



BWW Review: BRIDGMAN|PACKER Pack Sex and Art Into 3-D Renderings

by Juan Michael Porter II July 20, 2016



Myrna Packer and Art Bridgman in "Voyeur"
Photo Credit: Tyler Silver

If we've been here before, then why aren't the returns diminishing? The sequence repeats itself all night long in continuous loops and yet **the eye never wanders. To the contrary one is drawn in deeper with each new repetition.** Is it the weather-beaten beauty of the performers and the total investment with which they infuse every gesture? Is it the fusion of technology, holograms, and art? Looking around at the audience in The Sheen Center on July 13th, 2016, one is taken by the fact that the patrons are mature in age and completely in sync with this new mode of technology. Going off of appreciation alone, it seems that there is not a luddite in the room for this multimedia spectacle of art that would not look out of place at Coachella. **This is art that "younger audiences" think of when they ask for something cool.**

Created by long time partners Art Bridgman and Myrna Packer, "Remembering What Never Happened" and "Voyeur" fused the idea of interacting with memories - both recent and far flung - in real time to compose a portrait of a couple in climax. "Climax" because what has come before has placed these two at the breaking point where the future is up for grabs; anything and everything might happen and the anticipation keeps one on the edge of the seat at all times. It is possible to take a more abstract view of the relationship between these two. It could be that the man and woman - played with swaggering verve by Mr. Bridgman and sensual heat by Ms. Packer - were simply bodies moving in space that could not resist coming back to each other

over and over again. With "Voyeur" - which used a film of repeated encounters, throughout which the performers wandered and interacted in echo or response - this notion of two bodies with a magnetic charge for one another transcended the abstract through the mournful approach taken by the two. There is never a moment of reproach, though one can see in the



Myrna Packer and Art Bridgman in "Voyeur"
Photo Credit: Tyler Silver

ginger manner that Mr. Bridgman takes Ms. Packer in his arms and in her brief retreat before allowing him to do so - that there are hurt feelings here. We never see the cause - this is a world of "effect" - and the results are entrancing. The choreography is more movement and staging than it is technical dance. There are lifts, bends, swipes of the body, crouches, sharp knee raises, and body half battements for Ms. Packer. There could be more movement and greater invention to its deployment and yet in the bodies of these two seasoned performers the minimalism is enough. It is more than enough; to have more would distract from the message that memory is more than ephemeral.



Myrna Packer and Art Bridgman in "Remembering What Never Happened"
Photo Credit: Bridgman|Packer Dance

Transient thought and fleeting memory never come to mind in the opening concert piece, "Remembering What Never Happened". The simple conceit is that a person moves and then a 3-D rendering is projected next to that person, sometimes in canon, sometimes in real time. It sounds like a thing out of science fiction and it felt that way. The result was that I started to look to the echo of the human even as I connected with the "soul in the machine". Seeing Ms. Packer dance with her projections called to mind Medea conjuring magic to assist Jason and his Argonauts. There is something slightly wicked in the way she carves through the air with her body. It could be her smirk that is not quite a smirk; more likely it is that she clearly revels in dancing with her sister selves. Whatever the answer, I felt that I got to know her better in seeing her projections dance around her; reflection allowed for greater impact. With Mr. Bridgman what you saw was what you got. This was not unpleasant; if anything it helped to ground the proceedings while allowing Ms. Packer to unleash her orgiastic fervor without unbalancing the proceedings. These two are to be applauded for refining their work unto the scintilla. Though I found the ending of "Never" wonderful, I could argue that the piece had a more satisfying false ending during which the two came together, descended to the floor, and rolled over one another as their afterimages splashed upon them in waves; here, the projections became frayed and more impressionistic. It was like seeing the spirit of the movement come apart and take to the sky even as the flesh engaged in what felt like sex. This was the action and the memory combining to beautiful release: the action of flesh made atmosphere.

Beyond the fascination of advanced technology, how did this team keep the audience rapt for nearly two and a half hours? A world of projections, repetitive movement, and fine performances amounted to so much more than the sum of their parts during this evening. Why was watching this work so much more satisfying than the more acrobatic and athletic exertions I experience every other night? I won't condescend to sing the praise of "age"; there are plenty of older artists whose work doesn't come within striking distance of the fascination of what Mr. Bridgman and Ms. Packer have created. What makes them special is their sexy wit and intelligent design. Let's have more of this in the dance world, please.

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