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# Dispatches from The Fringe - A principled Hunger whets the appetite

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Hunger  
*Russian Contemporary Theatre*

## Hunger

Rating: ★★★★★

Russian artist Artem Kreto is undoubtedly a gifted and passionate performer. His integrity as an artist, who has refused to be defined by the commercialism of his art, striving instead to realize its creative possibilities, is indeed noble and admirable. In adapting [Knut Hamsun's](#) novel *Hunger* for the stage he has tried to create a vehicle to highlight the plight of the artist in a world defined by money and his passion permeates every aspect of this production. And perhaps therein lies the problem. For *Hunger* feels at times like it is blinded by an overwhelming passion.

Norwegian author Knut Hamsun is an often neglected hero of world literature. A Nobel Prize winner in 1920, Hamsun influenced almost everyone from Hemingway to Hesse and was a pioneer of psychological literature. His apparent support of Nazism in his later years led to him being driven into virtual literary obscurity for much of the 20th century. His seminal novel *Hunger*, about an unnamed character wandering through Christiania (now Oslo) in search of food has remained a must read book for any aspiring artist.

In Artem Kreto's energetic, one man performance based on Hamsun's *Hunger*, the show begins

with Kretov racing frenetically through doors, through the audience and across the stage. This sets the pattern and tempo for all of what follows. There is an overly long period of silence in which Kretov, scrambling together a meal gathered from crumbs in brown paper bags, eats hunched up like an animal. When he finally addresses the audience the tone seems one of outrage, the pitch too loud and the pace of delivery frenetic for the most part. This lent the dialogue the feeling of a tirade, and as language was already problem a distance began to emerge as communication became strained. Throughout, the words felt too literary, as if Kretov were reading from a novel instead of performing an interpretation of one. Also shifts from narrative discourse and exposition to immediate scenes were not always easily recognized, creating a sense of imbalance throughout.

Director Andrey Vasiliev decision to keep things moving at a relentless pace wasn't always successful. Instead of a principled artist suffering for his art, the unnamed character often came across as self-righteous, seeming to condemn God for not giving him what he believes he is entitled to. This sense of entitlement, the sense that God, the universe or the world owed him a living conducive to his art smacked of egoism and false pride and only helped alienate the character further.

Yet Kretov gives a powerhouse performance which attempts to remain true to *Hunger's* psychological realism. Physicalizing the characters inner angst and turmoil and his gradual decline, Kretov's physical vocabulary was powerful and compelling. Kretov also used the less than ideal space to its best advantage, including a pillar standing near the center of the stage.

Kretov is an outstanding exponent of his craft, but this translation of *Hunger* lets him down. It is political, it is protest and it is brave. Especially in a climate where Russian artists are suffering for voicing their beliefs. But *Hunger*, whatever its aspirations, doesn't always communicate as well as it should. This is exemplified when, in the end, the unnamed character becomes a clown of the system. The literal, physical metaphor was unoriginal and disappointing because, by then, Kretov had established that he is capable of delivering so much more.

*Hunger* runs daily at Paradise in Augustine (Venue 152) until August 27th. Door open at 7.10 p.m. and admission is £10.00



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