

6.12.78 "23 Skiddoo" Le Plan K from Belgium

THE NEW THEATRE FESTIVAL

Where is All Began

by Philip Arnoult and John C. Wilson

The New Theatre Festival (TNT) in Baltimore was created in 1976. The international festival was the brainchild of Theatre Project's founder/director Philip Arnoult, who brought Martha Coigney, president of the International Theatre Institute, and the legendary theatre thinker and director Herbert Blau, who was the newly ensconced dean at University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) into a troika of leadership.

Blau had brought along his fabled company Kraken, that included two members who stayed on in Baltimore after the company dissolved: Jackson Phippin, who went on to a directing career that included a stint at Center Stage as Associate Artistic Director, and Denise Koch, a much beloved anchor at the CBS affiliate WJZ.

The festival also owes much to producer Al Kraiser, and consultant Don Boros who helped realize the design of the festival as envisioned by the leadership.

The festival explored the question 'What is New Theatre?'. The first year brought together 35 companies: 30 American (five from New York) and five international groups. While the foreign companies (Squat Theatre/Hungary, Carlos Trafic/Argentina-Netherlands, Theatre Laboratoire Vincinal/Belgium, Krishnan Namburdire/India, and Copi/France) were important, 25 companies came from Milwaukee, Boston, Los Angeles, Knoxville, Omaha, East Lansing (MI), Oakland, Greenfield (MA), Oberlin (OH), New Orleans, Yellow Spring (OH), Sarasota (FL), Chicago, Costa Mesa (CA), Santa Cruz (CA), Annandale (NY), Buffalo, and Baltimore. The New York gang had Spiderwoman Theatre, Meredith Monk, The Family, Solaris, and Eric Bentley.

And it was clear that such an important gathering should continue. So the second festival was presented in June 1977

with an equally impressive lineup of national and international companies. In addition to performances, there were 15 workshops. Michael was the first to register for the workshop Graphics of the Theatre: The Spontaneous Vision, led by visual artist Rita Fecher around drawing during performances. She offered participants drawing techniques for transmitting the immediacy of action.

Rita Fecher (1934-2003) was an artist, teacher, and activist from New York. She expressed her art as a drawer, painter, illustrator, print maker, and filmmaker during a time of social revolution. She documented the work of the Open and Living Theatres, the Performance Group, and others.

For the 1977 TNT, while still located largely on the UMBC campus some events were scheduled in Baltimore. Some of Michael's first drawings based on Fecher's approach were rendered at the Festival. From these performance drawings it is clear that something powerful was happening for Michael.

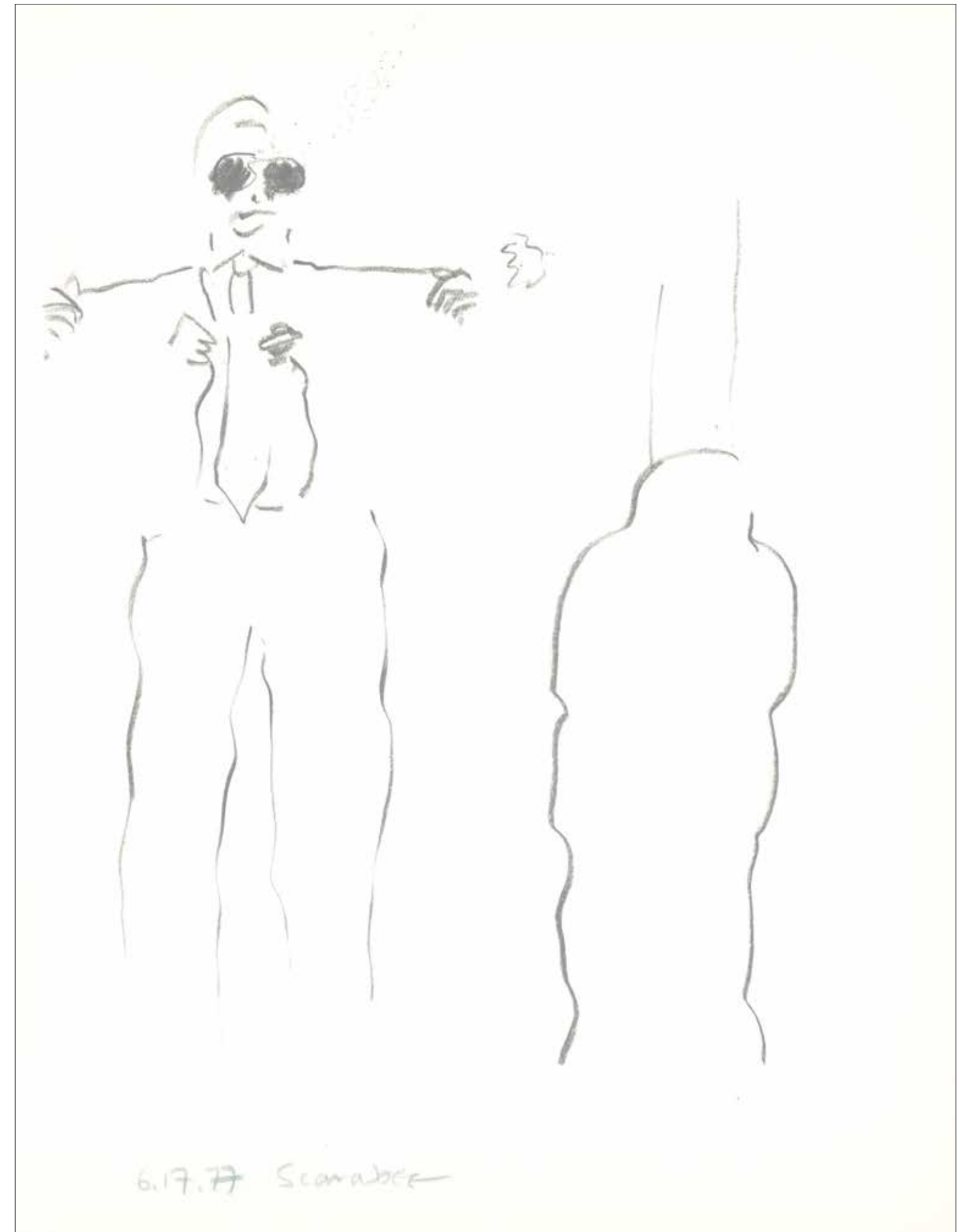
Within a sketchbook I found Michael's TNT performance schedule where he'd marked each day's list of shows he'd attend. All were full days of theatre, which suggests how captivated he was by the Festival.

For the 1978 and 1979 TNT Festivals, performances moved from the UMBC campus to the center of Baltimore, clustered around Mount Vernon Place. A memorable addition was a wonderful parade down Charles Street by Ralph Lee's Mettawee River Theater.

Baltimore was falling in love with international theatre, and in 1986 the Theatre of Nations Festival was hosted in Baltimore. The visual language of international theatre is often as different as the languages spoken around the world. These voices are exciting and Michael was there to capture the magic.



6.17.77 Portrait of Workshop Instructor Rita Fecher



6.17.77 "Havana Jojo," Studio Scarabee from The Netherlands



6.14.77 "Light," Kei Takei



6.13.77 "Pig, Child, Fire!"
Squat Theatre from Hungary



6.78 TNT Festival Parade, Ralph Lee's Mettawee River Theater



5.6.79 "The Primal Oom Pah-Pah," Michelle Rose



6.5.79 Spaulding Gray performing at Mount Vernon Methodist Church

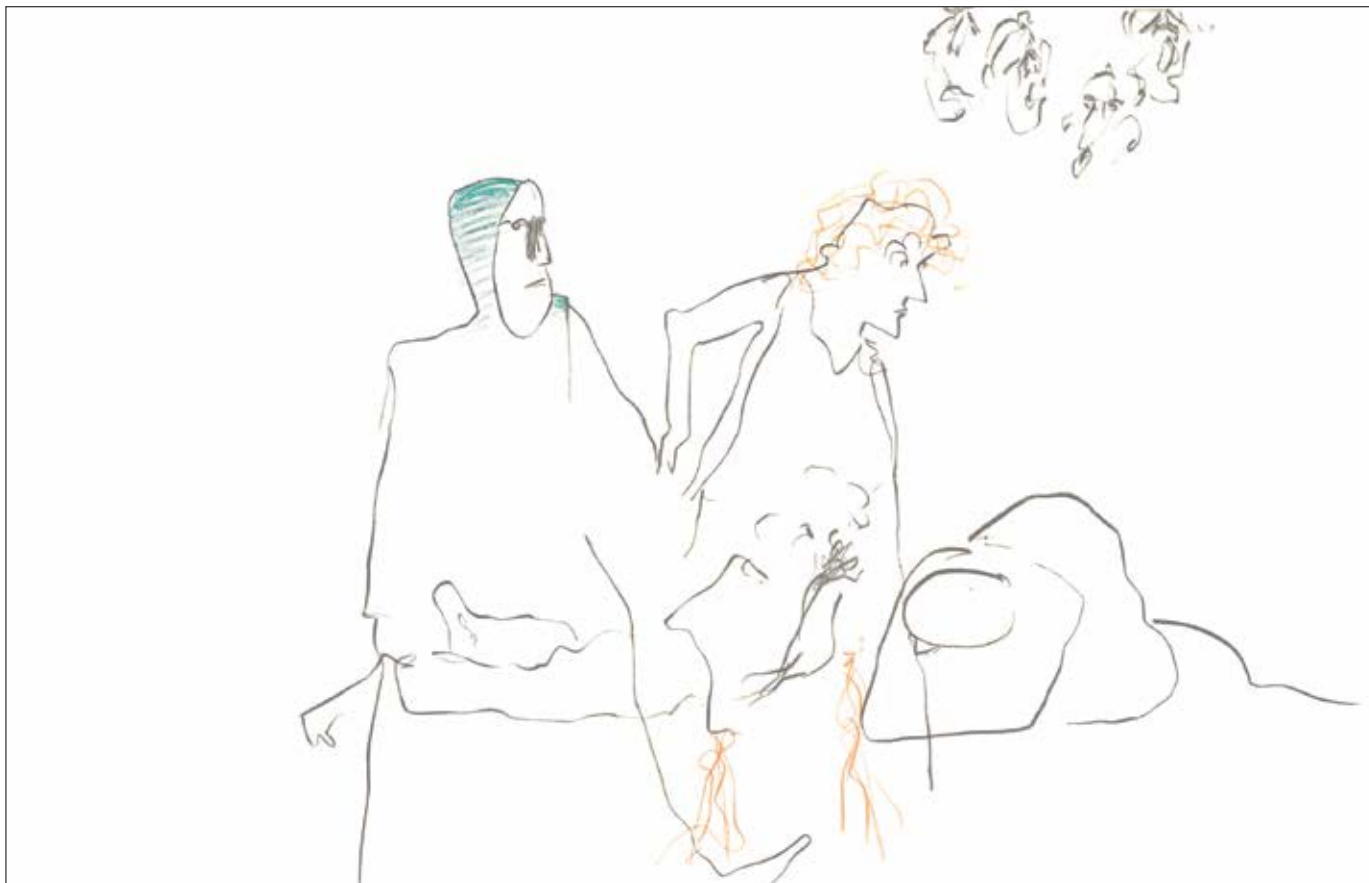


5.7.79 "Humboldt's Current," Fiji Company

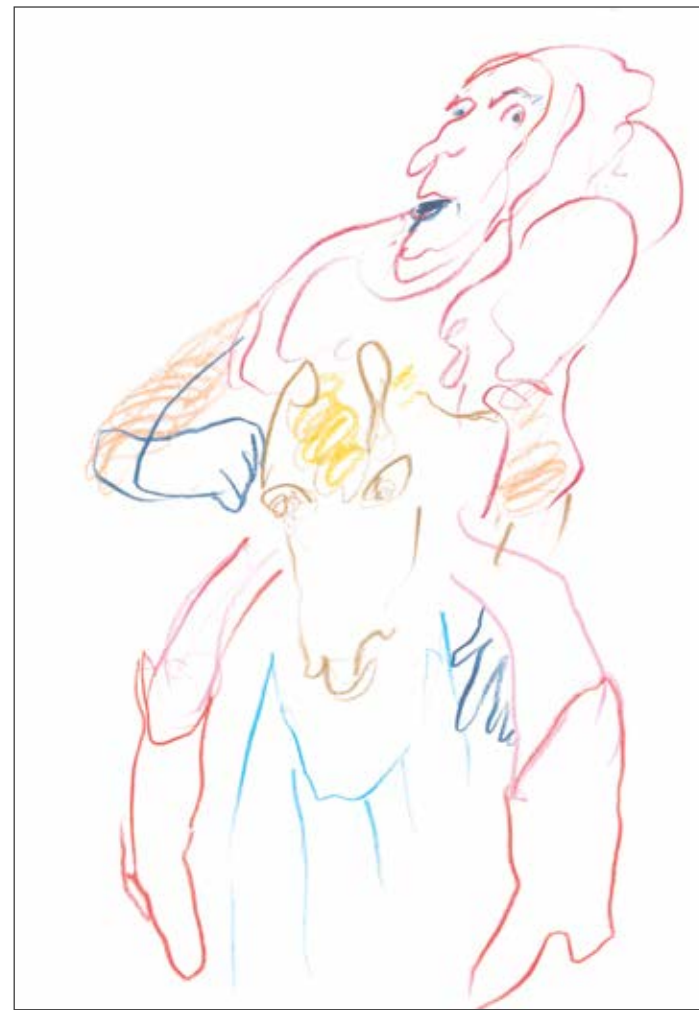


6.7.79 "Humboldt's Current," Fiji Company, Ping Chong director

"Dress rehearsal" current



6.8.79 "A Terrifying Story," The Khan Theatre



6.22.86 "The Jester and the Queen," Chantal Poullain Polivka (left) and Bolek Polivka (right) from the Czech Republic



6.21.86 "Inquest for Freddie Chicken," Fred Churchak during Theatre of Nations



7.12.86 "Eclaboussure," Le Theatre de Banlieue from France performed at St John's Church



6.18.86 "Animal Farm," National Theatre of Great Britain at the Morris A. Mechanic Theatre



6.28.86 "The Yellow House," Shaliko Theatre Company, performed at the Peabody Institute

THEATRE PROJECT (1977-1990)

Reflections by Philip Arnoult

I can't precisely remember the first time I met Michael Iampieri. I know it was in the first season of the Theatre Project in 1971. I think he was already a fan of Bill Russo's Peabody Rock Opera that had joined us on Preston Street that first season as a resident company. I think he was also in the audience for Tone Brulin's Otrabanda Company, our other resident group.

I am sure I remember that first sighting of Michael with a sketchbook in his bag, under his arm, or in his hands. And I remember a conversation that began in those early exciting days of Theatre Project and ended up lasting for over 40 years. A rich friendship/partnership that we now celebrate together in this wonderful book.

I always tried to tell the actors (and directors) about this shy man in the straw hat with the big book who captured incredible moments on paper with swift strokes. Introducing them to Michael before the performance payed off in spades afterwards.

Most of the time, on Michael's Night, after all the diehard audience had left the theatre, Michael would open his book for the now-cleaned up, out of costume and make-up, actors. And I would hear the splendid first sounds — not words — gasps of recognition, of connection, of this capturing a moment of movement, emotion, visual narrative, or silence in that actor's performance. Bullseye to bullseye: Michael to the actor/dancer.

Then came the second wave of astonishment, when fellow actors or dancers recognized the truth of the moment — again not with word, but with sounds. Night after night, they played together on the stage, in the worlds they created together, and never got to see them as we see them. Michael's drawing gave

them the essential, recognizable truth of the moment mirrored back by his unique outside eye.

Sadly, this book of some 267 of Michael's drawings doesn't have a sound track. But even without those moments of astonishment and recognition recorded or remembered, I think you will find a stunning opening up of special moments in the gift of performance.

As we enter the third month of COVID19 quarantine I have before me a catalog of Michael's drawings, chronicling the last 12 years of my 20-year leadership of the Theatre Project. I'm sitting here in my study in a meditative state, going over and over the list, time-travelling, through Michael's eyes, to an incredibly deep, rich and satisfying period of my theatre life. Images swirl.

Gerry Mulgrew's Comunicado Company from Edinburgh was a real find for me. I saw them at the Festival with their stunning "Carmen, The Play, 1936." The work was a wonderful mix of music, played on-stage and inside of scenes, with bold, full-bodied performances, squeezing the theatricality out of every moment on the stage. The company ended up opening the newly renovated Theatre Project in January of 1984, along with sharing their three week run with Fred Curchak and his "Stuff as Dreams are Made On."

We opened at the same time Ethel's Place opened the jazz venue downstairs. By partnering with jazz great Ethel Ennis (1932-2019) and her husband, Earl Arnett, the whole Preston Street building found new life.

The Kipper Kids from the UK offered a glimpse into the future of performance art, puzzling and delighting full houses on their way to the history books of performance art. The



2.9.86 "The Hunchback of Notre Dame," Comunicado Theater Company from Scotland

pounds of flour thrown on the stage over these two half-naked bald men can still be found in the crevices of the Preston Street stage! Harry Kipper and Harry Kipper, they were—on stage and off. Harry later married Bette Midler.

Theatre X from Milwaukee graced our stage with at least a half dozen new works. Its playwright John Schneider was right up there with Sam Shepard in the '70s, and a strong ensemble included Flora Coker, John Kishline, Deborah Clifton, Marcie Hoffman, Victor Delorenzo, and Willem Dafoe. Baltimore got to see "A Fierce Longing" before it went to New York City (NYC) and won an Obie in 1978.

Spiderwoman Theatre became regulars at the theatre soon after their founding in 1975. Three sisters, Muriel Miguel, Gloria Miguel, and Lisa Mayo (all Kuna Rappahannock), along with Baltimorean Lois Weaver and Pam Verge, were making history and wonderful, zany, tragic, political women's theatre. Lois went on to found Split Britches.

L. O. Sloan's Three Black and Three White Refined Jubilee Minstrels made at least three visits to the Project. I found Leni Sloan and the company in San Francisco, invited them to Baltimore, and then helped them plan an international tour. They made their way back to us as a final stop before heading across the ocean. It was one of the most entertaining and thought provoking theatre pieces I've ever seen dealing with subjects of race — teaching, illuminating, and bringing huge joy into the telling of the troubling history of minstrel shows.

Studio Scarabee coming to Baltimore was a three-year labor of love on both sides. Founder and director Adri Boon brought "Perfidia" to Baltimore. He built a stage on our stage with sliding white panels on which to project a 60+ minute film he created. Wallpaper melted, musical instruments were brought to life and live actors took us on a nautical journey to worlds beyond. Long before computer graphics, this was all done with wonderful actors and crisp, 16mm film images.

Avner the Eccentric rolled up in his live/work space van in front of the Project, and came up the stairs to see me and the theatre. He had a show, he said. At the time, we were training Baltimore youth for our Neighborhood Arts Circus; our Rat Squad was on tour in city middle schools; and "Baltimore

Voices" was touring Baltimore and beyond. He offered a private performance for all of us. We were blown away and booked him. He had a sold out run. Arena Stage in DC booked Avner Eisenberg forever in their Vat Room, and in a couple of years he was on the big screen with Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner in "Romancing the Stone."

I remember standing in the back of the theatre with Kari Magolis, co-founder of the Adaptors, in the mid 80s watching their first piece, "Autobahn." With something like a dozen actors/dancers/movement artists on stage, Kari sighed, "I love to work with that many bodies in space...but it's so hard." That production launched Kari and her partner Tony Brown into national and international touring and world-wide renown. Now 35 years later, they have a widely acknowledged training methodology, a home base and training center in Highland Lake, New York and an outpost in Barcelona, Spain.

Bolek Polivka made several visits to Preston Street with "The Jester and the Queen." I first saw the master of comedic mime in performance in Sofia, Bulgaria, playing to an outdoor crowd of 5,000. He made his second visit to Baltimore during the Theatre of Nations here in '86. I can still hear the gasps of every audience when the child doll, brought on in three or four scenes, floppy and clearly a stuffed doll, began to speak and move. We cast a young Baltimore girl to play that transformational role. Chantel Poulenc — French actress, artist, and partner of Bolek — were secretly married in the Theatre Project by Father Richard T. Lawrence, giving Bolek possible French citizenship in the last gasps of the Cold War.

Another world-class clown, Slava Polunin brought his Leningrad Clowns from Moscow to the Theatre Project for a mad, sold-out-to-the-rafters run in the late '80's. The company, also calling themselves Litsedei, made a huge impact in western Europe at the time.

Pure chance led me to find Nava Zukerman's Tmu-Na dance company. I caught their "Five Screams" final performance at the Edinburgh Festival, rushing by cab from another performance across town. I was stunned by the depth and beauty of this painful but sublime remembrance of the Holocaust. I waited around as they cleared out the theatre and



1.22.87 "Two Ships Passing in the Night," Kathy and Mo, performed by Kathy Najimy and Mo Gaffney

loaded their van to head to the airport and back to Israel. I carried blank contracts with me back then, and after we talked I signed two with different dates. They came to Baltimore almost a year later—I can still see that final image of these poor travelers, holding out their hands and blowing the ashes straight to us...

What a joy to have been a part of the story of the “Kathy & Mo Show.” Dear John Wilson heard about them from his friend Jeff Ide, a manager at Don’t Tell Mamma in New York. We had apartments for the artists next to the theatre, and Kathy Najimy and Mo Gaffney took every minute of their first multiple week run developing new material in the theatre. They played two performances on the weekend—SRO record setting numbers for us—and then invited the audiences back at midnight for free, to help them test out the new material!

They played three long runs in those early years before really breaking into the big time: together with an HBO special, Kathy with a film career, and Mo on BBC’s “Absolutely Fabulous” and a national talk show.

Another amazing duo, home-grown Baltimore talent, was Joyce Scott and Kay Lawal with Thunder Thigh Review. We worked on “Women of Substance,” ran it at BTP for multiple weeks, and then took it to Theatre Workshop Edinburgh for a run at the Edinburgh Fringe. Joyce and Kay were a huge success in Edinburgh. Joyce says she doesn’t perform any longer, but I’ve seen a couple of her talks/lectures as a MacArthur Genius Award Winner and I would beg to disagree. Kay Lawal-Muhammad has made important contributions to her hometown founding Actors Against Drugs, Kuumba Women’s Theatre Company, and WombWork Productions.

My work in Argentina was intense in the ‘80s, working with two companies from Buenos Aires: Diablo Mundo and Teatro del Sur. We only produced Diablo Mundo once on Preston Street, but with a major commission they created “Royal Hunt of the Sun” early in our relationship with Towson University, and later toured to the Public Theatre and the Henson Festival in NYC.

Alberto Felix Alberto’s company Teatro del Sur brought “The Warsaw Tango,” a powerful, almost wordless play

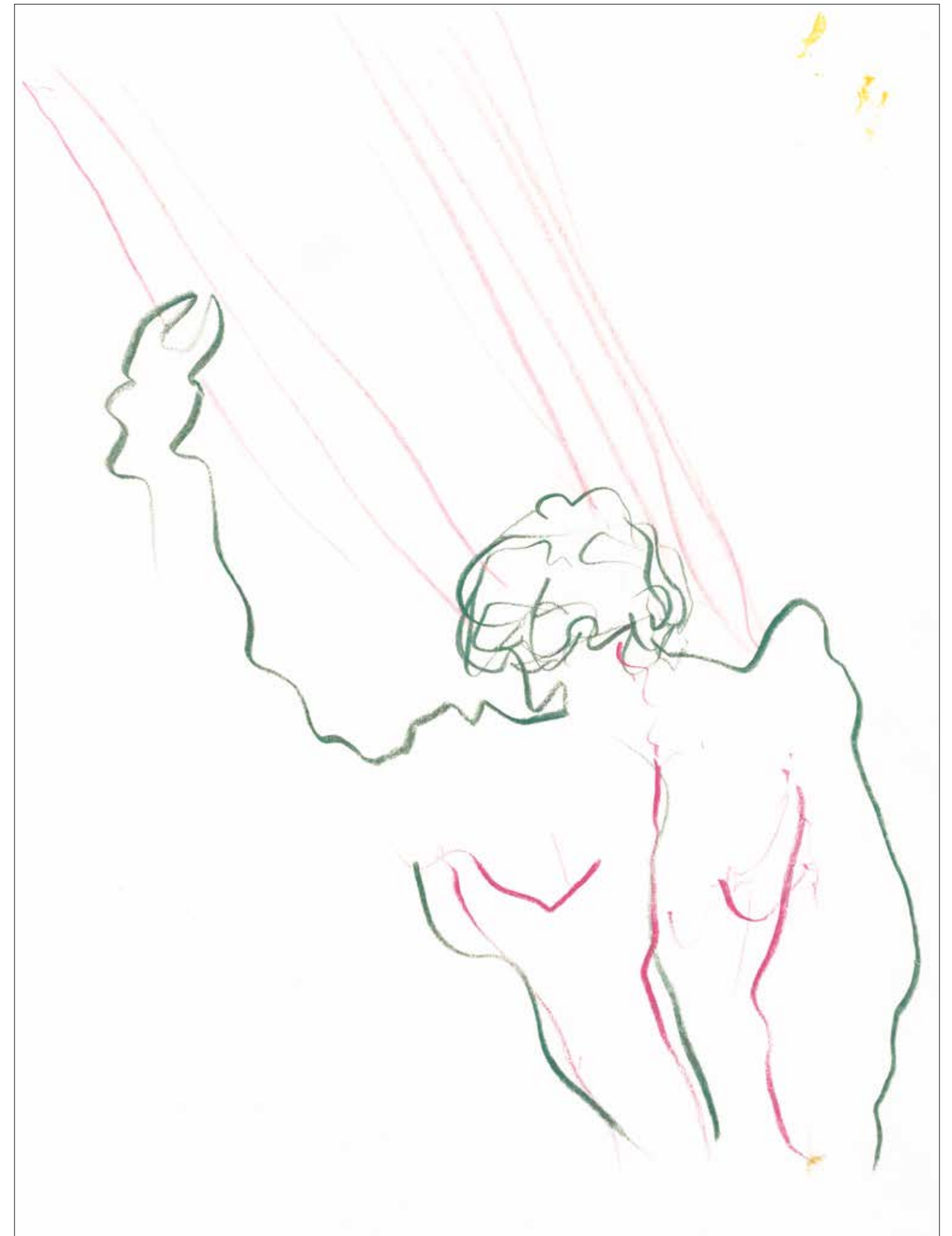
of images to our stage. Finding myself in Buenos Aires I discovered the play nearly by accident. Harvey Lichtenstein, the Brooklyn Academy of Music founder and director, was in Buenos Aires too, and I invited him to join me for the off-off-production in a tiny theatre. We both wanted to bring it to the US; BTP produced a tour that took the piece to BAM in NYC, Washington, San Francisco, Knoxville, and Philadelphia.

Modern/contemporary dance was a great fit for the Preston Street space. The steep rake of seating made “floor work” visible to all in the audience. One of our stalwarts in the early days was the local company Olufunmilayo Dancers. Olu always travelled with a group of very talented drummers, and the theatre was filled with sound, color, and music. And I remember a wonderful coming together of full houses of black and white fans of this truly celebratory art form.

We produced a great many US dance companies, and Jeff Duncan — an iconic pioneer in the modern dance world and founder of Dance Theatre Workshop in NYC — was at our side guiding choices. I also was on the lookout for interesting dance when I travelled. In Amsterdam I found the wonderful dancer/choreographer Nan Romijn and her husband, visual artist and designer Robert Broekhuis. The delicacy of her choreography that matched the deep subtlety of Robert’s environments touched me profoundly. We brought Nan to the US for multiple visits.

At the 1987 Edinburgh Festival I saw a powerful performance, “Have You Seen Zandile?” by South African playwright and performer Gcina Mhlophe. We tried unsuccessfully to get the production to the US then, but subsequently were able to commission Gcina to come and direct Zandile with Carpetbag Theatre in Knoxville, Tennessee, led by my long-time friend Linda Parris Bailey. That production opened in Knoxville and later came to Baltimore with the American cast. Gcina became the first black South African to direct the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, and was standing on the stage next to Nelson Mandela when he was inaugurated president.

In thinking back on how I found Theatre Buffo in then Leningrad, I really can’t believe my own story. I was in the city



11.8.85 “Inclined to Agree,” Daniel Stein

— working with the aforementioned Slava Polunin planning their tour — and had heard of the cabaret company Theatre Buffo and its director Isaac Stockbant. All I had was an address. When I got to a tall apartment building, with all signs in Cyrillic, it took a half hour to find their office. The next night I was sitting dead center on a sofa, with an audience of over 200, watching one of the most rib-cracking hilarious two hours of performance. The material was deeply subversive, highly visual, and truly ready for prime-time here in the U.S. Isaac had single-handedly kept a very strong St. Petersburg/ Leningrad tradition of cabaret alive and kicking.

This book is a real tribute to Michael Iampieri, but also to Bobby Mrozek, Anne Cantler Fulwiler, and Chris Pflingsten, who have kept this fragile, quirky, and radical idea of a theatre alive for 49 years and counting. When I get down to Preston Street I see the ghosts of these artists still on that stage floor. I know for Michael, John, Bobby, Annie, and Chris, they hold their own special chimera of the past on those holy, blessed, and historical boards. I hope you enjoy these magical Theatre Project moments Michael has given us.

Philip Arnoult is the founder of Baltimore Theatre Project, which he directed from 1971-1990. Philip is also founder and director of the Center for International Theatre in 1990. CITD was created to bring together performing artists to work collaboratively on international, cross-cultural projects. These include decade-long projects in East Africa, the Netherlands and ongoing, multi-decade work in Eastern & Central Europe. Philip was named a World Theatre Ambassador by UNESCO in 2017, awarded the Polish Order of Merit for Culture in 2017, and was the 2014 Adam Mickiewicz Laureate. He received the Rosamund Guilder Award of the U.S. Center of the Intentional Theatre Association in 1996. He is still leading CITD. Philip and his wife/partner Carol Baish live in Baltimore.



7.30.80 "Baltimore Voices," oral history project with BTP-based troupe, ensemble members Barry Meiners and Cathy Crawford



3.5.81 Avner the Eccentric



4.24.78 "A Fierce Longing," Theatre X



5.2.80 "Penelope," Theatre X

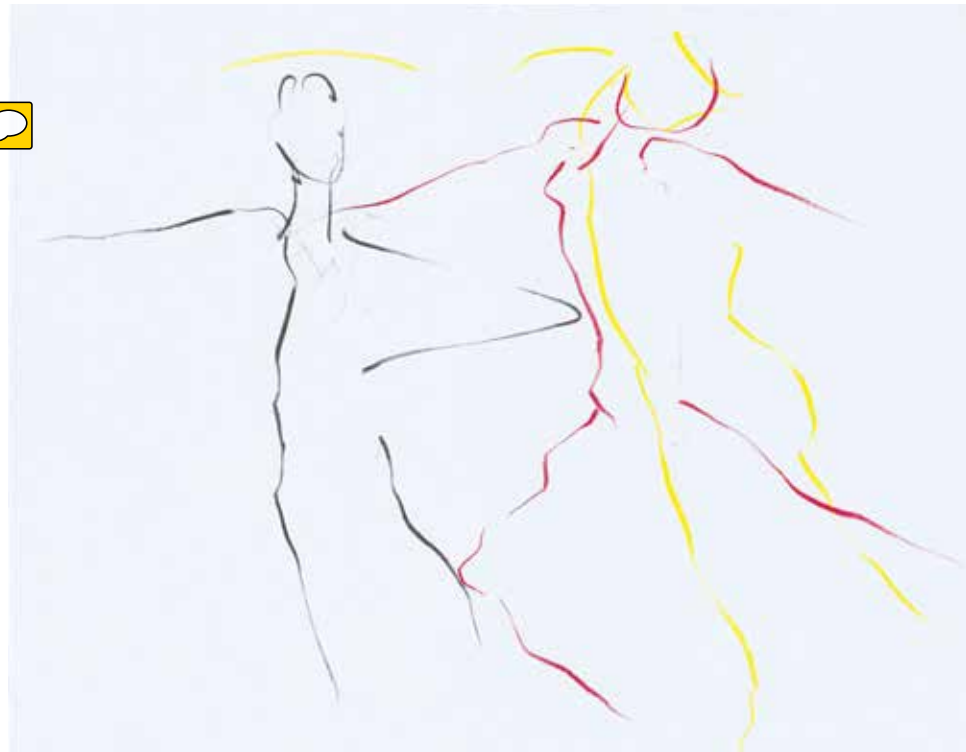


5.11.78 African Dance, Olufunmilayo & Company





12.7.78 The Kipper Kids



1.5.79 Cathy Paine & Friends



1.19.79 Hannah Kahn and Dancers, performer/choreographer Hannah Kahn



3.23.79 "Evening of Disgusting Songs." Spiderwoman Theatre



9.23.79 "The Wake: A Musical Tribute to Bert Williams," L. O. Sloan's Three Black and Three White Refined Jubilee Minstrels performer Nathan Stinson



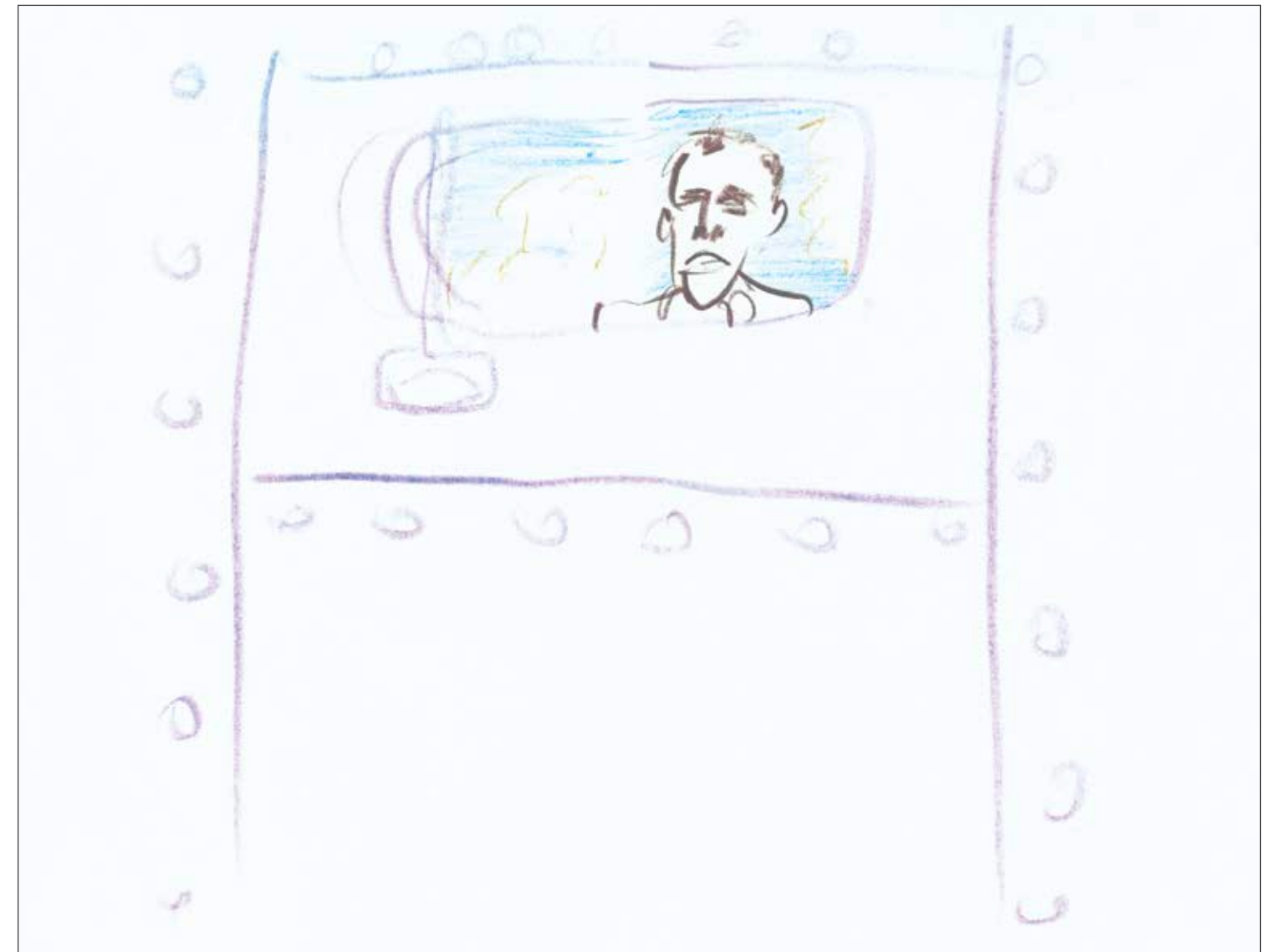
David Mark Epstein) - Andrei Codrescu, T.P., Oct 4, 11



10.14.79 poetry reading by Andrei Codrescu & Daniel Mark Epstein



7.10.81 "The Late Show," John Strausbaugh



1.31.80 "Perfidia," Studio Scarabee from the Netherlands





10.26.80 Pigeon Drop Comedy Company



12.3.80 "Don't Start Me To Talking or I'll Tell You Everything I Know," Free Southern Theatre, John O'Neil's play from "Life and Writing of Junebug Jabbo Jones"



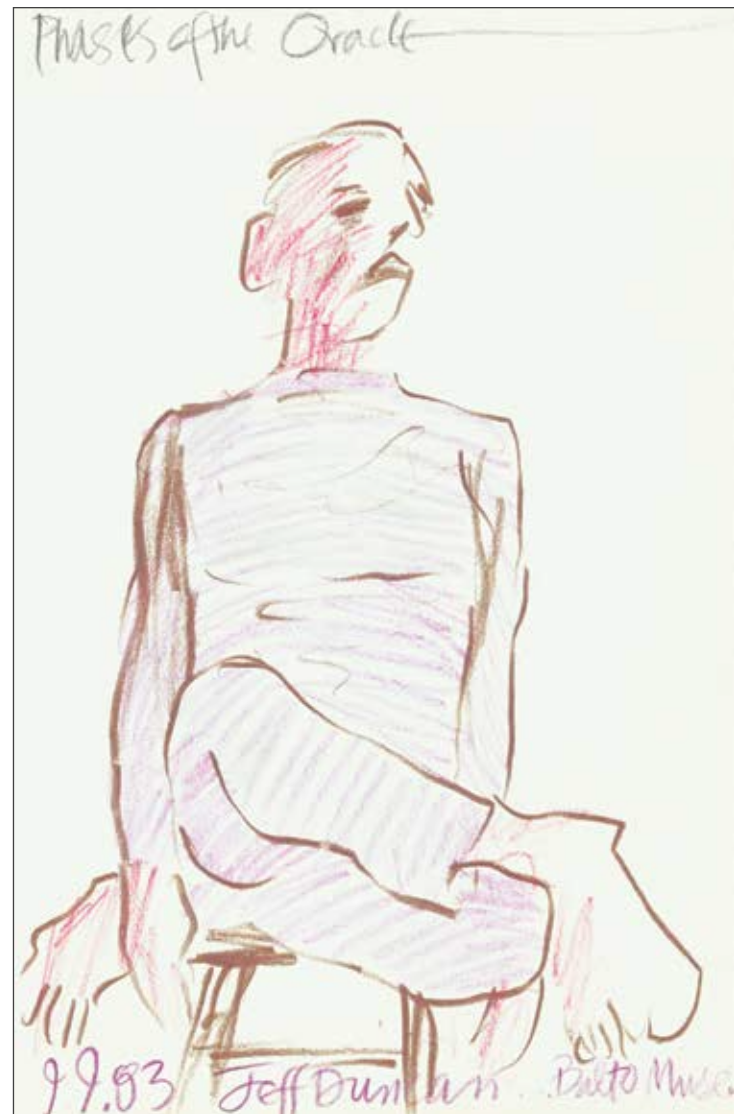
12.19.80 "A Christmas Story," Blackbird Theatre which was in-residence at Theatre Project



7.25.81 storyteller Alice McGill



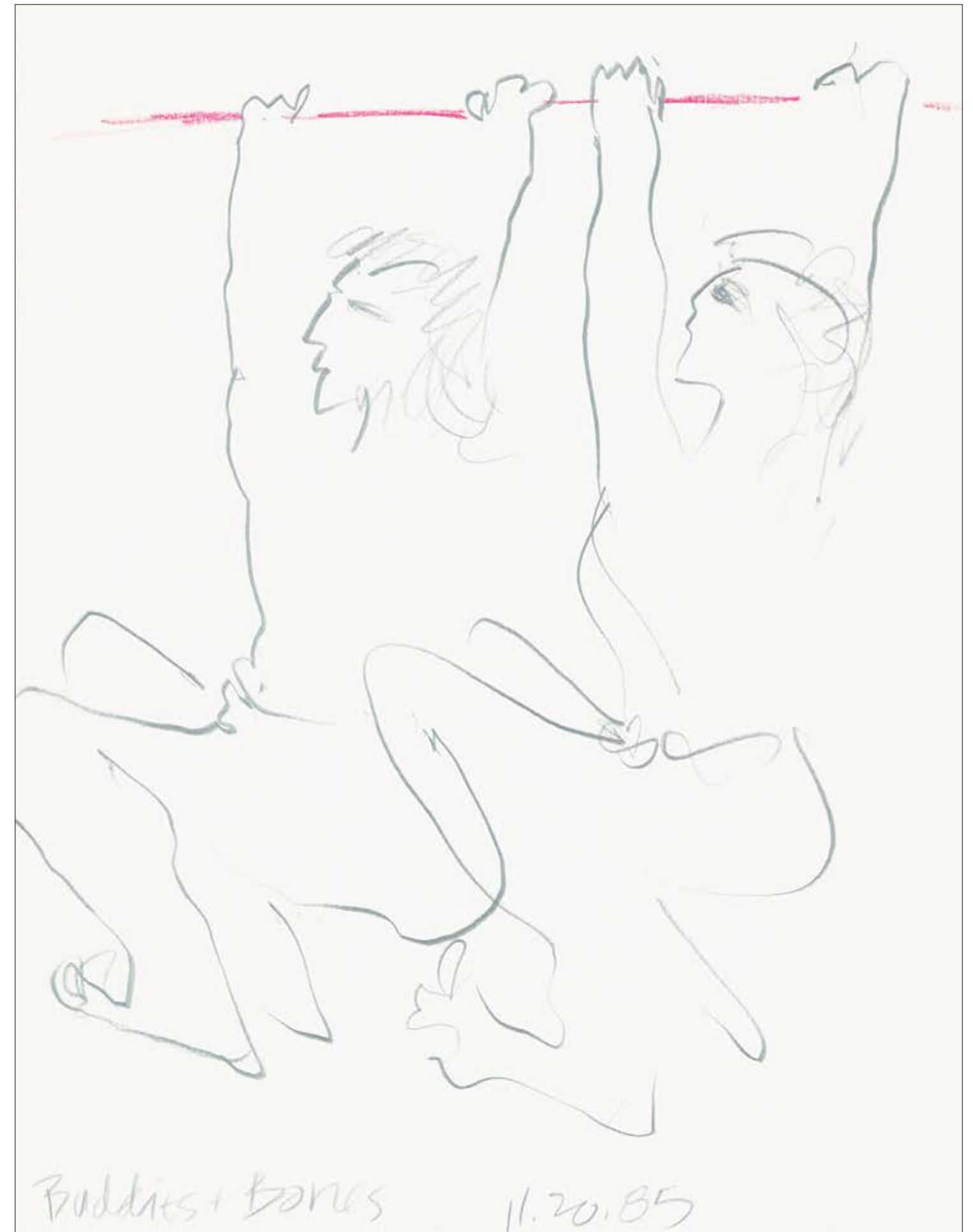
5.15.85 "Autobahn," The Adaptors



9.9.83 Jeff Duncan, dancer/choreographer and director of Impetus, here he performs his solo piece "Phases of the Oracle"



10.3.86 Diane Ramo, director/choreographer of The Downtown Dance Company which was originally in-residence at Theatre Project



11.20.85 "Buddies & Bones," Cardin, Derome & Therrien from Canada



2.19.86 "My Sad Face," Industrial Strength Theatre Company, Mark Redfield playwright



4.1.86 "Cora," 4/4 Time Productions



5.29.86 "Sun Moon Feather," Spiderwoman Theatre



6.18.86 "A Little Princess," Jordcirkus from Sweden



9.21.86 "Women of Substance," Thunder Thigh Revue,
Kay Lawal and Joyce J. Scott creators/performers



8.21.86 "The Kathy and Mo Show," Mo Gaffney



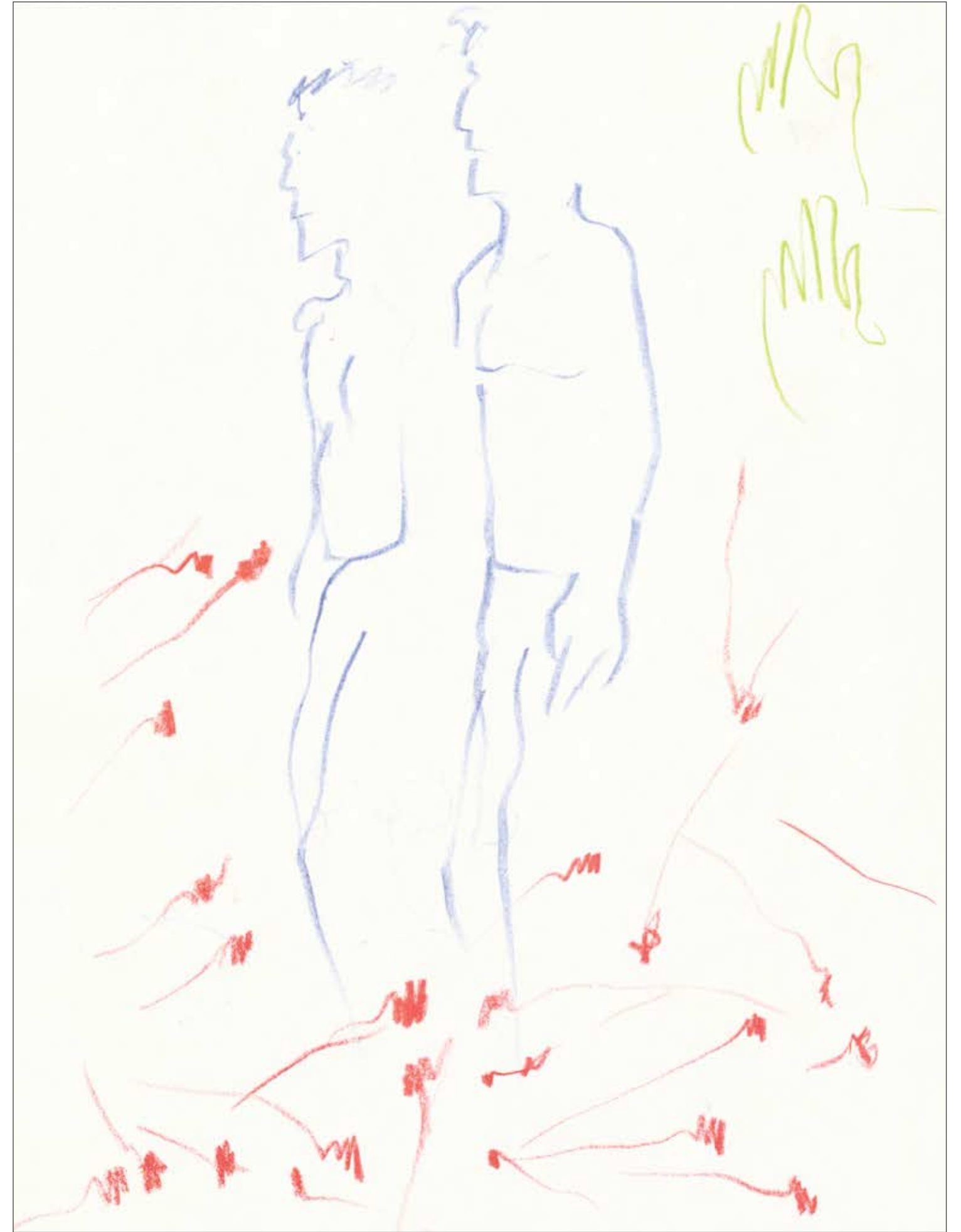
8.21.86 "The Kathy and Mo Show," Kathy Najimy



2.4.87 "La Pestilera," Teatro del Sur from Argentina



3.22.88 "The Warsaw Tango," Teatro del Sur from Argentina



3.16.87 "The Warsaw Tango," Teatro del Sur from Argentina



2.24.87 "Hunger Cantata," Bread & Puppet Theater, performing at St Vincent's Church



4.8.87 "The Sistine Floor," The Drawing Legion



3.21.87 "5 Screams, Tmu-Na from Israel"



3.21.87 "5 Screams" ... Tmu Na

M. Lampieri



4.14.88 "As the Piano Plays," Tmu-Na from Israel



4.22.87 "Sticking & Pulling," Thunder Thigh Revue, Joyce J. Scott and Kay Lawal



6.11.87 "Lord Buckley's Finest Hour," John Sinclair from England



5.9.87 "The Lost Valet" Paul B. DAVIES



7.7.87 Polivka "The Jester + the Queen"

7.7.87 "The Jester and the Queen," Bolek Polivka and Chantal Poullain Polivka from Czech Republic



8.6.87 "Oil City Symphony," clockwise from top left; Mary Murfitt, Mark Hardwick, Debra Monk, Mark Hardwick & Mike Craver



9.19.87 "Miracles," Man Act from Wales, performers Phillip Mackenzie and Simon Thorne



12.2.89 The Kosh "The Edge"

12.2.87 "The Edge," The Kosh from England



"Reinheit"

The Forrest Collection

10.14.87

10.14.87 "Reinheit," The Forrest Collection



10.21.87 "Daughters of Unrest," Naked Feet



9.23.87 "The Heptasoph Piece," PATH Dance Company



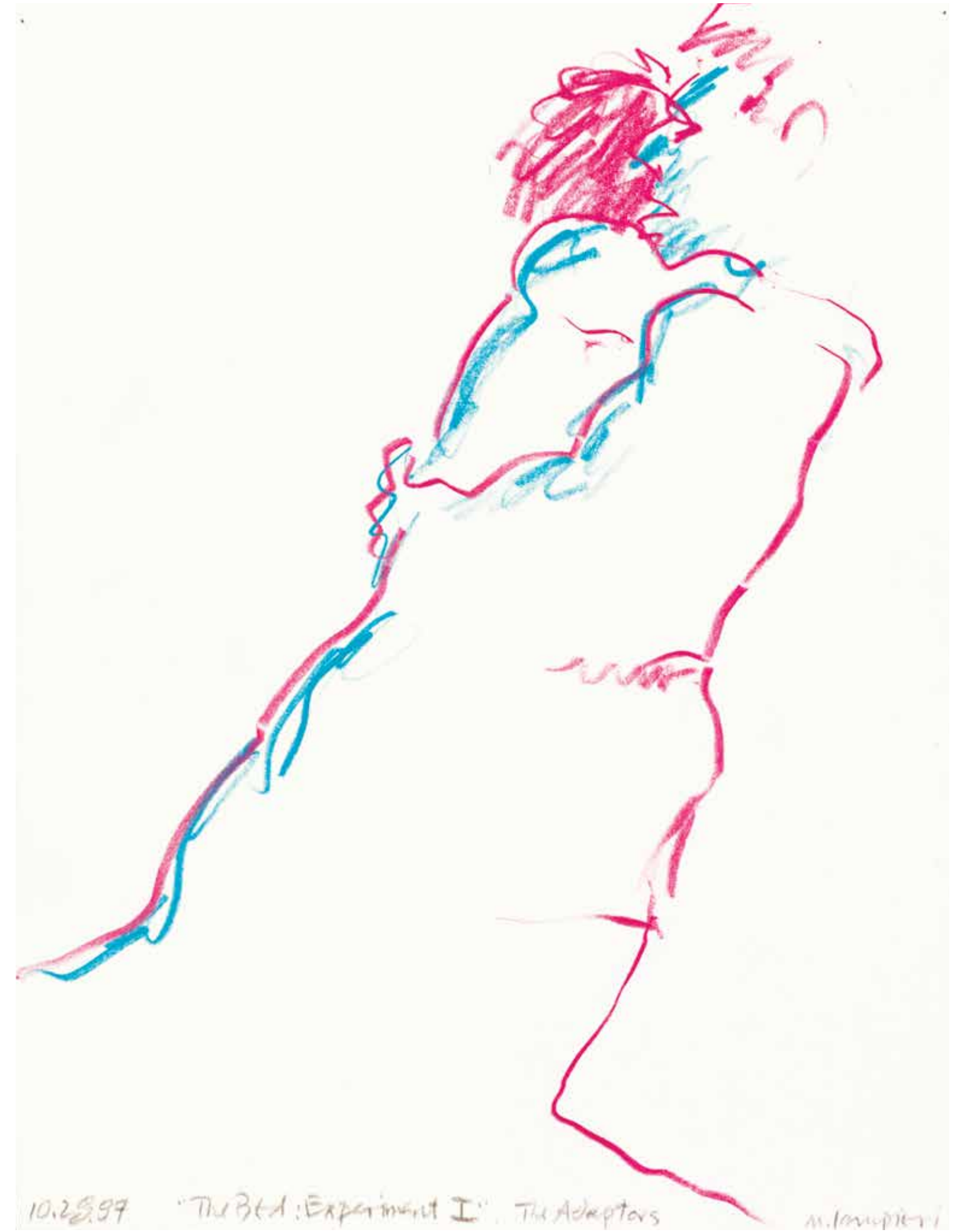
9.30.87 "Moorings," Phoenix Repertory Dance Company



10.7.87 Harbor City Ballet



10.28.87 "The Bed: Experiment I," The Adaptors



10.28.97 "The Bed: Experiment I," The Adaptors

m. lauppien

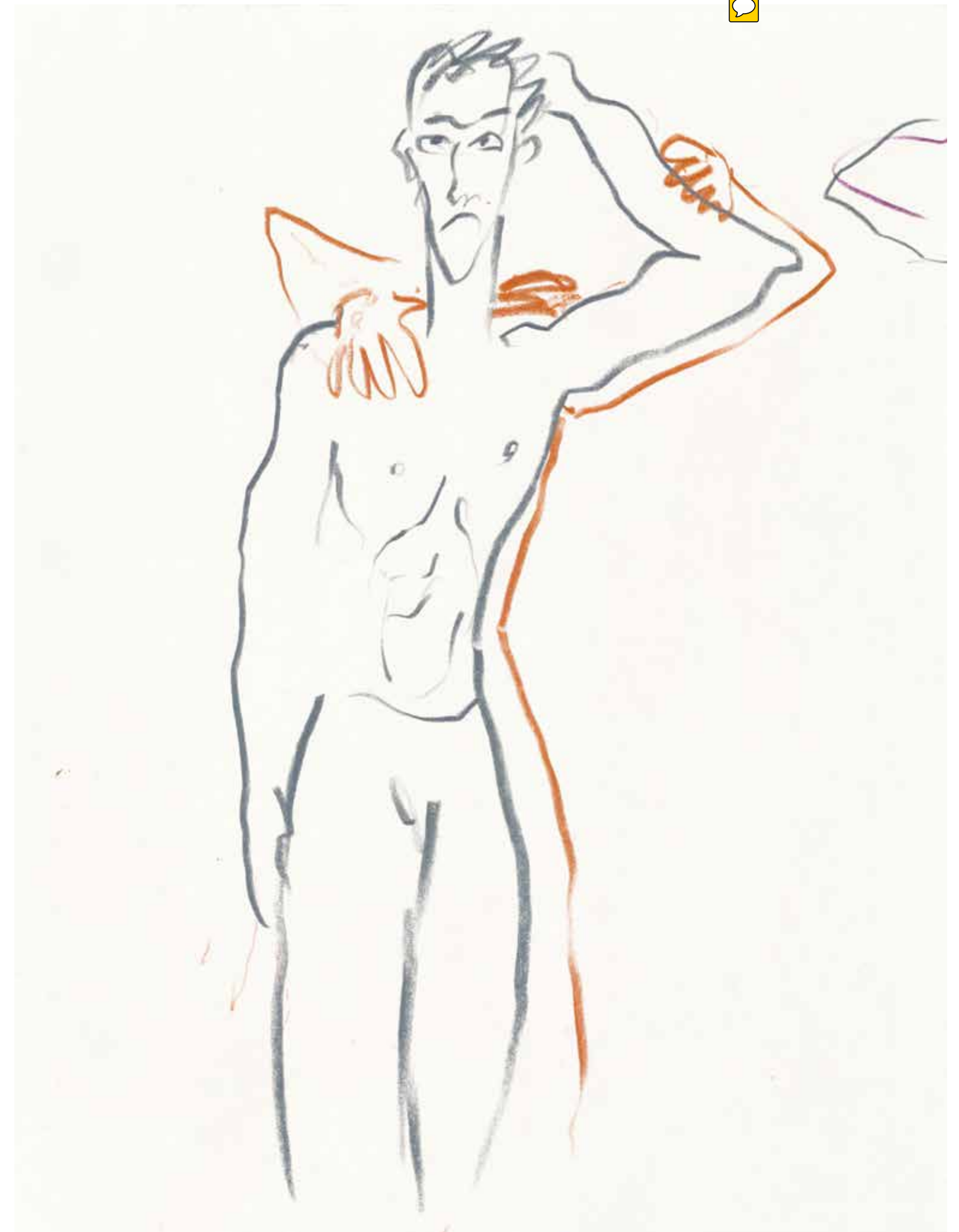
10.28.87 "The Bed: Experiment I," The Adaptors



1.23.88 "Somewhere Over the Balcony," Charabanc Theatre Company from Northern Ireland



5.15.88 "Dark Spring," Dans-Theater Nan Romijn from Netherlands



5.15.88 "Dark Spring," Dans-Theater Nan Romijn from Netherlands



6.15.88 "Assisyai's Review," Litsedei: The Leningrad Clown Theatre from USSR



6.15.88 "Assisyai's Review," Litsedei: The Leningrad Clown Theatre from USSR



2.17.88 "Ear Rings from Oral History," Lime Kiln Arts



3.10.88 "Two," Maryland Dance Theater



8.12.88 "With My Arms Around Wyoming," Terry Beck Troupe



10.11.88 "Saint John's Gospel," Paul Alexander, performed at St. Vincent DePaul Church



7.28.89 "Waiters," Terry Beck Troupe



2.5.89 "Laughing Dog," The Forrest Collection



6.3.88 "The N*gg*r Café – A Spooky Show," Judith Jackson



3.31.89 "Rasputin: The Forbidden Story," Kaboodle from England



11.6.88 "Not For Real," Leonard Pitt



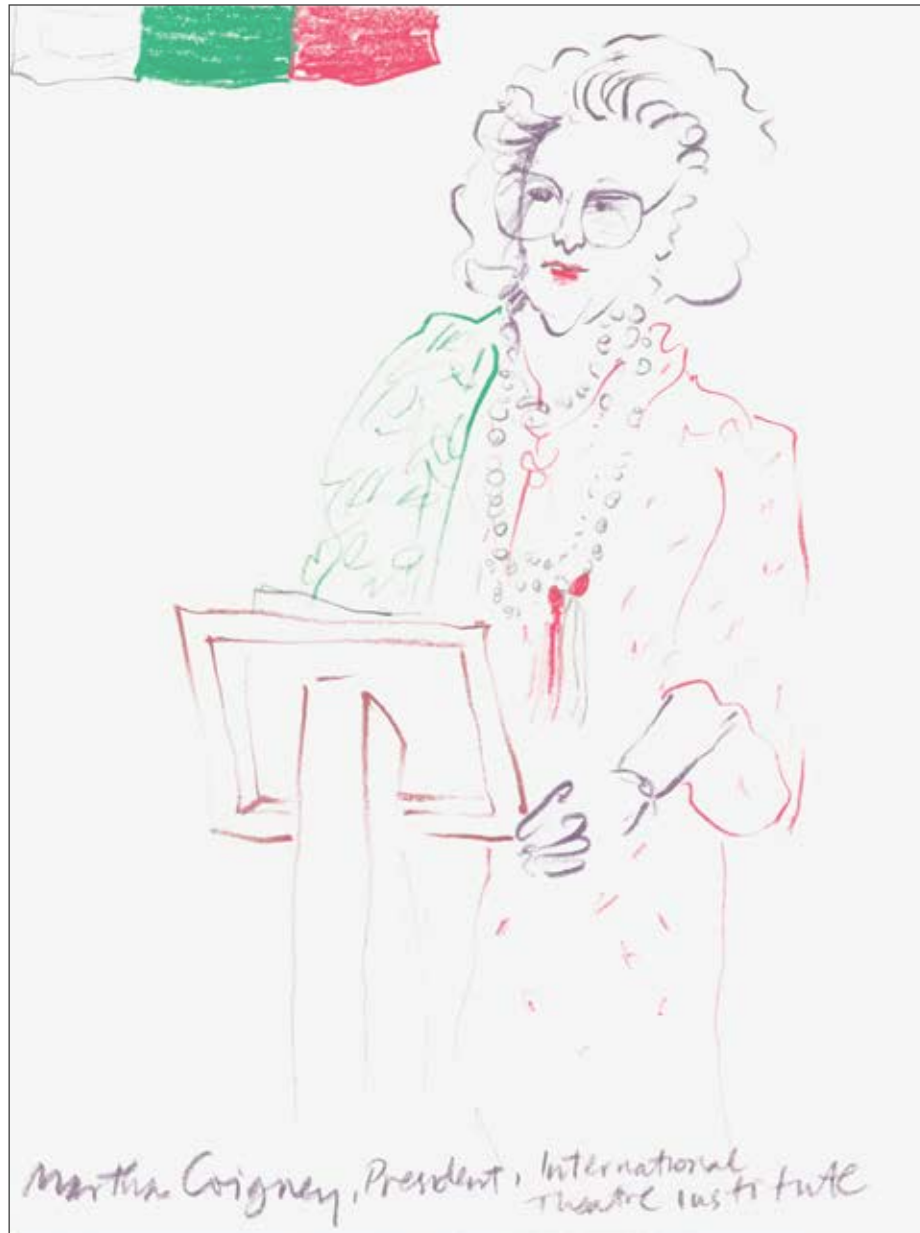
10.20.88 "The Power Project," Bob Berky



2.2.89 "Have You Seen Zandile?," Carpetbag Theatre



12.15.88 "Anerca," Figures of Speech Theatre



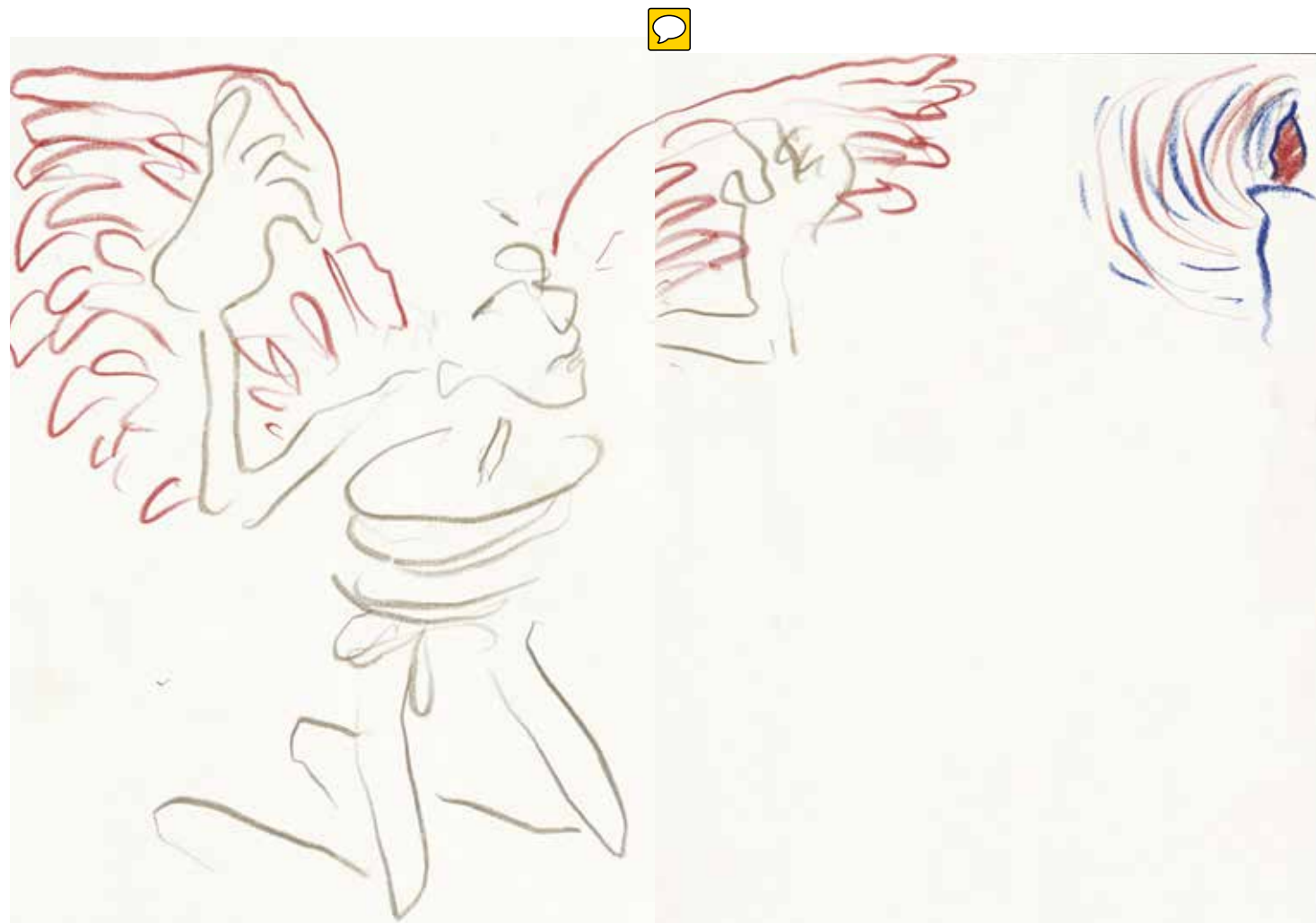
3.12.89 Dedication Ceremony honoring Bulgarian actor Liubomir Kabakchiev, Martha Coigney, President of the International Theatre Institute



3.12.89 Bulgarian actor Stefan Danailov performs selections from "Hamlet" at the Dedication Ceremony



6.11.89 "The Dance of the Chickens," Abel & Gordon, from Belgium



4.12.89 "Icarus," Kathy Levin (Producer)



10.18.89 "The Escape," Abel & Gordon



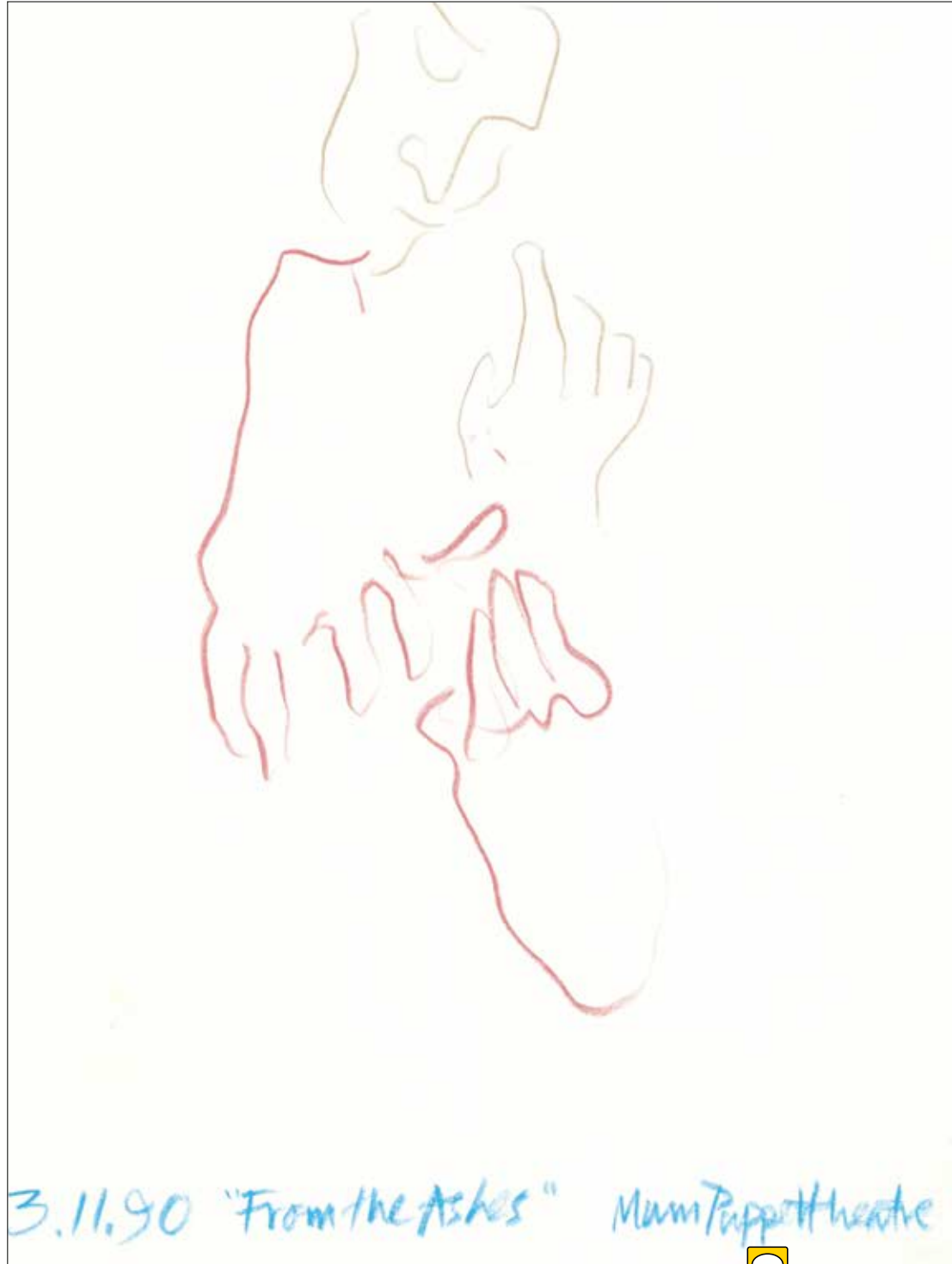
8.4.89 "Honey Chil' Milk," MAP/Diverse Works, directed by Donald Byrd



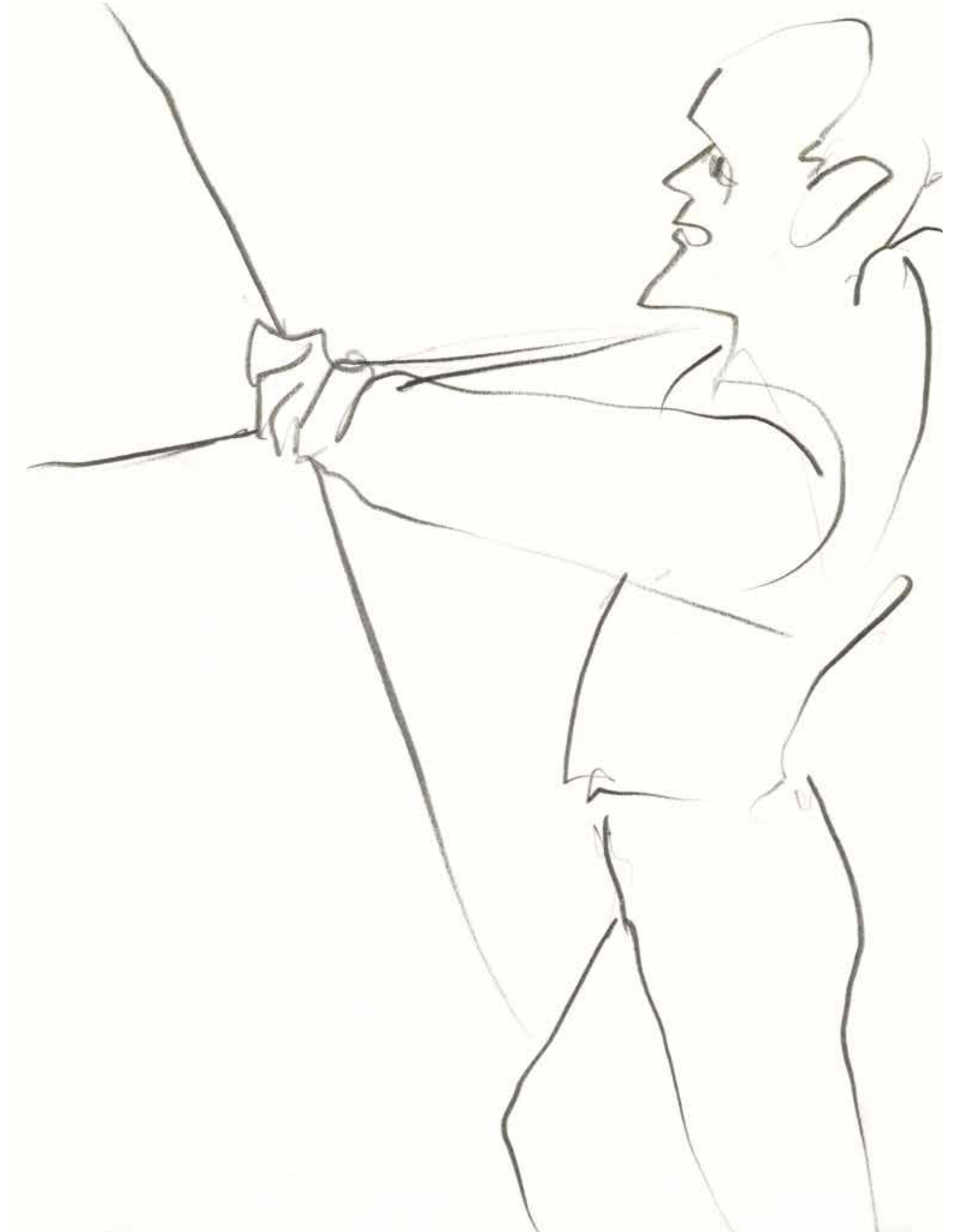
12.8.89 "Dream Bardot," Lambs Eat Ivy



1.14.90 "The Serpent's Fall," Sarah Cathcart



3.11.90 "From the Ashes," MumPuppettheatre



3.25.90 "Radio Sing Sing," Man Act from Wales



9.12.90 "Ah, Cabaret! Ah, Cabaret!" Theatre Buffo from USSR, Gannady Vetrov performer



9.12.90 "Ah, Cabaret! Ah, Cabaret!" Theatre Buffo from USSR, Elena Spiridonova performer



10.3.90 "It's Not a Movie," Tmu-Na from Israel, written and directed by Nava Zuckerman



12.2.90 "Stories From Here," Jottay Theatre performing "The House"



12.12.90 "Whosis," Figures of Speech Theatre

