

In my (under) estimation ...

Posted on [September 23, 2015](#)

I was worried, and the closer we got to the date, the more worried I became. Back in May Eiko Otake, a dancer and choreographer teaching at Wesleyan University, offered to perform at Russell Library one of a series of dances entitled '[A Body in Places](#).' She began the series in Fukushima, Japan, site of the 2012 tsunami and nuclear disaster, and continued at the Museum of Modern Art, Philadelphia's train station, and Wesleyan's Olin Library. Eiko wanted to perform for the Middletown community and, after conferring with others at Russell, I readily agreed. What an opportunity—a free performance by a distinguished, world-renowned artist! Thursday, September 17 was selected as the evening for the performance.

When I emailed the news to our incoming Community Services Librarian, [Rolande Duprey](#), her first question was, will she be dancing nude? Oh. Rolande had googled Eiko and found information about several of her performances. Eiko assured us that she understood the nature of a public library and would be clothed throughout the performance. OK.

Throughout the next several months, we were busy with summer reading programs, the new fiscal year, and vacation coverage. Rolande began publicizing Eiko's performance in August, and, after reviewing a YouTube video of Eiko's performance at Olin Library, I started worrying again. How would our patrons respond to such a performance? I knew that many would either enter in the spirit of the performance or ignore it altogether. But would some mock or interfere with the dance? Would they misconstrue the dance as an expression of genuine distress? Would they be angry at the interruption of their reading or work? We arranged for a second security guard to be on duty that evening, and asked one of our Circulation staff to reassure any patrons who seemed distressed by the performance.

The week of the performance came. Eiko and her students arrived and began exploring Library spaces: the courtyard; Children's areas; reading room; stacks ... Could they set up projectors? Could they have a Q&A in the lobby after the performance? Could book carts be used in the dance? Would the performance begin at 6:30 or 7pm? In the Library, many of us were getting nervous. What had we (and by 'we' I mean 'I') gotten into? I kept repeating to myself, it will be OK ...

And it was OK. It was better than OK; it was wonderful. Eiko's performance was moving and powerful. Everyone watching—those who came for the performance and those in the Library to pick up a book or use the computers—were mesmerized. Several of the staff said that the Library had never been so quiet. During the performance in the Main Reading Room, I noticed one of our regular patrons who was sitting, rapt. I asked him afterwards what he thought. "It was beautiful, just beautiful," he said, "She showed that knowledge is power."

And me? I underestimated everyone. I underestimated Eiko—her creativity and sensitivity to her surroundings, and the power of her performance. I underestimated the Library's staff and their ability to adapt to new situations. And most of all I underestimated our patrons and their openness to a unique and unusual performance. I need to

watch this tendency in myself, and to remember this the next time we have an opportunity to do something 'out there,' experimental, and innovative.

Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller is quoted as exclaiming, "I accept the Universe," hearing of which Thomas Carlyle replied, "Gad, she'd better." Words to live by ...

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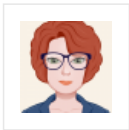
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2 Responses to *In my (under) estimation ...*



Bill Johnston says:

September 24, 2015 at 3:30 pm

Thanks, Pat. Wonderful to see your reflections on the performance here. Thank you for making it possible.

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Katja Kolcio says:

September 24, 2015 at 4:11 pm

Beautiful reflections! And Eiko's performances and teachings have this reality changing effect always. Hope and impact!

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