

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Pep Casadevall

Fever Dream of a Shapeshifter

by Megan Mizanty

As soon as she enters the stage, Vanessa Kamp's gaze pierces the audience. No one is safe from a second (or three) of direct eye contact as *Speak English* begins. I take her in, too: she's all muscle and sinew. A long, lean face. Severe cheekbones. Over the next hour, though, she will transform again, and again, and again...

Kamp as a syrupy, lip-syncing casanova. Kamp as a ludicrous punk teenage boy. Kamp as the eerie Slenderman - the stuff of nightmares. Kamp as a beer-bellied MAGA caricature. Kamp as a go-go girl. Kamp as a dainty walking pink poof. Kamp as machismo personified ("*I won! You lost! speak English, motherfucker!*"). Kamp as a constant chameleon.

And also - she isn't any of those people. These are merely my subjective understandings of her abstract costume shifts, alongside her mesmerizing body language pivots. She initially moves like a robot (all sharp, isolated gestures) and mime, to tip-toeing, to rapid swivels of her head, whipping a long, fake ponytail to swat away paper bags strewn throughout the floor. It's absurd, it's delightful, it's unexpected (especially the lip-syncing, suit-wearing opera singer). Who will Kamp turn into next? How will she expand horizontally or grow vertically?

Kamp isn't interested in linear narratives or direct storytelling. Instead, her performances are a steady offering of rapid images and glimpses of our own associations. It's a sensory buffet.

Her invisible duet partner is a lush soundscape by Crabwalker, featuring iLOVEtoFLY, composed for the dance. The sound makes it feel as though Kamp has been dropped onto another planet, where random sounds collide: rainforest drippings, industrial clanking, pop synth, the antennae of bugs rubbing against one another, marbles (?) rolling along the floor. These piles of sounds, coupled with projections of fast-moving animations, feet walking, and phone scrolling, is an avalanche of mind-associations and processing.

Vanessa Kamp is a consummate performer. She commands the space and attention of her viewers, and she deftly challenges our understanding of objects in real time. As Kamp proclaims, “any possibility for magic is exposed.” The gift, though, is turning the lens to us, the audience. We are responsible for the assemblage.

[Speak English](#), Vanessa Kamp, Icebox Project Gallery Space, Fringe Festival 2024, September 20-22, 2024.

Image Description (Article page): A pink poof of fabric is wedged under a dancer's shirt. It covers their face. The dancer is standing with their head thrown back, mid-movement.

Image Description (Home page): A dancer in a black three-piece suit looks up as their fake ponytail - attached to a hat - swings up to the ceiling.

By Megan Mizanty
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