



SNG MARIBOR

**DRAMA
OPERA
BALET**
MARIBOR
SLOVENSKO NARODNO GLEDALIŠČE
SLOVENE NATIONAL THEATRE

Sustainability and Dance Art: “The Unbearable Lightness of Dancing and the Ubiquitous Burden of Plastics”

27 November 2024 | Maribor, Slovenia

OPEN LAB PROGRAM

The openlab was made of two parts:

- The premiere of Ajda Tomazin's dance performance *Giants of Plastic Landscapes* – Maribor,
- A post-performance discussion with guests and the audience.



OPEN LAB CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

We designed the concept of an open laboratory with a focus on connecting creative individuals – stakeholders and experts in sustainability and environmental issues – with artists addressing environmental concerns through art.

The open laboratory aimed to reflect on the creative experiential process and establish an innovative “artistic laboratory”, bringing together artists, scientists, and audiences. Its goal was to explore, understand, and experience contemporary dance that addresses environmental issues through content and materials while fostering discussions on sustainability in nature, society, and the arts.

*This concept was enriched by the artistic residency of Ajda Tomazin, who conducted an experiential creative dance workshop with dancers from Plesna izba Maribor, led by Dalanda Diallo. The workshop, held the day before the open laboratory, provided young dancers (primary school students) with a unique experience using the method of creative movement. The participants engaged with themes from the performance *Giants of Plastic Landscapes – Maribor*, exploring sustainability through embodied movement and interactions with large plastic bags inflated with warm air. These “giants” served as sensory tools, evoking the sound of rustling wind and symbolizing the overwhelming presence of plastic in our environment.*

*The open laboratory, *Sustainability and Dance Art*, was structured around a viewing of the dance performance *Giants of Plastic Landscapes – Maribor* and a discussion with an environmental geographer, featuring an audience composed of students from *Tretja gimnazija Maribor* (Third Secondary School Maribor) and selected dancers from *Plesna izba Maribor*.*

The target audience was intentionally chosen to highlight the importance of arts education and participation in performing arts, particularly contemporary dance, within both formal and informal educational contexts. It emphasized:

- *Engaging children and youth with professional, high-quality cultural content,*
- *Presenting diverse cultural and artistic fields to younger audiences, enabling them to grow as:*
 - *Thoughtful and critical viewers, participants, and attendees of cultural events,*
 - *Researchers of the arts,*
 - *Creators,*
 - *Active participants (“prosumers”) in cultural activities.*



OBJECTIVES OF THE OPEN LABORATORY II

- *Experience the dance performance,*
- *Facilitate an active discussion between guests and the audience,*
- *Explore connections between ecological sustainability and sustainable contemporary dance, emphasizing shared values such as respect for natural processes, minimalism, and awareness of human impacts,*
- *Raise awareness about sustainability and foster critical thinking about the performance's themes,*
- *Provide participants with an experiential creative workshop involving movement and interaction with recycled materials from the performance.*

PARTICIPANTS

- **Ajda Tomazin:** *Author, director, dance pedagogue, choreographer, and designer.*
- **Špela Premelč:** *Performer and dancer.*
- **Igor Žiberna (PhD):** *Professor at the Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor; expert in climatogeography, ecological geography, and planetary geography.*
- **Audience and participants:** *Students from Tretja gimnazija Maribor (Third Secondary School Maribor) and dancers from Plesna izba Maribor.*
- **Moderator:** *Mojca Kasjak, geographer, sociologist, dance pedagogue, choreographer, dancer, and artistic director of Zavod Moja Kreacija, Maribor.*

KEY POINTS OF THE DISCUSSION

- *Igor Žiberna (PhD) emphasized ecological terms like ecosystems, biomes, and ecological niches while linking the performance to the broader issue of pollution and resource overuse.*
- *Ajda Tomazin elaborated on her creative process and motivation to explore ecological issues through choreography and design.*
- *Students particularly appreciated the use of headphones during the performance, describing the sound design as an immersive and unique experience.*
- *Špela Premelč reflected on the challenges of performing with recycled materials, noting the interplay between objects like “clouds” and “icebergs”.*

Integration of sustainability and dance: The open laboratory highlighted parallels between sustainable practices and contemporary dance:

- **Awareness of body and space:** *Both fields emphasize mindfulness and harmony, whether with the environment or movement.*
- **Sustainable materials:** *The performance used recycled materials, reflecting themes of sustainability.*
- **Energy efficiency:** *Minimalist production choices reduced energy consumption, emphasizing the body as the primary medium of expression.*
- **Environmentally responsible travel:** *Performers opted for shared transport, illustrating sustainable practices in the arts.*

The session concluded with reflections on the importance of live performances in fostering cultural engagement. Students expressed their appreciation for the proximity to the performers, which enhanced their experience.

The artists emphasized that every viewer has the right to interpret the performance uniquely, whether it evokes fascination or even boredom. They noted that boredom can serve as a catalyst for creativity, aligning with the broader artistic goal of awakening emotions and critical thought.

By fostering intergenerational dialogue and blending ecological and artistic themes, the open laboratory demonstrated how integrating sustainability into contemporary dance serves as both a response to ecological crises and a profound expression of contemporary artistic practice.

Prepared by Mojca Kasjak

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