

A NOTE FROM THE PERFORMERS IN THE EDINBURGH RUN OF EXHIBIT B

As performers in Exhibit B, we stand perfectly still and are stared at for hours. The reference to human zoo's and ethnographic displays in media and so on are a simple but incredibly narrow, and arguably inaccurate, descriptor of what we believe the show to be. It is difficult to describe art accurately but, having participated in the show, we are proud of our work and witnessed the impact it has made. Without attending the show, it is hard to realise the multi-layered nature of the exhibition and the difficulty in summarising it. At first glance at the materials, it is easy to assume that we are nothing but objects, repeating the worst of the racist and de-humanising aspects of the 'human zoos' referred to in the petition(s) to cancel the exhibition.

Standing, exhibited in this manner, we can state explicitly that we are not objects during the exhibition.

We are human, even more so when performing.

"The show "Exhibit B" is a presentation of hidden evidences to a jury (audience) to allow them see and come to individual conclusions and give their individual verdicts to the treatments both past and presently being handed out to black people! You have to be an audience in the show to fully grasp its effect!"

Jay C,

Each member of this cast has had racist encounters, some as violent and tragic as being beaten up by a white man in full view of a crowd, a crowd that did nothing to help. Many of you must have as well, or at least empathise with it.

"I am sure that the Exhibit will go ahead as look at the positive comments the audience give, should the few critics deny people what Edinburgh audiences have experienced? Last year at the Edinburgh Festival, the good works of Dr Livingstone were grossly exaggerated in 'I knew man called Dr Livingstone@'....no one protested about that and yet Exhibit B is making people aware of what happened and worse how even today asylum seekers are treated. " –

Tamara/Herero Woman, educating the natives

We find this piece to be a powerful tool in the fight against racism. Individually We chose to do this piece because, as art does, it impacts people on a deeper emotional level that can spark change.

"Ehibit B is an educational experience! It's not made to make anyone feel guilty but to teach them what they might not already know. People are familiar with the slavery in America and the Holocaust but Exhibit B tells the stories of those who are not recognised for what they've went through. Exhibit B has changed my life!. Not only has it educated me but also gave me

the chance to educate others!" –

Rania, asylum, found object

The exhibit does not allow for any member of the audience, white, black or otherwise, to disassociate themselves from a system that contains racism within it. Brett Bailey as a White South African, we believe, despite not having the lived experience of Black people, recognises that he is not outside of the system that allows for racism to exist.

“I invited a friend, a Black African and a scholar in African studies to the show. I knew he could deconstruct this piece every which way and I wanted his opinion. His comment after was ‘Everything I am trying to do in my work was presented in this exhibition.’ I have never felt prouder.”
Anne, Ogik woman

Further, we are proud to be Black performers in this piece. We are proud to represent our history, our past, our present and ourselves, by playing the various characters taken from the record books. Each character is presented with information, context in a stunning display that allows the audience to absorb pertinent information intellectually and react viscerally emotionally. The goal, as we understand it, is to create conversation through confronting the terrible things that have been, and are being done.

“It is an interactive experience that the descendants of black and white people communicate to each other and probably, more importantly, internally to themselves. it is a healing process that cannot be communicated with words for no words can describe the horror and trauma that transmitted from generation to generation.”
Chingi, Ogik woman

By recognising that we are *all* part of a system that uses race to dehumanise, takes the exhibit from a purely confrontational space to a conversational one, where each spectator is challenged to think of what part they play in the system, be it oppressed or oppressor.

The Preparation and Participation

Right from the audition process, from our roundtable discussion, we were well aware of what we were getting into. For those who argue that we did this for the money or reasons other than our, passion for the project.:

“This assumes we can’t think for ourselves, none of us have been forced to do this, and all of us can leave at any time. No one brainswashed us into taking part, and the more we do, the more proud we become of our performances.” –
Avi, Choir Member, Project participant for 3 years.

During the rehearsals, we were made aware that we could leave if we felt uncomfortable and were trained in standing for extended periods, making eye contact and conducted breathing exercises to enable us to perform. During the performance, between the ushers and the general staff for the show, we feel well supported both physically and emotionally.

Brett takes us through warm up including meditative practice and stretches, and if during the show one is unable to stand, ushers are at the ready with seats, and a medical officer is on standby.

Because of this support, many of the performers push themselves even further. People have chosen to remain standing when they could sit, or to continue on, even when Brett and the team are suggesting so because we want to make it work, and are as invested in the show's success.

The Experience During the Exhibition

Each audience member walks in alone into the exhibit, and each performer is exhibited in their own tableaux vivant. Each performer is instructed by Brett as part of the performance to look into the eyes of each audience member. A week of rehearsal and exercise prepared us to gaze unflinchingly into another's eye. However, on arrival, at the first tableaux, most people don't even recognise that human beings are standing there. For a moment, particularly for the first few, we are objects.

Then, our eyes meet.

We, as performers, in that moment when our eyes meet, cease to be objectified and become human. Some people literally jump back, startled. Some break into tears from the first moment. Others immediately look away. Others still gaze deeper as their eyes well up. In this moment, they feel more like the exhibited than we do. The 'Spectator(s)' - referring to the audience, as is written of the placard with information about the character(s) in each tableaux - form as big a part of the installation as each exhibit.

As they move through the exhibit, we watch them and witness all manner of emotion; anger, grief, pity, sadness, compassion. We watch them break down in tears and cast eyes down in shame, meet our gaze with understanding. This applies across all boundaries of race (including races outside of the white/black binary such as Asian and so on) – age, class or gender.

Above all, we witness a dawning of awareness.

This is why we keep doing this, and would keep on doing it, if we could.

"I feel blessed to have been in a position where I was able to tell a story of the injustice of past and present so that the future doesn't have to be the same.

Anna, Ghanain immigrant, found object.

Whether they realise the atrocities committed in Africa, or the modern day racialised injustice faced by Black people today (as illustrated by Asylum seekers – 'the found

objects'). Each audience member is struck by something different, and for different reasons, but they do leave with something.

“The first day of this performance showed me how powerful and important it was my mother came and cried appreciated and understood what I was trying to do. I never came into this for adulation but to show that racism is here and not going away”

Muya,

They cry because they didn't know what was done. They cry because they realise how it is still being done. They cry because they realise that the past impacts the present. They cry because they experienced this personally. They cry because they didn't. Reading the pages and pages of comments from the audience left at the end of the exhibit attests to this, but we don't need to read that.

We see it in their eyes.