



LAist Theater Review: *bobrauschenbergamerica*



TheSpyAnts in *bobrauschenbergamerica* at [Inside] the Ford | Photo: Debi Landrie

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"Why does a man in a chicken suit cross the stage?" is not the only existential inquiry tackled by Charles Mee's challenging but rewarding theater piece *bobrauschenbergamerica*. There's also: "Does man have the power to forgive himself?" "What's it like to swim in a giant martini?" "Do men and women deceive each other or themselves when they fall in love?" And, of course, "Did somebody make a mistake with the slide projector before the show started tonight?"

A series of 43 somewhat-related scenes collectively inspired by the "Combines" of genre-bending 20th-century collagist Robert Rauschenberg, *bobrauschenbergamerica* is Mee's idea of what the master would have produced if he himself "had been a theater maker instead of a visual artist." And like these Combines, the play initially greets its audience with a giddily disorienting juxtaposition of visual cues and gestures. Indeed, that slide projector presentation accompanying the play's opening monologue so vexed the couple sitting next to me that they started talking back to the stage for a moment and clearly never recovered their equilibrium over the ensuing hour and a half.

Others in attendance, however, may well spend this interval getting progressively seduced into the charismatic bizarro world that [TheSpyAnts Theatre Company](#) production team, under the helm of guest director [Bart DeLorenzo](#), creates in the Ford Ampitheater's "[Inside]" performance space. Set designer Marina Mouhibian incorporates some of the objects found in Rauschenberg's Combines, along with additional images she contributes on her own (including a gigantic bowling pin), into a fantastic junkyard playground for the ensemble cast to run - not to mention roller skate - around. And by the end of the evening you may be surprised, even moved, to realize how successfully these actors have done the work of building a coherently engaging emotional arc out of the rollickingly complex, sometimes esoteric raw material of Mee's playful, peripatetic text.

Although *bobrauschenbergamerica* was first performed by Anne Bogart's SIT1 ensemble in 2001, and included in the influential Brooklyn Academy of Music Next Wave festival two years later, the

play is only now receiving its Los Angeles premiere with the current SpyAnts production, running Thursdays through Sundays until the end of February.

General admission tickets are [\\$22.50](#) via the Ford Theatres' own web site, [\\$13.50](#) on Goldstar, and [\\$12](#) through the LA Stage Alliance.