

**THE PEOPLE'S SMART SCULPTURE PS2
BEST PRACTICE STUDY
2014 – 2018**

**FOSTERING PARTICIPATIVE ART AND COLLABORATIVE
URBAN ART & CULTURE PROCESSES IN EUROPE 'S
CROSS-CULTURAL CITY SPACES**

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"I'd like to have more time", a participant wished at our table. Nobody could give her more time, of course. But could we still try to find a way to make her wish somehow come true? Cook dinner or do the dishes? Or homework? It turned out she wouldn't let us help her with showering, jogging or going to the cinema. At least we had a good laugh, and after all her case joined the pile of unsolved wishes. So much about a confusing visitor's insight to a Social Muscle Club in Basel. Another visitor is quoted as follows: "My neighbour was looking for a horse no one had. He agreed on a riding lesson which some other guy at my table offered. Next to our table someone got a new haircut which he had just negotiated. Later he sang the song he had wished for himself – Nobody walks alone! – for the whole audience on stage, as a reward for his hairdresser."

Social Muscle Club (SMC) is hard to describe. The international performance art project mainly based in Berlin, Basel and Bristol, is all about giving and taking. Wishes and gifts are formulated on paper slips and negotiated throughout the evening – unconditionally, SMC is not a barter shop. If a wish or a gift is not fulfilled, there is at least a discussion to win. And sure enough, a singular amusement. A mixture of happening, celebration and social sculpture, Social Muscle Club is the place where art and anti-art conspire with immersive theatre while it's all about two simple questions: What can you give? What

SOCIAL
MUSCLE CLUB
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do you want? SMC trains your interpersonal strength through a simple game based on the fact that every human being wants something and has something to give.

The game is framed by a performative program that differs from city to city, club to club, evening to evening. Since its foundation in a Berlin living room in summer 2012, Social Muscle Club has celebrated itself as a playground of the subversive social. In 2013, the first foreign Social Muscle Club opened in Basel, which has so far hosted nine sold-out evenings – in the Kunsthalle, the Grand Hotel, a retirement home, a church, the market hall, barracks, art festivals, a refugee home and one in a fitness center. Soon SMC

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Scene from a Social
Muscle Club at the
Kunsthalle Basel.

Every event is different
and can take place in
almost any location

Photo: Nicolas Gysin

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Social Muscle Club
event in Zagreb as final
celebration of the PS2
subproject „Change of
heart“

Photo: Julien Duval



started to hit the road internationally, hosted by the most diverse institutions and events of the art world - starting in Bristol, followed by Athens, Freiburg, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Marseille, Munich, Nancy, Vienna, Zagreb, with Chicago, San Francisco and Zurich to follow this year.

Regardless of the city in which a Social Muscle Club is located, the curators, organised in an international core group, stick to a basic structure, a sequence of elements around an ever same wish and gift-game. While this structure always remains unchanged, the contents – a site-specific performance program with a lot of improvisation and most importantly, an open stage – differ widely. An evening at the SMC is a collective adventure that is – in its intimate setting – to be experienced and interpreted individually by each participant. Therefore, the text at hand is bound to the author and cannot reflect any collective opinion. The beguiling thing about

SMC is its effortlessness. Every cramped person who feels socially incompatible somehow manages to get involved in the game and gain something from it. Due to this low-threshold networking potential, SMC has all it takes to become a hit of the scene. To prevent this, the club continuously moves out of ancestral territories and integrates into the city. Because the gathering lives from its heterogeneity, the most unexpected encounters are possible. SMC left theatres and art spaces and entered new spheres. Thus, the club always has to take new forms in order to reach new audiences. SMC doesn't make itself comfortable just anywhere but ventures out into new social contexts – into fitness centres, old people's homes, luxury hotels, churches or refugee homes. SMC is not a party – as pictures of one evening might suggest. It is an intensive and sometimes strenuous artistic-social project with an elaborately designed framework.

For its organizers SMC requires constant reflection and attention, especially with regard to the seemingly self-evident aspects of gathering, which results in an exciting mixture - intimate, peculiar, effective. The feedback of the audience reflects this. At the beginning of the evening one was a stranger. SMC rituals gradually create the intimacy needed to relax. It is an informal, inviting setting. Nevertheless, a very clearly defined framework and concrete rules are indispensable to guarantee the necessary concentration. In the SMC everyone can move freely. But behaviours should be questioned, and barriers should be exceeded. These are the goose bump moments. The feelings that remain for a long time.

The well-known Swiss political publicist Daniel Binswanger described the relevance of SMC as follows: „The Social Muscle Club has met with an enormous response. The concept is far away from the classical ideas of mediation. The purpose is to intensify the interaction itself. The Social Muscle Club is consistently oriented towards the goal of participation, which is becoming a new urgency everywhere, also in the classical institutions. The playful removal of inhibition thresholds has the effect that any participants, without knowing each other, begin to give each other presents.“ The success of the Social Muscle Club in the cultural world is probably best reflected in institutional invitations to such renowned initiatives as the Berliner Theatertreffen, the Schauspielhaus Zurich or the Kunsthalle Basel. And of course the PS2 partner institution Museum of Broken Relationships in Zagreb.

Find more information on:
<http://socialmuscleclub.ch/>

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What often seems to be just a big party is a very demanding, well-curated artistic framework. In this case at the Elisabethen Church in Basel

Photo: Nicolas Gysin



Thank You

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