

Dance in Stillness

In *Sally Gross – The Pleasure of Stillness*, New York Times dance critic Jennifer Dunning recalls when she first saw Gross on stage, in a duet, *Petit Air*. "Her daughter, Sardonía, was sitting on a high wooden chair, and it was basically Gross carefully and slowly running a brush through her very curly hair. And I thought, 'Wow, this is really it!'. I am still not sure why it affected me so much, but anybody who could make a dance out of combing her daughter's hair had to be someone special."

An acknowledged pioneer of Direct Cinema – non-fiction features made without scripts, sets, interviews and narration – director Albert Maysles filmed Gross over three years beginning in 2004 for *Sally Gross – The Pleasure of Stillness*, realised in collaboration with director Kristen Nuttle and producer Tanja Meding, screening in Locarno's Ici & Ailleurs sidebar.

"I was intrigued to see how she is affected by everyday events, movements and occurrences, which she incorporates in her work. At first sight I thought, 'Where is the dance?', but I came to admire the intensity, intent and sensitivities that she and her dancers bring to her work. I learned that dance can also be found in stillness," Maysles said.

"Just like myself she continues to be inspired and energised by the creative process. We both come from an immigrant Jewish background and were in New York during important political and artistic times, sharing a lot of

common ground. We both have an undying love for our respective craft and art which I believe the audience will come to appreciate when watching the film."

Named "the most poetic of minimalist modern-dance choreographers," Gross was born and raised in New York's Lower East Side. She became part of the American avant garde in the 1950s and 1960s. Now in her seventies, she is one of the few members of the original Judson Dance Theatre who is still an active dancer and choreographer.

Maysles and Nuttle follow Gross while she is working on a dance piece for a new performance, adding archive material both from her own records and others, such as Gene Friedman's 16mm film of Gross dancing before the 34th Street Post Office early 1960s, and depictions of the 1930s' Lower East Side from the New York Public Library.

Always fascinated by dance, classical, contemporary or folk, Maysles made his first portrait of a dancer – Anastas Vens – with brother Dav in 1964, followed by a film about the Paul Taylor Dance Company. *Accent on the Off Beat* depicts Danish dancer and ballet master of the New York City Ballet, Peter Martins' collaboration with jazz musician Wynton Marsalis.

(17)

Sally Gross – The Pleasure of Stillness

La Sala, 10/8, 16.15

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