

Aleksandra Mir

The Big Umbrella



The Big Umbrella, twice the radius of the biggest men's umbrella on the market, was designed to shield up to 16 people from the rain. It was a cheerful and simply idyllic structure, but did 16 people want to crowd together to avoid getting wet? Does bad weather affect people differently in different parts of the world? To find out, I took my big umbrella on the road between 2003-2004, visiting Paris, London, Dresden, Copenhagen, New York and Martinique.

Traveling the world with a familiar object of uncanny proportions can have some unexpected effects. While the Big Umbrella proved useful as a tool for plucking down stray balls from trees, its unwieldy size on busy streets turned altruistic motives into harassment. Providing a shelter, it brought some strangers momentarily together, while alienating others, and in its most salient moments, simply amplified the solitude of the bearer. A. M.

onestar press / galerie laurent godin



aleksandra mir the big umbrella

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Paris

London

Dresden

Copenhagen

New York

Martinique

Paris

Wave at Alexander Bridge











Pink Scarf



Louvre Fountain









Smoking #1, #2, #3



London





Carnaby Street















Umbrella Shop





Oxford Street



Dresden



Canteen















Waiting Room



Couple





Copenhagen





Spiral Staircase







Circus Plaza





















New York





















Martinique











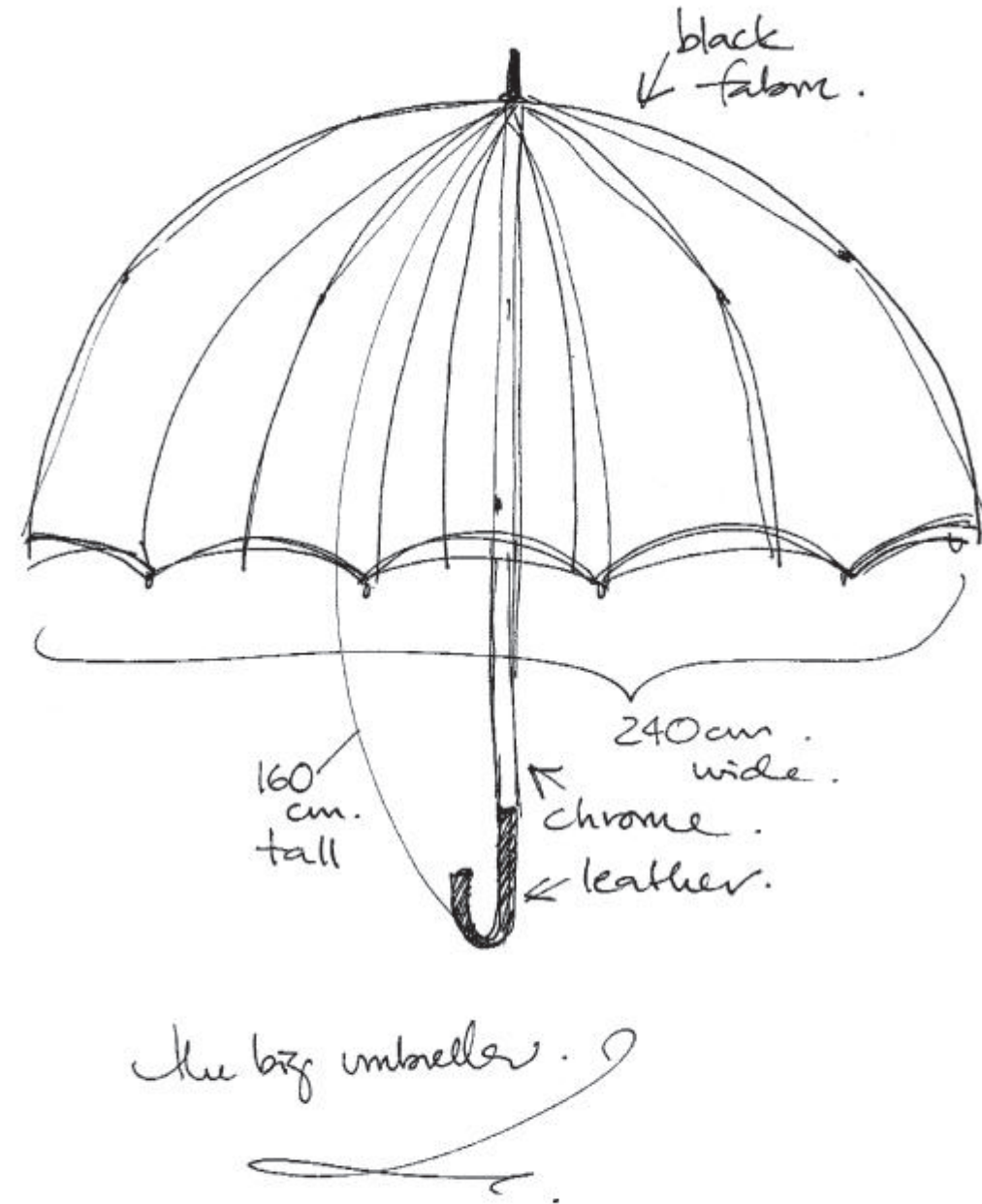












I met Aleksandra Mir in 2002 when I was working at Jousse Entreprise Gallery in Paris. One day, we received a telecopy at the gallery: 8 or 9 pages, with drawings and explanations about her new specific project called 'The Big Umbrella'. I remember very well one of this drawings representing Aleksandra holding a big umbrella with 16 persons under and a kitty. Everybody was smiling and looked very friendly. The project was to travel all around the world with this big umbrella to see how people could react and the social dimension of the object. We had to find a manufacture able to realize it. Not so easy, believe me! When we start our researches, we had no idea if it was possible, how much it is, how long it takes! First, we asked to professionals and they said no. We even thought about going to Thailande to realize it. Finally, we found a little manufacture specialized in accessories for advertises, cinema or attraction parks. The problem was they were unable to give us a price before doing researches. So, nothing happened for 6 months maybe. Philippe Jousse, the director of Jousse Entreprise Gallery and the producer, hesitated so much. His «yes» came in May 2003 only. One month later, I had an

appointment with Aleks and MC. The girl showed us a kind of prototype made with a sunshade to have an idea of the shape, weight, materials etc... Aleks wanted it the exact replica of an English umbrella but 2 meters height. I followed all steps of the realization, talk with her about last details: handle, leather, chrome etc...It had to be ready for beginning of October and been delivered just a day before Aleks came for shooting pictures in Paris. When I received the Umbrella at the gallery, I was so surprised to see this huge umbrella. It was PERFECT! Aleks was so busy (as usual!) and came only 3 days to do pictures. I booked a photographer (Sandrine Aubry) for 2 days and Aleks asked her friend Jason Schmidt to shoot one day with us. Jason is a fashion photographer. He was in Paris for another job but worked one day with us. I was assisting Aleks and filming everything, and Jason had his own assistant. The sun was shining and we were looking for locations with water all around Paris. We found fountains, ponds and cascades. We went to Trocadero, Concorde, Buttes Chaumont, standing in front of all fountains we found. Jason was so funny, so American! He was yelling people: «hey you! Come

under the umbrella for a picture! Ok don't smile, don't look at me...» We had great time with him and people but the result was so fake because of this beautiful weather. Aleks started to be depressed realizing that it wasn't working as in her drawings. The day after, we worked with the other photographer. We were 3 girls, an old car and a big umbrella and had fun. It wasn't raining and Aleks was stressed. We did pictures on Parisian bridges with the umbrella closed. Parisians people wasn't very reactive in front of this huge object except when we went in very touristy places like in Montmartre where people were screaming, following us and trying to catch the umbrella. A nightmare I filmed for 45 minutes! We went to Le Louvre and found a nice fountain. Aleks bought plastic boots and jumped into the fountain. It was beautiful to see how water could run on the fabric. A group of children came at this moment and saw her. Their eyes were amazed. It was Mary Poppins for them. But Aleksandra was more and more depressed because of the weather and she begins to feel very lonely under her umbrella. The last day, we took the car and drove west to find rain. Aleks was sleeping at the back and Sandrine and me were

singing as bad as possible to call the rain. We found it after more than an hour of drive in a small village. We found few teenagers (it was Wednesday afternoon) waiting for the bus. We did few pictures but it wasn't really what Aleks was expected. We left this village for a bigger one and before leaving we did a last picture of Aleks walking alone under the rain on a small road. «Alone again» I thought. Our next stop was La Ferrière-Bernard. It was raining a lot and people were surprised to see 'The Big Umbrella'. We helped people walking without being wet and met a group of teens (around 17 years old) waiting in front of the cinema. They came naturally under the umbrella, talked to Aleks, trying to pick up her, giving her some flowers, smoking cigarettes, waiting for their girlfriends. These boys were fantastic. It was one of our best moments in France, and the most important day because of the rain. The show at Jousse Entreprise opened his door 15th of November with 10 different pictures. Aleks received a proposition from the Serpentine Gallery in London to realize new pictures in London and for a show curated by Rochelle Steiner in February 2004. We produced a new umbrella for London. So, London was our next step. I had to come with 'The Big Umbrella' by train. Nice trip! I arrived in London 6th of January for 4 intense days of work. We had diner with the new photographer, a German guy based in London called Heikko Prigge. Each morning, we started at 8:30am. I saw that Aleks was still stressed because there was no rain, one more time! The floor was a little

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All works, edition of 5

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Editorial coordination: Virginie Jacquet
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Dresden: David Brandt

Copenhagen: Anders Sune Berg

New York: Chris Verene

Martinique: Yann Audinot

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Die Flut in Dresden



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Waiting Room



Couple





Copenhagen





Spiral Staircase







Circus Plaza





















New York





















Martinique











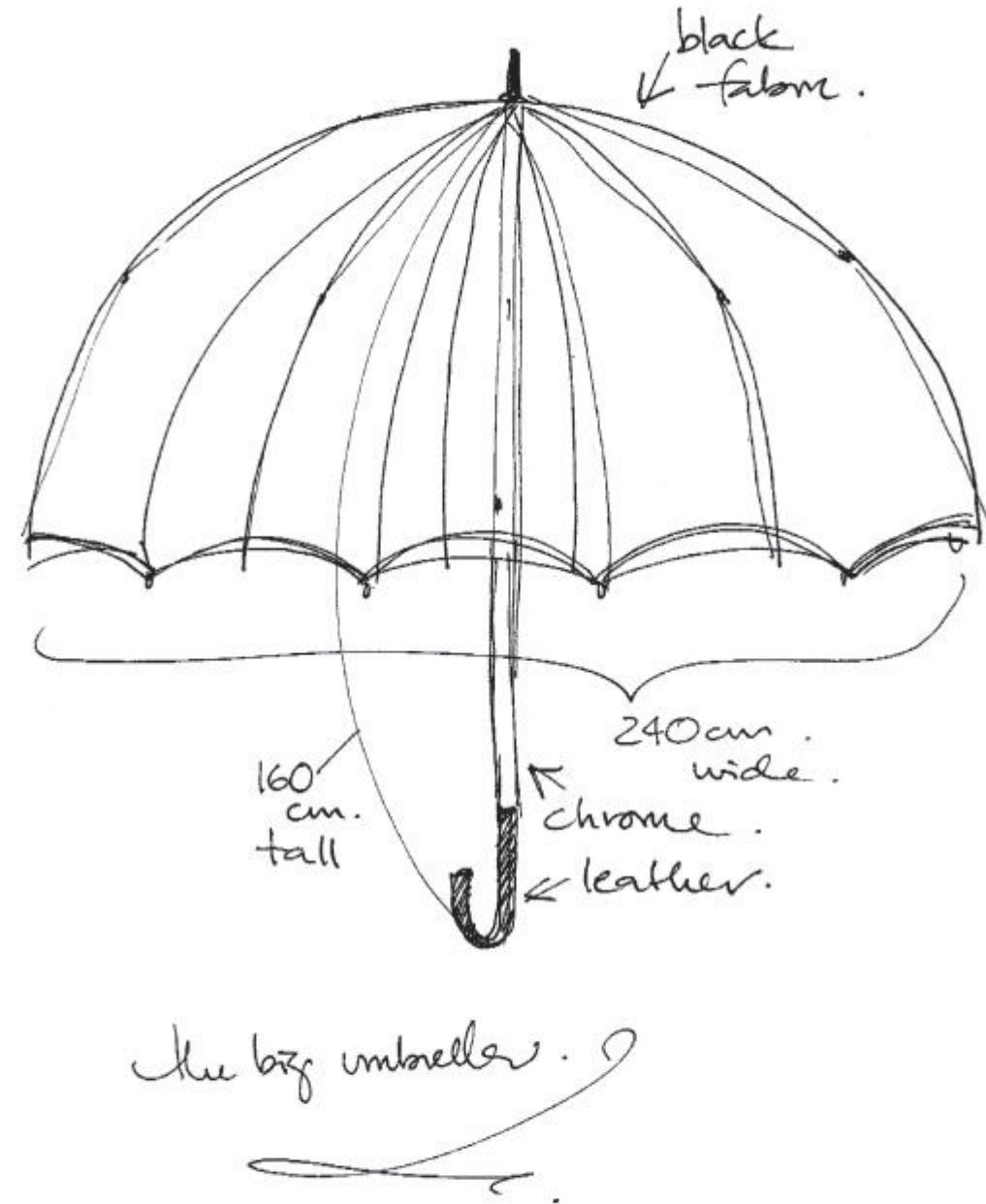












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