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Review: 'ChimaTEK' Offers Crystal Visions at a Transit Hub

By Gia Kourlas

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Aimee Meredith Cox, left, and Fréyani Patrice in "ChimaTEK: Chimacloud Control Center" by Saya Woolfalk at the Fulton Center on Thursday. Andrea Mohin/*The New York Times*

With all public art, the real test is making an audience out of those most elusive beings: passers-by. On Thursday night at the Fulton Center, the challenge was even greater — to delay the subway ride home. One transfixed man in the crowd was filming the scene when he received a call. "I'm going to hit the train in a minute," he told the person on the other end, "but I've gotten caught up with some interpretive dance."

The artist Saya Woolfalk has a healthy imagination — one that may be infused with a greater sense of the fantastical than most. In "ChimaTEK: ChimaCloud Control Center," she creates a virtual world that lives inside the Fulton Center in Lower Manhattan. And if a work can make you forget, even for a few minutes, about the assault of garish pink neon that permeates that transit hub, it's art.

Part of the River to River Festival, commissioned by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and presented with Times Square Arts and Times Square Advertising Coalition, "ChimaTEK" combines dance, video, animation and sculpture. In the 35-minute piece performed on Thursday, the control center, according to an informational brochure, "collects and crystallizes human and solar energy to create virtual crystals from the ChimaCloud." (A helpful fact: It's fiction.)

As three dancers — the piece's choreographer, Aimee Meredith Cox, as well as Fréyani Patrice and Kenya Joy Gibson — make their way down escalators and a winding staircase to the lower base of the multilevel center, three-dimensional crystals featuring diamond mosaics and propellers dance alongside them.

Some preparation is in order: To see these floating crystals, you must first download the [Refrakt](#) application and aim your smartphone on a design on the dancers' dresses. When it works — and you have to be close enough — a crystal suddenly appears to hover around the dancer's body. Spookily beautiful, these crystals help you reimagine space and time. Are the dancers impersonating the crystals, or is the crystal a guise? As the barefoot dancers incorporate lush African undulations and hold still positions with such focus and poise that they could be sculptures, even the hectic Fulton Center quiets down.

When they reach ground level, Ms. Cox, the leader of the group, dances before Ms. Patrice and Ms. Gibson while holding an iPad to reveal the crystals; it's as if she's demonstrating, wordlessly, how the application works. But the action also enhances the dreamlike quality of the dance in which a duet — with the help of a crystal — becomes a trio. Their exit is most haunting: Ascending escalators, they glide away.