

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Bethany Formica

Cooking, Cake and Conversation at the LAB

by Anna Drozdowski

The [Live Arts Brewery \(LAB\)](#) hosts an open showing each month to allow performing artists to show work in a developmental stage and receive immediate feedback from the audience. “That’s why we serve you beer,” quipped Director Craig Peterson, “so you’re more willing to volunteer your thoughts.”

As a dutiful organizer Peterson made it clear to me (the writer) and to the audience that the evening is research: simply a time for testing hypotheses and asking questions about unfinished work. This is hard to do, as so often artists squirrel themselves away in the studio until it’s “done.” Peterson believes early-intervention and feedback are valuable crafting tools, and, despite the many choreographic jitters buzzing about, I think that the artists believe it too.

There are many studio series in town (see recent articles by [Amelia Longo](#) and [Peter Price](#) for other TD coverage) demonstrating both the need for dialogue and the wide range in how they’re run. Beer helps, but I think this audience comes to make art a part of daily life, removing it from the entertainment category and getting closer to the book-group experience.

Eun Jung Choi’s work-in-progress, a patchwork of new sections sewn together for the evening, came out of her curiosity about magic--the magic of relationships, of tricks, of things you can feel viscerally and the circumstances of how she landed in Philadelphia. Her “loose sketch” equally employed four silent chefs, miming their way away from a strict gestural interpretation of Julia Childs and morphing into abstract lands more akin to [Jonathan Burrows](#).

We first see the quartet hard at work in the kitchen, and moments later participating in a human marionette march—examples of Choi’s interest in [muted narrative](#). Scott McPheeters and Guillermo Ortega Tanus manipulated the limp rag-dolls of John Luna and Bronwen MacArthur. In this slow-motion sequence on a human scale, both dancers played Pinocchio. All was dead but their eyes. A moment later, watching Luna and MacArthur hopping and flopping about, I too felt the delight of self-propulsion. Choi’s aspirations to make dances that the audience can kinetically respond to succeeds here.

[Bethany Formica](#) and Silvana Cardell brought us Flicker, which has previously seen the light through [Philly PARD's Mixed Grille](#) series as well as Aquarius Era in Bulgaria. Formica extinguishes many flames, the sole source of light in her solo work, as a marker of time—a passing of years. Starting with a four-inch square piece of cake (laden with more candles than likely safe for fire code), she leaves her birthday table to sit and flip amongst the candles strewn about the floor. Formica is, as always, most at home while upside down. Next the wall buffets her back and forth to the now-waxy marley--a nervous side-effect of Formica's normal razor-sharp precision.

We are close to her, can smell the wicks burning, can see the sinew of her bandaged foot as it narrowly skirts the flame. We are able to see less and less of Formica until, in a flash, she is gone. It reminds me that dance is dangerous, that this field is intrinsically tied to aging, and that Formica continues to defy both of these culprits that can fell a career that relies on the body.

Deliberately breaking from the tired post-performance discussion format, this month Peterson and Live Arts founder Nick Stuccio each headed a smaller chat with the choreographers, smartly allowing for more time and deeper conversation while simultaneously making many of us wonder what discussion we were missing next door.

The free 2nd Thursdays Series continues year round at the LAB, a partner of thINKingDANCE and member of the Alliance for Artist Communities which supports [residency opportunities for dancers and choreographers](#).

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