

The Play's the Thing

Claudia Boulton

Theatre Director, Producer and Actress. Claudia lived in and helped manage October Gallery in the late '80s, before returning to her stage career.

I would never have become involved with all the marvellous projects that the Institute of Ecotechnics (IE) initiated if they did not have theatre as a thread running through all their work. This gave me a vital link to working with everybody living at October Galley, and even to running Lundonia House while Chili was away in Australia for a year, in 1988.

I first met Corinna through her cousin Didi who was part of the all-woman theatre group I was in, Beryl and the Perils. We went to Nepal and though I was only meant to stay two weeks working with Sabine Lehmann, who had trained with the Berliner Ensemble and ran the Vajra Hotel, I ended up staying six months! Then I went to an IE Conference in Provence and was invited on a Theater of all Possibilities (TAP) tour of Nigeria, but that's another wild story! Someone suggested I stay at the house until we left, so, in 1986, I spent my first few nights at October Gallery.

The first Studio 8 show I was in was *Doña Juana* by Molière (we just changed 'he' to 'she' with few other changes required) where I played Scanarelle, the knowing side-kick, to Chili's *Doña Juana*. Then, José Férez did a series of plays written by artists, among them, Picasso's *Desire Caught by the Tail* with a wonderful cast of Corinna MacNeice, Elisabeth Lalouschek and Diana Mathewson, who was visiting from Quanbun Downs. Another production, Samuel Beckett's *End Game*, encouraged me to branch out and play Winnie in Beckett's *Happy Days*. I would never have been able to focus sufficiently without the space the Gallery afforded. My first performances, at the Gallery, had a poster generously provided by Ralph Steadman, who was showing at the time. In 1990, a World Tour beckoned, and I performed *Happy Days* at many venues including all the different IE projects: Hotel Vajra, Kathmandu; Birdwood Downs, Derby, Western Australia; Las Casas de la Selva, Puerto Rico; the Caravan of Dreams, Fort Worth, Texas and even in Arizona, at Biosphere 2, just before closure. I've also performed theatre with the RV *Heraclitus* crew in several ports.

Since then I've directed and produced many memorable shows with Studio 8 in London. They include, Robert Anton Wilson's *Wilhelm Reich in Hell*; a hilarious pantomime *CinderAlladin*, where I crashed the two fairy tales into each other; *Marouf the Cobbler*; and, latterly, *Deconstruction of the Countdown*, an original TAP play based on William Burroughs' writings. I hope that won't be the last, and am looking for another play that will expand the parameters of the *Transvanguard*. I feel incredibly privileged to have had such a close relationship with October Gallery, almost since its inception. It is a space uniquely open to explore and create together, and welcomes artists from all cultures. Theatre is such a fantastic way for people to work together - on a meta-level - rather than just in the mundane world. It gives a shared space where you can leave your 'self' behind and inhabit other beings, making them your own. Long live October Gallery and all the wonderful people who play there!

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