

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Nancy Chen

I Could Barely Breathe

by Lynn Matluck Brooks

We live in a world submerged in catastrophe, and in news of catastrophe. How to respond to—make sense, acknowledge, move past—this deluge? In *capsized*, Jungwoong Kim takes us down one possible road. Grappling, somehow, with “the tragic loss of nearly 300 young people in the [South Korean ferry disaster](#)” in April of 2014, Kim—with dancer Marion Ramirez, composer-musician Bhubu Rainey, and videographer Fred Hatt—draws the viewer into a breathless time warp of struggle, surrender and sorrow.

Upstairs at the [Asian Arts Initiative](#), spectators gather at the end of a narrow, debris-strewn hallway, framed at its opposite end by a large window. Ramirez roils on the floor, floating an arm, a leg, her hair in the slow turbulence of imagined seas. Rainey’s saxophone wails and ripples with her. When Kim lurches on board, he crashes down the hallway toward the gathered viewers, banging on walls and pipes as unseen but much-felt forces toss him. When Ramirez tumbles over him, he clutches her leg, she clutches a spectator’s bag, but the pull of their turbulent world washes them both from us.

Curving, ebbing, flowing, their viscous movement is in and of ocean. When she is swept out of view, he lies alone and chants, howls, cries from the depths. Ramirez steps into the light, framed by the far window, and enunciates a list—names of those lost? Kim rises and joins her, facing the frame of light, and they stagger against one another, stuttering.

We are invited to move down that dark hallway to an area where Kim faces a wall and we see, projected on the surface of his broad back, images of himself dancing—wildly, dangerously—in what appears to be a gritty construction site. When Kim-in-the-flesh rises, his filmic image reflects fully against the wall. Now, the shadows he casts dance a sorrowful duet with his projected self. He walks slowly across the wall in profile to us, the images painting his face and then ceasing entirely. We see that the wall is, in fact, a white barn door, its lock barring Kim from exit, despite his frantic, clanking struggle with it. My heart races, sinks, with his panic. When he finally yanks

the door open it reveals an elevator chasm, empty. Ramirez has entered to his left, cuddling a bag that, when opened, floods the stage noisily with metal nails.

Kim sings softly, his trembling breath a ghostlike wailing. The elevator passes down the shaft, its counterweights rising out of view. It is over.

I have never seen a site-specific work use a chosen space to better impact, or performers more committed to the world they create therein. The performances are both beautiful and heartwrenching. Although the work is brief—twenty minutes or so—I have dived in deeply, gasped, and barely emerged from this world of anguish, sorrow and memory.

[capsized](#), Jungwoong Kim, Asian Arts Initiative, October 10 and 11.

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