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Water City Berkeley

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Shotgun Review

Water City Berkeley

By John Zarobell

December 21, 2013

Why celebrate when the world is going to hell? Kim Anno's ambitious effort to envision the future of humanity through a multiplatform work of art offers an answer with play and consistent hope, despite imagery of rising waters and the gravitas of an ancient Greek chorus.

Water City Berkeley—a live musical performance centered around a dual projection that ran for two shows on Saturday, December 7, at the Kala Art Institute and Gallery—is the fourth chapter in Anno's *Men and Women in Water Cities* series, and it is the most ambitious to date. This ongoing project of Anno's, who is Professor of Painting at California College of the Arts, marks two important turns that inform one another: the first, from abstract painting to film-centric work that engages contemporary political content; and the second, from working solo in her studio to a collaborative mode of production. Anno has embraced other artists—composers, choreographers, dancers, musicians, even cheerleaders—in order to enrich and to complicate the visions she harbors of our world and its future development.

Water City Berkeley's vision of a half-submerged future draws on collaborations with Oberlin Dance choreographer KT Nelson, who has contributed beautiful compositions to the film performed by dancers half-submerged in the waters of the Bay. Composer David Coll's provocative score, played live by SF

Sound Players and the Berkeley Chamber Ensemble during the performances, is full of whimsical surprise due to its enigmatic rhythms and diachronic temporality.

The film itself is a carefully edited, 21-minute dual-screen projection featuring three sections carefully paced to deliver both a narrative and powerful imagery. The first sequence, “Work and Days,” features men and women in corporate dress on the beach and in the surf. The next segment, “Inexorable Tea House,” was filmed in the Tea House at the Oakland Estuary and combines readings from Oedipus Rex with a musical performance by a masked band of musicians (Kingdom of Not) accompanied by dancers. In the last and most dazzling section, “Poseidon’s Race,” a game of Capture the Flag is played on the beach, including dancers in referee costumes, athletes, cheerleaders, and children who seem to be performing a kind of ritual. Echoes of political domination are re-created in the form of play via the flags and airborne chest bumps. The visionary effect of the cinematography is enhanced by episodic interventions from an extra-filmic live chorus, who recite passages from Greek tragedies from behind the seated viewers. The august voices of ancient playwrights, newly retranslated by Anno, give the film’s images a sense of history and a common destiny amid our world’s changing ecology. By the end of the performance, there was not a hair left resting on the back of my neck.

Water City Berkeley was on view at the **Kala Art Institute and Gallery**, in Berkeley, on December 7, 2013.

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