



Photo by Julieta Cervantes

Luke Miller (audience watching)

A Pregnant Dream

"Center of Sleep" takes an audience through continual change

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"Center of Sleep" is Yanira Castro's latest performance experiment in live audio, spacial carving and audience movement, a piece apparently about the fleeting beauty and narcissism of youth, the conflictedness of domestic life and the serious transformation of pregnancy, in a womblike soundscape.

People with microphones and instruments of sound and music are the first visible performers in a stage transformed into half-spaces by movable panels that are alternately translucent and reflective.

Eventually, gradually, the audience wandering through the stage gravitates to four naked dancers doing odd things almost offstage. The card passed out to entering audience — "Assurances for an Audience: No one will touch you. No one will ask anything of you. You are safe. Do as you please." — becomes immediately ironic, as clearly the performers need to trust the audience.

Half-opaque plastic sheeting fuels curiosity as the four nude people congregate in close quarters and become a strange tribe, chanting/taunting "we are beautiful. . ." Then they each emerge to choose clothing from an amorphous pile, and structure largely becomes irrelevant. Other than a brief, ambiguously emotional scripted scene repeated in variations of roles and speaking speed, the rest of the evening could be completely improvised. The recurring pattern of boy-girl pairing occasionally gives the piece a coupled-life-at-home feel, but often these pairings are playful and tentative enough to feel like new love.

After the four couplers (Peggy Cheng, Luke Miller, Heather Olson, Joseph Paulson) have left, a very pregnant woman joins the audience and quickly becomes the object of attention because she is wearing no clothes. Externally silent, she gives an almost confrontational solo to the loud accompaniment of vacuum cleaners throughout the stage and ends the piece simply, by walking up some stairs to lie down on a raised platform, leaving the audience in the same state in which it began, curious and slightly confused.

"Center of Sleep" does seem to be about confronting expectations more than resolving questions, and in that sense it works well. It is mostly seamless, with little bits of audio or interaction or danced anger sticking around after it is over. One beauty of "Sleep" is that watching other audience members watching the piece can be just as compelling as watching the performers. The imperceptibly shifting audio space and the ambiguous physical space of the piece, along with nakedness and strange interactions, feel just like a nightmare or a dream.