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Dance

Liberation in the Subterranean

**In *duel* H, Andros Zins-Browne, Kris Lee, and Ley
traverse the edges of bodies in their environment.**

MARCH 2024

By Elinor Krichmar



Andros Zins-Browne's *duel H* at Danspace Project, 2024. Photo: Elyssa Goodman.

On View

Danspace Project

duel H

February 1–3, 2024

New York

Andros Zins-Browne's *duel H* begins in inky stillness. My eyes pass over a large black tarp covering the floor of St. Mark's Church, crumpled in indiscernible shapes. After long moments in darkness, small beams of light spring out from the risers: upon entering, each audience member is given a small flashlight and instructed to use it "as needed." An eerie mix of wind, static, and live vocalizations pierce through the speakers. As the tarp begins to rustle—an echo of the humming, moaning, and shrieking—the stage is illuminated from above.

I click on the flashlight. Through this motion, the audience is in control of what is visible on stage, inhabiting a role beyond simply witnessing. With an active engagement in the performance, I'm acutely aware of my physical and emotional reactions and attuned to my expectations and desires. Craving larger movements, I wait almost impatiently for the materialization of a body. Andros Zins-Browne, Kris Lee, and Ley usurp and weave around those expectations.



Andros Zins-Browne's *duel H* at Danspace Project, 2024. Photo: Elyssa Goodman.

Finally, flashes from beneath the tarp: a hand, an elbow, a torso reveal themselves. Once a part of the forms beneath it, the tarp is now a force of restriction; the dancers seem to fight against its dark plastic. As their bodies surface from the material, Zins-Browne, Lee, and Ley remain on a low level, extending away from the tarp and then shrinking into it. The trio dances restlessly. Sleepless and dreaming. They share weight, melding figures. Per the program note, *duel H* is part of a series exploring "care and violence between commingled bodies" and it succeeds in this endeavor.¹ *duel H* addresses periods of aftermath. Draping over each other, extending limbs, and locking eyes, the choreography is laden with a range of emotion: pain, relief, joy, and sorrow. As Zins-Browne "extends his inquiry into relationships between bodies and ecology," the tarp symbolizes their environment. It is an immersive topography eclipsed by kinetic bodies. The performers manipulate and shape the tarp, as if searching for something in its folds.



Andros Zins-Browne's *duel* H at Danspace Project, 2024. Photo: Elyssa Goodman.

Motions of digging, carrying, and cradling the material recall recent images of Gaza that flood social media timelines and are seared into my mind. I think of people in Gaza who return where their homes once stood, now obliterated beyond recognition, searching for their missing family members and friends, digging through rubble with bare hands.² Once full of light and life, the landscape of Gaza has been demolished by Israel's most recent onslaught. The material of the tarp evokes unmarked mass graves in Gaza where, without proper burial or ceremony, tens of thousands of corpses, brutally murdered by Israeli Offensive Forces, have been wrapped in similar material. The dance gestures toward loss and destruction of environment, which, in the context of our current moment, over four months into a genocide against Palestinians, reminds me of the necessity, and undeniability, of an end to the occupation and a free Palestine. "A life out of / from / negation / When life on earth seemed uninhabitable / We went under."



Andros Zins-Browne's *duel H* at Danspace Project, 2024. Photo: Elyssa Goodman.

While *duel H* subverts a linear notion of time, there is a clear progression throughout the piece. As the performers continue to emerge from the tarp, they eventually careen away from it with inversions, jumps, and lunges. The performers access higher levels and travel, devouring the space. Once Zins-Browne, Lee, and Ley have wrestled the tarp out of sight, behind a dark curtain hanging from the balcony, a change is palpable. Starting smooth, slow, and cautious, they've grown taller and louder. Zins-Browne unfurls a narrow blue fabric—a river, perhaps—across the

space and weaves it through audience members on the risers. Bringing with it a tonal shift toward lightness, the blue fabric is a moment of release, like a flash of memory. Toward the middle of the piece, a jumble of previously-still tarp begins to rustle. Another figure appears abruptly, crossing the stage and exiting. The dancers ascend to the balcony, sometimes out of sight of the audience depending on the vantage point of the risers, and audience members crane their necks to glimpse the rapid, expansive procession in sharp pathways audible from above. At this point, Zins-Browne, Lee, and Ley join the vocalization, and move more playfully. I sense the passing of time, growth, or rebirth.



Andros Zins-Browne's *duel H* at Danspace Project, 2024. Photo: Elyssa Goodman.

Zins-Browne complicates boundaries in *duel H*. Flashlight-toting audience members arrive at a place more active than watching, toeing the line between performer and witness, and throwing into question the binary between these roles. Viewers—participants—must consider their position within a collective through their use of the flashlight. A single streak from a flashlight may not illuminate much, but they are combined to cast light and shadows across the stage. The vocalization obscures the separation between pain and pleasure; the movement unites grief and ecstasy; sensuality and utility. Immersion into *duel H* “underneath the space that was earth,” as Zins-Browne writes, is a process of letting go of linear time, and conceptions of time altogether. It is an experience of loss and of hope. In a space between improv and set choreography, *duel H* encourages the audience to consider their role as collective actors, to release expectations, to plunge into a world that transcends boundaries and borders as we know them.

1. All quotations from the program note.
2. Shakeeb Asrar, Konstantinos Antonopoulos, and Mohammad Abu Shahma, “Under the Rubble: The Missing in Gaza,” *Al Jazeera*, December 30, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2023/12/28/under-the-rubble-the-missing-in-gaza>.

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