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'Adoration of Dora' explores the volatile nature of human identity through Pablo Picasso's muse

October 31, 2011 | Filed under A&E | Posted by Noura Alfiadl-Andreasson

What happens to a muse when she is no longer a muse?

How much is a picture worth when it's all you have left of yourself?

Pablo Picasso had many muses in his lifetime. Most of them were his lovers. "Adoration of Dora," a University of Idaho play, explored the other side of Picasso's canvas.

Dora Maar, a fiery and independent surrealist photographer and artist in her own right, met Pablo Picasso at a Parisian café in the 1930s. Picasso was immediately attracted to her dark looks and fluency in Spanish. Maar liked to play a knife game in between her fingers and as she left the café, she tossed Picasso one of her blood stained satin gloves. Picasso summoned her to his studio a week later and a relationship lasting nine years and spanning the dark period of the Spanish Civil War and WWII began.

"Adoration of Dora" showed a woman consumed and driven mad by the pressure of being the muse of one of the world's most brilliant artists. When Lojo Simon, playwright, journalist, dramaturg and MFA candidate in dramatic writing at University of Idaho wrote the script, she wanted to express the volatile relationship from Maar's point of view. Picasso was shown as a shadowy figure who never spoke, giving an ominous presence to the man who took over Dora's life.

The relationship between Maar and Picasso is a fascinating one, coveted by many art collectors. Picasso often drew her seated on what looks like a throne, symbolizing that he had possibly met his match. At a New York auction in 2006, "Dora Maar au Chat" was sold to an anonymous bidder for \$95,216,000, making it the second highest price ever paid for a painting at an auction at the time.

But who was this woman most famously known as Picasso's "weeping woman"?

In the play, Dora Maar's character was split into two roles. Dora (Cady Ann Smola) and Dora's fractured self Maar (Emily Nash-Gray). Both actresses were excellent. The Dora side of Dora Maar was petite and vulnerable. This was the side that wanted nothing more than to devote herself to Picasso, but was tormented by the fact that Picasso remained involved with the young, blond, Frenchwomen Marie-Therese Walter (Kristin Glaeser), mother of Picasso's daughter. This was also the side that never recovered when Picasso found a new lover and muse in Francois Gilot.

The Maar side of Dora Maar was robust and fiery. This was the independent side that struggled to resist Picasso's overbearing influence on her identity and soul. Neither side could reconcile, which is why Dora Maar is known as one of Picasso's most tragic lovers.

The set of "Adoration of Dora" was sparse; just a table and chairs, love seat, full -length mirror, and a giant silk backdrop. Most of the scenes were set in the Parisian cafes where the intellectuals of the day frequented, or in Picasso's studio. Director Rob Caisley sequenced the scenes in a disordered dreamlike fashion, mixing reality and the subconscious. The result was not only a telling of facts, but an internal voyage of Dora's imagination and Picasso's fractured art.

The cast was sparse as well, consisting of only six women. Nusch (Hillary Kay Mosman), Jacqueline (Lindsay Teter) and Valentine (Heidi Lindholm) were impressive as Dora Maar's vivacious group of girlfriends. These same actresses also played the roles of Hitler, Franco and Mussolini, Picasso's other mistresses, animal characters derived from Picasso's paintings, nightmarish visions from Maar's dreams, and stuck-up society women.

I rarely ever cry at movies. Plays in particular normally bore me with their corniness, but "Adoration" was something different. This was theater like I'd never seen it before. It was raw. There was loads of nudity, cigarette smoking and throwing around of the f-bomb and other profanities. The ominous presence of the Nazis and Dora's impending madness was visceral and intense. Purposeful comedy, exquisitely executed by the actresses, allowed audience members to laugh and breath every once in a while.

It still surprises me that one of the best the plays I've ever seen was a student production. Unfortunately, "Adoration of Dora" is no longer showing, but I look forward to more work from writer Lojo Simons and

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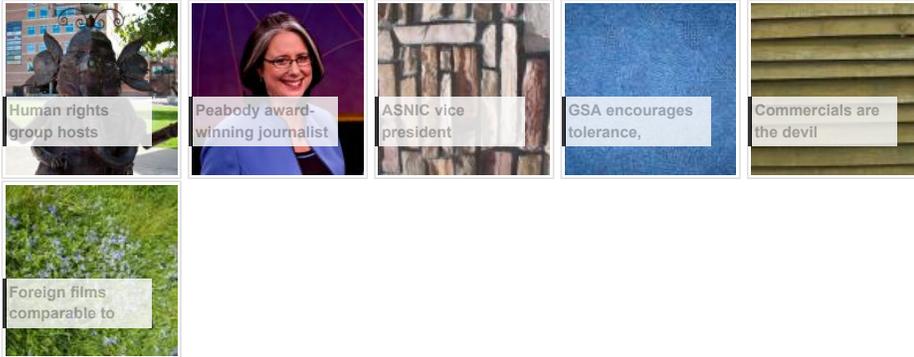
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University of Idaho's Department of Theater.

Dora Maar's experience is a universal testament to the delicacy of our own identities. Whether it be a lover, parent, or friend we are constantly trying to balance our own identity against another person's influence. Like many modern celebrities and young lovers, Dora Maar became a victim of love and vanity once she gave up her convictions.

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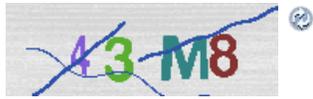
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