

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Natalie Fiol

Stripping the Dual West

by Nadia Ureña

I must confess: I do not know much about the frontier myth. I vaguely remember an elementary english class where my teacher argued the West was dual in nature. To them were two wests. On one side were the leading players: the cowboys and the cowgirls, the ranchers and the farmers, the prostitutes and robbers. On the other side was the land: unconquered, unnavigated, unlimited, yet bursting with potential. I did not fully understand this then, but in the wake of Kayt MacMaster's embodied exploration, I feel much closer.

At first there was light. Flashlight rather. One click and then another. They are being held by two dancers, Jessica Ziegler and Madeline Mellinger, who use the light to illuminate themselves. They shuffle around the space occasionally looking back and giving a flirtatious smile towards the audience to soft sounds of an old western saloon song. Eventually the dancers make their way towards the audience and ask two viewers to shine the flashlights for them. They continue their shuffling in the space, creating wide arcs and circles causing them to bump into each other. They giggle at first, pose, then continue their arcs, retrieving their flashlights.

There is a stark division between the introduction of the duet and the introduction of Kayt. Kayt, joined by the somber back track of a rolling storm with cracks thunder, holds a flashlight and intimately rides a boar head skull behind a white cloth upstage. The first monologue spoken by Kayt through the microphone was admittedly hard to hear due to feedback and the occasional interference of honking from the rush-hour traffic outside. Perhaps a happy accident, I felt this incomprehension worked. Were we entering a dream? Was this a trance?

Eventually, Kayt spirals onto stage, remaining separated from the audience by a long white fabric held by the other two dancers. She moves slowly, focusing the flashlight at first on the skull then around her body. She begins to spiral until she hits the white walls of the theatre. The duo then wrap her in the cloth as Kayt curls herself in.

The duo begin to speak: *Slow down cowboy. Slow down cowgirl.* Their hands move up around, around the head, and across legs. Their arms reach up toward the sky and suddenly slash downward. Kayt begins to speak again and together the trio repeats: *He is floating. She is choking.*

Again, there was light. This time, it fills the entire room. It is hard, white, and stark—a feeling exacerbated by the white warehouse aesthetic to the Asian Arts storefront. The light has expanded and yet it somehow feels worse. Painstakingly naked and vulnerable, the dancers seem paralyzed by it. They stand frozen in their spots, staring out at the audience. I wonder: was this expansion beneficial to those it illuminated or did it dominate uncomfortably, hurting the players in its wrath? Kayt breaks this paralysis again by warning of an impending darkness. The situation has escalated to turbulence; a force that is climaxed by a thrashing and violent shadowbox by Kayt that ends with all three bodies on the floor.

Kayt, back in the darkness of the theatre, lies beside the skull she once dominated. She speaks again, this time about home, and questions whether home is composed of its people, its nature, or of something entirely else. She rests, shutting off her flash lights and finally ushering in complete darkness.

hog ranch, hogwash, or putting lipstick on a pig is a 45-minute confrontation between the dual west; between the figures and the land. It is a haunted Americana homage that wrestles with ideas of control, desire, and the uncanny zone between reality and imagination.

[*hog ranch, hogwash, or putting lipstick on a pig*](#), Kayt MacMaster, Asian Arts Initiative Storefront, September 11-14.

Homepage and Article Page Image Description: *Kay MacMaster wearing blue coveralls stands in the center of a wood paneled performance space. Their body is folded forward, knees slightly bent, and the head tossed sideways with their long blonde hair dramatically fanning out, capturing a feeling of wild abandon and emotional release.*

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