

Utting Orners +++

Daria Blum (London/Tokyo Y-AIR Exchange Program 2019)

During my time on the LTYE programme, I choreographed new work which “spoke” nonverbally, communicating my ideas through the body and using my voice without speaking words. Tokyo’s codes were new and unfamiliar, and this first immersion in Japanese culture force-started the process of circumnavigating language in my work. As my experience of theatre and dance was grounded in Western aesthetics, I gained ideas for movement by experiencing butoh and current Japanese contemporary dance, and by participating in Kazuo Ohno and Natsu Nakajima’s butoh workshops. I investigated my responses to unfamiliar topography and cultural ‘strangeness’ by creating new video and audio work influenced directly by encounters in Japan, eventually integrating these into a performance. The work I presented at Youkobo at the end of my residency was concerned with voice and pitch, attempting to understand a foreign culture through its food, and cultural differences in the relationship between men and women, children and adults.

Because I had a concrete research plan, I was able to dive straight into the work immediately upon arrival in Tokyo. This gave me a sense of direction and momentum, even when I ended up changing course and focusing on other themes which became interesting to me along the way. It was a very structured way of working and I will no doubt find it useful in the future when initiating a new line of research or work. It also helped me time-manage, and kept me focused on producing work for two exhibitions (Ai Mi Tagai, and Utting Orners at Youkobo Art Space) in merely six weeks.

Participating in the LTYE program was a really valuable experience in terms of my artistic and personal development. Positioning myself and my work in an unfamiliar culture and context was challenging but also liberating— I was able to think, act, and react more freely and creatively, and felt less pressured to make myself entirely understood by an audience. In adapting to this new environment, I recognized patterns in the way I make work, and in the way I function as a person. More than anything, I became very aware of the constants, the unchanging givens, which was an invaluable lesson I’ve already been able to incorporate into my working process in London.

I’m extremely grateful to Graham, to the Muratas and to Makiko, as well as the rest of the Youkobo network for the opportunity and continued support. Working alongside Yohei Chimura, not only in Tokyo but also in London, really enhanced the whole experience of the LTYE. We both had a point of contact on which we could rely and were able to guide each other along the way. The many personal and professional contacts I made through the LTYE programme are invaluable, and I have already re-connected with several in London.

