

DOLORES WILBER
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Drawing from sources as diverse as David Salle canvases, William Faulkner stories, Stanley Kubrick's film *Barry Lyndon*, and the autobiography of porn star Linda Lovelace, Dolores Wilber designed two gripping performances executed by a well-drilled corps of hard-breathing actors. These latest pieces were physically demanding for Wilber's three-person casts, who performed in a pit-like arena bracketed between two risers of audience seats. With ritual urgency, they redressed patriarchal injuries. Wilber placed her visceral texts in adversarial settings: *Barehanded* alluded to a duel and *2 Men are Dead Continued* evoked a courtroom. The performers appeared primarily in solo and duo roles rather than trios, and this formal choice echoed the dichotomies of the opponents in both scenarios, as well as the opposition of the stage and the two-sided audience, the members of which were implicated as witnesses to Wilber's offering.

Barehanded began with two women lying on their backs on long tables, legs apart. A third woman sat apprehensively in a chair among the audience. White and waif-like, each was attired in a white, cut-off tee-shirt, black jeans, and heavy black boots. The first two women approached the seated woman and placed their ears to her chest, as if sensing hidden evidence. The one was then escorted by the two to the stage, noisily marching arm-in-arm, climbing up, over, and between the tables, then rushing back again several times. *Barehanded*, two women slapped a beat on a table, while narrating the protocol of a duel: "Cock your pistol" and "Lord Bullington, in view of Mr. Lyndon having fired into the ground, do you now consider that you have received satisfaction?" On occasion, the performers' faces froze with mute, open-mouthed, wide-eyed expressions. In a rite of emotional mobility, one woman artificially shortened and lengthened her legs. First she bound them into a Yoga squat and

hobbled around outfitted with knee and elbow pads. Later she put on a pair of stilts while relating a corny joke about an English truck driver picking up an armless, one-legged, three-headed woman. This disquieting piece closed with two women displaying the stilt-wearing woman spread-eagled to both sides of the audience, before all three lined-up for a sisterly six-armed Siva vogueing rite. Traces of sexual violence pervaded *Barehanded*, and Wilber's poetic program notes included lines like "German girlie magazines/mostly of women/car and airplane crashes" and "it's hard not to feel bare handed—bare faced, bare assed."

Two Men are Dead Continued relied on calisthenic exertions by three under-dressed performers. Two women and a man wore only boxer shorts and black boots as they



Maggie Hoffman (left) and Clare Dolan in Dolores Wilber's *Barehanded*. Photo by Dan Rest.

mock wrestled, ran in place, and parodied vain poses. Wordy and gothic, the narrative opened with the proclamation: "Your honor, two men are dead. Your honor, one woman is dead," and ended by scolding: "Stop fooling with different scripts and moral dilemmas . . . It's all a trick this writing and re-writing. It won't change the fact that you'll die in this place."

Wilber's tone here is rife with gym-class hijinks and youthful performers, intoning *Our Town*-like solemnities about marriage and murder. The high point is a Bunuelian finale in which all three characters don wedding veils crawling with ladybugs and exit in procession. Wilber, a member of the Chicago performance group Goat Island, delivers arresting, athletic, intimate, and occasionally sarcastic rites, but with this offering risked obscurity in her studied opacity. — Bill Stamets