

**FREIE
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📅 25-27 May
📍 Halle G MuseumsQuartier

KITTY

Satoko Ichihara

Theatre maker Satoko Ichihara stages the patriarchy's mechanisms of oppression with a vicious, analytic and at the same time comic touch like no other. Inspired by Japan's cutest hit export, the cartoon character Kitty, this new play is about female stereotypes, sex work and vegetarianism. If a woman wants to be attractive, she has to be childish, cute and innocent – like Kitty. With uninhibited honesty, Satoko Ichihara and her actors from Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong take us along into a not-quite-so-fictional world of ever-present pornography in which everything is turned into a commodity: meat, women, love. Satoko Ichihara is one of the most important voices of a new, actively feminist generation of theatre makers in Asia and has already caused a global sensation with her works.

🗣 Japanese, Korean and Cantonese

🗣 German and English surtitles

🕒 105 min.

♿ barrier-free access

Q&A

26 May, following the performance

HOW DO WE ESCAPE FROM THIS PORNOGRAPHIC WORLD?

Text, Direction Satoko Ichihara **With** Sung Soo-yeon (Creative VaQi), Yurie Nagayama (Seinendan), Birdy Wong Ching Yan (Artocrite Theater), Yuka Hanamoto (Yuka Hanamoto x Moe Matsuki) **Music** Masamitsu Araki **Costume** Shie Minamino **Scenography** Tomomi Nakamura **Lighting** Rie Uomori (kehaiworks) **Video** Kotaro Konishi **Sound design** Takeshi Inarimori **Dramaturgy** Takaaki Kumakura **Stage management** Yuhi Kobayashi **Costume care** Hino Korogi **Production management** RHOM Theatre Kyoto (Rika Kihara, Mizuki Kakita, Shunsuke Manabe) **Promotional design** Eiko Sasaki **English surtitles** Aya Ogawa

Production ROHM Theatre Kyoto **In cooperation with** Kinosaki International Arts Center (Toyooka) **Supported by** The Saison Foundation (Japan)

executed by the team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

World premiere February 2025, ROHM Theatre Kyoto

KAWAII ASA

SURVIVAL STRATEGY

INTERVIEW WITH SATOKO ICHIHARA

Tarun Kade: Where are you right now?

Satoko Ichihara: Inside, in my house in Tokyo.

What is the first thing to come to your mind when you think of Austria, Germany and Switzerland?

Countries with mostly white people. It still happens to me that people suddenly call out 'Nihao' to me out on the street. I have the feeling calling out something like that implies a certain degree of contempt. In those situations I think that the world hasn't changed so much after all. There is nobody who acts like that where I work. I have the impression that the system in German-language theatre is stricter than that in Japan.

What's the last thing you watched online?

On YouTube, there are old Disney animations that have been dubbed with utterly absurd, invented Japanese dialogues. They are very funny; I watch them in my free time.

What's the last thing that made you happy?

I was happy when I was in Thailand last year. It felt like moving through a film by Apichatpong Weerasethakul. It is quite possible that the country is perceived as rather complicated by the people who live

and work there, but for me as an irresponsible traveller, Thailand was simply beautiful.

What are you scared of?

Everyday life. Habits or places where I like being. If I don't watch out, I get caught in there. Without noticing, I settle in a pleasant, soft cage like that. I start imagining that this is what I want and what makes me me. This comfort makes me shy away from leaving the cage even if the door is open. How do I get out of there? It's difficult.

What is your favourite pop song?

*Bad B*tch* 美学 Remix. I've been a fan of Awich, a rapper from Okinawa, since I saw her live. She worked together with rappers and female comedians from Japan for her performance.

Every time I read a literary text by you, I am surprised or even shocked – and I mean that in an absolutely positive sense. Do you write from your personal life experience? What inspires you?

My texts set out from my unease at everyday life, but I don't transfer it into my works as it is. I want to introduce something unpredictable, a fiction, into my works. Because I want to change the audience's entrenched view of the world. At

least that is what I would want as a member of the audience. I think that manifests as humour in my works.

You repeatedly focus your work on beauty ideals. Why is this topic so important for you?

I think that is because the problematisation of beauty and ugliness already concerned me when I was a child. It applies particularly for women. I grew up in a society in which such norms naturally wield an influence. I had no confidence anymore, because I constantly had to wonder whether my face is beautiful or whether I'm too fat.

You are particularly interested in what is usually described as ugly, dirty or taboo – such as bodily fluids. Do you enjoy shocking the audience?

When I started my career as a writer in 2011, there was a serious earthquake in Japan. Society was in a state of chaos and I didn't know anymore what to believe – and I felt this need to break out of that chaos. I felt like I no longer knew what I could write about. So I started concentrating on my body. Because my body was at that moment the only thing I could trust. I looked for a way of talking about my actual feelings and experiences. I wanted to write something that nobody would be able to describe as a lie. That is still the case today.

The first play of yours that I saw live in a theatre was *Madama Butterfly*, a reinvention of Giacomo Puccini's famous opera. You developed the production at Theater Neumarkt in Zurich in 2022 and it went on to tour through all of Europe and to Japan. It was also shown at the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen). This piece was about the image of Asian women in the West. At what

point did you realise yourself that you are perceived as an Asian woman?

I noticed when I started working as a representative of East Asia. In Japan I never feel part of a minority. I don't consider myself a representative Japanese woman, but it is possible that people in Europe are primarily interested in my Japanese identity. But that is probably not the end of it. Even the Ancients already expected something new and valuable from the world out there. And I also invite artists from abroad as the artistic director of the Kinoshita International Art Center. We cannot defeat curiosity for the Other. However, it must not reinforce stereotypes or unequal power balances. That's what I was able to witness while I was working on my research for *Madama Butterfly* in a bar in Roppongi. Many white businessmen are settled in Roppongi and there are bars there, where Japanese women can meet these 'foreign men'. Their flirts reveal mutual stereotypes – for example, in the way the men look down on these women. I also felt affected by that. I felt like things haven't really changed since Puccini's time. It distressed me greatly, as an Asian woman who also works in modern Europe. That is how *Madama Butterfly* came to be.

In your latest work, *Kitty*, which premiered in Kyoto at the start of the year and is now on show at the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) and Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels, you are referring to a famous, irresistibly cute cartoon character. Why are you interested in cuteness?

The Japanese word *kawaii* (cute) implies childishness and weakness. But I think that *kawaii* is a survival strategy. Children are *kawaii* in order to be protected by people who are stronger than them. But a

thing that is *kawaii* can in fact be very strong or calculating. The Hello Kitty brand also uses a *kawaii* face in order to part people with their money.

In the play, one of the characters asks: 'How do we escape from this pornographic world?' What do you mean by that?

The world is full of different forms of consumerism. Just like Kitty, who can only exist as a commercial product, it is difficult to find anything that is not a commodity. It is also difficult to find 'sex' that is not a commodity.

Sex and violence are very present, and they are frequently linked in your plays. Why do you consider it necessary to establish this connection on stage?

They are what haunts us. I think that art can be an opportunity to reflect on one's own life. Maybe the performance of a play of mine lets the audience recognise what it is that haunts them.

Are there topics that are taboo for you when you write and stage a piece?

As soon as something is said to be taboo, I start being interested in it, why it is taboo, until eventually I write a piece about it.

How would you like to look back on your work in three decades?

I hope that my work serves to give people strength, especially those who feel powerless. If it triggers that reaction in the audience, it would feel like a confirmation of my work.

The interview was conducted by Tarun Kade (Vienna Festival | Free Republic of Vienna) in writing in March 2025.

BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1988 in Osaka, **Satoko Ichihara** is a Japanese playwright, stage director, novelist and artistic director of the Kinosaki International Arts Center (KIAC). She studied drama at J.F. Oberlin University in Tokyo and has been running the Q theatre company since 2011. She writes and directs plays that deal with human behaviour, the physiology of the body and the discomfort surrounding these themes, using language and physical sensitivity. In 2011, she was awarded the Aichi Arts Foundation Drama Prize for her play *Insects*. In 2019, Satoko Ichihara published her first collection of stories, *Mamito no tenshi (Mamito's Angel)*. In the same year, *The Bacchae – Holstein Milk Cows*, based on a Greek tragedy, premiered at the 2019 Aichi Triennale and won the 64th Kishida Kunio Playwriting Prize. In 2021, she co-produced *Madama Butterfly* with Zurich's Theater Neumarkt, which has been presented at the Zürcher Theater Spektakel, the SPIELART Theatre Festival (Munich) and the Wiener Festwochen. Her play *Yoroboshi*, a co-production that toured internationally, premiered at Theater der Welt festival in Frankfurt in 2023. She will stage her first production at Schauspielhaus Zurich in autumn 2025.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

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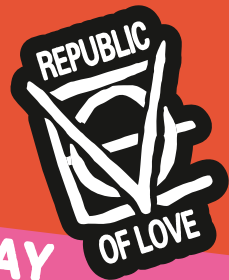
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