

Edinburgh Festival Fringe – Kostya Benkovich – ‘The Suitcase’

International artist, Kostya Benkovich, who fled Russia because of his anti-war stance, first heard this phrase in March 2022 from an unknown lady at the Ministry of Integration in Petah Tikva, Israel. Her sad and intense story was telling of a hasty escape from Ukraine with her children and grandchildren. Everything she ever had, had been left behind except for the contents of her suitcase.

A woman with a small child told Kostya about escaping Ukraine by booking a flight through Moldova and Romania to Israel and leaving with a hastily packed suitcase.

Another told Kostya that after witnessing the bombing of a nearby house, they hastily threw the first things they could get hold of into a suitcase and left the next day.





All felt that they were lucky to have escaped and survived.

“The theme of the absence, or restriction of freedoms, and the

recognition of the victims of state repression reoccur in my work. I had to flee Russia myself, and have to a certain extent, become an object of my own work because the suitcase is all I now have that connects me to the past”, the artist said.

These collective stories are the inspiration for the installation which will be displayed at the Assembly Garden on George Street during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

An embodiment of forced emigration, a sudden and violent displacement under great pressure and risk to life. The Suitcase is a cage-like object, constructed of reinforced steel which is also used to make prison bars in Russia.

“Thanks for the Suitcase”, Mikhail Goldenberg, the head of the Jewish community in the Ukrainian city of Nikolaev, commented on the project. “The smaller it is, the more valuable are the things that it contains. And the small size makes us consider the intrinsic value of what we still have and hold dear.”



The Suitcase, Assembly Room Garden – l-r The artist Kostya Benkovich, Depute Provost Lezley Marion Cameron and curator Alexandrina Markvo. © 2022 J.L. Preece

According to the UN Refugee Agency, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), for the first time on record the number of people forced to flee war, violence, human rights violations and persecution has now crossed 100 million, propelled by the war in Ukraine and other armed conflicts.

Kostya hopes the Suitcase, emotionally charged and laden with layers of meanings, is a tribute to the plight of refugees. The Suitcase will be free to view, however, the exhibition also invites visitors to support humanitarian relief for refugees who have arrived in the UK by donating to UNHCR.

The Suitcase will be displayed at Assembly Rooms, George Street, Edinburgh from 8th – 29th August. Entry is free. Visitors will have the opportunity to donate to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the UK via a QR code on the sculpture plinth.