

# British Theatre Guide

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## The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketchbooks of Egon Schiele

The Featherstonhaughs  
Robin Howard Theatre, The Place  
(2010)

Lea Anderson's all male company The Featherstonehaughs (pronounced Fanshaws) are celebrating 25 years of creating playful, boundary-pushing dance performances in and outside of theatres.

*The Sketchbooks of Egon Schiele* was first presented twelve years ago. It is an incredibly detailed and rich tapestry of movement inspired by Egon Schiele's sketches, which are concerned with the human body. As presented by Schiele, the body is a tormented and twisted vision, often staring wide-eyed at its spectator. Anderson and her dancers recreated their production by watching videos of the original performance, with a new dark, rumbling rock score now accompanying the dancers.

In Anderson's representation, the six-strong company embody the distress of Schiele's sketches throughout the 55 minute performance. Alert at all times, they twist and contort into hundreds of poses, stepping in and out of a frame of fluorescent lights that marks their playing space. With painted white faces and dark make-up circling their eyes, the troupe stare out at us as if questioning why we are watching them.

The piece is a masterclass lesson in composition. Anderson's use of space is incredibly dynamic and, despite the movements appearing relatively rigid, the composition of the dancers bodies is compelling. They seem to slide in and out of the space as if on a conveyor belt, with sudden changes in energy uniting the company in surprising unison movement and images.

The men are dressed in three-piece suits designed by Sandy Powell, which create a powerful image of the constructed male. They appear to have been painted with layers and layers of colour, melting into the dancer's painted face. In a mesmerizing sequence in which three dancers slither along the floor and recreate the semi-erotic poses of Schiele's sketches they are dressed in skin-tight body suits with anatomically correct sketches notating abdominals, calf muscles and genitalia. It cleverly reflects the vulnerability of the artist creating nude drawings, with just the right amount of distance from reality to allow us to safely see ourselves in the depiction onstage.

*The Featherstonehaughs Draw on the Sketchbooks of Egon Schiele* is a magnetic piece of work which lingers in the dark recesses of the brain.

Reviewer: [Terry O'Donovan](#)