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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Post-Orientalist Express

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The Post-Orientalist Express by Eun-Me Ahn (KR) at Burgtheater is a triumph. There are choreographers who deconstruct clichés, and then there is Eun-Me Ahn, who detonates them with confetti. At the Burgtheater, the South Korean auteur — often too easily labelled "Asia's Pina Bausch" — delivers the Austrian premiere of Post-Orientalist Express, the closing chapter of her long-running Asia Project developed through field research in Manila, Bali and Okinawa.

From the opening projections of clichéd "oriental" iconography, watched by a lone black figure, Ahn stages a knowing ambush. She enters herself in exaggerated Cantonese opera robes, and from that moment the piece becomes a rolling, ninety-minute study in productive dissonance: a Yin-Yang curve slicing across the austere line of Noh, a Kathakali mudra unfurling between them, all set against Young-Gyu Jang's techno-inflected score. Eight dancers, Ahn among them, move with the speed and physical intelligence of a company that treats acrobatics, satire and stillness as equal citizens.

What lifts the work above spectacle is Ahn's refusal of a single "Asian" essence. Orientalism, she reminds us, is not only a Western export; it is also traded between Asian cultures themselves. Her more than ninety self-designed costumes — larval sheaths, luminous panda-esque forms, dragon-emblazoned satin — function less as decoration than as arguments about who gets to define whom.

The result is a genuinely inter-Asian choreographic language: pop-cultural, ritualistic, futuristic, and radically dialogic. On the Burgtheater stage, Ahn does not resolve the tensions she names; she lets them dance. It is a dazzling, generous, and quietly radical evening — cultural exchange as choreography, and choreography as argument. Long after the final blackout, the Post-Orientalist Express keeps travelling in the mind of its audience, carrying us past the old maps toward a horizon that Vienna, this summer, was lucky to glimpse first.

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