

Something Old, Something New: Lisa D'Amour and Katie Pearl's *Bird Eye Blue Print*

By Justin Boyd
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One of the challenges of site-specific work is whether and how to make it portable. What does it do to a play when you move it from the place and time for (and from) which it was conceived? That was the question facing longtime collaborators Lisa D'Amour and Katie Pearl when they decided to bring their play *Dress Me Blue, Window Me Sky* from Austin to New York City. From 1996 to 2007. From a light, airy, open boutique to a fluorescent-lit, ground-floor cavity of One World Financial Center.

The result is a play re-imagined and re-christened *Bird Eye Blue Print*. It's both old and new, Lisa and Katie say, the essence of the original 1996 Austin production filtered through the eyes, minds and bodies of artists who are 10 years older, confronted with a space that's a near antithesis of the original.

And what a space. It's beige, boxed-in and laid out like a funhouse—a temp-job nightmare with all the useful office equipment and even feeble comforts removed. Passages lead exactly where you don't expect, switches control lights on the other side of walls. It's hard to get around without a map.

In this space waits the Blue Dress Lady, your host—as much as she's capable of being—with her assistants and occasional antagonists, the Red Dress Girls. The space is a clash of corporate and wild, foreign and inviting. Luckily, you're provided maps, some idea as to where you are, what you'll be up to. But your hosts' guidance is loose and sometimes flustered, as if they're not sure the best way to get their message across, as if they're trying different methods—verbal, visual and aural—to guide you to your destination.

Lisa and Katie constructed the original *Dress Me Blue, Window Me Sky* primarily on ideas of sight and perception. The Blue Dress Lady had invited you to her search—for a lost sister perhaps, but just as likely for herself and a sense of place in a shifting, unpossessable world. According to Lisa, the writer-performer, the play was partially informed by her interest in modern performance theory and the way looking and being looked at can be incredibly fraught for women. According to Katie, the director, the play was as much about Lisa as a performer—she played and will play the Blue Dress Lady—and 10 years ago she created a character who was as shy a performer as she was.

In its new version, the Blue Dress Lady's search is less literally defined, more impressionistic, more existential. She seems to be exploring—and inviting you to

explore—not only the limits and mechanics of perception, but the fundamental challenges and triumphs of simply being, as a body, a mind, an organism living in a universe that seems to delight in throwing you off balance.

This sounds heavy, but if there's one thing about Lisa and Katie's work—it's often associative and sometimes abstract, but it's never an expressionistic slog through the self-annihilating horrors of the human psyche. Yes, you're in some people's version of hell (a dull office space) and, yes, the Blue Dress Lady and the Red Dress Girls can be enigmatic, but they're at worst impish, and generally as polite and accommodating as they're capable of being. You're not nearly as likely to be assaulted with demands as you are to be offered games and snacks.

Lisa and Katie point to three main reasons for the piece's shift in focus: 1) the space—in Austin the piece was presented in an open room with natural light pouring through plentiful skylights (see above for what it is now); 2) their evolution as artists—perception and sight alone now felt like too narrow a subject; and 3) the play's place as the first part of a trilogy—*Slabber* and *Limo* are the second and third parts, and a unifying idea among them, Katie says, is the “essential relationship of every molecule in the universe, the essential connectivity of every person in the world.”

Those who are familiar with Lisa and Katie's work won't be surprised that this essentialness isn't expressed in words alone, or even through linear story structure. You meet the Blue Dress Lady, you implicitly volunteer to follow her lead, and you connect to what you think/hope/suspect/theorize she wants to do. But, she and her comrades are not taking you on a trip from A to B, they're taking you through an experience that leads you from A ... to A from a different point of view.

You hurtle through the subway tunnels, dodge through the crowds gazing at Ground Zero and scuttle across the West Side Highway into the belly of the stone-glass behemoth that is World Financial Center. Time slows and maybe even stops. You're invited to meditate on and explore what it is to be—with yourself, and in relation to the somethings and someones around you. Perhaps the Blue Dress Lady wants you to accompany her on a search for connection, for a sense of home in a most un-homelike place. Maybe she's one of those strange beings that can actually embrace the temporariness and arbitrariness of existence within the limits that we can perceive it. Austin, Texas is 10 years and 1,500 miles away. But it doesn't matter, really. Everything she is, and everything she needs—everything she's capable of needing—may, in fact, for now, be here.