

# Junk Shot



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Submitted by Leah Richards (/users/leah-richards) on July 28, 2018 - 10:00

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PHOTO CREDIT: JODY CHRISTOPHERSON

*Dick Pix*

Written by Daniel McCoy

Directed by Heidi Handelsman

Presented by Richard Pictures Presents at Theaterlab, NYC

July 19–August 11, 2018

As Scarlett Johansson steps back from an announced role as a trans man, and the #metoo movement continues to demonstrate its staying power, *Dick Pix*, a new play by Daniel McCoy, jumps gleefully into the current conversations surrounding gender. Running in rotation with *Perfect Teeth* (a "sibling play," also by McCoy), *Dick Pix*'s witty, self-aware comedy lets audiences have a wonderfully fun time interrogating the entire system of gender.

The first character whom we meet, Mrs. Marbleblatt (June Ballinger) is stepping down as headmistress of a private girls' school due to a scandal whose particulars we won't

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spoil here. Her introduction -- laugh-out-loud funny sprinkled with social critique and unexpected turns -- immediately sets the tone for the rest of the production, and Mrs. Marbleblatt's decision, as a newly wealthy widow, to become a patron of the arts will eventually bring her to cross paths with middling (straight, white, cisgender male) artist Calvin (David Gelles), who begins the play under pressure to come up with a show for his friend Fyn (Bruce Jones). Fyn, a gender-fluid African American, owns a gallery on New York City's Lower East Side, for which they hire two new art "handlers" (Lynne Marie Rosenberg and Erinn Holmes) to take care of the hanging, positioning, and other manual labor involved in exhibitions. When Calvin tells Grace (Kate Abbruzzese), his publicist and romantic partner, about his plan to make his own penis the subject of his show, she is less than impressed, but an incident involving her smartphone will ironically change her perspective, as well as her, Fyn, and Calvin's lives.

As one might expect, *Dick Pix* makes some fun of the conventions and self-seriousness of the art world, including some NYC-arts-and-culture-scene-specific jibes and some meta jokes aimed at theater; it also, in connection, critiques our social media age as one in which, for example, our smartphones paradoxically consume all of our minute-by-minute attention at the same time that nothing that we encounter through them can hold that attention for more than a day or two. The central focus of McCoy's satire, though, is gender norms. In order to highlight and denaturalize gendered behaviors and dynamics, *Dick Pix* brings about a sort of alienation effect by swapping the expected genders in certain situations. Grace, for example, becomes a stiletto-heeled sexual aggressor around the male art handlers, harassing them while they are just trying to work or to enjoy a drink at a bar. The handlers also endure a very accurate, albeit gender-swapped, presentation of street harassment, and Rosenberg's handler -- on the whole, a sensitive, unguarded man for whom classic Disney movies can trigger existential despair over the many injustices in the world -- plays out the scenario of a woman stranded alone at night, while Calvin himself is objectified through his art in direct contradiction to the artistic statement that he claimed to be making. An uproarious Aztec-sacrifice nightmare sequence positions gender as a performance within defined roles, breaking the fourth wall at the sequence's end to further emphasize gender's theatricality. A similar and very effective analogy is introduced through having women play

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the male art handlers, who are also former construction workers: it is not that they are playing gender-fluid people or trans men; it is just that in theater, if characters are identified as male or female, we as the audience accept that, no matter the gender of the performer, underlining gender's socially constructed performativity and, consequently, the exaggerated importance attached to its so-called natural or proper expression.

Most of the characters in *Dick Pix* have more than one side: Calvin can be a little obnoxious and self-interested, but he is also a good friend to Fyn; Grace undergoes some important growth but also, as mentioned, serially sexually harasses the handlers; and our sympathy for the sensitive, woke handler is complicated by one of the flashbacks that, along with scattered confessions to the audience, provide additional insight into these people. Gelles and Abbruzzese give effortlessly excellent performances, including in a clever device in which each essentially plays the other while recounting their conversations and which takes a pointed symbolic turn late in the show. Rosenberg's deadpan earnestness garners lots of laughs on its own and works as half of a well-balanced comedic pairing with Holmes. Jones is charming and assured but also vulnerable as Fyn, and Ballinger flat out steals scenes as Mrs. Marbleblatt embraces her freedom from the bonds of upper-middle class womanhood (but still doesn't own a computer).

*Dick Pix* shines in the execution of its combination of winning silliness and social satire. Don't miss your chance to experience it in the flesh. - Leah Richards & John Ziegler

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