Review: \textit{SUGA}
Travis Coe performs his personal solo work with rigorous grace

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\textit{SUGA} rips raw in an equally grounded and heightened solo show featuring Travis Coe of Double Edge Theatre. Under the direction of founder and longtime Artistic Director Stacy Klein, this traveling performance of heritage and growth finds a short-term home at the Rude Mechs’ Crashbox.

Littered with altar-ed flowers and scattered eucalyptus, this barn space is a familiar one to Double Edge, which is based on a 100-acre farm in Ashfield, Mass.

Outside of their rigorous training programs, focusing on strength and endurance, this theatre company crafts “imaginative, imagistic, and visceral” work featuring a close-knit ensemble. But in Double Edge's 35-plus years, Coe’s is one of only two solo performance pieces ever produced.

In the limbo of pre-show, awaiting house open, we are introduced to Coe’s quest for self via suitcases and crates of family photos, research images, and texts. We are invited to sift through them, these tattered memories and offerings spanning Puerto Rico, Belize, Nicaragua, and beyond. This exhibit is part 1 of the ritual/experience that is \textit{SUGA} and provides stellar visuals in a piece that gifts us only fragments of people, place, and positionality.

There’s warmth in the theatre, despite the hardness of the concrete floor. A second exhibit features the artist, but he lies onstage enmeshed in a see-through cloth, cocooned and tucked. Behind him is an elongated pedestal, low to the ground and the length of a table. It’s dressed with a bounty of flowers, an Eden in its own right. A chic Mother Mary-like statue shimmers in the candlelight. Coe breathes. More cloth drapes from the walls, maybe the ceiling. Each is a home to an altar-esque space featuring colored glass bottles, more flowers, and copper mannequin body parts. The soft patterning of rain makes for an unintentional, ethereal soundscape during moments of silence and the coming strife.

Coe births himself from the cocoon and rarely stops moving for the 45-minute performance. He describes \textit{SUGA} as “a deep process of rediscovering the vibrant kaleidoscope of myself and identity.” This manifests in beautiful fractals of growth and poignant repetition. A running sequence transforms from terror to liberation. Joy comes in the first stretch after sex with a new lover.

Coe’s body is percussive – bare feet stomps, ankle bell riffs. Shadows dance and play and love. “Tenderness so painful I thought my heart would burst” – such lines come from the artist, but we
also receive story from above, with pre-recorded
dreams seeping from speakers. (Exquisite sound
design by John Peitso scores the performance with
the rhythms and moods of another world.)

Such is the multimedia/multidisciplinary quest for
self. Coe aches, dances, and climbs toward
memories with care and resistance. What he finds
is a rejection of the American imagination, one that
aims to box and define “other” in ways that
constrict and kill. He carries and releases the
weight of family, one that is reticent to
acknowledge the past, to learn from it. Coe transits
through memories with a rigorous grace that is both
welcoming and implicating all.