

the DANCE i n s i d e r

Flash Review, 7-8: Enduring Energy
Bidding the Big Farewell with Eiko and Koma

By [Chris Dohse](#)

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NEW YORK -- In some ways it seems like Eiko and Koma, with "Death Poem" (seen June 23 at Danspace Project at St. Mark's Church), are narrowing their focus or getting more specific. I mean the scene depicted in this duet seems pretty inescapably one of a woman on her deathbed and a man who is her caretaker or silent watcher. There is a clear story happening. The two figures aren't only embodiments of energy or visualizations of rarified concepts; they are characters. But in becoming more specific they dwell in a universal reality. This story of somebody dying is the big story after all. The one we all face, the one that trivializes the rest.

The space in which they dance is immediately visually seductive. A partially transparent carapace, splotchy as if it might be a shroud, floats above Eiko's body in the center of the church as the audience enters. Its shape suggests the trash dumpster-sized object on which the couple performed 2003's outdoor ritual "[Offering](#)" in the St. Mark's cemetery. What looks like snow or ash has been strewn on the floor in arcs and dollops. A golden light isolates Eiko on a bower of fabric amid the blues and purples of evening.

Like the protector of a charnel ground, Koma paces counterclockwise as the overhead coffin flies away. Perhaps he has come to read the verses of dying to his mate, but realizes she isn't ready. Or does he think that he can ease her suffering?

At certain times the lighting turns the floor into a Milky Way scattered around Eiko and she rests on a nebula bed, from which she seems to survey the constellations of her life. She spasms in pain or curls in grief for what has come before, ashen in hue, with the frozen immobility of a Vesuvius relic or the grace of a young bride. When she scoots off her nest into the surrounding space, it is as if her consciousness wanders out of her body to glimpse the Bardo.

It's rare to see an audience so engrossed, so reverent, as they huddle forward to catch the whispers of crickets and frogs. Perhaps we all recognize this long collapse of waiting for death. We've either sat at the beds of loved ones or we

hope that we will ourselves find such strength, elegance and dignity in our final moments.

Koma enters again, this time with a burning brazier. A cloth swings out to hover over the space on invisible wires before fluttering to the ground on the steps of the church's altar. A Kronos Quartet recording of work by Hildegard von Bingen plays quietly and the two dancers join each other behind a painting of Eiko in profile.

Eiko and Koma's corporeal poetry roots itself in culturally specific elements to frame shared experience. By performing a short story of one couple's goodbye, they bring to life a visual meditation in which we can place our emotions and rest our hearts. They embody an enduring energy; on some intangible but not imaginary level that's all we ever are.