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REVIEW: LIT



# Naked on grand street

*In full visibility, LIT creates an outlet for dangerous ideas.*

By [ALEXANDRA BELLER](#)  
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There was no intentional theme to the inaugural performance of the LIT (Loft into Theatre) series, which was presented to a sold out house at Bill Young's 100 Grand Street Studio. But there seemed to be a constant: the affect of the naked performer on a room full of people. The performers revealed themselves socially, psychologically, spiritually, and physically. No one directed the show towards this risky end but, clearly, curator Colleen Thomas, the brainchild of the new program, cultivated choreographers willing to risk it all.

Presented in a space that was as raw and vulnerable as the work, with a wall

## LIT

Choreography by: Luciana Achugar, Monica Bill Barnes. Marv Cochran. Miquel Gutierrez. Paul

Notorious New Jersey  
by Jon Blackwell

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of mirrors and one of windows (doubly reflected in the mirrors), heightened the experience. The audience was allowed to see every angle of the body, every facial expression, even when the performers were turned away from us. It was ripe for exposure. And most of the choreographers on the mixed bill stepped up to the challenge.

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**Matteson and Joe Poulson.**  
 Dancers: [Luciana Achugar](#), [Monica Bill Barnes](#), [Mary Cochran](#), [Miguel Gutierrez](#), [Jmy Leary](#), [Melanie Maar](#), [Paul Matteson](#), [Joe Poulson](#), and [Melissa Spooner](#).  
 Curated by Colleen Thomas

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[paultaylor.org](http://paultaylor.org)

Monica Bill Barnes, an electric and dazzling performer, opened the show with her solo, "Once I Was In A Beauty Contest, But My Strap Broke." A stew of intentional dance clichés and staccato movement, it begged the question, "what would happen if a modern dancer landed in an insane asylum?" Her commitment to fulfilling a moment, a place, a movement was captivating and daring. Despite a compelling performance, it seemed to be more of a character study than anything else. Danced to a suite of Beatles songs, which had no clear connection to the dance, it was a cycle of repetitive movements, expressions and dynamics that never really took off.

Joseph Poulson and Paul Matteson, both members of the David Dorfman tribe, created and performed, "BULLSEYE!" danced to Ravel's Bolero. Most of us would be hard pressed to listen once more to that cyclical score, much less see another dance piece choreographed to it. But sit back. Well, sit up and pay attention, because anything might happen this time. Dressed like matadors just off work, they begin what looks like a trust game between inmates at a Spanish prison. They strip the violent contact relationship of any sense of safety or even sanity. They show the audience, through a series of unfathomable lifts and misses, the naked raw truth about contact with other bodies: sometimes it hurts. Both men, two of the most daring and untamed dancers you'll ever see, displayed that rare spectacle: a truly present being. But I do not envy their chiropractors.

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***Miguel Gutierrez, who must worship at the Judson Church, provided an astute exploration of nakedness on every level.***

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Once you leave the social coding of high school, most of us want to give credit to people who are willing to look like fools. Mary Cochran, who offered us a disclaimer built into the piece that she had "none of the skills necessary" to

successfully perform the work, gave us an opportunity to test our open-mindedness. If you resisted the impulse both to judge the performer (Cochran) for her discomfort, or to make sense of the fractured fairy tale she was telling in her solo, "Pitiful Vignette," you could enjoy the disjointed, unruly personality exposing herself to you. Her weakness was endearing, her vulnerability and her ability to bear scrutiny while maintaining an outrageous character,

was impressive. Cochran, a veteran of the Paul Taylor Company, was clearly putting it all on the line. In the end, the piece boiled itself down too far, distilling its message into a fortune cookie sized parable: if you try to protect yourself from pain, you shut yourself off from your whole life. It might have been more interesting to know what Cochran learned while revealing herself to the audience.

Miguel Gutierrez, who must worship at the Judson Church, provided an astute exploration of nakedness on every level. His staged event was like watching the surgery of a dance piece, sometimes gruesome but, ultimately, absorbing and fascinating. Dressed in only the top half of a suit, his nudity worked like truth serum, engaging him at a heightened level of self consciousness. He proceeded to work through the internal life his performance: lip synching himself at a post performance discussion, nearly injuring himself in a dance phrase, dancing tentatively until he has had a cigarette... It seemed like the type of experience you get to see only once and the title, "Friday, November 14, 2003," confirmed that you had been witness to a moment in time never to be repeated.

Luciana Achugar presented New Flesh Order: Hybrid, a work in progress created with the performers Jmy Leary, Melanie Maar and Melissa Spooner. It began with a play of light and shadow that worked so well in the space you couldn't imagine the piece anywhere else. A study of simultaneous and mirrored movement, the two women who began the work seemed like Siamese twins unwillingly separated. It was compelling in its attention to detail and the sensation of meaning behind the material. Once the piece opened out for two additional dancers, the images, while still detailed, became less meaningful. You wonder if they are Versace models, or factory workers dropping acid on their coffee break. The rhythm, even the disruptions of the rhythm, became predictable. In the end, you felt like you had become mesmerized by watching the internal workings of a machine.

Overall, the series promises to be a rich new venue for risk taking artists, and an exciting outlet for dangerous ideas. It was announced that they intend it to be a quarterly series, curated by a panel of contemporary artists. The Loft Into Theatre series supports innovative dance and performance in an informal setting, giving the audience an opportunity to experience work in the environment in which it was created. LIT supports the vision that dance performance is raw, vulnerable, and full of risk.

**DECEMBER 8, 2003**

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