

Strange Beauty: A Conversation on Theatre with Naoko Maeshiba

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By Peter Davis

Photography by Photos by Kintz (unless noted, feature photo by Kanje Taken)



Photo by Paul Emerson

Naoko asks big questions and then dances with the question. Participating as part of the audience, a shift happens immediately when I come to Naoko's performances. She creates spaces where I may imagine freely. Afterwards I'm never quite sure how to explain my experience to others than to say, "It is strange beauty. The movements of her body are spiritual, ethereal, and mesmerizing."

Naoko talks about her work, but is hesitant to explain it. She's in the question business, not answers. Language gets in the way of her style of communication. She lives daily with her whole body. Her relationship with her body is at once cellular and cosmic. The body knows! In order to understand, her body has to feel. If she cannot feel, she cannot understand.

Experiencing, feeling her art is satisfying. Yet, here we are limited by words to get at what her process and new performance at [Theatre Project](#) are about. We met four times exploring, distilling and clarifying her ideas. She is elegant, profound and unique.



Photo by Joseph Castor

What are you trying to do?

“Connect to the unseen world, so I can go beyond ingrained assumptions.”

What kind of assumptions?

“Between what is visible and invisible, between body and environment, between subject and object, conscious and unconscious, Eastern and Western, dance and theatre. I’m interested in how can I take away the boundaries between them.”

Visible / Invisible

“I don’t see it as either or. It’s a way of being present on more than one plane.”

Body / Environment

“Body IS the environment.”



“Once I speak what’s inside of me becomes objectified, filtered. It’s no longer me.”

Conscious / Unconscious

“It’s a matter of the soul and being awake to what’s actually happening.”

Eastern / Western

“I am of Eastern origin living a Western lifestyle. That doesn’t define me. I’m working with what is universal.”

Dance / Theatre

“The idea is dance without steps and a theatre without language. In this piece I do speak but not to deliver exposition, provide context, or give the audience an explanation. The performance is designed to give my body access to the space and time axis, or what some call flow, being present, where the activity itself, not the outcome, provides the joy.”

How do you do that?

“It’s not blending, that’s too simplistic.
It’s not challenging, that’s too adversarial.
It’s not exploring, that’s too cliché.
It’s not a dialogue, that’s too academic.
Welcoming or accepting is closer.”



What idea or principle guides your work?

“I would like what I create to be connected to how I live.”



What opportunities does this idea give you when approaching your work or performance?

“Subject/Object is not a manufactured piece; one that I perform again like a song or a play. I want things to manifest. Like food fermentation tapping into its own power. I prepare the conditions, so it can do its own thing.”

“In theatre there is so much we want to control. We think how well do I want to make it? Does it matter? Instead of manipulating the audience’s journey, in a closed system, I’d rather create the environment, let it ferment so that it becomes what it is or wants to become.”

“The audience’s responses are always different from what I think. I would be horrified if we thought alike.”

The question of originality is suspicious. Is the body original? I think only at pre-birth. How can the true self emerge before any form of orientation or institution takes hold of you?”



SubjectObject by Naoko Maeshiba

Thursday May 26 – Sunday May 29 at Theatre Project, [45 W Preston St, Baltimore, MD 21201](#)

SubjectObject is a highly experiential dance theatre performance. Led by her wonderment about the mechanism of the body, Maeshiba descends into her body’s primal maze, illuminating the mystery underneath her skin with humor and imagination. Through an auditory and kinetic journey, audience will move through multiple layers of personal and cosmic time/space with her.

This is an intimate performance presented for a small group audience.

Seating is non-conventional and limited.

[Reservations recommended.](#)