

## Robyn Orlin - City Theatre and Dance Group, And So You See... Our Honorable Blue Sky and Ever Enduring Sun... Can Only Be Consumed Slice by Slice..., Festival TransAmériques, Montréal

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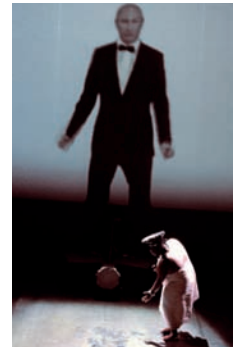
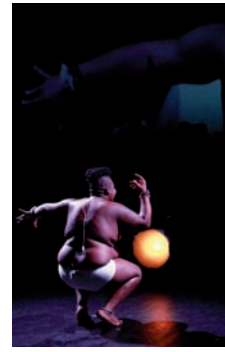
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**Robyn Orlin**

*And So You See... Our Honorable Blue Sky and Ever Enduring Sun... Can Only Be Consumed Slice by Slice...*, 2016.

Photos : © R. Orlin

## Robyn Orlin—City Theatre and Dance Group *And So You See... Our Honorable Blue Sky and Ever Enduring Sun... Can Only Be Consumed Slice by Slice...*

The opening was masterful. The initial image of Albert Khoza as a pile of sheets—an inanimate and beguiling conceptual artwork—quickly transformed: from under the radiant heap of sheets Khoza emerged wrapped in saran wrap, like a contemporary Leigh Bowery. What followed were “slices,” a succession of technicolour tableaux accompanied by a live video feed juxtaposing scenes where Khoza moved beyond “playing” this first amorphous form, and began “acting out” roles that depended upon narrative exposition. Following this scene, he sings Mozart’s *Requiem* in an evocative manner, a kind of *creolization* of the songs, perhaps attempting to construct a cross-cultural narration of common funerary rites of the never-ending failures of our shared global postcolonial moment.

After the requiem, the subsequent scenes of “acting out” degrade into farcical transmigrations in role playing. Khoza changes from a quasi-shamanic entity, to a grotesque *Ubu Roi*-like despot asking audience members to wash him while renaming another person Adolf Hitler, through to acting out as an extroverted drag performer getting ready for a date with the blood diamond *voleur* (Vladimir Putin) of Khoza’s native South Africa, all the way through to assuming the identity of postcolonial monologist. The reference to Bowery felt added on, like much of the performance. The drag reeked of being appropriated from a realm of *commodified identities*.

When Khoza finally faced us after his abstract opening scene, a theatre attendant unwrapped the saran wrap, and Khoza presented an incoherent ritual of self-flagellation, which gave viewers few entry points for comprehension. And after playing a gratuitous masochistic game with a knife and several oranges, the juice adorning his naked body, we were given hints of what would ultimately become an extroverted monologue, devolving into a full-blown selfie vlog.

Robyn Orlin’s *theatralization* remained centred in acts that felt self-indulgent, and as a result I lost interest in the geopolitical issues being presented. Affect seemed to be used to grandstand and provoke, rather than point to the complexities of the inner world that affect originates from—a world we hope to be invited into and get to know. Khoza’s use of affect and his cursory use of geopolitical language rarely seemed to result in a veritable mining of our postcolonial situation. In reality, we have a Black body on stage, being consumed by mainly white audience members, and as a Black reviewer, I felt great discomfort when the audience laughed at moments of pointed Black phenomenology and Black pain. The show brought to mind the following comment by Kafka, “The Negro who, having gone mad from homesickness, was taken home from the World Exhibition and, in his village, surrounded by the lamentations of the tribe, with the most solemn face, by way of tradition and duty, demonstrated the pranks that delighted the European public, who believed they were the rites and customs of Africa.”—Franz Kafka, *Blue Octavo Notebooks*

James Oscar

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