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Unearthing a many-layered performance

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By Smriti Daniel

Here is a list of reasons why Unearthed was the most extraordinary performance I saw in 2012:

1. The setting. A three-storey home in Kotte became the stage for the night's site specific performance. We began by peering from above into a room where lovers paced and ended on a verandah where a card game of lies unravelled its players entirely. In between we sat down at a dining table, eating cupcakes, while our hosts muttered secrets in our ears, we stopped by a display cabinet where a woman sat on a shelf, and winced at the thud of a man's body falling off a bench. The rooms of the house became a series of stages, but more, the house was itself a presence in the production – an inspiration, a director, a co-actor. Everywhere were signs that this was in fact someone's home, the awareness of which added a layer of startling intimacy to the performance.



2. The intimacy of the

performance. 20 people: the number who could be comfortably seated at the grand dining table and the number of people making up the audience. The small group clustered around each performer, leaning on walls, standing in a circle, peering over shoulders. The performers themselves seemed always within touching distance, occasionally closing the gap: he, with a furtive, unexpected touch on your shoulder as you sat watching or she allowing you a glimpse of turmoil in the reflection of her eyes in a mirror.

3. The performers. All regulars with the Floating Space Theatre Company, Jake Oorloff, Prasanna Mahagamage, Venuri Perera, Tracy Jayasinghe and Sulakshani Perera made up the cast of Unearthed. The performers claimed for themselves a space that was neither in the real world nor in the dreaming one. They never stop performing – turn away from one performance for a moment and you can see ahead to the flickering of the next or catch the echoes of the last.

The performers both saw and did not see you, they said and did not say what they meant, they spoke in glances cast, in silences held; in the breaking of a voice, in the quiver of a lip. Lies and secrets everywhere, even in very fabric that cloaked their bodies and seemed at once red and black and every shade in between. Their words sometimes improvised just for you but more often than not drawn from feminist and poet Adrienne Riche's beautiful, thought provoking texts.

4. The text. The performers used excerpts from the poetry and essays of the late American writer, feminist and critic Adrienne Rich, in particular her 'Twenty One Love Poems' and the essay 'On Lies, Secrets, and Silence.' 'No one has imagined us,' she says or 'That we both know we are trying, all the time, to extend the possibilities of truth between us.' Rich's meditations on human relationships, the nature of intimacy, love, connection and disconnection, truth, secrets and lies, are challenging, healing and confronting. There's the raw, naked honesty of a poem and an invitation to intimacy; a single, glowing moment in which one sees the chance to understand and to be understood by the other.

5. The programme. Part itinerary, part director's commentary, part critic's notes, the programme guided you from scene to scene, captioning each with the text used and often telling you what to look for. By providing context and insight, the


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programme ensured the production did not become tediously abstract or hopelessly esoteric. It encouraged you to explore the 'nature of the performance itself' and in doing so, drew you, ever so gently in.

Floating Space Theatre Company presents a rerun of Unearthed on February 16 and 17 with 3 shows on each day. Directed by Ruhanie Perera and Sally E. Dean, Unearthed premiered in December 2012, running for two nights with a total of five sold out shows. An international and cross-cultural collaboration, Unearthed was created with a team of producers, costume designers and performers from the US, Germany, Spain, Peru and Sri Lanka. Unearthed in its initial run was made possible using public funding by the Arts Council England and the British Council and through the support of Floating Space Theatre, Sally E. Dean Performing Arts, Inc. as well as individual backers.

Given the intimate nature of the performance, only a limited number of tickets are available. Please email info@floatingspace.org or sms +94771529889 to reserve tickets. Tickets are priced at Rs. 750 (There will be a shuttle van organised for the 8.30 p.m. performance for audiences who would require transport to and from the venue to Colombo city). For more details log on to unearthedsrilanka.wordpress.com

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