



EXCHANGE RADICAL MOMENTS!

Live Art Festival

5.10.2011 – Toby Huddlestone – Walk the Line

<http://11moments.org/walk>

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INTERVIEW #20: Today we are chatting with Toby Huddlestone, an artist and curator from London, United Kingdom. He will present his work „Walk the Line“ in Riga, Latvia as part of the Exchange Radical Moments! Live Art Festival. Hi Toby, where are you at the moment?

Toby Huddlestone

I'm in London, working from home as I currently have no studio!

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Hey, that's the best moment to search for one :) Your performance will take place on 10/11/11; one day before the festival officially starts. Why did you pick this date – and what will happen in Riga?

Toby Huddlestone

Yes, the performance will take place one day early. This is due to 11.11.11 in Riga being a commemorative day for the war of Latvian Independence resp. Liberation, in which the city and country stops and remembers fallen soldiers. This is a huge event in the Latvian (and therefore Riga's) calendar and so it was decided through consultation with LCCA (Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art) it was better to work on "Walk the Line" the day before instead. So, "Walk the Line" is a work in which participants (made up from people in Riga) walk through the city together down the middle of the road linking between the Freedom Monument and the Victory Monument in Riga.

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Are you still looking for people? Who can join you, and what can they expect from the event? Do they have to register somewhere?

Toby Huddlestone

Yes, we are looking for people. Anyone who is interested in the idea is welcome. The idea is that it is a form of protest in which nothing concrete is protested for or against – rather, it is an idea to 'occupy' public space, and push a statement of togetherness and action. It all stems from an idea that traditional protest methods do not work like they used to - so action without a clear message is a way of questioning authority in a way. It also means people can bring their own agendas and ideas along and walk for their own beliefs, too.



EXCHANGE RADICAL MOMENTS!

Live Art Festival

I'm hoping people will feel empowered by this collective action, and some sense of community will be formed before, during and after the activity. We will be setting up a blog and facebook group soon, as well as information being available via LCCA Riga website and facebook page, and of course ERM!/11 moments pages.

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Would you consider yourself a political person?

Toby Huddleston

That's a funny question! I think everyone is a political person. It's increasingly difficult to place politics these days. So much seems to shift and change, so it's harder and harder to define, but very simply, I believe what I believe in, on a day to day basis. I personally think living and philosophy drives your political belief. One more thing on that: being political doesn't necessarily mean being an activist. Some people don't have time to be activists, or have the necessary personal traits. I don't consider myself an activist.

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Is a walk still a purposeful approach to protest against something? Or do you think that it needs something else?

Toby Huddleston

Yes, like I said, I think the collective walk can be a powerful statement, and even more powerful when it isn't defined by a particular reason. So it is not a protest against something, but rather a protest against everything!!! Or it could just be that a group of people just feel like a walk. Its a beautiful thing to do together with people – and there's a history of it being used in contemporary art, as well of course in marches and protests.

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Why did you choose the line between the Freedom Monument and the Victory Memorial? Can you tell us more about the significance of these two historical monuments? What do they mean to the inhabitants of Riga?

Toby Huddleston

To start with, they are very familiar places that everyone in Riga knows – so they are a great place to meet and make sure people know where they are. Secondly, they are landmarks riddled with history and politics. The Freedom monument was built to commemorate the independence of Latvia fought for during 1918-20, and is now used for many occasions of



EXCHANGE RADICAL MOMENTS!

Live Art Festival

commemoration and remembering. The Victory Monument was erected by the Soviet's in 1985 to commemorate the victory over Nazi Germany during WWII - but actually for Riga's people, it is seen as just a transition between one power (Nazi Germany) and another (Soviet era). So to walk between these very 'political' points means to possibly remember, look to the future, or anything for those taking part. During the week up to 10.11.11 I will be meeting daily with the participants and talking about what the work can mean to them, how they can start to author the work and such like.

In terms of present 'use', the Victory Monument really has little happening. When I went to visit it during my research visit, I was there for over an hour, and not one other person came to the monument. It's a very contentious structure.

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Where is the line between a political protest and an art work or a performance? Is it so easy to make an art work out of a demonstration? Will people recognize it as art at all and is this important for you?

Toby Huddleston

Good question. I think the difference I've been thinking about and very concerned about, is that artworks are generally authored by one (or a few) individuals, and protest marches have much more to do with collective action. To quote Roman Ondak, who works with forms of participation quite frequently, there has to be a space for things to go wrong, or the artist has to leave a percentage for the work to be taken away from them – which I am really fine with. If people decide during the week before that the work should change, then I'm sure it will do. I guess I've set the parameters for something to happen, and then what actually takes place will be taken on by those doing the action with me.

I'm not concerned whether people refer to it as art or not. I stopped worrying about this a while back now. Defining things is sometimes too difficult, and often ridiculous. It's a moment, an action, a happening.

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Once I have seen Anita Lasker-Wallfisch giving a speech in Linz. She is a survivor of the holocaust, who is now living in England. She said that it is really important not to slavishly follow the authorities. How are your experiences in the United Kingdom comparing to Latvia or other states of the world?

Toby Huddleston

I agree with Anita, although must say I have never been through anything of the significance



EXCHANGE RADICAL MOMENTS!

Live Art Festival

of what she has had to. I can only speak from a UK perspective really, and over here, the authorities (this includes government and the media) over time, have really nullified thinking and belief. Over the past 20 years, through things like Reality TV, laws on what you are (not) allowed to do in public space, etc. have really had an impact on society over here. No one has a voice like they used to, which is why the recent protests in London and through the rest of the UK happened. The media made them sensational (again!), but they happened simply because people are pissed off, and want to demonstrate that. It's not as articulate as the media tells us, but they feel the need to define what has happened, and what to do to put it right – this is the thing that is wrong in the first place. The media and government 'speaking' on behalf of people, and getting it so so wrong.

Latvia is very different. When I spoke to people there during my research visit, there came across a feeling that to speak up and demonstrate is almost useless. They had been under rule for so long until the Velvet Revolution during the end of Communism in 1989 that it has really affected people's action and thinking.

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And for yourself? What are you protesting against on 10/11/11?

Toby Huddlestone

Haha, everything! Without wanting to sound patronising, I guess I'm hoping to offer some kind of platform for people in Riga to use, or to see if people are interested in using it for something – for their own ideas. Like I mentioned, that platform can change, but this will only be known through talking with people in the week before during the 'build-up' to the event.

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Have you ever experienced a radical moment in your work? If yes, what happened and how do you define radical?

Toby Huddlestone

That's the word I've been having problems with – radical. I'm not actually sure how to define "radical". I guess it has something to do with the extreme. I feel extreme emotions when making work sometimes. The work that really tests me, like "Walking the same speed as people" in 2008, or "Interruptions: Attempting to bump into people in the street" made last year. Both were very difficult to actually make, which is always a good feeling. It's weird when we test ourselves because there is no need to, other than some deep lying philosophy maybe. So, "radical", I've been trying to ignore the word and think about "Exchange Moments" instead. After all, something that is radical for one person, is not radical for



EXCHANGE RADICAL MOMENTS!

Live Art Festival

another - like the difference between experience (earlier in conversation) between someone like Anita and myself.

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Can we find your work online?

Toby Huddlestone

Yes, at <http://www.tobyhuddlestone.net/>

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Thank you for the interview and good luck in Riga. Please keep us informed about your project also here on our facebook page.

Toby Huddlestone

I will. Thank you.