

NIC Kay, [GET WELL SOON] you black + bluisé, Abrons Arts Center, New York

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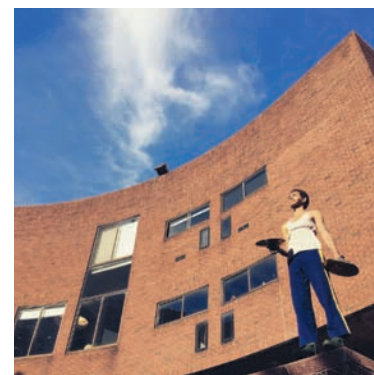
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NIC Kay

[GET WELL SOON] you black + bluised

NIC Kay's *[GET WELL SOON] you black + bluised* is the most recent iteration of an ongoing movement-based exploration by the New York-based artist. Presented at the Abrons Art Center, the three-night series of performances proposed three distinct yet interrelated pieces centred on the phrase "get well soon." Part of the Henry Street Settlement, the iconic arts centre was a formidable site for the dancer-choreographer's incisive context-specific approach. Investigating the potential for installation, poetry, ritual, and collective action to engender reparation, Kay embodies the political urgency of contemporary performance. Confronting issues of individual and collective agency, political complacency, and participatory power structures, *you black + bluised* moved to the rhythm of Kay's stirring voice, physical command, and spatial insight.

Day two of the series, entitled *Protest*, invited the audience into the Underground Theater "to experience a rupture." After performing outdoors during day one with a cast of collaborators, Kay worked solo in the concrete depths of the arts centre. The architecture of the space, a brutalist bunker evocative of the era's out-dated modernist principles, provided an ideal platform to consider "they versus us" as a paradigm of interpersonal life. Dressed in a slightly oversized grey suit that accentuated each movement, Kay initiated the performance by delivering a compelling talk from a lectern. With echoes of a stump speech, an ever-present reality in contemporary American life, the artist distorted the format by simultaneously exposing the rhetorical force of public addresses and their potential vacuity. Looping in and out of sense, the carefully crafted structure of Kay's allocation produced temporary moments of alignment—sentences unsettling the platitudes of political slogans, motivational quotes, and get well soon cards. In a calculated moment of agitation, the dancer bounced up and down, exaggerating the kinesthetic gesticulation of the soapbox speech. Closing the first section with "we are tired, we are mad, we have a right

to be mad..." Kay's words resonated profoundly; indicting forms of violence inflicted on Black and Brown communities, their performative presence challenged systems of erasure imposed by whiteness and patriarchy.

Claiming "we need a change," Kay then transformed the dynamics of the theatre entirely. Moving the audience out of their chairs and onto the stage, they shifted the choreography towards those who had until then been passive viewers. Using velour ropes and stanchions they cordoned off a division between where the spectators initially sat and their new place onstage. Emptying the seats of belongings left behind and stacking the chairs to reinforce the artificial barrier, Kay further entrenched the distance between the audience's anonymity when seated and the vulnerability of standing. Kay then performed a final exhausting dance to a bass-heavy soundtrack of house music, with the lyrics "work work; bang bang" resounding against the walls. Concluding the performance with a series of open ended *thank yous*, Kay gestured towards forms of reparation made possible by allyship and participatory action. Provoked to re-evaluate one's own position within the slippery "they versus us" dichotomy, the audience was left to consider its responsibility in shaping the existential truth of being *black + bluised* in America.

Didier Morelli

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May 23–25, 2019

NIC Kay

← *[GET WELL SOON] you black + bluised, day two, Protest*, performance, Abrons Art Center, New York, 2019.

Photos : courtesy of the artist, NK Studio

† *[GET WELL SOON] you black + bluised, day one, Prayer*, performance, Abrons Art Center, New York, 2019.

Photo : courtesy of the artist, NK Studio