



### Unerkant Durch Freundesland

Modern communism may have been planted in Germany, but it took root in Russia. For Germans living in the GDR, Russia was the motherland that delivered the ideal – but only officials were entitled to visit. But there was a loophole, a 48-hour “transit visa” for travel through the Soviet Union to Romania. Young GDR adventurers took advantage, travelling through the Caucasus, and some as far as Siberia. The photographs, films and documents in this exhibition weave memoirs and travelogues with adventure and spy stories./SW

**MUSEUM LICHTENBERG | Türschmidtstr. 24, Lichtenberg, S-Bhf Nöldnerplatz, Tel 030 5779 7388, Tue-Fri, Sun 11-18, www.unerkantdurchfreundesland.de. Through Sep 24**



### Being Singular/Plural: Moving Images From India

What distinguishes these films from those of Indian documentary filmmakers is their function as “evidence”, says the Gugg... But details are patchy. “Art show as a forensics report” isn’t a bad start, but the evidence is damning: the publicity material is made up of vague assertions referencing Jean-Luc Nancy (starring in the role of obligatory French theorist), with the artists’ names adding an exotic gloss. The plural, meanwhile, is tabulated as an itinerary of the museum experience – snacks, toys, lunch tours, catalogues and ticket prices. Academic obladi-oblada aside, the show promises worthy *National Geographic*-style stuff, though I’ve a hunch it lacks bite./SW

**DEUTSCHE GUGGENHEIM | Unter den Linden 13, Mitte, U-Bhf Französische Str., Tel 030 2020 930, Mon-Sun 10-20, www.deutsche-guggenheim.de. Through Oct 10**



### Teotihuacan: Mexico's Mysterious Pyramid City

More than 450 objects have been snatched from the art, everyday life and religion of Ancient Mexico for this mammoth exhibition. The specimens include huge bits of architecture, filigree vessels and figures, stone carvings, masks and god statues. The exhibition hints that this may be the last time 15 large murals will be allowed out of Mexico for display. These items are some 2,000 years old. Which makes you wonder: what will represent Europe in museums 2,000 years hence?/SW

**MARTIN-GROPIUS-BAU | Niederkirchnerstr. 7, Kreuzberg, S+U-Bhf Potsdamer Platz, Tel 030 254 860, Mon-Sun 10-20 (closed on Tue from Aug 10), www.gropiusbau.de. Through Oct 10**

## BACK TO BERLIN

By SAM WILLIAMS

British performance artist Stuart Brisley is having his first German solo exhibition in almost 20 years: four ground-breaking works, including the ground-digging “Survival in Alien Circumstances” (Documenta VI in 1977), in Germany for the first time; and the body-starving “10 Days”, which was originally performed in Berlin.

For over four decades, Stuart Brisley has been seeking out the hidden or discarded – homeless people, folk rituals, food and excrement – revealed through the ultimate disposable object, the human body.

His solo show at Exile Gallery features photographic and film documentation of four works, including “Measurement and Division”, for which he was suspended upside down in a wooden frame. For “10 Days” (created in Berlin between December 21 and 31, 1973), he fasted and offered his meals to people who walked in off the street, and finished the show by crawling naked through rotting food.

**A lot of the pieces in the show were first performed in Germany – what’s your history here?** I came to Germany 55 years ago as a soldier – a conscript – stationed near the Dutch border. Later I was invited to Berlin on a DAAD scholarship. Then I went to Warsaw and was invited to work there. Theatre in Poland at that time was quite powerful because of people like Jerzy Grotowski and Tadeusz Kantor, very experimental directors. A friend of mine was close to the president, so I found myself in the upper echelons of the Communist Party.

**What was that experience like?** I could really communicate with the performers there. But I didn’t understand the nature of the restrictions in the society. I suggested a public discussion and it was a complete disaster, because people didn’t feel free to speak. That was an education.

**How did you come to focus on performance art?** In Munich. Basically, it’s called theft: you have no money, so you go to a building site etc... In North Florida, I started going to dumps. I’d find things, make something out of them and then put what I’d made back at the dump to see what happened.

Back in England, I was thinking about dematerialization and eventually my work got down to one vertical and two horizontals. I was working with directions and moving towards nothing. Then I thought: “We’re on the earth... We eat, we sleep.” So I thought maybe I shouldn’t make things, but actions.

**What are you doing when you’re performing?** I don’t think that question can be answered, but I’ll try... If I step into a performance space, the struggle is to get from the ordinary social self to a condition where people are paying attention. Otherwise they’ll walk off. So performances don’t really exist until some point inside the work. Then something else can happen – when it does, it’s quite extraordinary: you get a sense of identity with the people watching. And I don’t know how it gets there and I don’t know how to keep it going. It lasts for as long as it lasts and then it fades away.

**Anything written about your work usually comes with the words “political” and “radical” attached...** Well, you know... that’s just artspeak.

**Tell me about your alter egos.** If I’m working alone there’s a need for an ‘A.N. Other’. There was a tiny doll-like thing for two or three performances until I got bored of it. Recently, I’ve used large sheets of brown paper that get transformed into a torso. That’s for a piece called “Two Last



Photo: LINDSAY ISOLA

Breaths”. The first is about a man in Speaker’s Corner. He stood on a milk crate and said, “I’m dying. And I haven’t got long to go.” Then he pulled up his trouser legs and there was all this shit and blood going down into his boots. Most people left at that point. So it was just him and me until finally we both walked off.

The second “last breath” is about a man I saw burning to death in a park. So the paper torso stands for that ‘other’ – here, the burning man. Then I take my trousers off and get onto a chair and describe what happened that day. I’m in a shirt, with my trousers off. I often take off my trousers to reduce the notion of male power.

**Are your identities clearly separated?** No. I performed “180 Hours” as two people, A and B. A was an inarticulate person in the street, and B was a bureaucrat who preserved everything. All the faeces and urine he created, he hung in a hole in the floor above A. So I’d be B, then come down and be A. Taxi drivers would come in to check on the state of play, and I’d be woken up at night and jump up as one or the other.

When it was over, I was sitting on a chair. From the foyer, there was screaming. It turned out a young woman had been coming to see it from a mental hospital, and she thought somehow the resolution to her problems lay in the resolution of this work. And it ended before she arrived – she’d arrived too late. So they drove her back to the hospital in a taxi, screaming.

**People often think of artists as removed from society. Your works seem to have brought you into head-on contact...** It can be very disturbing. I’m not feeling anything: I’m going through the process and have to keep a certain distance. And over there, somebody’s crying. It’s a sort of real contradiction. And I can’t resolve it, you know? It just stays – a kind of horrible split.

**STEWART BRISLEY’S MEASUREMENT & DIVISION | Exile Gallery, Alexandrinenstr. 4, Kreuzberg, U-Bhf Prinzenstr., Tel 030 7623 3061, Thu-Sat 12-18, www.thisisexile.com. Through July 10**

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