



osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019-2024 has invited writers from various disciplines — art, architecture, history, theatre, performance, and literature — to provide readings of its first set of 16 projects and their context. The essays have been commissioned and written in advance of the inauguration of the projects.

Åshild Kristensen Foss is studying BA Art and Dissemination at Oslo Metropolitan University and one of the participants in the Migrant Car project.

Ed D'Souza (Robert E. D'Souza, 1969, UK) is an artist, designer and Professor of Critical Practice at Winchester School of Art at the University of Southampton, based in London. He is known for his temporal, site-specific and participatory/collaborative art and design projects many of which connect to his Indian heritage. His work explores critical practices that engage with a variety of production processes and producers and is supported by his critical writings around social, political and cultural change. Recent projects have been shown in art institutions, biennials and public spaces in China, India, Spain and the UK.

For osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019-2024, D'Souza is co-producing a series of projects with students from Oslo National Academy of the Arts, OsloMet, and Eddie King's Workshop, located in the Markveien, Grünerløkka, surrounding the moving sculpture Migrant Car, which will move within Oslo's new car-free zone, Bilfritt byliv.



Curated by Eva González-Sancho Bodero and Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, **osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019-2024** has set in motion a specially conceived infrastructure to support a five-year programme of art in public space and the public sphere. The expanding programme will evolve and grow, adding and announcing projects and participants as the biennial moves forward in time. The project is the outcome of **OSLO PILOT**, a two-year experimental and research-based project that laid the groundwork for the biennial.

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Åshild Kristensen Foss & Ed D'Souza

Beyond Participation Into Art

The following text is an edited dialogue between the U.K. artist Ed D'Souza and Norwegian student Åshild Kristensen Foss, who is studying BA Art and Dissemination at Oslo Metropolitan University. Foss is one of the participants in the Migrant Car project and has been documenting the production of the car sculpture over a period of one month at the workshop of Eddie King in the Grünerløkka area of Oslo where she lives. D'Souza invited Foss to interview him, recognising her intimate understanding of the project as both participant and member of the local community in Grünerløkka.

AKF *Can you tell me a little bit about the evolution of the project previously titled End of Empire at Kochi-Muziris Biennale, which has become Migrant Car for Oslobiennalen?*

ED *I made a version of my car sculpture for Kochi-Muziris Biennale in 2014. Documentary evidence of this work was shown at Tate Modern in London in 2018 as part of an event 'How to Build a Biennale' organised by Winchester School of Art in the UK. A chance meeting with the curators of Oslobiennalen that year, when we discussed the motives behind the piece, led to the present commission. Rethinking the project for the city of Oslo meant new conversations about the concept of art in public space and subsequently the new car free zone came up in a discussion about the city. For me, the restrictions placed on this space could be used as a geographical framing device to connect the presence of the car sculpture to the city dynamics, at the same time engaging with local debates. The idea of the car as a visitor suggested contextualizing the city as a host, which led to a discussion about the possibility of renaming the car, thought of as a migrating object – Migrant Car. This opened a wider discussion on the situation of migrants in the city. It would enact the idea of a car on a journey – the actual movement*

would be a performative gesture in itself – providing this motion was driven by people power, which would also give non-art publics a chance to encounter art in action.

Important questions for me were: How might a project such as this promote cultural understanding and 'forms of exchange' as part of a strategy contributing to social engagement that would benefit the locality of Oslo, while contributing to a better understanding of peoples and societies within the context of the globalised urban situation that exists here. This led to my invitation to local students to develop participatory projects along the route the car would follow and to work collectively in shaping this journey, while also grounding the project locally. Part of my discussion with the student participants were around current critiques and political dialogues that focus on migration/immigration and 'tensions around difference' and what affective responses might inform attitudes and give voice to those who might feel marginalised in these dialogues. It was interesting to build on the discussions of education and action and approach ideas of participation for the city.

AKF *Can you tell about your first meeting with the workers that built the sculpture and why you chose them to make the car?*

ED *It was a conversation with Martin Berner Mathiesen, researcher at Oslobiennalen, about the need to find a furniture maker. Martin described this local character, a Trinidadian running a workshop near his home in Grünerløkka that led me to Eddie King's upholstery workshop. A short meeting quickly confirmed that this workshop, which looks onto the street, and the combination of personalities working there might be promising. An extended conversation with Eddie and colleague Ronny Karlsen clearly showed that they had an ambition to have their skills put to the test by collaborating with an artist to build this full-size car. And I liked their curiosity about the project's intentions, what collaboration might mean, and why I was so interested in them. It was their idea to add working wheels and hence the idea of the sculpture travelling through the city; this was a key shift in the project's development, which they initiated.*

For me, one of the important aspects of this project is the relationship between Eddie the migrant worker and Ronny as a Norwegian native whose family has been in Grunerløkka for three generations as makers, and their relationships with co-worker Kristian Rosskopf and neighbourhood friend and photographer Ken Opprann, and their extended participation which came about through their engagement with the project's evolution through their connection to the workshop. It was an interesting proposition for a project called Migrant Car that set out to engage with positive everyday realities of migrants and migration, something that the relationship between these participants illustrates so well. Their professional skills also entwine with a local history of production in Grunerløkka, which for me is an important narrative that my project can engage with by making art production public through the workshop. Extending these narratives post-project allows for an ongoing exploration of these relations and local understanding gained in the project. I was also struck by the photos pinned on the walls of children who had come into the workshop to watch the furniture being made. I knew this was the perfect site for participatory encounters because these photos evidenced that they were receptive to these encounters.

AKF *You included art students from OsloMet and KHiO in the Migrant Car project. I have heard you talk about why and how you want the students to be able to create and use their artistic approaches outside the institutional context and in 'real life.' Can you tell me why?*

ED *As someone who also works in an Art School setting, it is clear to me more than ever that we need to create opportunities that extend and test the 'institution' from the outside. Academia can be a bubble, with its internal structures and rules, so it's important to burst that bubble sometimes. I like the fact that there is a need for self-organisation in a situation like this, and an individual commitment that moves into becoming a group – a group that for the students crosses ages, institutions, experiences and opinions. What we created here through the Biennial becomes an informal art school where a lot of learning and practice are going on outside of the institution, which is a paradox in itself.*

The 'real life' I talk about is working in the public domain. This is a very challenging situation and full of risk because of the 'live' and unpredictable situation of the streets, which cannot always be controlled and so needs awareness and contingent responses. This provides an alternative to the institutional space, potentially allowing the students new freedoms to test their ideas and practice. Of course, I am aware that we have students studying art in public space, and art and dissemination with the contextual and theoretical background of study in art. But here, there is the potential for that knowledge to be realised via this project and through the Biennial event. Importantly, the street and public sphere doesn't necessarily care about or conform to institutional rules and knowledge, and this invites uncertainty. Learned theory being put to the test through practice and through dialogues with each other and the public also becomes a test of character, commitment and self-belief.

AKF *This is quite a generous action, I believe, as a participant in the project I have heard you mention generosity several times. Is generosity a word which you deliberately consider in your projects or does it just occur naturally?*

ED *I probably use the word generosity in my exchanges with participants as a reminder that participation requires recognition, support, hospitality, invitation and acceptance at many levels. For me, recognising co-workers – whatever they might contribute – becomes important, as a project creates an ecosystem where each person is valuable and makes a contribution. Normally events and projects of this nature focus on recognising and naming important relationships because they have social capital, such as galleries, funders, sponsors etc., while people who might be important to the local/social narrative become peripheral.*

In terms of my own generosity, I see myself as a facilitator within the process, bringing people together, finding connections and common ground, taking time to understand people's opinions and ideas and channelling these in some way through the opportunities that a project might offer to benefit collaborators and participants. At the same time, I recognise this also benefits me as the artist and I am very aware of the ethical issues that arise

from the inequalities of power inherent in producing participatory art, which are often inevitable.

Leaving Migrant Car as an artwork for three months in the public domain, on the streets of Oslo, might also be seen as a moment of artistic generosity and trust, but this is more a critical gesture. Having the work unattended on many occasions over a three-month period raises the question as to what could potentially happen if the car is attacked or destroyed. My answer is that this would become part of its narrative, a reflection of its life in the city and as art in public space. The project is designed to have the capacity to absorb these narratives as part of a conversation with the city. Is this perhaps the generosity of the artwork, or the generosity of the city to the artwork? We have to wait and see!

AKF *I like that the underlying political theme in the project is based on engaging with issues in society, but you're using participation and generosity to disseminate ideas rather than making an overt political statement, though the project title Migrant Car is provocative! Do you want the engagement to generate a learning situation and be a good example of how we can also work together through the dialogues generated by a project?*

ED *An engagement with socially orientated issues underpins my critical interest in making artwork and has been a focus in my own practice. I don't believe it is the job of artists to solve social problems, this takes away from the state's responsibility to improve the social situation for those within a society; imposing this burden on artists distracts from socio-political responsibility. I do believe though that being socially aware, provocative and active can be part of an engagement which, for some artists, can be a frame of reference to personally respond to what is happening in their time. In these terms, I really like the quote from Bertolt Brecht that, "Art is not a mirror held up to reality but rather a hammer with which to shape it." This thinking applies to art becoming a performance that might shape a social reality.*

AKF *The formal objects in your artistic activities/approaches are based on everyday objects used or looked at in a new way. The objects are supposed to challenge the audience to achieve an aesthetic experience? Is this also the 'goal' with the participation aspect, the participants become the formal objects that challenge both each other and the audience?*

ED *The everyday becomes a universal and local language that might bring people closer to the art rather than separate them from it, while revealing new ideas about the familiar. The crashed Hindustan Ambassador car – which I originally photographed on the streets of Delhi – was the initial starting point that became a ready-made artwork to me, and hints at my interest in reviewing existing aesthetics through objects with dynamic social functions.*

Some of the student projects being proposed while Migrant Car moves through the car free zone of the city seek meaningful relationships with the locality and communities. Some projects look back to hidden local histories, revealing pasts and links to trade and migration into the city, while others connect more directly with the work of prisoner refugees unable to traverse borders, others literally invite physical engagement with the art. You could say that these projects have an aesthetic of a time and place as they respond to the situation of the city and its people.

AKF *Also, to create art, the participants are or become the art?*

ED *Creating a project that can have a life of its own needs some system of organisation, participation and ownership, and I'm encouraged by the fact that the more successful the project, the less it needs me. My work might be seen to build on a legacy of Futurist, Dadaist or Situationist strategies of spectator participation and certainly this project in turn builds on a recent history and growth in participative practices. I like the blurring that might happen between spectator and participant and that they all might have the potential to be the art. I'm heartened at how the project has grown via the workshop into the local community and beyond.*

Going back to the project's genesis, to me it has been interesting to see how ideas tested in the Kochi Biennale and previously considered critically through my research and writing have informed the project. It has now developed more as a durational public participatory performance, with different audiences over time and space, where participants become performers of art, serendipitous guests bringing contingent art 'actions' and 'situations' into a space, and where the audience become part of a 'spectacle' of this art.

I'm attracted to the proposition that art in public space might close the distance between art and everyday life, a possibility I think about often. That we might produce a situation for people to rethink their locality through the most subtle of actions, or even simply by moving this object, this Migrant Car, through the streets of Oslo is a possibility of making art accessible and allowing for a testing of a democracy of art.