

## CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

# Eiko Invites You to Her Inner Land of Wraiths

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Eiko performing in the East Village.  
Ian Douglas

At 9 a.m. on Monday, if you had peeked through the storefront window of Dashwood Books on Bond Street in Manhattan, you would have seen a body on the floor, sleeping or possibly dead. Slowly, out of tattered Japanese robes emerged whitened feet, gnarled and aged and terribly exposed.

It was a startling sight, and no less unsettling if you knew those feet belonged to the dancer Eiko, whom you had come to watch.

Such was the case for the dozen or so spectators who were attending the first of a series of daily solos that Eiko is performing for three weeks at various times of day in seven East Village locations. These are the core of “Platform 2016: A Body in Places,” a multidisciplinary program focused on this extraordinary artist.

To many people, the sight of Eiko alone is shocking enough. For more than 40 years, she has been half of the husband-and-wife duo Eiko and Koma. Since Koma injured his ankle two years ago, Eiko, now 64, has been experimenting with solos. Where their duets were at once difficult to witness and hard to turn away from, the experience of an Eiko solo is, if possible, even more intense. Without Koma, there’s no buffer between you and her uncanny presence.

She is famous for moving very slowly, and slowness and stillness are still crucial aspects of her wraithlike persona, imparting the sense that she is there and not there. Moaning, whimpering, crying like a baby bird, she can appear as vulnerable as a fetus. You worry

about her safety. When she stops moving, you might worry if she will ever move again. When, in Dashwood Books, she lifted a full bowl of water to drink, the suspense of a potential spill was excruciating.

But surges of speed are just as important in these solos. Suddenly, she lurches, stumbles, crashes into a wall, beaches herself on a table. Her quick motions look panicky, like those of someone drowning. There is violence in her, and it erupts when she tears paper or stuffs a flower into her mouth and spits out the petals.

The violence is frightening, all the more so in a tight space. Eiko brushes very close to audience members, sometimes handing one a piece of her clothing. Yet the fear that she might expect something from you is never stronger than when she looks you in the eyes.

Her eyes, most often closed or unfocused, occasionally snap open as if she were waking from a coma. It's not clear whether she sees what we see or something else: memories, another dimension. When her gaze briefly meets yours, it's still unclear whether she sees you, but the possibility is enough to be harrowing. It's a look you might have seen on a homeless person or a refugee, a piercing look that reminds you of your sins and makes you count your blessings.

In the solo on Tuesday, we found Eiko at noon on a bench outside Liquiteria and stalked her down the sidewalk into the tiny fashion boutique Anna. Eiko seemed more sanguine than usual, using gentle gestures to encourage us to keep up. But some dissipation of intensity could also be ascribed to the outdoor setting and the quizzical looks of passers-by and the wary, semi-comical retreat of schoolchildren.

The sites where Eiko is performing have been chosen partly for their importance to neighborhood history. A preview show took place in a three-story townhouse that once was home to the Reuben Gallery, where Happenings happened many decades ago and a weaver was at work on a rattling loom. Those historical vibrations, though, were nothing compared to being there with Eiko, whose travels from floor to floor were high drama. A pair cats followed her as well, understandably fascinated but just as understandably on guard.