

Art



The joy of sects

Helen Sumpter succumbs to Jim Shaw's hypnotic cult of Busby Berkeley babes, learning the 'peek-a-boo push' and other odd dance moves

For the film 'The Whole: A study in Oist Integrated Movement', eight female dancers in wafty chiffon outfits and 1970s bobbed wigs, perform a choreographed sequence that concludes with a tableaux of the women draped around a revolving, life-size representation of a banyan tree. Performed to a new-agey soundtrack, their far-out moves – resembling a mix of contemporary dance, yoga and synchronised swimming – are an expression of the 'Oist' religion, in the form of a sacred dance. If you want to learn the movements, an accompanying video shows a woman in sweat pants and leotard demonstrating the individual postures; hydra, pyramid, fanning warrior, chevron swivel, peek-a-boo push. Hang on a minute – chevron swivel and peek-a-boo push? Something doesn't quite ring true. In fact both films are the invention of LA-based artist Jim Shaw, as is 'Oism' itself – a combination of fact, fiction and fantasy, involving the worship of a female divinity, 'O', and a bastardisation of nineteenth-century

'I did get asked to dance for people in the early 1970s and learned how to count with my body'

American religions such as Mormonism. Along with other works, including painting, drawing and sculpture, these films are the latest instalment in Shaw's complex and subtly subversive critique of American history, art history and popular culture, through the vehicle of 'Oism'.

'I first became interested in other faiths from watching programmes on cable about small religious sects, which, like 'Oism', are also essentially made up,' Shaw explains from the Simon Lee gallery, where his exhibition is installed. 'And



Pan's People Jim Shaw's lovely lilac ladies in 'The Whole: A Study in Oist Integrated Movement', 2009

'The Whole' developed from research into the work of esoteric writers and thinkers such as Rudolph Steiner and GI Gurdjieff, who studied the effect of sacred dance and movement as an aid to self-awareness. And also from the structure of films made by Busby Berkeley, who actually learnt to orchestrate large groups of dancers from his time spent in the army, drilling soldiers on parade.

A product of the art scene that emerged from CalArts grad school in California in the 1970s, (along with Mike Kelly and Tony Oursler), Shaw's diverse practice has included the creation of works relating to 'Oist' history and doctrine, in the form of drawings, comics, paintings, sculpture and installations since 2000, featuring both real historical and imaginary characters, but his focus on movement and dance for this exhibition seems to have hit a timely theme. This weekend Tate Modern's UBS Openings event, 'Characters, Figures and Signs' also combines art and dance with a series of talks, discussions and performances that explore contemporary

artists and choreographers' use of the language of gesture and dance. Next month gallerist Victoria Miro teams up for the second time with choreographer Siobhan Davies to present 'The Collection', their exploration of dance and movement in collaboration with artists including Anri Sala and Idris Khan (see 'Cut a Rug' sidebar).

Shaw collaborated with choreographer Anita Pace to create the 'Oist' movements but has his own experience of dance from his days at CalArts during the early years of performance art and disco. "I Feel Love" by Donna Summer was the ultimate track to dance to at the time and I did get asked to dance for people for a while in the early 1970s and learned how to count with my body. I also remember that I would be ruined for days afterwards.' So has Shaw tried out any of the 'Oist' movements? 'I've been doing yoga for the past year and a half, so I could probably do most of them, although these days I have a lot more trouble bending my knees!' 'The Whole: A Study in Oist Integrated Movement' and other works are showing until Mar 28 at Simon Lee (see Mayfair to Sloane Square).

Cut a rug

Characters, Figures and Signs: Choreography as 'Doing' and 'Saying'

Tate Modern's choreography season kicks off with molecular-biologist-turned-dancer **Xavier Le Roy** exploring the body through science and movement. 10pm Sat-Sun; £10, concs £7.50. **Plouff!** by Julien Bismuth and Jean-Pascal Flavier reinvents nautical communication with flags and text. *By the Thames* at 3, 4 & 5pm Sat; free. Guillaume Désanges questions the links between art, nature and culture in 'Signs and Wonders'. 2.15pm Sat; free.

The Collection



Art/dance crossovers at Victoria Miro's gallery include new work by **Anri Sala**, **Idris Khan** and **Francis Alÿs** (pictured), while **Conrad Shawcross**

installs his kinetic sculpture 'Slow Arc inside a Cube III' at Siobhan Davies Studios. Mar 24-Apr 9. For more, see www.siobhandavies.com/the-collection

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