

SOMALIA REINVISIONED at OYR

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An artist comes back from Somalia after six days as Canada's last official war artist. He had an hour and a half of video footage that would be condensed into 45 minutes. Discuss.

In *Somalia Yellow*, the One Yellow Rabbit ensemble takes said artist, Allan Harding MacKay, sits him down clad in khaki fatigue and proceeds to grill him about the implications of his 45 minutes of video. The discussion twists together one man's art with movement and sound, stylized drama and the oft not-so subtle concerns of a nation horrified by their military's peacekeeping actions.

More specifically, these concerns surround the infamous murder and torture of a Somali teenager by Canadian troops. MacKay was at the scene; his pictures reflect a situation confused by war.

The inclusion of MacKay as himself is certainly a risk on OYR's part, but the non-actor churns out a most intriguing character. Although he is obviously cued by the script or "notes" on the podium in front of him, MacKay's honesty and complexity shines and endears him to the audience. His dark wit and artist's perspective mixed with the compelling and disturbing images of his video and the on-stage action easily captivates the viewer.

Essentially, this show is a venue for artists to discuss art, and the novelty of this situation is a definite plus. Anyone who has ever contemplated art or Canadian identity will find themselves rapt with attention as the actors have dialogue with MacKay and interact with his video art.

Unfortunately, the novelty and niche quality that sells *Somalia Yellow* also condemns it to lack accessibility. First of all, the artistic essence of the play would hardly interest say, my mom, or anyone else who prefers conservative pop. People wanting a linear, plot driven show with well defined characters will surely find themselves checking their watches during the slow-motion video and interpretive dance montage. But, then again, that isn't the desired audience.

Secondly, OYR expects to tour this show in such exotic locations as Berlin, Prague and Glasgow. How can a foreigner relate to the Canadian art and identity crisis spurred by military indiscretions? My guess is about as well as Canadians understand Polynesian polygamy. These issues require a historical and cultural background in Canadiana, and *Somalia Yellow* needs to provide that.

Somalia Yellow



photo courtesy One Yellow Rabbit

A SORDID PAST: Denise Clark and Michael Green reveal the seedier side of *Operation: Somalia* in One Yellow Rabbit's *Somalia Yellow*.

Yet *Somalia Yellow* is not a play about war. Instead, it successfully looks at the effects of war on the people at home who see it through the eyes of the media and artists like MacKay. Relevant themes such as racism, Canadian identity, the expectations of art and audience, prejudice, among others, are put under the dramatic microscope throughout this 60-minute show that rarely waivers in its intensity.