

# thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Malaya Ulan

## Sifting through the WHITE noise

by Anito Gavino

Jason Vu's performance at the [Asian Arts Initiative](#) was a live montage of memories that question identity and ancestral grief as a child of Vietnamese refugees. Vu is a nonbinary, Vietnamese American dance and performance artist. As a Queer Asian dancer, they now find their own identity in an Asian American- categorized, fragmented, and classified as an identity simplified for America's convenience.

To respond to a white man solo performance-Through Noise- I respond with fragmented thoughts.

*A solo*

*One hu-MAN show*

*A story through a research practice of emBODYment*

*Jason Vu's investigation of tension juxtaposed against breath was evident in his expression*

*A practice of grounding.*

*I walked into*

*Jason Vu laying on the floor, wrapping themselves in banana leaves.*

*Banana leaves are more than a cultural identifier in this work*

*but an emblem of resourcefulness, blessing, and trauma within a Southeast Asian body*



*The scream lasted minutes  
A mere abstraction of what really lasted for decades  
An irreversible poisoning of soil, people, economy, history,  
But not memory.*

*Jason unapologetically made noise  
"I wanna be heard but I'm never heard"  
So he created a space  
a collection of memorabilia  
conversing with the memories of being wrapped in banana leaves  
Holding him in the contained ritual of a safe space*

*Is this a safe space?  
Or is he trapped in another camp of noise  
Tone deaf questions at the end of the show start to simmer  
"Why didn't you use Asian cultural dances to tell your story?"  
All of these....NOISE.*

*The noise intensifies.  
All noise of sounds too hostile to be his own  
Far from the noise of an Asian populated Bay area  
as Jason testified in the talk back.*

*Complexities through noise  
Layered over his movement were digital images of their memories  
such as the Asian supermarket at Washington Street  
or an image of his pool in his West coast family home.  
Noise becomes normalized.*

*So what is noise?  
Noise is being gawked at as an Asian dancer in these seemingly communal spaces with  
Identity as its commodity.*

*Noise was the woman who greeted me with her whiteness at an Asian centered space,  
Inhospitable  
Unwelcoming with a charge of \$25 a pop  
The Asian woman next to her reeking New York  
into a communal space that once was also my safe space.*

*The warmth of an Asian home was not the performance I received at the door.  
Watched me painfully sign into Ticketleap to pay for tickets, with no options to pay with a credit card or a QR code to quickly allow me  
to do such a transaction  
I was missing 15 minutes of the show..then...*

*After the show...*

*A talk back*

*A time to give the artist your gratitude.*

*A space for reuniting with other artists*

*Not a space to be patrolled by a curator.*

*"If you enjoyed the show, can you now pay the money that you owe?" the woman said verbatim.*

*Suddenly, I was policed as a reviewer.*

*From one OTHER to anOTHER.*

*Asian. Queer. First Generation*

*Jason Vu is BOLD in sharing his apprehensions in making*

*His fears*

*His questioning of why make a dance.*

*This is a writing of one's history*

*A beginning to a life work*

*A testimony that art making can be complex but necessary*

*A process not a product*

*Despite the militancy experienced from the door to the hallways*

*happy to have witnessed*

*To have engulfed Jason's personal journey of sifting through the white-ness noise.*

[Through Noise](#), Jason Vu, Asian Arts Initiative, April 14-August 5, 2023

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