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From The Times

May 16, 2009

Thousands offer to be living statues on plinth in Trafalgar Square



Will Pavia

We lined up beneath Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square, men and women of all ages and descriptions, standing on our plinths, all hoping to be works of art.

Nearly 11,000 people have applied to be a statue in Trafalgar Square as part of Antony Gormley's sculpture *One and Other*, which will occupy the fourth plinth from July until October.

As members of that hopeful multitude, we were at the first dress rehearsal, in advance of the lottery that will pick out 2,400 people to be elevated on the plinth for an hour each, over 100 days.

You may be wondering what works of art talk about between themselves. It is mainly quite prosaic stuff.

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"Why the outfit?" I asked the sculpture two places down from me, who was dressed as Wally from the children's books *Where's Wally?* He was Antony Pace, 46, a software engineer from Hertfordshire. "I happened to have it from my skiing holiday," he replied.

"Where did you go?" asked another sculpture. "Val Thorens," he said. "In France. Quite nice." He decided to dress up again because "there's not much a software engineer can do on a plinth".

This was a question all of us faced: to come as ourselves or not. Who were we, anyway? And was it good enough? Among us there was an editor, a housewife, a human rights barrister, a woman dressed as a nun and two morris dancers.

The morris dancers, presumably used to occupying public spaces for hours at a time, looked quite comfortable. So did Cleveland Watkiss, 49, a jazz vocalist. Was he really a work of art, I asked him. "Of course," he replied. "I'm the best Cleveland Watkiss there is."

Ian East, 69, an actor who appears alongside John Hurt in the film *The Oxford Murders* — "I had to kill my wife in three different ways, it was great fun" — wished to be naked. "I want to stand there," he said. "I just want to be a person."

Mr Gormley said it was a question of identity. "What's the difference between what you do and what you are?" he said. "Between doing and being?" He had tried it himself. "After a while you begin to feel the strangeness of your own self," he said.

Everyone liked my plinth, although some people seemed to think it was better without the work on top. I stood for a few minutes among the other works of art, in front of a bank of photographers. This is how it feels to be Mona Lisa, I thought. To live one's life in front of clicking cameras.

Then came a shout from *The Sun* photographer: "Oil Times! Get out of it!" He seemed to be recognising the essential tension between who I was and what I did, between doing and being. Could he not accept me for my being?

No, he said. Apparently I was "ruining the picture". I climbed down and moved to a more isolated location, feeling what Mr Gormley called "the strangeness of self".

Thankfully, the artist himself thought that I was a fabulous piece of work. "I would just like you to be a bit higher," he said. "More like an idealised object. You ought to go and stand on the roof of your house. That will be better practice."

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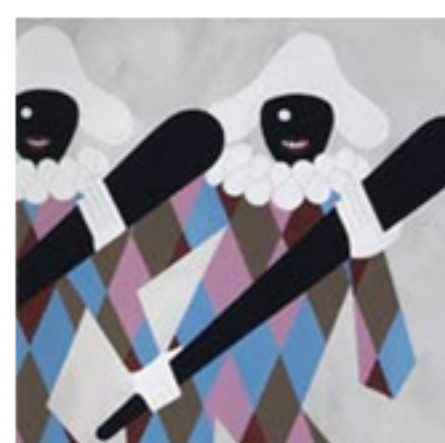
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The 4th plinth in Trafalgar Sq. should be permanently occupied by a statue of The Whistleblower who blew the gaff on MPs' expenses. The stature should have an arm raised pointing down Whitehall towards the crooks. The Whistleblower should also receive an amnesty and a peerage. He/she did us proud.

Rob Bryant, Bromley, England

HAVE YOUR SAY

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