

# SLEEP**NOMORE**

KAYLA SULEWSKI

Dear Reader,

*Sleep No More* is an interactive, immersive, wild, and dark theater production put on by the Punchdrunk Company in New York City. Believe it or not, I first heard about it on Gossip Girl (no judgement, please). A few months later, I heard about it again on the Freakonomics podcast where one of my favorite psychologists, Philip Zimbardo, was discussing the psychology of autonomy - in layman's terms, how people act differently when they are wearing a mask, or when they no they won't be caught. Zimbardo ended up referencing *Sleep No More* as a bizarre social experiment, not only get the audience involved with the production but also stripping the audience of their identities. Now this, I must admit, piqued my interest.

I looked into *Sleep No More* and learned that it was an interactive production of Macbeth. While I wasn't originally a fan of Shakespeare, I've grown pretty fond of the guy this year and that just further my desire to explore *Sleep No More*. Lacking the resources to drive down to New York City for the weekend, I figured some pictures, articles, and videos might quench my desire to experience it firsthand. That was how I came about making it the topic of my multi-genre piece.

When I first tried to do research into *Sleep No More*, I came up surprisingly short. The Wikipedia page is fairly barren, there are relatively few pictures of what the production is like, and I couldn't find a single video taking me inside. Because it was so elusive, such an enigma, of course I had to dig a little deeper. When I chose it as my topic for my multi-genre piece, I actually had the notion that I wanted to expose some of the secrets of the Punchdrunk Company and their mysterious production, so with an informational piece and an exposé on the rooms within the hotel, I began uncovering what *Sleep No More* was actually like. While I couldn't incorporate all of the details, secrets, and tricks I learned in the interviews I watched and read, I tried to capture the experience the best I could in my final piece which takes you, the reader, into the McKittrick Hotel for a night I hope I get to experience one day.

Enjoy this look at *Sleep No More*, and I hope it piques your interest as it did mine.

Sincerely,  
Kayla Sulewski

Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!  
Macbeth does murder sleep" - the innocent sleep,  
Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care,  
The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast.

- Macbeth, Act 2, Scene 2

# PUNCHDRUNKNEWS

Internet Blog for Punchdrunk® Co.

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## Dark. Sexy. Real. Macbeth Meets 1940's Noir.

By Kayla Sulewski

Something dark and sexy has spawned in a string of abandoned warehouses on W. 27th Street in New York City, and it reeks of Macbeth. It's a strange phenomena, attracting guests of all vocations before it steals their face, their voice, and even their morals. The warehouses, however, are not what they seem. Upon entry, one finds oneself in the five-story, 93-room set of the McKittrick Hotel. But you won't have too much time to look around before you're handing a playing card (your 'ticket') and a faceless white mask reminiscent of Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*. You're delivered explicit instructions to remain silent at all

times before being set free into this 1940's noir nightmare. If you thought this was going to be another plush-red-seats and intermission play, you were wrong.

Sleep No More is new style of theater, completely immersive and interactive, albeit a tad creepy. Beginning as a theater piece under the London-based Punchdrunk company, Sleep No More began in Boston for a few short runs before relocating on a more permanent basis to New York, where the audience is even more wild and daring. What makes Punchdrunk's production so incredible is not just the fact that it lacks a stage and seating, but that it encourages the

audience to become a part of the show. 'Visitors' in the hotel are free to roam through the dozens of rooms, rifle through the drawers, read the letters strewn across the desks, and poke around in closets and corners. They watch in silence as the actors perform their pieces as any number of characters from *Lady Macbeth* to Duncan to mere hotel employees.

If the historical feel and impeccable detail of every room on set, from the asylum to the graveyard, isn't enough to floor you, then the performances of the actors surely will. Each performer wanders about the hotel, inviting you with silently suggestive

## "This is a show and experience not to be missed!"

- [SociallySuperlative.com](#)

gestures to follow them, dressed in any number of eccentric outfits from Deco-era evening clothes to scanty lingerie to even nothing at all. They move quickly and fluidly, becoming a part of every room and making the McKittrick Hotel come to life. And it's always a surprise to stumble upon them amidst a performance. Actors are immersed in a variety of scenarios from dancing in the ballroom, conjuring the Weird Sisters, killing one another, washing off blood, or even making love. At some point, the line between performer and audience disappears, and the visitor becomes part of the show.

Something so innovative, undiscovered, and wholly undone before is bound to cause a stir amongst people experiencing it for the first time. An interview on [Freakonomics.com](#) with Felix Barrett, the creator of Sleep No More, explores the various audience reactions to the visceral, interactive experience. Regular performers on the show recount tales of visitors intervening in the performance and trying to catch a falling actress or hand a naked Lady Macbeth a towel, as though the masks allow them a sense of responsibility to protect the vulnerable performers. However the masks give some audience members a sense of autonomy, freedom from blame, and even recklessness. For some, the line between right and wrong fades as the mask goes on and anonymous visitors recall themselves pushing and shoving others, stealing artifacts off the shelves and from suitcases, trying on the actors clothes that were left lying around, taunting people, testing them, and pushing their own boundaries as well as others.

**"It's more filmic than theatrical," said Felix Barrett, Punchdrunk's artistic director. "I see the show as a film, a living film, and you're a camera moving within it."**

- [Huffington Post](#)

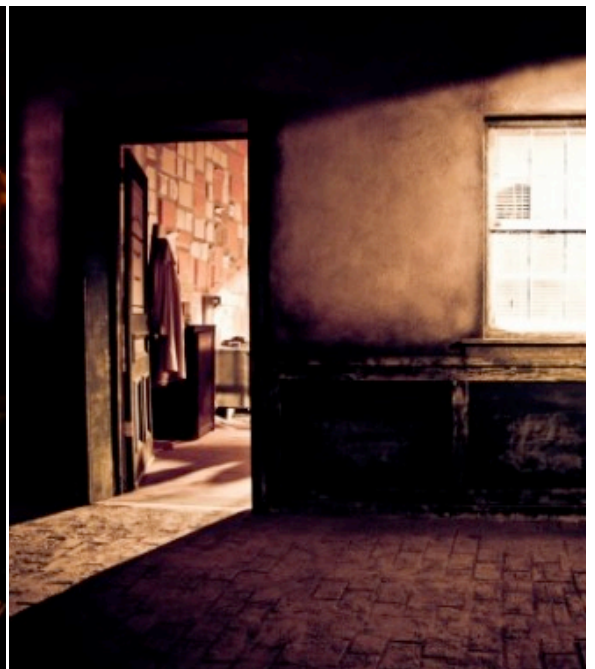
In all, Sleep No More has become a mysterious piece of theater, an enigma, but one that draws in its audience for an experience like no other. If you want to be shocked, amazed, thrown, confused, bold, daring, dominant, submissive, lost in the ride, or totally in control of yourself...Sleep No More is for you.

The tickets are now on sale on their website, [sleepnomorenyc.com](http://sleepnomorenyc.com), and are \$75 - completely worth it for this one-of-a-kind three hour experience. Entry times are Monday-Thursday at 7:00, 7:20, 7:40, and 8:00 PM and Friday-Saturday at 7:00, 7:20, 7:40, 8:00, 11:00, 11:20, 11:40, and midnight.

That's all for now, readers, and as always, check out more Punchdrunk news at <http://punchdrunk.org.uk>.

### We're Not in New York Anymore...

Sleep No More resides in two warehouses located in Chelsea, New York, but you'd never be able to tell. The warehouses have been beautifully transformed into the McKittrick Hotel, thanks to hundreds of volunteers and a budget of over a million dollars.



**Sleep**

shall

**neither**

**night**

nor

**day**

Hang

**upon**

his

**pent-house**

lid.

- Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 3

# The McKittrick Hotel

## A Glimpse Inside

By Kayla Sulewski

Inside the incredible set of the McKittrick Hotel, two abandoned warehouses in New York City, is a miraculously designed five-story, 93-room, 1940's noir-style hotel. Amidst this labyrinth of sets roam upwards of twenty Shakespearean actors dressed to the nines and interacting with their surroundings in a way that can only be described as visceral.

While the actors are a phenomena in themselves, the rooms are a complete other experience. Intricately decorated, they range from the grand ballroom to the master bath, to rooms not commonly found in a hotel, such as the apothecary and the graveyard.

### The Infirmary

One of the larger rooms is set up as a sort of 'ghost infirmary'. It has eight matching metal-framed beds set up against the walls. (The beds were all ordered off the internet, but one of the associate directors says knowing where the set came from or the hundreds of hours that went into building it kind of ruins the magic.)

The infirmary is decorated with small lamps, filled out patient charts, and crucifixes. It's also completely empty. That's part of the supernatural allure.

Across the hall is an office filled with catalogued hair samples (most donated by volunteers) of all different hues. The eerie feel of the place has even encouraged some visitors to give locks of their own hair, truly breaking that fourth wall between audience and performer.

### Sweet Shop

Perhaps one of the most frequented rooms by guests is the sweet shop. It's set up in the style of an old English candy shop with backlit jars of multicolored sweets filling each one. It includes traditional treats like pear drops, striped toffee-centered humbugs, and aniseed balls. The best part is probably the smell and the delicious memories it brings back; before every performance the room is doused with a caramel scented spray to draw in hungry visitors.

### Hecate's Apothecary (pictured right)

Enter if you dare the medicinal cave of the goddess of witchcraft herself. The room is incredibly authentic, filled with all manners of drying herbs and leaves. Woodsy and flowery scents fill the room from the bouquets of vegetation hanging from the ceiling. The shelves are stocked with soil, sand, trinkets, bugs, and other mysterious tinctures known only to the witch herself. Many of the arrangements (some of which include peppermint geraniums, lemon leaves, thistle, and coxcomb) were donated by a local florist, and the others were handpicked and assembled by volunteers.

### Taxidermy Room

It looks like something straight out of the Bates Motel, or maybe a room of Wesley's mansion from *Road House*. The room is filled with animals frozen in mid-battle; lions ready to pounce and badgers under attack bring a sense of urgency and threat to the room. They peer out at you from their dioramas, and for a second you may forget that they're stuffed.

Most of the animals included are from the collection of Frank J. Zitz, a taxidermist in Rhineback, NY. The genius behind *Sleep No More*, Felix Barrett, adds that "about half of his shop, his life's work, is in the show [...] We're grateful because the sheer quantity of the material that we needed to make the space feel real and authentic and unquestionably alive is difficult to source."

### Macduff's Children's Room

Perhaps one of the more instrumental rooms in the hotel, Macduff's children's room shows the violence and horror surrounding the murder of the Macduff family, an eye-opening and important aspect of the original play. With some theatrical trickery and the use of a full length mirror, and otherwise innocent and serene kid's room is transformed into a gruesome crime scene.

With half of the room containing a freshly made bed, children's toys, and some swaying curtains, and the other holding slashed sheets, pooling blood, and spatter on the walls, Macduff's children's room is one of the most surreal rooms in the hotel. As the slaughtering of the Macduff family was a critical element in Macbeth's character arc and the entire story, this room clearly conveys the importance of the scene with a dark and haunting atmosphere.

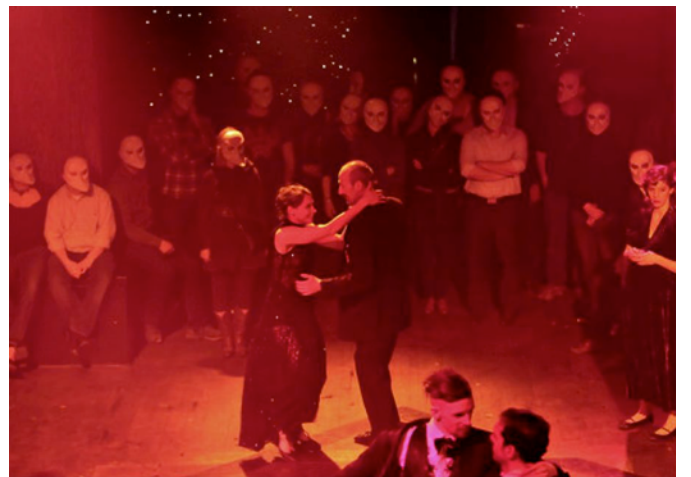


*"Nature has this huge power within this play, this sense of destiny and nothing you can do to stop it," Mr. Barrett said. "Things are collected, crafted and manipulated."*



Images, clockwise, starting from top left

- a rooftop bar called the Gallow Green, frequented by visitors after the performance
- the infirmary
- two of the dozens of actors in the show
- a couple performs a dance in the ballroom, watched by several visitors
- again, two actors perform a scene watched by several visitors
- the main lobby of the hotel
- Lady and Lord Macbeth in the royal bathroom





Duncan is in his grave

After life's fitful fever he sleeps well;

Treason has done his worst: nor steel, nor poison,

Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,

Can touch him further.

-Macbeth, Act 3, Scene 2

**It's a Friday night.**

Your friends invite you out.  
No explanation.  
Just an address.

You play along.  
Stand outside in the cold.  
Waiting but they don't show up.

So you take out your ticket.  
*Sleep No More.*  
A theater production?

You hate the theater.  
But they open the doors.  
So you go in.

It's a hotel lobby.  
Red, gold. Hardwood floors.  
A bellboy in a suit.

He beckons you to the elevator.  
The strangers flock in response.  
Metal doors slide closed.

"You are not to speak."  
His explicit instructions.  
Already you are silent.

"Do not remove your mask."  
Big and white and it has a beak.  
You become part of the faceless crowd.

Lurches to a stop.  
Doors creak open.  
You're not in New York anymore.

A few steps out.  
Everyone hesitates.  
Everyone is a scared white blob.

"Be free."  
You take the lead.  
A few steps out, and into another room.

A desk with a man behind it.  
He's not wearing a mask.  
A feather pen sits in his hand.

You tentatively watch him.  
He pays no notice.  
The mask is freeing.

He doesn't know who you are.  
You aren't responsible for your actions.  
You aren't yourself.  
You are free.

**You're part of the show.**

You move to stand behind him.  
Peer over his shoulder.  
He's writing a letter.

*Lady Macbeth, witches, Macduff.*  
You recognize the names.  
High-school Shakespeare.

Curious, you move to the next room.  
Animals poised, ready to pounce.  
Stuffed. Threatening. Next room.

There's actually a tree here.  
Green leaves and a chirping bird.  
A man standing underneath.

He's calling upon three witches,  
and you recognize Macbeth.  
The story floods back with his words.

Silently, masked figures join you.  
They appears from the bushes.  
Poems and chants and premonitions.

You watch with baited breath.  
Everything is real.  
These are not actors.

You are standing in a forest,  
watching this ethereal exchange,  
and you are just another tree, a ghost.

They call forth premonitions.  
Blood. Death. Murder.  
Three dance, then leave.

Macbeth flees in anguish.  
The silent sheep follow him.  
But you see a witch.

She is behind the bushes.  
Beckons to you with a curled finger.  
White mask. You aren't you. You follow.

She leads you through the bushes.  
Through a door you didn't see.  
To a room with only one entrance.

Dried flowers hang from the ceiling.  
The shelves are filled with vials.  
An apothecary of sorts.

She gives you a coy smile.  
Takes a pink flower pedal from a jar.  
You close your eyes.  
She is gone.

**You aren't alone.**

You stumble your way through the hall.  
The witch has disoriented you.  
What time is it?

You smell something sweet,  
and follow your nose  
to a room lined with candy.

You smile.  
See someone stuffing their pockets.  
Pop a gumball in your mouth. Minty.

Turn to the next room.  
Beds lined against a wall.  
An infirmary?

Patient charts are scrawled on.  
Beds are messy.  
It smells of bleach.

Three doors down.  
You follow a girl in a red dress.  
She's white-faced.

A children's room.  
Macduff's.  
It's surprisingly normal.

A toddler-sized bed.  
Wooden kids toys.  
A rockinghorse.

But then you turn.  
See the mirror.  
See the mess.

Sheets torn to pieces.  
Blood pooling on the floor.  
The walls are red.

Crime scene.  
Your stomach turns.  
It's all too real.

You stumble back.  
Get lost in the crowd.  
You're shuffled along.

It's a rooftop bar.  
The masks are removed.  
Real life flows back through your veins.

Everyone is buzzing.  
Things are yelled and whispered.  
It's over for now.  
But you're still part of the show.

We will perform

in measure,

time,

and place:

So,

thanks to all

at once

and to each one,

Whom we invite

to see us

crown'd

at Scone.

-Macbeth, Act 5, Scene 8,  
The End



## End Notes

### Informational Piece

For my first piece, I chose to write an informational article on *Sleep No More*. I wanted this to be my first piece because it introduces the reader to my topic, and gives them a good understanding of what the production is, who put it on, and why they should care about it.

When I wrote it, I was aiming for a newspaper article, however somewhere along the line my tone became more casual and I had the idea of setting it up as a blog post. The format of the pages to make it look a blog most from a fictional blog called Punchdrunk News became the format for my entire piece, both because it made the project look cohesive and also because I liked the idea of keeping it all as though you could find it in the blog. I think it works with my initial intent of exposing some secrets about *Sleep No More* for people who haven't been.

### Expository/Photographic Piece

I chose to make my second piece a closer look at the McKittrick Hotel through short descriptions of rooms and the inclusion of photos. I thought this was important to include because there were many references in the articles I read about the hotel being so detailed and exact that I wanted to take a closer look at it. I chose to examine the rooms because, honestly, I couldn't find much information about the actors or the behind-the-scenes work.

With the description of rooms I found interesting or bizarre, I included photos from inside the hotel. My goal for this piece was for it to act as an exposé on the hotel. I wanted the room descriptions to be vivid enough that you could picture them, and I wanted the photos to give a better feel of the atmosphere.

### Poem

With my final piece, I wanted to be more creative. I also wanted to step away from showing you what *Sleep No More* is like and begin to tell you what it's like. With this poem, written in second person, I wanted to give the reader a chance to experience *Sleep No More* firsthand and take them through the various things I find to be so alluring about the production: the sense of autonomy from wearing a mask, the struggle to stay silent, the wonder and amazement, the feeling that you can do anything since no one knows who you are, the rapture of seeing the artists perform, the loss of time in the hotel, experiencing each room, and the chance to interact with the performers and become part of the production.

I hope this poem was able to bring you to New York City and put you in the hotel, and I hope you felt like you were experiencing even a part of the wonderment that is *Sleep No More*.

### Glue

For my filler pages, I chose to incorporate quotes from the original *Macbeth* written by good ole Shakespeare. While the performers in *Sleep No More* don't actually follow a script, all of the words spoken in the play are able to be found at some place in the hotel, whether it be painted on the walls or scrawled in a letter that lay forgotten on a desk.