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KAREN BERNARD/SOLO

"Karen Bernard has a simplicity and earthbound directness that make her an often spellbinding performer with unusual themes."

Jennifer Dunning, The New York Times

"In her short, lean constructions, choreography is often a matter of linked still images, as if a mild earthquake had jolted a statue into motion."

Deborah Jowitz, The Village Voice

"Removed Exposure – explored the body (her own!) in which the wild joy of dancing resides..."

Margurete Affenzeller, Der Standard Spezial

"Bernard's a large woman with a lusty, down-to-earth persona. ... who isn't concerned with the aesthetics of cool."

Deborah Jowitz, The Village Voice

"Were this Europe (Bernard would) be a revered film star and sex symbol." "Her honesty plus the intimate room equaled unforgettable theater."

Eva Yaa Asantewaa, The Village Voice

"Karen Bernard's vivid commentary on choreography's shticks and foibles met with roars of laughter... Her capacity to unveil strategies for reading new dance through humor frames her as an exciting intermediary for live performance. She rides a wave of acerbic and unpretentious commentary that tramples over the fourth wall."

Virginia Preston, Montreal.com

"Karen Bernard is a big, forthright woman with an interest in nontraditional dance movement and a gift for capturing the essence of a gesture."

Jennifer Dunning, The New York Times

dance → music → performance → video → convergence

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KAREN BERNARD/SOLO

ARTISTIC STATEMENT

For decades Karen Bernard has used her own aging body unflinchingly as a canvas to push the boundaries of what dance is and, in the process, expand the very definition of how a dancer evolves and can continue performing through middle age—in theory to the end of her life. Her work contributes significantly to the continuing dialogue about our socially accepted ideas of beauty and age and their relevance to performing live dance works. Bernard's work is explicitly feminist and transformative in a non-sentimental, non-confessional, and non-didactic way that engages audiences in her and the audience's inner journey; one that does not offer easy or simplistic resolution.

Bernard has a history of creating solo dances that challenge audiences to engage in a specific reality of everyday life issues contextualized into heightened performative experience. Bernard has a life long ambition of making “smart art with unpredictable choices” and in the process she works to keep people on the edge of their expectations. Paramount in Bernard's creation of dance-work is the erasure of the “forth wall” between performer and spectator. Bernard sees her audience as an active participant beyond the fact that they have chosen to place themselves in the seats they sit in. Aware of her audience as active witnesses influences the content and delivery of Bernard's work in a way that highlights the subtle proximity defining a public and private moment. Bernard anticipates that her audience walks away from her work sourcing pleasure in a common and shared experience. Bernard's work contributes to an active contemporary dialogue of the dichotomy of high art and marginalized art polarizing the modern American experience of the non-institutionalized, under-appreciated performance artist. Her work also contributes to the continuing dialogue of socially accepted ideas of beauty and age and its relevance to performing live dance works.

BIOGRAPHY

Karen Bernard is a choreographer and interdisciplinary solo performance artist based in New York City. She began studying dance at age three with her father, Steven Bernard, a company member with 20th century pioneer, Charles Weidman. She grew up in a household which incorporated her father's dance school, with students crossing through the family space, so performance art has been deeply engrained throughout her life. As an artist and the Founder and Director of New Dance Alliance (NDA), she performs, teaches, lectures and serves on advisory panels across the U.S., Canada and Europe. This cross-pollination strengthens an ongoing social dialogue among international artists, one that exemplifies her lifelong commitment to performance. That commitment is fully brought to life in NDA's justly-renowned Performance Mix Festival.

Between 1986 and 1998, Bernard presented a series of solos in collaboration with Dia Center for Arts and went on to be presented at The Kitchen and Performance Space 122 (*It Could Have Been Different*) and Danspace at St. Mark's Church and Dance Theater Workshop (Blue). These solos mark the passages of her life experiences as daughter, wife, mother and artist – “spellbinding performer with unusual themes.” Jennifer Dunning, New York Times. In 2004, incorporating old video footage, conversational text, and popular music, Bernard received critical acclaim for *Removed Exposure*, which premiered at Dixon Place in New York and went on to the Festival of New Dance in St. John's, Newfoundland; Women in Transition, a festival in Vienna; then was remounted at Here Arts Center in New York. A handmade book of the same name, *Removed Exposure*, was co-created with Canadian bookmaker Gray Fraser. In 2006, *Totally In Love* premiered at The Kitchen – “lusty,” said Deborah Jowitt in the Village Voice and in 2008 *Surfing The Shadow* premiered at Joyce SoHo. From 2008-2012 she created *Ouette* developed through The Field and residencies at Bogliasco, Earthdance, Silo, White Oak and Wassard Elea and work-in-progress showings at Dixon Place in New York. Highlighted performances of *Ouette* included the Rhubarb Festival in Toronto, Joyce SoHo in New York and the Festival of New Dance in St. John's Newfoundland. Her most recent work, *Suspending and Other Trick*, was made possible through funds from USAProjects and Electronics Media Arts - and residencies at Bogliasco, Earthdance, Firkin Crane's Blank Canvas and Tractor, D'Clinic. She was awarded a Movement Research Artist in Residence and received a BAX 10 award for her invaluable service to artists in the founding and development of the Performance Mix Festival. Bernard is a co-founder of E|MERGE Interdisciplinary Collaborative Residency at Earthdance.

KAREN BERNARD/SOLO

PUBLICATION

A 101 limited edition, handmade book *Removed Exposure* was published in 2005 and distributed by Printed Matter. Six black and white photographs are cut down the middle and bound at either end, allowing for strange pairings between the halves of the noir-ish cropped portraits. A tiny manila envelope rests in a felt compartment in the back of the book and holds textual clues to the identity of the woman obliquely pictured in the previous pages. The book is based on a performance of the same name by Karen Bernard and was produced in collaboration with productiongray and Alexandra Wixon. Photography is by Newfoundland photograph, Sheilagh O'Leary.

WORKS TO GO

All works can be either performed by Karen Bernard or Repoeformed by diverse cast.

For inquires contact: Karen Bernard 646-510-1824 or kb@newdancealliance.org



SOAKING WET

David Parker & Jeffrey Kazin present

Soaking WET

works by Karen Bernard, Marsi Burns & Alice Tierstein, Rachel Cohen and Deirdre Towers

September 24-27, 2015

West End Theater, 263 West 86th Street, NYC

Reviewed by Barney Yates September 27, 2015

Soaking WET presented a program September 24 to 27, 2015 at West End Theater that was conceptually ingenious and therefore, exciting. Works by Karen Bernard, the team of Marsi Burns and Alice Tierstein, Rachel Cohen and Deirdre Towers were staged. Soaking WET is in residence at the West End, where it presents various collections of works. The last one I attended was in May and was also engagingly conceptual, although spotty in its successes. This concert was spot-on throughout.



Stephanie Beck's sculpted towers

In "New Developments" by Rachel Cohen, Stephanie Beck's sculpted cardboard (or was it papier-mâché?) towers leaned and swayed; a pile of paper cubes moved and seethed because a man is on his back under them. What's afoot was sort of whimsical urban renewal, with narrow buildings levitating and three people handing off their structures, catching them before they fell. A big building raised a new building on a crane. Gray buildings in a black surround made a very pretty stage picture. The dancers, manipulating all this real estate, were in black. It's funny that the choreographer of a different dance on the program was named Deirdre Towers. Her name would have fit in perfectly here.

Karen Bernard's "reperformance: 1963-1996, It Could Have Been Different" started out with video projections of the original versions of the works presented, harkening back to their years of origin, beginning with 1993.

In "Footsteps on the . . .," an excerpt from a 1993 dance, we witnessed Stacy Lynn Smith moving in Bauhaus shapes to Afro Disco music, then moving into fluid movement. Stark shadows appeared on either side, drawing attention to her big afro hairdo. The soundtrack (Brooks Williams'



Lisa Parra in "It Could Have Been Different." Photo by Tim Fujioka.

deconstruction of "Teardrops" by Womack and Womack) sampled and repeated. Starkly, Smith rocked herself in floor poses, then accelerated into quick movements. In "Work" (1994), Donna Costello, clad in blue shirt and apron, moved in prancing steps, then dropped, moving throughout like an unsteady marionette. Music by Wendy Mae Chambers was trumpet and xylophone. In "Strange Dear" (an excerpt from 1995), Cole Porter's "So in Love With You am I" from "Kiss Me Kate" played behind Merisiha Mesihovic as she took stage in a bathtub and then dressed herself. Clad in black velvet trimmed in white, she engaged in floor work on her back, grasped her erogenous zones, then threw currency into the air. In "It Could Have Been Different," harkening from 1996, short-haired Lisa Parra appeared in a striped costume, black and white with wide stripes, again Bauhaus influenced, and thereby Bauhaus was juxtaposed with Disco. A version of "West Side Story" was played ("Stick to Your Own Kind"). Ryan Migge, in a red cape, entered and circled the stage, singing the same song in Spanish with a lovely voice. He draped her in his red cape. She escaped the cape and made circles with it.

A confession: imagining the early 1990s as far away is a disturbing notion to me. I am still getting used to the loss of complete certainty I had in the early eighties, when I felt I knew everything, or at least everything I needed to know. In the early nineties, when the world got digital, my world seemed to fly apart and it didn't knit itself back after that. These dances, with their comment on the recent past (as seen in the Disco references and others) represented an aesthetic that was current just before the digital age. So they feel both current and past-tense, familiar and passe at the same time, and that uneasiness may just be what I was supposed to savor in the program. The curtain call, showing us the choreographer and all the dancers, helped us pull this "then and now" feeling together in our minds, coalescing our temporal perspective on the works.

In "Cross Currents" by Deirdre Towers, a standup bass and guitar took stage and Olsi Gjerci danced in Spanish style to Spanish guitar music. But his movements were more balletic than Spanish. Enter Elisabet Torras Aguilera, costumed in red. The music became a mix of Spanish and what sounded sort of modern pop or even country. (It included a number named "Driftin' Blues.") Aguilera was on and off quickly; when she danced before us, her percussive sounds--claps and stomps--fit the music nicely. Her back bends were impressive. There were no castanets; most of the rhythm was done with her feet. From the singer's voice (Paul Jared Newman), we got *Voce Americano*. From his guitar, we were getting *Guitar Espanol!* No wonder, I wrote in my notes, that the title was "Cross Currents." I love to see the art of Flamenco absorbing cross-cultural elements, stretching and growing. Too often inventive dancers get resistance when they mix Flamenco with other elements. Shame on their detractors when that happens.

"Comin' Or Goin'" with senior dancers Marsi Burns and Alice Tierstein was a Vladimir-and-Estragon piece without the bullying. The pair were clad in polka dots and porkpie hats. One fell repeatedly. The dialogue--"What did I?" and "Why?"--was a series of unanswered questions. Billed as a piece for two seasoned, mature dancers, we were pointed to the differences between seeing life in hindsight or in the moment. That's the human condition, isn't it? But older people are more aware of it. For Burns and Tierstein, as older dancers, it was a letter to the world, and a profound one, to cap an evening that was mostly about perspective in one way or another. [B.Y.]



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Performing Arts: Dance

SOAKING WET

October 3, 2015

A mixed Soaking WET bill is a dinner party in a treasure chest. It is the kind of diversity many presenters strive for but rarely can naturally attain. For its thirteenth season, David Parker has gathered ambassadors of multimedia, alienation, world fusion, and age.

Rachel Cohen opened with *New Developments*, for a cast of four humans and scores of paper sculptures by Stephanie Beck. Three dancers hold lanky forms, each divided into three segments. They fidget like mutant insect antennae until from under a pile of cubes a concealed Cohen slithers backwards, bringing all three figures to attention on her shedding exoskeleton. She slips into a large cylinder just the right size to reduce her torso to a single moveable joint. The tradeoff seems an improvement in strength at the cost of mobility, but the material is nonetheless soft. While bones must be hard, they require space within.

Meanwhile, the others stay separate from their structures, adjusting with their hands like chiropractors in training. Against Cohen's immersive relationship, we see abstracted expressions human relationships on a scale from codependent to negligent within joints interlocking people in a social skeleton.

With *Reperformance: 1993-1996 It Could Have Been Different*, Karen Bernard puts us in a snow-globe filled with a flurried history of work, vibrantly costumed by Liz Prince, costumed once more by new performers. Following a video of Bernard's renditions, the dances are reanimated. Bernard's movement language distills line and directionality so much it is only natural to continue the process into distortion.

Donna Castello is heavily agile in *Work*, aided by her boots and coveralls, marching in turned-in fourth positions between a menage of rotating cannonball jumps. *Strange Dear* finds Mersiha Mesihovic re-imagining mechanical crunches through a segmented supine promenade as bitterly mouthwatering, navigating the coldest principles of angles and spirals with sexual fire.

Footsteps on the... and *It Could Have Been Different* use pop music to find pleasure and duty in the groove of Bernard's stark vocabulary. Bumblebee stripes, Selena's rendition of "A Boy Like That," and a stealthy Lisa Parra leaping, crouching, and mouthing lyrics out of sync painstakingly build up psychic breakdown, Ryan Migge's bilingual singing and maudlin ad-libbing notwithstanding. Like Cohen's sense of skeleton, each performer is a body part in a larger organism of transcribing not just language, but aesthetic behavior.

Deirdre Towers uses her dancers resourcefully to grapple with cultural expression in *Cross Currents*. What is sung as a futile love story is danced between traditional flamenco dancer Elisabet Torras and flamenco-influenced contemporary dancer Olsi Gjenci, depicting the search for a heritage not grown up with, yet fully longed for.

Comin' or Goin' pits Marsi Burns and Alice Teirstein in an alternate plane of existence where thoughts only occur. They react to stimuli that are never seen through pedestrian sequences of motion and stillness. Unexpressed ideas radiate through the eyes as pure feelings, questioning if our voiced thoughts are ever fully formed.

EYE ON THE ARTS< NY -- Jonathan Matthews

Feminist Performance Art Blooms Anew at Dixon Place

June 24, 2011 by Guelda Voien



Dixon Place, on New York City's Lower East Side, is many things: theater, performance laboratory ... bar. But one thing it is not? Beholden to trends in art or performance.

The 25-year-old venue, recently reborn in a commercial space (it used to operate out of one of the founder's homes), is used to carrying the torch for experimental performance. Though long gone are the days when Jesse Helms threatened the National Endowment for the Arts and grants to feminist performance artists Holly Hughes and Karen Finley were vetoed, Dixon Place keeps the feeling of the era alive with posters comparing Helms to Senator Joe McCarthy and a poster that reads, "Keep your laws out of my crotch!"

In keeping with their long-held belief in new work for its own sake, on June 17 Dixon Place presented *Femmes*—an evening of experimental works from four independent women artists. The program could be described as culture-wars-era performance art redux, and complete with the requisite nudity, breaking things and dismantling of gender roles.

Jil Guyon's "Widow's Veil" was a dramatic solo which she has described as "a woman's journey through grief." At first Guyon made overwrought gestures of typical femininity—delicately serving tea to an imaginary suitor, for instance—without moving her feet. These gestures are interspersed with upper-body contortions, conveying a feeling that she is compelled by forces beyond her control. By the piece's climax, Guyon, still driven by some internal force, tries to hang herself with her scarf/veil. The work was simple and effective, the execution beautiful.

A solo by Karen Bernard from "Oulette" was perhaps the most experimental work of the evening. The piece begins with a laptop and projector on mobile cart and a wheeled chair, which are used both to project images and text and generate sound (from Francois Ozon's film *Swimming Pool*) and as a prop in the dance. Perhaps not yet fully realized, this conceptual piece felt a bit like a whimsical corporate presentation, with dance inserted in the middle.

"Stroll2," danced by Emily Bock and Hadley Smith, was a playful and meditative work, described by choreographer Johanna S. Meyer merely as "a dance piece for two performers, a mask and a beanbag chair." It was that and so much more. "Stroll2" combined great acting with clever prop work, showcasing the talents of two thoughtful young performers.

"Charlie Heatherington: 1976" was a revelation. Performed and choreographed by Dana Michel, a Quebecois former track star who goes by the pseudonym Charlie Heatherington, "1976" was perhaps the most daring and original performance piece since Karen Finley. Michel/Heatherington emerged from behind the audience dressed like a 70s pimp, in yellow stockings and a huge fur coat, and proceeded to work herself into a frenetic disco freak-out, not unlike that of a Pentecostal churchgoer, representing, among other things, her struggle to prove that she is feminine (Michel has a boyish, athletic build). The tension builds as Michel/Heatherington continues a palpably uncomfortable exploration of her body through movement. Eventually, she dons a clown nose and loses most of her clothes, revealing the helpless female body beneath them, though she continues the same agitated movements. The piece ends with nearly naked Michel/Heatherington face down in what could be a trashcan. When the lights came up, a calm (and demure) Michel grabbed a prop to cover herself, and shyly bowed before exiting the stage quickly, underscoring how revealing and personal the performance had been for her. The still-stunned audience erupted in the loudest applause of the night.

The evening was a welcome throwback to a time which unapologetically valued all things queer, provocative and new. Dixon Place and the women performers it supports should continue to break ground artistically, providing physical and emotional space for many otherwise underfunded and under-appreciated artists. And they can do so knowing that Jesse Helms is now six feet under.

Photo used with permission from Jil Guyon's performance of "Widow's Veil."

(R) E V O L U T I O N !

Catalyzing the Zeitgeist

« [Partial Solar Eclipse in Cancer: Awakening and New Beginnings](#)
[Chatham Performance Painting: The Gospel of Heide](#) »

Karen Bernard's "Femmes" & the Birth

I had a prescient dream about the death of the 10th rabbit. Ten is the number for endings and completion and the [dead rabbit](#).

[Karen Bernard](#), the downtown performer and [New Dance Alliance](#) impresario, has delivered her development of a performance, *Ouette*, engaging the feminine shadow into a new dialectic surrounding dark energy dark/kundalini with her unveiling of "Femmes" at Dixon Place on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

A highly focused development of the grounded femme evolved in program with three other choreographers: **Dana Michel** from Montreal and **Jill Guyon** from New York City performing their own diametrically opposed styles, unified by **Johanna S. Meyers'** *Stroll 2*.

The culmination of the evening was Dana Michel arising out of a black chair with a black chord snaking out to the audience...

She was wearing a rabbit coat pulled over her head and gold stockings!!

The symbolism so deep and profound, the body movements so integrated with the music. performance knocked me off my feet — literally. I had a hard time making back home, so unsettled I was by what I experienced. I was incapable of writing about it — until now...

Under the effects of the Solar Eclipse in Cancer, the sign of the Great Mother, I now understand what I was witnessing that night: the birth of a new feminine archetype which integrates the gender polarities. Since 1992, I have been pursuing, interpreting and disseminating the newly emerging icon of the hieros gamos, the sacred marriage of Heaven & Earth born from the womb of the dark mother, the Black Hole at the Galactic Center aligned with the Winter Solstice on December 21, 2012.

This is truly what is fresh, the very thing that is being overlooked by mainstream press, is this new relationship to the dark feminine & Uncertainty projected by the Mayans into the black hole at the Galactic Center where the Winter Solstice aligns on 2012.

I confronted it, repeatedly, in the Native American Church 19 years ago, before leaving California, where I was told it has to do with the transformation in the human DNA. I now understand this connection of internal evolution, the kundalini and the **Cosmic Serpent**, the subject of my father's pioneering research.

My dialogue with Bernard has been taking place for a decade now. In 2001, I first experienced the annual **Performance Mix Festival**, which she single-handedly produces through her organization, New Dance Alliance. I don't know anyone in New York City more grounded and connected by an umbilical chord to the authentic birth than Bernard. I have been to her loft to see the boxes of videos from performers striving to enter her annual Performance Mix Festival and she goes through them personally. There has always been a strong presence of the cutting edge scene in Montreal, which is how she discovered the extraordinary phenomenon of Dana Michel.

Here is how the evening progressed in the form of the self-devouring Ouroboros:

Mining the female consciousness of self-sufficiency as independence from the patriarchy...

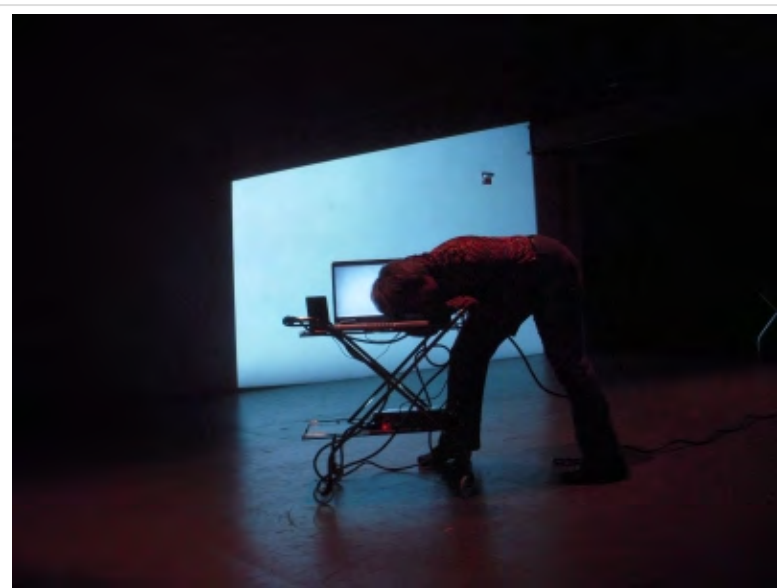


Jill Guyon's *Widow's Veil* is a stark, minimalist, solo movement-based performance that explores broken relationships and the struggle for transcendence. Set to the eerie, brooding soundtracks of David Lynch, a woman's journey through grief is documented through movements ranging from suspenseful stillness to sharp gestures and emotional extremes. Subtly layered costumes evoke a surreal Kabuki-like visual intensity — merging image, gesture, text and sound into a foreboding landscape that maps the sublimation of the physical by the mysterious realm

**...to a personal & artistic investigation of
the universal ever-present origin of
desire in the feminine shadow...**







Karen Bernard as Femme CyberIcon

Karen Bernard:Ouette (excerpt)

In Ouette (excerpt), Karen Bernard Uses a laptop and projector,

evoking imagined and real experiences created in different spaces. With video footage of floor tiles, patterned fabrics and human silhouettes, Bernard creates a heightened film noir that is quickly fractured by the non-performative technical tasks of manipulating the laptop and projector. is loosely based on the François Ozon movie *Swimming Pool*. Bernard's character parallels the film's protagonist, an elderly English novelist who becomes involved in a dangerous sexual fantasy that is part her fiction and part her desire. "... an exquisitely crafted solo piece, visually gorgeous and thoroughly intriguing, emotionally captivating, a shot in the arm of audience imagination". Robert Tyree, *Ultra*, Portland, OR.

Culminating in the birth of a liberated female archetype integrating the gender opposites.



Dana Michel's rebirth titled "1976" -- the year of her birth. Here the transparent birth canal is transformed into pedestal honoring the birth...

***Dana Michel** (Montreal) :1976 (excerpt)"It has always felt like a huge struggle – and I'm not even sure that I want these things – to be heard, to be adored, to be accepted, to be loved, and to be feared. And mostly, to understand what is going on beneath my skin." 1976 (excerpt) is a character-shifting solo that traces a glimpse of Michel's personal evolution thus far. Heading heart and muscle first into a hyper-personal performance state, Michel peels away the layers of her desired femininity and perceived masculinity to reveal her human truths. 1976, comprised of two 20-minute solos, is the choreographic anthem of the adventurous International Musical Chairs project. The project, which was conceived as an ode to the musicians and the dance artists she has yet to meet, will tour nationally and internationally. Following its Montreal debut, 1976 strives to morph as it travels. While Michel will continue to perform the same solo from city to city, the original musical soundtrack will welcome the new interpretation of a locally-based musician. In the same spirit of metamorphosis, a local

choreographer will also be invited to create a new solo based on the research used to create the original choreographic content. 1976 will be remixed in sound and in movement along the way, culminating in a second and mutated round of presentations in Montreal post- travel. "Michel... is a killer soloist who takes the warped, fierce and frenetic rhythms of her fiery piece with precision and authority", Eva Yaa Asentewaa, *Infinite Body*, 2007.

Afterwards, an informal post-performance discussion in the cafe of Dixon Place.



Jill Guyon in a discussion of "Femmes" at Dixon Place



Dana Michel from Montreal at Dixon Place



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dance

Trajal Harrell & Karen Bernard
The Kitchen
February 24 & 25

Living by Fragments

An unlikely pair of artists share a program

by Deborah Jowitt

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.

Harrell's work was inspired by James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*. In 1956, when the novel was published, much was made of the fact that Baldwin, an African American, was writing a *bildungsroman* whose troubled protagonist was a WASP expatriate in Paris. Harrell, who is black, has abstracted the concept of race in eerie, understated ways: Julie Alexander is wearing tan makeup, Anne Pinomaki-Ballantyne is in translucent whiteface (makeup and hair design by Carlos Villacres). But Harrell isn't concerned with narrative or in conveying that he, eyes closed, swaying to the tinny sound of violin music on a portable CD player, is remembering the tarted-up visions (costumes by Masala Browman) that periodically emerge from Erik Flatmo's gray fashion-show entrance and strut toward us, fixing us with that sullenly provocative stare. Our position as spectators is challenged when a man in the audience walks down the aisle and joins Arturo Vidich in his posturing walk, keeping an earnest eye on Vidich, who keeps his sly gaze on us at all times. Lesson over, the novice re-crosses the fourth wall.

Resonating overlapping fragments suggest homoerotic love, the ambiance of a gay bar, sophistication both faux and real, the applying and removing of disguise (i.e. items of clothing). At one point three diverse pieces of music bleed together. Double-entendre lyrics ("I've got big balls") roll up a video screen, also introducing the notion of balls as dance parties and següing into a hotel ballroom scene that begins a very lengthy clip from *American Gigolo*, a film in which Richard Gere, like Baldwin's David, moves in a world (not shown here) of drag queens and sex for hire, and, in which, as in *Giovanni's Room*, a murder provides a climax.

Certain passages, like Harrell's two brief, minimal solo appearances, have a mysterious resonance that goes beyond stimulating the eye and the intellect. In Thomas Dunn's dramatic lighting, an enigmatic figure stalks toward us: a tall, slim flaming redhead (Luke Wylie) wearing high heels, makeup that wounds his (her) face, and a pale, flesh-colored unitard festooned with braids of hair, chignons, and tresses (costume by Steel and Knife Style). There's something woebegone about this character seated on air, weight braced on hands and feet, swaying like a nervous spider, while the movie's credits roll, and then

reclining and stroking her throat with weary voluptuousness. When Wylie curls up to sleep, Isabel Gunther enters in dowdy plaid and hooks a contour sheet around the twitching figure.

There's no emphasized ending to this cracked flow of people and images. A performer holds up a sign that says "intermission" and we're left wondering what the nonexistent second act might reveal.

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.

The Intermission is the Thing

Tere O'Connor, the curator of The Kitchen's presentation of Trajal Harrell and Karen Bernard on February 24 and 25th, enjoys contrasting visions of life on the edge of dance/theater. On one side of the intermission we experience *Before Intermission*, Harrell's wide net of movement/theater/thought inspired by, according to program notes, "Cool," as well as James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*. On the other side of the intermission was Karen Bernard, resplendent in her life as mother, wife and artist and sharing her hilarious *Totally In Love*. Both artists stretch the idea of choreography and demonstrate an ability to shift and switch our attention on and off with videography, fashion, and toiletries.

Harrell began work on *Before Intermission* in Berlin in 2005 and said, in an interview with Gia Kourlas, "There's a lot of space and emptiness in my work," which he here attributes to the influence of Berlin's cloudiness. Taking his time with time and space Harrell, along with dancers Julie Alexander, Isabel Gunther, Anne Pinomaki-Ballantyne, Arturo Vidich and the memorable Luke Wylie, walk into the space either along the side of the audience or through a central upstage entranceway supporting the fashion runway theme, one of many co-existing ideas.

The dance begins with a TV turned on to show a video of a previous performance as the current performers lounge. The sound design and music compilation, also by Harrell, jumps from voice-overs to guitars and pianos but the TV rivets the audience. The musical collage is well edited although the projection of Richard Gere in *American Gigolo* plays for quite awhile. With the sound muted, stage lights off, and the audience glued to the TV we join the vast wasteland. Gere loses hold of another actor he's holding upside down over a balcony. The audience gasps. I think, "Are we going to watch the whole movie?" The dancers continue to sashay on and off. Interacting with knowing looks they try to be nonchalant. They don't completely succeed in removing their selves. Strutting and veering they

hand painted card telling us that, in fact, this is the Intermission. With its walking/dancing, television as player, clothing fetish and final strange image, *Before Intermission* left a quiet, disturbing reverberation in the room. In tune with its provocative gestalt some audience members laughed sporadically, others are not so comfortable. As Harrell says himself, "... that's what is interesting about me."

After the intermission the big belly laughs start as Bernard stares at her own TV set up and talks about her three children seen on-screen in an earlier video. Jumping up and down wildly at a super size version of their mother's face from *Momiton*, edited by Jody Sperling and Brooks Williams they are later shown in all their teenage slouchiness. Crisply directed by Maureen Brennan, *Totally In Love* melds material from 1995-2006 and is a love letter to her whole family. With confidence and humanity Bernard lives in



© 2006 Jody Sperling (Karen Bernard)

the same stretched dance world as Harrell but the sunny material, weaves a feeling based story that has the audience laughing loudly. Revealingly, Bernard shares that her own mother asked her, "Where's the dancing?" in this piece. She takes time to luxuriously rub on suntan lotion, but the dancing is there too in Bernard's contained, postural way. Not abstract, not locomotive but sculptural we watch her full-figure express openness and her face fill with the duality of annoyance and pure love.

A musical collage includes commissioned music by Owen Chapman as well as songs by Frank Sinatra and OutKast. Bernard taps into the middle age conundrum of knowing and wondering what's next. Dancing to the suggestive *The Love Below*, Bernard throws herself into a hip-hop mode. With a sharp deadpan turn she states, "I don't understand," but demonstrates, with her zoftig boogie, that she really does. Throughout the piece she talks to us in a sparse voice. One weekend when her husband and children were away she thinks, "I could be an alcoholic and nobody would know it," capturing the fantasy of escaping from the family's intimacy while pining for its embrace. Bernard's husband is irritated that he is not present enough in this piece.

HER POSITION IN TRANSITION

Das geheime Gesicht der Frau

Das Internationale Festival „her position in transition“ zeigt von 4. bis 18. März Positionen engagierter Künstlerinnen und Theoretikerinnen in einer Gegenwart fundamentaler gesellschaftlicher Veränderungen.

Frauen sind Frauen, das ist eine unumstößliche tautologische Wahrheit“, schrieb Elzriede Jelinek anlässlich der Eröffnung des Kosmos Frauenraums: „Sie müssen es sich nicht erstreiten, dass sie sie selber sein dürfen, im Gegenteil, sie dürfen nichts anderes als sie selber sein. Aber dieses sein ist gleichzeitig eine Entgrenzung um sich selbst (...).“ Die Frage nach dieser (Ent-)grenzung bildet den virtuellen Mittelpunkt des Künstlerinnenfestivals her position in transition, das auf Initiative des Theaters zwei Wochen im Wiener Bezirk östbau in 20 Kunst- und Kulturräumen in 20 meist interdisziplinäre Produktionen aus 20 Ländern von Künstlerinnen wie Valie Export, Pálma Jónsdóttir, Patricia Portela oder Karen Bernard präsentiert. Unter dem Ehrenpräsidium von Elzriede Jelinek, Valie Export, Barbara Prammer und der Unesco wird programmatisch der Modus vivendi von zeitweiliger Frauenkunst illustriert: „Weltweit beschä-

ftigen sich Künstlerinnen mit Geschlechterverhältnissen und Konstruktionen, Identitäten und der eigenen künstlerischen Rolle in den globalen Transformationen. Zeitbezogene und experimentelle Kunst kann heute ebenso wenig ohne Gender-Aspekt gesehen werden wie soziokulturelle Projekte.“ Im Zentrum des von einem fünfköpfigen Team organisierten Festivals stehen „Phänomene der Bewegung und des Wechsels – politischer, geografischer, kultureller und künstlerischer Art – und der eigenen Positionierung im Wandel der Paradigmen“. Und dieser Wandel bedeutet heute die Wendung von der 70er-Jahre-Erkenntnis, dass „das Private politisch“ sei, zu dem Privatwerden des Politischen in der Logik des Neoliberalismus. Über die Freiheit zur Prekarisierung bis hin zum Widerstandspotenzial von künstlerischer Performance führt eine Diskursebene, die das Festival durchgehend begleitet. (red) **Programm Seite A4**

Gläsernes Volk, kleidsame Frau

Zum Eröffnungswochenende von „her position in transition“

Margarete Affenzeller

Wien – Das von Barbara Klein und Margit Niederhuber konzipierte Frauenkulturfestival in der 1. Wiener Bezirk Neu-licht positioniert sich zur Blick auf zwei Wochen im Wiener Bezirk östbau in 20 Kunst- und Kulturräumen in 20 meist interdisziplinäre Produktionen aus 20 Ländern von Künstlerinnen wie Valie Export, Pálma Jónsdóttir, Patricia Portela oder Karen Bernard präsentiert. Unter dem Ehrenpräsidium von Elzriede Jelinek, Valie Export, Barbara Prammer und der Unesco wird programmatisch der Modus vivendi von zeitweiliger Frauenkunst illustriert: „Weltweit beschä-

ftigen sich Künstlerinnen mit Geschlechterverhältnissen und Konstruktionen, Identitäten und der eigenen künstlerischen Rolle in den globalen Transformationen. Zeitbezogene und experimentelle Kunst kann heute ebenso wenig ohne Gender-Aspekt gesehen werden wie soziokulturelle Projekte.“ Im Zentrum des von einem fünfköpfigen Team organisierten Festivals stehen „Phänomene der Bewegung und des Wechsels – politischer, geografischer, kultureller und künstlerischer Art – und der eigenen Positionierung im Wandel der Paradigmen“. Und dieser Wandel bedeutet heute die Wendung von der 70er-Jahre-Erkenntnis, dass „das Private politisch“ sei, zu dem Privatwerden des Politischen in der Logik des Neoliberalismus.

schlechter- und Identitätskonstruktionen (z. B. Was ist privat? Was ist Kultur?) animierte sie die anwesende Zuhörerschaft zum individuellen

Karen Bernard's performance on the stage of the Volkstheater's Rote Bar – *Removed Exposure* – explored the body (her own!) in which the wild joy of dancing resides, checking herself with mirrors and dressing and undressing. The artist based in New York City, a quite corpulent woman, danced spontaneously to the music of Cher and also gave away ten euros. A delightful/fascinating approach. *Her Position In Transition* negates art as the great success story. And cultivates it – in the tradition of American performance art – as an unpretentious and manageable intervention that can be used in specific context.



Besieht mittels Spiegel jenen Körper, in dem das Tanzvergnügen wild haust: Karen Bernard

Foto: Steinhilber/ANSA

Diskurse, Theorien und Diskussionen

Zwei Wochen lang treffen einander Künstlerinnen und Wissenschaftlerinnen zu einem intensiven Austausch über die Bedingungen weiblicher Kunstproduktion.

Marty Huber

must und ihre Produktion zeichnen sich durch hohe Mobilität, aber auch durch hohe Flexibilität zur Selbstinszenierung.

sen Ursache wohl hauptsächlich in der Namensnennung liegt. Denn, ehrlich: Wie viele Frauen würden schon eine als Männerkunstfestival titulierte Veranstaltungsreihe besuchen? Immerhin: Genug Publikum war vorhanden. Den Anfang machte am Samstag, vor der feierlichen Eröffnung mit Valie Export im Kosmostheater, die amerikanische Performancekünstlerin Toni Silver. Gemeinsam mit Joseph Shahadi führte sie den im Zuge der Terrorbekämpfung vom US-amerikanischen Kongress wenige Wochen nach dem 11. September 2001 verabschiedeten „Patriot Act“ ad absurdum. Ein herrlich „geschlechtslos“ Programm



March 31, 2005

Brooklyn Arts Exchange First Weekends

FRI, APR. 1

Through Sat, Apr. 2

BAX's First Weekends New Performance and Discussion Series offers dance audiences a real opportunity to impact choreographers from the ground floor. Each month, a presentation of works in progress and newly finished pieces is followed by a discussion moderated by series curator, BAX Executive Director Marya Warshaw. April offers new work by Karen Bernard, Ursula Eagly and Wendy Blum. Karen Bernard's career has evolved subtly and gradually out of a series of solos that unfold like pages in a journal. Often flaunting in-your-face feminism and challenging a culture obsessed with fitness and commercial beauty, Bernard fills her unflinching self-revelations with humor and passion. These live documents identify Bernard's ongoing position as a woman and human being in society, in relationship to others and to herself. "I try to arrest impermanence by practicing continuity," she says. *Totally in Love* finds Bernard celebrating and mourning as her children reach the age to leave the nest. "My pieces are set. However, I try to keep the emotion present, and therefore there is a sense of spontaneity. Being a soloist, I can play with the nuances within the set movements, or if an unexpected situation happens, deal with it on the spot." Bernard believes that allowing her personal rite of passage to be witnessed invites viewers to connect to their own lives. "The personal is what audiences relate to." Ursula Eagly's *You Are Responsible Forever for What You Tame* combines oral history, synchronized swimming, pickles and snakes, among other incongruous elements, as it unearths memories from the New York World's Fairs of 1939 and 1964. The audience is instructed to whisper stories to each other in a non-threatening game of telephone while Eagly's quirky, theatrical vignettes accumulate like animated objects in a display case. Completing the program is Wendy Blum's *A Hip Joint*, a preview of her upcoming evening-length *We Eat Secrets*.

BAX, 421 5th Ave. (betw. 7th & 8th Sts.)

Brooklyn 8, \$15.

---Chris Dohse



dance

If Wishes Were Horses, Bernard Would Be a Flamenco Dancer

by **Eva Yaa Asantewaa**
December 7th, 2004 12:45 PM

Karen Bernard/Solo Dances

Dixon Place
Closed

Karen Bernard is middle-aged, plump, and in control of every facet of her dancing body. In *Removed Exposure*, light sometimes lifts her handsome face out of the darkness, as if painted by a Renaissance master. Were this Europe, she'd be a revered film star and sex symbol. Her solo confronts us with a body type we don't expect from dance, but even more, it reveals an authentic person

who, with luck, could be ourselves. Bernard gazes at her flesh in an antique mirror and follows her soul: She can be a pinup girl, a haughty flamenco dancer, anything. On opening night, discovering that a crucial prop had wedged too deep within her bra, she merely excused herself to find a replacement. Her honesty plus the intimate room equaled unforgettable theater. Montreal's Nathalie Claude shared the bill, performing an amusing exorcism of sadness.

November 25, 2004

DANCE REVIEW | 'REMOVED EXPOSURE'

Confronting Mortality With a Smile

By JENNIFER DUNNING

How to define the art of performing? Karen Bernard, a New York solo dancer and producer, and Nathalie Claude, who works in dance, theater and television in Montreal, came close on Saturday night at Dixon Place on the Bowery.

Their material was decidedly offbeat. Ms. Bernard burrows into a middle-aged female self in "Removed Exposure," performed to music that included songs by Cher, Etta James and Outkast, with a film of her performing what looks like a striptease, except she is clothed. There is no easy feminist self-celebration here. Instead, Ms. Bernard's choreography, directed by Maureen Brennan, probes unlovely flab and all that comes with it with an interest that is strangely tender. The solo is sensual, too, as when the live dancer slowly strokes her leg with a mirror - a family heirloom, she says.

Ms. Claude tackles loss and melancholy in her three-part "Sadness Trilogy," performed to popular and classical music, a soundtrack by Isabelle Lussier and a spoken excerpt from Sophocles' "Electra." She plays three characters in the dance's segments.

First Ms. Claude is a plump, white-suited angel, with a large, bleeding wound over her heart, from which she extracts a tomato that she later crushes with a mallet. Next comes an over-the-top mourner, followed by a game-show contestant in a red space suit. The contestant is challenged to depict sadness vibrantly, and she does, in clowning that is breathtaking in its funky audacity.

Ms. Bernard and Ms. Claude share an interest in themes that are most often treated with violin-accompanied seriousness. But they also inhabit the stage with such fearlessness, adroit timing and quiet authority that they draw in the audience to live, with them, in their performing. We follow them wherever they go.

The Telegram

The Telegram (St. John's)

Arts & Entertainment, Friday, June 18, 2004, p. B1 / Front

Stretching mind and muscle: Opening night of Festival of New Dance offers three one-of-a-kind performances

Mandy Cook

Special to The Telegram

The 2004 Festival of New Dance was first in line to kick off St. John's summer festival season Tuesday night. This year's event -- the festival's 14th -- spans six solid days of contemporary dance, performance art, dance workshops, "guerrilla-style" dance (in which dancers will stage performances in and around the downtown area -- watch out for them), and artist and public feedback sessions.

With the participation of such dancers as Tonja Livingston, a Canadian-born but European-based superstar of contemporary dance, to New York-based dance-artist Karen Bernard, to Newfoundland's very own Sarah Joy Stoker -- a nationally recognized dancer herself and the festival's curator -- the St. John's festival is proving to be a "must-attend" event among the national and international dance community.

This week's opening night was launched with a welcome from the festival's chair, Alison Carter. Swathed in brilliant colour from head to toe, Carter credited the long list of businesses and individuals who sponsored this year's event and gave the audience an idea of what to expect -- including instructions as to when one was allowed to leave the theatre if necessary.

Then, the audience settled in for an evening of truly unique and provocative performance.

The queen of St. John's performance art, Lois Brown, was first on the bill. Brown, with her contemporaries Bernard, and Moncton-based dancer Natalie Morin, comprised the evening's program. They were slated together for a reason -- these artists fit more aptly in the realm of performance art more so than in the category of dance.

Brown, for example, emerged from backstage and immediately disarmed the crowd with an introduction to her piece, Wall of Galaxies. Her plaintive expression and relaxed, familiar voice helped to establish the genesis and purpose of the work.

Incorporating video of herself "philosophically ruminating," little girls in ethereal capes who chattered in some kind of foreign tongue, and props such as an upside-down Christmas tree (a real black spruce), Brown staged her piece inspired by the astronomical discovery of the Wall of Galaxies in 1990 -- an infinite number of galaxies that basically disproves the Big Bang theory.

At one point, a helmeted Brown emerged from her very own space capsule: a spray-painted silver casket. She proceeded to remove her matching silver helmet and "explored" her new surroundings. As suggested by the inverted tree, this new world is familiar, but clearly a different locale altogether. However, parallels between the two galaxies are offered through the use of organic objects that contain basic universal elements, such as eggs (collected in the silver space helmet by the young space-pixies). In the final moment of the work, Brown stepped into a beautifully illuminated waterfall and demonstrated that, yes, it is indeed real, and very wet. A clever and truly delightful moment, it soothed and refreshed the audience, who seemed to appreciate tagging along on Brown's wild space ride.

The following piece, Karen Bernard's *Removed Exposure*, relied upon movement more so than elaborate staging -- which is not to say props were not an integral part of the performance. Exploring the theme of aging, Bernard, like Brown, used video and costume for dramatic and narrative effect. But it is her grandmother's mirror that played the pivotal role in the work. Bernard also addressed the audience in order to create a rapport and to break down the "fourth wall" -- so typically sacred in more traditional dance disciplines. (At one point, she held up a crisp \$10 bill to entice audience members to take a stab at a skill-testing question relating to the a short piece she had just performed.)

After her opening piece, a performance to Cher's *If I Could Turn Back Time* that contemplates the perceptions of growing older, Bernard executed a series of studied poses with her mirror to a collection of alternating funky tunes, ranging from electronic to hip-hop, demonstrating her keen awareness of the passage of time and passing trends. At times gorgeously sumptuous and at others cheekily comical, Bernard was openly expressive in allowing access to what would normally be a most private ritual: the examination and scrutiny of one's mirrored reflection.

STOP AND START

The final piece of the evening, Natalie Morin's *Dance for Newfoundland*, was a premiere and inspired by a previous visit to the province. By far the most controversial work of the three, it had some audience members squirming in their seats and others practically dancing in the aisles.

Choreographed to an original soundscape that stopped and started in discordant but upbeat fits, Morin spent the bulk of the 40-minute piece frozen in difficult and sometimes painful-looking positions. Bereft of any stage dressings, save for one battered chair, the dancer's unique movements (and non-movements) forced the audience to start asking themselves some tough questions: Why am I here? Why is there (seemingly) nothing happening? What is the point? Does the dancer want me to ask these questions?

Unlike the formulaic North American entertainment machine that cues its audience with laugh tracks and heartstring-plucking violins, contemporary dance does not provide a blueprint to guide viewers through the experience. As a result, audience members ultimately alter what the artist offers to suit themselves.

Perhaps the tension that Morin's stillness created was a purposeful examination of the artist/audience relationship, and the dancer wholeheartedly desired to ruffle her viewers from their typical position of complacent passivity.

If you have a desire to shake up your daily routine with something out of the ordinary, the

Festival of New Dance is for you. It is a golden opportunity to experience contemporary dance in the province, and is one of the few artforms that takes place in real time - unlike books, visual art or film.

The remainder of the program offers a jam-packed schedule of dance that will be completely unlike what has gone before. Continuing at the LSPU Hall until Sunday, shows open at 8:30 p.m., with late-night video and multimedia showings on June 17 and 19 at 10:30 p.m.



Housewife Dances Madonna: Bernard at Seabury 47

By Bailey Triggs



Karen bernard is not your typical dancer.

You never really know what to expect when you walk into a Seabury 47 show. Unexpected could be New York-based choreographer/dancer Karen Bernard's middle name (I haven't looked at her birth certificate, but I'm assuming her parents weren't that cruel). Therefore, Karen Bernard performing an excerpt from her longer piece "CAUTION/be careful of what you dream" in Seabury 47 last Tuesday night was a perfect fit. Bernard's performance that night falls into what I like to call the 'is this art?' category. Not that I believe Bernard's performance wasn't art (hell, in my book everything is art); I classify it as such because it's the type of performance 'pedestrian' audiences (to misappropriate theaterspeak) leave and then rush home to their dictionaries to look up 'art' to see if what they saw had anything at all to do with it. (You might think it doesn't, but after two years in the InterArts program I can say with some authority that it definitely does have something to do with art, at least in the minds of many people).

At this point, I've probably got you wondering what exactly Bernard did that could put her in the 'is this art?' category. But before I can start with what she did, I must first tell you a little about who Bernard is (at least on the surface) that would garner such a reaction from an audience not familiar with her work. Bernard will be the first to tell you that she's not what you'd think of when you think of a dancer. She's in her fifties and doesn't have the typical

dancer body. Off the bat that would challenge some people's perception of dance enough to not label it as such. What made Bernard's piece interesting was that she not only didn't hide the fact that she wasn't a 'typical' dancer, she embraced it and made it a major theme running throughout her piece.

As the audience began filling the space, Bernard was already onstage warming up. By being visible from the beginning Bernard was able to familiarize the audience with her presence and prepare them (as if one could really be prepared) for her performance. Bernard looked like a vision of the typical housewife in her blue sweats, not what you would expect if you simply read her wide-spread dance credentials. She began the piece by talking to the audience about the difficulties in finding the best way to start a piece. As she spoke, she wandered the space almost awkwardly, as if she were uncomfortable in front of an audience. At first it was hard to tell if this was the 'real' Bernard speaking to us or a persona, but the question was cleared up (in my mind at least) when she wandered into what she called the perfect spot to start her piece and then snapped into 'performance mode' with the jerk of her head and a switch of the lighting. Bernard is a dancer who looks like a housewife playing a housewife who moves like a dancer moving like a housewife (whew!).

Bernard had commissioned two pieces of music for her performance: one by Los Angeles-based composer Kate O'Neal and the other by Montreal-based composer Annabelle Chvostek. Both pieces of music were based on the work of the cultural icon Madonna. The piece itself focused heavily on the work of Madonna: exploring what it means to be rich and famous like Madonna and contrasting that to the life of a housewife.

Many of Bernard's movements are 'pedestrian' in nature (to reintroduce the word and use it in its proper context). For those who think 'pedestrian' movement is something that could get you hit by a car if you're not careful (which it quite possibly could), just imagine catching your mom dancing along to the Madonna CD you left in the bathroom boom box.

Bernard not only danced like that, in the Q&A session after the piece, she actually told the audience that exact mom-dancing-in-the-bathroom experience was what inspired her to use Madonna in her piece (her being the mom in question). 'That's all well and good,' you might say, 'but I can catch my mom dancing to Madonna any old time. What makes this any different?' This is when it pays to be a trained dancer. Being a non-dancer, I needed a little dancerly guidance (thanks Emily and Jamie!) to pick up on the subtle differences between a housewife dancing around to the top forty of the 80s and performance art. Although her movements were 'pedestrian' on the whole, Bernard made allusions to classical dance styles (jazz hands etc.) that gave away her extensive background in dance. While she repeated the dance segment twice to two different pieces of music, she changed the gesture and articulation of her moments to evoke a very different emotion (at first I didn't even realize she was repeating the same dance). While it might have looked easy to the untrained eye, what Bernard was able to accomplish subtly was something only a well-trained dancer could pull off effectively.

When the performance was over, Bernard held a Q&A session: an awkward thing for a professional artist who is used to performing outside of academia. The relatively small Trinity audience was a far cry from the masses that come to see her perform in New York and the atmosphere felt an odd mix of receptive and resistant to her work. The questions and

comments ranged from confusion: 'What should we take away from this piece?' to praise: for stripping away the stereotypes of dancer to prove that anyone can do it (though I feel compelled to add that I don't think anyone could do what Bernard did without the thorough training she's had). I think Bernard sensed the resistance of the audience and deflected it by keeping up the persona she introduced in the beginning of the piece.

When asked what we could take away from this piece, she responded by saying it wasn't up to her to decide what we'd come away with, it was up to us. Though not an easily accessible statement, true nonetheless. The answer to the question 'is it art?' is up to you. And in my book, if any artist can get you thinking about the question at all, they've done their job.



montreal.com

dance & performance

Edgy women, from all over

Virginia Preston 2002

Edgy Women IX

March 22, 23

Studio 303

Studio 303, housed in the eclectic St-Catherine Street Belgo Building, is a popular berth for Montreal's emerging and mid-career dance artists.

Each spring, 202's Edgy Women event attracts multidisciplinary artists from across North America—and beginning this year from across the pond.

From Deborah Dunn's superb interpretation of T.S. Eliot's poem *Burnt Norton* to rawer work based on decidedly squishy feminisms, the event is a smorgasbord of spoken word, performance, and new media.

Karen Bernard, a New York City based choreographer, is a regular at the Edgy Women event. Her vivid commentary on choreography's shticks and foibles met with roars of laughter from an audience largely unfamiliar with her source material.

Bernard's capacity to unveil strategies for reading new dance through humour frames her as an exciting intermediary for live performance. She rides a wave of acerbic and unpretentious commentary that tramples over the fourth wall.

Time Out
New York

Takeout

A SAMPLING OF THE BEST THINGS TO SEE AND DO THIS WEEK

DANCE

Pick of the day

September 19–26

THURSDAY 19

Karen Bernard teams up with director Maureen Brennan to present the pop culture–infused comedy *Caution* at **HERE**. See Dance.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2002

CLASSICAL MUSIC AND DANCE GUIDE

A selective listing by critics of The Times of new or noteworthy opera, classical music and dance events this weekend in New York City.

KAREN BERNARD/SOLO DANCES. Ms. Bernard has an unmistakable look and style and neither is the norm in dance. But she has a simplicity and earthbound directness that make her an often spellbinding performer, with unusual themes. In her new “Caution,” Ms. Bernard tackles the notion that one must be careful of what one wishes for. Tonight and Wednesday and Thursday at 7 p.m. **HERE**, 145 Avenue of the Americas, at Dominick Street, South Village (212) 647-0202. Tickets: \$15 (Dunning).

The New York Times

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, MAY 22, 2001

Glamour Takes a Toll, Especially on the Feet

*Karen Bernard
Here Arts Center*

Karen Bernard donned personalities as well as clothes in the witty program she presented on Wednesday night. Ms. Bernard is a solidly built dancer with a big, round face capable of making every lift of an eyebrow or twitch of her lips comically effective.

In "Runway" she, Nuria Divi and Mary Ann Lacey portrayed models, assuming the sorts of languid, haughty and enticing poses associated with fashion shows. It was followed by "Ya Ya," in which Ms. Divi and Ms. Lacey kept presenting Ms. Bernard with various articles of clothing, which she put on while Richard Olson photographed her. Each change of apparel inspired a new change of expression.

Both dances concerned aspirations toward ideal images of glamour. But moments when Ms. Bernard's body sagged and her character's aching feet made her hobble in her high heels suggested that such ideals may be unattainable. And the facial expressions looked as manufactured as the clothing.

Yet the models who paraded and posed in these dances were in circumstances that perpetually required them to show off. No wonder, then, that "Runway" made my theatergoing companion remark that burlesque shows as well as fashion shows feature runways with bodies on display.

Wearing casual slacks and a sweater in "Western Flannel," Ms. Bernard stood scanning the horizon with firmly planted feet, then crawled on the floor and glanced warily, as if sensing an impending danger. She appeared to be acting out adventures in her own private western or suspense film.

All the performers returned in "Encore," a cheerful kicking dance in which they invited theatergoers to attend a reception afterward.

JACK ANDERSON

PHILADELPHIA

fringe

FESTIVAL

The Philadelphia Inquirer

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2000

Dance: solos

After seeing two solo dances by Karen Bernard, I'm left with a sense of the authority with which she moves her ample body and her expressive face, even when she's conveying fear or hesitancy. There was something poignant and girlish about her in *Blue* as she high-stepped or turned on flat feet, dressed in a long, gauzy tutu cum peasant frock. The tinkling, gonging sonic backdrop (by Wendy Chambers) supported the fairy-tale tone, as the effort of remembering steps and doing them "right" (a kind of test?) played across her face and body.

In *Star*, Bernard vamped in frumpy housewife getup, boogying, finger-snapping and belting out snatches of big songs; the piece's fitful stop-start rhythm underlined a feeling of frustrated fantasy.

**NATIONAL DANCE
MOORMOHS**

— Miriam Seidel

the village

VOICE

DTW
The Work of Artists

Dance Theater Workshop
219 West 19th Street, NYC
www.dtw.org

Karen Bernard
Gerald Casef
Amy Cox
Kristi Spessard
Nancy Turano
Jon Zimmerman



Fresh Tracks

Nov. 26, 27, 1999 at 8pm
Nov. 28, 1999 at 3pm
Admission: \$15

Tickets: (212) 924-0077 Info: (212) 691-6500

Karen Bernard photo by Lindsay Kagan

ShortList

FRESH TRACKS For the 76th time, a jury of experts launches a fleet of new works: see if they sink or swim. Note a schedule change: Instead of weekly shows, there are three performances over the holiday weekend. On this fall's roster are Karen Bernard's parody of sentimentality, Gerald Casef's attack on superhero envy, Amy Cox's search for identity in the frenzied city, Kristi Spessard's ode to early December, Nancy Turano's vest-pocket *Carmen*, and Jon Zimmerman's *Mergers and Acquisitions*, to Bellini. **FRIDAY AND SATURDAY AT 8, SUNDAY AT 3.** Dance Theater Workshop, 219 West 19th Street, 924-0077 (Zimmer)

DANCE

Time Out

New York

The obsessive guide to impulsive entertainment

Nov 25–Dec 2, 1999 Issue No. 218 \$2.50

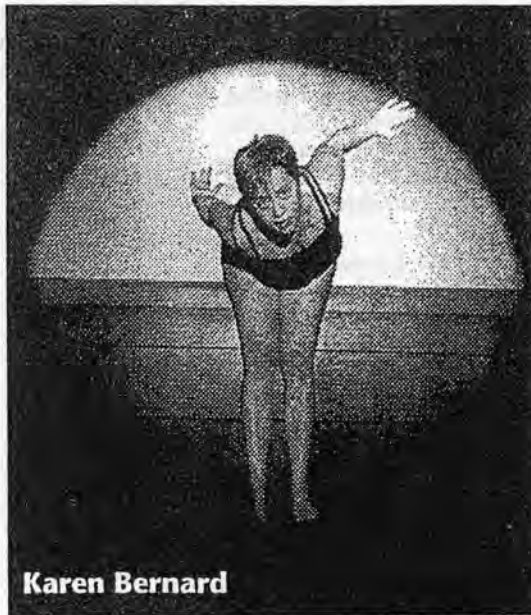
Fresh Tracks

Dance Theater Workshop's *Bessie Schönberg Theater*, 219 W 19th St between Seventh and Eighth Aves (924-0077). Subway: 1, 9 to 18th St; C, E to 23rd St. 8pm, \$15. The fall installment of Fresh Tracks, DTW's longest-running series, features work by Karen Bernard, Gerard Casel, Amy Cox, Kristi Spessard, Nancy Turano and Jon Zimmerman (see photo, right).



TRUE COLORS Karen Bernard
presents *Blue* at DTW Fri 26–Sun 28.

Photo: Carolina Kroon



Karen Bernard

Women on the Verve

AR
US

Since 1995 Studio 303 has united some of the wildest, innovative, skilled and cutting-edge performers for the Edgy Women series – and this year the edge is that much wider. Drag kings, contortionists and goddesses of all disciplines meet for two nights of fierce feminism, fabulous fury and simply kick-ass entertainment. Of the dozen pieces, Jinny J Jacinto twists the contortionist art from its Cirque du Soleil form to explore deeper, emotional regions. Hailing from New York City, and performance spaces like The Kitchen and PS 122, Karen Bernard dresses up two solo works...

Edgy Women VI, Fri and Sat, Mar 26 & 27, 372 Ste-Catherine W #303, 8:30 pm,

The New York Times

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 1998

THEATRE REVIEW

Vulnerable Behind the Sassy Roles

By JENNIFER DUNNING

aren Bernard is older and heavier than the dancer of popular image. She used rather than disguised her qualities in dark and brainy roles, set to popular music, that she danced on Thursday night at the New SoHo. The hourlong program, headed with Sandra Botnen and Ana Vega, had the invigorating color and energy of first-rate conversation. Ms. Bernard subtly explored concepts of femininity and social role-playing, making her points as much through stillness and awkward roll-and-crawling as through dance movement. In "Headphones, Heady, dache," she could have been any h-guy street-corner jiver, but mechanic's coveralls unzipped to reveal a woman's skimpy-black underwear.

"Dying for Lace," performed without a score, was an unnervingly acute portrait of depression. Ms. Bernard shifted seamlessly between defiant anger and flirtation in "Damn Your Eyes," as powerful as its accompaniment by Etta James. "It Could Have Been Different" was less evocation than theatrical tour de force, because of Liz Prince's stylish costume and the score, which juxtaposed drum music and versions of "A Boy Like That" by Selena and Scott Robinson, a wandering presence in the dance.

Two solos by Ms. Botnen, a Canadian choreographer and dancer of stunning imagination and physical control, were pure serendipity. She became an undersea creature in "Water." In "I Just Want Affection," she was a covert extrovert peeling off a stripper's crimson wrap and sequined dress to reach a wittily

stylized nudity.

Ms. Vega affectingly portrayed a woman as unformed as a statue not yet emerged from a sculptor's block of stone in Ms. Bernard's "Solo for Ana Vega," danced to music by Bill Obrecht. Severn Clay designed the atmospheric lighting.

The New York Times

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1995

DANCE REVIEW

Tapping and Rapping Through the Night

By JACK ANDERSON

Because the tiny Alterknit Theater at the Knitting Factory looks like a cabaret or coffeehouse rather than a conventional theater, it was wise of Karen Bernard and Jane Goldberg to present solos that resembled informal revue sketches when they danced there on Tuesday night.

Ms. Goldberg delightfully combined tap dancing with stand-up comedy in "Rhythm and Schmooze." Ms. Goldberg, who recently moved from New York to Miami Beach, was also a gracious hostess, serving the audience mango juice and Cuban cookies from Florida.

But her best gift to dance lovers was her jaunty tapping. As she tapped, she talked, touching on such topics as politics, Jewish holidays and Art Deco architecture in Miami Beach. When she recited antiwar slogans of the 1960's, her feet telegraphically beat out their rhythms in what she called "tapagrams." And she joked about her career and personal life. At one point, she re-

marked, "My biological clock is ticking so loudly I can hardly hear myself tapping." But everyone present surely heard her tapping very clearly. Ms. Goldberg might well call her little cabaret act "tap-rap."

Ms. Bernard, a modern dancer and performance artist, offered her own mixtures of movement and speech in "Strange Dear." Although she is a solidly built woman with a forceful stage presence, she appeared to portray someone who is increasingly overpowered by family memories in this comic, yet faintly melancholy piece.

In "Walking the Blues," a virtuosic study in shifting emotions, she made a multitude of personality changes, and in less than 10 minutes managed to be jaunty, aggressive, apprehensive, taunting, coy, gloating, prim and ecstatic.

The presentation was part of the Floating Archives series of Tuesday night dance performances, which continues through Oct. 31 at the Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard Street, TriBeCa. Each program features different dancers.

the village

VOICE

By Deborah Jowitt

Karen Bernard
Solo Dances
At Dia Center for the Arts
June 2 through 4

People tend to dance a lot these days—you know, hurl themselves around. Karen Bernard does not. She's a large woman, with an easy, unhurried manner, although not at all voluptuous or indulgent. In her short, lean constructions, choreography is often a matter of linked still images, as if a mild earthquake had jolted a statue into motion. The most minimal of three new solos is *Roy, Kd* [sic], *Gilbert and George*, and *Me* (directed, as were two of the other solos, by Eileen Kelly). Here, Bernard's small, slightly stiff gestures and poses, juxtaposed to "Crying" (written by Roy Orbison, performed by him and k.d. lang), seem as curiously sad as Gilbert and George's museum posing used to be: ordinariness as constriction, and vice versa.

Minimal in another way is the more fragmented *Blocks*. Bernard interrupts a careful grinding of her hips to walk over and check out a boombox that eventually does its stuff. Beside it is a tiny Ninja Turtle. Here are some other things Bernard does: almost manage a split, squeeze the turtle, crawl, walk in a square, walk an important diagonal, inch in a circle while sitting with her legs up in the air, ask, "Want to see me do something physical? Want to be?"

In *Work*, which Bernard performs in blue shirt and trousers and a long beige apron (by Liz Prince), repetition and precision render her machinelike. The call of the trumpet (played live by Wade Weast) and the restless ripple of the vibes (Steven Machamer) in Wendy Chambers's score seem to undermine the stultifying nature of this "work." Bernard's moves—her stiff marching, her clumsy turning leaps—are always circumscribed. After each spate of activity, she returns to neutral. Finally slowing down, she really does look like a windup toy running out of steam—or starting on a new career as a human being.

The compact program also included *Footsteps On The* (1992) and solo interludes by Machamer and by Weast. The lighting was by A. C. Hickox. I thought of the '60s, when such solos constituted a challenge to high-energy performing and virtuosic displays of dancing. In the context of today they're simply an alternative: mild, interestingly plotted statements with no axes to grind.

The New York Times

MONDAY, JUNE 7, 1993

Karen Bernard

*Dia Center for the Arts
155 Mercer Street
SoHo*

Karen Bernard is a big, forthright woman with an interest in nontraditional dance movement and a gift for capturing the essence of a gesture. The program of new and recent work that she presented on Friday night was full of curious but potent little solos that made refreshing use of Ms. Bernard's size and authoritative presence.

She opened the program with a new dance called "Blocks," set to music by Judy Dunaway, that introduced Ms. Bernard's characteristic bulky, sometimes heroic strides, turns, poses and falls. Her vocabulary is not pretty or large. But the movement has a personal integrity and self-awareness that make it as thought-provoking as the programs of dance, performance art and music by guest artists that Ms. Bernard and her New Dance Alliance produce at Dia.

Dressed in a long apron wrapped over her work shirt and pants, Ms. Bernard offered a continuous flow of

moves and gestures that hinted at a variety of occupations in her new "Work." The solo, danced to music by Wendy Chambers, ended with a mysterious winding-down.

In "Roy, Kd, Gilbert and George and Me," a new solo danced to mixed versions by Roy Orbison and K. D. Lang of the Orbison song, "Crying," Ms. Bernard could have been a figure stepping down from a Gilbert and George live sculpture. The touch of her hand to her cap was as important as her slow, Muybridge walk toward the audience, her gaze desolate but considering.

The program also included "Footsteps on The," a deconstruction of rock music. There were musical interludes by Steven Machamer on the vibraphone and Wade West on the trumpet and "Girls in Action," a dancing game for four little girls, Alex Wixon, Lacie Pulido, Djuna Da-Silva and Endomi Williamson. Eileen Kelly was the evening's director.

JENNIFER DUNNING

June 22, 1993•

the village VOICE

By Deborah Jowitt

Karen Bernard

Solo Dances

At Dia Center for the Arts

June 2 through 4

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2¢

I wanted to write a paragraph about women pulling cash out of their crotches. The only other lesbian I ever met who came from Bari, Italia, was a performer named Diviana Ingravallo. She could pick up twenty dollar bills with her labia. Nothing less than twenties.

Then, last year, Olga Tragant in her red-coated character who I think of as Anna Karenina, pulled a fistful of pennies out of her underwear, like out of a pocketbook. She snapped her underwear shut and showered the pennies on the floor. Last night, Karen Bernard pulled out flat bills. American money. There's a difference between pulling cash out of one's crotch, as a woman, than getting it tucked in, especially by another's hand.

--Annie Rachelle Lanzillotto



Karen Bernard in *Strange Deer*

photo: Niall Ruffalo

2¢

Money and sex are so intertwined as a symbol of power. Who has the power? How do women maneuver in a man's world? Is sexuality our *modus operandi*? Is our role to take care of and be taken care of? You think you can get through things by being pretty or being sexy, these are supposed to be the virtues, or tools, of women: how pretty, young, and sexy we are. Things still operate this way no matter how advanced we are! It's actually very confusing for me.

The idea is always in there: that the man is there to take care of us. By doing this ritual, this piece, doing it, and doing it, it is a taking control of these contradictions. Taking responsibility, ownership of my own power. Doing things for myself. My grandmother lost her husband early in their marriage and was on her own. My mother is an independant woman who played an important economic role in our family, but yearned for a father to take care of her. Her desire has been passed down to me.

The idea of working for men is almost like a turn on. Get paid the full worth of your services. Hell, I like doing it for free. Don't you think money is sexy? I want to get over this. You want to know something? So many people have so many problems with this money. They say take the money out of the piece. It's unnecessary. It's just another element. Take it out. Take it out. I love doing it over and over again.

--Karen Bernard

