Afterimage

Muna Tseng's last dance with her older brother, photographer Tseng Kwong Chi

June 1, 1999 By Esther Kaplan

To the strains of Eartha Kitt, Muna Tseng walks onstage in a plain slate-blue uniform that could have belonged in Mao's army. Her eyes are covered by shades, and she carries a camera's cable release. Suit, sunglasses and camera were the tools of her brother's trade, and everywhere photographer Tseng Kwong Chi traveled, he packed them along in his trunk. For 10 years, Kwong Chi—a child of Hong Kong, Paris and New York City—used them to create a brilliant group of self-portraits, *The Expeditionary Series*. At the Grand Canyon and Mount Rushmore, with Mickey Mouse and a statue of Jesus, he followed the trail of American tourism, adding himself to the landscape. His costume gave this East Village denizen the air of a dignitary, opening doors to Manhattan's most fabulous functions, and his dark glasses created the surreal effect of "a smooth surface...that reflected everything," in the words of dancer Bill T. Jones. Kwong Chi's selfportraits invite a string of Orientalist associations—he is Asian tourist, revolutionary, Cold War icon and emigré—but they also stir up a sense of the viewer's own dislocation.

Kwong Chi died of AIDS nine years ago, but in "SlutForArt," which premiered at New York City's Playhouse 91 in March, choreographer Muna Tseng seeks to engage her brother in dialogue. At times she plays herself, dancing to him in spare, lyrical moves; at times she appears to inhabit her brother's body, speaking to a journalist or clicking that ever-present shutter. She is accompanied by slide projections of Kwong Chi's photographs—*The Expeditionary Series* and his famous shots of Keith Haring's work—and a sound collage by performance artist Ping Chong, of Kwong Chi's menagerie of '80s East Village scenester friends. Jones, actress Ann Magnuson, artist Kenny Scharf, a cousin and a lover paint him in turn as the town's most sophisticated gay party boy, as a voice of protest, as "Ansel Adams taken to a new level."

In her loft, a few days after the performance, Muna laughs as she recalls her older brother: "To be a contemporary Asian in America, to be gay, to be living your life flamboyantly the way you want to—this just wasn't done!" Though Kwong Chi refused to identify as an Asian-American artist—"I am an artist," he'd say—he was, as C. Carr wrote in *The Village Voice*, "part of a transitional moment, from the old, white bohemia to a new, far more diverse culture of the margin." This postmodern gay artist who, in the words of his boyfriend, "didn't really enjoy being Asian," still responded to President Nixon's historic trip to China with a lifelong exploration of being both Chinese and American.

Near the end of “SlutForArt,” Muna sits on an empty stage and moves her arms in slow, measured strokes, as if rowing. She has become her brother in a shot he took on Vermont’s Lake Ninevah, pulling himself into the mist. Here, channeled across time, Kwong Chi’s mysterious image becomes the strangeness of loss itself. And Muna’s tribute is never just about a single life that ended at 4 a.m. on March 10, 1990, but, as she says, about “the death of a community, an era,” a gay subculture that AIDS nearly wiped out.

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