

Competition I: General Commentary

The 30th Competition featured performances from eight groups, selected from 153 applicants, representing Japan (4 groups), China (2 groups), Taiwan, and South Korea. Each group showcased their unique style within the 20-minute time limit, demonstrating impressive creativity and individuality.

Among them, I would like to give special praise to Kobayashi Moe's *ens*. The restrained flow of movement created a universal sense of time and space on stage. At first glance, the stillness of the body appeared serene, yet it became a dramatic site where the raw vitality of life and its inherent finiteness were in constant tension. Even the faintest movement of hair was elevated into choreography, revealing poetic creativity. I look forward to seeing this artistry deepen further during the recipient's upcoming residency in France.

The Jury Prize-winning duet *Nonfiction* by Kim Na Eui and Jo Hyun Do skillfully wove a narrative through clean and highly technical choreography that captured the emotions driving communication and the constant exchange of sensations. The duet *Flashbulb Memory* by Huang Yanlin and Sun Mengyao was equally striking, with tightly constructed, minimalist movements that defied convention and delivered a thrilling experience. Other standout works included CHUANG Po-Hsiang's *Remainder*, which employed boxes effectively as symbolic elements, and *Wake Up* by asamicro, which used street-inspired, fast-paced movements to explore its theme in a polyphonic manner. Additionally, Takeda Maya's *LINES*, which demonstrated solid foundational techniques, hinted at great potential for the future.

Okami Sae

(Dance Critic, Associate Professor of Kyoritsu Women's University)

This year, I had the privilege of serving as a judge for the first time, allowing me to experience the Yokohama Dance Collection from a perspective different from that of the audience. The eight finalists—four from Japan, two from China, and one from South Korea and Taiwan each—showcased a diverse range of works, from those that focused purely on physical movement to those that incorporated complex symbolic objects and lighting effects. I am grateful for the opportunity to witness the unique characteristics of choreographers from across East Asia.

As a specialist in contemporary art, I observed that, although the visual elements on stage—such as sets, props, costumes, and lighting—can sometimes enhance the symbolic meaning of the dancers' bodies, they may also inadvertently create excessive layers of meaning beyond what the choreographer originally intended. This is particularly important to consider in an international setting like this competition, which anticipates audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds, including the West. It raises the question of what such elements have to do with representations of Asian bodies and what meanings they convey. I strongly feel that careful consideration of these effects is essential.

Looking at these performances as overall art forms, *Nonfiction* by Kim Na Eui and Jo Hyun Do stood out as a piece deserving of the Jury Prize. Its simple yet powerful choreography, performed by highly skilled dancers, effectively demonstrated the strength of its concept without unnecessary embellishments.

Kimura Eriko

(Director, Hirosaki Museum of Contemporary Art)

I was struck by the physicality and high level of expressiveness displayed by the dancers from South Korea and China.

Kim Na Eui and Jo Hyun Do's *Nonfiction* was particularly captivating, as the movements of the two performers consistently held the audience's curiosity. While some felt that the performance could have done without the brief explanatory epilogue following the blackout which highlighted the theme, the piece was an impressive success that leaves us eagerly anticipating their future works.

Huang Yanlin and Sun Mengyao's *Flashbulb Memory* skillfully utilized light and shadow to fully showcase their mesmerizingly flexible bodies. Their unique physicality carried an intensity, as if reversing the inner and outer layers of the human body, offering a surreal perspective on the world. With their ability to materialize powerful imagery, I look forward to seeing them create new worlds in their future work.

Kobayashi Moe's *ens* confined itself to a severely limited cage. While I had high expectations for the live performance, the heavy reliance on video caused me to lose the central focus. The dynamic visuals may have filled the space, but they seemed to diffuse the attention that should have been directed toward the movements themselves. That said, Kobayashi's creativity and curiosity leave me eagerly anticipating future work.

As for asamicro, opinions were divided on her straightforward execution of movement. Personally, I felt her inability to fully command the theatrical space played a large part.

I was reminded of the importance of resonating with each technical aspect of a performance. Beyond collaborating with fellow performers, I hope to see these artists develop the ability to richly share their vision with others.

Even among the works that were not selected during the video screening, there were many bright ideas. While I cannot highlight each one here, I strongly encourage those creators to continue challenging themselves boldly in the future.

Nagatsuka Keishi

(Playwright, Director, Actor, Artistic Director of Kanagawa Arts Theatre (KAAT))

Each work deeply explored the performers' bodies, creating a compelling physical presence on stage. It was a lineup of exceptional pieces, perfectly suited to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Yokohama Dance Collection.

Kobayashi Moe's *ens*, recipient of the French Embassy Prize for Young Choreographers - Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels, marked an astonishing leap from the duet she presented in YDC 2021's Competition II to this bold solo piece. The work powerfully evoked a fragmented body, disjointed and torn apart, creating a vivid and haunting vision on stage.

The Jury Prize-winning *Nonfiction* by South Korea's Kim Na Eui and Jo Hyun Do was a captivating male-female duet. The two dancers probed the truths that lay between them, moving in a delicate push-and-pull dynamic that kept the audience riveted every moment. Both dancers displayed exceptional skill, but Kim's resilient and commanding movements were particularly impressive.

The Best Dancer Prize went to China's Huang Yanlin and Sun Mengyao for *Flashbulb Memory*, a piece that conjured an eerie world reminiscent of a horror film. In the darkness, their strange, otherworldly movements made them seem like yokai from the pages of Daijiro Morohoshi's manga, stepping through a tear from another dimension.

It was hard to believe that one of the original choreographers was no longer able to perform, requiring a last-minute substitute. Despite this, their performance was perfectly in sync.

All three groups left a strong impression, making me eager to see what they come up with next.

Hamano Fumio

(Senior Editor of Shinshokan Dance Magazine)

It had been a while since I last attended the Yokohama Dance Collection, and I was immediately struck by how much the dancers' technical abilities have evolved—even among those whose works I had only seen in the video screenings. However, I felt that many of the pieces lacked a sense of freshness in their overall concepts, direction, and musical choices. While innovation isn't always necessary, I believe there is still room to explore approaches that challenge the fundamental notions of dance.

For the final judging, I prioritized whether the body itself could communicate and express a language beyond words, rather than focusing solely on the overall completeness of the work.

In other words, it comes down to the question, "Is this something that could only be achieved through dance?" Merely expressing a concept isn't enough. What's required is a sense of physical inevitability and spontaneity so compelling that it makes you forget the concept was even there in the first place.

In this sense, the work by Kim Na Eui and Jo Hyun Do was compelling in how their movements emerged as a new physical language. Their unique style, which defies understanding in terms of how their bodies operate, helped create a piece that I would love to watch again right away. It provided the true joy of watching dance—a feeling of oneself dissolving and being drawn entirely into the performance unfolding before you.

Zhang Yutong's perspective of exploring self as a subject, was particularly intriguing. Huang Yanlin and Sun Mengyao presented a work where the balance between composition, technique, lighting, and sound was impeccable. Kobayashi's restrained framework revealed delicate breaths and subtle nuances, while asamicro's performance, with its steadily excavating quality, was deeply captivating.

Takahashi's piece delicately developed a single idea, with the dancer embodying it in a way that evoked a palpable sense of "humidity." Takeda's attempt to transform the tools themselves into dance offered a refreshingly unconventional approach. CHUANG Po-Hsiang's work, which played with imagery by wearing boxes, delivered the pure joy of watching movement itself come alive.

Each participant showcased wonderful choreography that highlighted their unique qualities as dancers. However, when it came to the use of visual elements, video, and music, there were moments that felt slightly underdeveloped. I hope these aspects are given the same level of careful thought as the choreography itself in the future.

One final note. These days, I feel that the role of a choreographer is no longer limited to simply presenting works, but has expanded to meet a wide range of demands and interpretations. Spreading the value of dance to various corners of society and pioneering

new pathways can ultimately become a source of inspiration and growth for an artist. So, don't limit yourselves to competitions or theaters—step boldly and passionately into the world and dance your hearts out!

Yasumoto Masako
(Dancer, Choreographer)