

## **Theatre Funhouse**

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### **FTA: Windigo**

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Jassem Hindi and Peter James in *Windigo*. Photo credit: Stefan Petersen

Presented by Lara Kramer Danse

Espace Libre, May 31 to June 1, 2018

Two men, possibly vagrants, while away their time in a setting that represents a cold indifferent universe. But there's no Beckettian music-hall patter in Oji-Cree artist Lara Kramer's *Windigo*, an uncompromisingly bleak meditation on the lot of Indigenous people haunted by memories of residential schools and the despoliation of their land and traditions.

For the first ten minutes or so, performers Jassem Hindi and Peter James lie inertly on two of the several mattresses strewn about the stage (another is still in its plastic wrap). Then, for the next fifteen minutes, they idly gut the mattresses with knives, maybe in lieu of the fish, fowl and other game that has been marked off-limits by modernization and “civilization.” Throughout this excruciating patience-testing show, Kramer herself sits on stage creating a soundtrack on her laptop: crackling flames, a passing ambulance, recorded conversations between mother and child.

Although Kramer is largely known as a choreographer, as well as a visual artist, there isn't much dance going on in *Windigo*. A rare burst of movement sees Hindi performing a spasmodic pas de deux with his mattress – the cord that connects them both keeps yanking him back as though he's the fish, the mattress the fisherman. Another long, long sequence sees James, with intensely serious concentration, walking a spring-loaded toy bunny in a circle around the stage. Sometimes the men half-heartedly make selections from a pile of old clothes in the corner.

The two men rarely connect. They never speak. At the end, they face each other in a charged moment. But charged with what? Hostile confrontation? Mutual yearning? Blank incomprehension? Kramer seems to be leaving the audience to interpret what it might mean.

I confess my confounded attempts to connect the sparsely arranged dots contended with profound boredom and growing exasperation. That may well have been the point, the audience being forced to endure just a taste of the drained hopelessness and dispiriting despair that its characters, representative of an entire people, have to endure in their daily lives.

In First Nations mythology a Windigo is a creature which exploits its victims' desires to vampiristically drain them of their life-force. Fans of HP Lovecraft will know he expropriated the myth for a thrilling horror yarn about a group of white campers being picked off one by one in a hostile wilderness.

There are, quite deliberately, no such thrills here. This is a distillation of that myth to a virtual still life of a community robbed of its hope, meaning and future. Kudos to Kramer for the harsh purity of her vision. Tempting as it might be, it seems churlish to complain about enduring just one hour of such an intolerable spiritual void.REPORT THIS AD