



The New York Times | <http://nyti.ms/1e9ONZA>

ART & DESIGN

Review: 'H {N}Y P N(Y) OSIS,' Out of This World, at Park Avenue Armory

By **ROBERTA SMITH** JUNE 12, 2015

What happens when the Park Avenue Armory puts its immense Wade Thompson Drill Hall at the disposal of an artist, and money is apparently no object?

The latest answer is “H {N}Y P N(Y) OSIS” — pronounced “hypnosis” — a sometimes enjoyable, occasionally moving, often tedious multimedia panoply of music, film, sculpture, lights and live performance assembled around a set of slowly rotating bleachers from which to view some of the action. It has been devised by the French artist-impresario Philippe Parreno, a founder of the relational aesthetics movement, known for its embrace of the collaborative, ephemeral and interactive.

All these elements are in play here, in what the armory’s V.I.P. invitation described as another of Mr. Parreno’s “interrogations into the radical redefinition of the exhibition ritual” staged in “one of the few spaces in the world in which such an epic experience could occur.”

There’s a lot going on here, but epic? Basically Mr. Parreno is using, but not really commanding, the drill hall’s 55,000 square feet to display several kinds of artwork. These provide different sensory experiences and are interactive foremost because they require visitors to move about to see it all — a pleasantly sociable process that takes two hours and, unusually, provides plenty of chances for cellphone use as things wind down or start up. Almost nothing is site-specific, nor is the space itself transformed.

“H {N}Y P N(Y) OSIS” is a form of avant-garde lite, a benign spectacle that is obscure enough to seem daring, unpredictable enough to be entertaining and big and professional enough to look serious. The armory’s production values tend to be high and in this case they are superb. Set design and lighting were overseen by Randall Peacock, and the sound design is by Nicolas Becker, a composer — both regular Parreno collaborators. One of the most memorable sights here is simply

the incredibly crisp silhouettes that viewers on the bleachers cast on the giant screens.

"H {N}Y P N(Y) OSIS" is also in many ways a disjointed love letter to New York; the city's initials — NY NY — are inserted into the title's eccentric spelling. Four films by Mr. Parreno play alternately on three large screens that are raised and lowered as needed. The most powerful is "June 8, 1968," Mr. Parreno's seven-minute color film from 2009 based on Paul Fusco's well-known photographs taken from the train carrying Robert F. Kennedy's coffin from New York to Washington for burial, passing bereft Americans standing along the tracks in tribute. Emotionally wrenching yet lushly artificial (and exquisitely styled), Mr. Parreno's version is paradoxical: a newly minted historical artifact.

The worst is "The Crowd," a pretentious new film in which Mr. Parreno had actors, some of whom may be hypnotized, move like sleepwalkers around the drill hall itself. The beginning isn't bad: a disorienting aerial view of a few people lolling about the vast wood floor as if it were a park lawn. But as the camera descends and the crowd grows and drifts about, or sits and stares, it becomes murky and melodramatic.

Also overlong is the labor-intensive "Marilyn," from 2012, which revisits a suite in the Waldorf Astoria where Marilyn Monroe lived for a time. A vaguely Marilyn-like voice enumerates the contents of the rooms as the camera tracks back and forth. The best shots are close-ups of the fountain pen (nib only) of someone writing letters in fluid cursive handwriting, especially one in which the pen rewrites over a line in perfect synchrony. (Turns out the writer is a computer recreating Monroe's handwriting.)

The shortest, most striking video is a four-minute digital animation of a Japanese manga character named Annlee who laments that she is "just a shell." Mr. Parreno made it in 2000 and, in a project initiated with the artist Pierre Huyghe, invited other artists to use Annlee in their own work, which made her something of a minor art star. Here she shimmers on a 19-foot-high LED screen, but she also figures in a live performance piece directed by Tino Sehgal. Periodically several child performers, girls age 8 to 13, appear and interact with visitors in the drill hall. They recount their character's metamorphosis to a living person and ask sometimes arcane questions — "What is the relation between a sign and melancholia?" (Whoa.) "Would you rather feel too busy or not busy enough?"

Between the films, three pianos — two of the player variety, one operated by

the well-known pianist Mikhail Rudy — rev up, one at a time or in unison, with a program of ravishing compositions by Liszt, Messiaen, Ravel, Scriabin, Wagner and Morton Feldman selected by Mr. Rudy that provides some of the presentations' most transporting moments. Other sounds conjure thunder and rain, and include traffic noises piped in from outside the building, amplified.

Then there's an allée of 26 examples of Mr. Parreno's hanging light sculptures, in white, translucent or transparent plexiglass based on movie marquees. A kind of ghostly stage-set version of the Great White Way, they seem overwhelmed by the drill hall's acreage but are engaging variations on a vernacular form — a people-friendly version of Minimalism combining Donald Judd's boxes and Dan Flavin's lights. The installation here is titled "Danny the Street," for a cross-dresser streetwalker from DC Comics, insinuating a bit of theater-district sleaze into the prevailing purity.

At certain points, the lights flash and blink in sync to works by contemporary composers — Benoît Delbecq, Mr. Becker and the D.J. Agoria — that boom and chirp from successive speakers, creating a son et lumière roundelay.

All these components don't really coalesce into a whole, but overarching unity was probably not Mr. Parreno's goal. Something fragmentary and episodic is more in keeping with relational aesthetics. Sound is the most powerful, enveloping and "epic" element: the propulsive chugging of the funeral train, the driving rainstorms, the surges of Mr. Rudy's pianos, the short spurts of music that seem to emanate from the lighted marquees, even the amplified traffic noise. To conjure an old technology that was once part of the city's cacophony, they make the armory sound like a big, culture-conscious boom box. "H {N}Y P N{Y} OSIS" is on view through Aug. 2 at the Park Avenue Armory, 643 Park Avenue at 67th Street; 212-636-3930, armoryonpark.org.

A version of this review appears in print on June 13, 2015, on page C1 of the New York edition with the headline: A Boisterous Love Letter to New York .