



Art Reviews

Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante in *Stuff* at Highways

Vaudeville is not dead, darling, it's alive and kicking its big, white Nina Blanchard panties off in Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante's bawdy border-burlesque *Stuff*, which ran at Highways, December 5–7 and 13–15. The color-by-deluxe evening, co-commissioned by Highways, the ICA London and the Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, took as its premise a tourist agency for First Worlders seeking exoticism and "authenticity" in supposedly indigenous Latina culture. The goings-on included an onstage banquet, character sketches exploring Latina identity, singing, dancing, voice-overs, a video-projected tour guide (played by a milky-mouthed Adam Bresnick) and (involuntary) audience participation.

Onstage, Fusco and Bustamante were nothing if not female drag queens, pushing Latina femininity to the umpteenth. Wearing numerous wigs and outfits (little Indian kachina doll-selling girl, fiesta hostess), the brilliantined Fusco morphed with ease from nasty *futa* into glamorous gamine. Reading from an enormous book of fake pre-Columbian myth, she was spiritualista, metaphysical-pataphysical-maternal . . . very Bodhi Tree. Later, giving an extemporaneous rhumba lesson, she worked the Catskills circuit in Sophie Tucker rubberface. Fusco was miraculously glam throughout (even when she was trying to be ugly — she definitely has what Elinor Glyn describes as "It"). Equally entrancing was Bustamante, with those Liza-with-a-Z eyes and that sexy strut — she's so comfortable with her body! At times, it seemed that Bustamante's innate tendency toward anarchy and wildness (roaming the audience, she was fear-inspiring — you almost expected her to take a man and cut his penis off!) was reined in by Fusco's more structured, academic style. Nonetheless, Bustamante exuded potential danger, with hypnotizing eyes and a hairdo that could have easily contained razor blades.

What really churned me was the way Fusco and Bustamante ended the performance: a Carol Burnett-Julie Andrews-type duet. Tin Pan Alley taking precedence over multiculturalism does it for me every time. And these two red-hot hoochie mamas can really sing a show tune.

—Vaginal Davis

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