

By **JENNIFER DUNNING**

Karen Bernard Dia Center for the Arts 155 Mercer Street SoHo

Karen Bernard is a big, forthright woman with an interest in nontraditional dance movement and a gift for capturing the essence of a gesture. The program of new and recent work that she presented on Friday night was full of curious but potent little solos that made refreshing use of Ms. Bernard's size and authoritative presence.

She opened the program with a new dance called "Blocks," set to music by Judy Dunaway, that introduced Ms. Bernard's characteristic bulky, sometimes heroic strides, turns, poses and falls. Her vocabulary is not pretty or large. But the movement has a personal integrity and self-awareness that make it as thought-provoking as the programs of dance, performance art and music by guest artists that Ms. Bernard and her New Dance Alliance produce at Dia.

Dressed in a long apron wrapped over her work shirt and pants, Ms. Bernard offered a continuous flow of moves and gestures that hinted at a variety of occupations in her new "Work." The solo, danced to music by Wendy Chambers, ended with a mysterious winding-down.

In "Roy, Kd, Gilbert and George and Me," a new solo danced to mixed versions by Roy Orbison and K. D. Lang of the Orbison song, "Crying," Ms. Bernard could have been a figure stepping down from a Gilbert and George live sculpture. The touch of her hand to her cap was as important as her slow, Muybridge walk toward the audience, her gaze desolate but considering.

The program also included "Footsteps on The," a deconstruction of rock music. There were musical interludes by Steven Machamer on the vibraphone and Wade Weast on the trumpet and "Girls in Action," a dancing game for four little girls, Alex Wixon, Lacie Pulido, Djuna DaSilva and Endomi Williamson. Eileen Kelly was the evening's director.

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