



Tom Brazil

"Figures on a Field," a dance choreographed by Dean Moss in collaboration with Laylah Ali, at the Kitchen.

## DANCE REVIEW

# Basketballs, Museum Galleries and Meaning

By JOHN ROCKWELL

"Figures on a Field," a new dance work at the Kitchen choreographed — or conceived, or directed — by Dean Moss in collaboration with the visual artist Laylah Ali, has a lot of ambitions. They don't all quite gel, but they set off interesting resonances against one another.

Mr. Moss is a curator at the Kitchen; Ms. Ali is best known for her "Greenhead" series of paintings depicting cartoonlike, round-headed figures. Mr. Moss's dance does not attempt to replicate the "Greenhead" pictures, but was inspired by them (and by "the museum environment in which they are typically exhibited," according to the advance publicity). Ms. Ali sat in on rehearsals, offering notes.

The same news release tells us

*The dance will be performed on Thursday and Saturday at the Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street, in Chelsea.*

## Figures on a Field

The Kitchen

that the piece is about "issues of power related to athletic, religious, and military contexts, while also exploring the dynamic between patterns of cultural consumption and formations of identity." A lot of baggage for a 40-minute dance.

At the beginning Mr. Moss is seen clinging to a wall, and then there is a video of little falling figures, evoking both wiggling tadpoles and the horrors of Sept. 11. Cultural consumption is most evident in the person of Kacie Chang, who invites audience members on a "guided tour," leading, on Friday night, a sheepish quintet around and through the performance, sometimes posing for group photos, and hence objectifying the performers.

The main dance is for six other dancers, including Mr. Moss. Athletics involves basketballs hurled hard by the dancers, usually at one of their

number as hapless victim. Sometimes the dancers seem mad, as in a madhouse. Sometimes they lope in loose formation. Belts are whipped on the floor; canvaslike rectangles are waved about; folding chairs are deployed.

The most interesting resonances came between the dispassionate, almost minimalist dance (or movement) and the overt references to ghetto mores. The six main dancers wear various forms of costuming resembling what might be found on a Harlem playground. Yet there is no exploitation of hip-hop or break dancing. It's Marshall McLuhan in action (or in stasis), hot and cool. But however inconclusive it may sometimes seem, the dance never becomes a weak synthesis of those extremes; it's never tepid.

The other dancers, all vivid personalities, are Keila Cordova, Pedro Jiménez, Wanjiru Kamuyu, Okwui Okopokwasili and David Thomson. The hushed, mysterious music is credited to Nguyen van Cung, MEXI and Marcel Duchamp.