

## Competition I: General Commentary

For the 31st edition, 8 groups passed the first round of judging from 167 entries—an increase of approximately 40% over last year—and 7 groups performed in the finals (one group withdrew).

The duo Wang Jiani & Feng Weidi, winners of the Jury Prize, expanded the communion between humans and nature into expansive dance. They skillfully fused tradition and modernity through the flexible yet precise physicality cultivated in Chinese traditional dance and stage design where negative space stimulated the audience's imagination. LAI Hung-chung presented a highly polished duet befitting his career. Overseas entries demonstrated refined concepts and choreography, including Guo Teng's expression of a relationship using a contracting cage-like object and Lim Ji Hoon's storytelling through a large plywood board transformed into various tools. Meanwhile, the candor of the three domestic participants held promise for future development. Abe Maria, winner of the Prize of the French Embassy in Japan – Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels, for young choreographers, drew inspiration from 3x3 basketball, choreographing nine dancers to portray the complex inner lives of athletes through diverse movements. Shawn K. Farrell confronted the state of the world head-on, placing wounded souls on stage with striking directness. Miya Yusuke paid homage to ancient Japanese mythology, positioning the act of dance within a cycle of repetition, all with a generous sense of humor.

As a competition, the level of refinement in the works is naturally emphasized. Yet, this edition reaffirmed that the boldness to resist established aesthetics is a defining appeal of YDC.

Okami Sae

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

The 2025 Competition I, my second time participating as a jury, left a strong impression of each dancer's individual proficiency. LAI I-fei and CHEN Yu-chi of HUNG DANCE, selected for the Best Dancer Prize, were different members from the first round's dancers; yet their exceptional physicality brought such a transformation that it felt like watching an entirely different piece, showcasing not only the dancers' skill but also the company's underlying strength. The work by Shawn K. Farrell, recipient of the Encouragement Prize, conveyed a powerful message by connecting the current world, filled with disconnection

and contradiction, with his own identity. The impression conveyed to the audience by the language and text used on stage varies greatly depending on the shared knowledge and ideological background of the majority of the spectators. What is required here, more than a direct message, is the universality that lies beyond, transcending time and region. I look forward to seeing the work deepen as it engages audiences from diverse backgrounds. The Jury Prize-winning work by Wang Jiani & Feng Weidi depicted a man and woman climbing a high mountain. Employing the technique of metaphorical representation while incorporating humorous movements at times, its structure was masterfully engaging. Simultaneously, the act of mountain climbing and the implications suggested by the title “Into Thin Air” allow for various associations and interpretations within social life, making it an intellectually playful work and rich in layers of meaning.

Kimura Eriko

(Director, Hirosaki Museum of Contemporary Art)

It was unfortunate that Charly Mintya from Cameroon could not come to Japan, but the participating works from China, Taiwan, and South Korea were all compelling and fascinating. From the video screening stage, I was captivated by the diversity and dynamism of contemporary dance works from China. The Jury Prize winner, Wang Jiani & Feng Weidi's “Into Thin Air”, strongly drew me in with its youthful sensibility that lightly transcends past styles and techniques after thoroughly engaging with them. I cannot wait to see what kind of work they create next.

Also from China, Guo Teng's “Consensus Gentium” impressed with its sculptural beauty created by movable apparatus and dancers, alongside the poetic quality emerging from the two performers. “Push and Pull” by LAI Hung-chung from Taiwan has already won awards in Rotterdam and Hanover. Its striking physical movements and composition are masterful, leaving nothing to be desired. The two dancers who executed this choreography flawlessly are worthy of the Best Dancer Prize. From South Korea Lim Ji Hoon's “We Decided to Spend a Day on the Plywood.” was enjoyable for its scenes of imagination expanding in various ways using plywood.

Abe Maria's “Queen of Zoos,” winner of the Prize of the French Embassy in Japan – Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels, for young choreographers, attracted attention with its intense and stylish dance performed by nine dancers. Miya Yusuke's “cockcrow: repetitions” was interesting in that it reversed the repetition, often treated as hardship in dance, into pleasure. Shawn K. Farrell's "Feast of Atonement ~The Lost ~~Desire~~ Nocturne

Ver.~”, driven by anguish over the current tragic world situation and with a harsh inward gaze, was astonishing in the physical strength he acquired through his diverse experiences, including butoh.

Hamano Fumio  
(Senior Editor of Shinshokan Dance Magazine)

I truly love watching dancers. It tickles the darkroom within me.

As a mere spectator, getting to devour seven choreographers' works up close was pure visual bliss. It would have been even better without having to judge, but precisely because I had to judge, I found myself continuing to stare intently long after it ended.

So, setting myself resolutely aside, I would like to offer my impressions—telling myself, “If I am to write, then write.”

“cockcrow: repetitions”

For the viewer, repetition isn't about questioning meaning; it's a technique to induce a transformation of sensation. In that regard, the interplay between the two dancers was refreshingly crisp. The choreography was so satisfying it played back in my mind even after the lights dimmed. It was neither more nor less than that. Was it trying to create something that repetition itself couldn't achieve? I couldn't quite grasp that. Next time, I would like to see what lies beyond a dance to explain.

“Push and Pull”

Thirteen minutes of such tension one hesitates even to blink. The dancers flawlessly executed, to perfection, both the floating choreography gliding across the floor like a compass and the thrilling exchanges where even the slightest misstep could lead to injury—nothing but admiration. Only later does a faint hesitation arise about innocently enjoying, as an audience member, something so thoroughly and impeccably choreographed.

“We Decided to Spend a Day on the Plywood.”

I was deeply drawn to the perspective aiming to depict the body as a worker rooted in daily life. The ingenuity of imagining plywood as various objects, and the unique, relaxed quality of the crouched movements, were both excellent. If only the crucial voice of the body had leapt out from the choreography itself, the physical sensations experienced scene by scene might have accumulated more strongly.

#### “Queen of Zoos”

At first glance, nine performers in this space felt like too many, making my eyes dart about, but that congestion might be intentional. Rather than observing them as individuals, there was a pleasure in watching a single mass undulate. The occasional solos were all dazzlingly strong and richly personal, offering moments of instant joy. If I could have felt more of a connection between the work and the questions of what this expression is for, and whom it is addressing, I might have been more fully immersed.

#### “Consensus Gentium”

The constantly shifting, calculated frames and movements were unpredictable and compelling to watch. The approach of choreographing not only the dancers but also the environment in which they were placed was also intriguing. However, because the dancers themselves moved the frames, the distinction between subject and object blurred, diluting the impression of what the work fundamentally sought to show. We don't often see dance so deeply integrated with structures, so I sincerely hope the choreographer continue exploring this potential.

#### "Feast of Atonement ~The Lost ~~Desire~~ Nocturne Ver.~"

Hearing Kanda's voice and the sound of bodies collapsing conveys a palpable heartache. The raw, unfiltered exposure of that pain makes me tingle with a stinging sensation. But. But. When it is presented on stage, I, as an audience member, felt a slight distance. Because the stage is, after all, a virtual structure. Placing something real onto a provisional platform is different from making what placed there real. Stimulating the audience's imagination (creating a two-way relationship between here and there), figuring out how

to create that space – I think that's harder and more important than actually creating the choreography itself.

That aside, this was the work where I felt the strongest driving force—the sense that it simply had to be done now.

"Into Thin Air"

Their presence, the understated movement choices, the sound selection and use—everything brims with fresh charm. Through simple staging, they skillfully utilize spatial and temporal breathing room. The result isn't just showcasing the dance itself, but using dance as a guide to evoke a sense of a place beyond here—which is brilliant. Moreover, the fact they achieve this (seemingly) without relying on technique highlights their innate artistic sensibility.

Final Addendum

In the video screening, some were eliminated by mere margins, by sheer luck. We're all standing on the same stage, myself included. This isn't just about being in the same field; it means the audience we aim to reach with what dance truly lies beyond that stage—especially beyond it. Let's move forward together.

Yasumoto Masako  
(Dancer, Choreographer)