



Mary Sofianos in her "Promethea" dance performance.



The band SKIN AGAINST METAL playing at the multi-media performance "Women: This much and more!"

PHOTOS: ABBY LUBY



Female images inspire multi-media performance at Hammond Museum

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Artists coming together in one collaborative space is rare, especially in a performance brimming with powerful social messages.

A standing room only crowd was precisely that kind of multi-media performance at the Hammond Museum on Sunday, Sept. 26. The performance, "Women: This much and more!" delighted the audience with a flowing, whimsical exchange by dancers, musicians, writers and poets.

Thirteen different artists offered their interpretation of digital collages by multi-media artist Marcy B. Freedman. The then-and-now collages copies the faces of staid ladies of yesteryear and transfers them to images of dynamic contemporary women — a simple but brilliant expression of how women have progressed so far.

"My work is a tiny seed of which these works have blossomed," Freedman said before the performance, explaining how the collages triggered a spate of ideas among a variety of artists she has worked with in the past.

The music by SKIN AGAINST METAL was innovatively improvised with nuanced jazzy shifts between readings. The four talented musicians include pianist Maurice Minichino, percussionists Ismael Adames, Belle Torres, and Nanette Garcia who tastefully embellished the spoken word and dance with their creative interpretations.

The spoken word moves people

in ways unlike any other art form, and this event was no exception. Social relevance linking past to future, the original poetry and prose imparting a strong personal interpretation coupled with impassioned readings, were totally captivating.

Poet Donna Barkman's "Hey Girlfriend," was read in front of the collage of an 1870 painting showing an unhappy, young black woman holding peonies, her face copied and moved to a present-day curator of contemporary art. Barkman's poem personalized each woman as 'girlfriend' while bridging past and present.

Beverly Army Williams' poem "My Boots and the Earth Below" is an imaginary chance sighting by a woman astronaut and John Singer Sargent's Elizabeth Winthrop Chanler of the late 19th century. Each woman considers their "primary life support system," one flies through space, the other affixed to the ground as their gazes meet.

A mesmerizing and scintillating performance by SKIN AGAINST METAL of their original piece "Get Out of Your Head" sizzled with syncopated layers of percussion, interweaving congas, bongos, cow bells, cymbals and timpanes. The piece seamlessly modulated into a sizzling rendition of Mikrokosmos by 20th century composer Bela Bartok brilliantly performed on the piano by Minichino.

Marsi Burns' energized dance interpretation of three collages engaged the audience in "Anything Goes! Three Vignettes." Quirky, humorous, Burns was Chaplin-

esque in her persona of a construction worker, replete with hard hat, work belt, brandishing two pieces of lumber and a tape measure which she flamboyantly extended out to the audience. In her portrayal of a woman philanthropist, Burns, in flowing black chic, a small clutch on her arm, was charming, elegant, a subtle twirl here, a dramatic gesture there to close by a toss of play dollar bills to the audience. As a veterinarian sashaying with a stuffed dog and cat, Burns exuded endearment and left no doubt she was an animal lover.

In a lucid and demonstrative reading, Kitty Jospé offered her poem "Posing," that fused the image of Sarah Siddons, an 18th century actress with a martial arts woman, each connected by the "unencumbered violent release...to avoid claims of licentiousness."

In her powerful lyrical poem "Terra Cotta," Rebecca Elisabeta Marya Ribeiro captured the raw essence of female endurance throughout history as she focused on caressing hands as sensors to the soul. By merging the identities of a 19th century aristocratic woman with a present-day clay artist, "Terra Cotta" pulled together universal yearning, pain and love.

Freedman read a poem by England-based Maz Hegehog who was unable to travel to the U.S. for the performance. The speaker in Hegehog's poem "Migrant and cleaner and almost free" is a young girl telling how she and her mother arrive at a new country to work for a rich family. Freedman's collage of Fanny

Eaton, a Jamaican-born artist's model and domestic worker living in the late 19th century and a 20th century woman architect motivated Hegehog, whose young speaker reminded us she hailed from migrants that were "almost free."

In a wildly imaginative performance of her prose poem "Henrietta," Linda Jean Fisher starts with jazzy, scatological utterances, an apt preface to a surreal world where her pet parrot, Henrietta, has a doctoral degree in contemporary art. The parrot appears on the arm of a 17th century Elizabethan noblewoman whose face reappears as a 20th century abstract painter. Fisher's painter spins a tale about cooked books, robbing armored trucks and culminates by combining artist and parrot into two off-beat personas.

Alicia Hoffman's eloquent reading of her coming-of-age poem "Bildungsroman," shows Elsie Palmer depicted in an 1890 painting by John Singer Sargent whose face is that of today's leather adorned runway model. Hoffman speaks to both women, addressing their emotional growth, closing the historical eras between each.

Dramatic movement by Mary Sofianos in her "Promethea" was a theatrical finale inspired by the image of a 19th century actress and a modern-day victim of domestic abuse. Moving to prerecorded music by Daniel Cordani, Sofianos, veiled and dressed in a sheer, flowing white peignoir, she slowly moved from the back of the gallery and through to the front, dropping her veil along the way. Sofianos'

angular movements and primitive hand gestures defined an unstable person vacillating between despair and fear. In her artist statement, Sofianos said she professionally works to implement creative arts programming to promote mental and physical health.

That the Hammond Museum to present a variety of artists in one performance was, in this case, a hugely attractive venue. Perhaps there will be more to come.

31 of Freedman's images can be seen at the museum's Hays Gallery in the show "Just Look at Us Now," celebrating the 100th anniversary of America's 19th amendment giving women the right to vote. Included are works by Carla Rae Johnson and Mary McFerran and is up until Oct. 31.



Marsi Burns' original dance as a construction worker.



Writer Linda Jean Fisher performs her prose piece "Henrietta."



Rebecca Elisabeta Marya Ribeiro reading her poem "Terra Cotta."



Kitty Jospé reading her poem "Posing."