

## Park Terrace lights a show of Solidarity

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This Gansu street lamp is one of many illuminating Christchurch's Park Terrace as part of Mischa Kuball's Solidarity Grid.

DUNCAN SHAW-BROWN

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Recently in Christchurch to oversee the installation of six newly-gifted lamps for his public arts project Solidarity Grid, on Park Terrace, German artist Mischa Kuball took time out to talk about his background in performance art.

"I started as a performance artist in 1977, without any announcement. I was a body in a waste-bag beside a shopping centre in Dusseldorf. The punk scene in Europe was an important influence at that time. My work was all about taking control of public spaces, responding to the broken state of the economy and drawing attention to it."

Convinced that performance art is both still around and currently going through a revival, Kuball believes it remains under-estimated and has maintained its relevance.

The principles and ideologies that informed Kuball's beginnings in performance art also continue to be important to a work like Solidarity Grid – a public arts project initiated for Scape7 in 2013. It began with a single street lamp from Kuball's home town of Düsseldorf and, like all his work, denotes a public intervention.

Seeking support over a period of four years for a total of 21 street lamps from as many countries to be placed along Park Terrace, Solidarity Grid is equally political – a global act of support for Christchurch with the potential for long-term relationships centred upon principles of kindness.

Central to Kuball's practice is his engagement with public spaces in work that will generate social engagement. Through such projects, "public and private space are crossed over, making possible communication between all participants; the artist, the art work, and the public space", he says.



In Solidarity Grid, each lamp provides evidence of an intimate and public association between the city who had gifted it and Christchurch. As well as being useful objects that light Park Terrace for Christchurch residents during the evenings, the lamps are also the outcome of conversations and friendships between numerous parties.

Solidarity Grid positions Christchurch within an international body of work by Kuball as a further "public proposition" that he has undertaken in countries like Japan, Poland, Italy and Australia. The Park Terrace project however, is his largest work in this series, but like its counterparts, it makes light the central subject of its narratives and symbolism.

Mischa Kuball started his career as performance artist in Germany.

MISCHA KUBALL ARCHIVE

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"Christchurch becomes connected internationally, not just by its economic associations, but by principles and actions that are about well-being and communication between individuals and communities," explains Kuball. "If I start to do something in a public space, I am immediately addressing those who are not traditional art gallery goers. Art is a political vehicle, but it also mediates the private into a public expression.

"The responsibilities around this have changed since my first performance in Dusseldorf, but politics have always been important to my work."

In 2013, Kuball initiated Ghost Tram, a public work in Katowice, Poland, in which he converted a 25-year-old tram into a glowing after-dark attraction. Empty of passengers, it appeared on the tramway tracks of Katowice and other cities in Southern Poland, seemingly travelling to nowhere. Neither stopping at stations or collecting passengers, Ghost Tram drew attention to its role as part of a transport network, as well as its potential as a means of community gathering and engagement.

Solidarity Grid now consists of 15 lamps, with six remaining to be installed by 2016. Kuball has visited Christchurch frequently since 2013 and will be back at the end of this year.

He first came to the city in 2004 for a project with the Physics Room, but through his friendship with Scape 7 curator Blair French became actively engaged with Christchurch's cityscape post-quake.

Kuball recalls that this initial visit to the city was a shock. "Blair wasn't even sure if there was going to be a Scape 7, but he agreed to bring me to Christchurch to see what had happened and what might be possible. I was struck from the very first moment – going through the Red Zone and seeing all these broken homes around the river. I agreed with Scape that I would like to work on the idea for Solidarity Grid."

Kuball emphasises that it is the actions taken up by people within such a project that are significant. "I am not interested in the street lamps as such, but the value they bring to the project. The city in 2015 has changed since my previous experiences of it. Blue-collar workers are now the players in the game and I love that. It gives the city a second fingerprint. It is being

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run by people who came here with an idea for reconstructing Christchurch. All the people who were involved with Solidarity Grid had a blue collar background, for example, Mainfreight (as a project centred upon the act of giving, Mainfreight co-founder Neil Graham was acknowledged at Scape's recent dedication ceremony on October 3 for his support for Solidarity Grid and "for his legacy and personally funding the carriage of every city's lamp across the globe to Christchurch").

"This is the largest work that I have ever done and, once started, things have started to happen. The city of Boston approached me about giving a lamp and it was spontaneous. I sometimes think that I am doing the obvious and the general, but I do it in a way that people cannot help but see it. I'm using objects for the process of mediating. You cannot substitute the physical presence of the human body in public, but the street lamp is creating a human presence."