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Bermondsey Tube Station, 142-154 Jamaica Road, London SE16 4RX

Ilona Sagar and Patrick Coyle: Art Licks Weekend

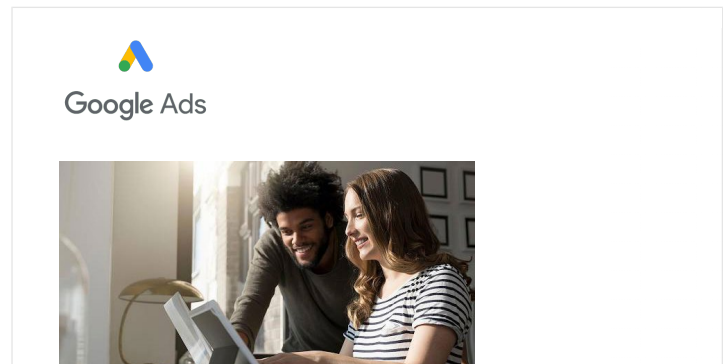
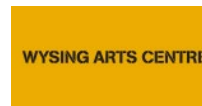


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Ilona Sagar and Patrick Coyle
Art on the Underground for the Art Licks Weekend
Saturday 5 October 2013
Review by Edwina Attlee

Bermondsey Underground Station is the greenhouse of the Jubilee Line; a Brutalist conservatory that lets the sky into the ticket hall and funnels it down the escalators to the dark vault of the platforms below. On the Saturday of the Art Licks Weekend that sky was both glowering and bright and the grubby glass panels brewed a stormy restlessness inside the station. Outside, a cordon was redirecting traffic, explaining that lane closures were in place due to a police incident. Inside, people began to



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gather and wait for something to happen. The crowd on the stairs to the ticket office made the entrance hall into a temporary amphitheatre.

Ilona Sagar's piece seemed to be perfectly composed to echo and refract the afternoon's burgeoning sense of pressure and release, using the space of the underground station as both stage and content. Two dancers, dressed in white tabard-like vests and shorts, moved through the space carrying in turn, each other and four oversized streaming banners - two a livid pink, the others subdued purple and beige.

It was a silent performance so the action took place to the sound of tube trains arriving and departing, the steady hum of traffic and escalators, and the regular tannoy service updates; planned engineering works on the Jubilee Line, a person on the tracks on the Piccadilly. The dancers moved slowly through the space, making a compelling series of shapes and structures; poses, tenses and contractions that depended upon contact and weight. She carried him, he carried her, and their bodies began to fuse into one odd animal shape, dragging a pole and a flag behind it. He carries her upside down; she drags the flag; flag and woman become dead weight. A young soldier with a pack on his back, as shapeless and heavy as a body, walks closely behind them. Her head is in his hand, fitted like a pot. Another man and woman shuffle across the space, carrying a large cardboard package between them mutely communicating the shared weight in their inadvertent balancing act.

The sense of the inadvertent seems crucial to what is at stake for Art on the Underground, relying as it does on the simultaneously theatrical and quotidian space of the public transport system. Sagar's piece, and the performance from Patrick Coyle that followed it, work a subtle alternation of the intended and the accidental. People stray into the action without meaning to, funneled by the crowd logic which pushes and pulls commuters through the city. People on mobile phones drift in and out of the spotlight, oblivious to their immediate location. Passengers arriving from the escalators find themselves centre stage, greeted by a waiting audience. Coyle himself arrives by tube, travels up the escalators and begins a poem he has written en route. The poem too is pushed about by the space it finds itself in, adverts mingle with his musings, the pot plants and their planters become the subject of a series of digressions, everything seeming to be premeditated and improvised.

It is this duality that the pieces best express; a city-duality of chance mingling with destiny, the ordinary and the unexpected, the accident and the plan. The city adapts unconsciously and the performances capture this unshakable adaptation; they are calm and at home in this space, just as the commuters are who find dancers or poets in their path; they take them, quite literally, in their stride, slowing the pace, giving one or two double takes, but keeping going all the same.

Published on 15 October 2013

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