

YOU ARE OUT!

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The Italian artist LIUBA is fed up with the European refugee policy and with the apathy and insensitivity we deal with concerning inclusion in our everyday lives. With her new interactive performance she wants to encourage us to get involved and interact with others, especially with the refugees.

It is one of these old circle games that we played back in our childhood times: The Trip to Jerusalem. There is one less chair than the number of participants in this game. When music plays people are asked to dance and walk and when the music stops everyone has to find a chair to sit on. Everybody, except one person, will find a chair. And the odd person out will be excluded from the game. LIUBA's performance *You're Out* uses The Trip to Jerusalem as a synonym for what refugees have to face in our societies: the exclusion from the community. "The idea of this work comes from the sense of frustration I feel when I see people fighting to have papers to stay in a country, or who are struggling to find a regular job and are excluded from a community", says LIUBA. "The same sense of frustration comes every time we feel expelled from a group – never mind if it is friends, the family, the workplace or a country." *Refugees Welcome*, that premièred in Berlin (Germany), in December 2013, is more than a performance. It is a whole project combining several performances at a gallery with meetings between refugees and citizens. It became a platform for an exchange of viewing points and problems. "The performance is just the tip of the iceberg of a long and deep relational process", explains LIUBA.

Another performance of *Refugees Welcome* took place in the Berlin venue Kreuzberg Pavillon just recently and included immigrants and citizens as participants, representing the multiethnic society in many European cities and the growing problem of integration. "The audience in the gallery is involved", explains LIUBA. "When the refugees and I arrived to the gallery, we asked everybody to join us in 12 symbolic minutes of silence, in which everyone is connected and accepted within the gallery space. Thus, people start to observe each other. Observing is the first step of accepting and respecting."

The second part of this project is the performance *You're Out* works with volunteers from the audience, who join The Trip to Jerusalem together with the refugees. What worked in our childhood works also in LIUBA's performance: laughter and – the fight for a space. And so, the performance manages to create a very personal experience not only for the volunteers and refugees but also for the audience.

LIUBA's performances and exhibitions have been seen at many international festivals, such as the Venice Biennale, the Art Basel or the EXPO. The Italian artist, who lives and works in Milan and New York, and who works with public art projects, performance, video, installations and photography, is well known by her critiques for her irony, lucidity and poetry that show the

restraints and stereotypes that permeate contemporary societies. And even more, her work goes far beyond an art performance.

“I am interested in performing art that involves the audience as an active part. People must experience the concept physically. In this case art becomes a tool that gives refugees the opportunity to be listened to, to be visible and to be respected in their equal rights”, says LIUBA.

The performance *Refugees Welcome* ends with a modification of the original game – for all participants and with enough chairs for everybody. When the music stops this last time everyone will find a place, a chair of his/her own, and nobody will be expelled. Everybody feels comfortable, with a place to be and without having to fight against others to obtain the right to stay in the community.

According to LIUBA it is also up to us, if this end stays a wish or becomes reality.