

Identity and Disability in Contemporary East Asian Dance

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Abstract : Influenced by the ideas of collectivism, East Asian contemporary dance is marked by an emphasis on unity and synchronization. A growing element of this discipline that disrupts the path that strives to attain perfection, requiring coordination between multiple parties in order to produce work of their highest artistic potential, with the support from individuals or groups is the presence of disabled dancers. Kawanaka Yo, a Japanese dancer with a mental disability, argues through her "'Dance of Peace' that a dancer should focus on her impulses and natural thoughts through improvisational dancing and eschewal of documentation. Professor and poet Jung-Gyu Jeong, co-founder of the Korea Disability International Art Company, demonstrates with his company's modernized performances of popular works and musicals that disabled artists do not need perfection so long as they can assert their finesse to mimic or create an equivalence with able-bodied dancers. Yo has studied various forms of modern dance and ballet in Japan and has used her training to ease her mental disability but also accept her handicap as an extension of her identity, representing a trend in disabled dance that favors individuality and acceptance. In contrast, Jeong is an influential figure in South Korea for disabled dancers and artists, believing that disabled artists must overcome a certain threshold in order to reach a status as an artist that is equivalent to a 'normal artist.' East Asian art created by the disabled should not be judged according to different criteria or rubrics compared to able-bodied artists because, as Yo explains, a person's identity and her handicaps characterize the meaning of, and the value of, the piece.

Keywords : disability studies, modern dance, East Asia, politics of identity

Conference Title : ICGHOST 2020 : International Conference on Ghost Conference

Conference Location : ghost city, Other

Conference Dates : December 12-13, 2020