

THOMAS BENJAMIN SNAPP PRYOR

AMERICAN REALNESS

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THOMAS BENJAMIN SNAPP PRYOR

AMERICAN REALNESS FESTIVAL

By Brian Seibert

Published January 2015

"...this festival has become New York's preëminent sampler of boundary-pushing performance bordering on dance."

Best of Dance 2010

By David Velasco

Published December 2010

THE NEW YORKER

ARTFORUM

1. American Realness (Abrons Arts Center, New York, January 8-10, 2010) All the legendary Children of the New York dance world served up over one crash-course weekend intensive: Migrl Gutierrez, Jack Ferver, Trajal Harrell and don't forget Ann Liv Young, whose fraught "Sherry" performances were utterly nonpareil.

Best of Dance 2013

By Gia Kourlas

Published December 31, 2013

TimeOut
New York

10. Thomas Benjamin Snapp Pryor; First, he created the American Realness festival; then, over the summer, he initiated Festival TBD: Emergency Glitter, which placed the spotlight on a younger generation of artists. Pryor is giving contemporary dance a home. His American Realness festival resumes at Abrons Arts Center on January 9.

Best of Dance 2014

By Gia Kourlas

Published November 20, 2014

TimeOut
New York

Dana Michel; The American Realness Festival introduced New Yorkers to a distinct choreographic voice from Montreal. In *Yellow Towel*, inspired by how, as a child, Michel would drape a yellow towel on her head as a way to emulate the blond girls at her school, she turns cultural stereotypes upside down in a riveting look at identity and metamorphosis.

Best of Dance 2015

By Shiobah Burke

Published December, 2015

The New York Times

The artist Michelle Ellsworth churns out surprises, from coin-operated choreography to implausible science experiments. New York was treated to her smart, singular zaniness twice this year, at the American Realness festival in January and at the Chocolate Factory in November. If you missed those live shows, check out their online counterparts, created with just as much care.

Best of Performance 2015

By Paddy Johnson

Published December 31, 2015

ART=CITY

Dynasty Handbag's Soggy Glasses: A Homo's Odyssey at American Realness. If I could watch this performance twenty times I would. The whole performance is so inventive; when you're not laughing you're marveling at how smart Cameron must be to have spun it together. If you have a chance to see this performance, ever, drop everything and do it. It's that good.

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Straddling Worlds of Performance

By Claudia La Rocco

Published: December 30, 2010

The New York Times

APAP: for many a New York choreographer, there's no more frightening sequence of letters in the English language. Pronounced A-pap and used as shorthand for the Association of Performing Arts Presenters' annual winter conference starting Friday, it's a chaotic gantlet of showcases and networking, spread over a very long weekend. The goal is to get your performance booked outside New York. The more typical result is exhaustion, resentment and ruined nerves — especially for those artists whose boundary-pushing work doesn't mesh with artistic directors' looking for easy box office sells.



Yi-Chun Wu, left; Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times, center; Ian Douglas, right

"It's a great big meat market," said Brian Rogers, a dance and video artist who is the artistic director of the Chocolate Factory theater in Queens. "It's this combination of anxiety and shame: you get all worked up, and at the end of the day nothing comes out of it."

Some contemporary choreographers have even hosted anti-APAP evenings, protesting the few opportunities available to them (independent festivals like Performance Space 122's COIL, while theater-oriented, do offer some dance). And then, last year, American Realness showed up. This upstart festival, which made a case for the cultural importance of dance and performance work often dismissed as marginal (if it's even discussed), was started not by a theater or consortium of industry insiders, but by a lone 28-year-old dynamo, armed with only a laptop, gamine good looks and seemingly inexhaustible energy reserves: Thomas Benjamin Snapp Pryor.

"It's just me and this computer and the world," Mr. Pryor said, speaking from a small office in the Abrons Arts Center, where a residency enables him to use this Lower East Side theater as something of a base. "I have no budget. This festival is being produced by me and the artists. It's a big, big puzzle."

But this puzzle is making waves. Crucial national and European presenters flocked to it last year, and Artforum.com's editor David Velasco included it on his "best dance of 2010" list. On Thursday, American Realness returns to Abrons, with an expanded roster of 15 works over five days. The lineup features some of the brightest and most provocative lights on New York's contemporary scene, including Kyle Abraham, Luciana Achugar, Miguel Gutierrez, Trajal Harrell and Ann Liv Young.

The idea for a festival began brewing in 2007, Mr. Pryor said, adding that he couldn't understand why there was no fully produced contemporary dance equivalent to Mark Russell's Under the Radar theater smorgasbord, held in January. "For me this was a gaping hole," he said. "DTW, Danspace, get it together," he continued, referring to Dance Theater Workshop and Danspace Project. "You're presenters and you're just going to do showings? You know how ineffectual that is."

Mr. Pryor is a keen and experienced observer of what is and isn't effective in his field. Before establishing his one-man management venture, tb&spMGMT, in 2009, he worked in the Brooklyn Academy of Music's planning and

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development department, directed operations at the Center for Performance Research theater and rehearsal site, and was an artist representative at the arts service organization Pentacle, where he tried unsuccessfully to lure many of the artists he works with now.

One of these was Ms. Achugar, who likened her relationship with Mr. Pryor to that of a painter and gallerist. The yearly retainer required by a firm like Pentacle, she added, was simply unrealistic for choreographers like herself, who have unpredictable finances and no set company structure, and work project to project.

"I'm doing everything on my own," she said. "It makes a lot of sense for me to work with someone like Ben who is passionate about the field, invested really deeply in it ideologically, and knows presenters nationally and internationally."

This ideological investment is writ large across American Realness, whose name refers to a slang term for drag queens, transgendered people and others who can pass as the opposite sex, and was prompted in part by a Huffington Post article by the president of the Kennedy Center, Michael M. Kaiser. Titled "Why I Worry About Modern Dance," it waxed nostalgic and asked, "Where is the current, not to mention next, generation of great modern dance companies to carry the torch?"

Mr. Pryor, like many of his colleagues, was infuriated by the essay and set out to prove that the current generation had already carried the torch into new territory. His press materials quoted Mr. Kaiser and explained that the festival's goal was no less than "to debunk stilted perceptions of American dance and give way to a new notion of contemporary performance."

The centerpiece of the 2010 festival was "Last Meadow," by Mr. Gutierrez, Mr. Pryor's main client. Though Mr. Gutierrez already had considerable career traction on his own, he credits American Realness with leading directly to a series of European engagements and describes his relationship with Mr. Pryor, who tours with him, as an intimate, intense collaboration.

"It's me and Ben on Skype, being like, 'How are we going to do this?' " he said, laughing. "I need someone who cannot only administer this stuff but have a vision about how it can happen. And that is Ben. Unquestionably."

If the path Mr. Pryor is traveling has a trailblazer, it is Barbara Bryan, the executive director of the progressive performance laboratory Movement Research. Ten years ago she created management models for choreographers like Sarah Michelson, Wally Cardona and John Jasperse, helping them rise to the top of their field.

"The generation he's working with has even less infrastructure support," Ms. Bryan said, describing that as "staggering" to contemplate. "I think of Ben as really a key person and probably at the top of the field in terms of the strong representation for a particular generation, but also a particular aesthetic and way of working — artists who really are pushing the boundaries of performance."

Like many of the artists he is most drawn to, Mr. Pryor has an attachment to working outside established support structures, or blazing his own way through them, that is both quixotic and (given current economic realities) practical.

"There's something about that freedom," Mr. Pryor said, his eyes glowing with a certain frazzled zeal. "It's also crazy, because it's just me."

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BEN PRYOR ON AMERICAN REALNESS

The festival's curator celebrates 5 years and running.

GAYLETTER

By Eric Torres

To many LGBT-identifying people, the word “realness” evokes a very specific image in queer history. It’s the sequence in Jennie Livingston’s 1990 documentary *Paris Is Burning*, in which several late 80’s NYC queens display what “realness” truly means: to blend seamlessly into heterosexual culture despite your queerness. It’s about being a walking contradiction, gender-bending your way into what culture has deemed the norm. It’s about being able to pass for something you’re not and subverting the entire image you’re conveying in the process. At American Realness, the arts festival currently happening downtown at Abrons Art Center,

creator Ben Pryor (pictured) has adopted this word to perfectly represent a series of new performance, dance, and art events that repurposes “realness” for a newly growing subset of American and international art.



Photography by Gayletter

We asked a few questions to Ben about the future of American Realness, doing homework in the BAM Opera House as a kid, and what “realness” means in the context of the artwork and performances on display at this year’s festival. Check out the full interview below.

What is your background in the arts? Are you an artist yourself? My mom was a publicist for contemporary classical composers. David Lang, Michael Gordon, Julie Wolfe, the Bang on a Can scene, Michael Nyman, John Corigliano... I grew up going to atonal music concerts, being seated between critics, forced to behave myself backstage at the Knitting Factory at age 12, or doing homework during sound check in the Opera House at BAM. There was a predisposition to artists pushing the boundaries, and I was stuffing press kits to earn allowance at age 7. I got more serious about dance when I was a little older, studying tap, jazz, ballet and still doing musicals in school. My BA is in theater performance. Later on I started seeing concert dance and was studying a lot of queer theory and looking at the performance of race, gender and the self. I got really interested in qualities of performance and of personhood. How does the performance of self constitute an identity on or inside a body?

I think these two worlds can be seen in the performance work that excites me today. There is text, there is song, there is dancing/movement/ideas within the framework of dance. It is really a queering of musical theater, of modern dance, of performance art and other contemporary art making practices — a mashing up of contexts, theatrical or otherwise.

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What stands out most to you when looking for performers for American Realness? I get excited about work when I am surprised, confused in that tantalizing or challenging way, and when I see or experience transformation — when I am pushed into new ways of thinking, into and through my own discomfort, or into a state of joy. American Realness presents work in which artists are exploring performative practices to show us that the world is larger than ourselves; that we are all connected. Their work is reflexive of who they are and how they make it, and subversive in how they approach the frames of dance and performance. The works are crafted as experiences more than shows, where the action is not just seen, but felt. It is about palpable energetic exchange between the performers and the audience. I want to FEEL something. I want someone to make sense of it all and tell me it is OK, however fucked up it seems to be. This is what I hope to offer audiences in a lot of different ways over the course of the program.

Over the past 5 years, what has been the most rewarding aspect of putting together American Realness? The program has been insanely rewarding in a number of ways. The resonance was palpable from the beginning. Everyone said yes. And keeps on saying it. The artists. The industry. The public. The program has had a remarkable trajectory and I am insanely grateful to Jay Wegman, Director of the Abrons Arts Center, for thinking it was a decent idea and making the path to today possible.

How do you define “realness” in relation to the arts? The term “Realness” comes from the Drag Ball context and has to do with passing. With the festival, I consider Realness in relationship to the performativity of personhood and identity and how these ideas are played with in the performance of life, highlighted here for us on stage. How are performers representing themselves? What are they presenting of “themselves”? I am really interested in that slippery space where we are not really sure what we know. It creates a heightened state of attention for the audience. They are forced to work through their own sense of confusion about what is happening.

There is also a level of “realness” that relates to the underfunded nature of American work (dance/theater/performance) in relationship to international work. It is about acknowledging that there is more frequently a DIY, raw aesthetic employed in this American work versus its international counterparts. But we are totally cognizant of that reality and making the decision to work with and call attention to it. We may not have everything that we wanted to do this, but we are making it work with what we have and not apologizing for it. Artists keeping it real.

There is also the level of marketplace that is somewhat transparent, perhaps less so for the public, but very much so for the programmers coming to the festival. The festival takes place during this huge performing arts conference. There are curators and programmers from all over the country and the world in town. Many of them are literally shopping for work to bring to their venues and festivals at home. So American Realness is also about selling your goods. In the traditional American entrepreneurial spirit, we have set up shop and we are for sale.

This year is the first time American Realness is featuring works authored solely by international artists. Can you describe your process for recruiting internationally? My day job is producing and touring the performance works of a few choreographers, Miguel Gutierrez and Ishmael Houston-Jones, for example. With that I end up traveling to different festivals and venues around the world where clients’ work is being presented. This affords me the opportunity to see a lot of work from other artists that often times isn’t otherwise coming to NYC. Every now and then I see works that I know will really resonate back home. I have resisted making invitations because my festival was supposed to be about “American” work. Now that the program is five years old, I feel like I can finally break out of that frame and not worry about what colleagues or the press might say. Now it is about sowing that the central aesthetic ideology of the program still holds clear across national and geographic boundaries.

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Several of the works at this year's festival challenge typical ideas of identity and how we see ourselves. What about the concept of identity, and the many ways it changes in our lifetime, appeals to you most? Like most homos, I had my own struggle with figuring out who and what I am and wanted to be. It wasn't really until I started reading Foucault and Butler that I really felt comfortable understanding my identity as the confluence of my mental and physical reality. I think the combination of the more body-based practice of dance and the more intellectually-based practice of theater (not to imply that a dance or body based practices are not also intellectually grounded or rigorous) lend themselves to an investigation of personal identity. It is true that identity shifts as life goes on, so it is a ripe and universal territory for exploration, one that audiences can find themselves in.

In the future of American Realness, are there any directions you haven't gone yet that you'd like to go in regard to artistic disciplines? I keep feeling interested in curating some sort of music program. I dabbled with some more musically based projects in 2013. This year I was trying to get Mykki Blanco involved in some aspect of the program. I was like *"Hey Mykki, I am this crazy guy you don't know who has access to a theater and this festival that gets some good press, wanna come make some crazy stage piece pop-opera?!?"* I like to have crazy fantasies I don't have the resources for. I think that could really be amazing though, broadening the program a bit, but also asking the artists to bring themselves to the forms of the program. I think there is a lot of potential there.

Can you give insight into any particular events/artists/art in history that have influenced American Realness? Mark Russell's Under the Radar Festival was the blueprint for American Realness. Mark ran Performance Space 122 for 20 years and then started Under the Radar as a way to bring new experimental theater to his national and international colleagues. For Realness, I shifted the focus from theater to dance and performance, but the format and function of the programs in the context of the APAP conference that is happening is quite similar.

American Realness spans many different venues, but is housed largely in Abrons Art Center. What about that space in particular appeals to your vision for American Realness? I love that Abrons is a campus. There are three theaters in the two connected buildings, and we have turned this multi-purpose room into another performance space. You can make a lot happen there. We take over the three gallery spaces too so the program really takes over all the public spaces and becomes something new. It allows the festival to become a fully social experience, not just going to the theater, sitting, watching and leaving. You can hang out, talk about the work, check out some exhibitions. Make some new friends and then go see something else. That was always really essential to the vision for the program.

Can you give us an insider's opinion on some of the must-see additions to this year's festival? This is always a hard one for me. I curated the program, so of course I have a reason for you to see everything! I would love for people to especially check out the international work as they are probably less familiar with these guys. Dana Michel is from Montreal. Her piece 'Yellow Towel' is playing with racial stereotypes in this really interesting way. When I saw the piece last summer I kept thinking *"WHAT THE FUCK IS SHE DOING?"* There is all this action going on, she is speaking all this quasi-comprehensible gibberish, and while she is totally captivating on stage, she isn't really letting you in 100%. It's the kinda confusing/exciting I go for. And people should check out The Lounge. It is a free after-party each night at The Public Theater with a cash bar, performances and DJs. Chris Tyler's TRL >>> Total Reject's Live is happening next weekend, that should be wild. Hope to see ya there.

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Unspared Audience: American Realness at Abrons Arts Center

by Sean J Patrick Carney

American Realness, an ambitious experimental dance and performance art festival, began humbly in 2010 by presenting the work of eight choreographers at Lower East Side theater space Abrons Arts Center. The 2018 program, presented by Gibney Dance in association with Abrons, featured eighty-nine performances of seventeen productions at several venues. Despite this impressive growth, American Realness has maintained its original mission to present work that is, as stated on its website, “loud, queer, disturbing, hilarious, critically engaged, beyond post-modern and undeniably present.” Performances I caught this year at Abrons checked all those boxes, while also pressing me to interrogate my role as audience member. What, they asked, did I expect I deserved out of this?

The work that resonated the most for me was nora chipaumire’s searing and defiant *#PUNK* (2017), an hour-long frenetic sensory assault of dance, voice, and music that left me feeling half-deaf and physically obliterated. Conceived and choreographed by chipaumire, it also featured Jamaican-born artist and dancer Shamar Watt and guitarist David Gagliardi of Los Angeles punk band Trash Talk. The piece is the first in a three-part series, “*#PUNK 100% POP*NIGGA*,” that charts chipaumire’s sonic influences during her youth in Zimbabwe. According to the program notes, the series “confront[s] and celebrate[s] the bodies and aesthetics of iconic women: Patti Smith (*#PUNK*), Grace Jones (*100% POP*), and Rit Nzele (**NIGGA*).”

After arriving at the Abrons playhouse, I was directed onto the stage and corralled with the rest of the audience in an area beside a set of risers. The house was empty. Bright lights stayed on for the entire performance, illuminating everyone in attendance. Like many theater and dance audiences, we were mostly white. Clearly, we were part of the set, meant to observe not only the performance but also each other’s responses to it. Punk isn’t just a noun or adjective; chipaumire also seemed to be using it as a verb, in the sense of dupe or deceive. She thwarted the audience’s expectations of comfort. Ill at ease, we awkwardly had to decide whether we could take a seat on the stage or remain standing for the next sixty minutes.

Art in America



nora chipaumire: *#PUNK*, 2017, at Abrons Arts Center. Photo Ian Douglas.



Neal Medlyn: *I <3 Pina*, 2017, at Abrons Arts Center. Photo Ian Douglas.



Michael Portnoy: *Relational Stalinism—The Musical*, 2016, at Abrons Arts Center. Photo Ian Douglas.

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Music blasted from speakers and chipaumire and Watts stormed the stage in matching tracksuits. They repeatedly shouted, "Are you ready?" and "This is an introduction to the introduction!" Seated on a diminutive amplifier on a corner of the riser, Gagliardi noodled guitar leads over a diverse prerecorded soundscape that included dub, mbaqanga, and Jimi Hendrix. Roaring, chipaumire said she "fuck[s] with the past, the present, and the future" (a play on, or a jab at, Patti Smith's "Babelogue," the spoken word prelude to her incendiary song "Rock and Roll Nigger"). Watts was electric, echoing chipaumire's voice, goading the hesitant audience to loosen up. He clapped rapid-fire to the dense beats, urging us to keep up with him. Eyes darted around fearfully as audience members feared they couldn't manage to clap in time.

After calling out Elvis for appropriating and profiting off black musical culture, chipaumire dared us in the audience to "steal *this*." As Gagliardi, who is white, riffed, neither dancer ever addressed him; he seemed intentionally separate and obedient. The pummeling music was relentless as chipaumire and Watts shed layers of clothing and introduced dances called King Kong Jesus and London Bridge, confronting our gazes and reveling in the awkward responses. When it ended, people looked hungover. I've been to a lot of punk shows, but this was one of the most battering performances I've witnessed. It put me in my place, sending me scurrying to the train, regretting having pitched a review of it. I'm white, so I am complicit in and benefit from all the power imbalances chipaumire interrogated. What's more, by rejecting conventional performer-audience relations, she got rid of the foundation that criticism itself is based on. And anyway, her work doesn't need a stamp of approval from my white fragility.

A few days later, I attended Neal Medlyn's *I <3 Pina* (2017), a performance about developing a performance about the late choreographer Pina Bausch's work and the fandom it garnered in later years. Medlyn showed clips from the television series "The Bachelorette" and later acted out a funnily banal date scenario with dancer Maggie Cloud (who also interpreted Bausch's choreography throughout). A projection of text scrolled by that included messages Medlyn traded with admirers of Bausch's work as he tried to figure out the piece's angle, bits about his frustrations with international curators and applying for grants, and the fact that he'd originally wanted to call the piece *White People Running Into Each Other Over and Over*. Medlyn, in a well-tailored suit, sang along with a few pop songs, more restrained than I'd seen him before. A lonely bar cart sat onstage waiting for patrons. It seemed like Medlyn was having a bit of a crisis. He's known for obsessive, though comedic and deconstructive, explorations of celebrity through his "Pop Star" series. He has embodied icons like Michael Jackson, Miley Cyrus, and Beyoncé with a scrappy religious devotion that garners equal parts awe and guffaw. But in *I <3 Pina*, Medlyn may have chosen a muse with whom he ultimately couldn't connect. With Medlyn so wrapped up in communicating how byzantine he found the process of staying motivated to complete the work, I wondered if the audience mattered at all, or if we were present to fulfill contractual elements of a grant. The piece wasn't joyless, but it was subdued in comparison to his previous works that I have admired. As Medlyn sang over Rihanna's "Needed Me," an anthem about being a single, self-actualized, "savage" woman, I couldn't help but recall chipaumire confidently sneering, "Steal *this*." I thought about whiteness, novelty, and mediocrity. I'm no Bausch scholar or psychoanalyst, but it seems to me that Medlyn may have been wrestling with those very qualities in her work and his own.

On the festival's final night, I saw Michael Portnoy's inside-baseball pastiche *Relational Stalinism—The Musical* (2016). Conceived as a series of Dada-drenched performances for museum and gallery spaces, Portnoy has retooled it for the stage. Full disclosure: I've studied under Portnoy and count him as a friend, but I'll be the first say that his work is often quite proud of itself. He thinks that it is very clever, and (sometimes to his detriment) it is.

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Relational Stalinism—The Musical began with Portnoy sardonically ingratiating himself to different demographics of the audience—theater aficionados, contemporary art enthusiasts, institutional curators—by alternately speaking directly to each group about how only *they* had the capacity to truly appreciate what was to come. He then presented eight movements, following a structure that recalled a sketch comedy show. He made an unscripted prank phone call to Chase Bank customer service that demonstrated his acrobatic abilities with language and scene setting. Performer Kenya Nara, in a seductively offensive bit called “An(al) Lee(k),” played the role of a robotlike Japanese actor hired by Tino Sehgal and then caustically discarded for asking museum visitors thoughtful questions that transcended Sehgal’s Philosophy 101 prompts. Audience members were invited onstage for an up-close view of an impressive choreography of blinking that Portnoy and company performed to a composition for taiko drum in mind-bendingly odd time signatures. Most rewarding were *100 Big Entrances* parts one and two, in which Portnoy, seated at a music stand and relishing his role as Relational Stalinist, directed performers Chris Bráz and Sean Donovan through a series of increasingly ridiculous stage entrance directives. One example: “Enter with a mixture of shame that you did it, shame that you didn’t do it better, and shame that you’ll never be able to do it again.” Both Bráz and Donovan were striking. They emerged from behind the curtain and channeled slapstick and rubber-faced reactions worthy of Jim Carrey.

Despite his penchant for alienating audiences and ridiculing their elevated tastes to their faces, Portnoy, as a devotee of comedy, ironically depends a great deal on ingratiating himself to them. He’s addicted to getting laughs. At the performance I attended, the audience was happy to oblige. There’s a participatory power in being an audience member in situations like these; if we’re reluctant to let ourselves get infected by the first wave of chuckles, the air will quickly get sucked from the room. Medlyn also likes his audiences to take themselves less seriously, but the introspection and dance-world in-jokes of *I <3 Pina* made it hard to loosen up. While Portnoy similarly relies on knowledge of the ins and outs of institutional frameworks, *Relational Stalinism—The Musical* had a buoyancy that made the work feel accessible. Audiences respond to that. He worked hard to please us, and was confident enough in the work’s comedy that he didn’t need to shield it with cleverness. Meanwhile, chipaumire exudes a self-assured excellence of an entirely different, confrontational kind. She goes after institutions on a much bigger scale. The way she accosts the audience is a microcosmic attack on structural racism. And she does it with a masterful precision and presence that changed the way I understood everything else at American Realness. There’s a song called “Drugs Are Good” by punk band NOFX that goes: “Join a punk band. Shave your head and get a tattoo. You don’t need talent, just sing attitude.” I thought that sentiment sounded pretty badass in high school. Compared to chipaumire, it now sounds painfully mediocre.

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Sass and Sensibility: The Eighth American Realness Festival

by Eric Sutphin

In 1988, at the Tracy Aviary in Salt Lake City, Utah, a flamingo took flight during a routine wing-clipping procedure. The bird, whose sex is unknown, flew to the Great Salt Lake, an environment not unlike its native roosting grounds in Chile. Popularly referred to as Pink Floyd, the flamingo lived at the lake for seventeen years, garnering attention as an ecological oddity and tourist attraction. A group concerned about the bird's welfare formed and advocated for the Utah Parks Department to release additional flamingos at the lake so that Pink Floyd could have some companions of the same species (even though the bird seemed healthy and content living among the geese and gulls). Local officials blocked the proposal, fearing the consequences of introducing a non-native species into the lake's ecosystem.

Pink Floyd's story figured into the spoken-word component of Jen Rosenblit's four-person piece *Clap Hands* (2016), which was staged at the eighth edition of American Realness, an eight-day live-art festival in New York hosted by the Abrons Art Center and Gibney Dance. Rosenblit's work centered on themes of the body, polyamory, and "self talk"-a therapeutic practice of talking to oneself about oneself-and was performed in the round, with a table in the middle covered with sound equipment. Rosenblit, in boxing shorts, acted as a narrator, delivering fragments that interspersed meandering poetic lines among anecdotes about nature ("An unknown disease began to kill bees; the hive died because it was queenless"). But it was Rosenblit's inclusion of Pink Floyd's story, with its themes of difference, displacement, fear of the other, and gender ambiguity, that echoed most loudly across the landscape of the festival.

This installment of American Realness featured performances, dance, panel discussions, and a digital publication that dealt broadly with issues of identity, race, and difference. American Realness was conceived by Thomas Benjamin Snapp Pryor, who acts as its curator and producer. What sets the festival apart from other live-art series is that it presents itself as a kind of kiki-a site for banter, camaraderie, and gossip. In drag parlance, "realness" describes one's ability to pull off an alternate identity. Realness is about the total embodiment of an identity as opposed to pantomime or make-believe. In the context of the festival, it is a state of total absorption in the craft of dance or performance, a promise that the participants delivered on.

Montreal-based choreographer and performer Dana Michel presented her solo work *Mercurial George* (2016). It opened with Michel crawling onto the stage and wading through a crumpled mass of tarp while murmuring to herself. Seemingly unaware of the audience, she enacted a closed-off, almost ascetic singularity that she maintained whether she was piercing a plastic bag with a barbecue skewer, tangling herself in wires, or mixing a green doughlike concoction. With each movement, Michel convinced her audience that her task, however absurd it might appear, was absolutely necessary. She unzipped a tent at center stage to reveal a podium, where she stood and delivered a soliloquy of utterances like, "Yes, milk!" and "Salt in the frothy butter!" She spoke in a deep baritone, like a civil rights leader addressing a group before a march. Though the statements were incoherent as directives in themselves, they came across with the stirring urgency of a political rallying cry.

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Ligia Lewis: *minor matter*, Dana Michel, *Mercurial George*, Jen Rosenblit, *Clap Hands*. Photos by Ian Douglas

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Polish choreographer Karol Tyminski presented the solo piece *This is a musical* (2016) in the Abrons Center's Underground Theater. He tapped a microphone and rubbed it across his body. The device picked up the subtle sounds of scraping and scuffing, which were recorded, layered, and played back as a soundtrack. As Tyminski's movement grew more complex, so, too, did the sound, which became the sonic residue of his body breathing, spitting, and slamming against the floor. Later, Tyminski thrashed around the stage, humping the air as his movements devolved into a fitful style of mosh-pit dancing to heavy trance music. He created an atmosphere reminiscent of a dance/sex club, like Berlin's infamous Berghain. His movements suggested that he was being acted upon—even dominated-by an unseen force. He left the stage and a graphic video of himself having sex with a figure whose identity was obscured by a kind of holographic filter began to play on the large rear wall of the theater. When the tension Tyminski built up in his performance was released in the form of a video of an actual sexual climax, the metaphor was ruptured, transgressed, leaving the audience with a naked image of messy postcoital melancholy.

A standout work in the festival was Berlin-based Ligia Lewis's *minor matter* (2016), the second part of her unfinished trilogy "BLUE, RED, WHITE." Lewis was joined by dancers Jonathan Gonzalez and Hector Thami Manekehla, and the three switched between solos to deftly executed trios. The latter included a sequence where the three performers advanced in a line toward the audience with movements that evoked both voguing and combat. When they reached the front row of the audience, they made eye contact with spectators through black contact lenses that made their eyes look hollow and alien. At one point, as Lewis and Manekehla sparred and grappled, Gonzalez said from the sidelines: "I make that choice everyday-to be an assertive bitch." For the last quarter of the piece, the three performers launched into a series of extreme movements and poses. They tangled their bodies together, took running starts and jumped on one another, collapsed in piles, and used one another as stepladders in futile attempts to scale the Experimental Theatre's concrete walls. As they became visibly more exhausted, their feats became more tenuous and dangerous. A trickle of blood ran down Lewis's leg, Gonzales's shorts had come off, and sweat fell in great beads from each of their bodies. The lodestar for this work was the color red. Toward the end of the performance, a series of red beams of light pierced the inky darkness onstage, landing on the dancer's bodies like laser sights of an automatic weapon.

As I waited in the lobby of the Experimental Theater to see Juliana May's *Adult Documentary* (2016), amid a scrappy installation by Franklin Evans composed of paper detritus and neon tape, I felt unmoored, uninitiated. Had I not read enough Butler or Sedgwick or Baldwin to fully understanding the goings-on? Has realness become institutionalized as yet another countercultural phenomenon that has been converted into an academicized aesthetic proposition? Sound bites from the crowd began to tell me a thing or two. A young woman behind me said to a well-known choreographer: "I just wrote about you in my grad school application . . . I mean, I don't even know if I want to go to grad school, but it's, like, so hard out here." Shortly after, a refined young man said to the same choreographer: "My adviser told me to just sit down and make sentences. So I did that and, you know, walked away with a PhD." This account of academic achievement, despite its shoegaze simplicity, seemed like rather sound advice to a choreographer (or critic). Though May's piece seemed milquetoast and insular (full as it was of inside jokes about dance that made the dance-world folks in the audience chuckle to themselves), it became clear that a venture like *American Realness* is absolutely vital. The conversation and kvetching (and posturing and flattering) that was going on before the doors opened galvanized the spirit of realness, which at its best foregrounds both attitude and inclusion. In a political moment where feelings of anger, alienation, and profound uncertainty are reinforced daily, *American Realness* continues to be not only an outlet, but a lifeline.

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American Realness: Subversive, Crowded and Lit by Vital Sparks

The New York Times

By Siobhan Burke
Published January 10, 2017

The downstairs lobby of the Abrons Arts Center on the Lower East Side is a gray, unglamorous space. But on Sunday night, the voguer Jason Anthony Rodriguez, known as Slim Ninja, strutted in as if it were a catwalk, parting the crowd that had gathered there with a sweep of his arms, then striking pose after steely-eyed pose.

It was an electric performance — for those who could see it, at least. The place was packed, wall to wall, with many of the audience members, who had come to see Ni’Ja Whitson’s “A Meditation on Tongues” as part of the American Realness festival, stranded on the stairs leading down to the lobby. Shouts of “We can’t see anything!” and “Work! Even though we can’t see you!” could be heard over the pulsing music.



The Canadian choreographer Dana Michel performing her own “Mercurial George” as part of the American Realness festival at the Abrons Arts Center. Credit Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

The scene captured some of the best and worst aspects of American Realness, the festival of contemporary performance that takes over the Abrons each January: on the one hand, irresistible dancing grounded in smart, subversive choices; on the other, a sense of complicated work too hastily assembled.

While some artists may deliberately play with invisibility and obfuscation, the site-specific opening of “Meditation” — first the voguing solo; then some related vignettes in a long, dark hallway — seemed intended to be fully seen. Yet both nights that I attended, seeing proved difficult.

Maybe such logistical problems are inevitable at a festival that boldly sets out to produce as much new work in as little time as American Realness. “Meditation,” a reflection on black masculinities inspired by the 1989 film “Tongues Untied,” was one of five world premieres in the eighth edition of Realness. The lineup, organized by the festival’s founder and curator, Thomas Benjamin Snapp Pryor, also includes four United States premieres, seven reprises, three works in progress, two exhibitions and five workshops and discussions, unveiled over just eight days.

Why the deluge? Along with festivals like Coil (presented by PS122) and Under the Radar (at the Public Theater), Realness coincides with the annual convention of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, which draws hundreds of curators and producers to New York in early January, for what’s essentially a live-art shopping spree. During this time, critics, too, might find themselves bingeing on performance — a feast that can be nourishing or depleting. The premieres at this year’s Realness took me to both extremes. Here are a few standout moments.

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Vital Rage

For the second year in a row, Ligia Lewis, a Dominican-born choreographer living in Berlin, offered the most vital new work in the festival. "Minor Matter," the second part of her "Blue, Red, White" triptych, is a beautiful, blistering trio for her, Jonathan Gonzalez and Hector Thami Manekehla. One of her guiding questions, stated in a description of the work: "Can the black box be host to a black experience that goes beyond identity politics?"

Whether erupting into synchronized stepping routines, flinging their bodies into precarious entanglements, or trying to scale the walls of the black box theater, the three rode a fine line between fighting for, and against, one another. While some of this year's Realness fare felt relentlessly inward-gazing — like Karol Tyminski's grating exercise in self-flagellation, "This Is a Musical" — "Minor Matter" tapped into a place of generous and generative rage.

Dancing Alone

The solo is a popular form at January festivals, the choreographer's version of packing light. But some solos deal more explicitly with solitude than others. Both Meg Stuart, in "An Evening of Solo Works" (four pieces from the last two decades), and the Canadian choreographer Dana Michel, the star of her own "Mercurial George," offered poetic portraits of the self unmoored from others.

In her pared-down worlds, Ms. Stuart contended again and again with her own flesh, manipulating parts of her body as if to assure herself they were there, or trying to shake them free. Ms. Michel found companionship, rather heartbreakingly, in objects that populated her stage: plastic bags, tin cups, a podium zipped up inside a tent, where she delivered an impassioned, barely decipherable speech. Teetering through the clutter, she maintained an arrestingly unsteady state for the nearly hourlong work, flirting with control — how much to keep, how much to relinquish — over her body, her voice, her surroundings.



Meg Stuart in "An Evening of Solo Works" at Abrons Arts Center.
Credit Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

"Cage Shuffle," a new solo by Paul Lazar with choreography by Annie-B Parson (the two are the co-directors of Big Dance Theater; they're also married), was less bleak. In a kind of choreographic juggling act, Mr. Lazar recited minute-long stories from John Cage's "Indeterminacy" — fed to him through an ear piece in random order — while performing a nonrandom sequence of movement, which itself had a kind of scrambled, shuffling quality. Later he repeated the same phrase, accompanied by an electronic score mixed live by Lea Bertucci. The brain-teasing tasks were good company.

Artists or Brands?

Alex Rodabaugh's "Amerishowz," presented at Gibney Dance Center in Lower Manhattan, took satirical aim at the economic structures around life as a dancer and dance maker. In an opening PowerPoint presentation, he and three members of a so-called 2017 Circle of Champions introduced a scheme to help starving artists capitalize on their roles as "walking talking advertisements for performance." Later sections, each stranger and more physically strenuous than the first, explored the transformation of an artist into a brand.

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Back at Abrons, Ni'Ja Whitson's "Meditation" took on more sweeping social problems: racism and homophobia, in particular discrimination against black gay men. This choreographer, joined by Kirsten Flores-Davis, has a magnetic presence that we could more fully enjoy once seated in the Underground Theater, after the chaotic prelude. The relationship between the dancers remained fluid, shifting from platonic to romantic, combative to supportive. As one said during a climactic sprint around the theater, "Our angers ricochet between us."

Correction: January 10, 2017

An earlier version of this review misstated the number of world premieres at the festival. There are five, not four.

THOMAS BENJAMIN SNAPP PRYOR

Review: American Realness, a Festival of Audacious Movements and Slitherings

By Siobhan Burke

Published: January 8, 2016

Though it may feel out of the way — far, far east on the Lower East Side — there's no missing American Realness once you get there. In its seventh edition, this annual festival of contemporary performance announces itself boldly, its name projected in big block letters on the facade of Abrons Arts Center, home to most of the festival's 18 boundary-blurring productions.

It doesn't take much to inject new life into an event sometimes at risk of stagnating, even as it champions the fresh, the unseen, the unexpected. At opening night on Thursday, visitors were guided from show to show through stairwells and hallways generally closed to the public. For anyone well acquainted with Abrons, as many Realness-goers are, this proved a simple, effective way to reinvent familiar spaces.

Masterminded by Thomas Benjamin Snapp Pryor, Realness coincides with the citywide conference of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters — international curators and producers in the market for new work — which returns each year like a recurring dream, or nightmare, depending on your relationship to the idea of shopping for live art. Last year's festival was full of work bemoaning the economic plight of performers; this year's first two productions struck out in less sullen directions, while still folding in some self-reflexive critique (also available in the form of Realness swag declaring, "I Suffer From Realness").

First was "Culture Administration & Trembling," a biodiverse collaboration among the performers Jennifer Lacey, Antonija Livingstone, Dominique Pétrin and Stephen Thompson. Ticket holders were instructed to remove their shoes, then led to the second floor of the arts complex, where a usually drab lobby had been transformed with geometric and botanical designs on the floor and walls.

Ms. Lacey, Ms. Livingstone, Mr. Thompson and Dana Michel crawled languidly around the asymmetrical room, the audience huddled around the perimeter, to a soundscape of intermittent bird song. Ms. Pétrin appeared just as calmly immersed in her task of adorning the ground with origami squares. Three live snakes, delivered from offstage, soon joined in. Humans and reptiles slid over and around one another.

The New York Times



From left, Stephen Thompson and Jennifer Lacey (with the dog Mouchette) performing in "Culture Administration & Trembling," part of the American Realness festival at the Abrons Arts Center. Andrea Mohin/The New York Times



The choreographer Heather Kravas in her solo piece "dead, disappears." Credit Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

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This was just the first of many tenuously related, increasingly chaotic episodes, including the arrival of two Chihuahuas (the snakes, not to worry, had exited) and a migration into the adjacent black-box theater for a ritualistic ringing of hand-held bells. A mysterious voice, accompanying a video projection, pronounced, "This piece will not save us." Ms. Lacey, cradling a small, three-legged dog while bending and stretching her limbs, told a story about an artist and an institution (Realness, perhaps) trying to spice up their relationship like old lovers. What to do with all this information? I thought of dance as undomesticated wildlife, of the predators and prey involved in buying and selling performance.

Down one set of stairs and up another, in a tucked-away dance studio not often used for performances, the choreographer Heather Kravas, visiting from Seattle, offered the New York premiere of "dead, disappears." Ms. Kravas was her own predator and protector in this stark, self-punishing solo, as she put herself through perilous paces inspired by the sculptor Richard Serra's "Verb List," a series of actions that he associated with making his pieces.

What seemed at first like arbitrary acts of masochism — walking on tiptoe with a trash bag over her head while barking two-syllable phrases — deepened into a formidable exploration of language, the female body and the power play between them. Having duct-taped a pillow to a chair, as if it were a prisoner, Ms. Kravas pounded it with a long pole, shouting a list of alphabetized verbs, one per swipe. By the end, in whatever this struggle had been, she had secured the upper hand.

American Realness continues through Jan. 17. Most performances are at Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand Street, Manhattan; 866-811-4111, americanrealness.com.

A version of this review appears in print on January 9, 2016, on page C1 of the New York edition with the headline: Audacious Movements and Slitherings.

THOMAS BENJAMIN SNAPP PRYOR

Review: American Realness Illuminates Racial Identities With 3 Dance Works

By Siobhan Burke

Published: January 10, 2016

The New York Times

"Where may I kiss you?" You don't expect to hear that question while waiting around a theater lobby for a performance to begin, especially not from a veiled stranger. But Keyon Gaskin established a certain intimacy early on in his 40-minute solo, "its not a thing," at Abrons Arts Center on Friday. Cloaked in black with a scarf draped over his face, Mr. Gaskin approached individual guests, inquired about their fears ("When were you afraid today?") and offered a kiss, planted in black lipstick.

In the sea of genre-crossing work at American Realness, the festival of contemporary performance that comes to the Lower East Side each January, common threads emerge. (This year's edition packs 18 productions, plus discussions and parties, into 11 days.) Mr. Gaskin's was one of three (mostly) solo works on Friday that addressed related themes of racial identity and masculinity through drastically different means. I saw it after the vehemently mournful "#negrophobia," by the Nigerian-American artist Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, and before the Dominican-born Ligia Lewis's transporting "Sorrow Swag."



Jaamil Olawale Kosoko performing in "#negrophobia," in the American Realness Festival at the Abrons Arts Center. Credit: Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Mr. Gaskin provides little context for his work, with just a one-line bio in the program: "Keyon Gaskin prefers not to contextualize their performances with their credentials." Sure enough, you want to know more. Once the audience was seated in the playhouse, he arrived unveiled, puttering around the shadowy stage while commenting on his "contentions" with live performance. These included dancing to music, audience participation and dealing directly with racism — all of which he confronted in "its not a thing."

After giving us permission to leave, then inviting us to sit onstage, Mr. Gaskin passed around a bottle of whiskey, cranked up Lil Wayne's "She Will" and clambered up to a grate above the stage, recklessly traversing its narrow length while smoking a cigarette. Back on our level, he darted among us, stuffed dice in his mouth and spit them out. Instructing one viewer to read from a book by the black feminist scholar Hortense Spillers, he removed his shorts (including American-flag briefs) and did a half-naked tap dance. Suddenly it was over. "Get your things and go," he said, "and please don't clap."

Though brimming with unresolved conflict, this piece seemed almost Minimalist in comparison with "#negrophobia," performed in the Underground Theater by Mr. Kosoko. (And, trailing him with an iPhone camera, a masked voyeur in heels and a thong — Alabama Kentrell, who goes by IMMA/MESS.) Mr. Kosoko transformed the concrete space into a tumultuous shrine to dead black men, including his brother, to whom the show is dedicated. From an initial reading of his own poetry to a trembling finale of simulated foaming at the mouth, he offers little hope, giving grief and rage a chance to reign.

While Mr. Kosoko explores the black male body, Ms. Lewis, who lives in Berlin, presents a white male body, that of the strapping performer Brian Getnick, a fighter figure in white sneakers, white socks and white basketball shorts. Against throaty waves of sound supplied live by George Lewis Jr. (Ms. Lewis's brother, known as Twin

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Shadow), Mr. Getnick embodies awkward shards of movement and text with chilling conviction, at times vanishing into thick blue-tinted fog. "Sorrow Swag" ends with a blaring reference to Samuel Beckett's dramatic monologue "Not I," a spotlight illuminating Mr. Getnick's mouth and gold-encased teeth as he wails into the darkness.

One of Mr. Gaskin's contentions sticks with me: that he is "performing for mostly white audiences," which describes the Realness audience. The festival addresses this, too, with a talk next weekend led by the scholar Thomas F. DeFrantz, who proposes that "the discourse of race in contemporary performance falls apart when whites try to understand black performance." Everyone should go.

American Realness continues through Sunday. Most performances are at Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand Street, Manhattan; 866-811-4111, americanrealness.com.

THOMAS BENJAMIN SNAPP PRYOR

FESTIVAL TBD: EMERGENCY GLITTER

2013 SELECTED PRESS

THOMAS BENJAMIN SNAPP PRYOR

Best of Dance 2013

Published December 31, 2012



3. Gillian Walsh: For *Grinding and Equations: Two Duets at Abrons* (part of Festival TBD: Emergency Glitter), Walsh layers two pieces that deal with formality and flesh, using written scores and confronting fetishization head on—or, really, from behind. Beyond the glute flexing, *Grinding and Equations* is an expansive, evocative investigation into structure and virtuosity, which takes voyeurism and pop culture to a new place.

6. Rebecca Patek: The subversive, satirical Patek shies away from nothing in her sexually explicit work—but it's about much more than that. For *ineter(a)nal f/ear* (part of Festival TBD: Emergency Glitter), a breathtaking work in which she scrapes beneath the surface of trauma and shame to reveal much about human relationships, she pinpoints awkwardness in a way that is both hilarious and horrifying.

10. Thomas Benjamin Snapp Pryor: First, he created the American Realness festival; then, over the summer, he initiated Festival TBD: Emergency Glitter, which placed the spotlight on a younger generation of artists. Pryor is giving contemporary dance a home. His American Realness festival resumes at Abrons Arts Center on January 9.

SUMMER STAGES | Dance

By Siobhan Burke

Published: May 17, 2013

The New York Times

FESTIVAL TBD Abrons Arts Center, July 24-28. From the founder of American Realness — the thriving festival presented each January at Abrons Arts Center — comes a new, related summer endeavor. The focus remains on cutting-edge performance but with an eye toward a younger generation of artists. Details are still under wraps, but knowing Ben Pryor's curatorial instincts, we'll have a lot to look forward to. abronsartscenter.org.

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Ben Pryor talks about Festival TBD: Emergency Glitter



By Gia Kourlas
Mon Jul 8 2013

Ben Pryor graces New York with the new Festival TBD: Emergency Glitter. Pryor's American Realness line-up continues to push the boundaries of curation along the lines of Danspace's Platform series and Aunts. His new festival is no different; this year's "Emergency Glitter," held at Abrons Arts Center/Henry Street Settlement features an assortment of young artists, including Lauren Grace Bakst, Burr Johnson, Niall Jones, Rebecca Patek, Gillian Walsh, Rebecca Warner and Emily Wexler.



Rebecca Patek performs at Festival TBD: Emergency Glitter, Photograph: Vincent Lafrance

Ben Pryor has a new festival up his sleeve, and it couldn't come at a better time. In New York, summer dance isn't exactly abundant with options; Lincoln Center Festival, in fact, scheduled nothing for this season. (Way to go, LCF!) But Pryor, whose American Realness Festival has turned January into a thriving dance season, has done it again for July, with Festival TBD: Emergency Glitter. Held at Abrons Arts Center from July 24 through 28, the festival will explore the work of a younger generation, including Lauren Grace Bakst, Burr Johnson, Niall Jones, Rebecca Patek, Gillian Walsh, Rebecca Warner and Emily Wexler. Pryor spoke about his latest curatorial adventure.

Time Out New York: How did this festival come about?

Ben Pryor: It totally goes back to Realness. When I started that, American Realness was about Miguel [Gutierrez's] *Last Meadow* and [Trajal Harrell's] "Twenty Looks" series. It was made around those artists and the work of 2010, and I was like, I'll change it next year. It'll be something different to reflect what the work is, the way a curator makes an exhibition. And then it was really successful, and people ate it up and were like, "You have to keep going, you have to do this again." Then it became this *thing*. There's a lot of pressure and attention because of APAP [Association of Performing Arts Presenters conference], and so there are a lot of people coming and a lot of eyes on the work. In some ways, this became a dangerous place to show stuff that isn't necessarily work that we know is going to succeed. I felt limited in terms of being able to support artists that I was interested in. I've had to be more careful about risk-taking in that way. I was like, If I can't do that within this context, then I want an opportunity to do that. I want to work with another group of artists in a different moment in their trajectory when it's not about selling for the market and presenting for the entire field. It's more about their research and their process and what they're interested in and being able to pursue it in a way that was not so...

Time Out New York: Visible?

Ben Pryor: Yeah—still visible, but it doesn't need that kind of attention and pressure. With Realness in 2011, it was still a part of my thinking to try and find a mix, from Ishmael Houston-Jones to Jen Rosenblit and everything in between. I feel like I backed away from that over the past two years. Next year, I'm hoping to introduce a new crop of people.

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Time Out New York: At Realness?

Ben Pryor: Yes. I have plans for that. But I felt this desire to do something for this other moment of artists. And there was my own desire to do this mega-international thing. Out of Realness came this idea that I would have three projects: one with the young, one that was the American marketplace thing and one that was a performing-arts festival that reclaims the cultural identity of New York as a global center—highfalutin whatever. [Laughs] That's still on the back burner. But I wanted to do this other thing. I started a program at Wesleyan, which I didn't end up finishing. I had trouble keeping up with the workload.

Time Out New York: Don't you also manage artists?

Ben Pryor: Yeah—in the past year, it's been Miguel, Trajal, Ishmael and Yvonne Meier. I did a Deborah Hay engagement last year. I produced Wally [Cardona] and Jenny's [Lacey] *Tool Is Loot*, but I haven't been involved in the new project thus far. I'm also in a place where I'm trying to move away from that, because I want to develop my own programs and build them into economically sustainable and more legitimate programs. Money is a whole other situation. [Laughs] I made the decision to use Wesleyan as an opportunity to develop a series of ideas. We had to complete an assignment to develop a program. The easy road would have been to make all my projects and assignments about American Realness. In some ways, I had already been doing the homework. I wanted to be thinking in another way and to be challenged and stimulated by what it was that was going to be proposed in the context of the program. I started what was then called Groundswell for one of my classes, which was this idea of creating a multiday program at Abrons that would be about... this is a struggle that I haven't totally addressed. I wanted to steer away from saying *emerging* because people are so touchy about it. Personally, I don't mind the word; it deals with classifying, so of course this is problematic.

Time Out New York: I guess part of the problem is what is the cutoff? When do you stop being *emerging*?

Ben Pryor: Right. And also it applies to recognition, which people don't necessarily think about [when they say], "But I've been making work for ten years." Has that work ever been supported institutionally or seen? Has it all been self-produced? In some ways then perhaps you haven't really *emerged* into the field. Anyway, I wanted to stay away from that because initially I wanted the program to be, not necessarily about a more generational thing, but about young work—maybe you're an older dancer, but you haven't necessarily had an ongoing practice of making your own stuff and maybe this is a moment for that too. In the end, it's ended up being a younger thing, and part of that was my own failure to figure out how I would deal with those two things in concert with each other without saying *emerging* or *young*. I didn't give myself a lot of time to name this whole thing in the first place. So I started this plan as my homework for the program, and it came to the point where I just wanted to do it. I can't play hypothetical. I work with these people on a regular basis; it's real. So it was just nagging me, and I had a slow summer coming up—Trajal has had this guy take over the European stuff. Miguel is doing a lot of teaching, and I haven't taken on new stuff. I had this moment, so I'm like, Let me give myself some more stuff to do! It's a little ridiculous. I guess I can't help it. It felt important to me to do something else. I wanted a moment to work with other people.

Time Out New York: What is the origin of the name?

Ben Pryor: I was traveling with Miguel in Beirut. It was my first time in the Middle East. We're going to the hotel the first night, and there's a sign on a plastic box that says "Emergency Glitter." I thought, That's fabulous—break in case of an emergency, and you need some glitter. It's just so ridiculous. And there was something so compelling about it.

Time Out New York: It's also such an amazing name because there's no dance at Lincoln Center Festival this year. The dance world needs some glitter.

Ben Pryor: I did hear that. Once upon a time, it was really loaded with dance. Also, because of the way Realness became an ongoing annual thing, I wanted this festival to be a little looser—that it didn't scream its whole

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aesthetic alignment, so I would have more room to shift within it. With Realness, I have to be interested in work that fits that aesthetic framework, which is great, because I am, but there's a lot of other work that's happening in New York that doesn't quite fit into that. Trends in what people are making shift, and I feel like I branded the festival around a specific moment in time. As things shift, how do I deal with that inside of this? So I wanted something that was a little looser and freer. Emergency Glitter, then, felt way too specific. I don't know that that can be an annual program. It's a burst of excitement, but I don't know that we replicate that. Maybe I want to give myself the freedom to respond to something different. That's where the Festival TBD concept came from. I wanted something that I could work with and play with and maybe create a relationship among the different programs over time.

Time Out New York: Let's talk about the artists.

Ben Pryor: It's a mix of different pieces I've seen and people that I'm interested in. Lauren Bakst—I've not really seen her make so much stuff. I met her when I was a student at ADF; I went for a year between leaving BAM and joining Pentacle, and it was my one moment of being a dancer in a six-week program kind of thing; we were in Miguel's composition class together. She's had interesting ideas. I don't know so much about what the piece will ultimately be, but I'm excited to give her an opportunity to come and do it. Gillian Walsh has been doing this whole butt choreography for a while, and I've seen it in a couple of iterations. I just thought that there were really interesting, sophisticated choices being made, and what she was doing—essentially working with two duets within one framework of a dance...one of which is really informal and silly and playful and the other that is very choreographed. Like they're doing ballet port de bras and things. She's trying to address the relationship in these worlds of dance also—the formal and the not so formal, and how do we deal with them? Time Out New York: And also how they can both be formal and virtuosic? Ben Pryor: Yes. Totally. So she's working that out, and she's never brought it to a black box. She's only done it at Judson and Danspace, so this presents new challenges in terms of adapting it to the space and dealing with that. It's exciting.

Time Out New York: I like that Abrons black-box space.

Ben Pryor: It's cozy. The stuff in the Playhouse—we're not using the [theater] traditionally. I had a fantasy of building an eight-foot wall at the foot of the apron and seating the audience onstage looking out. That's not happening. But we are seating people at the back of the stage looking out or just onstage in general, like for Rebecca Warner and Burr Johnson, who are sharing an evening; for it, the audience will be seated onstage. I'm excited about them; this is more the capital-D dance. One of the newer trends for me is that in the past two years, I've noticed people dancing more in ways that I wasn't seeing between 2005 and 2010; that moment was really screamy and in your face and aggressive—a little bit of that has let up.

Time Out New York: What are you referring to exactly?

Ben Pryor: Like when Ann Liv [Young] was making really tightly structured pieces and Miguel was doing *Retrospective Exhibitionist*. It was a lot screamier. Jeremy Wade was focusing on the ecstatic body—there was a lot of that happening, and I feel in the past couple of years, it's quieted in some ways. I don't know if it's my own psychology versus what I'm actually seeing, but people aren't interested in that necessarily, or that's not what a lot of people are doing. I'm seeing people dealing with a more formal sense of choreography that is refreshing to me and kind of exciting—it's stemmed from Sarah [Michelson] and John [Jasperse]. I don't know Sarah's work way, way back—she's always been interested in dance, but when I saw *Devotion*, I was just like, Oh my God, this dancing. And then John did *Canyon*, which for me was like, They're jumping! I feel like that's been more present and so Rebecca and Burr will be addressing that, and Burr specifically in a way that I feel is also infusing ecstatic energy into choreography via pop music. It's still charged in a way that comes out of the screamier movement, and then brings something new to the approach of big dancing and the sensation of play and fun.

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Time Out New York: What is Rebecca Warner working on?

Ben Pryor: I saw her do a shared evening at BAX [Brooklyn Arts Exchange] that Jillian Peña had curated, and it was more formal dance: This isn't about choreography in a larger sense, this is about dance and dancing. It just felt interesting to me. The piece was called *Into Glittering Asphalt*. She said that it's really gone in a different direction since BAX. I have no idea if this is going to be anything like I saw, and that's not really important to me.

Time Out New York: I was thinking that must be a relief for you.

Ben Pryor: Yes, because Realness is all about knowing. It's nice to be in a place of supporting the development of something new as opposed to: This is the thing, let's put it up. It's more, let's create an opportunity for you to develop what this is going to be.

Time Out New York: What about Rebecca Patek?

Ben Pryor: I've never seen her evening-length stuff.

Time Out New York: It is funny and smart.

Ben Pryor: She is wacky! I did this whole thing with everybody where I sent them questions to help me to develop more of a language around what this thing is. It was asking them about their process and about what they want for themselves now. Do they see what's next for themselves? Or is that not even in their thinking? I'm trying to imagine if this thing continues, and I want to keep working with younger artists, what are ways that I can make this more interesting for them? There were questions like, do you have a mentor? Do you want a mentor? [Laughs] That didn't actually seem like such a point of interest for people. It was just about trying to have more of a dialogue for them. Rebecca's stuff was just fantastic. She clearly has a sophisticated idea of what she's doing. [In her work] she's doing this thing with language where she [seems to be] finding the words, but creating this whole pull with the audience within that: "I'm going to...but it's...I'm kind of..." as she goes through this stream of consciousness. The subject matter is always a little off in this way that's like, should she really be dealing with that? Is it *really* okay? There was a performance at Judson recently where she was working with a girl in a wheelchair. I don't know quite what the situation was; the girl was mobile, but it looked like her legs weren't developed. There's a moment where the girl in the wheelchair organizes members of the audience to sit one behind each other and to put their arms on each other's shoulders, and she gets out of the wheelchair and climbs across everybody while Rebecca recites text that goes, "Isn't it beautiful? It's so amazing. Wow, look at that!" She's pushing, and I like that.

Time Out New York: There is Carlos Maria Romero and Juan Betancurth. What are they doing?

Ben Pryor: They're the ones that don't fit, in a way. They totally fit from an aesthetic and ideological point of view, but they're not in the New York community. Carlos is originally from Bogotá and has been all over the place—he's been dancing and making work, but has also curated stuff. I first met him at a festival in France in 2010. We've stayed in touch, and now he's more based in the U.K and is trying to focus on his artistic practice. Carlos has done this project a couple of times; he works with a different collaborator, and it doesn't actually get named until it happens. In the end, the piece will be called *July 25th, Abrons Art Center, New York, New York*, and every single audience member's name will be listed. For me, it's a very visual-art practice approach. And there's a lot of visual-art strategies in what he's doing in terms of looking at objects within sculpture and looking at the audience as object. I think he wants the audience to be doing stuff during the work. I'm not quite sure. It's getting developed in the week and moments before the program happens. This is in the Playhouse, because they wanted to work with the machinery of the theater. Juan is a visual artist who deals with performance. They felt a certain alignment with each other. Juan is also from Bogotá, but has been in New York for a while and works a lot with Elastic City.

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Time Out New York: Niall Jones and Emily Wexler will share a program. What are they working on?

Ben Pryor: They've ended up being remarkably in sync. This was another one where I was like, "I don't know what you're working on, but I really like you, and I think you've been doing interesting stuff, and I want to see if there's an opportunity that will support what you're doing and also add to what this thing can be." Emily is taking on sexual violence with women and objectification and is proposing to get rid of objectification altogether, which is pretty lofty, but great. And Niall is also dealing with the objectified self and self-identity within an active gaze of an other; he's talking about sadness and grief, and I don't know how that may manifest in the work, but they ended up in this place of dealing with the body and objectification.

Time Out New York: Were they fine with being put together on a program?

Ben Pryor: Yeah, they, in fact, were really pleased about that.

Time Out New York: What about the others?

Ben Pryor: I had conversations with Gillian and Lauren: What is it we're going to do? What are you making? How is this going to work? Lauren wrote a piece about what Gillian's been working on for *Bomb*, so they were already in conversation about work. When I started talking to Gillian, I had had some ideas about who she could be paired with, and we had a discussion about it. It was a really open dialogue; it's important to have their participation in shaping it in some ways so the whole thing is a conversation and the context is appropriate and reflective of who and where they are. I'd never done an exercise where I asked everybody to write stuff for the purposes of my marketing and so many of them had such similar answers to things. Everybody referenced RuPaul.

Time Out New York: Really?

Ben Pryor: Yes. I think as a cultural phenomenon and figure—and also dealing with sexuality and gender—RuPaul is really resonant with people right now because of the success of *Drag Race*. I was like, Oh good—I've done a good job as a curator; everybody's interested in similar things. And it was just amazing to see that demonstrated to me in their responses, which were all independent of each other. It was exciting and fun. I like RuPaul. As a point of reference for what this is? Super. There are some other things that might happen.

Time Out New York: Like what?

Ben Pryor: There is this more club performance evening that will hopefully be at 11:30pm on Saturday in the Playhouse. I've been dragging my feet a little with this. There's always been so much club performance in New York, and I always felt there should be more crossover between these worlds. The people doing this don't ever know about anything happening in the contemporary performance world, and I think it has to do with a lack of any kind of information about it. It's always been of interest to me to engage with the different programs. This is why I started doing *Pussy Faggot!* at Realness. Initially, I wanted to use the amphitheater at Abrons and have stuff happen outside and make that the beer garden. This was complicated in terms of sound permits that would only go until 9pm. And then getting a liquor license; I was like, I don't want to be creating that context without alcohol—it kind of really needs it. I'm still trying to hash out the club-kid thing. Is this going to be okay even if it's kind of terrible? The translation from a five-minute club context to putting something on a stage is a very big transition, and so I'm a little apprehensive, but that has always been a big part of what I want this thing to do. I have to at least try something.

Time Out New York: Is it drag? What is it?

Ben Pryor: Ish, but not even. It's kind of a literary-performance thing. And this is the thing: I don't know how weighty it is in terms of material and concept or whatever, but it feels like something I have to do.

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Time Out New York: Because you don't know?

Ben Pryor: Because I don't know. And also part of my struggle with it is that I realized in my own process that I haven't been going out like I used to. I'm getting older! I'm living in Lefferts Gardens in Brooklyn, which is not on the Lower East Side, so I'm not popping out to the club at 2am just to say hello or see what's happening. Plus, am I even here in town? My travel schedule's been so crazy. But at least I know that and I'm trying to be more active about getting research together; I have interns now who are 23 and gay in New York, and I'm like, Oh, that's me! And then I'm like, Oh that's *not* me actually anymore and what happened there? *[Laughs]*

Time Out New York: What do you think about so many pieces being created for the marketplace? It seems like you're trying to pull away from that in this festival.

Ben Pryor: Well, I think the marketplace is an interesting question and problem and situation. It exists. It's inevitable. Part of me feels that a lot of people actually aren't making stuff for the marketplace—specifically, younger New York artists. I don't even think they have a sense of what that is in some ways. And it feels really challenging for me, because in the role that I've created for myself, it's very much about market and being this agent-y kind of figure and selling these things and so when I go to see work, one of the questions is: Can we pack it up and take it on the road? Some of the artists I've worked with hate that about me. And I see it as being problematic in some ways to the artistic process: You want to have your process, and you want to make what you want to make, so it's this struggle of how much do you make something for the marketplace or not? I feel, not quite the villain, but I understand how that's not necessarily productive from an artistic place. Though I'm also like, if you're not considering this, what are you doing? Is this just being made for this moment and is that okay, or do you want to engage this thing and try to do it? I just feel for so many New York artists that it doesn't even become a question. And then you have somebody like Trajal who's taking that on and owning that and *has* made that work in this way—the series has totally changed his career. I think a lot of younger artists have seen that. People are like, "The concept is my favorite part of the whole series," and the way it engages marketplace and scale and creates product for all of the different places in a way that an artist might not normally do so.

Time Out New York: Whose curation do you follow in New York?

Ben Pryor: I'm looking at everything constantly. I think the whole platform series [at Danspace Project] has been so instrumental in my thinking. Realness really came out after the advent of that, and I was like, This is *my* platform. *[Laughs]* That's been huge. I feel it's so much more refreshing from an intellectual standpoint or in entering the work. The spring season was less curated than the platforms perhaps.

Time Out New York: But some of it came out of the platforms.

Ben Pryor: Yes, totally. Maybe it was about something else: supporting these artists on their next thing.

Time Out New York: It was an interesting experiment to see if what hit then could come back.

Ben Pryor: Yeah—outside of its fully explored context, it becomes a different thing. But it was so refreshing when she started doing it. The seasons are curated, but not in this way that a curator makes a statement and is crafting something more specific and pointed, which I feel like the platforms do, versus like the NYLA [New York Live Arts] season. Not to say anything bad about the NYLA season, but in "Parallels," [Ishmael Houston-Jones's platform focusing on black dance], there's a specific idea we're exploring here, and that's not the case in anybody's season, even at BAM. Joe's [Melillo] not putting forward any ideas here in a pointed, clearly written way. It's a different thing, and I feel it's so much more refreshing from an intellectual standpoint or in entering the work.

Time Out New York: And it's not cookie-cutter: There's an idea around the pieces, but there are so many entry points.

Ben Pryor: Yes. It's very refreshing and very simple. Why did it take so long for that to happen? Catch and Aunts—whatever they're doing is so important. I've called them all together to just have a conversation [as part of

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the festival]: I feel like we're peers. Class Class Class and Catch and Aunts and Realness—we're all unincorporated. We're all these highly visible programs that hold a lot of the community in New York. Are we going to keep doing that? Are we going to try to incorporate? Do we then have institutional identity? I already feel like I have that! That's something I have to struggle with or react against; it's something I feel that influences people's perspective of work in a way that I didn't realize was going to happen. I'm really dealing with this myself in terms of figuring out where I go from here. There's no job for me to go get. I've tried.

Time Out New York: Have you? Where?

Ben Pryor: Oh my God, yeah. All sorts of stuff. I interviewed once at PICA. I was one of the finalists for the Yerba Buena position. I was approached by the Whitney to interview for the curatorial position. It was like, Whoa. That's crazy! None of them have worked out for whatever reason. Meanwhile, I have this legitimate and successful program. I need to own that, and I need to knock on every foundation's door in New York until they give me some money to actually pay the artists real fees and myself to run the program and make this thing viable. Right now, it's a lot of smoke and mirrors.

Festival TBD: Emergency Glitter is at Abrons Arts Center/Henry Street Settlement July 24–28.

THOMAS BENJAMIN SNAPP PRYOR

Trespassing on the Proving Ground of the Next Generation

By Gia Kourlas

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The New York Times

When is the last time so much new dance crept into a New York summer? At Abrons Arts Center, the producer Ben Pryor gave downtown dance a jolt with his inaugural Festival TBD: Emergency Glitter, which ended Sunday, a five-day event focusing on a new generation of choreographers. Their efforts loosely represent a cross-section of what is happening in dance today: A return to full-bodied movement with toes that aren't afraid to point. Exploring the objectified body with a feminist eye. Showing the formality of a flexed buttock.

With Emergency Glitter, Mr. Pryor, who also masterminds the American Realness Festival, homed in on the fresh vitality that threads together a group of younger artists. Here, dance is rough around the edges and, in the most gratifying instances, supremely self-possessed.

That quality epitomized Gillian Walsh's "Grinding and Equations: Two Duets at Abrons," a scintillating meeting of virtuosity and pop culture. Ms. Walsh was paired with Robert Maynard; Maggie Cloud danced opposite Mickey Mahar. Sideways glances and quiet laughter relayed much about the intimacy of this group; it's as if we had trespassed into their universe.

Ms. Walsh rested backward in Mr. Maynard's lap as if she had been sitting in a chair; he propped himself up with his arms and thrust his hips until she sprang into the air and crashed back onto his crotch. "Sorry," she murmured breathlessly. All the while, Ms. Cloud and Mr. Mahar etched a frame around them with forthright walks, pausing to brush a foot to the side in a tendu or to whip their arms in a militaristic port de bras.

Later, Ms. Walsh and Mr. Maynard rested on their stomachs wearing underwear. In strict time, with a numeric movement score, they flexed their buttocks in a captivating pull between informal and formal concerns. But when a loop of Nicki Minaj music played over the speakers, this infusion of pop seemed redundant. Ms. Walsh had already taken the sex out of a stripper move; what remained was power. Ms. Minaj, in spirit, was there all along.

Throughout Emergency Glitter, there was a noticeable use of pop music, including Kid Cudi's "End" in Lauren Grace Bakst's "You Are Special," and Robyn's "Indestructible" in Burr Johnson's "Shimmering Islands." While music wasn't the downfall of either work - other issues were at play - it certainly cheapened it.

Ms. Bakst experimented with disorientation in her piece, which also featured Niall Jones and Lydia Adler Okrent. Her choreography highlighted disturbed bodies, in which dancers toppled into shapes, hard and soft, that buckled unexpectedly. She later altered the focus, asking audience members to recite text with lines like, "I didn't have a plan," or "How did you think it was going to end?"

"You Are Special" ended up in a place more trite than unsettling. The same was true of "Shimmering Islands," Mr. Johnson's duet with Reid Bartelme that expressed the vitality of a powerful male body (Mr. Johnson) and a refined, lyrical one (Mr. Bartelme). Grand jétés soared across the stage; there was an abundance of skipping. But such full-bodied expression assumed an artificial veneer. When the score switched to waves and sea gulls, it was as if the setting had shifted from a disco to beachfront property. In other words, similar.



Ruby Washington/The New York Times
Robert Maynard and Gillian Walsh in "Grinding and Equations," a meeting of virtuosity and pop culture, at the inaugural Festival TBD: Emergency Glitter.

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Rebecca Warner's "Into Glittering Asphalt" took inspiration from a number of choreographers and sources, from Gene Kelly musicals to Sarah Michelson and RoseAnne Spradlin, with whom she has performed. But to what end? A deeply contracted back in fourth position, taken from Ms. Warner's beautiful solo in Ms. Michelson's "Devotion," showed that even though Ms. Warner can appropriate steps, she hasn't the means to reinvent them. The airless "Asphalt" was little more than coloring within the lines.

At the start of his performance installation, Carlos Maria Romero, who creates encounters with other artists — in this case, it was Juan Betancurth — arranged for the audience to walk through a maze of back hallways and stairwells of Abrons until the journey ended where it began (the lobby). The piece, exploring paraphilia, or sexual arousal caused by proximity to atypical objects, situations and individuals, took place on the stage of Abrons's main theater and explored, once again, disorientation. The space was dark and foggy; tools, some of them fetish instruments, were handed out. But for all of its ominous undertones, this irksome work, which looked at issues of sex and labor, was unmoored. (Its title, given after the fact, will include the names of the artists and spectators.) I kept wondering: Is this all there is?

Emily Wexler and Niall Jones offered solos similar in intimacy and urgency. In "Blood Lines," Ms. Wexler, exploring objectification, evoked the wearied, frenzied image of Lindsay Lohan while whipping and twisting her legs and arms as she rolled on the floor. By the end, she was possessed, clawing at her thighs and frantically miming a series of incidents undercut with anguish. A similar possession took hold of Mr. Jones in "Blown October lash," in which he teetered and dipped with his body constantly askew. In this deeply sensorial solo, Mr. Jones had the look of clutching bits of air: reckless, out of control, searching for something.

As with any young work, there is that sensation of search, of feeling for a shape in the dark. But like the exacting and exciting Ms. Walsh, the choreographer Rebecca Patek possesses a daring choreographic voice.

Ms. Patek's "When Past is Presents Presents: Storydances #2: ineter(a)nal f/ear" is a risk: she used satire to illustrate the trauma of rape and shame. "I didn't care what he did to me," she said in a film that began the work. "I just didn't want to die. He smelled good. He smelled like he was wearing cologne or something." (Subtitles, hilariously, were in French.)

It's creepy. Uncomfortable moments — and dazzling, meandering run-on sentences — are the lifeblood of Ms. Patek's dance-theater. When she later appeared onstage, Sam Roeck, another performer with a rape story, joined her. Together, they faced their past, and here the work took a graphic turn. Both on film and onstage, sex acts were performed with a vacant, asexual air, which was wholly disturbing, but darkly funny. If you were brokenhearted when the HBO series "Girls" took a fairy-tale turn last season, seek out the work of Ms. Patek. An hour in her company will straighten you out.



Ruby Washington/The New York Times
Rebecca Patek and Sam Roeck in "When Past is Presents Presents," about rape and shame, at Abrons Arts Center.

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THOMAS BENJAMIN SNAPP PRYOR

The Margins of a Form Are, Increasingly, Not Where They Used to Be

By Gia Kourlas

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The New York Times

Like any artistic endeavor, Festival TBD: Emergency Glitter, presented last weekend at Abrons Arts Center, had its high and low points. But this brief yet packed event created by the intrepid Ben Pryor came at the right time to show how a generation of choreographers is embracing pop culture and pushing dance beyond its conventions.

In "Our Practice of Pop and Sex," a conversation held Sunday afternoon as part of the festival, the choreographer Gillian Walsh — whose "Grinding and Equations: Two Duets at Abrons" was a highlight of the season — spoke about her fascination with pop culture and music. For her, the notion of pop is omnipresent. "As far as thinking about choreography in a larger sense, it patterns people and cultures," she said. Later she elaborated, "I'm interested in the legitimacy of dance phenomena that are not within the high-art realm."



Ruby Washington/The New York Times
Gillian Walsh and Robert Daniel Holmes Maynard rehearse "Grinding and Equations: Two Duets at Abrons,".

How would a general audience even know that such topics were a part of the current dance conversation? The gap between mainstream dance presentation and work that pushes past the limits of comfort seems to be growing larger.

The New York Dance and Performance Awards, known as the Bessies, used to encourage experimental work, but its recent announcement of nominations for the 2012-13 season — perhaps even more clueless than last year — shows how glaringly disjointed the dance world is. When the choreographer Jennifer Monson is nominated in the outstanding performer category instead of outstanding production for her piece "Live Dancing Archive," there's a problem.

With no dance at Lincoln Center Festival this year and the typical path of least resistance taken by the directors of Jacob's Pillow in Massachusetts and the American Dance Festival in North Carolina, Emergency Glitter was necessary. Certainly there are people and organizations pushing new dance forward, namely Judy Hussie-Taylor at Danspace Project. But it's distressing that the American choreographer Trajal Harrell is presenting his entire multiwork project, "Twenty Looks or Paris Is Burning at the Judson Church," at the ImPulsTanz festival in Vienna and not in the United States, where it has been seen only in parts.

There's a fresh infusion of dance happening in New York, and while not all of the young choreographers working will rise to the top — they never do — they are trying to expand the notions of dance while, at the same time, honoring it. They haven't abandoned dance for the hazy category of performance; I get the feeling that, for them, performance is part of the dance umbrella, not the other way around.

Since May, Aunts, the female-driven dance organization, has hosted Time Share, a pop-up performance and research hub at Arts@Renaissance in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. On Saturday, after a weeklong residency, the musician Tara Jane O'Neil and the dancer and choreographer Jmy James Kidd, who was behind the formation of

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Aunts but now lives in Los Angeles, decorated dancers in flowers and presented a piece exploring how the body could be transformed into a rhythmic instrument. "Hallelujah Already" was a little too dreamily New Age for my taste, but it wasn't insincere.

Aunts, as its Web site states, is about "having dance happen." Its form is much looser than, say, Movement Research at Judson Church, a free series in which choreographers show pieces in development on most Monday evenings. (The season resumes in the fall.) Gradually Judson has shifted from being a safe haven for outrageous experimentation into a performance opportunity suitable for a résumé.

One of the most fascinating programs of the year was an edition of Dance and Process at the Kitchen. This iteration of the long-running series was not open for review; I won't discuss the individual works, which were created by Kira Alker and Elke Luyten, Anna Azrieli, Moriah Evans and Yve Laris Cohen. But structurally, it was a game-changer. It felt like a new beginning.

Instead of four premieres performed in succession, there were two performance times (one at night, the other in the afternoon), as well as extended intermissions, which were so drawn out that they lasted longer than the dances. That breathing space became part of the performance, too. To add another weird dimension, in order to see Mr. Cohen's work, which had extremely limited seating, spectators had to make a rash decision moments before entering the theater: see it and forgo the other performances or miss Mr. Cohen's altogether. (The next night I canceled my ballet tickets and went back. No regrets.)

What that June Kitchen program did was to shake up the usual way of presenting work; it was like that Merce Cunningham saying about dance, but directed, this time, toward the audience: "You have to love dancing to stick to it." I never knew how badly the dance world, including myself, needed rattling until that weekend.

Perhaps that has to do with a new rage for movement invention, but choreographers don't seem to be as mired in theory as they were a few years ago, when the ideas behind a dance crushed a performance to bits. Today choreography emerges from a more primal, personal place. It isn't limited to sex, but at Emergency Glitter, along with the pop references, that topic was prevalent — having less to do with provocation or shock than with relating the art form to the present.

In Ms. Walsh's work, the sexualized body may not be the focus, but it is a rhythmic force in the background. One dimension of her work involves isolation: flexing and releasing the buttocks muscles. While this physical practice has the air of fetish, it's not raunchy; rather, it's just a part of the body moving in space and time.

The choreographer Rebecca Patek, another talented artist from the festival, is much more explicit in her exploration of sex, yet her intent hovers around its potential for absurdity and shame. In explaining her approach during the discussion at Abrons, she said, "I had the idea of doing comedic pornography."

Ms. Patek has her finger on the pulse. With Anthony Weiner's sexual indiscretions so exposed, this has been an eventful summer. But sex aside, Emergency Glitter gave us a July to remember. It did more than make dance happen; in a couple of instances it managed to create "that single fleeting moment," as Cunningham put it, "when you feel alive." It's going to be a struggle, as it always is. But downtown dance is on the upswing.

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