



Shop > WINTER GAMES

This winter has been one of the wintriest in recent New York City memory. Between the unnavigable mounds of dirty snow at every intersection, dangerous patches of black ice, multiple days of subzero temperatures, power outages, and frozen pipes, there has also been the bone-chilling rise of authoritarianism in America: seen in the recent murders of witnesses to the unlawful and immoral work of ICE agents in Minneapolis and the 25 deaths of those detained by the Department of Homeland Security over the last year. Add to this the upending of any sense of international order, as our government kidnaps another leader of a sovereign nation and continues to turn allies into enemies through threats and tariffs. Most days it felt like even the joys of the Winter Olympics was at best a shallow balm for the dysfunction and disorder. It has been hard not to wonder about the sun or the verifiable whereabouts of light or warmth on the other end of this cold, dark tunnel.

 SHARE

Performance

Camille A. Brown's "Black Girl: Linguistic Play" / "Times Four" by Molly Lieber and Wally Cardona / Autumn Knight's "Nothing: more" / Mara McKeivitt and Monica Mirabile's "Paradise Container," 24, 11, 6, and 30 January, 2026

Place

New Victory Theater / Chocolate Factory Theater / Pioneer Works, New York, NY

Words

Candice Thompson



Mara McKeivitt and Monica Mirabile's "Paradise Container." Photograph by Maria Baranova

As I wrote, NYC prepared for a blizzard that dumped another foot of snow. During the editing and publishing process, the United States and Israel began a war with Iran.

But in performances across the city in January, I kept coming across one of our best and brightest coping mechanisms: the games we play. In moods that were competitive and playful but also subversive and empowering, dance artists found ways to share the rewards of their rigor and risk-taking with the audience.

From the fearless rhythms and reveals of Camille A. Brown's "Black Girl: Linguistic Play," revived at the New Victory Theater, to encore performances of "Times Four," Molly Lieber and Wally Cardona's reconstruction of the 1975 duet between

David Gordon and Valda Setterfield, and Autumn Knight's hijinks in "Nothing: more" at the Chocolate Factory Theater, high emotional stakes were found in all manner of matches, from the most simple and silly to the ever more complicated and daring. In the most uncanny version—Mara McKeivitt and Monica Mirabile's "Paradise Container," experienced at Pioneer Works—a son torches the structure that has boxed his family into a disconcerting and traumatic game of house.

In the frenzy of fall dance programming, I missed the initial performances of "Times Four." But this intricate memory game turned dare is perhaps only strengthened with more repetitions. For this duet, for which Cardona and Lieber made 32 new phrases to go along with the fragments of video and Setterfield's notes on 15 phrases from 1975, layers of dance history and memory permeate what is essentially a newly choreographed work for two exceptional movers in the prime of their craft.

The pair begin with the introduction of the most minimal of sequences—a leg lifted in a parallel front attitude that drops into a lunge before stepping back—with sharp quarter turns to acknowledge all sides of the room as equal facings. But after each repetition of four, new steps join, eventually including floor work and jumping. Diagonal and later, very complicated mirror patterns add an exclamation point to Cardona and Lieber's unrelenting synchronicity and spatial precision. What must it feel like to be on the same page with a partner in such a somatic and spiritual way? This seems like a sense that would be healthy for all of us to experience in an age where our divisions dominate the discourse.

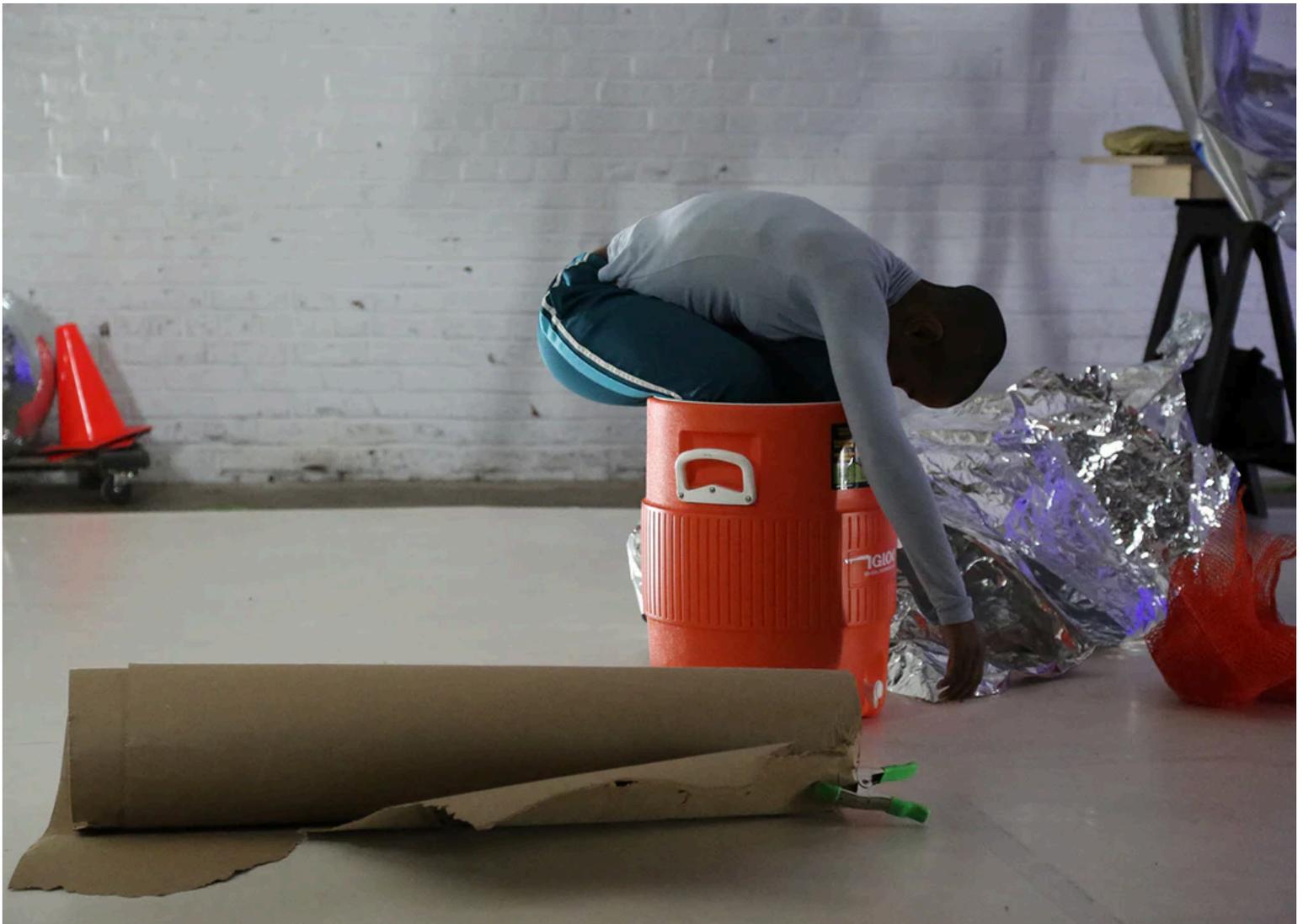
Perhaps synchronized divers or ski jumpers harness this notion in the Olympics? But their events lack the duration and continual re-faceting Cardona and Lieber deliver in this historic Soho loft where this work was first seen. It is a marvel,

one where my appreciation extends with each repeat in a new orientation, and it ends too soon (although it extends for a full hour).

Front-row ballet access

Get notified of our newest dance reviews, interviews & more.

GET NOTIFIED



Autumn Knight's "Nothing: more." Photograph by Brian Rogers

In “Nothing: more,” Autumn Knight and her collaborators and co-choreographers Kayla Farrish, Dominica Greene, and Jasmine Hearn let their imaginations roam in an interactive set that evokes an empty, after-hours gallery. With object design by Matt Shalzi, sawhorses, ladders, a Gatorade jug, a disco ball, and canvas stretchers create fodder for the busy scores of the performers. The trio attaches and detaches themselves from tasks of building and deconstructing barriers, winding and unfurling cords and rolls of paper and plastic, while also kicking soccer balls, harmonizing their voices, and changing their costumes. They proceed to follow unknown rules for a game that might be titled: *Make the Most Noise You Can with These Everyday Objects That Are Completely Foreign to You*. The effect is chaotic but somehow a delicate balance is struck, with Knight as chief obstructor, cutting in on the simultaneous actions with humorous questions and directions that seem to change the layers of their trajectories; Farrish and Greene err on the side of zany and extroverted while Hearn is more introspective.

Near the end they arrange themselves behind a frame, itself set within a frame, for a group portrait. (For much of the piece, a photographer also roams the stage at the direction of Knight.) They preen or make funny facial expressions but for this one moment they gather in a legible composition. When the spell breaks, a performer climbs through it and eventually the frame is broken too. But as the trio tears up the stage in the last five minutes—pulling, running, dumping various gathered piles of objects from a cart—their destructive urgency brings each performer into their own unique and ephemeral power.

The family portrait that emerges in “Paradise Container,” is decidedly bleak. Conceived and written by McKevitt and Mirabile, this dance theater work follows a family of five living in a warehouse owned by their employers, a multi-national corporation. That this company is also a front for a new intravenous narcotic called “Shift,” to which most of them are

addicted, only adds to the strong visual design from Charlie Robinson that work and home life no longer have any kind of clear boundary. Crocheted blankets obscure mounds of paperwork; meetings take place in kitchens; siblings argue among the boxes they are paid to store; and what appears to be their somnambulant father sits ominously still in a recliner while the rest of the family poses for selfies to post to their work Instagram and schemes about how to blackmail their boss who has impregnated one of the sisters.

As an audience we roam with them as their sorry tale and addictive, and co-dependent tendencies unfold across the expansive space. The feel is nightmarish, as their banter bounces back and forth, with resolution as far away as it is in Samuel Becket's play "Waiting for Godot." The surreal and heightened drama, and the lack of clarity around who is playing who, is maximized with Mirabile's strategic, trance-like choreography that comes near the end. Slow motion lifts tumble members of the family from high to low against a backdrop of a television spewing news, some of which eventually alerts them to the racket they are involved in through their employment. A long accusatory sequence of gestures repeats until the son decides to take initiative and burn it all down.



Camille A. Brown's "Black Girl: Linguistic Play." Photograph by Christopher Duggan

On a more positive note, in the revival of "Black Girl: Linguistic Play," the characters' trials by fire end with a sweeter tone. The dueling and daring between characters are auditory and tactile: stomping on chalk creates nostalgic clouds of dust and a dance battle between sisters against an illustrated wall leaves marks of color on clothes. And though the cast is without Brown this time, their rapport and talent make up for her absence. Syncopated jump rope rhythms, hand games, and body percussions traverse Elizabeth C. Nelson's island-like set like a high-speed train without brakes. On one upstage platform, musicians Kwinton Gray and Robin Bramlett stay mostly out of the fray while playing a groovy score of piano and electric bass.

Yet Brown does not shy away from the violence that lurks in this magical world of girlhood: there is kicking and a hard shove between sisters and physically aggressive mothering. But like the great bell hooks, Brown is here to give us a lesson in love. In a recurring motif, a hand reaches for a chin to lift it up. A fist rubs over the chest. And in a powerful moment of recognition and return, the mother character sinks to the ground in the final moments and immerses herself in the familiar dust of her youth.

These were winter games to challenge our highest aspirations and need for connectivity; they were also games to expose our darker and more divisive demons. Reminders of who we are or who we might be capable of being. I sat in these audiences, buoyed to hope in the act of watching them unfold.

CANDICE THOMPSON

Candice Thompson has been working in and around live art for over two decades. She was a dancer with Milwaukee Ballet before moving into costume design, movement education and direction, editing and arts writing. She attended New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, graduated from St. Mary's College LEAP Program, and later received an MFA in literary nonfiction from Columbia University. From 2010-2021 she was editorial director of DIYdancer, a project-based media company she co-founded. Her writing on dance can be found in publications like *Andscape*, *ALL ARTS*, *ArtsATL*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Dance Magazine*, and the *New York Times*.