience. She is unafraid to express what she finds, whether it be positive or disturbing, but it is always original and will always make you think.