

Beauty Is Skin Deep

by Adrienne Cea

Skins reviewed March 6, 2005

Stunning. Illuminating.

Touching. Powerful. These are just a few of the words that come to mind when describing the experimental dance piece *Skins*, playing at the historic La MaMa Theatre. Even without specific characters or a linear plot, *Skins* tells an amazingly human and compassionate story through its unifying themes about body image, self-expression, and the societal pressures that shape and change us.



This piece is based on the poetry of Elizabeth Ingraham, whose work has also inspired a series of life-sized female "skin" sculptures that can be seen hanging in La MaMa's lobby. Throughout the play, a compilation of Ingraham's poems is recited over a sound system as the words come to life onstage through music, dancing, light, and scenery.

Between poems, the dancing is underscored by hypnotically beautiful music performed live—by internationally renowned musician Yukio Tsuji—through windpipes, rattling beans, drums, and electronic sound mixers. The combination of his sound, the dancers' beauty, and the lighting's vivid colors creates an aesthetically pleasing experience that effortlessly transports you to an exotic world.



When you first enter the theater, there are audible gasps of anticipation from the audience. The stage is bathed in a bright orange light and completely covered in a large cloth with five peaks sticking up. When the lights dim and the music begins, the five peaks rise about eight feet from the ground before abruptly collapsing into little puffs.

Slowly, arms and legs start to appear as the performers tear through the cloth, desperately clawing their way to the stage.

Once emerged, these performers participate in an array of mesmerizing visuals. They run in frenzied patterns across the stage—leaping, flipping, dancing, and hoisting one another effortlessly into

SKINS

La MaMa (Annex)

Category: Performance Art
Written by: Poetry by Elizabeth Ingraham, adapted by Kathryn Moller
Directed by: Kathryn Moller
Produced by: La MaMa ETC and Fort Lewis College
Opened: March 3, 2005
Closed: March 13, 2005
Running Time: 1 hour, 30 minutes

Theater: La MaMa (Annex)
Address: 74A E. 4th Street
 New York, NY 10003

BOX OFFICE

Tickets: \$20.00
 \$15 for students and seniors

CREDITS

Poet & Sculptor: Elizabeth Ingraham
Adaptation, Direction & Choreography: Kathryn Moller
Composition and Master Musician: Yukio Tsuji
Set Design: Peter Case
Design of stage skin: Joel Eis
Lighting Design: LeAnn Brubaker
Costume Design:

the air. Even more impressive is when they mesh their bodies together to create a solid, synchronized pack that moves as one.

Aside from Ingraham's poems, most of the speaking is done in several different languages. The dialogue serves its purpose more as a soundtrack than a form of communication; it is the performers' facial expressions, gestures, and actions that really tell the story. When they cry in desperation, you sense their anguish; when they excitedly exclaim their happiness, you share in their joy; and when they struggle with their self-image, you feel their inner pain.

A particularly poignant scene begins with the sound of carefree children's laughter echoing throughout the theater. The performers carry long red clothes off the stage and down the aisles as a woman onstage looks into the audience and says, "While we are planning for early retirement / While we are buying futures in gold / Our children are dying / Our children are killing."



The children's laughter continues as an eerie battlefield scene unfolds, illustrating the destruction these little children will one day cause. The past and present are united in the woman as she fondly describes braiding her young daughter's hair with plastic barrettes. As she reminisces, the battlefield becomes increasingly cluttered with lifeless or dying bodies.

Fortunately, the storyline in *Skins* lifts you up high after it has plunged you down low. For this reason, the climax has an enormous emotional payoff as it follows on the heels of a dark, hopeless scene directly inspired by the "skin" sculptures hanging in the lobby.

The characters become so wrapped up in societal expectations and others' opinions that they become mummies. After being fully bound in tape and adorned in plaster, they are left alone for us to consider: real, struggling people trapped inside someone else's dressing. Their emergence from the oppressive tape that binds them is a turning point in the story. It involves images so stunningly beautiful that you might feel you are watching a high-budget Broadway spectacle.

Watching *Skins* is like staring at a painting that pulls you into its frame. The performances are excellent, the music is amazing, the settings are breathtaking, and the story is unforgettable.

Dramaturg/Director's
Assistant/Crew Desiree
Henderson

Digital Documentary:
Kurt Lancaster

Production Team

Production Manager:

Martin Moller

Production Assistant:

Kanako Hiyama

Publicity Consultants:

Lauren Fitzgerald &

Manny Igrejas

Technical Director:

Mark Tambella

Stage Manager: Shereen

AbuSaeedi

Company Manager/Crew

Josh Martin

Master Electrician/Light

Board: Momo Parra

Sound Engineer: Dylan

Margerum

Costume First Hand:

Adrienne Howard

Stitcher: Fern Hensley

Crew Desiree Henderson,

Josh Martin, Sienna

Moller

Camera Crew Caitlin Dent

& Michael Ramsey

Performers

Talia Bamerick

Darnell Daniel

Erika Golightly

Kanako Hiyama

Lala Linke

Felicia Meyer

Gabrielle Mischke

Tony Naumovski

Kyle Sheldon

Alessandro Tessitore

Elizabeth Thomas

Allison Wiest

Eagle Young