

ANATOMY OF A SCENE

SEATTLE CHOREOGRAPHERS DISCOVER THE SEDUCTIVE FREEDOM

OF DANCING FOR THE CAMERA

By Adrian MacDonald

At the other end of the technical spectrum, 24-year old choreographer Jessie Smith premiered her 16mm short, *In Memory of Corrosion*, to stunned audiences at the Northwest Film Forum's Local Sightings festival last fall. Shot by local rising-star DP Sean Porter, it represents perhaps the most meticulously crafted dance film in Seattle since the work of 33 Fainting Spells. "I prefer to think about making dance film as a filmmaker, not a dancer," Smith says.

"My whole goal is to get the film to capture the same physical intensity as the live show."

In Memory of Corrosion takes place in a spot-lit bathtub in the freight elevator of a dilapidated industrial building, and shows Smith in choreographed movements struggling against the confines of her slippery trap. The effect is one of tight, elegant hard work translated to film, with an unexpected sexual subtext as the camera moves over Smith's wet clothing and tattooed arms and legs.

Smith, who left the Cornish dance program after two years to start her company Dead Bird Movement, says her favorite

performance spaces are empty industrial buildings that often require breaking into in the middle of the night with bolt cutters. "They're not places that audiences can easily get to," she says. "So film is a tool to capture that."

But where *In Memory of Corrosion* was the result of a carefully planned shoot, Smith adds that her normal choreography style is improvisational. Her current work in progress is a short she shot with Kasulke on the fly on Super 8 film over 3 days in Berlin.

"That's normally how I choreograph, I don't put a lot of thought into it at the beginning," she says. "Instead of spending time getting into the details, [the shoot with Kasulke] was reverting back to making split second decisions."

The shoot began when she and Kasulke realized their travels would intersect over a few days in Berlin last summer. They met right before Kasulke's departure, and decided they would scout locations when they got there. The only planning Smith could do was to create costumes, made in colors that would show up well on Super 8 film.

"He gave me orange," she says. "That intimidated me. I thought about this safety orange dance costume and that disgusted me." Nonetheless, she went to the fabric store and bought orange, worked through a few renditions, and ultimately sewed a "crazy orange tutu with this tight bodice," she laughs.

Smith will edit the film this winter in part with the resources of 911 Media Arts Center.

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Jessie Smith's *In Memory of Corrosion*. Image by Sean Porter

