

THE DO LIST

# 'D.I.R.T Festival' Resists Land Grab and Trump Agenda



Lisa Kusanagi in '16 Day Return Policy', one of the pieces in this year's 'D.I.R.T. Festival' ( Photo: Victor Blanco)

With Dance Mission Theater losing its longstanding home on 24th Street as the inexorable gentrification of the Mission district marches on, the third annual *D.I.R.T. Festival of Dance in Revolt(ing) Times*, a political dance festival hosted by Dance Mission, is taking its theme of “Holding Our Ground” seriously.



The theme speaks eloquently not just to the issue of real estate, but also to that of political resistance. If the performance I attended last weekend -- barely 24 hours after the defeat of the Trump Administration's bid to "repeal and replace" Obamacare, and the same day a "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) rally in southern California turned violent -- is anything to go by, the mood at *D.I.R.T.* this coming weekend will be equally strident and feisty.

The diverse artists assembled for *D.I.R.T.* channel their own anger, fears, frustrations and joys into physical acts -- some of provocative beauty. These deserve a life beyond that afforded by the brief, small-scale festival. Though much of the program would very likely make the MAGA crowd see red.



Dexandro "D" Montalvo's 'Repealed' (Photo: Andy Mogg)

With a work titled *Repealed*, choreographer Dexandro “D” Montalvo plunges into the healthcare fracas, to the sonorities of industrial techno interspersed with recent soundbytes from the likes of senators Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders denouncing the Republicans’ travesty of a healthcare proposal.

Montalvo’s dancers enact a community struggling to care for each other as, one by one, they fall ill. Remarkably, even when racked with consumption, they manage the most physically heroic moves – whipping pirouettes and nervy group lifts. The community is decimated at the end. The outcome suggests that the lifeline furnished by the Trump Administration’s failure to repeal and replace is tenuous, and that what Americans have now by way of healthcare coverage remains broken.

Environmental issues and tribal rights are at the heart of a couple of other works in this year's festival. In *In the Name of Her*, choreographer and dancer Natalie Aceves responds to President Trump's signing of an executive order clearing the way for the Dakota Access oil pipeline. The fiery piece which Aceves created for herself, Kaley Isabella and Jillian Hibbert, unspools against the potent backdrop of video clips documenting the struggles of indigenous populations. The work elegantly weaves in shards of poetry read by Aimee Suzara, tying the destruction of Philippine watersheds to American colonization and militarization from the turn of the 20th century.



Stephanie Bastos in Millicent Johnnie's 'Spoken Once' (Photo: Robbie Sweeney)

Threats to Mother Earth also appear in Millicent Johnnie's *Spoken Once*, a solo for Stephanie Bastos, who swoops impetuously across the floor, her arms like an

eagle's wings as she hovers over sacred spaces. The dancer is missing the lower part of one leg, but that merely keeps her flight patterns low to the ground. At the wistful close, she examines her hands gravely, as if counting her fingers.

A third political theme at this year's festival is women's rights. Lisa Kusanagi's *16 Day Return Policy* is an indictment of misogyny by way of a strip-tease gone terribly wrong. Draped in a gold poncho and plowing through an inventory of flirtatious poses and facial expressions, Kusanagi jams her middle finger into her mouth, then her big toe. She turns her back on the audience and shimmies out of her panties from under the poncho.



Chris Evans and Byb Chanel Bibene (Photo: Kimara Dixon)

With many winks over her shoulder, she blithely traipses



upstage, continuing to shed more panties along the way in a steady rhythm, leaving a trail of rainbow-colored underwear in her wake. This extraordinary performance takes a grim turn when Kusanagi cowers under the poncho and creeps and stumbles forward, her hair draped over her face. The performer's undulating finger continues to beckon potential customers, like an aged street beggar.

When Kusanagi finally uncovers her face, only the whites of her eyes are visible, and the lighting lends her an inhuman pallor. The "show" over, she emerges naked from the poncho, dignified and erect, and walks slowly upstage into the deepening gloom. She's just another woman used, discarded, and forgotten.

Next weekend's audience can look forward to a slew of equally prescient work, ranging from Maurya Kerr and tinypistol's *anthem : two*, described as a "defiant and sorrowful refutation of America's 'national' anthem" to Jory Horn's focus on issues around cultural assimilation and the lives of children of refugees. (Horn's parents fled the Khmer Rouge.)



Rachel Hernandez of Viver Brasil (Photo: Linda Udin)

The ground may be shifting under Dance Mission Theater's feet. But the venue's audience has a passionate following for *D.I.R.T.* and a myriad other programs that nurture the varied artistic voices of the Bay Area's resistance.

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*D.I.R.T. Festival of Dance in Revolt(ing) Times* runs through Sunday, Apr. 2 at Dance Mission Theater in San Francisco. For tickets and information, please click [here](#).

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