

# The New York Times

September 24, 2011

## THE Arts

### *With the Help of Unusual Outsiders, Finding Love in Strange Objects*

The process behind "Tool Is Loot," the collaboration between Jennifer Lacey and Wally Cardona that had its premiere at the Kitchen on Thursday, was willfully, even perversely circuitous.

**BRIAN  
SEIBERT**

**DANCE  
REVIEW**

The two choreographers spent the first year of the project apart, on different continents. Instead of working with each other, they consulted with experts far outside the dance world. Each expert's opinions and suggestions, even those that struck Ms. Lacey and Mr. Cardona as idiotic, were incorporated into a solo. A total of 14 dances resulted, none of which appear in "Tool Is Loot," though they influenced the outcome.

Whatever works. For when "Tool Is Loot" comes together, and that is most of the time, it is utterly original, deeply comic and deviously beautiful. It doesn't hurt, of course, that both Ms. Lacey and Mr. Cardona are effortlessly charismatic performers.

Ms. Lacey, who has lived in Paris since 2000, is now the less-

er-known figure in New York, where she made a name for herself in the 1990s. But what a fearless, whip-smart artist she is. It's hard to recall a funnier sequence in recent contemporary dance than her love scene here with a folding chair. The chair is mute, inert; her girlish reactions give it

#### *Romantic scenes with a chair and an old-time mustache.*

life. Later she pulls off that hoary concept, a robot dance.

Mr. Cardona pulls off his own antiquated aesthetic, sporting a thick chevron mustache. His dancing, broader than Ms. Lacey's, is self-dramatizing, a crazy mix of pedestrian and histrionic gestures. At one point, he seems to go through a nervous breakdown; at another, he acts out the story of a tryst between an Indian prince and a mustachioed sailor. Though the tone is humorous, the absurdity gives Mr. Cardona access to a tenderness that his sophistication might otherwise preclude.

We also hear the story of the

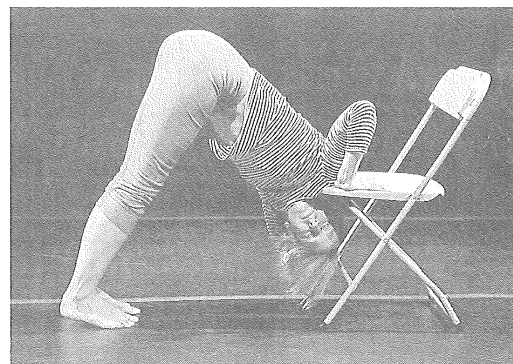
prince in one of the voice-overs that alternate between Mr. Cardona's wry baritone and Ms. Lacey's NPR whisper. At various times, objects onstage (two chairs and the two dancers) are described in awkwardly scientific language that drifts into odd poetry, and a self-mocking play-by-play accompanies reprised sections of dance.

The sound score, made especially strange and wonderful by the musical contributions of Jonathan Bepler, keeps nipping at the ear from all sides. When all the elements are firing together, their collective force is operatic.

Alas, the ending lost me. For once, the work seemed to be trailing residue of its curious genesis, perhaps the ideas contributed by an astrophysicist. Where before, the recalcitrant material seemed to liberate Mr. Cardona and Ms. Lacey, at the end it removed them from sight. And such enchanting performers as these should be seen.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREA MOHIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES



**Tool Is Loot** Jennifer Lacey and Wally Cardona in their new work at the Kitchen, in which Ms. Lacey gets up close and personal with a folding chair.

"Tool Is Loot" will be performed on Saturday, and Thursday through next Saturday, at the Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street, Chelsea; (212) 255-5793, Ext. 11; [thekitchen.org](http://thekitchen.org).