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Japanese butoh dance

Ugly and raw, grotesque and frightening.

At Fylkingen, Stockholm, Sweden

Siblings opens ambitiously and in style, with 20 minutes of darkness. When SU-EN Butoh Company invites to the spring program at Fylkingen, Butoh Breeze, the intention is not only to show performance but also to offer a chance for deeper understanding of originally Japanese art form. Ankoku Butoh, the Dance of Darkness, created by Tatsumi Hijikata 40 years ago has today very few but enthusiastic practitioners around the world. So the audience is blindfolded when the Dutch artist VLK M presents Unknown Territory. We sit in silence and stillness, listening to the darkness within, the breath. Forced? Actually not, even if it really demands a lot from the audience. Some will fall asleep, some will leave the room, but most of us still remain; preparing to see the performance Siblings, a duo by SU-EN (Susanna Åkerlund) and the Dutch dancer Frank van de Ven. Both dancers have worked for a long time in Japan in different Butoh traditions and it is this difference, friction and encounter between the dancers that makes this one-hour long performance so exciting, in spite of the occasional gap and sprawl, a feature inherent in the nature of improvisation.

SIBLINGS is a mainly improvised piece. The starting point is the intertwining of sister and brother, who searchingly move, at times slowly and precise or spastically and clumsy. The performance is cryptic but rich in associations. The two remind of cripples, birds, leaves. They break away of each other and are attracted again. SU-EN is more closed, precise and compact; Frank van de Ven is more open and free, fluttering and loose. This is butoh close to the roots: raw and ugly, grotesque and frightening, far away from Sankai Juku's polished, estetic performance art.

Here the darkness is present, the body exposed: butoh.