

Art meets political representation for Revolution 10 at the House of Commons

By Eddie Saint-Jean

March 13, 2015



I was recently invited to the House of Commons to see an event called Revolution 10 'Let The People Decide' which merged performance art with political representation. It was hosted by Green MP Caroline Lucas and performed by artist Joseph Young. They both bristled with easy authority as we were ushered into a rather grand looking committee room which refreshingly looked nothing like an art gallery. The artist briefly introduced himself as his politician alter-ego and then launched into his People's Manifesto with all the sincerity and gusto of a real political candidate campaigning for the General Election.

Image by Mike Massaro

So where was the art I hear you say? Well that's the clever bit. In the months leading up to this he had literally gone on the campaign trail, setting up on the street and inviting members of the public to answer three questions: 1) If you were elected as Prime Minister in May 2015, what would be the first thing you would say to the nation? 2) Does democracy matter? and 3) We need a revolution because... (finish this sentence). The answers to these 3 questions then became the performance of the amalgamous People's Manifesto. It was a bit left leaning, a bit anti-immigration, in fact a bit of everything because 'the man in the street' had contributed to this piece of living art.

This rather utopian approach to the problem of political representation actually triggered serious discussion there in The Jubilee Room of The Houses of Parliament. The guests, perched on the bottle green, portcullis branded Parliament issue chairs and clutching glasses of wine, were at first polite and then demanding total political enlightenment. What was it all about Mr Young and what issues did it resolve as well as raise? The artist coped well with the Q & A (just like a politician actually) yet despite all this maintained he was an artist and not a politician. However, it served an essential purpose, it made one consider the limits of true political representation.

At the turn of the century the campaigning of the Suffragettes and Lady Astor's landmark as the first woman to sit as a Member of Parliament in 1919 heralded a greater voice for women in both political life and society. The election of Britain's first female Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, in 1979 should have underlined this. But, by some strange irony Thatcher's cabinet was rigidly male. So are women adequately represented now (an important question just days after International Women's Day) ? Similarly President Obama's US election victory was embraced as a possible universal voice for ethnic minorities but honourable ideals can often get sucked into the

political machine after the euphoria of victory. No matter how strong the political voice. In the real world these politicians are contending with inner circle personalities, party accountability, economic factors and societal issues as well as national/international opinion.

For another example of this 'dilution of ideals' our own 2010 LibCon coalition was at first greeted as a step closer to some sort of wider political representation (even without the inclusion of LibDem proportional representation). It was certainly a welcome change from the traditional Labour vs Conservative election tussle. But, would it solve the issue of broader representation? The public in general and the Liberals in particular soon realised that even in a Coalition there is no guarantee of having your voice heard. I forget sometimes that Liberal MPs are actually in the cabinet and Nick Clegg is the Deputy Prime Minister. Or is that just me?

So the bottom line is that the performance of Revolution 10 should be taken pretty seriously. Hey I took it seriously – he was wearing a pin striped suit, had a sincere, middle-aged demeanour, all the right eye contact with the audience and looked a bit like a politician anyway. The other people in the room felt it too and, dare I say it, began to believe in him even though it was obviously just a performance. It's a fact of life that people are constantly looking for something to believe in. Caroline Lucas who hosted the event is a Green Party MP. The Green Party have got people believing as well. I hope that if they do perform particularly well in the next General Election, landslide, coalition or otherwise that they don't go through that dreaded political dilution that always awaits the victorious.

Joseph Young is an internationally renowned artist who has performed in The Tate Modern and Tate Britain. He is also the founder and Artistic Director of Neo Futurist Collective. His website is <http://artofnoises.com/> .

Copyright © 2015 Redhotchillineews.com. All Rights Reserved.