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Performing Arts: Dance

KAREN BERNARD

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Karen Bernard's Lakeside is, at the very least in title and chronology, a companion to 2019's Poolside, my missing of which has me unfortunately unable speak further to their relationship. I did, in the previous year, see and write about Showgirls, performed in 2018 at the currently relocating Brooklyn Studios for Dance. A testament to the way Bernard's imagery sticks with you, seeing Lisa Parra's wide gaze and blank smirk again in Lakeside immediately brought me back to her solo on roller skates two years prior – a sort of familiarity typically experienced with dance companies seen regularly over consecutive years.

This aptitude for lasting impressions can be attributed to the way Bernard unfolds moments in time. Lakeside begins with a search. Armed with flashlights, Bernard and Parra alternate between poised seeking and resting in sagging postures in an interrogative interplay of light and movement that removes the sense that Douglas Dunn's Studio might have any walls. It does, however, have mirrors, which allows their respective rays to bounce about the space in topsy-turvy zigzags, illuminating the slightest glimpses of their features for only so long.

What they are looking for has, meanwhile, lain right below their setup of two foldup lawn chairs. A costume created for Bernard in the late 70's, they discover a tiny dress in yellow and black segments. With no sentiment towards its history or its cuteness, Bernard and Parra patiently probe it – folding and unfolding – like an autopsy.

Removing her translucent outer layers, Bernard initiates what is ultimately a rather classical structure of traded off solos, concluded by a reconvening duet. Each solo finds each performer engaging the garment not so much as costumery, but in a fluid puppetry, which, despite the performer operating the garment, blurs the notion of which entity is actually playing the role of puppeteer and puppet.

Bernard no longer fits in the dress. She compensates by wearing it like a bib with sleeves. In it, she is transported to a time of childhood dance recitals while maintaining the rage of lived womanhood. The juxtaposition, often attempted by recent college grads, is truly unsettling from a performer who has actually put in the years. As she shimmies and kicks, her smile wavers, emanating rabid growls until her routine is done.

Parra is comparatively serene in expression, though physically demonstrates a similar distance of dynamics. She can wear the dress, and shows this ability off through a slow sensuality, interrupted by clunky episodes. She slowly shakes off the dress to match Bernard in sparkles for a redemptive closing. As they approach the machine projecting vibrant colors onto them, they mutter suggestions at each other on a downward trajectory toward a final resting place.

EYE IN THE ARTS, NY — Jonathan Matthews