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Glamour Shots

Kaj-anne Pepper's *Genderfantasy* to debut
at The Headwaters Theatre

BY RYAN J. PRADO

Sometimes all it takes to get a great idea off the ground is a little bit of support. As a member of notorious drag troupe Sissyboy, Kaj-anne Pepper established a fertile foundation for the power of collaborative art, conceptual dance and the strange beauty of genderqueer narcissism. With Sissyboy a thing of the past, Pepper's oeuvre had taken on the form of drag, painting, dance and much more, but one project loomed on such a grand scale that without a strong shoulder to lean on, it may not have happened.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Regional Arts and Culture Council last December, a whole lot of rehearsing, planning and collaboration—and the artistic flexibility inherent in facing a giant learning curve, Pepper's *Genderfantasy* has finally come to life.

Pepper, 26, describes the work's drag/dance premise as “an exploration of queer glamour and quicksilver identities which shift and change alliances and relationships.” But the scope of the performance isn't easily summed up in a sound bite. Instead, *Genderfantasy* is prone to abstraction. Based as it is in an undefined, dream-like habitat that could be a nightclub or a theater, with the choreography representing either dance pageant or competition, nothing in *Genderfantasy* seems certain within the identities of the characters or the location.

The performance itself consists of Pepper, along with dancers Keyon Gaskin, Michael

Reed and Lillian Rossetti, reveling in fluid movements while donning dirty glamour makeup and teased blonde wigs. “Tranny-pop” purveyor Cabiria Jones—of CJ and the Dolls—contributes beats to Pepper's sound collage, and local business Fliptography will provide an installation for attendees to participate in, producing 60-page personal flipbooks to take as souvenirs.

The concept of image and gender as social constructs resides at the heart of Pepper's creation, and with flourishes like

Fliptography, he hopes audiences will be able to better grasp the ideas behind his performance by delving headfirst into them.

“[The partnership with] Fliptography is another comment on the construction of a personality and of image, and how rapidly each still, frozen moment changes and how we're really a collection of these frozen

“It's always going to be evolving, just like our construction of gender is always evolving, and just like the construction of how we see each other in our own identities, how gender lays on the body, and how I believe that gender in essence is a fantasy.”

—KAJ-ANNE PEPPER

moments, and how that applies to gender and relationships,” explains Pepper. “When everyone is going through that installation, they're allowing themselves to be part of that process of the construction of their own glamour. They're literally initiating themselves into an aspect of what we've been working with for a while.”

As a performance, Pepper says *Genderfantasy* is also a vehicle to reveal histories of liberation, and to pay homage to his queer ancestors. Through the process of self-discovery and identity, Pepper hoped to answer for him-

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