

# [What] The body knows - Library of Walks

**Stefaan van Biesen**

Artist

**Annemie Mestdagh**

Artist

Belgium

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**Stefaan van Biesen & Annemie Mestdagh.**

*(What) The body knows - Library of Walks.* photo: lenke Kastelein, 2019.

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**Stefaan van Biesen & Annemie Mestdagh.**

*(What) The body knows - Library of Walks.*

upper right, centre right, lower right, photos: Stefaan van Biesen, 2019.

This performative walk (What) The Body Knows is part of the Library of Walks initiated by Stefaan van Biesen in 1990. From this ongoing process, various applications grew, realized in Europe and Brazil, in collaboration with curator-writer Geert Vermeire. For Made Of Walking (V) in Prespa, Stefaan van Biesen, together with Annemie Mestdagh, designed a portable nomadic library that is carried by a group of participants.

The carriers become the artwork. In this way, a mental and energetic field becomes a space specific practice. They feel their togetherness and become aware of each other's physical presence, through the object/prop that they carry together and that is functioning as a 'conductor'. During walking (and breaks), they are asked to explore the surroundings with an observing alertness and to absorb the scenery.

People carrying a portable library.

The slightly meandering, streamlined shape of the ultramarine blue canvas, (in ancient Greece there was



no name for the color 'blue'),<sup>1</sup> refers to the nearby Lake Mikri Prespa. Also a link to the fate of refugees. While observing, participants were asked to collect items they notice on their way in the environment nearby, small significant artifacts. The pieces could be put in pet bottles (or later in glass jars), which are attached to the blue canvas. This gave the walk a ritual dimension in which a collection is created that is representative of the biotope where the action takes place. This way the natural and social identity of a place is archived, documented.

Being together in silence, carried away by a human energetic stream, walking as a sensitive experience, must lead to a collective act that sensitively reinforces the walk. Practical, lost and found: If someone during the walk was noticing something that he wanted to pick up for the collection, then the participant raised the arm to stop the group. The person next to him then was taking over, holding the rope/handle for a moment. And so the object found could start to travel when the group left.

Intentionally this walk was an exercise focusing on our attention, awareness, creating tension and letting it go. There are also letters/stories of refugees that were part of the prop that were carried with and were read during the walk. And for the occasional stops, the participants could add, then (or later), texts, notes, sketches, to the traveling library.<sup>2</sup>

(What) The Body Knows: refers to the human capacity to regenerate wisdom intuitively from our body: the body "knows"!

1. According to people in Greek traditional villages, blue is the color that can keep the 'evil eye' (matiasma) away.

2. The glass jars can be used within a museum context for the Library of Walks exhibition. During the walk itself, pet bottles are provided / or transparent reusable environmental bags







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upper left, centre right, lower left, photos: Stefaan van Biesen, 2019.

upper right photo: Raffaella Zammit, 2019.

centre left photo: Miguel Bandeira Duarte, 2019.