

# For Half of a Dance Duo, a Venture Alone in a Crowd

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Oct. 1, 2014

It started ordinarily enough. Eiko, the Japanese choreographer and dancer, was waiting for a train at the 30th Street Station in Philadelphia when she began to notice the space around her, and then, the bodies in that space.

“Everyone is alone,” she said one recent morning at her Midtown Manhattan apartment where she lives with Koma, her husband and artistic partner. “And almost everyone is on a cellphone, reading or talking, especially right before they go to the gate. Then there are people who are just quiet. How could I place myself as one of those people who are kind of sitting, not going anywhere — yet?”

Raising an eyebrow, she emphasized that last word as if she were telling a campfire mystery. “Is she waiting for a train that’s much later?” Eiko asked. “Doesn’t she have a place to go? She’s in that little space between inside and outside: not at home, but not at her destination either. So a sense of this transition, transportation and transformation got me thinking: What if I don’t do Eiko & Koma here? What if I just use *my* body as *my* body?”

Fittingly, the notion of solitude and vulnerability has inspired “A Body in a Station,” Eiko’s first solo conceived and performed without Koma, who is nursing an ankle injury. Presented by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the work develops as a series of three-hour performances, once a week, at the 30th Street Station beginning Friday from noon to 3 p.m. Subsequent performances will pick up at the time of day when the last one finished; on Oct. 10, she performs from 3 to 6 p.m.

Also beginning on Friday, at the museum, is “A Body in Fukushima,” an exhibition of photographs by William Johnston featuring Eiko, 62, performing in abandoned train stations in Fukushima, Japan. The images, elegant, bleak and harrowing, place her in a desolate

landscape devastated by the explosions at the Fukushima nuclear power plant after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Harry Philbrick, the museum's director, regards the two projects as bookends. "She uses the phrase, 'a body,' in the title of both works," he said. "Her body is the link between them. They're radically different places even though they're train stations."

Eiko realizes that her "Body" series could expand to many locations. "It's Fukushima and the 30th Street Station and then all the other places I may go in the future," she said gleefully. "I am becoming a teenager. Leaving house!"

While Eiko & Koma do not refer to themselves as Butoh artists, their performances are marked by a bracing stillness that gives off the effect of arresting time. In Mr. Johnston's images, Eiko is often shown lying down or, as she recently demonstrated at her apartment, standing up while exuding the air of reclining. Her long hair cascaded past frail, dangling arms; her head fell to the side as if she were slowly wilting.

Without Koma to dance with, Eiko, as something of a conduit, is drawing energy from the places she inhabits. "Working with her alone in Fukushima was truly amazing," Mr. Johnston said. "For her, it became a dialogue with all the people who had been there."

By dancing in Philadelphia's main station, Eiko realizes that she might be an irritant for some hurried travelers. "You will have to accept me," she said. "So how do I deliver the pleasure of being a nuisance? I think I have a taste for it, and that's the bottom line: I have a taste for being a nuisance."

Certainly, she said, political protest is about being a nuisance, too. But while the piece isn't an overtly political work, as Eiko highlights the liminal experience of a body in a train station she hopes to reveal humanity among the travelers and herself.

Last summer, she performed "Two Women," a duet with Tomoe Aihara, in an enormous, raw space at Governors Island in New York harbor; throughout, she maintained eye contact with viewers, which emphasized the idea that even though she was performing, collectively we were all bodies in one place. She hopes to do the same at the station.

"I want to have a moment of that one to one," she said. "So this is not really a finished work presented in a grand place: It's my laboratory. At Governors Island, more than anything, I realized I need eyes. And I don't have to be praised. I don't have to be liked. But if nobody's there, I don't really see much point of doing this."

For her first solo work, Eiko has not sought direction from Koma. "At Governors Island, toward the end of it, by the time I knew it was O.K., he would come," she recalled. "And then he said crazy things, and I kind of said: 'There he goes again. I don't need this!'"

They've been together for a long time. But she did relent on one point: He suggested changing the seating to make better use of the natural light. "I moved people, and it made my choreography different," she said. "That was good. He is supportive, but I don't want any more than that. This is my test." She laughed. "And I can't cheat."