

AJ Project – Austria/Japan 2002-2003

Step 1: December 9 - 19 2002 Yokohama

“After a very successful presentation of the idea for an exchange project between Austria and Japan by Akemi Takeya, of Japanese origin but living in Vienna for several years now, in the Embassy/Cultural Forum of Tokyo, the first step of the three-part AJ Project took place in the Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse, with workshops by the Austrian participants, and demonstration performances and impro jams with the Japanese participants. An extremely attractive venue was found with the gallery and event space “Red Brick Building 1”. The two so-called Red Brick Warehouses in the reanimated and nowadays “hip” docks of Yokohama originally were two old customs storage houses built at the beginning of the 20th century, which had come through the big earthquake of 1923 and the bombings of World War 2 more or less whole, and had been renovated with great expense on the occasion of the first Yokohama Triennale in 2001. Among other things, they now offer generous and well-liked spaces for art, events, and exhibitions.

The Austrian participants Akemi Takeya, Daniel Aschwanden, Milli Bitterli, Saskia Hölbling and Paul Wenninger during one week held workshops which evoked much interest and were well visited; they ended their stay in Yokohama with two sold-out evening performances in the theatre hall of Red Brick Building 1 (capacity ca. 200). In part 1 of this event, the Austrian participants gave solo performances, while the second part consisted of an impro jam of all participants. Following the performance on the first evening, the audience was invited to a discussion with the artists, which showed an extremely active interest and curiosity of the mainly young Japanese audience for contemporary Austrian dance.

Another concrete result of the AJ Project’s first phase is an already planned future collaboration between Milli Bitterli and the Japanese dancer Un Yamada. The Project’s successful start in Yokohama, which was also taken up very favourably by the Japanese audience, gives rise to great expectations also for the Project’s further steps in Vienna and Tokyo. For Tokyo, there are negotiations with Setagaya Public Theater/Theater Tram, renowned for its presentations of illustrious European and Japanese dance and performance artists, and highly esteemed in Tokyo.”

(Christian Hasenbichler, Austrian Embassy/Cultural Forum Tokyo, to the Federal Ministry of External Affairs)

“An explosion of feeling in the present”

“The first AJ Project”

“On December 18 and 19, 2002, the first contemporary dance exchange programme between Austria and Japan, in the framework of the AJ Project, took place in “Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse Number 1”.

Each dancer at their solo nights left strong impressions through their vivid force of expression. With mature body language, they tried to express their own feelings vehemently, and therefore I can imagine that contemporary dance is very [beliebt] in Austria. Milli Bitterli, who – owing to her body control which she certainly attained in the course of her classical ballet training – was able to execute seemingly out-of-

control and unbalanced movements, perfectly knew how to present the moment of critical presence.

Paul Wenninger, who in his dance presentation pictured the encounter and positive confrontation with Japan excellently through his power and the agility of his arms, likewise was very impressive. The colourful work of Akemi Takeya, influenced by David Lynch and offering an interesting sequence of tension and relaxation, made a very strong impression.

The two days on which improvised dance was shown together with Japanese dancers (e.g. Yamada and Kasai) without doubt was a very interesting and inspiring challenge for both – and it certainly was a success.

(Akiko Tachiki, Dance Magazine, Japan (March 2003 issue))