

CARLOTTA IKEDA
COMPAGNIE ARIADONE

SORA NO AO

PRESS

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The mute cry of a poetic mirage

Never, in my experience as a member of the audience at the ADC (association of contemporary dance), never, as I say, has there been such lengthy applause as that given on Wednesday for *Blue Skies* by Carlotta Ikeda.

No hysteria, no cheers either, but a long emotional shower of hand clapping that came raining down, exactly like the curtain of sand which inundates the stage in the second scene in a continuous flow. This praise is more than well-deserved. In settings that encompass the fairground and the seaside, in the atmosphere of a waking dream, the dancer plunges dizzily into the most intimate emotions. With grimaces, tense movements or playful, deceptively carefree gestures, when Butoh is orchestrated in this way it gently recounts the amazement of being alive.

A bed of yellow flowers. A beach, winter. An orange, incandescent aura, perhaps the beginning of hell ... The first thing that strikes us is that this Japanese choreographer masters the poetry of images. Against a background of changing skies, little girls are dressed in muslin dresses and beribboned bonnets. The mood reflects the beginning of the twentieth century as it colours Carlotta Ikeda's first two solos with its sepia tints. On the threshold of childhood, *Tampopo* presents an impish young girl. With her round cheeks, she bounds around, playing at bows and arrows and mischievously portrays a series of heroic figures. But violence threatens. Suddenly the fanfares, the rowdy music cease. At the sound of a deafening siren, her face tightens, her muscles become taut, as if held in shackles.

When the softness returns, we realise that, whatever climate is being portrayed, movement in Ikeda's work is never anecdotal or innocent. And we remember, as did the critic Jean-Marc Adolphe, that Butoh is the "dance of darkness". Intentionally marginal, it bears witness to a Japanese society that is marked by the trauma of Hiroshima. So when in "Waves" another dancer, betrothed to the sand, eyes closed, leaves the shore to enter the water, an impression of drowning overcomes any pleasure there might be in the waves. Here too, sounds are muffled and it seems as if her body must resist if she is not to founder. We are stifled with her.

The same happens with the third age of our lives, which is portrayed in *Fantôme blanc* (White ghost). A woman with her back hunched over, comes out of a flowing dress the colour of fire, her arms ghostly, feeling the air, as if in search of support. She too is blind, with her eyes bound by a ribbon. Carlotta Ikeda was born in 1941 and she no longer dances. But her performers have learned from her this art of scrutinising intimacy, plunging inwards. Deeply moving.

Marie-Pierre Genecand

Le Bleu du Ciel (Blue Skies), is at the adc, Salle des Eaux-Vives, Geneva, until 17 May
www.adc-geneve.ch

Butoh and its Ghosts

Recreated in Geneva for the adc, Carlotta Ikeda's "Blue Skies" trilogy presents images of women and the feminine side of Butoh. Fascinating.

Watching these three solo dances labelled Carlotta Ikeda, born 67 summers ago in Fukui by the Sea of Japan, we understand better the title that brings them together. *Blue Skies* is an account by Georges Bataille of the apprenticeship of loss by revealing a rift within each of us, the latent presence of our own death. What emerges through this fissure is "the blue of a sky, whose "impossible" depth both calls to us and yet denies us", and this is the essence of the oscillating movement of Ikeda's performers.

Playing until 17 May at the Salle des Eaux-Vives in Geneva, this trilogy recreated for the adc (association for contemporary dance) unravels a series of variations around the image of femininity and that of Butoh, the "dance of darkness" based in particular on nuclear apocalypses. Faithful to the idea of metamorphosis, the company often wear white make-up, which gives the dancers the appearance of plaster-covered gorgons, as they adopt foetal positions as if returning to their origins.

Ghost stories

With knees tucked in, hands curled up, an expression that is lost out in the blue or turned towards the interior, *Tampopo* (dandelion) is a work where an ambiguous freshness (naive Alice in Wonderland style) flutters to combine with an after-taste of ashes. The stunning Mathilde Lapostolle is an adult ghost, who has grown up too fast in the body of a manga child. This delicate figurine also takes up the thread of quick-tempered outbursts as were found in the original Butoh by becoming one of the living dead, with arms that jerk mechanically into the void. The dance is a kind of trance. The body writhes under the constraints of madness, then opens up to reach the point of ecstatic rupture, arms forming a cross, the head contorted, before melting away in the military march of an automaton that is falling apart, possible satirical echo of a past Empire that had been militarised to death. The dancer, hypnotised by the notion of a hereafter which is very close yet which she is unable to touch, is puffing like a demon marionette without strings, she shrouds her face, before stretching out like a sweet Shakespearian Ophelia, enveloped in a river of flowers.

In *Waves*, devised for Christine Chu, surrounded by a halo of bronze light, the body is more earthly, with a low centre of gravity, avoiding certain movements, and where the limbs have a cadaverous stiffness. By paring the aesthetics in her work down to the bone, creating a vertical from the rain of sand flowing from on high, which grows from a thread to a cascade, Ikeda manages to shift the terror off centre. Woman of the sand, Chu slowly sinks into time, a tragic figure, not without its grotesque eroticism nor its Beckettian burlesque with a gait like a baby on tiptoes.

Spectral dance

In *Shiroi yûrei* (White Ghost) a spectre moves around as if in a trance. Wearing a kimono dress of crumpled paper, almost unreal, more sorceress than woman, Anna Ventura creates the folly of a zombie, like Lady Macbeth in Kurosawa's film "The Castle of the Spider's Web". Amazing sinuosity of the hands. Poignant fluidity of the body lines. Both frightening and frightened in turn, inhabited by naïve, meditative postures, by violent convulsive movements, Ventura lets forth a tense death rattle, a fine thread that is thrown towards the abyss. Her face contorts, framed by her hands then fixed into a scar or a dark hole. Here Butoh combines the influences of a pioneering play, *La Argentina* by Kazuo Ohno, co-founder of Butoh, with its wonderful lunar rapture, with those of the European romantic ballet: *La somnambule* by Balanchine and his pristine female ghost tiptoeing around furtively. All of Ikeda's transcultural talent for exploring the relationship between body, gravity, soul, nature, foetal life, cosmos, death and birth is here.

Bertrand Tappolet

Until 17 May, Salle des Eaux-Vives, 82-84 rue des Eaux-Vives, Geneva