

The Japanese Lighthouse

There is some resemblance between being a sailor and a performance artist. In both cases, they have a destination in mind, a detailed plan and motive, but they don't really know how the actual trip will develop.

When Shimoda-san invited me to participate at the "9th Asian Performance NIPAF series", I felt like a sailor boarding a vessel heading to Asia. For many westerners, Japan is like the doorway to the asian continent; in the case of the performance art world, NIPAF represents a beacon to orient us, performance art sailors, into the diversity of asian performance navigation.

The significance of NIPAF's work through the years is evident, considering the unifying force it embodies in the whole region. And foreigners can have a quick grasp of the status of asian performance art, through NIPAF.

I felt particularly privileged for being the only "non-asian" guest at the festival; for me this was a large learning experience.

Me as a Tourist, No.1: Once I was contacted at Narita by Yoshinori Niwa, I was asked to go on my own to Tokyo Station to meet the others; I arrived there and I was in shock by the hundreds of people around me and my virtual inability to go somewhere from there. Forget the jet-lag, this is Tokyo!

The festival started with the wonderful experience of street performance in Tokyo. I hadn't performed abroad in the street for some time, so it was refreshing. I'm impress by the quality of some works performed in the street, as well as by the audience response.

Then started the NIPAF Asia Performance Art Tokyo Meeting vol.1, with artist's talks at Morishita Studio. This was a crucial evening to learn from others; I loved to hear from experiences of artists in the asian region, I feel big connections with some artists. I realized the work from latin american performance artists have more in common with asian artists than what we are forced to think. Asia is conceptually closer to Latin America, than what Europe or the USA is for us.

I am presenting a series of performances in Japan, called "Andra", dealing with issues of perception of the "other"; in particular I'm interested in the relationship between gender and the position of power implicit in how we "view others". Surveillance cameras are the "usual way" to perceive the other in this era; instead of trusting the other, we fear them. So I'm exploring my own relationship with the "natural other": women, using the technological means to extend and dissect the problematic issues contained in the process.

It's amazing how responsive and emotional the audience was for my performances, I keep wonderful memories of my interaction with people in Tokyo, Nagoya and Kioto.

Me as a Tourist, No.2: I love japanese food. Before arriving in Japan, I loved what I thought was japanese food. Later I discovered how diverse food was, unlike what the western world believes. What great works! Specially I'm nicely impressed by some japanese artists: Nishijima-san and his exploration of objects and physical phenomena, with a mix of humor and the potent presence of his body; Fusae Suyama and her highly visual work; Yoshinori Niwa with his conflicting use of contrasting elements; Rei Shibata and the sensuality of a self-contained performance, where everything happens within the confines of her own body; and of course, Shimoda-san with the poetic and strong simplicity of his sole body.

This is my first time seeing performances from artists from China, Taiwan, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, Korea, Vietnam; I love the diversity that I saw. I keep vivid images in my mind of the performances in Tokyo by Can Xin, Jevijoe Vitug and Iwan Wijono (still the song "Fly me to the moon" resonates in my head).

It was boiling hot when I performed in Tokyo, almost 40 degrees Celsius!

After Tokyo, we head to Nagoya.

Me as a Tourist, No.3: Nagoya is a nice industrial city. Bigger than I thought. Everything is bigger than I thought, actually. We enjoyed very much going to the 100 yen stores, and also we discovered a street with public sculptures of anime characters.

The performances in Nagoya happened in a much smaller space, which is nice because the interaction with the audience was improved. People were literally inside the performances. I keep a nice picture of my own performance in Nagoya, the proximity of people and the screen I used to project the images from a surveillance camera in the hands of a woman from the audience, all looked warm.

I keep also a very nice memory of the performances by Bui Cong Khan, Sung-Baeg and Miyaki Inukai in Nagoya, not to mention the amazing "body auction" performed by Iwan Wijono (with the help of Juliana Yasin).

Then we head to Kyoto. I'm thrilled to be there. It's somewhat a dream come true to me.

Me as a Tourist, No. 4: I always hoped to be in a temple in Kyoto. I love the experience to be near the mountains in such a wonderful site. I felt something very special inside there. Besides, I love the city.

The performances in Kyoto are very special, not just because of the wonderful city, nor the amazing performance space, but also because we have the great chance of performing in the same evening as one former member of Gutai. Just watching Horio-san performing is learning from history.

Thanks Seiji!

I remember with nostalgia the performances by Juliana Yasin (with the help of Midori), Yen Yi-Tzu and Chaw Ei Thein at the Art Complex in Kyoto.

My own performance in the city was really special too, with the remarkable help of Mayumi, an art student who dared to experience her own nakedness as part of the piece. Later, she decided to become a performance artist.

Leaving Kyoto to Nagano. I won't be able to perform at the city, as I have to come back earlier than the rest

Me as a Tourist, No.5: I love the train system in Japan. Shinkansen is amazing. But I love the older trains too. I love looking the landscape while the train moves ahead.

In Nagano we go to the mountains, for the Summer Seminar. It's an amazing experience of more learning from other people's experience. The space is great, lost in the nature, while we talk of what we love most.

Then back to Nagano, where we perform the last set of street performances near the train station. I did my last performance there. With the help of Fusae Suyama, I did my last piece from the series "De Rerum Naturae: Japan". Still I keep an image in my head of my own feet and hand surrounded by salt on a street of Nagano. My piece was about leaving the city (and the country), and also about the impossibility of leaving a place once you have a bond with it.

Again, great performances in the street by all artists. By now, we are like a small family. We are engaged in the other people experience and passion.

Me as a Tourist, No.6: We go to a spa in Nagano. The mountains are on our backs as we relaxed, "japanese style". Amazing! I remember the stars in the Nagano skies as I felt my body re-living again.

I have to come back. It's such a sad morning, watching all my new friends at the platform as the train begins to move.

I visit Tokyo for a few hours before coming home. But it's not the same. There's no Nipaf friends around.

Nipaf is a lighthouse sending its signal for us, lonely performance artists in trouble oceans everywhere. Welcome to the lighthouse!