

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Rexxi

Who's a Sexy Finch?

by Ella-Gabriel Mason

Through layered nature videos and movement that repeatedly shifts between recognizable human gestures and distinctly nonhuman comportment, Emily Mayer and Tyler Rivera make clear that we are no different than the [bowerbird](#) as we use clothes or surgery to plump up our rear ends or elongate our eyelashes.

Bower Bird begins with a projection of a nature documentary. We watch sage grouse inflate their breast-like air sacs with a wet popping sound as they attempt to attract their prairie mates. Creator Emily Mayer (aka. Edith Poussard) and collaborator Tyler Rivera (aka. Oktober Third) enter in simple gray sweatsuits. "Confidence!" they proclaim, as each takes on various poses -- sometimes striking a model-like strut and at other moments mimicking the squatting, chest-forward posture of the horny sage grouses behind them.

Both performers easily command attention and they play off one another and the audience fluidly. Each performer frequently morphs between the movement vocabulary of recognizable dance forms, like [ballroom duck walks](#) and [death drops](#) and the staccato movements of their bird-like subjects. Or perhaps it is a misnomer to label birds as the subject. Truly the performance is a comedic exploration of how much humans have in common with other animals. Drag provides an excellent lens through which to explore this commonality as it denaturalizes the many ways we construct gender and attraction -- from bustles, to false eyelashes, to high heels. Despite the consistency of this premise, Poussard and Third deliver laughter and surprise, from Poussard's insertion of a peacock's awkward nasal cry in the midst of a lip sync, to Third's extended negotiation of moving across the stage in 9-inch platform heels.

The costumes are stunning. Poussard's base costume is a tight blue and green catsuit with cut-outs on the sides and sparkly blue high-heeled boots. During her first reveal, she adds a blue headpiece/wig replete with a halo of peacock feathers and two light-up balls that change colors. Third is adorned in a jumpsuit covered in tight ruffles of tulle in a gradient from red to orange to yellow.

The piece concludes with a high energy lip sync to Macklemore's *Thrift Shop*. While it was satisfying to watch the two performers come together in unison dance phrases, this section felt less connected to the thesis of the piece. Much like a female bowerbird, I was craving a final aesthetic touch at the top of the nest.

[Bower Bird](#), Emily Mayer/Edith Poussard & Tyler Rivera/Oktober Third, Cannonball Festival, MAAS Studio, September 11-26.

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