

Body reconstruction. After the premiere of the "Desert Rose" performance by the Gdańsk based butoh dancer TO-EN. The visiting performance on the Malarńia stage at the Theatre Wybrzeże in Gdańsk.

The face draws immediate attention. Even though it is mute, bare – without any trace of lipstick and pale. And it is the face that stars the key role here. But the body ...well, it does incredible things.

Butoh was born in the 50s in Japan as a profound avant-garde. Tatsumi Hijikata, a dancer and choreographer, is considered the key initiator of the genre. He revolutionized the outlook on the body performing on stage. Whereas the area of a chest is crucial to a ballet dancer, the energy of a butoh dancer is placed really low, in their abdomen, where, according to the Japanese, a heart - this spirit of matter, is located. So much for the theory.

When you are watching the butoh dancer TO-EN, it seems that the spirit is also revolving around the seemingly inanimate face. It is the latter that rules the body, chest and abdomen; it initiates the rhythm, gives direction, sometimes with blunt eroticism and threat. Apparently dead, but, in fact, living the life of its own.

"Butoh was born in the Japanese body, so if I want to dance it, I need to reconstruct somehow my European body" – this is TO-EN's own statement. I was deeply interested in this reconstruction, even though I did not have the slightest idea what to expect. And what I saw, was beyond any theories. The dancer moves each individual muscle; she even seems to be juggling with her bones. As if replacing one with another, drives joints and sinews. Within split second she re-builds her whole anatomy. How does she manage to reassemble everything back together after such a surgical modification – is more than I can imagine. But TO-EN's body juggling is far from a circus-like acrobatics; it rather resembles writing a poem. When she enters the stage, in the majesty of the classic black dress, one has the impression of her drifting on buskins. Are we being under illusion? Yes, this too, but a manipulation of senses and mystery accompanies the audience from the first moments of the performance. From the moment we enter the foyer, where the ushers offer each newcomer a smartly wrapped candy rose. The flower is amazingly beautiful and tacky at the same time; you feel like eating it, even though, from the very beginning you suspect that rather than tasty, it will be just vulgar and sweet. It seduces because it is pink and ideal. The usher's gift is not accidental. The title – "Desert Rose" – translates as a beautiful flower that grows in the barren and lifeless environment. Therefore this beauty exists just for its own sake.

The performance reveals the destiny of a human being, who desires goods of this world, falls prey to its illusion and finally becomes vulnerable to its seduction. So, you are going to eat this sweet rose and what next what? – the dancer seems to ask. A tag attached to the candy flower keeps tempting throughout the whole evening: "Taste the juicy colour as it smoothly melts into your mouth". Did anyone give in?

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