

Archive Box 1

29 August 2015 | 8pm | 72-13
Reviewed by Ariel Sammy

Night of the Living Archives

The Archive Box seemed an ambiguous concept at first. The archivist-choreographer takes the soul and sentiment of an artistic work, distilling it into a collection of elements. These elements form the Archive Box and are then left to the discretion of another artist to interpret and create a performer response.

The evening brought together Indian and Japanese artists in a fascinating interplay of dance and culture. Yukio Suzuki was first to begin. His Archive Box left little room to manoeuvre, presenting an artist's contract and synchronised audio dictating his intended choreography. Preethi Atherya negotiates this stipulated precision with fluidity, appearing to submit to his instructions as if the movements resonated within her body. As her performance drew to a close, she waved a light bulb defiantly overhead like a lasso and her shadow flitted around the studio, encircling her.

Mikuni Yanaihara's Archive Box bore the solemnity of the Japanese government's reinterpretation of Article 9, renouncing the constitutional clause outlawing war. In response, Margie Medlin's work featured an unexpected shift in medium, creating a short film that documented personal perceptions of war. The audio recording responses were honest, poignant and at times sensational, capturing the spectrum of humanness. The one element that didn't fully live up to its potential – partly due to the chosen media platform – was Yanaihara's desire to understand the constitution in a physical, bodily fashion, having imprinted clothes with Article 9 and placed it in the box. Images of the costume were shown intermittently and the disembodied voices rang slightly hollow amid the darkness of the 2D screen.

Easily the most hypnotic performance of the night was Mandeep Raikhy's response to Zan Yamashita's box. Two dancers turned methodically in circles, moving only their feet rhythmically with the music. Their repetition soon turned into a dizzying duet as they switched up patterns and ran rings around each other. The circular movements were reminiscent of the two spools in a cassette tape, an item Yamashita included in his Archive Box.

Padmini Chettur's interpretation of Ikuyo Kurda's box was a masterclass in simplicity. Poetry in motion, archivist and performer sat at opposing ends of the studio, reading personal responses to the archive box that were punctuated by brief solos and a duet. The cadence of their speech was beautifully in sync – Kurda echoing Chettur's words in native Japanese. The women, of such disparate dance and cultural roots, bridged the gap between them with their prose- prose that so eloquently captured the spirit behind Archive Box, prose that did not give rise to answers but instead provoked more questions. Is dance merely the body expressing bodiness? Is the truest way of archiving dance through a body- the oxymoron of a living archive?

If the Archive Box functions as an experiment in creation and recreation, perhaps it would have been better served to have the presentations close the event. A retroactive explanation would have allowed the audience to view the work with fresh eyes, instead of sifting through the details for elements of archivist-choreographer's intent. That being said, Archive Box proved an overall triumph, artfully intertwining the mindfulness of the creative process and the physicality of dance.

