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## THEATER REVIEW : 'Quotations From a Ruined City' Lashes Out at Brutality : Reza Abdoh's work-in-progress spews forth a barrage of powerful images, but his attack needs refinement.

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Reza Abdoh's "Quotations From a Ruined City" is a violent attack on violence. The promising and intermittently powerful work-in-progress--which has been one of the most anticipated events of the ongoing L.A. Festival--is a daring polemic that goes out on the edge and stays there.

Abdoh, who created, directed and co-choreographed "Quotations," is working squarely within the stylistic frame, if not the apoliticality, of the post-modern avant-garde. His theater of assault spews forth a barrage of confrontational and sometimes painfully eloquent images. And while he (and we) may suffer for his excesses, there's a compelling ferocity to the work. "Quotations," which was written by Abdoh and novelist Salar Abdoh, begins with the audience peering through barbed wire at a bleak Beckettian landscape. Prone mummies arch their necks upward like lizards. Wreathed heads poke up out of a white platform ringed by picket fencing. Disembodied talking faces are caught in pools of light in the middle of steel doors. And more heads on video monitors echo ominous yet poetic non-sequiturs.

This eerie scene gives way to a frenzied post-apocalyptic ruined city where the *lumpen* tortured cling to shards of lost cultures. Their costumes (by Eddie Bledsoe and Gene Barnhart) are Puritan, Victorian, Civil War, '50s-'60s Americana, contemporary and futuristic. There's a pyramid of laundry soap boxes at the back of the deep storefront space. TV tunes interrupt the otherwise loud and blaring soundtrack, and there are chorus-line dance numbers with women and men in Boy Scout uniforms and suits.

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There's little narrative to be found in this onslaught of sometimes trenchant, sometimes gratuitous imagery. But the subject is brutality--between individuals, within the traditional family, between political enemies--and it's addressed as much through form as content. This is not a play that allows its audience to be comfortable for long.

"Quotations" continues the lambaste of middle-class mores that L.A. audiences last saw in Reza Abdoh's 1991 "Bogeyman." The focus of the attack, however, has broadened from the nuclear family to the larger civic order.

Occasional topical references to Bosnia, Sarajevo and specific political figures distract from the abstract poeticism of the work. He also needs to trim some of the clutter within the many multi-focused scenes and to create distinct--and varied--rhythmic beats within the piece.

As is, the savagery onstage is so relentless (and sometimes pretentious) that it sometimes ceases to be a critique and reverts simply to being exploitation. Abdoh is treading close to the line in order to make a difficult point: Sometimes he falls on the other side of that line, despite the piece's intent.

This complex, choreographed work has more finish than many works-in-progress, which calls attention to its need for more substantive refinement. The ensemble, most of whom are veterans of Abdoh's Dar A Luz company, bring commitment and talent to Abdoh and Ken Roht's athletic choreography, as well as to their roles in general.

\* "Quotations From a Ruined City," 6411 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, Mondays through Sundays, 8 p.m. Ends Oct. 19. \$15. Information: (800) FEST-TIX. Running time: 90 minutes.