

## City transformations

*Keith Gallasch*

Times are hard in Sydney. The myth of it being the best-funded, easiest place to build a career in the arts is a long-time dead. Impossible rents, scarce and expensive rehearsal spaces, rare and expensive performance venues and arts funding split between more and more artists make it a tough place to survive let alone develop bodies of work. All credit then to Tess de Quincey's persistence with her company of performers, De Quincey Co.

In the relatively new open public space in front of St Mary's Cathedral (with its brand new spires) running all the way to William Street and finishing with a long pond (over the public gym and swimming pools below), De Quincey Co realised their latest version of *No Cold Feet*.

Performing in public space is about occupying and inhabiting it. First the performers had to share Cathedral Square, with skateboarders who looped and whooped around the pole-waving ensemble without directly interrupting the performance until the oncoming dark appeared to banish them at once to dinner. The other sharers were workers on their way home. Some were momentarily caught up in the flow of the work or, often, entranced for the duration. The rest were 'audience'-performance faithfuls or the curious who'd read about it that day in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The daylight challenge of the first huge space before the church, the distraction of the skateboarders and an inadequate sound system denied the sense of a space commanded. The pleasure to be had was in fragmentary gatherings, delicate duos and trios closely observed rather than in the sweep of the whole ensemble. While occasionally impressive as a lineup of caped neo-medieval, cross-gendered characters wielding and bending giant poles as they moved through us, a sense of totality was only occasional. However as the company slowly and elegantly moved into more intimate spaces and into distinctive lighting frames, along and into the stretch of water (a rare and welcome moment of exuberance) and, finally, down the stairs, disappearing into the adjoining little park, the sense of space transforming and an ambulatory adventure for the now sizeable audience had been firmly realised. Duration is everything in a performance like this and staying with it has its rewards.

There are few performance ensembles in Australia, and fewer rooted in the kind of sustaining discipline Tess de Quincey offers. It would be good to see De Quincey Co more frequently and, for this kind of working of public spaces, better resourced for its sound and light artists. De Quincey Co make me greedy for more performative engagement with the city's public spaces and architecture.

*De Quincey Co, No Cold Feet, choreographer Tess de Quincey; performers Lynne dos Santos, Ryuichi Fujimura, Kristina Harrison, Victoria Hunt, Thomas Jackson, Amanda Martyn; sound Composition: Barbara Clare, djbc; costume design Léa Donnan; lighting Design: Richard Manner; Cathedral Square, Sydney, May 28 - June 1*