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### Sight Unseen

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\*\*\*\* RAVE REVIEW \*\*\*\*

#### "Sight Unseen" Should Be Seen

By Cynthia Citron  
For ReviewPlays.com

Arthur Miller's plays are filled with tragedy and angst and troubled characters searching for identity and approval. So are Donald Margulies'. But unlike Miller, Margulies leavens his angst with humor. You might call him "Arthur Miller Light." Which is not to say that Margulies is not a formidable playwright. He has been nominated three times for the Pulitzer Prize (and won it for "Dinner with Friends") and four Drama Desk awards. And his play "Sight Unseen" won the 1992 Obie award for Best New American Play.

"Sight Unseen," which was originally commissioned by Costa Mesa's South Coast Repertory in 1991, opened here in Los Angeles this week at the art/works Theatre in Hollywood. Presented by a sparkling cast and well directed by William Lewis, "Sight Unseen" proves once again that Donald Margulies is one of our most interesting and engaging playwrights.

The play deals with the bitter aftermath of a love affair between two American college students, Jonathan and Patricia, that ended badly. Now, some 17 years later, Jonathan (richly played by Jeffery Dean), has become a much-sought after artist and Patricia (a gorgeous Tiffany Walker), is married to an angry, quirky archaeologist and spends her time helping him dig through the middens of an early encampment in the north of England. As the husband, Nick (in a spot-on rude and brittle portrayal by Steve Owsley), proclaims, "You have to study the past to make sense of the present." Which, of course, includes his wife's past love affair with Jonathan.

As the play opens, Jonathan has come to England for a retrospective of his work that is opening in a London gallery and, seemingly on a whim, has come to visit his old love. At her bleak home he rediscovers a portrait he painted of her when they were in school and, even though it is only a "student work, not meant to be taken seriously," he realizes that it has a life and spirit, a "certain something" that his current work lacks.

In successive scenes that move backward and forward from the past to a few days into the future, Nick is on the attack relentlessly. His jealousy knows no bounds, and his anger takes the form of outbursts against Jonathan's work. (He dismisses it

as "pornography.") Jonathan retorts that there is truth in his art and that an artist doesn't have to explain his work, but the audience does have to participate. "My intention is irrelevant," he says. "My work is what YOU think it is."

Four days later he is being interviewed by a reporter who also goes on the attack. She is a German woman (played boldly by Pilar Monroe), and she tries to explore his relationship with his own Jewish background. She claims that there is a commonality between artists and Jews, as they are both "alien from the

between artists and Jews, as they are both alien from the mainstream culture." Jonathan, who obviously has ambivalent feelings about his religious identity, blows up and storms out of the room. Ironically, he is currently married to a woman who is not Jewish, even though he had earlier broken up with Patricia precisely because she was not Jewish. But now his parents are gone and he laments that "all the shockable people are dead." Jeffery Dean holds the stage in a virtuoso performance that has him being self-effacing, tentative, pompous, and reflective. Unfortunately, Tiffany Walker does not match him in complexity. She plays her part consistently on one-note: unresolved distress. What's more, she is consistently unintelligible, speaking so rapidly that most of her lines are delivered in a frenzied lump. Steve Owsley, however, is a perfect foil for Dean. He plays Nick as a stiff, unpleasant, and frustrated husband. And he never loses his crisp British accent! Donald Margulies' plays are always worth seeing. And "Sight Unseen" is no exception. So go! You'll enjoy.

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\*\*\*\* RAVE REVIEW \*\*\*\*

### THE TICKET STUB

SIGHT UNSEEN

**Sight Unseen is a jewel made up of superb acting, insightful, powerful writing and great direction that that makes excellent use of a small space. Absolutely recommended.**

Reviewed by Herb Goldberg for THE TICKET STUB

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### SHOWMAG.COM

Ego, frustration, jealousy, unrequited love, and anti-Semitism constitute many of the elements of Donald Margulies' hit play now appearing at the art/works theatre in Hollywood until September 1.

The play first opened fifteen years ago, winning the Obie as Best New American Play. It was nominated for a Drama Desk Award and was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize. Mr. Margulies always has something of importance to say and says it here very well.

In the play, he uses the technique of shifting the action and time back and forth from its opening in an English farmhouse in 1991, forward a few days, and backward fifteen and seventeen years. None of this should create any concern, for the scenes are delineated clearly in the program.

...Jeffrey Dean's Johnathan, a renowned artist, is both articulate in voice and action. He is especially resonant in his scenes confronting Nick (Steve Owsley), Patricia's husband, who doesn't much like him or his art. The scenes at an art gallery during his interview with Grette (Pilar Monroe), who aggressively questions the purpose of his art and its relationship to his being Jewish, are explosive. These scenes are fraught with a number of questions, ideas, and attitudes in which Margulies' words shine. We are taken on many different paths throughout the two hours: Is art an expression of the artist or a business, necessitating certain acumen and goals? Exactly what constitutes "great" art and who is to determine that? What are the sacrifices that have to be made to achieve greatness? Factor in a love story, a marriage of convenience, the horror of the Holocaust, and an interfaith romance, all tuned adroitly by a master storyteller, and you have the makings of a fine play.

Credit the actors with understanding and appreciation for their craft and the script.

Reviewed by Joseph Feinstein

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**The Calendar Girls  
from The Jewish Journal**

Supremely talented playwright Donald Margulies penned "Sight Unseen" in 1992 and critics adored it: from the New York Times, "You can tell when a play has gripped its audience, for no one seems to breathe, let alone shift in his seat," and from [broadwayworld.com](http://broadwayworld.com), "Take note, this is what a well-written play looks like." The Pulitzer Prize-nominated drama delves into the world of a superstar artist haunted by the sadness of a lost lover/muse, plagued by anti-Semitism, and perturbed by the his role as an artist in society.

Thur.-Sat. at 8 p.m. Sun. at 3 p.m. \$20-\$25. Art/works Theatre,  
6569 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood. (323) 960-7789.  
[www.plays411.com/sightunseen](http://www.plays411.com/sightunseen).