

## Heavy topics

In “Weight of Things,” Li Chiao-Ping Dance provides commentary on today’s world

by [KATIE REISER](#)  
NOVEMBER 18, 2016



MAUREEN JANSON HEINTZ

**Li Chiao-Ping Dance** began a new season with *Weight of Things*, a brief but powerful performance with some indelible moments and plenty of socio-political commentary.

The concert, which runs through Nov. 19 at Lathrop Hall’s Margaret H’Doubler Performance Space, begins with 2014’s “Tendrils,” an unabashedly pretty piece for five dancers and the lightest of the works on the program. That lovely lightness is enhanced by flutist Laura Flazon’s warm and inviting tones as she accompanies and augments Eve Beglarian’s score.

“in media res,” Li’s 2015 solo, gives a concise overview of this choreographer, performer and thinker. It all takes place as she maneuvers around a small table, which is set in a simple square of light. I’ve probably used these words before to describe Li: athletic, inventive, strong, cerebral and witty. This dance underscores all of these qualities.

Liz Sexe is dressed like a precocious child in an abbreviated dress of white ruffles in

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“Woman in Glass,” a new work that Li choreographed for Sexe’s recent concert. Sexe is a ballsy dancer, taking risks and daring herself to fall before settling down to share a somewhat didactic monologue about society’s perceptions of women.

In the premiere of “Rubedo,” for Lauren Gibbs, Brianna Z. Kauer and Rachel Krinsky, the dancers move through stately poses on a long stretch of red fabric (from UW-Madison’s artist in residence Meeta Mastani) placed diagonally across the stage. The dancers create skirts for themselves from the fabric, but remain tethered and connected to each other; ultimately they are enveloped by more fabric. Throughout, we hear audio of students from the UW course “Tactile Textiles: From 2D to 3D” describing their class projects.



MAUREEN JANSON HEINTZ

In Li’s new solo, “E Pluribus Unum,” she appears in a severe black overcoat that is slowly leaking white feathers as she moves with a new passion and determination to a recording of Charlie Chaplin from *The Great Dictator*. Chaplin’s character implores, “You are not machines, you are not cattle, you are men! You have the love of humanity in your hearts! You don’t hate! Only the unloved hate; the unloved and the unnatural.” At the end, Li drops to the floor in a futile attempt to gather up the nearly weightless feathers. She stands again, deflated as her arms bump against her body.

The title piece, “Weight of Things,” has the cast of five dancers sporting bright blue wigs and 1940s style bathing suits with sheer plastic miniskirts, giving them the look of sexy, futuristic humanoid robots. The curtains are pulled back, allowing the audience access to the inner workings of the theater space. Recorded text addresses our wasteful ways, imploring us to shape up and take better care of our planet (timely, considering Stephen Hawking’s warning that we need to find a new home base), but it feels a bit clunky and scoldy at times.

Five of the six pieces on the program had text (performed live, recorded or a combo of the two). I admit I have a low tolerance for spoken word in dance. Not everyone is good at it, and it sometimes sounds stilted and cloying. I see why Li used it in each case, but it still overwhelmed me. At one point in the cluttered aural and visual landscape of the final dance, a recorded voice said “silenzio” and I so craved that.

In several pieces, Li addresses our current political landscape head on. If the recent election had gone another way, this concert would have felt quite different: The

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audience might have erupted in a spontaneous cheer at key points in “Woman in Glass,” and “E Pluribus Unum,” would have been far less unsettling.

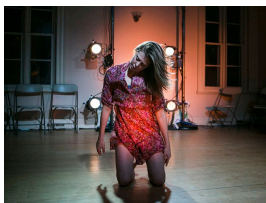
DANCE



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### Li Chiao-Ping Dance

“Weight of Things,” 8 pm on 11/17-18 and 2:30 pm, 11/19, UW Lathrop Hall-H’Doubler Performance Space. \$20.  
Nov 19, 2016, 2:30:00 PM



### Stamina and grace

The list of choreographers for Liz Sexe’s “TWO: exploring duos” is a who’s who of Madison’s female choreographers. The show plays Oct. 15 at Madison Circus Space.  
Oct 13, 2016



### Rapture in red

Fans of feminist art-pop icon Kate Bush re-created the music video from her debut single, “Wuthering Heights,” July 16. It was the Madison installment of a worldwide public art movement celebrating the cult classic. And it was magical.  
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