

Matjaž Farič

# GHOSTS

유령



**40th anniversary**  
of the professional career  
of choreographer and director Matjaž Farič



CHOREOGRAPHY AND DIRECTION: **Matjaž Farič**, DANCE: **Jeong Bin Seo**

DRAMATURGY: **Katja Markič**, LIGHT DESIGN: **Hotimir Knific**

MUSIC: **Martin Bedárd, Basiani, Art of Noise**, PHOTO: **Darja Štravs Tisu**

PRODUCER: **Ksenija Kaučič**

Performance includes a poem *Bolj brez* by Anja Zag Golob (found in poetry collection *Da ne da ne bo več prišla da ne bo da me žge da se odganjam odganja a ...*, self-published, Maribor, 2019), translated by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Byoung Yoong Kang.

PRODUCTION:

**Flota, Institute Murska Sobota and Flota, Ljubljana**

COPRODUCTION:

**En - Knap Institute, Korea Dance Abroad**

PARTNERS:

**Institute for Culture, Turizm nad sport, Murska Sobota, Youth Information and Cultural Club, Murska Sobota**

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TRANSLATION AND PROOFREADING: **Melita Silič**, GRAPHIC DESIGN: **Andreja Jež**

PREMIERE:

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## GHOSTS (Strahovi)

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The solo "Ghost of My Life" was created in the summer of 1986. That same year, Matjaž Farič received an award for the piece at the New Dance Competition in Budapest, marking his first international accolade. In 1987, whilst further developing his craft at the Palucca Schule in Dresden, Matjaž transferred the solo onto the body of dancer Mario Heinemann, renamed it "Geister meines Lebens", and won the choreography prize at the 10th Ballet Competition of the German Democratic Republic in Dessau.

Upon his return to Slovenia, the solo was titled "Fears" (Strahovi) and was included in the 1987 full-length original production *The Dreams of Maria H.* This was performed at the Youth Club, located in what is now the MIKK, Murska Sobota - Youth Information and Cultural Club. Matjaž Farič performed this production only once; a few days later, he suffered a severe injury that seemed to signal the end of his dancing career. Following his recovery in 1988, the solo *Fears* was integrated into the production *April 6th* by the *Vzhodni plesni projekt* (Eastern Dance Project) group. The premiere took place at Španski Borci on 4 April, as the 6 April slot was already booked for a concert by Aci Bertoncelej.

The solo *Fears* is intertwined with significant turning points in Matjaž Farič's professional path as a dancer and choreographer—beginnings, departures, returns, interruptions, and new starts.

### The Reconstruction: Time and the Body

The reconstruction of the solo *Fears* is not merely an act of repetition. Over the past 40 years, time has etched itself into the author's body—a period during which we have witnessed extraordinary technological progress and tectonic political shifts. Yet, the points of departure remain the same as they were four decades ago. If a large part of the world was then divided by the Iron Curtain, today—after decades of faith in political and economic progress—divergences and new divisions in the global order have returned to the forefront. The spectre of war and the threat of global conflict are once again increasingly present.



Alongside technological advancement, which “intrudes” upon the body, there are parallels in the precariousness of the creator. Whereas 40 years ago, the artist was framed primarily by ideological, socio-political constraints—orthodoxy—today, the framework is predominantly economic: productivity and usefulness.

## The Transformation of Fear

These foundations and frameworks are the generators of contemporary anxieties. The starting point of the choreography, rooted in personal fears from forty years ago, will be confronted in today's creative process with a central question: how do these fears moult from one form into another? How do they accumulate and sink into the vulnerable body? How are gargantuan global mechanisms mirrored in soft tissue, and how do these dilemmas scar and build up beneath the skin? Fears from forty years ago are resurfacing as Ghosts

## A Dialogue Between Eras

In his youth, Matjaž's dance was shaped by Eastern martial arts such as Karate and Tai-chi, expressionist and contemporary dance, as well as gymnastics and formal ballet training. These experiences define the foundations of his movement vocabulary and his signature approach to improvisation.

Similarly, Jeong Bin Seo's dance is “athletic”; her personal style reflects contemporary ballet practices, modern dance, and the traditional movement heritage of her upbringing. The styles of these two creators were formed decades and thousands of miles apart—a distance that provides enough difference to offer a creative challenge for the reinterpretation and expansion of Ghosts. Yet, in their dance sensibility, the two artists are so alike it is as if they have been collaborating for years.

With this reinterpretation of the solo Fears, the Flota Institute marks a significant anniversary in the professional career of choreographer and dancer Matjaž Farič.

# MATJAŽ FARIČ: SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

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Matjaž Farič has been active in dance since the age of ten. His unique movement style was deeply influenced by his early interests in gymnastics and karate. This year marks the 40th anniversary of his first international award, a milestone that launched his professional career in contemporary dance.

## Education and Formative Years

In his youth, Farič organized and led several dance groups in Murska Sobota—first in elementary school and later in secondary school. During his second year of high school, he moved to Maribor to attend ballet school, which at the time offered the only formal education in artistic dance in Slovenia. During this period, he continued to lead his dance group in Murska Sobota while performing as a dancer with the Celje Dance Theatre.

Following high school and mandatory military service, he joined the newly established Ljubljana Dance Theatre (PTL). A year later, he pursued further training at the Palucca Schule in Dresden. During his studies there, he personally met Gret Palucca, who, along with Mary Wigman, was one of the pioneers of modern dance in the 1920s.

## Founding of Ensembles and Choreographic Breakthrough

Upon returning to Slovenia, Farič founded the Eastern Dance Project and collaborated with the Amsterdam-based group TestWorks. He collaborated as a choreographer with PTL and as a dancer and choreographer with the cosmokinetic theatre Rdeči pilot (Red Pilot), and managed the Intakt Dance Studio.

In 1991, after intensive choreographic collaborations with various directors at the Mladinsko Theatre, he directed the production *Wind, Sand and Stars*, for which he received an award at the Borštnik Theatre Festival.

In the mid-1990s, he established The Matjaž Farič Company and staged his *Trilogy* at Cankarjev dom—a contemporary dance reinterpretation of three seminal ballet works: *Swan Lake* (Tchaikovsky), *Romeo and Juliet* (Prokofiev), *The Rite of Spring* (Stravinsky). During this time, he also choreographed works abroad for the Diversions Dance Company in Cardiff (now the National Dance Company Wales) and the Studio for Contemporary Dance in Zagreb.

## Important Recognitions and International Acclaim

In 1997, at the invitation of Ksenija Hribar, he joined the artistic leadership of the Ljubljana Dance Theatre. Shortly after, he created the production *Klon* (Clone), which, together with the *Trilogy*, earned him the Prešeren Fund Award. *Klon* was selected for the finals of the *Rencontres chorégraphiques internationales de Seine-Saint-Denis*, then the most prestigious choreographic competition, leading to significant guest performances in Paris, London (ICA), and Vienna (ImPulsTanz).

In the late 1990s, after leaving PTL, he participated in a pilot “artist in residence” program at Cankarjev dom. During this three-year residency, he created: *Terminal* (named *Production of the Year* in 1999 by *Mladina* magazine), *10° Below 0* (part of the *Hotel Europa omnibus*, which toured Austria, Italy, Germany, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Sweden, and the Avignon Festival in France), *Scandal* (based on Ivan Cankar), a co-production with SNG Opera and Ballet Maribor, premiered on the Gallus Hall stage of Cankarjev dom.

## Flota and the Front@ Festival

In 2001, he founded Flota, an institute he still artistically directs and under which he has created the majority of his dance works. In 2006, he initiated the Front@ International Contemporary Dance Festival in Murska Sobota. In 2025, the festival celebrated its 20th anniversary. The festival was born out of a desire for cultural decentralization and a drive to reform local cultural policy. Under his initiative, the international network of dance organizations, *Beyond Front@*, was also established.

## Directing and Recent Work

In 2010, Farič graduated in Theatre and Radio Directing from the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television (AGRFT). For his graduation radio play, *Hamlet*, he received the Grand Prix at the Prix Marulić International Festival of Radio Plays. In recent years, he has increasingly focused on theatre and opera directing: 2016: *The Dog, the Night and the Knife* (M. von Mayenburg), SSG Trieste, 2017: *Horrible Beauty / Paurosa bellezza* (M. Sosič), SSG Trieste & Il Rossetti, 2018: *Hamlet* (W. Shakespeare), SSG Trieste, 2018: *Beauty and the Beast* (P. Glass), SNG Opera and Ballet Ljubljana, 2018: *The Man with a Knife*, SNG Opera and Ballet Ljubljana, 2019: *The Rite of Spring* (puppet ballet), Ljubljana Puppet Theatre.

In 2025, he completed an authorial opus consisting of: *The Other Side of the Street* (a dance intervention in public space, 2019), the dance-theatre production *The Unwanted* (2024), and the anti-musical *Slippery Ground* (2025).

## Solo Works

In addition to over fifty stage works and numerous choreographies for theatre, Farič has created five full-length solo dance performances: *Mario H's Dreams* (1987), *The Break* (Zlom) (1988). *Solo* (1993), *3.oLo* (2002), *Red – Trace* (Rdeča – sled) (2016)

# DANCE AS A CELEBRATION OF FORM

## A Brief Overview of the Choreographic Oeuvre of Matjaž Farič

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Choreographer Matjaž Farič made his debut on the Slovenian contemporary dance scene as a teenager. Dolenc's photographs from the Summer Dance Schools (organized at the time by the Union of Cultural Organisations of Slovenia – ZKOS) show him in the 1980s wearing athletic adidas gear, immersed in rigorous dance training and already distinguishing himself as a compelling performer. (Within the history of Slovenian contemporary dance, Farič is unequivocally recognized as one of its foremost dancers.)

While still in high school, his early short choreographic pieces were selected for the *Dnevi plesa* (Dance Days) festival, signalling the beginning of a significant artistic journey.

In the 1980s, he furthered his training at the prestigious Palucca School in Dresden, during a period when the academy had already significantly moved beyond the expressionist legacy of its founder, Gret Palucca. Upon returning to the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, he established the Eastern Dance Project, envisioned as a counterpart to Dance Theatre Ljubljana, with which he had been collaborating since 1985. At the end of that year, he appeared as a performer in Ksenija Hribar's choreography *Concert*.

Unlike Ksenija Hribar, who during her Ljubljana period employed satire, parody, and subversion to position contemporary dance as a vehicle for institutional and social critique, or Damir Zlatar Frey, who at the same time developed his work through powerful expressionist theatricalization often termed "choreodrama," Farič brought a classical choreographic approach to the Slovenian cultural scene. His work is marked by formal structural balance and an aesthetic autonomy closely aligned with the principles of modern dance.

When Farič's work is at its most compelling, it stands as one of the purest examples of compositional choreography in Slovenia – bearing certain morphological parallels with the established canon of American modern dance. Drawing on his artistic skills and extensive experience, Farič navigated fluidly between institutional settings and the independent dance sector. The scale and formal clarity of his works enabled them to command the expansive stages of Slovenian theatres with both confidence and precision.

Matjaž Farič's artistic oeuvre is shaped by several parallel creative interests that he developed from the mid-1980s through the 1990s – a period during which the performing arts in Europe experienced significant aesthetic transformations, as choreographic approaches increasingly intersected with theatrical processes and redefined the construction of the performing body. This era also witnessed the emergence of powerful hybrid forms of theatre and choreography on stage.

In contemporary dance, this period marked a meeting point between academic modernism – characterized by clearly defined technical vocabularies and compositional structures – and emerging artistic and cultural alternatives, notably intensified forms of dance theatre (physical theatre). A form of choreographic brutalism made its way onto the stage through partially unstructured, contestational choreographic practices (often high-risk choreography), modulated explorations of contact improvisation, and a raw, aggressive engagement with the floor. In the dance film genre of the time (dance video), these approaches frequently found their aesthetic context in abandoned industrial spaces and stark architectural environments (for example *Rosas danst Rosas*, *Betontanc*, DV8 Physical Theatre, and others). Farič closely observed these trends, thoughtfully selecting and integrating elements into his own choreographic work with careful modulation and refinement.

His distinctive movement signature is most clearly expressed – though not exclusively – in his solo works, where the intimate focus allows the kinetic qualities of his choreographic "engine" to become visible. As both choreographer and performer, he employs the skeletal-muscular system in a manner characteristic of modern dance technique, deeply rooted in the era of dominant manual, industrial labour and physical human strength. This grounding imparts his movement with remarkable stability and weight, while simultaneously imbuing it with a generous softness and fluid pliability influenced by the kinetic explorations of the 1960s and 1970s, all unified by a finely calibrated muscular tension.

If we close our eyes and imagine the movement in Matjaž Farič's works, it is always slightly slowed by resistance – somewhat restrained, yet never forced into extreme or painful contraction. We sense it through subtle muscular tensions that elevate the dancing body beyond everyday movement patterns.<sup>1</sup>

The physical kinetic architecture of Farič's movement – shaped by modernism's gradual descent toward the floor from the 1930s onward, and its later embrace of the pure fall – is never strictly vertical. It consistently incorporates torsion, curvature, and spiralling, bestowing his dancing body with qualities of partial horizontality, undulating waves, incline, and folding (as seen in *Otok*, *Solo*). This movement quality introduces into the modernist paradigm of engineered verticality – where reaching skyscraper heights symbolizes technological progress and political or social power – a sense of landscape, a democratic horizon, and human existential vulnerability.<sup>2</sup>

Although his dancing body embodies the modulated stability of a vertically structured modern dance technique, it was often visually transformed through costume interventions – an approach tracing back to Oskar Schlemmer's experiments in *Triadic Ballet*, and resonating with contemporaneous works by Michael Clark (notably those influenced by Leigh Bowery's radical costume designs) as well as the neo-Dada sensibility of Philippe Decouflé. Beyond the spatial constraints or narrative shifts that permeate his oeuvre, these visual disruptions became a recurring element during a certain phase of Farič's work – one that extends beyond mere costuming. This is also where his interest in digital choreographic tools resides: alongside costume, these functioned as external systems aimed at challenging or fracturing the established compositional frameworks of modern dance.

In shaping choreographic space, Farič's work is rooted in compositional strategies that construct the work around the ideal of solid, almost organic structural coherence. The ocularcentrism in his pieces reflects the choreographer's authorial control – his need to manage the montage and visual flow of spatial arrangements, to maintain architectural proportionality, and to guide the dynamic progression of spatial transformations.<sup>3</sup>

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1 In the choreographic section of the performance *The Unwanted* (2024), this dynamic shifts. The softened movement arises from a pure, precisely controlled gravitational impulse in line with release system, executed with remarkable precision by the younger generation of dancers.

2 A Slovenian poet humorously echoed this invitation to descend from political or social heights in the title of his poetry collection *Nebotičniki sedite!* – literally, "Skyscrapers, sit down!"

3 Ocularcentrism refers to the philosophical and cultural bias that privileges vision and sight over all other human senses. Coined in the 1980s by historian and theorist Martin Jay, it describes the tendency of Western thought to equate seeing with objective knowledge and intellect. In dance, it refers to a well-composed choreography when watched from the auditorium.

It is important to acknowledge the choreographer's persistent drive to challenge his own artistic vitality by subverting the conventional theatre space – traditionally divided into auditorium and stage – through the introduction of obstacles and constraints that call for a re-calibration of movement and spatial organization. In doing so, he incorporates elements such as a convex floor (*Island*), a circular auditorium (*A Circle in the Body – A Square in the Head*), a spatial capsule (*Terminal*), a scenographic object that defines the site (the table in *Stravinsky and Me*, around which the entire first part of the choreography unfolds), and even the auditorium itself as an activated space for a meta-choreographic event (*Talk Me Your Body*). These are just a few illustrative examples.

The narrative dimension of Farič's choreographic oeuvre serves no single overriding purpose. Even in his reinterpretations of Russian ballet classics – ranging from Romanticism to the Avant-Garde – such as *Swan Lake*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Le Sacre du printemps*, he created a diverse body of work that resists reduction to a unified choreographic logic. Through these reinterpretations, Farič appears to have expanded his palette of choreographic tools, creative possibilities, and, notably, his range of performers, regularly incorporating dancers, ballet artists, actors, movement practitioners, and even carefully chosen non-dancers into his productions.

In his narrative choreographic works, Farič intentionally challenges himself by making artistic choices that push him beyond his comfort zone – the creative space where he usually works with ease. Consequently, the narrative elements in his pieces resist reduction to a single, unifying logic.<sup>4</sup>

It is worth highlighting his multiple stagings of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, presented in varied media and contrasting choreographic languages, yet consistently avoiding reliance on traditional narrative devices.

Although Farič collaborated with many theatre directors of the so-called third generation – peers with whom he practically could have studied (with Živadinov as a central figure in this movement, alongside Košnik, Jablanovec, and close collaborators such as Miler and Taufer) – and shares various aesthetic interests with them, his choreographies are not driven by constructivist intents. For Farič, form consistently takes precedence over bodily materiality or corporeality. Nor are his works performances in the strict sense: speech acts assume a leading role only once, entirely replacing choreographic form (*Talk Me Your Body*). His pieces do not commit to dominant expressive stances, whether oriented toward the emancipation of specific subjectivities or the embodiment of natural or cultural structures.

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4 Midway through his dance career, Farič chose to study theatre directing at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, after collaborating with a broad spectrum of theatre directors whose aesthetic approaches were often mutually incompatible.

Procedural or open-form works are rare in his oeuvre (*Synesthesia*), and even when theatricalization or dramatization is present, it primarily serves as a compositional catalyst rather than an end in itself.

Matjaž Farič's artistic oeuvre warrants a more detailed analysis and thoughtful positioning within both the broader Slovenian and international historical frameworks. Despite considerable progress, dance historiography in Slovenia remains largely an amateur pursuit. In the forty years since Farič began his creative work, contemporary dance has experienced far more rapid transformation than in the entire preceding century. Time has accelerated, contexts have broadened, and the field of reference has become richly layered. With the technological reshaping of the media landscape over the past two decades, access to information has increased dramatically, and the aesthetic spectrum within the field has expanded significantly.

Contemporary dance today forms a heterogeneous constellation within the broader landscape of contemporary arts. Perhaps for this very reason, it is now easier to recognize that Farič's work belongs to the paradigm of artistic choreography that originally positioned itself in opposition to the formal rigidity and kinetic ambition of institutionalized dance forms – forms that, until the late nineteenth century, were represented exclusively by ballet.

For dance to become contemporary, it first had to undergo modernization, and a new kind of body had to be imagined – one capable, even on an abstract level, of embodying new forms of life. This body needed to articulate, with the same conceptual breadth as ballet – the monarchical form of dance art – the formal elements of choreographic construction: kinetics, space, dynamics, and time, while simultaneously asserting a significance beyond mere physical materiality. (Corporeality entered dance around the late 1950s into the 1960s through various bodily configurations or "dance *kons*," borrowing a term from Kosovel.) Dance had to be realized in a modernist manner – much like functionalist architecture – as a celebration of form. It was an emancipatory project for the kinetic forms of modernity, where life ceases to be reserved solely for those occupying the top of the vertical hierarchy. A dance that is also attuned to the ground.

Of course, certain conditions are essential for this kind of work to exist at all, as the production infrastructure supporting contemporary dance remains unsustainable without the resources and institutional backing that ballet enjoys in Slovenia. Matjaž Farič has had the opportunity to infuse modern choreographic composition with layers and qualities drawn from the numerous dance experiments and alternative approaches that emerged from the mid-twentieth century onward, keeping alive the grand dance project of that century. Without his artistic contributions—and those of several of his choreographic peers – the case for advocating contemporary dance today would be significantly weaker. For all of us engaged in the field of contemporary dance, the presence of Matjaž Farič is a profound source of reassurance. "*What luck that we have him!*" Ksenija Hribar once told me. At the time, I sensed the truth of her words; today, I fully understand it.

Rok Vevar

# Forty Years of Creative “Intercannibalism” at the Crossroads of Dance, Ballet, and Theatre

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Matjaž Farič is both synonymous with and emblematic of contemporary Slovenian dance over the past four decades. He is simultaneously a dancing and thinking body as archive, movement as trace, and space-time as material. His returns to the stage – whether through the semiotic and phenomenal body in motion, or through speaking bodies inhabiting theatrical space-time, together with the many interconnections between them – are never nostalgic.

Rather, they function as analytical incursions into his own artistic practice. Each new performance is therefore more than simply a performance: it is a reckoning with, and an inventory of, his own recurring patterns – patterns that, over decades, have become embedded in muscular and mental memory, acquiring an almost self-evident quality. Yet paradoxically, every new work by Farič also constitutes a rebellion against precisely this self-evidence.

Whereas the body initially functioned for him as a trained and disciplined instrument, subordinated to an ideal of perfection, over the decades since his solo debut *Ghosts of My Life* (1986), it has increasingly become a question he feels compelled to investigate. In his performances, Matjaž Farič no longer conceals imperfections; instead, he incorporates them as constitutive elements of his stage language. Where the classical paradigm of dance demands control, Farič introduces a rupture. And it is precisely within this fracture that meaning emerges – choreographic, theatrical, hybrid. Movement, like the dancer’s or actor’s body, exists equally as representation and as process.

His remark that he had “grown tired of dancing” did not signal an ending, but rather a turning point in his career as a performer. From the 1980s onward, Matjaž Farič’s artistic trajectory reveals both the particular dynamics of Slovenian contemporary dance and the challenges involved in establishing contemporary ballet within the Slovenian cultural context: from the collective enthusiasm and packed auditoriums of earlier decades to today’s fragmentation and hyperproduction, which nevertheless seem caught in a self-perpetuating cycle.

Matjaž Farič’s reinterpretations of ballet classics in the 1990s were, in effect, deconstructions of the myth itself. Through them, he demonstrated that the canon is never static, but rather the product of historical interventions, ruptures, and adaptations. By dismantling the illusion of unity, Farič repeatedly shows – through the bodies inhabiting his dance and theatre works – that tradition, too, is a process rather than a fixed point of reference. His shifts from narrative structure to pure physicality are always internally coherent: when the story disintegrates, the body remains as the final bearer of meaning.

In the era of technology, when movement can be recorded, reproduced, and simulated, Matjaž Farič insists on its irreducible elusiveness. His engagement with computer choreography has led him to a paradox: the more one attempts to capture movement, the more it slips away. What is essential remains beyond documentation – the inner impulse that gives rise to movement itself. For Farič, improvisation does not signify the absence of structure, but rather a different kind of structure: open, responsive, and contingent upon space, time, and the presence of the spectator. Each performance thus becomes a variation rather than a repetition.

## From Representation to Event

Matjaž Farič's work can be understood as a passage through different performance regimes – from early forms of dance theatre to distinctly post-dramatic structures. His beginnings in the 1980s coincided with a period of intense artistic ferment, during which a broad field of contemporary performing arts emerged within the so-called alternative scene. Already in his early works, such as *Sixth of April* and *Red Alarm*, one can discern hybrid performance forms that transgress the boundaries between dance, theatre, and visual art, establishing a characteristic intermediality.

The break with linear narratives and fixed meanings became even more pronounced in the 1990s, when Matjaž Farič turned to the deconstruction of the ballet canon. His reinterpretations of classical works do not operate as reinterpretations in the conventional sense, but rather as post-dramatic performances that dismantle the myth of the authentic original. In this context, Farič once described *Swan Lake* as "a big salad" – a collage that openly exposes its own constructedness. Such procedures can be situated within the broader field of the deconstruction of representation and the shift toward presentation.

One of the central themes running through Matjaž Farič's oeuvre is the body as the primary site of the performative production of meaning. His shift from narrative structures toward the "pure power of dance" can be perceived as a move away from a mimetic model and toward the performative event, in which the body no longer represents meaning, but generates it through the very act of performance itself.

In works such as *Clone*, Matjaž Farič offers a profound reflection on the relationship between the body and technology. Yet despite his engagement with digital media, technology never takes precedence in his creations. On the contrary, it is the imperfect, vulnerable body that guarantees the autonomy of each performative event. In this way, Farič positions himself within a discourse that critically examines the digitisation and virtualisation of the body, while simultaneously affirming its materiality – its semiotic and physical dimensions, as defined by Erika Fischer-Lichte.

Over time, the self-referential dimension of Farič's work became increasingly pronounced. The solo *Red – Trail*, for instance, can be viewed as a process-oriented performance, where the emphasis lies not on the final product but on the creative act itself – an exploration of inner impulses, bodily memory, and states of perception. In his choreographies, Farič conceives contemporary performance as a space of heightened sensory and affective experience.

His performances no longer convey predetermined meanings but function as open systems that emerge from the interplay between performer, space, and spectator. Improvisation, employed as a central creative principle, further underscores the ephemeral and unrepeatable nature of each event. In this way, Farič's work aligns with the broader context of contemporary performing arts, where the spectator becomes a co-creator of meaning and the performance unfolds as a process taking place in the immediacy of the here and now.

An important dimension of Farič's work was the establishment of the Flota Institute, conceived as a response to the production conditions of contemporary art. This shift brought into focus the divide between artistic and production functions: the artist becomes both creator and organizer, a dual role that fundamentally influences the nature of performance production. Aware of this dynamic, Farič founded Flota as a production and festival turn that introduced significant innovations into the Slovenian cultural landscape. It became the production core of his own artistic practice while simultaneously providing a vital platform for a wide range of emerging artists and establishing a model of remarkably successful decentralization within the Slovenian performing arts scene.

## Persisting in the Space In-Between

On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of his career, it is fitting to emphasize that Matjaž Farič is an artist who operates within the space in between – between dance and theatre, structure and improvisation, body and mind. His oeuvre can be understood as a continuous interrogation of his own methods and an opening toward new performative possibilities, characterised by a Bourriaudian notion of translation across performance media and cultures.

While Farič's early phase was defined by his entry into the world of dance, the force of his "Theatrical-Dance Madness" over the past three decades has manifested above all as a steadfast, undogmatic, and unifying stance – driven by a desire, a will, and an extraordinary capacity to continually redefine the world of dance. In this sense, his artistic trajectory is not a closed system but an open process: a performative, creative, intellectual, and physical flow extending from its fourth decade into those yet to come. In doing so, Farič raises the question of artistic identity in the contemporary moment. When he observes that, by establishing production structures, artists have turned into bureaucrats, he exposes the split between creation and administration – the energy that should be directed toward art dissipates into mechanisms of survival.

And yet, it is precisely from this conflict that Farič's work emerges. The same holds true for his latest project, *Ghosts*, which is not merely a reconstruction of his early solo piece but a reinscription into a new body, a new era, and new discourses. Its transformation into a contemporary context does not mark a conclusion but the beginning of a new cycle – one in which the body, stripped of illusions, returns to the fundamental question: why dance at all? The answer, of course, is never unambiguous; it unfolds as a process that occurs anew each time, in every movement. On the fortieth anniversary of the creative career of dancer, choreographer, and director Matjaž Farič, his artistic journey thus reveals itself as a continuous exploration of performative strategies, physicality, and the relationship between performer and spectator.

Tomaž Toporišič

## MATJAŽ FARIČ - 40 YEARS

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Memory is not a reliable archive but a dynamic process in which language continually rewrites, reorganizes, and semantically reshapes events. And yet, I vividly remember *Sixth of April*, performed on April 4, 1988, at the Španski borci Cultural Centre, as a blazing meteor that illuminated the then-diverse landscape of Slovenian contemporary dance.

The performance *Sixth of April*, created by Matjaž Farič with his then dance group, the Eastern Dance Project, evoked the outbreak of World War II in Yugoslavia through its title, while its iconography and choreography opened onto a wider political and ideological horizon. Having recently completed his studies at the Palucca University of Dance Dresden – where expressionist "new artistic dance" intersected with Russian-style ballet – Farič drew on experiences shaped by the Yugoslav, Western European, and Eastern European contexts.

What has remained with me most from the performance is Farič's solo, which may be seen as the point of departure for his ongoing exploration of the relationship between body and movement on one hand, and meaning on the other. It is this very solo – now reimagined as *Ghosts* – that will be performed by the Korean dancer Jeong Bin Seo on the anniversary of Farič's professional career, in the same venue as four decades ago.

The human body is not a natural or biological fact but a construct shaped by discursive, normative, and representational structures that determine how it is used and perceived. Yet the body is never entirely subordinate to these structures, which regulate and organize corporeality through various mechanisms; it resists them through disruption, deviation, and excess. The enactment of this inherent fissure – exposing the limits of control over the body – constitutes a potential site of the political, and it is precisely this tension that underlies Farič's choreographic practice.

In *Sixth of April*, a large structure in the form of a fivepointed star served as the central signifier, positioning the body at the intersection of history, collective memory, and ideology. In his solo, Farič's body appeared as a rupture within this symbolic order, while the use of voice – in the Georgian folk song performed by the male vocal ensemble Basiani – can be read as a moment of sublime excess that escapes meaning. The body was conceived as a singularity resisting complete assimilation into the collective framework established through the group sequences. Movement, therefore, did not operate as a transparent vehicle of meaning but rather as its destabilization, while choreography functioned as a conceptual organization of the body that revealed a fissure between social order, history, and an individual corporeality that both eludes and, at times, consciously resists that order.

Farič's choreographic practice is neither an affirmation of the body as a vehicle of free expression nor its deconstruction – a strategy often employed in contemporary conceptual dance – but rather an inquiry into the tension between the body and the space it occupies within the symbolic order. The body is not a stable expressive or aesthetic unit but a fragmented field in which three layers intertwine: the material (its organic vulnerability and limitations, articulated through fragmentation and physical exertion), the symbolic (its inscription within canon, tradition, and history), and the affective (manifested choreographically and performatively through persistence, repetition, and enjoyment beyond pleasure).

Farič has frequently evoked this latter dimension through repetitive movement, and in last year's performance *Slippery Floor*, he also employed circular movement sequences. Circularity is integral to the structure of repetition and closure – a motion that does not unfold linearly but instead returns, persists, and produces enjoyment that exceeds the bounds of comfort. Dancers are intimately familiar with this dynamic, often continuing to perform in classes and productions despite physical injury or pain.

Matjaž Farič conceives of the body as a field in which meaning is not predetermined but emerges in the moment, becomes destabilized, and, above all, remains open-ended. In his choreography *Solo* (1993), set to Mahler's song cycle *Songs of a Wayfarer* – which meditates on life after personal catastrophe and concludes with the Macedonian folk dance *Žensko pusteno* – he employed intense physical tension to open a multilayered field of meaning in which one can also discern echoes of the war then unfolding in the Balkans. I believe that this remarkable solo – pushing the body at moments to its very limits – can also be read today in relation to current conflicts, including the ongoing wars and genocides in the Middle East.

A distinct strand of Farič's oeuvre consists of reinterpretations of canonical balletic and dramatic works. In his productions of *Swan Lake*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Le Sacre du printemps*, he reveals how the body is always already inscribed within aesthetic and cultural regimes. At the same time, he exposes the incompleteness of this inscription through the disintegration of the idealized bodily integrity characteristic of the ballet canon. In *The Temptation* – inspired by Cankar's dramatic text – he further foregrounds the violent dimension of symbolic law and the contingency of bodily norms.

Farič has also integrated contemporary technologies into his work as a means of examining the body's vulnerabilities and (im)possibilities. In the performances *Clone* and *3.oLo*, he juxtaposed the dancer's physical body with its virtual counterpart or avatar.

His extensive oeuvre encompasses more than a hundred choreographic and theatrical works, including collaborations in which he was a choreographer, as well as performances for children – the most memorable to me being his staging of Svetlana Makarovič's *Kuzma the Gremlin Gets an Award*.

Farič's creative practice can be perceived as a pursuit of an elusive object of desire – one that continually propelled him toward new challenges and that he often approached from multiple angles simultaneously. Some projects emerged as unexpected byproducts of productions he was engaged with at the time, while in others he reworked elements from earlier pieces. To mark the twentieth anniversary of his professional career, he brought together dance and theatre artists from different phases of his work in the project *Why Would Anybody Stop Me* (2006). Fragments of past performances were reconfigured into a new structure that combined self-reflection with ironic distance, exemplified in the final scene, where Farič stepped off the stage to watch a reinterpretation of his own solo from the audience.

This reconstruction of the solo from *Sixth of April*, performed by Jeong Bin Seo four decades after its creation, thus constitutes a reenactment through difference: her body differs from Farič's, and the political and social conditions have likewise changed. Following the collapse of the Cold War bloc system, we are now confronted with the neoliberal imperatives of productivity, accompanied by pervasive economic and social insecurity – conditions under which contemporary dancers too live and work in increasing precarity.

In comparison with the fears of four decades ago, those of today have assumed even more monstrous and terrifying faces and forms.

# FARIČ.

## MATJAŽ FARIČ.

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DANCE OFTEN NEEDS TO BE SEEN SIMPLY FOR WHAT IT IS - A FLOW OF MOVEMENT AND SENSITIVITY THAT DOES NOT REQUIRE TRANSLATION INTO LITERARY LANGUAGE. IT IS MUCH THE SAME IN SCULPTURE, WHERE MOVEMENT IS FROZEN IN FORM AND NEEDS NO INTERPRETATION, NO SPECULATION ABOUT WHAT THE ARTIST MAY HAVE WANTED TO EXPRESS. FORMS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES AND AFFECT US DIRECTLY. THE SAME IS TRUE OF DANCE... CONTEMPORARY DANCE IS FAR LESS INCOMPREHENSIBLE THAN IT MAY APPEAR.

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Matjaž Farič, Svet 24, May 2025

In this statement, I can already recognize, in a single gesture, the first twenty years of his work – the period when I was still closely following contemporary dance. Matjaž's dancing and choreography were, above all, precisely that: a flow of movement. Intensely physical, almost mathematically precise, marked by discipline and by a body wholly devoted to motion. A discipline that, for me, opened countless possible interpretations. Or nothing but repetition, repetition, repetition – which, through its very persistence, also set the imagination in motion. And yet there was nothing missing if I simply admired the discipline.

He was demanding – as a dancer, as a choreographer, as a person. Consistent. Persistent. Stubborn. In every respect. He refined his body, sculpting it like a sculptor in pursuit of perfection. All the way to the limits of what is human.

He was the finest ballet dancer among contemporary dancers, and the most contemporary among ballet dancers. He wove the two forms together – seemingly close, yet fundamentally different – with an ease that made it appear the simplest thing in the world.

His name is closely associated with the Dance Theatre Ljubljana, yet his style was never primarily theatrical or narrative; it was always rigorously physical. He belonged to the scene, to the great surge of that moment, and yet always remained entirely within his own code.

I reread the text I wrote for the twentieth anniversary of his career, trying to recover the memory of those years, and his early works begin replaying vividly in my mind. The first solo. The performances created during his – and still the only – artist residency at Cankarjev dom. I go through the list of his works, his theatre and other choreographies, the awards. And the distance of time draws me into a kind of sentimental remembrance.

Back to the waves of excitement in the 1990s, when it seemed that everything was possible. That everything was only just beginning; that the boom would naturally lead to stable development and a gradual integration into institutions. Or at the very least, that contemporary dance would finally gain rehearsal and performance spaces of its own. That seemed like the bare minimum the scene deserved. We believed we were not studying the Belgian model of dance infrastructure in vain – learning which institutions placed contemporary dance choreographers at the centre of their programmes, and which even had their own schools.

And then I find myself arguing – or rather negotiating – with artificial intelligence, asking it to write me a story based on his actual biography, the kind of story written by so many choreographers, not only in Europe, who built their careers through institutions of contemporary dance and ballet. But the AI refuses: apart from Fronta Festival and Flota Institute, and that brief leap into Cankarjev dom, he was never the artistic director of a ballet company, nor of any major contemporary dance or ballet festival. Hmm. And yet he should have been.

Still, I refuse to let go of the idea, and I write: "After twenty years on the independent scene, Matjaž Farič – dancer, choreographer, teacher, recipient of awards both at home and abroad – takes over as artistic director of a ballet company." I try to imagine the headlines reacting to my fabricated announcement. Who would be thrilled, who delighted? How would the entirely different mentality of the public sector receive him, absorb him – would he transcend it, or be consumed by it? This is not a question of discipline or order; Matjaž has more than enough of both. Enough to export. It is a question of two fundamentally different systems: the nongovernmental, precarious one, and the public sector with its union-regulated working conditions. If the former depends on constant work – until the task is completed, regardless of holidays, weekends, illness, or vacation – the latter is built around the protection of employees.

Years later, Sanja Nešković Peršin did become artistic director of the Ljubljana Ballet. But she was not an outsider; she was already part of the internal history of the institution. Sanja understands the mechanisms of both systems intimately. So does the current artistic director, Lukas Zuschlag. What had once seemed entirely natural in the Maribor Ballet took much longer to establish itself in Ljubljana. I still find myself amused by the fake news that Matjaž had, quite some time ago, become the artistic director of the Ljubljana Ballet... Better not to write down everything that crosses my mind, but the thought entertains me. It would have been a genuine bombshell. True, he was never first in line for such a transition, yet here – apart from Sanja – we could only imagine it in the way I am imagining it now: as fake news. Still, you will find his name on their website, listed as an external collaborator.

But let us stay, for a moment, with this fake news that – by every logic – could just as easily have been real: entirely plausible, even an obvious outcome of the work, the awards, the achievements; the very least one might expect. It would have been justified and deserved. And it could have happened here, or anywhere in Europe. Back in 2006, when Matjaž Farič was marking twenty years of work, Wayne McGregor was appointed the first resident choreographer of The Royal Ballet. And long before that, William Forsythe had already taken over the Frankfurt Ballet... Artificial intelligence keeps feeding me lists of contemporary dance choreographers who, at least twenty years ago – in the period when the world was more normal than today – were embraced by major institutions. In Berlin, Sasha Waltz, his generational contemporary, was thriving. Angelin Preljocaj had become a major force in France. Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker remained the driving force behind Rosas.

The situation in Slovenia was completely different. In 2012, summarising the MMC news report, Matjaž Farič – who was at the time serving as acting director – discovered through the media that the Centre of Contemporary Dance Arts was set to be closed. He was never formally notified of an official decision regarding the closure. Farič sought a meeting with the then Minister of Culture and Sport, Žiga Turk, who

explained the ministry's reasons for intending to shut down the Centre, while Farič advocated for the institution's continued existence.

Ultimately, Farič himself requested to be relieved of his duties, because "the institution's Board had not been appointed; the Centre was barred by government decree from hiring staff or signing authors' contracts; no one had secured an extension of the lease for the premises – partially renovated with the Centre's own funds – and completing the renovation under these circumstances would have been financially unfeasible; and after more than a month, Farič had still not received a contract for his position as acting director."

That marked the first time the Centre of Contemporary Dance Arts was closed. Today, a new Centre has emerged – will it endure? This, too, is part of the broader narrative of Matjaž's forty years of dedication to the field.

In the meantime, he worked tirelessly, he still runs the Front@ festival in Murska Sobota alongside his own productions. Yet, he also took an unexpected and unconventional detour. He completed a directing degree at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film, and Television. Naturally – who else but Matjaž? Among other subjects, he studied the history of Slovenian contemporary dance, a field closely tied to his own creative work, though he admits he tended to skip that part.

Over the next twenty years of his career, I found myself drifting into other areas. Still within the arts, but no longer focused on dance or theatre. I missed many of his performances – my evenings were devoted to work and literature.

I watched a short excerpt from his piece *Slippery Floor – Antimusical of The Unwanted*, directed by Matjaž Farič. It was filled with softness – a fresh movement vocabulary emerging within Matjaž's body of work. As MMC notes, the performance continues the story begun in *The Unwanted*, recounting the same event when a misunderstanding occurred between homeless people and dancers during a public dance intervention titled *The Other Side of the Street*. "With the earlier performance, which bore the telling title *The Unwanted*, we aimed to show that conflicts can arise even between unrelated social groups. Conflicts don't occur only between those at the top of society and those at the bottom, but also among people at the bottom themselves. We wanted to recreate a real event, but ultimately crafted a fictional narrative," explains actor Jure Žavbi within the piece. He also stresses that the homeless characters and their stories are entirely fictional.

I have missed much of Matjaž's recent work, but it's clear he remains a relentless and consistent explorer – always searching for new directions, shifting movement languages, and venturing into uncharted territories. He continues to pull the ground out from under us, leading us to unexpected places – and time and again, it is he who opens new paths and expands our perspectives.

Why am I not surprised? I eagerly look forward to where he will take us in the next twenty years.

## JEONG BIN SEO - AN INTERVIEW

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**Jeong Bin Seo** is a dancer and choreographer whose embodied practice is shaped by a rich history of ballet, hip-hop, and contemporary dance. With a deeply rooted understanding of the physical body, she explores the energies generated through diverse movement vocabularies.

Her solo work *There Was no Room for Food* has toured extensively, with performances in seven countries including Singapore, Poland, and Japan. In 2023, the piece received the Tatsumi Hijikata Memorial Prize (Grand Prize) in Japan, recognizing her unique artistic voice and movement language. Another notable solo, *Postponed*, was officially invited to the 29MASDANZA Festival in Spain in 2024. This work, reflecting on themes of delay, memory, and bodily resilience, attracted considerable attention within the Seoul contemporary dance scene. Consequently, she was awarded the Best Dancer Award at the 2025 Dance Vision Awards, hosted by the Korea Contemporary Dance Promotion Association – an honour rarely bestowed upon artists based outside the capital.

In 2025, she took part in the reproduction of William Forsythe's seminal work *One Flat Thing, Reproduced*, performing as a dancer in this internationally acclaimed project. That same year, she appeared in the dance film *Skull*, a collaborative production by choreographer Kim Hoyeon and filmmaker Lee Sanghak, produced by the Korea National Contemporary Dance Company.

Since 2023, Jeong Bin Seo has also served as a core dancer in several major works by JUMOK Dance Theatre, directed by Jung Hunmok. Her performances in *Yaras*, *Ezras*, and *Film Cassandra* have been central to the company's evolving aesthetic and touring repertoire.

**Jeong Bin, thank you for taking the time to talk to me and for coming here to dance in Slovenia. From what I have read about you and seen in rehearsals your style is very diverse. How would you describe your dance style?**

It is really complex to put into words. I like fixation, reflection, ... I started to dance ballet as a child, but I was not a good ballerina. I was a soft and weak baby; ballet was really difficult for me when I was a child. I turned to contemporary dance because I can express myself better through it. There is space for wilder movement and themes of anger or loneliness or more ... Even if I don't move at all, there is space for stillness in contemporary dance. It made me strong, I felt powerful dancing contemporary dance, like I can endure anything. Being able to express myself made me stronger – both in my body and in my mind. Since then, I can also incorporate ballet or hip-hop or other styles in my dance. Being surrounded by coworkers and choreographers that allow and encourage me to explore movement and expression has helped me become more confident as well.

**You are a choreographer as well as a dancer. When you are preparing to work on a new piece on your own, do you start from a topic, a story, an emotion, a movement segment, or something else?**

Usually I move first, I start from movement. I think of an experience with senses – smell, touch, taste, ... – and that brings out emotions in me, from which I build movement. Movement comes from the emotions, and emotions come from reacting to the senses. So, I just start moving and then I think about it, analyse it, and use my imagination. This is how I discover my themes and topics. I have started from a different angle in the past, but I find the way I just described the most inspiring, it wakes up my imagination without having to force it. Body first, then the mind.

**Are there any pieces that you danced in or choreographed yourself that you are especially proud of or that you feel you have learnt something important from?**

Ohm, that's a difficult question ... *(long pause)* ... There was one performance titled *Dating Abuse*. It was also performed at Front@ festival in 2023 – not by me, but I danced it elsewhere. It was choreographed by Su Yeol Park, he wanted really strong emotions and realistic and raw movement. So, I could be really expressive,

and I didn't have to hold back or think too much about what I was doing; I could yell, I could speak, move all around ... Second one was choreographed by Hun-Mok Jung, who is a member of The Peeping Tom Dance Company ... now that I think about it, I could also yell in this performance (*laughter*) – it seems I like yelling on stage. But everything was allowed in this performance; to move like crazy, to pee, to fart ... Maybe it sounds banal, but what I want to say is that there was no real limit to what dance is in those two performances. And I don't often get to perform pieces like those, which is why I think it was one of the best experiences of my career. But there were so many other amazing performances, and I grow with every choreographer I work with, finding something new I haven't tried on stage before.

**So, you are drawn to dance performances that border on performance art?**

Yes, those that are somewhat closer to theatre. I have also spoken in different languages in many performances.

**How did you prepare for rehearsals of *Ghosts*? What initially sparked your interest to work with Matjaž?**

Matjaž and I met in Seoul, where he first saw me dance, so I was very interested when he suggested we work together on the anniversary piece *Ghosts*. I liked the title and the topic of loneliness and fear, because I have experienced many different forms of loneliness and fear. Now that we are working together, I feel comfortable expressing it in front of him. Perhaps we feel it differently, every person feels it differently, but the topic is really strong because we can all relate to it in our own way.

**It is your first time collaborating with Matjaž, how would you say your choreography styles differ and what similarities did you find? Is there a type of movement that is new or inspiring to you that you want to explore in this collaboration?**

I think we have many differences ... (*laughter, followed by long contemplation*) ... Matjaž is very precise, his movement is very honest, very true, very angled ... like a square, but he has some circularity in him, he is a very warm-hearted person. I don't know how to explain it better.

**... you explained it well – did you know he did a performance in 2003 called *Krog v telesu – kvadrat v glavi* (A Circle in the Body – a Square in the Mind)? ...**

(*laughter*) ... No, I had no idea. Really? That is amazing. ... Now I know how to explain it. I would call his style “no make-up dance” – nothing artificial, just pure presence. But I am wilder, I use my body shapes and the character of my body – I have feminine hips and very thin wrists and long fingers, so my movement is more floating, light, and sensitive. When I dance Matjaž's choreography I have to use more muscle, dance stronger and I don't have to think about how to find movement that would be pretty, it's all about pure presence. There is no hiding any part of me, I have to reveal my true self through the movement. ... I realized during the rehearsal process that I am prone to over-analysing when I cannot do some specific movement, but Matjaž told me I don't have to analyse so much and we can find a different move that works for me. That was something new for me, I was a bit shocked but it felt good to hear such warm words. I am not used to choreographers willing to change the sequence to fit a dancer's body. I think about his words sometimes and I started to focus not so much on myself and what I can and cannot do, but to focus more on what is the core of a certain move, why it is in the choreography ... that was one of my “magical moments” or realizations I came to in Ljubljana so far.

**You presented your solo *Postponed* on 20. Front@ festival this past summer of 2025. Now you have come to work here in Ljubljana. Did you have a chance to watch any Slovenian performances? What have you noticed about Slovenian dance scene that perhaps we can't see from the inside?**

I wish I had seen more of Slovenian dance ... I'll have to go see some performances now that I am here. I'll tell you later.

INTERVIEW  
by Katja Markič