

DANCE

FLUSH IT Margaret Hallisey transforms herself into a toilet-paper mummy in Koosil-ja Hwang's *memoryscan*.



Interview

Total recall

Koosil-ja Hwang and dancers reveal diverse family traits through memory **By Gia Kourlas**

For her new work, *memoryscan*, Korean choreographer Koosil-ja Hwang, 38, has borrowed memories—buried and forgotten—from her dancers. It's been a painstaking process (she began in 1997), and the result is a cinematic evening-length work: a rapid series of scenes, separated by blackouts and connected through movement and music.

The middle section in a trilogy examining issues of ethnicity and culture, *memoryscan* continues where *Masao*, the first part, left off. *Masao* dealt with a Korean man's experience during the 1920 Japanese annexation of Korea; in the dance, the main character is forced to replace his Korean name with a Japanese one. Hwang, raised in Japan, was always known as Kumiko Kimoto; after creating *Masao* in 1997, she began to use her Korean name. While *memoryscan* focuses mainly on her dancers' ancestry, the piece helped Hwang to embrace her complicated past, for better or worse.

"Just because I changed my name to Korean doesn't make me Korean," she explains over tea at Limbo. "Growing up with a Japanese name, I felt in a sense that I was cheating and not standing up for my ethnicity. But now I am over with that guilt trip. I've been thinking about who is Koosil-ja inside? There are so many layers of culture. I am who I am. So I stopped pursuing one country to embrace all the layers of culture that are a part of me."

With that realization, she was able to go further: "I thought, Wait a minute—everyone from the

U.S. came from another place. How do they deal with their culture and their ethnicity? How do they negotiate the terms?"

At first, dancers Kathryn Sanders, Michael Portnoy, Margaret Hallisey and Mary Helene Spring worked individually with Hwang, who created special exercises for the project. "I asked the dancers to close their eyes and spin their memory backward to any events that could result in an emotional connection," Hwang explains. "I told them to pick a space in the studio and illustrate their memory externally. Then I videotaped them."

Hwang chose the memories she liked most, then negotiated with the dancers about how much of a particular memory could be used. "I sensed that it took a while for [the dancers] to give them up," she says. "What's in the piece is information about their emotional linkage to their ethnicity—it's mainly about their parents or grandparents."

The personal stories in *memoryscan* are delivered as snippets of dreams or journal entries. Music is mixed live by Hwang, who appears only briefly in the work. "I've always wanted to be completely out of a piece in order to be able to see it," she explains. "More and more, I really just like to watch." Also integral to the final product are live video by Benton Bainbridge and prerecorded video by Caspar Stracke.

The biggest change for Hwang is the addition of dialogue. "I hate to see dancers talking," she admits. "It has always been my signature not to do it! But in this piece, they do. It's

very hard for me to judge how good it is. I can critique a movement sequence, but when it comes to text, it's different. It's all very new to me."

While much of *memoryscan* features the dancers in typical family situations (at the dinner table or taking a golf lesson), there are also strange, almost surreal moments. In one scene, Portnoy leans back in an office chair holding a cigar; in the background is a video showing Jerry Lewis, his idol, in *The Errand Boy*. For the next few minutes, Portnoy mimics every one of Lewis's moves; words flash by on-screen, such as MONKEY MOUTH, LEAN FORWARD, SWIRL RIGHT, SCRATCH HEAD, SUCK CIGAR. For pure performance value, it's irresistible, but it also paints a vulnerable picture—you can't help conjuring up the image of Portnoy as a boy, perhaps practicing those very moves for an invisible audience in his parents' living room. Here, the audience learns less about his ethnicity than about what excites and pushes him as a performer—the playful, choreographed movement sensibility of Lewis.

Just as her dancers developed a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage, Hwang realized that an important part of her own is linked to the New York performance scene of the '80s. "I began creating dance works here in 1986," she explains. "I owe so much to the dance community: how I developed my vision, the choreographers I have been influenced by—Merce Cunningham and Susan Marshall. All of my colleagues—choreographers, artists and musicians—they try so hard to be seen and heard. They have to be so good. It's so painful and difficult to survive. In doing so, they're not just good artists, they're meaningful artists. Everything I do has to have meaning."

Koosil-ja Hwang/Dance KUMIKOKIMOTO performs *memoryscan* at the Kitchen through Saturday 13.

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IF YOU WANT TO BE LISTED

Submit information by mail or fax (673-8382) to **Gia Kourlas**. Include details of venues, dates, times, prices, telephone numbers and nearest subways. Deadline is Monday, ten days before publication. Listings information will not be accepted over the telephone. Junior-high- and high-school students: Certain theater and performance companies offer special rates (Mon–Thu \$5 for two tickets, Fri–Sun \$5 for one ticket). Ask about "High 5" tickets at the box office, or call Ticketmaster for info.

Performances

Thursday 11

Donald Byrd/The Group

Playhouse 91, 316 E 91st St between First and Second Aves (996-1100). Subway: 4, 5, 6 to 86th St; 6 to 96th St. 8pm, \$20. Donald Byrd premieres *Unusual Ellington*, a series of dances set to little-known pieces by Duke Ellington.

DanceGalaxy

Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Ave at 19th St (242-0800). Subway: 1, 9 to 18th St. 8pm, \$28. This new ballet company, directed by husband-and-wife duo Judith Fugate and Medhi Bahiri, performs works by William Forsythe, Michael Smuin, Ginger Thatcher and Dennis Wayne.

Fosse

Broadhurst Theatre, 235 W 44th St between Broadway and Eighth Ave (239-6200). Subway: N, R, S, 1, 2, 3, 9, 7 to 42nd St–Times Sq. 8pm, \$55–\$75. The star of this new Broadway production is none other than Bob Fosse—his choreography, that is. This show, directed by Richard Maltby Jr. and codirected and cochoreographed by Ann Reinking, features a cast of 32 dancers. See also Theater.

Keely Garfield

Dance Theater Workshop's Bessie Schönberg Theater, 219 W 19th St between Seventh and Eighth Aves (924-0077). Subway: 1, 9 to 18th St; A, C, E to 23rd St. 8pm, \$15. The marvelous Keely Garfield presents "Minor Repairs Necessary...and More Moving Dances," featuring dancers Karl Anderson, Lawrence Goldhuber, Rachel Lynch-John, Tom O'Connor, Jennifer Phillips and Daniel Safer (see also photo, page 105).

Flamenco

Helena's, 432 Lafayette St between Astor Pl and 4th St (677-5151). Subway: N, R to 8th St; 6 to Astor Pl. 8:30, 9:30, 10:30pm. FREE This tapas restaurant presents flamenco dancer Yumi Han, guitarist Arturo Martinez and singer Alfonso Mogaburo every Thursday night.

Koosil-ja Hwang/

Dance KUMIKOKIMOTO

The Kitchen, 512 W 19th St at Tenth Ave (255-5793). Subway: C, E to 23rd St; A, C, E to 14th St; L to Eighth Ave. 8pm, \$15. Choreographer Koosil-ja Hwang premieres *memoryscan*, which reveals how traces of forgotten ethnicity affect our personalities. See also Interview.

Mark Jarecke

Danspace Project, 131 E 10th St at Second Ave (674-8194). Subway: L, N, R, 4, 5, 6 to 14th St–Union Sq; L to Third Ave; 6 to Astor Pl. 8:30pm, \$12. Mark Jarecke premieres two works, *Water Candy Fruit* and *Other*. Also on the program is *Whetstone, Shepherd's Call* and *Synesthesia*.

Kloppenberg Dance

Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St at Washington St (924-0077). Subway: A, C, E, 1, 2, 3, 9 to 14th St; L to Eighth Ave. 9pm, \$12. Brian Kloppenberg presents three new works: *Dovetail, Grazioso* and *Caper*.

Fay Simpson Dance Theater

The Acting Studio, 29 E 19th St between Park Ave South and Broadway (228-2700). Subway: 6 to 23rd St. 8pm, \$12. Fay Simpson presents *Trapped in Seven*, a solo work about living with HIV, which includes movement and text.

Paul Taylor Dance Company

City Center, 131 W 55th St between Sixth and

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