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# SLEEK

Liberty On Film: Grace Schwindt's Visions of Freedom



The video and performance artist Grace Schwindt presents a feature length film exploring the notion of freedom in left-wing 1980s/90s Germany. "Only A Free Individual Can Create A Free Society" is the name of the London-based, German artist's

first solo exhibition at London's Showroom Gallery, and is her most ambitious project yet.

This conceptual film, named after a slogan discussed in the conversation that structures the film's script, is partly influenced by Schwindt's childhood amid leftwing individuals in Frankfurt, Germany. The film's script, however, is explicitly formed around an interview Schwindt conducted over the telephone with a left-wing activist-cum-taxi driver, on a journey back from the countryside to the city. What they discuss structures the film script, and the words spoken by the dancer-characters, as the activist's own role in radical left-wing German groups of the 1960s. Some groups are more familiar than others: the Frankfurt School, the Outer Parliamentary Opposition (OUP) and the Baader Meinhof Gang are all aptly mentioned. An unfortunate fact of having the script spoken in monotone and chant is that, over the 80 minute running time, you start to lose focus on what's been said. This may well be intentional, but it can be personally frustrating. Certain words, sentiments or emotions, however, trigger particular movements, revealing everything to be connected to everything else.

The film's setting is both familiar and strange: an orange and white set, seemingly open to the elements and positioned on a hill that overlooks London. The outline of Canary Wharf suggests this might be Primrose Hill. Large-scale photographic prints or paintings show reproductions of other landscapes or cityscapes, creating multiple layers as the film alternates between domestic and public space. Audience members sit on comfortable black seats, and the film is projected across a large curtained set in the gallery, a reference to the changing interiors of the film.

A group of eleven dancers perform a tightly scripted choreography that alternates between fast and slow movements. The work was a collaborative process between Schwindt, the dancers and a dramaturge over a period of five weeks, in which diagrams were used to map out the choreography. The costumes are exquisite, and made from a variety of materials both industrial and natural, including aluminium, wood, bark, cardboard, silk and velvet. Over 30 costumiers were brought in to design the costumes, which vary wildly from the am-dram to the highly modernist.

Extensive post-production video compositing gives the film a jagged and hallucinatory edge, aided by a swerving camera that sometimes swoops, loosely, around bodies and sets. The sets are also fragile entities, likely to fall or crumble, or snap open to reveal open sky.

With "Only A Free Individual...", Schwindt creates a narrative dance film which pushes towards a definition of what freedom is. Through word and movement, a debate ensues about who has access to freedom, and to whom it is denied; and how ultimately, we can work to create a society that is truly freer.