

Mother Courage, Remixed

by Kelly Aliano

Red Mother reviewed May 27, 2010

In her one-woman show *Red Mother*, Muriel Miguel takes the stage in order to invoke the spirits of the past. These otherworldly guides range from the souls of her ancestors, to the victims of war from many historical battles, to Bertolt Brecht. By mixing aspects of an epic theater aesthetic with an emotionally significant work of political performance, Miguel is able to create a poignant work about the devastating effects of war on the psyche of the individual.



Muriel Miguel
Photo Credit: Jonathan Slaff

Throughout the play, we see a woman negotiate the cluttered space around her, finding enough conflict within herself and the story she must tell so as not to need any other characters on stage. The work subtly suggests Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* without being a mere retelling of that story. Miguel uses aspects of Courage's experience—the need to sell the items she carries on her cart, the loss of her children, her aversion to and dependence on the surrounding war—in order to manifest a unique theatrical mother figure of her own. The woman we meet on stage is at times sarcastic, tough, and sentimental. Miguel gives her all in making each one of these distinct personality traits resonate in a believable fashion. When we see her comical side, we believe this woman is bundles of fun. When we confront examples of her suffering, we empathize with her. Miguel does a superb job at balancing all of the emotions without coming across as overly frenzied or frenetic.

The piece itself is equally as well-balanced. The Brechtian spirit is manifested not only within the narrative frame but in the technical aspects of the show as well. There are various projections that work acutely to alienate the spectator from an emotional

RED MOTHER

La MaMa (First Floor Theater)

Category: Solo Performance

Written by: Muriel Miguel

Directed by: Murielle Borst

Produced by: Presented by La MaMa E.T.C. in association with Spiderwoman Theater, developed in collaboration with Loose Change Productions
Opens: May 27
Closes: June 6
Running Time: 65 minutes, no intermission

Theater: La MaMa (First Floor Theater)

Address: 74A E. 4th Street
New York, NY 10003

BOX OFFICE

Tickets: \$18.00
none

Phone: 212-475-7710

Hours: Mon. Wed. & Fri. 10am-10pm, Tues., Thurs., Sat. & Sun. 12-10pm

CREDITS

Creative Team

Written by: Muriel Miguel



Muriel Miguel
Photo Credit:Jonathan Slaff

engagement. There are musical numbers that regularly break the narrative frame. There are movement and dance sequences that punctuate the text-driven drama. There is even a specific breakage of the fourth wall that addresses the audience's presence in the theater space. The upstage curtains are a nice touch; the wire on which they are hung is always visible, allowing the audience never to be fooled into thinking that they are anywhere but in a theater.

The Brecht motif is cleverly woven into the rich and dense material. There are really meaningful moments—such as her speech regarding her daughter's fate—juxtaposed against laugh-out-loud bits of comedy. The sporadic sounds of falling bombs add the right punch to the work; the war is never far away nor is it ever gone long enough to be forgotten.

The message about war is perhaps the play's most important one. The battles that affected Native Americans are constantly evoked, but the connection is also made to current warfare. War is never able to be viewed as a historical event. It is always distinctly a part of the present moment, in the here and now. War is also never a force that only affects some "them" who are "over there." Although Miguel gestures to a war that is being fought someplace just out of sight, its effects are abundantly obvious on the small stage space which we are viewing. This woman may have survived the specific battles, but she is not intact. She will carry the effects of this war—perhaps of all war—with her forever. She, too, is a victim, even if she will live to pull her cart another day.

Miguel's piece is an example of what theater should be: challenging artistic work that raises relevant questions without providing clear solutions. Despite its somewhat difficult to follow narrative threads, the overall package is a worthwhile experience. *Red Mother* will leave its viewer with lasting images and plenty of fodder for discussion. In its abstraction it is a concretely important work of theater.



Muriel Miguel
Photo Credit:Jonathan Slaff

Directed by: Murielle Borst
Produced by: Loose Change Productions
Light Designer: Don White
Composer and Sound Designer: Russell Wallace
Set and Costume Designer: Christine Plunkett
Projection Design: Bear Witness
Composer "You Can't Beat a Dead Horse": Edgardo Moreno
Dramaturgy: Murielle Borst, Marie Clements, Paula Danckert

Cast

Muriel Miguel

Crew

Project Manager: Michelle Karem
Stage Manager: Naomi Anhorn
Assistant to Set and Costume Designer: Karmenlara Ely
Scenic Artist: Kimberly Hutsal
Press Representative: Jonathan Slaff & Associates
Graphic Designer: Aidan Mackesy
Sound and Video Operator: Tracy Cowit
Audio Recording: Alex Smith
Original Projection Footage: William Kingfisher
Production Assistant: Luisa Ines Garcia
"Listen to Me" Voiceover: Josephine Tarrant