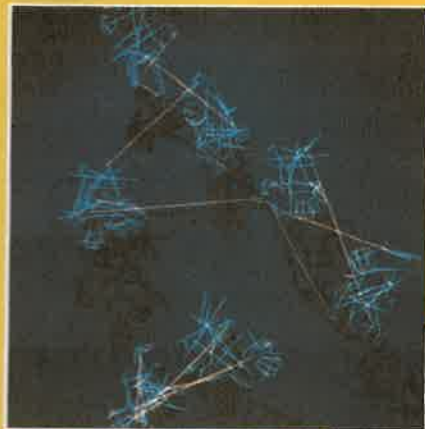# Ghostcatching | **Bill T. Jones**

Ghostcatching: A Virtual Dance Installation at New York's Cooper Union, by Bill T. Jones, dancer/choreographer, and Paul Kaiser and Shelley Eshkar, digital artists.

Ghostcatching is an optimistic, sentimental, and visually compelling video installation combining refined motion-capture and 3D rendering and an inspired eloquence in dance and choreography. In this collaboration, the confluence of Bill T. Jones' sophisticated dance language and the still-evolving language of these computer-based processes seems designed to present the essence of human movement. While the product displays somewhat beautiful, evocative graphics in a clearly readable dance language, I do not know if that actual essence of movement is captured.

Perhaps such a success would make this project too close to Muybridge's experiments, wherein a fascination with technology itself equaled one with the subjects. Much more interesting is an examination of *Ghostcatching* as the reverse: the creation of a fantastic dance-scape with no earthbound counterpart, and which is built not out of human movement but out of a completely transformed set of possibilities—an arena free of atmosphere, gravity, and the resistance that muscle and bone find in actual space.

The main gallery at Cooper Union was transformed into a very dark black theater. Until one's eyes adjusted, the only things visible were images of digital dancers: a single gigantic video projection of a seamless and mesmerizing eight-minute loop of figural contours in motion. The dancers in *Ghostcatching* are weightless, without mass. There is no ground, no atmosphere, no physical tension. Yet there is an effectively palpable, fantastic space where figures move, leap, bend, and reach, evoking chiefly their human "counterpart"— Jones himself, their only reference to real time and space.

The animation is rendered as charcoal and line drawings, which evokes the simple power of drawing. But there is a strange sense of volume, as figures take on a transparent three-dimensionality. The drawings never appear flat on the screen, and as figures move to the foreground, the viewer's perspective is like a camera's when moving about an object. One's "camera-eyes" even seem to move directly through the drawings, as if seeing inside the dancers, seemingly passing through their bodies as they gesture, jump, and twirl. One is watching a dancer from the inside out. Moreover, the video space/computer space is extremely well delineated. There is no essential illusion of place to support objects and actions, and therefore none to shatter.

Ghostcatching challenges us to envision this applied technology—based so much on the love of human movement, dance, and the body itself—as a portal to virtual existence, as a functional expansion of performance space. The project is sentimental, like science fiction. And, like science fiction, the project's story is one of adventure, tracing a line from the spiritual roots of primal body language through the rigorous cultural refinements of dance and narrative interpretive movement, and through the entranceway to a possibly new, real dimension. Therein lies its optimism.

—Cecilia Dougherty