

# Revolution Now!

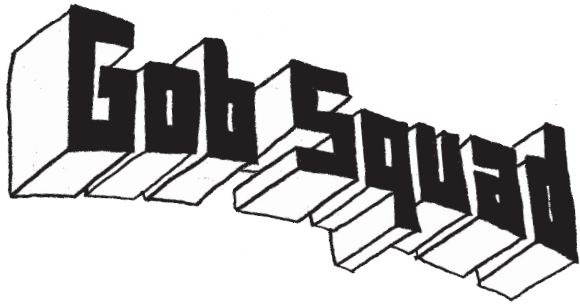
**REVOLUTION NOW!**  
**PRESS PACK**



PHOTO: MANUEL REINARTZ

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## About the group

*"This feels like one of the most impossible, beautiful, courageous and epic theatrical experiences you can imagine" The Guardian*

Gob Squad is a seven headed monster, an **arts collective** with seven bosses. Gob Squad has a schizophrenic identity and a multiple split personality: hermaphrodite, binational and bilingual, both a patchwork family and a social utopia. Gob Squad have been devising, directing and performing together **since 1994**, working where **theatre meets art, media and real life**.

For over 20 years, Gob Squad have been searching for **new ways to combine media and performance**, producing stage shows, video installations, radio plays, interactive live films and urban interventions. The use of audio and video technology plays a prominent role in their work, with the result that **alienated forms of intimacy** have become a central theme. They try to scratch beneath the shiny, pixelated surface of the 21st century, seeking out the dark corners and hidden desires of contemporary culture.

Always on the hunt for beauty amidst the mundane, they place their work at the heart of **urban life**: in houses, shops, underground stations, car parks, hotels or directly on the street, as well as in theatres and galleries. **Everyday life and magic, banality and idealism, reality and entertainment** are all set on a collision course and the unpredictable results are captured on video.

Motivated by a desire to elevate the everyday and empower audience members to step beyond their traditional role as passive spectators, Gob Squad set up often absurdly **utopian scenarios** where meaningful collective experience and genuine **encounters involving passers-by and audience members** are suddenly possible. Audiences seem to like the feeling that anything might happen during an evening with Gob Squad. They might be asked to dance, sing or even kiss one of the performers. They might play guitar in a band, play the part of a lover or liberator in a semi-improvised film, or be asked to explain the complexities of the world to an unknown future. Or they might just simply be asked to sit and bear witness to the organised chaos unfolding on stage before them.

Gob Squad was founded in **1994**, whilst its members were still at Nottingham Trent and Giessen universities. **Berlin** has been the group's creative home since 1999. **Core members** are Johanna Freiburg, Sean Patten, Sharon Smith, Berit Stumpf, Sarah Thom, Bastian Trost and Simon Will. Other artists are invited to collaborate on particular projects. The group is managed by Eva Hartmann.

Gob Squad's international reputation has grown steadily since coming to prominence at documenta X in 1997. Their productions have been shown on all the continents apart from Antarctica where projects such as SUPER NIGHT SHOT (2003), GOB SQUAD'S KITCHEN (2007, winner of New York's Drama Desk Award), SAVING THE WORLD (2008, winner of the Goethe Preis at the Impulse Festival), BEFORE YOUR VERY EYES (2011, selected for Germany's Theatertreffen) and WESTERN SOCIETY (2013) have received wide acclaim.



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## About Revolution Now!

**Imagine the scene** in the shiniest, biggest shopping mall in your town. Hundreds of sales assistants suddenly stop work and stage a walk-out. Customers in the middle of deciding which ultra large plasma screen to buy are left without advice. Piles of Chinese made jeans are left on the floor at H&M as the shelf-stackers leave the store and join the crowds. Shoppers help themselves to chunky crystal poodles from the Swarovski shop, to use as weapons in case things turn nasty. The crowds gather, hundreds of them now, as the procession leads out of the mall and into the street. Loan advisers from the banks hand out huge wads of notes to the throng. An upmarket deli is stormed and armfuls of organic Italian cheeses and salamis are distributed amongst the crowd. Bus drivers abandon their vehicles and suddenly there are thousands of people in the streets, an angry mob. It's the chaotic, noisy beginnings of a revolution...

Is it so hard to imagine? In these times of economic crisis, with uprisings in the Middle East and occupations in the heart of financial districts in recent memory there's definitely the smell of revolution in the air. But is the time right for a revolution? Here and now? Aren't our lives a bit too comfortable to revolt? What would we be prepared to sacrifice for the cause? Are we, and the way we live our lives, part of the problem or part of the solution? What does "revolutionary" mean in these post-Brexit, post-Trump times? And can we trust a word which is used to sell everything nicotine chewing gum to toilet cleaner?

Brushing these doubts aside, Gob Squad have taken the first steps in inciting an uprising. Or at least rehearsing one so we can be ready when the time comes. A theatre has been stormed and is now the revolutionaries HQ. Access to props and therefore weapons, explosives and special effects have been secured. Gob Squad lock the audience into the building and open a live video link to a solitary TV on the street, broadcasting to the unsuspecting passers-by outside. „This is Gob Squad Underground TV, and we're not coming out until the world is ready to stop and listen. We're in here for as long as it takes..."

With the help of the audience, revolutionary moments are re-enacted, manifestos are debated, electric guitars are turned up to eleven and rousing songs are sung, all with the aim of inspiring one passer-by to stop, listen and join us. As the evening continues, the search for this one person to represent "The People" intensifies. It's all or nothing. It's Revolution Now!

## Credits

**Concept**  
Gob Squad

**Performed and devised by**  
Johanna Freiburg  
Sean Patten  
Sharon Smith  
Berit Stumpf  
Sarah Thom  
Laura Tonke  
Bastian Trost  
Simon Will

**Live Music and Arrangement**  
Christopher Uhe, Masha Qrella

**Video**  
Miles Chalcraft, Kathrin Krottenthaler

**Sound Design**  
Jeff McGrory

**Technical Coordination**  
Chris Umney

**Costumes**  
Pieter Bax

**Dramaturgical Advisors**  
Aenne Quiñones, Götz Leineweber

**Dramaturgy and Production Management**  
Christina Runge

**Artistic Assistant:** Milena Kipfmüller  
**Stage Design Assistant:** Jochen Hochfeld  
**Costumes Assistant:** Veronika Weinhold  
**Management:** Eva Hartmann  
**Interns:** Hannah Senft, Florian Wessels

Revolution Now! is a Gob Squad production.  
Co-produced by: Donaufestival Niederösterreich, Schauspiel Köln  
and Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz.

Gob Squad is regularly funded within the Konzeptförderung programme  
2015 - 2019 by the Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Europa Berlin.



PHOTO: THOMAS AURIN



# Revolution Now!

## Gob Squad: The unruly Anglo-German theatre collective still evolving after 25 years

THE STAGE  
Jul 3, 2018

**The Anglo-German theatre collective considers itself 'a bit like a blob' – 'morphing' to meet its members' needs. Founder member Sarah Thom tells Matt True-man how the company has grown together over 25 years**

The Japanese art of flower arranging, ikebana, features heavily in Gob Squad's latest show. Throughout *Creation* (*Pictures for Dorian*), flowers are serenely slotted into place under a heat lamp. As an art form, ikebana elevates the act of arranging over the final arrangement, and it celebrates the plant's life cycle – growth and decay – over the pristine beauty of blooms at their peak. As the performance plays out, petals wrinkle and wilt.

Gob Squad's seven members have grown up together, over 25 years, but age has hardly withered them. The iconoclastic Anglo-German collective has built up a body of rambunctious performances unlike anyone else's – and is still going strong.

*Creation*, a careful meditation on ageing, art and visibility, which premiered at Brighton Festival, felt like Gob Squad's most mature work to date, but it still showed the silly side that has set the collective apart. En route, it has sent signals into outer space with *Calling Laika*, incited insurrection from the Institute of Contemporary Arts in *Revolution Now* and taken to the streets with camcorders and superhero capes to capture every single thing in existence for *Saving the World*.

**Gob Squad has always felt similar to a gang – and watching it, you want to sign up and join in.** But behind the buccaneering playfulness, there's always insight and

purpose. From its early site-specific shows to its own brand of real-time films, splicing the best bits of theatre and live TV, Gob Squad's work has consistently pushed performance. Its shows stretch their limits and expand horizons, whether riffing off classics, such as *War and Peace* or *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, or teaching robots to talk, such as in *My Square Lady*. But, for founder member Sarah Thom, it all adds up to something bigger: **"Just being Gob Squad, that's our greatest work. Some have come, some have gone, but we've managed 25 years. It's a piece in itself."**

Like ikebana, Gob Squad is an ongoing act: unfolding, evolving, undergoing growth and decay. It's more than its shows – more, even, than its members. Gob Squad is a process – perhaps a way of life. **It functions as a collective, completely and utterly. It doesn't just create work collaboratively, the team members run their lives and their company in the same way.** Touring dates, pay packets, funding applications – all of it comes from communal decisions.

"There really is no boss," Thom stresses. "It's a struggle, but we believe in the politics of that. You're constantly in process, negotiating things, working everything out so it's completely fair and egalitarian. We're all one – a bit like a blob. We can't exist without each other, but each of us is absolutely replaceable. Gob Squad would go on without any one of us."

It's not easy being Gob Squad. In fact, Thom reckons theirs is "the most inefficient way of working ever", but the benefits outweigh the hassle. "Everything takes longer, but it does mean that, at the end, everybody owns it." And nobody gets left behind, either – the company "morphs" to meet its members' needs and fit their lives. It has shifted to accommodate relationships, babies and illnesses – people

always come first. "There's no institution to defer or submit to. Everything's open to debate, everything's up for grabs. It's what has held us together all this time," she says.

Gob Squad grew out of Nottingham Trent University. Its founder members – four of which remain – met on its Creative Arts course, an inter-disciplinary programme rooted in collaborative practice that criss-crossed from video to visual arts. An exchange scheme with Giessen University gave the company its Anglo-German core: Berit Stumpf and Johanna Freiburg clicked with Thom and Sean Patten. They still do: "There was a kindred spirit. We just got on – that's the most important thing."

For the last 20 years, Gob Squad has been based in Berlin – the funding's much better, commissions matched by the state – but it has retained relationships with theatres in the UK. "The UK is so important to us, way more than people realise," says Thom. They still "feel very at home here", but homecomings are getting harder. "Funding's less available given the size we are now. Our shows practically have to fit into suitcases to tour."

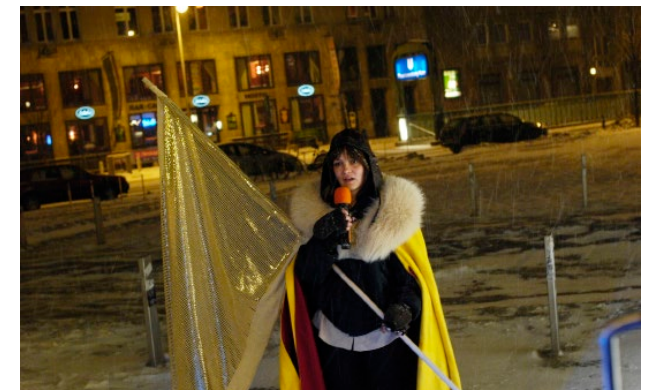


PHOTO: THOMAS AURIN

# Revolution Now!

Having begun making site-specific work, taking over houses, offices and a furniture shop floor to subvert everyday spaces, Gob Squad began taking “baby steps” towards theatres at the end of the 1990s. For its first foray on to the stage, *Close Enough to Kiss*, it built a mirrored box to block the audience out. “Theatre’s about the act of looking,” Thom explains, “not just telling stories. We wanted to ask questions about the stage as a space.”

Effectively, it treated theatres the same as any other site, toying with their configurations and conventions. The show *Safe* likened theatregoing to travel: ticket checks, stewardess ushers, a pilot MC. *Creation (Pictures for Dorian)* is all about “frames within frames”. Similar to Wilde’s novel, it examines the triangular relationship of art, artists and audience.

On stage, however, Gob Squad found itself constrained by the need to stick to the script. Since *Safe*, it has created structures, then improvised as it goes. **“Rules, risk, reality, rhythm” – that’s the Gob Squad playbook.** “Without them, something’s missing: the element of not quite knowing where you are. **We create a space where we’re able to be alive and to be ourselves** – and that is fun. It’s always at risk of being dropped and that makes it so much more exciting.”

If Gob Squad shows are alive, they’re also electric – literally as well as figuratively. Video is often at the heart of its work, the camera adding to and emphasising the quality of being live. *Room Service* plonks four lonely souls in separate hotel rooms for a night with only a camera for company. *Super Night Shot*, which it is doing for the National Theatre of Scotland this summer, sends four performers on to the streets to shoot a blockbuster film. One’s the hero, another the villain; one casts extras, another scouts

locations. Their four feeds are mixed live.

This, perhaps, has been Gob Squad’s most pioneering front – not just in terms of performance, but in relation to society. Since the members of Gob Squad first picked up their VHS camcorders, cameras have become ubiquitous. Anyone can be a social media star. “When we first started using it, lots of people had home video cameras, so it felt quite universal, quite a DIY aesthetic,” Thom says. It proved liberating, freeing Gob Squad from ‘stageyness’ and participants from inhibition. “As soon as you’ve got a camera, you’re not crazy. You can ask people quite full-on questions in the street and they’ll answer.” In today’s camera-centric world, it can go one of two ways: either people are cautious, wary of protecting their image online, or they’re comfortable – too comfortable.

That might explain Gob Squad’s retreat to the stage of late, and to those classic texts. Practically, it’s useful. Thom says: “Source material brings us all back to one point, as we go off on our seven different tangents.” But there’s politics too: about looking back, about remaking, engaging with the past. “You’re always standing on the shoulders of giants,” adds Thom. History, like Gob Squad, art and ikebana, is a process.

Matt Trueman

## Five Facts about Gob Squad

1. *Gob Squad started in 1994. Its members wanted a way to get into Glastonbury for free.*
2. *Gob Squad has toured every continent but Antarctica.*
3. *Among the unusual spaces Gob Squad has performed in are the Steffi Graf tennis stadium in Berlin and a bingo hall in West Bromwich, UK.*
4. *Gob Squad’s smallest production was To@ster, which involved two performers, 10 toasters and 1,000 slices of bread. The biggest, My Square Lady, involved a 40-piece orchestra, a choir of 35 children, 30 technicians, seven opera singers, seven scientists and a robot called Myon.*
5. *Performing Super Night Shot in Rio, Gob Squad faced arrest. The show ends with performers running through the streets in pants – illegal in Brazil. They bought bikinis and swimsuits, which are fine.*



## WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

### ON GOB SQUAD:

*Gob Squad has always felt similar to a gang – and watching it, you want to sign up and join in.*

THE STAGE

*This feels like one of the most impossible, beautiful, courageous and epic theatrical experiences you can imagine.*

THE GUARDIAN

*Gob Squad virgins, please stop reading now, and go get your tickets!*

TIME OUT NEW YORK (on WESTERN SOCIETY)

### ON REVOLUTION NOW!

*“What is ultimately created is nothing short of magical, a production that brings strangers together in the way that only theatre can.”*

Irish Independent

*“Wonderfully goofy... tremendous, giddy fun”*

The Irish Times

*“As competent and smart as professional TV hosts, but never arrogant or glib. It would be a beautiful revolution which started with these qualities.”*

Tip Berlin

*“A double-edged masterpiece.”*

Berliner Zeitung

*“Thrilling, rough, bonkers! A roller-coaster ride of passion, determination and outstanding lack of convention. Gob Squad, I salute you and your revolution.”*

A Younger Theatre blog



PHOTO: THOMAS AURIN



# Revolution Now!

A YOUNGER THEATRE

June 25, 2010

Revolution is in the air at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) as a collective of flag wielding, vodka drinking, and movement changing revolutionaries take over in the name of theatre (Bravo!). Gob Squad's latest exploits into their collective theatre work see's them broadcasting to the world their cries for revolution, or at least to The Mall outside the ICA. Revolution Now! is a thrilling, rough and bonkers production showing how persona, theatre and audience can be linked into performance.

Revolution Now! certainly fueled a mini revolutionist hidden inside of me and is a great addition to the Lift Festival. Gob Squad take the dreaded words of "audience participation" to a new level in their performance where cameras are poised in front of the audience, connected to TV monitors and screens around the stage. Portable cameras capture moments that are projected onto the screens and declared iconic revolution images, echoing dictators and revolutionary figures of the past across the world.

Revolution Now! is a playful and chaotic attempt at breaking theatrical conventions, and as an audience we can't help but to fall under Gob Squad's whimsical charm and humor. We learn of our cast through micro biographies declared on camera, "This is Sarah. She is the only member of God Squad who can fit all her possessions into the back of a postal van" – they are snippets of information that connect us to our protagonists for the evening. As the night continues we are drawn into a spirit of jubilation as we are prepared for our revolution that is to be broadcast to the outside world.

Our cameras are poised, outside the ICA on The Mall where a TV screen displays our performance, our broadcast to those outside. It is slightly apocalyptic, witnessing the outside world in black and white, a world where people progress through life without stopping to witness or question this broadcast, to question us, spurred on by a narration by the performers. Caught in the antics within the ICA and Gob Squad, the outside world seems bland full of spiritless people.

Revolution Now! molds the placement of audience into a performance. We are transformed from an audience "who just wants to sit and watch the performance" to a 100 strong revolution fighting audience spurring on Gob Squad to deliver our message to the outside world, to find 'the people' of the world. It's hard to get your head wrapped around watching a performance, where as an audience member you are part of the performance watching someone outside the building, who is watching you inside the building who now also becomes part of the performance. The cameras facilitate bridges between audience, spectator and performance.

The objective of Revolution Now! is to get a member of the outside world to join in our performance, initially in front of a screen, to end inside the theatre waving a flag of revolution. Gob Squad enter The Mall luring people into joining us, poised with their microphones and cameras, "We have 100 people who have taken over the ICA to aid a revolution, will you join us?". Stirred up in a frenzy of passion for someone beyond the walls of the ICA to stop and be integrated into our performance (our revolution), I found myself gripping the edge of my seat willing Gob Squad on. We have numerous encounters beyond the ICA, a Japanese man who speaks little English "The people of England don't speak English" declare Gob Squad, Nick who just wants to get his bus home, "We'll carry you home – all 100 of us" and the most promising efforts come from Barry, a Canadian who believes in change, in revolution... but sadly his train awaits him. "How many trains will there be in an hour? How many chances will you get of joining a revolution in an hour?" declare Gob Squad.

Their desperation, and interactions with the outside world are heartwarming insights into the British people and lead us into cheers and shouts of disappointment at those that stop and then move on. Ultimately Gob Squad play a difficult game in their interaction of real people beyond a theatrical context, to us within the context. They dance along the slippery edge of performance boundaries and create a performance truly unique and remarkable as they coax (although the well known actor/writer/director Tim Crouch) into joining our revolt.

Revolution Now! ignites something inside us. From a solitary audience member, to joining Gob Squads collective, it is a roller-coaster road of passion, determination and outstanding lack of convention other than a joy to watch and take part. Gob Squad, I salute you and your revolution.

*Jake Orr*

# Revolution Now!

THE IRISH TIMES  
October 14th, 2011



PHOTO: THOMAS AURIN

## THE IRISH TIMES at the Dublin Theatre Festival

### Revolution Now!

Samuel Beckett Theatre

★★★★

WHY IS it that contemporary theatre is often criticised for not being “political” enough, while politics is routinely dismissed as “theatre”? They both share similar ambitions – to represent the people, to effect change – they each make occasional, wonderful achievements, but are too often marred by disappointments and outright failures. Clearly it’s time for a revolution.

Cue Gob Squad, the Nottingham-originated, Berlin-based multimedia bricoleurs, who enter the space in bandanas and military jackets, striped tight pants and keffiyeh scarves – a radical chic that owes as much to *Mother Courage* as *Pirates of the Caribbean*. To the tune of Bob Dylan’s *The Times They Are a-Changin’*, they begin their near-manifesto: “Come writers and critics who prophesise with your pen/ Unsure of revolution in 2011.”

That line must have scanned better when the piece debuted last year, but time has added two awkward syllables, not to mention one London riot, the current Occupy Wall Street protest (and its international offshoots), and the not insignificant matter of the Arab Spring. These really are revolutionary times and Gob Squad – the charmingly playful, self-deprecating ironists – are caught between movements, trying to “stage” a revolution without a cause.

Instead, they have an aesthetic, enlisting the audience to emulate radical iconography: we pose with flags or super-soakers or samizdat literature for an emergency broad-

atre to a television on Pearse Street. This is all tremendous, giddy fun: hugging strangers or an electric guitar (try to sit next to one) while shredding for whatever it is that we’re supposed to achieve or overthrow.

But such distracting, materialism-added busyness replicates precisely the pacifying superstructure created by late capitalism, which now makes revolution seem so inconceivable, comrades! True, Gob Squad merrily implicate themselves in their own critique (“Would you surrender your iPhone 4 for the cause?” a doe-eyed Sean Patten is asked) but any revolution without an agenda can be hijacked or subverted. “The process, not the platform, is the point,” wrote one commentator of Occupy Wall Street. Here, it’s the other way around.

The theatre might achieve something revolutionary, Gob Squad suggest, if they can unite an audience and persuade at least one passer-by on that lightly populated, generally disinterested street, to join – nay lead – our ambiguous movement. It’s a wonderfully goofy and very cute idea, and our part in the game is beguiling, believing that theatre can reach beyond its confines and change somebody’s worldview, however modestly. When, on opening night, an unflappably good-natured pedestrian named Rory joined a long historical procession of student radicals and became our liberator (the show only concludes when they find one), it felt for a stirring moment as though theatre and politics had forged a non-partisan alliance. In an irony that not even Gob Squad could have anticipated, however, it turned out that Rory is an acting student . . . Revolution soon!

*Ends Saturday*



# Revolution Now!

ULSTER BANK DUBLIN THEATRE FESTIVAL BLOG  
October 14th, 2011

## Revolution Now! | UBDF



OTHER

14 October 2011 (*Review*)

**Star Rating:** 4/5

**Review by:** Lauren O'Toole

The people are angry, the people are primed for mutiny, this is the winter of our discontent and **Gobsquad** could not have picked a better time or place to stage their improvisational multimedia production **Revolution Now!** With the **Occupy Dame Street** demonstration at its height just around the corner from the **Samuel Beckett Theatre**, Dublin is possibly the most sympathetic climate for Gobsquad's very tongue in cheek rage against the machine.

Despite the standard communal shrinking-back-into-seat action from the audience at the initial mention of our obligatory participation in the evening's proceedings, the loud and energetic cast immediately establish themselves as friend rather than foe. Anybody with a deep seated fear of participatory theatre can breathe a sigh of relief for it quickly becomes clear that the interactive element, though a vital contributing factor to the success of the show, is all in good spirit and is more geared towards creating a feeling of *communitas* among those gathered than base public ridicule.

Audience members, the newly recruited revolutionaries, are enlisted to help create general images of rebellion, anger and outrage, images which are swiftly emblazoned on the various screens onstage. In addition to the camera that is almost constantly directed at the audience, these snapshots put us on the spot and leave us with nowhere to hide. It is through these devices that Gobsquad invite us to question our commitment to this revolutionary attitude, whilst simultaneously questioning their own dedication: Sharon insists that buying second hand labels is her contribution, while Sean balks at the suggestion he might offer up his **iPhone**. This comic strand that the cast members endeavour to maintain throughout is at times helped by and at others impeded by the improvisatory aspect of the piece. While the spontaneity of this production is the key to its impact, the one weakness it falls down on is certain cast members' ability to fully and bravely embrace the uncertainty of the format. Despite the occasional lull that can stem from the odd pothole in the ensemble's confidence what is ultimately created is nothing short of magical, a production that brings strangers together in the way that only theatre can. You will be ejected onto the streets invigorated, wound up and with one eye constantly alert for hidden cameras.