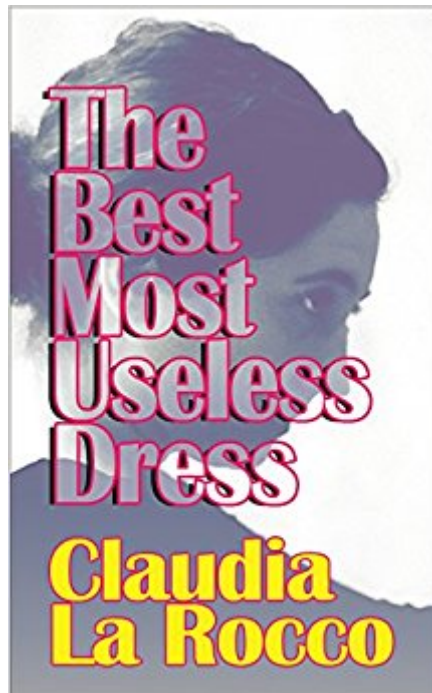


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The Best Most Useless Dress: Selected Writings Of Claudia La Rocco



Synopsis

Widely known as an incisive critic for The New York Times and Artforum, Claudia La Rocco is also a poet and performer whose hybrid texts are as mercurial and imaginative as her criticism. The Best Most Useless Dress reveals the breadth and depth of La Rocco's art, encompassing a decade's worth of poetry, essays, performance texts and reviews. These writings explore how movement and rhythm--in time, through space, across bodies, on the page--engender experience itself. Jay Sanders, curator of performing arts at the Whitney, writes: "Claudia La Rocco's impactful writing sketches its performing subjects in real time, depicting not only the character of work, but the conditions in which it collectively forms and exists. Here the spaces of New York performance and the spaces of critical writing reveal themselves anew." The book includes an introduction by poet Elizabeth Robinson.

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Customer Reviews

In the last ten+ years, Claudia La Rocco has amassed an impressive body of work across a number of seemingly incongruous disciplines: poetry, interviews, performance and visual art criticism to name just a few. The Best Most Useless Dress is an inventively organized, completely fascinating survey of this period of work. It's so rare to find a writer of talent, imagination and great intelligence paying attention to the (admittedly niche?) experimental performance scene (in NY and elsewhere) as it's happening NOW. The pieces collected in this book are an important addition to the official record of a (in my view) very important moment in time. I wish more works like this were in circulation when I was a teenager becoming interested in a world (mysterious and unknown to me at

the time) populated by creative individuals marking a unique and different path. Claudia's voice is totally unique. It deserves to be read and read again.

This is a great book for anyone interested writing that breaks all kinds of boundaries. Claudia La Rocco is probably best known as a critic for the New York Times. She writes dance and theater reviews. But She is also a poet and works with artists on projects. It's rare to see someone work on both sides of the fence, so to speak. But what is interesting is how she brings her aesthetic discernment, which is evident in her published reviews, into those other kinds of writings. From poems to artist texts that she has written, they all have her distinctive sensibility. She is also very funny. I was a pleasure to read and I would recommend this book.

When I was in college, I took a course in cultural reporting and it's true, writing about dance is one of the hardest things to do. Since then, I've been to the ballet, the opera, seen mind-bending performance art unfurl around me. Yet most days, modern dance still feels like an elaborate in-joke. I've read Ms. La Rocco's dance reviews in The New York Times, though it seems she has moved on to theater recently. Somehow, she is able to make perfect sense of seemingly senseless scenarios (even when they truly are, she is neither patronizing nor unkind). More than that, she elevates the medium and its subtleties. When Ms. La Rocco isn't in art critic mode, she also produces poetry, performance texts, and other personal sketches. The writings compiled here are introspective, sensual, self-effacing, and deeply humorous, without sacrificing any of the wit and insight that her art reviews bring to the table. Sort of like peeking into an art critic's notebook, minus the shorthand. It's hard to tell if the reader is anticipated to have a comprehensive understanding of Brecht, Graham, Cunningham, Kaprow, and all the late greats. That said, "The Best Most Useless Dress" isn't a dense book by any standard, and it does make you think about Dance versus Performance Art versus Theater versus Fringe Theater - and whether those distinctions even matter - without bogging you down with didacticism or insane semantics. What I can say for sure though, is that this is the sort of book that will leave you feeling inspired, a shade enlightened, a little more creative, a tad artistic. That's until you attempt to write about performance without resorting to cliches like 'ephemeral,' 'evanescent,' 'transient,' or 'transcendent.' Tough, isn't it?

There's no right way to dance. Instead, each movement is singular to its moment, always a beautiful little failure, swaying into focus as quickly as it dissipates into the next. Reading Claudia La Rocco's *The Best Most Useless Dress* feels like tipsying throughout La Rocco's

own personal dance floor, the poet and critic maintaining an almost-outsider stance when it comes to dance as a form of art, and therefore, contemporary dance as a club (or even a clique). La Rocco is always simultaneously watching and questioning where to look. She writes from a premise of perpetual fumble, gracefully saved by her language; her failures are, in her own words, "nimble and fearless." I most ardently recommend this book.

With all the crossing of borders in art forms lately, it is wonderful to see it done so eloquently in the form of a book. Poetry, critical thought, essays... all accomplished with wit, clarity of word choice, and a deep intelligence and generosity about that which she is speaking. La Rocco makes criticism an art form and you can see why when you have a chance to read it along side her poetry and other written prose. I highly recommend taking a look at this book. I hope it becomes an important part of dance writing and dance classrooms in general; moreover, it should also find a comfortable spot on anyone's bookshelf or coffee table.

WOW! I just ordered 7 more copies of this book -- to give away as presents to my friends. I bought it on a whim -- because I have enjoyed reading Claudia La Rocco's writing in the New York Times for years. Each piece in this collection is a short digestible, emotionally resonant, and intellectually provocative -- JEWEL.

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