

'Iridescent Meditation' a visual, aural peace protest

By JEFF SLAGLE
Staff Writer

The closing ceremonies for Max Below's July exhibit at CenterGallery began as a solid, well-crafted piece of performance art, poetically correct on every crucial base.

The visual and aural qualities of the show's first "act," though nothing short of bizarre, remained true to the performance's title and theme, "Iridescent Meditation." It was by this virtue, the imagery's purposeful nature and coherence, that the show ranged into the fascinating and even the lasting, and not by virtue of its bizarreness alone.

Picture a long, white room that contains two musicians, Doug Kent and Rich Roberson, one a cellist dressed in white loincloth with white spirals of grease-paint on his face, the other a percussionist, also in loincloth but with more grease-paint and white hair. The drummer sits cross-legged under a white lean-to, a huge jawbone beside him. The music has a primitive yet soothing quality: cyclical, repetitive, at peace.

Picture now a dancer, Fredrica Hall. One notices her more slowly, moving in place behind a triangle of muslin, completely white except for her eyes, pulling at invisible spectral strings. On the wall opposite her is a block of white cards, sections of which are unpinned during the performance to connote the passage of minutes.

The meditative aspects of such a stage are obvious. The virginal quality of the profuse white, the sense of comfort that comes from the ritualized passage of time, the

stark, primitive appearances of the musicians and their ethereal, hypnotic sounds, and spirits revolving in an archetypal vessel, the dancer.

But when it began to deal with the theme of iridescency, the show weakened. "Iridescent" is formed from iris, or "something bent or curved." In modern usage, it means "showing rainbowlike colors," which all makes sense if you think of a lense, flat in the middle but curved up towards its rim to separate the white light into primaries.

To summarize, we had been presented with a white, well-ordered sense of reality, flat and peaceful. We now stood, meditatively awaiting the sun's appearance over the edge of our universe, together with its splash of color. The lights brightened and a lull appeared bearing the form of a preacher, Gordon R. Dragt, sending out a plea to stop the pursuit of nuclear energy.

The sermon over, we waited expectantly for the sun to reappear. Where is the rainbow? But no, a dark, angry cloud, the dancer, whirled over the rim of our glass with a frightening, wailing dance, intending to scare us witless over the inevitability of the bomb. Her performance was beautiful, and an original protest, but it was also not meditative or rainbowlike in and of itself.

The "rainbow" never appeared, unless you count the preacher's rainbow suspenders. It can only be regretted that the artist did not see fit to take the performance's conclusion into his own hands and carry the metaphor to its logical conclusion.



Photos by Peter Krogh

Performance reception

...closed Max Below's art exhibit at Center Gallery



Performance art in Carrboro

...those performing and attending wore only white.

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