

## 19 by APRIL GORNIK

### THE SEMINAL DANCER/CHOREOGRAPHER

Martha Graham was 26 years old when the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote, was passed by Congress. The amendment's centennial this year is being celebrated in many forms, one being *The Eve Project*. For it, nineteen of Graham's iconic poses were extracted from her work by the ongoing Martha Graham Dance Company from Graham's photographed repertoire, highlighting the archetypal female power her dance vocabulary modernized. These nineteen poses, semaphores for the power of human expression, have been "offered to anyone who chooses to own them—to learn, remember and make them their own" by the Company.

Artist Margaret Garrett accepted this profound visual challenge, and it's hard to imagine a better person to rise to the occasion. Garrett began her creative career as a dancer, performing with the Pennsylvania and Cleveland Ballet companies, among others. For this exhibition, she has worked in not one but three mediums while digesting the complexity of *The Eve Project*. The power of contemporary women comes through vividly in Garrett's interpretations, which honor the significance of Graham's empowerment of women in the arts, the impact of her company, and its storied past.

Not surprisingly, Garrett's artwork has had its roots in movement, and her sensibility and even style might be called proprioceptive. From the motion of the brush in her hand, her mark-making

traces the body's trajectory through time and across space, connecting and capturing the rest of her body through these gestures. Although her paintings, drawings, and more recently prints and videos have evinced this for years, it is a kind of culmination to see it realized in this show, which is the most declarative of her dance background, while remaining transformative, to date.

For this show, Garrett has created an extraordinary video, a set of collages that represent the poses individually, and a suite of beautiful painted collages. She has also produced a set of woodblock and Chine collé prints, *19 Poses*. In this complex meditative interchange, the conversation between Graham, Garrett's own dance background, her mediums and her individuality accumulate in a rich and generous experience for the viewer.

For the video, titled *19*, Garrett learned the 19 extracted poses for *The Eve Project*, filmed herself performing them against a white background, and assembled them in a grid of powerful singularity and interaction, creating a mesmerizing flow of movement. Seen as individual panes, they're an alphabet of womanly power inspired by Graham's expressive intent. Interpreted by Garrett, they become an experience replete with an interchange of strength, fluidity, power, and a humor all her own.

The *19 Collages*, all oxblood red on naples yellow, are so evocative and specific there is no question that they are interpreting dance, and "talk" to each other in a way that I imagine Graham would have particularly appreciated. They have become a new extraction from the poses, and gather momentum together as their own kind of body

language in forms of tension and release. Experiencing them echoes the way Graham's dancers can be freighted with their own stolid corporality one moment and then be suddenly released like a falling ribbon the next. In them you see impatience, shyness, aggression, speed, deliberation, and so much more, body language evoking classic modern dance in a new kind of timelessness. Another version of them is realized in *19 Poses*, a set of woodblock and Chine collé prints in which the "staging" of them in this medium creates a different sense of touch and realization.

The painted-and-cut paper *Improvisations 1-9* is a set of intelligent, graceful and restrained collages, feeding like the other work in the show from the poses but particularly transformed by the interplay of shapes-as-bodies within the paper's painted atmosphere, which ignites the shapes. Most are pas de deux, in which the figurative elements are set free to touch, play, collide, and resist each other. The power they represent could be said to refer to female power, but fundamentally their expression of movement, sexuality, and eros itself is genderless, or at least fluid. Abstraction affords an expansiveness of interpretation which nevertheless remains true to human interaction.

Graham's work can seem both datedly "modern" and archetypal from our 21st Century perspective, but Garrett's reinterpretation liberates it from its origins. So while the work is time-specific in the celebration of the Centennial Anniversary of the 19th Amendment, in this exhibition we are gifted a timeless experience, true to Graham's vision and Garrett's spirit.