

DOMOBAAL

CHEERS - BON APPETIT

HE LIVED IN A HOLE IN THE GROUND, REFUSED FOOD AND REJECTS THE MONARCHY: STUART BRISLEY, ENGLAND'S MOST RADICAL PERFORMANCE ARTIST SHOWS HIS WORK IN BERLIN.

WHEN STUART BRISLEY, SHOVEL IN HAND TURNED UP IN THE SUMMER OF 1977 IN MANFRED SCHNECKENBURG'S OFFICE HE HAD NO IDEA OF THE SHOCK THAT WAS WAITING FOR HIM. AT THE TIME SCHNECKENBURGER WAS THE DIRECTOR OF DOKUMENTA VI AND HE HAD INVITED THE BRITISH PERFORMANCE ARTIST TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS WORLD FAMOUS EXHIBITION. STUART BRISLEY ARRIVED SHOVEL IN HAND. "I REMEMBER THAT IT HAD BEEN AGREED THAT IN KASSEL I WOULD DIG A HOLE AND WOULD LIVE IN IT DURING THE EXHIBITION". WHEN HE LEFT THE OFFICE AND WALKED INTO THE KARLSAUE PARK IN KASSEL HE COULD NOT BELIEVE HIS EYES. OUTSIDE HE FOUND AN ENORMOUS MACHINE WITH WHICH THE ARTIST WALTER DE MARIA WOULD NOT ONLY DIG A HOLE BUT WOULD DIG ONE KILOMETER DEEP IN ORDER TO BURY COPPER STAVES. THE MONUMENTAL SCALE ON WHICH THE AMERICAN ARTIST WAS GOING TO WORK MADE BRISLEY'S PLANNED PROJECT LOOK A BIT MISERABLE. THE BRIT DUG A BIT FURTHER ON IN THE MEADOW AND IS TODAY, 30 YEARS LATER STILL A BIT ANNOYED BY IT ALL. TYPICALLY AMERICAN. TO ARRIVE WITH A LOT OF MONEY AND TAKE OVER THE WHOLE SHOW. IT'S NOT THE FIRST TIME THAT SOMETHING LIKE THAT HAPPENED. IT IS NOT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT THE WORDS 'MONEY' AND 'AMERICAN' EASILY PROVOKE STUART BRISLEY BUT DESPITE THIS HE QUITE LIKES THE U.S. IT WAS THERE IN THE 60'S, IN HEADY NEW YORK THAT HE GOT TO KNOW THE PERFORMANCE ART OF JIM DINE AS WELL AS POP-ART. THERE HE ALSO BECAME FAMILIAR WITH MARX AND NEVER MADE MUCH OF AN ISSUE OF HIS LEFTIST TENDENCIES. UNUSUALLY FOR A BRIT, EVEN AT 77 HE IS STILL GLOWINGLY ANTI-MONARCHY. HE SPENT THE YEAR BEFORE HIS DOKUMENTA AS ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE IN THE NORTHERN ENGLISH TOWN OF PETERLEE WHERE HE GAVE FARM WORKERS A CASSETTE RECORDER AND ASKED THEM TO INTERVIEW EACH OTHER ABOUT THEIR LIVES. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO IMPROVE ON THIS WORKING-CLASS ROMANTICISM. HAD KEN LOACH BEEN AN ARTIST THEN HIS ART WOULD HAVE LOOKED LIKE THIS.

LEAVING THAT ASIDE STUART BRISLEY WAS AND IS ENGLAND'S MOST IMPORTANT PERFORMANCE ARTIST. HE EXPERIMENTS WITH PAINT, DIRT, HOUSEHOLD WASTE, DECAYING FOOD AND OTHER DISGUSTING THINGS. THE FORMER SLADE ART SCHOOL PROFESSOR IS TODAY SEEN AS THE LEADING LIGHT FOR THE GENERATION OF YOUNG BRITISH ARTIST BECAUSE OF HIS DETERMINED INSISTENCE TO BE DIFFERENT. HE BECAME A PROFESSOR IN 1968 AFTER A SIT-IN WHEN THE STUDENTS PROTESTED AGAINST THE EXISTING EDUCATIONAL REGIME OF THE BRITISH ART SCHOOLS. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT A PROFESSOR AT THE SLADE WAS NOMINATED BY THE STUDENTS.

IN HIS OWN COUNTRY BRISLEY IS BOTH FAMOUS AND INFAMOUS, IN GERMANY ON THE OTHER HAND HE IS HARDLY KNOWN. IT IS A NICE COINCIDENCE THAT HE IS NOW SHOWING IN TWO VENUES IN BERLIN. THE FIRST OPENS IN GALERIE EXILE ON THE ALEXANDRINENSTRASSE IN KREUZBERG UNTIL THE 10TH OF JULY, THE SECOND UNTIL THE MIDDLE OF AUGUST IN A GROUP SHOW CALLED 'RADICAL LONDON' IN THE NEUE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR BILDENDE KUNST (NGBK). BRISLEY HAS EXHIBITED PREVIOUSLY IN BERLIN IN 1973 AS PART OF THE DAAD ARTIST EXCHANGE PROGRAM. AT THE TIME HIS WAS A PERFORMANCE PIECE CALLED 'TEN DAYS' DURING WHICH FOR TEN DAYS HE REFUSED TO EAT AND TEMPTED HIS AUDIENCE WITH HIS FOOD. THE MEALS WERE SERVED ON A LONG TABLE TELLS BRISLEY. SOME OF ITS WAS EATEN, SOME OF ITS JUST SIMPLY WITHERED. AT THE TIME HE WANTED TO PROTEST AGAINST WESTERN EXCESS.

IN THE EXILE SHOW YOU WILL SEE SOME ELEGANT PHOTOS OF BRISLEY'S FOOD REFUSAL ART. THESE VINTAGE PRINTS - THE PHOTOS FROM THE 70'S ARE POETICALLY SLIGHTLY BLEACHED - SHOW THE MOUNTAIN OF FOOD ON THE TABLE. MEAT CUTLETS AND SAUSAGES WERE HANGING ON PIECES OF STRING. "I FOUND THE SAUSAGES AESTHETICALLY VERY INTERESTING. THEY JUST HUNG CORRECTLY" REMEMBERS BRISLEY. AFTER EIGHT DAYS HE BEGAN TO HALLUCINATE BUT ON THE NINTH DAY HIS HUNGER HAD GONE. AT THE END OF THE PERFORMANCE HE CRAWLED NAKED THROUGH THE REMNANTS OF FOOD OVER THE TABLE. "I REPEATED THE PERFORMANCE LATER ONCE MORE IN LONDON WITH A BUTLER WHO SERVED THE FOOD" RECOUNTS BRISLEY. WORD HAD SPREAD AND THE ACTION HAD SUDDENLY BECOME VERY CHIC. PEOPLE RANG TO ASK WHETHER THEY COULD BOOK A SEAT AT THE TABLE. IMPOSSIBLE. IN LONDON THOUGH, EVERYTHING WAS EATEN. AT CHRISTMAS EVEN TWO TRAMPS TURNED UP WHO ATE THE WHOLE THING. A SUPER-EIGHT FILM SHOWS THE TWO MEN EATING, AFTERWARDS THEY DEMANDED A WHISKY. THE ARTIST REMEMBERS THAT WHEN HE TOLD THEM THAT IT HAD ONLY BEEN ABOUT THE FOOD, THEY JUST LEFT. 'TEN DAYS' NEATLY SHOWS THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF BRISLEY'S WORK ALTHOUGH THAT WAS ORIGINALLY NOT INTENDED. "MY PRIMARY INTEREST WAS IN THE BODY AND THE QUESTION OF HOW MUCH IT CAN ENDURE. AND I WANTED WITH MY ACTIONS TO REACH A POINT WHERE THINGS CEASE TO BE BANAL, WHERE I NO LONGER HAVE THINGS FULLY UNDER CONTROL." IN LONDON BRISLEY ONCE HAD HIMSELF LOCKED UP IN A ROOM FOR 17 DAYS WHERE HE TRIED TO DO NOTHING. PEOPLE COULD WATCH HIM THROUGH A HOLE IN THE WALL. "AT SOME POINT OUT OF SHEER BOREDOM I BECAME PARANOID. I IMAGINED THAT SOMEONE WOULD TRY TO SHOOT ME WITH A GUN."

THE NGBK SHOW IN BERLIN SHOWS IMAGES FROM 1972 OF ANOTHER EXTREME EXPERIENCE OF THE ENGLISHMAN IN 'AND FOR TODAY...NOTHING' BRISLEY LAID IN A BATH TUB FOR TWO HOURS A DAY OVER TWO WEEKS. ON A NEARBY TRAY HE BUILT A TOWER OF STINKING WASTE AND SHIT. AFTER A FEW DAYS FLIES BUZZED AROUND, LAID EGGS IN THE TOWER OF EXCREMENT AND MAGGOTS APPEARED. THIS EXTREME ACTION REMINDS ONE OF LATER DAMIEN HIRST INSTALLATIONS EXCEPT FOR THE FACT THAT THIS TIME THE ARTIST DID NOT USE A COW'S HEAD BUT HELD HIS OWN HEAD ...VERY CLOSE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN 'PROST – MAHZEIT!' REVIEW BY TIM ACKERMANN IN THE WELT AM SONNTAG, 26-27 JUNE 2010