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DANCE

Review: In 'P.S. 122,' Watching the Painters Paint and Scrape

By **SIOBHAN BURKE** MARCH 9, 2018



Sally Eckhoff (foreground); onstage, Robin Tewes, a founding member of Painting Space 122, painted a portrait.
Credit: Julieta Cervantes for The New York Times

The name PS122 has been the subject of discussion lately in the world of contemporary performance. In January, the organization known since 1980 as Performance Space 122, housed in a former public school building in the East Village, announced that it would now be called [Performance Space New York](#). The change, timed to the building's reopening after a renovation, caused an [outcry](#) among those who saw it as a generic rebranding, an erasure of the institution's colorful history as a home for experimental live art.

Less discussion has surrounded the other, less public-facing PS122: Painting Space 122, a center for visual artists that has been a tenant in the building since 1978. It's Painting Space that turns out to be the subject — at least the most visible one — of "P.S. 122," a work by the artist Yve Laris Cohen that had its premiere on Thursday in the larger of Performance Space's two new theaters.

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Mr. Laris Cohen's work often deals with the infrastructure — architectural and institutional — behind the production of dance, theater and visual art. In 2015 at Danspace Project, he installed and uninstalled a portable dance floor used by New York City Ballet on tour. In 2014, he shuttled a slab of white wall from the old Whitney Museum into the new, unfinished one, bringing an audience with him. It may not be dance in any conventional sense, but Mr. Laris Cohen, who has a background in ballet, arranges materials and events with an exacting choreographic eye.

In "P.S. 122," part of Performance Space's East Village Series, he has covered the floor of the 3,600-square-foot theater in blank canvas, setting the stage for a conversation between painting and performance: a medium that yields tangible, purchasable objects and one defined by fleetingness. As the audience entered on Thursday, several artists were stationed at canvases around the room, and for an hour, to the roar of heavy metal played by the band Dither, we watched them work, engaged in activities much more placid than the music.

At an easel by one window, Sally Eckhoff painted the night skyline while sipping a beer. Elevated by scaffolding, Dominick Guida scraped a brick wall in what seemed like an effort to weather it. Karen Eubel, seated at a table, appeared immersed in cutting paper. It wasn't until about halfway through, when Mr. Laris Cohen handed out program notes with a history of Painting Space, that we learned these were artists affiliated with it. Absent from these notes, written by Andrew Glass, was the name Performance Space 122. Was Mr. Laris Cohen commenting on the obscuring of history that others had critiqued or just illuminating an alternate history not as familiar to performance-goers?

It didn't take long for Thursday's audience to grow restless. But Mr. Laris Cohen's work, deliberate even when it may seem diffuse, rewards patience. Those who walked out (there were a few) missed some telling twists toward the end, like the throwing open of storage room doors to reveal that the band, all this time, had been playing live. In a climax of sorts, Mr. Laris Cohen escorted a crisply dressed man onto the stage. Difficult to hear over the music, the newcomer introduced himself as someone involved in the theater's design and gave a brief, brusque lecture on the challenges of its construction. The speakers that amplified his voice were emblazoned with "PS122," a rare remnant of what had come before.

P.S. 122

Through Sunday at Performance Space New York; performancespacenewyork.org, 212-352-3101.

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