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Performing Arts: Dance

KAREN BERNARD SHOWGIRLS

June 6, 2018

In preparation for Karen Bernard's *Showgirls*, Brooklyn Studios for Dance's cavernous hall welcomes us with a DIY set up of light sources – a white string along the floor upstage, some lamps stage right, and a projection of Bernard's Runway playing on loop in the space's small proscenium stage left, guarded by a wall of cardboard boxes, from behind which the titular girls emerge.

The cast of seasoned women takes great pleasure in their present forms, feeling and exposing aspects of their formally clothed bodies. They seem as spirits, each with a distinct life force, generated via distilled, slow-moving activity. Rachel Thorne Germond maintains a sly grin with glossed over eyes, peering out saucily from her strutting.

Jil Guyon, under a retro styling of buoyant jet-black hair, keeps pursed lips and pointed eyes, her surroundings a continual nonthreatening surprise. Lisa Parra, saved until the very end, glides like a satellite in roller-skates and a baby doll dress with the most well-mannered blankness emanating from her wide eyes. Bernard, like a study hall monitor, presides – lethargically antsy, seeking solace from some preoccupation that keeps her indirectly on guard and liable to briefly join her cohabiters while largely leaving them unsupervised.

Activity, like an old lawnmower, takes time to rev up to a plateau of sustained intensity before dissipating into idleness. Bernard, like a canine matador, has a series of pivot turns as well as a percussive session of dress swooshing. Guyon and Germond, occasionally paired, verbally cue each other for aerobic shimmying sessions.

Wearing down begets specialization. Bernard naps on a chaise through much of Guyon and Germond's performing, maintaining them in sleepy gravitation until they are reduced to floor bound thrashes, decrepit crawls, and incomplete poses. Bernard stirs, tossing and turning through sleeping positions until, unsatisfied, she builds a stack of pillows on which she descends to inchworms through the space. Parra, however, remains consistently serene in her spatial loops and stoic stare, from which all else are free to flounder.

Such immunity reveals the work's lack of performer hierarchy, leaving the space itself as the anchor. Surfaces are intermittently adorned with projections of Venetian architectural details and vintage glamor shots, recalling perhaps a vacation or a past life. Bernard, periodically roused by a red light, often situates her activity in the projector's beam, inspecting her shadow as one might their reflection to manifest herself in the image. When she slumbers, a slideshow of macarons and Aperol spritzes demonstrate the colorful pleasures of a somber lady in black who spends a solo uttering variations of the phrase, "I don't worry."

When projected upon, the wall of boxes embodies the buildings depicted. Cleanup becomes tender demolition, poignantly emblematic of glamor in decline. Their embrace of decline redefines it as a redirection of transformation. If architecture gets better with age, why can't women? As such, *Showgirls*, offers a blueprint for a constructive sort of objectification of women – as structures of resistance.

EYE ON THE ARTS, NY -- Jonathan Matthews