

figure, or what Duchamp termed “retinal art”? The answer is all of the above. This beautifully installed, whip-smart exhibition features works such as a cracked and cloudy crystal ball that was rolled from its place of purchase to the gallery, a collaboration between Nina Beier and Marie Lund; a series of paintings by Pavel Büchler, composed of fragments from found flea-market canvases; Nina Canell’s alchemical assemblage, in which a bowl of water dissolving into mist hardens a nearby bag of cement; and Monica Bonvicini’s fractured safety-glass cube, which gives the finger to minimalism. Destroy away: art rises, ever phoenixlike, from the ashes. Through May 8. (Swiss Institute, 495 Broadway, at Broome St. 212-925-2035.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

The company goes back to basics, with seven days of Balanchine’s “black-and-white” dances, modernist masterpieces that have come to define the style and look of twentieth-century American ballet. In “Apollo” (1928)—set, like many of these works, to music by Igor Stravinsky—a “wild, untamed youth,” the dancer Jacques d’Amboise says, “learns nobility through art.” “Episodes,” from 1959, began as a double bill shared by Martha Graham and George Balanchine, and hasn’t been performed here in four years. And “Concerto Barocco” (1941), for two violins and two ballerinas, comes as close to revealing the essence of Bach as any dance ever will. ♦ May 4 at 7:30: “Le Tombeau de Couperin,” “Episodes,” and “Symphony in Three Movements.” ♦ May 5 at 8: “Monumentum pro Gesualdo,” “Movements for Piano and Orchestra,” “Apollo,” and “The Four Temperaments.” ♦ May 6 at 8: “Symphony in Three Movements,” “Duo Concertant,” “Le Tombeau de Couperin,” and “Stravinsky Violin Concerto.” ♦ May 7 at 2: “Apollo,” “Square Dance,” and “Agon.” ♦ May 7 at 8: “Episodes,” “Concerto Barocco,” and “The Four Temperaments.” ♦ May 8 at 3: “Concerto Barocco,” “Monumentum pro Gesualdo,” “Movements for Piano and Orchestra,” “Duo Concertant,” and “Symphony in Three Movements.” ♦ May 10 at 7:30: “Square Dance,” “Agon,” and “Episodes.” (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Through June 12.)

HEATHER KRAVAS

“The Green Surround” puts pressure on the concept of perfection by attacking it from two angles, pursuing it directly and setting it into relief by allowing for unrehearsed mistakes and real-time corrections. Kravas, borrowing the costumes and ideals of ballet, drills her nine-woman corps in precise repetitions that gradually shift and change character. Barre exercises turn dirty; calisthenics grow compulsive, then creepy. On all fours, in rows, the women form a human carillon that goes “boo,” and a metronome ticks away as they struggle to keep together. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101. May 4-6 at 7:30 and May 7 at 7:30 and 9:30.)

NICOLL + ORECK

Jessica Nicoll and Barry Oreck, veterans of physicalized black comedy, team up with the improvisational actors Laura Livingston and Mike Durkin for a bit of we-couldn’t-make-this-stuff-up social commentary called “They Might Be Napping.” The subject is recent man-made calamity—global warming, Wall Street fraud. The suggestion is that we must have been asleep at the wheel. Rolling stools facilitate some of the somnambulism, and Amir Khosrowpour provides the music to move (and snooze) to. (The Performance Project @ University Settlement, 184 Eldridge St. 212-453-4532. May 5-6 at 7:30 and May 7 at 3 and 7:30.)

LOS MUÑEQUITOS DE MATANZAS

The vicissitudes of U.S.-Cuba relations have kept these masters of Afro-Cuban rumba out of New York for nearly a decade. The loss is ours. “Drum of Fire in Tribute to the Ancestors,” the title of the group’s current production, could apply to any Muñequitos performance, except that the drums are always multiple, an incredibly complex web of percussion. Spare, harmonized vocals add such sweet-

CRITIC’S NOTEBOOK A NEW DAWN

When it was first produced, in 1946, Garson Kanin’s “Born Yesterday” made a star of Judy Holliday, who played Billie Dawn, the bimbo turned bookworm. The splendid new revival, directed by Doug Hughes at the Cort, makes a star



of Nina Arianda, in her scintillating Broadway debut. Arianda has a quirky combination of sinew and sass. Her smoky, high-pitched voice is full of wonder and good humor, which ride out perfectly on Kanin’s solid-gold dialogue. “I started in thinking,” Dawn says. “I couldn’t get to sleep for ten minutes.” As written, Dawn is an astutely judged character: a courtesan but not predatory; a captive but curious; an ignoramus but without shame. “I’m stupid and I like it,” she says at first, only to be dissuaded by her tutor, Paul Verrall (the excellent Robert Sean Leonard). Billie’s transformation acts out on a personal level the public awakening for which the play argues—a shedding of corrupt laissez-faire attitudes for more responsible social policy. The play couldn’t be more delicious; neither could the raffish Arianda.

—John Lahr