Art Reviews

Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante
in Stuff at Highways

Vaudeville is not dead, darling. It’s alive and kicking its big, white Nina Blanchard panties off in Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante’s bandy border-burr- 
beque stuff, which ran at Highways, December 5-7 and 18-19. The color-by-
number evening, co-commissioned by Highways, the ICA London and the Port-
land Institute of Contemporary Art, took as its premise a tourist agency for 
First Worlders seeking evocation and “authenticity” in supposedly indigenous 
Latinx culture. The going-on included an onstage banquet, character sket-
ches exploring Latina identity, singing, dancing, voice-overs, a video-projected 
journey (played by a Pill Reminder Adam Revick) and (voluntary) au-
dience participation.

Onstage, Fusco and Bustamante were nothing if not female drag queens,
pushing Latinita femininity to the forefront. Wearing numerous wigs and out-
fits (from hippie kachina doll-seller girl, fiesta hostess), the brilliant Fus-
co morphed with ease from natty panza into glamorous geisha. Resulting 
from an enormous book of fake pre-Columbian myth, she was spiritualista,
metaphysical pataphysical maternal...very Botho Bus. Later, giving an ex-
temporaneous thumb-bone lesson, she worked the Campbells circuit in Sophie 
Tucker revues. Fusco was miraculously glam throughout (even when she was 
trying to be ugly — she definitely has what Eliseo Glyn describes as “R”).

Equally energy was Bustamante, with those tires with a z eyes and that very 
straight — she’s so comfortable with her body! At times, it seemed that Busta-
mane’s intense tendency toward anarchic and wildness (roaming the audience, 
she was tear-inspiring — you almost expected her to take a man and cut his 
penis off!) was revered in by Fusco’s more structured, academic style. Nonethe-
less, Bustamante evaded potential danger, with hypnotizing eyes and a hairdo 
that could have easily contained razor blades.

What really channeled me was the way Fusco and Busta-
mane ended the performance: a Carol Burnett-Julie-
Andres-type duet. Tina Pan Alley taking precedence 
over multifunctional does it for our every day. And 
these two red hot hoochie mamas can really sing a 
show tune.

—Vaginal Davis