

# SPECTACLE

Arts and Entertainment in New York City

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## Worshipping Avant-Garde Performance in a "Temple of Difference"

by Gillian Emmett

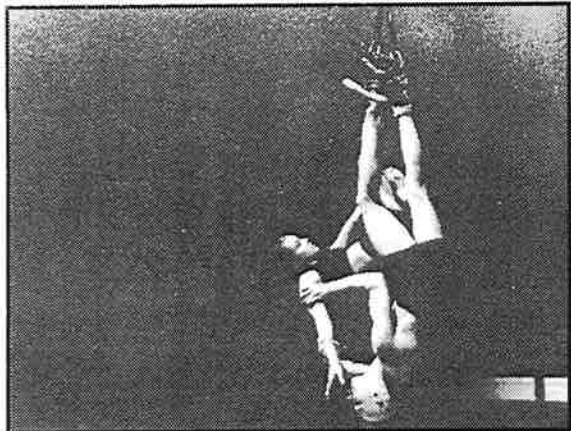
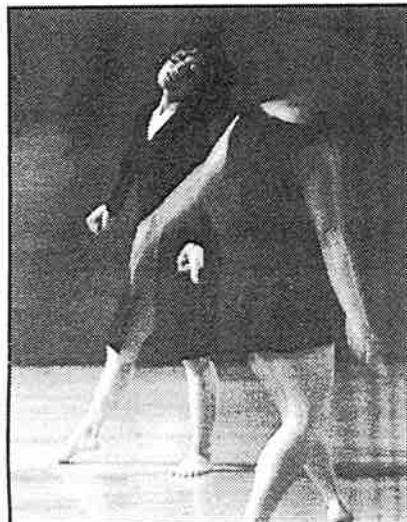


PHOTO BY DANIELA HORNIGROWA

Ctibor Turba's *The Hanging Man*

"That's why we're here—to be around others like ourselves—So it doesn't hurt quite so much—In our world, our temple of difference" — Karen Finley, "The Black Sheep"

When I walked up West 19th St. for the first time a month ago, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. After receiving



Dance Kumikokimoto

an assignment to sample some of the current offerings of an experimental theater in Chelsea, I had mentioned to a number of people that I was going to review the spring season at The Kitchen, and although almost everyone had heard of the performance space, no one had actually been there. As I walked from the 18th St. subway stop towards the theater, the crowds thinned out on the streets, and it soon occurred to me that 19th St. between 10th and 11th Aves. seemed an odd location for a theater. As I neared the theater I saw The Kitchen's blue banner raised high above the neighboring loading docks and crowd of people surrounding the black door of the theater. I walked into the small yellow lobby and approached the box office window to pick up my tickets. The affordable price (tickets generally cost between \$10 and \$15, with hefty discounts for students and seniors) encourages a varied audience. A diverse assemblage of casually dressed people milled around the small vestibule. Some were waiting

in line at the concessions window to purchase a coffee

or a Toblerone, while others talked quietly in groups often adding new arrivals to their circles. It was clear that the vast majority of people attending this performance knew each other, yet the atmosphere was welcoming to those who were new to the space.

It is understandable why people have this connection to The Kitchen—attending a show here feels like a gathering in your neigh-

bor's home...The Kitchen continues as a cultural center where emerging artists can challenge and expand the accepted definitions of performance, and experienced artists can test out new directions for an adventurous audience."

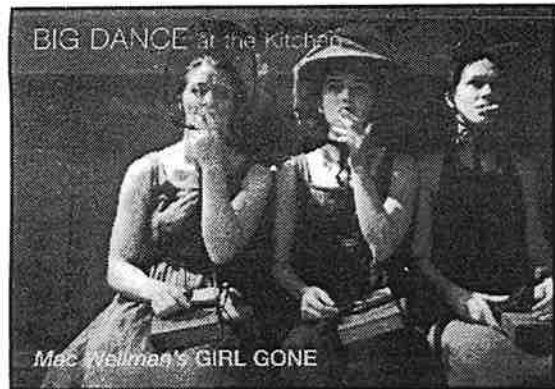
The Kitchen quickly outgrew its original space and, in 1974, moved to 59 Wooster St. in SoHo. As it became ever more popular and garnered extensive critical acclaim, it again outgrew its space; and, in 1985, it moved into its current home, the 16,500 square foot building, once an old ice house. The Kitchen's permanent home contains two of the largest black box theaters in the country along with a Media Services department, archival storage, and production facilities. In this space, The Kitchen is able to serve the community better and has nurtured the careers of creative artists such as Philip Glass, David Byrne with the Talking Heads, Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane, Peter Greenaway, Nam June Paik, Meredith Monk, Brian Eno, Robert Mapplethorpe, Cindy Sherman, Bill Viola, and Robert Wilson.

I had the great fortune of viewing four productions at this innovative theater. Each production broke new ground in theatrical production and provided an evening of unusual entertainment. On February 4th, I attended *Girl Gone*, a timeless fable performed masterfully by the Mac Wellman/Big Dance Theater. Set in a world resembling 17th century Salem, Massachusetts, this tale, told through dance, song, and poetic dialogue, is a haunting allegory about the disappearance of hope and the inability of man to find utopia. Performed on The Kitchen's main stage, an intimate space with a seating capacity of approximately 150, the show enchanted the audience with its exacting choreography and lyrical script. After the performance, The Kitchen hosted one of its frequent post-performance discussions—an open forum that allows the audience to ask questions of the creators and performers. The discussion session is a unique opportunity to speak directly to the people involved in the show.

During my next voyage to The Kitchen on February 27th, I attended *Fast Forward's Feeding Frenzy*, a "cooking concert." Performed in the upstairs theater—a versatile space, which at the time was occupied by variously sized tables set for a candle lit dinner—this piece of somewhat inane theater became the background for an evening of extraordinary conversation. At the front of the room stood three chefs, each behind individual cooking stations, and three musicians, who executed a perfectly timed 90 minute aural feast. During the performance three waiters served tapas-sized portions of the delicacies to the table of their choice. These portions were then passed around the table in order for each person to have a taste of the vegetarian banquet; this act of communal eating sparked numerous discussions around the room.

The final two performances I attended at The Kitchen, the U.S. premier of *Hanging Man* from The Czech Republic on March 4th and the world premier of *Memoryscan* on March 10, upheld The Kitchen's tradition of adventurous theater. *Hanging Man*, a creation of Ctibor Turba who is the father of modern European pantomime, is an experiment in perception. This poignant piece composed of 14 individual acts, involves four mimes suspending themselves upside down approximately five feet above the ground for periods of up to six minutes. In this position, they contort their bodies as a comment on the overproduction of the image in modern culture. *Memoryscan*, performed with exceptional precision by Koosil-ja Hwang/Dance KUMIKOKIMOTO, incorporates live video and digital music to create a sphere of cultural tension. The audience sat riveted as the five performers interacted with the video screen that served as the backdrop of the production. Taking movement cues from video games, robotics, and cinema, Koosil-ja Hwang, the choreographer, makes an acrid statement about modern interactions between man and machine.

All are welcome in this communal kitchen: the artist, the spectator, the innovator, and the investigator. It is a place of experimentation and excitement. You haven't really experienced New York's culture until you've treated yourself to something in The Kitchen.



Big Dance in MacWellman's *Girl Gone*



A frenetic feast at *Feeding Frenzy*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE KITCHEN

bor's home. The Kitchen was founded in July of 1971 in the kitchen of the Mercer Arts Center located in the Broadway Central Hotel in Greenwich Village. Organized by Woody and Steina Vasulka, two video artists eager to showcase their work and the works of other avant-garde artists, The Kitchen strives to provide a space for exhibition and informal discussion between artists and the public. This commitment to providing a space for new art forms is outlined in The Kitchen's mission statement: "The Kitchen was founded in order to carve out a place for artists working along the boundaries of new media and perfor-

The Kitchen is located at 512 W. 19th, btwn. 10th and 11th Aves. The Kitchen features performances, open discussions, films, visual art installations, children's workshops, and a cafe. Tickets vary in price depending on the program. Students with a valid ID receive a 20% discount on tickets, as do senior citizens. Groups of 10 or more also receive discounts. Call 255-5793 for information about upcoming events and ticket prices. Check out The Kitchen on the web at [www.thekitchen.org](http://www.thekitchen.org).