

AN INTERNATIONAL MASH NOTE TO THE NATIONAL REVIEW OF LIVE ART

The National Review of Live Art has always been a touch stone for me, a portal into what was really interesting in the Live Art movement in the UK. I, and so many of my international colleagues, have relied on Nikki Milican to seek out original artists and bring them to light.

The NRLA is the premier platform for Live Art artists. I love meeting so many of my professional peers from around the world coming to see what Nikki has conjured up each year. It can be a crucial moment in an artist's career to be introduced at the NRLA. Even if I cannot attend, I track who has performed. Sooner or later many of those artists end up on my own programs or touring the world.

The NRLA's international reputation is impeccable. Many festival planners, curators and critics rely on it as a platform where they will see the artists of the future. Live Art is always on the edge of what is art, its nature is that of a form that challenges other forms, pushes the buttons of contemporary culture. The artists that appear at the NRLA often go on to have incredible influence in the visual art, dance and theater worlds. They come back to the NRLA to reconnect with its adventurous audience and their peers. Of course it is Nikki Milican's amazing taste that drives the festival and that other curators count on to find the true artists working in the field. Often artists that have not found a place in their own countries are discovered by Nikki and given access to the great connections the NRLA offers.

She and her team make the festival a meeting place for artists and ideas, and that attracts serious cultural activists. The NRLA's embrace of innovation from around the world keeps it a charged forum for real global exchange. The NRLA has a unique and cherished role in the world of artistic investigation, it has never grown moss, and it has always surprised and challenged the field. New ideas and new forms are born here, new artists are discovered, and masters are revived. At the NRLA you can feel the heartbeat of live contemporary art, fresh, vivid and rushing with life.

Nikki has done incredible work for the Live Art scene in the UK. Her support of so many artists has made many careers possible. Her development of emerging artists is especially important in this field; Nikki can recognize a kernel of talent a mile away and help bring an artist forward. She has done this for artists all around the globe not just the U.K. I don't know what the field would be like with out someone like Nicki there to encourage, constructively criticize, and support Live Artists. She is someone who understands the need for masters, mid career and emerging artists to have a platform for their work, their need for community and exposure.

I have known Nikki through many tough times, changes at the Third Eye, the CAC, moving venues for the NRLA and New Moves. I know there have been times when she thought of quitting, yet she carried on. It is a remarkable achievement just to have survived these last 30 years, especially in a field as often marginalized as Live Art. Nikki and the NRLA have thrived.

Nikki believes in her artists with a fervor and passion that few of us can match. That rigorous eye, bracing honesty, a steel conviction in the power of art, that joy of discovery in a new voice, those are priceless talents. Her contributions to the world of performance are immeasurable and deep. She is one of my most valued colleagues and the NRLA is her most amazing and beautiful creation. It is itself an act of performance/live art, an act of personal endurance and sacrifice. An act that has taken 30 years to reach this perfect point and one that will continue to evolve grow and reverberate for many years to come.

I know Ms. Milican would like me to celebrate the NRLA and keep this anniversary from being about her. I can see her already, retreating quietly, sitting in the corner, watching, and making sure all goes as planned, her great mane of hair and those piercing eyes taking everything in. I think that Nikki prefers to stand under the work, to “understand” the larger implications of an artist’s creation. Supporting what she sees of true value, helping it grow and prosper and reach a wider world. She has plenty of pride and ego but she would rather that energy be put towards the artists themselves. Feeding it back into the field so even more flowers of art can flourish.

I once gave Nikki a single red rose at one of our early meetings at a cafe on a rainy night in New York back in the 80’s. I don’t know why, but I think I wanted to make some gesture of respect to someone I immediately saw as a fellow traveler, a good friend and a truly remarkable woman. A rose to mark the beginning of a long conversation that would take place over many continents, involve many artists, and countless glasses of Merlot. Nikki deserves dozens of roses, 30 car loads or more, for her amazing work creating and sustaining the NRLA, and most of all for keeping it sharply relevant and vital to this day and for years into the future. The world owes Nikki and the NRLA a great sweeping bow, preferably performed by legions of drag queens in full sequined regalia.

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