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Yin Mei

[Dance Magazine](#), [July, 2005](#) by [Susan Yung](#)

YIN MEI DANCE THEATER WORKSHOP, NEW YORK, NY MARCH 9–12, 2005

Yin Mei's Nomad: The River unfolded like a dream continuously on the verge of becoming a nightmare. Though Mei is a choreographer, she creates highly theatrical works using symbolic props and images, relegating the movement to a secondary role.

As the audience filed in, a recorded voice spoke of being a child of the Cultural Revolution in China, as Mei was. The intriguing set by Christopher Salter consisted of suspended fiberglass panels, which Lea Xiao lit in silvers and blues. Mei, Gaye Atay, Sonja Kostich, and Pedro Osorio lay on the ground, morphing from curled balls to rigid flexions, their entire bodies trembling in tension. In a nod to the resistance movement, Mei occasionally wandered away while the others worked as a team. The dancers appeared to miraculously pass through the cleverly overlapping screens. Lightning and thunder struck, and a projected tree motif began shaking violently while the dancers dangled from makeshift nooses fashioned from the panels.

In front of a projection of shimmering water (the Ganges and Yellow Rivers provided inspiration for the piece), Mei held a metal circle, which Osorio struck with a bouquet of flowers before finding himself lying with his neck under the disc, guillotine style. The other women wrapped themselves in metal squares like giant cannoli, then slid flowers down the tilted squares, which they shook overhead to simulate yet more thunder. Mei favors expressionistic upper body movement that resembles hula—soft, sweeping arms, prosaic gestures arrested—often with a sorrowful or pleading tone, wrists pressed together or arms linked behind backs. Salter also designed the sound, which ranged from industrial thrums and natural sounds of Philip Glass.

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The symbolism at times became heavy-handed, as when Osorio, carrying a little pot of paint, brushed the women's legs with red. Later, the women wore white masks with delicate painted expressions that could

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have been pain or ecstasy. In the final scene, sulfur-hued powder flurried down on the group, resulting in a ghostly entombment. The ponderous tone drained the performance of any vital dynamic, but the visuals were undeniably haunting.

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