

'Baggage Allowance':

'Baggage Allowance': Pamela Z's latest work is a performance installation on issues about travel

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Photo: Lea Suzuki, The Chronicle

In last year's sleeper hit film "Up In the Air," **George Clooney** played **Ryan Bingham**, a corporate downsizer who's equally effective at slashing personal relationships, severing ties he considers so much unwanted baggage. Think of Pamela Z as the anti-Bingham.

The San Francisco vocal and electronics artist turns her travels into opportunities for collecting sounds, stories and souvenirs from the **Transportation Security Administration**. In her new performance installation, "Baggage Allowance," Z weaves together multimedia set pieces, video and sculptural elements layered with processed sounds and her original compositions. From a weeping suitcase and a telltale X-ray machine to sound bites gleaned from travelers encountered on the road, Z has created an evocative environment that investigates all manner of baggage.

And while the work doesn't dwell on post-Sept. 11 security measures, Z traces its origins to the heightened scrutiny surrounding air travel.

"A couple years ago, I started collecting these love notes the TSA leaves in your suitcase," says Z, whose electronic gear assures close attention by the baggage screeners. "I had a stack of them with the various TSA branch names. Then the idea came to me that I should make a piece about baggage. "I interviewed all these people about what they take with them when they travel. I find that really interesting. Is there any kind of precious thing you have to have for comfort? And I asked about the attachments we develop over our lifetime. There's a kind of struggle in my work between literal and abstract."

Over the past decade, Z has created a number of acclaimed, large scale multimedia works, such as "Parts of Speech" and "Wunderkabinet." In demand around the globe, she's performed at Bang on a Can at **Lincoln Center**, the Interlink Festival in Japan and Pina Bausch Tanztheater's 25 Jahre Fest in Wuppertal, Germany. "Baggage Allowance" premiered at the **Krannert Art Museum** in Champaign, Ill., as a gallery installation, and she's expanded it for the Z Space run, a rare opportunity to present a full-scale work at home.

Employing live electronic processing, the occasional found object and samples triggered with a MIDI controller called the BodySynth, Z creates loops to accompany herself with her own voice. She often seems to pull sounds out of thin air with a graceful, **Tai Chi** like vocabulary of hand and arm movements, building musical collages that play with language, or that simply explore the shape of sound.

"I've collected these short little vignettes, but it's more about repetition, and the sound of certain lists," Z says. "I don't have the desire to tell some specific, concrete story from beginning to end. I'm making a big painting, and the colors come from ideas around baggage."

8 p.m. Thurs.-Sat., 3 p.m. Sun. \$16-\$20, Z Space at Project Artaud, 450 Florida St., S.F. (800)

838-3006. www.brownpapertickets.com.