

Exploring the Enigmatic World of Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh



Hijikata Tatsumi and the Dawn of Butoh

Butoh, a captivating and enigmatic form of Japanese dance, owes its inception to the visionary choreographer Hijikata Tatsumi. Born in 1928, Hijikata emerged as a revolutionary force, challenging traditional dance

norms and forging a unique aesthetic that would leave an indelible mark on the performing arts world.



Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh: Dancing in a Pool of Gray Grits (Palgrave Studies in Theatre and Performance History) by Karen Dickson

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Hijikata's early exposure to the works of avant-garde artists such as Antonin Artaud and Jean Cocteau influenced his artistic trajectory. Disenchanted with the limitations of established dance forms, he yearned to create an entirely new language of movement.

In 1959, Hijikata founded the Ankoku Butoh-ha (Darkness Butoh School), a breeding ground for his radical dance experiments. Butoh, as he envisioned it, was not merely a performance but a transformative experience that transcended the boundaries of the stage.

Characteristics of Butoh

Butoh is characterized by its distinctive movement vocabulary, often described as slow, contorted, and grotesque. Performers don stark white body paint, embodying a liminal space between life and death.

The body in Butoh becomes a canvas for exploration and expression, defying the conventions of beauty and symmetry. Movements are often inspired by natural phenomena, such as the crawling of insects or the sway of seaweed.

Butoh performances often take place in dimly lit or unconventional spaces, creating an immersive and otherworldly atmosphere. The intent is to elicit visceral reactions and provoke contemplation on the nature of existence.

Hijikata's Influence

Hijikata Tatsumi's teachings and performances had a profound impact on the evolution of contemporary dance. His unconventional approach to movement and his exploration of the darker aspects of human nature resonated with artists worldwide.

Butoh became an influential force in the development of modern dance, postmodern dance, and performance art. Choreographers and performers from different disciplines drew inspiration from Hijikata's techniques and philosophies.

Legacy of Hijikata and Butoh

Hijikata Tatsumi passed away in 1986, but his legacy lives on through his students, who continue to preserve and innovate the art of Butoh. Artists such as Yoshito Ohno, Kazuo Ohno, and Carlotta Ikeda have carried Hijikata's vision forward, expanding the boundaries of Butoh and bringing it to new audiences.

Butoh remains a potent and challenging form of dance, inviting audiences to confront their own mortality and explore the hidden depths of the human

psyche. It is a testament to the enduring influence of Hijikata Tatsumi and the transformative power of his artistic creation.

Further Reading

For those interested in delving deeper into the life and work of Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh, the following resources are highly recommended:

- Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh by Yoshito Ohno
- Burying the Dead: A Film by Tadeusz Kantor, a documentary that explores the influence of Butoh on Polish theater director Tadeusz Kantor
- International Butoh Festival Japan, an annual festival that showcases Butoh performances and workshops from around the world



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