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## The Marvelous, the Miraculous and the Mutilated

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Penny Arcade and Mink Stole in The Mutilated

### **Penny Arcade and Mink Stole Share the Stage in the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival**

*I think the strange, the crazed, the queer  
 Will have their holiday this year  
 And for a while, A little while,*

*There will be pity for the wild.\**

Sometimes mysterious forces bring people together. Opposites attract, but so do not so opposites, and in this year's Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival two performers who've never worked together unite as mismatched friends in one of Williams's later plays, *The Mutilated*, written in 1966.

Both performance art legend Penny Arcade and actress Mink Stole have underground street cred that goes back several decades. Both have worked with Charles Ludlam and the Theater of the Ridiculous; both made their mark as performers in works that celebrate society's misfits; both occupy a prominent space in the history of transgressive film and performance of the past 40 years; and each remembers Provincetown as having played an important role in their work.

"Provincetown is a place you internalize," says Arcade. "You don't really have to be [physically] in Provincetown. It was such a formative experience for me."

Arcade came here at the age of 16 with a group of young gay boys and a paper bag with clothes in it for a weekend back in 1967. At the end of the weekend, she said, "Why go back?" and stayed for three months. Looking back on it now, she says, "I just don't know how I ate!"

Stole, who is best known for being one of only two actors to have appeared in all of John Waters's feature-length films (as well as one short), met Waters right here in Provincetown in 1966 when her sister introduced them. She wound up staying in town with him and some others and when the summer was over, both went back to Baltimore and stayed in touch—and the rest is history.

"I'm as excited about coming to Provincetown as I am about doing the play. And, I'm as excited about doing the play as I am about coming to Provincetown—It's a double-edged happy," says Mink Stole.

*The Mutilated* was first performed right about the time each performer was in Provincetown—how fitting that they should work together on this play in this town now.

Each actress brings something different to her role, but as Arcade puts it, "You almost always get a role that's kind of like you."

Arcade plays Celeste, a hustler with a big bosom motivated by the need to survive in an unforgiving environment, and she does whatever she can to survive. Stole's character, Trinket Dugan, is a wealthy woman who is as lost as Celeste. Due to a medical procedure that leaves her "mutilated" and de-feminized, she uses cash to bolster her value to others. Her "mutilation," a mastectomy, is a source of shame for her, and Celeste is the only one who knows the truth. When the play begins, Celeste has threatened to tell others about this mutilation and has in fact started to do so. It's not exactly a healthy friendship.

"They're two middle-aged women who knew each other when they were a lot younger and had a lot of possibilities," Arcade says.

Of her character, Stole says, "She's a Texas oil heiress but she chooses to live in a flea bag hotel because that's where she's comfortable. She was once in P.R. but then she had a mastectomy and then her world fell apart... You have to remember it was written in the 1960s and mastectomies were not discussed: it was a woman's great shame."

Here we see Williams's uncanny knack for understanding and empathizing with women, but also for understanding desperation. It's significant that the play takes place on Christmas Eve, a time that, for many of us, is fraught with complicated memories, expectations, and family dysfunction.

"Christmas is a time that puts into stark relief people and the distance between the haves and have-nots," Arcade says. "All of these issues of belonging and not belonging, and the families that people form, and the need to be accepted."

Stole was drawn particularly to what she calls the "wonderful, chewy dialogue." She likens this to John Waters's scripts. Certainly both Williams and Waters champion outsiders, but Stole says they are also very different fundamentally.

"The worlds that John Waters has created are certainly extreme views of the world, and the world that Tennessee Williams has created in this play is much more of a real world. It existed, or some version of it did at that time," she explains.

Arcade has been returning to Provincetown frequently over the past three years, performing at the Afterglow Festival earlier this month and teaching at the Fine Arts Work Center, as well. Her work as a performance

artist is renowned around the world for its authenticity, her vibrant stage presence, and ability to move her audiences with material from her own life, which has been a struggle since she left home at 13. She first came to public recognition as a teenager in Andy Warhol's 1971 film *Women in Revolt* with Holly Woodlawn and Candy Darling, but by the late 1970s, she parted ways with the Warhol Factory. Her most meaningful work has been in the realm of performance art, even as the Warhol connection remains a point of interest for so many.

Stole says she "fell into" acting through John Waters, but in addition to doing his films, she's acted in others, including the Eating Out series of gay romantic comedies. She has also done a lot of theater work, including *A Winter's Tale* with the L.A. Women's Shakespeare Company, which she cites as a highlight, as well as recording and touring as Mink Stole and her Wonderful Band. Her first CD is entitled *Do Re MiNK*, just released this year.

*The lost will find a public place  
Where their names are not unknown  
And there, oh, there an act of grace  
May lift the weight of stone on stone  
A miracle, A miracle!  
The finding of a love unknown.\**

*The one-act Tennessee Williams play The Mutilated will be performed during the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival Thursday, Sept, 26 – Sunday, September 29 at the Gifford House, 9 Carver St., Provincetown. For specific showtimes, tickets (\$25) and information, call 866.789.TENN (8366) Ext. 1 or visit [twptown.org](http://twptown.org). During the festival, tickets can also be purchased at the box office at the Crown & Anchor, 247 Commercial St., Provincetown.*

\* From Tennessee Williams's *The Mutilated* (1966)

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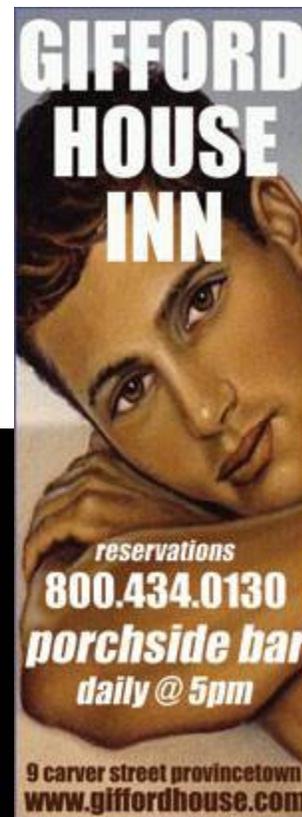
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