

Written by: Örjan Abrahamsson

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East meets West at dance festival. Performance in the midst of bodies, butter and dirt.

Dance

Asian Body and Beyond

Venue: Moderna Dansteatern, Stockholm

Is it possible that the difference between east and west, between Europe and Asia, can be explained through such a trivial thing as how we sit? On a chair? On the floor?

The choreographer SU-EN - artist name for Susanna Åkerlund - offers the hypothesis in a panel discussion with the other participating dancers, choreographers and artists at the dance festival Asian Body & Beyond at Moderna Dansteatern. A small, ambitious festival with artists from India, Japan, Singapore and Indonesia.

To sit on the floor requires a more forward balance in the body, that creates a small, but possibly crucial definition of the body that brings another interpretation of the body on stage. Like in Japanese butoh or classical Indian dance.

Performance artist Jason Lim from Singapore continues the thought and brings it into the most private room: the lavatory. And he illustrates what he means: the westerner's fear of, on an eastern toilet, while squatting, falling backwards. Not the fear of the emptiness, but of the shit.

Which touches upon another central theme under the festival, even if the opposites of clean and dirty scarcely are a unique Asian phenomenon. As in Japanese Hiroko Tsuchimoto's videowork "There is there". With SU-EN dressed in cocoon like shining white cloth that pupates. She smudges herself with -and eats - mud. Japanese butoh has always been built from the fascination for the unclean, the dirty. The so non-humanly human.

More direct and straightforward political is Indonesian Melati Suryodarmo's butter performance, where she, dressed in red high-heeled shoes and short black dress, dances in 7,5 kilo butter. She dances like a stripper, falls, rises, falls, and so on. At Moderna Dansteatern, furthermore, she dances with nine more women, all as if isolated on their own butter island.

What appears absurdly comical and sticky in the beginning, becomes more and more disturbing and thought-provoking.

The piece starts off as a mainstream form of entertainment, but ends up in an accusation, both calm and strongly feministic, post-colonial and anti-capitalistic; are you really prepared to pay to see a woman - a human being - be humiliated?

Örjan Abrahamsson