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Poli Dégaine (*Punchy Draw*) Aug. 18-21 at American Living Room.

COUCH POTATO THEATER

Before the city had more festivals on the cultural calendar than a convention of Cinderellas, Kristin Marting, co-founder and artistic director of HERE, created a new performance concept called the **American Living Room**.

This was 18 years ago, but the reasons for the festival then are the same as they are now—

to promote interesting and experimental work in a comfortable setting. So comfortable that the audience seating is largely made up of sofas, club chairs and recliners.

This year's American Living Room is a particularly long one—running through Sept. 2, it's 38 days worth of new material on a dizzying spectrum of ideas and themes. Glancing at the synopses on HERE's website, some pieces seem like a tease: Peter McCabe's *In the Company of Trees*, which "examines things that are real, cannot be perceived through the senses, but can be understood in a theater;" Vangelina Theater's *Voom*, which "rescues the camp, extravagant elements from Robert Wilson's *Voom* portraits."

Other works are astonishingly topical, like Jamie Lyn Smith's comedic *Free and Compulsory: My Year in Education*, which focuses on a first-year teacher in one of the worst high schools in Gotham. In *Floating Brothel*, set in 1789 and performed by an ensemble of actors on a 3-foot by 6-foot stage, "a 13-year-old prostitute, a savvy con artist and a fallen maidservant are shipped to a male penal colony," while Joanne Hudson's *Pop Art* is naturally inspired by Andy Warhol. There's also the Human Company's *Schiele*, about "tortured artist" Egon Schiele; excerpts from *The Passion of Saint Thomas More*, Garrett Fisher's new opera; and West Hyler and Tim J. Lord's "*We Declare You a Terrorist*," just for a dose of something uneasily political. (Leonard Jacobs)

Through Sept. 2. HERE, 145 6th Ave. (enter at Dominick St.), 212-352-3101, www.here.org.