

Striking a Sexy Pose, Recalling Younger Days

By JOHN ROCKWELL

Should each part of a double bill complement or contrast with the other part? Is it fair to conjoin two individual artists in an inevitably comparative format?

On Friday at the Kitchen (repeated Saturday), the choreographer Tere O'Connor as curator paired Trajal Harrell with Karen Bernard. He explained himself by arguing that with both, the "singularity of their vision" allowed them "to create poetic connections between multiple layers of information." He somewhat undercut himself by identifying them as members of a group, but never mind.

It is true that both used video (the initial monitor being placed in exactly the same spot on the stage) and each has a personal voice. That said, Mr. Harrell won this particular battle of the bands, however tasteless it may be to think in such competitive terms. He made more telling poetic connections from a deeper, wider range of information.

Mr. Harrell is interested in voguing, the emulation of the weird, cantilevered sashay of fashion models on the runway, still especially popular among black and Latino gays. At the outset of his "Before Intermission" -- Mr. Harrell knew full well he was part of a double bill -- he showed video from an earlier work that more overtly evoked a fashion show.

Here the emulations were veiled in darkness and mystery. Dancers would appear and fade away, hinting at emotions deeply personal and also drawn from James Baldwin's novel "Giovanni's Room" and from Paul Schrader's film "American Gigolo," rather too extensive clips from which were shown on the video monitor.

Luke Wylie was an especially enigmatic, androgynous creature, with pigtails coiled like snakes, recalling some walk-on character from an early work of Robert Wilson. And Mr. Harrell's musical collage was wonderful in its noirish way.

Ms. Bernard has been around a long time, and in her solo for herself, "Totally in Love" (dated as 1995-2006), she offered a valentine to her husband and family. (She "created" it, but Maureen Brennan was listed as director.) The video was good, the music (Owen Chapman, Frank Sinatra, OutKast) cute and Ms. Bernard charming about recalling her youth with her un-self-consciously dumpy middle-aged body. But it all rather paled next to Mr. Harrell's compulsively sexy insinuations.

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