



A Body in the O: Performances and Stories

Tim Miller

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One of the NEA Four, performance artist, teacher, and writer Tim Miller believes that “solo performers are first responders” who move into the political fray, making the personal political and using their own lives as fodder for fighting social injustice. In the essays and performance pieces of *A Body in the O*, Miller combines humor, history, and theatrics to make sense of his decades-long career as a performance artist and safe-space maker.

The book moves between cultural investigations and specific performances. Miller relates the early inspiration he received from the Women’s Building in Los Angeles, a center of feminist art practice, and shows the impact that performances in uncensored spaces can have. For Miller, seeing women speak their truths spurred his entire career. The book traces the gay rights movement through the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first, from the AIDS epidemic to the defeat of the Defense of Marriage Act, and from Miller’s battle with the NEA to his marriage to his longtime partner.

The book’s essays and performance pieces overlap, not just in their information but with their jokes and metaphors. Miller is at his best when he’s passionately defending performance art, writing about the art community’s response to AIDS well before the government or populous reacted: “What we had was care-giving on a one-to-one, in the trenches basis.” That person-to-person connection guides Miller’s teaching as well, and he speaks of his kinship to the artists he taught and mentored as well as to famous gay literary figures, including an amusing six-degrees-of-sexual-separation from Walt Whitman.

Activism, civil rights, and art weave into this history of Tim Miller’s artistic career, including his impact on the spaces and kinds of performances now available to other solo performers and activists.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (May/June 2019)

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