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SOCIAL CALENDAR Installation Art

Mapping relationships across industrial space

by Brian McCormick

In the middle of western Brooklyn near the Gowanus Canal (an area yet to be gentrified but just 10 minutes from great restaurants), there is a maze-like industrial complex called the Old American Can Factory. A host of visual and performing artists have set up studios in this 130,000 square foot structure, and in a site-specific dance installation called *Cartography*, Yanira Castro + Company capitalized on the unique character of its many spaces.



The performance (seen October 24) was composed of four duets—*haru*, *verano*, *autumn*, *hiver*—each evoking a season as a metaphor for the stages of a love affair. Ms. Castro and her collaborators created strong designs for each of the seasons, and each experience had a distinct aura. Like a good songwriter's album about a love affair, Ms. Castro's look back doesn't brush off the infatuation, or gloss over the bad times, but celebrates each stage for what it was, not just how it ended. The most

fascinating aspect of the work was how the spatial relations between audience and performer changed from one season to the next, reflecting the inner emotional life of the couple.

From the lobby, the audience was led into the street, and in through the alley, up the stairs in building A to the second floor warehouse. In this huge space with a floor made of reconstituted wood board and a very low ceiling crisscrossed by trestles, sheets of clear cellophane plastic (saran wrap) hung around the performance area like a curtain of spring rain. Dressed in white vest tops and skirts made of two layers of light green, Pamela Vail, and Jan Schollenberger depicted the innocence of young love through the supple movement. Bouncy leaps in interweaving circles mirrored the angelic harp music. Simple gestures—like holding hands—and repeating patterns gave *Haru*, (*Spring*) the semblance of a mating ritual.

Verano, (*Summer*) was set in the chapel, a long, narrow space dressed in white with yellow fluorescent lights along the bottom of the performance area. Dressed in tight black mesh bathing suits, Nancy Ellis and Ms. Castro waited, leaning back on their elbows, topless, as the audience filed in. To an apprehensive score of trombone trills, they twist, slide, and thrust in unison, stone-faced, untouchable, but sexually charged.

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The combination of visuals and music was reminiscent of hallucinations from Ken Russell's 1980 film *Altered States*.

The most engaging section was the third duet, *Autumn*, danced by Heather Olson and Marya Wethers to music for clarinet. A video projection created shadows of falling leaves on a floor of plexiglass over fallen foliage, on which the two, dressed in earthtone body suits and ripped stockings, lay wrapped in each others' limbs. The intricate choreography and the intimacy of the space—the tiny Dental Lab in the cellar of building D—created an emotional depth that was unseen in the other duets. Surrounded by the audience, the two joined, pushed, and grabbed each other in complex embraces seen from every angle. The performative elements that Ms. Olson and Ms. Wethers brought to bear aroused a deeper curiosity about these entangled lovers. They ended facing away, separated, draped in robes.

For *Hiver (Winter)*, the audience was led outside onto the roof. At a great distance from the audience, Ms. Ellis and Ms. Vail—in windy white dresses, candy cane red tights, and pigtailed wrapped in white—danced in unison, to a melancholy cello, at a distance from each other. Eventually, they drifted off to their own phrases, and sometimes the action interplayed. Finally, they shifted back into unison, a slow, definitive march toward the end, together.

The original music was composed by William J. Grabek Jr. Lighting and installations were created by Roderick Murray with visuals by Kevin Kwan. Albert Sakhai designed the costumes.