SANKAI JUKU
TOTEM—VOID AND HEIGHT
NOVEMBER 5-7
NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

CREDITS

Directed, Choreographed, and Conceived by
Ushio Amagatsu

Décor
From Natsuyuki Nakanishi "Quartet, Touching Down on Land and Touching Down on Water X"

Music by
Takashi Kako, Yochiro Yoshikawa

Dancers
Semimaru , Sho Takeuchi, Akihito Ichihara, Dai Matsuoka, Norihito Ishii, Taiki Iwamoto, Makoto Takese, Sotaro Ito

Assistant Director
Semimaru

Stage Manager
Kazuhiko Nakahara

Assistant Stage Manager
Keisuke Watanabe

Lighting
Genta Iwamura

Sound
Akira Aikawa

Company Administration
Midori Okuyama, Asami Hori

Music Production
IO-Factory inc

Co-produced by
Kitakyushu Performing Arts Center, Sankai Juku

North American Tour Produced by
Pomegranate Arts, Linda Brumbach & Alisa E. Regas for Sankai Juku

Pomegranate Arts Production Supervisor
Tony Crawford

Pomegranate Arts Tour Manager
Amit Hevrony

TOTEM—Void and Height's presentation at NYU Skirball is made possible in part with generous support from **Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels**.

The 2026 North American tour of Sankai Juku is supported by **the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan** through the Japan Arts Council

WHO'S WHO

Founded in Tokyo in 1975, **Sankai Juku** has become one of the most internationally recognized butoh companies in the world. Since its first overseas tour in 1980, the company has performed in more than forty countries and developed a longstanding relationship with the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris, which has co-produced many of its works. Sankai Juku's distinctive movement language is rooted in a highly refined approach to space, time and the body, and the company continues to tour internationally with a repertory created over nearly five decades.

Born in Yokosuka, Japan, in 1949, **Ushio Amagatsu** was Sankai Juku's founder, director, choreographer and designer, and one of the defining figures of second-generation butoh. He described his approach as a "dialogue with gravity": not an attempt to escape gravity, but to move in concert with it. Beginning with works such as Amagatsu Sho, Kinkan Shonen and Sholiba, he developed a theatrical language that combined movement, visual composition, sound and space with extraordinary precision. From 1981 onward, Paris became an important center for his work.

Amagatsu also worked extensively beyond Sankai Juku. He created *Fushi* for Jacob's Pillow in 1988 with music by Philip Glass, served as artistic director of Spiral Hall in Tokyo, and directed operas including Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* and Peter Eötvös's *Three Sisters* and *Lady Sarashina*. His work received major honors in Japan and France, including Japan's Purple Ribbon Medal, the Art Encouragement Prize from Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and appointment as Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. *TOTEM—Void and Height* was completed shortly before his death in March 2024 at the age of 74.

DANCE REFLECTIONS BY VAN CLEEF & ARPELS

Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan

NYU SKIRBALL

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

For nearly fifty years, Ushio Amagatsu made work with Sankai Juku out of a small number of elemental things: the body, gravity, time, space, breath. He came to butoh after its first generation had already broken radically with established forms of dance, and developed something quieter, more formal and unmistakably his own. Amagatsu often spoke of dancing not against gravity but with it, of the body as something subject to forces larger than itself. In Sankai Juku, that idea became a complete theatrical language: white-painted bodies, spare landscapes, precise movement and a sense that even the smallest gesture might carry enormous weight.

TOTEM—Void and Height is Amagatsu's final work. Its title suggests something ancient, ceremonial, even sacred, but the piece is less interested in symbolism than in presence: bodies gathering, separating, falling, rising and returning again to stillness. Like much of Amagatsu's work, it resists narrative. There is no story to decode and no single meaning to extract. Instead, the choreography asks us to spend time differently, to watch how a body occupies space, how one movement alters another, and how repetition can gradually change what we think we are seeing.

Since its first world tour in 1980, Sankai Juku has been a major presence on the international performance landscape, with appearances across Europe, Asia and the Americas, including multiple engagements at BAM in New York. Amagatsu's death in March 2024 gives the work an added weight, but it does not feel like a memorial. It remains alive in the bodies of the dancers performing it now. That is part of why it belongs at NYU Skirball: we are interested in artists whose work has changed the possibilities of performance, and in what happens when that work is carried forward by the people who know it most deeply. I am especially grateful to Linda Brumbach, Alisa Regas, and the team at Pomegranate Arts for their longstanding commitment to Sankai Juku and for helping bring Amagatsu's final work here and to audiences across North America.

Jay Wegman
Director, NYU Skirball

NOW THAT YOU'RE HERE

Keep following the questions the performance opened up. Our **Prep School** guide to *TOTEM—Void and Height* brings together readings, interviews and other ways into the work, from the history of butoh and Sankai Juku to Ushio Amagatsu's ideas about gravity, the body, transformation and the relationship between human movement and the natural world. Scan the code and feed your head.

GET CLOSER

You've just watched bodies, space and time transformed through movement, as a choreographic language built over decades is carried forward by a new generation of dancers. **NYU Skirball Membership** brings you closer to the artists who make that kind of encounter possible, with ticket savings, priority access, opening night parties, artist gatherings and other ways to go beyond the performance. Scan the QR code and get close...

WE LOVE THESE PEOPLE

NYU Skirball's programs are made possible with support from the National Endowment for the Arts; New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature; and the Howard Gilman Foundation; Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels; Culture Ireland; New York Community Trust; The Shubert Foundation; Collins Building Services; Goethe Institut New York; Adam Mickiewicz Institute; Polish Cultural Institute; Villa Albertine and Albertine Foundation through the Theatre & New Forms program; Consulate General of Switzerland in New York; Harkness Foundation for Dance; and Marta Heflin Foundation; as well as our valued donors.

WHAT'S NEXT IS HERE

DEAD CENTRE: DEAF REPUBLIC
November 12–15
Silence has never been this loud.

A gunshot kills a deaf boy in an occupied town. The next morning, the entire community wakes up deaf. Adapted from Ilya Kaminsky's acclaimed book of poems, Dead Centre's *Deaf Republic* turns that premise into an epic theatrical fable about war, complicity, and collective resistance, combining spokenEnglish,sign language, creative captioning, silence, puppetry,and live cinema. Created with sign language poet Zoë McWhinney and performed by deaf and hearing actors, it asks what happens when refusing to hear becomes a way of refusing to obey.

JORIS LACOSTE: NEXUS DE L'ADORATION
November 20 & 21
A religion for everything.

In *Nexus de l'adoration*, Joris Lacoste imagines a new kind of liturgy devoted to the wildly incompatible things that make up contemporary life, from electronic cigarettes and Dragon Ball Z to tango, pop music and humpback whales. Created for the 2025 Festival d'Avignon, *Nexus de l'adoration* is funny, strange and expansive: a celebration of a world too contradictory to be reduced to a single creed.