

THE KITCHEN

VIDEO

MUSIC

DANCE

PERFORMANCE

FILM

5-5793

EIKO AND KOMA. At the Kitchen (October 6 to 11). -By the River.

There is no restless shifting, no throat-clearing tonight at the Kitchen. Collectively, we deepen and slow down the tempo of our breathing for Eiko and Koma's *By the River*, until what might be unendurable becomes incantatory. While the mound that is Koma slowly twists on the floor until his face becomes visible, we watch dispassionately, yet with passionate curiosity, anticipating the next small, weighted shift of his body. Our eyes cling to Eiko's naked spine and pale flanks, to her clawed hands reaching along the floor. It is unendurable, but they are teaching us to endure it with them. The enigmatic road they travel agonized for almost an hour becomes our road.

Like many of Eiko and Koma's pieces, *By the River* is a primal journey, a transition between two states. Anticipation of the future or memory of the past clenches and contorts their bodies drastically, but as performers they don't comment on their condition: like animals, they do what they have to do.

A patterned cloth hangs behind them and spreads across the floor. (They designed it in collaboration with Clayton Campbell, who executed it.) The crowded gray and black shapes on it are enigmatic; at first sight they resemble rocks, but some of the shapes are unnatural, and after a while you can pick out stone idols. For a while, a film by David Geary covers the shapes with flickering candles—becoming thin, sliding down—and turns the back wall into a cemetery swarming with mourners.

Part of the floor is paler, and lit by Blu to suggest a river. It's along this path that Koma is traveling. He wears a heavy kimono that emphasizes his slow, labored motions. Blackouts punctuate the spare, brutal scenes. While he rests, motionless, Eiko crawls from another direction, struggles to stand. One poem in the booklet handed out after the performance recalls her vividly: "Merciless/ Big hand casts the dark shadow./ Fingers move as live as worms./ I hear my bones crushed and wail." Whether her chin is pressed against the floor and we see only her flexing back and upraised buttocks, or whether she's standing tenuously, eyes glazed, black hair tumbling over her shoulders, she makes us aware not of her muscles, but of her bones. In one of her solos, she looks as if she's quivering with what might be rage or fear or fever—a dying cat making a last stand.

When they finally come together, she half-climbers onto his back, clinging to him, one foot trailing. He can make al-



BEATRIZ SCHILLER

Eiko and Koma in *By the River*

Observed With Ceremony

BY DEBORAH JOWITT

most no progress with this burden, but he doesn't attempt to shake her off. They are traveling together now. In one "scene," he lashes the floor with a piece of black cloth, and it is this cloth that he finally drops over her. Slowly he pushes the dark bundle, and as she rolls along the "river," he—standing, facing us—begins to tremble violently, until darkness slowly blots out his fear.

VOICE