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STILL LIFE by Checkpoint Theatre

[Theatre Reviews](#)

“Poetry in Motion”

Reviewer: Lee Shu Yu

Performance: 2 March 2019

Upon entering the venue for *Still Life* – TheatreWorks’ white box at 72-13 – I swoon. We are in an artist’s studio, designed by Petrina Dawn Tan, and it is stunning. The centerpiece is a suspended sculpture, with branches caught in a net to form a nest. With the walls covered in portraits and nude paintings, and the studio bathed in warm light, it feels like I have stepped into a loving embrace.

The subject of our study, artist and former president of AWARE, Dana Lam, is sketching. Her piercing gaze passes over the crowd and her fingers work deftly to scrape charcoal on paper. In this casual but intimate setting, I feel exposed, yet well cared for.

That is the charm of *Still Life*, written by Lam, who also performs alongside Jean Ng, and directed and dramaturged by Claire Wong. This play comes at the end of a year where Lam set out to make all the art she had always wanted to. It is an introspection of her passion for both art and activism, but also a journey of finding peace with her late mother.

Lam is a joy to watch on stage. She carries the audience through vignettes of her life with great energy and fervour. From wrestling back leadership of AWARE to explaining about her three fathers to school teachers, the stories she shares are fascinating and heart-breaking. And she tells them with such lucidity and sincerity that I am hooked from start to end. Lam is tenacious and unflinching, and even when vulnerable, she is self-assured.

It is an invigorating portrayal of womanhood that is so rare, I hesitate to breathe for fear of breaking the spell. A play about women, made by women, *Still Life* shows sensitivity and wisdom. Strength, anger, humour, age and sensuality collide in a heady mix in this play, a cocktail so different from the usual reductive and misogynistic stereotypes of women in media.

Yet, beneath the strength lies tenderness. In one scene, Ng sits atop a table, posing for Lam. In the long silence, Ng and Lam look at each other, and the audience looks at them. Something silently passes between them; I see shared honesty, and love emanating from Lam’s brush as she caresses the canvas. The connection and tenderness they share brings all the other canvases in the room to life.

Through the brush and text, *Still Life* presents image after stirring image. The beauty of the staging and the poignancy of the writing makes this an evocative experience. The work is poetry in motion, delicately wrought by Lam’s lyrical word, and expertly executed.

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ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

STILL LIFE by Checkpoint Theatre

28 February – 10 March 2019

72-13

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Shu Yu is a currently pursuing a degree in Theatre Studies at the National University of Singapore and loves exploring all that has to do with the arts.

Her latest foray into reviewing stems from a desire to support the vibrant ecology of the arts in Singapore.

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