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Dance In Review

Dance works as short films show depth of concept



Tan Xin Yen danced as her own ghost – with a feral corporeality and a light bulb for a mouth, she stalked a wet market at night and jungle floor at dawn (above).
PHOTO: FRONTIER DANCELAND

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DANCERS' LOCKER

Frontier Danceland

Zoom screening

Sept 12

Seeking a digital alternative to live dance performances, Frontier Danceland decided that it was out of its depth.

The company reached out to Jeremy Chua, a film producer and screenwriter who has been bringing together dancers and filmmakers since 2015 in the Cinemovement platform that he helms with Elysa Wendi.

For the Dancers' Locker programme, Chua mentored six company dancers in conceptualising and developing their own short films - making clear that they were not so much making dance films as applying dance and choreography as "a framing of the mind".

The results were striking. Each of the six films had a distinctive aesthetic and an engaging premise.

Notably, Tan Xin Yen created a film in which she danced as her own ghost - with a feral corporeality and a light bulb for a mouth, she stalked a wet market at night and jungle floor at dawn.

Nelson Yeo shot five of the six films presented, and his cinematography for Tan gave a distant and surreal texture that has burned these images into my mind, notwithstanding the awkward title (You are 56, still counting and keep counting; I am 25), and the tired device of the ghost being just a dream.

I was also gripped by Sammantha Yue's narrative of loss Here Today, Gone Tomorrow, and its images of despair in the interior of a Housing Board flat. A desolate bed sheet billowed from a window grille as she rammed her body into walls and floor, and dunked her head violently into a tub of water and flowers (the kind traditionally used to cleanse a person of bad luck).

The programme was balanced out by the pop-art palette of Ma Yue Ru's close-ups of everyday objects, and Mark Robles' transformation into sensuous drag.

Alongside the company's main stage repertoire, the Dancers' Locker studio showings give company dancers space to develop their own voices.

Over the years I have caught many whimsical experiments - characteristically short-lived pieces made from raw ideas and lo-fi production values.

While this programme was also billed as a work-in-progress, the films showed an impressive depth of concept and sophistication in the use of the moving image.
