

W magazine

Time Well Spent

On a film set in Manhattan's West Village a month ago, Catalina Sandino Moreno (from "Maria Full of Grace") was bouncing on her toes just off-camera. "Action!" went the call, and the Colombian actress—in retro Shark attire from *West Side Story*—sprinted around a chain-link fence, burst through a crowd, bent over the prone body of her slain love, and looked up, her eyes shaded despairingly, toward the camera.



Catalina Sandino Moreno on set

The recreation of the musical's climactic scene took all of 10, maybe 11 seconds. Yet when it debuts as one segment of photographer David Michalek's many-chaptered large-scale video installation *Portraits in Dramatic Time* tonight in Lincoln Center, seconds will become—in ultra slow-motion—many minutes of excruciating drama.

"I remember trying to explain to this Indonesian actor what we wanted to do," Michalek told me over the phone later. "And his translator said he was very concerned that I wanted him to bring him to New York for five minutes." He laughed. "I said, 'No—I actually want him to come for five *seconds*.'"

Michalek, who led a former life as a fashion photographer (he started out working for Herb Ritts), didn't really have much trouble convincing actors to participate in the project—in addition to Moreno, Liev Schreiber, Holly Hunter, Ludivine Sagnier, William H. Macy, Alan Rickman, and Alison Pill are among the many who shot their own slo-mo segments, as well as some lesser-known Eastern acts like the Thai Likay Street Theatre company.



David Michalek (center) on set with Alan Rickman (right)

In a way, *Portraits* is an elaboration on his highly successful *Slow Dancing* installation at Lincoln Center from 2007, which featured dancers of international renown shot at 3,000 frames per second but viewed performing at a similarly sub-glacial pace. (Michalek is married to Wendy Whelan, a principal dancer with the NYC Ballet.) “This project was even tougher,” said Michalek. “It requires an extra level of focus from the audience. With *Slow Dancing*, spectators could enter and exit the scene at any time. Here, if you’re not paying attention, you might miss the arch of the story.”

The point is that five or 10 seconds is all you need to tell an entire narrative—you just really have to pay attention. “This project allows people to really see, for the first time in their lives, the full development of human emotion,” Michalek said. “I think the actors had to appreciate that if they were not being true in their emotional expression at any moment, it would be revealed. There’s no lying here.”

Portraits in Dramatic Time runs nightly from 8:45 to 11:45pm through July 31 as part of the 2011 Lincoln Center Festival.

Photos: Mark Stephen Kornbluth

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July 5, 2011

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