

Märkische Allgemeine

Destruction of one's own living room: The Unidram festival has begun.



A rose as a threat: The British-Belgian group Reckless Sleepers opened the Unidram with “Negative Space”.

© Pedro Sardinha

The international theatre meeting is entering its 31st year in the cultural quarter on Schiffbauergasse in Potsdam – the group Reckless Sleepers kicks things off with an exciting ride into the void.



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Those who mean well by the onstage brawling claim they're merely plucking a rose. But those with a trained mind see that they're dismantling a "panic room," a sanctuary against intrusion and destruction, the soul's last refuge.

The Belgian-British group Reckless Sleepers performs this with such expertise in the premiere piece of Unidram, the festival for poetry and nihilism, that the audience applauds with rapturous delight. The four men and two women on stage don't say much about their meticulous work. In fact, they say nothing at all.

At Unidram, the walls are collapsing; the structural integrity has been compromised.

A piece entirely without words, featuring a hammer and a rose, elegant costumes (the women wear dresses and high heels, the men waistcoats and jackets), a sophisticated ride into nothingness. Because in the end, little remains to provide support on stage. The walls collapse, the structure is broken. Carved like a Christmas goose, without a pattern, on impulse.

The 31st edition of Unidram opened on Tuesday at the T-Werk in Potsdam with the play "Negative Space," a piece that perfectly embodies the festival's tradition. Dismantling established perspectives is a key element of the festival's appeal. Ten international plays will be presented on various stages in the Schiffbauergasse cultural quarter until Saturday.



Where is the emergency exit? In "Negative Space," the ensemble artfully gets in its own way.

© Pedro Sardinha

When the Reckless Sleepers dismantle their cramped space, a pressurized boiler, it happens by accident, casually, as a minor mishap that leads to a fiasco. They probably don't even intend for the world to end. But once you've turned the wrong screw... We know that from Lorient.

The British penchant for fiasco, bad taste, and slapstick (see Monty Python or Mr. Bean) quickly overshadows Lorient. The chain reaction is spectacular; rarely has a lament for everything we hold sacred been so concisely conveyed in less than an hour.

“A woman and a man, both with hammers, strike rhythmically at the walls, dance flirtatiously, look into each other's eyes — a kind of tango, conversation, and intercourse.”

There are no characters on stage, only phenotypes. No real life, only its imitation. At the beginning, a man enters the open-topped box, the play's cramped habitat, constructed of thin wood, carrying a ladder. He climbs up the wall, crosses over, and takes the ladder with him. In itself, that's already a circus act.

A woman remains, unsure of what to do with herself. She takes her steps hesitantly, stands against the wall, and awkwardly and only half-heartedly strikes a pin-up pose. She seems uneasy and is relieved when a hatch opens in the floor. A man peeks out briefly and closes the hatch again. Another hatch opens, this time with a different man inside. Soon they are all climbing out of their holes.

Unidram is Rose and Hammer, paranoia and claustrophobia.

The colonisation of the stage is simultaneously its downfall, ordered into several chapters that escalate and follow one another. Again and again there is carrot and stick, or rather: rose and hammer. These are the states of matter between which this space collapses in on itself.

A man sits on a chair (chairs are the only furniture in the play); another man approaches with a hammer, raises it, does he intend to kill him? The man on his chair reaches for the wall; the man with the hammer pauses, puts down his tool.