

'Hyper Hyped' : Francesco Vezzoli *Così* e (se vi pare) *Right You Are* (If You Think You Are)

Perfoma07 Writing Live Blog

At one time, in the not-so-distant past, it would have been impossible to conceive of performance art taking its cue from red carpet glitterati. The “market” then hadn’t teeth as sharp as today, when the more elusive and coveted the thing, the more adept we are at capturing it. Of course, this is not a new phenomenon, it’s human nature, and it isn’t entirely bad. I’ve stopped believing in black and white long ago, and to experience a work of art that revels in the fine line between the two is an exercise in reality not for the faint of heart.

The pamphlet said “free” and so I arrived at the Guggenheim with 15 minutes to spare in anticipation of a crowd. What I didn’t expect was a line of anxious ticket-holders that went around the block. I heard from impatient fellow hopefuls that one needed to know Gagosian or Francesco to get one of the 300 tickets that were allotted for the event. It was hopeless. Even a friend that works at the Guggenheim’s curatorial department wasn’t granted a ticket. And so for over an hour I vacillated between trying my charm on the doormen or taking a nightwalk in the park. It was the lovely couple I befriended in line who helped pass the time and made the wait worthwhile. My anger grew – partly at myself for not having guessed the VIP filter and partly at the world, meaning that little big art world, which seemed then the strata of civilization most naively and fervently romanticizing hierarchical societal structure. When did our crush on the high life become a full-fledged love affair? When did we trade our berets for Prada couture and why was I spending an hour and a half in line for a show I clearly couldn’t get into and didn’t even know why I wanted to see it so badly?

But then, finally, o miracle of miracles, the frozen runway turned into a conga line of art fiends and by the time we reached the door it was a full-on frenzy. I put on my best smile and prepared my “what-do-you-mean-I’m-not-on-the-list” look, geared for a futile battle and ready to join the ranks of commoners and weirdoes walking the park, when I got a green paper shoved into my hand and was rushed towards the door. The entrance I was ushered into was not the main one and I realized that we at the tail end of the line got a bonus: we were in the auditorium and were to view the performance on screens rather than live in the main hall. I felt a bit slighted but realized that having to stand atop the spiral rotunda for the duration of however long this was going to be was less than appealing. I felt cozy and relieved. It was gonna be like a movie, even the program listed Hollywood stars I had no idea were involved. I got excited.

What followed was a play I had the benefit of multiple vantage points to. The actors sat facing each other on a small round platform in the middle of the rotunda. We in the auditorium had close-ups of each actor’s face and also wide views of the poor standing-room only horde lining the famed Guggenheim coil. O, their legs must be tired and all they could see from so far away were probably the tops of heads and nothing more. I pitied those little people but wouldn’t trade my cushy center-screen seat with any of them. I felt special. Lucky. But I deserved my seat too. I earned it. I was one of the faithful ones who really worked hard to get here.

The play itself was written by Luigi Pirandello in 1917 and tells the tale of gossipy petit-bourgeoisie whose flapping tongues weave the legend of a mysterious woman who becomes the town scandal. The interesting bit was the translation from Italian to English that incorporated old aristocratic language with modern lingo that served as a constant reminder of the artifice of it all. That was Ellyn Burnstein, not some character from 1917. It was really Natalie Portman up there, right in front of me almost, with her fake moustache barely registering as a prop. Turn-of-the-century provincial Italy was a thin veil for Manhattan in 2007. I knew exactly what Francesco Vezzoli was doing. He was playing the hype, giving us everything and nothing, which is exactly what we want. I was seduced by the sexiness of it all, just like those people in Italy. I came to see what the hype was about. I wanted to know, exactly, what everyone was talking about. But we all create that hype for ourselves. There’s nothing really there.

The foreplay, the buildup, was part of it all. When it was over, I humbly joined the plebs walking the park

-Chen Tamir

