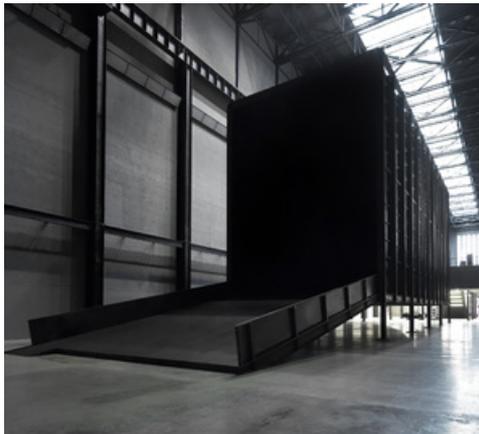


Review: Miroslaw Balka at the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall

By [Beth Walton](#), Deputy Arts Editor (2009/10)
Sunday 13 December 2009



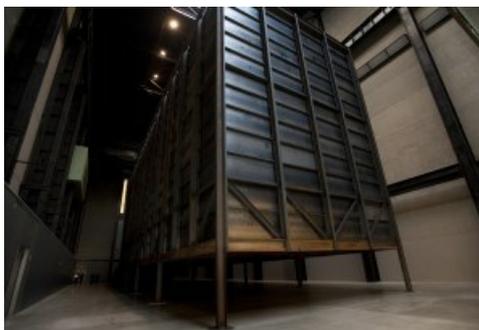
Unilever Series: Miroslaw Balka - How It Is 2009.
Photocredit: Tate Photography

Artist: Miroslaw Balka

Venue: Turbine Hall

Rating: *****

If you have not yet had chance to visit Tate Modern this Winter, this coming holiday is your opportunity to experience the latest instalment in the Unilever series , Polish Artist, Miroslaw Balka's monumental installation in the Turbine Hall. Curated by Helen Sainsbury, Balka's *How it is* was named after a novel by Samuel Beckett, in which the protagonist recites a monologue whilst crawling through thick mud, representative of purgatory. Although Balka likes to think that the meaning of the work is open to interpretation and not constrained by his choice of title, stating when asked about the concept behind *How it is*, "You can shape this yourself".



Unilever Series: Miroslaw Balka - How It Is 2009.
Photocredit: Tate Photography

The piece, 13 metre high, 10 metre wide and 30 metre long is effectively a huge shipping container visitors are invited to enter by means of a ramp , although it is possible , if you dare to do so, to walk

underneath it. Upon reaching the entrance to the 'black void' as it has been so aptly called, one is plunged into absolute darkness save for the tiny distant flicker of a red light. Presumably supposed to prevent the more daring of participants from walking face first into the back wall. I say daring, for once one ventures inside one might find themselves at intervals paralysed, unable to move forward and outside of their own comfort zone. Once within the visitor really becomes Balka's guinea pig in this most interesting of psychological experiments, come art installation. The issue of trust is an important theme, trust in both the creator as well as in oneself and those around you, when your sight and subsequently confidence is stripped away from you. Most interesting of all is on reaching the safety of the box's back wall, to turn around and watch the silhouettes of fellow visitors apprehensively navigating their way through the darkness and battling against their own instincts and anxieties.



Unilever Series: Miroslaw Balka - How It Is 2009. Photocredit: Tate Photography

"I'm touching the subject of disappearing" explains Balka , who does not deny the exploration of deportation and immigration identified within his work . *How it is* makes clear references to recent Polish history and the deportation of Polish Jews to the concentration camps. The piece also addresses current immigration issues, the problem of illegal migrant workers arriving on our shores in shipping containers, and our fears about refugees being lost in the system and of being kept in the dark.

As well as exploring a range of themes, *How it is* also exposes the visitor to a multitude of sensations from fear and apprehension to complete awe. Balka , cited by Tate director Vicente Todoli as a 'master poet', claims the piece was intended to "provide an experience for visitors which is both personal and collective; creating a range of sensory and emotional experiences through sound, touch, contrasting light and darkness'. To experience *How it is*, is to experience a mass of different emotions all at once and is easily the most stimulating thing to do at the Tate this Winter.

How it is remains on display until Monday 5 April 2010 at the Turbine Hall, Tate Modern.



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