

# The New York Times

## Review: Maria Hassabi's 'Plastic' Sends Dancers Crawling Through MoMA

By SIOBHAN BURKE FEB. 23, 2016



Mickey Mahar, bottom right, in "Plastic" and passers-by at the Museum of Modern Art.

Julietta Cervantes for The New York Times

It takes about 15 seconds, walking at a relaxed pace, to descend the stairs leading from the atrium of the Museum of Modern Art to the ground-floor lobby. On Sunday afternoon, the dancer Oisín Monaghan spent over an hour on that route, sliding down the steps through a glacial series of reclining, prone and seated poses. Visitors came and went, with some pausing to study his often-motionless body — was he sleeping? injured? — and others passing by unfazed. When he reached the bottom, he stood up and walked away. The next day, he would do it again.

That drawn-out descent was part of Maria Hassabi's hypnotizing "Plastic," a live installation of super-slow movement devised as a repeating loop. Through March 20, it will be unfolding whenever the museum is open, its tremendously focused dancers (17 in all) progressing incrementally across the floors and furniture of the Marron Atrium, down the lobby staircase and down the stairs connecting the fourth- and fifth-floor galleries. (On Fridays, it takes place only in the atrium.)

The Modern has presented its share of buzz-worthy dance programs in recent years. But not one has felt as well suited to the space, nor as satisfying to spend time with, as "Plastic."

Maybe dance in the museum has been too much in denial of the architectural reality: A museum is not a theater. "Plastic" doesn't pretend it is. You can comfortably watch the work from many vantage points, for any length of time.

At first it may seem like no more than Instagram fodder. But when you slow to its pace for longer than the time it takes to snap a photo and relax to watch dancers like Hristoula Harakas and David Thomson, poignant details crystallize: the trembling of her arm, supporting her weight as she sinks into a split; the inward yet receptive quality of his gaze; how a desperate pose can, with the slightest shift, become a hopeful one.

Gusts of ambient sound designed by Morten Norbye Halvorsen periodically blow through the space. The performers' denim uniforms, including pants with jeweled inseams (styled by threeASFOUR), match the gray of the atrium floor.

Some museum-specific problems remain unresolved. How to ensure the performers' safety without killing the mood? On Sunday, security guards directed traffic on the lobby stairs: "Stay to the left. Performing artist ahead!" It was a jarring but maybe necessary reminder that these exquisite dancers are human, capable of being hurt.

Correction: February 26, 2016

A dance review on Wednesday about "Plastic," at the Museum of Modern Art, misstated the number of dancers in the work. It is 17, not 18.

"Plastic" continues through March 20 at the Museum of Modern Art, 212-708-9400, moma.org