

Radiohole, PRELUDE festival highlights contemporary multidisciplinary artists through
Exposure

By Erianne Lewis

Dressed in a red velour jumpsuit, church hat, green fanny pack and wig with tight ringlet gray curls, Fantasy Grandma entered from stage right singing “Christmastime, oh Christmastime ” to command the attention of the room.

What followed was a brief introduction and the performance of a self-composed birthday song about sex by the exuberant host. A persona created by Cara Francis roughly 13 years ago, Francis told me a couple days after the show, that Fantasy Grandma is an attempt to “build an elder that was accepting and loving and less problematic than some of mine.”

To Francis, Fantasy Grandma represents a “magical genderless elder,” who is meant to showcase the beauty of the aging process and brings a funny, high-spiritedness to the room.

There were seven performers who participated in *Exposure*, the group show presented by the experimental and punchy ensemble, Radiohole.

This year marked the 20th anniversary of the free, 15-day PRELUDE festival created by City University of New York. *Exposure* opened the festival at the Collapsible Hole (located at 155 Bank Street), in the West Village. At 6 p.m., nearly an hour before the performances began, the roughly seventy audience members were given cheetah-printed wristbands and ushered in to sit on risers.

I spoke individually with five of the performers a couple days after the show to talk through their performance and backgrounds.

Peter Mills Weiss, a 35-year-old white man with a scruffy brown beard, performed first. His excerpt from an upcoming show created with his collaboration partner, Julia Mounsey, and fellow visual artist Matt Romein, centered around the relationship between digital bodies and emptiness.

Modeling an all-black one piece with fidget spinner-looking pieces, Weiss got into a peculiar discussion with the crowd about Toad from Mario Kart. Weiss presented his theory, backed by Reddit posts and a statement from Nintendo programmers, that the mushroom shaped object on top of Toad is his head and not a hat (a point the audience was previously divided on.) Weiss connected this discovery to emptiness surrounding digital bodies and the unknown.

Haunting music played as the next performers, Kristal Baldoz and Dante Migone-Ojeda, dressed in muted tones, circled one another until eventually embracing in contact. In the performance of Baldoz’s “Set, Standard,” they hit each other with bone-dry clay slabs, while barely uttering full sentences, during a staged argument. This culminated in an emotionally charged performance. Baldoz serves as department administrator of Tisch’s Initiative for Creative Research full-time.

A native of Delano, California, the location of the grape labor strike during the 1970s, Baldoz cites her strong heritage as a Filipino American woman as inspiration for much of her work.

“I think labor has been a really big interest in my movement practice and like monotonal repetitive movement, which is kind of a homage to the kind of actions that happen in the fields or this kind of laborious work that has to be done,” Baldoz said after the performance.

During a seven-week residency at the Chautauqua Institution in Chautauqua, a small lake town in upstate New York, Baldoz said the idea to create a fight piece came to her. In “Set, Standard” Baldoz chooses to fight a visual artist who changes with each performance, centering on “objecthood, personhood, especially within the Asian feminine body.”

Toward the peak of the performance, fellow performer and writer Alex Tartarsky entered the work as a live commentator while the fighting continued in the background. Baldoz admitted to me that she relinquished control to Tartarsky during the performance, allowing her to not only critique the performance, but also change the direction of it in whatever way she’d like.

Tartarsky chose to ramble about the lack of instructions, comment on the brawling occurring behind her and bring the audience in and out of the piece by breaking the third wall.

A spanking and shimmy by 33-year-old Tartarsky, who is known for her intentionally bizarre performances, signified the transition from her commentator role in Baldoz’s piece to performing in her own one woman show. She pulled out a comically oversized neon pink fur coat from a cheesy “I heart NYC” tote bag.

Tartarsky stripped down to nothing but flesh tone knee high stockings, which she stretched to cover her breasts, and her brown hair pulled into a tight bun with a white scrunchie. In a monologue, she talked about the difficulty of making money as an artist and her mother’s negative perceptions of her work. Tartarsky ended her shock-inducing performance by eating Life cereal with oat milk out of a skull-shaped bowl, then giving the illusion that she was shitting it out in a large orange pail (once again donning the oversized pink coat).

Up next was 33-year-old Blaze Ferrer, a full-time interdisciplinary dance performer and creator. His piece, “Dickbitter,” consisted of a lawnmower, butt plug, an American Eagle jockstrap, red fringe streamers and the artist dancing around in a circle for roughly five minutes and whirling a long red wig on his head. Ferrer wanted audience members to leave his piece with a “notion of unserious sexuality,” he said to me after the performance.

“I strongly believe in not talking down to an audience and just giving it sort of your fullest erotic and neurotic idea to its fullest execution,” Ferrer said. “And I think people get it from there, I think in terms of the butt plug stuff, you know, playing with textures, playing with sort of like imagistic, power with the mylar and that, but also grounding in this sort of like body. Sort of explicit, sexualized idea that is actually desexualized as time sort of goes on in the work.”

After an intermission, former sound designer and pastry chef at Jean Georges, Kristin Worrall, commenced a fifteen-minute culinary performance resembling a TV cooking show segment,

titled “The Recipe.” Donning a white apron and chef head scarf, which her short blonde hair peeked out from, she summoned two audience members to help her whip up a pear mousse dish. Sample cups with pears, meringue and dried milk chips were handed to audience members to try as Worrall went through the recipe. Justin Timberlake “Rock Your Body” played through the speakers as the audience was instructed to try the pear piece first.

Worrall first brought “The Recipe” to stages in 2015, after a stint as a pastry chef in fine dining. She said she enjoys the “juxtaposition” of having anecdotes while performing her recipes, because of the “sillier” and “meditative” nature of it.

Worrall’s anecdotes at Saturday’s show included describing her experience at a sex club in Chelsea a few years ago, with a few comically timed cooking instruction interruptions. The performance ended with Worrall grabbing an already made mousse from under the table and handing out some to a couple audience members to the tune of Prince’s “Kiss.”

Dressed as a pregnant Mickey Mouse complete with a scarily accurate vocal impression, 31-year-old Hannah Kallenbach, originally from a conservative Christian suburb of Kansas City, Kansas, closed out the night by taking a pregnancy test and “peeing” on the audience from a water bottle located under the first row of seats (to determine if Mickey was pregnant). To Kallenbach’s surprise, there was a young child on the second row, who got upset because she believed the “pee” was real.

After a quick apology, Kallenbach continued the performance, in which sad Mickey waited for the results of the pregnancy test, while talking to the audience about the rocky relationship between Kallenbach and her father. The Mickey voice was soon dropped as Kallenbach proceeded to give birth (surprise, the test came back positive) to a 22-inch plush doll with the help of two audience members elevating her feet in the air.

With black squared glasses, a blue hat, yellow Mickey Mouse ears, a Disney shirt, blue cargo shorts, gray sneakers, brown hair and light blue eyes, the doll, which she remarked resembled her father, cost Kallenbach \$153 total. She hasn’t spoken to her father in over two years, Kallenbach admitted to the crowd, since she came out as lesbian.

In an emotional ending, Kallenbach addressed the doll as if it were her actual father, asking why he didn’t love her and why he never called. She began to tear up and ultimately put the Mickey head back on, choking the doll while eerily singing. Kallenbach told me she hopes her performance causes people to think about their personal lives and gives them a space to do so. Kallenbach said she found it “powerful” when people approached her after the show to discuss their private experiences and how they resonated with her performance.

“Like the reason why we make art, to me, is this like connection between people,” Kallenbach said. “There’s universal experiences, and there’s sometimes if you put a lot of detail on it, and make it about you, and you make ‘I’ statements, another person’s allowed in, and they can experience your feelings and maybe think and feel something for themselves.”

Afterwards, the Radiohole team hosted a socializing hour, to allow the audience to speak with performers.

“One of the things that is most important to me is just this feeling of community and feeling of like, inviting people in and inviting them to stay,” Maggie Hoffman of Radiohole said. “This feeling of like, just everybody being present and together and not being pretentious or not being you know, behind some fancy wall that you don't get to see.”

CUNY Ph.D. student in theater and performance, Jess Applebaum, said the performances reminded her of the importance “of theater performance that is underrepresented and often not seen in the arts and that there is an honesty ... an energy and true relationship between the performers and the audience that is missed when we are in the theater world.”

Source List:

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