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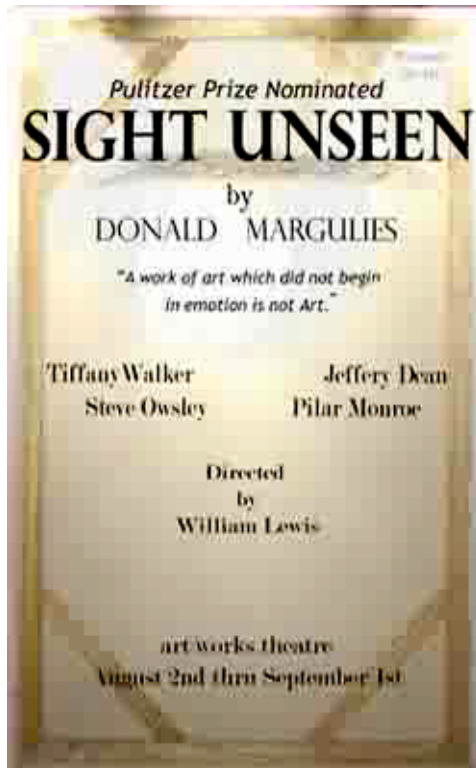
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Sight Unseen - Theater Review

By Keisha7

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Even before the house goes to half, Archeologist Nick (Steve Owsley) meanders onto the stage. He reads, writes, and ambles about the kitchen of his farmhouse, sneaking in whiskey between sips of tea. He's caught by expected visitor Johnathan Waxman (Jeffrey Dean), famous artist and ex-lover of his current wife, Patricia (Tiffany Walker).

Johnathan is on tour with his art and decides to visit his old friend. Perhaps after seeing how young and handsome Johnathan is, Nick stays on the defensive the entire time. Johnathan in the meantime, works very hard to charm the husband, unfortunately to no avail. Later in the second act, it is revealed that Johnathan has ulterior motives for visiting Patricia as well.



Jeffrey Dean (l.) and Steve Owsley (r.) in "Sight Unseen"

Patricia tidies and fusses with everything, in anticipation of Johnathan's arrival, even to the point of offering Johnathan the couple's bed to sleep on for the night. In her adult life, just as in her youth, she's smitten by Johnathan, and nothing she says or does helps to hide that fact.

The passing of the next 24 hours is the story of Donald Margulies's Pulitzer Prize nominated play *Sight Unseen*. The play is nonlinear going back and forth in time, by days, hours and years. Also woven into the story is an interview Johnathan has with a German journalist (Pilar Monroe) at an English art gallery.



Tiffany Walker & Steve Owsley in "Sight Unseen"

I liked how Nick confronts Johnathan point by point. He displays an acute understanding of what he has to lose: the woman he loves, whom he knows does not really love him. And yet, I could not really root for him because Johnathan's intention was not to steal Patricia away. Perhaps because he knows Johnathan could do it without trying is why Nick goes for the artist's jugular off the bat; because he has to. Maybe Nick is insecure, since excavations of the trash dumps of ancient civilizations is not as sexy as creating controversial painting that are pre-sold for obscene amount so of money.

I did not like Johnathan's self-righteousness throughout the play, nor that he never answered on direct question. I had a real problem with Patricia's complete lack of individual identity. I felt the shuffling of time was a manipulation on the part of the playwright, a last dig effort to make these characters likable by showing them in their youth, before their lives become so twisted and compromised.



The Artist & the Muse

This is quite an unenviable position for me. It is rare that I can't find anything I like about the story, regardless of whether I agree with the playwright's point of view. But quite frankly, I have no idea what the playwright was trying to convey to his audience. Clearly there is the issue of identity and how it manifests itself through an artist's work. Furthermore, no artist wants the complexity of his or her work to be reduced to something so banal as one's ethnicity. But in the scenes where Johnathan is being interviewed, every comment the journalist makes regarding the Jewish images in his art is taken by him as a personal affront, rather than an opportunity to express his personal opinions on the themes and issues he believes his paintings successfully communicate.

I fear the dilemma of the characters on the play is the same as mine as an audience member: what is this artist / playwright trying to say to me? Where is the lesson in creating the art / the work? Despite fine, committed, energetic performances by all the actors, I was left shaking my head: what was the point?



An artist defends his work

Perhaps the play is meant to be strictly presentational. Perhaps the point is to pose the question and not answer it because the artist within the play does not or cannot answer the question of: what are you trying to say with this piece? Perhaps the point is that, to name or define a work of art is to make it less than art. Perhaps it is "death" to an artist to

reveal what truly inspires him.

But the absence of that definitive voice that chooses a side or makes a statement, is what kept me at arm's length as an audience member. If you want to engage my emotions, you have to pick a side, even if I don't agree with it.

Sight Unseen is currently running at **art/works Theater** in Hollywood.

art/works Theater

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