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'Sleight' offers provoking look at art

By Rob Cline

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Sleight, the art form, is difficult to explain. So is "Sleight," the novel.

BOOK REVIEW

Kirsten Kaschock, who holds a master's of fine arts in choreography from the University of Iowa (to go with her master's in fine arts in creative writing from Syracuse and doctorate in English from Georgia, as well her doctoral fellowship in dance at Temple), has penned an absorbing, if often purposely and purposefully opaque, novel about art and artists.

The characters in "Sleight" (Coffee House Press, 330 pages, \$16) are practitioners of a (fictitious) interdisciplinary art form — part dance, part architecture, part spoken word, part mystic ceremony. West, director of a Sleight troupe, is seeking to push the art beyond its strictly non-narrative, anonymous bounds. To do so, he enlists (often via various kinds of coercion, subtle

and explicit) the help of a variety of troubled artists, setting them to work on a piece grounded in a shocking crime.

Kaschock's stylized prose requires the reader to focus, to be drawn into

her tale of the ways art can and cannot affect audiences and artists while seeking to reflect and redefine the world. The mysterious "wicking," during which Sleight artists vanish from the stage

in what audience members mistake for an illusion, haunts the story, asking the reader to consider the very nature of both art and artist. The book is much



Reading

- **What:** Kirsten Kaschock reads from "Sleight"
- **Where:** Prairie Lights Bookstore, 15 S. Dubuque St., Iowa City
- **When:** 7 p.m. Thursday
- **Cost:** Free

concerned with atrocity — large scale and small — and how artists can, or should, respond to it.

The book's climatic artistic performance is seen on the stage of Hancher Auditorium (the organization for which this reviewer works). It is unsettling to have Kaschock's story play out on a local stage, but that is far from the most unsettling thing about "Sleight." The book is not to be taken up lightly, but is worthy of being taken up.

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