

## DESIGNER THEATRE FROM NORTHERN LIGHT DIRECTOR

By JOHN CHARLES

The stage is dark. Suddenly two people swathed in black slide down ropes from the ceiling.

What an opening for a play! Only later do you ponder whether it meant anything, and regretfully conclude it didn't.

*The Corporate Nightmare Of Rembrandt Brown*, Northern Light's season-ender at the Kaasa, explodes with colorful images as director Gyllian Raby continues her imaginative exploration of visual and sonic stagecraft. For Raby, words

are just the starting point for theatre — not the be-all and end-all. True enough, but images should deepen the play's meaning, not be a substitute for meaning. In *Rembrandt Brown* there's a lot of flash but not much heat.

Calgary playwright Blake Brooker has written a clever, amusing satire on corporate jobs, and the dire consequences of being fired. Rembrandt (Max McLaughlin) is busily writing a speech for a hard-edged career women's group, but his boss lady (Giselle Lemire) isn't impressed. Before Rembrandt can feel the knife in his back, he's out on the street examining his severance package.

What follows is a series of waking-and-sleeping skirmishes. A nightmare of going to work mirrors an earlier

upbeat scene of the same events. We see Rembrandt walking naked into his old office, and the backstabbers cower before him. In reality, his girl (Patricia Darbasie) leaves him, his buddy (Kevin McGugan) brings him job-counselling books, while Rembrandt curls up to watch TV and play with toys.

This is familiar stuff, already mocked and embellished by books, movies and comic skits. What Brooker brings is a quirky sense of humor, and a scaffolding for Raby's colorful melding of sound-score, lights, and rapidly moving bodies.

In the play's best scene, Rembrandt wistfully contrasts his situation with Fred Flinstone's — Fred was always hired back the day after he was fired. Other TV refer-

ences seem slightly desperate, as if Brooker himself was sitting at home all day trying to fill out his scenario, but watching TV instead.

What works? A doll house which suddenly bursts into flame, suggesting the end of family-life dreams. Or Rembrandt, on the set's moving floor, walking and walking, then standing still, as he clutches a flower. As the floor continues to move, he recedes, looking vulnerable and alone.

Raby's cast of five are strong, as is the ingenious set by Nigel Scott and Morris Becker's lighting, but she seems too enamoured with style as a thing in itself. *Rembrandt Brown* is sassy and entertaining, but it ends up as designer theatre



—Photo by Perry Mah

Cyl (Patricia Darbasie) slides back to Rembrandt (Max McLaughlin) in *Corporate Nightmare*, at the Kaasa Theatre until May 21.