

The Five Points Star

Cultural criticism, news, schmooze and blues radiating from Durham, NC

Eiko Solo, at ADF through July 12

JULY 8, 2015 *By* THE FIVE POINTS STAR *in* DANCE REVIEWS *Tags:* A BODY IN PLACES, ADF, AMERICAN DANCE FESTIVAL, CORDOBA CENTER FOR THE ARTS, EIKO, EIKO AND KOMA, EIKO OTAKE, FUKUSHIMA LEAVE A COMMENT



(<https://thefivepointstar.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/dsf7942.jpg>)

Eiko Otake dancing the Cordoba Center for the Arts iteration of *A BODY IN PLACES*, her new series of solo works. At ADF through July 12. Photo: Grant Halverson.

Eiko and Koma. Of all the riches laid so lavishly in our laps by the [American Dance Festival](http://www.americandancefestival.org) (<http://www.americandancefestival.org>) since its first Durham season in 1978, the most precious to this viewer remains the work of the Japanese-born duo who have appeared here many times. It has been more than 30 years since I first saw them perform, in Reynolds Theater, and still-vivid memory-images from *Grain* and *Elegy* trigger the same sense of soul-shaking awe at fundamental truth revealed that overcame me in the theater that first night.

Now Eiko, after 40 years of collaboration with her husband, is here alone (Koma is working on his own solo project). Having herself been profoundly shaken by news of the cascading disasters in Fukushima Prefecture in 2011—earthquake, tsunami, nuclear reactor meltdown—she went there. And so began *A Body in Places*.

It is a mutable work, actually site-specific. Here in Durham, she is dancing an iteration of it in one of the large, post-industrial spaces of the Cordoba Center for the Arts, behind the Golden Belt complex, in the heart of old Durham's former manufacturing zone. Although these old mills have at last found new uses, they are still permeated by the feeling of something lost. The room at the Cordoba Center is stacked with things no longer useful—odd bits of factory equipment, old mainframe computer towers. Water driven in by the recent storms drips into sad puddles on the concrete floor. Between Eiko in her ghostly white body paint, with her silk-covered futon, her silk coverlet, her billowy length of red silk, and the concrete and metal room, the visual dissonance buzzes like the cicadas heard through the open door.

Eiko Otake was born in Japan in 1952. Her parents had married between the first atomic bombing in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and the Japanese surrender on August 15, following the second bomb, dropped on Nagasaki August 9. Hundreds of thousands of people died immediately or within the first few months after the bombings of acute radiation poisoning, and radiation sickness continued to claim lives and health for decades.

Eiko remembers, she noted at her recent talk at the Pleiades Gallery, living her childhood in "genuine fear of the radiation," fear that was only increased by the American nuclear testing in the Micronesian Bikini Atoll (1946-58), which rendered it completely uninhabitable. And yet, she said, "in a way, we were supposed to forget about it." The nation of Japan has built, post-war, 56 nuclear power plants.

The artist has lived in New York for decades, but when Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant was over-washed, leading to nuclear core meltdown, widespread radiation and the sudden evacuation of the area, Eiko felt compelled to go there. She went "not knowing why, but knowing I had to go—me as a body worker, me who has been haunted by the bomb, me who has been teaching about the bomb since 9/11." It was, she said, "as big a shock as 9/11 in New York."

On her first trip, she was “defeated,” she said, but she returned with photographer William Johnston, her costumes and a red fabric stitched together of bits of precious old silks. For her, red is a female color, an under-the-earth color, full of energy. “It gives me energy, but in such a way I must be careful.”

“When something this big happens, you as an artist have to respond. I actually climbed up the fence to get in there. It is a forbidden zone.” The shocking photographs Otake and Johnston made in Fukushima, painful records of her passionate mourning in a wrecked and empty landscape, are on view in Durham currently (Reynolds lobby through July 23; DAC and Pleiades until July 25).

Perhaps the most emblematic of the disaster in this group of photographs are the ones of empty train stations. The people left for work and never returned, their abandoned bicycles now carrying only toxic radiation. (When asked if she had touched them, she said “yes. It was my choice to use my body as a wash cloth.” Then she added, wryly, “this is a very good project for an old person.”) For her first American performance of *A Body in Places*, Eiko chose the magnificent 30th Street Station in Philadelphia, where she moved in her slow silent way as the hordes of travelers swirled around her.

“If I dig dig dig through this Western grandeur station,” she said, “through this hole you get to this small abandoned no people station. You can come through my body to Fukushima.” From Durham, you depart from a disused factory along a disused rail line. Last trip, July 12, 7 p.m.



(<https://thefivepointstar.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/dsf7963.jpg>)

Eiko, July 6, 2015. The mystically powerful dancer, who has always worked with her husband Koma, has made many appearances at ADF since the 1980s. This is her first solo venture. Photo: Grant Halverson.

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