

# The New York Times

DANCE REVIEW

## For Objects of a Gaze, a Chance to Return It

Liz Santoro and Anne Zuerner at Danspace Project

By Gia Kourlas  
April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012



Ruby Washington/The New York Times

**Liz Santoro and Anne Zuerner** Ms. Santoro, left, performing with Cynthia Koppe at Danspace Project.

What's with the shared bill? Over the past few months, choreographers have been pairing up everywhere, from New York Live Arts to the Kitchen and, finally, Danspace Project, where on Thursday evening, another double bill was unveiled, featuring Liz Santoro and Anne Zuerner. There's something regressive about this way of packaging dance. Ms. Santoro's "We Do Our Best" may not have been perfect, but it deserved its own night.

The program begins with Ms. Zuerner's shorter "vessel ventricle pearl," for which she uses only a part of the performance space at St. Mark's Church. Much of her dance, which she performs with Jessica Weiss and Claire Westby, takes place on risers, usually reserved for seating, in a corner of the sanctuary. A shift in perspective is undoubtedly behind this arrangement, but so much of this work is overdressed that it reads more like an assignment than like an inspired point of departure.

Heavy-handed blackouts are distracting, as are the dancers' costumes, by Nicola Gardiner, which include unflattering high-waisted, brown-belted pants.

But just when Ms. Zuerner gets going — mercifully renouncing static poses against the wall for a wildly beautiful passage of brisk footwork executed with a relaxed upper body — she spoils it with a tacked-on duet for Christiana Axelsen and Emma Desjardins, the celebrated Merce Cunningham dancer. It's tepid by comparison; the footwork section is a whole other dance waiting to be born.

Ms. Santoro, her cherubic face and red curls a familiar sight over the years in works by Jack Ferver, Trajal Harrell and Ann Liv Young, has choreographed a more substantial piece exploring the feminine body. Called "We Do Our Best," it features Ms. Santoro, Mélanie Giffard and Cynthia Koppe offering themselves as objects to be stared at. They also stare back. While Ms. Zuerner uses only a part of the space, Ms. Santoro gobbles it all up: the balconies, the stage and the aisle between the seats.

Wearing heels with Reid Bartelme's immaculate skirts and tops — he may be a dancer, but he has a future in costume design — the women spend much of the time walking, as well as standing still. It may not sound like much, but that is where Ms. Santoro's meticulousness comes in.

There's nothing casual about "We Do Our Best," which takes place under bright lights that magnify the most minute changes in bodies and facial expressions.

There are other scenes in which the dancers experience breakdowns of sorts, and their squeals and hysterical shrieks fall into the category of modern-dance clichés. But as with Ms. Zuerner's footwork passage, there is a standout moment in "We Do Our Best" when Ms. Santoro and Ms. Koppe perform a talking duet —

they're clueless women talking about other clueless women — while taking small, clipped steps.

As they point their toes to the side, rise on the balls of their feet or tap their heels onto the floor in unison, their obsessive precision is stunning. For a good few minutes, at least, Ms. Santoro takes her dance all the way.

Liz Santoro and Anne Zuerner continue performances through Saturday at Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church, 131 East 10th Street, East Village; (866) 811-4111, [danspaceproject.org](http://danspaceproject.org).