

The 'poetic mystery' of the world's leading dancers

By Benazir Wehelie, Special to CNN

Updated 10:49 PM ET, Tue October 13, 2015



Story highlights

Lois Greenfield photographed dancers from some of the world's leading dance companies

Her photos are split-second captures of the dancers' movements

still? For photographer Lois Greenfield, this contradiction evokes a sense of unity. The camera captures the actions of the dancers and freezes them within a split second of time, rendering reality into its most revealing state.

"I shoot just one moment at a time. ... These moments are beneath the threshold of perception," Greenfield said. "It's often a moment when (the dancers are) falling, or they're going up, or two people are about to touch or something like that. Those moments are more expressive than the typical dance photo of someone in a perfect position on the ground or in the air."



Photographer Lois Greenfield

about expressive gestures. And they're often, I call them, enigmatic or ambiguous moments."

These moments culminate to create a "poetic mystery," she said. The dancers' "movements are like letters" that form sentences to tell some kind of narrative.

"Working improvisationally in my studio with dancers, it's completely different," Greenfield said. "We don't have any starting point, we don't have an end point. We don't have anything we are trying to show or do. The picture evolves from nowhere."

Greenfield says that even in improvisation, the dancers move with an intention and a purpose. There is always a detail to discover and an underlying theme to ponder.

(CNN) - The photo book "*Lois Greenfield: Moving Still*" is not merely a documentation of dance. It is an experience in which the content of each and every image is a moment, an expression, a movement, just waiting to be unwrapped.

The title of the work is somewhat of a contradiction. How can something simultaneously be moving and

The subjects in the book are dancers from some of the world's leading dance companies, and Greenfield has two approaches when photographing such talents. If working specifically for the dance companies, her photos are based on choreography. However, she says most of the work she does -- and the majority of the photos in the book -- involve an improvisational approach.

"And out of this improvisation comes a moment that can't be part of a dance," Greenfield said. "It becomes more of a personal moment, a moment

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An interesting observation Greenfield notes is that, because some of her photos show dancers that look like they're fleeing -- as in the cover of her book and photo No. 2 in the gallery above -- there is a sort of biblical connotation. She also adds that because she uses mirrors a lot, like in photo No. 8, there may be allusions to Greek mythology as well.

The images completely stop reality in its tracks, but there is still a spectrum of endless motion permeating the photos. The photographer essentially takes a three-dimensional dance reality and brings it to life on a two-dimensional photographic surface.

"In some ways dance and photography are antithetical. Because (dance) happens in 360 degrees of space, according to musical intervals," Greenfield said. "A choreographed dance has to be performed in sequence; it's not just isolated movements. But I'm extracting one split second, which nonetheless kind of represents a sequence or is like a split-second dance."

Greenfield says she does not digitally manipulate her images. Instead, the props the dancers often use, such as flowing fabrics, are what enhance her photos. In photo No. 4, for example, a dancer is silhouetted in a silver, ribbon-like fabric.

"It's a good example of 'moving still,' because she's moving and the ribbon becomes like a sculpture," Greenfield said. "It's really a very simple shot, and it's just what I like to call a miracle moment. ... It's just the right moment, where you feel that she's running in (the ribbon)."

While shooting in color also contributed to the feeling of motion and three-dimensionality, Greenfield's images maintain a neutral, natural aesthetic.

"The pictures are in color. ... But for the most part, the colors are just the skin tones of the person," Greenfield said. "The backgrounds are either white, gray or black. And the clothing or fabrics are very, very neutral. I don't think it reads like color. I'm not looking at a colorful carnival."

Greenfield worked alongside William A. Ewing to make the final image selections for the book.

"He was basically juxtaposing pictures that seemed to tell a story when put side by side," Greenfield said. "Either one dancer's movement led into the other picture or maybe there was a relationship between the dancers' shapes. ... He had a design strategy of pairing images that became very exciting, because the connotation of (one) picture could be expanded by the juxtaposition to another picture."

This collaborative creativity resulted in a photo book that dances before viewers' very eyes.

"I want (viewers) to contemplate the mystery of what I'm presenting," Greenfield said. "Because people don't know how I did it or what it is or why it is. I'd like them to enjoy that mystery and make it their own."

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/13/arts/cnnphotos-moving-still-dancers/index.html>

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