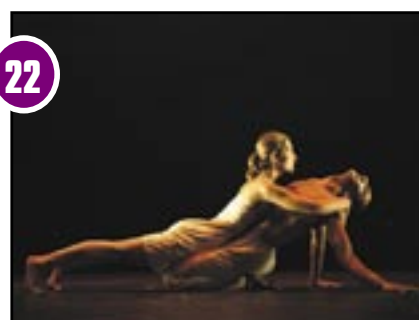


Reaching for the pink dollar



Our community's quest for funding



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Dangerous woman invades Canada

By Jan Guenther Braun

Beware! A very dangerous woman is coming to town. Her name is Alix Olson and if you go to her show she may try to brainwash you or possibly melt your brain. Yes, she very dangerous indeed “welding words, not weapons,” according to her website, and slamming down poems that make you want to get on your feet and spring into action.

On April 29, at Graffiti Gallery, Winnipeg will be graced with the first visit by Olson, and the evening will also include performances by Pamela Means, Lisa B and Sound Barrier. When asked why the trip to Canada Olson says, “Pamela Means and I decided it was time to bust out of the U.S. and finally meet all of Canada coast to coast. We’re doing Europe after that, in June. Personally, I need to hang out with non-U.S. folks and get some perspective back and send some alternative U.S.-citizen truth out.”

And that’s what it’s all about for Alix Olson — alternative U.S.-citizen truth. With tracks “Dear Mr. President” and “America’s on sale” Olson challenges conservative notions of what it means to be a patriot or to be patriotic.

“The concept of patriotism has always bemused me. I mean, essentially patriotism has been used to divide and conquer people; it seems very high school football team-ish to me to be patriotic. My understanding is that you have no choice in where you’re born and wherever that happens to be, you do your best to make the world a more humanitarian-friendly place for everybody sans artificial boundaries/borders. Perhaps I’d feel differently if I were living in Sweden or somewhere that made me proud. What I do feel pride about is the labour history, the anti-race, anti-imperialism struggles, the feminist strides, the political art and music that have come out of the U.S., but I’m much more aligned with those movements in a global people, not a government, sensibility.”

With a charged political climate, a lot of U.S. artists seem to have a heightened sense of responsibility in terms of art and politics and Olson seems to be no exception. It’s not simply a responsibility for Olson though; she also seems to be a proponent that all art inherently takes on a political component.

“All art affects the culture, (interactions, level of pathos, ideologies, desires) of a group of people and that in turn informs how those people react in any particular political moment. So, all art is political if you expand politics beyond government per se. Even art perceived as non-political ie: commercial, the trash on TV, has a numbing and/or distracting effect on people’s brains, disallowing them to focus on what really matters in this life and, in turn, working for that! Another ‘opiate’ of the masses!”

Olson is a conscious artist, though, and believes that she can choose to align herself with certain movements of art, “I do believe, however, that there is a category of activist-art and I would hope to fall into that alliance.”

Much of Olson’s art is focused on exploring taboos and in that pursuit relentlessly crisscrossing America in the hope of spreading her activist message, particularly regarding queer issues. In fact, Olson spends almost 200 days of the year touring America and the rest of the world playing shows in university halls and in small cafes. But there’s always more to do. When I asked her what she felt was the work that needs to be done and conversations that need to be explored within the queer community she’s not without a sense of humour, “More about gay marriage. Just kidding!”

“I think we’re doing a good job of talking about a wide variety of issues. Maybe ageism. I hope our community doesn’t fall into the same trappings as the straight community, youth-

Photo by Desdemona Burghin



Concerned Women for America deemed Alix Olson one of the most dangerous women in America while others, such as the DC Rape Crisis Centre, gave her an award for her “exceptional commitment to the promotion of social justice.”

focused, beauty-focused; think *The L Word*. Our elders worked hard for us, many died for us, faced persecution—they deserve our attention and help and appreciation.”

While reading through Olson’s press kit the words “fierce” “fiery” and “spitfire” came up a lot in descriptions of her work, and they’re words I would also use. However, Olson doesn’t look through strictly macrocosmic lenses. The past year has been incredibly difficult for the poet, with three of her parents coming down with life-threatening illnesses, and when I asked her what she was most afraid to write and perform about I was surprised by her answer. She says that it’s something that she’s “not been previously equipped to handle.” Olson’s biggest challenge recently has not been standing up to right-wing America, but dealing with personal pain and strife.

“I have been prepared to laugh, to rage, to sort through the composition of global inequality; however, deep and utter despair concerning personal tragedy has been new to me. Especially, in terms of how to fit that sadness into a life bent on combatting and celebrat-

ing more macrocosmic struggles. So, I guess, not just incorporating, but also threading true individual sadness into the political trajectory I have been on has been a learning experience. Balancing new priorities of being in constant touch with my family while I’m on the road has been rough as well. However, I do think that becoming a piece of the larger family of pain and sadness gives you a new rawness, honesty and that’s a big part of growing up, personally, universally and artistically. I hope to continue to see it that way.”

Recently, the conservative group Concerned Women for America deemed Alix Olson one of the most dangerous women in America while others, such as the DC Rape Crisis Center, gave her an award for her “exceptional commitment to the promotion of social justice.” Come out to her show at Graffiti Gallery to decide for yourself.

Graffiti Gallery April 29 with Pamela Means, Lisa B. and Sound Barrier. Doors at 7:00 pm, show at 7:30 pm. Admission is free. For more information visit <www.alixolson>.