



dance

Trajal Harrell & Karen Bernard
The Kitchen
February 24 & 25

Living by Fragments

An unlikely pair of artists share a program

by Deborah Jowitz

March 3rd, 2006 7:10 PM

Trajal Harrell calls his latest piece *Before Intermission* because it's first on a shared evening curated by Tere O'Connor; a program note suggests that the dance is "both literally and figuratively 'missing' its other half." What comes after the intermission is Karen Bernard's solo *Totally in Love*. The two choreographers' work is wildly dissimilar; however they share a flexible vision of time and memory. Both employ film or video to construct parallel realities. Both implicate the spectators by their gaze and/or spoken words.

Instead, we get Karen Bernard, who isn't concerned with the aesthetics of cool. If Harrell focuses on structural intersections and riffs on themes from a book (his program note says it doesn't matter whether we've read it), the subject of Bernard's *Totally in Love* (directed by Maureen Brennan) is her own life as a middle-aged wife, mother, and dancer-choreographer. In material dating from 1995 to the present, dailiness is abstracted, polished, and fragmented, and Bernard's image multiplies and alters over time. A small television screen on a stand that doubles as bathroom shelves shows a video within a video. Bernard's giggling kids, in footage shot 10 years ago, cluster in front of her close-up head. Her rolling eyes and wary glances are both eerily connected and remote from their patting little hands and kisses. Later, the screen shows her older face—expressive, with big eyes and a generous mouth, but wearier here and alone. These days, she muses, it's hard getting the much-older children to participate in her ventures—when they're around (the flip side: She can throw out some of the shampoos and lotions she's lined up on the floor)

Bernard's a large woman with a lusty, down-to-earth persona. For most of the piece she wears flip-flops, an orange T-shirt, and a green fern-print mini-skirt (if we prize aged wood, why hide cellulite?). In addition to pantomiming to the invisible family her need for privacy or reciting the many ways she's told them she loves them (and the often perfunctory echoes they return), she dances. Sometimes she stops or repeats moves, as if a snapshot's being shown over and over. At other times, moving with contagious pleasure to music she loves, she beams with her whole body, shaking it and rolling it around, throwing her arms up. She talks to us; she calls up to the control booth, wanting to dance to a Sinatra song she loves and finding that none is any longer quite right.

Bernard mixes the raw and the cooked, past and present, love's griefs and joys as if puttering about her house. Sometimes, the television screens hold only snow.