



James

Johnson

-Perkins

Bridge Guard Slovakia

KAPow!







8 Heroes, Vinyl on Card, 2011



12 Hero masks, Mixed media, 2011



The Guardian, Gigapan Photograph, 2011





The Violinist, Gigapan Photograph, 2011



**Interview by Lucia Udvardyova with James Johnson-Perkins
The Bridge Guard Residency, Sturovo, Slovakia, March 2011**

Lucia Udvardyova: Can you briefly describe the idea behind your project in Sturovo, Slovakia?

James Johnson-Perkins: In the year 2001 the Maria Valeria bridge (between Sturovo, Slovakia and Esztergom, Hungary) was reopened. This was the inspiration for this residency. Artists and scientists were asked to put forward projects, which place emphasis on uniting, connecting, and bridging. I was given a 6 months sojourn in the "Bridge Guard" residence in Sturovo, Slovakia, to do just this.

James Johnson-Perkins: For my residency I knew that I wanted to create something where I could interact with the community in Sturovo. Also I wanted to do a project on my childhood obsession with Super-heroes. As a child, I grew up watching endless episodes of Batman, Superman films and reading lots of comic books, so this subject was literally in my blood. I wanted to ascribe this childhood fascination onto an environment, which I was unfamiliar with. I imagined in my mind that super characters would be great fictional vehicle to protect Sturovo and the bridge.

Lucia Udvardyova: The crux of the project lay in interaction. Why did you choose this mode?

James Johnson-Perkins: I have done a lot of artworks where I have interacted with the public. Including an attempt beat a robotics world record and building giant dens in classrooms in Venice. I have worked with small groups as well as with hundreds of people.

James Johnson-Perkins: I like it when the people that I work with bring the unexpected and the element of fun to what we are working on. Be it an unusual costume, a crazy building technique or a playful idea. I also like creating events using the collective consciousness of many minds. This is exciting and can have surprising and wonderful results.

Lucia Udvardyova: Sturovo is a small border town. What reactions did you encounter?

James Johnson-Perkins: I worked with a number of people from Sturovo. This involved individuals creating super hero personas and designing and making a series of masks. I set up a series of mask making workshops, which were a great success. Actually I was surprised at the interest developed by my project. The people in Sturovo were very up for this challenge and many people came along, acted out scenarios and engaged with the film.

James Johnson-Perkins: I wrote in my diary about Sturovo 'thinking about the spirit of this place, my initial thoughts are. If Venice is like a heart of the world, then this place is like calf mussels or the gut. It's like a cart horse, which has suddenly been let free and doesn't know what to do with it's new freedom. There this wildness and a breathtaking beauty here and I knew right away that I really wanted to try and capture capture this spirit.

James Johnson-Perkins: So, in my film I also had simple scenes, which capture the natural beauty of this area. Including: The Danube river, the Esztergom Basilica and glorious wintery fields. I contrasted this with local focal points such as: Old factories, tower blocks and the swimming pool complex. These places have in themselves an inherent and strange beauty.

Lucia Udvardyova: What is the Sturovo Super Hero Society?

James Johnson-Perkins: The Sturovo Super Hero Society is a faux society of super heroes invented by and inhabited by 15 different local volunteers. I started the society simply by asking the people I met, if they were a super hero, which super hero would they be and what would their character look like? I then invited these people to act out these personas, wearing masks and costumes, which either I, or they invented. This developed into a small band of friends.

Lucia Udvardyova: How did the project evolve over time and did you experience any complications?

James Johnson-Perkins: It took a little while for me to meet new people. There were some language barriers, but in fact most young people here speak a small amount of English and I met some very helpful translators, keen to practice their skills. After a few weeks I decided to invite people to a workshop as a way of generating interest. Luckily, I had the use of a small kiosk in the centre of town, which I used to put up advertisements for these workshops.

James Johnson-Perkins: Slowly over time people started coming to visit me and I began to generate ideas, and make the masks and costumes. Gradually when people became comfortable with my ideas. I filmed them in prominent or interesting places, which meant something to those people. They also acted out simple gestures, which related to their super hero.

James Johnson-Perkins: I also created a series of vinyl drawings of heroes, from these ideas. Later I had the fortune to meet up with a talented violinist called Palko Trencsik. He very kindly made a music score for my film. This was recorded with Hungarian and Slovakian cartoon overdubs, and atmospheres by a music producer called Yomakomba.

Lucia Udvardyova: Can you describe the different Super heroes, which were invented?



Batwords, Bridge Guard Gallery, Sturovo, Slovakia 2011

James Johnson-Perkins: Super heroes are characters, which protect the public. Usually they have super powers, but the term can also be applied to any person, that performs the same function. I see super heroes as modern myths and like present day versions of mythical beings from history. Such as: Roman, Greek or Norse Gods. With their special powers and weapons. Or they are re-imaginings of present myths that have been around for centuries such as: Angels, Mermaids or Green men.

James Johnson-Perkins: With the super hero characters in the Sturovo Super Hero Society, material was sourced from present day super heroes as well as the canon of historical mythical characters and ideas from the history of art. This was mixed with the ordinary traits and passions, which reflected the volunteer's interests, such as: dancing, martial arts, playing football or riding bikes. In fact the heroes in the Sturovo Super Hero Society are more of the non-super power kind. Similar to Bat man, who needs his gadgets and suit to perform his heroic duties.

James Johnson-Perkins: The masks played a heavy role in the characters identity and I particularly liked to design masks with animal qualities, which are common in hero characters, such as a: Pig, crow and stork. With these the character takes on an animalistic quality. This also gave them a shamanistic quality. In the sense that shamans from cultures all over the world, don animal masks to inhabit the qualities of these animals.

James Johnson-Perkins: In the Vinyl Drawings I made of these characters, I also placed landmarks or objects in the background, which were sourced from the local landscape or my imagination. Such as: A bridge, a gravestone, a pile of skulls or books. I did this to give the characters a sense of place and to enrich them with symbolic meaning.

Lucia Udvardyova: What specific outcomes did the project have and were your initial expectations met? James

Johnson-Perkins: I was extremely happy with how much work I produced. All in all, I created: A film, a series of masks and 16 Vinyl Drawings. To be honest I didn't had any expectations to start with. Only that I wanted to learn about my location and create a series of works influenced by my experiences in Slovakia.

James Johnson-Perkins: Since completing the project I have sent the Sturovo Super Hero Society film off to various film festivals and events. The Elysium gallery in Wales selected it to appear in their travelling film program, visiting: The Hay and Wye Festival, the Elysium Gallery in Swansea and also the Galleria Perela during the 68th Venice Biennale. I am very pleased with this, as it means my film has been seen, and will be viewed by many different international audiences.

Lucia Udvardyova: How did you benefit from the residency in terms of your future artistic work and, in your opinion, how did the project enrich the town and its residents?

James Johnson-Perkins: The residency gave me a new belief in myself as an artist. You know it is a great gift to be given 6 months of freedom to dream up a new idea. I am indebted to the organisers of this project. Karol Fruhauf, Hanneke Fruhauf, Gyogri Himmler and Zsofi Himmler. They are amazing visionary people, with very big hearts. This is a remarkable residency situation where artists and scientists are encouraged to think about this notion of 'the bridge'.

James Johnson-Perkins: A bridge is a powerful symbol. It allows people to visit each other and connect. It joins two opposing places, both spiritually and physically. In a way I hope my project mirrors this idea. Sturovo is a wonderful place with an amazing but sad history. A place joined to Hungary by a new bridge, which has been destroyed by successive world wars. In my mind, I like to imagine the Sturovo Super Hero Society has and will continue to guard this place and this bridge, in spirit at least. Keeping it safe always from future conflicts.

Lucia Udvardyova is a sound artist and a journalist that lives and works in Prague. She is the director of the music project Easterdaze and has worked for Radio Wave, Czech Republic and Resonance FM, UK.



Film Installation, The Hay-on-Wye Festival, Salem Chapel, (Elysium Gallery, Bus Stop Cinema), 2011

Selected Solo

2011

The Bridge Guard Residency, Sturovo, Slovakia

Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Wales, UK

2010

The Emily Harvey Foundation, Venice, Italy

Nospace, Bangkok, Thailand

The Public, West Bromwich, UK

2009

Kube Gallery, Poole, Dorset, UK

Art Gene, Barrow-in-Furnace, Cumbria, UK DLI Musuem Gallery, Durham, UK

2008

Nospace, Bangkok, Thailand Exhibit Gallery, London, UK Red Gallery, Hull, UK

Selected Group

2011

Venice Biennale, Galleria Perera, Italy The Hay and Wye Festiva, I Wales Elysium Gallery, Wales

2010

Athens Photo Festival 10, Athens, Greece

2009

Building with Colour, Gallery North, Northumbria University, UK Digital Showcase, Austin Museum of

Digital Art, Austin, Texas. USA Attitude, Center for Contemporary Public Arts, Bitola, Macedonia

2008

Video Art and Architecture, National Centre for Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia

Illuminators International, Yekaterinburg Koltsovo Airport, Russia

Urban Identity, Monkey town, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York, USA

Harry Smith Anthology Remixed, The centre for contemporary Arts (CCA), Glasgow, UK

2007

Digital Long Island Media Festiva, I IMAC Theater, New York, USA

The International Experimental Film Festiva, I Florean Museum, Baia Mare, Romania

Video Art & Architecture, The Cultural Communication Centre of Klaipeda, Lithuania

& University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA

2006

First Play Bertin, Hau 2, Berlin, Germany

2004

Lux Artist Film, The Royal College, London, UK

Video Art & Architecture, Culteralel Molino Atomic, Barcelona, Spain

2003

Crossovers Japan, Toyota Museum of Art, International House, Kyoto, Japan



Flower boy, Vinyl on Card, 2011

The Bridge Guard Residency support artists, scientists and personalities from other professions who work on projects which place emphasis on uniting, connecting, and bridging. Support consists of making possible a 3 to 6 months' sojourn in the "Bridge Guard" residence in Sturovo, Slovakia, with the right to work in complete freedom on one's own project,

The town of Sturovo supplies the residence, living quarters and studio. The cultural association "Sturovo and Vicinity" takes on the responsibility for the management of the residence and provides local assistance to the Bridge Guards. The initiator of the "Bridge Guard Sturovo - Esztergom" residence is the fund "Stefan and Viera Frohauf"



Štúrovo Super Hero Society