

WATCH WEEKLY ON:



Eiko on Her Own, with Others

Who is “Eiko” without the context of “and Koma”? For the first time ever, the world-renowned performance artist switches partners, presenting a duet with another woman instead of her collaborator and husband, Koma.

The Japanese duo known as [Eiko and Koma](#) settled in New York in 1977 and have premiered a celebrated work for stage, gallery, the outdoors or film nearly every year since, including commissions from the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Lincoln Center and The Joyce, and month-long live installations at the Whitney Museum of American Art and Walker Art Center. In 1996 the pair received the first jointly held MacArthur “genius” fellowship.

Eiko’s *Two Women* will be performed June 20 and 22 Governors Island as part of the [River To River Festival](#). As a guest editor for NYC-ARTS, Eiko shares her creative process.

How has it been working on your own, and in collaboration with another artist?

Eiko: I have worked with Koma since 1972. After completing an intense three-year [retrospective project](#) (2009-2012) and “living” installation at MoMA in 2013, I began looking for new ways to work and collaborate with others, which includes *Two Women* and my first solo project, *A Body in Places*.

In the fall I will perform four three-hour solos in Philadelphia’s main train station as *A Body in a Station*, presented by the [Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts](#). In preparation, I observed that many people at the Amtrak 30th Street station are alone, so I had the idea of doing this project alone as a durational performance. But I had no idea how to make a solo event.

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In Eiko & Koma's work, I have created and performed many solo sections but audiences see these solos in the context of Koma's exit from and expected re-entry to a stage. So the solo in a duet remains a duet with invisible Koma.

When Sam Miller, the producer of the retrospective project and the director of LMCC, invited me to perform in the River To River Festival, I felt I was not ready to perform a solo. Thus I thought of creating a female duet as a process toward creating my solo project. I asked Tomoe Aihara, a friend from Japan, to help. I wanted to examine what it is to choreograph on another female body and how I myself could use the movement material I developed on her. I was also interested in the fact that our ages are such that she could be my daughter. *Two Women* is thus an intergenerational communication.

What themes or movement challenges did you work with in creating *Two Women*?

Eiko: The challenge has been communication on every level. With Koma we often know what the other would do or thinks. With a new collaborator, I need to talk, show and comment. I cannot yet feel or sense her movement in the same way as I do with Koma and will never gain that level of camaraderie. I have to make all the decisions and, in terms of decision making, I have to admit that I change my mind often, which makes it hard for another dancer. I also struggle with articulating and sharing the reasons behind my certain desires, such as why and how I want to lie flat on the cold, dusty, concrete floor.

Another challenge has been that I have had limited time to work with Tomoe because she lives in Tokyo and I in New York. In order to create a duet, I had to work alone between our times together. So in addition to my conceiving a duet as a process for creating a solo work, the very process of creating the duet has been undertaken largely alone, jump-starting the solo project. As a result, I regard this duet as a way to nurture solitude, which is not what one would think when creating a duet.

I believe this experience of dancing a female duet will affect how I deal with/consider/remember/imagine time and space

in my future solo project.

The most important concept I try to share, however, is how dance is an exploration not an expression. I do not engage in unison movement or symmetry in choreography. And certain details have the same weight as the whole.

How has working in the studio setting on Governors Island played a role in creating *A Body in a Station*, to be performed at Philadelphia's 30th Street Amtrak Station in October?

Eiko: Since March, I have been spending many days at Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Arts Center at Governors Island. LMCC 's Process Space Residency offered me the building's ground floor, a huge raw space. I was immediately attracted to the odd feeling it has. There are these wood pillars that have aged and weathered. After long years of being trees they have spent another many years standing here witnessing all that has taken place. The room is big but the pillars line up in such a way that breaks up the wide open space into smaller particular areas. When I stand here and there, I feel I am in a strange woods and that my body is also a trunk just as these pillars were tree trunks. The floor is cement and has cracks and indentations, traces of the work people have done here over the years of its existence. It just has a really different character than the dance studios and theaters that I'm used to working in. Yet it is also not like an outdoor site or a museum gallery. This is an odd place that makes me an odd woman.

Between Tomoe's visits, I started to invite friends to watch my rehearsals. Soon I realized I was not so much rehearsing as I was "performing" for that particular person. Doing so has been a unique experience for me, different from performing for general audiences. I would meet friends at the ferry terminal, talk about the piece on the ferry, dance, and then I would spend some more time talking about the piece with the guests. Each visitor offered impressions and reflections, which revealed more about who he or she is and, our relationship. The number of friends who came to visit me during my residency and the depth of their "seeing" and conversations that followed were so incredibly affecting

that I am re-recognizing the power of “artist residency” in one’s hometown, especially when it is an odd destination over the water!

I am using this place as is, which is unusual for me as I enjoy constructing sets and environments. I am performing with no theater lights or sound or music. After performing in theaters most of my life, it is shocking and profound for me that I could actually perform with only natural light. Here audience members do not disappear in darkness. They are several feet away. I look directly into their eyes and they look back at me, one to one. Such exchanges of gaze are deeply satisfactory for me and perhaps for viewers.

Governors Island is only accessible by a ferry and I like that. There is something special about being on water, feeling the wind and sun, and seeing the Statue of Liberty and Staten Island Ferries. Each ride is transformative, poetic and very New York; we can see Manhattan so close but separated by water. It is a healthy distance.

See [Eiko on the ferry photographs](#) by William Johnston.

I also enjoyed meeting and chatting with other artists in residence, particularly choreographers and their dancers, on ferries and in the building. First we exchange polite greetings. Most of them are of younger generations, whose work I have not been too familiar with. But by the second meeting we engage in full conversation. I get inspired by their energy and excitement. Several artists visited me to see my dance and I see their work. This process of learning about each other has given me deep pleasure. I also enjoyed exploring other parts of the island and taking some pictures.

See [Eiko on Governors Island photographs](#) by William Johnston.

What other River To River events are you looking forward to?

Eiko: I’ve deeply enjoyed seeing work-in-process showings of Tere O’Connor and Wally Cardona’s pieces. I highly recommend seeing those works. I am especially looking

forward to seeing Vanessa Anspaugh, Claire Chase, Maria Hassabi, Aya Ogawa, and Kimmo Pohjonen. And I am very honored to be sharing a space with Okwui Okpokwasili, who is one of the greatest performers working now. I hope many people return the following week to see her work.

Here are festival events and other happenings Eiko recommends, below.

[Olamide at The Bitter End](#)

[Bitter End](#)

Manhattan

[Tue, Jun 17, 2014, 10:30 pm](#)

Eiko's pick: "My favorite singer--songwriter is Olamide. He is a soulful talent I cannot wait to go back to listen to his band live."

[River to River: The Set Up: I Nyoman Catra](#)

[120 Wall Street](#)

Manhattan

[Thu, Jun 26, 2014, 5:00 pm](#)

Initiated in 2012, The Set Up is an eight-part series made by Wally Cardona and Jennifer Lacey with eight international artists viewed as masters in their respective disciplines. Each master is invited to teach what they think is most important about the form to which they have devoted their lives. This is followed by periods of response and reflection that culminate with a final piece.

River to River: Premiere by Hassabi

South Street Seaport Pier 15

Manhattan

Fri, Jun 27, 2014, 3:00 pm

Through Hassabi's sculptural approach to movement and extended duration, PREMIERE continuously exposes process, calling attention to the present moment. Keeping the aliveness of the form at the forefront of each individual encounter, the work will reflect on the human experience as an ongoing process. Performers: Maria Hassabi, Hristoula Harakas, Paige Martin, Andros Zins-Browne, Robert Steijn. Location: Bowling Green
