

DANCE

Preview

Climate control

In her new installation, Yanira Castro tracks a love affair through the seasons **By Gia Kourlas**



WINTER WONDERLAND Pamela Vail and Nancy Ellis, right, perform *hiver*.

Yanira Castro began working on her site-specific dance installation *Cartography: haru, verano, autumn, hiver* at the end of 2000, and there's a good reason why it took so long to arrive. Castro, 31, wasn't in search of a decent idea—she needed the right venue. An ordinary theater was out of the question. "I wanted a very particular space, but I had to find it," she says. The solution was the massive Old American Can Factory, a six-building artists' complex near the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn.

"I had to woo Nathan Elbogen, the director of the space, because it's not a typical theater, where you put in a proposal and it's accepted or not," she says. "I had to get him excited, so that he would invite me in. He's been generous about letting me do almost anything I want. Can I paint this white? Can I hang fabric? Can I staple sheets of plastic and staple to your floor? You can't do that in a theater, yet he's letting me."

Essentially, the hour-long work, composed of four duets, tells the story of a love affair that runs its

course during the four seasons (titled, successively, in Japanese, Spanish, English and French). Each intricate setting, created by lighting designer Roderick Murray, evokes an individual seasonal landscape. And audience members be warned: walking from site to site is part of the show.

In *haru*, which takes place in a 15,000-square-foot space, sheets of plastic hang from the ceiling to represent rain. Shocking yellow fluorescent lights illuminate dancers in the sexy *Verano*, and *autumn* features leaves embedded in a Plexiglas floor, with many more falling in the background via a video projection. Fog transforms the space into a wooded paradise. And in *hiver*, the audience sits in chairs on one of the building's rooftops. Slide projections by multidisciplinary artist Kevin Kwan resemble an abstracted stained-glass window.

The costumes, by designer Albert Sakhai, are no less flamboyant. In *verano*, Castro and Nancy Ellis wear black fishnets and corsets that

cut off seductively just below their bare breasts; *hiver* features Ellis and Pamela Vail in white floor-length gowns and shredded red tights.

Castro's seasons come to life as much in her quiet, intimate movement as in the setting and wardrobe. Such emotionally charged duets mark a departure in her work, which until now has been focused on dance-theater. "I was entering a different period in terms of making dances," she says. "I've been making group pieces for awhile, and I felt like I was losing why I was moving. I was making dances to make dances; I had six dancers and felt like I had to use them. These are not the reasons why you should ever make a dance. I felt like I needed to get down to real basics, so I started making duets. It was like a shedding of the skin."

In *autumn*, a subtle and haunting investigation of what happens when love begins to disintegrate, Heather Olson and Marya Wethers sit on the floor with their legs and arms tangled around one another. Much of the duet's intensity is rooted in the performers' gazes, but the choreography began in a wholly different vein. "I had all this furious movement with very intricate footwork," she recalls. "There was a lot of momentum. I just kept looking at it and going, So what? So you're moving big and it's fun—but why? There are so many people already doing this."

She started over, this time experimenting with a slow vocabulary. "I once read that in Butoh the reason to move slowly is for your body to catch up to your brain," she says. "I was moving slowly to try to find why I wanted to move. The goal was to slow everything down. That has been the life of all of these pieces—to try to find what was real and true, and I feel like that's freed me up."

Although Castro never choreographs autobiographical dances, the idea behind *Cartography* was sparked by a relationship. "I had just broken up with somebody I had been with for ten years, and it was a way to honor it," she says. "It wasn't a horrible breakup; we just realized it was time to quit. Strangely enough, as I was making the piece, I fell in love with someone else. It's spring for me right now! Actually, we've gone through the summer part. Let's just hope we don't get to autumn."

Yanira Castro + Company performs at the Old American Can Factory Thursday 24 through Saturday 26.