

Stewart Laing

Live art was new to me when I arrived at the National Review of Live Art in 1989. My professional experience was as a set designer at the arty end of conventional theatre: I was Head of Design at the Citizens' at the time. My tastes pretty much stopped at the classy Rolls-Royce perfectionism of Peter Stein and Patrice Chereau.

I met Derek Jarman through a mutual friend, Jonny Phillips, who had acted in his films. I'd seen *Sebastiane* and *Jubilee* when I was a teenager, they had made a big impression on me, so Jonny thought it would be interesting if we could meet. It was interesting to meet Derek, but it was more interesting meeting Keith Collins, who was working with him at the time. So it would be true to say my introduction to live art was driven by my attraction to Keith, rather than any high minded aspiration towards the art form.

The work I actually did with Derek was pretty similar to what I'd done in theatre, organising the making and building of his installation. The content was radically different, but the process was the same. But being about the National Review of Live Art marked a shift in my interests in performance. I had an idea at the time that live art was pretentious and self indulgent, certainly not for me. Even being part of the event, directly involved in Derek's piece, I felt no inclination to see any of the other work being presented.

It was Nikki Milican who suggested that I actually see some of the performances. I can't remember specifically what I saw that first year, but it was enough to make me go back the next year, and since then I've become an enthusiastic and regular supporter of the NRLA. There is not a particular artist that stands out, or performance that defines it for me, more of an attraction to the reckless energy and anarchy of it all, the submersion in the diversity of the entire event.

When I started to direct my own theatre projects, performance art was certainly an influence. Many of the performers I've worked with, and the forms I've used are rooted in the live art scene. But I describe myself as a theatre director. The work I'm interested in seeing now is much more extreme, although I do tend towards the live art end of theatre, such as the Wooster Group and the collaborations between Frank Castorf and Jonathon Meese at the Volksbuhne in Berlin. But I would never have arrived there without stopping off at the NRLA along the way.