

Watching Brief: Cookies, Clouds, and Crowd Psychology (Review)

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Having recently moved in from the Cleveland area, MegLouise Dance closed their newest performance *Watching Brief* last Sunday at Links Hall. Little did I know when I showed up at Constellation that I was entering a sociological experiment.

The element of play is obvious from the very beginning. You're presented with a coloring sheet, rather than a program, and offered a cookie in the lobby. Instead of sitting in the performance space reading your coloring sheet, you are brought in one at a time and "introduced" to the space by the dancers. Most notable in this intro (mine from dancer Angela Luem) is when your attention is drawn to a big, puffy, projected cloud in the middle of the performance area.

There are bare risers (a beautiful addition to Links' new space!), chairs facing the cloud, and chairs facing the wall. I chose a seat on the cloud side, and shortly after patrons were shown in we were invited by the performers to "move" or "be moved" by them. I immediately regretted wearing a dress, but embraced this interactive component. Each time I was moved I was given a new vantage point to watch the interspersed interludes of dancing.

I'm all for playing with the audience format; in this case I have rarely felt so exposed as a patron. At times it seemed like I was at a Jr. High School dance: I desperately and awkwardly waited to get picked in spite of emitting clear body language to please ignore me. After a time, everyone was invited to join a circle and move in toward the dancers. As each dancer soloed, we all seemed to feel bold enough to stand dangerously close to the action. When the performance settled into a more traditional series of unison phrases, we lost our nerve and reverted to our respective corners of the room. Invited back toward the center, the performance dissolved into discussion and cloud gazing rather than bowing and clapping.

When they danced, it was good. The performers of MegLouise displayed strong technique, beautiful lines, and solid performances, all happening six inches away from me. This was unexpected for such an experimental format, but highly satisfying.

I just wish there had been more of it.

Watching Brief was, in fact, very brief (clocking in under an hour), and felt more like an appetizer than a main course. I always knew that Cleveland rocked, and I'm glad that, for now, they've given us the gift of MegLouise Dance. I can't wait to see what they do next, and whatever that is, I'll be wearing pants.
