

PROJECT 28

Roman Ondak

2014

Measuring the Universe

Swap

Terrace

25 January – 14 February 2014

Parramatta Town Hall

BIOGRAPHY

Through his poetic interventions, Roman Ondak alters our perception of everyday life. Ondak merges art and the everyday experience, leading to an impressive body of globally significant work. Audience participation and the involvement of the public is integral in the realisation of his work.

FACTS

- Project 28 was presented as part of Sydney Festival at the historic Parramatta Town Hall in January 2014.
- In *Measuring the Universe*, 2007, Ondak gave the organisation a set of written instructions, which informed the development and evolution of the artwork.
- Ondak prescribed the size of the room, the specific marker pen and the way in which each participant's name should be written.
- The attendants were instructed on what to say when approaching the audience members, and how to respectfully measure a visitor with limited body contact.
- As the piece developed over the exhibition period, the invisible relationship between every visitor revealed itself through their shared experience of having their height recorded. This traditionally private undertaking, occurring between parents and children in the family home, became public through the work.
- In *Swap*, 2011, a community was generated within the gallery space as the performer searched for items to trade. Setting in motion a chain of swapping, the performer continued to ask each visitor to trade an object with the one on the table.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 2014, celebrated Slovakian artist Roman Ondak presented a trio of engaging works at the historic Parramatta Town Hall in the multicultural heart of Sydney. *Measuring the Universe*, *Swap* and *Terrace* were realised in conjunction with Sydney Festival.

Born in the former Czechoslovakia, Ondak attended Bratislava's Academy of Fine Arts before studying in the US. His work has been exhibited around the world, including at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009, and at documenta 13, 2012.

Ondak takes the familiar elements of everyday life and reframes them to surprise viewer expectations and perspectives. Through installations, performances and interventions, he investigates social conventions, rituals and forms of exchange by dislocating objects, ideas and actions from their usual contexts. Often humorous, Ondak's works provoke double takes, making the viewer question their preconceptions and modes of interaction.

British critic Laura Cumming noted, "In the long tradition of art that involves the public as both viewer and performer, Ondak has proved himself capable of directing (and affecting) multitudes of people with the simplest of ideas."

In Parramatta, Ondak realised *Measuring the Universe*, 2007, previously presented to acclaim at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 2007, and *Swap*, 2011, the audience favourite from *13 Rooms*, along with the debut of a new work, *Terrace*, 2014.

MEASURING THE UNIVERSE, 2007

Measuring the Universe begins with an empty gallery. Performers mark the wall with each visitor's height and name, along with the date. As the blank wall transforms into a constellation of inscriptions, a dense mass of marks coalesces at the average height of the participants, transposing a common family ritual into a mesmerising collective portrait.

SWAP, 2011

Swap merges art with everyday life. A performer sits at a table akin to a vendor in a marketplace. Inviting each visitor to swap something of their own for the object on the table, the performer sets in motion a chain of barter and exchange, which ends only at the close of the exhibition.

TERRACE, 2014

Evoking the artist's presence as much as the sense of home and belonging was the newly commissioned work *Terrace*, a faithful replica of Ondak's post-war apartment terrace in Bratislava. The installation offered a shift in perspective for visitors as they navigated the works within the Town Hall.

Kaldor Public Art
Project 28: Roman
Ondak, *Measuring
the Universe*,
Parramatta Town
Hall, 25 January –
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Photo: Paul Green



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