

The Guardian



Land Without Dreams review – the future gets stuck in the mud

Gate theatre, London Despite Temi Wilkey's best efforts, including rolling in slime, Tue Biering's play can't decide whether it is a critique of utopianism or a message of reassurance

Michael Billington

Thu 21 Nov 2019 11.10 GMT

I've seen the future and it works," Lincoln Steffens, an American journalist, famously exclaimed after visiting the Soviet Union in 1919. This hour-long solo play written by Tue Biering for the Danish experimental company Fix&Foxy and here performed in English by Temi Wilkey appears to take a similarly positive line. I found it hard to tell, however, whether its optimism was authentically sincere or bitterly ironic.

It starts with a character simply known as The Woman walking on to a bare stage and announcing "I've come from the future to tell you that it's going to be OK." A good deal of time - too much, in fact - is spent reminding us that she is a performer and that we are members of an audience. Periodically, she exits and re-enters but the burden of her song remains the same: that we are wired to expect catastrophe. She even imagines a member of the audience shouting at her that "I would rather die today than in 10 years". In an extraordinary final sequence, The Woman strips off, covers her naked body in soft clay and slime and lists some of the innovations that have helped to make human life more bearable.

There is an interesting debate to be had about whether we are so doom-laden that we ignore past progress. But this play never gets to grips with it and when *The Woman* envisages a future without “climate crisis, financial crisis, humanitarian crisis, refugee crisis” and much more, I could only assume that the intent was to induce doubt about her utopian message. Wilkey, who has an engaging presence, deserves some kind of medal for her final act of exposure and left me hoping the Gate has a good shower system. But the play itself seems uneasily poised between peddling a transgressive hope and deploying a Swiftian scepticism. It is also so busy being meta-theatrical that it ducks the most important issue: what we can do in the present to ensure that we actually have a future.

At Gate theatre, London, until 7 December.

We won't let Brexit come between us...

... and we hope you feel the same. Britain may be leaving the EU, but the Guardian remains committed to Europe, doubling down on the ideas and interests that we share. Our independent, fact-based reporting will inform Britain about Europe, Europe about Britain, and the rest of the world about both. These are turbulent, decade-defining times. But we will stay with you, delivering quality journalism so we can all make up our minds based on fact, not fiction.

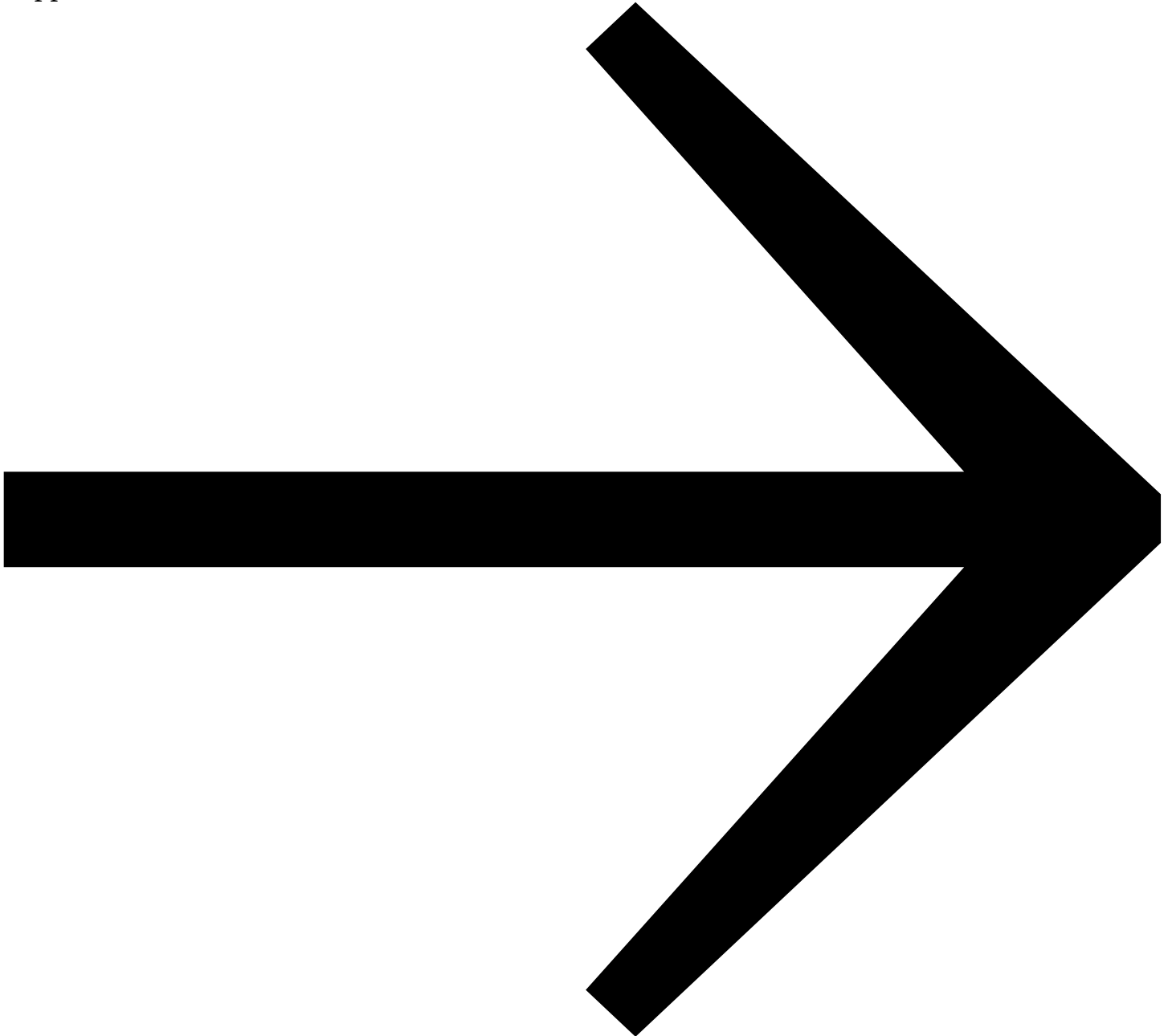
More people than ever in Denmark and across Europe, like you, are reading and supporting the Guardian's independent, investigative journalism. And unlike many news organisations, we made the choice to keep our reporting open for all, regardless of where they live or what they can afford to pay.

The Guardian will engage with the most critical issues of our time - from the escalating climate emergency to widespread inequality to the influence of big tech on our lives. At a time when factual information is a necessity, we believe that each of us, around the world, deserves access to accurate reporting with integrity at its heart.

Our editorial independence means we set our own agenda and voice our own opinions. Guardian journalism is free from commercial and political bias and not influenced by billionaire owners or shareholders. This means we can give a voice to those less heard, explore where others turn away, and rigorously challenge those in power.

We hope you will consider supporting us today. We need your support to keep delivering quality journalism that's open and independent. Every reader contribution, however big or small, is so valuable. **Support the Guardian from as little as €1 - and it only takes a minute. Thank you.**

Support The Guardian



Topics

- Theatre
- reviews