ZEST

DIVERSEWORKS PREMIERES

SUBTLY POLITICAL IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

By Molly Glentzer

A few big-name American artists have quit projects as a protest of the Trump presidency — witness Christo's decision last week to abandon his controversial plan to drape reflective fabric across an Arkansas River canyon in Colorado because he no longer wants to work with its landlord, the federal government. But the new administration could also inspire an outpouring of activist art.

In Houston, the stirrings began during the evening of the inauguration, when DiverseWorks premiered "Only in Your Way" — although this newly commissioned project by New York artists Kate Gilmore and Heather Rowe doesn't look or sound overtly political.

Artists continue on C14

Kaci Farnin performs during the opening of "Only in Your Way" at DiverseWorks.

THEATER REVIEW

Investment in Wall Street satire 'Dry Powder' pays off

By Wei-Huan Chen

When was the last time a play was so intensely quotable? In "Dry Powder," Sarah Ruhl's take on the 1999 Enron fraud, the dialogue is so biting it's almost surreal.

Singers are spit out with the speed and punch of an Aaron Sorkin screenplay, and the dialogue is so biting it's almost surreal. It's a reminder of what's at stake in the real world.

Most of these lines are shot out from the mouth of Elizabeth Bunch, who has a sardonic yet magnetic take on a private equity manager named Jenny. It's a part

Elizabeth Bunch stars as Jenny, John Feltch, center, as Rick and Jay Sullivan as Seth in the Alley Theatre's production of "Dry Powder."
Artists intrigued by concepts of fragmentation and repetition

A slightly elevated, bright-red runway follows the walls of the L-shaped gallery, passing through several pergola-like structures with metal posts that also support smallish assemblages of architectural remnants, mirrors and mesh screens.

Might those assemblages be worthless transit signs? Or are we looking at the ruins of a landscape that has been stripped bare? And what do we have to do with it, since we can’t escape our own reflections in the mirrors?

A lone performer—a woman—paces the runway in red sweatpants, a baseball cap and hiking boots. She’s gripping so grandiose but heavy-looking sculptural object with both hands. The thing looks like it might be a futuristic lyre, and it has an embedded speaker that projects a snippet of a lyric from the ballad “I Will Always Love You.”

You remember this song. Maybe you once belted it out in your car after somebody broke your heart, or just belted it out because it made you feel good. You keep expecting the big refrain to come, but only that one line keeps repeating, in between pregnant pauses, like a broken record. And it’s not exactly right. The original line is “I would only be in your way.” Gilbert and Rowe have sampled it a bit so it’s more aggressive, “I will only be in your way.”

The woman in red repeats, too. She walks backwards, forth and back, the length of the runway, for longer than you would probably stick with her. She’s working a three-hour shift, or at least that’s the plan.

“We’ll see how things go in terms of endurance,” DiverseWorks director Xandra Eden said.

Fourteen Houston dancers have agreed to take turns giving Gilbert and Rowe’s “duration performance” on Fridays and Saturdays through mid-March. They get to choose which of three props they’ll carry, each with speakers playing the same song fragment. Gilbert and Rowe, who have both appeared in the prestigious Whitney Biennial, are separately renowned for sculptural art that addresses gender issues. They first paired up last fall to create stage sets for “Virtually There,” a New York performance with choreography by the great Karlie Armitage, inspired by Oscar Schlemmer’s avant-garde 1922 “Triadic Ballet.”

“Only in Your Way”

Where: Live performances noon-8 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays, through March 18

Where: DiverseWorks, 3400 Main

Info: 713-223-8345, diverseworks.org

Heather Rowe, left, and Kate Gilmore are separately renowned for sculptural art addressing gender issues.

A detail of Rowe’s architectural fragment assemblages, part of the pergola structures she created for the site-specific collaboration with Gilmore at DiverseWorks.

Paul Hester

Burgess’ play exposes hypocrisy and lampoons today’s world of finance

Burgess from page G7

rings true in the post-Occupy Wall Street era—a woman so ridiculous in her competitive nature that she must be fiction, yet you feel like you know people exactly like her.

And you probably do. She’s that person, grown up white and upper-middle class, graduated from Harvard Business School, rose quickly at Goldman Sachs, now CEO of a real estate investment firm with a net worth of $400 million, lives in a trophy home in Beverly Hills, and spends the weekends dining out on the Upper East Side with the rich and famous. She is, in other words, not fiction. She is, in other words, too real.

‘Dry Powder’

When: 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Thursdays, 8 p.m. Fridays, 2:30 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. Sundays, through Feb. 12

Where: Alley Theatre, 615 Texas

Tickets: $26-$90; 713-220-5700, alleytheatre.org

masterminded massive layoffs at a grocery chain and the company filed for bankruptcy.

Cuthroat as she is, but the impending birth of her daughter, not to mention a lingering belief in the American dream, makes him consider the human cost of capitalism after Jenny suggests that the firm buy out a California-based luggage company, lay off its entire workforce, relocate it to Bangladesh and sell the products to China. But Seth’s dilemma comes to a head when the company’s comptroller, an ex-convict who has been a mentor to Seth, makes a move to replace him and takes over the company.

A story of privilege, power and the corruption of the American dream, ‘Dry Powder’ is a scathing and powerful play that explores the dark side of capitalism and the cost of success.

Hutchinson fills her roles with as much flair as any cast. The fast pacing by director Tahl Magar (“Underground Railroad Game”), the stormy, guttural soundscapes by Broken Chord and the scenic design by Kevin Rigdon, which evokes a grime nightclub in the Meatpacking District, contribute to Burgess’ exceptional piece.

As the second theater to produce “Dry Powder” and throw its weight behind Burgess, the Alley has landed itself a winning investment.

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