

H.Ly. "Performance: The invitation from Japan." Lao Động [Labour] 23 May 2000: 5.

Recently many artists in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) attended a performance and discussion with the Japanese performance artist Seiji Shimoda (organized by Blue Space Gallery) in the inner courtyard of the HCMC Fine Arts Museum. This is evidence of Vietnamese artists' interest in this contemporary art form, which has achieved global popularity, but which Vietnamese artists have yet to "see with their own eyes." "Performance" appeared after World War II. Early on in Japan and Korea there were 'avant-garde' groups 'playing' with this creative art form. Up until now many Asian countries have engaged with the genre of performance art, and several performance art festivals have been organized in Japan, Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and Taiwan. Using the term "playing" is accurate. Through two videos introduced by the organizer and founder of Nippon International Performance Art Festival (NIPAF), as well as his performance on-site, we have seen that performance artists are completely free to express their ideas, emotions, and personal responses through their bodies and through any other possible materials or means, beyond the boundaries of conventional art forms (visual arts, dance, drama...). A big, light-weight plastic ball rolled around on the floor, and in the end two legs emerged from within, symbolic of life's origins. Squirming bodies covered in mud, paint and blood, as though recreating the people's struggle against dictatorial corruption... The artists are self-confident and carefree, but also serious in realizing their creative vision, although the viewers may not be able to understand it yet, and may even burst into laughter in reaction to some bizarre movements...

NIPAF is the most effective organization of performance art in Asia. It began in 1993, and after six festivals it has attracted hundreds of international artists participating with hundreds of Japanese artists. "Let's throw away narrow mindsets and hold onto your pride," is the motto and also the lesson of performance festivals, said Seiji Shimoda. "Making the richest event in the poorest situation" is the festival's guideline (which takes place in small rooms, on the streets), because "playing" with performance gains neither fame nor profit, it cannot be bought or sold, and receives little support. Is this mode of artistic practice really "free of demands" and satisfying? This art form might still be too new for Vietnamese artists (Truong Tan, Nguyen Minh Thanh have 'performed' a couple times, during exhibition openings in Hanoi, but that's it), and when Seiji Shimoda called for participation in 'NIPAF 2000' in Japan at the end of this year, local artists responded with... puzzlement and wariness.