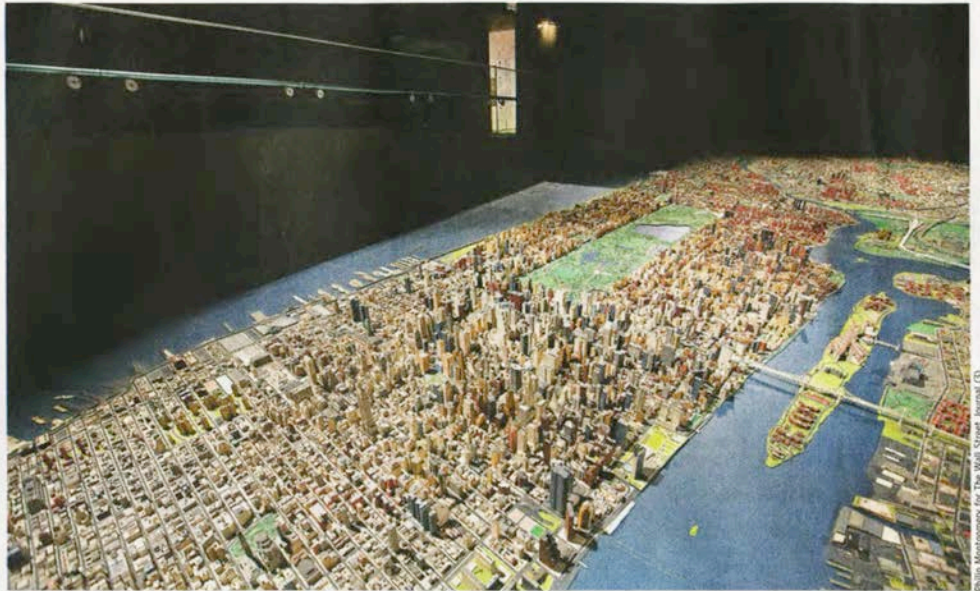


ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



Above, Topaz Arts founders Todd Richmond and Paz Tanjuaquio with Tom Finkelpearl, the executive director of the Queens Museum of Art. Below, Mr. Richmond and Ms. Tanjuaquio in the Topaz Arts gallery in Woodside. At right, the Queens Museum's 9,335-square-foot panorama of the city.



CULTURE CITY | By Pia Catton

In Queens, Going Where the Art Leads



Culture City's month-long resolution to venture forth beyond familiar museums and performances is now in its second week. This time, the anti-procrastination effort takes us deep into the heart of Queens.

The ultimate goal: to see the New York City panorama at the Queens Museum of Art. But there's a lot of ground to cover between the museum's location in Flushing and the established arts hub that is Long Island City.

The day began on a quiet residential street in Woodside, with a visit to Topaz Arts, a nonprofit visual-art gallery and dance space now in its 11th year. Founders Paz Tanjuaquio and Todd Richmond are a husband-wife arts team: both create visual art, but she is best known as a choreographer and dancer, while he is a composer and filmmaker (who also can build seemingly any-

thing that's needed).

Together, they renovated a former manufacturing workshop into a dance studio (rental goes for \$10 per hour) that can be converted into a 50-seat theater. Visitors are greeted in a pristine art-gallery area filled with natural light, passive solar heat and plants rescued from the street. Topaz Arts exhibits four shows a year (with an emphasis on emerging and mid-career artists) though it does not sell the art work or function as a dealer.

"We view the visual arts as a way to engage the community, whereas the dance is more private," Mr. Richmond said.

But when a choreographer has worked in private long enough and has something to present, Ms. Tanjuaquio is a good person to know. Since 2003, she has led the programming of Dance in Queens, a contemporary dance series at the Queens Museum of Art. Over breakfast (divine pastries from the Jackson Heights bak-

ery Cannelle Patisserie) in their gallery space, Ms. Tanjuaquio and Mr. Richmond related the story of how they landed in Queens. "We had looked everywhere. It was a dream of ours to create a multi-use space," Ms. Tanjuaquio said. While driving through the neighborhood one day, Mr. Richmond spotted the building's garage-like door and coveted the property: "I said, 'How come places like that are never for sale?'"

About a week later, a "For Sale" sign popped up outside and the couple expressed interest. When the owner (who still owns the neighboring properties) asked them what they planned to do with the location, they were nervous: The words "nonprofit arts space" had already made enough sellers anxious. But their luck was better. "He said, 'That's perfect. You're going to buy this place!'" recalled Mr. Richmond.

And they did—knowing that by eschewing the foot traffic of neighborhoods closer to

Manhattan, they would be giving artists (and themselves) a peaceful, nurturing place to create and present their work, be it visual or performing. The opportunity to share one's work publicly, without heavy commercial pressure, fills a need that is difficult for mid-career artists to fulfill, as Ms. Tanjuaquio explained: "When you are ready to show something, you want the feedback."

She and her husband are both still creating their own work, but in order to give themselves some freedom from running the shop, they regularly seek out artists' residencies away from home. "We do end up focusing our time and energy on other people," Mr. Richmond said.

But that's also what makes them local art celebrities. When the three of us drove to the Queens Museum in Flushing Meadows, Ms. Tanjuaquio and Mr. Richmond were greeted as beloved neighbors by everyone from executive director Tom Finkelpearl to the

security guard who sets up for the performances that make up Dance in Queens.

Mr. Finkelpearl, the museum's executive director, gave us a sneak peek at the ongoing construction project that will double the museum's size. The hanger-sized building, which was erected for the 1939-40 World's Fair, had been home not only to the museum but to a full-size ice rink. The renovation, set for completion in 2012, will reclaim the space for galleries, performances and public use. "We have very small galleries that don't allow us to show much right now," Mr. Finkelpearl said.

Currently, the galleries house an exhibition of works from the collection that emphasizes architecture, as well as a show of photographs by Luis Márquez, who was the art adviser to the Mexican Pavilion at the 1939-1940 World's Fair.

But of course, the star of the show is the 9,335-square-foot architectural model of the City of New York. There's just no

way to be blasé about it: The panorama at the Queens Museum is a fascinating must-see.

Constructed as a means of showcasing the city during the 1964 World's Fair, it represents every building in the five boroughs constructed before 1992. It took 100 people three years to build. "People spend a lot of time looking at it—half an hour easily," said Mr. Finkelpearl. "New Yorkers are obsessed with New York."

After the museum, Team Topaz and I capped off our day with a quick visit to the Fisher Landau Center for Art, in Long Island City. It was a chance for me to see one more new venue—and to see some art that Mr. Richmond had helped create: Years ago, he worked for sculptor Richard Artschwager and contributed to a large-scale wooden sculpture of a book, which is in the collection.

From there, it was a short subway ride back to Manhattan, which the panorama will remind you, is just a sliver of New York City.

NY CULTURE | October 18, 2012, 9:48 p.m. ET

The Sculptor's Apprentices

By PIA CATTON



Andrew Hinderaker for The Wall Street Journal

Former Richard Artschwager assistants Tenjin Ikeda, Alan Ulrich and Todd Richmond at Topaz Arts, where their group show will be presented.

When the Whitney Museum of American Art opens its retrospective of painter and sculpture Richard Artschwager next Thursday, the exhibition will span the breadth of his career, from paintings on the building material Celotex to sculptures made of Formica to the flat, oval "blps" that became public art.

Underlying the show is Mr. Artschwager's process of discovery through art-making. "He's trained as a scientist, he's working question to question," said Jennifer Gross, a curator at the Yale University Art Gallery which worked in association with the Whitney. "He's a maker."

In stretches of his long career, Mr. Artschwager, who is 88, engaged in that process as an individual. But from about 1986 to the late 1990s, he, like many artists, employed assistants who produced at prolific levels but went unacknowledged. Young artists hired by his studio manager, Tom MacGregor, would travel to a woodshop in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, to create multiples, execute complicated joinery and turn the artist's mock-ups into full-scale reality.



Enlarge Image
Courtesy of Tom MacGregor
Chris Freeman, Tom MacGregor and Mr. Ikeda with a model of an Artschwager sculpture circa 1991.

The studio became one of those New York scenes that coalesces for its time, then fades to a footnote. The scene dissipated by about 1999, when Mr. Artschwager turned toward a more private practice. But several ex-assistants have recently regrouped for an upcoming exhibition of their own work, aptly titled "Under the Influence."

Though hardly as camera-ready as Andy Warhol's Factory, the environment at Mr. Artschwager's

studio was rigorous both in the creative process and the carousing. "It was a boys' club, and we had a wild time," said Mr. MacGregor.

By all accounts, Mr. Artschwager was above the fray. He didn't hang around or sit in with the studio band, Pooder, which made its own recordings, but never actually booked a gig.

"It got a little too crazy in terms of drugs," said Alan Ulrich, who arrived in 1991 at about age 20. "Looking at back, it was a little much—staying up late, using power tools."

Mr. Artschwager, who was not available for comment, did make daily appearances at the studio to discuss models or approve the selection of, say, Formica panels. But he'd then retreat to work on other projects. Having worker bees around was not unfamiliar for the Washington, D.C.-born artist, who had been a professional furniture maker and ran a commercial wood shop.



Richard Artschwager/Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Mr. Artschwager's "Portrait II" (1963), which will be included in his retrospective at the Whitney.

20 shipping crates (four of which are in the new Whitney show) that became art themselves.

"He didn't need to make them in his own hand," Ms. Gross said. "He wasn't going to learn anything new."

The hired guys, however, were on the learning curve. In an effort to explore the long-term influences (the good ones) of their time with Mr. Artschwager, four former assistants—Mr. Richmond, Mr. Ulrich, Tenjin Ikeda and Chris Freeman—will show their work together the Topaz Arts space in Woodside, Queens, which is run by former assistant Todd Richmond and his wife, Paz Tanjuaquio. "Under the Influence" opens Jan. 5.

On the surface, the four may have little in common aesthetically. But the variety reflects the multiple perspectives of Mr. Artschwager.

The Brooklyn-based Mr. Ikeda makes prints that evoke his Afro-Caribbean heritage. His days of cutting Mr. Artschwager's Formica for inlays gave him an eye for precision. "You're using heavy machinery to cut it off," he said. "There is sanding and scraping. That translates to how I carve and cut."

Mr. Ulrich learned woodworking (and played the drums) at the studio. Now living on Long Island, he applies his carpentry skills to home renovations and has continued to make art furniture incorporating found objects and aluminum bands. The latter, he said, is "a direct link. That's a material I learned how to work with there."

Mr. Freeman, who lives in Hudson, N.Y., makes large-scale black-and-white paintings. He also learned by keeping an eye on Mr. Artschwager. "Richard had built a small model of two walls joining in a room. And he had glued a couple of small pieces of Formica to where the walls joined, like two tiny lengths of wood touching at the corner," Mr. Freeman said via e-mail. "He just sat there staring at it like nothing more could happen."

Mr. Richmond, a Queens resident who lost the top of his pinky finger while making Mr. Artschwager's sculpture "Diderot's Last Resort" in 1992, initially shifted to film and music; his current paintings are filled with colorfully defined shapes.

One of his formative moments, he said, came while assisting on the painting "Hot Grotto": "Richard said, 'Add, take away, add, take away,'" he recalled. "The adding is allowing the creative process to flow. The taking away is the reflective process of seeing what's necessary to the composition. I always think about that."

Some two decades after their experiences with Mr. Artschwager, none of the four reports having an ongoing relationship with him. That their work was not recorded or attributed raises little resentment—that's the business. But they also know where the signatures are buried: Before laying down Formica, they would liberally add their names, poems or drawings to the wood bases inside the sculptures.

"The sculpture we built," said Mr. Freeman, "will be hanging in museums long after we're gone, with all those little voices underneath the Formica keeping quiet."

Write to Pia Catton at pia.catton@wsj.com

Language

English

VIDEO: Former Richard Artschwager Apprentices Reunite For a Group Show



BLOUIN ARTINFO

Installation view of "Under the Influence" at Topaz Arts

by BLOUIN ARTINFO

Published: January 11, 2013

After working intensely together as assistants to Richard Artschwager during the 1990s, artists **Chris Freeman**, **Tenjin Ikeda**, **Todd Richmond**, and **Alan Ulrich** split ways to build their careers elsewhere — and have now reunited 20 years later for a group show at **Topaz Arts** in Woodside, NY, titled “Under the Influence.” The exhibition features a diverse array of pieces including monochromatic and vibrant paintings, linoleum prints and wood sculptures. The artists shared with **ARTINFO** their experiences working for Artschwager and discussed how it has shaped their work since. **Watch:**

VIDEO: Former Richard Artschwager Apprentices Reunite For a Group Show

Topaz Arts, a green gallery

BY RINA ANGELA CORPUS

POSTED ON 10/30/2012 10:44 AM | UPDATED 10/30/2012 11:46 AM



TODD RICHMOND AND PAZ Tanjuquio of Topaz Arts
All images from the Topaz Arts Facebook page

NEW YORK, USA - Imagine a run-down warehouse space converted into an ecologically-sound multidisciplinary art gallery in the heart of Queens, New York.

This is exactly the story of Topaz Arts, a non-profit art space founded by a creative couple – American visual artist-composer Todd Richmond and Filipino-American choreographer-visual artist Paz Tanjuquio.

Built in 2000 after the tandem searched for a space that could approximate the artistic spaces they saw in their residencies in Japan, Korea and across the US, Topaz Arts was a do-it-yourself dream that was conceptualized and crafted by the hands of the couple – literally.

Todd and Paz have been collaborating in creating visually-rich dance works since 1993, choreographed by Paz and set to the music, film or visual backdrop by Todd.

Paz relates how they began constructing Topaz Arts:

"Everything was on credit since we did not even have money then to hire carpenters. [We were] lucky enough that Todd has some hands-on training in building things given his visual arts background."

The idea of having a heated floor came from their residency in Korea, where traditional houses have heated floors for winter. Todd researched on how they can make their own using 7 layers of materials that would help generate heat in the cold months.

The 2,500-sq-ft facility currently houses a dance studio with a sprung floor, an audio room and a gallery exhibition space. They have incorporated radiant heat for the dance floor, installed energy-efficient products, and mostly reused and recycled materials from friends' donations and from Materials Company.

Interestingly, they have also maintained an edible rooftop garden that grows kale, basil, berries, broccoli and, recently, after the couple's trip to the Mountain Province, Philippines, a rice paddy.



TOPAZ ARTS' ROOFTOP GARDEN

"Building this space was really an extension of what Todd and I have already been doing. Art is something shared with the community and can be found in one space so that they can interact with one another," shares Paz, who was born in Manila and migrated with her family to San Diego, California when she was 5 years old.

“ Amidst the competitive environment of the New York City art world, it is refreshing to find non-commercial artists who work with a sense of responsibility for their living environment, who engage actively with the community they are in and who open our eyes to the fact that the most creative of arts is never disengaged from everyday life. - Rappler.com ”

Paz was trained as a visual artist, graduating with a degree in Visual Arts at the University of California in San Diego. She later moved to New York and decided to make dance her artistic expression and career, taking up her MFA in Dance at New York University. Todd, meanwhile, is a graduate of City College of New York in Music and Film.

Paz describes her and Todd's works as a result of an organic process that usually evolves from their travels. Their travel and residency to Cambodia, for one, resulted in the dance piece "Dancing to Cambodia." Paz's first travel to the Philippines in 1997 led her to choreograph her first evening-length work "Strange Fruit and Other Secrets" (1999), where she collaborated with Fil-Am poet Luis Francia and theater actor Nicky Paraiso, among others.

Their trip to the Philippines in 2011 not only exposed them to the precise beauty of the rice terraces, but also allowed them to meet Manuel Ocampo who — together with 20 other artists from Manila — will run an exhibit called "Bastards of Misrepresentation" this fall in Topaz Arts and 4 other venues: New York University, Crossing Art, Tyler Rollins Fine Art and Queens Museum of Art.



TOPAZ's WINTER HARVEST 2011

Topaz Arts has also hosted book readings by Fil-Am poet Luis Francia, Armenian-American writer Nancy Agabian and, earlier this month, this writer's book reading on Philippine women in contemporary dance.

In December, they will host a "Brunch Event" with independent artist AA Bronson who has dealt with themes of HIV/AIDS, trauma, loss and healing.

Besides this, the space also hosts choreographers' residencies. This began in 2003 through a project called *Dance in Queens*, made possible by their membership with the New York State Dance Force. *Dance in Queens* receives funding from the NY State Council on the Arts Dance Program and in part from the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs.

Through state funding, they are also able to provide affordable rent space for dance rehearsals and showings.



PAZ WITH FILMMAKER KIDLAT Tahimik (aka Eric de Guia) at 'Bastards of Misrepresentation' in Topaz

Art critic Suzi Gablik once evocatively described the art world as a "suburb of hell" where artists are defined by "the goals of money, prestige, and power... disconnected from ordinary life and action... defined entirely in individualistic terms."

Amidst the competitive environment of the New York City art world, it is refreshing to find non-commercial artists who work with a sense of responsibility for their living environment, who engage actively with the community they are in and who open our eyes to the fact that the most creative of arts is never disengaged from everyday life. - Rappler.com

NY1 News, Featured on April 13, 14, 15, 2012

Woodside Space Gives Local Artists Room To Grow

By: NY1 News



NY1 VIDEO: NY1 recently got an exclusive tour of the Topaz Arts facility in Woodside, which is specifically devoted to creative development.

Alanna Finn of NY1 News interviews **Paz Tanjuaquio**, Co-Founding Director of TOPAZ ARTS, Inc., discussing TOPAZ ARTS' Artist Services; Visual Arts Program, Partnerships, and TOPAZ ARTS Dance Productions. The 3-minute segment emphasized the need for affordable space especially for contemporary dancers in New York City; introduced one of TOPAZ ARTS' Spring artists in residence, Monstah Black, with a brief performance; featured choreographer Paz Tanjuaquio in rehearsal with dancer Ashley Liang; and toured the TOPAZ ARTS facility's rehearsal studio and gallery space featuring the current solo exhibition "The 80's" by renowned artist from Manila Manuel Ocampo.

The New York Times

March 21, 2010

Dance

Jack Anderson

MOLISSA FENLEY concludes this year's **92ND STREET Y HARKNESS DANCE FESTIVAL** in a spirit of conviviality and generosity. In addition to presenting her own pieces, she has invited three choreographic colleagues to show works: **NORA CHIPAUMIRE**, **PAZ TANJUAQUIO** and **PENNY HUTCHINSON**.



TODD RICHMOND

Paz Tanjuaquio, a choreographer whose work will be part of the 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Festival as part of the Molissa Fenley program.

Ms. Chipaumire, a Zimbabwean dancer who is creating a duet for the program, says she brings a specifically African quality to her choreography: "It has to do with attention to time. Time unfolds differently there. Time is endless, and that means it becomes special. And the movement adds to the disappearance of time."

Ms. Tanjuaquio offers a film inspired by a visit to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and a duet in which she splits the space down the middle so that the two performers face each other as if in a mirror. Ms. Hutchinson has contributed a duet of her own, a two-part piece that views the dancers from two choreographic perspectives. She'll also present a dance based on the many meanings of the word "rhubarb."

And Ms. Fenley will be represented by a new trio version of a dance that once was a solo, and by the latest installation of what she calls her "prop dances," this one involving steel plates embedded with eagle feathers. *Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m., Sunday at 3 p.m., 92nd Street Y, 1395 Lexington Avenue, (212) 415-5500, 92y.org/HarknessFestival; \$15; \$12 for students and 60+.*

SEEING THROUGH THE SILENCE

BY RACHEL KALINA PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF TOPAZ ARTS, INC. & TODD RICHMOND

WHAT WAS ONCE A RAW WAREHOUSE SPACE IN Queens now serves as a creative hub for dance, music and art. Previously home to a mailing distribution factory and a subsequent a sewing company, Topaz Arts, Inc., had to be completely gutted and remodeled by co-founders Paz Tanjuaquio and Todd Richmond when it was founded in October of 2000.

Once Richmond, a composer/filmmaker, and Tanjuaquio, a choreographer, (also husband and wife) had set their sights on the space in Woodside, they lovingly molded it to their standards, with determined physical labor.

Tanjuaquio laughs while pointing to a photo in an album of Topaz's early days.

"The things I do for dance," she says, regarding a picture of her holding a shovel amongst long strips of wood and rubber pads, which eventually came to comprise the space's current sprung heated floor.

A concept of Richmond's inspired by the floors they experienced when they performed in Korea, the sprung heated floor is not only toasty on dancers' toes, but also energy efficient. Hot water flows through it, emitting warmth and spreading it throughout the floor and the room where it resides.

"We knew we wanted to be energy efficient," Tanjuaquio says. "And this was back before the green trend." Now, Topaz uses eco-friendly lighting, energy efficient and recycled materials for productions and through-

out the entire space – and vegetables even grow on the roof come the warmer months.

In addition to being environmentally responsible, Topaz's founders were also aware that they wanted their nonprofit organization to boast a gallery as well as a rehearsal space.

"We really take a very holistic approach to making art," Tanjuaquio says. "The space itself has become our art as well."

Four visual arts exhibitions featuring emerging and established artists are hosted per year at Topaz Arts. Aside from using Topaz for this function, Tanjuaquio and Richmond also rent it out as a rehearsal space for choreographers, use it for artist residencies, and engage it as a stage for dance productions.

Topaz's December showing of the evening-length "On the Other Side of Silence" was the creative organization's first main production of their own work in the space. (Prior to this, Topaz had informal showings of works). Based on Yoko Ono's 1952 "Soundless Music" manuscript, the piece had been shown in segments at different spaces throughout the city since Tanjuaquio and Richmond first started working on it in 2006.

When it all recently came together as a main event, the production included film as well as choreography.

"I felt it really lent it to dance imagery," Tanjuaquio says. Noting what drew her to the script, she adds, "I was really excited about it and the parallels of what (was going on) then and now."

She refers to the concept of manmade destruction, such as that experienced in Hiroshima in 1945 and Manhattan in 2001, and explores through the choreography she created. "How society picks itself up after something catastrophic."

Tanjuaquio explains she was additionally intrigued by the contradiction presented by the "Soundless Music" title.

"We challenged ourselves to see what that was," she says. "(For me), it was finding bal-



ABOVE: CO-FOUNDING DIRECTORS OF TOPAZ ARTS, INC., PAZ TANJUAQUIO AND TODD RICHMOND

Seeing Through the Silence, INS & OUTS MAGAZINE (continued)



—ance in a tilted world,” she continues, speaking of the production’s meaning.

Richmond’s exploration of spaces of silence in the show’s film imagery and musical scores took the audience to West Coast deserts filled with sand dunes, Nevada atomic bomb test sites, and Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The couple spent time shooting in each of these places during the last few years, although some film locations weren’t all that far from where it was shown in December: Viewers were also taken to local haunts like Flushing Meadows Park.

The films were shown at various points throughout “On the Other Side of Silence” and combined with Tanjuaquio’s attempts to seek balance via the movements of her dancers. Dressed in costumes ranging from Kimono tops to space age-like jumpsuits, the dancers swung each other back and forth like pendulums, bounced rubber balls or acted as though the floor had uneven areas to it – all in different segments during the evening.

Tanjuaquio was also seen making her way across the floor with her dancers. “On the Other Side of Silence” may have been the first full-length piece to grace Topaz’s space, but Richmond and Tanjuaquio have been collaborating on dance pieces and films since 1993. Both visual artists, various residency arts programs took them around and outside of the country to practice their crafts. When in Manhattan, they were constantly moving around for rehearsals and productions. “The main thing with dance is really finding a home to be able to create the work,” Tanjuaquio says, which is why anchoring Topaz Arts in Queens was a great step for the pair, as well as city artists.

“We wanted to create this reverse residency space where instead of leaving New York, you can still be in New York and find that concentration and peacefulness,” she explains.

Now, Topaz Arts collaborates each summer with the Queens Museum of Art for its Dance in Queens program, which gives choreographers the opportunity to apply for rehearsal and a dance-based performance space at the museum. Four choreographers are chosen and given rehearsal time during museum hours, which engages visitors. “I think it’s intriguing for people to see how dance is made,” Tanjuaquio says of the program’s effects on Queens community members.

Topaz also teams up with performing arts institution Dance Theater Workshop for its Outer / Space program, which promotes affordable space and artists residencies in the boroughs. Through this grant, Topaz participates in choosing artists to use its space.

Its proximity and yet short distance from Manhattan allows audience members who flock to Topaz to indulge in city culture surrounded by a tranquil environment. “They come from all over,” Tanjuaquio says of the Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan residents who come to see shows or rehearse, “Which always surprises me. It shouldn’t: I mean, it’s New York City.”

Upcoming goals for Topaz Arts include a May showcase at LaMaMa in Manhattan, a June 13th event at Topaz Arts featuring an open rehearsal with choreographer John Jasperse with an exhibition of new media work by Hector Canonge, and to continue to expand its collaborative projects with organizations. It may be on a quiet Queens side street, but as Topaz’s recent “On the Other Side of Silence” production exemplifies, a lot can be happening in a seemingly subdued spot.

“Once people get here, they get it, because it’s so peaceful,” Tanjuaquio says. “But at the same time [it’s] so close to Manhattan and the frenzy... We’ve been able to cultivate people who don’t normally come to see dance.”

Along with Richmond, Tanjuaquio was initially unsure if people would even come to Queens when they took the leap and dove right into the project that has blossomed into Topaz’s current state. “When we started out, we tested the ground,” Tanjuaquio says. “We built the space and they actually came... It’s really great how much it’s grown: the community and artists here. As far as dance and performance, it’s really grown a lot.” To learn more about Topaz Arts’ full offerings, including annual open houses, workshops, readings, technical support services for recording, sound and graphic design, visit topazarts.org.

Repurposing a warehouse with Topaz Arts

Posted on [August 11, 2011](#) by [Kevin](#)



Co-founding directors Paz Tanjuaquio and Todd Richmond.

This past Monday, Harriet Taub, executive director, and I paid a visit to long-time recipients and fellow Queens residents [Topaz Arts](#). Todd Richmond and Paz Tanjuaquio founded Topaz Arts in 2000, and they have been recipients for almost just as long. After founding the organization, the first step was to find a space. They bought a raw warehouse in Woodside and set out to make an awesome yet affordable dance and visual arts space. As the pictures demonstrate, they definitely succeeded. And as one of the first contemporary dance organizations in Queens, no less.

As members of MFTA for almost ten years, most of the items we saw came from the MFTA warehouse. We were



Harriet and I enjoyed some of their fresh tomatoes and grapes on an MFTA table in their gallery.

told that office supplies had lasted them three years, a table has been there for over five, and a sink has been there from the beginning. Topaz Arts has also found chairs from [Gracie Mansion](#) and dishes from [MoMA](#) for their gallery space.

In the contemporary dance studio, MFTA wood helps shape the ceiling, a ballet barre contributes to rehearsals, curtains set the mood, a projection screen is incorporated into performances, and benches allow visitors to view and enjoy the pieces. The floor is a heated sprung floor, an idea inspired by a residency they had in Korea. Todd and

Paz constructed the floor themselves using small rubber pieces and wood also found at the warehouse.

If that is not impressive enough, Todd and Paz built the skylight in the gallery using salvaged wood and a polycarbonate greenhouse insulation. They found so much insulation they were able to even replace the garage door in the front of the building with a wall made entirely of the material. The polycarbonate and wood were found, of course, at MFTA.



Salvaged wood and polycarbonate from MFTA allowed them to create this beautiful skylight.

Todd estimates that finding the polycarbonate at MFTA saved them about \$3,000. The skylights allow light to brighten up the space, and offer a small glimpse into the rooftop garden. They grow the grapes and tomatoes we enjoyed in this garden, as well as rice. And a cute family of birds.

Aside from the rooftop garden, Topaz Arts features rescued plants from the neighborhood that Todd and Paz nursed back to health. Thanks to the multi-cell polycarbonate sheets, cold air is kept out while sunlight is let in all year round, allowing the plants to flourish and grow. This is a much better use of space than a garage door.

The team had actually wanted to install these sheets before coming to MFTA, but found that they were too expensive. They were very shocked but pleasantly surprised to find them in the warehouse. As you can see, they really did them justice, and we're happy to have kept them out of the landfill and placed them into such capable hands.



Seriously, it was delicious.

As far as the artwork itself goes, the space is a real treasure to the community. They work with emerging and established artists, and they have previously teamed up with a local [AHRC](#) chapter. Members of AHRC made work and put it on display in the gallery, and some people projected their pieces onto the screen in the dance space.



A sample of Roy Fowler's work at Topaz Arts.

Currently, the gallery features solo work by artist [Roy Fowler](#), and I highly recommend checking it out. Topaz Arts is a really unique space in a very unique location. The streets are lined with trees and residential buildings, making the space an art oasis, and an excellent example of how just two people can turn an empty warehouse into a successful gallery and dance studio using creative ideas, hard work, and salvaged materials.



Blending Art Forms TOPAZ Provides What So Many Need

By IMAN KHAN

Queens Tribune, September 1, 2006

As a new generation of artists carves out its niche in Queens, a non-profit arts company in Woodside is leading the way for the borough's contemporary dance movement.

The organization, TOPAZ ARTS – a name derived by cleverly combining Todd and Paz, the first names of the group's founders – opened its doors in 2001 and is housed in a 2,500 square-foot space that was formerly a warehouse.

The founders, Todd Richmond and Paz Tanjuaquio, collaborated on a multimedia dance project in 1993, which planted the seeds of the eventual creation of the space they call home to their arts today – a place born of the effort to foster the need for collaboration in the arts.

"We fell in love with Queens, in particular Woodside," Tanjuaquio said. "It's quiet and away from the city, which facilitates creativity."

In addition to being a creative space for Tanjuaquio and her partner, TOPAZ ARTS is also a center dedicated to artists' services. It provides local choreographers with hard-to-find rehearsal space at extremely low prices, something Tanjuaquio said is a very rare commodity in the dance world. The group also provides an array of technical support in terms of audio and graphic design needs to other artists looking for some assistance.

The complex that is TOPAZ ARTS houses a soundproof audio/media studio and an art gallery in addition to their dance space.

The art gallery, located in the front half of the space, generally features about four shows a year, featuring primarily emerging artists from all across the nation.

TOPAZ ARTS offers a summer dance residency every summer in conjunction with Queens Museum of Art. After an open call in which choreographers from around the country submit proposals and videos, four are chosen to receive rehearsal space and an opportunity to perform at QMA at the end of the summer.

Todd Richmond, president and treasurer of TOPAZ ARTS, is a composer and multi-media artist who has been based in New York City since 1990. His very early exposure to art labs at Carnegie Mellon influenced his philosophy in the use of many media, from painting, sculpture and music, to film/video and computer technology.

Paz Tanjuaquio, vice president and secretary of TOPAZ ARTS, is a choreographer and dancer who received her MFA in Dance from NYU Tisch School of the Arts, and her BA in Visual Arts from University of California San Diego. In 1994, she established Paz Danz Productions [now TOPAZ ARTS] to explore multidisciplinary dance works.

Most recently for founders Richmond and Tanjuaquio, was a show called "*The Soundless Music by Yoko Ono*," with music and choreography by the founders themselves. The New York Times called the piece, "intelligently conceived, image-filled dance."

For more information or to contact TOPAZ ARTS, visit www.topazarts.org.



A view from "The Soundless Music" at TOPAZ ARTS.



Harmonious Worlds

Two women choreograph peaceful climates in disastrous times

by **Deborah Jowitt**

The Village Voice June 13th, 2006

Paz Tanjuaquio and Todd Richmond

Joyce Soho: June 1 through 3

Allyson Green Dance

Danspace Project at Saint Mark's Church: June 2 through 4

Some dancers move as if their bones and joints were flexible wires, driven by a ticking inner power source. Others respond to invisible forces—interior or exterior siroccos—tumbling them this way and that. Paz Tanjuaquio and Allyson Green have distinctive presences and styles that fall between these extremes. Arresting performers, they project serenity, gentleness, and thoughtfulness that are in no way bland. Bursts of swiftness sometimes propel them into leaps, but not the photo-op soarings we see on the ballet stage; they're low and easy, rebounding as if the floor were suddenly resilient. When these dancers lift one leg into the air, they're not unfurling a flag, but testing equilibrium or recovering from temporary imbalance. Their choreographic patterns and the shapes their bodies form are clear without being emphatic.

In different ways, these two choreographers are concerned with landscape. Not surprising. Tanjuaquio has in recent years been involved with projects in Asia. Green has worked extensively in Eastern Europe and left New York a few years ago to teach at the University of California at San Diego. They perform as if seeing into great distances. Tanjuaquio wheels her straight arms like weather vanes. One memorable gesture recurs in Green's work: She lifts her arms to the sides, squared off, palms forward, the way you might if surrendering to cops, but cranes her neck slightly forward; she might be looking out a window, listening for a sound, or pushing a thought behind her. Collaborators provide virtual landscapes for both. Tanjuaquio has been working closely with composer and visual designer Todd Richmond since they founded Topaz Arts, Inc. in 1990. Mark Simpson's red wash and borders and regions of white light are a vital component of her *To Be: 'Etre'*, the third part of *Thunder*. In at least one recent piece by Green and in her new duet *Abandon*, artist Peter Terezakis's light installations play a vital role. Tom Ontveros's video projections and original lighting designs (recreated at these performances by Carol Mullins) grace the also new *Full Circle*.

In pointing out qualities and ideas that the two choreographers have in common, I'm not implying that they aren't distinctive as artists and people. For one thing, Tanjuaquio is small, trim, and dark, Green fair and extremely slender. In terms of these concerts, emotionally loaded gestures and actions crop up in Green's dances; Tanjuaquio is cooler—both in her choreography and her own presence. The four women in her *The Soundless Music By Yoko Ono Choreographed by Paz Tanjuaquio* (presented as a preview) rarely touch, while Green's dancers, especially the guesting members of the Tijuana company Lux Boreal Contemporanea Danza, for whom she created *Nada Que Declarar (but everything to say)*, push and slide their way into sometimes intimate contact.

The ongoingness of Tanjuaquio's solo work reminds me of Molissa Fenley, whose choreography she has performed. The first and third parts of *Thunder* are like journeys that rarely pause, even though they revisit the same movements and points in space. The second part, a film made during Richmond and Tanjuaquio's 2004 residency in Cambodia, reveals links between her luminous composure and that of the lovely young traditional dancer with whom she exchanges steps. Their tranquillity is curiously at odds with Richmond's rapid cutting rhythms between views of dancing and sights along the Mekong. And, performing in the first part of the dance against the film *Unter der Mittleren Brücke* by Richmond and Brian Dean Richmond, Tanjuaquio seems almost still compared to the flurry of enigmatic, blurred black-and-white (more blue than black) images of the moon, clouds, water, a bridge, wheeling lights, etc. competing for our attention.

The text that apparently accompanied earlier performances of *Thunder* has vanished, nor is one inspiration, Tristan Tzara's Dada Manifesto of 1918, manifest in the work, except in terms of the blending of possibly contrary visions and dynamics. Yoko Ono's text plays no obvious role in her new piece, for which Richmond's marvelous film creates the illusion of the corner of a room, or an open book, on the flat back wall. The images, accompanied by his spare music, are of landscapes—sometimes populated by the dancers in the work. Metal structures such as wrought iron balconies, elevators, the Perisphere from the 1939 World's Fair, and the Eiffel Tower elegantly offset the unhurried onstage forays of Lynn Huang, Chia Ying Kao, Uta Takemura, and Tanjuaquio into unison, pairings, and a brief solo for Takemura. They're like voyagers but also like sentinels. In the end the filmed images are replaced by their swaying shadows.

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The work of both Tanjuaquio and Green emerges from a world enmeshed in violence. The dancing they make, however abstract, offers another model: moral, cooperative, peaceful.

DANCE REVIEW

Security Concerns in Travels to Distant Shores

BY ROSLYN SULCAS

Published: November 1, 2005

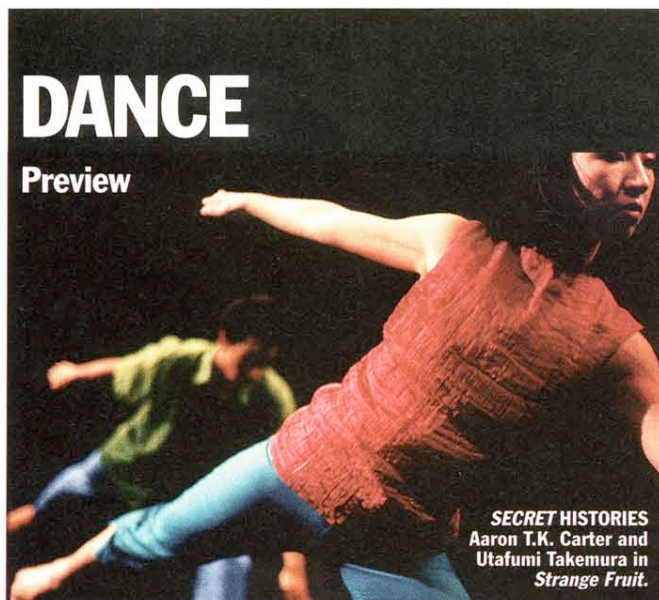
Imaginary voyages to Southeast Asia linked two short but satisfying pieces on a program of intelligently conceived, image-filled dance by the choreographers Paz Tanjuaquio and Joyce S. Lim at St. Mark's Church on Friday night.



Paz Tanjuaquio in "Thunder Against 1,2,3" at St. Mark's Church.
Tom Brazil

First came "Thunder Against 1.2.3.," a solo choreographed and danced by Ms. Tanjuaquio, who was born in the Philippines and has worked in New York since 1990. An official-looking security guard (wearing a badge marked "Dance Authority") checked bags before lights dimmed and brightened upon Ms. Tanjuaquio, moving with sharply delineated precision to knocking, clanking sounds. The stretched, geometric clarity of the movement, sustained throughout the three sections of the work, is Ms. Tanjuaquio's strongest asset — along with a mellifluous voice that renders the spoken sections of the work (a poem and diary extracts about a trip to Cambodia) rather more than the sum of their parts. A number of short films (variously by Brian Dean Richmond, Todd Richmond and Ms. Tanjuaquio) accompany the solo, their fleeting, mostly obscured images offering a counterpoint to the sharp clarity of the dance.

In the last section, a mildly amusing spoof of a CNN-style report (subject: "Is dance good for America?") precedes a more urgent solo, watched by two impassive security guards. Her arms sweeping from side to side, legs whipping her body through the beautiful open space of St. Mark's, Ms. Tanjuaquio suggested the necessity of art in frightening times.



Exotic Fruit

Paz Tanjuaquio's work ripens following a trip to her Philippines homeland By **Gia Kourlas**

As a dancer, Paz Tanjuaquio is a bit of an optical illusionist. Her style blends ballet, modern dance, improvisation and butoh, offering a clarity not always apparent in contemporary dance. It's not as if other choreographers haven't tried the same combination, but Tanjuaquio's key is her delivery. She's tiny, but as soon as she begins to move, she somehow seems to double in size. "People have thought I was six feet tall onstage," the 33-year-old dancer-choreographer admits with a laugh. "Someone once told me that my dancing looked like writing in space. In a way, I do view dance sculpturally. Like I'm leaving a mark in space."

Tanjuaquio instinctively felt that the source of her unique movement style could be unearthed in her birthplace, the Philippines. "My family moved to California when I was five," she explains. "I was really interested in seeing what dance was like there—just to find out if there was any inherent connection to my movement. I applied for lots of grants, and in the summer of '97 this incredible donation came out of nowhere! It was anonymous. I thought, This is the time to go. In a month, I was there."

The result of that trip is *Strange Fruit and Other Secrets*, an evening-length piece that features dance, text, original music and

video. The first part of the title refers to what initially inspired the piece for Tanjuaquio: the taste of fruit. "None of my childhood memories were concrete," she recalls. "But that taste immediately brought me back to when I was five. The title came to me one morning. It's the first time, actually, that I worked from one—it just hit me." The *Other Secrets* in the title is a metaphor. "The work reminds me of a piece of fruit. As you peel it and eat it, you find the seed inside. The trip helped me to get to the core of who I am."

Part of this self-discovery process involved traveling to Mindanao, a dangerous part of the Philippines (kidnappings are not uncommon) where Tanjuaquio saw a traditional dance company perform. "I did feel a connection," she notes. "There are similarities in terms of body structure. And their dances were based on myths and tales and stories. It felt like a lineage, a passing on of material, instead of 'Here's a dance we do; it's a folk-dance.' It felt incredibly ancient and important."

Composer and videographer Todd Richmond accompanied Tanjuaquio to the Philippines and shot footage of the landscape (including close-ups of indigenous

fruit), which will be shown during the piece. "Some of the images are emotionally charged for me," says Tanjuaquio. "For instance, looking out a window—it's raining, but there are palm trees. Things like that really hit me; they trigger my memory."

During the past two years, Tanjuaquio has choreographed *Strange Fruit* in separate sections. As the piece developed, she invited different writers to contribute to the text. Luis Francia talks about fruit; George Emilio Sanchez delivers a poignant monologue on issues of ethnicity and identity. In another section, Ava Chen interviews Tanjuaquio about her trip. "I've always worked abstractly," Tanjuaquio says. "I wanted to bring in writers to add not a literal interpretation but to help give people a frame."

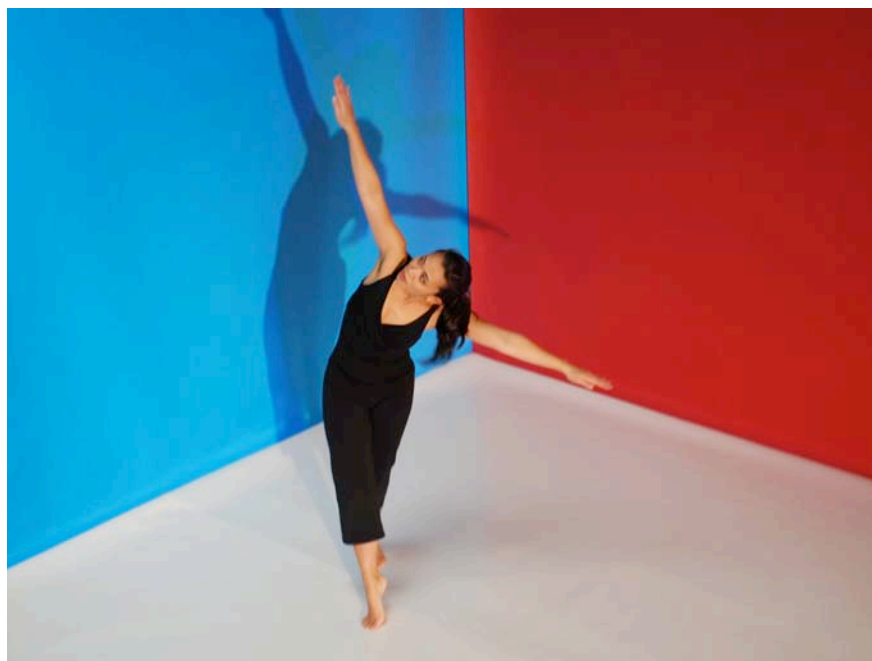
The choreographer's interest in combining disparate art forms stems from her creative background, which began in visual art. She became serious about dance relatively late, after studying with Jean Isaacs at the University of California at San Diego. "Before I met Jean, I spent all my time painting and drawing," she says. "But I always needed a physical element to what I was doing. When I had a painting studio in California, I would end up dancing more than I would paint. After working with Jean, I just continued moving in that direction. Now I'm adding more forms—film and text."

And despite the difficulties involved with featuring so many elements in a work, Tanjuaquio has

"[This] work reminds me of a piece of fruit," explains Tanjuaquio. "As you peel it and eat it, you find the seed inside."

chosen to produce *Strange Fruit* entirely on her own. "I needed it to happen now," she says. "It's like a fruit that has ripened." As she sees it, there's only one downside to her choice of venue. "I really wanted to serve fruit, but the Cunningham Studio doesn't allow food!"

Paz Danz Productions presents *Strange Fruit and Other Secrets* at the Cunningham Studio Thursday 17 through Saturday 19.



pictured: Paz Tanjuaquio
photo by: Todd Richmond

contact

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