

*The object left the luxury district to take part in the exhibition
at the West Norwood Library & Picturehouse*



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The stone

@beschinstv 14 February 2026, 11 a.m., a sunny morning in South London. I'm heading north, carrying a heavy backpack. The plan is to relocate a stone from Croydon to some more respectable place in central London, and to reflect on migration along the way.

Yeah, it's art — performance or something. Three years ago, I was granted a Global Talent visa by the Arts Council, and I feel obliged to occasionally justify that decision. So here I am, contributing to British culture with all my strength. Shut up, I'm trying my best.

I found this stone in Heavers Meadow — a place surrounded by railways in Croydon. Why exactly Croydon? Because I live here, and because it is regarded as one of the most deprived boroughs in London. No one has a proper job here; everyone carries knives, shoplifts, litters, and commits arson. A dreadful place. Or so goes the public image. In a desperate attempt to improve the situation, the Mayor of Croydon is planning to introduce beavers into a nearby park. Hope it helps. Until that happens, we must rescue at least a stone.

The motherfucker cuts into my back with a sharp corner, which makes the experience a bit challenging. But the real challenge is providing some photographic evidence of deprivation in such sunny weather.

We got a little off course and climbed quite a hill. Why am I doing this again? To create a legitimate reason to complain about my life. Complaining and bragging are the twin engines of creativity. But perhaps I am simply a masochist. Or just not capable of creating anything better. Or perhaps I lack adventures of the hiking sort. In any case, I will probably not tell my therapist about this performance. I try to present myself to him as a normal, reasonable person — there is no need to undermine that image.

Why walk, though? There was Selhurst station nearby; I could have used it. But it would not have felt quite right — everyone likes to see suffering, some visible labour. A railway journey would be too radical. Besides, I need time for reflection; after all, the artwork here is what I thought about while carrying this stone. The Arts Council frowned here.

2. After a couple more kilometres, I figured out how to turn the stone in my backpack the other way, and it stopped digging into my spine. Damn, carrying it became comfortable. It feels heavy in the

hand, but now sits on my back as if it belongs there. It is a bit disappointing, to be honest, but perhaps the other burdens of migration and guilt are also not as heavy as they sometimes seem. And again, what a nice sunny day it is.

Yes, I could probably carry a dozen such stones. A year ago, one elderly art professor was giving away sketchbooks, and I brought home about 40 kilograms of paper. That's how greedy and stupid I can be. And I had thought up so many jokes in advance to describe my unimaginable suffering — but it's just a pleasant walk in perfect weather through a beautiful, calm Saturday city.

So what about migration? I don't know, I've never thought much about it. The topic itself is quite popular among artists, alongside liminal spaces and the artist's own sexuality. Perhaps it's a bigger deal for those who used to live in one place, for those who had a home and then had to leave it. My situation is different. I am constantly in the process of migrating. Since early childhood, moving has been frequent, and it did not become less so as I grew older. Ufa, Moscow, Vienna, Beijing, Voronezh, Yerevan, London — these are only the cities where I have lived for more than a year. Moves within a single city, or places where I stayed briefly, I would not be able to count. However, I never thought about migration seriously, as an ordeal — it was always an adventure to me. Also, I am not the first migrant in my family. My mother was the first to break out of the village, obtain higher education, and build a proper urban life. I know less about my father's side, but at some point, they had to flee the Volga region to Uzbekistan during Soviet times and moved frequently afterwards.

3. I'm not sure if I will ever be able to carry my mother out of Russia — British immigration laws make this nearly impossible. Whether I will ever have children of my own is also a big question. But at least I will save the stone. We will move to the northern part of the city, a posh area like Chelsea, maybe even with a view of the Thames. You will have a beautiful life there, my stone.

We're seven kilometres in and still in Norwood. This part is more promising, though: yoga studios, vegan cafés, cherry blossom by the cemetery; even the high street looks nice. I examined the flowerbeds with interest — potentially not a bad place for my stone. Nearby, a bus stop bears an encouraging sign: "When girls think they can, they do."

After Tulse Hill — also quite a pleasant place — I walked into a large, beautiful park. Runners are running. People walk their children and dogs. I walk a stone. 10 km in — well, I feel a slight fatigue, but there isn't much left.

Trying to dig deeper, I didn't always feel entirely at home in Russia. A Tatar from Bashkortostan, a double minority; in Moscow, I was a provincial student with an unusual name. It was far from the same as being someone local with a Russian name and family around.

I was too young to care much, but xenophobic attitudes were common in Moscow. Jokes about how poorly labour migrants from Central Asia spoke Russian were widespread. I laughed along, because my Russian sounded almost Muscovite — demonym, not a mineral.

After 2022, many of us who once laughed at migrants suddenly found ourselves abroad, becoming exactly those people — with unpronounceable names and only a hesitant command of the local language. There is a certain justice in that. Karma does its work.

Perhaps it is slightly easier for me now because I have lived in places where I barely understood the local language — China, for instance, Austria, and even my grandparents' Tatar village, where I was sometimes sent as a child and was the only one whose first language was Russian.

4.

Speaking of language, I am writing this text in something like Burgess's Nadsat — a mixture of English and Russian. Later, I will feed it into ChatGPT and hope for the best. Burgess described most of the roots of Nadsat as "Slav. Propaganda. Subliminal penetration." But don't worry, my droogs —

it's a good stone, not a spy one. Some twenty years ago, a story appeared in the news about a fake rock the UK allegedly used for espionage in Moscow. It's nothing like that, I swear.

In the meantime, we survived Brixton — noise, crowds, someone campaigning in Spanish for the socialists. Fatigue has set in, but it would be unsporting to sit down and rest. So here we are, me and a stone, making our way slowly towards a better life in central London.

How many of you say “sorry” — half in jest — after answering the question, “Where are you from?” Being Russian in Europe, or “from Russia” in my case, has never been particularly easy. I remember once being told to get out of the car by an older couple while hitchhiking in Austria many years ago — of course, it was a joke. I know my country has done much evil to others; my own family was badly damaged by the state many times during the last century. I understand such jokes. I also remember other Europeans from that trip, proud of their countries and “carrying their flags high” — something I found harder to understand. Even before, being “from Russia” was not especially comfortable; now we have become Ruzzians, with two Zs. I know it is not my fault.

5. Exactly 15 km and three and a half hours of walking, and we are in the middle of Lambeth Bridge across the Thames. Behind us are ugly greenish buildings; ahead — a beautiful future. I wonder if I could swim with this backpack and the stone in it. My fingers are freezing in the wind, but only a couple of kilometres remain.

On the north bank stands a large metal sculpture by Moore — a gift to the City of Westminster from Tate. I will also make a gift. Let's see whose lasts longer on this bank.

6. Being an artist is itself a form of migration — a displacement from normal life, stability, and self-esteem. Or perhaps just an attempt to escape reality, to flee the heavy, tedious problems of everyday life. But it is also a Sisyphean task, sometimes literally. Just with less money.

End of the route — Victoria Tower Gardens. Not bad, though somehow too manicured. I am concerned that I cannot see any other rocks here. The ground is completely dug up; not even pebbles are visible. Does a stone need company anyway? There is a view of the Houses of Parliament, though. Or perhaps 16.5 kilometres is not enough for me today. All right — we are heading towards Chelsea.

Eighteen kilometres. Who are we? Where are we going? God knows. Soon there will be a better life. Just a bit more — let's get through Pimlico.

Eventually, after walking about twenty kilometres, I left it under a palm tree on Chelsea Embankment, next to a bench and a pier. A prime location, stone-wise. Maybe not ideal, but I was already tired, and the sun had begun to set. Perhaps there is no ideal place for this stone — only chance and the skill of adaptation. Maybe I should have left it in West Norwood, in those flowerbeds I liked.

Well then. At least I've dropped this stone.