

DAVIS FREEMAN, a favela project

Dear Lola!

We came to talk to you,
but you were not here.

As we were waiting the
wind blew away your tend
infant of us.

We PUT IT BACK AS
MUCH AS WE COULD!

I'm on my way to get cigarettes. I need a smoke. It's all too much at the moment. I'm on a break from a project I'm doing in the Kaai studio with 5 other artists. We're all been asked to bring content from our own desires. Our passion. Those things that you're obsessed with, those things that bother you, those things you want to change. In fact those things that drive you to make art. You then share this content with the room and from then on, everybody owns it. It's open source material. We're all equal. It's all a bit personal and I don't like sharing. What content do I bring it? I bring one word. Activism. With all of it's confusion, layers & hypocrisy. Activism in its simplest form as to be active in pushing back against the negative tide the world is turning in at the moment. They can choose what they want to tackle first..... I need a smoke.

I leave the Kaaistudio turn left. Up few streets, left again and I pass by a woman sitting next to a large blue tent. Not your classic camping tent but one that provides more shelter than recreation. From Brico I guess. She's sitting on a small chair with a notebook on her lap and I think she's drawing or possibly writing. Either way she's intent on her task. She looks up but not in my direction, makes an observation, and goes back to drawing. Or writing. The smell of Speculus is in the air as there's a small factory I had never noticed before making those cookies or that disgusting paste. Then the questions start to emerge. *Does she like that smell? Why is she there? What is she doing? I look again at her makeshift tent. It's a bit shabby and obviously not really meant to be there. Is she sleeping in there? Is this a project? Is she an artist? Is she asking us for something? What is she trying to say?* All these thought rush through my quick mind as I pass by her going to the shop.

I continue on to the store but now this unknown woman has infiltrated my mind. So I find myself continuing with my inner-monologue. *Ok she's not homeless. You can see that by her clothes, her looks, just the feeling from the space. She probably doesn't live there... who would want to... Of course there are exceptions and I live to be surprised but this must be some kind of art project. An experiment. An attempt to provoke reactions and possibly meet people on the streets? Is this her temporary office? Her studio? Or maybe she's some kind of sociologist. A student. But still whatever she is it's admirable that she is alone. Never liked this neighborhood much. Wim Vandekeybus told me how he got beat up just around the corner trying to get to his car. OK so it must be a project, an invitation.* I race through all these thought and more as I buy my smokes, light one outside the shop and pass by her tent again heading towards the Kaai studio. I'm late... I pass her by one more time but then stop. *I can't pass this person by. This is someone like me, asking similar questions I have to find out more.* I walk back and approach.

"Hi."

"Hi

"So what are you doing here?"

"It's a project I am working on for my dissertation. I'm working on the line between public art & social work."

"That's great, I work along the same lines. How is it going"?

"They won't let me sleep here and I get harassed a lot with another group trying to see if I am ok."

"I am a bit late for my rehearsal I'm doing but can I came back with the other artists I'm working with and talk to you more about the project?"

"That would be great"

"See you later"

I mention to my crew I met a woman/ girl working outside. I would like to include her content. We gather ourselves together and go to meet her and she's gone...

Without anyone there the tent is quite sad. You could see it as an installation in itself as all the objects become an archive of some invisible person that vanished. There's some fruit. Some books, a Moroccan teapot, teas, a kind of broken bed, blankets or two, some makeshift shelves. A few rocks flimsily holding down the tent. A few string keeping it upright. A few chairs. We're waiting. Exploring. Watching the men in the factory pour bag after bag of brown sugar into a large vat to make their Speculos. It's strange that all this stuff is just out there. It can be easily stolen. I imagine if it was in the back seat of a car the window would be broken and taken away but here it would be like kicking someone when they're down. As least the rough boys in the neighborhood don't go that far.

We're standing passing time and suddenly the wind picks up the entire tent and throws it across the space, flips it over and tries to take it off into the street. We scramble for it, hold it and then we're caught. This is our tent we have to deal with it. We realize why we're here. This tent is a home of a friend, a neighbor a stranger, and this is our test. How do we deal with this in a human level? People have seen us we catch the tent. Papers are blowing all over. We're running

around catching these objects. We've become a social experiment. We're a comedic street art performance. I start to wonder what others would do. Probably just let it all spread throughout the neighborhood.

I met this woman for only 2 minutes so I have some connection but my fellow artist haven't. They act from the base humanistic level of helping others, as you would like to be helped. It's like the sociological experiment where you are in a waiting room and you hear someone in trouble next door. Two or three people in the waiting room are a part of the experiment and don't react or do anything. They then watch if the subject will react. I think all of us would go to the other room pretty quickly. But not the people in this neighborhood they are just watching us. Not reacting.

All of her stuff is now blowing around, papers, books all over the place and we proceed to rebuild her tent for over 45 minutes. We look for bigger rocks to hold it down. We dig holes to plant the poles in to keep it more in place. We rebuild her library. We try to find places for things we hadn't even noticed the first time. It reminds me of a game I used to play when I was a teenager. We would break into people's homes and just rearrange their furniture. Not steal anything just confuse people and give them another perspective of their home. So we're finally done. Everything is at least stable. Tied down and still this mysterious woman never arrives. So we leave her a note for her on a scrap of her paper and a broken pen and go back to the Kaai studio to work.

We never met this woman but she influenced us. She affected our day, our actions, even how we came together as a group with this unspoken agreement to put back together this stranger's stuff. Even without her presence this tent influenced us in a number of subtle ways. Throwing us off our regular path. Having us become the subject through her concrete objects. Is what Lola proposes activism? For me yes, in its simplest terms. She is actively proposing this intervention on the streets. She might not know what will happen but by being there she creates the possibility for things to happen and she did influence us.

Months later I am leaving the Kaai studio. Looking for a bar to have a drink after a premiere. Someone recommends a new one around the corner near the Walvis. She gives us direction and says, "It's just past the woman in the tent. You know the one that's famous, she's been there for years". The woman that Lola had gotten to know is mentioned again. Three times now is just the past month where for years I have never had heard anything about her. Something is working. Things are happening.

DAVIS FREEMAN

Davis Freeman is an American artist based in Brussels with his company Random Scream. He makes contemporary theater & dance, photo/video installations and curatorial projects. His work is referred to as devious political theatre or docu-performances and often fights for a more ecological planet.

Currently he's touring his latest pieces 'Do My Mouth', 'Karaoke (ART)', '7 Promises' and 'What you need to know' which won the 2nd prize in the Danse Elargie competition at Theatre de la Ville. Along with his own work Davis works as a performance artist with Forced Entertainment (Bloody Mess, The World in Pictures), Meg Stuart (Built to Last, Highway 101, Alibi), Stephan Pucher (Kirshgarten, Snapshots) and Superamas (Big 2, Big 3, Empire)