

やまきわ美術館
Yamakiwa Art Hotel
350 Kamiebiike, Tokamachi, Niigata, Japan
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Dialogue within body, dialogue through body

Ema Yuasa
Workshop and Lecture

Organised by 000 & Yamakiwa Art Hotel

Press release

Dates: 2019.7.7 15:00- 16:30 Workshop
7.8 14:30- 16:30 Workshop
7.9 14:30- 16:30 Workshop
7.10 19:00- 20:30 Workshop & Talk

Place: Yamakiwa Art Hotel

Please contact Yamakiwa Art Hotel for the details.
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We would like to acknowledge support from the NPO Citizen Activity Network HITOSAPO.

(Text: 000 staff, Mei Kanematsu)

For our first 000 (Alt) public programme in 2019, in collaboration with the Yamakiwa Art Hotel in Niigata, Japan, we invited dancer and choreographer Ema Yuasa to speak and run workshops. Ema, currently based in the Netherlands and active in various parts of the world, ran six days of residency, dance workshops and talk from July 6 to 11.

After graduating from ballet school in Monaco, Ema joined the Netherlands Dans Theatre, performing with them in Europe and around the world for 11 years. She then became an

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independent dancer and collaborated with artists from various fields, including artists, pianists and Noh dancers, to explore the possibility of new expressions.

These performances, based on professional skills acquired through physical training, seem to be on a different stage from us. On the other hand, the body movement and behaviour — the basis for expression — are closely connected to regional culture and ways of living, and related to the value judgements of right or wrong, and beauty or ugliness. In this 4-day workshop, *Dialogue within body, dialogue through body*, we aimed to create opportunities for people of different backgrounds, lifestyles, and ages to gather and re-examine those aspects of their lives which have become ordinary.

The workshop was attended by 15 to 20 people, who arrived from both inside and outside the town, including Kamiebiike Village where Yamakiwa Art Hotel is located. There were people from a wide range of backgrounds, including young dancers from elementary schools, elderly people in their 80s who work in the fields every day, a monk from a Zen temple, Korean wives who live in neighbouring villages, and artists who create installations, including performances.

‘First, let’s lie down on the floor, and feel the gallery space all over our backs, arms and legs’, Ema encouraged the participants. ‘With a big breath, push your stomach up. Exhale your breath, and then feel your body sink slowly down into the floor.’

Ema moves around the space as if she is swimming. ‘Move a little bigger’, she says, explaining the movement with a gentle touch. ‘Don’t close your eyes. Focus your eyes on your hands. Look at the columns, beams, ceilings, windows, and all sorts of places. Your hands now became snails and the whole body follows the movement of your hands.’ With Ema’s voice, and the music quietly wrapping around the venue, the participants gradually become more and more conscious of their bodies and their movements.

After moving their whole bodies for about an hour, the group shared how they felt during the workshop, over a cup of tea.

‘I feel my body got lighter’, said one dancer. ‘I usually work with the back rolled up, but now it feels so relaxed.’

‘I feel so refreshed’, said another. Others in the group agreed. ‘It was fun to feel the whole room and house’, one commented. ‘Teacher moves really beautifully’, said another.

The first three days of sessions were attended under a soft afternoon sun, whereas the workshop on July 10th began at twilight. Candles were lit all over the room, including the altars, the beams, and the alcove. The room was gradually cossetted in a deepening darkness and the participants’ faces were lost in the shadows. The sensations in their feet, back, arms, and fingertips started to loosen as they moved with the silhouettes of bodies around them, responding to the tatami mats and white plaster walls lit by the faint light. When the waves of sounds flickered to silence, the light was eventually turned on and the scene appeared full of strange faces, as if the participants had suddenly returned to the real world.

At the beginning of the lecture after the twilight workshop, Ema told them she was surprised. ‘Unlike dancers who have a wide range of motion, I thought it would take a long time for you to move big, but just a little guidance made your bodies react and move quickly.’ She then said, ‘I think that is because you don’t know the shapes and forms, and you are not searching for that: that’s made you so flexible.’

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Ema said she saw, felt and touched the plants, mountains, rivers and hot springs during the stay, and she became aware of the energy that is constantly moving in her body and in nature: for example, plants appear to be motionless at first sight, but change their form day by day, adapting to the sun and wind. Many people seemed to be moved by her comments, when she said, 'I think that the source of imagination (creation) comes from a way of living, being driven by external stimuli, rather than being active in our own action, and not fighting with something.'

On the other hand, Ema pointed out that in the process of creating a dance as a collaborative movement with people of different nationalities, religions and sexualities, meaningful works are created by challenging the differences in attitudes, rather than acting in a manner required by other people. 'My theme is: how can people with different ideas coexist flexibly and tolerantly together, and how can we make things and live together?' She emphasised the importance of challenging each other until they were satisfied, not only in dance, but in everything, so that they could face rather than avoid each other, and deal with collisions that occurred between them.

Dance, which is generally defined on the premise of the presence of the audience, historically came from 'dancing for yourself'. Based on that, Ema said 'I want to go back again to the movements through which I can get into my mind.' She then introduced the words that her teacher (Czech choreographer, Jiri Kylian, from The Netherlands Dans Theatre) taught her: 'Dance is the oldest in history among various categories of art, including painting and music. In the moment we were born, we were moving, and that was already dance.' However, this does not just mean that you can move your body. 'There is no freedom where there are no rules. Improvisational body expression is only established by moving while protecting and breaking the image of the rule in yourself.'

'Last week, I did a workshop with a woman who lost her eyesight, ten years ago. Through questioning and answering each other, we connected the process to the way she moves her body', Ema explains. 'I would like to see the difference between dancer and non-dancer, or blind and non-blind. I want to take it as one of the characteristics of each person, and to create a form with her while clearing the various walls of thought.' Ema's journey, using words and movement as a means of communication and forming new expressions while continuing to face each other's differences, will be continued.

In the gallery space where the workshop was held, work by British-based artist duo, Hanqing (China) & Mona (South Korea), was exhibited. The artwork questions how natural elements are coexistent with, intertwined with, and transformed into artificial materials, while the human construction is yet being re-occupied by nature. After a discussion with Ema, the installation was temporarily removed during the workshop, and was set up and released again after the talk. The building where the gallery space is set is a place for gathering, which protects people from nature, rain and snow, and will change its form depending on what it is used for. The alteration from a workshop place to an installation space seemed to present a new form of art, in which artists face each other and respond to each theme.

We are grateful to all who gathered at the workshop, and everyone at Kamiebiike village, who helped with Ema's home-stay and prepared a lot of delicious dishes for the exchange session, Hanqing & Mona who happily and kindly helped with the project, and the staff of Yamakiwa Art Hotel, who put in a lot of effort to manage the project.