

carrie ahern DANCE

PRESENT PARIAH, INC. | carrie@carrieahern.com | www.carrieahern.com | 917.703.5327

“Her (Carrie Ahern) ensemble includes some of the city’s most interesting dance artists.”
—Jennifer Dunning,
The New York Times

“Ahern’s choreography is striking and original.”
—Brian Seibert,
The New Yorker

“Carrie Ahern is a dancer and choreographer whose work shows a powerful sense of visual order and psychological depth.”
—Eva Yaa Asantewaa, *Infinite Body*



ABOUT CARRIE AHERN DANCE

Carrie Ahern Dance is the contemporary dance company performing the choreographic works of Carrie Ahern. The company is committed to organic and original collaborations with dancers, composers, musicians and visual artists.

Artist Statement

Carrie Ahern Dance/Present Pariah Inc. performs the choreographic works of Carrie Ahern.

Founded in 2005, Carrie Ahern Dance creates hyper specific worlds that are complete in their lush layering of visual, kinesthetic and aural textures. The company works to address the over-sensitization and de-sensualization of modern life. It places its trust in the medium of the body.

Biography

Carrie Ahern Dance was a BAX space grant artist in 2007/08, recipient of a Fractured Atlas' Creative Development Grant, and a recipient of an LMCC Swing Space grant in 2009/10. Carrie Ahern Dance is a 2011 NYFA BUILD grant recipient.

Evenings include: **SeNSATE**, which began as collaboration with Nietzsche scholars, premiered to acclaim in 2009 at the 100-year-old former bathhouse, the Brooklyn Lyceum. It then was performed in 2010, in an underground bank vault, presented by LMCC. Excerpts performed at Princeton University (via the music department) and Columbia University (in conjunction with Rosalind Morris' class "Cultures of Accusation" via the anthropology dept). It toured to Baltimore Theatre Project in 2011.

Covers, (2009) Ahern's performance installation with crochet sculptress Olek, was performed for 3 weeks at rush hour for The LAB, a midtown storefront gallery. Her first collaboration with Olek was 2008's **The Unity of Skin**—commissioned by Danspace Project. Danspace Project and the Guggenheim/Works-and-Process commissioned the company's first evening, **Red** (2006).

Two Solo commissions: Bessie award winning dancer Carolyn Hall (2003) actor/director Jeffrey Frace (2013). Nationally and internationally, her work has been presented at Project: Space Available in Seattle, Baltimore Theatre Project, Danceworks and Walker's Point Arts Center in Milwaukee, Le Regard du Cygne in Paris and at the Festival OFF in Avignon, France. Residencies the company has been invited to include: Certain Bird in Vermont, Project: Space Available in Seattle, The Art Mill in Jeffersonville, NY. Ahern has taught master classes at the University of Washington, NYU, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She has taught movement workshops for academics (originally developed in Germany) and been a guest speaker at NYU for philosophy classes in Spectacle. She co-presented at the ASTR/CORD conference in Seattle in November 2010.

Carrie's most recent work is a continuum of community connections, moving beyond traditional research to immerse herself inside a community. In this way Carrie effectively embodies that which she presents to the audience.

Borrowed Prey seeks to unveil spaces of connection/disconnection in our culture. It is a diptych that moves beyond commentary from afar to engage inside a community.

Borrowed Prey: part I is an investigation of our relationship to the animals that most of us consume. Bringing together 4 strands of research: hunting, butchering, and slaughtering of animals, plus the work of animal behavior scientist and autistic Dr. Temple Grandin, it attempts to illuminate more about the true "farm to table" process and our human capacity for empathy. World premiere April 26 to May 13, 2012 at Dickson's Farmstand Meats inside the Chelsea Market. **Borrowed Prey: part II** turns empathy inward to investigate dying and the process we undertake when witnessing life's final journey. In development 2012-2013.

“Fascinating. I think it is really important for people to see where their food comes from and not just see a piece of bacon on a plate.”

—*Manhattan resident Sarah Chiapetta*

“That was one of the most provocative pieces I’ve seen in a long time. It made me completely rethink what it means to be human...”

—*Bob Stein, founder of The Voyager Company*

“You are the voice of the animal.”

—*Jennifer Hilton*

BORROWED PREY



Photo by Kris Martin

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AN EMAIL INTERVIEW WITH CARRIE AHERN

By Natalie Axton

Watching Dance | March 29, 2012

WD: How did you come to the concept for *Borrowed Prey*?

CA: I came to the concept for “Borrowed Prey” because I was hearing so many people talk about “sustainable food”. The more I heard people talk about it, the more it bothered me that I did not know what that phrase actually meant. I decided to explore that by researching firsthand. And I decided to focus on “sustainable food” in terms of animals we consume because I had never been a vegetarian and I wondered why. I wanted to look at all aspects of the process of animals as food from beginning to end (wild–hunting, farmed–slaughtering and butchering).

After those 3 strands of research had begun, and I was thinking about what it is like to embody an animal, I got introduced to the work of Temple Grandin by seeing her on the “Golden Globes” and by a friend who lent me her book “Thinking in Pictures”.

WD: So what is your definition of “sustainable food,” and does meat-eating have a place in it?

CA: I think “sustainable” in terms of food has many layered meanings. Can the planet sustain our current eating habits especially with India and China eating more meat? Not likely. Most of the farms in this country are factory farms that are subsidized by the US government. So they are not even sustainable in terms of the marketplace. Small farms in this country that are not using GMO seeds and raising animals humanely (which takes more time) struggle in a culture disconnected from more basic ways of doing things– many question why food at the farmers markets are so much more expensive than factory farmed food. So many small farmers are barely making ends meet.



Photo by Julie Lemberger

Sustainable has come to mean to me a sense of connection about the process of food and is directly connected to ethics. In terms of animals and meat it is understanding the life behind the piece of meat and how it gets to the plate. Which is recognizing that an animal had to be killed to sustain me. What was it's life like before it was killed– and was it killed humanely? Could I kill an animal in good faith and if I couldn't –shouldn't I be a vegetarian?

I found through this project that I had a deep desire to eat meat. There are theories that mark a big jump in our brain development and evolution as humans to when we began eating meat. This is another level of how meat has sustained us as a race.

WD: So because of your research you're empathizing with the animal and also thinking about your own human bodily needs. This is an intellectual as well as physical approach to the topic. How much dance is in this piece?

CA: The entire piece is a dance.

All the research–except for the Temple Grandin strand–is first hand, embodied research. The hunting, the butchering, the slaughtering. But the most essential part is going into the studio with that research in my body and seeing what comes out. Movement shows up a lot but also sound, image and language.

And the last strand that is not firsthand–one of Temple Grandin's great gifts is being able to put herself inside the body of an animal and sense what it thinks and feels and how. An embodied knowledge.

It is a physical and intellectual approach, as well as aural and imagistic but I don't see those things as separate.

WD: So tell me about your experiences hunting, butchering, and slaughtering.

CA: I have “mentors” for each part of the research.

I have been hunting with Dale Rodefer on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. It is a mosquito infested swampland. We hunted Sika deer—which are small deer that are part of the antelope family. I did target practice (with a rifle) before we went out. Shooting a gun for the first time was a strange feeling and challenging. It takes a great deal of skill, as did the rest of the preparation for the hunt. Most of the prep is all about not “spooking” the deer. You have to become one with the environment in order for anything to even come close enough for you to shoot. This means rubbing your boots (16 inch lace up boots because of the mud) with a salve that helps rid the leather of human scent; not using any shampoo or lotions or scents; full camo and most of all learning how to move through the woods and be as quiet and still as possible even though it is cold! But you also don’t want to get shot by other hunters which is why you wear the flurescent orange which is a color deer cannot see. You cannot wear anything blue—that color deer will recognize. And you are up before dawn as animals are most active right before sunrise and sunset. Dale and I climbed up into a 2 person tree stand in the dark and waited. And waited. Finally we saw some deer prancing around, but they were too far to shoot at. This continued through the morning with the two of us dozing in the tree stand (and always the fear of falling out of the stand) . Nothing ever came close enough, but we did see another hunter kill a deer, gut it in the field (which it makes it much lighter) and then go get a cart to drag the animal out of the swamp. This process took that hunter about an hour and a half to 2 hours. That afternoon I was alone in the tree stand, at dusk, without a weapon, my senses super attuned and I heard a thrashing about in the swamp—a doe came right up next to me. That was magical. Hunting surprised me—mostly a very meditative and sensory experience, and you are outside all day seeing every manifestation of the light shift from pre dawn to afetr dark. But then you have to be ready to pull the trigger on a vibrant fragile living thing.

Butchering—I have my original mentor in Seattle—Russell Flint at Rain Shadow Meats (I spent a month working in his shop) and then here in NY with Marlow and Daughters and butcher Andrew Dorsey in Brooklyn. Butchering is really dissection—and I have always had a deep interest in human anatomy. It is also a highly developed skill—how to use a knife properly, carving with or around the joints and bones and knowing what customers will purchase as meat. The most powerful thing that struck me about butchering is how much these animals are like us—especially the larger animals—lamb, pig, cow. Their anatomy is basically the same except for just a few differences—extra vertebrae, different back muscles because of their relationship to gravity, a simpler structure to the forearm and hand. Each animal I worked on felt very different and I got a sense of the individual life behind the carcass. And how young the animals are. I also learned a lot about the retail portion of butchering—what is more flavorful, more tender, aged beef goes through a process of rotting, bone decomposes faster than flesh when cut.

Slaughtering—This was the most difficult part of the research to accomplish. Slaughtering is mostly secretive and highly protected. I was introduced to Janelle and Jerry Stokesberry of Stokesberry farm in Olympia, Washington at a Seattle Farmers Market. They raise cows and pigs, but the bulk of their farm business is chickens who they slaughter almost daily. After a vetting process—where Janelle wanted to be clear about my motives and intentions, and I agreed to take no photographs, they invited me to the farm to assist with the chicken slaughter.

WD: Last Questions: how did you get the space at Dickson’s Farmstand Meats, and how many people will the space hold?

CA: Dickson’s came about because I was dreaming of the right place for the work to be shown, and I spent a lot of time in the Chelsea Market over the summer. So I started dreaming about Dickson’s. One day I just thought, What the hell!, and walked into the shop and asked to do my show there. I happened to talk to Sarah Levine (one of the butchers) and she got really excited about the idea and talked to Jake the owner about it. Later, when I met with Jake and Sarah, they pretty much agreed to my ideal scenario and they completely understood the ethics of my project firsthand. It was seamless.

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ONE OF THE THINGS ART IS FOR

By David Mogolov

The Mogolog | March 29, 2012



Photo by Julie Lemberger

My pal Stephanie has a relatively new job in New York, managing a dance company. She wrote to me about it, saying she thought I'd be interested in the production they're about to open, and holy hell, am I ever. I'm not going to make a claim about the show without having seen it. I'm responding to the marketing materials they've produced, and to a few short pieces of video on the company's site. Based on that, I'd see it (and will, if I end up in New York during that span). But without even seeing it, it's got me thinking.

It's called "Borrowed Prey" and the company is Carrie Ahern Dance. It's being performed at a butcher shop.

So, she's got my attention a few ways here. I've been mulling our relationship to animals, and the unreflective way we consume meat. Many, many people have been, if Michael Pollan's book sales are any indication. What got me thinking, though, was something else: Check out this video, where people who went to a preview event talk about their reactions.

<http://vimeo.com/30052484>

"Borrowed Prey" says it is an "investigation of our relationship to the animals that most of us consume" and the audience's reaction here is to examine their relationship to the animals they consume. She's doing something right.* The entire stated purpose of her piece

is to encourage engagement with a topic society has made it easy to disengage from. Staging this in a butcher shop is so natural and so smart and so right, and now I can't think that there's any other way she could do this. There's an element of spectacle to it, but it's not mere spectacle. She's asking people to engage, and she herself is engaging fully. It's not contrived. The butcher is here, in the open, doing the work you don't usually ask to see. The dancer is here, in the butcher shop, connecting the human and the animal in the place where so much of the unsaid is made clear. You don't pull the animal into the sanctified performance space of a theater, where people get to nod and say, "Hmm. Interesting."*

I'm not a believer that art is for any one thing, but I think this is one of the things art can be for: to expose something that is part of your everyday but has remained invisible, to not just cast a light on it, but to reframe it in a way that raises questions rather than insists on answers. I haven't been in that butcher shop with her, but this is what the show seems to promise. And if I'm in New York in late April/early May, I'll let you know.

* When you're doing something new and unconventional and have an audience talking, reflecting, examining, saying anything other than "INTERESTING"* after a performance, it's the beginning of a success. "Interesting" is such a terrible word. I dread "interesting." Usually it means, "this is something I'm supposed to have serious thoughts about. Smart people are supposed to like this. Truth is, the details are already slipping away."

MEAT THE CHOREOGRAPHER

By Leigh Witchel

NY Post | April 24, 2012

Anyone who believes there are no meaty roles for dancers should check out “Borrowed Prey,” starting Thursday. Performed for just 20 people at a time, it’s the rare dance piece that takes place in a butcher shop. And no, says Carrie Ahern, its Brooklyn-based choreographer and performer: Lady Gaga’s infamous meat dress had nothing to do with it.

“So many people talk about ‘sustainable food,’” says the 36-year-old. “I wanted to find out what that really means.”

To bone up on the subject, she hunted deer in Maryland, slaughtered chickens in Washington state and apprenticed with butchers in Seattle and Brooklyn. Eighteen months later, she carved out a solo — an hourlong piece intended to make you think about your place in the food chain. Accompanying the dance is text by Ahern and Temple Grandin, the autistic animal-behavior scientist; an original vocal and electronic score . . . and a 50-pound lamb carcass, courtesy of Dickson’s Farmstand Meats in Chelsea Market, where the dance is set.

“Dance and meat? Why not?,” asks owner Jake Dickson, who’s game about bringing fresh meat — that is, dance aficionados — into his shop.

Wearing a furry top and cap with a blood-stained smock, Ahern begins by stretching out on the butcher table, then sliding off and crouching under it. Sometimes she’s the hunter, sometimes the prey. She talks about her research and experiences as well, and before your eyes, she gradually turns the lamb into chops and roasts. It may make you think twice about ordering a burger.



Photo by Zanny Mangold

But Ahern, who has fond memories of visiting McDonald’s as a kid, isn’t a vegetarian. And while she’s learned to handle a 6-inch boning knife with aplomb, she’s not quite ready to quit choreography for full-time carving.

“It makes me so relaxed,” she says of cutting meat. “But I would need a lot more training.”

“Butchering is not all that bloody,” says Ahern, who’ll take orders for lamb chops to go, “but decomposing flesh, blood and bone does have a special smell.”

Bon appetit!

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LOCAL PERFORMER LEADS SENSORIAL JOURNEY THROUGH “FARM TO TABLE” PROCESS

By Erin Cassin

The Brooklyn Bugle | April 26, 2012

Dance and performance artist Carrie Ahern brings a whole new meaning to the phrase “you are what you eat” with her current project that delves into the connections between humans and the animals that many of us consume.

“For years, this question about sustainable food had been bothering me,” says Ahern, a Wisconsin native who moved to Brooklyn 17 years ago and currently resides in Ditmas Park. “I just felt so disconnected from going into a grocery store and buying a piece of meat and not really understanding where it came from.”

A growing interest in the origins of her food prompted Ahern to seek hands-on experience in the “farm to table” process back in 2010. The undertaking resulted in a bicoastal journey that involved hunting for Sika deer in the swamplands along the Eastern Shore of Maryland in the autumn of 2010 and then heading to Seattle, Washington a few months later to learn the art of butchering at Rain Shadow Meats. Ahern eventually spent a day slaughtering chickens at Stokesberry Farm in Olympia, Washington before returning to Brooklyn. Here, she has continued to perfect her butchering techniques at Williamsburg-based Marlow & Daughters.

Ahern’s forays into hunting, butchering and slaughtering serve as the main basis for her new work, “Borrowed Prey.” Though Ahern initially set out to better understand her own relationship with the “farm to table” process, the project took on a broader dimension during the course of her research.

“I felt like I really needed to be able to kill an animal if I was going to eat it... I really was so curious about what that experience would be like and if I would be able to eat meat after it,” Ahern notes. “But what ended up happening right away is I realized it is a project about empathy, more than anything. And it is a project about connection.”



Photo by by Lori Singlar

The performer is creating “Borrowed Prey” as a diptych, with part one focusing on human-to-animal empathy and part two centering on human-to-human empathy.

Ahern began choreographing the first part of “Borrowed Prey” during her stay in Seattle last year, often walking straight to her studio after a shift spent carving up carcasses at Rain Shadow Meats. There, her roles as researcher and dancer became fascinatingly intertwined, as Ahern explains. “I started making the movement when I started the butchering,” she says. “So it comes directly out of my experience with all the research... putting it in my body and seeing what would come out.”

The result is a stunning work in which Ahern embodies both predator and prey, right down to her costume by Naoko Nagata that pairs a woolly, pointy-eared hood and furry shrug with a butcher’s apron splattered with fake blood. During a rehearsal at Brooklyn Arts Exchange in Park Slope, Ahern skillfully shifted from the limp stillness of a carcass on a butcher’s table to the playful strokes of a cat toying with a mouse to the skittish hops of a scared deer. Her movements were accompanied by a hauntingly beautiful score by composer Anne Hegethat eventually gave way to an eerily distorted recording of Ahern reading text by Dr. Temple Grandin.

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Grandin, an autistic and renowned animal behavior scientist, played an important role in the creation of Ahern's new work. The scientist's published findings serve as the fourth strand of research (along with Ahern's hands-on studies of hunting, butchering and slaughtering) that informs part one of "Borrowed Prey."

"Temple Grandin helped to answer some of the questions that we have about us versus animals," Ahern notes. "Do animals think? Do they feel?"

Ahern hopes to get people thinking about these questions and many more by taking them along on a 55-minute sensorial journey filled with dance, music, spoken word, interactive touch experiments and open dialogue that leads up to the butchering of a lamb at the conclusion of the work.

The setting for Ahern's upcoming performances will also provide rich stimuli, as the show will take place inside an actual butcher shop – Dickson's Farmstand Meats – complete with pungent orders, a massive sausage grinder and a hefty butcher block that will serve as the dancer's stage at times. Ahern plans to add her own touches to the space with the help of set and lighting designer Jay Ryan. Even such simple decorations as rawhide bundles dangling from the ceiling will serve to further Ahern's examinations on the inescapable cycles of life and death, as she plans to fill them with decomposing flowers.

"Every aspect of the project is trying to get people more connected," Ahern says. "It's not that we just don't ethically understand where our food comes from, it's also that we've lost something in culture because we don't participate in that process... by having a connection and empathy, there is more of a wholeness to our lives."



Photos by by Lori Singlar

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REVIEW OF BORROWED PREY

By Joseph Samuel Wright
Theater Online.com

*“Miss Scarlett, get the smelling salts!
The performance art is too much for him!”*

Borrowed Prey, a 60-minute performance art dance piece exploring the relationship between humans and the animals we eat, brought me to my knees. Literally. Maybe it was the overwhelming smell of meat in the room, maybe it was the skinned lamb carcass swaddled in cloth, or maybe it was just standing on hard cement for an hour, but something about the experience made me nearly faint. Whatever the cause, though, I can honestly say that the work elicited a visceral reaction. And the staff were very kind about my attack of the vapors.

Borrowed Prey is an engaging, boundary-pushing, and highly personal work conceived, researched, choreographed, and performed by Carrie Ahern. Derived from four areas of research including butchering, deer-hunting, a working cow farm, and Dr. Temple Grandin’s research in animal behavior, the work “seeks to unveil spaces of connection/ disconnection around death in our culture.” To this end, the soundscape features text by Temple Grandin and by Carrie Ahern.

The performance is accompanied by a haunting, dynamic, exciting score by Anne Hege and “Knife Dance” by musical duo New Prosthetics. The close collaboration between Ahern and the musicians is undeniable—the tone, style, and heart of the sound is tightly tied to the rhythm and emotion of Ahern’s action.



Photo by Julie Lemberger

Ahern is a clever, engaging, and highly emotive performer. Her confidence, kind calm, and earthiness fortify the inherent authority that enables her to guide the audience through the unexpected, invasive, and sometimes unpleasant elements of her show. In fact, it is only after an initial, internal interlude, when Ahern begins to engage directly with the audience that her work in *Borrowed Prey* begins to soar.

Jay Ryan lends a dramatic and stark lighting design over a set that’s centerpiece is a butcher table on wheels which is moved throughout the performance to functionally change both the playing space and the audience’s area. Naoko Nagata’s costume design features a knit hoodcap, a bloodied butcher’s apron, and a shabby faux-fur jacket that looks like someone skinned a white-tail deer mascot. Much like the charged subject matter and ardent nature of the performance, the same costume that would be used for the spoof version of *Borrowed Prey*, but it is through this same inherent authority Ahern carries that she pulls off the look.

In addition to its charged nature and invasive presentation, *Borrowed Prey* makes use of sensory and emotional explorations by Ahern. To an extent, these can be a tease, as the audience watches a sensitive artist explore source material that isn’t shared, but the information is revealed as the performance goes along, so observers are eventually invited in to the experience. The whole piece culminates with its most striking moment—the final image of Ahern cradling the skinned lamb carcass. *Borrowed Prey* is an ambitious, thoughtful, site-specific performance art experience. It’s a must-see for those who see such things, but is not for the faint of heart—pun intended!

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KNIFE EDGE

By Claudia La Rocca

The Performance Club Blog

My experience of *Borrowed Prey* was bracketed by scent. I walked into Dickson's Farmstand Meats for Friday's P. Club outing worrying about what odors were waiting for us. And when I walked out, an hour later, I was enveloped by the warm, comforting aroma of baking bread in the shop across the hallway.

My worry was tied to my memory of experiencing Ishmael Houston-Jones' darkly beautiful *Them* at Performance Space 122 two years ago—specifically, to this memory, which I wrote about when I reviewed the work then:

But there's no escape. [Arturo] Vidich, still blindfolded, ends up on a thin mattress wrestling with the carcass of a goat, its throat slit. The smell of the dead animal, meaty and thick, is almost unbearable. Blood smears the white fabric. It's horrible to watch. It's also somehow beautiful and, despite the uncomfortable ethical questions, necessary: The us witnessing the them.

I knew that Carrie planned to butcher a lamb during *Borrowed Prey*, a solo which examines our relationship to our food, and which developed in part from her research hunting and slaughtering animals (the animal behavior scientist Temple Grandin is another influence). All I could think about was that musky, overpowering stench, the way it washed over the P.S. 122 audience in a heavy, horrible wave. Dickson's was too small, I thought, a little panicky; the odor would be too intense and I would have to leave (I wasn't surprised to learn that at least one other P Clubber, who had also seen *Them*, had this same fear...).

But, of course ... there was no smell. The lamb had been refrigerated. It had also been stripped of its hide; its denuded head and thin neck appeared at times almost bird-like, and young. I am not a vegetarian, and so ... there are a lot of disturbing things to think about here, beginning with remembering that lambs, as well, are babies. (After the announcement for this outing was sent out, one P Clubber wrote to me: "I feel like it can't possibly be good. It's possible for suicide to be good art, but I think that murder can never make for good art!")



Photo by Sarah Sterner

But I am thinking about these disturbing things now. I was not thinking about them during *Borrowed Prey*. Not really. Not in the way that I could feel the work wanting me to think about them...

(Funny how that happens, the way our relationships with art works are so much like our relationships with people, how we resist or evade the very thing that is pressed upon us. After the show, when we were at The Grey Dog for our post-performance drinks and giant cookies—no one ordered meat—we talked about how difficult it is for art to get at causes or messages earnestly and head on, what a knife edge the artist has to walk.)

I was thinking, instead, about how vulnerable Carrie seemed during the solo, and how easy it is, when you go to see numerous shows a week, to forget what it is for people to get up in front of other people and speak to things they feel strongly about. What a big deal that is.

And so, perhaps, in a way *Borrowed Prey* worked its way into my system. Carrie talked a lot about empathy, about a need for closeness even when we cannot stand to be close (here she borrowed from Grandin, whose autism, which sometimes isolated her from other people, also helped her to empathize with frightened livestock, eventually making her a galvanizing figure in the animal welfare movement). I loved the moments in the dance when she got very close to us, breathing on our necks or nuzzling our bodies. I was amazed at how good it felt to have my knees rubbed, gently, for a moment, how important that brief touch could be.

But but but ... I wanted something else, too ... afterwards, one of the P Clubbers said that there was no "dissonance" in the solo, that the emotional tenor stayed too firmly in one place. Someone else mentioned the theatrical overlay that didn't allow her to simply sit with what was already plenty dramatic... I agree with both of these points. It isn't, after all, every day that you stand inches away from a knife-wielding dancer as she slices into a dead animal.

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KNOWING HOW YOUR DINNER SEES THE WORLD

By Deborah Jowitt

Arts Journal.com | May 3, 2012

When writing about art with a message, critics tend to soft-pedal and back-pedal. Perhaps their hearts are with the messenger, yet they have reservations about the forms in which the ideas are delivered. Perhaps, for some, the message doesn't come through strongly enough. There's little doubt as to what Carrie Ahern wants to put across in her provocative and deeply felt *Borrowed Prey*: If we eat animals, we should be willing to face what they endure between untroubled life in a pasture and becoming chops on a plate. She herself has experienced hunting game and learned how to kill chickens.

Ahern, an accomplished performer-choreographer, is showing her work (the first half of a projected diptych) at Dickson's Farmstand Meats in the Chelsea Market, 75 Ninth Avenue, through May 13 (carrieahern.com). In the middle of the piece, she climbs on something in the narrow space behind the counter and writes two sentences on a big piece of butcher paper taped to the wall. One says, "Empathy is not generally seen as a useful tool." For butchers in relation to the meat they sell, that's probably true. But Ahern clearly feels a great deal of empathy for animals destined to be food, as does the brilliant autistic thinker Dr. Temple Grandin, who has redesigned numerous slaughterhouses to make them more humane (and whose words Ahern speaks during *Borrowed Prey*).

Grandin's condition has made her sensitive to what cattle feel. She doesn't like to be touched unless she initiates it. Physical pressure (like being wrapped in something)



Photo by Sarah Sterner

calms her. Loud sounds disturb her. Ahern, being a mover, wants to show us—as best she can—what animals respond to.

With the exception of the few people accommodated on VIP chairs, the spectators in Dickson's market (20 is the limit) stand for the performance, moving around the close quarters when necessary or desirable. Ahern's outfit (by Naoko Nagata) startlingly combines the butcher with the stock and challenges description: soft, non-descript black pants; a mottled brownish top; a shaggy, long-sleeved brown bolero jacket that looks as if it's been cut from a cow's pelt. On her head is a gray, faux-lambskin hood with a faint suggestion of ears. To this, add a blood-stained white apron.

Ahern climbs onto a large table that divides the narrow front part of the store from its larger workspace at the back. The table is topped by butcher block and can be wheeled to other positions. She moves both like a dancer warming up and a passive carcass. Lying on the table, she lets one leg hang limply over the edge, arches her back, then collapses. At one point, it's as if someone is hauling her up by the buttocks. She spasms, folds herself into a bundle, and —half-hidden on the metal shelf under the table—trembles.

Throughout the hour-long piece, she finds ways to demonstrate how narrow a cow's range of depth vision is, how it places its hooves, how four-legged animals groom themselves, scabble for footing, sink down. After she has removed her hood, welcomed us, and brought up Grandin's need to feel pressure, she begins to crawl among the spectators, rubbing against people's legs, touching one watcher, standing up to lick another's face (possibly someone she knows). She talks about the benign method of slaughtering chickens, while getting a volunteer (consulted quietly in advance) to lie on the table and be wrapped tightly in a length of unbleached

carrie ahern DANCE

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muslin. Then—with the help of two nearby spectators—she lowers the young woman to the floor and drags her to the front of the shop. Swaddled like that, the woman resembles the paper-wrapped leg of lamb that Ahern gives away at the end of the performance, as well as the hand-stitched, hide and hair sculptures by lighting designer Jay Ryan and the choreographer that hang from the ceiling. (Ahern makes sure that “Amy” is all right and back among friends before continuing the work).

Borrowed Prey is most powerful when it is most direct in terms of the complex bonding of consumer and consumed. Two sections affected me less, or, fell short of what they seemed to intend. One occurs just after Ahern has performed her initial sequence on the table. Anne Hege’s very effective music begins with a high voice calling, and Ahern begins to dance. Her little turned-out steps could pass for bourrées, even though her body eventually starts to jiggle and sag. Finally, she collapses under the shop’s painting of cows in a sunset field. I couldn’t figure this out. Is she afraid we’ll forget she’s a dancer? Is she trying to forge a connection between ballet’s vision of the creaturely world and the gritty reality?

After Ahern has fetched a dressed lamb from the shop’s refrigerator and carried it through the shop so everyone can see it up close, she washes her hands and head at the sink and contemplates the six-inch knife she’s about to use (here the music switches to “Knife Dance” by New Prosthetics). The lamb is already missing one leg. She wants to convey, I believe, that even a dead animal must be treated with respect, and that butchery can be conceived as a ritual. But somehow, this sequence seems a little heavy-handed, especially when she places the knife blade against her own ankle and holds it there for a few seconds. We get the point. In the same way, it seems almost corny for her to hold a leg of lamb against her own leg, comparing them (maybe it’s the timing that’s at fault). She also licks the knife quite a lot—as if to show that the killing tool itself doesn’t inspire fear in animals.

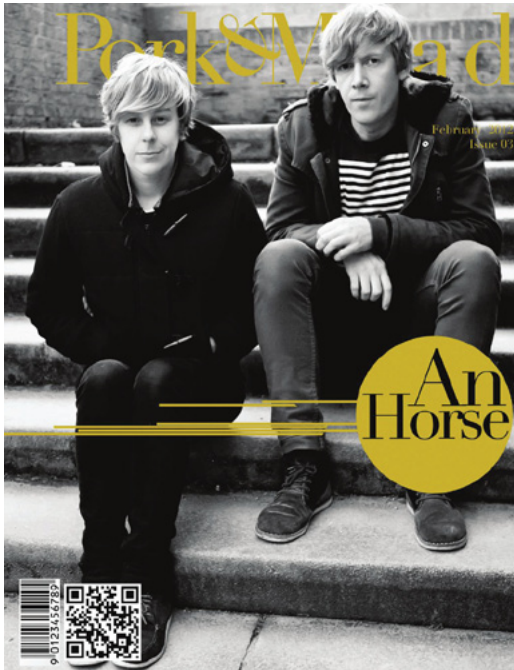
It’s more engrossing—and somehow more moving—to see her use the knife on the lamb’s body. She moves with care and a dancerly ease, shifting angles as she slices

the animal’s remaining leg off, wraps it in paper and tapes it. She carefully frees the small kidneys and lays the hanging tongue beside something else retrieved from the cavity. These too she wraps and bestows on favored spectators.

Just before she tackles the lamb, she polls the spectators about the other statement she wrote earlier: “The greatest of ethological sins is anthropomorphism.” Is she guilty or innocent of this? She stands there wide-eyed, waiting. After a long silence, the woman standing behind me says quietly “guilty.” No one else speaks.

The matter is more complicated. Ahern isn’t attributing to her prey the nuanced human feelings that pet owners commonly ascribe to their animals (she missed me, he likes my husband better). She knows that what keeps her awake at night wouldn’t trouble a sheep, and vice versa. As Grandin found, given the right conditions, cattle don’t experience terror as they approach slaughter. Yet in very sensitively and skillfully absorbing and physicalizing the animal’s responses, isn’t Ahern making the animal seem humanized simply because a human is portraying it? (She must know that there’s no easy answer to that.)

Her final image brings the ambiguity into sharp focus. She doesn’t rise and bow as we clap and get up to leave. She’s sitting on a stool at the rear of the workspace, holding the dead, carved-up lamb in her lap and looking down at it. Madonna and Child. The Lamb of God. Life as death. If you look behind the obvious sentimentality of the picture, it can keep you awake and thinking hard for some time.



BREAKING THE LAMBS' SILENCE

By Hanna Palmer-Egan
Pork & Mead | Feb 2012

080 -PORK&MEAD

Breaking the Lambs' Silence:

Art, Modern Meat &
Life on Borrowed Time

Words | Hannah Palmer-Egan



082 :PORK&MEAD

The evening started as any intimate arts fundraiser might – in a sprawling, 19th century townhouse on a quiet side street in New York’s West Village. Guests sipped fine wine and sampled cheeses, olives and finger snacks spread across a wide table at the back of the parlor, chatting about their mutual acquaintance with the artist of the night, whom they all knew and respected.

After a brief introduction, Carrie Ahern walked into the room, dressed simply in a white top and black pants. Ahern is a critically acclaimed dancer best known for visceral, haunting performances that push the boundaries of both dance and abstract thought.

She was carrying the skinned carcass of a lamb. She held it with a calm tenderness, befitting of such an animal, but strangely out of context, given the lamb’s condition. It had no head, and without its skin, you could see its muscles shining ruby red and the thin white layer of fat surrounding those muscles.

Ahern walked lightly, blithely across the room, quietly regarding her audience. She laid the lamb on an antique table with a cutting board where a butcher in a white overcoat and apron was waiting to carve it up. She then walked to another table nearby and climbed on top of it.

As the butcher cut into the lamb, Ahern flung herself upon her table. She lay on it, writhing, twitching, slowly ensconcing herself around and underneath it, mere steps from where the butcher worked the meat.

Now she lurked under the table—all eyes—darting around the room and with a palpable sense of waiting, like she was biding her time for something. Then she erupted in motion again. Her body pushed violently out from the confines of the table-legs, as if trying to escape this seemingly self-imposed cage, and then suddenly, she reeled inward again into a tiny ball. I half expected her to disappear right into the floor or *poof!* into thin air.

Looking back, the moment reminds me of an owl in the woods, or a deer frozen at the edge of a field at dawn; how it will stand so still when it senses you near, as if hiding in plain sight. It’s like they will themselves invisible until they can no longer deny that you see them.

The performance was a teaser for Ahern’s current work, entitled *Borrowed Prey*. The project seeks answers to questions the artist had regarding sustainable food – organics, free-range meats, and items that are hunted or foraged, which are oh-so-in-vogue right now in the culinary world.

Like many artists, Ahern often uses her work to seek answers to questions. This issue of food sourcing and sustainability “was bothering me for a few years, leading into the project. Discussion [about sustainable food] was at a certain level, and it wasn’t going too far.”

It’s true. Visit any self-respecting fine-dining restaurant in New York City, and the meats will be either free-range (Amish chicken, grass-fed beef) or game (venison, rabbit, pheasant or squab). You’ll

see exotic mushrooms that can’t be cultivated, and produce which is farmed, but of old-world heritage or heirloom varieties. Often the menu will inform you, “We use organic or locally-sourced meats and produce whenever possible,” or something similar. If none of these sounds familiar to you, you need to eat out more. It’s seriously everywhere, to varying degrees.

Then, ask your waiter where the Kobe beef tar-tar actually came from. Likely, he’ll say he has to check with the chef. Press the chef on why sustainable meat is important, and she’ll tell you how the taste is superior, and how she likes to support family farms, and it’s healthier for you and the environment. The conversation ends there. Period.

I arrived at Ahern’s fall benefit fairly well-apprised of the trends she was probing with *Borrowed Prey*. I’ve worked on organic farms and farm-to-table eateries. I grew up in a Vermont barnyard alongside “sustainably raised” pigs and chickens, which my father would slaughter before my very eyes (the guts and gore used to really fascinate me, I was never a girly-girl). I wondered what a performance examining these issues could look like, and what it may reveal.

I sipped my wine and chatted with guests around me. People mostly wanted to talk about how kind Carrie was and what a charismatic performer she could be. Questions regarding her current work were mostly met with befuddled, if intrigued uncertainty.

As the performance unfolded, I could see that Ahern’s movements were connected to—even in tandem with—the action at the butcher’s table, as one cut up the other and wrapped her in white deli paper, slowly whittling away the body until little but bones remained. The butcher hacks off a leg, and Ahern’s leg goes crazy with twitching, her face all askew with I’m-not-sure-what emotion. Or so, it seems.

And then. The lamb. Was gone.

Left in its place were neat little stacks of white paper packages, placed on the table next to where the lamb used to be, next to its bare, unused bones. They’re for sale, by the way. Proceeds will continue paying for Ahern’s project. The dancer exited and the guests returned to their wine. The conversation was livened, to a degree.

I mingled with Ahern’s guests to vibe out a response. Ruth is an 88-year-old New York native who met Carrie over dinner at a mutual friend’s home. “Fascinating, wasn’t it?” Ruth remarked. Then, she whipped out her iPhone and played a video she shot during the performance.

I watched again as Carrie’s body writhed and shook on the table, with the butcher in the background. “I may not eat another lamb chop again,” Ruth mused, adding that the performance was “like nothing I ever saw before.” I didn’t press her on the issue, but I quietly wondered why the performance may change her eating habits.

Weeks later, I was talking to my friend, Fenella Roche, who has been a vegetarian for 15 years. She described the moment she went veg: “I was in the

kitchen with my mom. She had a whole chicken and she was pulling out the organs—you know, whatever they leave in there—and I thought, ‘my mom is doing this for me, but there’s no way I could actually prepare that food for myself.’”

In that moment, Fenella decided, “Until I could kill an animal and go through that whole process, there was no way I could eat meat.” Perhaps Ruth, after seeing a lamb butchered before her eyes,

“I do have a desire to actually kill something, to be a predator, and that’s part of who I am and maybe why I never wanted to be a vegetarian.”

tapped into a similar sentiment.

To me, these reactions to the simple fact of butchering beg the question: To justify consuming an animal, must we feel capable of personally slaughtering and/or butchering it?

With *Borrowed Prey*, Ahern wanted to examine her own boundaries of violence and nonviolence as they related to the animals she’s been eating since childhood.

Last fall, she went to the marshlands of Maryland to hunt with Dale Rodefer, an avid woodsman who she knew through a mutual friend. Before they went into the woods, Ahern practiced shooting from the balcony of Dale’s house. When she failed to hit a single target, Dale stopped her and said, “You have to want to kill it, and want to shoot it.”

Ahern thought about Dale’s advice. She then put the gun back up, fired once, and hit the target. “I’ve been finding,” she told me over tea one day, “I do have a desire to actually kill something, to be a predator, and that’s part of who I am and maybe why I never wanted to be a vegetarian. That’s very much a part of this project.”

She finishes the thought, saying, “I’m not totally nonviolent.” Something in the statement seems hesitant to me. I ask her if she aspires toward total nonviolence. She pauses for a long moment and answers finally, “You know, that’s a really good question. I don’t know that answer.”

After we spoke, I looked over Ahern’s website at her other works. They all shared a sense of ragged catharsis, in which the dancers in her company seemed to be both exorcizing and embracing abstract, figurative demons at once. It is all very haunting, while maintaining a luscious, gorgeous sheen of grace and beauty. But it is dark, and definitely violent, as catharsis often is, as good art can often be.

To be clear, Carrie Ahern is a serious dancer and artist. The classically trained ballarina moved from Wisconsin to New York at 19 to “be a dancer,

to pursue that passion," and her work has been extremely well-received, with great reviews in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, and other worthy publications.

Despite the darkness in her work, Ahern is friendly and light and easy to talk to, outgoing, even. Her porcelain-white skin glows with life, and maybe a few freckles. Her eyes are big and bright and round, and her perfect little heart-shaped lips smile often. So, there is some duality in her personality: there is the Carrie who craves shooting and killing things, who presents pondering, three-hour performances deep within Gotham's bowels, her dancers clad in rags and caught in web. Then there is the Carrie who sits and drinks tea with you and hugs you when the interview is over.

However, she seems to have found a balance between the two Carries, and it hasn't compromised the scope of her work at all. Rather, it has enabled her to thrive while making art in a city that would just as likely eat you alive. Some artists must explore, even indulge, the inner darkness to feed the creative process. For Ahern, this meant going hunting, with intent to kill, then carving up animals in a butcher-shop. Even slaughtering living, breathing chickens at Stokesberry Farm, in Washington State, watching their lives slip away as they bled out before her.

The artist seems interested in exploring her personal tendencies toward violence to learn more about her own humanity, but only to a point, and only within a specific context, which she creates through her work.

Ahern can carry a skinned lamb into a fancy party on a Tuesday night and be applauded for it because she creates a framework for such things to happen. As artists, it's important to keep this in mind, particularly when the work challenges standard perceptions of ordinary items or attempts to illicit new thought on tough subjects. Surprise people too much and they will coil away from your work, or blow it off completely. Much of our task as artists is simply about creating a space where others can receive our ideas.

Ahern says her concerns with this project have more to do with time: "Will it have an impact on others who don't invest [as] much time [as I did]," she wonders, acknowledging that she has spent an exorbitant number of hours researching and plotting this work. More basely she seems to wonder if people can slow down enough to learn from it in the short span of the performance.

Here in New York, a city where everything rushes forward at blinding speed, this is a valid concern. "Everything is about convenience," she muses, and she is right. Even Slow Food done the NYC way, is calculated in two-hour table turns. Sit down at an organic restaurant and you have two, maybe three hours before the waiter starts checking his watch on you.

But for this project, Ahern had to live differently. Over the course of the year since beginning her research, she says she has "been able to live better," because of the practices she's adopted while living

the life of hunter, farmer, butcher. She says she feels "less pressure, even though the pressures in New York are very intense," and that she is "not spread as thin."

Studying Slow Food has taught Carrie Ahern a lesson or two about slowing down her own life, and listening to herself and those around her. She says that formerly, she built a lot of time into her projects, both in actual performance (her shows often break three hours with no intermission), and in exhaustive preparation. She felt she needed to take this approach "because there's not a lot of time in my life," she said, but now that is starting to change.

Borrowed Prey helped Ahern see the strings which connect humans and animals, life and death, and the ways in which many Americans refuse to acknowledge things that make us uncomfortable. "If you're disconnected from some of these natural processes of life, and death perhaps being the most major natural process in life, I feel like people can't really live their lives as fully. They can't have the same sense of satisfaction, of richness."

This week, I spoke to Gina Fiori and Geof Hancock of Alma Farm, an organic farm in Porter, Maine. Fiori and Hancock raise cattle and pigs for slaughter and have twin daughters who are about to turn three. As farmers and parents, they made a decision not to shelter their daughters from the stark reality of death in farm-life. "The girls understand when they eat [our meat]," Gina said, "they get it that the pig was in the yard and it's on the plate now." Does this mean they are living more richly? I don't know. But I do know that they speak freely and easily about death, and they eat ridiculously well. Their girls are happy, healthy and well-adjusted.

For *Borrowed Prey*, Ahern also studied the work of Dr. Temple Grandin, the famed animal-behavior scientist, who is also autistic. Because of her autism, Grandin thinks in pictures instead of words. This gives her the ability to empathize with animals on an extraordinary level: she can clearly visualize life the way they see it, and by extension, feel how they would feel, given her professional background in animal behavior.

Grandin's work helped Ahern understand how animals perceive the world, which lent great insight to the project. Grandin's experience living with Autism also reminds Ahern that "everyone kind of lives on a different spectrum," an idea that helps the artist empathize with both animals and people.

All of this is an ongoing process. It will not end when *Borrowed Prey* closes in NYC on May 13. Ahern's next project, which grew out of her current work, will be a closer investigation into empathy between humans in the modern age.

"We're not empathizing with each other in the same way [we once did]," Ahern said. "There's more access to information, [but] less direct communication." She sees this as particularly troubling with regard to how we handle death and dying: "we're still not really looking at what we might need. Not just to live longer but to live better."

In one of our talks, Carrie mentioned something that struck me. She described Dale (her hunt-

ing mentor) as someone who "really created his own life." He hunts much of what he eats and built his house, which she described as "finished and unfinished at the same time." To me, it seems her work is also this way, as is the work of most of the artists, farmers, and other creative people I know.

Creating something is, by default, an ongoing process; something that builds on past experience and current learning, and sometimes becomes indistinguishable from the lives we live around and through it. Even when a piece is finished it influences the work that follows, and through it all runs the quiet tendrils of time, which refuses to call attention to itself. It is we who focus so much on time - on making it, saving it, the fact that we feel we are wasting it.

We would all likely be a bit more the wiser to pause for a moment and remember, as Carrie reminded me, that day over tea: "things that are real take time." Thus, let the world speed around you, and focus on what you've chosen to do with your time. ■

BORROWED PREY OPENS ON THURSDAY, APRIL 25, AT DIXON'S FARMSTAND MEATS, IN CHELSEA MARKET, NYC, 16TH STREET, BETWEEN 9TH & 10TH AVES.

A FEAST FOR THE SENSES AT TASTE WILLIAMSBURG GREENPOINT

By Erin Cassin

The Brooklyn Bugle | Sept 2011



Photos by Lori Singlar for the *Brooklyn Bugle*

A strip of Williamsburg waterfront was transformed into a smorgasbord for the senses on Sunday, as some 2,000 visitors from Brooklyn and beyond streamed into the CitiStorage lot at 5 North 11th Street to sample tantalizing dishes and drinks, dance to live music, and watch a butcher demonstration-cum-performance piece at the 2nd annual TASTE Williamsburg Greenpoint benefit that raised approximately \$75,000 for the Northside Town Hall Community and Cultural Center.

Switching the venue from last year's block-long spot on Williamsburg's public streets to this year's location on CitiStorage's private property gave event organizers the ability to feature an expanded lineup of restaurants and bands, as well as the addition of alcoholic beverages and the culinary performance piece. With food and drink in hand, festivalgoers snagged seats at picnic tables with a waterfront view, while others stood in front of the music stage or gathered around the butcher demo/performance piece.

"There is a diversity of food... and everybody has been really nice," said DUMBO resident Jack Berkowitz. "And the (butcher) demonstration has been spectacular."

The inclusion of the culinary performance piece gave event attendees an up-close look at the "farm to table" process during a fascinating two-hour demonstration/discussion that involved anatomy lessons, proper

butchering techniques, cooking tips and audience participation. While butcher Andrew Dorsey from Williamsburg-based Marlow & Daughters meticulously carved up a 110-pound half pig and described the various ways each cut could be prepared and served, performance artist Carrie Ahern discussed the animal's anatomy in an interactive lesson that quickly attracted a small crowd.

"I'm hoping to get people a little more connected to where their food comes from," Ahern explained. "The process of how we get our food is so slow and complicated, while our experience with it is one of convenience."

"It is something greater than just a cellophane-wrapped Styrofoam tray in a supermarket fridge," Dorsey added. "I hope (the performance) will bring more of an appreciation for the similarities between us and the animals that we raise for our nutrition."

The pair led their audience on a sensorial journey through the butchering process, with Ahern using former dancer Rebecca Smith and volunteers from the crowd to draw comparisons between the anatomies of pigs and humans. As Dorsey cut into each part of the animal, Ahern touched related spots on her human models and discussed the functions of various muscle groups for both pigs and people.

Spectators were also given the option of participating in a tactile exercise when Ahern passed out disposable gloves and invited them to probe the glistening cuts – exposed muscles and all – that Dorsey piled onto platters.

“I thought it felt really slimy and kinda gross, but when you cook it into bacon, it tastes really delicious,” said one of the youngest audience members, 10-year-old Adrian Korin from Greenpoint.

“I like the fact that we are trying to connect the animal to what is on our plate, so from the standpoint of agriculture, we’ll hopefully have a little more respect for how we handle and treat animals before we serve them up as food,” added the youth’s father, George Korin.

Some curious passersby paused to watch and then quickly walked away in disgust, while others were impressed by the knowledge imparted by Ahern and Dorsey.

“I thought it was fascinating,” said Manhattan resident Sarah Chiapetta. “I think it is really important for people to see where their food comes from and not just see a piece of bacon on a plate. I think it is fine to eat meat as long as you have that understanding.”

The culinary performance piece also gave festivalgoers a glimpse into the range of cultural programming offered by the Northside Town Hall non-profit that benefited from the TASTE fundraiser. Proceeds will be used to redevelop Williamsburg’s shuttered firehouse at 134 Wythe Avenue into a community center focused on art and activism. Formed by local advocacy groups Neighbors Allied for Good Growth and The People’s Firehouse, Inc. who are heading up the renovation project, the non-profit has already staged performances at the site, which will be reborn as the Northside Town Hall Community and Cultural Center once the proposed \$2-million revamp is complete.



“We have this Northside Town Hall Arts Happening Series that is now in its second year... and when we were looking for artists, we started talking with Carrie Ahern and the TASTE was coming up,” said Northside Town Hall board member and art

committee chair Jaclyn Moynahan. “Since it is all about food, what better place to present her work? It became this perfect pairing.”

Ahern will premiere her Borrowed Prey show, which incorporates elements of her TASTE performance, in 2012.

“If you go, you’ll feel the hairs on your arms tingling....Ahern’s choreography and the Bacchante-like performances of her fellow dancers—can often sizzle. They take to this work with feverish abandon and put their bodies—maybe even their sanity—on the line.”

“Favorite things of 2009: Donna Costello’s performance in *Sensate*”
—Eva Yaa Asantewaa, *Infinite Body*

“Way down in the depths of an abandoned Wall Street bank vault, a performance to remember.”
—Carl Glassman, *The Tribeca Trib*

“Both the joy and sadness of the piece come from watching dancers full of muscle and body, in close contact with each other and yet seemingly out of reach to us audience, even though we could reach out and touch them anytime if we chose to break our voyeur bonds.”
—Quinn Batson, *offoffoff.com*

SeNSATE



Photo by Sarah Sterner

“Both the joy and sadness of the piece come from watching dancers full of muscle and body, in close contact with each other and yet seemingly out of reach to us audience, even though we could reach out and touch them anytime if we chose to break our voyeur bonds.”



Photo by Julie Lemberger

REVIEW OF SENSATE

by Quinn Batson

Sep 2010 | *Offoffoff*

Carrie Ahern's *Sensate* has gone from a large, airy space full of wood and church pews to a stuffy, inactive bank vault on Wall Street, and now feels like commentary on money, security and insecurity.

At the subway exit, the entrance to Wall Street presents a fortified checkpoint, apparently guarding real people and real buildings from unknowable threats. Since the stock exchange contains no actual money to steal but is even more heavily guarded, the question becomes, “are they guarding a concept or a building?” With the vast majority of trades now being performed by offsite computers, I wonder if the stock exchange building is essential or symbolic.

Things get even murkier upon entering a fairly impressive bank building and being directed to a disused, unimpressive area of the basement that used to contain things of value. Heavy-as-a-truck vault doors look stuck in the floor and ridiculous. The movements, migrations and performers are pretty much the same as before, but now the shivering and shaking of the dancers seem like reactions to loss of money, or to the losses of concrete, physical connections to money and other people, in our increasingly virtual, computerized world.

Both the joy and sadness of the piece come from watching dancers full of muscle and body, in close contact with each other and yet seemingly out of reach to us audience, even though we could reach out and touch them anytime if we chose to break our voyeur bonds. The performers play with this proximity, too, brushing audience members or stamping the ground inches away from us while doing solos in the upstairs freakout room. Layered, shifting music of sound fragments and live-recorded vocals, sung and designed by Anne Hege, is haunting, and continually builds and crests over time, in very long waves of sound.



Photo by Sarah Sterner

CARRIE AHERN'S SENSATE HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!

by Alan Sondheim

Sep 2010

Tonight we went to the premiere of Carrie Ahern's *Sensate*, a dance/ performance at "The Vaults at 14 Wall Street" and we do want to recommend it. You can get there with the 4,5,2, or 3 trains. The performance takes place in two spaces and you move among the dancers and spaces (and other spaces for that matter); the piece lasts three hours, slowly cycles, and you come and go as you want. (We were there for two and a half hours, enough for two-plus cycles.)

We loved the performance; in particular, I liked the dancework of Jillian Hollis and Donna Costello - Hollis' work is close to my aesthetic, and she did amazing solos (at times reminding me of Foofwa, but then what do I know?). Ahern's performance with David Figueroa (and solo) was slow and eerily intense; her facial movements were uncanny. Costello's work at times seemed, deliberately, barely in control. The ensemble work was complex and tense and some of it was terrific.

We came out elated and wandered around Wall Street for a while - I hadn't been down there at night for a long time, and it was oddly magical; even the Stock Exchange was illumined in purple light.

NYTHEATRE REVIEW

by Judith Jarosz
Sept 2010

The LMCC is a great organization that among other things makes spaces available to artists, and art groups, and I had never seen The Vault space at 14 Wall Street. The whole experience leading up to entering the building is very cool and surreal. It was a particularly beautiful late summer evening and the Wall Street area was lit with soft gold street lighting. Trinity Church was framed at the end of the street against a black sky. 14 Wall seems deserted, with only an occasional flyer stuck to the wall to let you know that you are still going in the right direction. The air pulsates with droning electrical tones and percussion sounds. Through another door and I am in an expansive space with halls and doors that lead to rooms of different sizes.

Part of the fun with this installation is that the audience is free to move about at will, and leave and come back again if desired during the three-hour running time. Since I happen to be a choreographer with a touch of the ADD, this seems a match made in heaven. I see a large vault door swung open at the end of the hall and enter it to encounter other audience members standing around the sides of a smallish room, as a lone performer in what appears to be torn and paint-spattered toga drags an imaginary weight across the floor slowly in a square formation. This holds my interest for a few minutes and I find myself looking more at the other audience members' reactions than at the artist. I sense that this is part of the creative intent. Getting antsy, off I go to explore. The space is huge. Two floors of varying spaces, and I hear there is a third floor that they didn't use. I pass a room filled with nothing but office chairs across the entire floor, and feel free to sit and spin for a moment. Onward to another very large room that holds a lone mock set-up of a dingy living room at one end, with a couch and lamp. I never saw any performance activity in this room while I was there, but did witness other observers making use of it to sit and chat with each other.

Heading down a metal staircase, I encounter another large room brimming with activity. The feeling down here is very apocalyptic. There are platforms of different heights and dimensions throughout the space and cloth pieces hang from the ceiling here and there, separating



Photo by Julie Lemberger

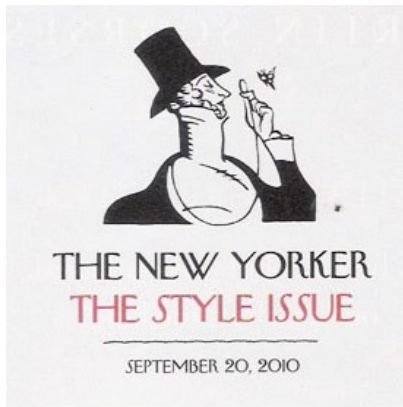
the space enough to provide different movement encounters to go on simultaneously. It is up to us where we go and what we watch. The artists' costumes by Naoko Nagata with their lost-boys-from-Peter-Pan look fit the desolate atmosphere, and the lighting design by Jay Ryan dims and brightens around the entire space creating a spooky additional dimension. The music is composed and performed live by Anne Hege who walks around and through the artists chanting, wailing, and moaning into a headset that sends the sound throughout the space. It's rather eerie, and all of the elements come together to complement that feeling.

The performers, Ahern, Donna Costello, David Figueroa, Kelly Hayes, Anne Hege, and Jillian Hollis seem to be perpetually off in corners alone, writhing or looking perplexed, or confronting each other violently in pairs or groups. I am lucky to be in the right room at the right time, and sit on the right chair (there are chairs positioned sporadically around the space) to see a segment with four dancers that lasts about 20 minutes. In this segment, the dancers slowly slither towards each other across an expanse of floor until they are clumped together, they then undulate as a clump for a while, before bursting apart and crawling away in one direction or another. The composer continues her chant-like contributions and the total effect is mesmerizing. I feel myself moved enough to gently pat one of the dancers on the head after she basically collapses at my feet. I stayed for over an hour, taking breaks here and there, and the overall effect was satisfying. It is a unique experience.

carrie ahern DANCE

SENSATE

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DANCE

CARRIE AHERN DANCE

"Sensate," which premiered at the Brooklyn Lyceum last November, moves to an underground bank vault on Wall Street, in a production presented by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. It's a post-apocalyptic installation, the performers in raggedy fashions, convulsing like maenads. The work repeats in cycles in the course of three hours, and Ahern encourages visitors to come and go at will. (The Vaults, 14 Wall St. For tickets, visit brownpapertickets.com. Sept. 18 at 8 and Sept. 19 at 4. Through Oct. 3.)

Bloomberg

PERFECT NY WEEKEND
OCT 2 | SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Head down to Wall Street at 4 p.m. and you'll see people shaking, wiggling, wrestling and convulsing. Carrie Ahern's "Sensate" takes place across the street from the New York Stock Exchange on two underground floors of a former bank vault. Inspired by the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, the dance installation with six performers lasts three hours. No worries: Visitors are encouraged to come and go as they please. At The Vaults, 14 Wall St.

The New York Times

CARRIE AHERN DANCE

by Roslyn Sulcas | Oct 2010

This dance installation, "SeNSATE," takes place in an underground bank vault on Wall Street, reason enough to go and see Ms. Ahern's dancers, accompanied by Anne Hege's electronic score."

THE BALTIMORE SUN
FRIDAY, MARCH 25, 2011

12 THE BALTIMORE SUN | LIVE! | FRIDAY, MARCH 25, 2011

ARTS

CARRIE AHERN'S SENSATE: Half exhibit and half dance, Carrie Ahern's SeNSATE brings live music and a company of dancers to the stage, through April 2 at Baltimore Theatre Project, 45 W. Preston St. Tickets are \$10-\$20. Call 410-752-8558.

Carrie Ahern's "SeNSATE" plays at the Theatre Project through April 2.

CITY PAPER
BALTIMORE'S FREE ALTERNATIVE WEEKLY 4,443
VOL. 35 NO. 12, MARCH 23-MARCH 30, 2011 1,452

BALTIMORE WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS
MARCH 23 THROUGH MARCH 30

FRIDAY 25 SENSATE
7:30 P.M., also March 26 and April 1-2 and 3 P.M. March 27, Theatre Project, 45 W. Preston St., (410) 539-3091, theatreproject.org, \$20, seniors, artists, and military \$15, students \$10, multiple performances \$5 after first ticket purchase.

If you're the type of person with a very definite need for personal space, SeNSATE may not be for you. For three hours, the crew and cast of this N.Y.-based company make every effort to discard any semblance of boundaries. The show's goal is to transform surroundings, and anything is fair game, including the audience. The dancers are abandoning the stage and taking over the entire theater in order to follow all creative impulses. They're bound to have quite a few, with the disconcertingly eerie compositions of Anne Hege acting as muse. Viewers also get to add to the chaos: Throughout the show everyone is free to come, go, sit, stand, and ponder the question, "How do we create boundaries—and meaning—with so much freedom?" (CHRISTINA McDONALD)

JILLIAN HOLLIS, DONNA COSTELLO IN SENSATE

FRIDAY 1 SENSATE. In this part dance-show, part museum-exhibit, choreographer Carrie Ahern allows her audience to follow their whims and move where they feel compelled. Though April 2, 8 P.M., Theatre Project, 45 W. Preston St., (410) 752-8558, theatreproject.org, \$20, seniors, artists, and military \$15, students \$10, multiple performances \$5 after first ticket purchase.

“Way down in the depths of an abandoned Wall Street bank vault, a performance to remember.”

SENSATE 14 WALL REVIEW AND FEATURE

by Carl Glassman

Oct 2010 / *The Tribeca Trib*

In the subterranean silence of a vast abandoned vault far below the former Bankers Trust building at 14 Wall St., Carrie Ahern staged “Sensate,” her three-hour, energetic dance work. There, beyond massive safe doors, four performers of Carrie Ahern Dance alternately hurled their bodies, spasmodically shook themselves, hugged, fought, crawled and occasionally walked in a dreamlike state. With no stage, the audience followed the performers between two cavernous floors, and were free to stand or sit wherever (and as close as) they liked, coming and going as they pleased. Below, Carrie Ahern discusses the work.

For most people, the moment they enter “Sensate” they feel self-conscious, even uncomfortable. This is true for the performers as well as the audience. That’s because of the freedom that we both have.

As a performer, you always feel the audience intensely. Even in the most formal setting, like the Metropolitan Opera, for example, the audience is influencing the performance. Many audience members don’t have a sense of that. They feel like, “I’m on this side of the line and the performers are on that side of the line and I’m just watching.” But that’s not the case, especially in this piece.

I was interested in allowing complete transparency between the audience and performers. That’s why I wanted the audience to move wherever they wanted—to view the performance from their own perspective, from a place to which they are personally attracted. For the performer, that means people are following you around the stage. Some come close to you; others stay away and you can feel their tenseness. Sometimes,



Photos by Carl Glassman

a performer can feel energized by the presence of someone in the audience, or we can feel irritated. Recently we had a young girl who came very close to the performers, even lay down on the floor near them. Although she was obviously enjoying the attention, she was also reacting honestly to the piece. It was such a wonderful surprise.

I encourage the performers to make eye contact with the audience. Sometimes, we touch audience members and when we do, they have different reactions. People have very different boundaries, and touch is the final boundary. A lot of issues pop up when people feel discomfort. But that’s where we all begin when we enter the space. Where we go from there is up to us. Are we going to transform any of those boundaries? Are we going to look at them differently? Are they going to stay the same? What do we want from this experience? More and more, I see people who can’t stop using their iPhones to take pictures or videotape during the performance. I think that is a way of distancing themselves from us and their feelings. The other day, a man opened up his laptop and started working!

WALL STREET SUPERMEN SALVAGE DANCE MAKER'S NIETZSCHEAN TRIBUTE

*Bloomberg News Feature article by Philip Boroff
November 2009*

When New York dancer-choreographer Carrie Ahern had a falling out with the academics who'd offered to support her work, the market came to the rescue: Capstone Equities provided free rehearsal space in an underground bank vault near the New York Stock Exchange. *Sensate*, a three-hour "dance installation" ending this weekend at the Brooklyn Lyceum, was inspired by Ahern's reading of Friedrich Nietzsche, the 19th-century philosopher who created the idea of the "superman."

Nietzsche scholars in New York at first offered to collaborate with Ahern on the production and to help raise money. In November 2008, they asked her dancers to work gratis. "They asked the dancers to donate their time in the spirit of Nietzschean sacrifice," Ahern said in an interview. "Their fees are a matter of respect. I was insulted that they would use Nietzsche's work as a justification for not coming up with the money."

Enter Capstone. Ahern, whose work the *New Yorker* magazine has called "striking and original," applied for free rehearsal space from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, which places artists in unused commercial space. For two years, closely held Capstone has lent LMCC the vault in the basement of 14 Wall Street, a space totaling 22,000 square feet. The choreographer, four performers and a composer rehearsed about 260 hours there, saving her about \$5,000. "It was important aid," Ahern said, adding that the vault had proven to be an artistic as well as financial plus. "You can do so many things in it," she said. "It's much more malleable than other space."

Cheaper to produce than a Broadway show, dance's lower profile and smaller audience make fundraising especially difficult. "Even for established artists there aren't a lot of funding sources," said Andrea Sholler, executive director of Dance Theater Workshop, a downtown Manhattan venue. Moreover, the throbbing, gyrating and convulsions on view at a recent *Sensate* rehearsal won't remind anyone of *Swan Lake*. "If there is not movement



Photo by Julie Lemberger

people understand, they feel uncomfortable," Sholler said. "It's more challenging to the viewer than other art forms."

Ahern started dancing at 11 in Milwaukee. After high school, she moved to New York, skipping college to avoid debt. She danced freelance while working as a waitress and caterer. Today, she teaches yoga and Pilates. In 2007, she was encouraged to create *Sensate* by the Nietzsche Circle, a New York non-profit that brings together artists and writers to engage with Nietzsche's work. After committing to help, circle members said they had no time for fundraising, Ahern said. Rainer J. Hanshe, executive director of the Nietzsche Circle, wrote in an e-mail that he and his colleagues found Ahern's \$15,000 budget "exorbitant." Hanshe, a Ph.D. candidate in English at CUNY Graduate Center, said he helps run the circle without pay. He cited in his e-mail "the very large fees for the choreographer, the dancers and a composer." Ahern "refused to even talk about such fees and was completely inflexible in that regard," wrote Hanshe, who co-edits the circle's online journal *Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics*.

Ahern said she took no fee for herself and that the budget included pay for a lighting and costume designer and \$2,000 per dancer. "It's like, nothing," she said of the dancer fees she fought for. She ultimately raised \$17,000 herself through a fundraiser hosted by members of her troupe's board.

At the Lyceum, audience members can traverse the two-level converted bathhouse and come and go as they please. Ahern said she sought a format in which performers and audience have unusual freedom. "As for roughhousing among dancers in the piece, Ahern said everyone has the capacity to be violent. "If you don't recognize it, you're more likely to act on it," she said. "If we sublimate it, we are not living to our full potential."

carrie ahern DANCE

SENSATE

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Photo by Julie Lemberger

“... makes the piece a complete success and so unique that anyone with an interest in dance or performance must come and experience it, is the perfect, full, and flowing use of the space.”

REVIEW OF SENSATE

by Harrison Owen

Nov 2009/ www.fingeredmedia.com

Last night I walked into *Sensate* mid-way through the second of three cycles and was immediately entranced and enveloped by its world, an other world both deep in the past and far into the future - the vocals and electronics recalled Ligeti's *Lux Aeterna*, the haunting soundtrack for the monolith's discovery on the moon in 2001 while the dancers quivered and shook, primordial ooze - all physical sensation and biology. An impressive initial reaction, for sure, but what kept me involved for the next hour and a half, and what I believe makes the piece a complete success and so unique that anyone with an interest in dance or performance must come and experience it, is the perfect, full, and flowing use of the space.

The Brooklyn Lyceum has a huge main theater, with a back balcony, and a smaller performance space above, separated by windows. *Sensate* uses both spaces simultaneously, with both the performers (five dancers and the vocalist) and the audience moving freely between the two - creating new, ever changing formations. Two different soundtracks bleed into each other, and both dance areas can be viewed from either space, though I was constantly aware that something else was going on elsewhere and therefore actively explored the space and its infinite perspectives. The piece is on hour in duration, but is run through three times with out stopping each night and the audience is encouraged to come and go, or stay, for as long as they choose.

“*Sensate* is disturbing.”



Photo by Sarah Sterner

REVIEW OF SENSATE

Excerpted from a review by Meghan Frederick
www.idanz.com | Nov 2009

Theories about creation tend to take one of two routes, either there was always something, or, before there was, there was not. *Sensate*, Carrie Ahern’s new work at the Brooklyn Lyceum, speaks strongly for the first of these ideas. Walking into *Sensate* is stepping into a world that has always been.

There being no discernible beginning or end to this dance, one is struck by various impressions which overlap and overwhelm one another. First, two women in rags; They run at one another, pushing each other to the ground, one gains the upper hand and folds her partner into a ball, then kneads her like dough as she climbs to kneel on top. On a catwalk in the back of the space, a woman in a long dress, her face to the corner, a man, opposite her with hands curled like fiddleheads, walking very slowly, a woman’s bloody knees as she hangs, upside down, against the wall... Then, one notices the audience members. Stage lights glint off glasses, footsteps add to the atmospheric score as people shift. You hear something, you turn, and you don’t know whether to expect an audience member or another dancer, appearing out of the woodwork.

Each viewer has a different experience of this work but, from my perspective, the strongest section of this dance is Donna Costello’s arresting solo, performed in

a smaller space adjacent to, and above the main room, separated from it by a plane of glass. Sitting on the catwalk, I can watch Costello shake and fall, punctuating her destructive movement with moments of “dance” moves. From my viewpoint, Costello is seen through the plane of glass and the criss-crossed strips of marley, lain onto the bare plywood floor in the main room, are reflected over her body. As the dance continues in the room where I am sitting, the dancers seem to move over her, worlds colliding, but taking no notice.

I shift to watch the dance from this smaller room and am involved more than expected. I am actually hit by the dancer performing here as she rushes by. Her dance is violent, with swinging, jabbing arms, and even before she slams into my legs, I am afraid she is going to punch me. In this room, I am also illuminated as to the construction of the sparse, apocalyptic score we have been hearing all night. Anne Hege is singing, live, into a contraption that seems to be made of balsa wood, tape players and a Mac computer. As she sings she manipulates the tape players and several feet of the actual tape, to distort and loop her voice. It is quite impressive.

At some point during this last solo, I realize the dance is about to repeat and this knowledge urges me to step out and end my experience. I realize, rather than watching the creation of the universe, we are watching what is left after the world has ended. *Sensate* is disturbing.



Photo by Sarah Sterner

“You’ll feel the hairs on your arms tingling.”

SENSATE: AHERN’S SPOOK HOUSE

Review by Eva Yaa Asantewaa

www.infinitebody.blogspot.com | Nov 2009

Halloween might be long gone, but **Carrie Ahern** and her fellow dancers are haunting the **Brooklyn Lyceum** this week. They’re decidedly flesh-and-blood creatures. But, if you go, you’ll feel the hairs on your arms tingling, particularly if you spend any time in the small, upstairs room where powerful **Donna Costello** might thrash around like a maniac only a millimeter away from you.

Sensate, running for three hours at every installation performance, offers each audience member his or her choice of arrival and departure time, viewing location and even intermission. (A restroom is conveniently located to the rear of the main space’s primary seating area. Quietly slip back to your bench without fuss, and know that it’s okay that you’ve missed what you’ve chosen to miss.) Ahern invites us to collaborate with her by creating our own experience of the work, going beyond her own efforts to shape its structure by willfully reorganizing her output.

From what I could tell, last night’s small audience saw itself in a far more linear way. For instance, for long stretches of time, people sat in a conventional arrangement, facing the main space head-on. And Ahern’s use of the Lyceum’s features--including stairs to different levels--rarely went beyond expected functionality. It’s certainly not the first time, we’ve seen dancers suddenly arrive or withdraw by taking the stairs.

A live, visually-innovative performance voice and electronic music by composer **Anne Hege** and eerie lighting by **Jay Ryan** contribute to the spooky, mysterious air. Costumer Naoko Nagata’s raggedy layers make the dancers resemble survivors of some unnamed disaster. And the site itself, a former public bathhouse, is a potentially eccentric space for a show. But it needs more imaginative magic-making.

Ahern’s choreography, however, and the Bacchante-like performances of her fellow dancers—**Costello, David Figueroa, Kelly Hayes and Jillian Hollis**—can often sizzle. The audience might evade Ahern’s invitation to freedom, but her dancers do not. They take to this work with feverish abandon and put their bodies—maybe even their sanity— on the line.

“Carrie Ahern’s *SeNSATE* offers more than usual.”



Photo by Julie Lemberger

SENSATE: A PLACE TO STAY AWHILE

Review by Quinn Batson

www.offoffoff.com | Nov 2009

Entering *SeNSATE* is like entering a comfortable spaceship in which human creatures are interacting, oblivious to the presence of watching earthlings. This spaceship is both luxuriously spacious and oddly rustic, with warm, shifting lighting and gentle ambient sound that mixes looping human murmurings and soft gongs. All this peacefulness does little to calm the inhabitants, though. Much of the time they are shaking and convulsing and stamping and pulling, alone or in pairs or threes.

Just as it seems they may shudder themselves to exhaustion, though, things shift to a gentler, calmer place and action becomes more rare and subtle, even tender and lethargic. This, too, gives the group the feeling of being encapsulated for what may be a long time, as though these five people are stuck together on a very long trip. Anxiety and comfort are continuously at odds, and each wins for a little while. A smaller upstairs room, visible but mostly silent from the large main room, seems to be the freakout room, where members of the group can go individually to blow off real steam without creating any friction down below. Really violent stomping does get through muffled to the larger space, continually keeping that freakout vibe at the edge of consciousness while watching others doing other things.

This is such an interesting use of space. Flooring strips at random overlapping angles mix with similarly random church pews and a human-size box on the main floor, and every inch of the space is available to explore. There are vantage points from above, below and immediately next to the performers, and only the built-in human tendency to not disturb others prevents the audience from touching or engaging the performers. Interestingly, individual dancers do occasionally test this, moving very close to seated people. Coincidentally or not, there is a vaguely sacred feeling to the space and proceedings that gives the church pews subtle meaning. And subtle is the best word to describe the piece, even as performers thrash about. There is never any pressure to stay in one place, so there is never any real need to leave the show. The whole experience is continually shifting over three hours and will probably shift subtly over the course of the five performances, making this one of those pieces that invites multiple viewing.

Credit Carrie Ahern for conceiving and directing the piece, Jay Ryan for some really beautiful and innovative lighting design, Anne Hege for live music that is similarly intriguing but noninvasive, and Ahern, Donna Costello, David Figueroa, Kelly Hayes and Jillian Hollis for engaging performances. Only by spending some time inside the piece do all the meanings of the word *sensate* seep in.

“The performance is a midtown island of calm, craft and counter-consumerism. Nothing here’s for sale...This is an only-in-New York moment: Linger, and you’ll be glad you did. Hurry past, and admit you’ve lost your sense of urban wonder.”
—Margot Mifflin, *Margotmifflin.com*

“Riveting and mysterious ...These dancers, draped in crochet, are goddesses clothed in recycled fibers, seen by the public through a window reinforced with silver tape in the shape of oversized chain mail. ... A moving and memorable experience.”
—Dora Ohrenstein, *Crochetinsider.com*

“I am in the center of weirdosity. What the Sam Hill is going on here?”
—Random passerby

COVERS



Photo by Olek

carrie ahern DANCE

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“A moving and memorable experience.”



Photo by Olek

COVERS: RUSH HOUR ART, NEW YORK STYLE

By Dora Ohrenstein

crochetinsider.com | Sept 2009

At the busy corner of 47th Street and Lexington Avenue, during the evening rush hour, New Yorkers encountered *COVERS*, a performance in the window of the LAB Gallery. A collaboration between choreographer Carrie Ahern and visual artist Olek, it was inspired by three book titles. The artist blurb states the piece addresses how desires are projected onto the objects in store windows, and how those desires shift when the objects become live women, vulnerable to the audience's gaze.

What it was like was more riveting and mysterious. Live women in a store window immediately capture one's attention. These dancers, draped in crochet, are goddesses clothed in recycled fibers, seen by the public through a window reinforced with silver tape in the shape of oversized chain mail.

The small store environment is deranged with color, panels of crochet camouflage and shiny silver on the walls, plastic tentacles dangling from the ceiling, strips of tubing stretched from floor to ceiling. On the floor sits a human figure enclosed, except for eyes and glasses, in a red body bag, crocheting non-stop. Nearby are a matching pink television, chair, and dog-like hulk. The

dancers move slowly through the space, each entangled in her own web. In the front window a dancer in white has an immense piece of fabric on her head that suggests a wedding veil with a long trunk-like train. Her dress of burlap hangs loosely around her body as she crawls to the window's edge, genuflects very slowly to the outside crowd, and enacts a dream-like sequence that ends with her picking up a small iron covered in crochet. With it, she irons a piece of her dress, then her foot, then her cheek and finally her tongue.

A second dancer in the back is a striking beauty showing skin, wearing a hot pink head dress and black bustier. Caught in a giant net, she writhes in very slow motion, finally emerging to grasp a small watering can. The woman in white is a domestic sufferer, the one in pink and black, punishable for her sins, no doubt. The performance evolves very slowly over the course of an hour. The audience is out on the street, where city life is going on in all its teeming chaos.

Passersby stop for a moment, watch with curiosity, wonder aloud about what's going on, and move on. A few linger and snap photos. One fella asks if he can jump on the girl the window. Another asks for an interpretation, but when a few sentences in her cell phone rings, that's that. The artists remain in their separate world. A moving and memorable experience.



Photo by Olek

“...a midtown island of calm, craft and counter-consumerism.”

KNIT PICK

By Margot Mifflin

Margotmifflin.com|Sept 2009

If you gave Yayoi Kusama a crochet hook, she might mount the kind of fuzzy spectacle you'll find on the corner of 47th St. and Lexington Avenue this week. *Covers*, a collaboration between choreographer Carrie Ahern and fabric artist Olek, is a silent performance/installation piece in which two women wrapped (or trapped?) in bolts of kooky knitwear move in slow motion in a storefront gallery itself webbed in wool. It's as if a spider on acid had spun out of control, trading silk for yarn and catching moving mannequins in its web.

Between the buzz of fashion week in Bryant Park and the bustle of people rushing along Lexington Avenue at rush hour (the only time the women appear) the performance is a midtown island of calm, craft and counter-consumerism. Nothing here's for sale. Step closer and you'll notice random crochet-covered objects—an iron, a sled and a t.v. —along with crazy little phallic sheaths (and balloons) dangling from the ceiling. While the two artists perform in a trance, a third figure, wearing a head-to-toe fitted number (half burqua, half spidey-suit) knits maniacally in the corner, stopping only to glare at random spectators. This is an only-in-New York moment: Linger, and you'll be glad you did. Hurry past, and admit you've lost your sense of urban wonder. The *Covers* women are at the Lab Gallery, next to the Roger Smith Hotel, September 16, 18, 21, 23rd and 25th from 5:30-6:30.

“Ahern’s choreography is striking and original...powerful”
—*The New Yorker*

“Captivating...a thing of beauty and strangeness haunted by
unconnected moments and discontinuous time...compelling.”
—*Offoffoff.com*

“A performance that is more truth than representation.”
—*Jeffrey Fracé*

THE UNITY OF SKIN



THE NEW YORKER

APRIL 7, 2008

CARRIE AHERN DANCE

Multicolored crocheted webs of fabric by the artist Olek serve as striking costumes and props for "The Unity of Skin." Ahern's choreography, apart from some pseudo-mystical spinning and clichéd running in a circle, is striking and original in itself, and even more so in its use of Olek's creations. One powerful pas de deux takes place with a wall of webbing dividing the man from the woman; the partnering takes place through the gaps. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. April 3-5 at 8:30.)



The Unity of Skin performance photos by Michael Faulkner



The Baltimore Sun

Saturday, March 3, 2008

DON'T MISS THIS TODAY...

8 P.M.



THE UNITY OF SKIN // Ancient Greek philosophy takes the form of contemporary dance in this presentation by Carrie Ahern Dance today and at 3 p.m. tomorrow at Theatre Project, 45 W. Preston St. Tickets are \$10-\$20. Call 410-752-8558 or go to theatreproject.org.



CITY PAPER

BALTIMORE'S FREE ALTERNATIVE WEEKLY

★ VOL. 32 NO. 10, MARCH 5-12, 2008 ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
WEDNESDAY-TO-WEDNESDAY
HIGHLIGHTS
March 5 through March 12



Photo by Olek

THURSDAY 6

THE UNITY OF SKIN

Through March 9, 8 P.M.
Thursday, Friday, and
Saturday, 3 P.M. Sunday,
Theatre Project, 45 W
Preston St., (410) 752-8558,
www.theatreproject.org, \$20,
seniors and artists \$15,
students \$10.

Ancient questions of trans-
cendence inspire modern answers,
as evidenced by *The Unity of
Skin*. This modern dance per-
formance is a result of direc-
tor Carrie Ahern's exploration

of boundaries between people
and their environment stem-
ming from one pre-Socratic
theme: "It is not possible to step
twice in the same river." Visual
artist Olek, known for her cro-
cheted sculptures, contributes
through costumes and sets to-
ward another idea—that life is
perhaps cyclical—and Greg
Heffeman performs his sound-
track of cello and laptop live.
Starring dancers David Figueroa,
Kelly Hayes, and Jillian Hollis.
(Christina Lee)



AUDIENCE QUOTES ABOUT THE UNITY OF SKIN:

“This evening length piece was very rich and complex. There were great moments of tenderness and human gentleness but also a sense of terror...the original movement resonated with such authenticity.”

“...gorgeous and unique...seamless and sculptural”

“...inevitable but surprising transitions”

“...fascinated by the tension (literal and figurative) that the crocheted material created... truly original movement that came from hours of working with the props and sets and exploring their possibilities and qualities...”

“Compelling images, and beauty, and a great bow toward the funny and fanciful too.”

“The dancers gave so much of themselves, it was beautiful to see. There were many, many images that I took home to think and talk about...”

“...struck by the individual power and presence of each performer.”

“...beautiful, haunting choreography.”



“a thing of beauty and strangeness
haunted by apparently unconnected
moments and discontinuous time.”

A CROCHETED DREAM

By Quinn Batson

Offoffoff.com | April 2008

Carrie Ahern's *The Unity of Skin* is an often perplexing and occasionally beautiful slice of an alternate world created by rich computer-augmented cello music played live by Greg Heffernan and a spiderweb set of netting crocheted by Olek, lit by Carol Mullins to create sumptuous moods. Dancers David Figueroa, Kelly Hayes and Jillian Hollis slither, flow, run, sleep and bark in this world, which we enter and leave through a gloaming light while the dancers float and drift.

It is never obvious what is going on onstage, but compelling moments and odd set design give this piece many layers of possibility. The light/heavy crocheted netting is used as transport, road, blanket, skirt, barrier and semi-permeable wall; it resembles cells viewed through a microscope, shed snakeskin or a heavy-duty spiderweb. Dancers often interact with each other via the netting, as a source of connection or restriction. The most captivating example of this is the partnering between Figueroa, behind a net wall, and Hayes, on our side of the wall, as she is variously supported, lifted and captured through the holes of the net, as if some sort of tactile mirror or portal of consciousness is interacting with her thoughts and physical being.

Other compelling moments like the protracted and impressive barking by Hayes' "dog," restricted behind a web fence, are inexplicable, but the overall mixture of the piece works really well. Small touches throughout also add richness; two pieces of hanging fabric that begin the piece in stillness near one corner of stage front, for example, begin moving almost imperceptibly and eventually make their way all the way around the perimeters of the stage before falling to the floor. *The Unity of Skin* feels largely like a dream, a thing of beauty and strangeness haunted by apparently unconnected moments and discontinuous time.

“The audience is treated to a more immediate experience of their (the dancers) energy, and to a performance that is more truth than representation.”



MULTIPLICITY OF DISCOURSE

Excerpted from a review by Jeffrey Fracé

Carrie Ahern experiments. She asks the question, “Let’s see what happens if…” and then sees what happens. She ponders a problem, then examines it and discusses it in a discourse of the body. She doesn’t tell the audience what she’s learned. Instead, she structures the problem so that the audience can examine it as well. We are brought to a place in the process where we are made equal.

Very few artists succeed at allowing the audience into the room with the performers; more often, “we” are here and “you” are there. In Ahern’s work, we are all here. First, because we all share the process of examination. Second, because Ahern is expert at integrating the architecture of the playing space into the show. Very frequently we are reminded that we are in the very same room as the performers; this is attributable both to the lighting and set designs, but also to the attitude of the performers who apparently share our wonder at their physical surroundings.

The third reason is that Ahern resists the impulse to entertain us. In her audience, I meet her work as though I’m meeting someone who is a rigorous and subtle thinker, and yet completely transparent and forthright. I’m neither tricked nor seduced. Everything is what it is, but because of the quality of our shared interest, it has become extraordinary. In *The Unity of Skin*, dancers

repeat short phrases for hypnotically long durations, they take physically demanding solos, they promenade slowly through the environment, and they entangle themselves in the crocheted set. What’s unremarkable in description becomes mesmerizing in execution when performed with a clarity of intention that disallows assumptions, and a force of interest that precludes rote.

Lights come up to reveal dancers in tight formation, repeating short individual circular movement phrases in varying tempi while the live cello offers vibrations. I felt the energy of a river contained by a lock. As the lock opens, there’s a rush, and the water pours from the container into the new space, gradually finding equilibrium in the expanse. And so the dancers gradually bring the audience to equilibrium in this room in St. Mark’s Church, expanding into space, finding gradually more unison movement, and mixing some retrograde in their expansion as ebb mixes with flow. In their bodies’ discourse, the dancers have moved past indication—“this” pointing at “that”—and have created metaphor. The audience is treated to a more immediate experience of their energy, and to a performance that is more truth than representation.

We allow ourselves to slow down time, along with the dancers, into a finale that refuses to burst, but instead releases in a long exhale. We can hear our own breathing—or is that the dancers’? In the darkness we are still wondering what happens next.

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE UNITY OF SKIN

by Rebecca Smith Millstein



beginning

Whirling dervish repetition,
taking great care in the
placement of self and things.
The dervish: there is an
unyielding, starched nature to
neck/head placement and arms
Protection? From nature of self?
From the inertia of life?
The soft masculine—such care,
such specificity throughout piece
showed softness
within a strong framework



caught

In the universal web, tangled up in life,
struggling/enveloped/yield
Rolling in fabric on floor
—will she be swallowed up?
Will she be able to breathe
amidst the chaos,
the wrapped up nature of living,
of the strands of our lives?
Will the other dancers allow her to stay
there or will they peel
the layers to free her?
Perhaps she is swaddled,
constraining against or reveling in?
Maybe not caught
but running headlong
into entanglements
Alternately hyper-vigilant
and the nexus who is gently watching,
overseeing whirling cosmos
Intersection of lives—
the connector (connection)
between the other two

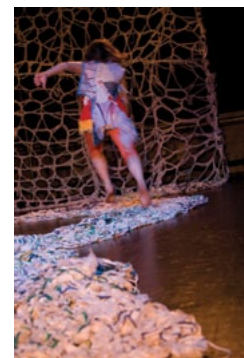
Ankles become wrapped,
grounding one in the world.
Choice or vortex pull?

spectrums

Sound—the air fills with the
vibrations. You can feel it suffuse
your marrow, your fluid self.
Feel it in your skin; through your
bones; in the watery you; through
your many layers.
Dancers their non-selves; their
boundaries; their energy which
moves the space
Layering of one's self
within movement

light

Emanating from the dancers,
pulsing from the space, the walls,
saturating the air in layers
(light through particles?)



sliding along a continuum

Being in the moment vs
on the moment vs mindlessness
Life is fun; life is slippery and
precarious underfoot; challenging
your support (emotional foundation,
making choices contrary to your
norm) or boundaries

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE UNITY OF SKIN

by Rebecca Smith Millstein



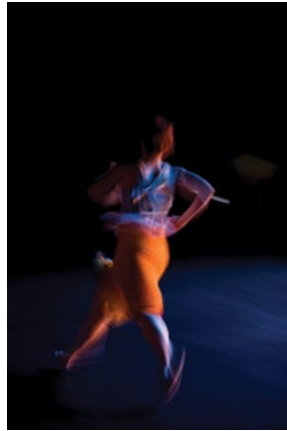
pup

The sound returns us to the corporeal
Fearful and menacing
and defensive
Pushing/landing onto those
powerful boxer front limbs,
shoulders connecting
so emphatically to the ground beneath
Again, a return to the
daily-ness of our world
out of lofty notions
Soothed by a simple touch



duet on material

Floating (lifts)
Letting the universe hold you; the
interconnection of us all (cosmic
strings that separate & unite)
Reaching through and around
obstacles to be with another
giving over to support by another,
by the universe.

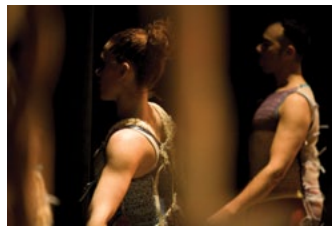


running

Sucked my breath away
with the force of the vortex
Not pedestrian—familiar,
brings us back to our world

solo

Running back and forth
such tiring work to rail
against your boundaries
both seen and silent
Catching up
and being caught up



releves

Balanced at the end of the world,
standing on the threads
of the world
connection between different
versions of self? Tenuous, strong
the break between two dimensions



ending/retrograde

Laughing and stillness
In the stillness which surrounds
this sound both keeps it contained
and allows it to move beyond itself.
Allows us to move beyond ourselves
Dancers as pure light,
so rich they reflect us in their glow
Nebulous lights, particles....
Will they bind? Will they float? How
can time hold such a sound for so long?
Did the laughing slow time?
Were the revolutions of this world
aligned with the other dimensions?
When all is just right, harmonized,
will we slow rapturously? Can we?
The spectrums of our self
Which layers will allow for this
and which rebel? How does time slow?
How elastic can these three
show it to be so?
The warp and weft of time,
the structure for experience
Comfortable/uncomfortable
in living moments.
Living in moments,
moving through moments.

“Ahern’s *Red* was a rich tapestry of densely layered images of pent-up ferocity... her own striking investigation.”
—Sarah Maxfield, *Culture Catch*

“Her (Carrie Ahern) all-female ensemble includes some of the city’s most interesting dance artists.”
—Jennifer Dunning, *The New York Times*

“*Red* is a rich piece, full of unique movement. This piece is exceptional...a dance feast.”
—Quinn Batson, *offoffoff.com*

RED



Photo by Steven Schreiber

carrie ahern DANCE

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Photo by King Morgan

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2006

THE LISTINGS

Dance

Full reviews of recent performances:
nytimes.com/dance.

★ **CARRIE AHERN** (Thursday) Ms. Ahern describes her new "Red," inspired by Margaret Atwood's "Handmaid's Tale" and by the clean lines of the performance space, as a "work of beautiful suffocation." Her all-female ensemble includes some of the city's most interesting dance artists. (Through Feb. 26.) 8:30 p.m., Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church, 131 East 10th Street, East Village, (212) 674-8194 or www.danspaceproject.org; \$15. (Jennifer Dunning)

the village VOICE

FEBRUARY 22-28, 2006 VOICE CHOICES

Comments by ELIZABETH ZIMMER unless otherwise noted
PICK Voice Pick ● Free

PICK **Carrie Ahern Dance**
Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church, 131 E 10th, 212-674-8194. Ten women perform Ahern's *Red*, which has music by Kristin Norderval, costumes by Naoko Nagata, and a sense of "beautiful suffocation," inspired by Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* and the architecture of St. Mark's. Thu-Sun 8:30pm, \$15.



Photo by Steven Schreiber

AUDIENCE QUOTES ABOUT RED:

“I liked the impressionistic nature of the piece, the way it really created an atmosphere and used the space not in a tedious “site-specific” way, but as part of its overall canvas. I can still very clearly see the flash of your shadow on the wall as you come running down in the beginning. There were many striking images—I felt like you created a claustrophobic atmosphere that was both sexual and strange, detached from normal society, devoid of nicety. The music was beautiful and very supportive of the overall atmosphere of the piece.”

“The work was incredible. Incredible intensity. One of those shows where you need about another minute and a half in the dark after it ends, before you could possibly think of clapping.”

“I was totally impressed by the scope and ambition of your piece. I loved the staging.”

“It was very striking and the whole group had an energy that was strong and deliberate and therefore engrossing.”

“It was very beautiful and enigmatic; I loved the interplay of stillness and movement.”

“Red was smart, visual and emotional...the piece went by so fast.”

“The overall intensity and intention held the space. As unique as each dancer was in shape they all uniformly carried out their character and that presence was embodied the whole time. You were successfully able to evoke strong feeling and quality and personify compulsion, fear, and anxiety in a way that was fluid. You created a vocabulary of simple movements that you then added level change, locomotion or partnering to; this building of gesture accelerated the feelings of anxiety. The squareness of the spatial patterns added to the feeling of being closed in; like being closed inside with one’s feelings. You were able to bring alive feelings that are internalized.”

“You took amazing risks and the result was really spectacular.”

“*Red* was a rich tapestry of densely layered images of pent-up ferocity...her own striking investigation.”



Photo by Steven Schreiber

REVIEW OF RED

Excerpted from a review by Sarah Maxfield

CultureCatch.com | Feb 2006

For Carrie Ahern, red is a very scary color. Inspired by Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Ahern's *Red* was a rich tapestry of densely layered images of pent-up ferocity. For Ahern red represents oppression, aggression, and fear, and possesses power to overwhelm and consume. As the piece opened, one could hear only an eerie swishing sound, which was generated by the odd, sliding gait of ten pairs of feet approaching us from behind. In near dark, women in long, multi-textured dresses, with blacked-out eyes, marched monk-like to the stage. A light shone briefly bright, throwing an elongated shadow of the balcony railing onto the upstage altar wall as Ahern bolted down the balcony stairs to join the rest of the group onstage, knocking the other women to the floor like dominoes.

There was a certain voyeurism attached to bearing witness to this world. Throughout the work, the dancers took turns watching each other with sinister attention, as if to ensure a sentence would be carried out. The potential harm remained captive in the performance space and was amplified by the virtuosic sound design, which was deftly woven into the work. Kristin Norderval's design incorporated live singing

mixed with pre-recorded sound, which was then also recorded and re-mixed to build a complex, ghostly score that fluttered between lullaby and scream.

Just when we thought we had this grave, sinister world pegged, miniature basketballs rained down from the balcony, bouncing insanely and immediately exploding the restrained energy of the performance. The sports reference was a brief, anachronistic, zany, masculine intervention in what is otherwise an exclusively somber, female world. The respite from the thick gloom was welcome, yet the influence did not hold long. Gradually, the dancers came to rest, forming a stoic frame for the space in which they resembled statues in a Greek temple, as one woman gathered the basketballs to create a precarious, uncomfortable bed.

By the end of the work, the allusion to Atwood's novel took over. When Ahern kept closely aligned to the themes of the book, the effect was less fascinating than the spin-off world into which she drew us for the first two-thirds of the performance. The line between terror and angst is thin, and the reverential reference to Atwood that had initially inspired the work seemed ultimately to dissipate Ahern's own striking investigation.



Photo by Steven Schreiber

REVIEW OF RED

Excerpted from a review by Quinn Batson
offoffoff.com | Feb 2006

Carrie Ahern chose the right color for the title of her evening length piece *Red*. Think overwhelming red with some of the creepy but gorgeous visual richness of *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*. Then add music with primal vocals and the stark simplicity of the soundtrack of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Throw in beautiful lighting design and strong performers, and Ahern's *Red* works.

The first third of this 55-minute piece is exceptional. In the beginning, in darkness, softly shuffling feet make their way behind the audience and down the center aisle onto the dance floor, forming a rough V shape while light rises to a predawn gloam. As a woman races in from offstage and collides with the quiet lines, everyone falls like dominoes and a soprano vocalist slowly begins to create a magic musical environment. There is a wonderful feeling of ancient and primeval in the early stages of this piece, first with strange primate-like behavior and later with dancers moving like a procession of druids or *Da Vinci Code* priestesses.

Throughout, Ahern plays with the tension created when placidity or tenderness are randomly interrupted by acts of violence, aggression or emotional turmoil. Her stated intent is to explore the dynamics of repression and surface façade

“With rich vocals, visual, and dancing, Carrie Ahern’s *Red* explores the placid surface and the turbulent eruptive underbelly of a society.”

versus the “chaos in the underbelly of every society.” This sometimes comes across as obsessive-compulsive behavior vs. catatonia, but overall the acts of random violence and love mix. Exploring darker urges also leads the choreography to animal behavior, especially of primates. The effect is subtle and humorous because the movement is often hybrid, as if the dancers are monkey-lizards, cat-baboons or gorilla-cattle. An odd section of mini-basketballs falling from the sky and being treated as dangerous but possibly coveted items is amusing but not overdone.

The almost impossible variety of this piece ends with a circle of running, shoving and falling dancers and one figure tenderly smushing her face into the inert body of the other she has been dragging around the stage.

Red is a rich piece, full of unique movement. The stellar music is composed and performed by Kristin Norderval, and the lighting design is by Carol Mullins. Strong performances by Ahern, Julie Betts, Donna Bouthillier, Christina Briggs, Jennifer A. Cooper, Eun Jung Gonzalez, Yoko Sugimoto and especially Carolyn Hall make this a dance feast.

carrie ahern DANCE

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WORKS & PROCESS AT THE GUGGENHEIM Featuring CARRIE AHERN, GINA GIBNEY DANCE, and YASUKO YOKOSHI

September 18-19 • [Sun-Mon] at 8:00 PM

Admission: \$24.00 (\$18 for members, students, and seniors with valid ID at the box office)

Reservations: (212) 423-3587 (Mon-Fri 1-5 PM)

Location: Guggenheim Museum, 5th Avenue at 89th Street

works
process

You can take the dance out of downtown, but can you take downtown out of the dance? Danspace Project partners with Works & Process at the Guggenheim to bring a special preview of our 2005/2006 season to the esteemed uptown venue. Artists whose work has been lauded by critics as being "wonderfully lush," "fearlessly idiosyncratic," and "polished to a tantalizing sheen," perform excerpts of dances set to premiere at Danspace Project later this season. In a collaboration with composer/soprano Kristin Norderval, Carrie Ahern brings *Red*, a dance of austere beauty and terror that mixes primal force with rigid formality inspired by Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale"; Gina Gibney Dance explores the tension between clinging to the details of a finite and concrete world and reaching for that which is infinite and unknowable with *unbounded*, (Ryan Lott's music compositions accompany the work); and Yasuko Yokoshi offers *what we when we*, which transforms Raymond Carver's stark writings into the magnificently muted languages of traditional Japanese Kabuki Su-odori dance. Douglas Dunn will moderate a discussion on the creative process with the artists on Sunday; Laurie Uprichard moderates on Monday. For further information, visit www.worksandprocess.com



Photo by King Morgan

Brooklyn Daily Eagle

June 8, No. 10, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2007

E-mail: edit@brooklyneagle.net

BAX: 421 Fifth Ave., Park Slope.
(718) 832-0018 or www.bax.org.
SPACE GRANT SHOWCASE. Oct.
19-20, at 8 p.m. Tickets \$15. Grant
recipients Carrie Ahern, Abigail
Browde and Chris You present new
work.



Grant recipient Carrie Ahern is one of the BAX artists in residence who will present new work on Oct. 19-20. See listing under Dance. Photo by Steven Schreiber

“The wonderfully lush Carrie Ahern has a mysterious role... dancing like a bacchante.”

—Deborah Jowitz, *The Village Voice*

“High-spirited female insanity danced extremely and well... It certainly achieved lift-off...”

—Quinn Batson, *offoffoff.com*

“I’ve never seen a dancer eat cigarettes, fried chicken, and a fly before. And this was all in one dance! *RAW(hide)* cracked me like a whip.”

—Jill Emerson, *The Dance Insider*

PAST PERFORMANCES



Photo by Bill Ashton

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“*Exploding Plastic Acorns!* was high-spirited female insanity danced extremely and well. Carrie Ahern and Jennifer A. Cooper put together a well-developed show that ran the gamut from impassive stillness to full-throttle partnering. It certainly achieved lift-off and flew quite well, a thoroughly fun yet filling evening of dance with every element working well together—dancers, music, lighting, costumes and choreography.”

“*Postcard from the City* was a strange but effective mix of quiet glamour and intensely physical dancing. A recurring motif was a frantic, crawling escape, bodies clawing past others, a sort of survival scramble after an apocalypse.”

“*Orphan* was an unsettling and strong piece, showcasing the dancing of Bessie award-winning Carolyn Hall, with an effectively haunting soundtrack by Matt Darriau and Ivan Goff.”

—Quinn Batson, offoffoff.com



Photo by Marco North



Photo by Bill Ashton

“Part two of the program began with *Nostalgia*, a quirky, sardonic dance by guest choreographer Carrie Ahern...The tinkly ragtime jazz [music] was the machine which powered this strangely self-conscious doll and masochistically forced her to repeat tricks for her audience.”

—Faith Pilger, *The Dance Insider* (May, 2001)

“Carrie Ahern choreographed *The Greeting*, which was performed by Carolyn Hall and Catey Ott. Both expressive and theatrical performers, Hall and Ott made great use of facial expression to portray the changing emotions of conflict resolution. The opening stance—legs in parallel second, holding hands—conveyed the childhood sense of ‘me and my best friend against the world.’ As that unity dissolved, however, from initially playing patty-cake to whispering to each other, to poking at each other, it occurred to me that even for adults, the evolution and escalation of emotions during conflict often follows the same, simple path of children. A pointedly exaggerated balletic section proved both performers to be technically proficient, very clean dancers that made a nicely matched duet.”

—Darrah Carr, *The Dance Insider* (June 2002)

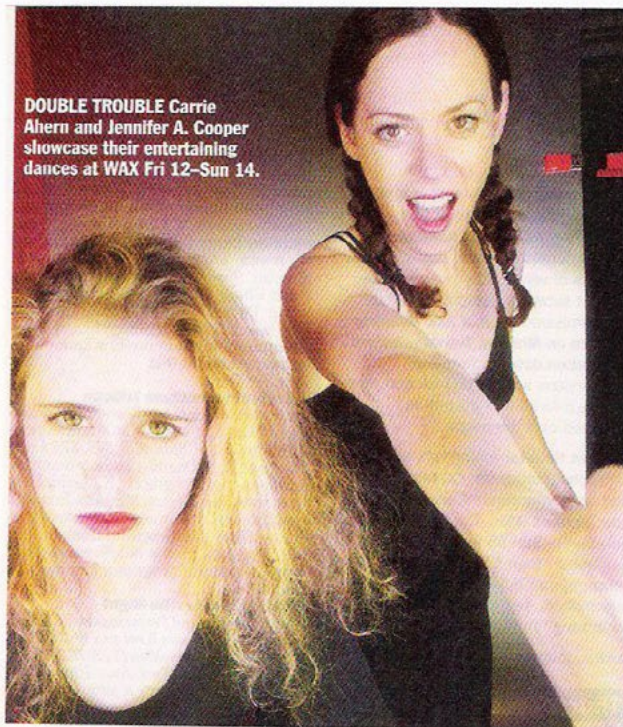
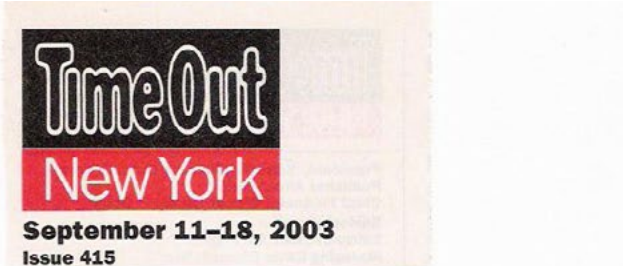
“I’ve never seen a dancer eat cigarettes, fried chicken, and a fly before. And this was all in one dance! *RAW(hide)* cracked me like a whip. Carrie Ahern provided campy entertainment with a western theme. She’s brilliant with physical comedy.”

—Jill Emerson, *The Dance Insider* (January 2001)

carrie ahern DANCE

PAST

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DOUBLE TROUBLE Carrie Ahern and Jennifer A. Cooper showcase their entertaining dances at WAX Fri 12-Sun 14.

Carrie Ahern and Jennifer Cooper
Williamsburg Arts Nexus, 205 North 7th St between Driggs Ave and Roebling St (718-594-7997). Subway: L to Bedford Ave. 8pm, \$15. Carrie Ahern and Jennifer Cooper present "Exploding Plastic Acorns!," an evening of five pieces. See photo, page 110.



Photos by Simon Burstall

BROOKLYN RAIL CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

ALL THE CITY'S A STAGE

by Meagan Bruskwicz
offoffoff.com | Feb 2011

Such was the Facebook status of a fellow New York dancer as APAP|NYC, the annual Association of Performing Arts Presenters conference, descended on the city the second weekend in January. APAP always packs a brutal punch right after the holidays. This year, about 4,000 performing arts professionals flooded the Hilton during five jam-packed days of conference panels and plenaries, and over 1,000 performance showcases erupted all around the city; it was nearly impossible not to be affected by the excitement and hysteria. For artists, trying to navigate the competitive terrain and sell themselves to presenters from around the world, it can seem like a fight to the finish. A pie-eating contest indeed.

As a newcomer to the entire APAP experience, I wanted to get a sense of what really goes on and to gauge the effectiveness of APAP for the dance community. My conclusion? Pretty grim.

The main problem is that there is entirely too much going on for APAP to be effective for anyone. For someone attending the conference itself, there are four full days of plenary sessions, panel discussions, workshops, forums, meetings, networking, and expo hall vendors to attend to: one could stay inside the Hilton and be busy from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Yet that's only half of it. The other component of APAP is attending artist showings in order to catch the trends and hypothetically look for performances to book. This is where APAP gets really chaotic.

For dance performances alone, there were 10 different venues with APAP-affiliated showcases: Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, New York City Center, Joyce SoHo, Dance New Amsterdam (DNA), Dance Theater Workshop, Danspace Project, Baryshnikov Arts Center, the Park Avenue Armory,

Japan Society, and the 92nd St. Y. Add to this full-length shows at theaters like the Center for Performance Research. Factor in Dance Gotham, the Gotham Arts Exchange showcase Sunday night at the NYU Skirball Center. And don't forget about the growing crop of indie performance festivals that have developed around APAP, including American Realness, Ben Pryor's assortment of artists mostly housed at Abrons Arts Center, and Performance Space 122's COIL.

"It's exhausting," said Catherine Peila, DNA's executive director. As a presenter trying to get to as many shows as possible, she noted that early morning conference sessions had to be sacrificed after long evenings at the theater. Her strategy for covering as many shows as possible was to plan ahead which events were of interest to DNA and divide them up among her and a handful of staffers attending the conference. Sydney Skybetter, artistic director of Skybetter and Associates and DanceNOW [NYC]'s co-artistic director/producer, planned to camp out at City Center, catching as many showcases as he could and balancing out the informal studio environment with a few shows of interest at other venues and the occasional drink with colleagues.

Even with the best laid plans, though, it's impossible for presenters to get to everything. Peila noted that fewer presenters attended the showcases at DNA in comparison to years past because so many more dance performances were added to the mix this year. "You have to be really good for people to show up or have really good word of mouth." Getting people in the door



ALL THE CITY'S A STAGE

Cont'd

is, of course, hardest for emerging artists. Telling me about her company's first APAP showcase, ANAHATA Dance's artistic director Natalie Teichmann said, "I'm not yet sure whether or not any presenters even came." After sending dozens of letter invitations, postcards, and flyers to targeted individuals and organizations, only about 30 people came to the ANAHATA showing at Joyce SoHo on Monday evening. "Six of our press kits were gone at the end of the evening, so that might imply that six presenters came."

Some artists have it slightly easier. Kyle Abraham enjoyed having an agent represent him for the first time at APAP this year and felt lucky to be placed on a bill with dance All-Stars like David Dorfman and Tere O'Connor in Friday's danspace unplugged performance. Many choreographers, though, aren't fortunate enough to be produced by an agent or venue and must put in significant time, effort, and money to book and market a showcase. In Skybetter's words, "APAP is not better or worse than other showcases, just more expensive." So far, he said, the conference has been worthwhile for his company, and remains economically feasible. But Carrie Ahern, who founded Carrie Ahern Dance six years ago, still does not feel that APAP is economically justifiable. Especially since, she notes, "Most people do not get work from it, anyway."

Why is that? Is the actual format of APAP even conducive to the art itself? In thinking back on her many years' experience with APAP, Ahern added that the showcase format, even at different venues, never felt effective. With little time to tech and usually only a snippet of time to perform, it's impossible for choreographers to show their best work. "That is why you see even established artists not doing it," she said. "And you see new formats, like COIL and American Realness, which have been very influential."

And it's no surprise that these indie festivals are popular with the artists. Anybody who has slogged through an APAP frenzy can tell you that it isn't about the artists at all. Perhaps appropriately so, a conference for the Association of Performing Arts Presenters is focused on benefitting the presenters, and mostly those from out of town. The New York City dance community is forced to play the gracious host and put on a good show for the thousands that come for "the largest, most inclusive marketplace for performing arts in the world." It would be nice for such a gathering to be equally beneficial for all, but it seems the size and scope of APAP renders this impossible. As the willing pawns in this annual spectacle, NYC dance professionals are forced to simply make the best of the week. A messy pie-eating contest indeed—and the most we can hope for is to get a meager slice.

carrie ahern DANCE

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Photo by Michael Faulkner

BOOKING CARRIE AHERN DANCE

Carrie Ahern Dance has a variety of live performances available for local, national and international touring. The company is also available for university and artistic residencies, and can teach a wide range of workshops and master classes (*see reverse side for more information on specific classes*). Ahern is also available for lectures on her artistic process and contemporary dance history and trends.

Contact company manager Stephanie Plaitin at stephanie@carrieahern.com for booking info

DONATE

Keep thoughtful, intelligent art alive by making a contribution to Carrie Ahern Dance. Carrie Ahern Dance is a sponsored project of Fractured Atlas, a non-profit arts service organization. Contributions to Carrie Ahern Dance are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

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PERFORMANCE LIST

Borrowed Prey, 2011-12: *solo*

April/May 2012 Dickson's Farmstand Meats
Sept 2011 TASTE of Williamsburg
(butcher/human anatomy comparison)

SeNSATE, 2009-11

3 hour dance installation on two floors for 5
Baltimore Theatre Project March/April 2011
The Vaults at 14 Wall St. (LMCC) Sept/ Oct 2010
Columbia University April 2010
Princeton University (excerpt) Feb 2010
The Brooklyn Lyceum (NYC) Nov 2009

Covers, 2009

rush hour window performance installation with Olek
LAB Gallery (NYC) Sept 2009

The Unity of Skin, 2008:

commissioned evening length trio
Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church (NYC) April 2008
Baltimore Theatre Project March 2008
Movement Research at Judson Church
(in progress excerpt) April 2007

The O Solo, 2006: *self-performed solo*

Danceworks (Milwaukee, WI) March 2007
The Flea (NYC) Nov 2006

Red, 2006: *commissioned evening length for 10*

Danspace Project at St. Marks Church (NYC) Feb 2006
Guggenheim Works-and-Process (NYC) Sept 2005
Dixon Place (NYC) May 2005

Red Duet, 2004: *duet*

Wave of Humanity Benefit, curated by DTW,
Dance New Amsterdam (NYC) Jan 2005
Raw Material, Dance New Amsterdam (NYC) Nov 2004
Danspace Project, Food for Thought (NYC) Feb 2004

It Goes to Eleven, 2003:

duet (collaboration with Jennifer A. Cooper)
Williamsburg Art Nexus (NYC) Sept. 2003

Orphan, 2003: *commissioned solo for Carolyn Hall*

Williamsburg Art Nexus (NYC) Sept 2003
Dixon Place at University Settlement (NYC) June 2003

Postcard from the City, 2003: *quintet*

Williamsburg Art Nexus (NYC) Sept 2003



Photo by Michael Faulkner

Nostalgia, 2001: *self-performed solo*

P.S. 122 (New York) June 2004
Surf Reality (New York) Feb 2002
Baltimore Theatre Project (Baltimore) May 2001
Williamsburg Art Nexus (New York) May 2001

The Greeting, 1999: *quartet*

Chashama (NYC) Aug 1999
Cunningham (NYC) June 1999
Dixon Place (NYC) May 1999

Raw(hide), 1998: *trio*

Danspace Project, Food for Thought (NYC) 2000
Cunningham (NYC) June 1999
Sundance (NYC) Oct 1998

Undone, 1998: *self-performed solo*

Baltimore Theatre Project 35th Anniversary (April 2007)
Cunningham (NYC) June 1999
Sundance (NYC) Oct. 1998

Closer Ties, 1997: *duet*

Avignon Festival D'OFF (Avignon, France) July 1998
Le Regard du Cygne (Paris, France) July 1998
Pier 23 (NYC) 1998
Angel Orensanz Foundation (NYC) June 1997
Context (NYC) Nov 1997
Walker Point Art's Center (Milwaukee) Sept 1997

Carrie Ahern Dance has a variety of live performances available for local, national and international touring. Please contact company manager Stephanie Plaitin at stephanie@carrieahern.com for booking info.

carrie ahern DANCE

PRESENT PARIAH, INC. | carrie@carrieahern.com | www.carrieahern.com | 917.703.5327

GUEST ARTIST MASTER CLASSES & COMPANY RESIDENCY

Carrie Ahern Dance offers a wide range of workshops for adults and children of all levels of ability. Please contact Carrie at carrie@carrieahern.com for any questions about booking her or her company for teaching or residencies.

Master Class

Carrie teaches a highly physical, athletic class which combines her extensive knowledge of anatomy and biomechanics with the breadth of her knowledge as a performer and creator. This approach combines a solid technical foundation with an ability to be at our most expressive as individuals, even when movement is completely set.

Repertory Class

An opportunity for students to learn selections from the company's repertory.

Composition Workshop

Carrie opens the students awareness to their own innate ability to make dance-making decisions that are brave and completely their own. There is a strong focus on how to structure a dance and the importance of revision in the process, to make it more "itself".

Site-Specific Dance

Every performance is automatically, by its very nature, site-specific. Carrie draws students attention to this reality, and gives them tools to use a space as part of their overall palette when combining everything that makes up a dance performance: movement, music, visuals, and audience. It helps develop their openness to inspiration from a specific site as well as honing their skills as adapters of a work originally created previously.

Directing Dancers

How do you communicate effectively as a choreographer to dancers and other collaborators? How do you utilize their strengths and weaknesses and inspire them to push past their habits? This workshop helps enable you to make authoritative yet respectful decisions for a rich, fulfilling process for all involved.

Researching a Dance

An often overlooked part of dance making. How do you use literary, visual, scientific or other source material to expand your knowledge and provide context for your concept? Carrie examines how this can inform and deepen your work in the studio. A laboratory that combines discussion with physical action.

Yoga

A vinyasa (flow) style with attention to detail.

Pilates

A distinctive Pilates class by an experienced teacher who specializes in alignment, injury recovery and prevention and whole body connection.