

Pictures without a story

MIKE Mullins is certainly not afraid of attacking large themes with his Theatre-in-Sculpture group.

His Shadowline II opened a new season at Sydney's Seymour Centre Downstairs this week, presented by the Theatre Workshop.

The program explores, he says, man and woman, the need for religion and the way of achieving solitude; part one is entitled the Old Testament and part two the New.

They consist of a series of titled tableaux, each making a point about the suburban struggle between material and spiritual yearnings.

Mullins's tools of expression are mime, music, snatches of poems and symbolic objects: together they make a moving picture. But while there is action there is no progression; it took me a while to realise that each sketch was an end in itself.

An Italian-style picture of Jesus, bleeding heart spilling over the frame, moves on a wire across the

THEATRE

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stage as Him and Her stare at each other across the dinner table. Her washes up with orgasmic joy while Him reads a book of exotic cooking. A skeleton, milk, a baby with a noose spill out of the wardrobe and refrigerator; part one ends with a version of Edvard Munch's *The Scream*.

In part two [the Continental influence upon Mullins becomes fully apparent.] The couple in black soutanes are masked in enigmatic black-and-white fibreglass masks and their actions are directed to the symbolic presentation of abstract forces: fear, dominance, mortality, submission and the vulnerability of the act of being alone.

Mullins's style is skilful and economical; and it demonstrates the store of experience he has had working and performing in Poland and America.

His partner, the Czech-born actress Ludmila Knorles, works in complete sympathy with him and together they create often very beautiful sensations, particularly of the romantic tragic kind, which are quite foreign to anything the Australian theatre is accustomed to producing.

The weakness, in this instance, lies in the messages the works express. I do not doubt the sincerity of Mullins's intention, nor the emotion with which he executes it. But I think both his methods of exploration and his emotions are as yet too undefined, too undirected for the discipline he brings to their expression.

The questions he raises are those which have preoccupied civilisations since ancient times; the sources from which he has culled his style are equally ancient. The successful moments in this production are when Mullins is able to direct himself and us away from what he is thinking and feeling to the exploration itself. I would like him to make that exploration, not his messages, his object.



MASKED figure from Shadowlines II.

10—THE AUSTRALIAN Monday March 5 1979

Arts Australian