



Fostering Synergy Between Art and Technology in a Diverse Realm

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In June, an announcement opened doors for artists from diverse backgrounds to immerse themselves in the captivating realm where art merges with technology. Admit rapid technological advancements, both solo artists and collectives who share a fascination for the potential synergy between art and technology are invited to be part of this endeavor.

This interview with Dr. Yumin Ao, the curator of CAPAS 2024, was conducted by Zijin Chen, on August 30.

Chen: In light of the upcoming CAPAS2024, can you share your observations and insights on the evolving relationship between art and technology and briefly discuss the preparations and ethos driving this festival? What was the inspiration behind conceptualizing an art season centered around the interplay between art and technology?

Ao: In my discussions with peers and younger cohorts, I've consistently observed a profound interest in the interplay between art and technology. A prime example of this convergence is the ACGN realm, which stands for Anime, Comic, Game, and Novel. To many, especially the younger generation, the ACGN realm is more than just entertainment; it's a cultural movement and a significant currency in artistic practice. As technology has evolved, it has seamlessly integrated into the ACGN world, enhancing the depth and range of expression within it. Think of how virtual reality and augmented reality are now used to create immersive experiences in games or interactive comics. This blending of art and technology is reshaping the way we perceive and interact with these mediums.

Given this exciting intersection, I felt it was crucial to create a platform, hence the inception of this festival, to delve deeper into this intricate relationship between art and technology. Our festival aims to highlight how technological advancements have not only transformed the tools artists use but also the very essence of creative expression and how audiences engage with it.

Chen: In the context of CAPAS2024's dedication to the intertwining between art and technology, can you share insights into the preparations undertaken for the festival, specifically concerning the call for artist submissions? How has the global community responded in terms of participation and artistic forms?

Ao: In anticipation of the Contemporary Asian Performing Arts and Performance Art Season 2024 (CAPAS2024) in Göttingen, we initiated a comprehensive call for artists in mid-June. This was broadcast across several platforms, such as the EU-funded Creatives Unite, Berlinartlink, and the Asia-Europe Foundation, echoing our commitment to fostering a global nexus of art and technology.

The Call for Artists has garnered widespread attention. A total of 75 proposals poured in. We received entries from a vast array of artists and collectives across 26 countries, stretching from Armenia to the United States and including renowned artistic hubs like Austria, China, France, India, Japan, and Germany, etc. The artistic concepts submitted were as diverse as they were inspiring, ranging across music, theater, dance, performance art, and multimedia presentations.

A glance at the CAPAS2024 applications reveals that 35.6% of the proposals aim to merge multiple artistic disciplines, embodying a truly interdisciplinary spirit. These projects, seamlessly intertwining music, dance, performance, and new media elements using AR, VR, Motion Capture, and Sound Capture, have unequivocally seized our focus. Such proposals have been particularly intriguing to us, as they mirror the ever-evolving frontiers of artistic exploration in our contemporary world.

The open call has enlisted the expertise of three discerning judges: Prof. Dr. Georg Hajdu from Hamburg University of Music and Theater, Japanese stage and film director Hiroshi Koike, and artistic director Yu Rongjun from Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center. With the application deadline having concluded on August 22nd, we are now embarking on the selection process, aiming to finalize the selection by the end of September.

Chen: Considering CAPAS's emphasis on the interplay between art and technology, can you share the motivation and personal insights that led to the inception of this art season? Specifically, how did your experiences in Göttingen highlight the challenges and representation gaps faced by Asian artists in the European theater landscape?

Ao: The drive behind organizing this art season originates from personal observations and a profound connection to Asian theater and performing arts. As the editor-in-chief of an Asian theater-focused journal, I've had the privilege to witness firsthand the innovative ways in which traditional theater is embracing modern technology to forge new expressions. However, the rich creativity of artists with Asian backgrounds is often underrepresented on the European stage.

During my time at the University of Göttingen that began in 2018, the conspicuous absence of Asian productions, artists, and attendees at The Theater in Op—a university institution established in 1984—caught my attention. This omission created a notable void in representation for the Asian faculty and students. Beyond academia, a similar pattern emerged within the city and on a national level. Asian migrant artists encountered obstacles in terms of visibility and resource access. Many talented Asian migrant artists grappled with visibility challenges and faced limited access to the ever-evolving technological tools that could amplify their stories.

Regrettably, efforts to promote diversity through various theater festivals in Germany often adhered predominantly to political correctness, sparking contentious debates. These events frequently missed the essence of true inclusivity, which extends beyond borders and encompasses the technological renaissance underway in the artistic domain. This highlighted the pressing need for an inclusive platform transcending geographical boundaries, providing a space for artists from any corner of Asia, including those identifying as Asian artists outside the continent.

Chen: Could you walk us through your own journey in the theater and performing arts, especially in interdisciplinary projects? How have these projects reflected your philosophy and vision for Asian theater, and how do they contribute to the larger dialogue between Europe and Asia?

Ao: From 2019 onward, alongside my academic pursuits, I embarked on theatrical projects, including productions presented in Frankfurt and Göttingen like "Folding Cities," "Hello Strangers," "Plärren," "Love Letters," "The Last Laughs," and "Tough." In 2020, I directed "The Sound Topography of Göttingen" as part of the New York International Virtual Performance Festival. I also curated a series of concise plays named "Thunderstorm 2.0." Interdisciplinary works deeply resonate with my artistic philosophy, which centers on the convergence of elements within the performing arts realm.

In addition to editorial responsibilities and theatrical endeavors, I orchestrated public lectures on Asian theater, inviting scholars and artists from across the globe. In my bid to promote dialogue in Asian theater, I initiated public lectures, inviting internationally acclaimed scholars and artists. Among them was Deepan Sivaraman, a renowned Indian theater director known for his avant-garde productions; Octavian Saiu, a globally recognized theater critic; Rongjun Yu, an influential figure in Chinese theater; Amelie Deuflhard, the artistic director of Kampnagel Theater and a prominent supporter of contemporary theater in Germany; Nurkan Erpulat, a Berlin-based director famed for his transformative works; Kyoko Iwaki, a curator and scholar renowned for her contributions on Japanese contemporary performing arts; Xavier Le Roy, a French choreographer breaking boundaries in contemporary dance; and Wang Chong, an innovative Chinese director celebrated for his global collaborations. Their practices, investigations, and research are closely related to Asian theater.

The highlight of my endeavors was the International Symposium on Contemporary Asian Theater in 2022. With over 20 Asian artists based in Europe participating in the Forum of Young Asian Artists, it witnessed the beginning of a voyage aimed at nurturing cross-continental artistic dialogue between Europe and Eurasia.

Chen: How are you fostering collaborations and partnerships, especially with local German theaters and university departments, to amplify the impact of CAPAS and align it with the broader convergence of art and technology?

Ao: At this moment, I would like to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude. First and foremost, I want to thank my co-curator, Mr. Xiaoyi Liu, the Artistic Director of the Singapore-based theater company Emergency Stairs, for his invaluable insights and open-minded discussions. Equally, I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my dedicated organizing team for their exceptional talents and unwavering efforts.

In our pursuit to bridge art and technology, we've identified the power of collaboration as crucial. Our commitment extends beyond individual efforts. Recognizing this, CAPAS has actively sought to build bridges with prominent institutions. Collaborative undertakings with German theaters and partnerships with university departments are in progress. We are also trying to liaise with artists' associations and foundations in various regions with a view to helping artists from diverse regions obtain support. We believe CAPAS can not only amplify its reach but also enrich the initiative through these connections.

Chen: In the face of global challenges and uncertainties, how do you perceive the role of artists and the performing arts? How does uncertainty shape the creative process and the resultant expression?

Ao: Undoubtedly, the realm of performing arts faces uncertainties, exacerbated by global pandemics and geopolitical shifts. Amidst this uncertainty, artists find their unique voice, transcending reality to explore boundless possibilities. They don't merely act as reflective mirrors, but also as vessels of resilience and innovation. It's fascinating to see how such an uncertain environment nurtures innovation, ushering unforeseen vocational opportunities and sparking advancement. The crux lies in recognizing that uncertainty is woven into existence itself. Artists respond to and interpret this uncertainty through their expressions, creating works that resonate with emotions, thoughts, and experiences. Amidst challenges, uncertainty offers a platform for creativity, driving progress and igniting advancement. (End)