

Electric Zoo Gives Randall's Island a Positive Charge

A Music Festival Gets Intimate with its Venue

By Andrew Wood 8/19



Electric Zoo 2010. (Bennett Sell-Kline/ElectricZooFestival.com)

On a recent Sunday, *The Observer* stood on a vacant lot neighboring the East River. While wistfully admiring Manhattan's picturesque Eastern skyline, we soaked in the park's halcyon beauty. Turning back to face the body of the Randall's Island, we tried to visualize this site swarming with thousands of sweaty, painted, and dust-covered beings.

The next time *The Observer* will be here the scene will be much different. In less than one month, this site will be filled with a

crowd—twice the size of a packed-house at Madison Square Garden—moshing to the most celebrated deejays in house and electronic music.

On Labor Day weekend, Randall's Island will host the third annual [Electric Zoo music festival](#), an event that shares an unconventional history with the island. Unlike other music festivals whose tenancy lasts only as long as festival weekend, Electric Zoo and the island's management have developed a unique symbiosis over the past decade; a relationship that extends beyond Labor Day and into the renovation of the island itself.

"We've spent all year working on making Electric Zoo 2011 even better than the last two," **Mike Bindra** and **Laura De Palma**, Executive Producers of Made Event (the festival's sponsoring organization), told *The Observer* in an email.

The three-day festival is expected to draw one hundred-thousand people, and will showcase over one hundred world-renowned deejays, a collection of themed art installations, multiple popular food vendors, and a ceremony spotlighting a new public art exhibition on the island entitled *FLOW*.



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Five years ago, Mr. Bindra and Ms. Palma teamed with **Aimee Boden**, the Executive Director of the Randall's Island Sports Foundation (RISF), to collaboratively develop the island as a public space. Drawing on inspiration from the festival, Ms. Boden conceptualized **FLOW**, a seasonal, outdoor art exhibit which consists of five large-scale installations throughout the lower-half of Randall's Island. The exhibition's title "evolved from both dance music and from artistic expression," Ms. Boden told *The Observer* in an interview at the Foundation's

midtown offices.

Having no artistic expertise, she enlisted the help of **Sergio Bessa**, the Director of Programs at the Bronx Museum of Art. With the support of Made Event and the Rockefeller NYC Cultural Innovation Fund, RISF and the Bronx Museum launched **FLOW**. Made Event donated over \$42,000 to the project in 2010, and this year they will dedicate \$2.00 from every festival ticket sold to the exhibition.

The artists for **FLOW** were selected from a pool in the Bronx Museum of Art's Artists in Motion program (AIM). AIM is a highly competitive, biannual program that consists of twelve workshops designed to prepare emerging artists for the art market. "It is the most successful program the museum has ever implemented," Mr. Bessa told *The Observer* in a phone call.

"This is just the beginning," Mr. Bessa eagerly informed us. He added that Randall's Island has recently signed a contract to host the esteemed Frieze International Art Fair's first exhibition in the States.

"Made Event has a big stake in this," Mr. Bessa told *The Observer*, and Ms. Boden agrees. "[Mr. Bindra and Ms. De Palma] go beyond just looking for a venue to slap down an event," she told us. "They have an appreciation for the Randall's Island environment."

With the support of their venue and city, Electric Zoo 2009 exploded out of the woodwork. More than forty-thousand people traversed the East River and Hell Gate rapids for the two-day festival. And Made Event never looked back. In 2010, Randall's Island shook under the feet of fifty-thousand indefatigable bodies dancing to Benny Benassi, Kaskade, and others.

"Music and art have always been a part of New York City life and bringing those two elements together within a city park is a natural fit," Mr. Bindra and Ms. Palma wrote to *The Observer*.



Electric Zoo 2010. (Bennett Sell-Kline/ElectricZooFestival.com)

According to DJ Magazine, the festival's line-up for 2011 boasts seven of the world's top ten deejays. The festival's headliners—**Armin Van Buuren**, **David Guetta**, and **Tijs "Tiësto" Verwest**—currently hold the top three spots on the magazine's esteemed international rankings.

With this in mind, *The Observer* called-up native-New York deejay and Zoo veteran, **Richard "Moby" Hall**, to get his thoughts on the festival. Mr. Hall is currently on-tour in Europe, but we were able to reach him in

his hotel room before he went live in the Spanish nightlife hotbed, Ibiza.

Mr. Hall confessed that despite being born only two miles from Randall's Island, he never even knew it existed until he was invited to play the Lollapalooza Music Festival there in 1995. He recalled being struck by the island's antiquated infrastructure. "I thought it was the place where the Legion of Doom would've been housed," he half-joked.

Mr. Hall played Electric Zoo in 2010. "I was really surprised how big Electric Zoo was last year," the festival-hardened deejay recalled. Yet despite its size, he was shocked that hardly anyone in the music business was aware it was happening. "It was literally an underground festival for fifty-thousand people, a mile away from New York City."

He feels that it is the production value that distinguishes this event from the rest. "Electric Zoo offers this huge, over-the-top festival," he asserted, and then added, "In many ways the festival isn't even about the deejays, it's about the production."

"It's kind of like the Wizard of Oz in that way. I'm just the small man behind the curtain," the famed disc jockey concluded.