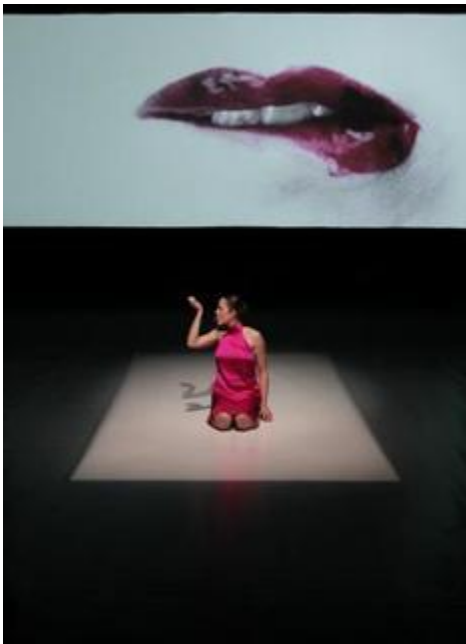




TEATR DLA WAS



REVIEW



Phot. Natalia Osuch

18/05/15

## ROSE BLOSSOMS WITH SACRIFICE

### Desert Rose

*Desire, sweetness, temptation*

TO-EN Butoh Company, Gdańsk

Director: TO-EN  
Performer: TO-EN  
Premiere: 02/12/2014

"Desert Rose. Desire, sweetness, temptation" is a butoh performance that opened the programme of the "Japanese Weekend" at the Gdańsk Shakespeare Theatre. TO-EN is a Polish artist who was apprenticed by the butoh master SU-EN. Butoh developed in the mid fifties in Japan and originated from a deep avant-garde, which later has developed into various styles as each particular master of the dance develops it in their own way. The form is firmly based in the environment surrounding the artist. Following TO-EN's opinion, we should be talking of a human rather than an artist dancing butoh and that is also the reason why the dancer does not divide her lifetime into a private domain and the other destined to art, but keeps her body in discipline, trying to be observant to the fact, how the own body occupies the space. A well-trained body and focused mind pay back with openness to the world, perceptiveness and the desire to share the truth discovered.

The "Desert Rose" performance is a creative meditation over the phenomenon of a desert rose, a flower budding with a futile beauty, as it remains unappreciated by anyone and next, it decomposes in extreme conditions. This exotic motif is the point of departure for the dancer. However, being an observant person, living "here and now", she roots this image in pop culture. The impulse that gave a spark to the "Desert Rose" production were the photographs by the recognized artist – David LaChapelle – a watchful observant of the pop culture himself. What makes TO-EN's art difficult to apprehend is the fact, that the artist exposes the audience to the overwhelming reality. The omnipresent image of a body, glamour stylistics and the culture of pervasive hoardings – we have got used to them as a part of our reality, however, when shown onstage they become oppressive. When we are forced to change our perspective and focus on what usually looms at the background: advertisements, which are usually given just a brief glimpse, magazine covers or stylistics of the by-passers, suddenly we start perceiving our own environment as an extreme living-condition: our desert. From within the empty stage, the audience is confronted with dazzling lights, deafening industrial music, bright pink background, a costume and an almost vulgar video - all that we are used to glancing at in the streets. This kind of world is ready to offer a bonus – a sweet, pretty candy rose wrapped in rustling cellophane, tagged with a tempting label. Be brave and taste how delicious it is. Can't you see – it is perfect.

Contradictions merge in TO-EN's dance. Each micro-movement is meaningful and even though the body performs machine-like movements it nevertheless manages to convey its own truth. It is neither about beauty itself nor is it a show-off of fitness. The images are ambiguous and can be deciphered in multiple ways. My mind kept searching for a plot: I saw the process of rooting, the terror of approaching death and the budding of a flower in the dance. I missed to give any rational order to the clear associations of animal or human behaviour. But even without it, the images made a strong enough impact. The trembling of eyelids, the movement of eyeballs, the tongue and hands, the arrangement of her feet – the artist's whole body conveys messages with sacrifice; and with the same sacrifice it receives impulses. The performance is well orchestrated time and space-wise. Vivid expression intertwining with dim moments of idleness gave ground for gradual escalation of emotions until a truly spectacular pitch with moments of physical fear and the urge to escape.

Only a true artistry is capable to create such a pronounced form out of a seemingly trivial observation of an exotic (kitsch?) image of a desert rose. And due to this very form she is able to carry a purifying message.

**The review of the TO-EN Butoh Company performance shown at the Gdańsk Shakespeare Theatre during the "Japanese Weekend".**

<http://www.gazetaswietojanska.org/index.php?id=2&t=1&page=50858>

written by: Małgorzata Bierejszyk