

# danceviewtimes

## writers on dancing

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**"Tacit Consent"**  
**Liss Fain Dance**  
**Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Forum**  
**San Francisco, CA**

by **Rita Felciano**  
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*Liss Fain Dance in "Tacit Consent". Photo © Benjamin Hersh*

Liss Fain has been making dances in the Bay Area since 1990. The choreography has always stood out for following her inclinations towards challenging music, literary inspirations and strong design. At first her longtime designer Matthew Antaky signed on for the lighting; but these days he has stepped into the third dimension with elaborate, inevitably airy structures. Fain's installation work, as is its nature, asks audiences to forgo their seats and pick their own trajectory through what still is a time-based art. It's not a process ideal for someone who is less interested in what can be absorbed individually -- though, of course, that is intrinsic to any communal experience --

– than in determining how this way of working shapes the choreographic process. Until now Fain has made plausible but not completely convincing cases for abandoning the proscenium stage. The new "Tacit Consent" is different.

The idea behind this fifty-minute work is the everyday experience during which we give involuntary permission to a moment of intimacy when strangers look at us, and we may, or may not, exchange glances. It happens on crowded streets, at parties in the office. The question, of course, is to what extent these moments register and impact our sense of self. In walking around the quadrants of "Tacit's" set, peering through its window-like slots or the spaces between its "curtains" (600+ suspended manila envelopes) and align ourselves close to phone-sized loudspeakers (some fifty), we looked at the dancers--sometimes live, sometimes on in-time video. In one large still photo two female eyes stared at for the whole length of the piece.

But we also take in the couple sitting on a bench, the man's back in front of us, the woman with the backpack or the two men whispering diagonally from across the theater. My sense was that the closer up physically, the more personalized the experience became, voluntary or not.

In most installations the performers remain a self-contained unit. In "Tacit" their presence blends into the audience. As they changed places, they looked out for and at each other with a steady glance, but if it happened, accidentally as in life, they saw us, they stared right through us. Without recognition, no emotions, just those blank eyes. In this context it felt like an intrusion into personal space and I, at least, became inevitably part of the performance.

Fain has been working with a core group of dancers -- Shannon Kurashige, Katharine Hawthorne and Megan Kurashige among them -- for many years. This year Sonja Dale, Cassie Martin and Sarah Dionne Woods-LaDue joined them, making hers an all-female company, perhaps for the first time. They have strong voices, are able to hold their own among fellow artists and

comfortably participate in the ever-changing ensemble. Martin looked like the most intriguing, combining a fierce determination with a sense of passion and lyricism, particularly in her solo.

The dancers explosively spread from a central circle which also provided a space for periodic refocusing. It also happened to be a good place to catch simultaneous actions in different spaces. Throughout "Tacit" one could intuit an underlying sense of order, perhaps even geometry, that is constantly being undermined. These dancers may have had a touch of humanity about them but they remained strangers -- just like those you encounter on your way to work.

As a choreographer Fain is committed to a reasonably inventive ballet-inspired but modern vocabulary which includes pure dancing sections among imagistic ones -- wheelbarrows, tugs of war, two women clutching each other, one searching for a shadow behind her, trembling hands and repeated glances into the overhead lighting grill on which were spread out mannequins. The fast-paced, clean and unadorned choreography is rich and technically demanding. Huge extensions drop into curls or trio entanglements that call up wrestling matches. A series of unison hops felt like raindrops bouncing off asphalt. Rare are the moments of stillness, such as when three dancers stand at the periphery and watched the tall and immensely expressive Hawthorne work herself across the floor like a stream of lava.