

press quotes
on
STIRRING, SPINNING, SWEEPING

"Once Arsem gets us twisting the wool, feeling and smelling the lanolin that has softened the hands of spinners for centuries; once we have acclimated to the magic forest environment surrounding us: the piles of wool, the two antique spinning wheels, the cauldron; once we have gotten used to the mysterious figure sweeping a mound of flour in the center of the floor...we relax. Our minds begin to loop and spin, caught in the spell of Arsem's soothing, unassuming voice.... As the lights slowly dim - imperceptibly at first- the stories begin to take eerie turns and Arsem's persona becomes more and more strange, almost uncanny.... 'Stirring, Spinning, Sweeping' weaves a potent spell if you let it. In its warp and woof are countless associations, echoes and pieces of dreams."

- John Dennis Anderson, **Bay Windows** (Boston)

"From the threads of historical fact, family and natural history, tradition, myth, and fairy tale, Arsem weaves a gently fascinating experience that is both intellectually and sensually satisfying.... Typical of the best of the Mobius collective's work, this performance involves virtually all the senses: ears are submerged in the gently bubbling and sweeping soundscape; fingers and nose enjoy the pleasant oiliness and smell of washed raw wool; eyes are treated to the bright alchemy of the dyeing cauldron; imagination and memory float free. Deep artistic cohesion exists here between what is being expressed and its presentation; the piece literally and figuratively spins and weaves its spell."

- Scott Stroot, **Art New England** (Boston)

"Marilyn Arsem...excavates deep layers of traditional women's work. Gradually, her semi-didactic introduction into the prehistory and development of the thousands and thousands-of years-old labor is transformed into an adventurous narrative - a labyrinth of meanings, references and psychosomatic experiences.... All aspects of Arsem's performance, from a brief chronology of spinning, the quiet, calming voice of the performer-narrator and the monotonous sound of the spinning wheel to the change from light to darkness, refer to the passing of time: they measure our lives, make us parts of the history, and turn most of the once-great thoughts, idols, and objects into ruins. However joyful the story-telling of Marilyn Arsem might be, time is a metaphor for death here....Marilyn Arsem devotes her performance to women's heritage...but, unlike a lot of essentialist feminists, she represents the feminine in a multifaceted manner....Instead of appropriating the ready-to-consume images and narratives of women, there is a careful and detailed research in the history of women's work behind Arsem's performance....[She] creates a spinning woman not as an ideological construct but as a subject of one's (woman's and man's) imagination and physical experience."

- Martina Pachmanova, **artsMEDIA** (Boston)

"In this work Arsem is actively locating herself, wrapping herself around, weaving, embedding herself in traditional women's work and it into her. What's more, she roots herself into the sandy New England landscape, telling stories about her grandmother, who quickly multiplies into many grandmothers - increasingly uncanny, twisty stories that remind me of the Hawthorne I read as a schoolgirl on Cape Cod. She is remembering, and so revivifying, the forgotten women whose traces live inside our bodies.... Watching Arsem's hands at the spinning wheel...I can appreciate how arcane much of 'women's work' has seemed to men, with its oral traditions passed down from mother to daughter: recipes, herbal concoctions, spells, secrets of menstruation and childbirth. So the associations between women and witchcraft, between weaving and spinning and terrifying secrets, are vivid and understandable."

-Rebecca Todd, **Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory** (New York)

In "Stirring, Spinning, Sweeping," the audience is led to question the imbalance between the representation of women in history and the facts of their daily lives. Woven into this performance is a carefully constructed manipulation of the audience. "In 'Stirring, Spinning, Sweeping,' Arsem creates "dreamlike spaces" where the audience can examine "the influence of the social milieu" on the (re)production of the past, of history. This is not an escape from reality in the traditional sense of theatre, but an enabling of the participants to critically examine the shaping of the narrative framework of history. ... In the dimly lit theatre, where reality and dreams seem to intermingle, the images of women working repeatedly alternate between the familiar and unfamiliar, the commonplace and the uncanny. ...Arsem challenges the audience not to focus on the words alone, but on the format of their presentation within a broader context of narrative, theatre, performance and history. ... The audience is asked to consider the factors that determine the point at which we choose to believe, and choose not

to believe, the presented information. ... Arsem brings to light the narrative hierarchy implicit in the documentation of history and the perception of truth.... It is the space between the binarisms of truth and fiction, belief and disbelief, the familiar and the unfamiliar, which Arsem investigates in 'Stirring, Spinning, Sweeping.'”

-Mia Rosenblatt, **Performing Arts Journal** (New York)