

SITUATIONS

Walk Hands Eyes (Plymouth) – Report by Louise Riou-Djukic.

Myriam Lefkowitz's artwork 'Walk, Hands, Eyes (Plymouth)' was a huge success at this year's Plymouth Art Weekender. With your eyes closed and only being instructed to open them briefly, participants were guided around the city by a series of trained guides. Louise Riou-Djukic was one of them and recounts her experience of being an integral part of this artwork.

For the Plymouth Art Weekender this year, Situations invited the artist Myriam Lefkowitz and her collaborators to perform her guided walks with the help of 8 Plymouth-based guides that would train with them - luckily, I was one of them!

I found out about the opportunity by word of mouth and applied to the call, mostly out of curiosity. As a student in Fine Art whose practice is focused on performance, I believed this artwork would be really interesting for me as it could help me to develop my practice; or it would at least be a way for me to get involved in the Weekender. I applied and fortunately was selected.

At the start everyone was a bit unsure of what would happen. We only had the essential information relating to the project, and beyond this did not know what to expect. There was a lot of curiosity amongst the recruited guides: what will happen? How will that week be? What were we doing here?

Myriam arrived to transmit her 'tool' to us and training began in an unexpected way. I am not actually sure of what I expected but it definitely wasn't this! The first step towards becoming a guide was to open up with some sense-led exercises. We needed to remove any shyness and the apprehension so we could receive and transmit in our turn. As the training continued, I came to the realisation that being a guide for Walk, Hands, Eyes (Plymouth) wasn't only being the hand that people would lead others with their eyes closed; it wasn't about transferring my intentions to go from a point A to a point B. Becoming a guide needed me to open up and to find new ways of exploring, feeling and moving so I could take myself for a walk and then transmit my own wandering to the person I was guiding. "It's more about attention than intention," said Myriam and I believe this sums it up very well.

When walking with someone, my conscience of the surroundings expanded but it could only happen in parallel of an increased awareness of myself and of the other person. I think mindfulness could be easily compared to this experiment as it pushed me to open up - to observe and to accept. During the whole process there was something important about acceptance and adaptation. And indeed, as everything varies from one person to another even when encountering the same obstacles or places, we needed to adapt. Perhaps sometimes there was fear, or peace, or joy, or even boredom but it always was 'okay'.

For me, being a guide had a strong social aspect. As you take someone's hand and ask them

to close their eyes, an agreement occurs and this person starts to trust you. It's not an unlimited trust, but as you walk together it develops and a bond is created. It amazed me to realise how intimate it could feel; some people said they felt like it was like a secret, and at the end of a walk, it almost always felt like I knew the person already. This magic also happened within the group, as at the end of the first day, it already felt like we knew each other for a very long time.

To be honest, describing this whole experience objectively is impossible, as it seemed almost like a dream. All I can say is that I am really glad I was part of it. It touched me on a very personal level and everything I learned will have a lasting impact on my life and on the way I connect with people and my environment. It is almost like it gave me the key to a sort of peace that I didn't know existed before and I feel like this is just the start to a long journey. Will I be guiding again? I hope so!