

pzazz



**To Bloom ()**  
**FloreCIMIENTO**

AMANDA PIÑA

Watery Reverie,  
Dynamic  
Structures



Marina Srnka

Chilean-Mexican choreographer Amanda Piña's latest performance-installation 'To Bloom () Florecimiento' has nothing to do with flowers. Instead, we enter a blue-hued room and cross a subterranean beach on a journey to the depths of the ocean. Collaborating with dance students from the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp, Piña crafts a series of live-body sculptures revolving around the sacred and historical significance of the water: as the origin of life and movement, but also the violence of the Middle Passage, and contemporary environmental and migratory concerns.

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The scenery is rich with suggestive imagery and sensory encounters of touch, sound, light, and smell. Soft sand covers the floor and dim yellow spotlights pierce the air filled with a musty mist. The entire back wall projects a dark underwater journey, accompanied by sounds of breaking waves and water streams. It makes for an airless environment. Three water-filled ponds in the sand are filled with trash and dirt and display projected messages like 'the Atlantic Ocean', 'transatlantic migration', and 'racines'. Even if the room is filled with spectators, sounds and movements, there is a darker undercurrent. This does not feel like a healthy ocean.

Every element of the stage is meticulously realized, from the bridal shrine adorned with symbols of matrimonial bliss suggesting a path towards union and completion, to a huge torn fishnet in the opposite corner conjuring the looming threat of human destruction. Several sand mounds are spread throughout. At one point, I realize that the many plastic fishnets dispersed around the stage are filled with people struggling to break free, in slow jellyfish dances. Their struggle with the fabric is somewhat reminiscent of Martha Graham's 'Lamentation,' but in a sedated, underwater version, like creatures at the mercy of the ocean currents.

The performance flows in three 40-minute cycles that repeat without ever being entirely the same. The audience can roam across the large sand-covered floor, be present for a single part of the triptych or stay for all three; to capture moments with their phones, talk and laugh, or silently drift through the room. They are strange fish in these waters, and the interplay between the audience, performers, and technical staff shapes the piece's dynamics. At times, it is pure chaos, as the masses of spectators swirl across the landscape seeking the perfect vantage point to witness whatever is happening in the choreography. Other times it settles into a more traditional setting, with onlookers nestled along the edges of the room.

Three black-clad performers, Layza de Rocha Soares, Nyandra Fernandes, and Amanda Piña herself, sitting on sand mounds around the room, drive most of the narrative. As they step down from the mounds, they begin to tap and shake a hollow wooden instrument to a simple rhythm. The larvae-dancers sealed within their fishnets start to hatch and crawl out of their living sculptures, migrate across the space and converge under a larger fishnet hanging from the ceiling in

the corner. These hatchlings – students of the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp – are all dressed in beige. Like a school of fish, they will run around and inside the circle while Fernandes is spinning wildly, waving her long black hair and spreading her hands like wings. The dim spotlights are replaced by neon rows in blue or red, and a throbbing techno beat starts pulsating above like a persistent headache. It then settles down: sitting down, Fernandes begins to sing a traditional tune, and all the performers join in with an air of weighty reverence. They may be enchanted, but it is not quite enchanting.

The most remarkable scenes, however, occur towards the end of each cycle. During the second cycle, the stage is still filled with curious onlookers ambling about when the Cameroonian dancer Zora Snake emerges on the far side. As a sea nymph in a glittering blue skinsuit, he seems impossibly small and fragile, snaking and undulating his way through the crowd. It hardly seems possible this frail creature is the same performer that, 40 minutes later, towards the end of the ultimate cycle, emerges for a blistering finale. With the remaining audience members scattered around the edges, and the sand-covered stage and ponds bathed in an ominous crimson glow, now he is dressed in a demon-like red costume with an extra pair of tentacles hanging out. A mirror mask gives him an otherworldly appearance: I can only assume he represents some undiscovered deep-sea crustacean. The powerful and absorbing dance of this hellish creature leaves the slightly ambling and watery episodes of the preceding hour far behind, as Snake fuses belly-dance, Central African tribal dances, and urban hip-hop in a final *coup de grâce* of electric intensity.