

dk pan: bridging dichotomy

Judith van Praag

"my mother my father" is the title of a theater installation and performance series presented at the new SOIL Art Gallery (located in the rent controlled artists' haven in the renovated Tashiro Kaplan building).

Borrowing from the "black box theater", which allows for easy changeovers –from arena, to thrust or end wall and visa versa– but also and perhaps more importantly, responsible for greater intimacy between performers and audience, SOIL's Art Gallery now houses a "white box theater".

The instigator to this intriguing adventure is performance/ butoh artist and founder of the performance art network, dk pan. The lower case letters are no accident, dk adheres to email etiquette, where capitals stand for yelling and besides that, he just likes the way print work looks when no words or names are capitalized.

He (dk that is, but I must admit, I have a problem starting a sentence with a lower case letter) asked participants of his project to play with the premise "my mother my father". The premise is combined with the idea of bridging dichotomy, which in a way starts at birth, when a child is born out of two people. "Show, or at least take an aim at ending what divides – parents and children in particular– people in general, from one another."

During the two years that dk pan worked on this project, two peers of the artist lost a parent. At age 32 dk pan is aware there's no time like the present to communicate with one's parents.

"The world doesn't exist in dichotomy, the project is a way to reconcile differences," said dk pan.

With this in mind, dk gave adult artists permission to be sentimental and personal in their approach of the subject matter.

A monitor in the window of the SOIL Art Gallery shows butoh performers -acting on the theme "my mother my father", inviting you inside. Wide steps lead to the top of platforms for seating, placed on a double diagonal in the original rectangular gallery space.

There's a "sea of salt", 2500 pounds of -food grade- crystalline substance, connecting the stage floor with the back stage area. Through a triangular opening in the back drop you can see a wall of white covered books, collaborator Chris Engman's tribute to his father.

From an opening in the intimately low ceiling, work on video by Kaleb Hagan-Kerr, Robb Kunz, Sara Murá, dk Pan, Tzaddi and Ishan Vernallis is projected onto the white waves. No image is ever the same. Every footstep, every hand print, any touch at all, distorts or changes everything. The way all of us are touched by interaction, or lack thereof, with other people.

The work on video by dk pan shows his parents' history (and therefore his); their youth in Korea; his mother from the north, his father from the south, dk pan's birth in South Korea in 1972, the family's immigration to the US when he was four. His makes one of the 1.5 generation, not quite 1st nor 2nd generation, yet with only partial first hand ties with the old country.

Our conversation halted while we listened to dk pan's mother singing -a Korean version of an American gospel song- in a beautiful operatic voice. The artist's own figure dissolved into that of the sonar image of his niece, daughter of his brother and Swedish sister-in-law. The child's birth in itself the result of a bridged dichotomy.

Other video presentations are equally compelling, personal documents, given an extra dimension by the way they are projected.

It's on this same floor, in the salt, that live performances take place. On opening night I saw butoh artist Sheri Brown "wondering where she came from". With total muscle control she moved through all stages of (her mother's?) life. From baby

"amazing daughter of God", to "mental health care" suffering adolescent and cello playing adult. And perhaps I only imagined all that. But I was trying to understand (bridge the dichotomy), and so seemed the rest of the audience, for we all sighed with relieve when Sheri ended her performance, "birthing" herself with the aid of a hoop, and thank goodness with a smile. Butoh ain't that dark a dance anymore!

"What remains of traditional butoh today, is the spirit and truth seeking, sociopolitical, confrontational and experimental "butoh punk", said dk pan, who himself studied this movement art form for the past seven years.

Kaleb Hagan-Kerr, a young man in a black three piece suit introduced us to the memory of the two fathers whose names he carries. He clearly took dk pan's invitation to heart, his deliverance, a step removed from standup comedy, was sentimental and personal. So much so, that again I was glad to see the performer smile after relating his(s)tory.

Until the end of December, SOIL's white theater box is open to the public to view works on video from Thursday-Sunday from 12 noon-5 PM. On December 18 and 19 at 8 PM there will be a poetry/dance performance by Laura Corsiglia and Margit Galanter with Jessica Kenney. On December 26 at 8 PM Maureen Freehilll, Monte Merrick and Ishan Vernallis will present a butoh/ poetry performance.

Don't miss this opportunity to come close and up front with artist and performers. One advice, check your socks for holes before you go!

"my mother my father" december 2-26, 2004. a theater installation by dk pan in collaboration with inphase productions & chris engman 112 3rd Avenue South, Seattle WA 98104. contact: pan@graffiti.net or 206.940.6079

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