The Dance Enthusiast’s Brand of Review/Thoughts on What We See

IMPRESSIONS: New Dance Alliance and Chashama present WORKSession In Four Walls at 1 Brooklyn Bridge Park

Work by multidisciplinary movement-based artists, Karen Bernard, Lisa Parra, Rachel Thorne Germond, and Jil Guyon

WORKSession In Four Walls brings together four multidisciplinary movement-based artists; Karen Bernard, Lisa Parra, Rachel Thorne Germond, and Jil Guyon. Finding common ground through the exploration of age, autobiography, and memory, their goal is to inform each other and generate ideas that wouldn’t otherwise arise from working alone. Although
movement is incorporated in each work, these artists rely more heavily on visual, audio, and theatrical modalities.

Performed in a small, unused storefront across the street from Brooklyn Bridge Park, the space is provided by Chashama and is surprisingly bare bones with only a concrete floor, fresh drywall, and exposed pipes. At the center of the room is a bench and several chairs. There are no guidelines to denote each performer’s quadrant, but near each corner of the room there is a drastically different setup. Turning my head about, I feel like I’m behind the camera of an old movie set, panning from scene to scene. I immediately notice a woman in black undergarments standing stoically against the left wall—immobile yet completely in character. Has the show already begun? We are told her piece will be performed last and because it has no end, we are free to leave when we want. We are also encouraged to reorient ourselves in the space for each piece.

Karen Bernard in Device Not Detected; photo by Julie Lemberger

Wall 1:
Device Not Detected
Creation and performance: Karen Bernard
Creative development consultants: Jil Guyon and Lisa Parra
Costumes: Karen Bernard and Hwa Park

The first work, Device Not Detected by Karen Bernard, takes place along the back wall of the room with a simple projector, mat, and a speaker set up. Bernard rises from a chair she’s
been patiently sitting in and begins to speak about aging and, more specifically, about her contemplations of getting to the floor and back up again. She does this slowly and carefully. Her movement, though not smooth and swift, is practiced and thoughtful. Through these repetitive motions of falling and raising, we feel the impacts of time and the struggle of acceptance. The ability to get up again and again, is something a young body takes for granted and an older body celebrates.

Wall 2:

*Family Reunion_side 2*

Creation and performance: Lisa Parra
Costumes: Hwa Park and Lisa Parra
Voice coach: Alicia Ohs

The lights darken and we turn our attention to the right wall for *Family Reunion_side 2* by dancer [Lisa Parra](#). A standout of the evening, she wears a long black skirt that swooshes on the concrete as she paces to and from her laptop. When she pushes a button, the computer plays back looped audio recordings of a family reunion. Interjecting every few seconds, Parra boldly impersonates snippets of the sing-song quality of her family's speech patterns. She uses her voice skilfully and accompanies each sound with equally vivid facial expressions. It’s as if her family is speaking through her, their voices echo in the tempo and quality of her steps and gestures. I could watch and listen all day while contemplating the inherent movement in every sound wave, and the inherent sound in every movement.
Wall 3: 
*Memoir/Art/Dance*
Performance, installation, paintings and drawings, text, sound collage and video projections:
Rachel Thorne Germond

*Memoir/Art/Dance* by Rachel Thorne Germond, is memorable for its elaborate installation—a tent with all manner of personal objects strewn about, a projection on the wall, and accompanying sound. Overloaded with personal effects and details without much context, we are read excerpts from Germond’s diary about a time in her life when everyone thought she was crazy for wanting to pursue a career in dance. Suddenly it makes sense.

Program notes reveal Germond began as a visual artist, receiving a BFA in photography and printmaking, before becoming a choreographer. Her paintings and drawings are projected on the wall as she moves about her mind palace, a tangible representation of a challenging time in her life, filled with fond memories.
Jil Guyon in WIDOW; photo by Julie Lemberger
Wall 4:
WIDOW
Performance installation
Creation and performance: Jil Guyon
Video stills: Valerie Barnes — documentation from performance intervention inside the Oculus/NYC, 2022
Digital prints: Jil Guyon — from the Études series, 2022

The last piece, WIDOW by Jil Guyon, is a statement of contradictions. Simultaneously short and long—the work “ends” as instantaneously as it “begins”. Not long after the lights illuminate her wall do we hear, “thank you all for coming.” That's it?

Guyon moves imperceptibly slow, like a Butoh artist. We begin to move about the space, inspecting the other artists’ walls as she retreats to her corner, slumping melancholically behind a large pipe. Her black undergarment is attached to a huge sculpture of marled black cloth that is strung up, twisted, and woven through the exposed pipes on the walls like a cobweb. Her performance is unique because it begins before we enter the space yet appears to never end, even after we exit. The work is eternal, as is the widow’s loss and grief.

WORKSession, a unique immersive experience unlike any other, begs the question; how much of a work must be movement-based for it to be considered dance?

WORKSession In Four Walls is the third iteration of the experimental performance project, which was first presented by New Dance Alliance (NDA), as WORKSESSION in August 2021, and WORKSESSION 2.0 in July 2022. NDA is a nonprofit whose mission is to support experimental movement-based artists in marginalized communities by providing residencies, performance, and networking opportunities.