

# Artists Take Over

Interim  
Queens Museum of Art  
October 19 through 21

The Flies  
BAM Majestic Theater  
October 26 through 28

**BY JOAN ACOCELLA**

**T**he idea behind BAM's new "Artists in Action" series, that visual artists should direct stage shows, is not new. Diaghilev used it in the '20s; Robert Wilson has been using it for years. The problem is that the visual imagination is not necessarily a theatrical imagination, one that can conceive of an action developing over time. Of the two "Artists in Action" programs I saw, one was splendid, the other a flop.

In *Interim*, installation artists Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel teamed up with Indian choreographer Chandralekha and percussionist T. H. Subash Chandran to create a piece about the innards of time, how time would seem if you could only penetrate it. On the back wall, on a shelf maybe 20 feet above the floor, lay a man sleeping. Hanging over him was his shadow, a silhouette that must have been painted on rubber, for as the show progressed it was stretched sideways, via ropes pulled by two women sitting in chairs that were also mounted perilously high on the wall.

All this was weird and fantastic—modern Fates extending the thread of life, not clipping it—and it was echoed by the four Indian dancers on the stage below. Their shadows stretching like the silhouette, across the stage, they moved with that infinite slowness that Asian dancers somehow know how to make interesting. Watching the male soloist, Shaji John, palms out, lower his buttocks toward the floor in a long,

deep plié that looked like the Brooklyn Bridge easing itself into the wind, we found out as much about the inside of time as we're ever going to know.

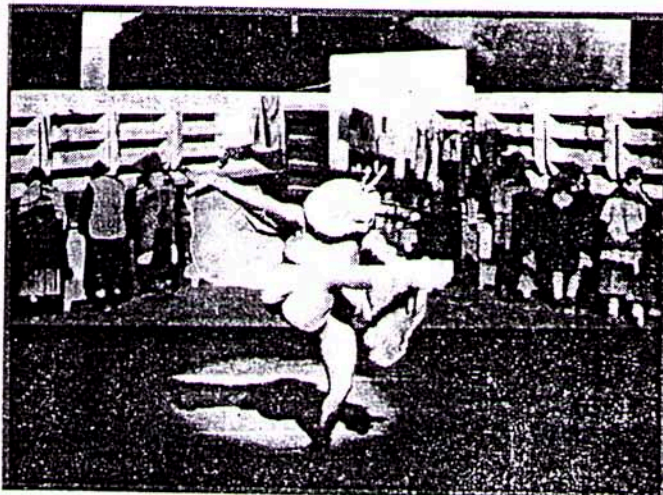
The secret of *Interim's* success, apart from the brains involved, seems to have been close collaboration. In the postshow Q&A, Jones said that she and Ginzel talked about the piece with Chandralekha for over a year. By contrast, in the Q&A that followed *The Flies*, a theater work by Ilya Kabakov with Vladimir Tarasov (music) and David Dorfman (dance), Dorfman said, "Ilya pretty much told me what he wanted to happen."

What happened was both chaotic and static. There was a set—a Soviet communal kitchen with six women at six sinks—plus, above the set, slides of actual Russian communal apartments (kitchens out of Dostoyevsky, bathrooms from hell), plus, on both sides of the stage, ever-changing panels of quotations reflecting the irritations of communal living ("He never wipes his feet," "He never flushes," "You fucking slut"), plus, stage left, a three-man orchestra playing jazz overlaid with opera recordings, plus, on opposite sides of the stage, Kabakov and his wife reading things in Russian that nobody could hear, let alone understand, plus, in the middle of the stage—if you ever

had time to look at it—a dance by Dorfman for 10 people costumed as flies.

Amazingly, considering the impediments to seeing it, Kabakov said in the Q&A that the dance was the key to the piece. While most of the flies did a sort of brutish improvisation—jumping, bumping—two of them performed a nice classical adagio, whereupon the others attacked them. That, Kabakov said, was the point of the show: Communal life makes people inhuman and if anything human appears in their midst, they kill it. It is good that Kabakov clarified this, because otherwise I think everyone would have missed it.

"Artists in Action" projects are chosen by competition. I can understand BAM's choosing Kabakov. He is a famous man, the leader of the Soviet "unofficial" artists who emerged on the international scene with perestroika. But BAM might also check whether its theater-bound visual artists have any theater-worthy ideas. The "Artists in Action" shows are billed as works in progress, but it's hard to imagine *The Flies* making any progress toward stage viability. It's an installation, the very thing Kabakov is known for, and you can't ask people to sit in the dark for an hour to look at an installation. ♦



HEIDI FELDMAN

Fly in the ointment:  
Kabakov's designs,  
Dorfman's dancing