

500 WORDS

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- Meredith Monk speaks about her new work at the Guggenheim
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- Atelier Bow-Wow discuss their exhibition at REDCAT
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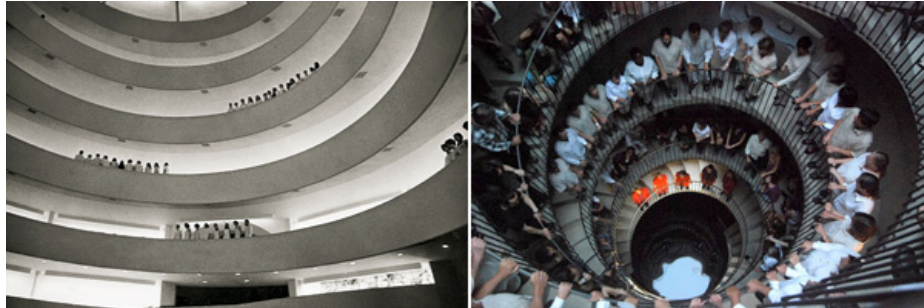
NEWS DIARY PICKS

Newest Reviews

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Meredith Monk

02.13.09



Left: Meredith Monk, *Juice*, 1969. Performance view, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1969. Photo: V. Sladon. Right: Meredith Monk, *Songs of Ascension*, 2008. Performance view, Ann Hamilton's tower. Photo: Marion Gray.

Composer and performer Meredith Monk became the first artist to engage the Guggenheim Museum's entire rotunda in a single work with the premier of *Juice* in 1969. A new work, *Ascension Variations*, incorporates visual and musical material from both *Juice* and *Songs of Ascension*, a performance that has been touring the country since its premiere at Stanford University last October. Here Monk speaks about her involvement with Buddhism, as well as her experience preparing *Ascension Variations* from fragments of two other works.

I WAS EXPOSED to Buddhism in 1975, when I was asked to teach and perform at the Naropa Institute. I responded immediately to the respect art was given in that spiritual context. At that time, Naropa was a very lively creative community—it had the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics; Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman were there. I had already made a lot of work by then, and I felt affinity to Buddhist principles of silence, space, and fluid time. Those were already the aesthetic values in my work. I continued to study Buddhism, but I didn't really commit to the practice until about ten years later because I felt I needed to work on some things in the "life" part of my life. Buddhism made me much more conscious of my aspirations as an artist and as a human being.

Ascension Variations is quite a complex project. The music and the movement from *Songs of Ascension* are the overall material, but I'm also weaving in some elements from *Juice* as a kind of echo. I'm also following the spatial structure of *Juice*, where the audience starts downstairs and then moves upward and passes small events that are going on throughout the spiral. At the end, the performers are at the bottom and the audience is at the top, looking down, so the space is turned inside out.

Meredith Monk, *Passage*, 2005, from her album "Impermanence," 2005 Meredith Monk Music (ASCAP)/ 2008 ECM Records.

Songs of Ascension also has a surprise ending, with a reversal of the audience's point of view. We did a version of it in October in Ann Hamilton's tower in Alexandra Valley, California. Her building is eight stories high, but it's a narrow double helix, with the audience on one strand and the performers on the other. It was very intimate. The Guggenheim allows me a bit more freedom in terms of entrances and exits, because getting people into and out of the tower before was a major operation.

Both *Songs of Ascension* and *Juice* have their own integrity, and I'm trying to weave in elements from the two pieces. Interestingly, the color palette of *Songs of Ascension* is the same that I used for *Juice*, dominated by shades of red, with white, black, and gray. The choice of that palette just came naturally, before I started thinking about *Ascension Variations*. Also, I was working in my archives and found an element for *Juice* that I had never used, because the violinist whom I had written it for died a few months before the performance. It has a very earthy quality, and when I listened to it I thought it would be interesting to include it in *Songs of Ascension*, which is very airy. I like that contrast between visceral music and more spacious material. *Ascension Variations* contrasts the raw quality of *Juice* with the more refined *Songs of Ascension*. Performing this weave at the Guggenheim will bring the past and the present full circle.

Ascension Variations will be presented at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in conjunction with the exhibition "The Third Mind" on Thursday, March 5, at 6:30 PM and 9 PM.

— As told to Brian Droitcour

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