



latimes.com

May 1, 2003

## Concept is anything but pedestrian

By Chris Pasles, Times Staff Writer

Where most of us see a crosswalk, choreographer and filmmaker Morleigh Steinberg and butoh dancer Oguri see opportunity.

The two have been working together since the early 1990s, documenting Oguri's severe style of dance in various environments, including Joshua Tree's desert and, now, the City of the Angels. Steinberg came up with the idea of showing Oguri moving through two busy Los Angeles intersections. The result is the 11-minute dance film "Xing," which will be screened Friday at the Getty Center during Dance Camera West.

"The concept was dancing within the timing of crossing a street and having your audience be people in cars, waiting for the light to change," said Steinberg, a founder of ISO Dance and former member of Momix Dance Theater who began working in film in 1994. It took a little time to think through the idea and find the right locations, she said. The film was shot in one day.

"Nothing was choreographed beforehand," Steinberg said. "Oguri doesn't choreograph, he improvises. But the shots are very specific and the direction is very specific. He knows that he has to get from point A to point B, but I don't mind how.

"The choreography is done in the edit: linking movements, how one shot ends and goes into the next. It's a wonderful way to make a dance. But it's not easy. The movements are different. They're not consecutive. But that brings life to the film and to the dance."

About 10 minutes into Oguri's dance at one of the intersections — Van Nuys Boulevard and Riverside Drive in the Valley — the unexpected happened: The police arrived.

"I hear some voice," said Oguri, a native of Japan who has been a Los Angeles resident since 1990. "What are you doing?" And I looked and there were the police. I said, 'Yes, I'm dancing here.'

"I have in my head, 'Oh, if I say, I'm filming,' it would be a very clear answer for them. But I'm a dancer. I have a responsibility for my dance.

"It was really a scary moment," said Steinberg. "The whole day was scary. I felt we were escaping the cops all day. We didn't have any permits.

"But these were the nicest cops in Los Angeles. They could have thrown him in jail. He was in the middle of the street. I don't think legally you're allowed to hang out there." Still, the incident had its silver lining: "When I saw that," Steinberg said, "I knew that was the ending."

Copyright 2003 Los Angeles Times

By visiting this site, you are agreeing to our [Terms of Service](#)  
[Privacy Policy](#)