



Ideas in new-dance showcase feel tentative, unfinished

REVIEW: Series that fosters experimentation looks at early photography and female adolescence.

By **CAROLINE PALMER** Special to the Star Tribune
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The opening weekend of the Right Here Showcase offered more questions than answers. The event, which promotes Minnesota's midcareer performing artists, fosters experimentation. But the works presented by Penelope Freeh and Melissa Birch on Friday night felt unfinished, as if the creators are still deciding which direction to follow.

Both Freeh and Birch took on interesting subject matter. Freeh's "Helioscope," created, directed and choreographed in collaboration with Donna Schoenherr, draws upon the stop-motion images of 19th-century photographer Eadweard Muybridge. The work has a sepia-toned quality to it, as if the scenes were torn from the pages of an old album.

Freeh and Schoenherr summon past longing in their dancing. Their personas are from literary limbo — Freeh darts like a searcher for meaning while Schoenherr sways with a more ghostly, Miss Havisham quality. There is real promise for future development here, but the pacing of the work is too cautious. It seems like there is an attempt to reproduce the stop-motion quality onstage, but the energy ends up constrained. The same holds true when the "cloud corps" dances — the force of their concentration undermines potential for a lighter dreamlike quality.

Birch's "Who Moved My Child" is billed as a preview, which may explain the unfinished quality of the work. The movement theater piece, written by Birch (who also performs in it), has codirection and sound design by Sharon Picasso as well as choreography from Deborah Jinza Thayer.

The subject matter builds on the fever dream that is female adolescence, with all of the potential within for play as well as aggression. Birch, a maternal figure among a cast of six younger women, is a master wordsmith — her clipped words warn us: "I see your chaos and I raise you chaos." Thayer's choreography is built upon pent-up feelings that bounce poignantly between violence and restraint.

The work follows one train of thought and repeats it again at a different speed. The quality of being dropped into the midst of something happening is intriguing — but at the end it feels like the bottom drops out with no resolution. Not that there has to be a pat answer, just something more substantial. Birch has built a sturdy foundation — now to see what comes next.