

Still Life

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Still Life

By Alexander Dinclaris

Directed by [Elizabeth Bove](#)

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Elizabeth Bove is a fine actor, as abundantly evident by the three plays in which she was featured and which I have reviewed on this site. Her portrayal of Ms. Venable in *Suddenly Last Summer* was particularly outstanding. She also appeared in a rollicking production of Larry Shue's venerable farce, *The Foreigner*, which was ingeniously directed by Noel MacDuffie. In *Still Life*, the tables have turned: Ms. Bove proves herself an excellent director and Noel MacDuffie, as a featured player, shows himself to be a skillful actor.

Still Life is an intriguing rumination, and moving examination of a group of Generation X'ers as they confront "What's it all about?" -- romance, work, friendship, and mortality. The play centers on Carrie Ann (Leticia Diaz), a successful photographer, who, subsequent to her father's death three months previously, can not bring herself pick up a camera. Through conversations, with Joanne, a professor of photography (and a one time mistress of her father) she finagles a teaching position in which her lack of being able to take photographs will not matter. Carrie Ann's tribulations over her father's death has her in a "push me-pull me" state, both welcoming and repelling those around her. Jeff (Noel MacDuffie) is a "trends analyst" working in advertising. Jeff's boss, Terry (Ari Vigoda), is a loathsome, charmless, go-getter, who is out only for himself--for success and for sex: needlessly bossing around his secretary, hitting on every woman that comes his way, and taking delight in viciously firing a troubled underling, contributing to the man's suicide. Jeff and Carrie Ann meet at a gallery opening of photos she took shortly prior to her father's death -- a series of shots of beautifully posed dead animals.

Carrie Ann and Jeff share an immediate attraction and a romance develops, and are on their way to good old-fashioned love. Jeff speaks to his old friend Sean about a health challenge that seems to be developing. Sean tries to be supportive but gloom is at hand. Carrie Ann and Jeff become a couple and share an evening of bombastic conversation with Sean and his genial wife Mary (Stacy Capone), but the evening

ends with Jeff fainting because his illness is progressing. Theo (Arthur French), Carrie Ann's late father, seen in a number of flashbacks in the final stage of his life, semi-coherently blithers about the art of photography, extolling the virtues of a photograph thinking it was taken by his daughter although it is actually one of his own.

Carrie Ann is offered a National Geographic assignment in Africa and arranges to take along an enthusiastic student Jessie (Portia Rose Lee) as her assistant. Carrie Ann is reluctant to take the job while Jeff is getting weaker, but he encourages her to get back in the game. In Africa, Carrie Ann manages to avoid shooting any photos and takes her name off the shoot in favor of Jessie. Will Carrie Ann return in time to say goodbye? Will she ever bring herself to take another photo?.

The action of this two-act play is series of twenty five or so scenes, not unlike a series of snapshots. Most of the scenes are two-character conversations of varying length, some short, some lengthy. Ms. Bove has done an extraordinary job of shaping the performance of these sustained conversations so that they flow with invisible grace. The momentum of these often intense scenes never lagged, and I found myself drawn into them, even forgetting for a time that I was in a theater. This to me is mark of **real** theater. Credit must be given to Ms. Bove's intelligent casting, selecting actors who could co-create with her such theatrical intimacy.

Ms. Bove did not just engaged a first rate cast, she welded them into an ensemble--and though the lead characters have abundant stage time, each player gets their moment. Leticia Diaz, in the complex role of Carrie Ann, wonderfully balanced both of the character's abrasive and inviting natures. Noel MacDuffie could not be more appealingly human as Jeff, Carrie Ann's doomed, soft spoken lover. Maxemillian Corkum perfectly represented the proper public goody-two shoes professor/private bitch. Ari Vigoda's nasty-souled, reprehensible Terry was so accurately a portrayal of a hyper-egotistical manipulative boss, that I began to cringe each time he made an entrance. Best friend Sean, played by Brian Edwards, was perfectly present with his sincere and authentic performance. Arthur French, as Carrie's doddering dying father Theo, raving in his pajamas, created an image and sound that cut straight to the heart. Stacy Capone played Sean's intelligent and poised wife Mary, as well as an awkward woman named Al who Terry hits on at a bar, and the stone-faced bar waitress, Michaeline. It never ceases to amaze me that one actor can portray multiple roles in the same play in such a radically different manner to the degree that you check the program to see who the extra cast member was! This was equally true for Ewa Maria Wojcik who was so totally "something else" as Lena, Terry's unsuccessful pickup, Terry's frump secretary, and Sandra, a

dimwitted married woman who Terry finally succeeds in picking up. Both Ms. Copone and Ms. Wojcik are exceptional actors who can completely transform themselves. Portia Rose Lee in the role of Jessie, the young photography student, was the picture of self-conscious youth and enthusiasm.

A "Big Questions-Big Emotions" play, such as *Still Life*, directed by someone less talented than Ms. Bove could have easily slipped into soap opera mode. Ms. Bove's fine direction intelligently sustained the power in this highly charged play, rendering it--down to its closing scene -- as poignant as poignant can be. - *Jay Reisberg*