



The audience assembled under the Manhattan Bridge for Janet Biggs' *Wet Exit*



Janet Biggs' *Wet Exit*, with projection, mezzo-soprano and kayakers



Janet Biggs' *Wet Exit*, with mezzo-soprano Carol Grayson Johnson



Kayakers in Janet Biggs' *Wet Exit*



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The *Wet Exit* crew, with Biggs to the right

Janet Biggs WETNESS VISIBLE by Charlie Finch

I can always count on one of my favorite artists, **Janet Biggs**, to be coolness under pressure, and such was the case at the end of last month at the premiere of her outdoor performance *Wet Exit* on the East River, sponsored by Smack Melon Gallery and Mr. and Mrs. David Walentas, to close the DUMBO arts festival.

Friday's performance and a dress rehearsal had been cancelled, and a tugboat on which the drummer from the band Mars Volta was to bang away had also cancelled due to the weather, but the clouds held between the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges, as the grand mezzo-soprano Carol Grayson Johnson began to sing, "small things, small patterns, take it slow" (to paraphrase), sinking me into a zone of contemplation as the ambient sound of a subway train bridged us overhead.

Wet Exit nods ever so slightly to 9/11, but it is really about the practice of all the arts (including sports!) in the chaos of New York and the world that gazes upon our great town. Five champion kayakers -- Margaret Mann, Lev Grote, Jake Lewis, Agnes Nakhapetian and Agnes Simon -- are the key to the piece. Kayaking at night in the river's dirty waves and the unforgiving spotlights of Janet's technowiz hubby Bob Cmar is not easy, but the team managed to simulate peaceful syncopation and noise-drenched conflict without zipping or tipping, and then climb out of the water for between-performance interviews with the media, while art star **Eve Sussman** took their photos from all angles, and not even perspire.

Balancing the athletes were triumphant modal sounds, cello and electric violins moaning in concupiscent joy, in front of videos of Janet's water endurance work: near-drowning in pools and drifting through the ice. The total effect of 15 minutes was like an eternal massage. I am not the peaceful type but Janet's work always gently drags sublimity from within me.

Now she is off in Indonesia to spelunk into a dangerous, slightly dormant volcano. My heart awaits the artistic results.

CHARLIE FINCH is co-author of *Most Art Sucks: Five Years of Coagula* (Smart Art Press).