



7TH GIBANICA SLOVENIAN
BIENNALE OF CONTEMPORARY DANCE, 2015

FESTIVAL OF DIFFERENCES

Pia Brezavšček



Pia Brezavšček is a philosopher and art historian who works as a critic and theatrologist and is self-employed in the field of culture. She is currently engaged in a volunteer traineeship at a secondary school. She is a contributor to the newspaper *Tribuna*.

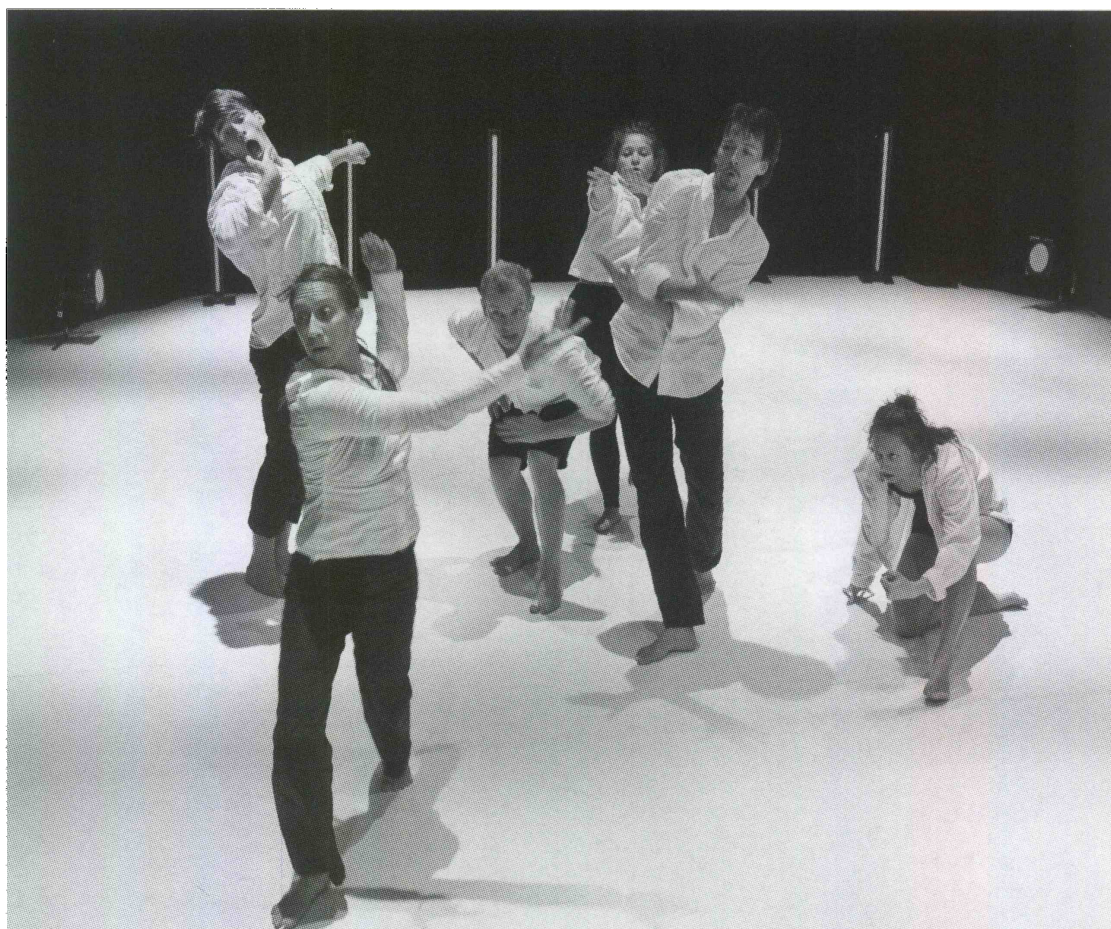
Translated by Filip Drnovšek Zorko

As Igor Ružić said in his piece on Gibanica 2013 in a previous edition of *Maska*, the attempt of the selectors (of which I was one of three) to present a more curation-based platform of Slovenian dance rebounded on them like a boomerang in its negativity. The jury prize and the audience prize went to two of the three performances (*Shame* by Maja Delak and *Eden* by Mala Kline) listed in the additional programme, which ran independently of the curated strand. That latter strand, Ružić continues, was ambitious more in its conceptual basis than in the way it was realised in practice. It is worth mentioning (as an explanation, not an apology) that the curatorial scope of our work originated in certain tendencies apparent in the productions and did not merely anticipate them; instead, the idea was to highlight a particular approach to dance in domestic productions, which we had identified but not, perhaps, supported and illuminated to a sufficient degree. The additional programme was not an accompaniment, was not excluded from the competition (or expected to do poorly in it); instead, it was composed of those productions that we considered unmissable, but which fell outside the scope of the approach we had chosen to highlight.

And yet it is all but impossible to ignore the fact that, at least in the last two editions of Gibanica, the two most important prizes, which reflect the festival as a living event – the audience prize and the jury prize (in 2015 featuring Paula Caspão, Jana Jevtović and Yvonna Kreuzmannova) – have functioned as a kind of subconscious mechanism, a corrective for the rational process of selection, in that they have been awarded outside the main programme. This year's festival confirmed the trend by awarding both prizes to the same piece, Irena Tomažin's *The Taste of Silence Always Resonates*. This was a valuable, sincere, but atypical dance performance by an artist who is promoting the conception of choreography beyond the physical body and into its vocal extension, the voice. The voice is never just a rhetorically reduced foundation of the discursive content but rather represents its softness. Tonal shifts, small mistakes, and large resonances blur the boundaries between the interior and exterior of the body, between medium and content, between the motion of the body as emergence of voice and voice as cause of motion. The performance was listed among the additional programme with the sincerest of support from the public, which is crucial in regards to the audience prize, while also possessing a conceptual design that crossed genre boundaries and allowed the body in dance to be thought in new ways, which is appealing to the expert – two elements that are rarely combined in a single work of art.

In this sense, the two *in situ* prizes (again) represented an important expansion of the Ksenija Hribar prizes, which are given for lifetime achievement and for work spanning the last two years in choreography, dance, criticism, pedagogy, etc. From my experience on this year's committee, I can confirm that, because of the scale of productions and also the diversity of approaches to contemporary dance, these kinds of marginal practices are often overlooked. The prestige and

Milan Tomašič: *Sezona lova/The Hunting Season*, MT, Ljubljana, 2014.
Foto/Photo: Natalia Zajakova.

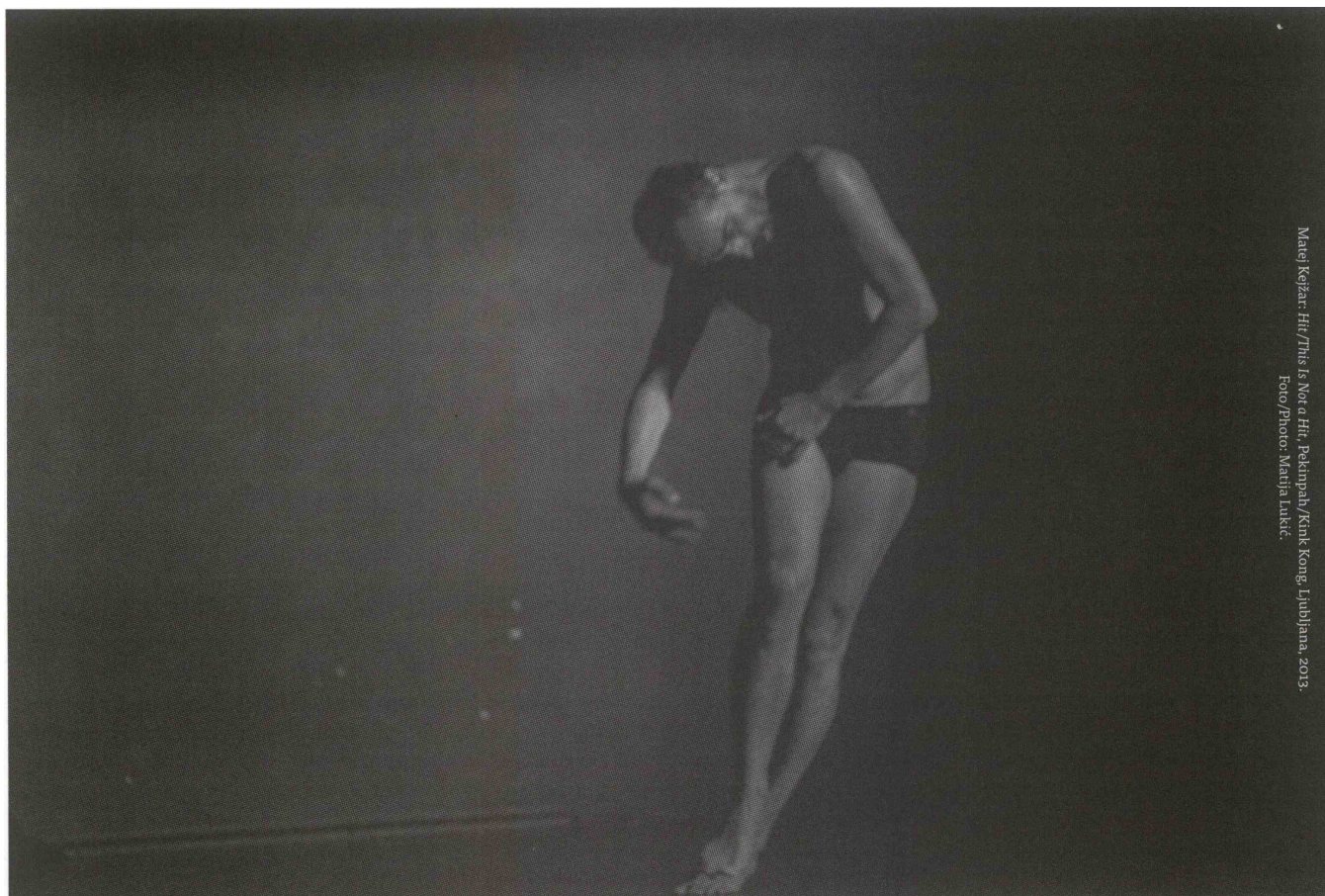
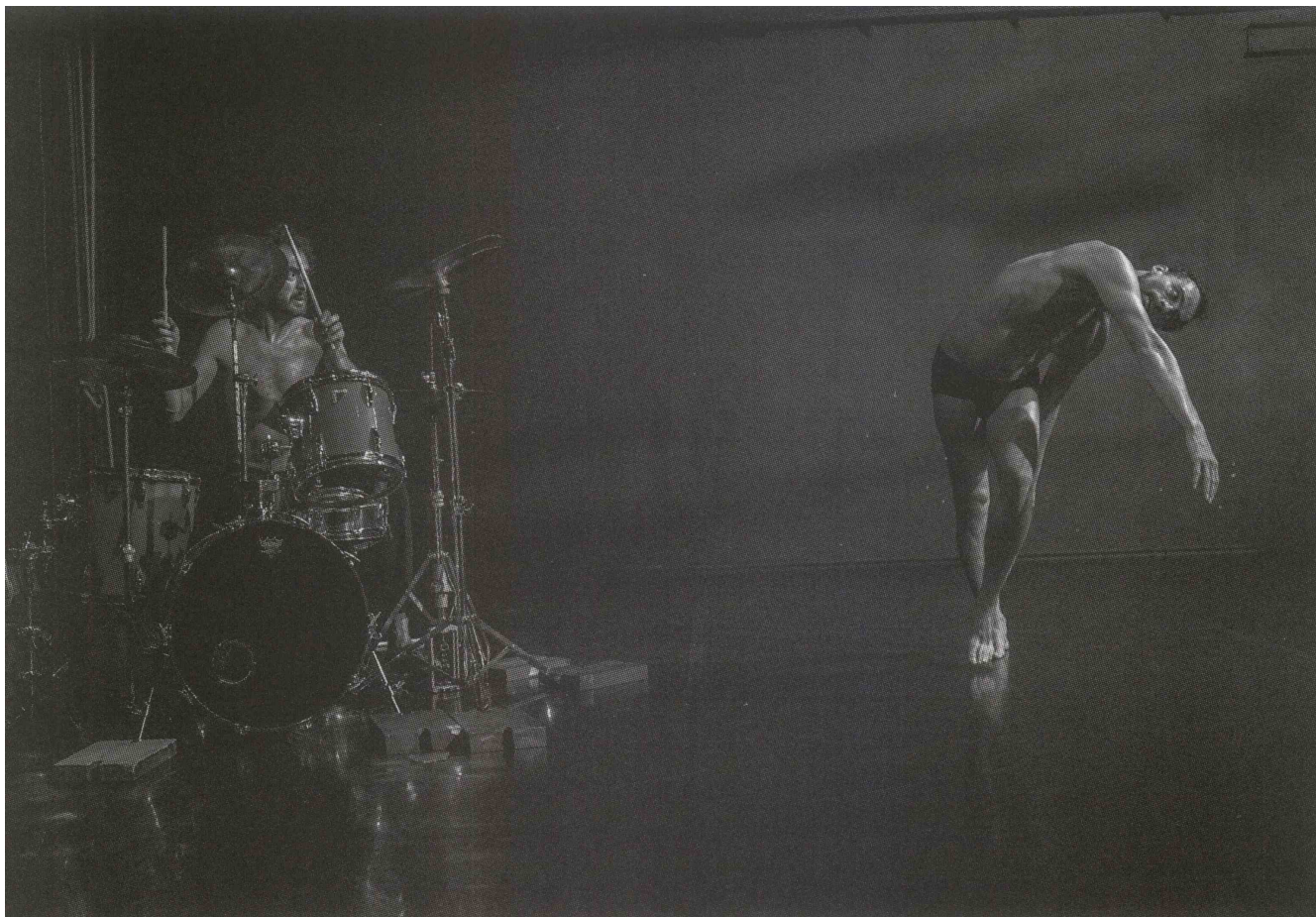


importance of the Ksenija Hribar prizes, at Gibanica 2015 awarded for the second time, are undoubtedly on the rise. The organisers of this year's Gibanica, especially Rok Vevar, are partially to thank: the conference they organised about the dancer and choreographer Ksenija Hribar, who founded Dance Theatre Ljubljana and mentored many currently active artists, created an important historical contextualisation of contemporary dance in Slovenia while also ensuring that, in remembering the work and personality of Ksenija Hribar, we recalled the community potential of the contemporary dance scene. Because of divergences in ideas about dance and especially because of an infrastructure that forces artists into competition, this potential is being neglected – all too often, in fact, we act in direct, destructive opposition to it.

This year Gibanica's selection committee (Nina Meško, Iva Nerina Sibila, and Marc Olivé López) had as its prime directive the recognition of artists' expression and the power of individual works. This was manifested in the programme, which maintained through representation the heterogeneity of the Slovenian contemporary dance scene in all its markedly authorial approaches. In the programme, we could identify themes based on the everyday, the intimate; works that, in the sense of choreographic principles, formally extend into everyday motions; conceptual explorations of the place of dance in relation to other media; the addition of rhythm, voice, speech, and narration into the abstraction of dance; a study in composition with multiple dancers; an exploration of the slowness

of movement in relation to objects, which leads to the absurd; a feminist take on the erotic nature of transfer; markedly performative approaches; a questioning of form originating within dance; and, finally, a notable increase in the number of works addressing the conditions for artistic work and the objectives of artistic creation.

In both festival performances that were co-authored by Teja Reba, *Today Is Tomorrow's Yesterday* and especially *The Second Freedom*, dance is merely one – albeit an important one – of many ways of expressing powerful emphasis on the content itself. More than dance, we can speak here of the medium of the body as the means of expression, which often reaches for the explicit, more or less real interventions into itself (tongue cutting, urinating on stage) that have an effect just where performative art meets the art of performance. The effect is created in the uncertain entanglement of role and individual person, of fictitious blood and real bodily fluids. Artists are not constrained in their approach: the creation of the effect is centre-stage. From the dramatic/theatrical side of things, this kind of practice is probably most closely approached in the work of Via Negativa, which has in the past appeared in the Gibanica festival by virtue of a similarity in format. Reba is characterised, especially in tandem with Leja Jurišić, by the resolute and persistent presentation of feminist themes, which is especially courageous and important in light of the current debates around the overreach of feminism. Reba is also opening a new chapter in the intensity of stage collabora-



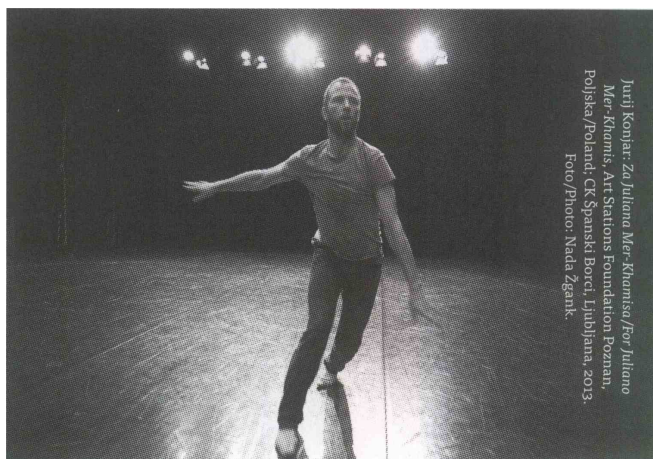
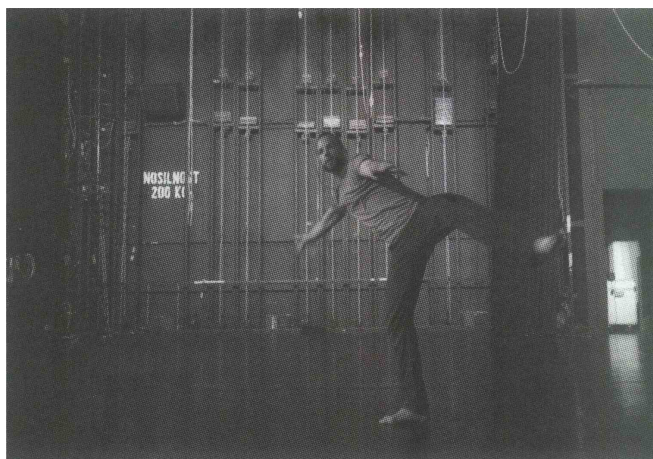
Matej Kežar: Hit/This Is Not a Hit, Pekinpanh/Kim Kong, Ljubljana, 2013.
Foto/Photo: Marija Lukic

tion in her work with Abramovici on the performance *Today Is Tomorrow's Yesterday*, created together with Bara Kolenc.

Choreographer Andreja Rauch Podrzavnik also operates with entirely different means of reality in her work *Time Body Trio*. This is no longer the excessive, abject, hidden reality, but the integration of the everyday with art. In this way, artistic work, the convention of the performance itself (which in this case is entangled with form in the guise of workshops for children and adults being guided around the exhibition) acquires a more and more banal note. The borders between work and free time, between stage and audience, between the clearly delineated temporal slice of the performance and the fragmentation of the unconsecrated before and after times are weakened. For Andreja Rauch Podrzavnik, choreography is the regulation of just such transitivity, which is always perforated to begin with, in the service of some collective functioning, some collective experience.

Barbara Kanc is characteristically eccentric in her piece *Searchings Untitled*, playing with the meaning of relationships between objects and slow-moving bodies, brought to absurdity in a gallery space. Her approach opens up an entirely novel field of exploration, which we can either chide for its hermeticism or praise for its unexpectedly meaningful and often humorous effects. Maja Kalafatić and Marie de Duenas Lopez's *Betwixt* is in this sense more ambitious in its approach towards a greater philosophy of *l'art pour l'art*, remaining firmly within the level of dance in its formal exploration of motif material, and failing to open itself up to the outside. Nevertheless, it is sufficiently current in its presentation of a particular direction of exploration in dance that co-exists with all the other enumerated practices that the Gibanica selectors successfully displayed in cross-section. The only programming lapse we might hold against the selection team is the inclusion of the mocking, shallow-entertainment event *Post hoc ergo propter hoc* by Sebastjan Geč, Milan Loviška and Otto Kraus – and that right before the closing ceremony. Admittedly, the (non)event was placed there precisely because of its levity, that it might conclude the festival by creating a sort of bittersweet universal festivity around the principle of removing chairs from under people. But it failed to elicit the crowd, composed primarily of professionals, into participating, as it was clearly created for some other scene and was not transferable. It also lacked a backup plan, and the event was therefore a complete wash.

If I had to draw a line – from my own, extremely affluent, perspective (which is not much good at strategic thinking) – I'd conclude that (at least of those which applied – some people simply do not apply to the festival) the performances that were highlighted represented the most presentable lines of activity in current contemporary dance. The state of dance in Slovenia is lively, heterogeneous, and despite struggling under weighed-down work conditions, is managing to keep its head above water – if, often, only because emphasising one's own conditions and methods of work through formal and thematic contemplation has become a necessity that is especially important to reflect on precisely through the prism of art.



Abstract

The article analyses the 7th Gibanica biennale of Slovenian contemporary dance. It notes that both festival prizes – the jury prize and the audience prize – have, for at least the second time in a row, come as a surprise, and that they represent a sort of subconscious mechanism. It highlights the importance of the festival conference about the Slovenian dancer, choreographer and pedagogue Ksenija Hribar (1938–1999), which also had a role in promoting the awards named after her (now awarded twice). By considering some of the themes in the works chosen for the biennale, which move from the conditions under which artistic work occurs and the objectives of that work to a within-dance questioning of form, the heterogeneity of Slovenian contemporary dance is highlighted.

Keywords

7th Gibanica festival, contemporary dance in Slovenia, curation, dance production, Ksenija Hribar, Pia Brezavšek.