

THE AUSTRALIAN

FRIDAY APRIL 8 1994

PERFORMANCE

IS

Choreographer: Tess de Quincy. Set design: Stuart Lynch. Sound: Julian Knowles. The Performance Space, Sydney.

WILLIAM SHOUBRIDGE

BUTOH is a movement form, first evolved in Japan by Hajikawa and Min Tanaka, that has been cited as a dance style where the body is constantly in a crisis, caught between intense focus and dissolution.

In poorly trained hands it can seem to merely veer from the narcoleptic to the epileptic.

Tess de Quincy is an Australian dancer who has studied butoh for years with Tanaka in Japan and who spends a great deal of her time performing in Europe.

This gives her pieces and her performance manner a unique and intriguing tang. She has all the hallmarks of the style — the twisting balances and shuddering repeated falls to the floor, the moments of intense stasis or wild frenetic action, but there is overall a silkiness and grace to her movements that contrasts nicely with the Euro-glumness of much of the work's fabric.

This current manifestation is the third instalment stemming from a long interest in and fascination with exploring the expanse and atmosphere of Lake Mungo in western NSW, a dry lake bed that has evidence of some of the oldest Aboriginal habitation in the country and that is indeed a sacred site.

Previous works have seen her and other dancers actually performing at the lake and the result has been videotaped.

This time the exploration is more schematic. De Quincy has placed the piece within an installation by Stuart Lynch, quite lovely and expressive in its own way, that incorporates a veritable lean-to of corrugated iron and projected satellite readouts and images of the lake surrounding a cocoon of manipulated sound, moulded and shaped live by Julian Knowles.

It's a collaborative exploration, yet one that is seamless and complete unto itself, an hour of masterly drawn movement and image where the pen never leaves the page, a surefooted and highly distilled reaction to an ancient place displaced to a city stage.

De Quincy dominates the piece entirely. She has a presence and hieratic solemnity to her dancing that gives it the weight of a sibylline utterance, yet the work has a cool Euclidean logic in its geometry and layout and its use of the performing space and set.

The overall feeling you get from watching her dancing is of a body acted upon by deep and mysterious forces and her commanding expression resonates with those forces. It's like dancing that is turned inside out, if you like, and it is rarely seen on an Australian stage.

IS cannot be blandly and easily followed but there are contours within it that stay in a viewer's memory for a long time.