

***ROSS SINCLAIR***

***20 YEARS OF REAL LIFE***

# ***APPENDIX***

**A**

***PUBLISHED TEXTS:  
REAL LIFE WRITING***

***INTRODUCTION / AFTERWORD***

***DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY BY PUBLISHED WORK  
THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART, 2016***



# Ross Sinclair 20 Years of *Real Life*

Doctor of Philosophy by Published Work at  
The Glasgow School of Art, 2016

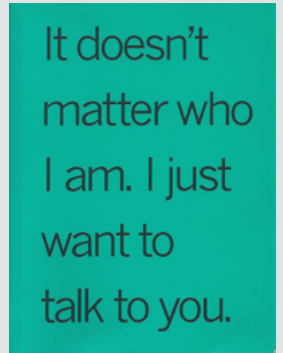
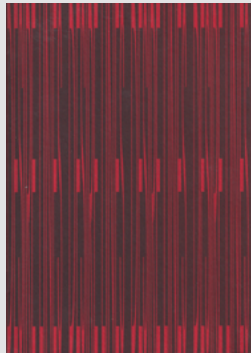
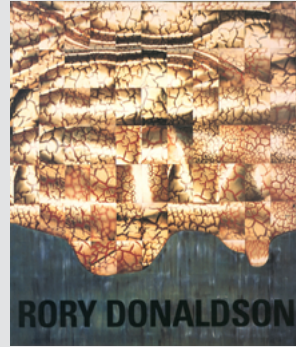
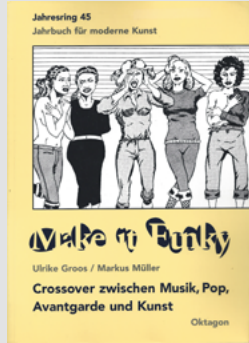
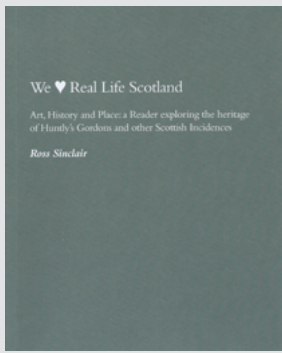
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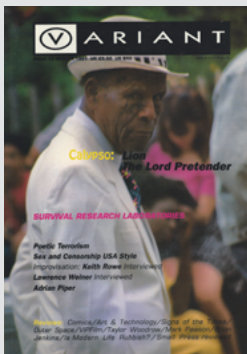
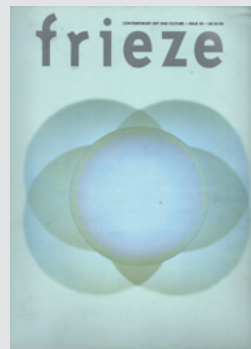
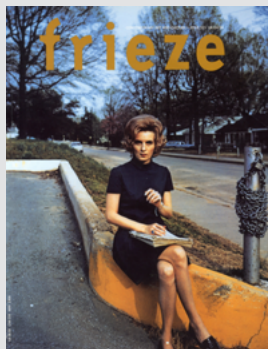
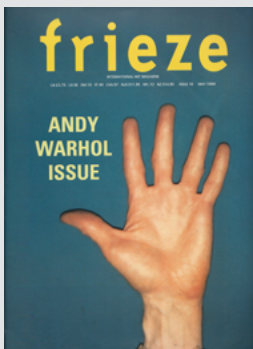
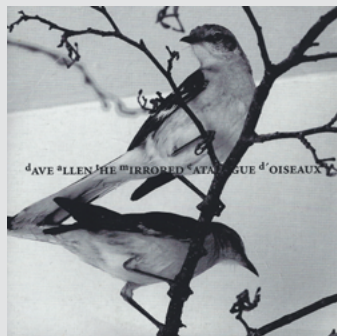
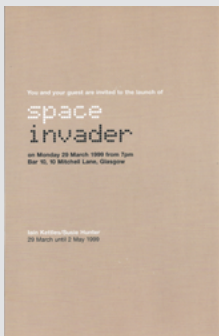
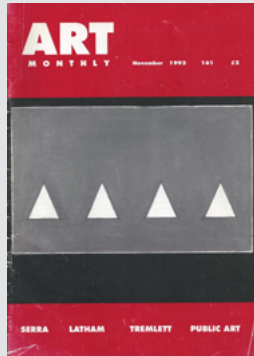


## **Appendix A** Published Texts by Ross Sinclair

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Collected texts originally published in books,  
catalogues, artist monographs, art journals,  
magazines and informal publications 1991-2014





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# A

**Pages 016 - 415**

## Appendix A; Published Texts by Ross Sinclair



**Pages 418 - 421**

*Real Life Magazine*

*A note of thanks to Tom Lawson & Susan Morgan*

These essays, reviews, articles and other informal texts written over the past couple of decades are brought together here for the first time. They support the main critical overview of this PhD by published work at Glasgow School of Art and constitute part of the significant and original contribution to existing knowledge proposed in this submission.

This *Fanzine* contains a series of published texts concerning art and artists, written by an artist. They do not constitute art criticism per se, lacking the requisite levels of objectivity and distance. Their value lies somewhere else, a view from the *bottom-up* versus the *top-down*, perhaps? A voice from the studio? They broadcast the clamour of new ideas explored in situations expanding and multiplying, understood and reported from the inside out. Considering these texts reproduced side by side for the first time, they appear as despatches from the front line, fieldwork notes from a practice led research project. The texts interrogate and celebrate a particular geographic, political and cultural context that has been at the core of the development of my *Real Life Project* over the past twenty years.

The texts began to be commissioned and published in magazines and books just before my *Real Life Project* officially comes into being with the permanent marking of the tattoo in 1994. However these early texts, published as the project comes into focus, such as *Bad Smells But No Sign of The Corpse*, Windfall '91, Glasgow,

(subsequently republished in *Generation, 25 Years of Contemporary Art in Scotland, Reader*, Ed. Moira Jeffrey, 2014, pages 22-29) and even the very first magazine text published here, (reworked from my undergraduate dissertation), 'Capital of Culture/Culture of Capital, Representing Representation', *Alba Magazine*, Vol. 1 no. 1 Jan 1991, offer some insight into the context into which my *Real Life Project* was born. They set out the stall of its multiple dialogues exploring the construction of realities in a specific geographic and historical context. These early essays often reflect on institutional strategies and the tactics explored by artists to engage and outflank them at a particular moment in time (perhaps in the manner of the tactical consumer identified in 'Making Do: Uses and Tactics' in Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 1988). The arguments explored in these texts articulate how an idiosyncratic milieu of artists and the works they are producing might be self-defined and self-valorised in a local, national and international context set against (to start with) an inhospitable backdrop of early '90's metro-centric culture. Developing the thinking around these early texts suggested to me the need for an umbrella project to hold over my own particular practice, giving it's diverse forms and multiple approaches some shape and structure, a clearer pathway into an uncertain future. Enquiries into a collective experience of the multiple incarnations of *Real Life* and the joys of exploring these in the world of art are subsequently explored in many of the texts.

A key research question infused throughout these texts building on the foundations of the *Real Life Project* could be characterised as, '*How can a nascent cultural milieu engage with its indigenous context in a self-determined manner while simultaneously articulating itself in relation to an indifferent metropolitan centre, consistently underlining its idiosyncratic internationalism, while at the same time avoiding any sense of parochialism?*' I think that just about covers it. Through the publication of these texts I insistently and repeatedly demand that these artists in this place, this context: Glasgow, Scotland, be discussed, understood and mobilised in the construction of a contemporary art scene in a particular place that at the start of the project was considered a very minor and far flung outpost of a fading cultural empire. Subsequently this logic would be applied to explore other artist-led situations in Reykjavik and Amsterdam, Berlin and Bregenz. Viewed as a developing series of related texts published in Scotland and London, Europe and beyond, the contents of this 'Fanzine' becomes a valuable aid to understanding the contemporaneous visual art milieu and the context out of which my *Real Life Project* begins to grow.

I have reproduced the texts here in the format in which they were originally published. It is useful to see them set in this context and to observe the flow from publication to publication, the design and texture on the page. Each text here was formally commissioned in one way or

another and was published in the regular formats of the art world, usually exhibition catalogues, books and magazines, all still the main modes of dissemination. The timings and spread of the published work here is somewhat uneven, years go by between some of the texts, it's an occasional series. Inevitably there is a degree of repetition and re-articulation of the same ideas in different ways throughout the texts. I would shape each text specifically for the context and moment of the particular publication and if I felt a reiteration of certain 'manifesto points' was required I would simply crowbar them in. At certain moments in time I made rather petulant decisions to stop writing for a period, when I found I was being invited to contribute texts to exhibitions where I would have preferred to be included 'as an artist'. In hindsight it is clear that not every text is completely successful, a youthful hubris sometimes overtaking the task at hand. I simply felt I was doing *what was required* at the time. A continuing and urgent obligation.

This volume is included as an appendix to the main 'artist monograph' publications under consideration in the PhD submission as the texts here weave in and out of the *Real Life Project* touching on it in a number of different ways, sometime head on, sometimes in more elliptical ways. They assist in the fleshing out its context and background, seeking to illuminate the broad constituency that has informed and shaped many of my *Real Life* works.

Although all the texts here have been published in a traditional manner with reputable art institutions and publications this compilation is not a formally edited publication or 'RealLifeReader' in its own right, outside the boundaries of my own informal collation of the texts. A few of the texts are also reproduced more than once, mainly in different languages in diverse international publications. I include all these as I think it is interesting to observe how the texts might pop up in different context, years apart, as they come back into focus re-entering the consciousness of editors and readers. A couple of the texts are missing, presumed lost. The last two essays in the first section are re-produced from a bona fide reader published alongside the *Generation Exhibition*, National Galleries of Scotland, celebrating 25 Years of Contemporary Art in Scotland in 2014. These two essays, (one originally commissioned for the unpublished Transmission Gallery 10/12/15<sup>th</sup> anniversary Book, '95/96, the other from the *Windfall '91 Project*) both contribute to a paradigm shift in Scottish contemporary visual art seen over the last 20 years. One text is self-determined, politicised and sloganeering; a cultural call to arms, while the other is more poetic and fantastical, a window on to another place, *Not as it is, but as it could be (P2 Real Life and How to Live it; Ross Sinclair, pages 48-49)*. This dynamic proposes novel ways to consider the distance between everyday life and this *other place* and how the two might be reconciled, at least in an imaginative

sense. I believe somewhere between these two paradigms can be witnessed the conversations of the *Real Life Project* itself, repeatedly tested and explored through hundreds of exhibitions and dialogues with diverse and varied 'publics'.

Many of the publications where these texts originally appeared are now unavailable, out of print and are generally invisible online. The preservation and collation of this body of artist writing represents an important contribution to the available knowledge. This informal collection should prove a useful tool for researchers exploring the rise of *post conceptual* art in Scotland in the late 20<sup>th</sup>/early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries promoting a deeper understanding of the broader aspirations of my *Real Life Project*. Understood in the context of an on-going re-assessment of what is discussed as *the regional* in the visual arts, these texts offer a vibrant evocation of the geography, history, culture and politics of a particular place, at a particular time and how its indigenous artists are shaped by this unreliable identity. The texts illuminate a route through the last twenty years of an important contemporary Scottish cultural *landscape*. They reflect half a lifetime in art, as it happened, straight from the horses mouth, unvarnished and shooting from the hip.

**R.S. 2016**

# I. Book Chapters / Essays

- 01**    **016**    'Bad Smells but no sign of the Corpse', *Windfall '91*, Glasgow, pp. 6-13, UK,  
**027**    1991
- 02**    **028**    'Museum Keys', Interview with Douglas Gordon, *Guilt By Association*,  
**031**    pp. 22-23, MOMA, Dublin, Ireland, 1992
- 03**    **032**    'This is Something for the Blunted', ed. Karen Caldicott/Barry Hylton/  
**035**    Richard Caldicott, *In And Out, Back And Forth*, pp. 12-13, Julia Arts  
Foundation, New York/Idaho Editions, UK, 1992, ISBN 1-1874592-01-2
- 04**    **036**    'Faster than a Pool of Piss on a Hot Summer Sidewalk', *International*  
**047**    *Departures : Bond/Gillick, Barclay, Buchanan, Sinclair*, ed, Tom Eccles/Eva  
Schmidt, pp. 34-45, Gessellshaft fur Actuelle Kunst, Bremen, Germany, 1993,  
ISBN 3-926865-07-5
- 05**    //    Julie Roberts, ed, Achille Bonito Oliva/Helena Kontova, *Aperto 93 :*  
*Emergency*, Venice Biennale, Giancarlo Politi Editore, Italy, 1993, ISBN 10:  
8878160539    \* Text not found \*
- 06**    **048**    'The Sociable Art of Douglas Gordon', *It doesn't matter who I am. I just want*  
**073**    *to talk to you*, ed. Nicola White, Douglas Gordon, pp. 1-37, Tramway,  
Scottish Arts Council, UK, 1993
- 07**    **074**    'Makes No Sense at All', *Loaded*, ed. Noreen O'Hare, Rory Donaldson,  
**081**    pp. 6-10, Orchard Gallery, Derry, UK, 1994, ISBN 0-907797-76-8
- 08**    **082**    'Nietzsche, the Beastie Boys and Masturbating as an Art Form,' *New Art in*  
**089**    *Scotland*, ed Nicola White, pp. 24-31, CCA, Glasgow/Aberdeen Art Gallery,  
UK, 1994, ISBN 1- 873331-10-X
- 09**    **090**    'This is the Sound of the Suburbs', *Maikafer Flieg*, ed. Heike Weber/Uta  
**103**    Weber, pp. 69-81, Impress, Germany, 1995
- 10**    **104**    'Ugly/Beautiful - The Wonderful World That Never Was', *Kenny Hunter –*  
**107**    *Work 1994-1998*, ed Tessa Jackson, pp. 20-21, Arnolfini, UK, 1998, ISBN  
0-907738-56-7
- 11**    **108**    'Music can Save your Life : Art can Save your Life', *Make it Funky,*  
**137**    *Strategies between Pop and Avant-Garde in Music and Visual Arts in 20th Century*,  
Ed. Markus Muller/Ulrike Groos, pp. 342-356, Oktagon, Germany, 1998, ISBN  
3-89611-054-3
- 12**    **138**    'Can none of you Fuckers speak English?', *Desire Lines*, ed. David Harding,  
**141**    pp. 16-17, Book Lab, UK, 2000, ISBN 0-9530489-2-6
- 13**    **142**    'Les clefs du musee', *Deja-Vu, Douglas Gordon, Questions and Answers*    Vol-  
**155**    *ume 1, 1992 – 1996*, ed Suzanne Page, pp. 33-44, Musee d'Art Moderne de la  
ville de Paris, France, 2000, ISBN – 2-87900-516-7

- 14**    **156**    Politics, Loyalty and the Class of '84', *Roderick Buchanan : Players*, pp. 8-19,  
         **167**    ed. Katrina Brown, Dundee Contemporary Arts, UK, 2000,  
                ISBN 0-9535178-4-5
- 15**    **168**    'Forward', (with Bryndis Snaebjornsdottir), *If I Ruled The World - Living Art*  
         **173**    Museum, Iceland/CCA Glasgow (project curated with Bryndis  
                Snaebjornsdottir) 1999/2000/200,1 including artists Sinclair and  
                Snaebjornsdottir, Martin Boyce, Simon Starling, Rose Thomas, Clara Ursitti,  
                Claire Barclay, Roderick Buchanan, a project in Glasgow/Reykjavic with 2  
                exhibitions and book, ed. Mark Wilson, UK, ISBN 1-87333122 3
- 16**    **174**    'What's in a Decade, The Glasgow Miracle vs. Utopian Modernism done  
         **183**    by Third World Peasants', *Circles*, pp. 193/199, ed. Christoph Keller, ZKM/  
                Siemens arts program/Revolver – Archiv fur aktuelle Kunst, Germany, 2002,  
                ISBN 3-934823-21-1
- 17**    **184**    'From Gnostic to Quixotic in 5000 years, History, Geography and Henry  
         **195**    VIII's Wives', pp. 35-46, *Henry VIII's Wives : We March Under the Banner of*  
                *Visual Art*, ed. Ross Birrell/Alexia Holt, Tramway, UK, 2002, ISBN 1-899551-  
                28-X
- 18**    **196**    'Art School is Dead/Long Live Art School', *A Curriculum for Artists*, pp. 60-62,  
         **199**    The Laboratory at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, University of  
                Oxford and the New York Academy of Art, ed. Paul Bonaventura/Stephen  
                Farthing, UK, 2004, ISBN 0-9538525-3-9
- 19**    **200**    'Tonight We're Gonna party Like its 1999?', *S. Mark Gubb*, pp. 6-32, ed. Ceri  
         **215**    Hand, Ceri Hand Gallery, UK, 2009, ISBN 978-0-9561300-0-6
- 20**    **216**    'A Reflection on a Journey with the Real Life Gordons of Huntly', *Ross Sinclair*  
         **241**    - *We Love Real Life Scotland ; Art, History and Place*, pp. 17-52, ed Claudia  
                Zeiske/Ross Sinclair, Deveron Arts, UK, 2012, ISBN 978-1-907115-09-7
- 21**    **242**    'Socialism in Her Heart', *Susan Philipsz*, ed. Brigitte Franzen/James Lingwood,  
         **247**    Susan Philipsz – Ten Works (the Work), UK, Artangel/Konig, UK, 2014 ,  
                ISBN 978-3-86335-405-3
- 22**    **248**    'Bad Smells But No Sign of the Corpse', *Generation, 25 Years of Contemporary*  
         **257**    *Art in Scotland*, Reader, pp. 22-29, 2014, ISBN 978-1-90627-72-8
- 23**    **258**    'An Open Letter to Whomsoever it may Concern Regarding : Scotland – A  
         **265**    Brief and Fractured Introduction to the History of the Period 1983/2083',  
                *Generation, 25 Years of Contemporary Art in Scotland*, Reader, pp. 36-43, 2014,  
                ISBN 978-1-90627-72-8

## 2. Contributions / Texts in Informal Publications

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- 01**    **267**    'Real Life and How To Live it : Transmission', *A celebration of 20 years of Transmission Gallery, 1983-2003*, pp. 36-37, ISBN 0-9529002-2-X  
**267**
- 02**    //    'Well it's 1969 OK?', Jackie Donachie/Kirsty Ogg, Galeria Knoll, Budapest 1995    \* Text not found \*
- 03**    **268**    'Storing up the Static, The Inflatable Art of Kettles and  
**273**    Hunter', Tramway, 1999
- 04**    **274**    'A long journey towards this exact moment', *The Mirrored Catalogue D'oiseaux*, by Dave Allen, Boileau & Narcejac 7"  
**277**    single, sleeve notes 2003
- 05**    **278**    'Random Notes for Living Artists', *Seaview*, pp. 1-2, UK, A  
**279**    Shoal of Mackerel, 2007, ISBN 978-1-905640-15-7
- 06**    **280**    'When did it stop being a matter of life and death?'  
**283**    *Algebra*, Tramway, <http://tramwayalgebra.com/issue1.html>, 2011
- 07**    **284**    'Theory and Practice', *Sculpture and Environmental Art Degree Show Book*, Glasgow School of Art, pp. 7, 2010  
**285**
- 08**    **286**    'How to Secede as an Artist', *Wave Cut Platform*,  
**289**    Exhibition Essay, 83 Hill St., Glasgow, 2011
- 09**    **290**    '20 Years of Real Life, Free Instruments for Teenagers',  
**295**    *Collective*, Edinburgh, Year long project creating new bands with record and shows.
- 10**    **296**    'The Glasgow Model: and the Cyclical Nature of Arts  
**313**    Communities', *Symposium - Global Culture and Arts Communities*, pp. 66-78, Canada, Edmonton Arts Council, 2000, ISBN 0-9686425-0-0

### 3. Published Articles in Art Journals / Magazines

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|-----------|------------|---|
| <b>01</b> | <b>315</b> | 'Capital of Culture/Culture of Capital', <i>Alba Magazine</i> , Vol |
|           | <b>319</b> | 1 no. 1, pp. 6-9, January/February 1991, ISSN 0954-3740             |
| <b>02</b> | <b>320</b> | 'Alan Johnston', Transmission Gallery, <i>Art Monthly</i> 146, pp.  |
|           | <b>323</b> | 22-23, May 1991, ISSN 0142-67                                       |
| <b>03</b> | <b>324</b> | 'Mark Pawson', Community CopyArt, London, <i>Variant</i>            |
|           | <b>325</b> | <i>Magazine</i> , Issue 10, p. 61, Winter 1991, ISSN 0-954-8815     |
| <b>04</b> | <b>326</b> | 'Contact 552 4813', Transmission Gallery, <i>Art Monthly</i>        |
|           | <b>327</b> | 158, pp. 20-21, July/August 1992, ISSN 0142-6702                    |
| <b>05</b> | <b>328</b> | 'How to Deal With Dinosaur Culture', <i>Art Monthly</i> 161, p.     |
|           | <b>331</b> | 2, November 1992, ISSN 0142-6702                                    |
| <b>06</b> | <b>332</b> | 'Julie Roberts', CCA Glasgow, <i>Frieze Magazine</i> , Issue 6, pp. |
|           | <b>335</b> | 53/54, September/October 1992 ISSN 09620672                         |
| <b>07</b> | <b>336</b> | 'Tracy McKenna', CCA Glasgow, <i>Art Monthly</i> 166, pp.           |
|           | <b>339</b> | 22/23, May 1993, ISSN 0142-6702                                     |
| <b>08</b> | <b>340</b> | 'Douglas Gordon', Tramway, Glasgow, <i>Art Monthly</i> 167, pp.     |
|           | <b>343</b> | 22/23, June 1993, ISSN 0142-6702                                    |
| <b>09</b> | <b>344</b> | '11 Tyne International', <i>Art Monthly</i> 169, pp. 26/27,         |
|           | <b>347</b> | September 1993, ISSN 0142-6702                                      |
| <b>10</b> | <b>348</b> | 'The Morning after the Eighties', <i>Variant Magazine</i> , Issue   |
|           | <b>353</b> | 15, Autumn 1993, ISSN 0-954-8815                                    |

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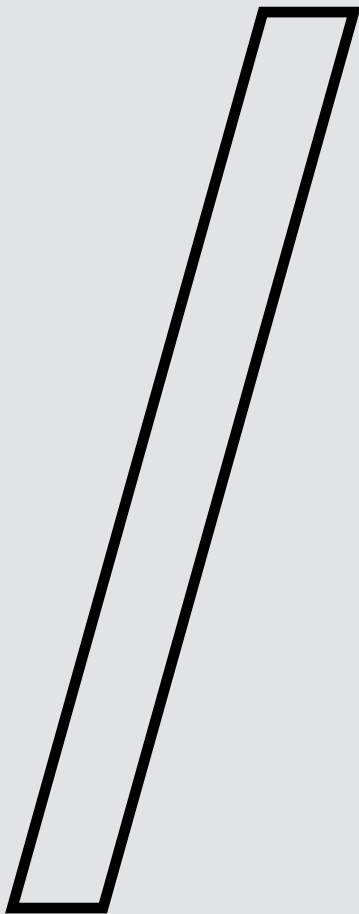
### 3. Published Articles in Art Journals / Magazines (ctd)

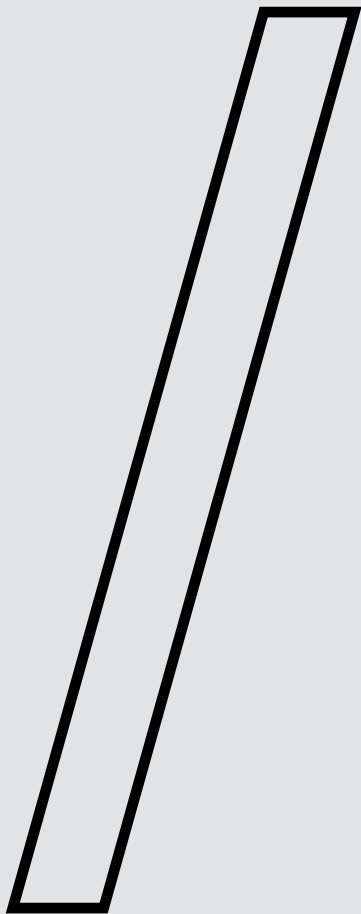
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- 11**    **354**    'Lux Europae', Edinburgh, *Variant Magazine*, Issue 13, pp. 28/29,  
         **357**    Winter 1993, ISSN 0-954-8815
- 12**    **358**    'Getting Closer to Failure', New performance in Glasgow, *BE*  
         **367**    *Magazine* (Kunstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin), Issue 2, pp. 81-86  
            Oktober 1994, ISSN 0946-3585
- 13**    **366**    'Faster Than A Pool of Piss on a Hot Summer Sidewalk', *Real Life*  
         **371**    *Magazine*, Los Angeles, No 23, pp. 4-9, Autumn 1994, ISSN 0739  
            196 X
- 14**    **372**    'Douglas Gordon', Tramway, Glasgow, *Flash Art*, Vol 27, no.177,  
         **373**    p. 67 Summer 1994, ISSN 0394-1493
- 15**    **374**    'Roddy Buchanan: Global Village Idiots', *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 16,  
         **377**    pp. 22/23, May 1994, ISSN 09620672
- 16**    **378**    'Julie Roberts, Life the Universe, and Science', *Art Press*, Paris,  
         **387**    199, pp. 30-34, February 1995, ISSN 0245-5676
- 17**    **388**    'Simon Starling', Transmission Gallery, *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 38,  
         **391**    pp. 78/79, February 1998, ISSN 09620672
- 18**    **392**    'An Open Letter to whomsoever it may Concern Regarding :  
         **409**    Scotland – A Brief and Fractured Introduction to the History of  
            the Period 1983/2083', *Casco Issues*, No. 4, Netherlands, 1998  
            ISSN 1385-9064
- 19**    **410**    'Jim Lambie', Transmission Gallery, *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 46,  
         **411**    pp. 84, May 1999, ISSN 09620672
- 20**    **412**    'Peter McCaughey,' Coming Soon/ARC : ABC Glasgow, *Frieze*  
         **415**    *Magazine*, Issue 52, May 2000, ISSN 09620672

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//    **418**    A note of thanks to Tom Lawson and Susan Morgan: *Real Life*  
     **421**    *Magazine*.





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I  
Book Chapters  
/ Essays  
/ Artists  
Monographs

sylvie reynaud

niels staal

elsie mitchell

martin boyce

edwin janssen

julie roberts

claire barclay

norman regler

boris achour

jens heise

emma mcmullan

david mcmillan

michael lapuks

roderick buchanan

iain kettles

anita drachman

gerard byrne

josep dardañà

blan ryan

david allen

nathan coley

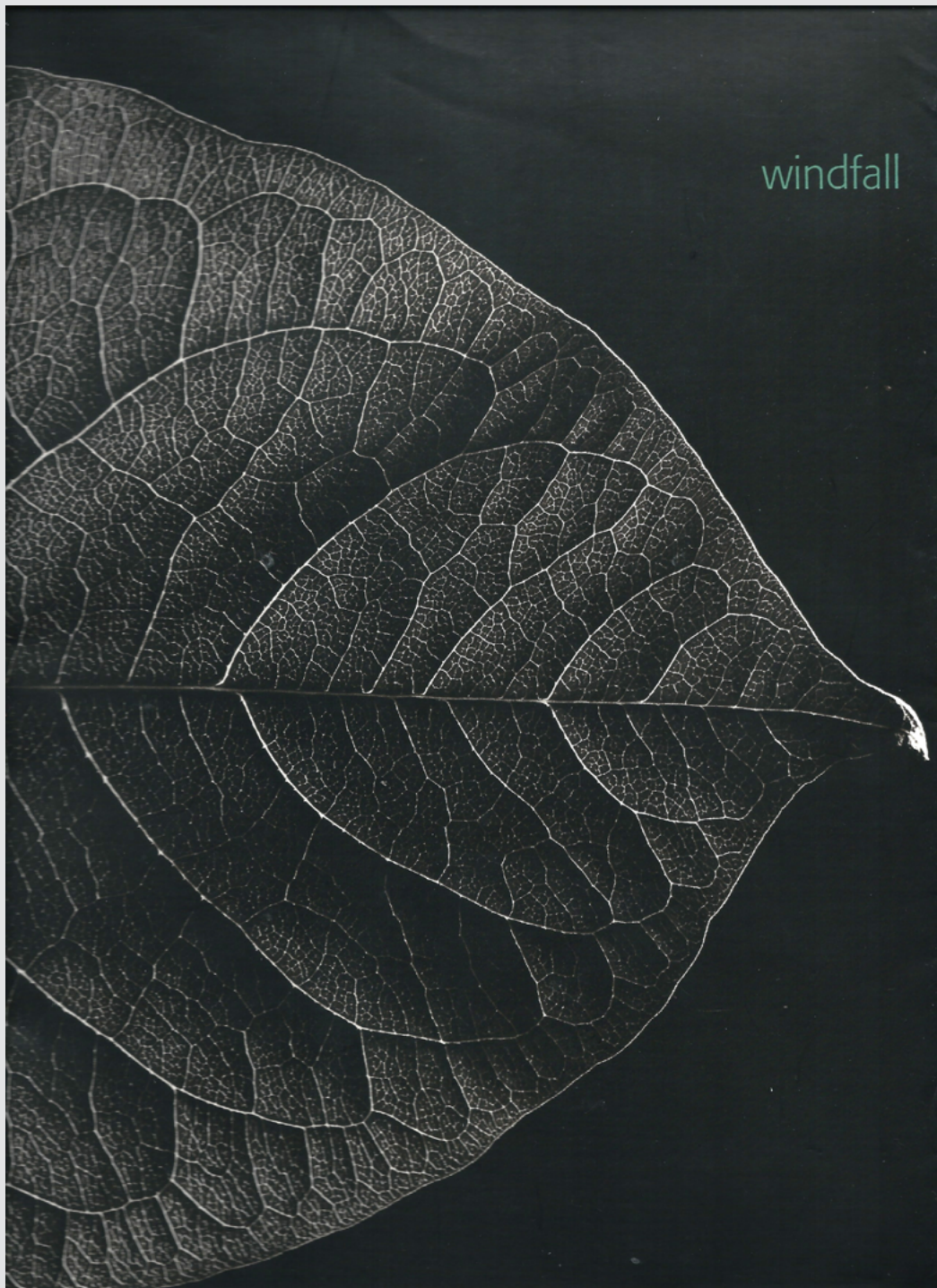
douglas gordon

jim hamlyn

achim bertenburg

craig richardson







bad  
smells  
but no sign  
of the  
corpse

**THE WAIT** Once there was an artist who everybody thought was very good. He had a few doubts about this, but it was true – he was smitten with the idea of art. So he painted. And painted. Soon someone said that he should have a show. “Not yet,” he said, and went back to work.

He entered his works in local competitions now and then. The local library showed one of his paintings and the art critic of the town paper mentioned his name. A relative said his paintings looked like a linoleum floor and asked if he could draw. He knew that he was slowly becoming an artist.

“You should show your works in a one man show.” “No,” he said, “Not yet”, and went back to work. Fellow art students rose to fame; they sold, they had shows, people talked, they moved to big cities. “Come” they said. “No, not yet” he replied. Soon his work had authority, had insight, had maturity. Should he show, he thought. No, he answered, though rewards beckoned.

One morning he walked into his studio and it was clear. His work was pivotal, even seminal. The time had come for a show.

He showed and nothing happened.

Moral; Artists come and go.

(John Baldessari,  
from “Ingres and  
other parables” 1970)

## QUESTIONS

Anyone who follows the fortunes of the contemporary Art world in Britain could not help but notice over the past few years a renaissance of what can be described as non-gallery, gallery shows noticeably in London and Glasgow. These are often housed in disused, industrial spaces or in temporarily dormant commercial office spaces. *Often they are initiated by artists.*

“Once upon a time, far from cities and towns, there lived two painters. One day the king, hunting nearby, lost his dog. He found him in the garden of one of the two painters. He saw the works of that painter and took him to the castle.

The name of that painter was Leonardo da Vinci. The name of the other painter disappeared from human memory.”

(Braco Dimitrijevic from *Status Historicus*, 1969)

Artist initiatives are a valuable way of demystifying the business of art. They promote a sharing of information, skills and experience while also nurturing relationships between artists which can often become fertile breeding grounds for a horizontal and organically developing infrastructure of cultural activity. They often embrace a desire to communicate with that great unfashionable and unknown quantity, the general public. *But, it is often asked whether these kinds of exhibitions really acknowledge their local contexts?*

Events of this nature which occur outside London have the added (dis)advantage of being forced to justify themselves as something other than a regional showroom for the “jaded palates of the metropolitan centre.” Do these kinds of exhibitions have any intrinsic meaning or do they only represent a limited window of opportunity onto the merry go round of the market for those individuals involved? Certainly they represent a valuable and energetic self determination, but to what ends? Is this situation merely symptomatic of the old guard being replaced by the avant garde, the establishment vs. the new establishment.

*Are these kinds of shows only regional showrooms for the hungry market or do they slowly build an international awareness of any given city which could prove to be to everyone’s benefit? Are notions of increased value and engagement through site specificity and claims of greater public accessibility only excuses to placate (public) funders. Artists gain valuable experience by getting involved in all aspects of initiating/funding/curating/administrating, but why then do the public still feel alienated*

**THERE IS A BAD SMELL** and excluded from projects where every effort is made to engage them?

**AROUND BUT SO FAR**

**NO SIGN OF THE CORPSE** There has come to exist in Western culture a certain perception of artists which has taken to characterising them to a large extent as passive, distant (elitist) and politically impotent. In other words, that complex, problematic and

largely undefinable grouping 'the public' seems to have been persuaded that those individuals who choose to spend their time producing what is sometimes referred to as "high culture", are unable or **unwilling** to operate reciprocally in a world outside that which cocoons the realm of aesthetics. This situation can be conveniently illustrated by the time honoured and persistent cliché of (male) artists toiling in garret studios (often by candlelight because they are too poor to pay the bill but in this equation; **poverty = integrity**). They are of course *necessarily divorced from the world as it is*. How else could they honestly promulgate their **personal vision** with the adequate degree of integrity, intensity and above

all autonomy? These hypothetical artists are generally ploughing through some torturous scenario or other designed to show that they (he) just wasn't made for these times i.e. they are suffering for their art. Often they are represented rendered powerless by some inexplicable malaise, trapped in a kind of aesthetic limbo. They never seem very happy or contented with their present situation because they always seem to be waiting for something to happen. What they are doing (or in most cases not doing) is biding their time before being recognized and valorized by external forces. – i.e. they are **waiting to be discovered**.

This cliché of artists at odds with the real world has been developed consistently over the past 500 years but made a spectacular leap forward in the last few decades with the rise of popular culture, particularly in the film industry. The classic exponents of this genre have included Tony Hancock in "The Rebel" or Kirk Douglas caricaturing Van Gogh for Hollywood in "Lust for Life". The cliché of the artist as the misunderstood outsider still dominates television of all kinds. A current television commercial continues to prove that this image has a strong popular currency which has as much kudos today as it ever did. This advertisement, part of a large series which depicts a broad cross section of British society (i.e. white, middle class), features people who tell us what they really want from their lives, the coda of which is "Whatever you want in life... you want to be with the Prudential." Unusually an artist is represented in this imagined cross section of United Kingdom citizens. This artist is a Woman (still more unusual) with an unmistakably (Northern) Irish accent. She is depicted in the studio putting the finishing touches to a ridiculous sculpture of a hand which fills the large studio. (too large of course for an undiscovered artist). The index finger of this hand is extended upwards as if toward the stars. While other individuals in this advert express generally a desire to take control of

of this hand is extended upwards as if toward the stars. While other individuals in this advert express generally a desire to take control of their lives with with some degree of self determination this artist says simply... **I want to be discovered.**

This advertisement projects an assumption that artists, particularly women artists, are always at the mercy of some external forces and therefore unable to organise themselves into any relevant or meaningful situations. The subtext of the ad. revealed by the artists accent further proposes that “regional art” exists only when appropriated and approved by the centre and reveals the basic assumption that it is disenfranchised, marginal and ultimately of no value whatsoever within its own social context (if indeed it is of any value outside of that situation). It is thus defined through the mechanics of the Metropolis as inferior to cultural activity which takes place at the centre.

Of course this is only one example of a crude and reductionist T.V. view (perpetuation) of the problem. But the duplicitous relationship between Metropolitan mass media and the historification of “high culture” plays an increasingly important part in defining public (i.e. everybody’s) perception of culture (and everything else). And anyway it really seems to have a lot to do with the fact that Metropolitan based ‘cultural organisers’ can’t be bothered to get out of the city.

“I think that’s a specifically British problem. Nobody in London thinks that anything outside London’s worth looking at. It’s a real problem. They always talk about France being centralised. Well, they haven’t seen anything like this. Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow, wherever – nothing exists anymore. It might as well be open sea.”

(Karsten Schubert – London Gallerist)

Of course any artists with any meaningful contribution to make do not sit around waiting to be discovered in quite the way represented above but this preconception does persist and you know if you are told something often enough maybe you start to believe it. Often artists conspire to their own marginalisation by accepting projected views of the parameters of cultural activity, particularly in regional areas and of course by accepting and patronising the cultural hegemony enforced from the metropolitan centre.

So where does all this leave you, the young artist just out of art school in Glasgow or Liverpool, Belfast or Hull? When you’re standing at the top of the steps of your college, 20 years of education behind you, is the only way really down? ...Well,

bedroom/studio for 10 years piling up the canvases while you 'wait to be discovered'. Even if you manage to plough through most of what you imagine might be on the Whitney Independent Study Programme reading list it doesn't mean that when the selectors for the British Art Show 1998 (or whenever) come a calling at your studio (which they are unlikely to do anyway) they are going to be bowled over by your work. Why wait for your work to be approved/validated/confirmed by some ex public schoolboy in a sharp suit/jeans'n sneakers? (but maybe you knew him already from prep school). You get out there, do some fucking hot shows and invite them over on your own terms.

Art schools have become ever more intensive and frenetic, and increasingly close to the market. They have also however witnessed a retraction of sixties radicality and have become increasingly conservative and apolitical. (if in fact they were ever anything else). Generally speaking, many of the teaching staff reflect this shift and now consist of artists who couldn't cut it on their own terms and mistakenly believe that their personal failure and spectacular mediocrity is a valuable foundation for their 'teaching' methods. Moulded by draconian changes in public education funding, art schools will now become a new kind of finishing school for upper middle class children of the successful 70s/80s generation. This highly pressurised situation means that students come careering out like a fast train, fuelled up in a speed frenzy where you've *fuckin' had it* if you're not famous by the time you're 25. The production and turnover of ideas is deemed all important. New ideas must be churned out at the rate of 3 or 4 a term, say a round dozen a year. And if you are any good maybe just one of these ideas could warrant thorough investigation and development for a year.

So what do you do? You get together with other artists and set up some shows. Starting modestly and getting more ambitious. Then before you know it you're getting public funding, putting on important shows of new work in (con)temporary galleries which are often much better and

more representative than fake survey shows like New Contemporaries or the New Scottish/Irish/Welsh/Northern/Eastern/Polish/Czechoslovakian etc. etc. season held at your local Arts Council gallery. In London this might mean the chance of selling work to collectors, or if you're lucky becoming involved with a decent gallery. In Scotland it often means wrangling with public funding bodies and meagre

**Far  
fresher  
than**

private sponsorship. But the situation certainly forces you to learn a thing or two, it teaches you to be resourceful and now the Metropolis is coming up to see what all the fuss is about.

**Fresh  
Art.**

Artist initiated projects are of course borne out of a desire to get out there and do something. To create a context for initiating and exhibiting work – *on your own terms*. They express a belief in themselves. They are positive examples of the implementation of *self co-determination*.

## **They are the impatient and aggressive**

**rejection  
of the  
perceived  
notion of  
artists as  
passive  
and  
apolitical.**

This current milieu of artist led projects do point to a different direction from previous artist's projects, certainly in Scotland. In the past, artists have sought to create lasting, enduring establishments to further the situation of art and artists in Scotland and internationally. eg. Large art centres/print studios etc.-permanent structures. These have now become the corner stones of what could be somewhat generously described as the Scottish contemporary Art scene. The new generation of active artists are less interested in creating lasting monuments to their efforts. The structures of organisation/initiation are more fluid and devolved. The idea of constant expansion as a strategy is being questioned. There has been a general deconstruction of traditionally accepted strategies and possibilities but more attention should/is being paid to a horizontal or organically developing infrastructures both geographically and socio-economically. Scotland has historically of course had very strong links in a European context and these will continue to be developed to the fullest extent. Windfall and the many exchange projects that have occurred, particularly in Glasgow, are evidence of addressing this and these will grow. Already more projects and shows are in the pipeline. Although London will always have a strong pull there exists a valuable and potentially more reciprocal relationship with the European context.

But there are curatorial problems for artist initiatives. The loose committee structure usually adopted in groups tends to devolve responsibility for curatorial decisions to such an extent that it becomes problematic to reach consistent levels of good work. Sometimes neat packages of work are promoted at the possible detriment of a broader expanse of ideas. Thus often (and arguably correctly) the act of organising and discussing the project takes precedence over quality of work. This is a situation which cannot remain unaddressed for ever or the art being exhibited becomes a homogeneous veneer of stylistic vacuousness where the over emphasis on presentation destroys the potential for meaningful engagement.

Unfortunately along with the freedom which is a part of projects which retain a large degree of autonomy it seems that in some quarters it has become fashionable to dispense with a contextual agenda indigenous to geographic and social situation and instead adopt one which issues forth from the pressures of what could broadly be termed the centre, to suit its needs. This is often a strategy adopted by individuals who do not, for whatever reasons, create their own opportunities and vicariously feed off the efforts of others. This shifting of agendas is undoubtedly a contributing factor to the alienation felt by certain sections of the public who engage with the work first hand rather than those who gain their knowledge from the mediated channels of books and magazines. This alienation is easily understood when the artist makes it manifestly clear (intentionally or not) that his/her work has nothing to do with them, the “public” – it doesn’t relate to them, it isn’t for them – and in fact they the artist, couldn’t give a **flying fuck...** but hey! why should it be made easy? I’m bored to tears hearing whinging apologists justify terrible, patronising art by professing it’s supposed site-specificity and public significance. Maybe it’s better not even to try. If you had never seen a football game before it would seem like an incomprehensible farce. But if it’s in your blood you play at school, go to a few games, you learn as you go along – football is the most popular sport in the country. Why should things be so different for Art. Its really not that difficult to understand.

By embracing the agenda of the centre the artist necessarily begins to erode the chance of creating and/or developing an indigenous and independent cultural agenda which even begins to address the problems and needs of any kind of cross section of people who live where the artist is working. This of course includes the artistic community. The artist therefore turns his/her back on an important context where his/her work may have a real and meaningful social function. When the context of art dissolves into the realm of formalism and the art world exclusively, it has relinquished much of its potential for social function. It loses an important dimension and diminishes from a potentially rounded, holistic art practice and becomes a two-dimensional veneer. Then its meaning and location exists primarily for the market and the cultural activity, Art, ceases to have a wider social function other than in matters of economics.

“One of the biggest problems I have is to get it to where it looks like a blob on the canvas that has dripped

And this is where many feel art functions best, disengaged and estranged from the inconveniences and untidiness of the “real” world.

or whatever, and there are no real  
life associations at all"

(Ian Davenport, Turner prize nominee  
quoted in "Broken English" catalogue)

What is clear however, is that these arguments of Regional/Central issues can be both diverting and exhausting. There is a real danger for artists involved in this debate expending all their efforts, as has happened in the past, shouting about their own value and perhaps not enough time developing and disseminating the work. A significant feature of the current situation is that the focus of discussion is slowly returning to a discourse about the work, about art. Energy is being harnessed and moulded into forms which proclaim an overwhelming attitude of just getting out there and getting on with it. In Glasgow at any rate, whingers get short shift. What has finally been

exorcised is a feeling evident in years gone by that coming from Glasgow, or Belfast or any other city meant having a chip on your shoulder, feeling short changed because you weren't born in New York or London. What is happening now is active — not re-active. That is where its indigenous values lie. The forms taking shape from this energy, North and South of the Border show clearly that all that separates Scotland or Ireland or anywhere else from the rest of the world is geography alone, nothing else. Past prejudices have been shrugged off and a passionate internationalism is being embraced. James Hall of The Independent discussing Windfall said that "as far as he was concerned, all the artists were from abroad, Scots and Europeans alike". This is a sentiment which should be reciprocated. For Scots know from bitter experience that anywhere outside Scotland is international, whether it is England or Wales, 'Russia' or the U.S.A, and they have had many centuries to get used to the fact.

So now, more than ever, the parochialism which has dogged the Scottish visual arts for so long seems at last to have gone knocking on Metropolitan doors. These appear to be slowly closing while elsewhere doors lie open all over the world.

**All it takes is for us to go through them.**

ROSS SINCLAIR



# guilt by association

CHRISTINE BORLAND  
RODERICK BUCHANAN  
DOUGLAS GORDON  
KEVIN HENDERSON  
CRAIG RICHARDSON



Douglas Gordon, *Museum Keys*.

An unlimited multiple work for The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin. September, 1992.

The following are excerpts from a conversation between Douglas Gordon and Ross Sinclair; Transmission Gallery, Glasgow, August 20, 1992.

RS How did this work develop ?

DG It came about through being in a situation that most artists find themselves in at some time. I was installing some work in a gallery last year and, as happens often, the gallery gave me a set of keys to let myself in and out of the building whenever I wanted. I couldn't help thinking about how easy it would be to copy those keys. They might even have fallen into the wrong hands, if you know what I mean.

RS But it's not as if the 'wrong hands' are going to be the audience for this work.

DG You never know.

RS Who do you reckon is the audience for this work ? It won't be the *casual passerby*.

DG Well, you have to aim for the audience that you anticipate. The people who will see this work in the museum, or those who might come across it later, are there to spend a bit of time on ideas. That's a situation that can be used to present work which will involve those people's expectations and desires.

RS So what will the *art lover* get in this work ?

DG They'll get a set of duplicate keys to The Museum of Modern Art in Dublin. I want to sell the keys as a fairly cheap multiple to alter the significance of *the originals*. The originals are unique and valuable precisely because they are unavailable. I want them to be very available so that the more keys that go out, then the further the idea can travel - literally and conceptually. This element of distribution is emphasised by the fact that the multiple includes a set of 'blanks' ; so that whoever has a set of keys can go along to their local keycutter and continue copying as many times as they want.

RS Do you want to anchor the idea in the context of *The Museum* ?

DG I hope that people who read the work will recognise the significance of 'the keys to a museum'. In recognising this it can trigger off all the other ideas we might have about keys.

RS Yes...the key has a strong metaphorical value. Like in films and stories keys represent access, privilege, success, power, fulfilment, and so on. But the main implication seems to be a reconsideration of the status of *The Museum*. I mean, here we are being offered a set of keys to a repository of cultural and economic value. That's going to appear to some people like an odd thing to do.

DG The main focus of the work may appear to be this reconsideration that you're talking about. But the work needn't be limited to a pure critique on museology. The motives are more pragmatic, less specific, than that. I reckon that whilst I'm working in this museum I should try and do something here that might not be possible elsewhere.

RS So why the keys as opposed to anything else ?

DG Out of all the museum accessories that I could have chosen to work with, I chose the keys because they have this metaphorical and allegorical currency outside of, and as well as, the critique on the museum. It means that the keys can operate alongside all our ideas to do with relics.

RS Like what ?

DG I could see the work operating along the lines of...well...imagine that someone came up to you in the street and offered you some old nails 'from the crucifixion' or a bit of shroud or something. You probably wouldn't believe it, but you might enjoy thinking about it. And if it was cheap enough you might even buy it.  
I think we like the idea of relics.

RS But these keys don't have the same retrospective aspect as those nails or whatever.

DG I don't know.

The work is a mechanism for pushing that kind of responsibility onto the viewer. They have the responsibility to construct a meaning for the work. Decisions related to the construction of meaning have to be made by asking questions and weighing up the answers. Those answers are not to be found in gazing at the object; they are based on an individuals thinking around moral and ethical issues.

RS So what we've got is this dilemma as to whether the keys are genuine or not. And then all the metaphorical stuff, with some moral and ethical questions thrown on too. It's a bit of a crisis.

DG Well, you know how these things work. The relationship that a viewer has with a work can be much the same as any other kind of relationship. If you're in a relationship with someone, and you start to doubt some aspects of the other person, then you might dwell on that doubt until the whole thing snowballs towards a serious crisis. Maybe a crisis in belief.

DG They might have someday.

RS Haha.

DG But if somebody offered you the keys from The Guggenheim Museum, from the 50's say, you wouldn't be interested in whether they still functioned or not. The issue is whether you want to believe that they are genuine relics, or fakes.

RS As you say, if you were looking at the keys from any major museum of say 30, 40, 50 years ago; you start to imagine their relationships with artists, and in a wider sense, their relationships with artists, and in a wider sense, their relationship to everything else that was happening in the world at that time.

DG Absolutely.

RS But the work remains kind of absurd.

DG It's the fact that you might doubt the truth of the piece that raises the issues of authenticity and belief. The core of the idea is in the questions that people might ask themselves on doubting the work.

RS Are the keys 'real' ? Is the work purely metaphorical ? And if not, then have the museum changed their locks since this project ?

DG It's all about those types of questions to begin with. Or rather, how people choose to answer them. It's about whether people believe or not. As far as I'm concerned, though, I don't want to know what the museum do as regards changing locks or whatever.

RS Do you think that the type of people who might want to buy keys are likely to try and use them ?

DG In what way ?

RS I mean..do you think they'll try and get into the building at 3 o'clock in the morning ?

RS So would you do it all again ?

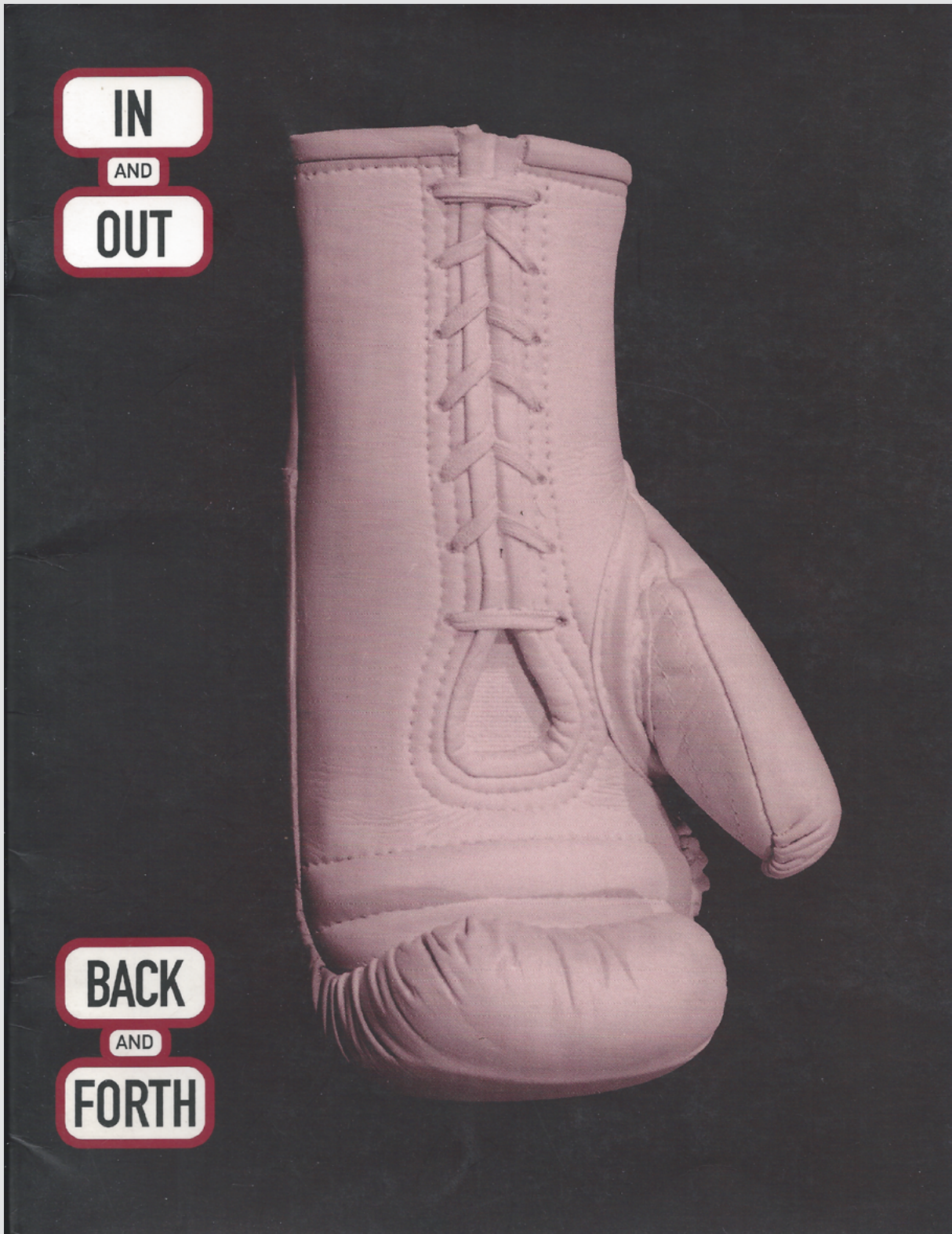
DG Well, this thing could go on. More keys from more museums.

RS That sounds like a 'shrewd move' idea.

DG I don't think it's shrewd. I think it's good. I've got to think it's a good idea.

RS But it's a high mileage thing. I can imagine it functioning like the John Baldessari painting that moves from museum to museum, and in your case accrues a new set of keys each time. Almost an archive project.

DG Well if the keys prove to be as interesting, or more interesting, in 10 or 20 years then that's perfect.



## 1. Los Angeles 12 April 1992

What the fuck's going on here? – I've only been in this goddam country of yours for five minutes and already it's driving me out of my fucking mind – this situation of yours is fucked up man and I mean out-of-control. Just what the hell are these primary elections all about? it's fucking insane.

– I can't fucking believe these guys are supposed to be on the same stupid team – <sup>er</sup>why they seem to spend all their time trying to prove that the other guy is secretly fucking Satan right up his big fat ungodly arse – you know from where I'm standing this whole sorry election campaign looks like one holier than thou pub crawl round the fifty states of this crazy fucked up nation – same old guys fucking things up again – like a bad joke gone very wrong where the guy who killed the most stinking fucking commie gooks in 'nam and didn't get caught fucking his secretary at home is the winner – and this is the great democratic model everyone wants to be like – Jesus fucking Christ.

Well excuse me I hear you say but who in their right mind really gives a fuck anyway – I mean you might as well be deciding whether you'd prefer Groucho – Harpo or whatever the fuck the other one's called in the Whitehouse – but without the jokes – anyway – I'm glad I won't be voting – I'll be long gone by then – in fact about five fucking thousand miles long gone – I even missed my own stupid election this year which was one fucking gigantic stroke of luck as I'm sure you'll agree – but you guys are still dealing with it – and I don't envy you one little bit.

– I mean who can you vote for when there's no one worth voting for and you know that's exactly the whole fucking point – and problem for that matter – the thing is though all of this election stuff is kind relative to where you live isn't it – and for your information the country I come from makes you feel like you're living in the

fucking middle ages or something which is badly fucked up – but look – let's not get started on that one.

– So you see the upshot of it all is that I think I'll definitely be coming back here soon which is funny isn't it – after all the shit I just said – I guess the thing is that even in this whole crazy unfair fucked up world you've just got to make the best of it haven't you – and let's face it – you have to laugh – I mean how can you take any of it seriously – after all the shit that's gone under the bridge theres really nothing left to believe in – is there – all that's left are a bunch of souvenirs from better times long since fucking gone – piles and piles of meaningless signs and stupid fucking symbols you have to climb on top of just to catch a glimpse of exactly what the fuck is happening today –

– And as for universal suffrage – remember all the shit folks went through and are still going through to make that happen –

Well look around you and check it out –

– These days it doesn't mean a fucking thing.

## 2. New York City 1 September 1992

I like it here, I really do. Let's face it – where else on this excuse for a fucking planet can you get a case (24!) of drinkable beer and a bottle of whisky 20 out of 24 hours of the day – and all for 20 bucks! I guess this must be what freedom of choice is all about – and the people in the stores – check them out – you just don't know you're born lucky around here – these store people – they're genuinely happy and friendly – you know what they say to me – “Gee honey where are you from – Ireland?” – and I politely reply – “No, Scotland actually” – and they say, – “Wow that's neat” – and you know – it is neat – you must admit – and the service is great too – for example they might say something like,



you get right down to the fucking nub of the whole shitty question of countries and belonging and being from somewhere I just end up feeling sick and thinking that you're really just on your fucking own wherever you are on this big dirty planet – aren't you? – and I won't hear anyone tell me different – so let's you and me just be honest about it for once and admit that if you're really lucky maybe there's a couple of people out there who actually give a fuck whether you live or die – and that's what coming home is all about – but even that doesn't last forever and I bet you fucking anything when you've finally given up the fucking ghost and snuffed it and you're standing up there at the edge looking at the biggest black hole of fucking nothing you

it hard with your soft hands while there's still a tiny bit of time left but now it's running out fast like sand between your fingers but its only three little words and it goes a lot like this...

## Do it now

*Claire Barclay*

*Henry Bond & Liam Gillick*

*Roderick Buchanan*

*Ross Sinclair*

*Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen*

Ross Sinclair

SCHNELLER ALS EINE PISSPFÜTZE AUF EINEM HEISSEN BÜRGERSTEIG IM SOMMER...

*Ist das nicht einfach schrecklich? Diese verdammte Rezession, sie hat es allen verdorben – links, rechts und in der Mitte. Von ganz oben pißt sie auf absolut alles herunter. Als ob Gott für die Exzesse der achtziger Jahre Rache üben würde, in dem er über die gesamten neunziger Jahre uriniert. Jeder hat seinen Regenschirm aufgespannt, um trocken zu bleiben, und verdammt noch mal deshalb kann keiner mehr etwas sehen. Keiner kauft, keiner riskiert etwas. Jeder setzt auf Nummer sicher. Sicher und solide – **gelangweilt und langweilig** – Und so ist es, auch wenn du es gerade geschafft hast, deine Türen offen zu halten. Keiner weiß, was als nächstes passiert. Also wartet jeder herum, tritt Wasser, kommt irgendwie durch und hofft, daß das nächste große Ding auf der eigenen Türschwelle landet. Im Vertrauen kann ich Euch sagen – verehrteste Leser – **seit Monaten habe ich nichts mehr verkauft.***

*Machen wir uns doch nichts vor – der Kunstmarkt ist schneller ausgetrocknet als eine Pißpfütze auf einem heißen Bürgersteig im Sommer.*

**Habt Ihr es eigentlich nicht langsam satt, immer das Gleiche zu hören?**

*Versetzen wir uns einen Moment lang in eine Situation, in der der Kunstmarkt überhaupt nicht existiert. **Was denkt ihr jetzt?** Wo könnte er stattdessen sein? Im Fegefeuer, Nirvana, Himmel, in der Hölle? Das hängt wahrscheinlich davon ab, wie man damit klar kommt. Aber eigentlich ist es nur eine leichte Verschiebung der Vorstellung. Ein Künstler zu sein ist heute gar nicht so anders als vor fünf Jahren in den florierenden Achtzigern.*

*Immer noch wachst Du auf, gehst in dein Atelier und arbeitest. Natürlich läuft das Geschäft schlecht, wirklich verdammt **schrecklich**, aber bis jetzt scheint sich, was die Kunst an sich in diesem Jahrzehnt betrifft, nichts radikal verändert zu haben. So ungefähr stehen die Dinge hier in Schottland. Schottland ist Teil des Vereinigten Königreichs, es ist an der Oberkante von England befestigt, hat eine Bevölkerung von ungefähr 6 Millionen und annähernd die Größe des Staates New York. So weit, so gut. Es gab hier eigentlich nie so etwas wie einen kommerziellen Markt für 'ernsthafte' zeitgenössische Kunst. Aber trotzdem hat Schottland, und Glasgow im besonderen, in den vergangenen Jahren eine Vielzahl interessanter Ausstellungen und eine aufstrebende Generation von Künstlern hervorgebracht, die im konzeptuellen Bereich arbeiten. Und so wurde ein internationales Interesse in einem Ausmaß geweckt, das sonst nur für figurative expressionistische Aufgüsse oder Schottenkaro-Kitsch (eine Kombination von dem, was die schottische Kunstszene durch die achtziger Jahre hindurch prägte) vorbehalten war. Und diesem jungen Milieu gelingt es allmählich, den Markt **oder was davon übrig geblieben** ist, nach Schottland zu ziehen, und nicht das Werk hin zum Markt, der sich – jedenfalls für das Vereinigte Königreich – in London befindet.*

*Vielleicht ist es so, weil jeder einmal eine Chance bekommt. Oder ist es vielleicht deshalb, weil die Kunstwelt so verzweifelt nach einem absetzbaren Produkt sucht, daß sie ihren Stolz vergißt und die Umstände in Schottland überprüft? Wahrscheinlich ist es von beidem etwas.*

*Viele der Ausstellungen in Schottland, die Interesse auf sich gezogen haben, wurden von Künstlern ins Leben gerufen und durchgeführt. In viele dieser Ausstellungen waren Künstler verwickelt, die etwas mit*

Ross Sinclair

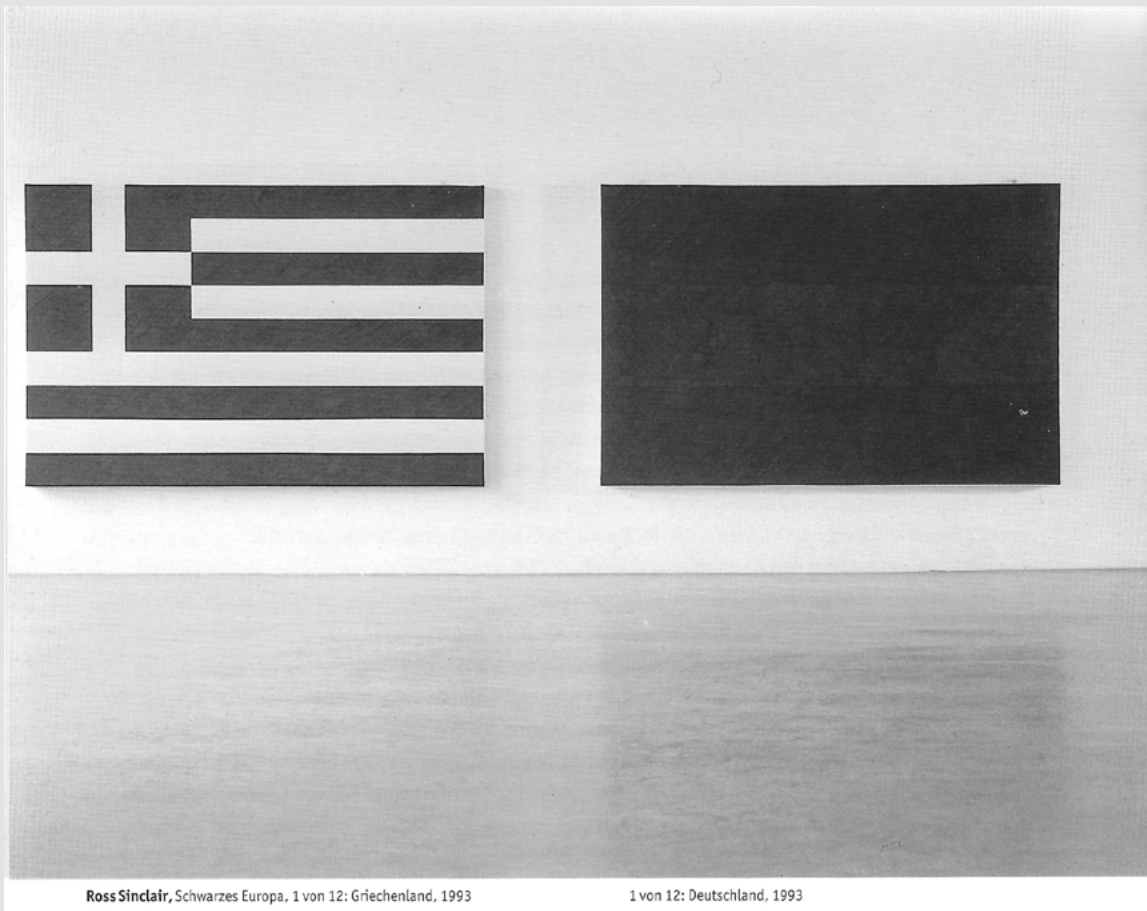
FASTER THAN A POOL OF PISS ON A HOT SUMMER SIDEWALK...

*Oh, this is just **terrible** isn't it? It's messed things up for everyone — left, right and centre. This bloody recession. Pissing down from on **high** into absolutely everything. It's as if God was taking out his revenge for the excesses of the eighties by URINATING all over the nineties. Everyone's got their umbrellas up to keep dry, so you can't see a fucking thing. No one's buying, no one's taking any risks. Everyone's playing things safe. Safe and sound — **bored and boring** — And that's if you've actually managed to keep your doors open! No one knows what's going to happen next. So everyone is waiting around, treading water, just getting by, hoping that the next big thing arrives on their doorstep. And I'll tell you something else in confidence dearest readers — **I haven't sold a thing for months.***

*Let's face it — the art market dried up faster than a pool of piss on a hot summer sidewalk.*

***And don't you just get sick of hearing about it?***

*Okay now, lets imagine for a moment in a situation where the Art Market never existed in the first place. **Whaddya think of that?** Where is it? — Purgatory? Nirvana? Heaven? Hell? I guess that really depends on how you manage to deal with it. But it's really only a slight shift of mind set. Being an artist isn't so different now than five years ago during the booming eighties. You still get up, go to your studio and work. Okay so business is bad, absolutely fucking **terrible** in fact, but nothing so far seems to be radically different about the art of this decade **per se**. That's pretty much how things stand here in Scotland. Scotland is part of the United Kingdom — It's attached to the top of England — It has a population of around six million and is approximately the size of New York State. Okay. So there's never really been much of a commercial market for 'serious' contemporary art. But in the past few years Scotland, and Glasgow particularly, has generated numerous interesting exhibitions and a thriving generation of conceptually based artists. This has attracted international interest on a scale usually reserved for figurative expressionist re-runs or parochial tartan kitch (a combination of which dominated the Scottish art scene throughout the eighties). This milieu is gradually succeeding in attracting the market **or what's left of it**, towards Scotland, rather than taking the work to the market — i. e. in the U. K. — **London**. Maybe it's true that every dog has his day. Or maybe it's just that the artworld is so desperate for some marketable product right now that it's swallowing its pride and checking out what all the fuss is about in Scotland. It's probably a bit of both. Many of the shows in Scotland which have generated this interest have been initiated and organized by artists. Many have involved in some way by artists associated with Transmission Gallery in Glasgow. Transmission is at this time, probably the most significant artist run space in the U. K. Artist run projects like those seen recently in Scotland have been born out of a simple desire to get out there and do something. To create a context for initiating and exhibiting work, to show with people whose work you happen to respect and admire — on your own terms. And now that these type of shows are generating interest and excitement younger artists are slowly realizing that it might be worth staying in Scotland, at least for a while, instead of running off to London or wherever, at the first invitation. When there are not many opportunities available via the market you either sit at home feeling sorry for yourself or get on*



der Transmission Galerie in Glasgow zu tun haben. Transmission ist zur Zeit wahrscheinlich der wichtigste von Künstlern geführte Ausstellungsraum im Vereinigten Königreich.

Künstler-Projekte wie die, die man kürzlich in Schottland sehen konnte, sind aus dem einfachen Bedürfnis heraus entstanden, herauszukommen und etwas zu tun. Einen Kontext schaffen, in dem man Arbeiten möglich macht und zeigt, zusammen mit Leuten ausstellen, deren Arbeit man respektiert und bewundert – und zwar zu den eigenen Bedingungen. Jetzt, wo diese Ausstellungen Interesse und Aufregung wecken, merken die jüngeren Künstler langsam, daß es sich vielleicht, zumindest für die nächste Zeit lohnt, in Schottland zu bleiben, anstatt bei der ersten Gelegenheit nach London oder wo auch immer hin zu laufen. Wenn es nicht viele Gelegenheiten gibt, über den Markt vorwärtszukommen, sitzt man entweder zu Hause und bemitleidet sich selbst oder man geht weiter, wird damit fertig – und tut selbst etwas. Die Projekte, die sich daraus entwickeln, widerspiegeln das Potential an individueller und kollektiver Selbstbestimmung. Die Grundlage dieser Strategie, die in Glasgow und anderswo offenkundig wird, ist eine aggressive Ablehnung der herkömmlichen Meinung, daß Künstler passiv und unpolitisch seien. Das heißt nicht, daß ihr Werk trocken und dogmatisch ist.



Henry Bond und Liam Gillick, Documents, 1993

Ross Sinclair, Schwarzes Europa, 1 von 12: Dänemark, 1993

*with it and make your own. The resulting projects reflect the potential of self/co-determination. The subtext of this strategy revealed here in Glasgow and elsewhere, is an aggressive rejection of the accepted view of artists as passive and apolitical. That's not to say the work being produced is deadpan and dogmatic. Far from it. It's just the artists I'm talking about are working from a premise which demands acute awareness of the complex relationships between a Metropolitan centre and its peripheries. This has been the case in public and private art spaces alike. In short, there is much evidence here of a gently **politicised** atmosphere.*

*There's an interesting situation here, working away from the market but not entirely divorced from it. It's only an hour on the plane to London, or five to New York, or two hours to Cologne. You can keep in touch with developments in the Metropolis while having the space to develop projects and ideas where the market need only intrude if desired. In fact far from increasing feelings of isolation, this situation has fostered a passionate internationalism. This recognizes its peer group on a global scale be it in L. A., Glasgow or Moscow, through the universal language of **ideas**. Generally these artists from Glasgow are now showing more often in Europe and the States than in the U. K. What is significant is that they are still*

Weit gefehlt. Eher gehen die Künstler, über die ich spreche, von einer Voraussetzung aus, die ein scharfes Bewußtsein von den komplexen Beziehungen zwischen einem großstädtischen Zentrum und seinen Randzonen erfordert. Dies gilt für öffentliche wie für private Ausstellungsräume. Kurz gesagt, es gibt Anzeichen für eine sanft **politisierte** Atmosphäre.

Die Ausgangssituation hier ist interessant, man arbeitet abseits vom Markt, aber doch nicht gänzlich von ihm getrennt. Nur eine Flugstunde nach London, fünf Stunden nach New York, oder zwei nach Köln. Man kann mit der Entwicklung in der Großstadt in Verbindung bleiben, während man den Raum hat, um Projekte und Ideen zu entwickeln; der Markt braucht sich nur einzumischen, wenn es gewünscht wird. Weit davon entfernt, das Gefühl der Isolation zu vergrößern, hat diese Situation einen leidenschaftlichen Internationalismus erzeugt. Man erkennt seine **peer group** auf globaler Ebene, in L. A., in Glasgow oder in Moskau, über die universelle Sprache der Ideen. Im allgemeinen stellen die Künstler aus Glasgow öfter in Europa und den Staaten aus als im Vereinigten Königreich. Bemerkenswert ist, daß sie alle wieder nach Schottland zurückkehren, um hier zu leben und zu arbeiten.

Die wichtigsten Orte, um in Schottland zeitgenössische Kunst auszustellen, sind Galerien und Museen, die vom Arts Council und von den City Councils unterstützt werden. Dies könnte anderen lobenswerten europäischen Institutionen wie dem Netzwerk von Kunsthallen und Kunstvereinen in Deutschland entsprechen, aber unglücklicherweise gibt es nicht genug Geld oder Engagement auf der Seite der Regierung im Vereinigten Königreich, um beide Systeme annähernd vergleichbar zu machen. Die Vorstellung, daß eine Galerie in Schottland überleben könnte, in dem sie zeitgenössische Kunst verkauft, ist unglücklicherweise unmöglich, in der nächsten Zukunft sowieso.

Dies ist ziemlich lächerlich, da es mehr als genug wertvolle neue Arbeiten gibt, die von hier kommen und dies rechtfertigen würden. Aber Geographie kann man nun mal nicht ändern. Also akzeptiert man sie und arbeitet mit ihr oder **man geht verdammt noch mal hier weg und woanders hin.**

Die Arbeit an von Künstlern initiierten Projekten ist ein vielversprechender Weg, das Geschäft der Kunst zu demystifizieren. Solche Ereignisse fördern den Austausch von Information, Fähigkeiten und Erfahrung, während gleichzeitig die Beziehungen zwischen den Künstlern genährt werden. Das kann oft zu einer breiteren und sich organisch entwickelnden Infrastruktur kultureller Aktivität führen. Oft stellen diese Ereignisse Ressourcen außerhalb der Reichweite eines Einzelnen bereit. Grundsätzlich machen sie einen stärker. Unglücklicherweise scheint es so zu sein, daß es nie genug Zeit gibt, um die gleiche Art von Beziehungen in einem streng kommerziellen Raum zu entwickeln.

Was geschieht, wenn man in Schottland die Kunsthochschule verläßt? Da steht man auf der obersten Stufe, mit der Auszeichnung in der Hand, die Ausbildung hinter sich, Schulden vor sich. Man schaut über die gottverlassene Stadt (Bevölkerung weniger als 1 Million — nicht großstädtisch, kein Kunstmarkt, tut mir leid) und man denkt: **“Scheiße, hier wirst Du es nie schaffen.”** Stell dir vor, du dort oben auf den Stufen, auf der Spitze des Berges, zwanzig Jahre Erziehung auf deinem Rücken. Geht der einzige Weg abwärts? Wahrscheinlich ja, wenn man sich in sein Schlafzimmer/Atelier zurückzieht und zehn Jahre lang Leinwände aufstapelt und darauf wartet, ENTDECKT ZU WERDEN. Sich nachts in den Schlaf heulen, weil man

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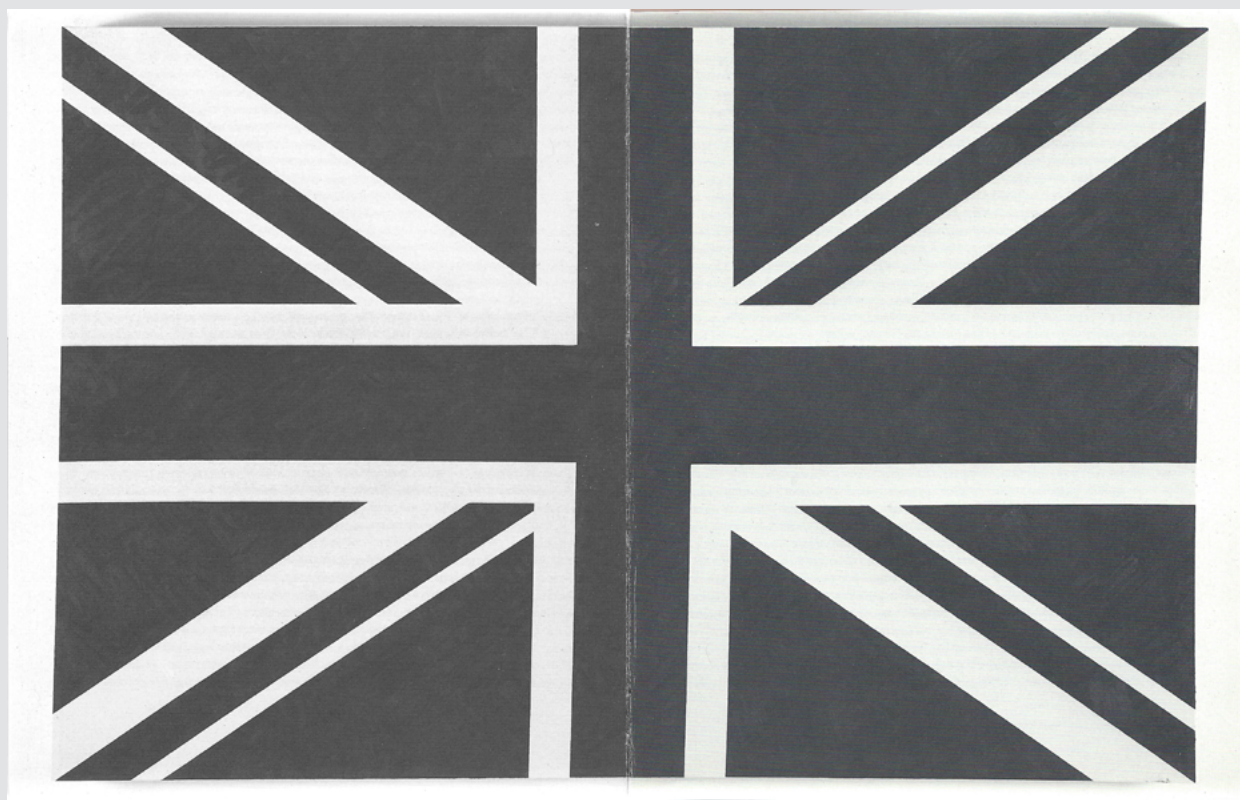
returning to live and work in Scotland. The main venues for exhibiting contemporary works in Scotland are galleries and Museums funded by the Arts Council and City councils. This would appear to mirror other laudable European institutions such as the Kunsthalle/Kunstvereine network in Germany but unfortunately there just isn't enough money or commitment from the Central Government in the U. K. to make the two systems even vaguely comparable. The idea that a gallery could survive by selling contemporary work in Scotland is unfortunately impossible for the foreseeable future at any rate. This is quite ridiculous as there is more than enough valuable new work coming out of here to warrant it. But you can't change geography. So you accept it and work with it or you **get the fuck out of there and go somewhere else.**

The production of artist initiated projects is a valuable way of demystifying the business of art. Such events promote a sharing of information, skills and experience while simultaneously nurturing relationships between artists. This can often lead to a more horizontal and organically developing infrastructure of cultural activity. Often they provide resources which are outside the reach of individuals. Basically speaking, they are **empowering**. It unfortunately seems that there's never much time to develop these kind of relationships when you're working in a strictly commercial space.

So, what happens when you leave Art School here in Scotland? There you are, standing at the top of the steps, degree in hand, education behind you, debts in front of you. You look out over your godforsaken city (population of less than 1 million — non Metropolitan, no art-market, sorry) and you think, **"shit, I'm never going to make it here"**. Picture yourself up there, top of the heap, 20 years of education under your belt standing at the top of those stairs. Is the only way really down? Well I guess it is if you're going to retreat to your bedroom/studio for 10 years piling up the canvases while you're WAITING TO BE DISCOVERED. Crying yourself to sleep at night because you've never sold so much as a shitty watercolour sketch. Even if you keep working away, reading away, ploughing through most of what you imagine is on the Whitney Independent Studies Program reading list, it doesn't mean that when the selectors for the Documenta X come a calling at your studio (which they are unlikely to do anyway) they will be knocked out by your work. **Jeezus** it'll probably have been in and out of fashion 2 or 3 times by then. Why wait for your work to be approved/validated/confirmed by some ex \*public\* schoolboy in a sharp suit/jeans 'n sneakers. You may as well learn on the job. So you get out there, put together some fucking hot shows and invite them over on your own terms. You get together with other artists and set up some shows. Starting modestly and getting more ambitious. Slowly you start to gain respect from (public) funding bodies.

But it doesn't just happen on its own. You have to get out there, get your hands dirty, play around in the mud a bit. Get up peoples noses. You're only young once, and you'll probably never get away with it later on. So do it now. You can't be on the outside for ever but you can afford to make mistakes now — so get out there and make them!

And don't worry, if you're making interesting work the critics and curators will come crawling out of the woodwork as soon as they think they're missing out on something. That's exactly what happened here in Scotland. Windfall is a concrete example of what I've been theorizing about above. The Windfall project came to fruition in the summer 1991 and was one of the most ambitious artist run projects exhibited to



nie mehr als ein blödes Aquarell verkauft hat. Sogar wenn du das durcharbeitest, durchliest, durchpflügst, was Deiner Meinung nach auf der Literaturliste des Whitney Independent Studies Program steht, bedeutet das nicht, daß die Selektoren für die zehnte Documenta an die Tür klopfen (**was sie wahrscheinlich sowieso nicht tun werden**), und daß sie von deinem Werk hingerissen sind. **Jesus**, es wird wahrscheinlich bis dahin zwei oder dreimal in und wieder aus der Mode sein. Warum wartet man, bis die Arbeit begutachtet, bewertet, bestätigt wird von einigen Ex-Schulkameraden im scharfen Aufzug mit Jeans und Turnschuhen. Man kann in diesem Job auch etwas lernen. Also kommst du heraus, stellst einige verdammt gute Ausstellungen zusammen und lädst sie zu deinen eigenen Bedingungen ein. Dann triffst Du andere Künstler und machst mit ihnen Ausstellungen. Bescheiden anfangen und dann ehrgeiziger werden. Langsam gewinnst du den Respekt der (öffentlichen) Geldgeber. Aber das passiert nicht von selbst. Du mußt heraus kommen, deine Hände schmutzig machen, ein bißchen im Schlamm herumspielen. Tanze den Leuten auf der Nase herum. Du bist schließlich nur einmal jung, und so leicht kommst du später nicht mehr davon. Also tu es jetzt. Du kannst nicht immer draußen stehen, aber jetzt kannst du es dir leisten, Fehler zu machen – also geh und mach sie! Und keine Angst, wenn du interessante Arbeit machst, werden die Kritiker und Kuratoren aus dem Holz kriechen, so bald sie das Gefühl haben, sie könnten etwas verpassen. Das ist genau das, was in Schottland passiert ist. Windfall ist ein konkretes Beispiel für das, worüber ich eben theoretisiert habe. Das Windfall-Projekt kam im Sommer 1991 zustande und war bis jetzt eines der ehrgeizigsten von Künstlern organisierten Projekte hier in Schottland. Windfall '91 war in einer alten Seemannsmission am Fluß untergebracht – ein Bürohaus aus den fünfziger Jahren, das mietfrei von den Besitzern überlassen wurde. Windfall '91 stellte 25 Künstler aus 6 europäischen Ländern vor und wurde organisiert und kuratiert von den Künstlern aus Glasgow. Zunächst sandte man Kundschafter in ganz Europa aus, die sich Arbeiten anschauten und Informationen über die Ausstellung verbreiteten. Dann kümmerte man sich um öffentliche und private Unterstützung, Sponsoring etc. Dadurch wurde eine einzigartige Zusammenstellung von Künstlern durch Künstler, die als Kuratoren arbeiteten, erreicht. Die erste Windfall-Ausstellung fand im Hyde Park in London 1988 statt, die zweite 1990 im Hafengebiet von Bremen. Ein flexibles und offenes Konzept. Eher eine Geisteshaltung als etwas anderes. Keiner besitzt das Copyright für Windfall, es ist wie eine öffentliche Software.

Windfall '91 war in vielerlei Hinsicht erfolgreich. Sicher, es zog Kritiker und Kuratoren großer Museen und Galerien aus Europa und USA an. In einigen angesehenen Zeitschriften und Zeitungen wurde es bevorzugt rezensiert. Aber genauso wichtig waren die 3 oder 4 Wochen Aufbauzeit von Windfall, die ein Potential für eine einzigartige Synthese von Ideen und Meinungen schufen. Wie in einer großen Sandgrube, in der jeder herumspielte, wo man Ideen gegenseitig testete, Dinge ausprobierte, bis eine Art von Schlußfolgerung erreicht wurde. 25 Künstler mit ganz unterschiedlichem Hintergrund, Belangen und Persönlichkeiten, und es gelang, durch einen Prozess von Debatte und Dialog hindurch, eine zusammenhängende und fesselnde Ausstellung herzustellen. Und das, ohne künstliche und banale Konzepte, die sich auf eine ausgedachte Thematik oder geographische Kriterien bezogen wie zum Beispiel **„Neue östliche, westliche, nördliche Saison“**, oder was auch immer. Ziemlich viel Qualität für wenig öffentliches Geld, glaube ich.

date here in Glasgow. Windfall '91 was housed in the old Seamen's Mission on the riverfront — a reclaimed office building dating from the 50's which was negotiated rent free from its owners. Windfall '91 presented 25 artists from 6 different European countries and was organised and curated by the Glasgow based artists. This was achieved by sending representatives scouting over Europe to look at work and spread the word about the show, then applying for public and private funding, sponsorship etc. This produced a unique blend of artists selected by artists working as curators. The first Windfall was held in London's Hyde Park in 1988, the second in the docklands of Bremen in 1990. It is a flexible and open concept. A kind of attitude more than anything else. No one owns the copyright for the idea of Windfall, it's like public domain software.

Windfall '91 was successful in a number of different ways. Sure, it attracted critics and curators from Metropolitan museums and galleries in Europe and the U. S. A. It was favourably reviewed in several reputable magazines and newspapers. But just as important was the 3 or 4 weeks spent building and installing Windfall which created the potential for a genuine synthesis of ideas and opinions. Like a big sand pit where everyone just played around, bouncing ideas off each other, trying stuff out, until some kind of conclusion was reached. It brought together 25 artists of vastly different backgrounds, concerns and personalities, and managed, through a process of debate and dialogue, to produce a coherent and engaging exhibition. And all this without having to resort to artificial and banal concepts relating to fictional thematic or geographical concerns like "New Eastern/Western/Northern season," or whatever. Pretty good value for a little public money, I think.

Okay, there are problems. No one gets paid properly, all money is going to travel, materials, catalogue etc. Things can get a bit chaotic when everyone's working on good will. So make a success of this one and next time you make sure there's enough money in the budget for everyone to get paid.

So anyway, that's a brief introduction to the kind of activity that's been happening here in Scotland. I personally believe that it is particular to a specific group of people at a specific point in time. But it can happen anywhere. The idea of artist-run Galleries and projects is not new of course. I just think there happens to be a whole bunch of exciting and important young artists coming through here. Maybe now that the atmosphere of the Market is very different we'll see a return to smaller, more intimate projects initiated from a more grassroots level. Or, hell, who knows?, maybe the big no-risk blockbuster museum shows with their convenient packages of easily digestible and marketable work will destroy all competition.

Some folk would have you believe that this decade will be spent treading water waiting for the recession to end. Certainly so far things don't seem to have changed much. That fact is plain from the kinds of work proposed as "Art of the Nineties" (be it L. A., Europe or anywhere else) in shows like "Helter Skelter" or Jan Hoet's Documenta IX. Contriving "Art of the Nineties" at this stage seems as fictional and fraudulent a proposal as organizing a show in hell. But the collection of odds and ends (good **and** bad) in a show like "Helter Skelter" has already become **history**, even in Europe through the insatiable appetite of the channels of mediated — trans-national communication.

**But Art isn't over just because the market is fucked.**

*Na gut, da gibt es auch Probleme. Keiner wird anständig bezahlt, das ganze Geld wird in Reisen, Material und in den Katalog etc. gesteckt. Es kann etwas chaotisch werden, wenn jeder freiwillig arbeitet. Also mach einen Erfolg daraus und das nächste Mal sorgst du dafür, daß genug Geld im Budget ist, damit **jeder** bezahlt wird.*

*Egal, dies ist eine kurze Einführung zu dem, was gerade in Schottland passiert. Ich persönlich glaube, das liegt vor allem an einer bestimmten Gruppe von Leuten zu einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt. Aber es kann überall passieren. Die Idee von Künstlergalerien und -projekten ist natürlich nicht neu. Ich glaube, daß gerade im Moment eine Reihe von aufregenden und wichtigen jungen Künstlern hier überleben. Vielleicht, weil die Atmosphäre des Marktes jetzt so anders ist, gibt es eine Rückkehr zu kleineren, intimeren Projekten, die an der Basis entstehen. Oder, zum Teufel, wer weiß? Vielleicht werden die riesigen risikolosen **blockbuster** Museumsausstellungen mit ihren bequemen Paketen leichtverdaulicher und marktfähiger Kunst jeden Wettbewerb kaputt machen.*

*Einige Leute wollen dir Glauben machen, daß dieses Jahrzehnt weiterhin mit Wassertreten verbracht wird, bis die Rezession zu Ende ist. Sicherlich hat sich bis jetzt nicht so viel geändert. Dies wird deutlich an den Arbeiten, die als "Kunst der neunziger Jahre" ausgegeben werden (**sei es in L. A., Europa oder anderswo**) in Ausstellungen wie "Helter Skelter" oder Jan Hoets Documenta 9. Die Kunst der neunziger Jahre zu fabrizieren scheint in diesem Moment ein genauso fiktiver und betrügerischer Vorschlag zu sein wie der, eine Ausstellung in der Hölle zu organisieren. Aber eine Zusammenstellung von diesem und jenem (gut und schlecht) in einer Ausstellung wie "Helter Skelter" ist schon **Geschichte** geworden, sogar in Europa durch den unersättlichen Appetit der medial vermittelten transnationalen Kommunikation.*

**Aber die Kunst ist nicht zu Ende, nur weil der Markt versaut ist.**

*Künstler tun es immer noch, reden immer noch darüber. Denken immer noch darüber nach — IDEEN werden immer noch geboren. Sie werden nicht aus Geldmangel aufhören, geboren zu werden. In einem ungastlichen Klima muß man das Terrain kennen und lernen, wie man Camouflage anwendet. Wenigstens eine oberflächige Kenntnis von Guerilla-Taktiken ist in Krisenzeiten gar nicht so schlecht. Es ist schwer, mit Gewohnheiten zu brechen, besonders wenn man als Abhängiger geboren ist. Aber hier stehen wir nun mal. Die achtziger Jahre sind zu Ende. Der Markt ist verschwunden — die Party ist vorbei. Aber das Leben geht weiter. **Also laßt uns auch weitermachen.** Wir werden noch unsere Rente verdienen, wenn wir herum-sitzen und auf den nächsten Aufschwung warten. Also hören wir auf zu jammern, wie beschissen die Dinge **jetzt** sind und **holen uns ein verdammtes Leben.** Also — **kommen wir darüber hinweg.** Oder besser, besuch uns in Schottland. Spür die frische Luft, probiere die grünen Wiesen, und wir geben dir einige Tips, wie man wieder anfängt **ohne** den Markt. Und wenn das sich anhört, als wenn es harte Arbeit wäre, solltest Du verdammt hierher kommen und einen WIRKLICHEN Job suchen. Vielleicht suchst Du ja etwas Sicheres wie eine Versicherung oder noch besser, warum gehst Du nicht in die verdammt Armee. Da hast du eine zuverlässige Lebensstellung.*

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*Artists are still doing it, still talking about it. Still thinking about it — IDEAS are still being born. Not being still born, as some people would have you imagine, just because of a lack of cash. In an inhospitable climate you have to know the terrain, learn to use camouflage. Having at least a cursory knowledge of guerilla tactics is no bad thing in a time of crisis.*

*It's hard to break any habit, particularly if you were born dependant. But here we are. The eighties are finished. The market's gone — the party's over. But life goes on. **So let's get on with it.** We'll all be collecting our old-age pensions if we sit around waiting until the next boom decade. So let's quit whining about how shitty things are **now** and **get a fucking life.** I mean — **get over it.** Or better still, come visit us in Scotland. Taste that clean air, check out the greenery, and we'll give you some tips on how to get started again **without** the Market. And if that all sounds too much like hard work maybe you should just **get the fuck outta here** and get yourself a REAL job. Maybe you'd prefer something safe and secure like insurance or better still, why not join the fucking army. Now **there's** a reliable job for life.*

It doesn't  
matter who  
I am. I just  
want to  
talk to you.



*It doesn't matter who I am.*

*I just want to talk to you.*

The quote above is taken from a telephone conversation which was Douglas Gordon's contribution to an exhibition, "The Speaker Project" at Multiplici Culture in Rome and the I.C.A. in London last year. Formally, the work consisted of nothing more than the play-back of an unsolicited telephone call to the project curator, Liam Gillick. During this telephone exchange, an individual unknown to Gillick calls him up and attempts to initiate an intimate conversation. The caller ignores all social convention and immediately asks embarrassing and personal questions. This interlocutor refuses to reveal his identity, but wants to know all about the unsuspecting curator; *is Liam happy? – is he in Love? – where exactly is he living? – what exactly is it that he does?* The response to these questions is guarded but eventually the curator agrees to meet the caller sometime. He hangs up and puts on his answering machine to defend himself, while the unknown caller repeatedly tries to get through again. The caller pleads with Gillick to lift up the phone but to no avail – *"Liam,...I'm really surprised. Why? Why don't you answer? – Please.* Gillick thinks, *"Well, what the hell was that all about?"* Or maybe he doesn't. Maybe he realises the preceding few minutes had been part of some kind of art game. He realised the call was being recorded. Wouldn't that make the whole experience seem even more unsettling?

This work is part of a series of phone call pieces Douglas Gordon has been contributing to various group shows over the past year or so. Some of the others use as their context the social situation of late evening in a crowded bar. The project organiser (never Gordon himself) calls a specific cafe or bar every night for the duration of the show. The particular bar is

chosen carefully and the barkeeper is in on the plan. When the curator calls, the barman randomly selects someone in the bar he knows by name and calls them to the phone, indicating that someone wishes to speak to them. When the unsuspecting individual picks up the receiver he is greeted not by a friend but by the curator who, unannounced, relays a specific message which Gordon has supplied, then disconnects the call. On different occasions these mysterious messages have included, *"You can't hide your love forever"*, *"Everything is going to be alright"* or *"I won't breathe a word (to anyone)"*. Sometimes the original instructions for these phone calls (usually relayed by fax) are displayed in the gallery concerned and contextualise the project in a physical way. Sometimes there are only the words themselves. On one occasion an assistant made the call whilst the curator sat in the bar to gauge any reaction. Responses vary. I don't know about you, but I think I would be at the bar ordering the first of many double whiskies if someone had just phoned me at my local and told me mysteriously, *"From the moment that you hear these words, until you kiss someone with brown eyes"* I mean, this could be seriously strange. Even more, a statement like *"I won't breathe a word (to anyone)"* could easily induce a sense of paranoia in someone who feels they have something to hide. On the other hand, I guess, *"you can't hide your love forever"* could sound pretty good, taken as imploring the listener to think again about some unrequited love. Like the playground tradition of getting your best friend to tell the girl/boy of your dreams that, *"my pal fancies you."* Gordon himself draws an analogy to the narratives of the classic Hollywood thriller. In a recent interview he cites the old Jimmy Cagney movie, *Angels with Dirty Faces* as a referent. Cagney has just been released from prison and his old mob



Instruction No. 1



Telephone Conversation/The Speaker Project



Instruction No. 2

are out to get him. The hit man follows him to a bar and waits outside. He doesn't know what Cagney looks like so he makes a call to the bar phone, with the intention of shooting whoever steps up to take the call. Cagney suddenly realises what's about to happen, and as Gordon says, *"He shouts some other mug over who gets wasted while Cagney gets away"*.

Whatever the response, one of the aims appears to be to get the individuals who receive the call talking about it. Why them, and not someone else; what do they have in common? Why this disruption of the normal channels of communication?

In one sense these are contingency works, and they reflect and thrive on the social genesis of much art production. Say you meet someone in a bar, after an exhibition opening; you get talking with them, they're organising a show somewhere in Europe or America. Later on they phone you, and ask if you would like to contribute something to the show. But it's in two weeks time, 3000 miles away. There's no time or money to ship anything over. This is a situation familiar to many young artists and it provides a context well suited to an art practice like Gordon's. It reflects his ability to make the maximum impact with the most minimal of interventions. In other words, with an apparently modest effort he is usually able to prise open some aspect of the closed social, geographic or political agenda in a given situation. Whether it is with the phone call works, or one of the other strategies he employs, it seems he is able to make it *look* easy, in fact sometimes it doesn't *look* like art at all.

These telephone works grew out of another of Gordons strategies, his series of letters; this project involves sending unsolicited texts to friends, acquaintances and a variety of names culled from numerous art mail-out lists.

The genesis of these letters was a show called, *"The Archive Project"* at Nevers, in France in '91. He was sent a list of the participants, who were mostly London based, some of whom were already quite well known. As he thought few of the artists involved would have heard of him, he decided that his contribution would be a letter sent to each of the participants. This letter was dated, and read simply *"I am aware of who you are & what you do."* It was signed, Douglas Gordon. This letters project has been running steadily since, and there are now about a dozen in circulation. While there are many similarities between the letters and phone-calls, maybe the postal works appear more threatening, possibly because they betray a knowledge of where the recipient lives. The declamatory statements contained in the letters seem tinged with a more unsettling flavour. Messages such as, *"Life or death"*, *"I remember more than you know"*, or *"Nothing can be hidden forever"* could certainly be attributed with a malicious premise. On the other hand they do flatter the recipient with recognition. A certain parallel can be drawn here to the postcards and telegrams of On Kawara. A telegram of 5 Dec 1969, sent by Kawara reads, *"I am not going to commit suicide – Don't worry"*. Gordon's communications lack the internalisation of Kawara and instead focus on the reader to decide exactly how this communication refers to him/her. In contrast to Kawara, he has little interest in imparting the mundanities of his daily schedule to the world. I mean who cares when Douglas Gordon got up out of bed? However, he has no wish to terrorise with these letters and will carefully select new names from a mailing list with a curator to ensure people don't get too freaked out. Some individuals receive more than one letter and this build up of relationships is an important part of the process. There have been

replies, and these communications range from witty acknowledgement to an infuriated response to what was seen as an unacceptable breach of privacy. I always enjoy these letters. Let's face it, who could resist a smile on receipt of a letter stating boldly "*I have discovered the truth*" – I mean, it's really quite amusing – I guess some people just can't take a joke.

One of the games Gordon plays involves throwing down the gauntlet, challenging his viewer to look deeper and longer into what appear to be simple and in some cases insolent or banal communications. He floats these messages out into the world, much like the mythical castaway and his message in a bottle. Gordon's messages employ the same brevity; but if one reads between the lines, it quickly becomes clear there is something less straightforward going on. This attitude displays a certain knowledge of what lies between the cracks in the art world and exploits any relevant opportunities. One tiny crack is all that is needed, an entry, to enable one to prise something apart. Insider dealing, if you like.

Looking at his work you sense a kind of joy, a celebration of the complex lines of communication which condition the social intercourse at life's foundation. As a viewer you may be reluctant to pursue a particular line of inquiry for fear of finding out something you might not want to know. But Gordon is not cynical, just *playful*.

*"Much art is now transported by the artist, or in the artist himself... or by existing information networks such as mail, books, telex, video, radio, etc. The artist is travelling a lot more, not to sightsee, but to get his work out."* Lucy Lippard, *Six Years*, 1973

The first of Gordon's works to indicate this knowledge were his wall based text works, which preceded the phone calls and letters, and have punctuated his work since 1988.

Most of these works have in some way or another included an acknowledgement of site specificity. Many have been in the public arena. The texts began life as a part of drawings Gordon would make to sort out ideas for his early collaborative performance work with Craig Richardson while he was still a student at Glasgow School of Art. These works were fairly generic installation/performances which took the pair to festivals around the U.K. and Europe : sorting old clothes, folding them, peeling eggs, walking very slowly for hours surrounded by piles of old newspapers, possibly an invalid car, or some old hospital paraphernalia. When that work ceased, the text which had been used in the working drawings came to the fore, but other residues also remained. Notions of *perception*, and its relationship to *memory*, and the *construction* of memory, continue to be preoccupations and are evident in a current work, *24 Hour Psycho*.

One of the earliest text works Gordon made was for a small exhibition in Reading, held at a studio complex of a couple of friends. The building in which the studios were located had originally been an army barracks and the M.O.D. still owned the land to the rear of the building. While the second and third floors of the building housed the artists studios, the ground floor which had previously been the barracks prison was now a halfway house for homeless people. On the perimeter wall which separated the yard outside the shelter from the M.O.D. property Gordon applied his text, a quote from Naum Gabo, which read, "A BUILDING IS MORE THAN a dwelling place... AND HAS INFLUENCE on the emotions OF HUMAN BEINGS." The work remains there today so I guess the residents must have liked it.

In 1989 Gordon was invited to participate in the second



Performance in collaboration with Craig Richardson



Untitled



Forget Facts and Figures

Windfall project which was housed in a disused electricity generating plant in Bremen, Germany. He worked there for a month researching and painting two large text works, entitled, *"Forget Facts and Figures"*. One text was painted directly on to the windows which span one side of the building and read simply, *Vergessen* (this single word describing the process of forgetting). The other was applied to the wall of a small bunker-like room and read *1946 – jetztzeit* (this translates with difficulty but means approximately *still time*, or *now time*). Gordon then sealed off the bunker and made holes in one of its walls so that only a fragmented view could be seen. Implicit in the work was a strong metaphorical association with the Berlin Wall which at that time was on the verge of demolition. The bleak post-industrial setting of the piece focussed on an obsession with German history and its relationship to contemporary events. The title, *"Forget Facts and Figures"* seems to be imploring the viewer to dig a little deeper into history, reflecting on parallel but often unwritten events.

*"Rotting from the inside out"* was the title of a work made for the Smith Biennial in Stirling later that year. The Smith Museum is a piece of rather grandiose 19th century architecture which was more used to the annual watercolour club than difficult and aggressive work by young artists. The barely readable text *"Rotting from the inside out"* was flanked on the perpendicular walls by two elements facing each other across the gallery. On the left was a large photograph, behind glass, which showed an anonymous looking apartment block with a dotted trajectory leading from one window to the ground. On the other wall a hole of identical size to the photograph had been cut and covered with glass, leaving the bare brickwork and supports of the gallery visible. His removal of a section of

the museum wall literally strips away the surface veneer of the institution – an idea which has become a popular part of new museology. Into the naked brickwork, holes had been drilled which resembled either the after effects of a search for dry rot or maybe even the bullet holes from a Hollywood gangster shootout; deconstruction with a sense of humour.

Simultaneously he is proposing to the viewer a sepia toned reconstruction of a murder mystery. The large photograph was in fact culled from a french Police manual and showed the path of a body ejected from an upper story of the apartment block. Here Gordon offers a number of divergent, potentially contradictory, narratives. He leads the viewer only so far down a certain path and then challenges the foundation of the whole scenario. As ever, the responsibility rests with his audience for the final cut.

More recently Gordon completed a work for the Natural History Museum in Bergen, Norway. This is a municipal Museum, largely unchanged and unchallenged over the past hundred years. It is a macabre Noahs Ark; a poorly maintained selection of odds and ends from the natural world. Its specimens are displayed with the intention of recreating their last dynamic action, in mid flight, or at the kill. No amount of foliage and backdrop can suspend disbelief in what lies before the audience – a depressing display of turn of the century taxidermy. Gordon's text is applied on a wall where dozens of reindeer skulls had been removed to make room. It reads, *Stille I Museet*. This translates as *Silence in the Museum*. The only group the museum is still capable of exciting are kindergarten kids, and they run riot through the echoing hallways. This dynamism, combined with the grotesque freeze frame of the stuffed animals makes the contradictory idea of the *Still-*

ness, or *standstill* in the Museum all the more ironic.

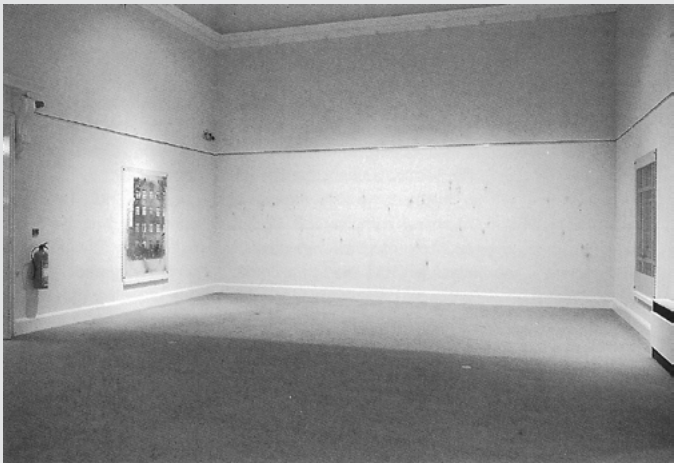
In 1990 Gordon participated in a public art project, "Sites/ Positions" with a simple text entitled, "*Proof*". For the site of his work Gordon selected the derelict Glasgow Green railway station. All that now remains of the building is its elaborately decorated facade and one supporting wall. On the reverse of these Gordon painted the word, *mute*, and the dates 1787, 1812, 1820, 1916, 1922 and 1932 – this can only be seen when travelling into the city from the East End.

Glasgow Green in many ways has a similar history to a cultural institution like Speakers' Corner in London where public meetings were held and important issues of the day dissected and debated. The dates listed in this work represent important moments in the history of this place, from the industrial revolution to the freedom of speech acts in the thirties. As this place is no longer a forum for debate, the work which remains generates a feeling of quiet melancholy, a kind of resignation.

A year or so later Gordon presented his postgraduate show at the Slade. With a display of his sometimes irreverent self confidence, one piece of his show presents the artist in collaboration with Marino Marini and Andre Minaux. In an effort to secure a reasonable exhibition space in the cramped University College, Gordon unearthed a store room which happened to contain a small wall drawing by each of the artists. These had remained in place but had been generally ignored and forgotten as successive redecoration occurred. Gordon's 'collaboration' was to refurbish this room, stripping back, repainting, cleaning the red carpet, and reverently placing a glass panel over what were actually very insignificant doodles. Most art colleges have some scribble or other *bequeathed* by a prominent member of its alumni, but usually they stay in their right-

ful place – hidden behind a board or are eventually painted over by an unsuspecting student. Outside the room in a dead-pan style he painted an announcement of the show, *Douglas Gordon – Marino Marini – Andre Minaux*. This ironic self mythologising is typical of the humour in much of Gordons *oeuvre*. The funniest part was how ridiculous the little drawings he chose to associate himself with really were, contrasted with the pristine and immaculate re-furbishment.

In the same show Gordon produced what must be one of his most complex text works, though employing his usual economy of syntax. *Meaning and Location* shows his ability to plant a small seed in a fertile context. The grand Dome is probably the most recognisable feature of University College, London, home of the Slade School of Fine Art, and it contains a library of modern philosophy. University College was one of the first secular educational establishments, and one of the first to admit women and non-christians. Its beautifully furnished library contains only moral philosophy, excluding the theological arts. Gordon selected a controversial Biblical passage and placed the two interpretations which form the dialectic, around the aperture from which the dome rises. The quotation is attributed to Jesus, on the cross, spoken to one of the thieves at his side. It deals with the theme of the Ascension and continues to provoke intense debate within the confines of theological linguistics and philosophy. The two versions of the quotation are; “*truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise*” and “*truly I say to you today, you will be with me in paradise*”. The crucial placement of the comma alters the interpretation of this pivotal axis of Christianity and is consequently a seriously debated topic. Gordon sets up a face to face with the two opposing ideologies and while the formal beauty of the



Rotting from the Inside Out



Proof

work is sympathetic with the architectural context, it is anti-theoretical in content. One would gaze upwards into the beautiful, slightly grandiose interior, looking through the text which in fact challenges the orthodoxy of the library and its premise.

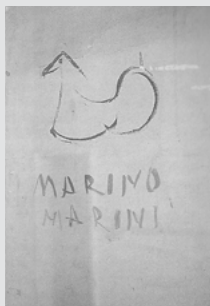
Gordon's collaborations with other trusted artists have produced some of his most interesting contextual work. *Self Conscious State* was the title of an exhibition at Glasgow's Third Eye Centre and was the first of two shows in which Gordon has collaborated with Christine Borland, Craig Richardson, Roderick Buchanan and Kevin Henderson. The five worked together as a group, discussing individual works and the interaction of the various elements in the show. Gordon's piece was one which has become an ongoing project.

On a wall 70 feet by 15 feet he simply listed everyone he could ever remember having met. A list of names exceeding 1500 in number. The process employed in this work is the act of remembering itself. Gordon does not rush home to write down a new name everytime he meets someone, you won't get on his list that way. The project is very much about remembering individuals who punctuate his memory banks, for whatever reasons. The process has been repeated since, but it's only when actually preparing the work that he sits down and writes the list. This work raises questions of access, privilege, knowledge and acceptance. If you like, a simple case of Inclusion/Exclusion. I recall at the opening of *Self Conscious State* watching people nervously scanning up and down these lists, unable to relax and get drunk until they had seen for themselves their name among all the others, cut perfectly by a computer from sheets of matt black vinyl. (*I saw mine early, so I could relax*). Formally the work was awesome, a cross between the controversial Vietnam War Memorial in Washington

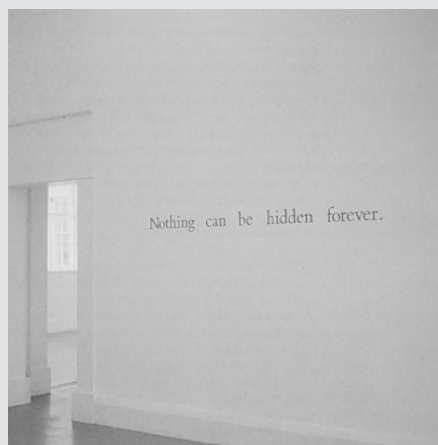
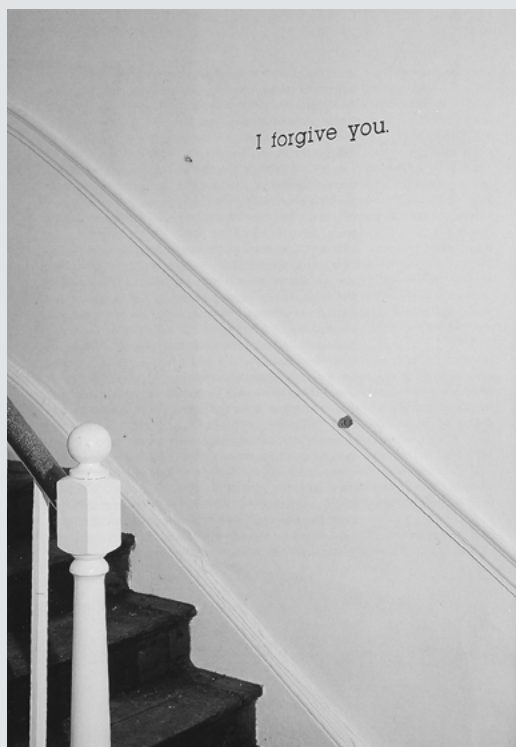
D.C. and a kind of namecheck graffiti gone mad.

When this same group collaborated again recently in the exhibition, *Guilt by Association* at the Irish Museum Of Modern Art, Gordon returned to this theme but with a slightly different twist. This time he displayed headings on the Museum walls, like a proposal for an impossible work. These categories were the flipside of the remembered list of names. Included in these potential lists were, *Those I Do Not Know*, *Those I Cannot Know*, *Those I Would Like To Know*, *Those I Have Forgotten But Will Remember* etc. Maybe they will appear at some point in the future, or could they just be another of Douglas Gordons playful red herrings, sent to try us?

Gordon worked with Roderick Buchanan again for the exhibition, *London Road, Glasgow* at the Orpheus Gallery in Belfast. The piece was one gigantic photographic image, made on canvas by a scannachrome process, which filled the whole back wall of the gallery. The image is of the side of a building, obviously in poor repair, on which the word ARMY was underlined in white on a red background, carefully painted though slightly old-fashioned looking. Above the word ARMY it is possible to see the bottom of another word, though so little that it is unreadable. This fragmented image remains on what was at one time a Salvation Army hostel, the painted gable was advertising its 50 beds. Years after the hostel closed, the gable was re-painted, but by then a billboard had been affixed to the wall. It was only when that billboard was removed that the bizarre image was revealed. The title, *London Road, Glasgow* refers simply to the location of the building, but begins to work on a different level in the politicised atmosphere in Belfast. The Orpheus gallery was at that time a converted shop with a massive plate glass window opening on to the street. When



above:  
Renovation  
right:  
List of Names



above:  
Letter No. 8  
left:  
Letter No. 7

the canvas was stretched, covering the back wall it was difficult for the viewer to gauge whether they were looking in to the space or in fact out through the back of the gallery to a wall at the rear. A strange visual conundrum for the shopper going about their business; an image of ARMY without *salvation*.

A couple of years ago Gordon made a small work for a friend's house in Glasgow which would inform a later collaborative work with Simon Patterson for Frieze Magazine, and later at Milch Gallery. *The Living Room* was organised by Gianni Piacentini who decided to ask various artist friends to make a small work in the living room of his west-end flat. This project involved dozens of artists exhibiting in weekly groups over a couple of months. Gordon exhibited a wall full of re-classified domestic paint samples changing a title like Watersilk to Nihilism, or Dusky Apricot to Hallucinogen. The sickly domesticity evoked by a title like Dusky Apricot certainly appears all the more nauseating when you imagine painting the bedroom a nice shade of Hallucinogen.

When he got together with Simon Patterson they compiled *Colours for Identification, Coding and Special Purposes*. This series of over a hundred British Standard colours was made available through a project in the pages of Frieze Magazine, each colour renamed and re-classified based on criteria known only to the artists. Here you can choose from 1lt., 2.5lt. or 5lt. of *Rosa Luxemburg*, *Cassius Clay* or indeed *Richard the Third*. At £80 a litre, a little expensive for domestic use perhaps, but imagine relaxing in a room painted a subtle shade of *William Burroughs* or *Isabella Rossellini*, and suddenly the price begins to sound like a real bargain.

For the Milch show they contrived sculptural groupings of various sized paint tins, under the heading "*Framework for*

*Colour Co-ordinating for Building Purposes*". The tins were grouped together in families of colour, their British Standard numbers then substituted for members of the Royal House of Windsor, The Royal Scottish House, the Ptolomys, The Kennedys and so on. These dynasties were represented in various formal arrangements; some considerably neater than others. I'm not sure if it was intended to imply something about the particularly privileged groups selected, but the Scottish House was in complete disarray while the Royal House of Windsor looked very precarious; stacked high, it resembled a supermarket display of baked beans.

In 1991 Gordon was part of a group of young artists exhibiting at the Serpentine Gallery. Being known for his site specific public works, the selectors hoped he would use the opportunity in an interesting and tangential kind of way. So Gordon went about marking certain trees surrounding the Serpentine, with personal dedications. In contrast to the Empire monuments he came across in Hyde Park, he decided he would use the trees to construct his own monuments to his own heroes; an honest and subjective celebration of those public figures important to one individual. These were simple bands of white canvas sewn around each tree, with a surname displayed in a simple typeface – DUCHAMP, DALGLIESH, and CONNERY, were all fairly straightforward, but others generated some serious misunderstanding. The surname STEIN was assumed by some to indicate a veneration of that icon of 20th century art Gertrude Stein, when the truth of the matter was that it was really a homage to Jock Stein, the best manager the Scottish Football Team ever had. Other viewers reckoned COLTRANE must be a nod in the direction of that heaviest of Scots funny men Robbie, when in fact Gordon was eulogising his jazz hero John.

Indoors, Gordon was up to more mischief. He had occupied the cupola of the building, painting it with a large splash of sky blue. This aped the metaphysical space of the Byzantine Trompe l'oeil ceiling painting, referencing both the sky blue of the immortal heavens and the current resurgence of process based abstract painting (examples of which were present in the show). Over this disruption of the spaces perfect symmetry he placed, in black letters four feet high, the text, *WE ARE EVIL*. The title of the piece was, *Above All Else. We are Evil* had been culled from a popular chant sung by the supporters of Millwall Football Club. Its recontextualisation from the terraces to the gallery created an uneasy tension with some of the other more prosaic works in the show. Once installed, however, the text looked more like it had been taken from Nietzsche than the East London terraces.

*Radical artists are now faced with a choice – despair, or the last exit: painting. The discursive nature of painting is persuasively useful, due to its characteristic of being a never ending web of representations. It does often share the irony implicit in any conscious endeavour these days, but can transcend it, to represent it.*  
Thomas Lawson, *Last Exit Painting* 1981

The other aspect of Douglas Gordon's art practice are the paintings he has been producing, in series, over the last two years. While on one level the physical act of making studio paintings may seem at odds with the dialectic of his other work, Gordon argues that although these paintings are seldom site-specific they are always related to a context. The history of painting and art is of course the context for these works and within that sphere Gordon adopts a strategy similar to his more ephemeral works.

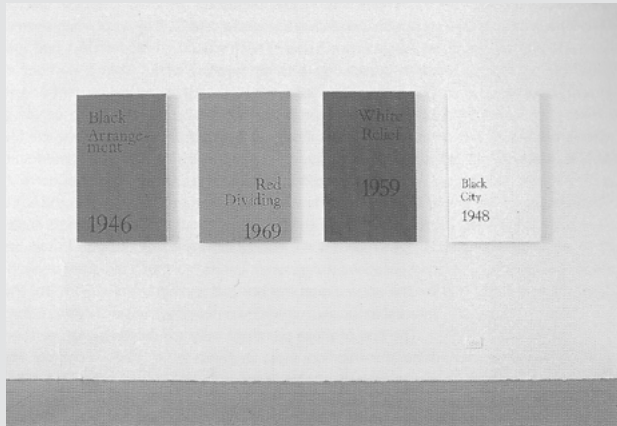
The paintings began life during the initial stages of discussion with Declan McGonagle for the *Guilt by Association* show in at I.M.M.A. in Dublin. The Museum of Modern Art had just opened and had a remit to show works from a number of prominent collections owned by the Irish Government or lent by European collectors. Gordon was proposing to curate a number of works from these collections to show alongside the works of Borland, Buchanan, Richardson and Henderson. These works would compliment, contradict and contrast with the rest of the show, contextualising the work within the complex backdrop of the Museum; curating a show within a show. Gordon received the lists of all the works but due to various complications things never got any further than that,<sup>1</sup> his work for the show eventually going in a different direction. But the interest in the lists remained, informing the paintings to follow.

The first of these paintings were exhibited during the third *Windfall* exhibition, held in Glasgow in 1991. Formally the works have flat colour backgrounds (usually a sombre tone) with the title and date of another artwork painted in plain lettering. They are titled by a serial number and the name of the artist who made the original work. For example;

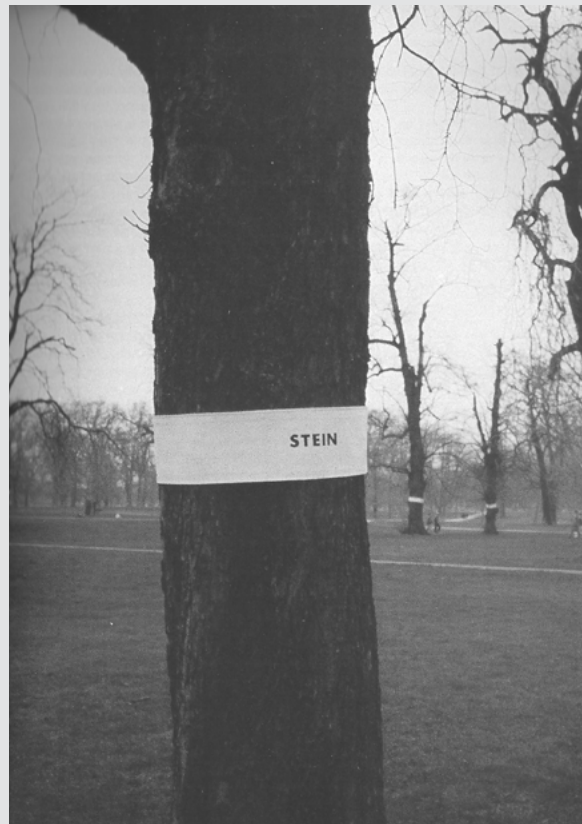
Painting no. 132 :  
Robert Morris/Sonnabend (series)  
One Shot Enamel, 199 – L,  
on acrylic B.S. 20 C 37, on canvas

This is a painting, 1m x 1.66m, with a blue grey background and a text which reads; *Slow Motion 1969*.

In keeping with aspects of his other strategies, these works key into questions of access and knowledge. Gordons interest here is the line which separates his intentions with the perception of the viewer. And in a stance antithetical to the canons of



above:  
Installation view, Jack Tilton Gallery, New York  
right:  
New Maps



high modernism these paintings are entirely *somewhere else*. They eschew the notion of the painting achieving a self referential status, of it referring to nothing further than the parameters of the canvas. Instead they refer to another artwork, possibly made 20 years previously. But in many ways they keep the circle closed. Gordon selects his titles carefully, always establishing a number of possible entries into the work, even if it is only on the level of a beautiful and poetic phrase. Most of the works he chooses to use as subject matter have a sympathetic bearing on his own practice. He plays with the viewers recognition and expectation. Citing a painting which utilises the title of a Baldessari book, *Brutus Killed Caesar*, 1976 as an example he says, "(the viewer) thinks, well, yes, Brutus did kill Caesar. But in 1976? And isn't this the title of an artwork by someone else, somewhere else?" On occasion Gordon has allowed a particular site to inform and activate the paintings. In a 1991 show at Jack Tilton in New York, he did a little research and found out the gallery had been the old Betty Parsons space. Consequently Gordon made paintings which were based on the titles of paintings that had hung on the walls of the self same gallery up to fifty years previously by the likes of Reinhardt, Rothko, Kelly et al. Gordon's paintings read, *Black Arrangement* – 1946, *Red Dividing* -1969, *Yellow Whites* – 1963, *White Relief* – 1959, *Red Whites* – 1963, *Red Front* – 1946, *Korea Goes to War* – 1959 and *Black City* 1948. At the opening, the older visitors recognised these titles from the original works; a strange relationship brought about by a shift in time at a specific location. Some reminisced about the good old days of New York in the 50s while the younger generation discussed the paintings as conceptual works engaged in some contemporary debate surrounding ethnicity and multicultural-

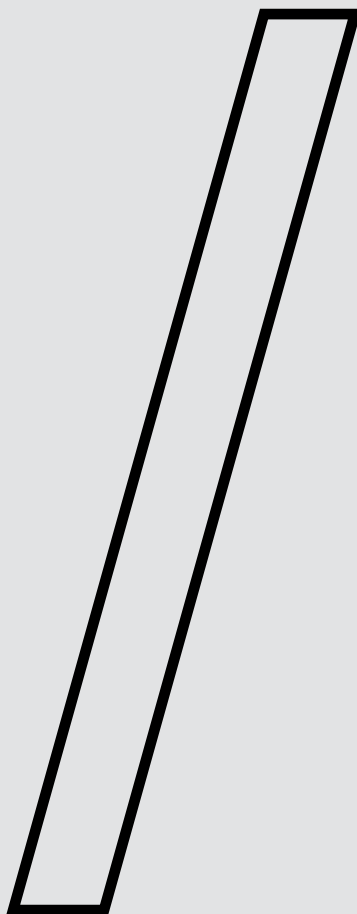
ism. As far as Gordon is concerned, these readings reflect diverse points of entry into the works and as such are equal and correct. The paintings continue.

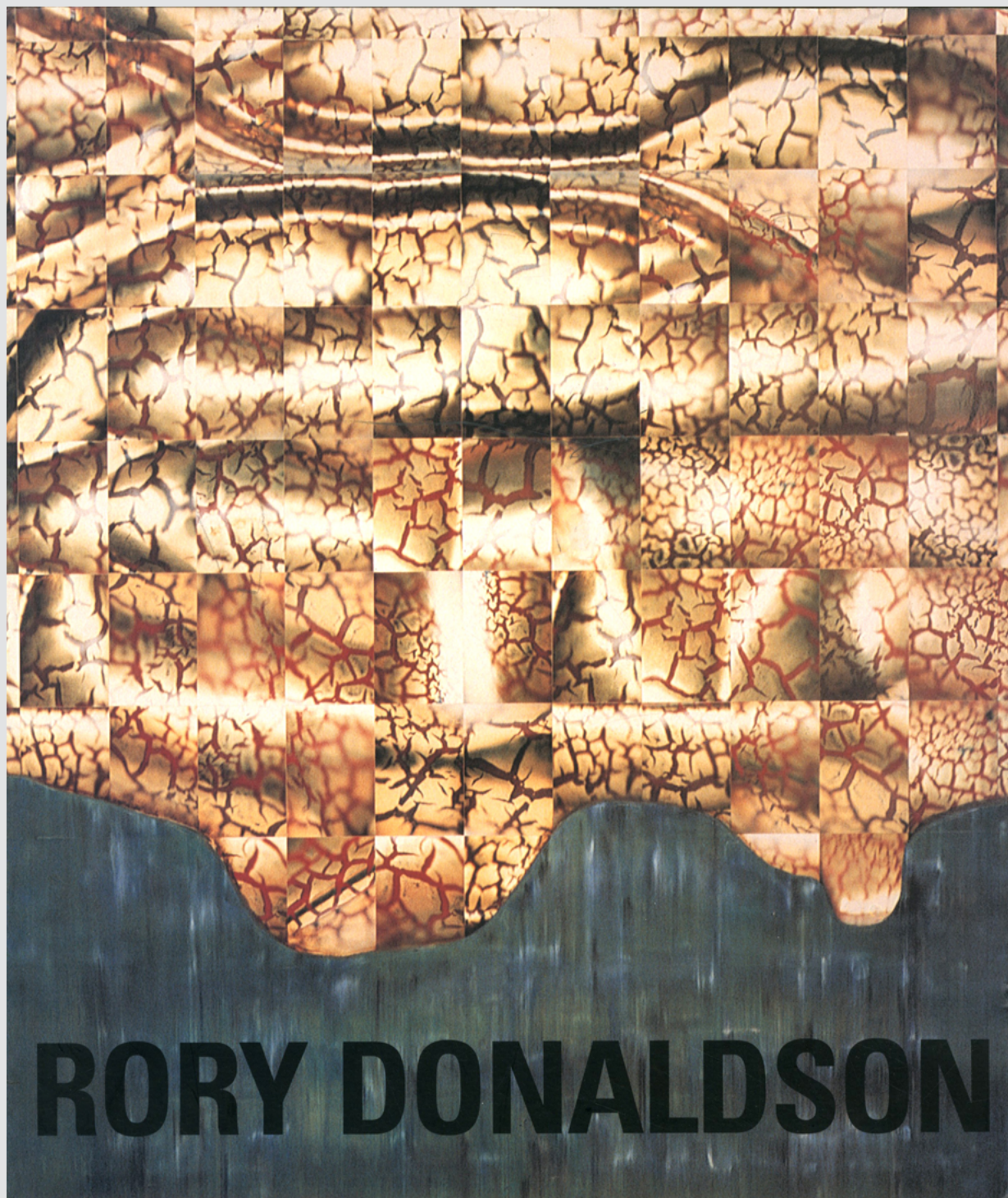
In an art magazine advertisement for a current work, *24 Hour Psycho*, Douglas Gordon is photographed standing on the central reservation of a deserted motorway. He holds up a handwritten sign saying simply – *psycho*. As there are no cars around, it is unclear whether he is trying to hitch a lift to a place called psycho, or if he is labelling himself with the sign, or indeed if he is signposting a possible destination for the motorists. It is typical of his work that we, the audience, must decide for ourselves whether or not to stop the car and give him a lift.

**Ross Sinclair. March 1993**

*Quotations from interview with Thomas Lawson in Frieze Magazine issue 9 and from conversations with the artist.*

<sup>1</sup>One of the works eventually completed for the Dublin show did arise from a list Gordon had requested but not the list of the collections. This was a list of the keys to the Museum. He obtained a full set of keys which corresponded with the path of entry from the gate-house into the particular wing where the exhibition was located. The keys were available as an edition with a set of blanks included.





## MAKES NO SENSE AT ALL

*I have never claimed to have anything new to say; I am not trying to launch novelties on the culture market. One tiny adjustment in what is essential has much greater import than a hundred incidental improvements. The only truly new thing here is the direction of the stream carrying commonplaces along.*

*Raoul Vaneigem, The Revolution of Everyday Life, (Introduction)*

Okay, So this crocodile goes into a bar, it steps up to get a drink. The barkeeper comes over to it and says, "hey!, why the long face?".  
Think about it.

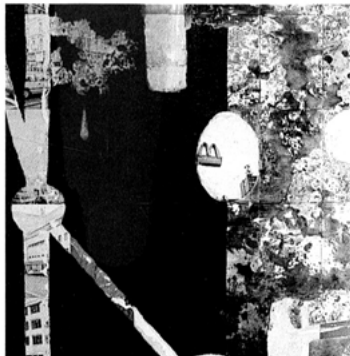
That's the bare bones of a joke I overheard in a bar recently, and believe me I've spared you the rest because it's nothing but a rambling shaggy dog story. But you know what, there's something about that joke that gets me. I would be the first to admit that I'm really not too well up on the semiotic deconstruction of jokes, but I guess this one relies on the pun of 'long face' metaphorically signifying a certain melancholy with the face that the crocodile does actually have a long face. Well, there must be more to it than that but I for one don't know how to unravel it. It could be the presence of a slightly surreal element that can't be explained. It confounds your expectations. Whatever, it's just not what you expect from a proper joke, is it? It's too jarring, too realistic, too sad. A heavy stench of pathos hangs like a cloud over it. Imagine the idea that the subject of the joke is always going to be a loser just of its physiognomy, just because of the way it looks at first glance, on the surface. Anyway, there was something about this joke that reminded me of a work by Rory Donaldson. Or hell, maybe it was just because there's a crocodile in that too. The work is called, 'Pretend Family' and contained within it are four 'family snap' size colour photos. These have been almost totally obliterated by a white movie thriller, there's almost nothing left. But somehow there's always just enough left. In this case there's enough left so that you can make out that Donaldson's pretend family consists of a crocodile, a porno mag centerfold(male), some kind of weird bird and a glowing religious Icon. Funny kind of family, you might think, or you might not. Donaldson uses this ridiculous mix of incongruous bedfellows to open a wry commentary on the fanatical resurgence (and hypocritical promotion) of 'Family Values' in our increasingly conservative (and not in fact roaring - that, in case you hadn't noticed, was last century) nineties.

He's simply proposing we look over the edge of the gaping chasm between official newspeak parlance of 'nuclear families' and 'back to basics' and '2.4 children' and 'burning hearths' and 'warming slippers' and hey ! - **wake up and smell the coffee.** Back in the real world, everybody's gotta live and this means a myriad diversity of combination couples, gay, straight, single, double, triple even; i.e. Real Life - Lived.

In 'Pretend Family', these 'family' values are firmly put in their place. And this place looks like a fictional game show simulacrum, banal, fake and horrific. So why not, **Come on Down.** Why not indeed.

Donaldson's work is complicated. It looks like painting but it's actually made out of photographs. At first sight it simply looks decorative, like the attractive panels you might see in a corporate waiting room. But when you move forward to inspect the sumptuous tones and beguiling textures you find that the work contains many subtle little barbs. These tend to get themselves hooked under the skin and nag away, till you pull them out and have a proper examination. A decorative 'camouflage' is often employed in order to inject the work with the required layering of meaning and metaphor.

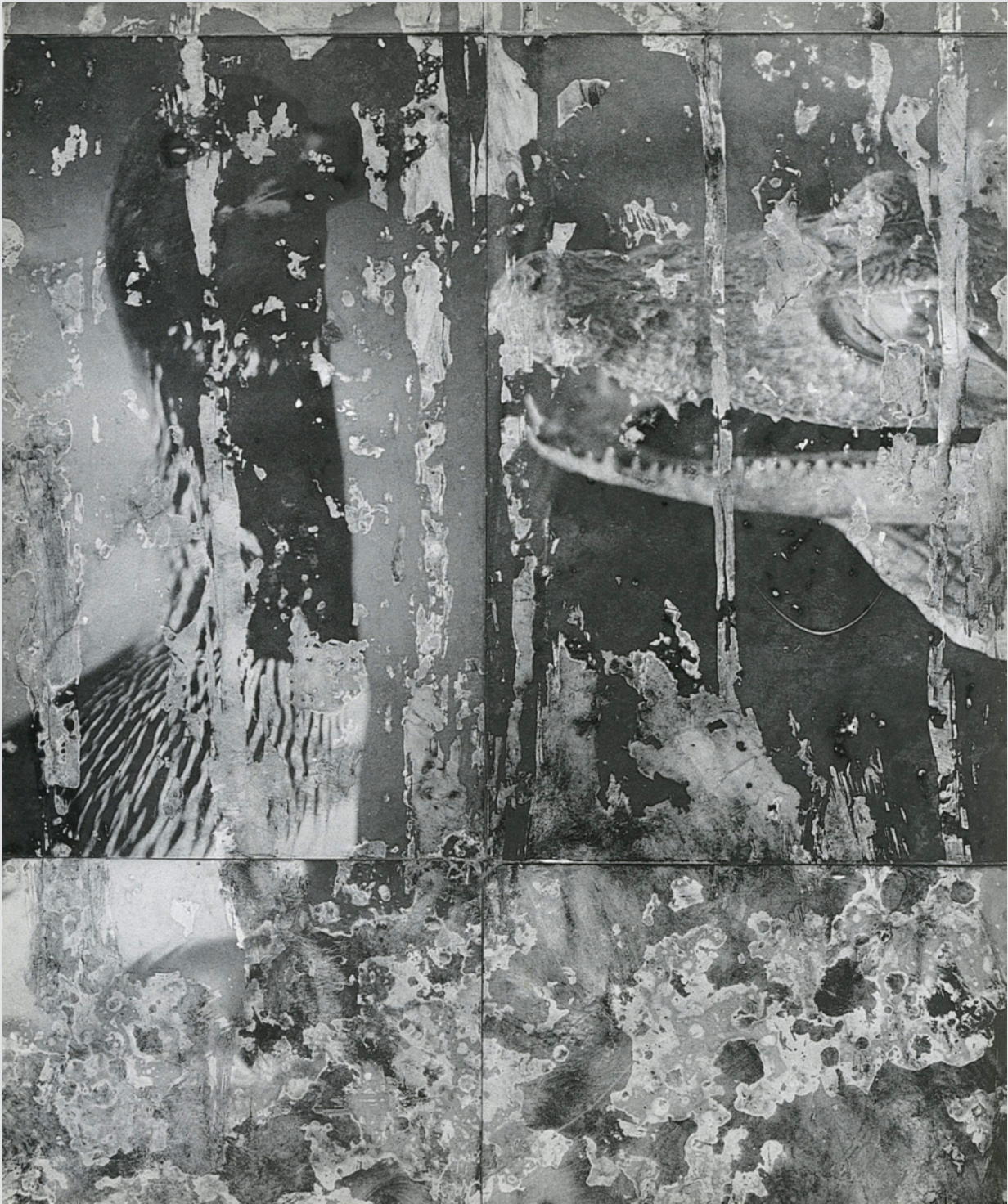
Take for example, 'Olive Branch(Constructed and Reconstructed)'. On first inspection this triptych appears to be a straightforward essay in formal photography. Donaldson uses photographs to construct his works, sometimes thousands of them. They're always developed in high street photo stores, the kind that even five years ago still specialised in 110 'instamatic' films. Donaldson regularly employs a grid constructed of many images of one shot. Within this self imposed foundation he uses these photo fragments to reconstruct whatever the form of whatever idea he is working with. It really doesn't seem so different from using the palette he previously worked with back when he still painted. It would be wrong therefore to instil this process with too many



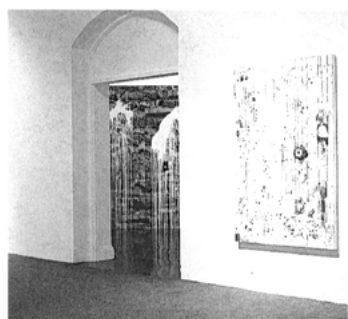
*Communication Cancers  
(Detail) 1994.*



cumbersome post modern photographic theories. It's just another tool, utilised like any other modern technique. Sure it's disjointed and fragmented, but this only serves to affirm the main themes in his practice. The triptych of 'Olive Branch' contains two identical images of a branch from an olive tree constructed on a grid pattern from 105 photographs. Although these two parts contain exactly the same fragments, they are put together so that they appear to be two distinct images. In other words, they contain exactly the same ingredients but on the surface they sure don't look that way. Like two identical jigsaws put together by two different people, but with no pre-determined final image. They are kept apart by a smaller centre part containing 35 images of what resemble berries or olives which might be the fruit of the tree. On one level this is cosy, it all fits together, two olive branches, the fruit in the centre, all nice and simple, wrapped up, formal, beautiful, lush, nothing too taxing there. But the central image does not picture fruit. The images are the head of rivets. The tiny conjunctions which hold the world together, or keep it apart, depending on how you look at it. Re-contextualised from his studio in Glasgow to the walls of the Orchard Gallery in Derry, the piece begins to function in many other ways. The metaphorical reading of the olive branch as a token of peace to the fore. On a recent trip to Donaldson's studio I came across some small pieces stacked in the corner which seemed kind of lost, but required attention. They are made using beautiful little devices used by jewellers to



simultaneously grip and magnify small objects. Instead of holding a ring, or a necklace, these 'helping hands' held one photograph each, gripped tightly in mechanical fingers. One piece in particular caught my attention. I peered through the circular magnifying glass to find that I was gazing into a black hole. The scale was indistinct, I couldn't tell what size this hole was. The image was blurry. It could have been a bullet hole, or maybe I was looking down and it was a mortar crater from a freeze frame T.V. image. Maybe I had it all wrong and it was something far less sinister, a drilled hole perhaps, but why was I being implored to examine this unnatural, man made orifice? A disquieting prospect. Maybe if I looked hard enough through this magnifying glass I would see some hard evidence of its creation. A tell tale remnant of its reason for being there. I suddenly imagined that the whole complex background of a conflict could be seen in the manifestations of it's symptoms. If you looked hard enough. Could the world be like that? It must seem like that at first hand contact. That each bullet hole, every piece of shrapnel, every tear shed, in some secret way contains the incomprehensibly complex blueprint for the horrors of a conflict, of loss. Like some perverted holiday rock, wherever you break it open it contains its identity tattooed irreversibly throughout its core. An engaging, if horrifying prospect. This idea is also examined in a work titled, - 'Random' where a wall constructed of 99 photographs appears pitted with fifteen holes ripped from its surface. How do we know though, whether this is in fact the same hole repeated 15 times or whether there were even more to begin with. The image is heavily edited, but reminiscent of one of those kids puzzles where you slide numbers of letters around trying to make a recognisable form. But this isn't a square and there's no missing section to enable you to shuffle it around. It just isn't going to work out. Its been a long time since we could trust the hegemony of meaning attributed to the photographic image. Certainties are dispelled, the goalposts are moved. You have to think on your feet, make your own decisions. The sands are shifting underfoot and they are never going to be still again, so get with the program - work it out for yourself.



*Installation,  
Orchard Gallery,  
1994.*



*White Caught Painting  
(Detail)*

Donaldson's practice often uses the microcosmic to address the wider picture. Particular pieces may appear to allude to specific situations but they function because they address both the 'local' and the 'global' simultaneously. Quite often the original images he works from become obliterated in his reconstruction of the finished piece. Recognisable forms give way to emotive textures, details which form new images and ideas which read only from a distance, but sometimes revert into their original, recognisable focus on a much closer inspection. This creates a dense layering of ambiguous forms and messages, many points of entry and just as many exit points. Donaldson has made two site specific works for the Orchard and Derry. One work is a free standing wall piece, literal and metaphorical. One side of this wall is completely covered by tiny details of the old city walls. These contain images which map the

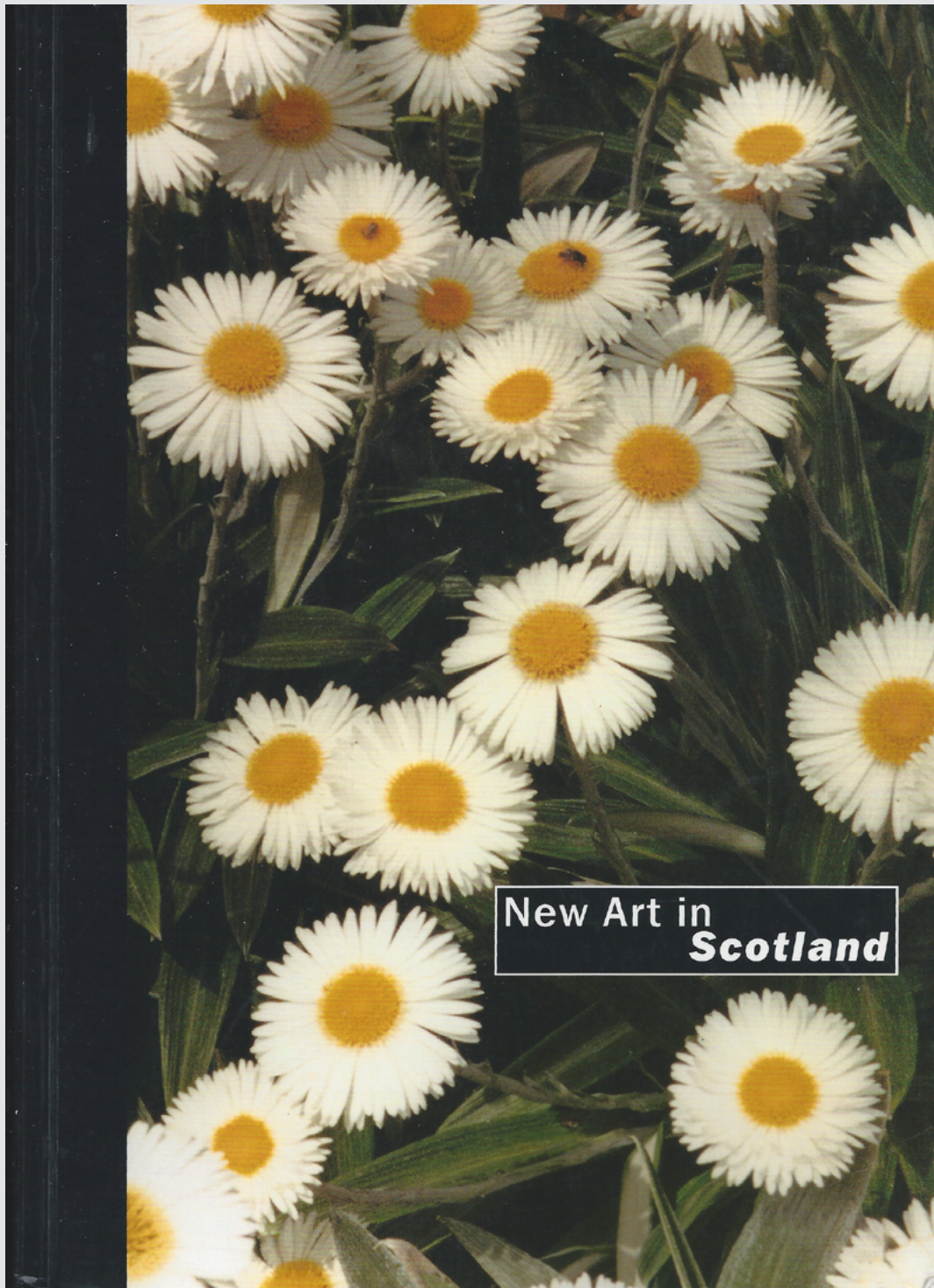
surface of the walls with architectural vigour. Again it's as if evidence of history must be visible in the minutia of this scrutiny, like carbon dating a lived history. The tiniest details become visible, significant, plants and mosses clinging for shelter in the crevices between the stones. Marks scratched on the stones, who knows how long ago. On 'the other side' of Donaldson's wall is a mural size scanachrome photograph image of a micro-fragment of skin from the back of his hand. This image of the living body becomes almost abstract in its re-presentation at hundreds of times its actual size. The image is so big that it is easy to see the pores on the surface of the skin. Here too, then, is evidence that the surface is permeable, not an intransigent barrier, but a changing, evolved form.

The other site specific work seems less optimistic about the future. Entitled, 'Drowning in Petroleum' it consists of another large scanachrome image on canvas. It is an image of a petrol stain, its seductive colours exploding out from its centres like a living organism, growing and multiplying before our eyes. A metaphorical reading of this image is one of satellite topography. Like a tiny section of a forgotten coastline photographed from space. Maybe one where we see the evidence of an arms dump or a body discovered. The kind of images we only see when something untoward has happened, they have become almost sinister. The canvas is presented draped over a wooded box. Possibly memorial, possibly funereal it could be even monumental. Whatever, it evokes a studied melancholy, focussed all the more by it's almost dazzling velveteen beauty.

Today, more than ever, there's a bitter irony in the fact that the end of the cold war, far from heralding a period of calm and consolidation, has in fact sounded the starting pistol for a hundred and one bitter conflicts. Age old religious, political and cultural divides have sprung up after centuries of hibernation. Communism vs. Capitalism seems like last years model. Arid and theoretical. Dry as a bone. A temporary flirtation with the psychological flotsam and jetsam of the industrial revolution. Market forces win out, of course. Ideological battles are now fought on the streets, with automatic weapons, bought from respectable U.N. nation states. Meanwhile, media wars rage all around us, perfecting the reduction of all subjects into meaningless soundbites or just churning out the same old shit for the advertisers. I just can't seem to shake my 'Neighbours' habit though. All my friends were doing it, I thought I could stop anytime etc. etc.

A reflection of this disintegration and fragmentation runs like a main artery through Donaldson's work, fuelling and propelling it forward. The very form he uses to construct his images demands it. While rarely alluding to any specific scenario, the representation of the commonplace and everyday beckons us to look again. A double take where the second glance is always the one that counts.

Ross Sinclair Feb. '94



Ross Sinclair

***Nietzsche, the Beastie Boys  
and Masturbating as an art form***

*"Well you say I'm twentysomething and I should be slacking,  
But I'm working harder than ever and you could call it macking,  
So I'm supposed to sit on my couch watching my t.v.  
I'm listening to wax, I'm not using the CD  
I'm that kid in the corner all fucked up and I wanna so I'm gonna  
Take a piece of the pie why not? I'm not quitting  
Think I'm gonna change up my style just to fit in?  
I keep my underwear up with a piece of elastic  
I use a bullshit mic that's made out of plastic  
I send my rhymes out to all nations  
Like Ma Bell, I've got the Ill Communication."*

'Sure Shot', from *Ill Communication*, Beastie Boys, 1994

*The Sun is Your Enemy, Our Parents had More, Quit Recycling the Past, I am  
Not a Target Market, Quit Your Job, Dead at 30, Buried at 70, It Can't Last,  
Shopping is not Creating.*

chapter headings – *Generation X* by Douglas Coupland, 1991

*Why I am so wise, Why I am so clever, Why I write such good books, Why I  
am a destiny*

chapter headings – *Ecce Homo* by Friedrich Nietzsche, 1888

Art isn't feeling too well at the moment ... One minute, reports are coming in that it's suffering from a mystery bug from which recovery is imminent, next moment it's just damn tired and recovering at home. Hell, I know I would be if I'd taken the beatings art has endured over the last few decades of global communication revolution. But what if it's more serious? I'm starting to hear rumours of a bleaker prognosis. Could it be that what we're witnessing are the first stages of a ghastly illness whose symptoms have just started to show? What if we are already in the terminal phase of a malaise which has no cure? Whatever the source of the problem is, the symptoms are looking damn ugly and that's for sure. What if the cultural position *artist*, defined through centuries of tradition and patronage, has finally been made redundant? What if the slow war of attrition with the industrial revolution of information technology has finally been lost? As other forms of contemporary communication zip up and down the *information stuporhighway* in super stylish stolen cars (*some they stole from us*), artists are stumbling along the slow lane getting picked off one by one. We're an easy target – defenceless, dazzled by the

headlights like dewy eyed fawns. If something isn't done, this process will continue until the cultural significance of artists will disappear completely. We will end up as just another batch of road kill on this meaningless mainline into the future, decorating the highway with our blood, guts and bad attitudes.

One of the symptoms of this malaise is the embarrassing failings of contemporary art when it comes to addressing the *big issues* of modern times. *Sounds familiar; huh?* That toe curling embarrassment when you open the Sunday supplement and see so and so's latest paean to the suffering in Bosnia being lauded by some old tosser who should know better, or that cheesiest chestnut of them all – *The expression of the human condition (what is that anyway?)* This breed called artists appears to be so out of touch, it really is embarrassing – and I'm a card carrying member of the club – shit.

But don't despair, maybe we've just got the wrong angle. Spectacular art merely applauds the spectacle, and you can't compete with MTV, you can't criticise it, you can only embrace it with open arms, pucker up to the screen till you fall asleep from boredom. Only economics can criticise, it's impossible. In a cultural sphere full to bursting with over stimulated images of dizzying speed and prozac self-satisfaction, the visual arts must seek out new strategies to communicate with the global idiots – *or die*. If the artist's voice is to be heard at all in the maelstrom of 21st century culture it will need to find a workable midpoint between vacuous chest beating and the pip-squeak whisper of this nation's cultural apologists.

A big problem for aspiring cultural terrorists is the lack of inspirational role models. What can the kids in school be thinking (if they're even listening to the teachers drone on though art history)? *Yeah – Rembrandt was way cool – what!! – no way dude, Vermeer is dope.* Hello, this is 1994. Things have kinda changed in the last 300 years, you know?, a couple of developments here and there. Yeah? I mean everything was basically the same for 2 million years and then boom, in a few hundred years we make up for all that lost time in the real big bang. But you wouldn't really think so the way some artists go on. *"Sperm tempera on goat skin – oh yeah, spot on mate, just the job for my new show."* All I can say is: *Get a fucking life.* Just imagine prime period Duchamp dropping into today to do some work, now that *would* be something to see. But you can't see it anywhere, and that's the problem.

Well shit, if these role models don't exist for today's situation I'll just have to invent one that would have got me going – *back in the days when I was a teen-age-er, before I had status, and before I had a pager.*

So here's the plan, *listen up.*

What we need first of all is a platform, that's what's lacking for the visual arts today, a decent global infrastructure to communicate through. Then we get some serious ideas going and bang, we're up and running. *Sound good to you so far, yeah?*

Okay, hold on to your hat. What we're going to do is collapse together *The Beastie Boys* and *Friedrich Nietzsche* with an art department thrown in, boy *there's* a starting point. – *What?* you mean that *doesn't* sound so good to you?

Well, let me try to explain.

The Beastie Boys started off about ten years ago as a thrashy punk rock band in New York. They were the first white act to translate hard-core ranting into hip-hop rhyming. They hooked up with Russell Simmons and released *Licensed to Ill* on his then fledgling Def Jam Label. They took off in a big way making their name as spoilt white brats with their retard anthem: (*You got to*) *Fight for your Right (to party)*. But forget all that, that's all bullshit. In '89 they transplanted from New York to Los Angeles and that's when they started getting interesting. There they recorded their hitless second album, *Paul's Boutique*, which was a dense layering of 70's funk samples and break beats way before its time, but it was 1992's *Check your Head* that really sounded like it should have been their first record. A surprise hit with its mix of laid back grooves, weird samples and live playing gave The Beastie Boys a fresh start. Their new record, *Ill Communication*, was released earlier this year to critical and commercial success – but it's not really the music I want to talk about.

What is interesting about The Beastie Boys is the whole set up they've made for themselves. Bedroom self-determination on a global scale. They have their own record label, *Grand Royal*, on which they release their own records as well as other acts like *Luscious Jackson*. They have their own 24 track recording studio, *G Son*, to make the records at their own pace and in their own time (*which, believe me, makes a difference*). They have a *Grand Royal* magazine which they use to spread their word on a whole number of different themes and issues (*although this can be a bit lame brained*). The three members of the band also have their own interests which nevertheless come under the Beastie umbrella. Group member

Michael Diamond aka *Mike D* is the co-owner of the extremely successful *X-Large* clothing empire he set up two years ago. This sends out cooler than cool merchandise with a twisted ironic edge to the kids around the world via its select stores dotted at strategic points globally. At the moment he's helping *Sonic Youth's* Kim Gordon set up her X-Girl range and store. Adam Horovitz aka *Adrock* has a fledgling film career appearing in movies like *Roadside Prophets* and *Lost Angels*, usually acting the bratty adolescent as a foil to older actors like Donald Sutherland. Snowboarding Adam Yauch aka *MCA*, as the oldest (29), is the group's spiritual conscience, recently converting to Buddhism and hanging out with the Dalai Lama. Not bad for three so called slackers not yet thirty. So with this base they make records, videos, design their record sleeves and accompanying advertising campaigns, and consequently have built themselves a formidable international (*and interracial*) platform to discuss their ideas and concerns. They have a finger in every pie of the global media pantry. Add to this their access to the pages of magazines which actually reach millions of people, not to mention transnational TV, and things are *starting to sound a bit better – yeah?* Sound a bit more like a *90s communication set-up?*

Sounding good so far but admittedly some of the B Boys ideas can be a little *thin* at times. They *have* found it difficult to shake off their beer swilling, party monster image of seven years ago. This attitude is now sorted out but maybe we could do with a bit more beef. Enter *Friedrich Nietzsche*.

You might have Nietzsche down as a bit of a fascist but that's all wrong. It's just that he's had a bad press because of evil dudes deliberately misreading his work. In fact I think he and the Beasties would have more than a little in common. Let me give you a quick run down

(*apologies, Fred, very simplified*):

Nietzsche was a big fan of the individual and hated the herd mentality, he was vehemently opposed to Christianity, finding it anonymous, passionless, self-righteous and hypocritical. He often attacked accepted notions of morality arguing that they were based exclusively on a slave morality 2000 years old. This slave morality said that life is basically unhappy and unfulfilling and consequently emphasised the evils of power, wealth and leisure time, all things enjoyed by the master class and unobtainable by slaves. Because things were so awful for the slaves they had to say, *things are shit here but play the game and you'll get your reward*

*in the afterlife.* How this slave morality eventually became the accepted morality is another story, what Nietzsche calls '*the incredible act of revenge*'. He is often accused of believing in nothing and is often described as a nihilist. But Nietzsche, in fact, used nihilism as a diagnostic term to attack modern society, traditional morality and religion, claiming that they, and not his philosophy, were nihilistic. His critique proposed that the modern sense of the self had become so emptied of content, but at the same time so arrogant, that it was as if there were no longer any real values at all. As if society was shouting very loudly but saying nothing at all – sound familiar? So what Nietzsche considered nihilism in contemporary society was not necessarily the explicit denial of values, much more often he describes it as despair and resentment that covers itself with grand illusions (*on which modern life is based; formerly religion, now the spectacle*). Getting rid of the illusions as he proposed does not leave us with nothing of *nihilism* however; instead it removes much of the motivation which makes nihilism unavoidable. This would let us refocus our vision on the world as it is. Not as it now appears through the distorting filters of spectacular life. Nietzsche wrote that it is our instincts that move us, and make us creative, perceptive and wise, but they also make us stupid and '*drag us down with their own weight.*' All in all he was a live for now kinda guy. Nietzsche wanted us to grab the ball and run with it, straight between the posts. He was a proto-anti-slacker. O.K. got all that?

So now you've got to try to imagine Nietzsche as a kind of 4th Beastie Boy. Maybe *M.C. Ubermensch* in shell toe Adidas and X-Large. Another player in the Grand Royal team. Of course he's been away for a hundred years so he's had plenty of time to mull things over and he's decided that philosophy is a bit old hat and he'd rather go for the jugular now. So he's into art as a way of communicating to the masses. Then imagine the new Beastie Boys single. What about doing the video Fred? *Hell yeah.* So Fred thinks about MTV and comes up with a sure shot, knock'em dead – *guaranteed to wake the kids who are all asleep at the wheel on the information stuporhighway idea.* It's like he just got a backstage pass to the spectacle. *Access all areas.* Working from the inside out. But fun filled Fred has been dead for a hundred years so he might be a bit slow coming up with ideas to begin with, so I'll give him some tips about some new art getting made here in Scotland which would be just the job for his new found art supra-infrastructure.

Quite a few artists have been working recently (*amongst other strategies*) in a post-performance non-performance kinda way, to name a few: *Jacqueline Donachie, Jonathan Monk, Roderick Buchanan, David Allen, myself, Douglas Gordon etc.* Broadly speaking, this work examines the position of the individual in relation to the world we live in, particularly with the 21st Century breathing down our necks. Quite Nietzschean in a funny kind of way, these artists are presenting documented evidence (often unedited or unproduced video) of actions performed. Perfect foil for MTV. That is not to say that the works produced are specifically or singularly concerned with the artist as an individual. The artist uses him/her self to advance a particular idea or strategy which has a wider constituency in culture/society. Much of this work documents shared 'secret' histories, unvalued or ignored as a whole, often because they have no marketable value. Some of these artists employ residual skills which have been built up over hundreds of hours over many years. Buchanan uses soccer skills; Allen, Gordon and myself have used music and singing; Donachie uses storytelling, and these skills reflect a very particular cultural upbringing. It's not necessarily the actual skills that are important but the cultural melting pot which produced them. I suppose it's a bit like masturbating as an art form, but why does masturbating always get such a bad press? I'm a big fan myself.

The work these artists are making exists in the grey area between real life as it is lived and the aspirations/parameters offered to us over the mediated airwaves of post-pop global culture. By performing in the public spotlight the kind of activity usually performed in the bedroom in front of the mirror, the private is made garishly public. The sentiments here can be shamelessly amateurish but tap into a rich and energetic tradition of *bedroom culture*. It's true, as a friend once pointed out to me, that the premise of much of this work is situated *within three feet of your bed*. But the modest aspirations for this work are therefore all the easier to fulfil in an honest and straightforward way. The work pulls into focus the duplicitous relationship of the individual with the society/culture which constructed him/her in the first place. *Biting the hand that feeds you and always hurting the one you love*. This is complicated further by the relationship between an indigenous culture and the new global hybrid (*heavily North American influenced*), producing a generation of artists for whom an international hybrid culture is the norm. Of course you can never step outside society. The individual is plugged into it and dependant

on it on so many different levels that the art which explores this relationship inevitably operates on a number of necessarily contradictory levels. I think Freddy N, aka *MC Ubermensch*, would appreciate these contradictions. So I think that should be more than enough ideas for him to ponder as he starts to find his feet in the Grand Royal camp. Now does that sound as if we've finally cracked an A1 strategy with which to stroll on into the next millennium *or what?*... *You're not entirely convinced?* Okay, okay, I know I'm pushing it a bit here, but if you think you've got any better angles let me know; there's a lot to be done out there, we could work together on this and make it a whole lot easier on ourselves. This is just my angle, I'm sure you've got yours.

Well, enough talk of this fictional *ubergroup* that's going to save the world. I'm away to Amsterdam for a year to set up the *Studio Real Life*, just down the road from Rembrandt's old studio. I want to find out if being an artist in 1994 really is different from hanging out in the 17th Century with the likes of Rembrandt and his mates. And I'll tell you something, if I find out things aren't moving with the times, changing for the better, I'm giving up this lark and getting myself a real job once and for all – £3.25 an hour? – *that sound like good money to you?* I thought so.

Ross Sinclair is an artist.



MAIKÄFER FLIEG...

**THIS IS THE SOUND OF THE SUBURBS**

Same old boring Sunday morning -  
old man's outside washing the car...

Ross Sinclair

In a recently aired television documentary about *The Sex Pistols* and *Punk Rock*, a new emphasis was placed on the fact that all the main protagonists in the emergence of this peculiarly British institution did not actually come from the buzzing metropolis itself, as usually thought, but in fact came from various satellite estates and suburbs surrounding the city of London. I happened to watch this documentary in Holland, where the informed audience of cultural practitioners with whom I was watching (*one of whom had actually seen the Pistols live*), were quick to emphasize their belief that the whole phenomenon of Punk Rock was very much part and parcel of their accepted view of the British way of life. The whole phenomena was inexorably intertwined with the political and cultural vacuum of the post empire/post war United Kingdom. Or should I say "*Great Britain*" - with all its guilt and bitterness and *keeping up appearances - Grin and bear it*, with the stiff upper lip of the traditional British psyche. It really couldn't have happened anywhere else. Even in purely cultural terms, punk certainly had a lot of ammunition to throw back in the faces of the "*Establishment*".

Thinking about the rise and fall of Punk Rock in this context reminded me a lot of the British art scene of the intervening years.

**ENGLAND'S DREAMING...**

It was enlightening to hear that this core group of seventies situationists who kick-started a cultural revolution with *No Future* as its slogan, were mostly from fairly drab lower middle class homes. They watched activities in the centre developing from a distance, making interventionist forays into the heart of the city then going home to *re-group* and think up their next outrageous project.

This goes some way to illustrate why the self determinist mantle of Punk Rock was so easily taken up by disaffected youth in the suburbs of other British cities such as Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow. It spread like some contagious disease, a common voice with which to articulate the impotent anger of Britain's youth in the 1970s. Everyone was an outsider.

In October 1977, at almost exactly the same time as kids on estates in Belfast and Birmingham were discovering "*Never Mind The Bollocks - Here's The Sex Pistols*", for the first time, elsewhere in Europe, the *Baader-Meinhof gang/Red Army Faction*, had reached the end of the line. The nihilistic quest of these self-styled urban guerillas was sounding its last death rattle (*literally*) in a prison in Stammheim. The last great flourish of political terrorism in opposition to *late capitalism* was all over.

But back in Britain, the explosion of *cultural* terrorism was just beginning. The Sex Pistols were a potent synthesis of the style and truculence of the *R.A.F.*, the *Situationists* and the all the hits of *Fluxus* and *Dada* rolled into one.

And this is essentially where John Lydon (nee Rotten) has it wrong. He is always quick to tell whatever interviewer is asking that he thinks the real meaning of punk had evaporated by the time it moved out of London, when the kids in the suburbs of provincial British cities started getting into it. - *But in fact that's when punk rock began!*

MAIKÄFER FLIEG...

## BE A PUNK WEAR A UNIFORM...

It is difficult to imagine that a cultural movement with the external energy and international momentum of Punk Rock will come along again on such a scale, but the curious slant of this recent documentary reminded me of the peculiar talent of British youth culture to be at the right place at the right time. To continually be the avant-garde of the international zeitgeist, in the flux of youth culture. To somehow know, intuitively, when the time is right to harness a particular context and reshape it to its own ends. This is what happened to the British art world in the mid eighties.

## JOHNNY ROTTEN VS. DAMIEN HIRST

By the mid eighties in U.K. the time was right for something else to happen. But this time it was to be in art, rather than music. Looking at the rise of young British art over the past decade, the generation of artists represented in this exhibition, there are many parallels with the model of cultural expansionism re-defined by punk rock.

The cultural landscape had been drastically altered, suddenly anything was possible, punk showed you didn't need to wait for your band/shop/haircut to be discovered anymore. If you had the courage of your convictions and were willing to *put your money where your mouth is*, the sky was the limit.

The similarities with the resurgence of young British art are clear; massive surge of energy, self-determination, infectious self confidence, de-centralisation, horizontally reciprocally supportive infrastructure, assimilation and ultimately disillusion. No more heroes, well, maybe. Whereas bored kids in comprehensives in the 70s had *Johnny Rotten*, bored kids in art schools in the 90s have *Damien Hirst*.

## DON'T KNOW WHAT I WANT BUT I KNOW HOW TO GET IT...

If there is one identifiable characteristic in this period of British art since the demise of punk rock, it is the emergence of the artist as *curator*, the artist as *entrepreneur*. Young artists, brimming with the confidence of the *anything is possible eighties*, kick-started their careers with aggressive, artist-initiated exhibitions in warehouses and un-rented office spaces, left over from the eighties building boom. Many of these artists were from provincial cities and towns, maybe coming to London for postgraduate study. Shows like *FREEZE* (1988) and *MODERN MEDICINE* (1990) curated by Damien Hirst, and the whole Goldsmiths phenomenon in general have been well documented. Less well documented is the fact that, suddenly, shows like this were springing up all over the country. And it wasn't a cynical thing - it was pragmatic. If you couldn't get access to, or simply didn't like the contexts that were available to show your work - why not make your own. Why wait until you're 40?

## THE SOUND OF THE SUBURBS

By the late 80s it was clear that you didn't need to wait around anymore for your work to be discovered/validated/confirmed by *some ex-public schoolboy in a sharp suit/jeans'n sneakers*. All you had to do was get together with some friends, find a space, a little money and *hey presto!*, everyone came crawling out of the woodwork to make sure they weren't missing out on anything. Well, almost. Of course it's a hell of a lot of work to organize these kind of shows in non-art spaces, sometimes with no basic facilities. And you do have to be able to persuade people that it's worth the trip. But once the ball is rolling, the mysterious veil of the gallery and the curator quickly evaporated, at least for a while. Within a short period of time these artist-initiated shows

MAIKÄFER FLIEG...

were becoming more representative, more international and simply *better* than a good deal of what was happening in the plodding and predictable Government/arts council funded galleries round the country.

WINDFALL '91 is an example of a successful exhibition from this time, held in an old seamen's mission in Glasgow, featuring 25 artists representing 8 European countries. Self-serving polemic in catalogue essays for shows such as this were part and parcel of contextualising these exhibitions within a self-determined context of *de-mystification*, both for the public and the artists. Who cared if you had to be a little over the top to get your point over? It was clear from the beginning of this *boom* that publicising and documenting events was just as important as making the shows. Sometimes *more* important. If you were finding it difficult to break into the mainstream process of historification - why not just write *yourself* in? why not *demand* a bunch of backstage passes for the party? There was no law against it, and maybe it really wasn't *that* difficult. Artists were supporting each other locally and internationally. It was very exciting and very stimulating. A whole new infrastructure to develop projects, a new attitude and energy to augment and challenge the existing institutions, and some of them sure needed a kick up the arse.

#### I WANNA BE ME

Say you put on your "Ground breaking, zeitgeist-exploding exhibition of next years' dead-cert art stars" (or so you write in the press release), in a redundant fish processing plant in "Glaschester". You can wax lyrical with potential funders till you're blue in the face, about the importance of getting the local community to *expose themselves to art*. In fact, feel free to organise a bit of an education programme and all the rest, but let's be honest - once you've had the cash you could do what you wanted

with it. But if the work was *good* you *could* believe the hype. And it didn't seem too difficult to attract at least a couple of decent curators/gallerists/collectors in with the 'real' punters - *why* the hell not? Everyone's got to eat, you've got to try to make some money somehow.

But perhaps, most important of all, was a feature or review in the art press, preferably FRIEZE MAGAZINE (*well! we paid enough for the bloody advert didn't we - what! - no chance - shit, what about ART MONTHLY then?*). Support from magazines like these and young curators/galleries proved very important in spreading the word about these shows. In the case of WINDFALL '91, they all came, 500 miles from London, buying their own tickets just to see what was happening. It was perhaps an uneasy relationship between certain aspects of the requirements of public funding and wider aspirations of the artists involved. But it was working. There was a good balance to this strategy. Working with a specific context, whether that was a disused warehouse, or a billboard, or whatever. An acknowledgement of the local *and* the international.

Take the example of Glasgow, where more than half the British artists in this show are based, unusual enough for a show reflecting young British art. Glasgow has emerged as the Number two destination in the U.K. for the international art world at this point. Travelling around Europe, people are always asking me, *what has made Glasgow so special?, so vibrant?, so important?, why is everyone talking about this city?* I usually reply that I believe it's really just about a small group of people who happened to go through the same undergraduate department at the same time, which was about *ideas*, not formal disciplines. It was good training but the fact is, for whatever reasons, a disproportionate amount of very good artists have emerged from this group, supporting each other while working very hard. This situation has happened before and it will happen again, *anywhere*, but you couldn't contrive it. Unfortunately this means that these situa-

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tions do not last forever. Maybe that's why all exciting milieus eventually explode, implode or simply fade away as the few key individuals who define them drift away. But advances are made during these boom periods. Galleries are started, magazines festivals are initiated, attitudes are permanently changed.

#### PROBLEMS...

Somewhere, however, over the last few years, something has gone wrong.

The genuine enthusiasm for these artist-run projects has somehow faded and the pre-eminence of the mainstream is once again returning. As the enthusiasm waned the institutional art world played catch-up. The freshness of the artist-run show started to feel a little past its sell-by date, in some ways becoming a victim of its own success. The way to mount your own artist-run show became so well defined that a lot of the spontaneity and excitement was gone. Now it has become the new orthodoxy, the new establishment. If it's important to keep a step or two ahead of the pack, if you want to keep your finger on the pulse, then maybe when the *peleton* catches up, it's time to move on.

I think more than anything everyone is now a little bored with the format. The unpredictable has become just what you expect.

Another worthy show put together by struggling artists - *compassion fatigue* has set in.

Another problem is that artists (*and more significantly traditional art administrators*) up and down the country have seen certain groups, certain strategies, becoming successful and have duplicated the basic infrastructure of these projects but with a cynical approach. What some fail to realise is that success comes from making vital and engaging shows full of *good work*. It's all very well trying to short cut the apprenticeship into the annals of art history but there's no point in having a high profile exhibition if the

work you're showing is a stylistic afterthought. At the beginning of this period there was certainly some honest career building going on, but the significant thing is that the *work came first*.

Many artists from these scenes have made their opening into the art world and have disappeared into it. This is often criticised by other artists who consider themselves to be on *the outside*, but this is really just another form of self-determination. It often is the case that the artists who enjoy success in the mainstream art world are also those who worked hardest in the shared workload of the artist initiative.

#### NO FUN...

What remains from these years is a shift of attitude. A model had been created. Only ten years ago young artists in Britain could only look on the bombast of a second-hand neo-expressionism and wonder where the hell their work about ideas was going to fit in. Now these artists can look around and think, well maybe this isn't an impossible task after all. The concept of the artist-initiated project is once again changing. The apex of this most recent flourishing has come and gone, the most interesting projects happening now are once again much smaller, more modest in ambition, and underground in feel. But art about *ideas* has once again returned to the fore.

And this alone was worth all the trouble.

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**THIS IS THE SOUND OF THE SUBURBS**

Same old boring Sunday morning -  
old man's outside washing the car...

Ross Sinclair

In einer vor kurzem gesendeten Fernsehdokumentation über die Sex Pistols und Punk Rock wurde darauf hingewiesen, daß alle Hauptprotagonisten beim Entstehen dieser seltsamen britischen Institution nicht, wie gemeinhin angenommen, aus der tosenden Metropole selbst, sondern aus verschiedenen Trabantenstädten und Vororten Londons kamen. Ich sah diese Dokumentation in Holland, wo das gut informierte Publikum von Kulturschaffenden, mit dem ich zusammen vor dem Fernseher saß (*einer von ihnen hatte die Pistols sogar live gesehen*), sofort die Meinung verkündete, das ganze Phänomen des Punk Rock entspreche voll und ganz ihrem Bild des britischen *way of life*. Dieses Phänomen war untrennbar verflochten mit dem politischen und kulturellen Vakuum des Vereinigten Königreichs nach dem Untergang des Empires und nach dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs. Oder sollte ich sagen „Großbritannien“ mit all seiner Schuld und Bitterkeit, mit seiner Wahrung des äußeren Scheins - gute Miene zum bösen Spiel - und dem Motto der traditionellen britischen Psyche, Haltung zu bewahren. Dieses Phänomen hätte wirklich nirgendwo anders auftreten können. Auch in rein kultureller Hinsicht hatte Punk sicherlich eine ganze Menge Munition, die er in die Gesichter des „Establishments“ zurückfeuern konnte.

Als ich in diesem Kontext über Aufstieg und Fall des Punk Rock nachdachte, wurde ich stark an die britische Kunstszene der dazwischenliegenden Jahre erinnert.

**ENGLAND TRÄUMT...**

Ich war erfreut zu hören, daß dieser harte Kern von Situationisten der siebziger Jahre, der eine kulturelle Revolution mit dem Slogan *No Future* losgetreten hatte, überwiegend aus ziemlich tristen Elternhäusern der unteren Mittelklasse stammte. Sie beobachteten aus der Entfernung, wie sich die Aktivitäten im Zentrum entwickelten, machten interventionistische Vorstöße ins Herz der Stadt und gingen dann wieder nach Hause, um sich *neu zu gruppieren* und sich ihr nächstes skandalöses Projekt auszudenken.

Damit soll ungefähr illustriert werden, warum der selbstdeterministische Deckmantel des Punk Rock so einfach von der entfremdeten Jugend in den Vororten anderer britischer Städte wie Manchester, Liverpool und Glasgow übernommen wurde. Er breitete sich aus wie eine ansteckende Krankheit, eine gemeinsame Stimme, um die ohnmächtige Wut der britischen Jugend der Siebziger zu artikulieren. Jeder war ein Outsider.

Im Oktober, fast zur gleichen Zeit, als die Kids in den Siedlungen in Belfast und Birmingham „*Never Mind The Bollocks - Here's The Sex Pistols*“ zum ersten Mal hörten, war anderswo die Baader-Meinhof-Gruppe/Rote Armee Fraktion inzwischen am Ende. Die nihilistische Suche dieser selbsternannten Stadtguerillas lag (*buchstäblich*) in den letzten Zügen in einem Gefängnis in Stammheim. Die letzte große Bewegung des politischen Terrorismus im Widerstand gegen den *Spätkapitalismus* gab es nicht mehr.

Aber in Großbritannien hatte die Explosion des *kulturellen* Terrorismus gerade erst begonnen. Die Sex Pistols waren eine durchschlagende Synthese des Stils und der Trotzigkeit der R.A.F., der *Situationisten*, und all der Hits von *Fluxus* und *Dada* in einem. Und genau da irrt sich John Lydon (geborener Rotten). Er sagt jedem Interviewer, seiner Meinung nach habe sich die wahre Bedeutung des Punk in dem Moment in Luft aufgelöst, als er aus London herausgegangen sei und die Kids in den Vororten provin-

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zieller britischer Städte sich einmischten. - *Aber Tatsache ist, daß Punk dann erst angefangen hat!*

#### BE A PUNK WEAR A UNIFORM...

Es ist schwer, sich vorzustellen, daß eine kulturelle Bewegung mit der externalistischen Energie und der internationalen Durchschlagskraft des Punk Rock sich noch einmal in solchem Ausmaß wiederholen könnte, aber die seltsame Tendenz dieser Fernsehdokumentation erinnerte mich an das besondere Talent der britischen Jugendkultur, zur richtigen Zeit am richtigen Ort zu sein. In der Schnellebigkeit der Jugendkultur stets die Avantgarde des internationalen Zeitgeists zu sein; irgendwie intuitiv zu wissen, wann die Zeit gekommen ist, um einen bestimmten Kontext zu nutzen und ihn zu seinen eigenen Zwecken umzugestalten. Und das geschah Mitte der achtziger Jahre auch mit der britischen Kunstszene.

#### JOHNNY ROTTEN GEGEN DAMIEN HIRST

Mitte der achtziger Jahre war im Vereinigten Königreich die Zeit für etwas Neues gekommen. Aber dieses Mal ging es eher um die Kunst als um die Musik.

Betrachtet man den Aufstieg junger britischer Kunst im Laufe der letzten zehn Jahre - die Generation der in dieser Ausstellung vertretenen Künstler - findet man viele Parallelen zum Modell des kulturellen Expansionismus, das durch Punk neu definiert wurde. Die kulturelle Landschaft hatte sich drastisch verändert, plötzlich war alles möglich; Punk hatte gezeigt, daß man nicht mehr darauf warten mußte, mit seiner Band, seinem Laden oder seinem Haarschnitt entdeckt zu werden. Wenn man den Mut besaß, zu seinen

Überzeugungen zu stehen und bereit war, Taten sprechen zu lassen, war der Himmel die Grenze.

Die Ähnlichkeiten mit dem Wiederaufleben junger britischer Kunst sind eindeutig; ein massiver Energieschub, Selbstbestimmung, ansteckendes Selbstvertrauen, Dezentralisierung, eine horizontale Infrastruktur der gegenseitigen Unterstützung, Assimilation und endgültige Desillusionierung. „No more heroes“, vielleicht. Gelangweilte Kids in den Gesamtschulen der Siebziger hatten *Johnny Rotten*, und gelangweilte Kids in den Kunstschulen der Neunziger haben *Damien Hirst*.

#### DON'T KNOW WHAT I WANT BUT I KNOW HOW TO GET IT...

Wenn es in dieser Zeit nach dem Ende des Punk Rock ein erkennbares Merkmal der britischen Kunstszene gibt, dann ist es die Entwicklung vom Künstler als *Kurator*, vom Künstler als *Unternehmer*. Junge Künstler, die vor dem typischen Vertrauen der *Achtziger*, daß *alles möglich* sei, nur so strotzten, starteten ihre Karriere mit aggressiven, von Künstlern organisierten Ausstellungen in Lagerhäusern und Büroräumen, die seit dem Bauboom der frühen Achtziger leerstanden. Viele dieser Künstler stammten aus der Provinz und waren vielleicht wegen eines weiterführenden Studiums nach London gekommen. Ausstellungen wie *FREEZE* (1988) und *MODERN MEDICINE* (1990), kuratiert von Damien Hirst, und das ganze Goldsmiths-Phänomen wurden im allgemeinen ausführlich dokumentiert. Weniger ausführlich dokumentiert ist hingegen die Tatsache, daß plötzlich Ausstellungen wie diese im ganzen Land aus dem Boden schossen. Und das war nichts Zynisches - es war pragmatisch. Wenn man zu den Kontexten, die zur Verfügung standen, um seine Arbeiten zu zeigen, keinen Zugang hatte, oder sie einfach nicht mochte - warum nicht seinen eigenen schaffen? Warum warten, bis man 40 war?

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## THE SOUND OF THE SUBURBS

Ende der Achtziger war es klar, daß du nicht länger darauf warten mußt, bis deine Arbeit von irgendeinem *ehemaligen Schüler einer Privatschule in schickem Anzug/Jeans und Turnschuhen* entdeckt wurde. Man mußte sich nur mit ein paar Freunden zusammentun, einen Raum finden, ein bißchen Geld auftreiben und *Hokuspokus Fidibus* kamen alle aus dem Gebälk gekrochen, um bloß nichts zu verpassen. Nun, ganz so einfach war es nicht. Natürlich war es wahnsinnig viel Arbeit, diese Art von Ausstellungen in kunstfremden Räumen zu organisieren, manchmal ohne die geringste Einrichtung. Und man mußte die Leute davon überzeugen, daß sich die Reise lohnt. Aber wenn die Sache einmal ins Rollen gekommen war, verschwand der mysteriöse Schleier der Galerie und des Kurators schnell, zumindest eine Zeitlang. In kürzester Zeit wurden diese von Künstlern organisierten Ausstellungen repräsentativer, internationaler und einfach *besser* als vieles von dem, was in den schwerfälligen und berechenbaren, von Regierung/Arts Council unterstützten Galerien im Land vor sich ging. WINDFALL '91 zum Beispiel war eine der erfolgreichen Ausstellungen dieser Zeit; in einer alten Seemannsmission in Glasgow wurden die Arbeiten von 25 Künstlern aus acht europäischen Ländern gezeigt. Selbstgefällige Polemik in Katalogessays für solche Ausstellungen war fester Bestandteil von deren Einbindung in einen selbstbestimmten Kontext der *Demystifikation*, für Öffentlichkeit und Künstler. Wen kümmerte es, wenn man ein bißchen übertrieb, um seine Sache durchzusetzen? Seit Beginn dieses Booms war klar, daß es ebenso wichtig war, über Ausstellungen zu informieren und sie zu dokumentieren wie sie durchzuführen. Manchmal sogar *wichtiger*. Wenn es einem schwerfiel, in den Mainstream-Prozess der Historifizierung einzudringen - warum nicht *sich selbst* einschreiben? Warum nicht ein Bündel Backstage-Karten für die Party verlangen? Dagegen gab es kein Gesetz, und vielleicht war es ja gar nicht so schwer. Künstler unterstützten

sich auf lokaler und internationaler Ebene. Es war sehr spannend und anregend. Eine ganz neue Infrastruktur, um Projekte zu entwickeln, eine neue Einstellung und neue Energie, um die bestehenden Institutionen zu erweitern und herauszufordern, denn einige von ihnen konnten einen Tritt in den Hintern gut gebrauchen.

## I WANNA BE ME

Angenommen man veranstaltet seine „*Bahnbrechende, Zeitgeistsprengende Ausstellung mit todsicheren Kunst-Stars der kommenden Jahre*“ (so, oder ähnlich schreibt man es in der Pressemitteilung) in einer stillgelegten Fischfabrik in „*Glaschester*“. Man kann mit potentiellen Geldgebern bis zum Gehtnichtmehr darüber ins Schwärmen geraten, wie wichtig es für die Gemeinde ist, *sich der Kunst zu öffnen*. Soll heißen, man kann ruhig ein kleines Erziehungsprogramm usw. organisieren, aber mal ehrlich - wenn man das Geld einmal in der Tasche hat, kann man damit tun, was man will. Aber wenn die Arbeit *gut* war, konnte man der Hype glauben. Und es schien nicht allzu schwer, zumindest ein paar anständige Kuratoren/Galeristen/Sammler zusammen mit den „wirklichen“ Spekulanten anzuziehen - warum nicht? Jeder muß essen und irgendwie zu Geld kommen.

Aber am wichtigsten war vielleicht ein Feature oder eine Rezension in der Kunstpresse, am besten im FRIEZE MAGAZINE (*wir haben schließlich genug für die Scheiß-Anzeige bezahlt - Was? - Keine Chance - Scheiße, was ist mit ART MONTHLY?*). Die Unterstützung von Magazinen wie diesen und von Kuratoren/Galerien erwies sich als sehr wichtig, um solche Ausstellungen bekanntzumachen. Im Falle von WINDFALL '91, 500 Meilen von London entfernt, kamen sie alle, kauften ihre eigenen Tickets, nur um zu sehen, was da vor sich ging. Einige der mit den Auflagen durch öffentliche Finanzierung verbundenen Aspekte waren vielleicht schwer mit den höheren Zielen einiger der beteiligten Künstler zu verein-

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baren. Aber es funktionierte. Die Bilanz dieser Strategie war ziemlich gut. In einem bestimmten Kontext arbeiten, ob es sich um ein leerstehendes Lager, eine Plakatwand oder sonstwas handelte. Die Einbeziehung des Lokalen *und* des Internationalen.

Nehmen wir zum Beispiel Glasgow, wo mehr als die Hälfte der in dieser Ausstellung vertretenen britischen Künstler leben, ungewöhnlich genug für eine Ausstellung, die junge britische Kunst reflektiert. Glasgow ist zum zweitwichtigsten Bestimmungsort für die internationale Kunstszene im Vereinigten Königreich geworden. Wenn ich durch Europa reise, fragen mich die Leute immer: *Was macht Glasgow so besonders, so lebendig, so wichtig? Warum reden alle über diese Stadt?* Meistens antworte ich, meiner Meinung nach handle es sich im Grunde nur um eine Handvoll Leute, die zufällig zur gleichen Zeit zusammen studiert haben, wobei es um *Ideen* und nicht um formale Disziplinen ging. Es war eine gute Ausbildung, aber Tatsache ist, daß diese unverhältnismäßig hohe Anzahl sehr guter Künstler aus welchem Grund auch immer aus dieser Gruppe von Leuten hervorgegangen ist; sie haben sehr hart gearbeitet und sich gegenseitig unterstützt. Diese Situation hat es vorher gegeben und es wird sie wieder geben, *überall*, aber man kann sie nicht konstruieren. Leider bedeutet das, daß solche Situationen nicht ewig dauern. Vielleicht ist das der Grund, warum jedes aufregende Milieu plötzlich explodiert, implodiert oder einfach verschwindet, wenn sich die wenigen Schlüsselfiguren, durch die es bestimmt ist, zurückziehen. Aber in diesen Zeiten des Booms werden auch Fortschritte gemacht. Galerien werden eröffnet, Festivals von Magazinen organisiert und Einstellungen permanent verändert.

## PROBLEME...

Irgendwo ist in den letzten paar Jahren jedoch etwas falsch gelaufen. Die echte Begeisterung für diese von Künstlern organisierten Projekte ist irgendwie verschwunden, und der Mainstream gewinnt wieder an Bedeutung. Als die Begeisterung nachließ, versuchte die institutionalisierte Kunstwelt aufzuholen. Die von Künstlern organisierten Ausstellungen waren nicht mehr so frisch, schienen ihr Verfallsdatum ein wenig überschritten zu haben und wurden in gewisser Hinsicht Opfer ihres eigenen Erfolgs. Es war inzwischen so klar festgelegt, wie man die eigene, von Künstlern organisierte Ausstellung aufzog, daß viel von der anfänglichen Spontaneität und Aufregung verlorengegangen war. Mittlerweile ist es zur neuen Orthodoxie, zum neuen Establishment geworden. Wenn es wichtig ist, der Masse einen oder zwei Schritte voraus zu sein, wenn man seinen Finger am Puls haben will, ist es vielleicht an der Zeit, etwas anderes zu machen, sobald das Verfolgerfeld aufholt.

Ich glaube vor allem, daß inzwischen fast jeder ein wenig von dieser Machart gelangweilt ist. Das Unerwartete ist genau zu dem geworden, was man erwartet. Noch eine von ausgezehrten Künstlern organisierte Ausstellung - ein *Mitgefühls-Überdruß* hat sich breit gemacht.

Ein weiteres Problem ist, daß Künstler (*und deutlicher noch traditionelle Kunst-Verwalter*) im ganzen Land gesehen haben, daß gewisse Gruppen und gewisse Strategien erfolgreich sind und dann die zugrundeliegende Infrastruktur dieser Projekte übernommen haben, allerdings mit einem zynischen Ansatz. Was einige nicht sehen, ist die Tatsache, daß sich Erfolg durch lebendige und engagierte Ausstellungen mit *guten Arbeiten* einstellt. Es ist gut und schön, wenn man versucht, die Lehrzeit auf dem Weg in die Annalen der Kunstgeschichte abzukürzen, aber es hat wenig Sinn, eine profilierte Ausstellung zu machen, wenn die gezeigten Arbeiten ein stilistischer Nachtrag sind. Zu Beginn dieses Zeitraums haben

bestimmt viele ernsthaft an ihrer Karriere gebastelt, aber worauf es ankommt, ist, daß bei ihnen die *Arbeit an erster Stelle stand*.

#### NO FUN...

Was von diesen Jahren bleibt, ist eine veränderte Einstellung. Ein Modell wurde geschaffen. Noch vor zehn Jahren sahen junge britische Künstler nur den Bombast eines Neo-Expressionismus aus zweiter Hand und fragten sich, wo zum Teufel ihre Arbeiten über *Ideen* wohl hineinpassen könnten. Jetzt können sich diese Künstler umsehen und denken, daß das vielleicht doch keine so unmögliche Aufgabe ist. Das Konzept der von Künstlern organisierten Projekte verändert sich ein weiteres Mal. Der Höhepunkt dieses allerneuesten Aufblühens ist gekommen und gegangen, die interessantesten der gegenwärtigen Projekte sind wieder viel kleiner, viel bescheidener in ihren Ambitionen und mehr von einem Gefühl des Underground bestimmt. Aber Kunst über *Ideen* ist wieder einmal in den Vordergrund getreten.

Und allein dafür hat sich die ganze die Mühe gelohnt.

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## TAK ZNÍ PERIFERIE

Zas to nudný nedělní ráno - fotr venku umejvá auto...

Ross Sinclair

V nedávno odvysílaném novém dokumentu o Sex Pistols a punk rocku autoři zdůraznili především fakt, že žádný z hlavních protagonistů tohoto podivného britského institutu nepochází z rušné metropole, ale z různých satelitních sídlišť a předměstí Londýna. Shodou okolností jsem tento pořad sledoval v Holandsku spolu s odborníky na kulturu (*jeden z nich dokonce viděl Pistols hrát živě*), kteří mě hbitě začali přesvědčovat, že celý fenomén punk rocku je z jejich pohledu součástí britského *způsobu života*. Punk rock byl totiž neúprosně propleten s politickým a kulturním vakuem post-imperiálního a poválečného Spojeného království - či měl bych spíše říci „*Velké Británie*“ - se všemi jeho pocity viny a hořkosti, s jeho motem „*Drž hubu a plav*“ a strnulostí tradiční Britské duše. Jinde by k ničemu takovému nedošlo. Řečeno čistě kulturologicky: punk měl jistě dostatek munice, kterou házel do tváře „*establishmentu*“.

Vzestup a pád punk rocku mi v tomto kontextu velmi připomíná britskou uměleckou scénu let následujících.

## ANGLICKÉ SNY...

Z velmi poučného pořadu jsem se dověděl, že jádro situacionistů 70. let, kteří svým sloganem „*No Future*“ odstartovali kulturní revoluci, pocházeli většinou z celkem průměrných rodin nižší střední třídy. Vývoj v centru pozorovali z povzdálí, do srdce velkoměsta jezdili jen řádit a pak se odebírali domů, aby se znovu *seskupili* a vymysleli nový šílený projekt. To do značné míry vysvětluje, proč

byl tento plášť sebeurčení punk rocku tak rychle okopírován nezúčastněnou mládeží na předměstích jiných britských měst jako Manchester, Liverpool nebo Glasgow. Rozšířil se jako nějaká nakažlivá choroba, byl to společný hlas, jímž britská mládež v 70. letech artikulovala svůj bezmocný hněv. Všichni byli tehdy outsiděři.

V říjnu 1977, téměř ve stejnou dobu, kdy děti ze sídlišť v Belfastu a Birminghamu volaly „*Vykašlete se na pitomosti - jsou tady Sex Pistols*“, vrcholily jinde v Evropě události kolem gangu *Baadera a Meinhofové* a *Frakce Rudé armády (RAF)*. Nihilistický boj těchto stylizovaných městských bojůvek vydával (*doslova*) poslední smrtelné zvuky ve věznici ve Stammheimu. Poslední větší vzestup politického terorismu, který byl v opozici k *pozdnímu kapitalismu*, tak skončil.

V Británii však nálož kulturní revoluce teprve doutnala. Sex Pistols byli mocnou syntézou stylu a brutálnosti *RAF*, *situacionistů* a všech hitů *Fluxu* a *Dada*.

John Lydon (zvaný Rotten) se však ve svém výkladu historie zásadně mylí. Každému novináři totiž vykládá, že svůj skutečný význam punk ztratil, když se rozlil z Londýna na venkov, když se do něj pustila děcka z periferií provinčních britských měst. *V této chvíli ale punk rock teprve začal.*

## SPÁVNÝ PANKÁČ NOSÍ UNIFORMU...

Je těžké si představit, že by se takové kulturní hnutí jako punk rock se svou externalistickou energií a mezinárodním dopadem objevilo znovu ve stejném rozsahu. Ale detailní pohled dokumentárního pořadu mi připomněl onen zvláštní talent mladé britské kultury být vždy ve správný čas na správném místě, být neustále avantgardou generačního pocitu mladé světové kultury, tak nějak intuitivně vědět, kdy je ta pravá chvíle využít ten který kon-

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text a dovést jej k jeho vlastním závěrům. Přesně to se britské umělecké scéně přihodilo v polovině 80. let.

#### JOHNNY ROTTEN VS. DAMIEN HIRST

V polovině 80. let ve Spojeném království nastal čas, aby se stalo něco nového. Tentokrát to však mělo být ve výtvarném umění, nikoli v hudbě.

Ohlížeje se za vzestupem mladého britského umění uplynulých deseti let, tedy generace umělců reprezentovaných na této výstavě, lze nalézt mnoho paralel s modelem kulturní expanze, tak jak ji definoval punk rock.

Tvář kultury se výrazně změnila. Najednou bylo vše možné, protože punk ukázal, že už nemusíte čekat až někdo objeví vaši kapelu nebo obchod nebo účes. Jestliže jste měli odvahu a přesvědčení a byli jste ochotni *místo mluvení investovat své peníze*, pak se vám otevřely naprosto neomezené možnosti.

Podobnosti punku a vzkříšení mladého britského umění jsou jasné: masivní vlna energie, *sebeurčení*, nakažlivé sebevědomí, decentralizace, horizontální infrastruktura vzájemné podpory, asimilace a konec konců deziluze. Už žádní hrdinové, možná. Znuděné děti na gymnáziích v 70. letech měli svého *Johnnyho Rottenu*, kdežto znuděné děti na uměleckých školách 90. let mají svého *Damiena Hirsta*.

#### NEVÍM, CO CHCI, ALE VÍM, JAK TO DOSTAT...

Existuje-li jediný charakteristický rys vývoje britského umění od zániku punk rocku, pak je to nástup umělců-*kurátorů*, umělců-*podnikatelů*. Mladí umělci překypující sebevědomím 80. let, kdy všechno bylo možné, zahájili své kariéry agresivními výstavami ve skladištích a prázdných kancelářských prostorách, které zbyly po

boomu stavebnictví v 80. letech. Mnoho z nich pocházelo z provinčních měst a do Londýna přijeli třeba na postgraduální studium. Existuje dobrá dokumentace výstav jako *FREEZE* (1988) a *MODERNÍ MEDICÍNA* (1990), jejichž kurátorem byl Damien Hirst, i celého fenoménu *Goldsmiths*. Méně dokumentů už máme o dalších výstavách, které se začaly najednou po celé zemi objevovat, jako houby po dešti. Nejednalo se však o cynický úkaz - bylo to pragmatické. Jestliže jste neměli přístup k výstavním sálům nebo se vám nelíbil kontext, v němž mělo být vaše dílo prezentováno, uspořádali jste si svou vlastní výstavu. Nač čekat, až vám bude čtyřicet?

#### ZVUK PŘEDMĚSTÍ

Koncem 80. let už bylo jasné, že nemusíte čekat, až *nějaký absolvent soukromé školy ve slušivém obleku nebo džínách a teniskách* objeví vaši tvorbu, až bude uznána a potvrzena. Stačilo přeci dát dohromady pár přátel, najít prostor, trochu peněz a *hej, presto!* Všichni vylezli, aby si nic nenechali ujít. Tedy téměř všichni. Organizovat výstavy v neuměleckých prostorách je samozřejmě strašně těžká práce. Často v nich není ani základní vybavení a nakonec také musíte přesvědčit lidi, že jim to za tu cestu stojí. Jakmile se ale všechno dá do pohybu, rychle zmizí tajemná rouška galerie a jejího kurátora, aspoň na chvíli. Zakrátko se umělci iniciované výstavy staly reprezentativními, mezinárodně uznávanými a jednoduše *lepšími* než mnoho z těch úporných a předvídatelných expozicí v galeriích financovaných státem. Příkladem úspěšné výstavy tohoto období je *WINDFALL '91*, která byla uspořádána v bývalé námořní misi v Glasgowě a zúčastnilo se jí 25 umělců z 8 evropských zemí. Jako v případě jiných výstav byla samoúčelná polemika esejů součástí jejich kontextualizace v rámci sebeurčujícího kontextu *demystifikace*, a to jak pro veřejnost tak pro umělce. Koho zajímalo, že to trochu přeháníte,

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abyste dosáhli svého? Od začátku tohoto *boomu* bylo jasné, že publicita a dokumentarizace akcí byly stejně důležité jako výstavy samotné. A někdy i důležitější. Když se vám zdálo, že je těžké dostat se do oficiálních analů, proč byste neměli psát sami o *sobě*? Žádný zákon to nezakazoval a možná to ani nebylo zas *tak* těžké. Umělci se tedy navzájem podporovali, a to jak místně tak i mezinárodně, což pro ně bylo velmi vzrušující a podnětné. Byla vybudována zcela nová infrastruktura pro rozvoj projektů, zakotvil nový postoj a energie v boji proti existujícím institucím, z nichž mnohé jistě potřebovaly kopanec do zadku.

#### CHCI BÝT SÁM SEBOU

Řekněme, že jste připravili „výstavu, která znamená průlom ve vývoji a novou explozi v poklidné atmosféře doby“ (tak to aspoň napíšete do oznámení tisku) v opuštěné továrně na zpracování ryb v „*Glaschesteru*“. Potenciálním sponzorům můžete med kolem huby, až jste z toho modří, a vysvětlujete, jak je důležité, že místní obyvatelé budou *vystaveni umění*. Navrhnete dokonce, že zorganizujete naučný program a kdovíco ještě. Ale buďme upřímní - jakmile máte peníze, můžete si s nimi dělat, co chcete. Když budou vystavovaná díla *dobrá*, sami tomu shonu *uvěříte*. Ani nakonec není tak těžké přilákat aspoň pár slušných kurátorů, galeristů a sběratelů spolu s těmi „skutečnými“ startéry vaší kariéry. Proč ksakru ne? Všichni musíme jíst, peníze člověk musí nějak vydělat.

Nejdůležitější snad ale tehdy bylo získat článek nebo recenzi v uměleckém tisku, nejraději ve FRIEZE MAGAZINE. (*Vždyť jsme za ten inzerát přeci zaplatili tolik peněz - Co! - nejde to - sakra, tak co tedy ART MONTHLY?*) Podpora od těchto časopisů a od mladých kurátorů a galerií se při prosazování výstav ukázala velmi významnou. V případě WINDFALL '91 přišli všichni, z Londýna to měli 500 mil, a dokonce si koupili vlastní lístky, jen aby viděli, co se to

děje. Jisté aspekty požadavků veřejných rozpočtů a širší aspirace zainteresovaných umělců se asi moc dobře nesnášely, ale fungovalo to. V této strategii byla jistá rovnováha. Pracovalo se ve specifickém kontextu, ať to byl nepoužívaný sklad, billboard nebo cokoli jiného. Uznávalo se souběžně to domácí i zahraniční.

Jako příklad vezměme Glasgow, odkud pochází více než polovina britských umělců účastnících se této výstavy, což je v prezentaci mladého britského umění celkem neobvyklé. Glasgow se totiž stal druhým nejvýznamnějším městem Spojeného království, kam se umělecký svět sjíždí. Když projíždím Evropou, vždycky se mě lidé ptají: *Co je na Glasgow tak zvláštního, tak energického, tak důležitého? Proč o něm všichni tolik mluví?* Obvykle na to odpovídám tak, že jde ve skutečnosti jen o malou skupinku lidí, kteří shodou okolností chodili ve stejnou dobu na stejnou fakultu zaměřenou spíše na *myšlenky* než na formální disciplíny. Byla to dobrá škola, ale to nemění nic na faktu, že z ní vyšlo neúměrné množství dobrých umělců, kteří se navzájem podporovali a tvrdě pracovali. V historii má tato situace obdoby a bude se opět opakovat, a to *kdekoli*. To se ale nedá předpovědět, shody okolností přeci netrvají věčně. Snad právě proto všechna vzrušující milieu jednou vybuchnou, zhroutí se nebo se rozplynou, protože několik jejich klíčových osobností odejde. Boom za sebou ale vždy zanechá jistý pokrok: zakládají se galerie, časopisy, festivaly. Dojde k trvalé změně postojů.

#### PROBLÉMY...

Během posledních mála let se však něco zlomilo. Ono čiré nadšení projektů iniciovaných samotnými umělci nějak zesláblo a oficiální umění zase nabývá svého výlučného postavení. Tak, jak ubývalo nadšení, nabírala institucionální umělecká scéna na síle. Výstavy organizované umělci začaly trochu přetahovat svoji

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záruční dobu a v jistém smyslu se staly obětí svého vlastního úspěchu. Způsob jejich organizování dostal už tak přesná pravidla, že se vytratila dřívější spontaneita a vzrušení. Staly se svým vlastním náboženstvím, novým establishmentem. Je důležité udržovat si vždy krok, dva náskok, aby se vám neztratil pulz doby. Když vás ale *peleton* dožene, je čas poohlédnout se po něčem jiném.

Podle mého názoru jsou všichni přinejmenším znuděni touto formou výstav, protože z nepředvídatelného se stalo něco naprosto předpověditelného: zase jedna výstava, kterou připravili *lopotíci se umělci*.

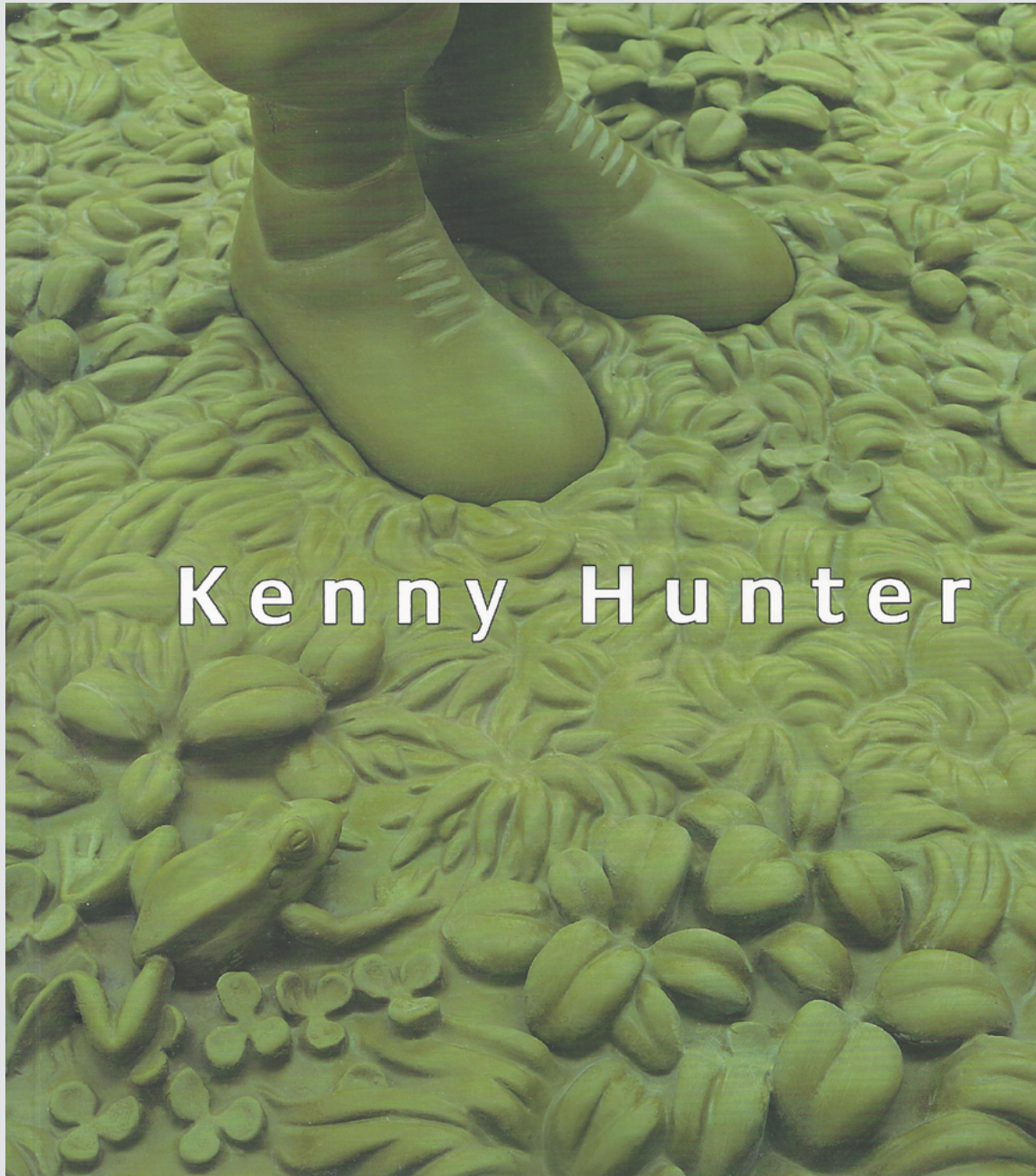
Dalším problémem je, že umělci (a zvláště *tradiční umělečtí pracovníci*) poznali různé skupiny, jisté strategie, úspěchy a okopírovali základní infrastrukturu těchto projektů, ale tentokrát s cynickým přístupem. Někteří z nich si totiž neuvědomují, že úspěch vyplývá z živých a poutavých výstav plných *dobrého umění*. Je zcela přijatelné zkrátit si cestu do análů historie umění, ale nejde to pomoci úzkoprofilových výstav, na nichž je vidět stylisticky dodatečný nápad. Na začátku této éry šlo skutečně o upřímné budování kariéry, ale podstatné na něm bylo, že *šlo především o umění*.

Mnoho umělců se tímto způsobem do umění uvedlo a ztratilo se v něm. Jiní to zase kritizují a říkají, že stojí *mimo*, ale ve skutečnosti je to jen další forma sebeurčení. Často se stává, že ti, kdo se těší z úspěchu na oficiální umělecké scéně, dříve tvrdě pracovali na umělci iniciovaných projektech.

#### UŽ ŽÁDNÁ LEGRACE...

Výsledkem minulých let je tedy změna postojů. Byl vytvořen nový model. Ještě před deseti lety se mohli mladí britští umělci jen dívat na nabubřelost obnošeného neoexpresionismu a podívat se nad tím, jakže do toho zapadá jejich tvorba založená na

*myšlence*. Teď se mohou rozhlédnout a říct si: nakonec to není tak nemožné. Koncept umělci iniciovaných výstav se ale opět mění. Vrchol ještě nedávného vývoje přišel a zase pominul. Nejzajímavější projekty současnosti jsou opět mnohem menší, skromnější co do ctižádosti a mnohem undergroundovější. Ale umění založené na *myšlence* se opět vrátilo do popředí. A tento fakt samotný přeci za tu námahu stál.



# Ugly Beautiful

## The Wonderful World That Never Was

**Two guys walk into an art gallery.**

**One guy says to the other guy;**

***Wow man, this art looks really realistic.***

***What do you mean realistic?, says the second guy***

***Well, you know, explains the first guy, they really look like the things they're supposed to be...***

***But what are they meant to be? queries guy number two***

***Are you blind? explodes guy one, you know, like an ape in a spacesuit, or a military guy standing on a cartoon hill, or 4 giant kids heads or a fat cherub with a black skull it can't quite shake off or a...***

***Okay!, Okay!, says the second guy, I can see what they are but just what exactly are they supposed to be?***

***Well...Oh, right - I see what you mean, says guy one Do you really see what I mean? insists smart guy number two.***

***Well, Yeah, hey, they look kinda real but not like anything actually realistic, you know, well, actually they do look realistic but, well, - d'ya know what I mean? asks the first guy, starting to regret he'd ever brought it up in the first place***

***Well, Not really... says the second guy***

The work they were discussing was made by Kenny Hunter. This work is both strange and perverse, full of wonder. Each piece takes months to make. And each is flawless, perfect, super smooth. These works have received so much loving attention from the hands of the artist and his assistants that they eventually look like they have been made by a machine. In perfecting this transubstantiation the artist releases them from his tutelage, he lets them go, free to roam the world as autonomous beings, able to make friends and enemies, to forge associations or to remain anonymous in the imagination of anyone who comes into contact with them. Hunter's works are fashioned to such a sophisticated degree that they travel free in the knowledge that anyone who meets them would take them or leave them on their own merits, just thinking that they had been there all along. Unofficially sanctioned for firing the popular imagination. This art looks realistic but in fact it's nothing of the kind. It conveys only the most superficial kind of realism. This is partly why it is so convincing. Sure, on the surface its all smiles and laughs and chubby cherubs, but look beyond, below. This is one strange vision, one obtuse angle. And if you take the trouble to look at what's under the carpet, the world you find there is almost recognisable but here something is not quite right. A fractured mirror. The menagerie of misfits Hunter has created to inhabit this work ask us to reassess big and difficult questions such as; what is real? - where is the truth? - why are things the way they are? Particularly pertinent here are the dialectics of the paradigm of everyday reality as we have come to understand it through the manifold organs of mediated communication. What is going on there? What are we really supposed to believe? Can the world be as sad as it seems? Who can we trust? That is the question posed in this work. Hunter doesn't mirror the world as we know it, reflecting it back in our faces (however much that may at first glance appear). He instead presents us with another idea.

This is an idea of the world, not as it is, but *as it could be*.

Hunter's world looks quite safe from a distance, everything seems o.k. particularly when framed in the flat grounding of the photographic composition. But as you get closer as you begin to understand the scale, the surface, the colour and the materials which seem to have jumped right out of Toys'R'Us gone wrong (or should that be gone right). Close-up the onus is on us, the collective public, in our multifaceted diversity, to

bring our desires and needs into dialogue with this work. Its refined surfaces are difficult to penetrate, but once inside we can detect a dystopian undercurrent here, something troubling, melancholic. Politicised rather than political. Like officially sanctioned statues for a world with different priorities.

Take two examples of Hunter's work. First *Military Figure*. This piece is eerily ambiguous. And because of it all the more redolent of a violence in waiting. To engage with this work you must get off the fence, make a decision. Here's one reading - this hooded man, stripped of weapons and anonymous is a broken, slumped, dissolute figure. I can almost see the loaded gun of the executioner at his temple. The figure is a study in resignation. Almost serene, as if already departed from this world, resigned to his fate, happy to be leaving this place behind. The rich and verdant mound of lush country he stands on merely indicates he has further to fall, how much he has departed from acceptable levels of engagement with life. What has he done to transgress this natural order? Does Hunter here refer to the flux of contemporary events? or does he once again simply propose the everyday of another world? A strange, other place. Works like this seem to remind us of specific moments in history, half remembered, an irritating echo of events which never happened because they happened in some other place, some other time. Maybe even events which have not yet happened.

Perhaps the most disquieting piece in this group shows the current Presidents of the nations which have cast the longest, and darkest shadows over the twentieth century. Yeltsin and Clinton are presented as an oleaginous mass, fused together forever, in bright red plastic. They are clutching each other, ugly Siamese twins laughing openly in a way which seems somehow obscene. They sit on a strange box, awkward, half lectern, half state coffin, as if some further explanation was about to be revealed like the magician, opening his magic box to explain their perpetual hysterical laughter. Of course it will never be revealed. Whatever the joke, as communism crumbles and the force of personality politics of every nation forgives us our every sin we can be sure they are laughing at our expense, fiddling while Rome burns...

#### **Ross Sinclair**

is an artist who shows internationally. Over the last few years he has been working on a project examining real life. He is currently based in Glasgow where he teaches in the Environmental Art Department of Glasgow School of Art.

Meanwhile, back in the gallery, our guys have been listening in.

**Guy number one:** *Oh, I see, so the fact that this stuff looks like real things but put through a blender and looked at through some weird magnifying glass actually accentuates the idea that they are presenting us with some kind of alternative, parallel universe.*

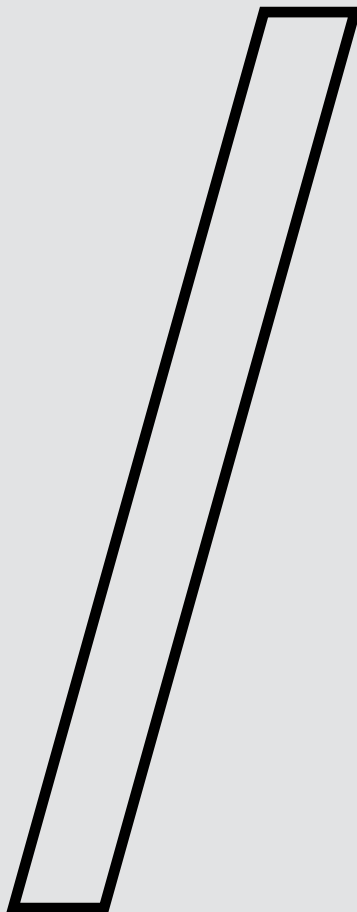
**Boy you sure learn fast,** says guy number two.

**But hey,** says the first guy, suddenly concerned, *I guess if we can't really believe anything we see and nothing is quite as it seems and everything like that then what does that say for us, stuck in this gallery, maybe we don't seem so convincing either...*

**Guy number two - now you're thinking, we only exist as words on this page and when they run out, well then it's all over...**

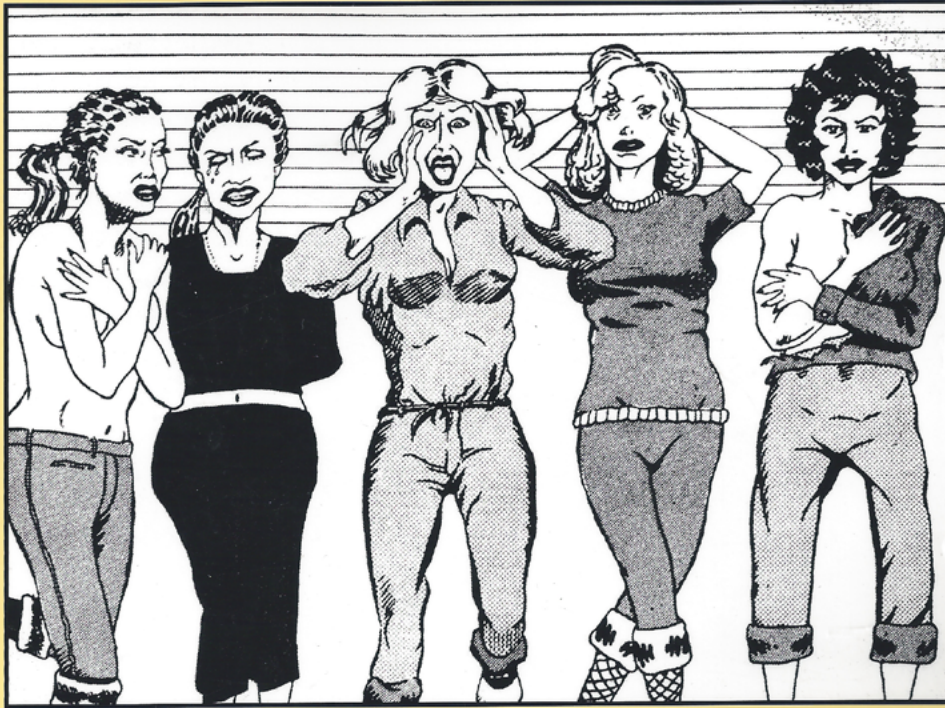
**First guy - So you mean like, wow, we don't actually exist**

**Second guy, No, probably not, not really**



**Jahresring 45**

**Jahrbuch für moderne Kunst**

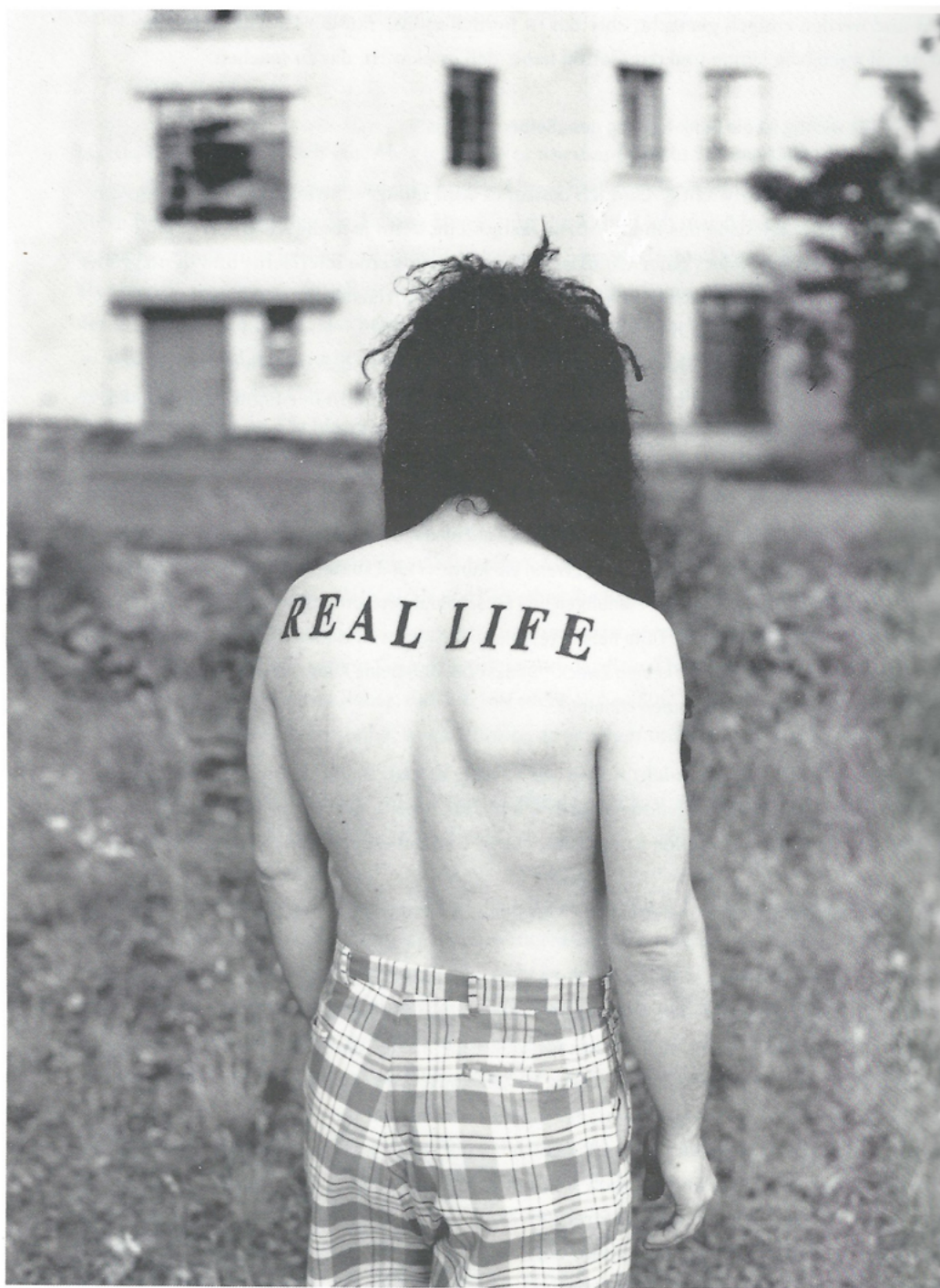


# **Make it Funky**

**Ulrike Groos / Markus Müller**

**Crossover zwischen Musik, Pop,  
Avantgarde und Kunst**

**Oktagon**



# MUSIK KANN DEIN LEBEN RETTEN KUNST KANN DEIN LEBEN RETTEN

von  
Ross Sinclair

FÜNF NEUERE PROJEKTE, IN DENEN MUSIK ZUR KUNST WIRD

I NEVER FELT MORE LIKE SINGIN' THE BLUES

REAL LIFE MOBY DICK

REAL LIFE ROCKY MOUNTAIN

THE SOUND OF YOUNG SCOTLAND

DEAD CHURCH/REAL LIFE

plus

THE SECRET OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

und

WITHOUT YOU I'M NOTHING...

THE AUDIENCE IS ART AND ART IS THE AUDIENCE

*Die großartigste Musik ist das erste Stück, daß Du morgens spielst, und das letzte, daß Du spielst, bevor Du abends ausgehst. Andere Leute sagen, daß sie das nicht verstehen, aber für Dich macht es todsicher Sinn. Es ist das Stück, das Du majestätisch spielst, volle Lautstärke, 3 Uhr morgens – und scheiß was auf die Nachbarn. Die Leidenschaft dieser Musik macht Dein Leben lebenswert. Und angesichts der Power dieser Musik wirst Du Dich fragen, ob Kunst jemals so gut sein kann.*

*Das großartigste Kunstwerk dringt durch Deine Augen und Ohren ein, bombardiert Deine Sinne, strömt in Deinen Kopf. Es läßt sich in einer bequemen Falte Deines Hirnstamms nieder und entwickelt sich wie ein wunderschönes befruchtetes Ei. Du gibst ihm ein kleines Stück von Dir, und dieses Kunstwerk gibt es Dir zehnfach zurück. Er wächst in Dir, dieser unglaubliche Foetus, den Du mit dem glorreichen Samen nährst – ein Stückchen von ihm und ein Stückchen von Dir. Dann, wenn es gut und fertig ist, explodiert dieses Kunstwerk in einem leuchtenden Meteoritenschauer und blendet jeden Winkel Deines zerebralen Sehvermögens – wie eine elektrische Verbindung zwischen vielen Stäbchen, die schließlich wieder an ihren Ausgangspunkt zurückkehrt. Wenn Du es läßt, wird Dir dieses Kunstwerk viel darüber sagen, wer Du bist und wer Du nicht bist. Und angesichts der anhaltenden Power dieser Kunst wirst Du Dich fragen, ob Musik jemals so gut sein kann.*

### AUCH SONGS SIND FUNDSTÜCKE

Vor ein paar Jahren habe ich eine Arbeit mit dem Titel „I NEVER FELT MORE LIKE SINGIN' THE BLUES“ gemacht. An einem Samstag Nachmittag sang ich auf einer belebten Straße in der Fußgängerzone eines Stadtzentrums populäre Songs und begleitete mich dabei auf einer alten akustischen Gitarre. Wie ein Straßenmusiker hatte ich den Gitarrenkoffer aufgeklappt und akzeptierte die Münzen, die die Passanten hineinwarfen. Während ich sang, wurde ich von hinten gefilmt, ich stand vor einem Durchgang. Es war ein heißer Tag, daher trug ich nur ein Paar Shorts. Ich habe eine Tätowierung auf meinem Rücken, die lautet REAL LIFE. Die Komposition des Bildes dieser Arbeit zeigt meinen Rücken mit dieser Tätowierung, eingerahmt von der belebten Straße mit dem nie endenden Strom von Leuten, die vorbeigehen, stehenbleiben um zuzuhören, zuzusehen, gelegentlich etwas Geld zu geben. Ein Portrait der belebten Straße einer Stadt am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts.

Gleichwohl unterschied sich diese Vorstellung von der eines normalen Straßenmusikers. Ich hatte aus der Geschichte des Rock 'n' Roll 10 Songs ausgewählt, die in meinen

Ross Sinclair, „I never felt more like singin' the Blues“, 10 x 1 Std. Video, 1995 (this clip: The Rolling Stones Satisfaction [I can't get no])



Augen „Protest-Songs“ waren. Es sind Songs, die sich selbst gegen die Gesellschaft, gegen den Wahnsinn des heutigen Lebens stellten. Der Hauptunterschied zwischen mir und einem normalen Straßenmusiker war der, daß *ich jeden Song ununterbrochen eine Stunde lang sang*, und so zehn Stunden Video-Aufnahmen produzierte. Auf diese Art konnte ich herausfinden, wie viel ich mit jedem Song pro Stunde verdiente, als ob es ein regulärer Job wäre. Ein regulärer Job heißt, im Gegensatz zu allem Schwachsinnigen. Ein regulärer Job, der die assimilierte Rebellion des Rock 'n' Roll auf eine Stundenrate reduzierte – wie jeder andere auch. Was ich nicht vorausgesehen hatte, war, wie pervers es ist, denselben Song immer und immer wieder eine ganze Stunde lang zu spielen. In einigen Fällen hieß das, denselben Song fünfundzwanzig oder dreißig Mal hintereinander zu spielen. Das hat die Leute wirklich angekotzt. Im allgemeinen ist die Bevölkerung sehr tolerant. Sie können etwas, das sie nicht mögen oder mit dem sie nicht einverstanden sind, durchaus akzeptieren, vor allem an einem belebten Ort. Die Idee von der Verteidigung der Redefreiheit reicht weiter, als die Gesetze uns glauben machen wollen. Was die Leute jedoch nicht akzeptieren können, ist etwas, das sie nicht verstehen. Das ängstigt sie und bringt sie ungeheuer auf. Mein Verhalten war irrational. Ich habe diese Arbeit in Nijmegen in Holland gemacht, einem allgemein als gelassen geltenden Land. Dennoch wurden die Leute, die meinen ständig wiederholten Songs zuhören mußten, sehr aufgebracht. Das waren die Leute, die in den umliegenden Geschäften arbeiteten, also nicht einfach weggehen konnten. Sie schrien mich an: „**BIST DU WAHNSINNIG**“ oder „**HALT ENDLICH DEIN MAUL, DU IRRER**“ und so etwas, *auf Holländisch*. Auch die Bullen rasteten aus. Sie sagten mir, ich bräuchte eine Erlaubnis, um auf der Straße zu spielen, und selbst dann könne ich an einer Stelle nur 30 Minuten lang spielen. Sie sagten mir, ich müßte zum Rathaus gehen und dort vor einer Jury spielen, die entscheiden würde, ob ich für eine Lizenz gut genug wäre – ich meine, könnt Ihr Euch *das* vorstellen? Also suchte ich mir einfach eine andere Stelle zum Spielen, bis die Leute, die da in den umliegenden Geschäften arbeiteten, wieder die Bullen holten.

Ein interessanter Aspekt dieses Projekts war die Frage, wer mir Geld geben würde, für welchen Song, und wer nicht. Die Demographie der Bevölkerungskreise, die Geld *gaben*, setzte sich, fast ohne Ausnahme, aus jungen Frauen zusammen, meist jungen Müttern, die ihren Kindern die Münzen gaben, damit diese sie in meinen Koffer taten. In gewissem Sinne war das für die Kinder, die meistens ein bißchen schüchtern und ängstlich waren, eine Herausforderung, aber sie waren angesichts der Live-Musik auch irgendwie aufgeregt. Eine alte Frau gab mir einige Münzen und weigerte sich dann zu glauben, daß ich Schotte und nicht Holländer sei, weil ich auf meinen Gitarrenkoffer „Dank u Vel“ geschrieben hatte, was natürlich ganz einfach Danke auf Holländisch heißt. Teenager – Grunge-Typen, versammelten sich um mich herum, und wenn ich Nirvana spielte, bewegten sie sich dazu und nickten weise, als ob sie, und sie allein, die spirituelle Hauptverbindung zur bürgerrechtslosen Seele dieser Musik besäßen. Aber sie gaben mir nie Geld und beschlossen schließlich, nachdem

sie mich zum zwanzigsten Male „Smells like Teen Spirit“ mit dem endlos wiederholten Hauptmotiv „here we are, now entertain us“ hatten spielen hören, daß ich selbst für sie ein zu großer Irrer sei.

Wie dem auch sei, dieses war eines der Projekte, das aus Musik bestand, aber, wie ich glaube, auch etwas mit Kunst zu tun hat. Ich habe die Videobänder dieses Projekts in einer Ausstellung mit dem Titel „Shopping“ gezeigt, die Jerome Sans in der reichen französischen Stadt Bordeaux organisiert hat. Alle Arbeiten der Ausstellung wurden in Geschäften gezeigt. Das mir zugewiesene Geschäft war eine teure Damen-Boutique. Es war urkomisch, all die reichen französischen Frauen dabei zu beobachten, wie sie sich über ihre teuren Kleider ausließen, während sie der auf zahlreichen im Laden installierten Fernsehern laufenden langgezogenen Pantomime meines Projekts zusahen. Oh, falls Euch die *Stundenlöhne des Rock* interessieren, die letztlich bei dem Projekt herausgekommen sind, sie waren wie folgt:

DIE STUNDENLÖHNE DES ROCK 'N' ROLL  
im einzelnen – vom höchsten zum niedrigsten

EDWYN COLLINS – NORTH OF HEAVEN	FL 11,55 (ca. DM 10 / Std.)
ROD STEWARD – YOU WEAR IT WELL	FL 10,05 (ca. DM 8,50 / Std.)
SMASHING PUMPKINS – TODAY	FL 8,35 (ca. DM 7 / Std.)
NIRVANA – SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT	FL 6,10 (ca. DM 5 / Std.)
CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL – BAD MOON RISING	FL 5,80 (ca. DM 5 / Std.)
THE ROLLING STONES – I CAN'T GET NO SATISFACTION	FL 5,50 (ca. DM 4,50 / Std.)
OASIS – LIVE FOREVER	FL 5,30 (ca. DM 4,50 / Std.)
BON JOVI – SOMEDAY I'LL BE SATURDAY NIGHT	FL 5,00 (ca. DM 4 / Std.)
THE SEX PISTOLS – ANARCHY IN THE UK	FL 1,75 (ca. DM 1,50 / Std.)

aus diesen Ergebnissen könnt Ihr Eure eigenen Schlüsse ziehen

## REAL LIFE MOBY DICK

die Suche nach dem großen weißen Wal  
contra den großen toten John Bonham

Während dieses Projekts spielte ich ein 24-stündiges Schlagzeugsolo. Moby Dick ist ein Stück von der zweiten Led Zeppelin-Platte. Es ist ein Schlagzeugsolo. Auf der Platte ist es etwa fünf Minuten lang, aber live könnte es eine halbe Stunde dauern. Tatsächlich nutzte die Band es als Gelegenheit, die Bühne zu verlassen und ein bißchen zu entspannen, während ihr unnachahmlicher Schlagzeuger, John Bonham, sich die Seele aus dem Leib spielte. Die Leute sagen mir, daß er eigentlich nicht wirklich so ein guter Schlagzeuger war und seine Technik bleiern und schwerhändig war, aber diesen Leuten zeige ich den Finger und sage, „LECK MICH“. Kein Jazztrommler hat mich je dazu gebracht, „Luftschlagzeug“ zu spielen (Du weißt schon, wie Luftgitarre spielen) und mir dabei vorzustellen, daß meine Gliedmaßen diese urzeitlichen Beats heraustrommeln.

Jedenfalls interessierte mich das rein mental/physisch Extreme dieses legendären Solos. Natürlich ist *Moby Dick* auch der klassische Roman von Herman Melville, jene Odyssee der Selbsterstörung auf der Suche nach dem großen weißen Wal. Ich wollte etwas machen, was diese beiden Kultur-Artefakte enger miteinander verband, sie vielleicht sogar verschmolz, um etwas Neues entstehen zu lassen. Eine Suche nach Bedeutungen in der offensichtlichen Bedeutungslosigkeit des Exzesses. Also baute ich mir eine kleine Bühne in einer Kiste in einer Galerie und staffierte sie mit Exemplaren der „Led Zep 2“ und Moby



Ross Sinclair,  
„Real Life Moby Dick“,  
Video – 24 Std., 1997

Dick-Exemplaren aus Remittenden-Buchläden aus. Ich verkaufte Souvenir-Pakete, die ein *Real Life Moby Dick*-T-Shirt, eine speziell ausgestattete Ausgabe des klassischen Melville-Romans und ein speziell ausgestattetes Vinyl-Exemplar der *Led Zep 2*-Platte (mit aufklappbarem Cover) enthielten. Ich baute eine Art analog-digitale Superuhr, die die Zeit von 24 Stunden bis Null rückwärts zählte, wie ein Amateur-Raketenstart. Dann stellte ich eine Videokamera auf und begann zu spielen. Wie üblich saß ich mit Blick in die kleine Kiste (ca. 3 x 3 x 3 m), also mit dem Rücken zum Publikum, so daß das, was am deutlichsten zu sehen war, meine REAL LIFE-Tätowierung war. Ich spielte von 8 Uhr abends bis zum nächsten Abend 8 Uhr. Niemand versuchte, mit mir zu reden. Ich wollte diese 24 Stunden durchgehend jede Minute spielen – wie bei einer dieser heldenhaften Performances aus den 70er Jahren. Ich hatte vor, in einen Eimer zu pinkeln und in meinen Schuh zu kacken, aber das stellte sich schließlich als nicht sehr praktisch heraus, und so muß ich zugeben, daß ich dreimal während dieser 24 Stunden pinkeln ging, schätze aber, daß das zusammen nicht länger als 4 oder 5 Minuten gedauert hat. Ich nehme an, daß ich eine Menge Wasser durch das Schwitzen und dadurch, daß ich halbnackt war, verloren habe. Das war eine seltsame Sache, ununterbrochen Schlagzeug zu spielen, die ganze Zeit über. 24 Stunden/1.440 Minuten/86.400 Sekunden. Das sind eine Menge Sekunden, wenn man in derselben Haltung sitzen und dieselbe Tätigkeit ausüben muß. Das Projekt fand in der Norwich Gallery in England statt, und sie ließen die Galerie für mich die ganze Nacht über geöffnet, und es war erstaunlich, daß die ganze Nacht hindurch Leute hereinkamen um zu sehen, wie ich weiterkam. Vielleicht ist das ein Argument für Kunstgalerien, nicht tagsüber, sondern nachts geöffnet zu haben. Die härteste Zeit für mich war von etwa 6 bis 9 Uhr morgens, als niemand in die Galerie kam (abgesehen von den Mitarbeitern, die erstaunlicherweise die ganze Nacht über blieben). Während dieser Phasen überlegte ich mir ein einfaches Riff oder Pattern und spielte es ununterbrochen eine Stunde lang, veränderte es dann leicht und ging zu einem anderen Pattern über. Das war die seltsamste Zeit. Während der ganzen 24 Stunden hatte ich einige körperliche Probleme wie Muskelkrämpfe usw., aber der mentale Streß – und das muß ich wohl nicht extra betonen – war am schlimmsten. Wenn ich diese einfachen Pattern über Stunden spielte, geriet ich in eine Art hypnotischen Zustand, wie in einer schlechten Hollywood-Darstellung von einem LSD-Trip. Da die Kiste, in der ich mich befand, so klein war, war mein Blick auf etwa 1,5 m Abstand fixiert, und ich trat richtiggehend geistig weg. Ich denke, all die chemischen Substanzen, die unter Deinen Muskeln lauern, wie zum Beispiel Milchsäure, all das Zeug, was hervorkommt, wenn die Muskeln erschöpft sind, überflutete meinen Körper und veränderte vorübergehend die Funktionsfähigkeit meines Gehirns. Aber es war ein verdammt gutes Gefühl, das durchzuhalten, und es gelang mir tatsächlich, in den letzten 5 Minuten für die ekstatische Menge noch einmal ein bißchen aufzudrehen – so nahe bin ich einem richtigen Solo nie wieder gekommen. Es ist erstaunlich, was Adrenalin mit Deinem Körper machen kann.

### SING HISTORY CHANGED: REAL LIFE ROCKY MOUNTAIN

Im Innern einer an einer sehr belebten Großstadtstraße gelegenen Galerie baue ich einen großen Teil dessen, was wie ein Hochlandberghang aussieht, 8 x 8 x 5 m. Dieser Aufbau wird von einem Holzgerüst gestützt, er ist sichtbar konstruiert – man kann die Holzbalken sehen, die ihn stützen. Auf diesem ‚Berg‘ gibt es einen Wasserfall, viele Vögel und Tiere, Gras, wogende Hügel, Teiche, ein kleines Haus, Bäume. Aber alles sieht nur echt aus – es ist vorgetäuscht, gefälscht, Ersatz. Das Gras ist aus Polyäthylen, die Felsen und der Wasserfall sind aus Plastik, und der plätschernde Bach wird von einer 240 Volt-Pumpe erzeugt. Die Tiere sind seit Jahrzehnten tot und kunstvoll von der Hand des Tierpräparators ausgestopft, und die Bäume sind aus Fiberglas. Aber ich bin da, *live*, singe, mit dem Rücken zum Publikum und der für immer in meinen Rücken eingebrannten REAL LIFE-Tätowierung. Ich nehme die Außenwelt nicht wahr, ich weiß nicht, wann in der Galerie etwas los ist oder wann sie leer ist, ich bin völlig in meiner eigenen kleinen Welt versunken. In diesem seltsamen und wunderschönen Diorama sitze ich mit einer Gitarre und singe und singe und singe. Ich singe stundenlang, tagelang, wochenlang, wie ein alter Balladensänger. Meine Stimme wird rau, heiser, aber der Klang ist wahrhaftig, ehrlich, bezaubernd. Ich singe

Ross Sinclair, „Real Life Rocky Mountain“, 1996



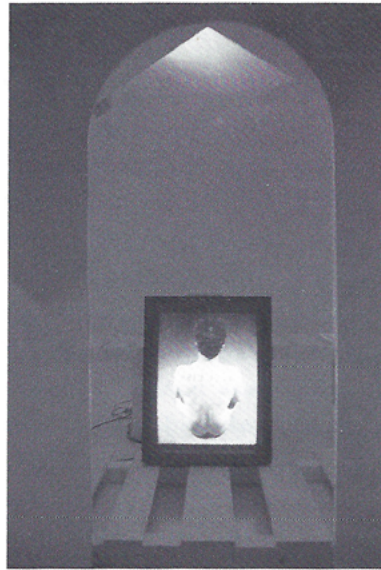
volkstümliche Lieder, die die Geschichte Schottlands unterstreichen, Lieder, die die politische und kulturelle und romantische Geschichte dieses Landes nachzeichnen. Ich singe Lieder von vor 300 Jahren, als die Nation sich in den Klauen eines Krieges um Unabhängigkeit und Autonomie befand, Lieder von vor 200 Jahren, die die gescheiterten Revolutionen und verpaßten Gelegenheiten dieses Unabhängigkeitskrieges beklagen, Lieder des Scheiterns, die der kollektiven Psyche dieses Landes teuer sind. Ich singe Lieder von vor 100 Jahren, als die ersten Schotten begannen, nach Übersee zu reisen, um Lieder zu singen, die die merkwürdige romantische kulturelle Identität dieser kleinen Nation karikierten und jene Stereotype aufbauten, die sich noch heute hartnäckig halten. Und schließlich singe ich die Lieder der Musiker und Poeten von heute. All diese Lieder sind in den letzten 300 Jahren zu einer bestimmten Zeit bei den Menschen populär gewesen, es sind Lieder, von denen jeder ein Bruchstück kennt, selbst wenn man sich nicht erinnert, woher, eine Art unbewußter Absorption.

Ich benutze diese Lieder als Linse, mit der ich den Blick auf die Geschichte meines kleinen Landes konzentriere – aber es könnte jedes kleine Land sein. Ich bringe den Berg in die Stadt, in die Galerie. Sind wir aus der Geschichte, aus der Natur herausgerissen? Wird die Geschichte und Geographie einer kleinen kraftlosen Nation besser erlebt als ein keimfreier Themenpark? Vielleicht hat der Ort, von dem ich gesungen habe, nie wirklich existiert. Ich benutze die Lieder, um diese Geschichte neu zu interpretieren, weitere, andere Geschichten, versteckte, inoffizielle Geschichten – wahre Geschichten zu finden. Ich möchte eine einfache Frage stellen: Wer sind wir? Wie werden wir kollektiv „wir“ und individuell „ich“? Wie wirkt sich Dein Heimatland darauf aus? Und wie können wir beginnen, das zu bewältigen, um besser zu verstehen, wo wir heute stehen und wohin wir gehen?



Ross Sinclair,  
„The Sound of young  
Scotland“, Part 2,  
vol. 2, Video,  
30 Min., 1996





Ross Sinclair, „Dead Church,  
Real Life“, 1998

Vertrauen hatte, an den Gott zu glauben, der ihnen ihre Bedeutung gab. Gleichwohl fühle ich mich mit zunehmendem Alter immer stärker von diesen Hymnen angezogen, mache Jagd auf obskure CDs, um die zu hören, die ich flüchtig von irgendwelchen Beerdigungen kenne oder andere, die von irgendeinem berühmten irischen Tenor gesungen werden. Ich kenne sie auf dieselbe Art flüchtig, wie jeder flüchtig all die Lieder aus „Real Life Rocky Mountain“ kannte, in einer unterbewußten nationalen Absorption. Plötzlich wurde mir klar, daß Hymnen wie „ABIDE WITH ME“ oder „HOW GREAT THOU ARE“ mich tatsächlich zum Weinen bringen konnten. Das hat mich sehr verstört – ich habe tatsächlich beinahe gebetet. Diese magischen Lieder schienen alle Antworten zu enthalten, und die waren so schlicht, so klar, so einfach, so perfekt. Alles Nichtsinnliche bekam in ihnen einen Sinn. In ihnen wurde jeder schöne Moment und jede schreckliche Grausamkeit als das gleiche erklärt, nämlich ganz einfach als – *der Wille Gottes*. Alles war festgelegt, vorherbestimmt – alles würde für immer, auf ewig in Ordnung sein, wenn man an Jesus glaubte, ihn liebte und ihm vertraute. Aber diese Musik war die Antithese zu einem pragmatischen, rationalen Geist. Was passierte mit mir? Ich mußte herausfinden, was diesen Hymnen ihre Kraft verlieh. Also schuf ich eine Skulptur mit dem Titel „Dead Church/Real Life“. Ich baute eine merkwürdige Kirche, die rot gestrichen war und auf der Seite lag, als ob sie tot sei. Ich drehte ein Video von mir, wie ich diese Hymnen singe, die ich schnell mit einem Gefühl der Dazugehörigkeit lernte. Ich bin, wie üblich, von hinten aufgenommen, ein ganz normaler Durchschnittsmensch, abgesehen von der REAL LIFE-Tätowierung, wie ich nackt auf einem Holzboden sitze. Der Fernseher, auf dem dieses einfache Video läuft, ist in den umgestürzten Kirchturm eingebaut. Das Publikum kann diese tote Kirche betreten, sich hinsetzen und das Video ansehen, während der Ton von oben angebrachten Lautsprechern herunterfällt wie ein himmlischer Chor aus „der

Höhe“ und die ganze Szene vom sanften roten Glühen einer Leuchtschrift, die einfach REAL LIFE lautet, beschienen wird wie von dem schönen, durch das durchscheinende Testament eines Buntglasfensters gefilterte Licht. Man sagt, *der Teufel hat die besten Lieder* – ich wollte es herausfinden. Was das Publikum von dieser Arbeit hielt, hing davon ab, was die Einzelnen über Gott, Jesus und die praktische Wirklichkeit des modernen Lebens dachten.

### THE SECRET OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

der etwas mehr ist als die Summe seiner Teile

Musik ist so verdammt gut – was die rein physische, innere Erregung angeht, ist sie nicht zu schlagen. Sie ist wie eine Droge. Ich glaube, und ich bin sicher, daß ich da nicht der Einzige bin, daß bestimmte Musik zur richtigen Zeit Dein Leben lebenswert machen kann – sie kann Dich vom Sterben abhalten, sie kann Dein Leben retten, und zwar buchstäblich wie auch im übertragenen Sinne. Als ich ein bißchen jünger war, habe ich einige Jahre in einer Rock-Band gespielt, aber meine naive, idealistische Vorstellung davon, warum Musik in einer Band zu machen eine gute Sache sei, bröckelte und wurde schließlich zerstört durch das Geld und Manager und Plattenfirmen und teure Videos und einen allgemeinen Mangel an Kreativität und Vorstellungskraft auf der Suche nach Erfolg. Das Großartige



Sony Dragons, 1987

am Musikgeschäft ist, daß Du Deine Arbeit unter so vielen Leuten verbreiten kannst, aber die Kehrseite ist, daß das Musikgeschäft sehr intolerant ist.

Aber was für eine Freude, 20.000 Platten zu verkaufen, und zu wissen, daß jeder, der sie kauft, sich über jedes Detail der Hülle, die Du entworfen hast, auslassen wird, ist eine echte Verbreitung der darin enthaltenen Ideen. Ich erinnere mich, daß ich auf dem 87er oder 88er Glastonebury-Festival gespielt habe, ich weiß nicht mehr, auf welchem, aber ich weiß noch, wie ich auf 20.000 Leute gesehen habe und gedacht habe, daß das eine absolut unglaubliche Geschichte ist – ein unglaubliches Gefühl, gleichzeitig erschreckend und begeisternd. Das Schlüsselerlebnis an der Musik ist der Aspekt des Zusammenarbeitens, den ich in der Kunst nie erlebt habe. Ich muß meine Kunst immer selbst machen. Den meisten Künstlern, die ich kenne, geht es genauso. Das Beste daran, Mitglied einer Band zu sein, ist ganz zweifellos die Zeit am Anfang, wenn es noch einfach vier Leute in einem Raum sind, die Baß, Schlagzeug und Gitarre spielen und singen – das ist das Geheimnis des Rock 'n' Roll. Die Magie dieser Momente, dieser kreative Akt, die Geburt dieser neuen Melodie, ein neues Leben, ein neues Gefühl, ist in anderen Situationen sehr schwer zu finden. Jeder, der in einer Band gespielt hat, die ihr eigenes Material geschrieben hat, weiß, wovon ich rede. Du jamst um ein Riff oder einen Song herum, und plötzlich passiert eine unbeschreibliche und magische Sache. Alles verbindet sich, kommt zusammen, *wird zu etwas, das mehr ist als die Summe seiner Teile*, um zu einem neuen Song, einem neuen Wesen zu werden. Das ist der Moment. Er kann dieselben Grundakkorde haben wie tausend andere Songs, aber irgendwie ist dieser anders, besonders. Die reine Energie, die von dieser Kernfusion erzeugt wird, ist das Geheimnis. Ich kann ehrlich nicht beschreiben, was für ein Machtgefühl das ist.

Das ist großartig, wenn man 18 ist, aber wenn Du nicht besonders viel Glück oder Talent hast, hältst Du das nicht durch. Das Musikgeschäft ist noch geldgieriger als die Kunstszene – es ist einfach zuviel Geld beteiligt. Ich mußte aus dieser Situation herauskommen und zur Kunst zurückkehren. Mit vier Leuten, die als kreative Einheit arbeiten, kannst Du nur bis zu einem gewissen Punkt kommen, es ist zu schwer aufrechtzuerhalten, vor allem, wenn Geld beteiligt ist. Das Musikgeschäft kann die Entwicklung dieses kreativen Malstroms nicht tolerieren. Jeder Fehler ist viel zu kostspielig, und die großen internationalen Plattenfirmen können nur eine gewisse Summe steuerlich als Verlust abschreiben.

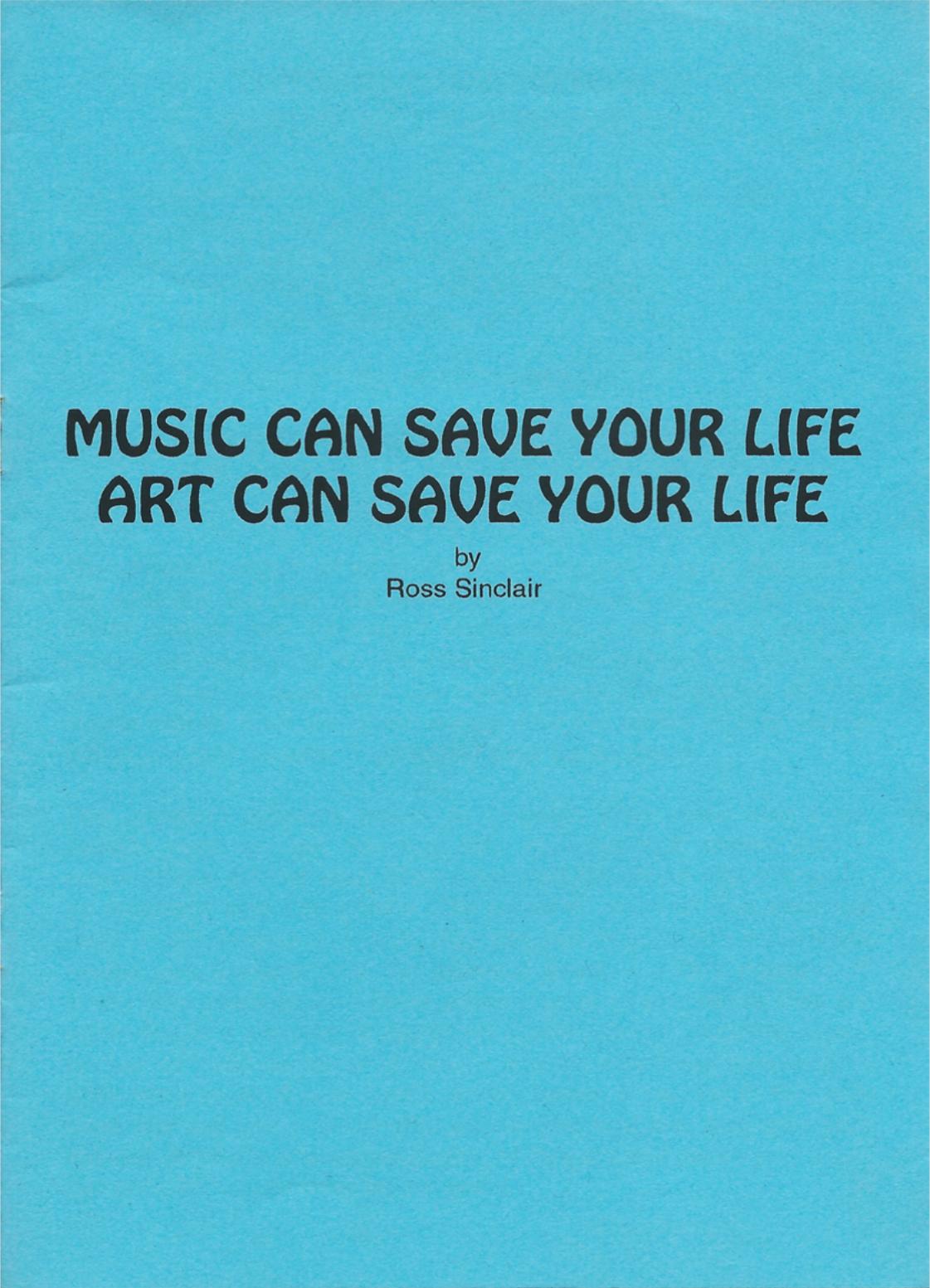
Wenn ich heute in meiner Arbeit Musik verwende, schreibe ich sie nicht, sondern nehme bereits vorhandene Stücke, in derselben Art, wie ich ein Ready-made verwenden würde. Ich nehme spezielle Songs oder bestimmte Arten von Musik, die eine identifizierbare Bedeutung haben, wie die religiöse Musik, über die ich weiter oben geschrieben habe, oder Punk Rock, weil diese Musiken eine spezielle kulturelle Resonanz haben. Dabei fühle ich mich, glaube ich, als ob ich sie betreuen oder auf dieselbe Art mit ihnen zusammenarbeiten würde, wie ich es mit einem objet trouvé machen würde. Ich verwende Musik, die der Betrachter identifizieren, mit der er sich identifizieren kann, und ich nutze dieses Wiedererkennungspotential.

WITHOUT YOU I'M NOTHING ...  
 THE AUDIENCE IS ART AND ART IS THE AUDIENCE  
 AND THIS IS WHY ART WILL LIVE FOREVER

Mich mit dem Publikum zu unterhalten ist mein Ziel, in einer Art zu reden, die Sprache und internationale Barrieren überwindet. Das ist die eine schöne Sache, die ich vom Musikgeschäft gelernt habe. Nicht unbedingt in Worten oder Bildern zu erläutern, sondern in Ideen. Und nicht einfach auf eine passive oder vorübergehende Art und Weise, sondern in einem ehrlichen Versuch, uns alle zusammenzubringen, uns alle auf den Kopf zu stellen und zu schütteln, bis es weh tut. Mein Wunsch, jedes Publikum einzubeziehen, basiert auf dem fundamentalen Glauben, daß Kunst mehr kann als den Platz über dem Kamin eines reichen Enthusiasten zu schmücken. Das ist ein Einfluß der großartigen demokratisierenden Wirkung populärer Musik. Wenn wir nur miteinander reden könnten, wären die Dinge anders. Musik in der Kunst kann dazu beitragen, denn sie ist ein so zugängliches Medium. Sie ist auch nur ein formales Medium wie Farbe oder Video oder Skulptur. Ich hoffe, daß meine künstlerische Arbeit damit anfangen kann, das zu formulieren. Nicht nur für den aufgeklärten Konversationstreibenden auf einer Dinner Party, sondern für jeden und alle. Ich glaube, daß Kunst die Welt, in der wir leben, verändern kann. Menschen verändern kann. Ich möchte andere Strategien finden, um neue Wege zu erforschen, die Welt um uns in einen neuen Kontext zu setzen, damit wir besser darin leben können. Das beginnt in den Köpfen von Künstlern und sickert dann hinaus in die Welt, berührt zunächst vielleicht nur einen Menschen, aber dann wächst es. Kunst muß unumstößlich mit der Welt verknüpft sein, in der sie existiert und **IM DIALOG**, nicht im Monolog atmen, wenn sie im 21. Jahrhundert irgendeine Bedeutung haben soll. Ich möchte eine Kunst, die alles mit der Welt zu tun hat, die ohne sie nicht leben kann. Und umgekehrt – inklusive, nicht exklusive. Reziprok. Symbiotisch. Quid pro quo.

Kunst ist immer noch eine der wenigen relativ unvermittelten Aktivitäten, in der Du die Stimme eines **Individuums** vernahmen kannst, das sich darum bemüht, aus der Kakophonie der Kompromisse und des Kapitalschlagens herausgehört zu werden. Deshalb habe ich das Gefühl, daß eine einzigartige, unverwässerte Vision von Kunst ein solches Potential in sich birgt. *Und das Erstaunliche ist, daß wir „bildenden“ Künstler alles benutzen können, was wir möchten.* Nicht wie der Musiker, der normalerweise unweigerlich auf die stereo-phonische Landschaft begrenzt ist. **Wir haben allen Raum und alle Zeit und alle Klänge und alle Visionen zum Reden. Kunst kann all das haben.** Aber häufig benutzen Künstler es nicht. Ich möchte all das benutzen – am liebsten gleichzeitig. Das ist die Grundlage meiner speziellen Vision von der Zukunft, vertraute Songs/Musik/Szenarien/Bilder/Objekte/ Hoffnungen/Ängste/Schuldgefühle/Sorgen zu benutzen, aber damit neue und herausfordernde

Situationen/Szenarien zu konstruieren, um ihre Bedeutungen zu untersuchen. Eine wahre und ehrliche und schwierige und einfache Kunst für das nächste Jahrhundert zu finden – das ist die Aufgabe für Künstler. Das ist **REAL LIFE**, amateurhaft, analog, weltlich, organisch, eine Kunst, die mehr ist, als die Summe ihrer Teile – die sich die Welt nicht vorstellt, wie sie ist – **SONDERN WIE SIE SEIN KÖNNTE**.



**MUSIC CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE**  
**ART CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE**

by  
Ross Sinclair

## TURNING MUSIC INTO ART IN FIVE RECENT PROJECTS

1. I NEVER FELT MORE LIKE SINGIN' THE BLUES
2. REAL LIFE MOBY DICK
3. REAL LIFE ROCKY MOUNTAIN
4. THE SOUND OF YOUNG SCOTLAND
5. DEAD CHURCH/REAL LIFE  
plus
6. THE SECRET OF ROCK 'N' ROLL  
and
7. WITHOUT YOU I'M NOTHING...
8. THE AUDIENCE IS ART AND ART IS THE AUDIENCE

*The greatest music of all is the first song you play in the morning and it's the last one you play before you go out at night. Other people say they can't understand it but it sure as hell makes sense to you. It's the tune you play majestically, top volume, at 3am — and fuck the neighbours. The passion of this music makes your life worth living. And the power of this music will make you wonder if art could ever be as good.*

*The greatest Artwork pours in through your eyes and ears, assails your senses, flooding into your head. It settles into a comfortable fold of your brainstem and develops like a beautiful fertilized egg. You give a little piece of yourself to it and this work of art returns it tenfold. It grows inside you, this incredible foetus you nurture from the glorious seed — a little piece of it and a little piece of you. Then, when it is good and ready, this art explodes in a shower of starburst illuminations, dazzling every corner of your cerebral vision — like an electrical connection with many rods, finally being driven home. If you let it, this artwork will tell you a great deal about who you are, and who you are not. And the sustained power of this art will make you wonder if music could ever be as good.*

### SONGS ARE FOUND OBJECTS TOO

I made a work a few years ago called “**I NEVER FELT MORE LIKE SINGIN’ THE BLUES**”. I sang popular songs with an old acoustic guitar in a busy street in a pedestrianised town center on a Saturday afternoon. Like a street musician, I opened my guitar case and accepted the coins thrown in by the passers by. I was filmed performing from the back, I stood in the opening of an alleyway. It was hot weather, so I wore only a pair of shorts. I have a tattoo on my back which reads, REAL LIFE. The composition of the image of this work shows my back with this tattoo framed by the busy street, with its never ending flow of people moving by, stopping to listen, to watch, occasionally to give some money. A portrait of the busy city street, in the late twentieth century.

However this performance was different from that of the regular street musician. I had selected 10 songs from the history of rock ‘n’ roll which I considered to be ‘protest’ songs. These are songs which positioned themselves against society, against the madness of contemporary life. The main difference between myself and the regular street musician was that *I performed each song continuously for one hour*, subsequently producing ten hours of video. Thus I could find out how much each song would earn, per hour, as if it were a regular job. A regular job, that is, in opposition to everything insane. A regular job which reduced the assimilated rebellion of Rock ‘n’ Roll to an hourly rate — the same as everyone else. What I didn’t anticipate was how perverse it was to play the same song over and over again for one hour. In some cases this meant playing the same song twenty five or thirty times in a row. This really pissed people off. Generally speaking, the population are very tolerant. They can accept something they don’t like, or don’t agree with, particularly in a busy public space. The notion of the defence of free speech extends further than laws would have us believe. However, what people simply cannot accept is something they do not understand. This frightens and upsets people tremendously. My behaviour was irrational. I made this work in Nijmegen, in The Netherlands, generally accepted as a very easy going country. However, people who had to listen to my repeated songs became very upset. These were the people who worked in the

nearby stores, who couldn't easily move away. They would shout into my face **"ARE YOU INSANE"** or **"SHUT THE FUCK UP YOU FREAK"** and stuff like that, in Dutch. The cops were freaked out too. They told me I must have an entertainers license to play in the street, and even then I could only play in one place for 30 min at a time. They told me I would need to go to the city hall to perform in front of a panel of judges who would decide if I was worthy of a license — I mean, can you believe *that*?

So I just found another place to play till the people who worked in the nearby shops called the cops again. An interesting aspect of this project was the question of who would give money, for which song, and who did not. The demographic of the population who did give money was almost, without exception, formed by young women, usually young mothers who would give their children the coins to place in my case. In some sense this was a challenge to the kids, who were usually a little shy and afraid, but they were kind of excited too by this live music. An old woman gave me some coins then refused to believe I was Scottish, not Dutch, because I had written *"Dank u Vel"* on my guitar case which of course simply means thank you in Dutch. Teenagers — grunge types — would gather round when I played Nirvana and rock out, nodding along sagely as though they, and they alone, had the spiritual mainline to the disenfranchised soul of this music. But they never gave any money and eventually they decided I was too much of a freak even for them after they had heard me play, "Smells like Teen Spirit" for the twentieth time with its main motif endlessly repeated — "here we are, now entertain us". Anyway this was one project which was made of music but I think has something to do with art also. I showed the video tapes of this project in a show called 'Shopping' which was organised by Jerome Sans in the rich French city of Bordeaux. All the works of the show were in shops. The shop allocated to me was an expensive woman's boutique. It was hilarious, watching all the rich French women pouring over their expensive gowns watching the elongated pantomime of my project unfold on numerous TV screens installed in the shop. Oh, in case you're interested in the final wages of rock for the project they are as follows:

**THE WAGES OF ROCK 'N' ROLL**  
in detail - biggest earners thru to smallest

**EDWYN COLLINS -**  
***NORTH OF HEAVEN*** **FL11.55 (approx £3.50)**

**ROD STEWART -**  
***YOU WEAR IT WELL*** **FL10.05 (approx £2.80)**

**SMASHING PUMPKINS -**  
***TODAY*** **FL8.35 (approx £2.30)**

**NIRVANA -**  
***SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT*** **FL6.10 (approx £1.80)**

**CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL -**  
***BAD MOON RISING*** **FL5.80 (approx £1.80)**

**THE ROLLING STONES -**  
***I CAN'T GET NO SATISFACTION*** **FL5.50 (approx £1.50)**

**OASIS -**  
***LIVE FOREVER*** **FL.5.30 (approx £1.50)**

**BON JOVI -**  
***SOMEDAY I'LL BE SATURDAY NIGHT*** **FL5.00 (approx £1.20)**

**THE SEX PISTOLS -**  
***ANARCHY IN THE UK*** **FL1.75 (approx 50p)**

You can draw your own conclusions from these results.

### **“REAL LIFE MOBY DICK”**

#### **The search for the great white whale vs. the late great John Bonham**

During this project I play a 24 hour drum solo. Moby Dick is a track on the 2nd Led Zeppelin record. It is a drum solo. On the record it lasts around five minutes but live it could go on for half an hour. In fact the band used it as an opportunity to leave the stage and relax while their inimitable drummer, John Bonham, spilled his guts all over the stage. People say to me that he wasn't really that great a drummer and his technique was leaden and heavy handed but to these people I raise the finger and say, **“FUCK YOU”**, no jazz twitcher ever made me want to play 'air drums' (you know, like playing air guitar) imagining my very limbs were beating out those primeval beats.

Anyway, I was very interested in the sheer mental/physical extremity of this legendary solo. Of course Moby Dick is also the classic novel by Herman Melville, the odyssey of self destruction in search of the great white whale. I wanted to make something which fused these two cultural artifacts closer, perhaps melting them together to produce something new. A search for meanings in the apparent meaninglessness of excess. So I built myself a little stage in a box in a gallery and populated it with copies of 'Led Zep 2' and copies of Moby Dick from remaindered bookstores. I sold souvenir packages which included a Real Life Moby Dick t-shirt, a specially customised copy of the classic Melville novel and a customised vinyl copy of Led Zep 2 (with gatefold sleeve). I built a sort of super analogue digital clock which would count down the time from 24 hours to zero, like an amateur rocket launch. Then I set up a video camera and started playing. As usual I faced into my little box (approx 3m x 3m x 3m) with my back to the audience so the most visible thing was my REAL LIFE tattoo. I played from 8pm one night to 8pm the next night. No one tried to talk to me. I wanted to keep playing continuously for every minute of the 24 hours — like some heroic performance art event from the seventies. I planned to piss in a bucket and shit in my shoe but in the end this was not practical so I must admit I went to piss 3 times during that 24 hour period but I would estimate this accounted for no more than about 4 or 5 minutes. I guess I lost a lot of water through sweating and being semi-naked. It was a strange thing to do, playing

the drums continuously, for all that time. 24 hours/1440 minutes/86400 seconds. That's a lot of seconds if you have to sit in the same position performing the same activity. The project took place in the Norwich Gallery in England and they kept the gallery open all night for me and it was amazing that people would come in at all times of the night to see how I was getting on. Maybe this is an argument for Art Galleries being open during the night instead of during the day. The toughest time for me was between about 6am and 9am when no one came into the gallery (apart from the staff, who, amazingly, stayed all night). During these periods I would set up a simple riff, or pattern and play it continuously for one hour, then modify it, moving into a different pattern. This was the strangest time. Throughout the 24 hours I suffered some physical distress, muscle cramps etc, but needless to say it was the mental stress which was the worst. When I was playing these simple patterns for hours on end I would enter some kind of hypnotic state, like some bad Hollywood idea of an acid trip. Because the box I was in was so small, my focus became fixed at around 1.5 meters and I really zoned out. I think all the chemicals that lurk under your muscles like lactic acid, all that stuff which emerges when the muscles are exhausted, flooded out into my body and temporarily altered the ability of my brain to function. But it felt fucking great to finish it, and I actually managed a bit of a final flourish in the last 5 minutes for the ecstatic crowd — the nearest I got to a real solo. It's amazing what adrenaline can do to your body.

### **SING HISTORY CHANGED : REAL LIFE ROCKY MOUNTAIN**

I construct, inside a gallery which sits in a very busy city street, a large section of what looks like highland mountainside, 8m x 8m x 5m. This construction is supported on a wooden scaffolding, it is clearly contrived — you can see the wooden beams that support it. This 'mountain' has a waterfall, many birds and animals, grass, rolling hills, ponds, a little house, trees. But everything is verisimilitude — fake, false, ersatz. The grass is made of polythene, the rocks and the waterfall are plastic and the babbling brook powered by a 240 volt pump. The animals have all been dead for decades skillfully preserved by the hand of the taxidermist and the trees are made from fibreglass. But I am there, live, singing, my back to the audience, the REAL LIFE tattoo forever stained into my back. I am oblivious to the outside world. I don't know when the gallery is busy, or when the gallery is empty, I am completely absorbed in my own little world, In this strange and beautiful diorama I sit with a guitar and I sing and I sing and I sing. I sing for hours, for days for weeks, like an ancient balladeer. I get rough, hoarse but the sound is truthful, honest, compelling. I sing popular songs which punctuate the story of Scotland. Songs which chart the political and cultural and romantic history of this place. I sing songs from 300 years ago, when the nation was in the grip of a war for independence and autonomy. Songs from 200 years ago, which lament the failed revolutions and missed opportunities of these wars of independence. Songs of failure held dear in the collective psyche of this place. I sing songs from 100 years ago, when the first Scotsmen began to travel abroad to sing songs which caricatured the peculiar romantic cultural identity of this small nation, constructing the very stereotypes which still hold strong today. And finally I sing the songs from the musicians and poets of today. All these songs have been popular amongst the people at some time in the last 300 years. Songs that everyone knows a fragment of, even if you cannot remember from where, a kind of unconscious absorption. I use these songs as a lens with which to focus this history of my small nation —but it could be any small nation. I bring the mountain into the city, into the gallery. Are we dislocated from history, from nature? — is the history and geography of

a small emasculated nation better experienced as a sanitized theme park? Maybe the place I sang of never really existed in the first place. I employ the songs to re-interpret this history, to find other, different histories, hidden histories, unofficial histories — real histories. I want to ask a simple question — who are we? how do we become “us” collectively and “me” individually. How does your home country affect that? And how can we begin to come to terms with this to better understand where we are now and where we are going?

### THE SOUND OF YOUNG SCOTLAND

Secreted in my Real Life Rocky Mountain there is a TV set which plays a video. In this video I am framed in the wilderness of the mountains, yet again pictured with my back to the camera, singing some of these old Scottish songs, often in the geographic locations they were written about. There is no evidence of civilization in these images, no roads, no houses, no people, no noise except the sound of me singing my heart out into the wilderness of the past and the future, framed forever in the present, this present or a later present when a gallery visitor in the next millennium might see the work.

### DEAD CHURCH / REAL LIFE

I never believed in god. I never felt he existed. I never sang the hymns in church. I defiantly kept my head aloft during prayers, eyes conspicuously open. (I always felt aggrieved if I was chastised later for having my eyes open as those who did the chastising must have had their eyes open too, to see you). But I always felt strangely drawn to these songs, these hymns, but it seemed hypocritical to sing them if you didn't have the faith to believe in the God which gave them their meaning. However, as I get older I find myself becoming increasingly drawn to some of these hymns, hunting down obscure CDs to hear the ones I vaguely knew from some funeral or other sung by some famous Irish tenor. I vaguely know them in the same way that every-

one vaguely knew all the songs from Real Life Rocky Mountain, in a subconscious national absorption. Suddenly I realised that Hymns like **'ABIDE WITH ME'** or **'HOW GREAT THOU ART'** could actually make me cry. This was very disturbing — in fact, I almost prayed. These magical songs seemed to have all the answers, so simple, straightforward, so easy, so perfect. They made sense of everything that is non-sensical. Their meanings explained every beautiful moment and every horrific atrocity as being no different, simply — the will of god. Everything was fixed, pre-ordained — everything would be OK for ever, eternally, if you put your love and faith and trust in Jesus. But this music was the antithesis of a pragmatic, rational mind. What was happening to me? I had to find out what gave these hymns their power. So I made a sculpture called Dead Church/Real Life. I built a strange church, painted red, pushed over on its side, as if it was dead. I made a video of me singing these hymns, which I learned easily with a sense of belonging. I am framed, as usual from behind, just an average human being, except for this Real Life tattoo, sitting naked on a wooden floor. The TV set which shows this simple videotape is framed in the fallen spire of the church. The audience can enter this dead church and sit and watch this videotape unfold, while the sound falls down from speakers above like a heavenly choir from 'on high' while the whole scene is illuminated by the soft red glow of a neon which simply reads, REAL LIFE, like the beautiful light filtered through the translucent testament of a stained glass window. They say the devil has all the best tunes — I wanted to find out. What the audience thought of this work really depended how they felt about god, Jesus and the practical realities of modern life.

**THE SECRET OF ROCK 'N' ROLL ;  
something more than the sum of the parts**

Music is so fucking great You simply cannot beat it for sheer physical, visceral thrills. It's like a drug. I believe, and I'm sure I'm not the only one, that certain music at the right time can really make life worth living — it can stop you from dying, it can save your life, literally and metaphorically. When I was a bit younger I played for some years in a rock band but my naive, idealistic idea of why playing music in a band was a good thing to do was eroded and eventually destroyed by money and managers and record companies and expensive videos and a general lack of creativity and imagination in the quest for success. The great thing about the music business is that you can get your work disseminated to so many people but the downside is that the music business is so very intolerant.

But what a joy selling 20,000 records and knowing that everyone who buys it will be pouring over every detail of the sleeve you designed — a real dissemination of the ideas within. I remember playing at the Glastonbury festival in '87 or '88, I can't remember which, but looking out over 20,000 people and thinking that this is a fucking incredible thing — an incredible feeling, simultaneously terrifying and elating. The key thing about music really is the collaborative aspect which I've never found in art. I always have to do art myself. Most artists I know are the same. The best thing about being part of a band is, without doubt, the times at the beginning when it is simply four people in a room playing bass, drums, guitar and singing — this is the secret of Rock 'n' roll. The magic of these moments, this creative act, the birth of this new tune, a new life, a new feeling is very difficult to find in any other situation. Anyone who has played in a band where you are writing your own material will know what I'm talking about. You are jamming around some riff or song when suddenly an indescribable and magical thing happens. Everything coalesces, comes together *becomes something more than the sum of the parts* to make a new song, a new being. This is the moment. It could have the same basic chords as a thousand other songs but somehow this one is different, special. The raw energy generated by this nuclear fusion of sounds is the mystery. I genuinely cannot describe how empowering this feels.

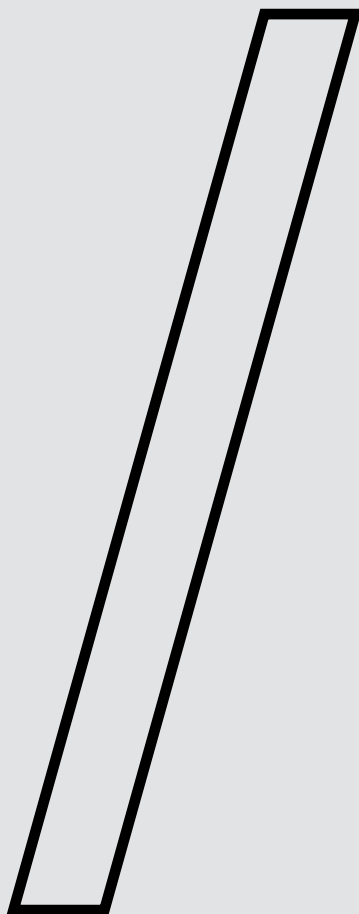
This is great when eighteen years old but unless you're very lucky or very gifted you can't last forever. The music business is even more mercenary than the art world — there's simply too much money involved. I had to get out of this situation and go back to art. There is only so far you can go with four people operating as one creative unit, it's too hard to maintain, especially when money is involved. The music business cannot tolerate the development of this creative maelstrom. Every mistake is far too expensive, and there is only so much the big transnational record companies can write off for tax relief. When I use music in my work now I don't write music, I use existing pieces of music in the same way I would employ a "ready-made". I use specific songs or certain kinds of music that has identifiable meanings, like the religious music I discussed earlier or Punk Rock music because they have a specific cultural resonance. I guess I feel like I'm curating them or collaborating with them in the same way I would do with a found object. I use music that the viewer can identify, and identify with, and utilise that potential for recognition.

**WITHOUT YOU I'M NOTHING...  
THE AUDIENCE IS ART AND ART IS THE AUDIENCE  
AND THIS IS WHY ART WILL LIVE FOREVER**

To converse with the audience is my goal, to talk in a way that transcends language and international barriers. This is the one beautiful thing I learned from the music business. To discuss not necessarily in words or images but in ideas. And not just in a passive or passing way either, but in a genuine attempt to pick us all up together, turn us all upside down and shake us till it hurts. My desire to engage every audience is based on the fundamental belief that art can do more than just decorate the space above the fireplace of the wealthy enthusiast. This is an influence from the great democratising effect of popular music. If only we could talk to each other — things could be different. Music in art can help to do this because it such an accessible medium. It's just another formal media, like paint or video, or sculpture. I hope that my Art can begin to articulate this. Not just for the enlightened dinner party conversationalist but for anybody and

everyone. I think art can change the world we live in. Change people. I want to find different strategies to explore new ways of recontextualising the world around us in order to live better in it. This begins in the heads of artists and seeps out into the world, maybe just touching one person at first, but then it grows. Art has to be inexorably linked to the world in which it lives and breathes **IN DIALOGUE**, not monologue, if it is to have any meaning in the 21st century. I want an art that has everything to do with the world, that cannot live without it. And vice-versa — inclusive, not exclusive. Reciprocal. Symbiotic. Quid pro Quo.

Art is still one of the few relatively unmediated activities where you can hear the voice of one individual striving to be heard above the cacophony of compromises and cash ins. This is why I feel a unique, undiluted vision of art holds so much potential. And the amazing thing is that we 'visual' artists can use anything we like. Not like the musician who inevitably is usually limited to the stereophonic landscape. We have all of space and time and sound and vision to talk. Art can have it all. But often artists do not use it. I want to use them all — preferably at the same time. This is the basis of my particular vision of the future, using familiar songs/music/scenarios/images/objects/hopes/fears/guilt/concern that people understand but constructing new and challenging situations/scenarios to investigate their meanings. How to find a true and honest and difficult and simple Art for the next century — that's the task for artists. This is Real Life — amateur, analog, secular, organic, an art which is more than the sum of its parts — imagining the world not as it is — **BUT AS IT COULD BE.**

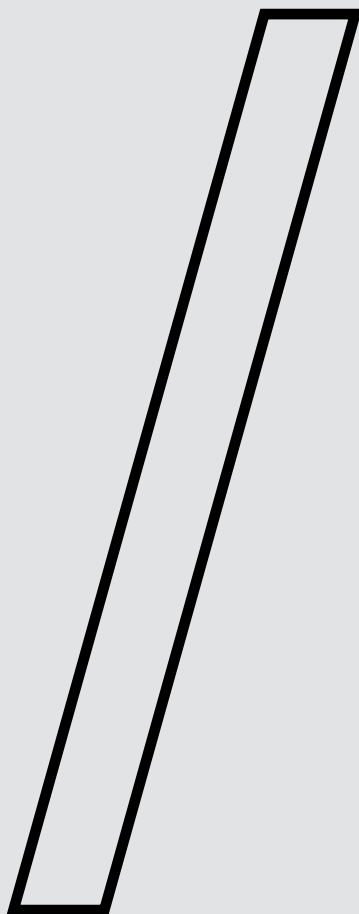


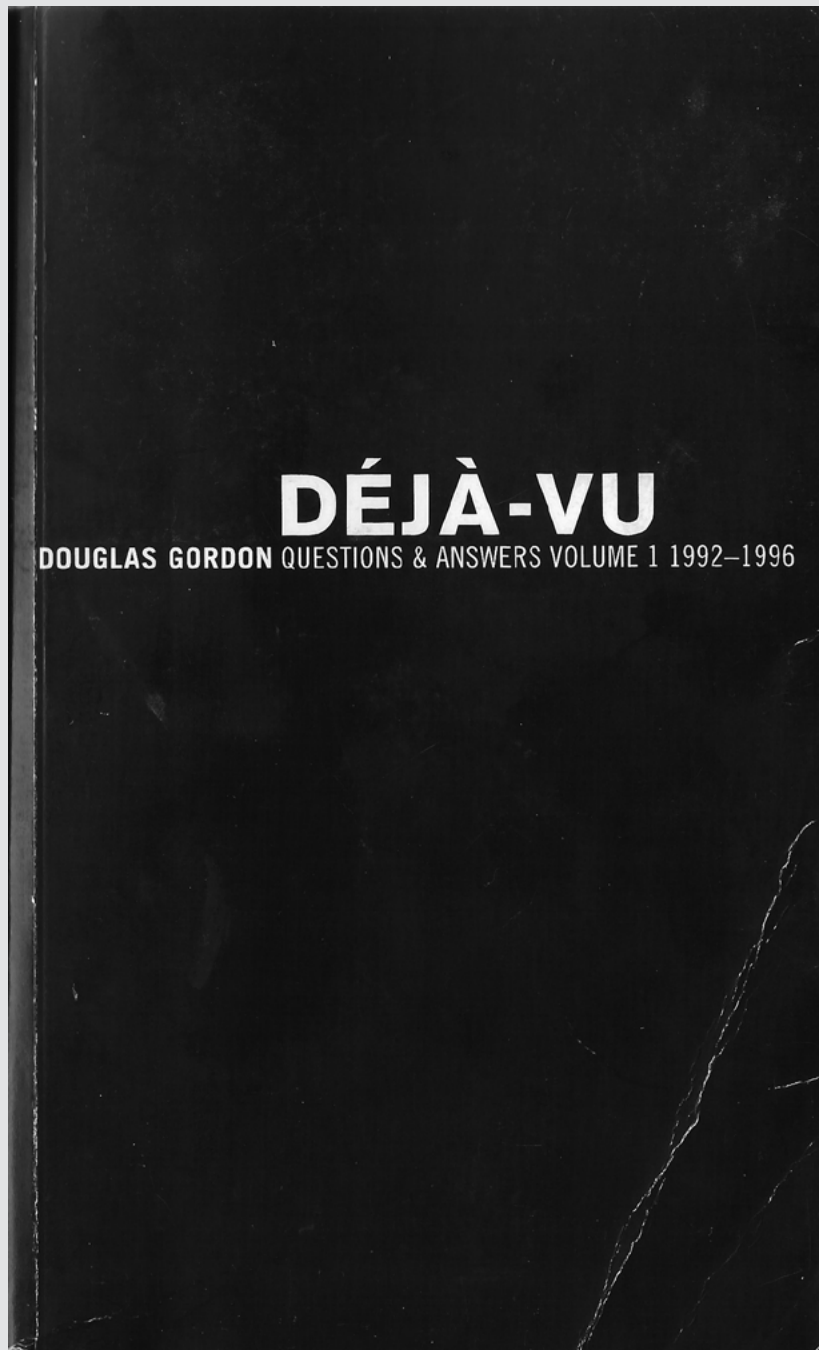


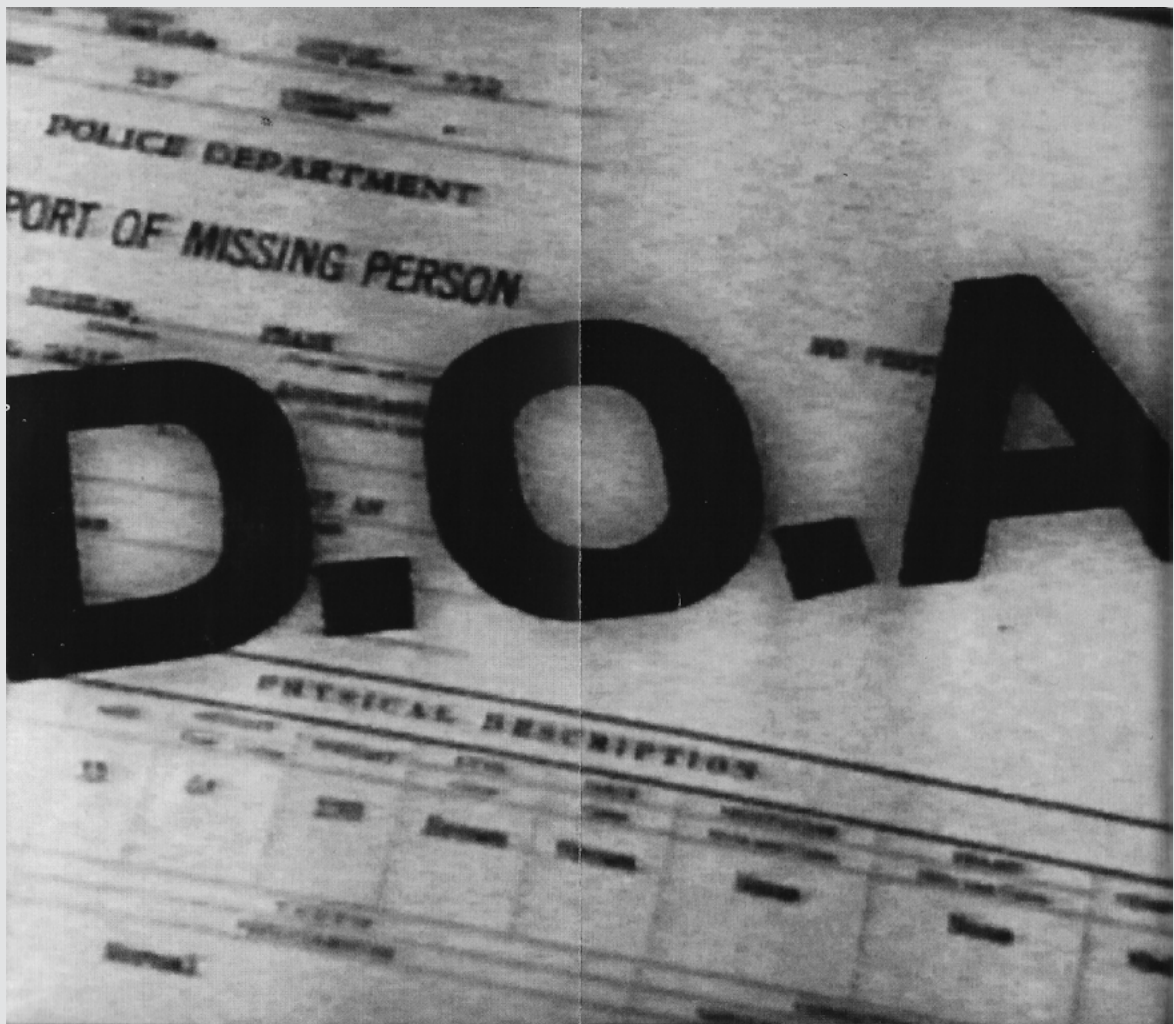
"CAN NONE OF YOU FUCKERS SPEAK ENGLISH?" once asked Jonathan Monk, Environmental Art, class of '91, in a posterwork flyposted in the street. It's a good question. Sometimes you wonder. Are we even speaking the same language here? And I'm not talking about languages like French or German. It's not a question of where you come from geographically, it's *where you are coming from* that counts. I'm an artist, you're an artist - we're all artists but often I don't see any similarities. In fact I see antithetical positions, opposition, conflict - are we even looking at the same thing here - painting - sculpture - installation - figurative - non-figurative - abstract - conceptual - commercial - minimal - sell-out - Sunday... I could go on but I'm sure you get the picture. Am I missing something. Does where I'm coming from change the meaning of this thing so much that it becomes unrecognisable to you? Are we even on the same planet? You and me - Us and them - forever out of love - apart... In the last 35 years we have witnessed the absolute abdication of sixties radicalism and revolt and the possibility of change. The spectacular apotheosis of modernism - the end of history - the promise of the 60's, the end of modernism, Paris 68, revolution, pop art - the situationists, fluxus, minimalism, conceptualism and then the 70's - Red Army Faction fighting 'late capitalism' and flares everywhere and then Stammheim in 1977 - their ambiguous deaths occurring at almost exactly the same time as Punk Rock began, or ended, depending on how you look at it. Then - an abyss, a crevice, a hole. The eighties, money - the market - acid house - rave culture - ecstasy - who was on the outside - who stood apart - who was part of the problem - and who was part of the solution?... We are now standing at a precipice, formalism is poised to make a triumphant return to the centre stage of chic and credibility. It's probably too late already. New, 21st century formalism is the antitheses of everything that is worthwhile in art. It's an abdication of responsibility, it says - *fuck you*, you don't count, and you couldn't afford it anyway. In 1956 it was a different story. Ad Reinhardt, then Robert Rauschenberg - black and white respectively - everything was black and white then - right and wrong - good and evil - capitalist and communist - west and east - north and south. Like extra terrestrial bloodacid burning through 7 floors of that spaceship in Alien - you think this is new - futuristic - well knock me down and I bleed - and look at what comes out. I always imagine that Reinhardt and Rauschenbergs' are the last houses on the opposite sides of a one way street of beautiful 1930's houses. The kind you now see on tv documentaries about where Mr famous used to live when he was young and poor - and think - these are really great houses - so roomy - so attractive - how come no one lives here anymore - painters used to live here... Don't let them fool you, all the rest is bullshit... How can a generation born in the late 70's make sense of the world today - after history, dislocated, floating, taking in water but going down in incredible style. Can the world be as sad as it seems? - I guess it could seem that way if you were born in 1980. Born into post-modernism and cultural studies of a study of a study of a history of something that never really existed in the first place.

This is student life today. Can art be anything other than a cynical reworking of past solutions, a schmaltz ersatz imitation whose highest ambition is dowdy verisimilitude. Looks like art - smells like art - must be art. Can new things ever be made? And if so, where are the new ideas to fuel them. But what does this mean - new - novelty - the latest thing - this months vogue - is grey the new black or am I getting confused - Is it stripes or spots this year - impasto or airbrushed - If nothing new is possible, progress is anathema, sideways steps are all we can muster, forever sideways, endless recontextualisation. The lines have ended, the fires on the coasts have extinguished, we are all ships at sea, charting uncertain waters, pitch black, no sextant or compass. But can we imagine this history is credible - what about all the things that never even made it into history - the thousands and millions of other parallel histories, the history that wasn't tough enough, went for a walk on its own instead of staying around and playing to the gallery - got overlooked - never was picked up - never realised it's full potential or just never made it to the photo call?... - MAKING ART should make you feel like you are running as fast as you possibly can, running till your legs are screaming, lactic acid pumping through your veins and your lungs are bursting and you are smashing through a series of walls on to higher and higher levels - that paper wall at the end of the process where you can see the shape of it through this paper screen - it's right there, just on the other side of this fragile paper - you could blow a hole in it - but you can't touch it - you have to work your way through it another way and then - blam - you're over the edge - you're up and running - leaps of faith - again and again - every day - jumping - falling over the edge of a cliff into the abyss of possibilities and potential - of space and nothingness and failure and success and trying - pushing - falling - with no parachute - no escape route and please - no excuses. Then we are in freefall - terminal velocity - alone - hurtling through space. Sometimes you win. Often you lose. But you can always say that at least you tried. You didn't just buckle under to the mindless, stultifying, sickening, stupid, cynicism of towing the line with parlour painting or ABC conceptualism. Questions of form and value exist only in an academic framework, no one in their right mind gives a fuck about them. Painting, sculpture, photography, who cares, who gives a shit. Students should not be exposed to this kind of neurosis so early in life, when you are immortal and everything, your whole life ahead of you AND THE WORLD IS LYING PROSTRATE AT YOUR FEET. Lets face it, there's plenty shit coming later - CEASE TO EXIST - - why not - When did it end that art could change the world? When you're 21 years old - who in their right mind doesn't want to see all the old farts burnt at the stake, left to smoulder in their own smug arrogance. WHERE IS HISTORY WHEN YOU NEED IT? - It's right here and now - and we've only got ourselves to blame.

Ross Sinclair







## DÉJÀ-VU

DG : Eh bien, il faut viser le public qu'on attend. Les gens qui verront cette œuvre au musée, ou ceux qui la découvriront plus tard, sont là pour passer un peu de temps sur des idées. C'est une situation qui peut être utilisée pour présenter une œuvre impliquant les désirs et les attentes de ces gens.

RS : Alors, que trouvera l'amateur d'art dans cette œuvre ?

DG : Il trouvera un double des clefs du Museum of Modern Art de Dublin. Je veux vendre les clefs comme une œuvre multiple relativement bon marché, pour changer la signification des originaux. Les originaux sont uniques et ont de la valeur précisément parce qu'ils ne sont pas disponibles. Je veux que les clefs soient très disponibles pour que, plus il en sortira, plus l'idée puisse voyager loin – littéralement et conceptuellement. Cet aspect de distribution est souligné par le fait qu'aux doubles, s'ajoute une série d'"ébauches", afin que celui qui possède un jeu de clefs puisse aller chez son serrurier et continuer à copier autant de fois qu'il le veut.

RS : Voulez-vous ancrer l'idée dans le contexte du musée ?

DG : J'espère que ceux qui liront l'œuvre reconnaîtront ce que signifie 'les clefs d'un musée'. En comprenant que cela peut déclencher toutes les autres idées que nous pouvons avoir sur les clefs.

RS : Oui... la clef a une forte valeur métaphorique. Comme dans les films et les récits, la clef représente l'accès, le privilège, le succès, le pouvoir, l'épanouissement, et ainsi de suite. Mais la principale implication semble être une remise en cause du statut du musée. Ici, on nous offre un jeu de clefs d'un lieu qui a une valeur culturelle et économique. Cette action pourra sembler étrange à certains.

## MUSEUM KEYS

DG : Il pourrait sembler que l'idée centrale de l'œuvre est cette remise en cause dont vous parlez. Mais l'œuvre n'a pas besoin d'être limitée à une pure critique de la muséologie. Les motifs sont plus pragmatiques, moins spécifiques. En travaillant dans ce musée, je dois essayer de faire quelque chose qui ne serait peut-être pas possible ailleurs.

RS : Alors pourquoi les clefs plutôt qu'autre chose ?

DG : Parmi tous les accessoires du musée avec lesquels j'aurais pu choisir de travailler, j'ai choisi les clefs parce qu'elles ont cette valeur métaphorique et allégorique en dehors et en plus de la critique du musée. Ce qui veut dire que les clefs peuvent 'jouer' parallèlement à toutes nos idées liées aux reliques.

RS : Comme par exemple ?

DG : Je verrais l'œuvre fonctionner suivant...eh bien...imaginez quelqu'un qui vous aborde dans la rue et vous propose quelques clous 'de la crucifixion', ou un fragment de suaire, ou autre chose. Vous ne le croiriez probablement pas, mais vous pourriez avoir plaisir à y songer. Et si c'est assez bon marché, vous pourriez même l'acheter. Je crois que nous aimons l'idée de reliques.

RS : Mais ces clefs n'ont pas le même aspect rétrospectif que ces clous, ou qu'autre chose.

DG : Elles pourraient l'avoir un jour.

RS : *Rires.*

DG : Mais si quelqu'un vous offrait les clefs du musée Guggenheim, des années cinquante par exemple, ne cherchiez-vous pas à savoir si elles fonctionnent encore ?

## DÉJÀ-VU

La question est de savoir si l'on veut croire que ce sont d'authentiques ou de fausses reliques.

RS : Comme vous le dites, si on regardait les clefs d'un grand musée d'il y a trente, quarante ou cinquante ans, on commencerait à imaginer leur relation avec les artistes, et, en un sens plus large, leur relation avec tout ce qui s'est passé dans le monde à cette époque.

DG : Absolument.

RS : Mais l'œuvre garde un côté absurde.

DG : C'est le fait qu'on puisse mettre en doute la vérité de la pièce, qui pose la question de l'authenticité et de la foi. Le cœur de l'idée est dans les questions que les gens pourraient se poser en mettant l'œuvre en doute.

RS : Les clefs sont elles 'réelles'? L'œuvre est-elle purement métaphorique ? Et, sinon, le musée a-t-il fait changer ses serrures depuis ce projet ?

DG : Tout tourne autour de ce type de questions pour commencer. Ou plutôt, de la manière dont les gens choisissent d'y répondre. Il s'agit de savoir si les gens y croient ou non. En ce qui me concerne, cependant, je ne veux pas savoir ce que fait le musée, s'il change les serrures.

RS : Pensez-vous que ceux qui pourraient vouloir acheter les clefs auraient des chances de les utiliser ?

DG : De quelle manière ?

RS : Je veux dire...pensez-vous qu'ils essaieront d'entrer dans l'immeuble à trois heures du matin ?

## MUSEUM KEYS

DG : Je ne sais pas. L'œuvre est un mécanisme conçu pour imposer ce genre de responsabilité au spectateur. Il a la responsabilité d'élaborer une signification de l'œuvre. Les décisions relatives à la construction de la signification doivent être prises en posant des questions et en soupesant les réponses. On ne trouve pas les réponses en regardant l'objet ; elles se fondent sur des personnes qui réfléchissent à des questions morales et éthiques.

RS : Nous avons donc ce dilemme : savoir si les clefs sont vraies ou non. Et puis toutes les choses métaphoriques, avec certaines questions morales et éthiques qui s'y rattachent. C'est un peu une crise.

DG : Eh bien, vous savez comment cela fonctionne. La relation du spectateur avec une œuvre peut être la même que toute autre relation. Si on est en relation avec quelqu'un, et si on commence à douter de tel aspect de l'autre personne, on peut s'appesantir sur ce doute jusqu'à arriver à une crise grave, par effet boule de neige. Peut-être une crise de confiance.

RS : Vous pourriez donc tout recommencer ?

DG : Oui, cela pourrait continuer. D'autres clefs provenant d'autres musées.

RS : Cela me semble une idée astucieuse.

DG : Elle n'est pas astucieuse. Elle est bonne. Je dois penser que c'est une bonne idée.

RS : Mais c'est une chose qui peut aller loin. Je m'imagine qu'elle pourrait fonctionner comme la peinture de John Baldessari qui va de musée en musée, et qui, dans votre cas,

## DÉJÀ-VU

s'augmente d'un nouveau jeu de clefs à chaque fois. Presque un projet d'archivage.

DG : Eh bien, si les clefs se révèlent intéressantes, ou plus intéressantes dans dix ou vingt ans, alors c'est parfait.

\*

Traduction de Dennis Collins

© Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 1992

## Museum Keys

ROSS SINCLAIR, 1992

*An unlimited multiple work by Douglas Gordon in Guilt  
by Association, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin,  
September 23rd–October 11th, 1992*

In conversation with Ross Sinclair, Transmission Gallery,  
Glasgow, August 20th 1992

ROSS SINCLAIR: How did this work develop?

DOUGLAS GORDON: It came about through being in a situation that most artists find themselves in at some time: I was installing some work in a gallery last year and, as happens often, the gallery gave me a set of keys to let myself in and out of the building whenever I wanted. I couldn't help thinking about how easy it would be to copy those keys. They might even have fallen into the wrong hands, if you know what I mean.

RS: But it's not as if the 'wrong hands' are going to be the audience for this work.

DG: You never know.

RS: Who do you reckon is the audience for this work? It won't be the casual passer-by.

## DÉJÀ-VU

DG: Well, you have to aim for the audience that you anticipate. The people who will see this work in the museum, or those who come across it later, are there to spend a bit of time on ideas. That's a situation that can be used to present work which will involve those people's expectations and desires.

RS: So what will the art lover get in this work?

DG: They'll get a set of duplicate keys to the Museum of Modern Art in Dublin. I want to sell the keys as a fairly cheap multiple, to alter the significance of the originals. The originals are unique and valuable precisely because they are unavailable. I want them to be very available so that the more keys that go out, then the further the idea can travel – literally and conceptually. This element of distribution is emphasised by the fact that the multiple includes a set of blanks, so that whoever has a set of keys can go along to their local key-cutter and continue copying as many times as they want.

RS: Do you want to anchor the idea in the context of the Museum?

DG: I hope that people who read the work will recognise the significance of 'the keys to a museum'. In recognising this it can trigger off all the other ideas we might have about keys.

RS: Yes; the key has a strong metaphorical value. Like in films and stories keys represent access, privilege, success, power, fulfilment and so on. But the main implication seems to be a reconsideration of the status of the Museum. I mean, here we are being offered a set of keys to a repository of cultural and economic value. That's going to appear to some people like an odd thing to do.

## MUSEUM KEYS

DG: The main focus of the work may appear to be this reconsideration that you're talking about. But the work needn't be limited to a pure critique on museology. The motives are more pragmatic, less specific than that. I reckon that whilst I'm working in this museum I should try and do something here that might not be possible elsewhere.

RS: So why the keys as opposed to anything else?

DG: Out of all the Museum accessories that I could have chosen to work with, I chose the keys because they have this metaphorical and allegorical currency outside of, and as well as, the critique on the museum. It means that the keys can operate alongside all our ideas to do with relics.

RS: Like what?

DG: I could see the work operating along the lines of...well, imagine that someone came up to you in the street and offered you some old nails 'from the crucifixion', or a bit of shroud or something. You probably wouldn't believe it, but you might enjoy thinking about it. And if it was cheap enough you might even buy it. I think we like the idea of relics.

RS: But these keys don't have the same retrospective aspect as those nails or whatever.

DG: They might have some day.

RS: Ha ha!

DG: But if somebody offered you the keys from the Guggenheim Museum, from the fifties, say, you wouldn't be interested in whether they still functioned or not. The

## DÉJÀ-VU

issue is whether you want to believe that they are genuine relics or fakes.

RS: As you say, if you were looking at the keys from any major museum of say thirty, forty, fifty years ago, you start to imagine their relationships with artists and, in a wider sense, their relationship to everything else that was happening in the world at that time.

DG: Absolutely.

RS: But the work remains kind of absurd.

DG: It's the fact that you might doubt the truth of the piece that raises the issues of authenticity and belief. The core of the idea is in the questions that people might ask themselves on doubting the work.

RS: Are the keys 'real'? Is the work purely metaphorical? And if not, have the museum changed their locks since this project?

DG: It's all about those types of questions to begin with. Or rather, how people choose to answer them. It's about whether people believe or not. As far as I'm concerned, though, I don't want to know what the museum does as regards changing locks or whatever.

RS: Do you think that the type of people who might want to buy keys are likely to use them?

DG: In what way?

RS: I mean, do you think they'll try and get into the building at three o'clock in the morning?

## MUSEUM KEYS

DG: I don't know. The work is a mechanism for pushing that kind of responsibility onto the viewer. They have the responsibility to construct a meaning for the work. Decisions related to the construction of meaning have to be made by asking questions and weighing up the answers. Those answers are not to be found in gazing at the object; they are based on an individuals thinking around moral and ethical issues.

RS: So what we've got is this dilemma as to whether the keys are genuine or not. And then all the metaphorical stuff, with some moral and ethical questions thrown in too. It's a bit of a crisis.

DG: Well, you know how these things work. The relationship that a viewer has with a work can be much the same as any other kind of relationship. If you're in a relationship with someone and you start to doubt some aspect of the other person, then you might dwell on that doubt until the whole thing snowballs towards a serious crisis. Maybe a crisis in belief.

RS: So would you do it all again?

DG: Well, this thing could go on. More keys from more museums.

RS: That sounds like a 'shrewd move' idea.

DG: I don't think it's shrewd. I think it's good. I've got to think it's a good idea.

RS: But it's a high-mileage thing. I can imagine it functioning like the John Baldessari painting that moves from museum

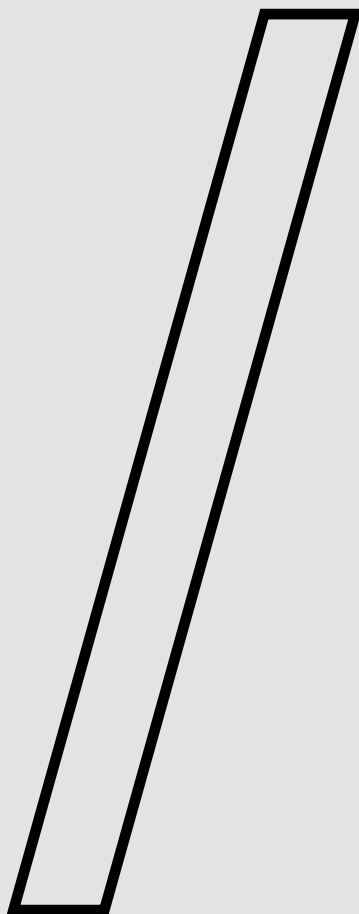
## DÉJA-VU

to museum, and in your case accrues a new set of keys each time. Almost an archive project.

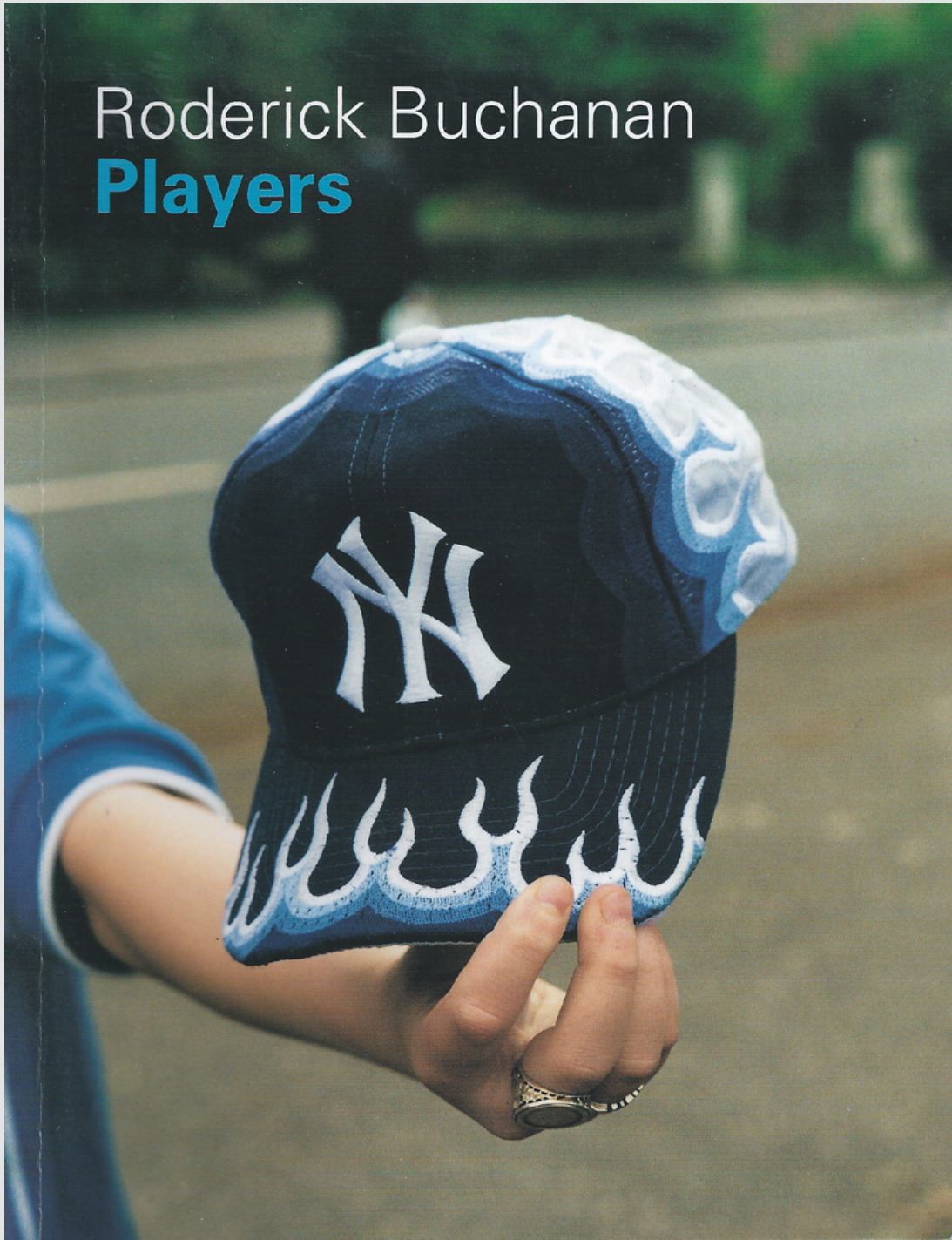
DG: Well, if the keys prove to be as interesting, or more interesting, in ten or twenty years then that's perfect.

\*

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Roderick Buchanan  
**Players**



BUTTER KNIFE  
CHEESE KNIFE  
DESSERT KNIFE  
DINNER KNIFE  
FISH KNIFE  
STEAK KNIFE  
GRAPEFRUIT KNIFE  
OYSTER KNIFE  
PARING KNIFE  
BREAD KNIFE  
FILLETING KNIFE  
BONING KNIFE  
HAM KNIFE  
CARVING KNIFE  
COOKS KNIFE  
CLEAVER  
MACHETE  
COMMANDO KNIFE  
PONIARD  
STILETTO  
DAGGER  
ONE-HANDED SWORD  
ONE-AND-A-HALF SWORD  
RAPIER  
SABRE  
TWO-HANDED SWORD

## Politics, loyalty and the class of '84

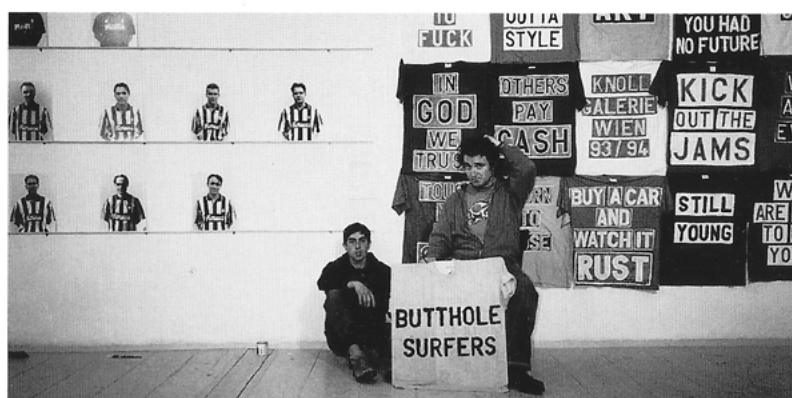
Ross Sinclair

We've known Roddy for more than fifteen years. We've watched his work emerge over those years. We were in the same year at art school, same department, Environmental Art, same space, same flats, same friends – same neighbourhood. We have shown often together, in Scotland, England, Europe, America, Australia and other places too. It's part and parcel of the whole world we came out of, showing together, dialogue, argument. We learned a lot from each other – taught each other. We learned a lot from Roddy.\* Back in the day, our work was similar, coming from the same place. In some ways it still is, although you wouldn't think it at first glance. But back then everything was open, nothing was fixed, anything was possible. At that time, when we were students, Glasgow was a hotbed of Neo-Expressionism. It seemed as though this work had fallen in from another century. Above all, it was anathema to our need to talk, our desire for dialogue, with each other, with the audience, with anyone who would listen. Nevertheless, at least it proved to us there was life beyond the backwater. What was there to lose by looking to the wider world? We were the *avant-garde*, the new breed, and now we are the mainstream.

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List of Blades 1993

\* I remember once seeing him adding some text to a piece of work which was in a horrible typeface. I asked him why he was using this no frills basic typeface when another would surely make the work look better. He explained to me that it wasn't supposed to make the piece 'look good' but was supposed to make it work.



Roddy Buchanan  
and Ross Sinclair  
Galerie Knoll,  
Vienna, 1993

10 The infectious self-determination of those days has produced a generation of Scottish artists who are quite simply the best there has ever been. Roddy has always been at the heart of it – the planning, the scheming, the discussions, the arguments, the passion, the integrity, the location of the core of identity. National and international, horizontally developing infrastructures – Glasgow to Amsterdam, Glasgow to Berlin, Glasgow to Paris, Glasgow to New York, L.A. wherever and all on return tickets – fuck London, we thought, who needs it? (though we always kept in touch). Throughout these years of argument, debate and discussion Roddy has always demonstrated an innate talent for controversy. I can't quite think how else to put it. He makes things happen. He is passionate. Sometimes he is reckless and insensitive, provocative and aggressive. Sometimes he goes too far. But his work is perceptive and precise, and it travels its own path. It works on the same premise as his personality. He knows who you are. He knows where you live. Metaphorically speaking of course. Roddy knows us well, even after all these years, and sometimes it can be disturbing. We both came from the suburbs, not cred, not cool, just blank. But the thing about Roddy is that in the last 15 years he hasn't lost a desire, a need to push things as far as they can go, to cut through the polite conversation of cosmopolitan art and the aspirational lifestyle of its practitioners. In his work, and sometimes in his life. Of course some people don't like it.

Loyalty is very important. It cuts through Roddy's work from the very beginning. Loyalty to background, your school, your class, your country,



**Mid-Atlantic Tartan**  
1986

your team, your mates, the crown, your gang, your ideals. Not just your own idea of loyalty, of course, but how this concept changes in different cultures, different places, different times.

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So here's a salutary tale about loyalty. It has etched itself into the core of our relationship. I think most people he knows well have a story like this. It happened to us sometime in the late eighties. I don't exactly remember when. We were rolling home to the flat we shared, in the early hours of the morning after a Ramones gig, both absolutely drunk. The road we were walking took us through a park that the police patrolled regularly. Sure enough, a police van crawled by and I made the mistake of gesticulating rather too enthusiastically in its general direction. It pulled over and we were collared. Unless you've been asked, you can't imagine how ridiculous 'What's your name, sonny', sounds at 3am on a dark Glasgow street. While I dutifully answered in my best slurred suburbs accent Roddy answered sharply, 'Roger Ramjet'. Five minutes later he was handcuffed in the back of the van and the cop turned to me and asked if I wanted to join my smartarse friend in the back of the van. I replied simply, 'no'. 'Well fuck off home then', I was strongly advised. Rightly or wrongly Roddy never forgave me. That breach of loyalty was anathema to him. I supposed he couldn't understand it, it was us against them, wasn't it? The moment passed, but it has been the source of an unresolved barrier between us ever since. Together we were strong, but I let them divide and conquer. Of course, I now wish I'd gone with him. Because nothing really came of it. So



**Warning: MORE THA**



- 12 I imagine us, brothers in arms in the back of the black Mariah, standing together against the forces of oppression, then telling the story for years to come as our friends cried, 'not again'. Sadly the fact is, if it happened again tomorrow I'd probably do the same thing.

Roddy's early work around this time was politically informed, politically motivated. Printed tartans with Polaris submarines in fashion shows, plaster petrol bombs, milk churn bombs, flags, graffiti (official and unofficial). Formally diverse and rich, intellectually striving, politics and struggle elevated by a curious mix of clean edges and revolutionary colour schemes. He worked for a whole year on a series of billboard interventions during a year out from art school. He wanted to do this outside of the restrictions of the academic process. We lived together at that time and I would regularly hear him going out in the middle of the night, sometimes several times in one night, to make his billboard works. These were generally based on the space at the bottom of the poster filled with government health warnings on tobacco advertisements. First he would paint out the warnings, then would return a few hours later when it was dry to complete the *détournement*, often proposing a new relationship between this new text and the existing image, sometimes unaltered, sometimes radically changed. No graffiti scrawl this, no polarised politics. The attention to detail was immense.

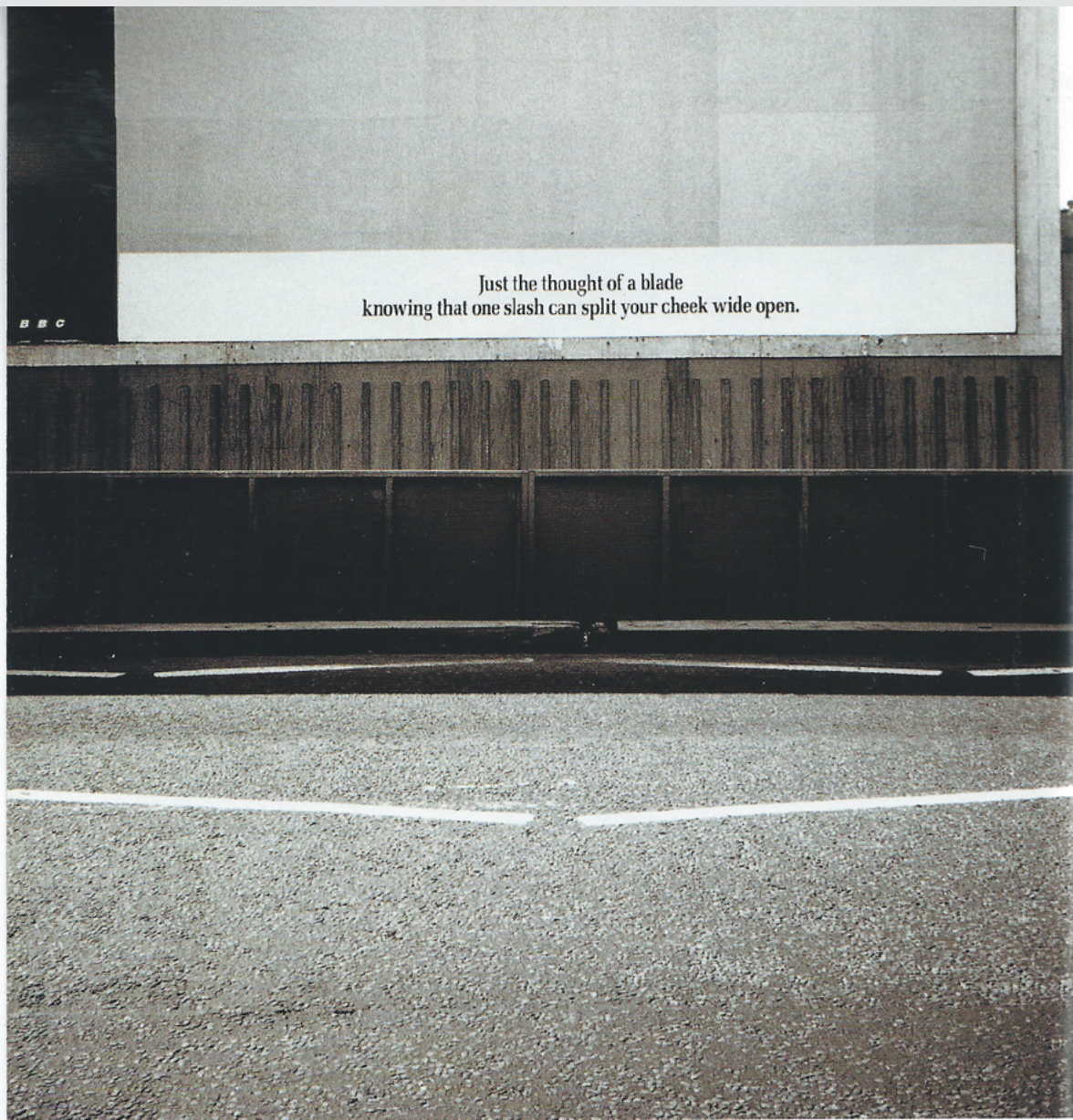
These works were sophisticated and beautiful, politically charged and aesthetically sublime. But he still had to dodge the cops. Often these



works were very subtle, the antithesis of a more overtly politicised political graffiti popular at the time. In many ways this was their great strength. The uncertainty and confusion provoked by these new images provided a more powerful and unsettling experience for the viewer, if they happened to notice something was different. His work has always challenged the viewer in this way, and has sought a more profound relationship with a small number of viewers rather than a catch all, something for everyone strategy. Sometimes his works do not readily announce themselves as ART, and consequently possess a great power and possibility for real engagement. Nevertheless these works needed the public, they relied on a context, and they were slow burners, though often they didn't last long. I'm sure there are some he never even managed to photograph.

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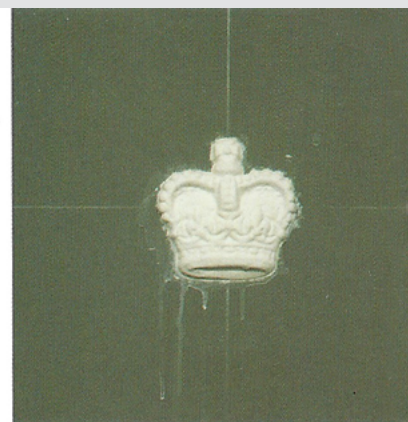
In one of his works from *Guilt by Association*, 1992, he spent the months before the show documenting the meetings between the artists and their meetings with Declan McGonagle (illustrated above). This work captured the dynamics of these long discussions about the nature of the show, and this particular group of artists. He was striving to document the process of this collaboration. And to show these in the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin served to emphasise the assertion that this debate, this process, these questions – How can we make an exhibition? How can it be coherent? How can our individual concerns come together to make something which is more than the sum of the parts? – were just as important as what was on the walls at the end.



**Outing Art**  
BBC billboard commission  
1992



**Social Security**  
1990



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To nobody's surprise, in 1989 he went to study for an MA in Belfast, with Alastair MacLennan. The draw of the city was overwhelming for Roddy. The conflict, the contradictions, the abuse of power, the history and the geography. His investigation of the relationship between politics and aesthetics continued apace over his year there. Roddy is a great explorer of people and places, whether it's wandering up to the Bronx on his skateboard on a student trip to New York and nearly missing the plane home, or his late night walks around Belfast, through all the places you shouldn't really go. I accompanied him on one of these trips and while we walked cautiously various routes through the places well-known from news footage and a hundred songs, discussing the complexities of this complicated city and its war, he was at great pains to avoid any inference of cultural or political tourism. He was living there and expressed the utmost respect for the complexities of history. But still, he wanted to see for himself.

There is another important aspect of Roddy's practice and it's a kind of work ethic that flows through its various forms. From the earliest works there has been something of a process of production evident. This is certainly clear in the intensive dedication of the year long billboard series, or the casting of hundreds of plaster relief crowns attached permanently to temporary walls at his MA show in the foyer of the art school at the University of Ulster in Belfast and in *Self Conscious State*, 1990, at Third Eye Centre in Glasgow. There was the project on a bus shelter in Glasgow where he made silk screen prints on coloured sheets of paper which each

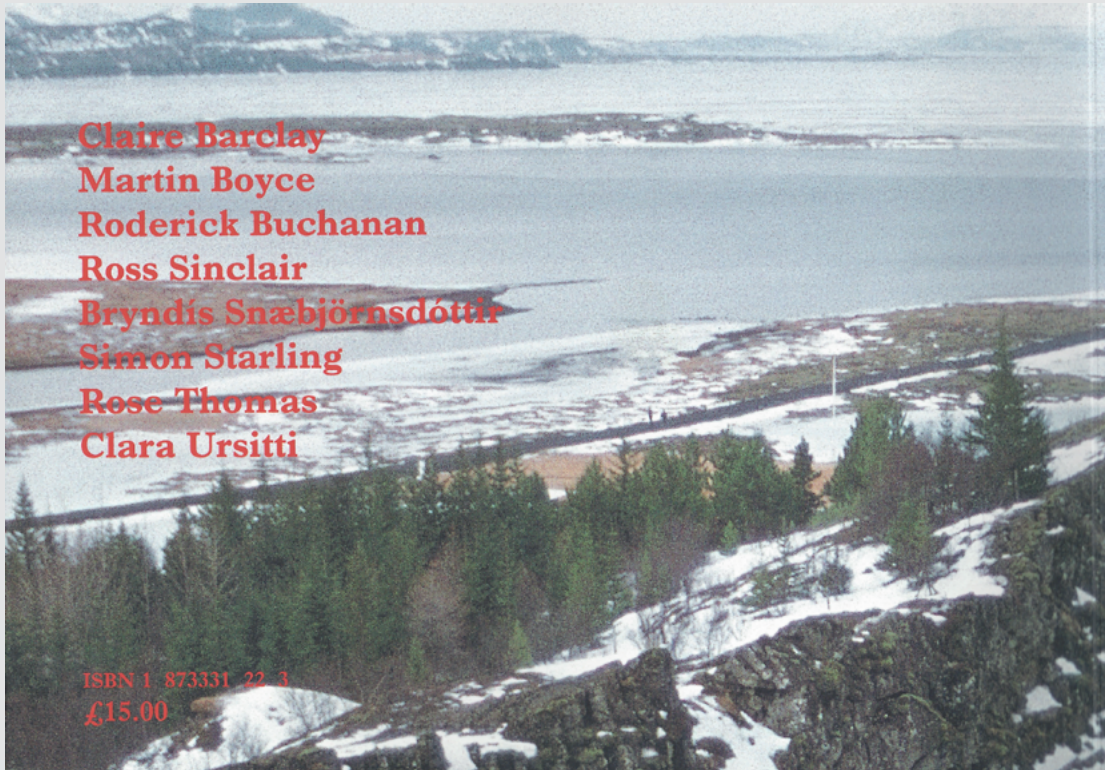


figured a single head, copied from the masthead of *The Guardian*. These were then attached to each panel of the bus shelter and changed every day. The installation looked like a continually evolving flag of a non-nation with mysterious, statesman-like figures at the centre of each colour. People would come to the shelter every day, waiting around for their bus. This captive audience would witness this strange transformation and try to piece together the fractured narrative. Then there's *Ten in a Million* ... I remember helping him make one version in Amsterdam and I can vouch for the difficulty in organising this not to mention the uncomfortable practicalities of producing it. It's a sign of his passion for the project that he has made this work in nine cities now. However, this allows him to explore these cities where this series has been made, an excuse, if one were needed, to go native. This process continues in the *Coast to Coast, Dennis-toun* series. This project has spread over four years and has necessitated Roddy going out, countless times, on the streets of Glasgow's east end, approaching gangs of teenagers, asking to photograph them and their baseball caps. In one sense the images from these projects are merely the record of the process of investigation, the journey. This is significant in many of his works. There also seems to be a desire in this process to put himself in uncomfortable or challenging circumstances while making the work. Making himself vulnerable.

We have all changed quite a lot in the past decade. There is no longer the same proximity between us. This little group has exploded out into the

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- 18 the same proximity between us. This little group has exploded out into the world. Everyone is on their own trajectory and it's now common to go for months or sadly, years, without seeing the new work of someone of whom you used to know every nuance of the tiniest thing they did. We all feel that loss, but I think Roddy feels it a little more than most. I know he still feels the first audience for his work is his peer group. While living in New York a few years ago he worked as an art shipper. 3000 miles away from home, schlepping Monets and Rymans in and out of Upper West Side apartments. I remember seeing a photo of him, I don't remember whether it was a work or just a snap. He was standing by a big truck on a New York street wearing a white t-shirt with black text clearly visible on the front. It read simply, 'Be true to your school'.



## foreword

The geographical distance between Glasgow and Reykjavík is not great. Despite that, the contrast could hardly have been stronger during our spring visit. Winter was hanging on in there, demonstrating not only its ability to whiten the land but also to preserve that condition through freezing temperatures. The northern lights ran dancing steps across a clear sky – a spell was cast...

We hadn't met together as much as we had hoped – everyone was just too busy, there was never even one moment when everyone was in the same country. We wanted to talk this whole show through, resolve our differences, suspend our individual egos and try to define an honest dialogue, a collective ego. What could this idea mean? Collectively. Individually. So the meetings became a year-long evolving Chinese whisper. Slowly a feeling emerged. Individuals were away, came back, caught up, got the new information. Our desire was to capture the spirit of the group shows we had been in a decade ago, where there was no money, few opportunities but all the time in the world to define first principles, to set an agenda, to make it perfect. We wanted to rekindle that incredible optimism and ambition and marry it to the incredible wealth of experience now accrued within our artists' group.



The Living Art Museum was our 'home' during our stay in Reykjavík and as we completed our respective projects the spirit of the place pumped through our veins. As a consequence of the experience, the initial impetus of the idea was reinforced conspicuously. Once back in Glasgow this collective energy was sustained and led to a further breaching of boundaries in individual practice as we'd expected, provoking amongst other things three collaborative works in the exhibition at the CCA.

Iceland was the catalyst. The very idea of the place made us realise that the show made sense. This was a context where art and ideas could breathe. I mean, our first trip was to the site of Althing – the oldest parliament in the world. How could we lose? Everybody brought their ideas, some bits and pieces. We made the show there, together. For once, everybody discussed where the best place for each artist's work would be – what needed room to grow, what was condensed and self-contained. Generous and genuine. How would this work develop? How would that work be brought to a conclusion? Let's talk about it. I made a work that involved painting the flag of every country in the world and hanging them on washing lines. I thought it would be quick but it wasn't. So everyone helped out, painting flags as if in some therapeutic geography class. But somehow this made sense, all of us, from all over the place via Glasgow, sitting in the Living Art Museum in Reykjavík, painting these paper symbols representing every far-flung province on the globe.



We all choose different ways of seeking regeneration: in religion, by travelling, listening to or playing music, reading or constructing stories, taking drugs or participating in sport activities. For me, hillwalking is a source of ideas and rejuvenation, particularly in long-distance projects, but like many such pursuits it demands preparation and necessitates travel. As well as physical ability, it requires psychological openness and concentration. Couple this with the additional benefits and challenges of teamsmanship – of undertaking such an enterprise with others – and the parallels with the current project were never far from my thoughts.

We brought our different obsessions to this project. We wanted to mix them together and see what the resultant cocktail would taste like, or smell like, or sound like, or look like. Poetry and politics. How could things be different? Why are things the way they are? I have a vision – you have a vision – let's have a vision together – let's show it to other people – let's blend them together.

To take a group of fellow artists to the country of one's origin could be regarded as some sort of transcendence. It could be seen as an attempt momentarily to merge the boundaries through a symbiotic existence. The opportunity to re-contextualize oneself in the 'previous homeland' surrounded by familiar contemporary values of the 'current homeland' was enough to provoke determination and an atmosphere of excitement not to



mention propitiousness. For the group it represented an opportunity to carry a collective strength to respond individually and almost spontaneously to a new cultural experience.

Where do we come from? Who are we? What does it mean to be born in one specific geographic location? Maybe nothing. What if you feel more at home somewhere else, somewhere that suits you? You can choose your friends but your family you're stuck with, but your country too? You can change your name, but your birthplace? Imagine chopping someone down the middle and, like the rings of a tree, trying to see what parts come from the country where they were born/live and what parts are from the myriad of other influences from around the world. Or imagine perhaps a refugee state where everyone is from somewhere else, but with no religious or political imperatives, only an empathetic desire to be together.

The art scene in Reykjavík is cosmopolitan, energetic and in some ways similar to that in Glasgow. This I believe can be attributed to most Icelandic artists living abroad for various periods of time in capitals around the world. Until recently, in Glasgow an equivalent art scene might tend to have been sought by looking south, west or east, to London, New York or Berlin. It is only in the last few years that the emergence and consolidation of Glasgow's position in this respect has provoked its community to look more closely at intermediate venues or even over its shoulder to places in the north.



The relationship between the central and the peripheral is ambiguous. You can get a lot of mileage by being on the periphery if you operate like Glasgow has in the last ten years, but maybe not if you're too far away – Glasgow was on the periphery ten years ago. But not now. There are other problems but everyone who is interested in new art knows where Glasgow is. We found Iceland to be truly unique. In Iceland Cosmopolitania is an absolute imperative. Everyone has been somewhere else for years and then comes back. Then moves on, comes back etc. Then they come to Scotland and we go there. Iceland Glasgow/Glasgow Iceland.

All the artists in *If I Ruled the World* have made Glasgow their home although their places of origin might differ. Diversity is after all one of the elements that contribute to Glasgow's exciting and challenging art scene. Increasingly, a key to this phenomenon has been the blurring of professional boundaries where artists initiate projects and institutions facilitate optimism.

Glasgow would never have achieved so much and been home to so many important artists without the joyous influx of so many people from other places. This has been critical in Glasgow's development in the visual arts over the past ten years. We felt this was essential to *If I Ruled the World*. – diversity and empathy. Desire to change and the breadth of experience to signify that this wasn't the culmination of this idea – it was only the beginning.





## DEAR ROSS,

I really don't want to stretch the talk about a possible »Glasgow phenomenon« any further, something which was discussed in many exhibition projects and writings since the mid nineties all over the european art world. Although I would fully agree with Donnie O'Rourke's statement, that »Douglas Gordon's Turner Prize win is a reflection of a peer group and a period«, and a remarkable result of a special social constellation of artists, articulated via Transmission Gallery and Glasgow School of Art's Environmental Art Department, still vital through the following generations in Glasgow today.

Instead I would like to raise some structural questions and thoughts on the reciprocal interactions of mythology, history and real life and – even more important – the consciousness of these effects.

When I made the trip to Glasgow in February 2000 to propose the exhibition project in Karlsruhe, later resulting in »Circles 4: One For One«, you all expressed profound doubts about the benefits of such a recapitulation of a social situation. There were individual reasons for this hesitation but, over all, I felt that the fear of mythologizing and historicising something that was still going on was in everyone's head. We have talked about the notion of these dangers earlier during a panel discussion and Douglas Gordon's contribution to the exhibition – a remake of his earlier statement *Forget Facts and Figures* – was a clearly visible hint that expressed this impression once again. His statement was formulated in the late eighties, only a short time before you exhibited your work *The Irascibles* at Gianni Piacentini's »Living Room« project in 1991. Entitled identically as the famous picture of the so-called New York School protagonists or, more importantly and within the context of your work, the protégés of Clement Greenberg who were photographed 1954 as a group portrait, you have taken a photograph of 14 artists living and working in Glasgow at that time (1990), many of whom are included in the Karlsruhe

exhibition, i.e. Nathan Coley, Craig Richardson, Christine Borland, Douglas Gordon, Roddy Buchanan, Martin Boyce, Jackie Donachie, Dave Allen and yourself. The photograph was put in a golden, Victorian(?) picture frame, accompanied by an outline drawing of the same picture and a list of names and numbers – maybe we should stress the term »legend« in this case – providing the key to figure out who's who. Remembering the date when the photograph was taken at a time when all of the portrayed artists had recently graduated from art school, the ironic implications of the work become very clear – a »simple and quite humorous instant historification, an acknowledgement of an increasingly condensed time-scale of assimilation«, as Katrina M. Brown put it some years ago. But regarding the list of names featured in this piece and the unproportional quantity of artistic quality represented by these names (I doubt that you will find a similar concentration of artists who have meanwhile become world famous in comparable group portraits of art school classes) we also have to consider the intentional or unintentional mistakes in reception that happen once a while: despite the arrangement of photograph and explanatory drawing/legend which clearly mark the field of an artwork with paraphrasing and ironic content, the piece will automatically become a »historic document«, a fact, displaying the whole circumference of the »dilemma«. Times are changing.

I guess you must have been aware of these intercourses between real life and its historification and mythification at the time you did this work. Apart from the playfulness, the humouristic twist, for me, it also proves the (self-)consciousness of history that I tend to apply to much of the Glaswegian artists, the consciousness of being part of something. Something that has to do with art but with social constellations at the same time. This awareness of things happening in Glasgow in the early nineties, this shift from »nowhere«



to »Now Here« also taking part in the artists' consciousness, allows me to think of something special. Something to be (mis-)taken as a role model for other times and places.

Don't ask me to prove this impression of an explicit consciousness of historification. I could only claim the fact that I have rarely seen a nomination of about 15 co-students at art school, like the one included in your personal chronology/vita of your first solo-catalogue. This enumeration supposedly also serves as a context reference for your own work.

Mike Kelley has illuminated the special role of the artist-critic, the artist that writes in a recently published anthology of John Miller's writings. The double impact of such a position – doing art and simultaneously writing about art – is a special role. A role that you have not only played, but also lived and shaped during the last couple of years. Through numerous texts on the work of artists friends and colleagues, on Scottish/Glaswegian art, through various lectures and discussions you have done while travelling the world, you have thoroughly spread the word on the meanwhile unloved »Glasgow phenomenon« and I, therefore, consider you and your consciousness of this historical coincidence as an important part of it. Being at the same time author, promoter and hero of this beautiful myth – or true history if there exists such a thing – is an interesting position. I say this with no cynical intentions. Even more, if a huge warning sign is simultaneously erected: »Attention! The legend begins here! Do not enter!«

I was wondering what one might get by starting a history book with the topos »Forget Facts and Figures«... it might become quite the contrary. What do you think?

Frankfurt, June 2001  
Christoph Keller

Sightseeing-Tour nach Straßburg und ins Casino Baden-Baden



ROSS SINCLAIR  
**WHAT'S IN A DECADE  
 THE GLASGOW MIRACLE VS. UTOPIAN  
 MODERNISM DONE BY THIRD WORLD  
 PEASANTS**

Christoph – Where to start with all your interesting thoughts and questions surrounding history and geography, mythology, real life facts and figures. Okay, let's begin here. »The Glasgow Miracle«, as Hans Ulrich Obrist would describe it.

I'll tell you a story. I was at a talk/seminar at the Tate Gallery a few years ago. It was a big panel discussion concerning the Turner Prize the year Douglas won it. I think it was 1996. I happened to be there with Liam Gillick, who was writing something for me at the time (good company with whom to discuss this sort of thing). On the panel were the contemporary top dogs of young(ish) Euro-curators; Hans Ulrich, Ute Meta Bauer, John Roberts, Charles Esche (the then director of Tramway) etc. Anyway, Hans Ulrich Obrist started going on about this idea of »The Glasgow Miracle«. I'm still not sure exactly what he meant, but back then in 1996 I really thought it sounded odd. I think he was asking or maybe reflecting or perhaps proposing, »How could it be that so many interesting artists develop in a place which was so bereft of culture with no history of or relation to, modern art? How could this city be hosting and generating so many important exhibitions and conferences, writers, artists etc. when there was not even a system of private galleries for the commissioning, buying and selling of contemporary art. No infrastructure, no rules, the Wild West«, I guess he was thinking. After everyone on the podium had waxed lyrical on this point for twenty minutes I felt compelled to make an observation from the floor (a little intimidating in a room holding a couple of hundred of the most righteous London *cognoscenti*). So, anyway, I get up and say that, amazing as it all seems, the dynamic of Glasgow was, in fact, a very tenuous proposition, a castle built on sand, if you like. A ghost – a specter – a phantom. I tell them all that the main gallery spaces, Tramway, CCA, Transmission etc., were effectively being kept going by a tiny group of individuals who put their heart and soul into carving

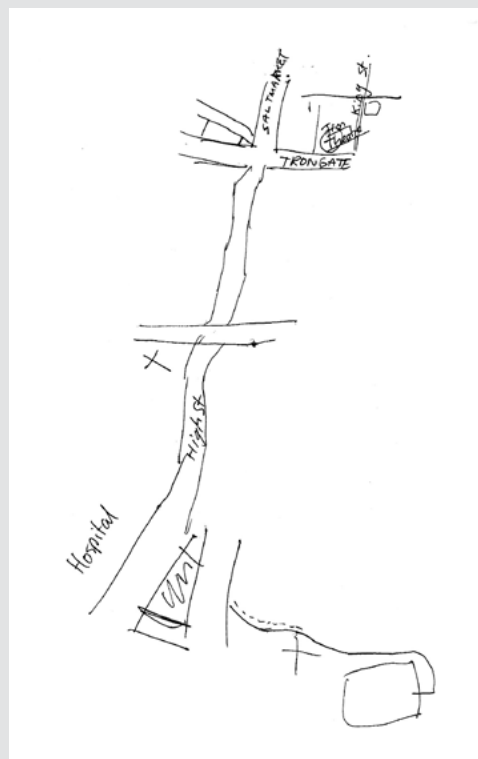
out a space for these galleries in a very unforgiving civic climate. There was no provision within the structure of these spaces for the success to be consolidated in a long term way – it was all about the individuals and their ambition and passion for art. There was a new Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow (either at that time or shortly thereafter – I can't remember), but this had opened to international derision having chosen to present its so-called »collection« under the themes of »Fire«, »Air«, »Earth«, etc. – I mean – what the fuck? In fact, the Civic City of Glasgow as a whole ignored the whole contemporary scene at that time and was still more interested in the fag end of a neo-Expressionist scene which had been popular in the city a decade before with the previous generation of artists. (And it couldn't even show these paintings properly. Half of those guys like Currie, Campbell and Howson complained and wanted their work shifted from this monstrosity of a museum. Whether you like this work or not, if you're going to show it, at least do it sympathetically and with integrity. Jesus, I mean, tolerate this and your children will be next etc.).

Sadly, the relationship of the City of Glasgow to its contemporary artists remains largely unchanged to this day. (Oh, but I'm forgetting, when D. G. won the Turner Prize he was awarded the Lord Provost's (the Mayor) medal as a recognition of his achievements as a Glaswegian citizen!!?? They would have been better off buying some of Douglas' work for the people of the city to see, except by then they had missed the boat and probably couldn't afford it.)

Well, surprise, surprise, I'm not one to say, »I told you so«, but a couple of years later Tramway and CCA were closed for renovation/refurbishment/rethinking, all the interesting curators had left and the city had returned to its early seventies cultural desert incarnation (in terms of the institutional visual arts).

Throughout that period, however, many smaller spaces sprang up and died out, new ones came to light and a new generation of younger artists showed it wasn't

Vortrags- und Diskussionsveranstaltung, Samstag, 10. März 2001,  
 Vortragssaal, ZKM Karlsruhe



going to be put off by the absence of these bigger spaces. In fact, artists were pouring into the city from all over, some to study, some just to see what was happening. This made for a much more diverse community, a broader gene pool for the city's new cultural identity. Transmission kept strong because of its unique changing committee structure which ensures that interesting and committed artists continually come into that set-up.

Only in the last year have these »institutional« spaces re-opened, though in fact, after a £9-million makeover, CCA no longer has a dedicated visual arts curator/programmer and the space for visual art is actually smaller than it was before – huh? work that one out? Tramway is slowly re-establishing itself with some interesting projects but seems to lack political power and international profile in the current cut-throat economic climate. Dundee Contemporary Arts has opened and forged ahead to become the most interesting visual arts space in Scotland and The Modern Institute in Glasgow has become the new Transmission in terms of profile, newness and hipness, but actually makes money for its artists, too. There has been a microboom in public art funding agencies, some of which have made very interesting projects with good artists.

But we arrogantly assume the artists who you invited to participate in the circles project are (mainly) still living in Glasgow/Scotland and are (mainly) bigger and better than ever. How come? Maybe by the time these problems started happening with Glaswegian Art Institutions most of the artists were already linked in to a more international scene so it really didn't matter so much. Maybe this domestic league had become less significant when the team was playing in all the important euro-competitions. Needless to say, the reputation of the city's art community had been made internationally by the self-determination of the artists involved and the few visionary individuals who ran these spaces mentioned above. This went on for a few

years, almost entirely in spite of the prevailing »cultural trends« in the city and without institutional support on a wider national level.

The younger artists simply start their own galleries and projects in a similar spirit of self-determination as us old crones. If nothing is happening the only way to do anything about it is to do it yourself – that never really changes. Of course it must be said that international curators still come to Glasgow and ask where they can see the work of this generation of »The Glasgow Miracle« – perhaps Frac Languedoc Roussillon with Ami Barak or the Migros Museum in Zurich (but now that Rein Wolfs has left this will probably diminish. See what I mean – enlightened individuals making a difference again, not that he ever bought anything of mine, bastard). Still, I've never met an artist who didn't bitch about the institutions in their home city, whether it's Glasgow or New York City, so nothing new there.

Okay, so it's clearly not the cultural infrastructure that made Glasgow an interesting place. Another quick story: Around 1992 Vienna/Budapest gallerist Hans Knoll came to Glasgow for a visit. In a meeting he said he thought Glasgow was a bit like Bratislava, capital of Slovakia, formerly second city of Czechoslovakia. I felt vaguely offended without really knowing why. A couple of years later I visited Bratislava while en route from Vienna to Budapest. With Knoll and Roddy Buchanan I went to see some artists living there and initially felt even more offended as The Slovak Republic was still very slowly waking up from the Soviet influence. It seemed an ugly, poor, third world city with very little to recommend it (I was there for one day! Sorry) – apart from some very interesting artists, most of whom had been hidden from history. We even managed to get lost on the bus from the station and ended up in the countryside, completely failing to explain to anyone that we wanted to go into town. However, ten years later, I see that Knoll's comparison was actually quite perceptive and the relationship within these two com-

**Gruppenbild vor der Abreise, Flughafen Hahn, Eifel; v.l.n.r.: Roddy Buchanan (knieend), Archie Buchanan-Donachie (auf dem Arm), Jackie Donachie, Claire Barclay, Ross Sinclair, Toby Paterson, David Harding**

munities was born from a confident self consciousness only really possible because of the lack of credible antecedents or infrastructures and, I believe, the lack of a market, too. No one was encouraging or rewarding us (and in fact you wouldn't have got away with it) to make shitty little paintings to flog off cheap in a gallery which was also a bar or hairdresser or something because they simply didn't exist in Glasgow at that time. Knoll was also quite right that in some respects Glasgow also feels like a third world city, too. This forces a certain pragmatic approach and distinct lack of self-pity. Let's not forget also that this »first« wave of artists were never associated through a similarity of form or style. It was the approach and the attitude, perhaps in fact, the diversity of approaches that interested people from the outside. Another significant aspect of that history is that ten years ago everyone was still talking about ideas and the place of art and what art could do in any kind of cultural and social sphere. Now, of course, the pendulum has swung back to formalism, albeit the ragged glory of »fuck you formalism« which is now popular everywhere (apologies to whoever coined that term, I read it somewhere and can't remember where, but thanks). I think you could say that the most recent generation in Glasgow are more related formally. It's more about form and surface, style and synergy.

Sorry, Christoph, I'm getting away from the script a bit here. You were asking about that old *Irascibles* piece of mine – ah, from the fuck you self-determination of youth to fuck you formalism – and all in a decade. But remember, that work was presented in a show in somebody's living room! How's that for a big fuck you to the world – saying it loud and proud, we're all fucking great – fuck you! – in a show in Gianni Piacentini's (temporary Glaswegian) living room. It really didn't seem so out of the ordinary to do something like that at that time. I thought everybody's friends were great artists, if you know what I mean. It was only really in

the couple of years after that when I started travelling more that I realised that the ambient quality of these artists I knew and worked with was well above the international average. I guess I was still idealistic then and thought all communities of artists supported each other and shared contacts and information and ideas and generally helped each other whenever they could. I mean they do, don't they?

Yeah, you were also asking about the general lack of enthusiasm at first for the Circles project from our lot. No one really was that keen on the Circles show because the Glasgow that everyone talks about and remembers and wants to make shows about represents artists from a two or three year period of graduating classes from around 1988–1992 and there have been ten years of new artists since then. These artists are Glasgow, too, (though some are in Circles) and the work they are interested in is sometimes very different and very good indeed – most recently it's all gone international style ... it's all about a feeling of ambient surface tension – stripes, glitter brand soul Olympics, the empathetic Eamesism experience (are you experienced?), no meaning (in a good way), wallpaper (in a good way), don't worry be happy (any way), a dynamic and beautiful void (cut out or painted over, it doesn't matter), head nodding recognition of utopian modernism done by African villagers kind of thing, architecture as emotion, design as dogma, the best quality for most people at the cheapest prices turned into the exclusive Masonic lodge of recognition of the feel good relics of the modernist saints. Old dogs like me (35 years) should maybe keep quiet about a passionate feeling that art is often working well when it's talking 'bout ideas and is about something rather than nothing (which has become vogueish, too), if you know what I mean. Above all else I think I should keep quiet about retaining an embattled ideal that art can still change people, begin a dialogue which can alter perception, CHANGE THE WORLD. It's funny how no

**Wegbeschreibung:** von den öffentlichen Fußballplätzen (»Pitts«, Quadrat rechts unten) zu Transmission (Trongate, Ecke King Street);  
**Zeichnung:** David Shrigley



one thinks that anymore or is even interested in discussing it. Never mind, maybe like everything else it will roll back into fashion someday and in a few years time we'll have a revival of ART BEING ABLE TO CHANGE THE WORLD, in capital letters in a tabloid newspaper headline kind of way and during that window of opportunity maybe, just maybe, we'll be able to save the human race from self destruction by employing the soaring and effortless power and magic of art. Until then, well, just sit back, go with the flow, enjoy the view. And stop fucking moaning – okay? Whatever happens, I'm sure Glasgow will be at the front of the queue, you wouldn't dare leave us out now, would you?

Glasgow, November 2001

In einem hochdramatischen und abwechslungsreichen Freundschaftsspiel gegen die Milano-Bar-Mannschaft, die sich vornehmlich aus Karlsruher Künstlern (u.a. mit Martin Boukalfa, Jürgen Galli, Axel Haberstroh, Ralf Keller, Lutz Schäfer) zusammensetzt, konnten die Gäste aus Glasgow das Spiel ca. eine Stunde lang ausgeglichen gestalten. Nach dem Führungstreffer durch Roddy Buchanan (Foul-alfmeter) gingen die Gastgeber in der ersten Halbzeit zwar schnell mit 4:1 in Führung, ein lupenreiner Hattrick von Jonathan Monk kurz nach der Halbzeitpause sorgte jedoch für den zeitweiligen Ausgleich zum

4:4. Nach der 60. Minute offenbarten sich bei großen Teilen der Glasgower Mannschaft eklatante Konditionsängel, die einen geordneten Spielaufbau unmöglich machten. Auflösungserscheinungen führten zu einem Totaleinbruch, den die gastgebende Mannschaft aus Karlsruhe geschickt zu 8 weiteren Treffern nutzen konnte. Das Endergebnis von 12:4 täuscht allerdings über die tatsächlichen Kräfteverhältnisse der beiden Teams hinweg. Der von der Glasgower Mannschaft gestiftete Pokal verbleibt bis zum nächsten Aufeinandertreffen in der Milano Bar.



## From Gnostic to Quixotic in 5000 Years: History, Geography and the Way of the Wives

Ross Sinclair

### The facts — where do they come from?

One bright morning deep in the winter of 1850, William Graham Watt, seventh Laird of Breckness, awoke, dressed, and stepped out of Skaill House\* on the 'mainland' of the Orkney Islands, an archipelago of some 70 islands and skerries off the northern coast of Scotland. He set out on his morning constitutional towards the Bay of Skaill, a wild and magical place only a couple of hundred yards from his front door. The night before, the whole of Orkney had experienced one of its great winter storms, and this gale had provided the islands with an exceptionally severe mauling. As Watt neared the beach he stopped, confused at encountering a familiar scene suddenly altered. He had expected to see, as usual, a series of mounds covered with grass on the rolling dunes behind the bay known locally as Skerrabra.† As he drew closer he pulled up sharply. Something had changed, for ever. On closer inspection Watt realised that the storm had completely ripped the turf and topsoil from a large area of the dunes directly behind the beach. To his astonishment he saw that what had been revealed was the most perfectly preserved Neolithic settlement ever found in Europe. Hidden for 40 centuries, uncovered overnight by a mighty Orcadian tempest. The site we now know as Skara Brae had lain, undisturbed, for one hundred and twenty generations. Ironically it was preserved so perfectly by the very same encroaching sand that had probably forced

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\* Constructed in 1620

† Mixing the local dialect 'skarrie', meaning 'cormorant' and 'brae', meaning mounds, on account of the birds who frequented the mounds

its final inhabitants to quit the place for ever, never to return, over four and a half thousand years ago.

**Brigadoon or bust**

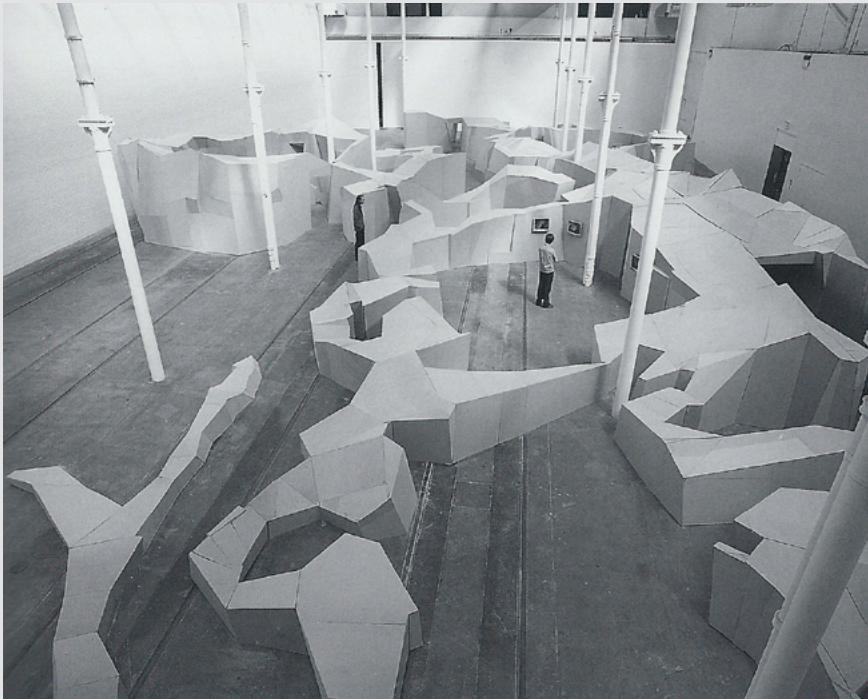
On the 11th of April 2002 at seven o'clock in the evening Skara Brae materialized again. Its twenty-first century doppelganger appeared in the cavernous interior of Tramway, an art space for visual art and theatre in Glasgow, in the Lowlands of Scotland. Its recreation was the brain-child of a group of artists who go by the name of Henry VIII's Wives. We came from the north side of the city, crossed the river and made our way the mile or so south to Tramway. Like Watt one hundred and fifty years previously our expectations were confounded. We didn't know what we would find. For us it was as if this invention of Henry VIII's Wives had simply appeared from nowhere, like we imagine all art appears. But we also knew that whatever they were to present had taken more than three months to plan and construct by the six individuals who possess a collective identity as Henry VIII's Wives.

**It's just the way we did it (it's slightly different)**

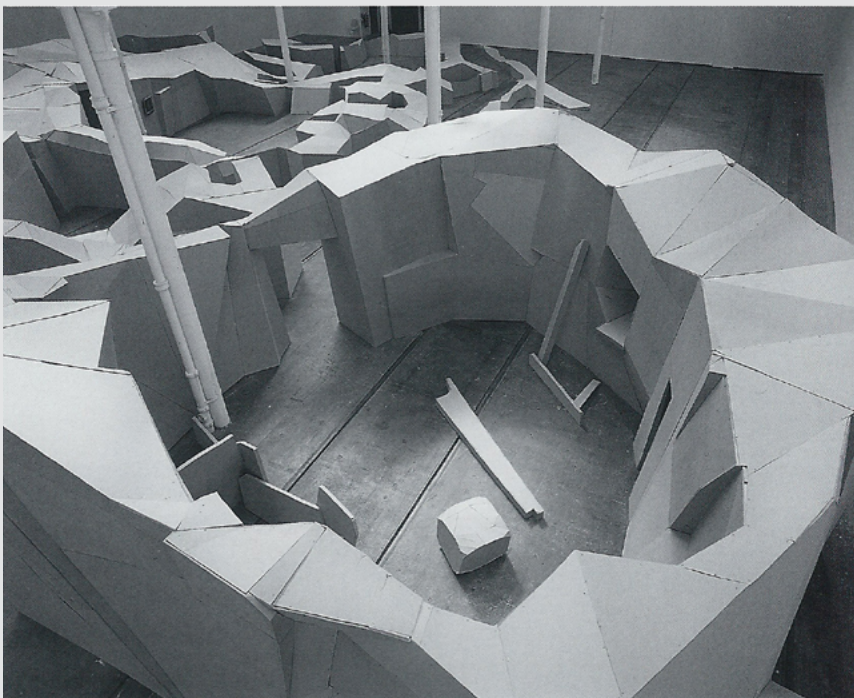
Skara Brae had been occupied from before 3100 BC to 2600 BC. One hundred and twenty generations. The village is made up of seven houses and a workshop linked together by a series of low alleyways. It was inhabited continually for at least 600 years, sheltering 50–100 souls at any one time. The total floor area of each of these houses is generous, approximately 36 square meters. Each house provided its inhabitants with a central hearth for cooking and stone beds were set into the walls at either side of the hearth. Opposite the entrance was the shelved stone dresser used to show off the precious objects of the family, or social group, perhaps indicating their social standing in the village hierarchy. This item of furniture is so familiar to contemporary eyes it almost looks like someone has deliberately constructed a 'stone age' dresser, based on a modern design. The roofs, covered with skins or turf and with a central hole serving as a chimney, would have been supported by driftwood (there is no indigenous tree-growth of any significance on Orkney) and, perhaps, whalebone: 5000 years ago, it was not uncommon for large whales, even blue whales, to be stranded on the untroubled shores of such northern islands, and these massive creatures would easily have provided building materials and roof-coverings for a village far larger than this. A remarkably sophisticated drainage system was built into the design of the village and may have afforded some kind of indoor toilet. The local blue clay was employed in the foundations to form a dampcourse layer. Not bad for an Orcadian Neolithic settlement built before the Great Pyramids of Egypt and Stonehenge.

**The backwoods of your own reality**

Almost five millennia have passed and Henry VIII's Wives have re-imagined Skara Brae in Tramway, made from left-over medium-density-fiberboard and memory, on a scale of 1:1. You enter from the sea-side, on the beach, if you like. And you try to find your way through the maze like structure. They pull up its Neolithic anchor and bring it to 21st century Glasgow.



'Light Without Shadow', Tramway, 2002 (recycled MDF 1:1 model of Skara Brae and videos)



'Light Without Shadow' — House 7, Tramway, 2002

21st century civilisation. 21st century confusion. The city where you find the new Science Centre, Discovery Tower and I-Max cinema, rising from the very graves where the shipyards used to stand along the River Clyde. History collapses in on itself. Everything remains provisional. All that is solid melts into air. Maybe in the hands of the Wives Skara Brae becomes a franchise, histographic and spiritual instead of commercial and economic. The maze of Skara Brae (Glasgow) eventually opens out into the remains of each of the houses, roughly reconstructed with the angular and unsatisfyingly clean and easy edges made by the combination of MDF and the jig-saw — like the irregular facets of a cheap brown diamond. Passageways go nowhere, blind corners become passageways, and vice-versa. This Skara Brae is wind-dried, but windless, desiccated, a skeleton of itself. All meat is stripped from the bones. It is bare, colourless, odourless, smooth, pre-pubescent.

It is many miles from home, and although the Bay of Skail is as cold, wet, wild and windy a place as you can experience anywhere, it possesses a powerful primeval physicality. You can stand on the head of the beach, lean into the wind and be completely supported by it. In the gallery space things are different. Here Skara Brae struggles to find a reason for being. It is uncomfortable in its new environment of uncertainty. Here everything is provisional. For Skara Brae culture and the cultured are just another new idea, uncertain and tentative. Art in white boxes, divorced from life, hypothetical, vicarious and majestic is a difficult concept to grasp from the perspective of a 5000-year-old Orcadian. The Church, the Renaissance, Modernism, its antecedents and its bastard offspring — Skara Brae just doesn't give a fuck.

### **The Hamnavoe diaspora**

All the houses of Skara Brae are built to a similar design emphasizing the sense of identity with this close knit community. Unlike other Neolithic settlements, the standardized nature of the apportionment of space and almost modular living quarters indicates that individual status was not measured in terms of worldly possessions and material goods and that perhaps, as in a commune, all the inhabitants of Skara Brae were equal.

These Neolithic generations were settled for 600 years, cultivating the land and raising livestock. They were completely self-sufficient and perhaps their apparent democratic or egalitarian nature gives some indication as to why they lasted so long. Henry VIII's Wives would have fitted in well.

House 7 at Skara Brae was different from the rest, and was the only one that could be locked from the outside. Maybe it was a store room or workshop. They found the remains of two female bodies there during the excavations, perhaps sacrificed in a foundation-laying ritual. Maybe it was a space for isolating menstruating women, common in these cultures, or even a birthing room. Or perhaps it is the space of the Wives. Henry VIII's Wives.

### **There are too many bees for the amount of flowers**

Henry VIII's Wives met at college, on the Environmental Art course at Glasgow School of Art. I was one of their tutors. Did we ever teach them anything? What did they learn? Clearly



they learnt a great deal from each other to the extent that this loose peer group of student showings and random pairings evolved into a sentient organism, with six brains at its disposal capable of thought and action in its own right. This produced a Frankensteinian behemoth not less but more than the sum of the parts, and with no master on whom to wreak revenge.

Certainly the Wives were all interesting individually, some of them still are, but now they work together, they function as constituent parts of a meta-national stateless community — no manifesto, no boundaries, perhaps no precedents, more like a theatre company than a visual art collective.

The Wives worked in Tramway for three months. They always do it this way. They never do it any other way. When they are not together they don't exist. Theirs is a live event. This is their playground. And they re-invent it every time they visit. Sometimes they live in the space in which they work and show, other times sharing a nearby apartment. Henry VIII's Wives have evolved a sophisticated non-democratic decision making process which is a million miles away from a show of hands, one vote, one member. It is the defining characteristic of their practice. They are immersed in their own world. They don't even seem to thrash problems out in words. They just do it till every member of the group is satisfied. This reveals an empathetic and psychic understanding of the tangible teleology of their long-winded processes. Forwards/backwards, inching towards a synergetic consensus. They make works for us to see but you get the impression this process would remain the same even if no one was watching.

### **Henry VIII's Wives vs. Skara Brae — 7 yrs in, 4093 to go (video evidence)**

In two of the re-created houses there are three screens showing video works. Angular, fractured narratives, seemingly showing the same scene from three positions. One drama is played out by three young actors, the other by three people who appear to be blind.

What do these videos mean? Let's look at the evidence. Remember they are set amongst the MDF ruins of the transplanted Neolithic village, hundreds of miles from home. There is nothing else but it and the videos in the massive space of Tramway 2. There are few pieces to this puzzle.

In both 'houses' the videos are presented as three-monitor installations. They ostensibly function as micro dramas, with three persons in each drama, each one appearing to occupy their own monitor, yet it appears as if they are filmed at the same time, but from different angles.

### **Let's keep it more tentative — a thought in the back of your head**

The first set of three video tapes features three young actors: two men, one woman. One man has a distinct Scottish accent, the other I took for Australian, maybe New Zealand, perhaps even South African. The woman's accent I remember less distinctively, but I think it was Scottish too. The action takes place in what appears to be an abandoned house, perhaps not in a city. Definitely sub-urban. The fading charm, peeling paint and paper could be in the

Highlands, but it could be in the Balkans, it could be on the West Bank. It has a strange 'other-worldly' distant feel.

The fragments which construct the texts and form the scripts were taken, verbatim, line by separate line, from interviews and visits the Wives made during the three months they were resident at Tramway. These lines were carefully gathered, and in some cases, painstakingly sought out. Of course the Wives could have inserted their own conjunctive sections, in order to push the narrative one way or another, but that's not the way of the Wives. They only work with what they can find, what they can get out of someone. They will ask pointed, leading questions in order to get their interviewees to say a specific thing, but if they don't say a line it doesn't end up in the script. Random visits were undertaken to the public galleries of Glasgow court rooms. The subject of cases was unknown, even sometimes after a day of attendance. Some were banal, some horrific. They all centered around the interrogation of memory. Where were you? What time? Why? How can you be sure? Planting seeds of doubt in a collective memory, to be harvested later in a show of contradiction and uncertainty. Non-sequiturs were collected and collated. Another set of lines were gathered in an old folks' home, responses to memories of a summer's day, or reminiscences of an object significant to the individual. These evoke curiously unsettling images, many fragments seem dark, almost morose, certainly melancholic. But perhaps now the script is working, melding the sources together into a new story in front of our eyes and ears. These videos concerned us with the vagaries of memory. Perhaps they dwell on the disappointments of an unfulfilled life. How do we remember our lives, Real or otherwise, when they are near the end? What happens when you look back and cannot honestly say, 'it's better to have loved and lost than never loved at all' — what if you never loved anything or anybody?

### **Almost utopian — something beautiful and ugly at the same time**

Henry VIII's Wives take the lines from these investigations and form them into a script of sorts which naturally separates into three characters. The action appears taut, a melodrama, intensive, charged. The urgent, impatient delivery of the lines implies a sense of the characters having run away from something, to this 'safe' house. The young people we see on the screens seem older than their years. It doesn't seem quite right, something is wrong, it doesn't fit. Props come and go. An owl appears, makes some noise, disappears. Magpies in a cage, one for sorrow, two for joy? Loaded symbolism literally flies in and out of the frame; it doesn't come together, it refuses to make perfect sense, but it exudes a very particular feeling, a tangible atmosphere of doubt. It feels like a different story, each time you watch it. The narrative is initially credible, but suspension of disbelief can only be pushed so far.

### **Comes in and out of focus — the way of the Wives**

The other set of videos has the same basic structure of three characters, three scripts, three monitors. It resides in a recreated house just a little north of the other, through another set of passageways. You can hear the voices but you can't see where they come from, lost in a

maze. Until you happen upon the entrance. It has the same feeling of tension, but is lighter in tone. The action unfolds in a stage set of some description, institutional in tone, where the walls seem to change colour as the shots themselves alter. In contrast to the location setting of the other piece, this is definitely a controlled interior. The three individuals pictured appear to be blind. Maybe they are visually impaired. Their accents are central Scotland. As they speak their lines a series of objects appear in their hands, as if by magic. These objects look like examples from a very grand collection: an oversize and lavish gilded urn; jewels, and less explicit, ethnographic objects — Egyptian, perhaps Mediaeval. They turn them over in their hands as they speak, absent-mindedly, as if they were important parts of the plot construction. Of course they are 'looking' with their hands as they speak, performing the two activities simultaneously. But again one plus one equals three. The lines spoken by the blind are constructed by the Wives in the same way as the other tapes. This time we have evidence of visits to many tomato farms, where the fruits (vegetables?) are grown hydroponically.

#### **More questions than answers ...**

If the other video installation is about the imperfections of memories of the past, spoken on screen by young people, then in contrast this seems all about the future, delivered by older folks who seem to have more past than future in their lives. The words they say suggest the planting of seeds, sowing, incubation, growing, transformation, re-birth, harvesting, the future, optimism. "Two seeds were planted in the early '80s ..." Other visits were made by the Wives to a drama school. Notes were made on directions given to young actors by their teachers, their voice coaches. How do you make the fictional believable? How do you learn to lie with your whole body? Sometimes without even uttering a word. These are the questions which interest the Wives. The script emerges from these observations and to have it relayed by people who will never again see imbues the lines with a curious pathos.

As this 'story' emerges we step back a pace or two and consider some of these questions and how they relate to the space in which we are looking at this Art at this time. This space is frozen in a state of perpetual parenthesis.

How do we assess the veracity and value of something which only survives if you keep it in a box with the lid closed?

#### **The man don't give a fuck — the Wives don't give a fuck**

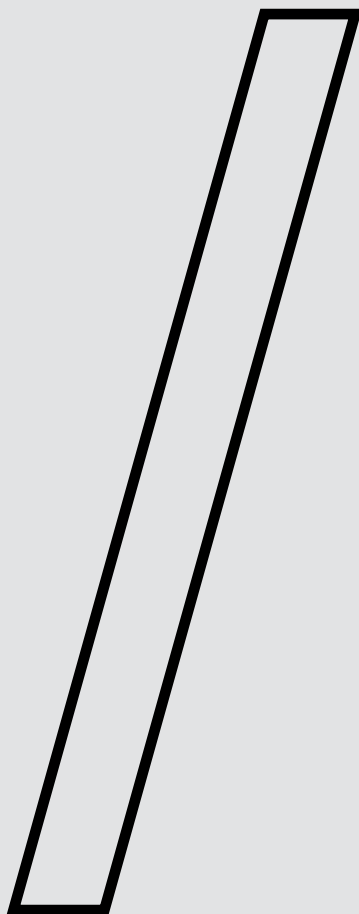
Orkney, home of Skara Brae, sits aloof at the top of Britain. It is suspended in between this wet green clod at the edge of Europe and the continent itself. It is very much caught between the two. Its people do not consider themselves Scottish, never mind British, and the influence of Scandinavia is historically strong. Over the last 5000 years it has been an important point of confluence between Europe, Britain and beyond. This history is displayed proudly like the scars from a thousand battles in Orkney's incredible density of archaeological sites and remains. Maybe everywhere is like this, under the foundations, but in Orkney it was never covered over by civilisation. It is somehow outside of recent industrial history,

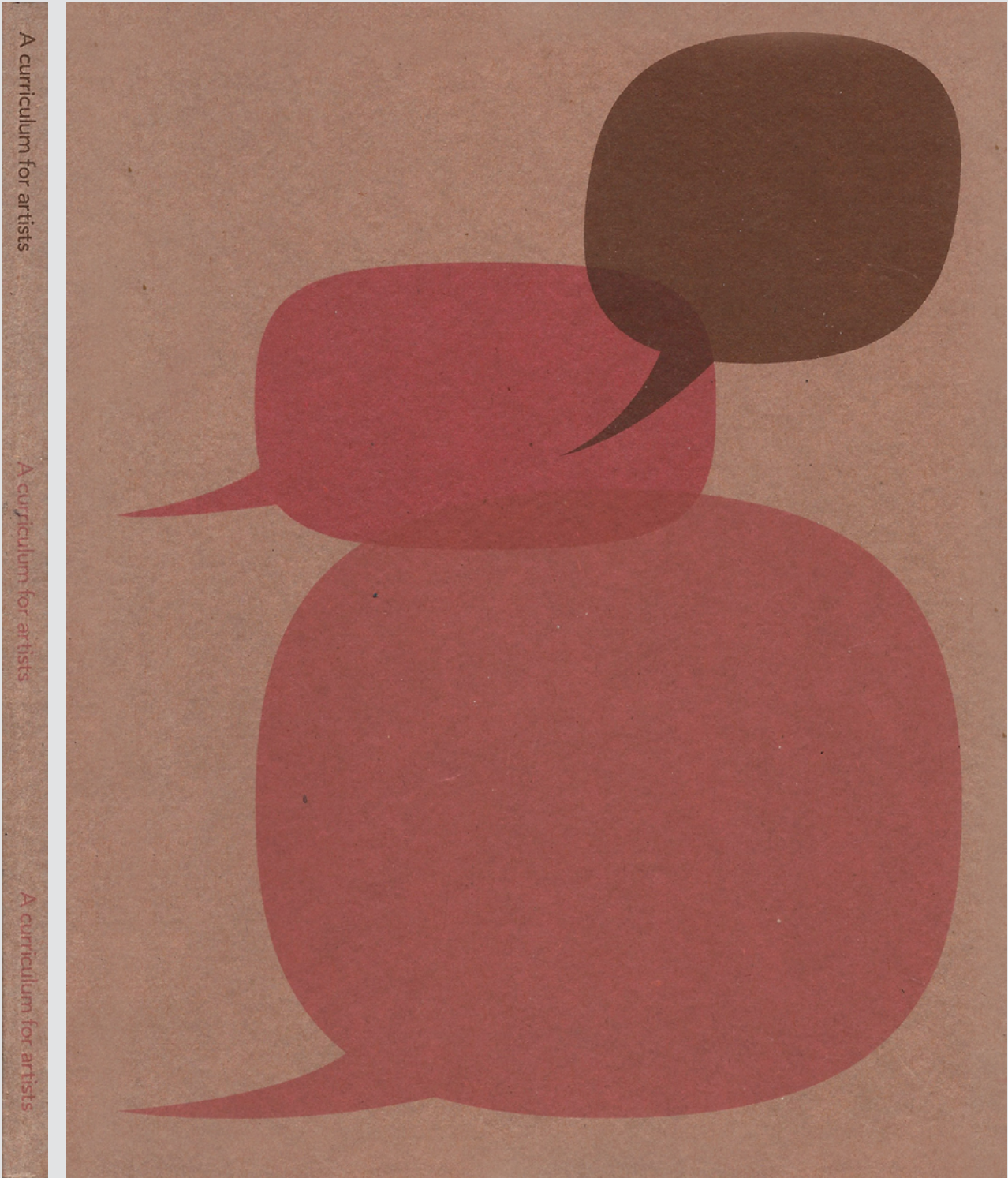
yet completely defined by an ancient unshakable identity. This almost seems as if it could be the ancestral homeland of Henry VIII's Wives. It suits them. Orkney is a strange place. But it's a perfect place to imagine the Wives. Its history and geography articulates the Wives very well. They first visited Skara Brae in the mid '90s. I was with them as they were all students at the time. It was a great trip. We stayed at Brown's Hostel in Stromness. Booked the place out as I recall. Dinners were cooked in the big kitchen facing on to the main street. Very communal, watching out of the window at the people walking by, just two feet on the other side of the glass. The sea only ten metres away. Some tourists, some fishermen returning from their boats just down the road on the pier. With the Wives now living in Scotland, Norway and Germany, counting four different nationalities amongst their group, it reflects something of the flavour of their coming together. They seem pan-European, yet outsiders, a trans-national entity. A mutated organism. A new social identity where national boundaries are an unknown and invisible idea. A line on a map that doesn't yet exist. Like it was for the people of Skara Brae. The apparent wish to defy categorization or definition is significant. Perhaps, they do it the only way they can, or maybe theirs really is a new way of working. Maybe they feel if they give their magic a name it will simply die.

### **We are the New Truants**

The works the Wives have made together for the past five years are shaped by the opportunities the group make or are offered. They always consider these projects site-specific, time-specific, context-specific, people-specific. They are convinced that whatever happens in the future they'll never make any money with six of them in the group so what's the point of worrying about it, of courting the market, the world of art. So they operate comfortably around existing cultural structures. Their practice meanders like a series of interconnected moats, a canal system running around the monolithic architecture of petrified culture. Maybe you could argue that this momentum slowly eats away at the foundations, eroding, undermining the preconceived notions of curators and public alike. Or perhaps its residue merely shores up the barricades against real openness, serving only to legitimize the phantasmagoria of inclusivity, free speech and cultural liberalism that are at the core of the conceits of 21st century western culture. What if they occupy both sides of this duplicitous penumbra at the same time? Maybe this is how we live and work now? Everything and everyone is assimilated, but there is no dominant narrative. A strange rigour emerges from the Wives' way of thinking about their work and the world when you get to know them and their works. Their practice is process-based, coming very slowly into focus. In a room with no windows, the Wives feel their way in the dark for a light switch, stumbling over the unknown terrain they can't make out in the absence of light. Sometimes a hand finds the light switch and clicks the light on. What was infinite and endless becomes, in one moment, formed, shaped and solid. Other times there simply is no switch, perhaps no electricity and the eyes of the Wives wait until they become accustomed to the dark. Shapes emerge. I wonder. What do they see?

As a group, they appear free from the contemporary vogue for cynicism. No career responsibilities or paranoia. Though you could argue this could be a no-strategy-strategy for the 21st century. After history, after the end of the line. The end of the story with only one ending. Where the linear pipeline of cultural history has fractured and failed a large puddle has formed as the energy which flowed through it pours out, unrestricted, unchannelled, pulsating out in every direction. This has formed a reservoir of ever changing shapes and cultural forms, ideas and theoretic waves. Henry VIII's Wives have been washed up on the far shore of a distant island in this current sea of possibilities. They've built a shelter by the beach, caught some fish for dinner. The only problem is that they can't get the fire lit. They could just send out for some dry matches, but that's not the way of the Wives. They have been trying to light that fire for more than five years now. They've got the feeling it's never going to happen. But you should see the video they made where they're trying to start this fire. I can't remember the last time I saw folks having so much fun. And this, friends, is the way of the Wives.





ART SCHOOL  
IS DEAD  
/LONG LIVE  
ART SCHOOL

Ross Sinclair

CAN NONE OF YOU FUCKERS SPEAK ENGLISH? asked Jonathan Monk (Environmental Art, Glasgow, class of '91) in a posterwork once flyposted on the streets of Italy. It's a good question. Sometimes you wonder. Are we even speaking the same language here? It's certainly not English, German or even Esperanto. More like double Dutch. It's not a question of where you come from, it's *where you are coming from* that counts. I'm an artist, you're an artist. We're all artists, but often I don't see any similarities. In fact, I see antithetical positions, opposition, conflict. Are we even looking at the same thing here? Art about ideas, art about painting, sculpture, installation, figurative art, non-figurative art, abstract art, conceptual art, commercial art, minimal art, sell-out art, Sunday painting... I could go on, but I'm sure you get the picture. Am I missing something? Do my ambitions for my art – its proposed journey through life – transform it to such a degree that it becomes unrecognisable to you? Where do you want *your* art to go? Are we even on the same planet? You and me, us and them, staff and students, teachers and pupils, the old and the young, my department, your department, my budget, your budget...

The last thirty-five years have witnessed the absolute retraction of the promise of Sixties radicalism. After the spectacular apotheosis of modernism came the end of history – Paris '68, revolution, pop art, situationists, fluxus, minimalism, conceptualism, postmodernism (to name but a few) – and Seventies politics – the Three Day Week, flares, the Red Army Faction fighting capitalism, spectacle against spectacle, and then Stammheim, the ambiguous deaths of Baader, Meinhof, Ensslin and Raspe occurring at almost exactly the same time that Punk Rock began or ended, depending on how you look at it. After which an abyss, a crevice, a hole... Eighties money – the market, acid house, rave culture, ecstasy. Who was on the outside? Who stood apart? Who was part of the problem? Who was part of the solution? And along came the yBas and the rest is History.

This passing of time has paralleled the rise and certainly the fall of ART SCHOOL as a way of life, as a Platonic Ideal. Art schools have changed, irrevocably. Now it's like going to university, but a bit hipper. Or maybe a cheap alternative to a posh finishing school for darling daughter, a way to spend Daddy's surplus cash on expensive European fees (if you're a non-EU student).

I used to think it was always ALWAYS about ideas, but I now see that this was just a phase that I was lucky enough to grow up in. A luxury of excess cerebral effervescence I thought would never go flat. I thought forms were only the building blocks that would exist as substructure of work, helping to support it without getting too pushy... But for some time now we've been standing on the precipice and it's collapsing under our feet. Formalism is poised to make a triumphant return to the centre stage of critical chic and credibility. In fact, it's here already. Formalism is back, even if it is *fuck-you formalism*. And what's the point of teaching formalism – a means with no end – recycled? New, 21st-century formalism is the death knell of everything that is worthwhile in art. It's an abdication of the responsibility of freedom, it says fuck you, you don't count, and you couldn't afford it anyway. Oh yeah, and it's about the sublime and God and everything, yeah right, just make some space above the fireplace and get rid of that neo-conceptual mantelpiece installation, I never really liked that anyway, great to get a splash of colour back in the living room etc etc...

How can a generation born in the late Seventies make sense of the (art) world today after history – dislocated, floating, but taking in water – goes down in incredible style on a raft of surface values one micron thick? Fiddling while Rome burns. Can the world be as sad as it seems? I guess it could seem that way if you were born in 1980, born into postmodernism and cultural studies of a study of a dubious history of something that never really existed in the first place. This is student life today. Simulacra studies. How can we offer the students something other than this paradigm of art as a cynical reworking of past solutions, a schmalz ersatz imitation whose sole ambition is verisimilitude? Can new things ever be made? And, if so, where are the contemporary, but timeless ideas to fuel them? Let's teach those. But what are they?

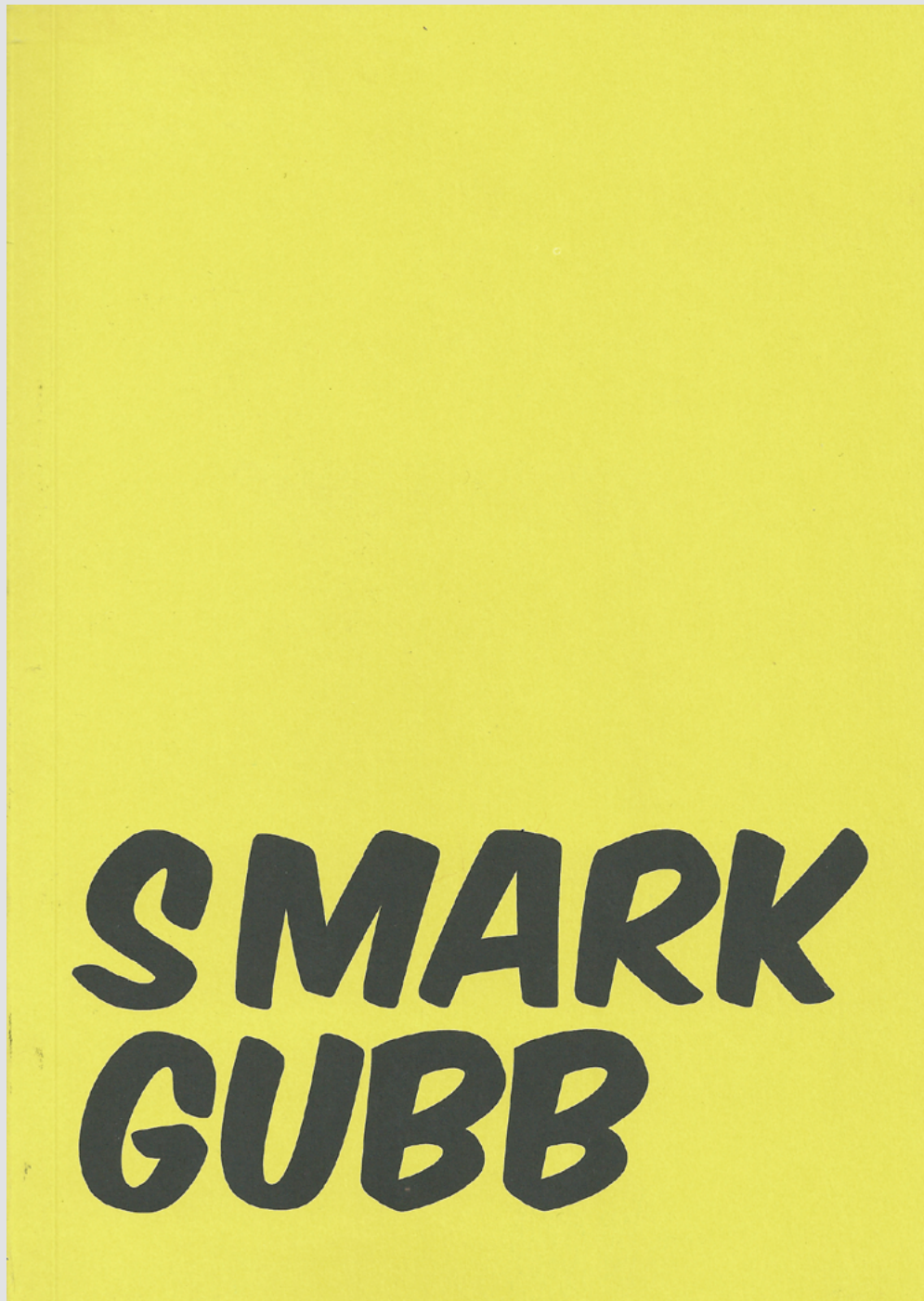
What are we saying? Call the teleology police! New-shmoo... Nothing new can be possible, can it? Progress is anathema, sideways steps are all we can muster, forever sideways, endlessly recontextualising existing material creating third meanings, fourth, fifth and sixth meanings from an endless reshuffling of the deck of cards of life, the universe and everything... The lines have ended, the fires on the coasts are extinguished. We are all ships at sea, charting uncertain waters, pitch black, no sextant or compass.

MAKING ART should make you feel like you are running as fast as you possibly can, faster than you've ever run before, running till your legs are screaming, pure lactic acid pumping through the veins and your lungs are bursting and you are smashing through walls of self-doubt and censorship and confusion and denial, onwards to new and hitherto unknown levels. Confidence is soaring, absolute certainty is forming and then... The paper wall at the end of the line through which you can see the shape and form of your work through this screen, it's right there, just on the other side, you can see the shape, the outline, the silhouette, but it's blurred, just out of reach and you can't touch it, you think you're never going to get to it and there's nothing left, but to *will* your way through to it and then – BLAM! – you're over the edge, FREE FALL, a leap of faith, jumping, falling over the cliff into the abyss of possibilities and potential, of space and nothingness and failure and success and trying, pushing, with no parachute, no escape route and please, no excuses. Sometimes you win. Often you lose. But you can always say that at least you tried. You didn't just buckle under to the mindless, stultifying, sickening, stupid cynicism of market forces, 'looks like art/smells like art' art, *Parlour Art* or abc conceptualism. You didn't do what you thought someone else wanted to see, you did exactly what you wanted and nothing else matters. You made it yours, your voice, no one else's. Well, of course, *they made you*, but still just maybe you can find a true thought, an oblique position, a REAL LIFE.

When did everyone stop believing that art could change the world? Maybe that was just a phase, maybe I've had the wrong idea all along. Students certainly don't believe it anymore. But when you're twenty-one years old, who in their right mind doesn't want to see all the old farts (like us) burned at the stake, left to smoulder on the bonfires of verbose arrogance?

The thing is, there are very few old farts left in the system. Maybe this is what we need. More targets. More obstacles to smash to pieces (in the still of the night) in order to position yourself as a budding iconoclast. The problem could be that art education is simply too good now, too slick, too considered. In short, it has been assimilated into the higher education system, and every other system, too. Maybe it's just become the by-product of the mechanics, the sweet smelling faeces of an administrative intestine. The cart before the horse, arse to elbow. Maybe we should lose the essays, simplify things, stupefy it into life. Dumb down the system, bring back the diploma, bring back the birch. Lets face it, in the way we've always known and understood it, ART SCHOOL IS DEAD and its demise has ushered in a moment of infinite possibilities. That moment is now. LONG LIVE ART SCHOOL.

*Ross Sinclair is an artist. Since 1995 he has worked part time in the Department of Environmental Art at Glasgow School of Art where he is currently an academic researcher. His new CD The Real Life Rock Opera Volume 1 accompanies his exhibition of the same name in the Travelling Gallery.*



*The Church of the Greys*

Mixed Media Installation  
Grizedale Arts, Cumbria  
April 2003

Commissioned by Grizedale Arts. This was a two-part project; a permanent sculptural installation in the forest and a video work. The sculptural element took the form of a wooden chapel in the heart of the forest. This was built out of untreated wood, the intention being that it would quickly begin to decay and become dilapidated. This was positioned near to popular ramblers routes, offering the B-Movie experience of stumbling upon an old building in the middle of a forest and the 'should we go in or shouldn't we?' debate that ensues. The second part was the production of a short 16mm horror film based around a false history written for the church. For this, I worked with Zenolith, a young Death Metal band from Barrow-in-Furness who, along with their extended social and family networks, became the actors and crew in the films production. The film was never completed due to equipment failure and a three car smash on route to Grizedale from Barrow.

**TONIGHT WE'RE GONNA PARTY  
LIKE IT'S 1999?  
A CONVERSATION  
BETWEEN S MARK GUBB (SMG)  
& ROSS SINCLAIR (RS)**

**ROSS SINCLAIR: WHEN I WAS  
YOUNG YOU WERE INTO PUNK  
ROCK OR HEAVY METAL. PUNK  
WAS PRINCIPLED, SERIOUS,  
HEAVY, DEEP – IT SPOKE TO  
ME DIRECTLY, IT SET ME APART  
FROM MY PEERS, IT WAS MINE,  
BUT IT TAUGHT ME TO QUESTION  
EVERYTHING AND HELPED  
FORM MY VIEW OF THE WORLD.  
BUT YOU, MY FRIEND, WERE  
DIFFERENT, FOR YOU ANOTHER  
WORLD WAS OPENING UP  
– A WORLD OF FANTASY  
AND ESCAPISM, MAIDENS AND  
MYSTICISM – A WINDOW INTO  
A DIFFERENT PLACE.**



*The Church of the Greys*  
Installation view



*The Church of the Greys*  
Detail



*The Church of the Greys*  
Detail

*Welcome to Hell*

UCE, Birmingham

September 2004

Exhibition marking the end of The Wheatley Fellowship at BIAD, Birmingham. A mixed show containing around sixteen separate works and a lo-fi, photocopied, exhibition plan, including text adapted from the 'Protect and Survive' manual of the late 70s. The works in the show weren't specifically linked, but their exhibition together alluded to a kind of 'end-of-days'; slightly apocalyptic and questioning, including references to music, comedy, the Cub Scouts, Protect and Survive and nationalism.

**S MARK GUBB: MY COUSIN GOT ME INTO IRON MAIDEN WHEN I WAS EIGHT. PUNK WAS ABOUT THE URBAN, SUBURBAN AND REAL LIFE, THATCHER'S BRITAIN AND HOW SHIT EVERYTHING WAS, WHEREAS METAL WAS ALL MYSTICISM, CASTLES, BIG BOOBS AND BADLY VEILED PHALDIC REFERENCES, BUT IT WAS NEVER THAT SIDE OF THINGS I WAS IN TO. I LOVED THE EXTREME IMAGERY OF SKULLS AND THE DEVIL, BUT IT WAS THE NOISE, BRIGHT LIGHTS AND THE FIRE THAT I LIKED. I BECAME A HUGE THRASH METAL FAN – SLAYER, ANTHRAX, MEGADETH, METALLICA AND TESTAMENT. I WAS YOUNG ENOUGH TO FIND THE IDEA OF THE DEVIL FRIGHTENING AND THAT IT MIGHT SOMEHOW MANIFEST ITSELF THROUGH THIS MUSIC WAS EXHILARATING.**



*Educate to Liberate*  
Installation view



*An Important Moment in Hi(ck)story,  
Nuclear Family (2004) and Be Prepared*  
Installation view



*Jesus Saves and Still We Stand Tall*  
Installation view

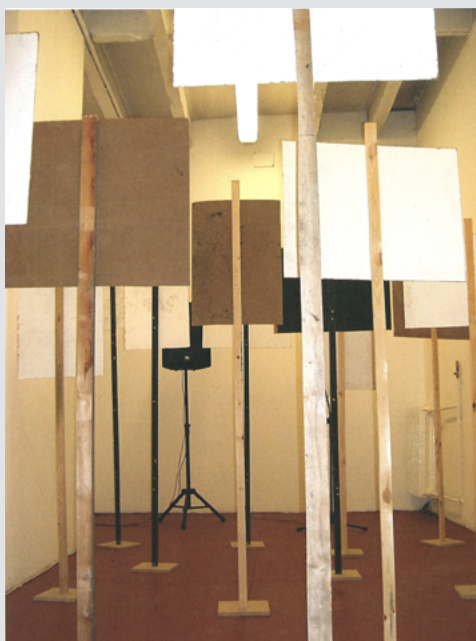
*Black as midnight on late evening moonless*

Bunkier Sztuki, Krakow, Poland

December 2004

An installation produced as a result of a residency hosted by Bunkier Sztuki, Krakow, Poland. This work was made in response to my time spent in Poland and, more specifically, a series of interviews and conversations with Krakow residents from a range of age groups, all of whom have lived through the massive shift in Poland's history from Communism to Democracy. The work consisted of a series of free-standing placards positioned so that, as you entered, you couldn't see what they said; you were joining the protest from the rear. At the front of the space was a microphone and PA, plugged in and switched on, so that if the viewer wished they could make their way through the placards and speak in to the microphone. By doing so, it would also be revealed to them that the placards were blank. A sound element to the work consisted of the sound of marching feet and a military style drumbeat; samples from 'Holidays in the Sun' and 'We're Not Gonna Take It' by The Sex Pistols and Twisted Sister, respectively.

**RS: I REMEMBER THINKING  
THAT THE 12" RECORD WAS  
THE HEIGHT OF EMPATHETIC  
ENGAGEMENT WITH AN  
AUDIENCE, A BEAUTIFUL THING  
WITH ALL THIS EXCITING EXTRA  
STUFF (PATCHES, STICKERS),  
SOME KID WOULD BUY IT  
AND TAKE IT HOME TO THEIR  
BEDROOM, CAREFULLY UNWRAP  
IT, PORE OVER IT, INSPECT IT,  
TREASURE IT.**



*Black as midnight on late evening moonless*  
Installation view



*The Death of Peter Fechter*  
Documentation of performance



Promotional poster designed and printed  
by Hatch Show Print, Nashville, USA



*Everyone Knows This Is Nowhere*  
Installation view

*The Death of Peter Fechter*

Live Performance

London

18th August 2007

Commissioned by the ICA, this was a re-enactment of the death of Peter Fechter; an 18 year old citizen of the DDR, shot and fatally wounded attempting to escape over the Berlin Wall on August 17th 1962. After being fired upon and hit in the back and abdomen, Peter fell back in to the no man's land on the DDR side of the wall and lay calling for help for 50 minutes whilst he slowly bled to death. Neither the DDR nor GI guards stepped in to help him, despite pleas from a large group of West Berliners who gathered having heard the shots. This project was a straight re-enactment of this hour in Peter's life and death, staged at a secret location in London. Two coaches of audience were bussed there from the ICA with no knowledge of where they were going. Integral to the performance was the use of live-firing AK-47 machine guns by the DDR guards (firing blank ammunition), providing a very real and physical experience for the audience. Planted among the audience were performers who took the role of the West Berliners once the performance was under way, in an attempt to blur the line between audience, performer and performance.

**RS: HOW DO YOU THINK OF THE  
AUDIENCE? WHAT ABOUT THE  
CONTEXT IN WHICH THE WORK IS  
MADE – THIS SEEMS IMPORTANT  
FOR YOU?**

*Everyone Knows This Is Nowhere*

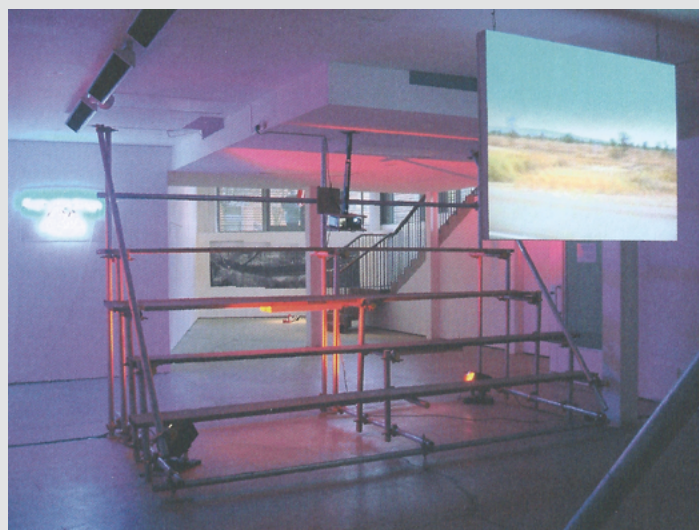
Mixed Media Installation  
Castlefield Gallery, Manchester  
December 2007

A collaborative project with Gordon Dalton, this exhibition was based around a road trip we made from Los Angeles to Snake River Canyon in Twin Falls, Idaho, in an attempt to track down the site of Evel Knievel's failed 'Snake River Canyon Jump'. The exhibition took the form of an installation in the gallery including large-scale bleachers (American stadium style seating), projected video, fly-posters and a promotional poster produced by Hatch Show Print of Nashville, Tennessee; Hatch are America's oldest working print shop having been established in 1879. Their look and style are synonymous with the art and culture of the American South and has become as famous as the people they have produced posters for; the likes of Johnny Cash, Elvis and The Grand Ole Opry. The exhibition was very much a sum of its parts; the nostalgia, the futility, the trip in to the Wild West, the posters, the bleachers, the film, the stunts. It becomes a dialogue around our positioning to American cultural and political history; both the culture and politics of today and the aspirational, superstar culture of our youth. A ridiculous pilgrimage to engage with an impossible dream and the inevitable crash down to earth that this entails, both physically and aspirationally.

**SMG: AUDIENCE AND CONTEXT ARE IMPERATIVE. TAKE MY A REAL ROCK ARCHIVE PROJECT, WHERE I STAGED AN EVENT AT THE BOAT CLUB IN NOTTINGHAM, AND INTERVIEWED TWO GUYS CALLED GEOFF LUCAS AND PHIL MYATT LIVE ON STAGE. GEOFF USED TO BE BLACK SABBATH'S ROADIE AND TOUR MANAGER AND PHIL USED TO RUN A CLUB IN BIRMINGHAM CALLED MOTHERS.**



Promotional poster designed and printed by Hatch Show Print, Nashville, USA



*Everyone Knows This Is Nowhere*  
Installation view

*Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*

Mixed Media Installation

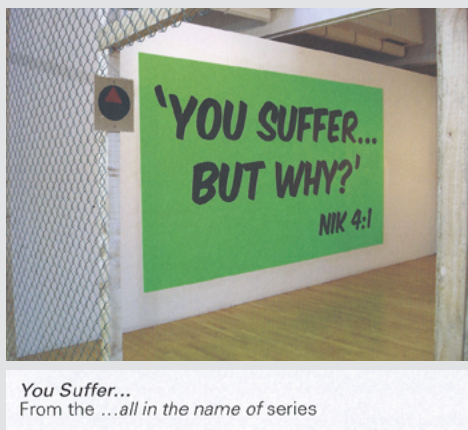
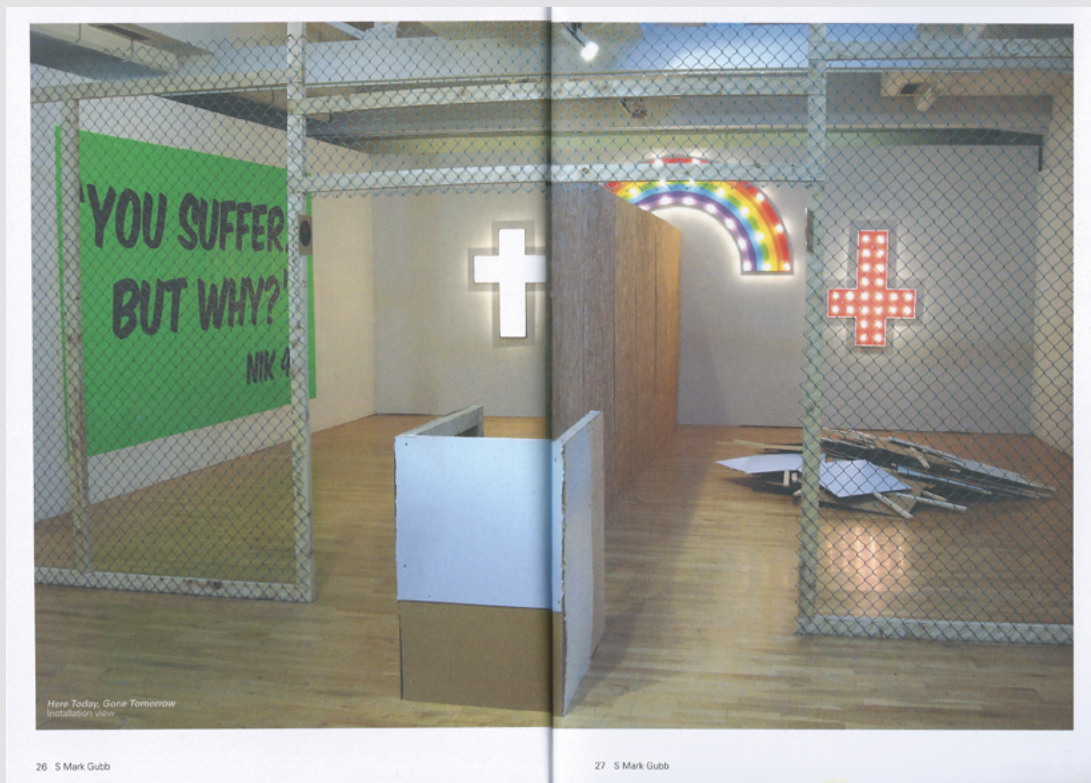
The City Gallery, Leicester

March 2008

A solo show drawing together various themes and interests running through my practice. The gallery space was divided in two by a roughly fabricated wall of wooden boards. These spaces were fenced off and a process of discrimination used on the visiting audience to decide which half of the gallery space they were allowed to enter; this was a token and arbitrary process based around height – if the visitor was over 5' 7" they were allowed in the left hand space, if they were under that height they were allowed in the right hand space and if they were exactly 5' 7" (the same height as myself) they were allowed in both. This was enforced by someone I employed by placing an advert in the local job centre. The exhibition was aiming to draw discussion around political/social/moral structures, religion's role within these structures, political apathy, the human desire for change and each persons (in)ability to achieve this.

**SMG:** WHAT YOU'VE SAID ABOUT THE RECORD AND POSTERS AND PATCHES, AND THE RELATIONSHIP IT HAS WITH ITS AUDIENCE IS TRUE. THERE'S THAT ETERNAL QUESTION, HOW DO YOU DO THAT WITH ART?! I'M ALWAYS REALLY CONSCIOUS NOT TO SAY 'THIS IS THE WAY IT IS' THROUGH MY WORK, I WANT THE WORK TO BE A DISCUSSION, ALTHOUGH AS AN ARTIST YOU'RE RARELY AROUND TO HAVE THE CONVERSATION.

**RS:** THE AUDIENCE IS ALL OVER YOUR WORK LIKE A RASH. FOR EXAMPLE HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW AT LEICESTER, TELL ME MORE ABOUT THAT?



**I'M INTERESTED  
IN GIVING  
THE AUDIENCE  
A PHYSICAL  
EXPERIENCE,  
IN THE  
SPECTACLE,  
AND IN  
ATTEMPTING  
TO BRING OUT  
AN EMOTIONAL  
RESPONSE...**

**SMG:** I WANTED TO CONTROL THE AUDIENCES EXPERIENCE IN THE SPACE, SO DIVIDED THE GALLERY DOWN THE MIDDLE, WITH DIFFERENT WORKS ON EITHER SIDE, CAGED OFF ACROSS THE FRONT AND A GALLERY ATTENDANT PRESENT TO DETERMINE WHICH SIDE OF THE GALLERY THEY WERE ALLOWED IN. I CAME UP WITH AN ARBITRARY SYSTEM BASED ON MY HEIGHT. I'M 5' 7," SO IF PEOPLE WERE OVER THAT HEIGHT THEY WERE ALLOWED IN THE RIGHT SIDE, IF THEY WERE UNDER THEY WERE ALLOWED IN THE LEFT AND IF THEY WERE EXACTLY THAT HEIGHT, THEY WERE ALLOWED IN BOTH, THE CHOSEN ONES. THE ATTENDANT I HAD DIVIDING THE AUDIENCE WAS SOMEONE I'D FOUND BY PUTTING AN ADVERT IN THE LOCAL JOB CENTRE.

THE INDIVIDUAL WORKS THEMSELVES ALLUDED TO VARIOUS THINGS – RELIGION, POLITICS, ASPIRATION, DISCRIMINATION, APATHY, DIVISION, MUSIC. I GOT REGULAR FEEDBACK FROM THE PERSON I'D EMPLOYED, A DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIP TO THE ONE I WOULD HAVE HAD WITH A GALLERY ATTENDANT. THEY WOULD TEXT ME DIFFERENT PEOPLE'S REACTIONS AND LET ME KNOW ABOUT CONVERSATIONS THEY'D HAD. ONLY A COUPLE OF PEOPLE COMPLAINED ABOUT THE HEIGHT THING AND IT WAS INTERESTING TO NOTE THEY WERE WHITE, MIDDLE-CLASS, EXACTLY THE KIND OF DEMOGRAPHIC WHO ARE LEAST LIKELY TO HAVE EXPERIENCED ANY REAL KIND OF DISCRIMINATION IN THEIR LIVES.

I'M INTERESTED IN WORK GIVING THE AUDIENCE A PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE, IN THE SPECTACLE, AND IN ATTEMPTING TO BRING OUT AN EMOTIONAL RESPONSE. THAT COMES BACK TO MUSIC; THE POWER OF THE CONCERT, THE VOLUME, THE SHOW, BUT HOW UNDER-PINNING ALL THAT SPECTACLE, THE MUSIC IS TRYING TO CONVEY SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT AND TO TAP IN TO SOMETHING DEEPER THAN A VISUAL EXPERIENCE; SOMETHING I THINK I'VE ACHIEVED BEST WITH MY RE-ENACTMENT PIECE, THE DEATH OF PETER FECHTER.

**RS:** I REALLY IDENTIFY WITH THAT IDEA OF THE AUDIENCE'S PHYSICALITY. I THINK OF THE AUDIENCE LIKE ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE WORK, AS IMPORTANT AS A PHYSICAL DIMENSION – ANOTHER MORE FLUID, CHANGEABLE BUT CORPOREAL CHARACTERISTIC. I FIND IT HARD TO DEVELOP WORK SOMETIMES IF IT'S NOT FOR A PARTICULAR SHOW, SPACE, IDEA OR AUDIENCE. I LIKE TO IMAGINE THE PUNTERS COMING IN TO THE SPACE, HOW THEY ENTER, WHAT THEY SEE FIRST, HOW THE WORK PUSHES THEM AROUND – NOT IN A CARSTEN HOLLER KIND OF WAY, MORE IN SOME KIND OF INSANE URBAN PLANNING WAY.

SO TELL ME MORE ABOUT PETER FECHTER – THAT WORK SEEMS TO TAKE THE RELATIONSHIP WITH AUDIENCE SOMEWHERE ELSE ALTOGETHER?

**SMG:** WHILST I'VE MADE WORK THAT HAS A PERFORMATIVE ELEMENT, I'D NEVER MADE AN OUTRIGHT PERFORMANCE WORK, AND THIS WAS ALSO REALLY FLIRTING WITH THEATRE.

ALL THE 'ACTION' HAPPENED IN THE FIRST 5 MINUTES AND THE OTHER 55 MINUTES WAS A GROUP OF PEOPLE WATCHING AN INDIVIDUAL SLOWLY BLEED TO DEATH WHICH, IN TERMS OF A THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE, ISN'T THAT INTERESTING.

THE PERFORMANCE WAS UNDERWAY BEFORE THE AUDIENCE ARRIVED ON SITE, THE GUARDS WERE ALREADY 'ON DUTY' AND THERE WAS NO ANNOUNCEMENT AT THE END, THE GUARDS JUST MOVED AROUND THE SITE USHERING PEOPLE AWAY IN A TYPICAL 'NOTHING TO SEE HERE' MANNER. WE USED REAL AK-47 MACHINE GUNS. I WAS INTERESTED IN WHAT PROCESS WOULD BE INVOLVED TO BRING REAL MACHINE GUNS TO A LONDON SUBURB AND FIRE THEM. IT'S SURPRISINGLY EASY TO GET THE PERMISSIONS YOU NEED. I WANTED REALISM BUT ALSO A WARHOLIAN NOTION THAT WE HAVE BECOME DESENSITIZED. I'D NEVER BEEN AROUND A REAL AK-47 BEFORE AND SO FIGURED MOST OF THE AUDIENCE PROBABLY HADN'T. THE ONLY WAY TO DESCRIBE THOSE THINGS WHEN THEY GO OFF IS AWESOME, TRULY TERRIFYING. WHEN THE ACTORS STARTED FIRING, AUDIENCE MEMBERS WERE LITERALLY DIVING OUT OF THE WAY, WHICH I GUESS IS A GOOD REFLEX RESPONSE TO HAVE.

**I'D NEVER  
BEEN AROUND  
A REAL AK-47  
BEFORE AND  
SO FIGURED  
MOST OF  
THE AUDIENCE  
PROBABLY  
HADN'T...**

THE AUDIENCE COULD GO WHEREVER THEY LIKED, PROVIDING GUARDS DIDN'T STOP THEM. THERE WERE NO SEATS AND I'D PLANTED PEOPLE IN THE AUDIENCE TO TAKE ON THE ROLE OF THE WEST BERLINERS WHO GATHERED AGAINST THE WALL DURING THE ORIGINAL EVENT, SHOUTING AT THE GUARDS TO HELP PETER. I WANTED TO MERGE AUDIENCE AND PERFORMER A BIT FURTHER, WHICH SEEMED TO WORK AS A FEW AUDIENCE MEMBERS JOINED IN WITH THE SHOUTING. EQUALLY, IT WASN'T ABOUT DRAWING IN THE AUDIENCE IN ANY OTHER WAY THAN EMOTIONALLY.

**RS:** THIS PROJECT BRINGS INTO FOCUS SOME OF THE AMBIGUITIES AND 'TONES' IN THE OTHER WORKS. IT DEMANDS A LOT OF THE AUDIENCE – IT'S LIKE YOU'RE TAKING THEM HOSTAGE AND THEY CAN'T ESCAPE UNTIL THE SCENARIO IS PLAYED OUT. PERHAPS THIS IS THE ULTIMATE IN USING THE AUDIENCE AS ANOTHER PHYSICAL ELEMENT OF THE WORK.

**SMG:** IT DIDN'T DEMAND A LOT OF THEM IN A PHYSICAL SENSE, BUT EMOTIONALLY IT DID. I'M ALSO A BIG FAN OF THINGS THAT ARE NOT NECESSARILY IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZABLE AS ART. I'VE MADE A COUPLE OF PROJECTS THAT STRADDLE THE LINE BETWEEN 'THE CULTURE I'M ENGAGING WITH' AND 'ART'; A REAL ROCK ARCHIVE AND AMONG THE LIVING, WHICH I CURATED AND WHERE WE MET; ONE ENGAGING WITH ROCK MUSIC AND HISTORY, THE OTHER WITH SKATEBOARDING. BOTH OF THESE PROJECTS CAME OUT OF A GENUINE PASSION I HAVE FOR THE SUBJECT MATTER, BUT ALSO FROM A BELIEF THAT I COULD BRING TOGETHER 'ART' AND 'THIS OTHER CULTURE' WITHOUT COMPROMISING EITHER; THE ART WOULD STILL BE CRITICAL AND CREDIBLE BUT THE OTHER CULTURE REMAINED INTACT TOO.

**THOSE KIDS  
IN CARDIFF  
ARE GOING  
TO REMEMBER  
THAT GUITAR  
FOR THE  
REST OF  
THEIR LIVES...**

**RS:** THAT REFLECTS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF YOUR PRACTICE THAT ENGAGES WITH DIFFERENT CONSTITUENCIES – ALMOST LIKE A DOCUMENTARY MAKER WOULD POINT THE LENS IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS TO FOCUS ON SPECIFIC 'IDENTITIES' IT SEEMS THAT EACH WORK DEVELOPS A DIALOGUE WITH THE SPECIFIC CONSTITUENCY ADDRESSED.

THE PETER FECHTER RECONSTRUCTION MEANS SOMETHING DIFFERENT NOW THAN IT WOULD HAVE A DECADE AGO. I THINK THAT'S SIGNIFICANT AND I THOUGHT ABOUT THAT A LOT IN THE WORK I MADE FOR CHAPTER, IN CARDIFF, FOR MY PART OF THE SKATE PROJECT, IN YOUR OWN STORY, YOUR OWN RELATION TO THESE COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE WORK. I LOVED THE IDEA OF FREE ELECTRIC GUITARS FOR UNDER 18S ON THE UNDERSTANDING THAT I'D MAKE A CD OF COVER VERSIONS OF THE FIRST SONG THEY WROTE ON THE GUITAR AND THEN WE'D RELEASE THAT – IT EXISTS IN ONE MOMENT, BUT PROMISES SOMETHING FOR THE FUTURE.

**SMG:** THOSE KIDS IN CARDIFF ARE GOING TO REMEMBER THAT GUITAR FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES... YOU MADE REFERENCE TO DOCUMENTARY AND ANTHROPOLOGY. MY WORK IS JUST BASED ON THINGS I FIND INTERESTING IN THE WORLD, HOLDING THEM BACK UP FOR RE-EXAMINATION. REFERRING BACK TO A POINT YOU MADE, THE WORKS WITHIN THE HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW PROJECT HOPEFULLY ALLOW THE AUDIENCE TO CONSTRUCT THE WORK TO BECOME MORE THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS. THAT WAY OF WORKING TO ME IS REALLY IMPORTANT. I DON'T SUPPOSE ANY CREATIVE PROFESSIONAL WANTS TO BE REMEMBERED FOR ONE THING, ONE PIECE OF WORK, ONE EXHIBITION, ONE FILM, WHATEVER, AS THAT'S JUST ONE THING YOU WANTED TO SAY TO THE WORLD.

**RS:** IT GOES BACK TO THE IDEA OF THE CREATIVE LIFE. THE LONG HAUL. IT'S A POLITICAL ACT. IT'S AN ONGOING FIGHT AGAINST CYNICISM – THE ANTITHESIS OF THE 'HERE TODAY – GONE TOMORROW' MENTALITY THAT SEEMS SO PREVALENT IN THE ART WORLD AT THE MOMENT.

EVERYTHING IS CONSUMED AND DISCARDED SO FAST THESE DAYS BUT I THINK THERE IS A REAL VALUE IN REFLECTING ON WORK IN CHUNKS OF YEARS. LET'S THINK ABOUT IT, LET'S TALK ABOUT IT, LET'S LOOK AT IT AS A BODY OF WORK WHICH SHINES A LIGHT ON MANY DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF LIVING TODAY, SO WE CAN CELEBRATE AND COMMISERATE IN EQUAL MEASURE. ART, AND LIFE.

FOR A FULL VERSION OF THIS CONVERSATION BETWEEN S MARK GUBB AND ARTIST ROSS SINCLAIR, PLEASE VISIT [WWW.CERIHAND.CO.UK](http://WWW.CERIHAND.CO.UK)

**S Mark Gubb** is represented by **Ceri Hand Gallery**  
This book was published to coincide with his first  
solo show at the gallery:

*My Empire of Dirt*,  
16 January – 28 February 2009

For more information on the artist and extended  
version of the texts in this publication, please visit  
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# We ♥ Real Life Scotland

Art, History and Place: a Reader exploring the heritage  
of Huntly's Gordons and other Scottish Incidences

*Ross Sinclair*

## Where are we?

### A Reflection on a Journey with The Real Life Gordons of Huntly

by Ross Sinclair

The Real Life Artist in residence is currently residing in the Old Road house, working in the Empty Shop in Bogie St. and will soon move to the closed down museum of this very particular town of Huntly, embedded in this northern community working with the very particular organisation Deveron Arts (DA).

But how did I get here – and what could this mean? A couple of years ago, Claudia Zeiske asks if I would like to come to Huntly to do a residency. I know about Deveron Arts, I am interested in context, passionately interested in the audience, in what ART looks like when you add people. I had worked with Claudia years before, on the Glenfiddich residency. So, I say yes. Some time later she says there is a summer slot coming up the following year, which suits me with my other work/family commitments. But she says because of the way the money supports the residency there has to be a theme.

Stop – A theme? I think, a theme, I've never been given a theme, I don't need a theme. My autonomy and individuality as an artist is surely my theme, my particular and unique voice which is constructed from my experience of the world and the history of art and culture and then gets right back out there, offering insight and dialogue and humanity : that's my theme. My 25 years of art practice, hundreds of exhibitions – catalogues, *Real Life* monographs, (*Real Life Mono-logues* maybe) But these are my themes. They are mine – Aren't they? *Are they?*

But now my theme, for 3 months if I choose to accept it, is the story of the Clan/Family/House



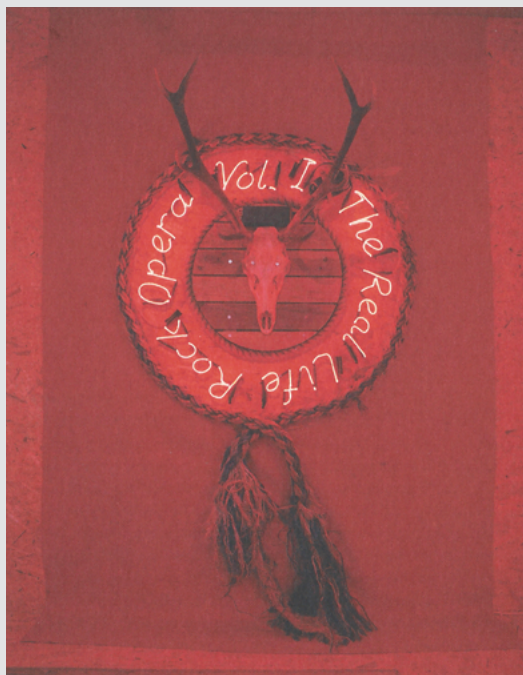
of Gordon in Huntly, or maybe in History, or in the imagination, or in collective memory perhaps, or in Scotland – or in the world – that's up to me. My job is the Gordons in Huntly. However, I want to cut it, any which way I want to look at it... hmmm, ok, lets think about it.

Before I come to Huntly, I spend some time working up, and proposing, a couple of defined projects specifically in relation to the context. They are politely, but firmly rebuffed by Deveron Arts. This was an unusual experience for me, particularly as I thought they were good projects. Usually, as an artist, the organisations/institutions who invite you to work with them want to try to utilise what you propose, develop your project, realise your *vision*. But DA wanted me to think about how 'my vision' would be refracted and re-focussed through the collective lens of the people of Huntly. Interesting.

Can I make this residency work? It seems so random at first, the theme, this place, this story – is it for real? But the more I think about it the more I begin to believe this story could weave itself in and through lots of works I've made in the past which reflect on notions of history and politics



*Real Life Huntly, 2011*



*The Real Life Rock Opera Vol.1, Travelling Gallery, 2004*



*Gordon Crest at The Gordon Highlanders Museum*

and people of a small damp northern European nation. *Capital of Culture/Culture of Capital, We ♥ Real Life Scotland, Real Life Rocky Mountain, A Dream of the Hamnavoe Free State, Journey to the Edge of the World – The New Republic of St Kilda, The Real Life Rock Opera, Sinclair vs. Landseer*, and many more peppered throughout 20 years of work. Maybe that's an angle.

By now I'm thinking, well, why shouldn't I have a theme – it's a new challenge, new ways of thinking, quick on your feet, get on with it. A fresh start – no gallery, no baggage, no infrastructure, just

the audience, the people – the conversation, the dialogue. A simple contract. Can I make it mine? This is the first time I have ever been approached to engage with a theme, how will this work? But all the time the idea is growing – how this plugs into an idea of the specifics of History and Geography explored through my practice. For me, the story of this family in this one discrete location itself is almost literally incredible, particularly in how it weaves through the history of Scotland. From the beginnings through the Norman Conquest, this family Gordon wending their way North,



*Real Life Huntly, 2011*



*Real Life Artist in Residence, Huntly Livestock Mart, 2011*



*Real Life Artist in Residence, Huntly Livestock Mart, 2011*





guarding the English border for Bruce and before for Wallace, being then granted the lucrative lands up here in Huntly by Robert the Bruce after they supported him at the Battle of Bannockburn, while the previous Lord changed sides to the English at the last minute, shifting allegiances. What a story. You couldn't make it up. *Or could you?*

But how can this story turn into art? I'm interested in the attempt to engage an audience – to start to unravel or explore what it means to be somebody – anybody – an individual who lives in a small country like Scotland, or a place like Huntly in the heart of this *History*. Some of the related projects I've made before have not always been exclusively Scotland-identified, but have been more about the identity of a small country

which has been politically and economically overshadowed by a more powerful neighbour and has perhaps had long spells of thriving as an autonomous nation state, but subsequently from an international socio-economic point of view has been subsumed by this other nation state. Are you with me? A Gordon for me? In terms of the population you could be from anywhere but if you're here now then you're a Scot as far as I can see, a component part – but then again this could be true of any place or 'no-place' (utopia). Look at anywhere in central Europe, Scandinavia... Scotland is just one of many examples, but it retains its own unique story. Maybe that's true for the Gordons too, as it was in the past, you changed your name and pledged allegiance to the Earls for a "Bow o'

Meal". In the story of the Gordons of Huntly we have the whole complicated and contradictory paradigm of Scottish History conjured up in glorious microcosm.

At its core, Scotland is endlessly interesting because the accumulated image of Scotland, which has slowly come into focus over the past 300 years, is essentially fictional. Of course it's made up of a large part of Walter Scott, from Queen Victoria coming back to Scotland (with Edwin Landseer doing the visuals), Ossian, the fashionably fictional poet of Scots folklore which of course was exposed as a beautiful scam "translated" by James Macpherson. And yes, all these things are related to historical facts, but this re-imagining of the culture, the mythology, the identity if you like – becomes reified after the last political force of the nation has faded, made impotent after Culloden – Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Stewart line disappear back to Europe and by then it's all over. So the tartans and Clans are proscribed, then in 1822 Walter Scott stage-manages George IV's trip to Edinburgh where he supposedly invents the short kilt etc. And it all kicks off again. Then Victoria follows twenty years after that, along with her Balmorality – or should that be *Balmory-Ality*? Next stop Harry Lauder and Brigadoon. But it's all a fiction – isn't it? *Is it?* Then why do we love it so much? Uniquely in the world, the *given* image of Scotland comes from art, poetry, and literature, and because we're still at the moment part of the United Kingdom we have the latitude to make it whatever we want as it doesn't really exist in the first place. That's got to be exciting. Maybe that's really the biggest issue

surrounding Scottish Independence – to advance towards this goal intellectually perhaps we have to find a way to knock our famously mythologised history out of focus – in order to ultimately make this country a *Real Life* Proposition? Maybe we can no longer have our cake and eat it?

So I spend a few weeks making portrait paintings of the historic lineage of the Gordons in Huntly, from the Lords to the Earls through to the Marquis' to the Dukes etc, etc. thinking about the history, devouring the books, the dates, the names, the honours, the hierarchy. It seems like a good way to start a dialogue – with myself, with the story and with the people of Huntly – ancient and modern. I'm working in the empty shop on Bogie Street. People pop in and visit. Later I move to the closed down museum. Making objects, tools, something to get the conversation started – a way to engage folk. I put some paintings on a pole and carry the pictures up the Clashmach on sunny summer days – to give the old nobility a great view of the town they so carefully laid out and modernised two-hundred years previously. I walk round the town with them. The Square, the Shortbread factory, the town, the country – talk to the people – everyone is interested – what do they think art could be?

But DEVERON ARTS says – *the town is the venue*.

So now I'm in living in Huntly working with Deveron Arts who are committed to a socially engaged art practice. But when I'm out and about making my socially engaged art the citizens of Huntly still say to me, "*What's this for then?*" And I can reel off the aspirations for the project, 'what



I'm trying to do with it', but at the same time I sometimes wonder. But I'm also imagining a place where Art didn't exist. Perhaps observing a place where art doesn't exist, at least not in the way we usually discuss it. That's why this is fertile ground. *Where's the gap that exists in the market of our imaginations today that necessitates something called art to fill it?*

And what if ART had never been invented? How would you punt it on Dragons' Den as a new idea? What would be the USP of an art invented in the 21st century? No cave paintings – no high church – no renaissance – no patronage – no modernism – no post-modernism and certainly no situation we've become accustomed to in the recent decades at the end of this vertical, hierarchical, linear history when post-historical art has been flooding out sideways from the plundered corpse of modernism – all of culture floating around like little islands of non-conformity on

ever expanding oceans of uncertainty.

So what then are the aims and objectives of the artist today? What does he or she think about in the studio? Who are the audience in the imagination of the artist? In the mind's eye? Maybe there isn't one – maybe there shouldn't be one – Is it art for art's sake? A dialogue with itself, a feedback loop, a specialist interest, like stamp collecting or bird watching. Autonomous. A thing of rare beauty. An evocation of the sublime? It makes me despair about all the things we say about art, "*asking the viewer to think about things in a different way*" – "*holding up a mirror to society*" – "*creating a window to see a view of something, not as it is but as it could be*"... What do these words mean to people in the everyday? What could they mean when you're walking down the street, and you come across me parading round the square outside the Museum in Huntly with a painting of Robert the Bruce, (who gifted Huntly to the Gordons in 1318)



*Real Life Huntly, 2011*



*Real Life Huntly, 2011*



*The Real Life Gordons of Huntly Portable Museum Tour, 2011*

attached to a pole, strutting around as if I were protesting about something. Dressed only in shorts with a tattoo that reads 'Real Life' indelibly inked on my back (*serving you, the public, since 1994*) But protesting against what? *Well Whaddya Got?* Maybe that's part of what I've been trying to find out – what do the people of Huntly think *their* history is – where could art fit into this? So I try to talk to them, tell them about the project, undermine their scepticism – usually it works – a bit of human connection... Think of it as *Fieldwork*.

Then I begin to wonder. Are the citizens of Huntly socially engaging with my socially engaged art practice? That's quite a complex exchange.

But the audience, the public, the participants, the citizens of Huntly in this case – what do they get from this exchange? Entertainment? Distraction? Affirmation of what they thought already – are we simply singing to the choir – preaching to the converted? Or is a simple provocation enough? *An exhortation to think again, to reconsider one's preconceptions about one's attitude to life?* The old art talk. Or can we hold up a new paradigm of relational aesthetics where the audience truly are part of the artwork. They make it. They realise it. *They ARE it.* Could that be where art is hiding today?

But who are this audience? Who are this Scottish public? And what about now, after the event? Are you, the reader, now the audience of this work, a few steps removed – another layer of participants in the process?

DEVERON ARTS told me they want participants, not audience.

## Strategies

### Three works made in Huntly

#### Example One

OK so I wanted to explore the situation of the Gordons in Huntly today – 600 years of Gordon History, all those generations. What does it mean now, today? We hosted an event down by Huntly Castle where we looked up the Huntly phone book and found all the Gordons listed. We called them up and invited them to have lunch together at Huntly Castle, their ancestral seat. I set up a carnival style tableau facade constructed from the portraits I'd made of the old Nobility, that I'd been previously carrying around town, and up local Hills, one of which, the Clashmach is owned (as part of their farm) by one of the Gordon families attending. We invited them all to come, cajoled and encouraged, asking them to bring mementos and memories of their Gordon heritage/lineage to share and discuss. As an art event, it turned out to be a really unusual and unique day. It was a meeting (possible the only one ever) of the remaining Huntly 'clan' – whose individuals mostly did not know each other before that day. We had a homemade lunch and chatted. I made a performance of a song I made that charts 12,000 years of Huntly History. I wrote and used this song in various forms over the residency and recorded it as "*The Huntly History Song*" with "*A Gordon for Me*" and "*Cock o' the North*" blended in for good measure. After lunch and the 'entertainment' from me we made photo portraits of all the present



*The Real Life Gordons of Huntly 1318 – 2011*

day Gordons in Huntly with the tableaux of their illustrious forebears in the background and the glorious castle as the backdrop, as individual family groups and as a whole, all together. Trying to make sense of it. Later we made a poster of the group with the song lyrics on it and sent it around.

In one way this was a very simple, straightforward way to document the Gordon Family in Huntly in 2011 at the castle bearing their family name. But there's the artist in residence framing it as an artwork with Deveron Arts hosting it most generously and bringing it all together. Looking back at its core this work begins with a simple human moment of a really elemental exchange – an invitation – a warm reception, and sitting down across the table and talking, talking with a constituency of people that really had little interest in Art *per se*. But then

we document the process, the contemporary Gordons together with the old Gordons. A strange moment. A rich and dynamic moment. A moment of participation, of engagement, no doubt. Through the work one can reflect on questions of identity, what's in a name, what's family, where do we come from and where might we be going? How can we understand and engage with these big issues of identity/geography/history/time/class/ownership. Maybe in a small way by initiating the dialogue with a kindness. But on another level "the work" becomes about the whole story of the event itself, imagining it – constructing it, making it happen, documenting it, publishing it – adding another layer to *The History*. A new and reflective layer, probably like no other in the story of the Gordons.



*The Real Life Gordons of Huntly 1318 – 2011*



*The Real Life Gordons of Huntly 1318 – 2011*





The Real Life Gordons of Huntly 1318 – 2011 (souvenir poster)



The Real Life Library of Scotland (archive)



*The Real Life Gordons of Huntly*  
*Portable Museum Tour, 2011*

People wore their Sunday best, but it was Saturday.

On the poster we see pictured “*All the Real Life Gordons in Huntly*” – again we ask – are they participants or audience – or are you the audience for this work, suddenly now, at this moment, holding this book in your hands? This moment exists in the memory of these Gordons.

Does it now exist in an art dialogue – relationally – caught in the middle somehow, related to the participants but also related to you? And how does this square with House of Gordon USA’s Kim William Gordon’s relation to Huntly, to Scotland to his Gordon ancestry, 10 generations removed in St Louis, USA? Which is more real, more authentic?



*The Real Life Gordons of Huntly 1318 – 2011*



*Real Life Artist in Residence, Huntly Livestock Mart, 2011*

### Example Two

*Real Life Artist in Residence* (made with a great deal of assistance from Gayle Meikle) was sited in the livestock mart on the Huntly Hairst weekend. During this yearly event (a sort of Hybrid Halloween) Huntly hosts its yearly celebration of all things local and fresh – farmers’ market on Saturday in the town square and then on the Sunday at the local livestock mart all of Huntly life is represented in each of the metal pens of the sprawling market. It’s a kind of Gala Day, with the bouncy castle and the tractor show, rare breeds, sheep shearing and rabbit skinning amongst the crafts, and photos, clubs and associations represented – politics and woolly jumpers together and all sorts of other things in between. And so, in the middle of the livestock mart, we constructed our “artist in residence”. I brought all the stuff I had been working on from the “studio” in the museum – into our pen, and I sat there all day painting away (with the help of Ross H. Frew) and making music with my back to the audience as usual, singing the Gordon Songs old and new – *Real Life* tattoo to the fore. After a few hours I really did feel like I was just one of the other exotic ‘rare breed’ animals in the show. On one level this was surreal and bizarre. Gayle sat at the front of the stall and spent the day talking to the visitors, trying to frame the project for each one, patiently explaining who we were and perhaps what we were trying to do. Of course this was working on different levels. One was a straightforward presentation of the studio, the ‘creative moment’ albeit symbolically recreated through my *Real Life* Paradigm and completely out

of context – but this led to a broader question – what are we doing here – what is the job of art in this place?

Can culture and art can be just another aspect of what goes on in this town, within this community? This project sought to address the question of what really goes on in the studio – and how does that translate out here in the world? What’s my job? What’s my role? Of course in Huntly, in plain view of the people, in an animal market surrounded by all aspects of vibrant rural life, this question is considerably more complex, challenging and engaging than it might be in a city gallery. What is an artist – what do they do, what are they for? Can they ever be a constituent part of the community



like the farmers/rare breeds/sheep shearing/rabbit skinning/knitting etc we see displayed at this event? We show what we do. Are we just the same, can we make a contribution – be another part of the Jigsaw that makes up the big picture? It’s a messy business – there are no real answers – only more questions, but good questions, valuable questions.

That’s been the really interesting part of the

residency – to assemble this jigsaw puzzle with all these different parts or versions of *History* in relation to the present moment. They don't really fit together very coherently, but are all just as believable as the next version through the sincerity and veracity of the convictions held by all the people I met who told me about the part that was important for them. They might not be the voices normally heard together in the choir of *History*, those of regular citizens who happen to share the name Gordon, or soldiers who served in The Gordon Highlanders, or the informal historians, community workers, artists, singers, archaeologists, teachers, dancers, speakers, listeners and participants who helped construct my project. But they can be in this *Choir of History*.

I think, of course, the responsibility of the artist in this context is to make sure the projects that develop are, on balance, first and foremost artworks that involve mixed audiences/participants rather than simply entertainment or diversion, especially in the often robust shadow of funding imperatives and a bums-on-seats demand/mentality of post project reports and review. However I think that's why the project above with the "*All the Gordons in Huntly 2011*" worked because there was a clear premise for their invitation, i.e. simply their name in relation to 600 years of local history but they were a completely diverse demographic right across the social spectrum. In a sense the family name here is completely arbitrary, but defined and critical at the same time in relation to the notion of this event as an artwork – so everyone was in it together, equal, perhaps unsure what they were part

of at first, then slowly coalescing into some kind of definable group in relation to and through the artwork, the event. That was a stimulating journey through that day – a new community proposed – a reflection of a sense of place – a belonging – created in the moment that didn't exist at the start of that day and thereafter exists only as a memory, a feeling, an idea one can build into one's *Real Life*. An image, an idea that can be carried with you always – forever. To assist in locating where we are, in Huntly, in Scotland, right now, locally, nationally and internationally.

### *Example Three*

#### **A Museum Tour**

On the last weekend of the three months I was in Huntly I made the '*Real Life Gordons of Huntly Portable Museum Tour*' with a group made up of the various people I met and worked with during my stay, and the invited public. I had experienced many different histories of The Gordons in Huntly with the many fascinating people I had met during my residency and I wanted to make a project which brought some of these people together along with the works that I had made, so that we could experience together many different ideas and impressions of this history in the very locations in which it was made. The academic, the amateur, the lived, the remembered, the forgotten, the paradoxical and the contradictory. A different story. A celebration. And this would conjure a conversation, in which we invited the people who came on the tour to join. Perhaps we could bask together in the warm glow of an ambiguous grasp



*Brander Museum/Studio*

on a factual history of The Gordons in Huntly, in Scotland, in Europe etc, and begin to reconstruct it in a more common, enquiring manner. Perhaps we could think about how this might affect our attitude to all of history.

So the public were duly invited and a group of around 40 (just the right amount!) met in the old Huntly Museum where I'd been working in the Brander building, on the town square, under the Library, surrounded by the remaining artefacts from the Huntly collection not already returned to the Aberdeenshire Council vaults. This now appeared as a strange space, a mix of the studio-museum-history-contemporary. I introduced the whole notion of my residency to the assembled visitors and we kicked off the tour with a skype conversation with Kim William Gordon. He lives

in St Louis, Missouri, USA and I first played the visitors part of an interview with him I made at the start of my residency, when I met him in Huntly, where he had passionately articulated his relationship with his Gordon heritage, Huntly and Scotland, as Head of the House of Gordon USA. He wished us luck for the tour and set us off in good spirits.

I had prepared all the works I had made over my residency and everybody grabbed something from my 'Museum' - large paintings, t-shirts, small paintings, sing along song lyrics, posters, 'Real Life Tour' signs etc which made for a bright and lively looking tour group. Everyone had something to carry along and I reckon the age range was about 5 yrs to 80 something. It gave us a common identity. We were on a journey together. My modest



*Real Life Artist in Residence performance lecture (Brander Museum/Studio)*



*The Real Life Gordons of Huntly Portable Museum Tour, 2011*

contribution to the annals of Huntly history. Three months from 600 years. I was interested in how the group would look to the general citizens of the town who would see us as we perambulated awkwardly round the different stations on our tour. Not immediately identifiable I hoped, diverse and puzzling. We exited into the summer evening, making some art.

We first went round to the town square and enjoyed an introduction to the history of Huntly by Patrick Scott, town historian and author of the timeless, "A History of Strathbogie". We crowded round as he jumped up on one of the benches in front of the library and gave us the story of the square. We then processed along to the war

memorial where he informed us about the history of the memorial and the town's long and intimate relation to the military, imploring inclusion on the memorial for recent casualties in Afghanistan. Then it was along to the Gordon Highlanders Memorial (sculpted by David Annand in 1994 to commemorate the regiments 200th year) where I 'interviewed' Private Darren Sharp, whom I had got to know over the previous weeks and Major Mike Tait, both of The Gordon Highlanders Regiment. I had made a 'surprise' painting of Darren which he was carrying wrapped in paper - a symbolic painted image of a regular soldier, in contrast to the many paintings of commanding and high ranking officers we had seen on a visit

to the Gordon Highlanders Museum, some weeks earlier. We unveiled and presented Darren with the painting (it now hangs in his mothers hall). He seemed happy with the picture and I think it sat well alongside the other many images clustered around the memorial at that moment, carried from the studio/museum, including one of the 4th Duke of Gordon, who founded the regiment in 1794. We posed for photos. From there we made our way to The Gordon Schools Arch where we had the pleasure of seeing two students from the Brenda Gordon School of Dance entertain us with some Highland dancing for which I supplied some live music, the traditional bagpipe tune 'Cock of the North', played awkwardly on guitar. This tune was named in Honour of the 4th Duke of Gordon. We tripped through the arch and travelled down the grand avenue in a novel procession of portraits and colour.

We continued down to Huntly Castle where we were treated to a succinct though comprehensive introduction to the Gordons and the Castle by Anne Forbes based on her forthcoming book on the rise of the Gordons. She stood and spoke on the upper level of the castle grounds flanked by myself, Anna and Gordon (Black) who held up her annotations as required – it was quite a spectacle. As the light began to fade we then retraced our steps up the avenue where we were accosted by a dark stranger who sang a Broadside Ballad to the throng concerning the dastardly deeds of the 4th Duke of Gordon – in contrast to his shining public image, alluded to above. These ballads were sung in Huntly and in town squares across the country

during the time of "the improvement" (circa 1800/ industrial revolution) and the printed words sold to interested listeners for a small coin. Our stranger handed us our song-sheets free, gratis. (*The stranger was none other than esteemed local archaeologist Colin Shepherd*). This unadvertised intervention added a welcome note of disquiet, that things are not necessarily all they seem. From this encounter we went into the Gordon Primary School where we had a presentation from Norma Hunter and Sarah Rumis who discussed the projects they had made with the schoolchildren in relation to my residency and displayed some of the results on the windows around the entrance. I had visited the primary and secondary schools on a few occasions to help out. Then with the help of Mina (P5) and her friend Hanna we tried to teach the assembled crowd 'A Gordon for Me' which I had been rehearsing with the primary school choir for use on my *Huntly History Song* I had been making at a local recording studio. The adults were hopeless – the kids were much better students of the singing. After a couple of verses and a wobbly key change we hurried through the gloaming up to Gordon affiliated St Margaret's Chapel, the first church built in Scotland after the reformation with a spire and bell. This institution was constructed with support from the so-called *Sherry Gordons*, who moved to Spain from Aberdeenshire and started the successful Gonzalez-Bayez sherry empire. They later sent an impressive suite of paintings to decorate the Chapel and tell the story of important scenes from the bible. We took all my paintings in there too and they mingled awkwardly with the

sacred art. It was an intriguing contrast. We were treated to a fascinating history of the building from Ann Dean, who had written about the history of the chapel and after a short Q and A we retired to the hall next door for a well earned drink (of *Spanish Gordon* sherry) and tasty tapas supplied by Daisy Williamson.

From there we carried all the paintings, signs, t-shirts, posters and songs round to the Gordon Arms to display them around the hall, where the Gordon Family Ceilidh, organised by Norma, was already in full swing. A great night was had by all.

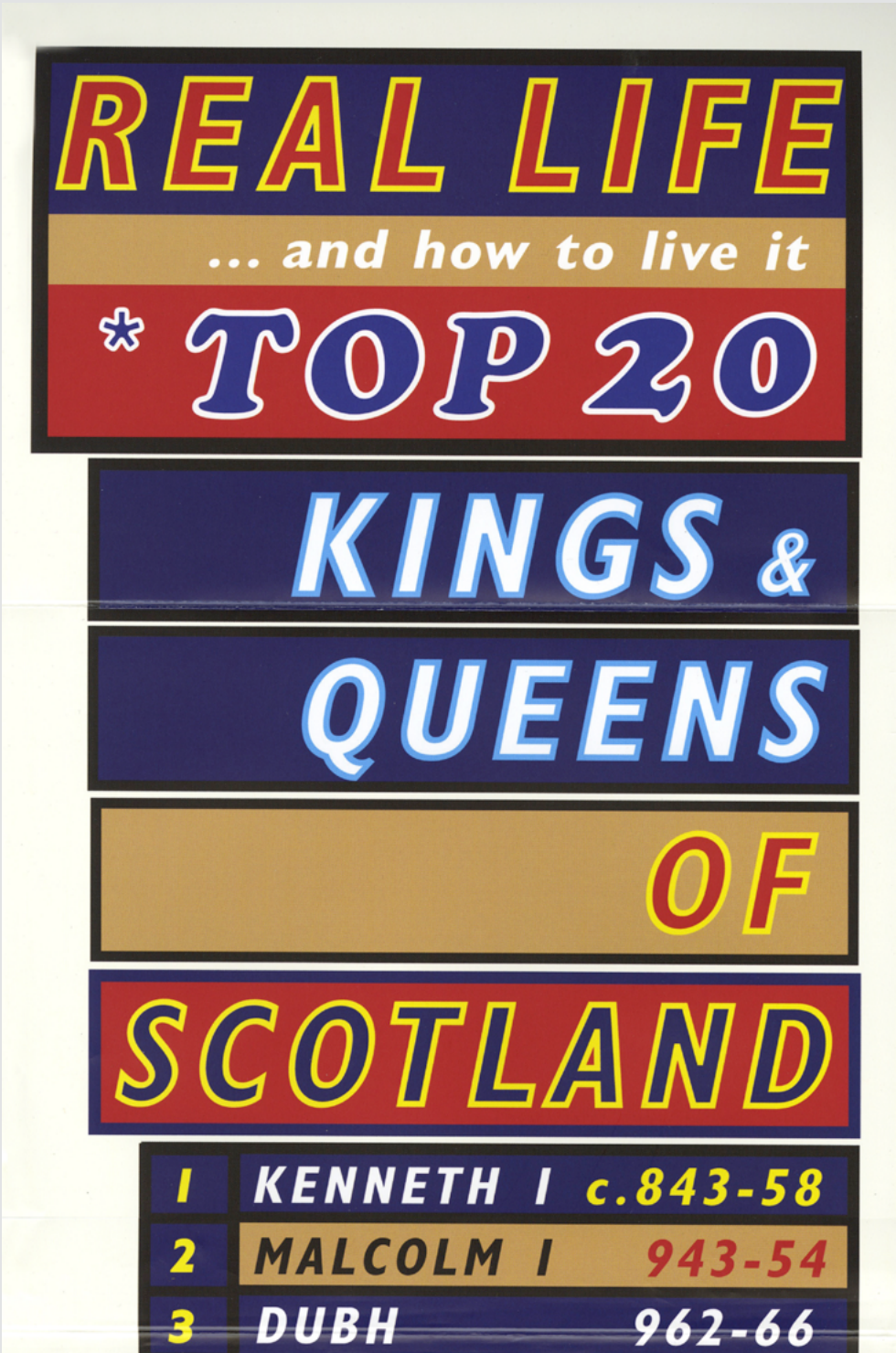
The next day Norma D. Hunter hosted a world record attempt of dancers performing Ceilidh classic *The Gay Gordons* in the Stewarts Hall. We took the portraits etc along to flank the hall for this ambitious challenge, while films of The Gordon Highlanders played in the background.

Again, Mina and Hanna helped me galvanise the dancers with a round of '*A Gordon for Me*' and we were then piped along in the dance by the Huntly and District Pipe Band. I'm sorry to report that the plucky dancers were narrowly defeated in this world record attempt. However, what the dancers lacked in numbers was more than made up for in enthusiasm, engagement and spirit.

And this was the same spirit that had flowed generously through all the people I met and all the works we made during the story of my residency in Huntly.

January 2011, Kilcreggan, Ross Sinclair

*Particular thanks to Amy Fung for help in crystallising some of these thoughts during interviews and discussions in Huntly.*



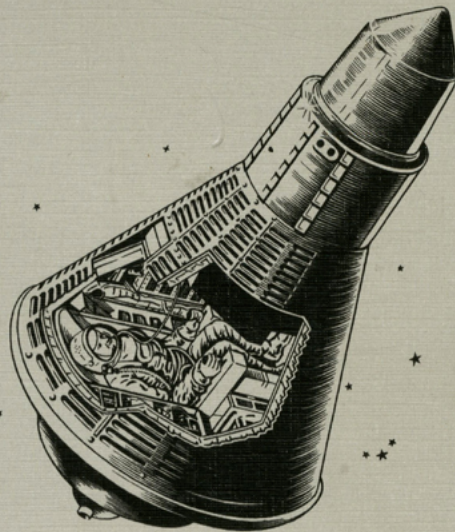
<b>4</b>	<b>DUNCAN I</b>	<b>1034-40</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>MACBETH</b>	<b>1040-57</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>ALEXANDER I</b>	<b>1107-24</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>DAVID I</b>	<b>1124 - 53</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>WILLIAM I</b>	<b>1165-1214</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>MARGARET</b>	<b>1286-90</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>JOHN</b>	<b>1292-96</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>INTERREGNUM</b>	<b>1296-1306</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>ROBERT I</b>	<b>1306-29</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>JAMES 3</b>	<b>1460-88</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>MARY Q.of S.</b>	<b>1542-67</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>JAMES 6<sup>&amp;1st</sup></b>	<b>1567-1625</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>CHARLES I</b>	<b>1625-49</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>CHARLES 2</b>	<b>1649-85</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>JAMES 7</b>	<b>1685 - 89</b>
<b>19</b>	<b>WILLIAM/MARY</b>	<b>1689-1702</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>ANNE</b>	<b>1702-1707</b>
		<b>2014</b>
✱		OUT OF ABOUT 50

**The Real Life Gordons of Huntly  
History Song (in the key of A)**

**Ross Sinclair, 2011**

I 2000 bc was the end of the glaciation period  
 In 6000 bc – the Hunter Gatherers arrive in Grampian  
 In 4000 bc the Farmers replace the Hunters  
 And the Garioch has a settled way of life -  
 Long cairns and barrows, recumbent stone circles and henges  
 I don't mean to offend you's  
 It was the Neolithic period – it was time to get serious  
 In 2000 bc the Bronze age really gets started  
 with burial cairns and bronze age technology  
 Don't need to make no apology  
 In 500 bc The Iron Age begins slowly  
 Here come the Picts with their Brochs and Language  
 And the soldier of Barflat  
 They built the Tap o' Noth, Dunnideer and Benachie Hill Forts  
 It lasts for 1500 years – Rhynie Man can you hear me?  
 In 1066 King Harold dies at the Battle of Hastings  
 It was the Norman Conquest of England  
 It kind of spread up to Scotland  
 The first Gordons arrive from Normandy  
 They settle down in The Borders  
 But that's only the start of this story  
 For 600 years the Gordons Rocked the affairs of Scotland  
 But local people got caught in the crossfire  
 With all the Killing, Blood, Death and Dying.  
 The ruling classes can be very trying  
 In 1318 – Robert the Bruce, The King of Scotland  
 Grants the lands of Strathbogie, now Huntly, to Adam de Gordon  
 Because he loyally supported Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn  
 The Old Lord Strathbogie changed sides to the English  
 – 600 years of drama – Cath-o-lic Religion and armour  
 The Cocks O' the North, Sometimes educated in the South  
 1st Lord Gordon – Earl of Huntly  
 Lord of Badenoch – 2nd Earl  
 3rd Earl – 4th Earl

Cock O' the North  
 Dies in battle fighting Mary Queen of Scots  
 5th Earl  
 6th Earl  
 2nd Marquis – Executed 1649  
 3rd Marquis George  
 4th Marquis George  
 1st Duke in 1684  
 Alexander 2nd Duke, 3rd Duke, 4th Duke  
 Last Duke dead 1836  
 Lord Lieutenant, Sheriff, Constable  
 Order of the Thistle  
 Cock O' the North  
 In 1769 the 4th Duke starts modernising Huntly  
 He marries Duchess Jane, well known as the Floo'er o' Galloway  
 In 1794 he rais-es the Gordon Highlanders – Duchess Jane recruits with a shilling and a kiss  
 That's something I'm sorry I missed  
 She's very good friends with the great and good of Scotland  
 She made Robert Burns famous and Walter Scott was her pal  
 Yeah Yeah Yeah  
 In 1827 The 5th and last Duke takes over – but he dies in 1836 with on offspring – the title lapses –  
 Duchess Elizabeth starts the Gordon schools in 1839 - in his memory  
 The 5th Dukes sister marries – The 4th Duke of Richmond and he becomes a Gordon in name  
 – But they're gone down South  
 It's the end of the Gordons in Huntly  
 Or is it? What about you Gordons left behind?  
 Now Im here for 3 months trying to make some sense of the Gordons in Huntly  
 And what a story it 's – a – mel-o-dramatic Hollywood movie  
 Its local it's national its truly international  
 Blood Marriage and Scandals, Religion Murderous Vandals  
 What a Film it would make What a beginning and middle and ending  
 Power Glory and Ambition propel it – Im sure you could sell it –  
 Be worth doing just for the Helluv it  
 Just don't let Mel Gibson direct it



Susan Philipsz

You — Are — Not — Alone

## Socialism in her Heart: A Melodic Reverie in the Key of G. The Seven Harmonies of the Timeline

Ross Sinclair

### C Major — When is Now?

I'm running along Princes St. It's the summer and the drained Nor-loch is on my right, a fetid swamp flooded by King James 3rd in 1460 to strengthen the defences of Edinburgh Castle. By the 19th Century it's been filled again to accommodate the demands of the expanding new town. Ebb and flow. Now it's called Princes St Gardens and I look beyond its trees and flowers and all the people lying on its rolling lawns towards the Castle above. It's nearly one o'clock. I anticipate a sound, I can almost see it floating there, hanging in the air, waiting in readiness, but something's missing. I'm still running, still dreaming. Calton Hill is directly in front of me, but flying far away and high above, the strange jumble of *world heritage*, monument and folly rising up from the East end of Princes St, high above the heads of the thousands of people swarming in between me and it. I know there is a connection between one of the monuments there and the sound I'm keen-ing to hear. I'm listening, still running, late, late, past the broken tram works and their stupid everyday traffic jams towards the mound of Royal Scottish Academy and The National Galleries of Scotland. This place hasn't changed much since 1781 when one and a half million cartloads of earth excavated from the new town excavations were dumped on the nor-loch to make this ersatz hill on which the city's grandest art institutions were constructed. I'm still heading towards them where I know something is happening. I see a flash of red through the crowd, I think I can see her sisters. Suddenly the one o'clock gun fires, exploding in my right ear. I immediately understand that this something is happening right here, right now and that I am in the middle of it. There's an echo. A response. It has changed. A new sound. A woman's voice. I hear it again, in the gardens, on the bridges, in the air. Far away on Calton Hill. I think back, the direction is not clear. The sound is all around. In her *Timeline*, nothing

is carved in stone. Geography, history and the relative position of people in-between are open and fluid. It might still be the 19th Century, and maybe the now famous one o'clock gun is about to fire for the first time. And a voice responds, echoing, falling across the city in an uncertain harmony. A peculiar siren, coming and going, breathing. No, not yet.

### D Major — Empirical Evidence

Edinburgh Castle. The Old Town/New Town shuffle. Politics and parliament, education and knowledge, culture, democracy and 900 years of history punctuated every day by the now famous tradition of the one o'clock gun, still anachronistically keeping time for long dead sailors from the 19th Century. This is the Capital City of somewhere and the *Timeline* is currently pointing us to the epicentre of the exact moment of now. It feels like home for her but only because she hasn't lived here for years. This is a Sunday best image of a nation's home. Too good to be true, a dream, an unknown place, like the past—a reverie, a *foreign country*. It looks the part, more than most, but what's underneath? There are no foundations to these places, nothing fixed. Tectonic plates have become separated from their core and float around aimlessly, the people milling around on top, confused. Nothing is certain in the *Timeline* of the past or future of this damp northern European country. A nation's identity forged on myths and stories, literature and fiction, defining moments that never really existed in the first place—it's perfect for this *Timeline*. Everything could change forever, simply by answering one question on a ballot paper. The only authentic moment is right now, and her *Timeline* illuminates it momentarily before it evaporates. She's never really worked here before, but she's working now. It's one o'clock. Again I hear a woman's voice.

## E Major — Sing History Changed

The *Timeline* grinds forward. We jump from the 15th to the 18th to the 21st Century. It's later now and everything has been transformed. The date is now 2015 or perhaps 2020. The Citizens of Edinburgh are living in 'The Pan-National All Inclusive Free Artists and Peoples Independent Socialist Republic of Neo-Scotia'. After Scotland became a sovereign nation state in the independence referendum of 2014 (answering one simple question), the leaders of the ruling Party sold off all current and future rights to all the oil in the North Sea for the people. It was worth trillions. And the people owned it all. Fired by the success of this socialist vision employing wisdom and foresight, the politicians handed over the running of the country to the nation's artists. Thus the new cultural custodians, with only the promise of good for all and joy ringing in their hearts, were able to immediately disband the military, sell off all the banks and turn over all the major infrastructures and the hundreds of billions now available in the peoples' reserve to the citizens of the new republic. Artists, writers, and philosophers, poets and musicians, playwrights, thinkers and dreamers would run the country now. And as Beuys said, everyone is an artist so everyone could be in charge. This new reading of the *Timeline* was very popular, and everyone was welcome to come from around the world, because all kinds of people are needed for all sorts of important jobs running things in this culture country.

So things are done differently, in this new Republic of Artists. For instance the *one o'clock gun* which inspired her *Timeline* no longer exists. There is no one o'clock gun here in Edinburgh anymore, no guns at all in the new *Timeline*, no shells, no explosion, no military barking and shouts, no men up here at all, no army and no navy and certainly no nuclear submarines and no nuclear weapons. All of these things have been de-materialised. Like all the objects which ceased long ago to be important in the *Timeline* of her artworks.

Replacing the one o'clock gun is a series of sounds which emerge from the high ramparts of this fortified structure previously called Edin-

burgh Castle. Echoing in a series of stages up from Calton Hill to the famous volcanic plug, this rock of ages, we hear a woman's voice, a harmony of voices — tremulous, yearning, travelling, and seeking out the company of other voices, a choir of a people, mapping a territory, constructing a constituency. This is the thing the tourists come to hear now. The one o'clock shout. This is her *Timeline*. First experienced in 2012 as part of the Edinburgh Art Festival in response to the gun, it has now totally replaced it. Objects de-materialised by the sound of her individual voice. This *Timeline* needs no gun, no bullets. There are no leftovers, no waste. Only the mechanics of the transfer of the sound into the air. Hers is a lean economy. One voice, amateur, idiosyncratic, individual and glorious.

## F Major — Patterns of History in the Timeline

The Nelson Monument on Calton Hill, overlooking the city was originally designed by Alexander Nasmyth in 1807, though this scheme was deemed too expensive and eventually an alternative design of an 'upside-down telescope' was obtained from the architect Robert Burn. In 1853, the Astronomer Royal for Scotland, Charles Piazzi Smyth, invented the time ball, still seen today on top of the monument, made of wood and covered in zinc, after a version at Greenwich, home of time. This clock mechanism is raised everyday just before one o'clock and at one pm exactly... it falls. It's strange to celebrate Nelson in this small country. The Napoleonic wars for which he became a martyr at Trafalgar were one of the prime motivations for the Highland Clearances, in which the poor people were forced off the land in favour of better paying tenants, sheep for example, because the landed gentry were being squeezed for more taxes from their masters in the south-east to fund the war. This forced population removal produced a lively Scottish Diaspora, handy for future '*Years of Homecoming*' and touristic visits to Edinburgh in a genealogical grave-robbing frenzy to eclipse that even of Burke and Hare. Though in reality this changed the land and the people and the history of the 'half-nation' forever. That's why, on our peripatetic

sojourns into deepest Scotland, we don't see anybody actually living in all the fertile hills and glens of this picturesque country, of which Edinburgh is the shining, gaudy bauble, as Dr. Johnson probably never said.

G Major — It's Always One O'Clock  
Somewhere

So on Calton Hill at one o'clock exactly every day since the middle of the 18th Century the ball drops on this monument to Lord Nelson, 561 feet above sea level. It gives the signal to sailors, enabling ships in the Firth of Forth and Port of Leith to check and reset their chronometers and watches since the days before accurate time-pieces were available. However this rudimentary method of time keeping meant that someone would have to be looking out for the ball and it often couldn't be seen in foggy or inclement weather, of which there is a good deal in this damp country. So to augment this visual time-piece a gun began to be fired in tandem. The one o'clock gun was positioned on the highest vantage point, the castle, fired simultaneously to the time ball dropping. The gun could easily be heard by ships two miles away in Leith Harbour whatever the weather. Originally an 18-pound muzzle loading cannon that needed four men to load and activate was fired from the Half Moon Battery at the Castle. The cannon was eventually replaced with a 25-pound Howitzer in 1953 and was subsequently fired from Mill's Mount Battery on the North face of the Castle.

In 1861, to ensure the timing of the gun was perfectly accurate, a 1225 metre cable was installed between the eight-year-old clock on Calton Hill and the battery in Edinburgh Castle. At the same time the *Time Gun Map* was produced showing the time it took for the sound from the gun to reach different parts of the city out towards the ports and the sea, enabling compensation to be made for the time it took the sound to travel. Mapping time. In *Timeline* her voice retraces this now invisible connection, building a harmony in response from 'the clock' on the monument on Calton Hill to the gun, back to the Castle, different parts bonding, coalescing in the key of G. These singular voices radiate around

the city, exploring, harmonized tones, coming together, falling apart.

A Major — The Timeline seen from  
Different Angles

The form of the sound created in *Timeline* is her voice emulating the noise of a ship's siren. In some ways this squares the circle, provides an essence of the original audience on the ships at sea for whom the whole complicated signal is intended, which now becomes an integral part of its own construction. This siren is not one tone, but is made up of different sounds heard together, an insistent harmony in three voices in our *Timeline*, constructed from sounds emanating from different points across the city, mirroring the Time Gun Map. Multiple voices, coming together. The mathematician and philosopher John Robinson invented the first siren in Edinburgh in 1799. Designed as a musical instrument, the apparatus was first fitted to the wind-chest of an organ and was thus described, *The sound in G alt was most smoothly uttered, equal in sweetness to a clear female voice*. It was later proven that these sirens worked equally well under the water and had in any case been named after the classical Siren of Greek mythology, *femmes fatales* who lured sailors to their deaths with their enchanting music and voices. Since the Scottish Enlightenment, Edinburgh has been known as *The Athens of the North*, its neo-classical architecture the backdrop to a new way of ordering the shape of the world into existence and now serves as a rich context for her evocation of its sirens of mythology. Maybe the artist's feminine voice is here symbolically projected back from the sea, drawing listeners in, imploring, seducing, exploring a new topography across the neo-classical vista's of this peacock of a city. Bouncing from Calton Hill to the Castle to the sea and back, it oscillates, a critical frequency—a harmony in the key of G. This woman's voice.

B Major — A Tough Kind of Love...  
a Virtuous Circle

A Militant Tendency exists at the core of her work. This has been in her heart since the experience of

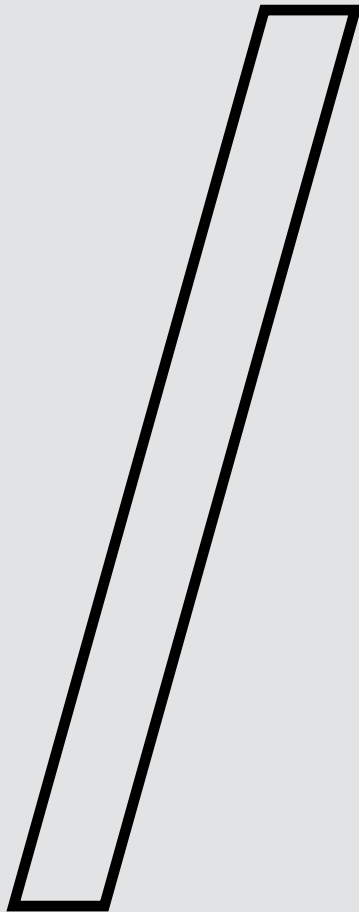
her formative years conjured a landscape of politics populated by the passionate voices of its irascible inhabitants. With this paradigm, in this manner, she has been singing in the high world for many years but at the same time she sings a hymn to the low world and its fractured and frightened constituents, dismantling their barricades, piecing together the shards of experience, smoothing the edges. She will re-imagine the space where people will live yesterday and tomorrow using only the air that comes from inside her body, born out of her lungs, today. She has been pioneering new relationships, growing new rhizomatic networks – high – low – hi – lo – hello. Often we don't even know we are part of a conversation —we think it's all about us, the sounds inside our head, an indistinct voice of anaesthesia —we are opened up. This represents a rare victory. It's a tough kind of love... to make us part of the *Timeline*. Perhaps this need for dialogue is something to do with where she comes from, and where her *Timeline* might lead us.

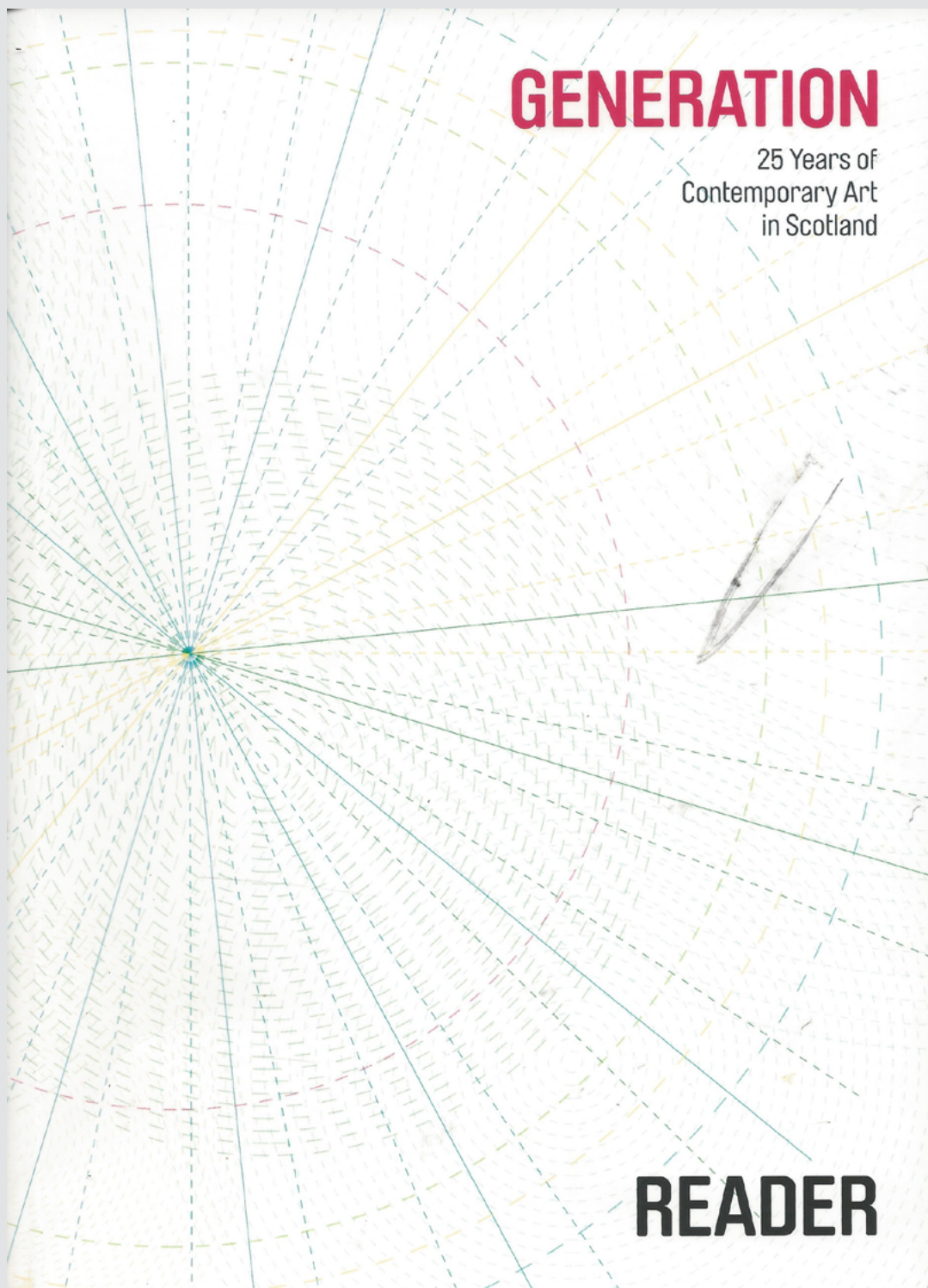
High C — Finding the Correct Key that  
best suits your Voice

She told me recently that when she meets people they are often very excited to convey to her their unique experience of the work. They tell her about the specific meteorological conditions that were in place at the precise moment they found the work - what the weather was like, what time of day, the light, what they felt, what they thought, what they knew. And even in the summer, harmonising across the width and breadth of the city in the key of G, the weather of the Edinburgh *Timeline* is far from reliable. Still her listeners can believe their experience of the work is the only real and authentic one and yet one which she herself could never know, never experience. The work can be experienced without art always being the framing device. So people discuss the work as if it were lost and they, alone, had discovered it. They have the idea that the work doesn't actually exist until their experience of it gives it a shape. This articulates an odd paradox that although the audience can be in literal dialogue with the artist herself about her work, they can have the feeling that it is they, themselves, who

have constructed it, authored it, whether in Edinburgh or Kassel, Berlin or Beijing, New York or Tokyo.

We listen to her voice and dream of the *Timelines* that articulate this precarious kind of socialism.





# 1991

The exhibition *Windfall '91* took place 5–25 August 1991 at the Seamen's Mission on the Broomielaw in Glasgow, a building that was subsequently demolished. It featured the work of twenty-five artists from eight European countries including many from Glasgow. The first *Windfall* had been held in London's Hyde Park in 1988, the second in the docklands of Bremen in 1989. During 1990 David McMillan, a Glasgow-based artist, had travelled in Europe meeting artists for *Windfall '91*.

*Windfall '91* was notable for many reasons. Organised by artists, it was a collaborative venture that helped consolidate the pattern of artist-led activity in Glasgow, cementing relationships between artists that would be longstanding and influential. Like many subsequent ventures it took place in an atmospheric found building rather than a formal art institution. Above all it was an outward-looking exhibition that suggested it was possible to build artistic relationships in Europe directly from Glasgow rather than artists moving to London, the traditional centre of the art world in the UK.

This essay by the artist Ross Sinclair for the *Windfall* catalogue expresses the optimism and energy of its times and the determination of young artists to make opportunities and control their own destinies rather than waiting for institutional approval. Sinclair had graduated from the Environmental Art Department at The Glasgow School of Art in 1990 and was undertaking his Masters in Fine Art. Alongside his own work he wrote numerous catalogue texts for fellow artists and reviewed for art magazines. Now a prominent contemporary artist and an influential teacher at The Glasgow School of Art, he continues to use the written word, including text and song lyrics, in his art today.

First published in *Windfall '91*, exhibition catalogue for an artist-initiated exhibition at the Seamen's Mission in Glasgow, 1991

## → Ross Sinclair

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## BAD SMELLS BUT NO SIGN OF THE CORPSE

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### THE WAIT

Once there was an artist who everybody thought was very good. He had a few doubts about this, but it was true – he was smitten with the idea of art. So he painted. And painted. Soon someone said that he should have a show. ‘Not yet,’ he said, and went back to work.

He entered his works in local competitions now and then. The local library showed one of his paintings and the art critic of the town paper mentioned his name. A relative said his paintings looked like a linoleum floor and asked if he could draw. He knew that he was slowly becoming an artist. ‘You should show your works in a one man show.’ ‘No,’ he said, ‘Not yet,’ and went back to work. Fellow art students rose to fame; they sold, they had shows, people talked, they moved to big cities. ‘Come’ they said. ‘No, not yet,’ he replied. Soon his work had authority, had insight, had maturity. Should he show, he thought. No, he answered, though rewards beckoned.

One morning he walked into his studio and it was clear. His work was pivotal, even seminal. The time had come for a show.

He showed and nothing happened.

Moral: Artists come and go.

(John Baldessari, from *Ingres and other parables*, 1972)

*Once upon a time, far from cities and towns, there lived two painters. One day the king, hunting nearby, lost his dog. He found him in the garden of one of the two painters. He saw the works of that painter and took him to the castle.*

*The name of that painter was Leonardo da Vinci. The name of the other painter disappeared from human memory.*

(Braco Dimitrijević from *Tractatus Post Historicus*, 1976)

## QUESTIONS

Anyone who follows the fortunes of the contemporary art world in Britain could not help but notice over the past few years a renaissance of what can be described as non-gallery, gallery shows noticeably in London and Glasgow. These are often housed in disused, industrial spaces or in temporarily dormant commercial office spaces. *Often they are initiated by artists.*

Artist initiatives are a valuable way of demystifying the business of art. They promote a sharing of information, skills and experience while also nurturing relationships between artists which can often become fertile breeding grounds for a horizontal and organically developing infrastructure of cultural activity. They often embrace a desire to communicate with that great unfashionable and unknown quantity, the general public. *But, it is often asked whether these kinds of exhibitions really acknowledge their local contexts?*

Events of this nature which occur outside London have the added (dis)advantage of being forced to justify themselves as something other than a regional showroom for the 'jaded palates of the metropolitan centre'. Do these kinds of exhibitions have any intrinsic meaning or do they only represent a limited window of opportunity onto the merry-go-round of the market for those individuals involved? Certainly they represent a valuable and energetic self-determination, but to what end? Is this situation merely symptomatic of the old guard being replaced by the avant garde, the establishment v the new establishment?

*Are these kinds of shows only regional showrooms for the hungry market or do they slowly build an international awareness of any given city which could prove to be to everyone's benefit? Are notions of increased value and engagement through site specificity and claims of greater public accessibility only excuses to placate (public) funders? Artists gain valuable experience by getting involved in all aspects of initiating / funding / curating / administering, but why then does the public still feel alienated and excluded from projects where every effort is made to engage them?*

## THERE IS A BAD SMELL AROUND BUT SO FAR NO SIGN OF THE CORPSE

There has come to exist in Western culture a certain perception of artists which has taken to characterising them to a large extent as passive, distant (elitist) and politically impotent. In other words, that complex, problematic and largely undefinable grouping 'the public', seems to have been persuaded that those individuals, who choose to spend their time producing what is sometimes referred to as 'high culture', are unable or **unwilling** to operate reciprocally in a world outside that which cocoons the realm of aesthetics. This situation can be conveniently illustrated by the time honoured and persistent cliché of (male) artists toiling in garret studios (often by candlelight because they are too poor to pay the bill, but in this equation: **property = integrity**). They are of course *necessarily divorced from the world as it is*. How else could they honestly promulgate their **personal vision** with the adequate degree of integrity, intensity and above all autonomy? These hypothetical artists

are generally ploughing through some torturous scenario or other designed to show that they (he) just weren't made for these times i.e. they are suffering for their art. Often they are represented rendered powerless by some inexplicable malaise, trapped in a kind of aesthetic limbo. They never seem very happy or contented with their present situation because they always seem to be waiting for something to happen. What they are doing (or in most cases not doing) is biding their time before being recognised and valorised by external forces – i.e. they are **waiting to be discovered**.

This cliché of artists at odds with the real world has been developed consistently over the past 500 years but made a spectacular leap forward in the last few decades with the rise of popular culture, particularly in the film industry. The classic exponents of this genre have included Tony Hancock in *The Rebel* or Kirk Douglas caricaturing Van Gogh for Hollywood in *Lust for Life*. The cliché of the artist as the misunderstood outsider still dominates television of all kinds. A current television commercial continues to prove that this image has a strong popular currency which has as much kudos today as it ever did. This advertisement, part of a large series which depicts a broad cross section of British society (i.e. white, middle class), features people who tell us what they really want from their lives, the coda of which is, 'Whatever you want in life ... you want to be with the Prudential.' Unusually an artist is represented in this imagined cross section of United Kingdom citizens. This artist is a woman (still more unusual) with an unmistakably (Northern) Irish accent. She is depicted in the studio putting the finishing touches to a ridiculous sculpture of a hand which fills the large studio (too large of course for an undiscovered artist). The index finger of this hand is extended upwards as if towards the stars. While other individuals in this advert express generally a desire to take control of their lives with some degree of self-determination, this artist says simply ... **I want to be discovered**.

This advertisement projects an assumption that artists, particularly women artists, are always at the mercy of some external forces and therefore unable to organise themselves into any relevant or meaningful situations. The subtext of the ad, revealed by the artist's accent further, proposes that 'regional art' exists only when appropriated and approved by the centre and reveals the basic assumption that it is disenfranchised, marginal and ultimately of no value whatsoever within its own social context (if indeed it is of any value outside of that situation). It is thus defined through the mechanics of the metropolis as inferior to cultural activity which takes place at the centre.

Of course this is only one example of a crude and reductionist TV view (perpetuation) of the problem. But the duplicitous relationship between metropolitan mass media and the historicisation of 'high culture' plays an increasingly important part in defining public (i.e. everybody's) perception of culture (and everything else). And anyway it really seems to have a lot to do with the fact that metropolitan based 'cultural organisers' can't be bothered to get out of the city.

*I think that's a specifically British problem. Nobody in London thinks that anything outside London's worth looking at. It's a real problem. They always talk about France being centralised. Well, they haven't seen anything like this. Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow, wherever – nothing exists any more. It might as well be open sea.*

(Karsten Schubert – London gallerist)

Of course, any artists with any meaningful contribution to make do not sit around waiting to be discovered in quite the way represented above. But this perception does persist and you know if you are told something often enough maybe you start to believe it. Often artists conspire to their own marginalisation by accepting projected views of the parameters of cultural activity, particularly in regional areas and of course by accepting and patronising the cultural hegemony enforced from the metropolitan centre.

So where does all this leave you, the young artist just out of art school in Glasgow or Liverpool, Belfast or Hull? When you're standing at the top of the steps of your college, twenty years of education behind you, is the only way really down? ... Well, it is if all you are going to do is retreat to your bedroom/studio for ten years piling up the canvases while you 'wait to be discovered'. Even if you manage to plough through most of what you imagine might be on the Whitney Independent Study Program reading list it doesn't mean that when the selectors for the British Art Show 1998 (or whenever) come a calling at your studio (which they are unlikely to do anyway) they are going to be bowled over by your work. Why wait for your work to be approved / validated / confirmed by some ex-public schoolboy in a sharp suit / jeans 'n' sneakers? (But maybe you knew him already from prep school). You get out there, do some fucking hot shows and invite them over on your own terms.

Art schools have become ever more intensive and frenetic, and increasingly close to the market. They have also, however, witnessed a retraction of sixties radicality and have become increasingly conservative and apolitical (if in fact they were ever anything else). Generally speaking, many of the teaching staff reflect this shift and now consist of artists who couldn't cut it on their own terms and mistakenly believe that their personal failure and spectacular mediocrity is a valuable foundation for their 'teaching' methods. Moulded by draconian changes in public education funding, art schools will now become a new kind of finishing school for upper-middle class children of the successful 70s/80s generation. This highly pressurised situation means that students come careering out like a fast train, fuelled up in a speed frenzy where you've *fucking had it* if you're not famous by the time you're twenty-five. The production and turnover of ideas is deemed all important. New ideas must be churned out at a rate of three or four a term, say a round dozen a year. And, if you are any good, maybe just one of these ideas could warrant thorough investigation and development for a year.

So what do you do? You get together with other artists and set up some shows. Starting modestly and getting more ambitious. Then before you know it you're getting public funding, putting on important shows of new work in (con)temporary galleries which are often much

better and more representative than fake survey shows like New Contemporaries or the New Scottish / Irish / Welsh / Northern / Eastern / Polish / Czech / Slovakian, etc., etc., season held at your local Arts Council gallery. In London this might mean the chance of selling work to collectors, or if you're lucky becoming involved with a decent gallery. In Scotland it often means wrangling with public funding bodies and meagre private sponsorship. But the situation certainly forces you to learn a thing or two, it teaches you to be resourceful and now the metropolis is coming up to see what all the fuss is about.

**Far Fresher than Fresh Art.**

Artist-initiated projects are of course born out of a desire to get out there and do something. To create a context for initiating and exhibiting work – *on your own terms*. They express a belief in themselves. They are positive examples of the implementation of *self co-determination*.

**They are the impatient and aggressive rejection of the perceived notion of artists as passive and apolitical.**

This current milieu of artist-led projects does point to a different direction from previous artists' projects, certainly in Scotland. In the past, artists have sought to create lasting, enduring establishments to further the situation of art and artists in Scotland and internationally, e.g. large art centres / print studios, etc. – permanent structures. These have now become the cornerstones of what could be somewhat generously described as the Scottish contemporary art scene. The new generation of active artists is less interested in creating lasting monuments to their efforts. The structures of organisation / initiation are more fluid and devolved. The idea of constant expansion as a strategy is being questioned. There has been a general deconstruction of traditionally accepted strategies and possibilities but more attention should/is being paid to a horizontal or organically developing infrastructure both geographically and socio-economically. Scotland has, historically of course, had very strong links in a European context and these will continue to be developed to the fullest extent. *Windfall '91* and the many exchange projects that have occurred, particularly in Glasgow, are evidence of addressing this and these will grow. Already more projects and shows are in the pipeline. Although London will always have a strong pull, there exists a valuable and potentially more reciprocal relationship with the European context.

But there are curatorial problems for artist initiatives. The loose committee structure, usually adopted in groups, tends to devolve responsibility for curatorial decisions to such an extent that it becomes problematic to reach consistent levels of good work. Sometimes neat packages of work are promoted at the possible detriment of a broader expanse of ideas. Thus often (and arguably correctly) the act of organising and discussing the project takes precedence over quality of work. This is a situation which cannot remain unaddressed for ever or the art being exhibited becomes a homogeneous veneer of stylistic vacuousness where the overemphasis on presentation destroys the potential for meaningful engagement.

Unfortunately along with the freedom that is a part of projects which retain a large degree of autonomy, it seems that in some quarters it has become fashionable to dispense

with a contextual agenda indigenous to geographic and social situation and instead adopt one which issues forth from the pressures of what could broadly be termed the centre, to suit its needs. This is often a strategy adopted by individuals who do not, for whatever reason, create their own opportunities and vicariously feed off the efforts of others. This shifting of agendas is undoubtedly a contributing factor to the alienation felt by certain sections of the public who engage with the work first hand rather than those who gain their knowledge from the mediated channels of books and magazines. This alienation is easily understood when the artist makes it manifestly clear (intentional or not) that his/her work has nothing to do with them, the 'public' – it doesn't relate to them, it isn't for them – and in fact they, the artist, couldn't give a **flying fuck** ... but hey! Why should it be made easy? I'm bored to tears hearing whingeing apologists justify terrible, patronising art by professing its supposed site-specificity and public significance. Maybe it's better not even to try. If you had never seen a football game before, it would seem like an incomprehensible farce. But if it's in your blood, you play at school, go to a few games, you learn as you go along – football is the most popular sport in the country. Why should things be so different for Art. It's really not that difficult to understand.

By embracing the agenda of the centre the artist necessarily begins to erode the chance of creating and/or developing an indigenous and independent cultural agenda which even begins to address the problems and needs of any kind of cross section of people who live where the artist is working. This of course includes the artistic community. The artist therefore turns his/her back on an important context where his/her work may have a real and meaningful social function. When the context of art dissolves into the realm of formalism and the art world exclusively, it has relinquished much of its potential for social function. It loses an important dimension and diminishes from a potentially rounded, holistic art practice and becomes a two-dimensional veneer. Then its meaning and location exist primarily for the market and the cultural activity, Art, ceases to have a wider social function other than in matters of economics. And this is where many feel art functions best, disengaged and estranged from the inconveniences and untidiness of the 'real' world.

*One of the biggest problems I have is to get it to where it looks like a blob on the canvas that has dripped or whatever, and there are no real life associations at all.*

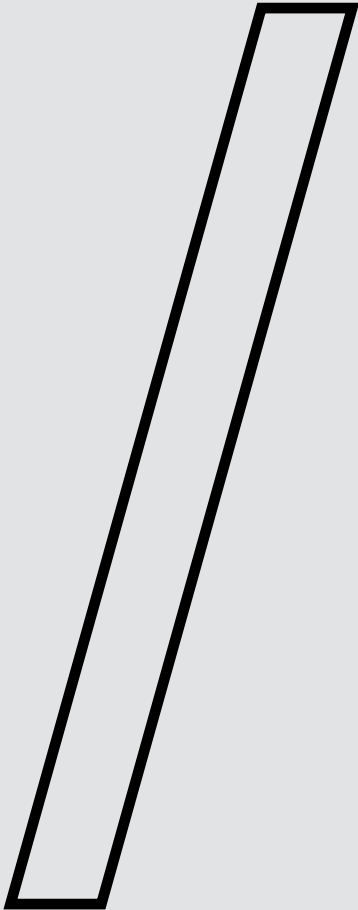
(Ian Davenport, Turner Prize nominee quoted in *Broken English* catalogue)

What is clear, however, is that these arguments of regional/central issues can be both diverting and exhausting. There is a real danger for artists involved in this debate expending all their efforts, as has happened in the past, shouting about their own value and perhaps not enough time developing and disseminating the work. A significant feature of the current situation is that the focus of discussion is slowly returning to a discourse about the work, about art. Energy is being harnessed and moulded into forms which proclaim an overwhelming attitude of just getting out there and getting on with it. In Glasgow at any rate, whingers get short shrift. What has finally been exorcised is a feeling evident in years gone by

that coming from Glasgow, or Belfast or any other city meant having a chip on your shoulder, feeling short-changed because you weren't born in New York or London. What is happening now is active – not reactive. That is where its indigenous values lie. The forms taking shape from this energy, north and south of the border show clearly that all that separates Scotland or Ireland or anywhere else from the rest of the world is geography alone, nothing else. Past prejudices have been shrugged off and a passionate internationalism is being embraced. James Hall of *The Independent* discussing *Windfall '91* said that 'as far as he was concerned, all the artists were from abroad, Scots and Europeans alike.' This is a sentiment which should be reciprocated. For Scots know from bitter experience that anywhere outside Scotland is international, whether it is England or Wales, 'Russia' or the USA and they have had many centuries to get used to the fact.

So, now, more than ever, the parochialism which has dogged the Scottish visual arts for so long seems at last to have gone knocking on metropolitan doors. These appear to be slowly closing while elsewhere doors lie open all over the world.

**All it takes is for us to go through them.**



# 1996

Transmission Gallery was set up in 1983 by a group of graduates of The Glasgow School of Art who were frustrated at the lack of exhibition opportunities for young artists in the city. It quickly widened its remit to invite artists from outside the city to show and develop artistic exchanges with like-minded groups in the UK and overseas. In over thirty years since its foundation it has been a crucible for artist-run culture and its model of a membership organisation, with a rotating committee of artists working as volunteers to manage the gallery, has been admired and imitated worldwide. Its street-front premises, first at Chisholm Street and then King Street in the city, have hosted key exhibitions, screenings and performance by artists from Scotland and significant works by international artists. From its early days Transmission developed ways of working including discussion events and symposia, self-education and publishing that reflected its emphasis on dialogue and exchange.

In 1993 Transmission planned a tenth anniversary book that was never published. Ross Sinclair's essay written for the book is a satire in which, 100 years from its foundation, Transmission still lives on in a Scotland that is independent, but has become a theme park. The essay reflects on Transmission's role at the heart of debates about cultural politics in the early nineties, about the gentrification of the Merchant City where the gallery is based and about Glasgow's role as 1990 European City of Culture. Sinclair's art is concerned with ideas of identity and belonging and as part of this he has addressed ideas and images of Scottishness, often examining its role in idealised forms, traditions and clichés.

Written for Transmission Gallery, but first published in *ROSS SINCLAIR: REAL LIFE*, CCA, Glasgow, 1996

## → Ross Sinclair

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## AN OPEN LETTER TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN REGARDING: SCOTLAND – A BRIEF AND FRACTURED INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF THE PERIOD 1983–2083

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*Thinking about the things that people forgot about  
because they weren't written down in history books.  
The year is 2083 Anno Domini and Transmission Gallery  
is one hundred years old today. The place is The People's  
Republic of Scotia, a small, northern European nation  
with agreeably changeable weather. More than twenty years  
have passed since Scotland achieved its long cherished  
ambition, independence from England and the Crown.  
However, this occurred at some cost to the Scottish people ...*

### The Path to Freedom?

At the Stirling Bridge Referendum of 2061, a handsome majority of the Scottish people decided that they wished to secede from the United Kingdom of Great Britain. There were five million or so inhabitants in this poor, damp country, for so long under the sword of one conquering invader or another. And this populace eventually decided, once and for all, to leave the Union in order to implement a novel plan to completely reinvent the Nation in a manner never before heard of anywhere in the world. The new official name they chose to reinvent Scotland, from those suggested, was: *Scotia – The Living History of a Small Nation*. At first glance this may sound like a strange name of a small country, newly independent after 500 years of struggle, but to explain the unprecedented move: the Scots had voted en masse to turn the whole country, and everyone in it, into the world's first national scale historical theme park. *And it was to be of truly epic proportions.*

In 2062, almost overnight, a big fence was built along the border with England. This was not to keep the poor Scottish people in, as you might have thought, but to keep everyone else out, because now you were going to have to pay to get in – and it wasn't going to be cheap.

Most people north of Hadrian's Wall were initially very enthusiastic about this new development, as Scotland in the middle twenty-first century was suffering an horrific depression, the likes of which had not been seen since the Middle Ages of the previous millennium. Diseases which had lain dormant for centuries had returned with a vengeance and were killing off poor people in tens of thousands. Those who couldn't afford the simple drugs which prevented these grotesque diseases became truly outcast, living in pathetic ragged groups like the leper colonies of biblical times. Thus they were not represented on any voting rolls and therefore did not take part in the 'democratic' Stirling Bridge Referendum of 2061.<sup>1</sup> Officially they did not even exist. By the 2040s they had become such a problem that large walls were built round the major cities to keep them out and the people who lived inside them tried to forget about those poor wretches who were outside.

When the idea for the theme park was first mooted in the mid-2050s it fired up the Scottish peoples' imagination, galvanising them into an intense debate and direct action not witnessed for many decades. The publicity generated by these debates slowly encouraged many ex-patriots to return home. There were at least twenty million people around the world who considered themselves Scottish by ancestry, but had never actually been 'home'. This turned out to be quite fortuitous as some of these folk were very rich and brought back their fortunes with them to invest in the park. It was the first good idea anyone in Scotland had thought of for quite a while so it was no wonder it caught on so quickly. It also helped them forget about all the horror that went on outside the city walls.

At this point in the 2050s, before the park was built, the Parliamentary Monarchy of England had many problems of its own. Its coffers were much depleted after protracted wars with France and Ireland.<sup>2</sup> It simply could not afford to worry about Scotland any more, particularly since the oil had run out. England's international reputation had sunk to an all-time low and it was the popularly held belief that Westminster was, in fact, quite happy finally to get rid of its troublesome and costly northern appendage.

Most poor parts of the world were really wasted with wars and famines while diseases and bad planning had made millions of people unhappy. Everywhere had been discovered, nowhere was remote or savage any more. Scotland wasn't actually too bad in comparison with the war torn 'outside world'. Although there certainly were plenty of poor and diseased and unhappy people (mainly those living outside the city walls), there had never really been any kind of modern, technological warfare to physically mar the natural beauty of the place. When proposals for the park became public, it transpired that the outsiders (as these outcast people were known) were to be rounded up and put into hostel camps to be rehabilitated out of harm's way, in the northern parts of the country, because now it suited the country's leaders to help them as plenty of workers would be needed for the park. There were big areas in the north of Scotland where most of the people had been thrown out in what was called the Highland Clearances, which began in the nineteenth century. They were replaced with sheep during the blockades of the Napoleonic wars because these animals were actually more profitable than people. The outsiders were to repopulate these remote areas for the



Thomas Faed **The Last of the Clan**, 1865  
Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Life (Glasgow Museums)



Horatio McCulloch **My Heart's in the Highlands**, 1860  
Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Life (Glasgow Museums)

benefit of the tourists, in what became known as: 'The Highland Clearances in Reverse'<sup>3</sup>

The basic idea for *Scotia -The Living History of a Small Nation*, when it opened in 2062, was very simple. Each area of the country would adopt the look and lifestyle of a certain epoch in Scottish history. Everyone who lived in these areas would adopt the mores and manners of their designated period. Our best actors would play the great figures in our history, except they wouldn't so much play them as be them, since they never got the chance to be off set or out of costume. This should be stressed. The whole country was subsumed into the park, you couldn't escape it. Anyone else who happened to live in Scotland at the time got the chance to stay on, if they wanted. This was to reflect for the tourists, the tolerant atmosphere created by the mixture of people who originally came from elsewhere to settle in this small country. However, you couldn't really have people coming and going all the time so it was decided that employment for the lower ranks in the park would be a bit like the volunteer armies of the twentieth century, where you signed on the dotted line and agreed to stay for something like three years at a time.

All Scotland's most spectacular battles and events were re-enacted daily in the hills and glens of the Highlands; tourists would flock to the most barren and remote places searching for the theme park's most authentic experiences. Thus a visitor from China or Peru could easily get a vivid impression of the whole history of our small nation in only a week or so, not to mention seeing the wonderful scenery. All the original flora and fauna were restored - complex deciduous forests filled with wolf, boar and all the other interesting animals that used to live in the place, but had eventually died out because the Scots didn't take care of them properly.

The Scottish people appeared to be quite happy in their new occupation as Real Life extras in this simulated version of history. Scotland became very successful and prosperous and everyone agreed that reinventing itself as a theme park had been a really great idea. Everything was free for Scottish people, although the tourists paid frankly outrageous prices just to be breathe the same air as the Scots. From the outside it might have seemed like a bit of an odd situation: the Scottish people were basically providing a service for the tourists while achieving just about the same standard of living as them. But the Scots were tied to this way of life in the theme park, they could never go home to somewhere real or do a normal job - it was twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Even leisure pursuits were open and available for the global tourist to gawk at. However, it was a comfortable life, and few people complained, especially the ones who had previously been forced to live outside of society for the want of a few pounds worth of cheap drugs.

#### **The Main Cities of the Central Belt, Edinburgh and Glasgow**

The City of Edinburgh elected to represent the pre-industrial Enlightenment period of the city's history,<sup>4</sup> while Glasgow adopted the post-industrial or 'cultural period'. This era in the history of Glasgow originally occurred during a ten-year period at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, when Glasgow was briefly very popular with

global tourism. New museums of art and culture were built at an extraordinary rate and on the surface everything seemed to be going very well. These new repositories of culture championed a popular kind of art which everyone was supposed to be able to access.

There was a major problem though. The educational establishments which taught people from five years old upwards had, at this time in the late twentieth century, stopped telling people anything about art and culture because it couldn't get you a job in an office when you left school at seventeen. So, it came to the point where nobody felt they really knew anything about art and culture any more, which was a great pity as Scotland had once been a very bright country. This made the public suspicious of the people who still made art and culture – and who could blame them? This self-proclaimed 'renaissance' was advertised as providing art for the people but the problem was that the people never asked for it.

The flaw in this 'renaissance' was the approach the city fathers took to make culture more accessible to the public. They made all the culture so simplified and banal that it would appeal to everyone, even those who knew nothing about any form of cultural activity beforehand. Productions of plays which dealt with complex and difficult issues were discouraged, in favour of Busby Berkley-style musical extravaganzas – everyone loved these. Visual art was reduced to greeting card designs, though painted in oils, naturally. Glaswegian literature, which was once incisive, politicised and independent, was now produced by the city itself, in defence of its own strategies. This New Glasgow Culture (as it became known) was very easy on the eye and on the ear, and provided a cosy hour or two of distraction out of the rain, and everyone – even those who stood against the imposition of this cultural equivalent of flock wallpaper – agreed that all these places of culture had lovely coffee bars.

#### However ...

... The initial appeal and excitement of this era quickly dwindled when the people began to understand that they were being patronised. By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century this period was already seen by any one who knew anything about life and culture to be truly daft. It eventually stupefied the locals by patronising them into thinking that they couldn't understand any kind of culture that you had to think about for more than ten seconds. This led to the Scottish people becoming lazy. After being fed this sickly sweet culture mulch for many years they could no longer digest any kind of solid cultural food. They faded away to mere shadows of their former, robust selves, becoming thinner and paler and lethargic. They were losing the ability to think for themselves. Internationally, New Glasgow Culture was an embarrassment.

#### The Trongate Affair

This period ended for good in 2013 in what became known as 'The Trongate Affair'. By this time various members of Transmission Gallery and other independently-minded cultural spaces located in the area, had successfully infiltrated over the year various committees and held numerous important positions in the local and national cultural councils. From these

positions they were able to undermine the whole sorry system and eventually brought the whole New Glasgow Culture crashing down around the ears of those who had been too deaf to listen to the detractors, who had foreseen this moronisation of the people.

This 'coup' was unfortunately deemed to be illegal and resulted in Transmission becoming a proscribed organisation and being forced underground. Here it flourished under the patronage of a local artist who had become very rich and famous by selling his work outside Scotland and who asked nothing in return except that the gallery continued in the way it always had. Just after the debacle of 'The Trongate Affair', the final nail in the coffin for the city fathers was the 'Purple Wednesday Crash' of 2014. Printed money became obsolete overnight, causing mayhem and revolt across the globe, particularly from those who didn't have credit cards and were therefore excluded from the new system. Since many people in Scotland still lived a hand-to-mouth existence this was, indeed, bad news for the city fathers. It was all over for them. New Glasgow Culture has gone for good (or so everyone thought).

### The Irony

So, ironically, although the period of New Glasgow Culture is now wholly discredited, and has in fact become an aphorism to describe the banalisation of culture, it is this period the new city fathers chose to represent in *Scotia - The Living History of a Small Nation*, fifty years after the debacle itself. This was simply because it was the period that had garnered the most global media attention and everyone remembered it, for better or worse. Some say there's no such thing as bad publicity, but I'm not so sure.

### Epilogue

Thus, as it was in Real Life, now it is in the theme park. Transmission is still a proscribed organisation but continues to flourish to this day, presenting thoughtful, challenging exhibitions in temporary out of the way spaces. Some aspects of its exhibition structure resemble the popular rave culture of the late twentieth century, where you hear of a new exhibition<sup>5</sup> from a complex grapevine of friends and acquaintances. People gather illegally on their days off from working in the theme park,<sup>6</sup> arranging to meet at a particular ferry terminal somewhere, desperate to see something new and real and engaging. For although the park is fascinating to the tourists, it is, of course, very, very boring for those who live and work there.

Transmission events and exhibitions have become somewhat vogueish with the more intrepid tourists who vie with each other over the most obscure and exciting shows they have seen, but it is mainly the indigenous population who enjoy them. Unfortunately these exhibitions get closed down with great rapidity as they are illegal. Records are always kept in the old book form and these get distributed widely although they are banned and destroyed if found. Sometimes these books are produced in such a way as to look like a relatively innocuous text or history book, so they can be surreptitiously inserted into public library collections. A strategy currently popular is to place these books into public collections of times gone by, using a standard linear time shift document transferral. Thus the books

and information of the future are already in circulation decades before the actual events described have happened.

If you haven't guessed already, this is how you are able to read this history now, almost 100 years early. This document transferral technique usually doesn't change much of the course of history because the future always seems too fantastic to believe before it actually happens. I mean, who would have believed the incredible history of the twentieth century if you'd foretold it in 1899? Thus it is with the twenty-first and twentieth centuries. So let us take a moment to join together, raise a glass and make a toast to Transmission. Happy hundredth birthday, here's to the future ...

*To be Continued ...*

1 These poor disenfranchised people may not have had the vote in any election but they didn't have to pay tax either.

2 Ireland had become very rich in the first decades of the twenty-first century with the discovery of certain natural elements found only in its indigenous peat bogs which proved to be a panacea for many cancer-based illnesses.

3 While the English were always willing to encourage anything that would destabilise Scotland, it should be pointed out that in this respect the Scots have more often than not been their own worst enemies. The Highland Clearances were just as much the fault of the money-grabbing Scots landowners as the English. When the political and economic situation changed many years later, most of these folk who'd left never went back because they'd gone far away to Ireland or the Americas or

to the cities in the lowlands of Scotland. Wherever they went they had got used to it and probably quite liked it and forgot about Scotland except in a vague romantic way, based more on the Hollywood movies of the time than anything they actually remembered, as they probably hadn't been back home for 150 years. So most of them just stayed wherever they ended up. Better the devil you know, they thought – until they heard about the park, that is ...

4 This involved the reconstruction of the Royal Mile, which was completely destroyed by the Disney Castle riots of 2025.

5 These exhibitions are usually in the remoter parts of the Highlands or on uninhabited islands.

6 'Illegally' because no one is ever supposed to be seen 'out of character'.

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# 2

## Contributions / Texts in Informal Publications

# ***REAL LIFE***

***... and how to live it***

## ***TRANSMISSION***

<b>1</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>PAY</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>THANKS</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>CAFE</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>WINDOW</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>TIME WASTERS</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>ART</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>ARTISTS</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>TWENTY YEARS</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>THE COMMITTEE</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>THE COMMITTED</b>



## storing up the static

### The Inflatable art of Kettles and Hunter

You may have noticed a bit of a hoo-ha in the press recently regarding the commissioning of artworks for an empty plinth in Trafalgar Square. Much agonising over this 'unparalleled' opportunity for artworks to sit proudly atop the famous vacant pedestal along with the rest of the capital's worthies. I had to laugh, reading all this, as I remembered Kettles and Hunter interventions in George Square, in Glasgow, on two of the occasions the city has hosted an Art Fair.

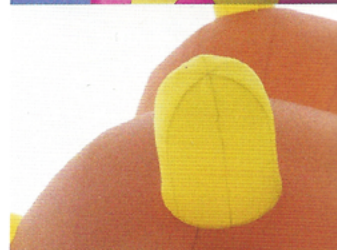
Unphased by the fact that none of the existing plinths were empty, Kettles and Hunter simply designed their works to fit right over the whole plinth, statue and all. Instead of waiting for the opportunity to festoon a naked plinth, these two made *their* sculptures to sit on plinths completely entombing the existing statues that flanked the entrance to the Art Fair. Then they attach the hose and fill 'em full of air. One time the viewer was greeted by two gigantic microbe like scientific - cartoon -D.N.A.- style -blobs while on the other occasion, the statues were pleasantly obscured by twin fluorescent vases - a futuristic vision of the antiques road show, 25'. This prompted the Evening Times to describe these mighty vases, appearing as if they were Technicolor left overs from an oversized D.W. Griffiths set, as "*Mingin.*" Get it? - *Ming-in* as in vases. Superb Glaswegian art criticism. Enough said.

Kettles and Hunter inflatable works are fleeting, transient, made from air, nothing really. Because they never have any discernible function they are free to simply *glow*, roaming the hazy outlines of the imagination. They appear as a half remembered dream where the shaky set of *Space 1999* is invaded by an irrepressible menagerie of 21st century animated culture - *in 3-D*. A strange Mickey-like mouse engages in combat with a giant inflatable shark, more *Jaws* than Damien Hirst. Headlines in some parallel universe scream, "*Giant cardboard squid tussles for elbow room with strange tentacled couch*". Meanwhile,

top - Public Art Inflatable  
1997

middle - Public Art Inflatable  
1996

bottom - Giant Squid  
"Zoo" 1992



a satanic eight ball, 10' in diameter, complete with horns and forked tail sits malevolently in the corner next to a 20' high inflatable ladder, promising instant access to higher climbs by way of its accommodating rungs, but of course barely able to support its own, inflated weight.

Where can we look for convincing images of the future when Space 1999 is now? You could do worse than keeping your eye on the airhead offspring of Kettles and Hunter. They talk about visions of 30' high replicas of injected moulded toys that fall out of cereal packets, made from the very materials discarded from the packaging. They talk about sounds and images and ideas from all culture flowing through everybody who's got their eyes open, but *they* somehow channel these vibrations through the purifying conduit of their tangential vision. Then the finished products pour out into the world looking like computer generated images covertly inserted into *real life*. Their work comes across like a trompe l'oeil art gallery escaped from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. We are the 'live' actors surrounded by their animated visions, hauling the future kicking and screaming into the here and now.

### Call for escape route

For inspiration, Kettles and Hunter go shopping, storing up the static electricity of visual culture. Then they go home and it all crackles out again into the incredible, fantastic creations they sew together in their front room. They like films like *Star Wars* and *Blade Runner* where you see very shiny and perfectly formed futuristic bits next to the very grim and grubby evidence that, even in the future, the arse end of town will always be the arse end of town - unloved, dirty and unglamorous. Heating vents, power conduits. Exteriors that look as if they should be hidden somewhere on the inside.

top - One over the Eight  
1995

middle - Sea Anemone 2  
"extra-" 1993

bottom - Sea Anemone 1  
"extra-" 1993



Union Place is a bit like that. You've walked past a hundred times, probably never given it a second glance, unless you're the kind of person who has an eye for wee alleyways that look like they've just fallen in from some New York backstreet. It's a space resolutely constructed from the backs of other buildings, on three sides, but open to the front a bit like a movie set, or a stage. Into this urban artery they have inserted a strange cell like structure. *Space Invader*. It's a modular organism. An architectural DNA fungus growing between the two sides of the alley. An inflatable Samson in ripstop nylon. It looks impossible, wedged 20' up between the age old grime of these trade halls of the Victorian city, an artist's impression drawn with big felt tips - rendered 20' high and 30' long. For this Tramway commission, Kettles and Hunter originally planned to make an inflatable bridge spanning the River Clyde, linking the North and South of this city where one closed road bridge creates absolute chaos. Unfortunately it couldn't be realised in time for 1999 - but what about next year? An inflatable bridge to span two millennia. Now there's a millennium project worth talking about.

Still, we shouldn't complain, we've still got *Space Invader* to blast into hyperspace. So look no further - the future is here - at last - now.

Enjoy it while stocks last.

© Ross Sinclair, March 1999.

top - Its a Girl  
1998

middle - M&M's Man  
1993

bottom - Inflatable Ladder  
1996

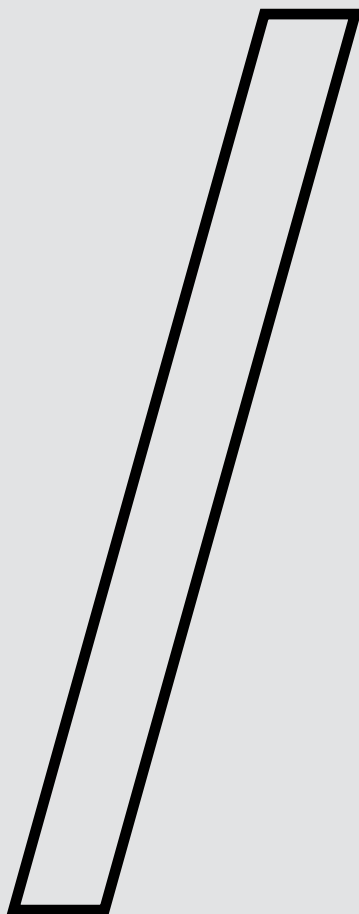


You and your guest are invited to the launch of

space  
invader

on Monday 29 March 1999 from 7pm  
Bar 10, 10 Mitchell Lane, Glasgow

Iain Kettles/Susie Hunter  
29 March until 2 May 1999







## A LONG JOURNEY TOWARDS THIS EXACT MOMENT

Two birds are in a room. They want to sing. They want to be with nature. They are nature. They are mockingbirds and in nature they mimic the songs of other birds, mixing them together with imitations of other animals and mechanical sounds and any sounds, like a mirror. A mirror for sound. A mirror where one can hear the reflection of many moments, distinct in space and time but reflected together, at once, making a new moment. But these birds are not in nature. They are in a gallery, in Halle fuer Kunst, Lueneburg, in an aviary constructed in order to facilitate a different kind of moment. This is a moment which began in nature fifty years ago, but reverberates through you today.

In a room next to the mockingbirds music plays. It is the *Catalogue d'Oiseaux* by the French composer Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992). First performed in 1959, the *Catalogue d'Oiseaux* (Catalogue of Birds) comprises thirteen pieces for solo piano, the composition of each based on the song of a specific bird. Messiaen composed these works in the birds natural habitat, in the fields, in the woods and meadows, situating each piece in the context of its natural place, »in the field and by the ear«. Though famed throughout his life for his religious and spiritual music, for some years around the 1950's, the analytical and mathematical interpretation of birdsong from around the world provided Messiaen with his chief compositional elements.

The record you are holding in your hand is a moment from Dave Allen's exhibition, »The Mirrored Catalogue d'Oiseaux«

held at Halle fuer Kunst, Lueneburg, in May 2002 described above. It is a recording of the two mockingbirds, who spent the duration of the exhibition listening to *Catalogue d'Oiseaux*, playing in the adjacent room. It was the only »unorganic« sound source they heard, merging together with the human sounds of the visitors.

Messiaen began with the birds. He composes with this source and his systems and creates a moment. Dave Allen offers this moment back to the birds in Lueneburg – a generosity of spirit. The visitors came to the show and listened to the birds creating new moments, mirroring the score of the *Catalogue d'Oiseaux* and every other sound which echoed around the space.

Now you hold in your hand the recording of the mockingbirds alone in their room in Lueneburg, without Messiaen, without an audience. Maybe in the future someone will compose a piece of music using this recording of two mockingbirds as a starting point and 50 years later another artist will construct another moment for reflection, distant in space and time. And this new moment will become one of many such moments which will in turn become part of another brand new moment, on and on – exponentially multiplying until the end of time.

It may sound like the mockingbirds are recorded in nature but now we know they have travelled a long way from there to here. A long journey to meet you now, here, wherever you are, in this exact moment, forever. (Ross Sinclair)



## dAVE aLLEN tHE mIRRORED cATALOGUE d'OISEAUX

Recorded live at halle\_für\_kunst e.V., Lüneburg, May 2002

Track A: 3 min. 5 sec. Track B: 2 min. 33 sec.

Photography: Hans-Jürgen Wege. Published by Boileau & Narcejac © 2003.

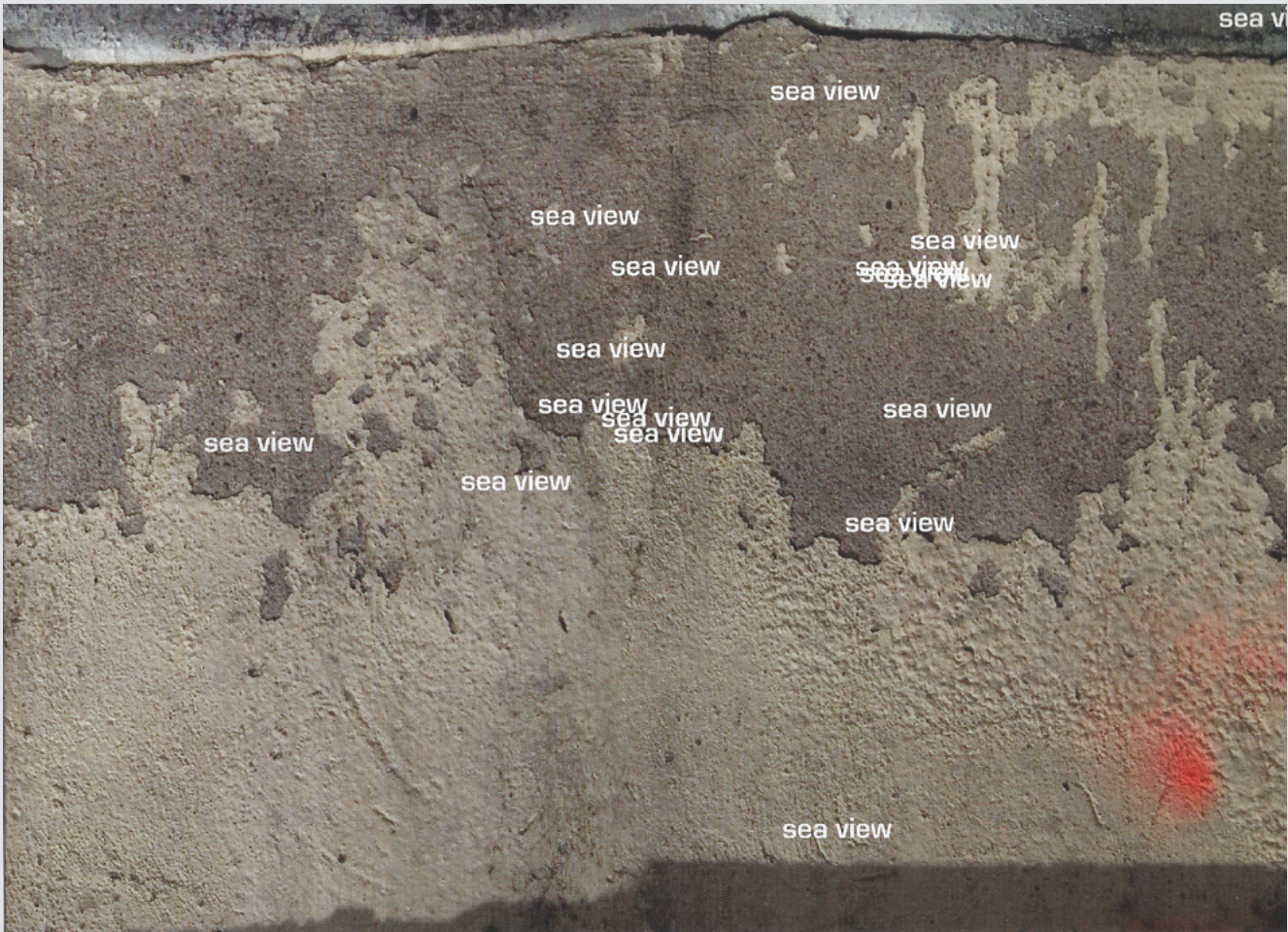
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## Random Notes for Living Artists

Ross Sinclair, Kilcreggan 30/5/07

Be yourself, that's all that makes you different from everyone else  
 Get in with the in crowd - that's how you get ahead  
 Understand that you are special and unique, that's where your art comes from  
 Identify a gap in the market and exploit it  
 Go meet people, talk to them, engage them in a meaningful dialogue  
 Ingratiate yourself with influential people  
 Make your own luck, forge your own opportunities, be your own boss  
 Learn the art of sycophancy  
 Find your true voice amongst all the noise  
 Learn to shout louder than everyone else  
 Seek out the world beyond your own imagination  
 Learn from other artist's mistakes  
 Understand where things are heading  
 Make sure you're at the front, but not too far ahead  
 Identify the dynamics of other scenes and other times - use them like tools  
 Don't listen to the little people - they don't know shit  
 Try to be part of a scene  
 Learn to harness your intuition - untamed it will destroy you  
 Your art can't live without you - you are the boss of it  
 Remember - no one asked you to be an artist  
 Do exactly what the fuck you want to - all day - every day - forever  
 Don't be the one who's left behind  
 Treat gallerists like royalty  
 Cherish and value the people who truly believe in you  
 Go to Art Fairs - see the dynamics of the art world in action  
 Don't forget - This is what you wanted  
 Try to enjoy being poor but enjoy imagining you're rich even more  
 Do what you have to in order to get through the day  
 But don't do it every day or that becomes all that you're doing  
 Build a creative life, nurture it, grow it, cherish it, love it  
 It could keep you alive  
 Welcome your public with the shout, My house is your house  
 But remember if you shit on the floor it still gets on your feet  
 Visualize your audience - you are one of them too  
 Don't expend energy on people who don't matter  
 Learn to work that crowd  
 Know that the public are many different people  
 Understand that as an artist YOU are the centre of the universe  
 Make a valuable contribution  
 Don't give a shit what other people think  
 Keep asking yourself - Can the world be as sad as it seems?  
 Make sure your brain is always switched on  
 Believe that your art can change the world  
 Try to appeal to a range of collectors  
 Consider the importance of the texture of things  
 Understand the meaning of the Lowest Common Denominator  
 Stay true to your vision  
 Understand the difficult position of curators: without you they don't exist  
 Don't shit on the folks below when you're climbing life's ladder -  
 You might see them again on the way down  
 Savour the flavour of hearing a single voice - that's what art is  
 Half close your eyes and imagine the presence of the most amazing work of art in history, its  
 size and shape and feel and setting and audience -  
 Go and make it.  
 And just for a minute, all the rest can go to hell



## When did it stop being a matter of life or death?

*by Ross Sinclair*

Sailors brought them to us from pre-history and the South Pacific, and before that from the Far East along the silk route. Or maybe for us it was the lineage and influence of the Vikings, the Celts. Exotic outsiders. Perhaps more recently the circus freaks, covered head to toe, defiantly signalling their absolute refusal of the everyday. Showing a window onto another world, outside of the rat race, the run of the mill, the grind. Or maybe it was about the outsiders looking in on bourgeois society from another place. The embodiment of the spectacular paradigm that would infiltrate every human relationship way before Guy Debord got hold of the idea. Then or course it was prisoners. Army. Navy. Always a matter of life and death. Nailing your colours to the mast, so to speak, offering your skin under the needle. But at the same time still branding your group as outsiders from normal society, a clan that shared knowledge and experience that 'normal' people didn't know about, somehow different from all the rest.



So of course, it's a perfect space for artists to inhabit. Perfect for Artists as outsiders. Tattooing was revolutionized by Samuel O'Reilly's invention of the electric tattoo machine during the last decade of the 19th century. The time required to complete a design went from hours to minutes, moving the art away from personally conceived, hand picked designs towards stock choices that were displayed like art on the walls of the tattoo parlor. Maybe the idea of artists making tattoos are interesting because they reach back to the earlier, original impetus of the process

I got my first in '93 (*Skull/Born to Lose*) but I got the big one that says *Real Life* in '94. I wanted to sign on for life. Make a commitment. A little known fact is that the artist/critic Thomas Lawson paid for it. He and Susan Morgan had been publishing their *Real Life Magazine* since '79 and were signing off with a final issue. Number 23. I was the cover star. They paid for it in exchange for using my image on the

cover. It just felt right. Perfect. I wanted to take on the mantle. Sieze the bull by the horns, or something. To paraphrase Gilbert and George, *to be with art* was all I asked. I wanted to signal all my life in art to the world. (Though, even then I remember the tattooist, Stuart Wrigley at Terry's Tattoo, Glasgow telling me they regularly had guys running in asking for something quick because their bus was leaving in 15 minutes and they only had a tenner—I mean - *for fuck sake?*) Anyway, I got mine because I knew my work was all over the place formally. I wanted to unify it somehow. I thought this idea would form an umbrella to hold over the diverse output that has characterised my work since. And in a way it has. I wanted to create this *Real Life* character who would wander through the work, through the decades, through a life, searching for something you could never put into words. To investigate this paradigm, from under the skin of one individual out into the world. I also wanted to demonstrate my commitment to my *Real Life*, which paradoxically I have found is not *real* in the way you might imagine. Nevertheless I have sometimes had cause to wonder since if this was a deft idea or merely a daft idea.

Because like everything else in the big rancid blancmange pudding of global capital it appears that 5000 years of tattoo history have become well and truly assimilated, absorbed, sanitised, prettified, nullified, made meaningless, cleaned up, eviscerated, sucked in, blown out, defused—and all in a decade or so—Wow. Well-done Pan-National global capital. It's good to see you're still as fucking smooth as ever. So

what does that mean for artists tattoos? I think it means forget it. It's over. If you haven't started already I wouldn't bother. You'll just look like a cultural sub-footballer's wife wannabe.

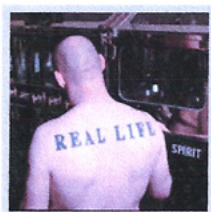
Is there a future? What of the old and the new in artist tattoos ? We should now look to the example Belgian artist Wim Delvoye's ArtFarm project where he has been tattooing pigs since the early nineties for inspiration and guidance.

Delvoye describes it thus—" I started in 1992, did one or two pigs in 1994 and in 1995 I tattooed 15, but they were dead pigs; I got the skins from slaughterhouses. I started to tattoo live pigs in 1997. I was interested in the idea of the pig as a bank—a piggy bank. I didn't have the concept formulated yet, but I decided to place some small drawings onto these living organisms and let them grow. From the beginning, there was the idea that the pig would literally grow in value, but I also knew that they were considered pretty worthless. It's hard to make something as prestigious as art from a pig. It's not kosher."

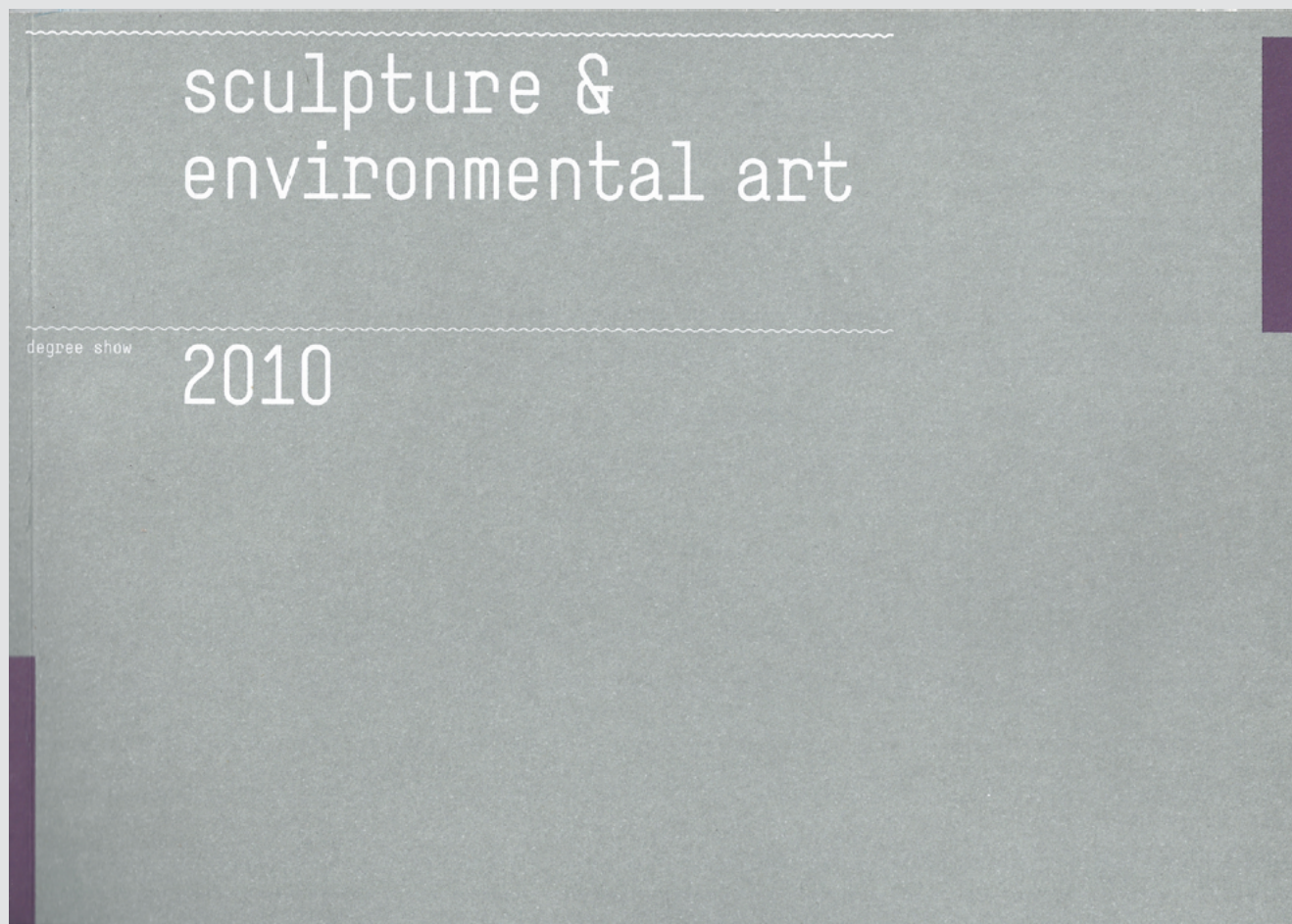
So there you have it. It's hard to argue with that; it really gives the art world everything it deserves. So ugly, so beautiful. And all at the same time. But. Why? Why? Why? It makes me wonder. Even with the images of stuffed tattooed pigs ringing in my eyeballs, why do I still catch myself imagining new forms of ink on my body every now and

then? Am I still searching for something definite on whose form in ink I can metaphorically nail my colours to the mast of in the shifting sands of twenty-first century desiccated living? Is it a God? Satan? Children? Love? Music? Maybe in a world that's gone way beyond belief we are all still searching for the evidence of something, something true, something definite, something real—Real Life. Hey - maybe the old umbrella's still keeping the rain out—maybe my project's still working after all.

Come on—lets get down to Terry's and celebrate with a new tattoo.



*Ross Sinclair is an artist. He studied at Glasgow School of Art and Cal Arts in the US. He has exhibited widely in Europe and further afield and his work is held in many major international collections. 'Since I had the words Real Life tattooed on my back in 1994,' he writes, 'my project has been an extended investigation/celebration/commiseration of the paradigm of The Real - from under my skin out, always in relation to a particular context and audience. My Real Life projects over the years have aimed to explore the world like the temporary autonomous zones of Hakim Bey - windows where the public, the audience, can take a look towards these other horizons, different spaces, other places where the way we think about life and the way we live it could perhaps be different.'*



## Theory and Practice

### *What is Sculpture/Environmental Art 2010?*

Sculpture/Environmental Art is the Contemporary art department, or maybe the current art department. It is concerned with materials and ideas and audience, sometimes individually, sometimes all joined together. The staff and students discuss this. They think about the relation of the work they make to the world outside and the people who live in it. But they also think of materials and forms and how meaning is derived from those fundamental constituents. What are materials for art in 2010? They are clay and stone, video and the web, time, context and situation, presence and absence. The staff and students then talk about the space in-between materials and ideas and audience. And that's the really interesting part. It is like the 2 sides of the brain, working together in an unfathomable synergy of human culture. They talk about ways of positioning Art in a contemporaneous dialogue of culture and place, politics and aesthetics, History and Geography. They talk about 'the public' – who are they? Where are they? Are we the audience too? They reflect on the dynamic engagement of turning our work around to face this public. They talk about the possibility of the audience making the work, bringing it into being as they look and think – another material for consideration...

They talk about the moment when 'they' becomes 'we'. I think they are coming into the world to find who 'we' are.

### *What is Sculpture/Environmental Art 2010?*

...hatching flies, just sitting around posing, football casuals in public as culture cast in wax, sports courts appearing overnight in Royal Exchange Square, Spirit of the Goat, Spirit of the Drum, The Internationale rising again in George Square, Stories in coins always thinking of Japan, Gendered geography and menstrual drawing, modular thinking - social sculpture, facebook fascism, melancholic comedy that's not supposed to be funny, something unusual seen from the corner of your eye, the magik bins, unexpected on-line musical messages and what does that black shape mean, the collapsing cosmos in the SECC tunnel, crazy rhetoric-politics and pedagogy, reflecting process-drawing-installation, clay monuments to random strangers, self portrait through performance and the handmade, unheimlich drawings in boys toilets, sex and theatre-viscera and what's on the inside, mushroom forms in online store, smashed teacups-reconstructed everyday, multiple columns, leaning menacingly with weight and mass-glass and concrete-dimensions variable, simple plaster and wood together make a new proposal, multiple body forms-multiple materials-intelligent bacteria, forms in culture, surface and style, photography and the nuclear (power station) family...

Ross Sinclair, May 2010

# WAVE-CUT PLATFORM

Dave Allen  
Andrew Miller  
John Shankie

MARCH 5 - MARCH 19 2011

*Speeding Motorcycle, won't you change me?*

*Speeding Motorcycle, won't you change me?*

*In a world of funny changes*

*Speeding Motorcycle, won't you change me?*

*Speeding Motorcycle of my heart ...*

(Daniel Johnston 1983)

## How to Secede as an Artist\*

Have a thought. Visualise that thought. Feel a feeling. Imagine feeling that feeling together with people. Think about these folk. Think them different. Consider it a love affair – but different from sex. A two-stroke Proustian rush. Think about a space. It's always changing. Whizzing past. A blur. Freeze a frame. You'll never pass this way again. But beware of closure on the open road. Look at this space. You are already making the work. So make the work. Look at the space again. Where is it? How is it? You remember but it's not clear – were you drunk? We always were – good times. Everything was possible. You hear a long forgotten melody. The Classic Line-up.

Try to remember the chord changes. There's one missing, you wrote it but now you can't remember it. Shit. Were you asleep? Where can it be – this Lost Chord? So make the work some more, keep on top of it but don't smother it – roll it outwards – upwards – sideways – in and out. But think about those people – think about the other work. Is it right? Is it good? What does it mean? Does it talk to yours – listen to yours? Is it better at playing the game than yours? What does that mean to you – to other people? It means you better get your finger out and make the work some more. Got any other friends? Could they help? Maybe that's what it's all about in the end. And in the beginning.

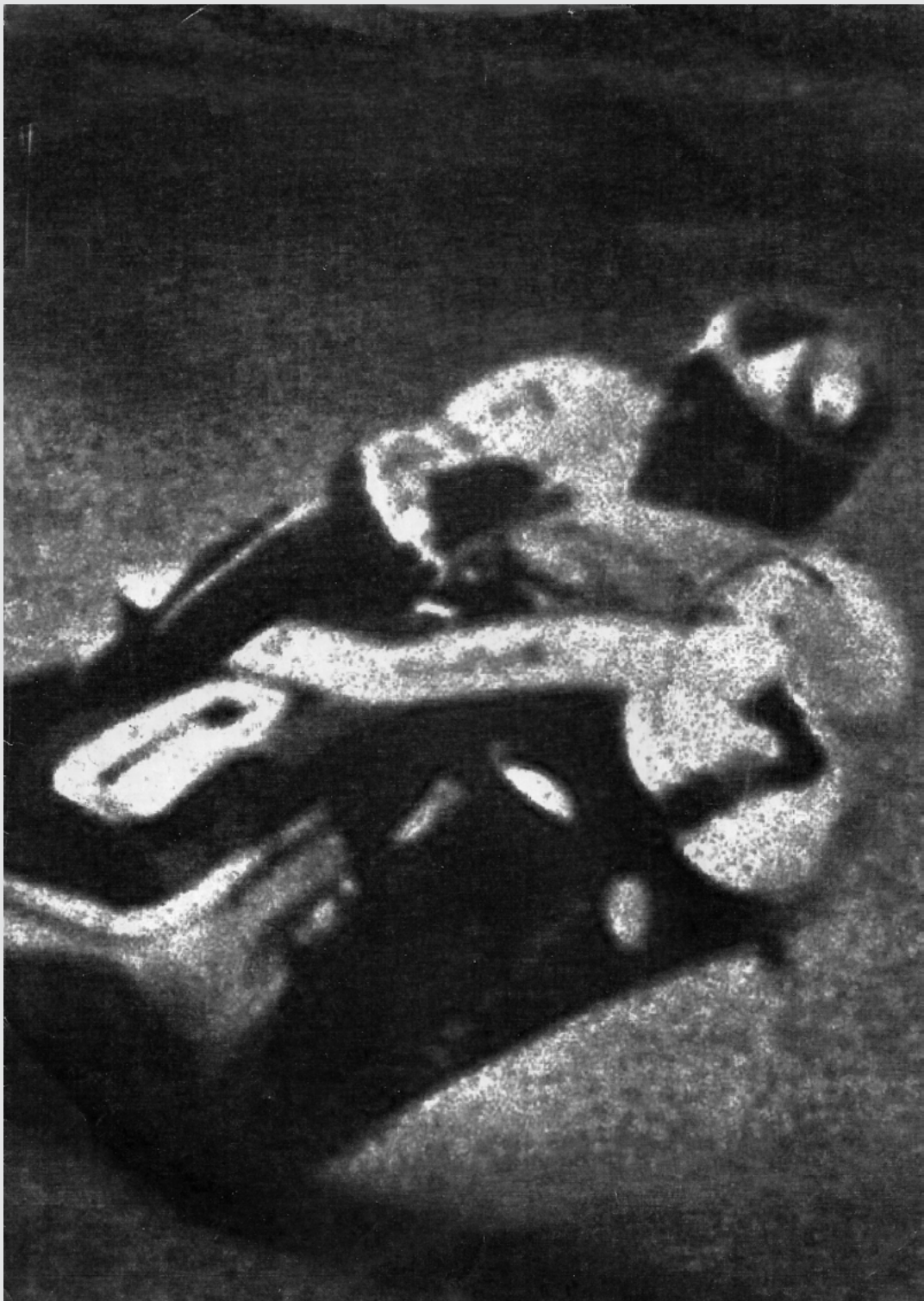
No Revolution Here. Is this somebody's flat? Does somebody actually live here? For fuck sake. Really. Still? Who? Are they here now? Well, where else did you think they would go? We live here too. Is the audience here now? Has it started already? Lets do the show right here. Where is the work? How does it fit together? Can we make any sense of it? Are we even in the business of making sense? Are we accumulating meanings and piling them up, constructing new things from all the pieces we have already, everything we now know. Or is that just the words we use to stand for the feeling. Let's try to forget it all. It's a dangerous game – maybe we should be going the other way, in the other direction, taking it apart, smashing it to pieces. Can this work ever be more than the sum of its' parts - more than the span of the hands that made it? Can we ever be more than one person together, turned around to face an audience? What about this crowd here – who are they, why are they even here? Come on - Fuck Off, Come on - Fuck Off, Come on - Fuck Off, Come on - Fuck Off. Is this a dialogue, a conversation? An argument. A Joke. It's a party, a dream - who did we invite? I don't know any of these people. A cacophony. A triple track simultaneous monologue. Then it's over. Where do we go from here? Is it three feelings and one audience? Or one show and three audiences. Or more. What will be different once we've finished? Who will be different? Can you take anything away? Are we making it more the same than it was before? No goods can come from this. It's just a social network. Then maybe we should split-up. Musical Differences.

So let's enjoy the majesty of the melody for one last moment.

\* A class taught by Lane Relyea at Cal-Arts, early nineties.

© Ross Sinclair 2011

83 Hill St, Glasgow, G3 6NZ, United Kingdom ~ Tel: +44(0)7580 428 422  
www.shankie.com / info@shankie.com ~ Gallery hours Friday & Saturday 12 noon - 5pm  
Or by appointment.



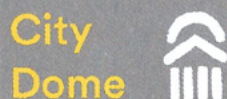
# Ross Sinclair

*20 Years of Real Life*

Admission Free 27.06.14 – 31.08.14

Ross Sinclair, 20 Years of Real Life, 2014.  
Photo credit: Ross Sinclair





City Dome is Collective's major new space for exhibitions and commissions.

#### Ross Sinclair

##### *20 Years of Real Life*

27 June – 31 August

*20 years of Real Life* is a new installation by Ross Sinclair. 2014 marks the twenty-year anniversary of Ross's *Real Life* projects. Throughout that time Ross has sought to re-imagine the relationships in our society through an ongoing investigation of the many institutions and constructs to which we are all inextricably linked, both collectively and as individuals.

Ross' exhibition at Collective will provide an opportunity to look back at the last twenty years of his work, while also firmly positioning it in the present and imagining possible futures.

*Free Instruments for Teenagers!*  
From June 2014

##### *20 Years of Real Life*

launches a yearlong project

##### *Free Instruments for Teenagers!*

Five new bands made up of teenagers will be provided with instruments and will work with Ross and a team of mentors to write and perform new music.

The instruments form an integral part of Ross's installation. Each Saturday afternoon throughout the exhibition, there are drop in sessions where teenagers can try them out.

Part of GENERATION, a landmark series of exhibitions celebrating 25 years of contemporary art in Scotland.

**GENERATION**  
25 Years of  
Contemporary Art  
in Scotland

EDIN  
BURGH  
ART  
FEST  
IVAL

Still from *The Ballad of 20 Years of Real Life*, 2014.





# ARE YOU A TEENAGER? WANT TO START A BAND?

**Collective Gallery and artist Ross Sinclair are giving away enough instruments to start five new bands in Edinburgh during summer 2014.**

**You can get:**

- Free instruments
- Free mentoring
- Free recording time
- Free distribution

**You need to be:**

- 20 years old or younger
- Committed to starting a new band
- Able to and want to take part in the project over the next year
- Interested in performing

**Ross Sinclair has made art and music for the last 25 years. 2014 marks the twenty-year anniversary of *Real Life* projects and to celebrate he is giving away instruments to start new bands. The bands will work with Ross and others over the next year to write and perform new music.**

**There will be the opportunity to come and try out the instruments at the gallery every Saturday during the exhibition between 1-5pm, 28 June – 31 August 2014.**

**If you are interested have a look on the Collective Gallery website: [www.collectivegallery.net](http://www.collectivegallery.net)**

**Follow the hashtag on twitter: [#freeinstrumentsforteenagers](https://twitter.com/freeinstrumentsforteenagers)**

**Or contact us at:**

**Collective | City Observatory & City Dome | 38 Calton Hill | EH7 5AA  
t: ++44 (0)131 556 1264  
e: [mail@collectivegallery.net](mailto:mail@collectivegallery.net)**

**COLLECTIVE**

• EDINBURGH •  
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL



**GENERATION**

25 Years of  
Contemporary Art  
in Scotland

250 million years ago all the continents of the world  
were locked together in one great supercontinent called Pangea...

# FREE ELECTRIC GUITARS

Scientists predict all the continents will come together once again in  
250 million years to form a new supercontinent called Pangea Ultima...  
+ amp/ strap /lead /stand

The current fractured state of those continents and their inhabitants is temporary  
WE ARE ALL PANGEAN - and we will once more be PANGEANS together...

## ★ For Under 18s ★

This Amazing offer is part of the exhibition "Real Life and How to Live it in Pangea - Guitar Special"  
by Ross Sinclair at Chapter, Cardiff 14 - 22 July 2007. Free guitar seekers must come along to the  
exhibition in the Stiwdio gallery at Chapter during the dates above and get a free guitar prize drawticket.  
We have 25 guitar packages to give away. On Sunday 22 July, Chapter Stiwdio will host a Skate Day with a  
series of events between 3-8pm; from a 'Design your own board' workshop with prizes to be won, to DJs and  
film screenings inspired by Skate Culture (free guitar draw between 6-8pm).

Bring your 'free guitar tickets' back to this event and we will give Guitars/amps to the first 25 out of the hat.  
Limited to one guitar per applicant - we reserve the right not to give you a guitar if we think you're not going to  
use it for playing music and writing songs - duh! - "The Catch" - Guitar seekers must agree to send the artist a  
version of the first song they write on the free guitar - that's the only stipulation - he will select the top 10  
songs and record a special CD of cover versions of the songs - which will then be re-distributed  
to all involved - don't worry no time limit. This will not affect the ownership or copyright of the songs which  
will remain totally with the author. (On Saturday 21 July there will be a live Skate Jam Event at Skate  
Extreme, Newport Skate Park from 12-4pm where prizes can be won. A free bus from Chapter will provide  
return transport to and from Newport during the day. The Skate Park's normal entrance fees apply.)

**Real Life and How to Live it**

# P<sup>in</sup> PANGAEA

chapter  
Market Road, Canton, Cardiff, CF5 1QE  
029 2050 4400 14-22 July 2007

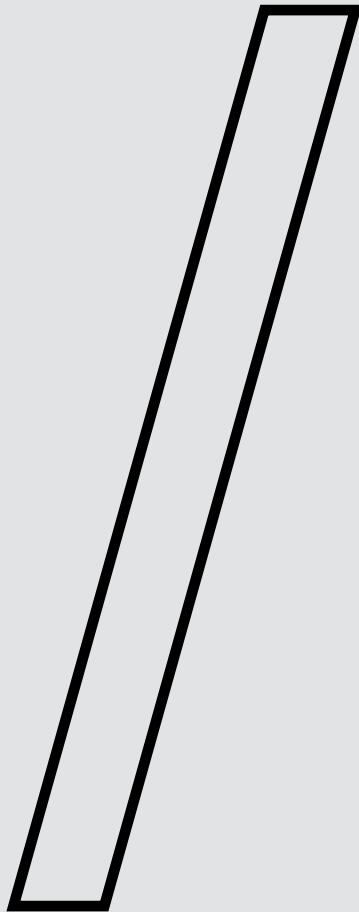
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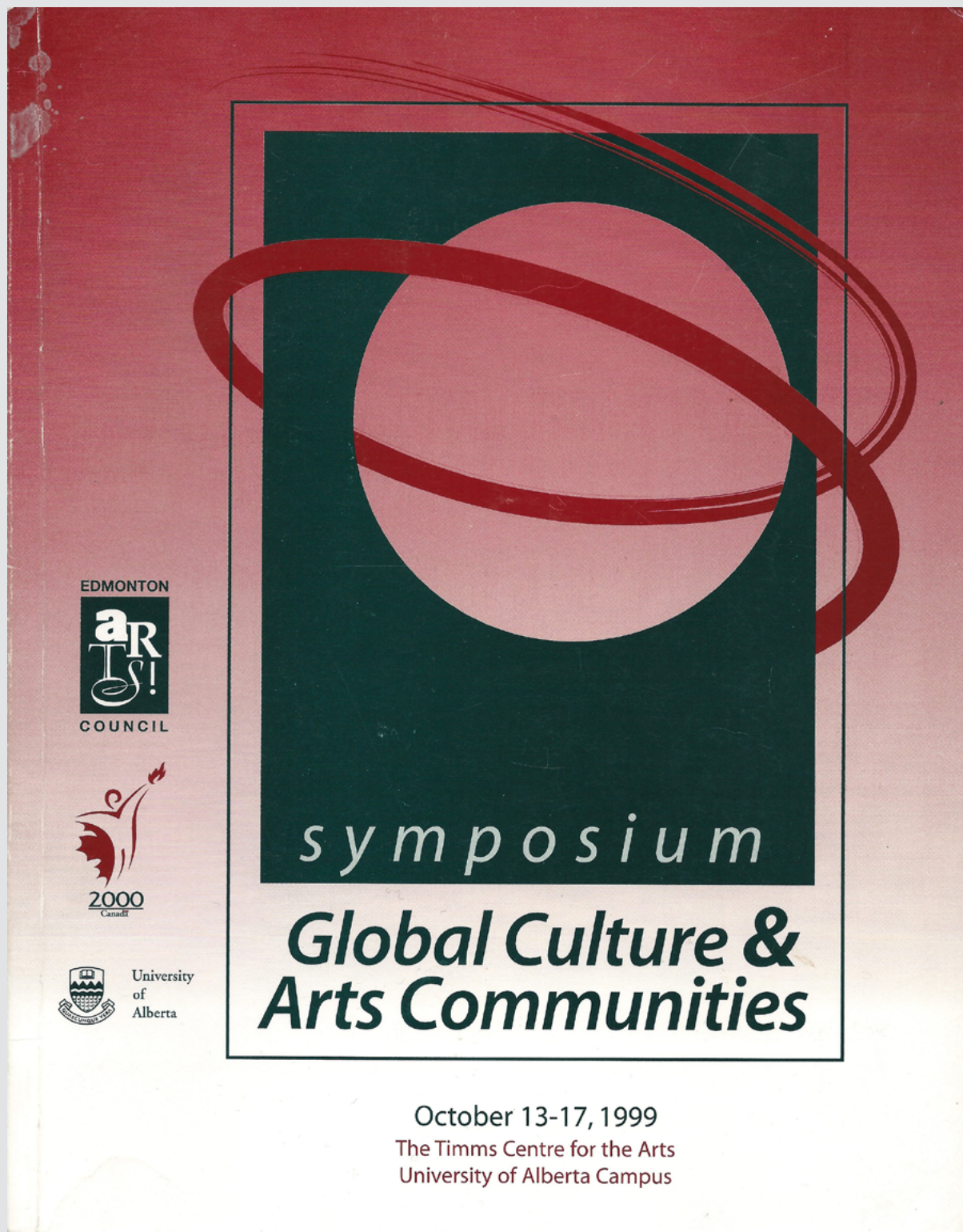
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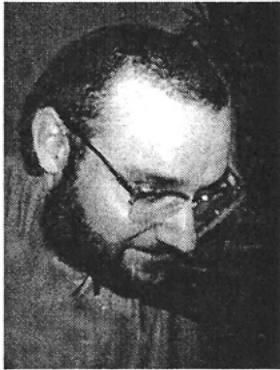
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## Ross Sinclair



Ross Sinclair is a visual artist and writer who has lived and worked in Glasgow, Scotland all his life. He earned his graduate degree in fine arts in the Department of Environmental Art at the Glasgow School of Art where he now teaches. This department has been seminal in nurturing the talent that has helped to put Glasgow on the international art map. Ross is a key part of the group associated with the Transmission Gallery that came to international attention during 1990, when Glasgow was proclaimed European City of Culture. Ross has numerous accolades, including the Scottish Arts Council Artist Award in 1997 and the Paul Hamlyn Award for 1998 – 2000. He also has an impressive array of article publications and catalogues. His work has been exhibited extensively throughout Great Britain and internationally. As well, Ross has curated several exhibitions, including one in Iceland and Denmark.

Glasgow is a fairly typical post industrial European city with a population of around a million. It was the second city of the British Empire at the turn of the century and the last remnant of heavy industry. Over the last ten years Glasgow has attempted to rebuild itself using culture as a tool for regeneration, a tool for re-imagining the city. My peer group is a collection of artists who have shown internationally for the past decade. It is an identifiable that doesn't really have a name. It's based on ideas more than anything, a way of thinking about what art is, what art could be. Over this last decade, as well as showing consistently in Scotland, the United Kingdom, Europe, and occasionally in the USA, Canada, and Australia, I've curated a few shows and have written a good deal about artist initiated projects amongst other things. I write about artists and events in Glasgow and what happens when they go abroad. These texts are published, primarily, in magazines, journals, and catalogues in other countries. They give you a snapshot of the enthusiasm and activity in the city of Glasgow now in comparison to the situation of ten years ago. The current situation is more difficult, more problematic, slightly less vital amongst younger artists. I want to look at the cyclical nature of artist initiated projects, and arts communities generally in any given city or country. This one in Glasgow is really just a model. The questions that arise are whether that's a natural cycle, whether it even exists, and how and if the dynamic of the situation can be maintained and built on. Or, on the other hand, are

these situations just about a specific group or groups of interesting, talented people who happen to come together at a specific point in time with a finite life span. And, if indeed that is the situation, is that necessarily a problem?

One important question is how does writing and publishing material about artists, and in particular artist run projects contribute to the process of historification and the reification of the aims and objectives of any given group? This is particularly important in a place which is traditionally understood to be on the periphery, on the margin. How is this place articulated, by whom, and where? Writing can sometimes make concrete ideas out of attitudes that have been shifting and are still open to change. This can be both good and bad, often it means centralizing the marginal, in other words creating a new centre for better or worse, in truth or falsehood. Although I am a writer, I am primarily an artist. I teach in the Glasgow School of Art, in the department called Environmental Art, where I also studied. I don't consider myself a critic, I'm an artist who writes as well. The situation that existed in Glasgow at the time my peer group emerged (around the mid to late 80s) was called New Image Painting. From my perspective, this art movement consisted of boring monologues of white middle class male artists painting gruesome pictures of the down-and-outs of the east end of Glasgow and selling them to rich collectors in Berlin and New York. New Image painting was basically expressionism that had come second-hand from the Germany of the late 70s. It embraced the myth of the male artist tolling away in his studio, sending his paintings down to the gallery in the big city. Rather than that awful monologue, we wanted dialogue, diversity, context, accessibility, and above all, ideas. In the mid to late 70s, Third Eye Centre, now called the Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA) was established. That, and the Glasgow Print Studio (now an important facility for the city) are, in a way, concrete remnants of a ground-swell of a particular kind of artistic activity that came out of the late 60s and early 70s. But by the middle 80s, the sense of those things having come out of artists dissatisfaction had gone, dissipated. These institutions became the new establishment. It was open season for self-determination and New Image painting, this neo-expressionism, was an easy target to oppose.

We were all in the same new department, Environmental Art. Our basic plan was to get out and find some spaces, do some shows, get the public in, get the critics in. *Information* in Paisley Museum in 1989 was possibly the first. *Windfall*, (1991), a big show in the old Seaman's Mission, and *Saltoun Arts Project*, and many others happened about the same time with different groups of artists. These shows are a massive amount of work to organize but everything seemed very much in our favour. The public and the press and local and international television seemed very interested. It was fresh, new, arrogant, radical,

strong, defiant or so it seemed at the time. I'm going to read you a few of the opening paragraphs from three of the essays and articles which I wrote around that time.

The first one is from *Windfall* (1991) which featured 26 artists from six European countries. This was from an essay that I wrote for the catalogue.

*Bad Smells But No Sign of the Corpse (1991)*

Anyone who follows the fortunes of the contemporary art world in Britain could not help but notice over the past few years a renaissance of what can be described as non-gallery, gallery shows noticeably in London and Glasgow. These are often housed in disused, industrial spaces or in temporarily dormant commercial office spaces. Often they are initiated by artists. Artist initiatives are a valuable way of demystifying the business of art. They promote a sharing of information, skills, and experience while also nurturing relationships between artists which can often become fertile breeding grounds for a horizontal and organically developing infrastructure of cultural activity. They often embrace a desire to communicate with that great unfashionable and unknown quantity, the general public. But, it is often asked, whether these kinds of exhibitions really acknowledge their local contexts?

Events of this nature which occur outside London have the added (dis)advantage of being forced to justify themselves as something other than a regional showroom for the "jaded palates of the metropolitan centre." Do these kinds of exhibitions have any intrinsic meaning or do they only represent a limited window of opportunity onto the merry-go-round of the market for those individuals involved? Certainly they represent a valuable and energetic self-determination, but to what ends? Is this situation merely symptomatic of the old guard being replaced by the avant garde, the old establishment versus the new establishment?

Are these kinds of exhibitions only regional showrooms for the hungry market or do they slowly build an international awareness of any given city which could prove to be to everyone's benefit? Are notions of increased

value and engagement through site specificity and claims of greater public accessibility only excuses to placate (public) funders. Artists gain valuable experience by getting involved in all aspects of initiating, funding, curating, administrating, but why then do the public still feel alienated and excluded from projects where every effort is made to engage them?

There has come to exist in western culture a certain perception of artists which has taken to characterising them to a large extent as passive, distant (elitist) and politically impotent. In other words, that complex, problematic and largely undefinable grouping “the public” seems to have been persuaded that those individuals who choose to spend their time producing what is sometimes referred to as “high culture”, are unable or *unwilling* to operate reciprocally in a world outside that which cocoons the realm of aesthetics. This situation can be conveniently illustrated by the time honoured and persistent cliché of (male) artists toiling in garret studios

(often by candlelight because they are too poor to pay the bill, but in this equation poverty equals integrity). They are of course necessarily divorced from the world as it is. How else could they honestly promulgate their personal vision with the adequate degree of integrity, intensity, and above all, autonomy? These hypothetical artists are generally ploughing through some torturous scenario designed to show that they (he) just weren’t made for these times, that is, they are suffering for their art. Often they are represented rendered powerless by some inexplicable malaise, trapped in a kind of aesthetic limbo. They never seem very happy or content with their present situation because they always seem to be waiting for something to happen. What they’re doing (or in most cases not doing) is biding their time before being recognised and valorised by external forces. That is, they are waiting to be discovered.

*Faster Than a Pool of Piss on a Hot Summer Sidewalk (1994)*

Oh, this is just *terrible*, isn't it? It's messed things up for everyone, left, right, and centre. This bloody recession. Pissing down from on *high* into absolutely everything. It's as if God was taking out his revenge for the excesses of the eighties by *urinating* all over the nineties. Everyone's got their umbrellas up to keep dry, so you can't see a fucking thing. No one's buying, no one's taking any risks. Everyone's playing things safe. Safe and sound—*bored and boring*—and that's if you've actually managed to keep your gallery doors open! No one knows what's going to happen next. So everyone is waiting around, treading water, just getting by, hoping that the next big thing arrives on their doorstep. And I'll tell you something else in confidence dearest readers. I haven't sold a thing for months.

Let's face it, the art market dried up faster than a pool of piss on a hot summer sidewalk. *And don't you just get sick of hearing about it?* Okay now, let's imagine for a moment in a situation where the Art Market never existed in the first place. *Whaddya think of that?* Where is that? Purgatory? Nirvana? Heaven? Hell? I guess that really depends on how you manage to deal with it. But it's really only a slight shift of mind set. Being an artist isn't so different now than five years ago during the booming eighties. You still get up, go to your studio, and work. Okay, so business is bad, absolutely *terrible* in fact, but nothing so far seems to be radically different about the art of this decade, the 90s per se. That's pretty much how things stand here in Scotland. Scotland is part of the United Kingdom (bear in mind this is written for an L.A. magazine), It's attached to the top of England. It has a population of around six million and is approximately the size of New York State. Okay. So there's never really been much of a

commercial market for "serious" contemporary art in Glasgow. But in the past few years Scotland, and Glasgow particularly, has generated numerous interesting exhibitions and a thriving generation of conceptually based artists. This has attracted international interest on a scale usually reserved for figurative expressionist reruns or parochial tartan kitsch (a combination of which dominated the Scottish art scene throughout the 80s). This milieu

is gradually succeeding in attracting the market or what's left of it, towards Scotland, rather than taking the work to the market, that is, in the United Kingdom, London. Maybe it's true that every dog has his day. Or maybe it's just that the art world is so desperate for some marketable product right now that it's swallowing its pride and checking out what all the fuss is about in Scotland. It's probably a bit of both. Many of the shows in Scotland which have generated this interest have been initiated and organised by artists. Many have involved, in some way, artists associated with Transmission Gallery in Glasgow. Transmission is at this time, probably the most significant artist run space in Europe. Artist run projects like those seen recently in Scotland have been born out of a simple desire to get out there and do something. To create a context for initiating and exhibiting work—to show with people whose work you happen to respect and admire—on your own terms. And now that these type of shows are generating interest and excitement, younger artists are slowly realising that it might be worth staying in Scotland, at least for a while, instead of running off to London or wherever, at the first invitation.

This third text is from a show in Cologne, organised by and featuring artists from different European countries. The first bit is about punk rock.

*This is the Sounds of the Suburbs*

In a recently aired TV documentary about the Sex Pistols and punk rock a new emphasis seemed to be placed on the fact that all the main protagonists in the emergence of this peculiarly British institution did not actually come from the buzzing metropolis itself as is usually thought but in fact came from various satellite states and suburbs surrounding the city of London. The whole phenomenon was inextricably intertwined with the political and cultural vacuum of the post empire, post war, United Kingdom or should I say Great Britain with all its guilt and bitterness and keeping-up of appearances, grin and bear it, stiff upper lip of the traditional British psyche. It really couldn't have happened anywhere else. Even in purely cultural terms punk certainly had a lot of ammunition to throw back in the face of the establishment. So thinking about the rise and fall of punk rock in this context reminded me a lot of the British art scene of the intervening years. It was enlightening to hear that this core group of 70s situationists who kick-started a cultural revolution with no future as its

slogan were mostly from fairly drab, lower, middle class homes. They watched activities in the centre developing from a distance, making interventionist forays into the heart of the city then going home to regroup, to think up their next outrageous project.

This goes some way to illustrate why the self-determinist mantle of punk rock was so easily taken up by disaffected youth in the suburbs of other British cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow. It spread like some contagious disease, a common voice from which to articulate the impotent anger of Britain's youth in the 70s. It seemed then that everyone was an outsider. In October 1977 at almost exactly the same time as kids on the estates in Belfast and Birmingham were discovering "Never Mind The Bollocks, here's the Sex Pistols" their only real record, for the first time, elsewhere in Europe the Baader Meinhoff gang, Red Army Faction had reached the end of the line. The nihilistic quest of these self-styled urban guerrillas was sending its last death rattle, almost literally, from a prison in Stammheim. The last great flourish in political terrorism in opposition to late capitalism as an idea was all over, but back in Britain the explosion of cultural terrorism was just beginning. The Sex Pistols were a potent synthesis of the style and influence of the Red Army Faction, the situationists and all the best hits of Fluxus and Dada all rolled into one.

The curious slant of this recent documentary that I watched in Holland reminded me of the peculiar ability of British youth culture to be in the right place at the time, to continually be the *avant garde* of the international *zeitgeist* in the flux of youth culture. To somehow know when the time is right to harness a particular context and reshape it to your own ends—and this I think is what happened in the British Art world in the late 80s—Johnny Rotten versus Damien Hurst. By the mid 80s in the UK the time was right for something else to happen but this time it was to be in art rather than music.

Looking at the rise of young British art over the past decade, the generation of artists represented in this exhibition, there were many parallels with the model of culture expansionism redefined by punk rock. The cultural landscape had been drastically altered and suddenly anything was possible. Punk showed you didn't need to wait for your band, shop, haircut to be discovered any more. If you had the courage of your

convictions and were willing to put your money where your mouth is, the sky was the limit. The similarities with the resurgence of young British art are clear; massive surge of energy, self-determination, infectious self-confidence, decentralization, horizontally reciprocally supportive infrastructures, assimilation, and ultimately disillusion. No more heroes, possibly. Where as bored kids in comprehensives in the 70s had Johnny Rotten, bored kids in art schools in the 90s have got Damien Hurst,

“Don’t know what I want but I know how to get it.” If there is one identifiable characteristic in this period of British arts and the demise of punk rock it’s the emergence of artist as curator, the artist as entrepreneur. Young artists bringing confidence from the “anything is possible” 80s kick, started their careers with aggressive artist initiated exhibitions in warehouses, and unrented office spaces left over from the 80s building boom. In London these were called *Frieze*, *Modern Medicine*, *Gambler*, with Damien Hurst, and the whole Goldsmiths phenomenon. So you didn’t have to wait for your work to be discovered—or validated by some ex-public-schoolboy in a sharp suit (or more likely in jeans and sneakers)—all you had to do was get together with some friends and do it yourself....

Now only ten years after this burst of energy that enthused me to write these kind of things, it seems much more difficult for younger groups of artists to set up similar sort of projects. A project like *Windfall* in Glasgow 1991 was large and ambitious. As you know, it takes an incredible amount of work to make these things happen but when it happened everyone came running to see what it was all about. It was much more invigorating and truthful than what was going on in contemporary and official (so-called) art spaces at that time. I think now that it’s difficult for younger artists. You can’t get bigger than that or more ambitious in a sense, without generating institutions. Now it’s far more difficult to generate the same kind of interest from artists or the public (who have art fatigue) and mediating channels of TV, magazines etc. The projects have to be bigger, better, faster, slicker, more expensive, have a bigger catalogue, have more money. Also there’s the problem of curator fatigue. At first they came running, wanting to see what all the fuss was about in Glasgow. But now there’s a real danger that two or three artists become identified with a scene and that’s what people want. Glasgow is two or three artists and that is evidenced by various shows that have been happening.

A few years ago Glasgow was like a fertile field in which seeds were planted, grew, and blossomed, fulfilling their natural life span and then these seeds were blown into neighbouring fields where they sprouted. But it seems now that it's far more difficult to plant seeds again in that same soil. Is it that the earth, the whole infrastructure, the people are worn out and does it mean that it has to remain fallow for a period before the necessary commitment of energy, talent, and enthusiasm necessary to build a strong sense of self-determination arises? Does that have to be dead for a while before young artists think, "Well, I have to do something here?" Another problem is that this particular burst of energy that I came out of hasn't made any new institutions, we haven't made any new art centres or anything like that. Hans Ulrich Oberst wrote something called *The Glasgow Miracle*...how did all this come out of a place which was basically considered to be like the third world?...and as he ranted on about how fantastic Glasgow is, and how amazing all these great artists are. I pointed out to him that while that was true, it is built on the energy and commitment of individuals—and that is really dangerous—because obviously they made this thing happen.

It's kind of come to pass that things are difficult in Glasgow. There's a lot of lottery money flying around and a lot of these places, such as the Centre for Contemporary Art where they have an eight million pound lottery grant to rebuild the space, have to worry about dealing with this money. It is difficult now, and it's more difficult I think for younger artists in Glasgow to dismiss my generation because it's not so 2-D. It's not so easy just to say, "That's all crap, let's do something else" because—the situation that Shivaun was talking about is absolutely true—the funding situations are terrible. They're probably like Canada is going to be in ten or fifteen years if you don't make a noise about it. I did a show in Toronto about eighteen months ago at a space called Mercer Union and I could see from the way that their funding was going that they were just at the beginning of full funding starting to go down the plughole. So it's important that you fight for that, and I'm sure you already are.

Right now, in Glasgow, there are a lot more things happening on a smaller scale again. All this desire to get bigger and bigger has dissipated and people are doing things on a much smaller scale, shows in apartments, shows in small spaces, small groups of artists bringing in other artists to do things together. Everybody's doing it themselves again. I think that's maybe what Derrick was talking about (the positive aspects of the things he was talking about) can really be of value. When you're just doing it yourselves and you're starting from grassroots all over again, the technology can really help you to do it.

**Comments and Questions**

Derrick de Kerckhove

David, you raised an issue that I think is really worth picking up, which is that a critical mass of artists is necessary for any community or any society. But then you said that the critical mass is equal for Iceland or the USA. I'm not sure I understood what you meant. Could you expand on that point?

David Arnason

I think that a country needs to provide a critical mass of people who are engaged in the arts. In the USA, you need about as many artists as you need in Iceland, but now you spread this through films, through blockbusters, through a centralizing force, so that only the same number of people get to take part in the culture in any country. So, in a big country you are excluded from the possibility of significantly altering your culture and being at the centre of your culture, whereas in Iceland, you really can do it. You can hope to be famous. It is within the context of your cultural or sub-cultural community that you can do things. Small countries have great advantages. Canada itself has an immense advantage over the United States or Britain in that more people can actually actively participate in the arts community.

Participant

We do have a chance in Canada of retaining this tremendous intellectual wealth if only we can preserve the critical mass and the kind of funding that's needed for the artists in our two languages to create works of art.

Participant

I speak as one of the drama students here about the ideal of young people breaking the ground. The volcanic theory of art is a wonderful image and I've been using it lately with my friends. From my experience in this drama department, there is only so long that young people will bust their heads against the wall to get funding. How long are you going to try before you say, "Let's go somewhere else and make our own new ground, from scratch, grass roots?" Apartments are really where the most exciting stuff is happening right now. Shivaun

talked about how hard it is to go out as an artist and have that business sense, but that's what you have to do, you have to do that all by yourself and be a jack-of-all-trades. And a theatre entrepreneur, someone who in my mind works on a very small scale in that grassroots sense, ends up as a catalyst. Ross talked about seeds. There are new grounds out there to plant your seed and try to grow more roots. We, the young people, need to get out of the structures that are creating barriers for us.

**Ross Sinclair**

I think the main thing is trying to develop this confidence in yourself and any group you may feel you're a part of. Talking and working with people and artists, people who are in senior positions in visual arts or who are in positions to be able to do something for you, whether it's with grant money or access to their space.

**David Arnason**

What we need in Canada is a model of contention, not of homogenization. The Iceland model wouldn't work in this multicultural country. We need people who believe in the process of art, not the products of art, but being engaged in it. For the young who complain that they're not getting support, well, they're not supposed to. They should be engaged in shaping and doing things. If we give them the support immediately and put them on the main stage we're not going to get the kind of art we need that can change things. If you've got radical and exciting ideas you can put them together and go out and do it. Once you've done something we'll be more than willing to fund you. Every jury I have been on has been looking for radical ideas, for exciting new things. Not for someone who says, "I've got an idea, give me the money" but

for someone who says, "Look I've done this, now give me a hand to go the next step."

- Shivaun O'Casey Companies collapse and communities collapse. They get tired, apart from anything else. Survival is very difficult in this day and age. You need money to live, you need food to eat, and if you have families it becomes more difficult. That happens with young people when they have more mouths to feed. Very often it's exhaustion.
- Derrick de Kerckhove For people here it's really impossible to imagine what the situation is like in Northern Ireland, in terms of education and the way kids are brought up. Even now when the peace process is still hanging on by the skin of its teeth.
- Participant Maybe we need to focus on places like that to see what kind of help they need, essentially the nature of arts and culture that is needed there, something that would give hope.
- Ross Sinclair That's true, but it goes back to an important question about art and life, "How can art insinuate itself into people's lives, what can it mean, and where does the power and meaning of art really reside?" Conflict on this level really does test one's ability to produce art in the face of extreme adversity. And what does the production of culture and the creation of dialogue mean against the backdrop of this terrible situation. What you are suggesting is laudable, in theory. The reality of it is so different.
- Participant I'm going to shift topics slightly. Ross, you brought up the idea of accessibility. Did you mean accessibility by the public? I believe you suggested that your colleagues weren't necessarily exhibiting in art galleries proper, that they were selecting industrial buildings or other spaces? Because, when I think about the average Joe or Jane public those aren't exactly what I would think of as accessible spaces either. I would think more of the beauty salon, the Ford dealership, the local restaurant. I'm being provocative here, but how do you feel about that?
- Ross Sinclair At the Glasgow School of Art, we do endeavour to get students to go out and do these kind of things. We have a

thing called public art project, every year they have to go out somewhere in the city and talk to somebody, whether it's a beauty salon, a community group, or a newspaper. They have to make it happen, raise some money, gain permission. So that does happen. What I was talking about was more specific,

using industrial spaces. In these spaces you just pass by and there it is, on the street, non-threatening. Moreover the idea of getting the public into these things, which I am passionately committed to, is a way to say, "Look at the things we're making. They are a little difficult, they don't use materials you usually associate with art...you're going to have to do a bit of work yourself here." You go there to learn something. "Here it is, maybe it's not what you expected, but really, just give it a chance, it's not so difficult you know."

Same Participant

But you are starting to bridge physical accessibility with intellectual accessibility, the ability for average Jane or Joe to understand what is happening. I agree, some work is much easier to understand than other work. Art education in some of our large art galleries isn't as great as it could be, not as creative as it could be, not as provocative as it could be. And sometimes it doesn't exist at all. Where do you and your colleagues sit on the issue of the artists concerning themselves with intellectual accessibility?

Ross Sinclair

There are so many incredible people working in art education who, in spite of the various barriers, do a great job and really care about what they do. I think that, in terms of self-determination, it's important to demystify this whole business of art because there's nothing difficult about it.

David Arnason

The French critic Roland Barth once said, "I want to write with the maximum readability and the maximum subversion." I think an artist ought to do that.

Shivaun O'Casey

I think you must start with the very young, babies, children, and drama in the schools, to get young people used to diverse things and creative efforts.

Participant

When you are an administrator who used to be an artist (becoming an administrator out of your own financial need) you want to balance your administrative skills with your creativity. I now find myself at the coast running an arts council that has a mandate that includes enabling emerging artists and established artists to do their work. But what I find is that these arts councils have been there for 30 years. While I know that our audience and our constituency is older, I have always tried to work more with younger people to keep that energy flowing through the institutions that do exist, so that they do not die out. But how do we open ourselves up to that group of people. I'm in Coquitlam, which is a suburb of a

vibrant arts city, Vancouver. I know those kids are out there, I know those artists are out there, but there is a hesitancy to go to the hands that can help them do what they want to do. And there's a distrust that people like me know anything about art.

Ross Sinclair

I think that people sometimes don't want to take public money because they are often forced to jump through so many hoops to justify what they do, in terms of the specific criteria of assessment, in a particular project. I know quite a few people who choose not to do that because they feel that, with a proven track record, artists who are capable of applying for money should get it, with no strings attached. It is deadening, to have that kind of mold, not what you do—but to try to articulate it and justify it in particular terms—so that it fits in with this year's funding criteria.

Same Participant

The art of co-operation is key. Different opinions or forces tend to polarize people and this can result in a dearth of art. There are communities that go beyond their individual

David Arnason

difficulties to co-operate together. Their work and the work of their groups is still individual but because they came together, and their energies came together, they create something more, much more than they could do on their own.

Part of the problem is the notion of professionalism, the notion that you have to be a full time artist or you're not an artist at all. That's silly. Art can be part of a decent life. The man doesn't have to quit making music simply because he can't live making music all the time. Get a part-time job, make music part-time, stay alive somehow. Art is a vocation. You enter it. If you just quit it completely, you were never an artist to start with.

Participant

I come from the corporate side, where we spend a lot of energy trying to work with public sector. Some of the comments and commentary concern me, things like "having to do battle" against funders, governments, politicians, corporations and facilitators to obtain funding. There doesn't seem to be a recognition that all of the applications and the filling-out of forms is a surrogate for understanding what the point is. It is a mechanism for me to understand how my corporation or my government or my voting public will benefit (or not) from investing in this kind of activity. Art for art's sake is fine, but when you start to engage the rest of the community to participate in that funding, you have to understand what their needs are too. My question for the

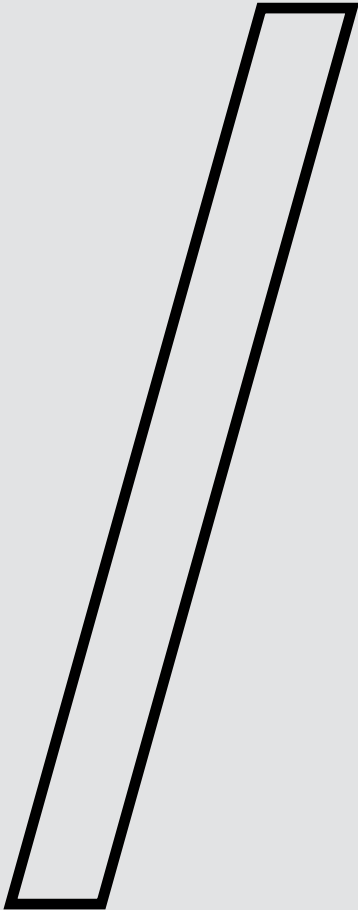
panel is, “Have you found that success hinges somewhat on artists being more holistic in their view of what art is about?” I’m wondering if maybe what they’re missing is a more streamlined way of translating that. These stakeholder groups do speak a different language, absolutely. So my second question would be, “Is it important to teach artists coming out of academies and formal institutions how to understand these other cultures so they can talk about their place in the world overall?”

David Arnason

First, I think artists do have to explain more clearly that in this world, business is the means, art is the end. You make money to live a good life. You can’t live the good life without art. We have to explain that to business people and to corporations. Second, contemporary art overwhelmingly approves and supports the status quo. The artist who is subversive has to subvert, not merely political structures, but the structures of art itself, and has to play a double game to be an artist. I don’t see why governments are afraid. Overwhelmingly, art is just what they need.

Ross Sinclair

I feel that’s a typically patronizing comment from corporate sector and it explains why artists are so mistrustful. I don’t think it’s the artists’ job to justify to corporations why what they do is valuable. There are many other far more valuable ways of doing that.



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# 3

## Published Articles in Art Journals / Magazines

alba

scotland's visual arts magazine

£3.00 volume 1 number 1 january-february 1991



CULTURE WITHOUT FRONTIERS MICHAEL IGNATIEFF  
CAPITAL OF CULTURE/CULTURE OF CAPITAL ROSS SINCLAIR  
ARTISTS OF A DIASPORA R B KITAJ  
SITE SPECIFIC WORK: GLASGOW 1990 FIONA BYRNE SUTTON  
ARTIST'S PAGE WENDY MCMURDO  
NEW SCOTTISH PHOTOGRAPHY JEAN BAIRD

## Never Read

culture: 1. the total of inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge, which constitute the shared basis of social action.

*Collins English Dictionary*

Any debate which concerns itself with a critique of a spectacle of the magnitude of 1990 in Glasgow should not be confused or diverted by the year or the geographic location. It should in fact be treated as a straightforward critique of late capitalism.

Glasgow 1990 was a rare opportunity to view at first hand the inner workings of the social and economic construction which in the past few years has transmogrified the city, systematically turning it into yet another suburb of the global village, where the streets are paved with gold and there's no trash on the sidewalks. It was a spectacle of late-transnational-consumer-commodity-postwar-capitalist culture, building a new infrastructure of self perpetuation.

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I don't fuckin' care  
What clothes you wear  
How you wear your hair  
You're still fuckin' square -  
And I'm laughing at you all of the time

TEENAGE FANCLUB:  
*Everybody's Fool*, released Glasgow 1990

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It was also a concrete example of how representation – or simulation – has replaced production at the core of our social and economic systems. Since Glasgow's cultural history is so heavily steeped with production, particularly heavy engineering, this has been sharply focused. It shows quite clearly that contemporary culture has long ago dispensed with the classic marxist use value/exchange value relation – the quid pro quo distinction – and now operates on the basis of the unchallenged value of the signifier, and never of its sign.

## Never Shop

Unlike its traditional image of high finance and banking, the power of capital today is invested in many diverse and complex systems and structures – most significantly in cultural rather than the more traditionally political infrastructures. This is how, as accepted political distinctions continue to blur, capital can continue to widen its horizons, regenerating itself under the guise of 'cultural development'. Television, advertising and the mass media (including of course this text) are the cultural pillars which underpin the stability of capital. To a large extent these media created and defined 1990: a spectacular example of form over content.

The media are terrorists in their own fashion, working continually to produce (good) sense, but, at the same time, violently defeating it by arousing everywhere a fascination without scruples, that is to say, a paralysis of meaning, to the profit of a single scenario.

JEAN BAUDRILLARD

It is no news that the world has become homogenised through the saturation of mass culture. In this international atmosphere of mass inebriation the foundations were laid well in advance on which Glasgow 1990 could be constructed.

In consumer capitalism every object, subject, personality, decision and so forth has its appointed model, its cliché: a specific and contrived representation against which all other interpretations and assumptions can be defined. Just as we are the consumer – we are the consumed.

We become what we are through our encounter while growing up with the myriad of representations of what we may become – the various positions that society allocates to us. There is no essential self which precedes this social construction of self through the agency of representation.

VICTOR BURGIN

It is precisely this endlessly reformable tool of representation which has served the creators of the 'nouvelle Glasgow' so well. The representations which form the basis of the city's transformation appear natural, evolved, perfect and truthful, apparently mirroring the real

world. This is not the case. These systems of representation do not reflect reality. They construct it. These representations are carefully contrived, artificial and open to any distortion or alteration foisted upon them. In short they are a means to an end. Then they become 'reality'. The new Glasgow has been so 'successful' essentially because it has constructed itself from almost nothing. A clean slate, no awkward social history, no real stories, no real people. Certainly it will be regenerated the way we, the public, want it; but only when its giant publicity machine has sold us the concept.

In this respect the 'rebirth' of the city of Glasgow is similar in many details to the accepted models of development of emerging 'third world' nations. That the patterns of development in these cultures are outward looking is well researched (see Susan George: *A Fate worse than Debt* and *How the Other Half Dies*). They never seek to enhance the specific, generic, original features of the underdeveloped countries and their people, treating them rather as if they were a kind of undifferentiated clay to be moulded to the standard requirements of the world market and world capital, to the uniform tastes of international bureaucrats and their national clones. Glasgow's recent transformation is made possible by adopting this approach, by officially relinquishing an indigenous cultural identity that is in any way autonomous to that of the global village. This can only be possible when the city presents itself as a willing victim.

All year long the festivities last. A celebration the city has created out of its enduring strengths: its remarkable history, the splendour of its architecture, the traditions of its universities, its colleges and churches, the beauty of its parklands, the serenity of the River Clyde and the glories of the surrounding countryside

Souvenir programme:

Official Handover of Title 'European City of Culture',  
March 1990

Whatever the exaggerated publicity may have proclaimed, no-one would seriously try and tell you that 1990 was about 'the city's remarkable history' or 'the serenity of the River Clyde'. It was about the power of advertising (David Kemp: 'for instance, what was spent on advertising *Glasgow's Glasgow*? If it was as much as I think it was, with that money I could have attracted half

a million people to a display of Julian Spalding's old socks'). It was concerned with social and economic reconstruction and the regeneration of capital. More insidious however, it was (and continues to be) about the construction and definition of a synthetic reality – a reality based not on commonsense elements of the truth (social situations or political history for example) but a new city, a new Glasgow constructed and defined through the manifold agencies of reproduction.

## Never Wash

So far I have argued that the residues of power in late capitalism and so the potential for misrepresentation saturated 1990. They were disseminated through an increasingly dizzy array of cultural as well as political activity. This does not (of course) exclude this particular area of cultural activity – the construction of a text. I cannot possibly distance myself from the inevitable contradictions and inaccuracies present when participating in the attempted definition of 'truths' (sometimes referred to as 'the well rounded argument'). I engage with the representatives of capital (however well intentioned) and cannot avoid revealing through my criticism its apparently democratic nature. Criticism is welcomed, because it is instantly recuperated. How can an entirely effective critique be made in a text like this which uses a dominant linear narrative, if one accepts that a set of problems are mirrored in the construction of a text? The text is only another system of representation, and its problems are present in the many representations which construct a spectacle like 1990. This manipulation of the text is perhaps more subtle than the more obvious deception of a visual system like advertising, for example, but this only serves to highlight its potential deviousness. These are the problems of representing representation – problems which focus on the inevitable paralysis of real meaning effected by the singular reading of the dominant narratives of the written text – criticising cliché with cliché.

Encratic language (the language produced and spread under the protection of power) is statutorily a language of repetition; all official languages are repeating machines; school, sports, advertising, popular songs, news all continually repeat the same structure, the same meaning, often the same words. The stereotype is a political fact, the major figure of

ideology... the bastard form of mass culture is humiliated repetition; content, ideological schema, the blurring of contradictions, these are repeated, but the superficial forms are varied: always new books, new programmes, new films, new items but always the same meaning.

ROLAND BARTHES

This 'encratic language' Barthes describes is familiar in what we have come to accept as 'Nineteen Ninety Speak'. This language can make even the most ridiculous idea seem eminently plausible (hello *Glasgow's Glasgow*) because it continually asks us to believe that it is transparent, merely an unbiased vehicle with which to transport information and meaning. In fact the rhetoric of this language constructs its meaning.

The amorphous nature of capitalist culture implies that a wide variety of critical works (particularly of a theoretical nature) can quickly be assimilated into the mainstream or 'dominant narrative'. This is possible precisely because of its formlessness, its construction through systems which are being perpetually revised and reformed. You cannot strike at its heart because it ultimately has no centre. This recuperative ability is aided by oppositional groups who persist in personifying the modern capitalist as an evil cigar-smoking industrialist from some Dickensian monochrome nightmare, abusing homeless children or at least sending them down the pits.

This simplified analysis conveniently focuses criticism on the most superficial symptoms of the capitalist system and encourages a thoroughly reductionist polarisation of the issues. It can be turned on its head by the fact that on one level these critical positions only serve and legitimise, pander to the supposed 'democratic' appearance of dominant western society, and therefore strengthen the very ideology they seek to criticise. These critical positions can become parasitical in nature, fuelled by the culture they apparently want to change. It is essential to understand this relationship when attempting to produce a critique: there is always the danger that those who base their identity on their opposition to the world as it is actually have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

## Never Never

I'm free, to do what I want, any old time

I'm free, to be what I choose – to get my blue, any old time

Love me – hold me – 'cause I'm free

THE SOUP DRAGONS: *I'm Free*, released Glasgow 1990

Any critique of 1990 is inevitably parasitic in nature. The agenda is set, defined by those holding the balance of power – ie: from elsewhere. A critical response which mirrors the distortions of the subject only legitimises and confirms it.

But by now the bleached bones of 1990 will be picked clean by those who a year ago were unwilling or unable to dirty their hands in open debate. What agenda will now be proposed by those who successfully rejected the glittering agenda of 1990? Where are the soaring visions of a culture yet unformed, where the full potential of each and every individual can at last be unleashed? This is the agenda which must now be re-addressed. Not in response or in reaction to recent changes in Glasgow, but in an independent, informed and autonomous parallel to it.

The authentic cultural strength and identity of Glasgow was established long before the 1990 circus set up its big top in the city. What should be understood is that this culture will continue to develop long after 'Glasgow 1990, European Cultural Capital' has become just another highlight on the curriculum vitae of celebrated visionaries of the international heritage industry. Goodbye *Glasgow's Glasgow* – hello *Dublin's Dublin* anyone?

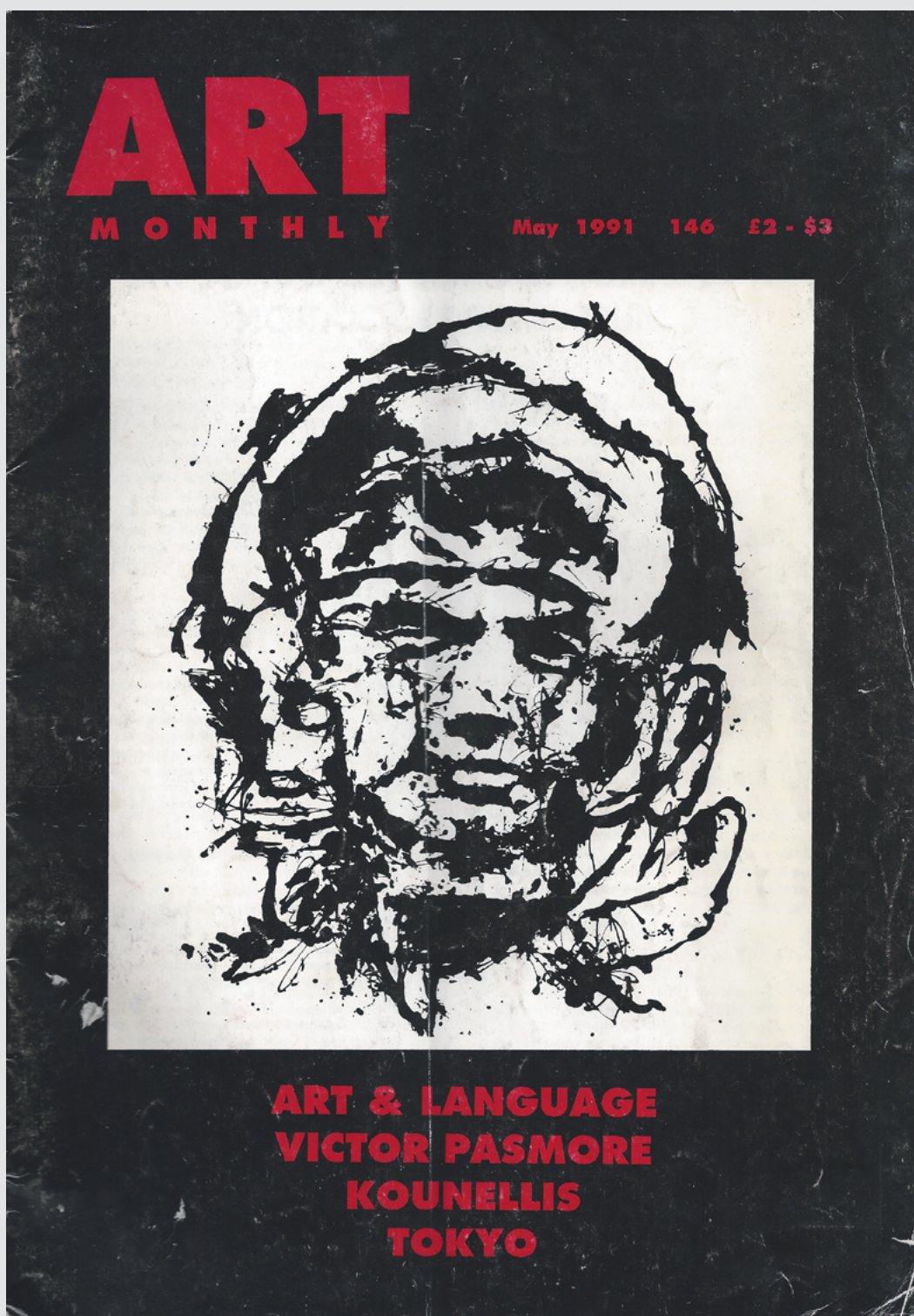
## FOOTNOTE

If you are interested in a accurate statistical post-mortem of 1990 in Glasgow, if you want to hear the precise details of the 'behind closed doors' deals that formed the subtext of Glasgow – European Capital of Culture you must look elsewhere. It will take many months, years maybe, to unravel the intricate web of duplicity which conceals the exact nature and precise amount of money which changed hands during 1990. However, if you want an informed deconstruction of the machinations of the international heritage industry at work in Glasgow, talk to the Worker's City group, or read David Kemp: *Glasgow 1990: The True Story behind the Hype*.



ROSS SINCLAIR: 'Capital of Culture/Culture of Capital',  
Sauchiehall Street, 1990

Ross Sinclair's posterwork 'Capital of Culture/Culture of Capital' with associated postcards and badges was flyposted and distributed in Amsterdam (European Cultural Capital 1987), Glasgow (European Cultural Capital 1990) and Dublin (European Cultural Capital 1991) during February/March 1990.



## EXHIBITIONS

## ALAN JOHNSTON

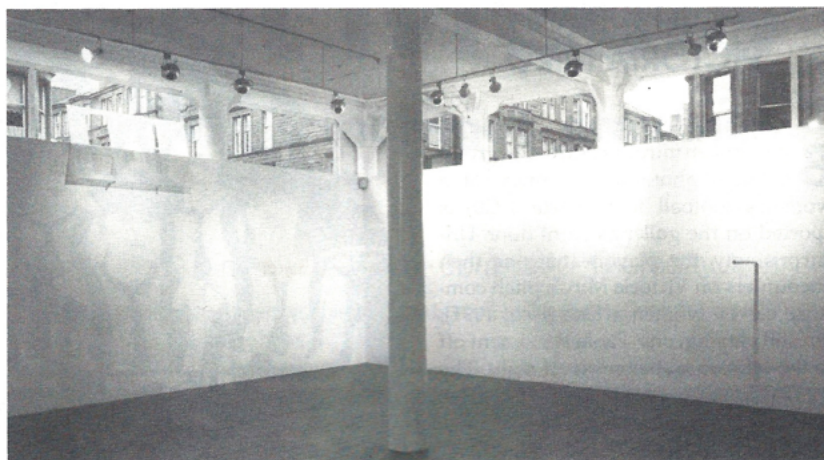
It is both appropriate and significant that Alan Johnston's first solo show presented in Glasgow, entitled 'Silence Exile Cuning', should be held at Transmission Gallery in the city's King Street.

Over the past eight years Transmission has developed into Scotland's foremost artist-run space which in the two years since the move to its current (excellent) space in King Street has gained international repute. This has been achieved quite simply by constructing a creative programme of work by a younger generation.

Transmission is curated and administered by an elected steering committee of artists from a membership of over one hundred. The members of the present committee are Christine Borland, David Allen and Craig Richardson, with Douglas Gordon, Claire Barclay and William Clark in supportive roles. Gordon has shown recently at the Barclays Young Artists at the Serpentine, while he, Borland and Richardson are part of the 'Self Conscious State' group who exhibited recently at the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow and will show next year at the new Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin.

The gallery is run on an entirely voluntary basis. It received revenue grants for the financial year 1990/91 of £8,300 from the Scottish Arts Council and £7,000 from local authorities. This must pay rent/rates/premises etc. and cover all aspects of administration as well as the programme itself.

All artists who pass through the management group at Transmission pick up ways of operating in the often inhospitable landscape of art funding. This process of demystification and democratisa-



Alan Johnston, Silence exile cuning, 1991

tion of knowledge (ie. power) is crucial to the gallery's philosophy and the advancement of the artistic community. Interestingly, as many other publicly funded galleries are forced to cut back their programmes to eight or nine shows a year, Transmission continues to broaden out, and last year presented 21 major exhibitions and events in its three versatile spaces. The only reason this can happen is because six people work there for nothing. Highlights from last year's programme include the German pioneer of 'Art Informel', Wols (Alfred Otto Wolfgang Schulze) and a Norwegian exchange involving nine artists which resulted in two significant exhibitions in Bergen and Glasgow, through to new work by Keith Piper. Forthcoming projects include a full month of events/exhibitions from The Workers City group (May), Cathy Wilkes (June), a group of Trans European artists (July), with shows by Jo Spence and Yuji Takeoka soon to be confirmed.

It is with the work of this younger generation of necessarily politicised art-

ists that Johnston's art practice is closely paralleled. His minimal and contemplative work inhabits a world of deliberate cultural intransigence, polarised by the pragmatic and utopian. Its appearance is untainted and tenacious, its attitude antagonistic towards those artists who opt for compromise or duplicity as a career strategy. His work is uncompromising and unflinching in its pursuit of the goals of excellence and perfection. It demands that the viewer makes the effort to penetrate its difficult exterior in order to experience the work at its most engaging.

The installation at Transmission proposes a soaring vision of spatial harmony, a complete cultural experience where the key element is democratisation. The work seeks to democratise the relationship between artist and viewer, gallery and public. Responsibility is placed on the viewer, who is asked to bring a great breadth of personal understanding to the work in order to activate it. Very little help is given. To a large extent with the work of Alan Johnston, what you give is what you get. Furthermore, and signifi-

cantly, his modest but concentrated installation aims to democratise the physical space. His installation is a collaboration with the space, not just an intervention on its surface. When it is working well, this work is in the walls, not on them. Art is only the catalyst for this democratisation, this re-interpretation of the gallery in all its contradictory entirety. The work itself lets the viewer re-examine the relationship between artist and gallery, and the gallery's relationship to a wider social context.

Johnston's utopian outlook is reflected in his belief in the social significance of a commonsense philosophy set out by the Scottish philosopher George Davie.\* This commonsense philosophical view in general is the apparently obvious point that people can think for themselves - apparently obvious because nowadays most ruling minorities tend to regard it as dangerously subversive. Commonsense takes the view that the reasoning skills which we use in our everyday life are there to be developed and applied to any subject. The idea that this philosophy is continually simmering under the surface of accepted (imposed?) social organisation is essential when making a critique of this work because I believe this commonsense attitude is seen by Alan Johnston as a solid foundation for a positive engagement and understanding of his work. Johnston's work may contain the key to unlock this language; however, I think it is often hidden so deeply that it is effectively unreadable.

Although he rarely exhibits in publicly-funded galleries, in this context I think some measure of the success or failure of Johnston's work hinges on its ability to engage a wide audience whether familiar with a specialised art language or not. The social and geographic context of the Transmission gallery in the city centre's East End further highlights this problematic aspect of the work and asks whether the element of democratisation experienced in the gallery can in fact be successfully extended out of the gallery to become a catalyst in a wider cultural context. This question recalls Johnston's only other significant work in Glasgow, a 1983 project, ironically entitled *Torn Bough* (a

Dantéan symbol of betrayal), which consisted of a major series of large mural drawings made in an empty industrial unit north of the city in Springburn.

The completed installation was never open to the public. Springburn was, not so long ago, famous for its railway-related industry and the building itself was sited on a defunct railyard. Johnston's installation was a self-proclaimed, socio-physical site-specific work, articulating a

quiet dismay at the dismally patronising state of public works then being commissioned.

Eight years later in 'Silence Exile Cuning' at Transmission, what is in fact the key work in the exhibition places a convenient focus on this area of private 'populism' / public indifference. This work is a large glass rectangle which balances precariously eight feet above the ground. It leans against the top of the gallery wall, framed by the outside windows and supported only by two flimsy-looking rods. The glass is sand-blasted leaving several clear areas in geometric patterns similar to those in Johnston's wall drawings. This is the key to the exhibition because it almost literally straddles the space between the gallery and the street. It draws attention to the precarious relationship which exists between the publicly-funded gallery and its potential audience. From the street you can see the gallery framed through the work and from the gallery this work sections off the outside world fragmenting its complex images through the delicate transparencies of the sandblasted glass.

This untitled work points to the uncomfortable relationship between the undoubtedly sincere philosophical base of Johnston's quiet, concentrated work and its very difficult, almost impenetrable public presence. While no informed art practitioner would advocate a patronising 'cheering up of the workers' or, to use Johnston's own criticism of publicly funded and poorly conceptualised public art, I fear that an assumed undercurrent of commonsense philosophy in the average gallery-goers would lead them to dismiss this work as élitist, intellectual posturing.

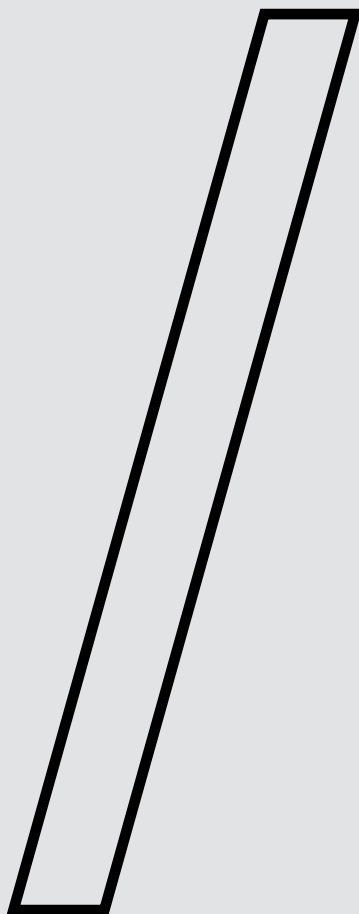
These criticisms aside, Transmission Gallery and Johnston himself should be applauded for presenting this exhibition to the public at a time when the relationship between the Scottish Arts Council and its 'clients' (eg. galleries and artists) has deteriorated to such an extent that in the future difficult work such as Alan Johnston's may be banished from publicly-funded galleries forever.

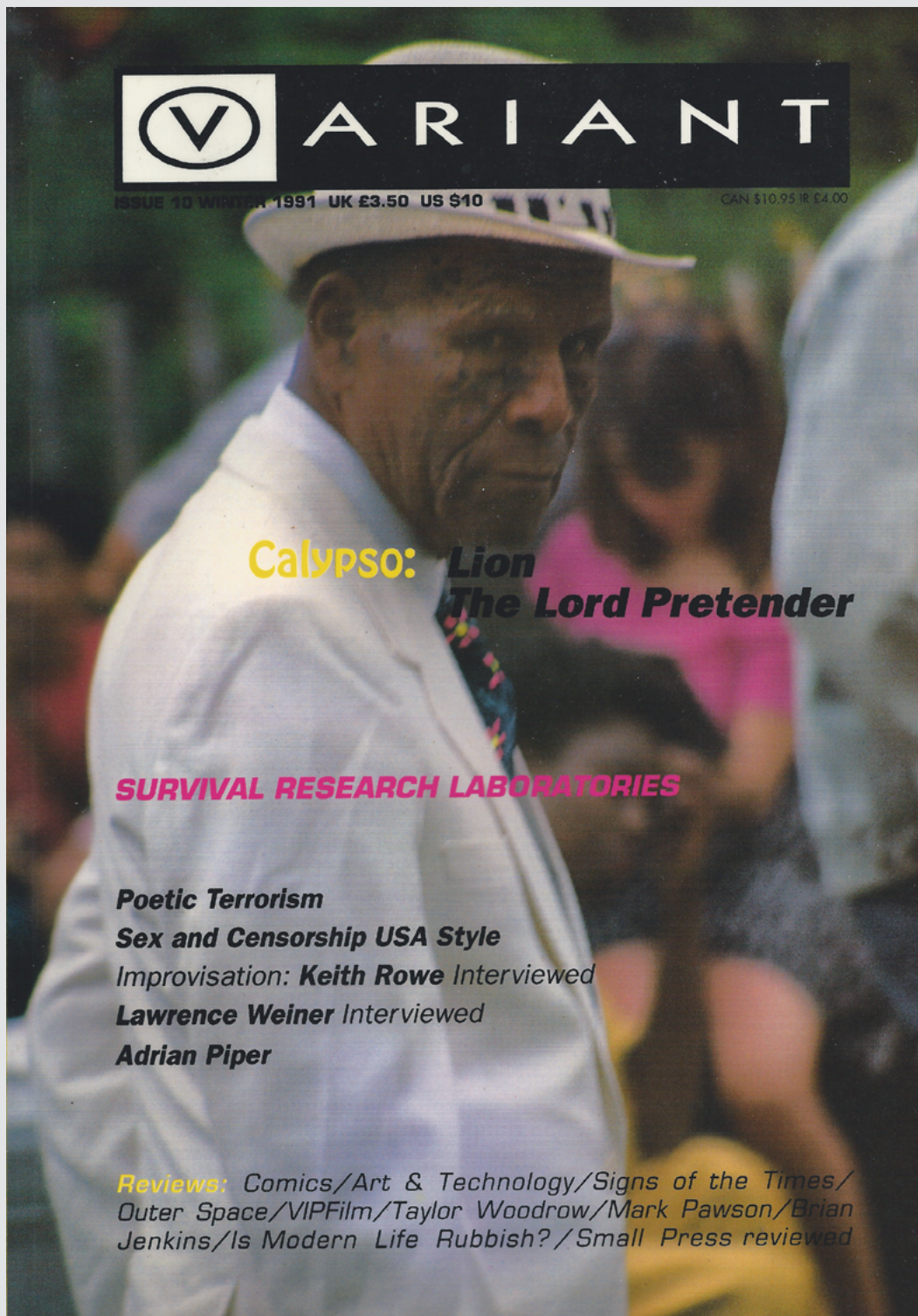
**Ross A. Sinclair**

\* This definition of commonsense philosophy is paraphrased from an interview with James Kelman concerning Noam Chomsky and George Davie in VARIANT No. 8 1990.

**Silence Exile Cuning was at Transmission Gallery, Glasgow in March.**

*Ross A. Sinclair is an artist who lives and works in Glasgow.*





## MARK PAWSON

Community CopyArt, London,  
7th October to 8th November 1991.

Community Copyart is a collective of five workers who run an arts resource centre which is situated within the sprawling complex of Kings Cross/St. Pancras rail stations in London. This resource centre houses the very latest in black and white/colour copying and also offers Macintosh desk top publishing technology, all of which is available for use by the public. Also offered are a range of services designed to compliment the resource centre, such as training, graphic design, art workshops and exhibitions.

**Mark Pawson's** recent exhibition was an installation of immense proportions, covering 2200 square feet, using over 1600 b+w A3 photocopies. These copies crowded every available inch of the centre's wall and ceiling surface. At the close of the exhibition the installation was removed from the wall/ceiling and the sheets of paper assembled into an edition of 80 books, approximately 24 pages each, numbered and with an extra page showing overall views of the completed installation. These books were intended to be enjoyed in their own right or possibly de-assembled for re-use and plagiarising.

This recent approach to formal exhibition differs from Pawson's earlier work, shown last year with **Ben Allen** at Transmission Gallery in Glasgow. Pawson's concerns then seemed to be centred around the construction of hundreds of individual - and indeed unique - pieces made from coloured copies. These pieces were made by copying repeatedly in many different colours, layering over and over again to produce dense and lavish images. In his recent show at Copyart he has returned to a more conventional multiplicity of identical images: an installation of *wallpaper* where the images are not intended to function individually.

Significantly, Copyart is not a white gallery space. It is a working environment where people come and go all day or may in fact be there for the whole day, every day. Some people would come in specifically to see the installation while others were there primarily to use the centre's facilities. Although this situation opened up a number of possibilities for these two quite particular audiences, there were problems too. This 'dual audience' situation was prone to cause some feelings of awkwardness for individuals who came specifically to see the show as there was a vague feeling of rudely intruding on a working environment. However, all the work for the installation was constructed and copied at Copyart and certainly on one level the installation served as a glorious example of the potential of copiers when manipulated by knowledgeable hands to produce large scale, vibrant and challenging artworks.

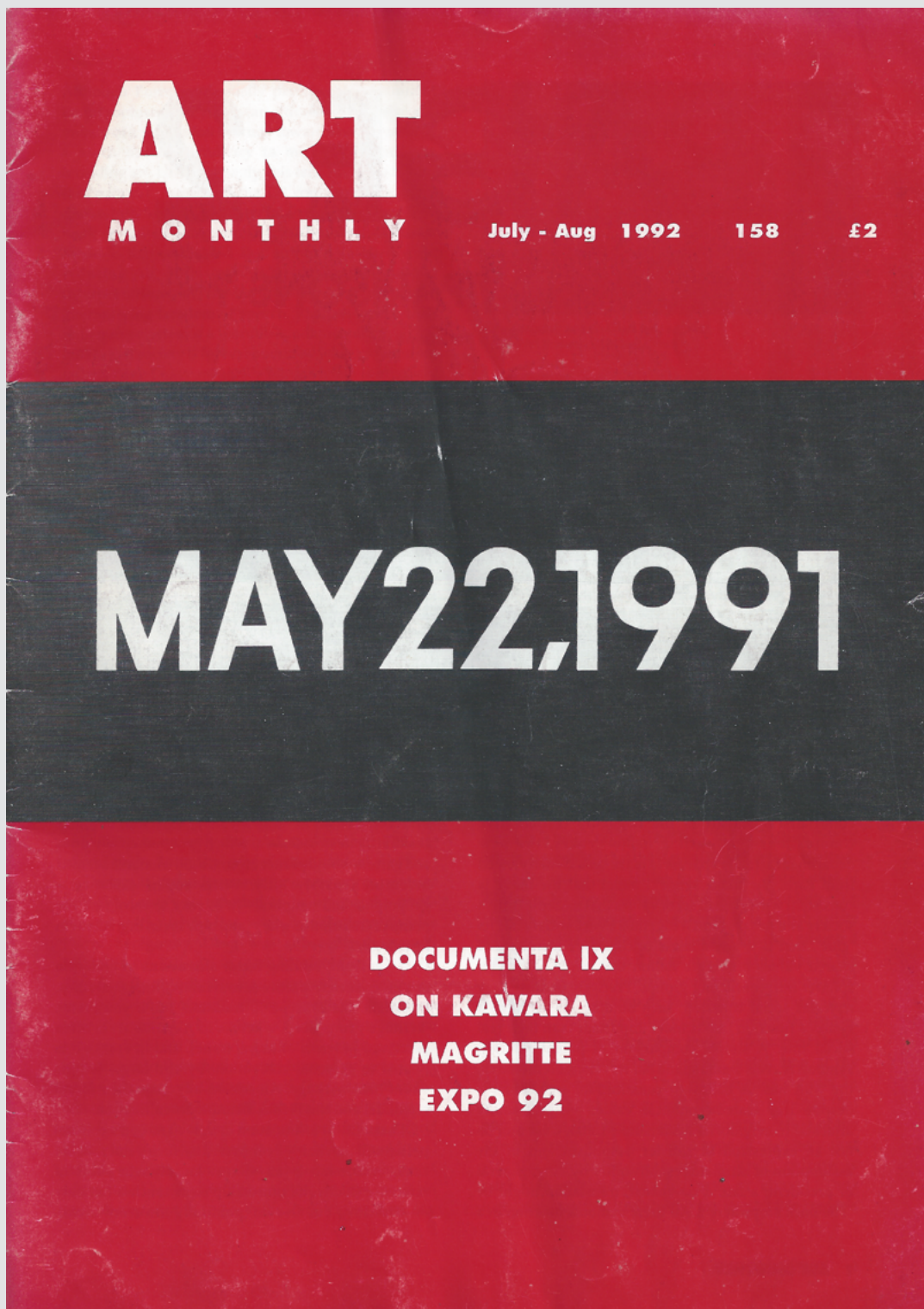
This recent installation which Pawson constructed from literally hundreds of source images, produced a saturated visual bombardment which was genuinely kaleidoscopic and mesmerising. The wall space, mainly between the many windows, was filled with a variety of different thematic copy blocks, utilising images from diverse sources such as packaging/copying instructions for recycled photocopy paper, though to pious copyright warning notices, repeated on top of one another until they resembled the desperate and meaningless symbols they are. Images of de-construction/re-construction abound. Scalpel blades duel with legions of stylized copiers while giant "paper-jammed" symbols joust with distorted litter warnings. Through this process of 'compare and contrast', Pawson transforms meaningless individual fragments into tiny icons of potential transformation.

The ceiling was by far the largest uninterrupted area and was suitably engulfed by a complex series of mutant and bastardised paisley pattern designs of the kind that adorn 'thirtysomething' braces and boxer shorts. These designs were attached in combinations of crosses, distinguished by copying on recycled (slightly off-white) and 'clean' paper. Pawson's current trademark text, "AGGRESSIVE SCHOOL OF CULTURAL WORKERS", adorns each fragment of the design alongside the acid-dripping test tubes, cartoon bombs and skull n' crossbones which amongst other images construct the different segments.

Interestingly Pawson does not have a traditional fine-art background but took a sociology degree at London City University where his final thesis was written on the subject of Mail-Art (see his essay in Variant no.7 pp. 9-12). Pawson has been an active member of the International Mail-Art network for many years and he produces many artworks/cultural artifacts/propaganda utilising the popular currencies of T-shirts, books, badges, stickers etc., as well as participating in and organising many other events and projects. To this end his recent show seems to function like a strobe photograph, a frozen image of a fluid and organic art-practice. Pawson produces small but potent pieces of ammunition for use in the cultural war of attrition. Contrary to a current apathetic vogue, his work is evidence that this conflict is on-going against the stupefying malaise induced by the fantastic banality of transnational global culture.

### Ross Sinclair

*(An ironic postscript to this review is that if the government's proposed channel-tunnel rail terminal at Kings Cross goes ahead, Community Copyart and homes for over 150 people will be demolished to make way for the high-speed Euro-link.)*



## CONTACT

Over the past couple of years Transmission Gallery has generated some interest with the steady trickle of metropolitan artworld cognoscenti who trundle North in search of new work and new faces. This interest is reflected in the fact that 'Contact 552 4813' is even reviewed in a magazine such as this one which usually favours a certain bias towards the comings and goings of the

Metropolitan milieu.

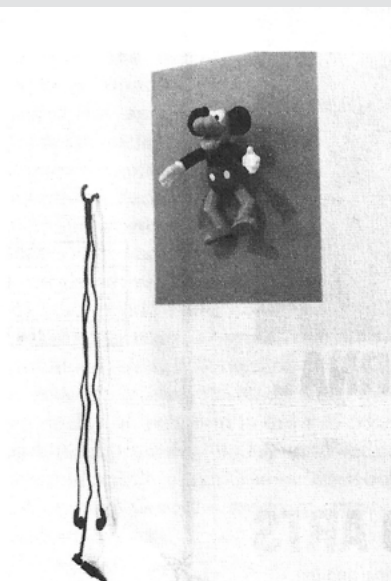
Transmission Gallery in Glasgow is an artist-run space which has been operating since 1983. It is run by a committee of between four and six practising artists who remain on the committee for approximately two years. The gallery is publicly funded and has consistently managed to retain a good degree of autonomy and integrity over the last few years, during which many publicly funded spaces have been placed under extreme pressure from Arts Councils to initiate questionable commercial developments in their spaces. These developments often generate revenue *at a cost* to the art on show but they were of course instigated on the *advice* of the Arts Councils in order to make the galleries appear more *user-friendly*. This policy is a hangover from the ill-fated incentive / enhancement funding schemes of the late 80s under which galleries were rewarded by increased public funding in return for generating some funds themselves.

Transmission seems to be one of the few spaces in Scotland that has weathered that particular storm and the draft copy of the Charter for the Arts (in Scotland at any rate) criticises this Arts Council policy and proposes a return to the situation where public funded art galleries can be places where one actually goes to *see art*.

Last summer Transmission presented a large group show entitled 'Speed'. The show, as its name suggests, was put together very quickly after the late cancellation of a programmed show. 'Speed' featured 30 plus artists each invited to submit a work of modest scale within, literally, a few days. The show

was very successful and generated a good deal of interest in the gallery.

This year Transmission has built on the success of 'Speed' and presented 'Contact 552 4812'. This is simply the Gallery's phone number and reflects the Transmission's desire to affirm established relationships and to forge new links with artists and other gallerist/curators. 'Contact 552 4813' features 42 artists who were asked to make a work of appropriate dimensions, but this year with a sufficient period of time to make work specifically for the show. The result is a refreshing and confident exhibition reflecting the current attitude in the gallery and the varied works which make up the



Mike Ellen, No title, 1992

show offer the viewer an accessible and engaging cross-section of new art.

The show was not tightly curated. Its premise was more inclined towards bringing young artists together with an idea of investigating and expanding the discursive and communicative potential of a large group show. 'Contact 552 4813' has an overall *cool* feel. The perfect summer show. The artists involved ranged widely in experience and exposure from artists such as Simon Patterson and Douglas Gordon to promising undergraduate students from the Glasgow School of Art. Patterson showed his print, *The Great Bear* based on the the London Underground Map, seen recently at 'Doubletake' at the

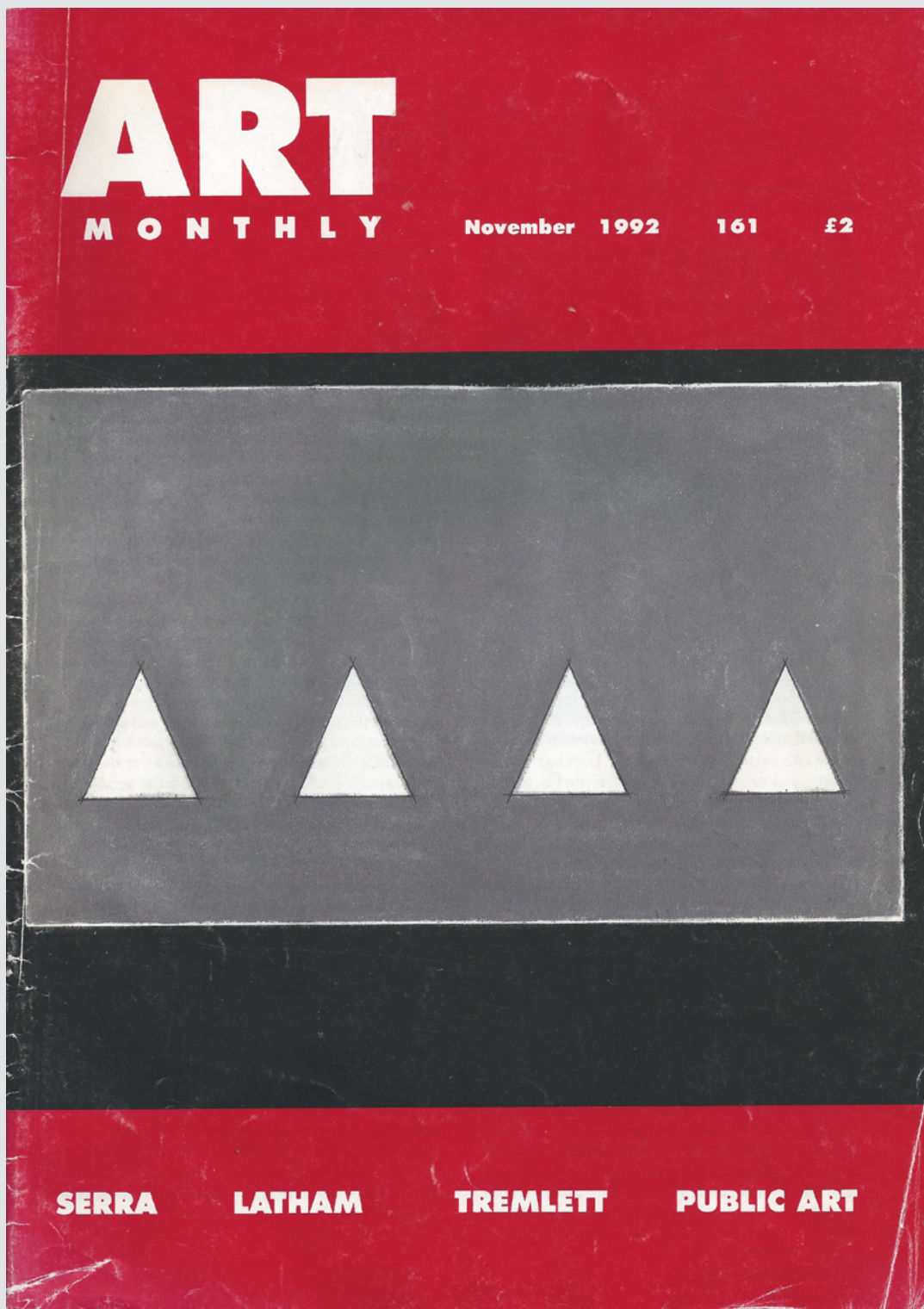
Hayward. Away from its London context, however, it didn't seem to have quite the same authority and its enjoyable chaos lost a certain disruptive element, though it would make an interesting pocket Journey Planner. Gordon showed a new neon text, *Blue Faust*, which references 14 lines from Goethe concerning 'the word' in relation to thought and deed. Unfortunately with 42 works in the show it would be impossible to mention even half of them. Mike Ellen showed a bizarre and memorable Disney toy, a Frankenstein's monster created from the dismembered body parts of a plastic Mickey Mouse and Pluto, nailed to the wall by its arse. A suitably psyched-out sound loop on a Walkman completed the weirdness. Adrian Wiszniewski, who by all accounts has given up painting, made an interesting corner piece with a white

neon walking stick on a red perspex background and a mirror. Roderick Buchanans presented a wall text almost at floor level which read, 'Full Scale Premier League Goalmouth' accompanied by a long white length of metal on the floor, indeed the actual size of the goal (bigger than you think). The English Football League is adopting a Premier League next season while Scotland's Premier League has been up and running for over 10 years. Perhaps Buchanans' piece points to the possibility that it is not only in football that important and exciting developments can be nurtured and brought to fruition outside of the pressures of the metropolitan centre.

**Ross Sinclair**

**Contact 552 4813** was at **Transmission Gallery**, Glasgow, Jun 8-27.

*Ross Sinclair is an artist living and working in Glasgow.*



# PAGE 2

## HOW TO DEAL WITH DINOSAUR CULTURE

The answer, artist *Ross Sinclair* says, is to get out there and do-it-yourself

I don't know about you, but I've always kind of liked the idea of being a part of something. You know, just getting together with some people, talking about something, an idea. Getting off on some crazy hare-brained scheme, maybe just for the hell of it – but because you *believe* in it. And let's face it, there's not a helluva lot to believe in these days, is there? Being part of something is even better when you do it with a bunch of people you happen to respect and admire, doing it together. And because you believe in it, you're going to do your best to MAKE IT HAPPEN.

I think artist-initiated projects are always something like that, artist-run galleries are *definitely* like that. I mean, you've really got to believe in what you're putting together because, although the pay-back will consist of many rewards, a salary will certainly not be one of them. In fact, when salaries come in, the vitality and urgency inherent in artist-run spaces usually sneaks out the back door – unnoticed. But you know, sometimes not getting paid works out not too badly, because it means that you're not going to hang around for ever, getting stale, bored and boring. With the best will in the world I guess you can't live without getting paid forever.

Last month I was part of a group show at City Racing in London. There were four artists involved in the show (Annette Heyer, Andrew Lockhart, Julie Roberts and myself). We had been invited to participate by the committee of Transmission Gallery in Glasgow. Concurrently at Transmission there was a show of the artists who run the City Racing space (Paul Noble, Matthew Hale, Keith Coventry, Peter Owen and John Burgess). It was a valuable and rewarding exchange. An exchange between two artist-run galleries.

Both Transmission and City Racing were founded on a similar desire to just get out there. Get out there and show your work with people you respect in circumstances of which you are in complete control. These galleries continue to thrive by providing a sym-

pathetic context for artists where there's space and time (although usually not too much money) to try out new ideas. There is freedom to experiment with different forms, different approaches – installation for example. Fundamentally, though, a context is created where market pressures need only intrude if desired. It can be quite an eye-opener working professionally with other artists – individuals whose main concern is the work, who have experience of producing, organis-

### 2 ART MONTHLY

ing and showing work from the artist's point of view. I've found this always produces a certain frankness and honesty about the business of ART which sometimes seems to be difficult to create in other contexts. It also sets loose the possibilities of collaboration in a working environment which otherwise might be difficult to contrive.

Artist-run ventures are a valuable way of demystifying the business of art. They promote a sharing of information, skills and experience while simultaneously nurturing relationships between artists which can often lead to a more genuinely horizontal and organically developing infrastructure of cultural activity. Often they provide resources which are outside the reach of individuals.

While two spaces like Transmission and City Racing were founded on a similar premise, they are highly individual and idiosyncratic.

Transmission started in 1983 and is a registered charity with a constitution. It is run by a committee of between 4-6 artists who generally stay on the committee for not more than two years. It has a membership of over 150 artists and interested individuals. This committee structure means that the core group which organises the space is always evolving and growing.

It is an organic infrastructure able to build from its strengths and learn from its mistakes. Over the past ten years Transmission has earned the grudging respect of funding bodies and proved itself an important player by keeping its doors firmly open over the past couple of years while the rest of the Scottish contemporary art scene took an enforced sabbatical. Transmission now receives realistic public funding and shows new contemporary work from a cross-section of national and international artists.

City Racing started in 1988 and grew from an artist's studio in a squat to an exhibition space. City Racing has only recently begun to receive any public funding. As yet, it has no constitution or charitable status, it just seemed like a good idea at the time – and continues to do so.

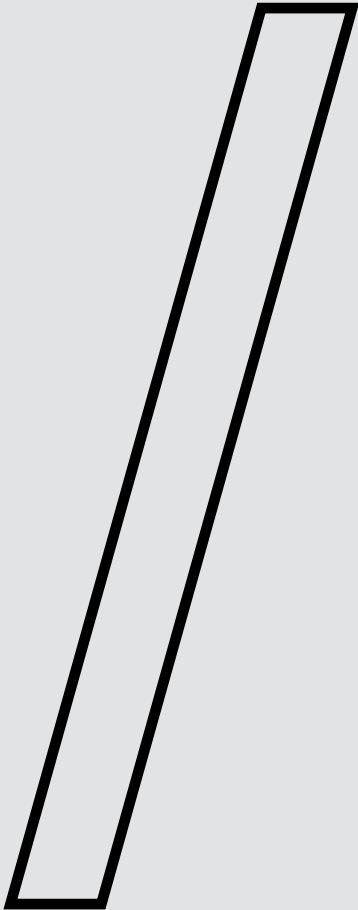
It is a plain and sobering fact that the recession has proved unendurable for many galleries, large and small, up town, down town and outta' town. It's interesting, though, that while many commercial galleries have battened down the hatches, drawn in their horns or *closed down altogether*, artist-run spaces like Transmission and City Racing have remained largely unaffected.

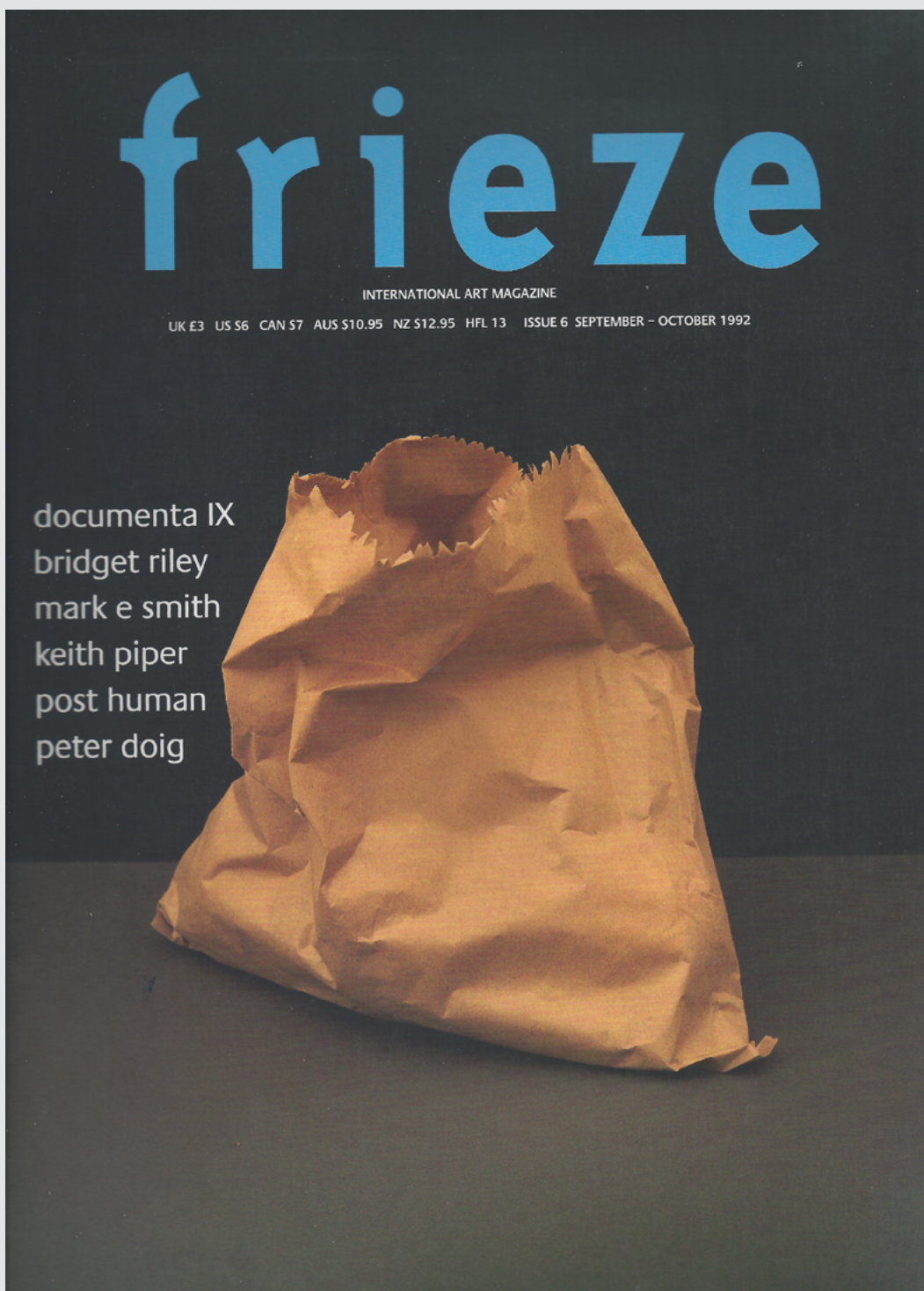
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Artist-run spaces in the Nineties will provide a healthy alternative to the latest art world malaise. That is, the tendency towards large scale, centralised 'blockbuster' art shows. These Dinosaurs usually take years to organise, and require massive funding to feed their ravenous administrative appetites. They are usually packaged for the public in a patronisingly simplified and easily marketable manner. While the most interesting work of the past decades has sought to shift the balance of power and responsibility on to the viewer, these dinosaur shows seem to do all they can to snatch it away again.

In a blurring of the boundaries between street theatre and big movie entertainment, often the only tangible thing these shows represent is an inane manifestation of curatorial megalomania. The intimate nature of artist-run spaces will become a breath of fresh air as the roaring Nineties kick into gear, globalising culture like never before. They will continue to provide an experimental sand-pit for young ambitious artists. And they'll *still* provide the 'big boys' with the fodder they need to mount next year's big thing. Pretty good value for (zero) money, eh? So, get out there – get your hands dirty – play around in the mud a bit – get together with a few friends, put on some shows, get up people's noses a bit. But do it now, before it's too late. And don't worry about doing it wrong – *just do it*, and remember, as Christopher Wool would say, 'FUCK 'EM IF THEY CAN'T TAKE A JOKE'





## Julie Roberts

CCA, Glasgow

23 June - 18 July 1992

Don't you think sometimes that the whole protracted saga about painting being dead, dead on, or indeed neither of the two sometimes is just *dead boring*. Artists do it, dealers deal it, collectors buy it and here you are reading about it. I mean, *get over it*. For young British artists, painting seems a bit like flares or *Top of the Pops*, variously cool or uncool, next years new style or last year's old fashions, sometimes taking a back seat but never disappearing altogether.

It seems that there's quite a lot of young artists painting at the moment. The most interesting and engaging of this work is often shored up with some sturdy conceptual foundations or alternatively stripped of all associative elements and described variously as 'process', 'formalist', or sometimes rather optimistically as 'spiritual'. Julie Roberts' recent paintings seem to fall neatly outside any of these familiar strategies yet remain engaging, curious and well, really quite beautiful.

This is odd since at first glance the paintings themselves appear to be inhabited by equipment and contraptions liberated from an Orwellian psychodrama located in the torture chamber of some Stalinist Euro Gulag. You might be forgiven for thinking that they're just the surplus props from a drab Frankenstein B-movie, where draped sheets conceal hidden shapes, and impressions of bodies

left on pillows look as though they might still be warm. It is with some relief you realise that these images are nothing of the kind. The objects Roberts paints are, in fact, the latest thing in state of the art medical furniture and apparatus.

Contrary to the potential melodrama inspired by such concerns, Roberts approaches her subjects in a detached and straightforward manner. The objects themselves (and they are always objectified) are presented routinely, isolated on a large flat field of some appropriately nondescript tone. Her larger canvases are generally more successful than the smaller groups. In these larger paintings the objects have more room to breathe. They appear to be floating in a vacuum, unattached to any of the surfaces which surround them, in suspended animation.

Roberts selects her subjects variously from glossy hardware brochures sent as mailshots to consultants, and personal visits to various hospitals such as the Honved Central Hospital in Budapest where she photographs pieces *in situ*. Whatever form the research takes, the objects are painted from photographs.

Much of the equipment she chooses to picture in her gloomy, brooding paintings is designed (by men) with the purpose of rendering the patient (often a woman) prone, motionless and physically inert. The paintings propose an examination of the relationship between the individual and the institution of Medicine, public and private, amateur vs. professional. They evoke a difficult situation when, past the point of our intervention we have given ourselves up to Science.

So, obliquely, but without exception, the works in this show allude to the body collapsing and failing us which is kind of interesting from an artist who is at an age when everyone still thinks they're going to live forever. Thankfully there is no evidence of a mid-life menopausal death fixation (male or female) here. What is apparent is that for many years now the constant trail of diseased and broken bodies that flicker across our TV screens have managed to render once distressing images of the bodies fragility commonplace, abstract and banal. The images Roberts presents to us, cool and detached, are all the more ghoulish for the very absence of the body. The objects she paints



**Julie Roberts**  
Obstetrics &  
Gynaecology  
Couch - Invitro  
Fertilisation  
Unit, Glasgow  
Royal Infirmary.  
Oil on Canvas,  
1992

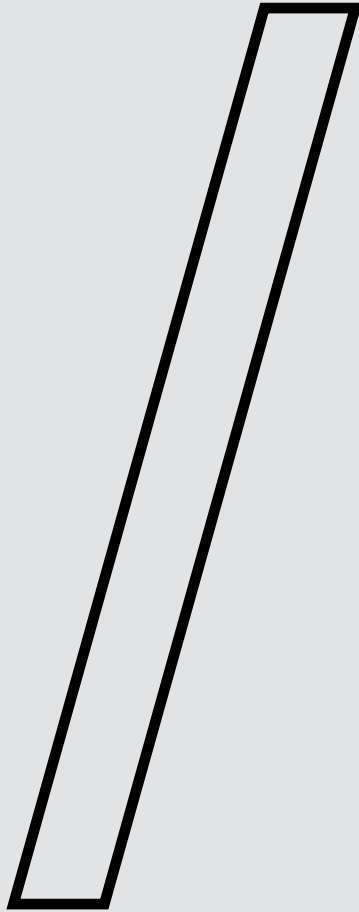
appear beckoning and vigilant, sentinel like. A human presence is implied, but always removed. They kind of look as if they are waiting just for *you* to fall ill. Roberts paints these works in series, designed to imply a certain feel or aura depending on equipment selected. Always they are imbued with a strong institutional aura, the unmistakable dulled routine of hospital life.

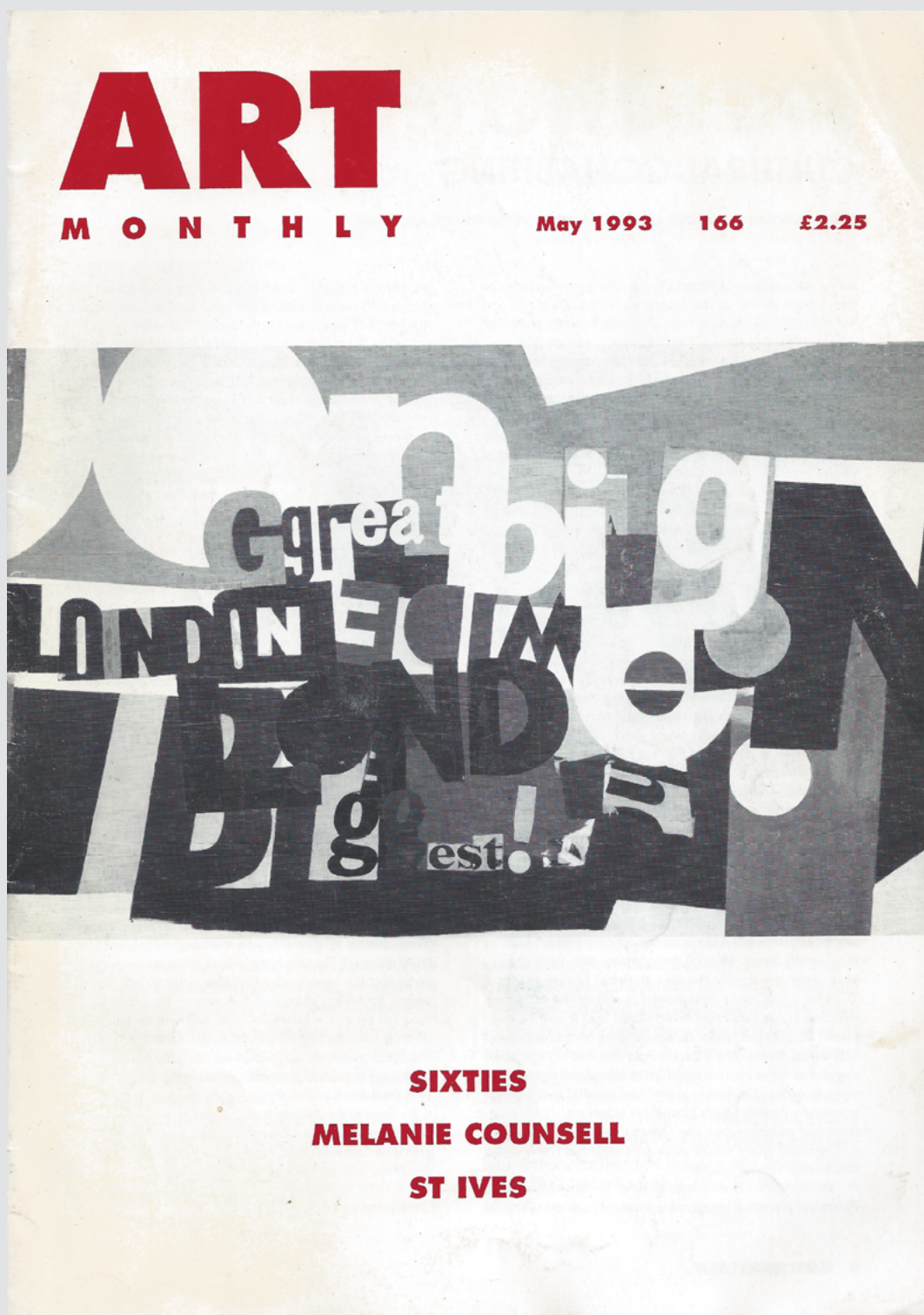
Roberts often goes along to visit the doctors in the hospitals who use this equipment to chat about what kind of impression this apparatus leaves on its patients and how they the doctors respond to it. The doctors in turn are always interested to know exactly what interest an artist could possibly have in such specialised pieces as the In Vitro Fertilisation unit or the latest line in silicone breast implants. Of course the doctors believe in the *Science* of their medicine and distance themselves emotionally from their 'tools' and 'subjects'. It is consequently a reappraisal of this psychological and emotive response to the hardware of modern medicine that is proposed in Roberts' work.

It is difficult to ignore that implicit in this area of investigation is a discourse with the dialectics of Feminist theory. The very subject matter of medicine she chooses is of course a political issue. Can the re-appropriation of the body, affir-

mation of the right to choose and representing, in fact physically reforming the tools of Medicine become politicised through the act of painting? Contrary to certain notions of Feminist art theory Roberts does not attempt to confront or re-formulate ideas of painting itself. Her actual painting style is representational and functional, almost style-less. The work presents the viewer with contradictions – it demands that a position be taken. Roberts appears disinterested in elongated debates about the pros and cons of contemporary painting and instead gets on with the job at hand. In doing so she appears to abdicate a certain responsibility for the work, but in the process she just manages to transpose it on to the viewer.

**Ross Sinclair**





## TRACY MACKENNA

Walking around this show at the CCA in Glasgow you get the eerie feeling of things fast approaching some kind of critical mass. But you can't really tell whether this work is the start of something, the end of something, or whether it's just stuck right in the middle. Whichever it is, Tracy Mackenna's show is ambitious and impressive, occupying both galleries with related installations made specifically for the space.

Over the past five or six years Mackenna has split her time between Glasgow and a number of different European cities, living in Hungary for a couple of years and showing work in diverse contexts during these visits. For some reason she is now beginning to get lumped together with a slightly younger generation of Scottish artists – Gordon, Borland, Roberts, etc. – in an attempt to construct some kind of Scottish neo-conceptual school. I can't see the connection myself and the whole notion seems far from accurate, promoted by people who must surely have been fast asleep during their art history lessons. I guess it's always easier to talk about a 'new Scottish posse' or the 'Manchester milieu', rather than taking the trouble to discuss the breadth of work which is usually going on.

Mackenna's work reflects this breadth and in the smaller of the two connected galleries she transformed the space in a work called *Dispersion, Glasgow*, by completely covering the floor with a pale yellow, marbled linoleum. Inset into this flooring are many short texts fabricated using a prototypical computer-aided design process. Bold red veins intersect across the floor, rem-

iniscent of rock fissures or markings on maps where rivers begin or disappear underground. The walls are bare and the only architectural feature, a pillar, is painted a pale yellow. The overall feeling generated while walking around the room is curiously domestic and the white walls glow warmly with the reflected light from the floor and pillar. Many of the texts in the lino floor were derived from diaries and photographs made whilst the artist was living in some of the cities mapped in the other works in the show. The intensely personal nature of these texts reflects on the minutiae observed in hours spent wandering around a foreign or alien place when perception seems sensitised to the tiniest details, which quickly fade from an over-familiar setting. Some of the textual fragments eclipse this hypersensitivity and evoke the poetics of a sexual longing. All the texts, even those comprising one short line, seem tinged with a latent frustration, albeit in the form of a fragmented poetry. The viewers are free to wander around this room mapping their own narratives.

The larger space seems cold, clinical and very public by comparison. Here, the work consists of seven glass panels, each eight foot square, which lean precariously against the wall separated from the floor by grey wooden blocks. The light seems blue, like the cold glow from an open refrigerator. Sandblasted out of the middle of these glass panels are drawings of street maps from seven city centres: Baghdad, Berlin, Budapest, Bucharest, Bratislava, Belgrade and Brussels. On the facing wall are two series of smaller works: glass studies depicting details from the city maps, and a series of paintings entitled *Eight Alternatives*. These depict patches of colour the size and shape of autumn leaves which also resemble provinces within nations, isolated in a way which reminded me of seeing for the first time

the many separate states which made up the now defunct USSR or the former Yugoslavia.

Sorry to say, I never did work out why all the cities shown on the large glass panels started with the letter B. The way in which their titles were displayed implied a list from a dictionary or encyclopaedia, but they weren't in alphabetical order and the selection seemed far from arbitrary. With the exception of Baghdad, they are all cities familiar to the artist. Consequently, one

had to be sure to keep referencing the private meanderings of the other space, because without this, it was somewhat difficult to get past the polarising of Baghdad and Brussels at each end of the space, with the capital cities of war-torn Europe stuck in between. One could sense a tension between the introspection of a personal geography, in contrast to the ruthless indifference of political expediency witnessed in these cities. As individual objects these windows are very seductive, their frosted greeny-blue maps casting intricate shadows on the polished grey gallery floor. But read in isolation they seemed almost too beautiful, too aestheticised.

The end result of the juxtaposition of all these components led to an uncomfortable feeling of dislocation – one felt implicated, if only by inaction. The focus of the show fell on the relationship between the two distinct spaces, with their respectively private and public personae, warm and cold, individual and ideological. Within this relationship Mackenna examines complex and problematic euro-relationships from an individual's standpoint, an experience lived and acutely personal, in opposition to the vicarious generalities of a mediated view.

While I was writing some notes just outside the smaller gallery, I was

accosted by an irate member of the public, who raged on about the fact there was nothing on the walls. He insisted indignantly that this was a waste of a show in a public gallery and that empty space should be filled! Ironically enough, if he'd taken the trouble to look down he would have seen the words 'Space watcher' ingrained in the linoleum under his feet. It's no coincidence that even before one stepped into the installation, Mackenna was urging one towards the *unfilled* space between its different referents.

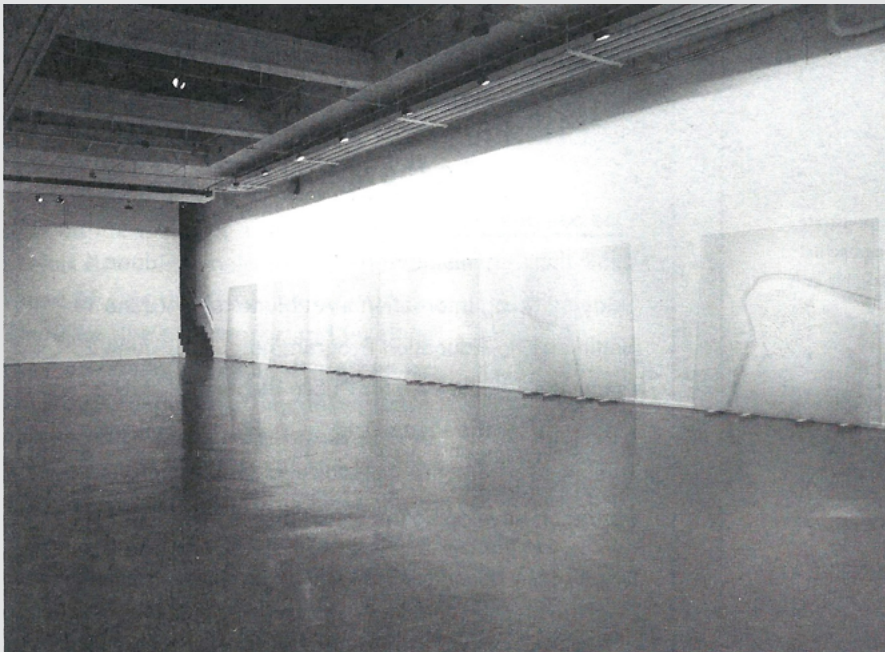
Somewhere within these ambiguous relationships lie the meanings of this work.

Ross Sinclair

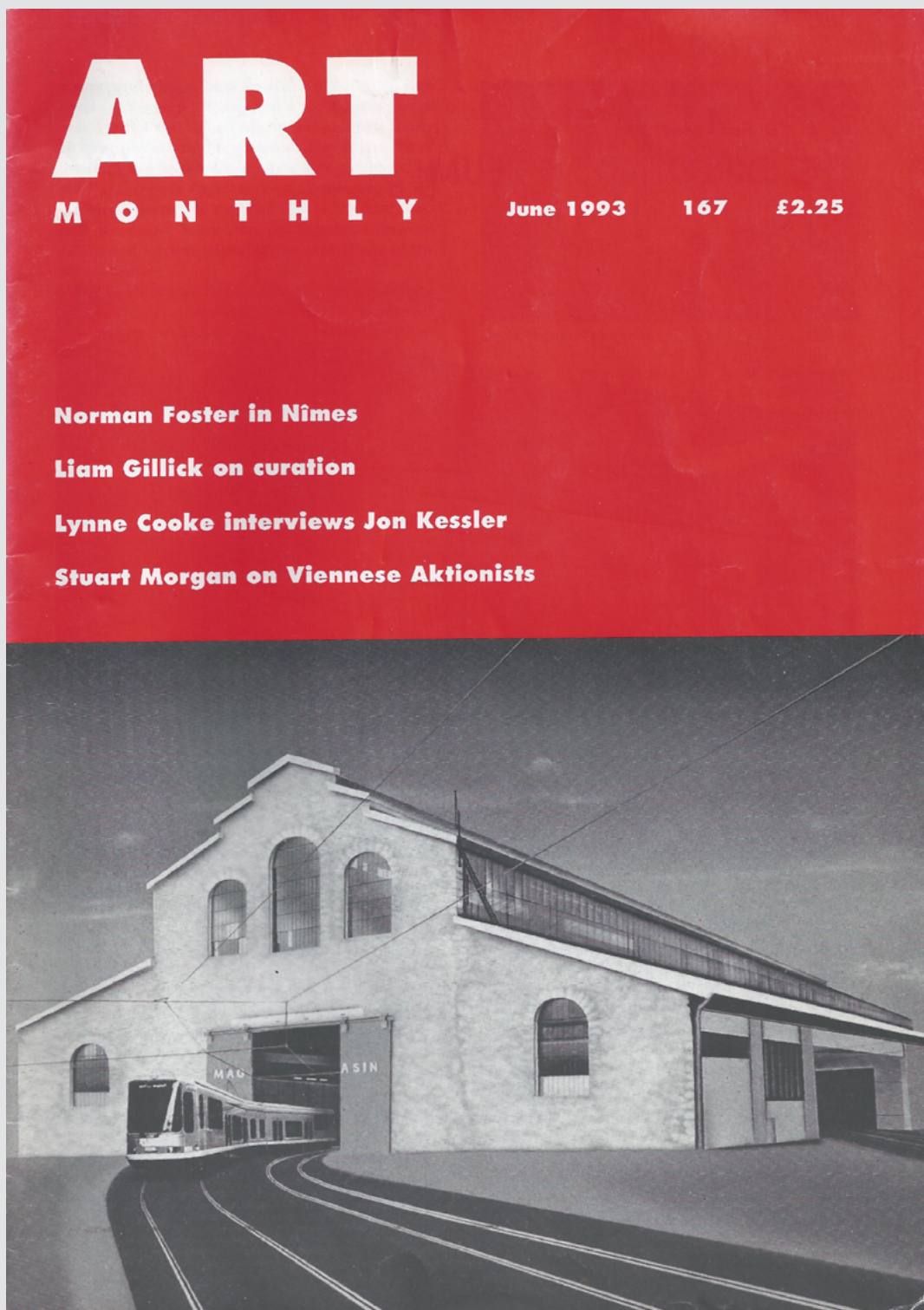
Tracy Mackenna was at CCA Galleries, Glasgow Mar 27-Apr 24.

*Ross Sinclair is a Glasgow-based artist*

**ART MONTHLY 23**



Tracy Mackenna, Installation, CCA Glasgow



## DOUGLAS GORDON

*24 Hour Psycho* is a pretty good idea. And with it Gordon has generated a good deal of interest. One reason for this success was the ease with which this *idea* captured the imagination of a wide cross-section of the public, both inside and outside the art-world. Local papers lambasted its supposedly *pretentious* and *ludicrous* intentions. Updates were run on what exactly *Mr. Gordon* will get up to next. And what about the weird letters and phone calls this 'artist' *inflicts* on people? It can't possibly be art.

The cult status of the original version has, in a strange way, been transferred to this event, over 30 years after *Psycho* was first released. Everyone is talking about *24 Hour Psycho*. Members of the outraged public cannot believe someone would do this and have the audacity to call it their own work. Housewives are writing letters of protest to the evening papers. But there's an interesting twist to all this, which is that once people actually look at the work, they all seem to love it. *24 Hour Psycho* jumps in at the deep end of the debate surrounding authorship and art which Duchamp kicked into high gear 80 years ago. It throws back in your face preconceptions about High culture vs. Popular culture, with contradictions a go-go. In the mind's eye it conjures up a compelling picture of *24 Hour Psychosis* – a pathological *rock around the clock*.

To realise this unsettling proposal, Gordon slowed down Hitchcock's Oedipal tale of morality, voyeurism and desire so that it lasts for 24 hours. And if you think that's not really a particularly long time to sit through a movie (compared to an average week's TV viewing), then you'll need to wait for Gordon's version of *The Searchers*. He's considering elongating the length of that in parallel with John Wayne's epic search for his girl. So how about watching *The Searchers* stretched to *five years* – if you've got nothing better to do?

At Tramway Gordon has suspended a cinema screen 15' x 10' in the middle of the cavernous interior, which has

been entirely blacked out. There's no sound either, so the first impression on entering the space is disorientating to say the least. After you've fumbled your way towards the screen and your eyes slowly become accustomed to the gloom, you see that there are a few benches scattered around. To get a reasonable impression of what the hell's going on you really have to stay put on one of these uncomfortable benches for at least a couple of hours.

Gordon selected *Psycho* mainly for its familiarity, its age, and above all its distance. Over the years, analysis of this movie has been a must for film critics and students everywhere. In the shower scene it has what is arguably the most famous moment in the history of cinema. Its blend of morality and murder is a compelling mix, but the strict and linear timescale of the movie is a stronger indication of the artist's intentions.

I don't believe that the work *24 Hour Psycho* is really about the movie *Psycho* at all. In fact I think if it is then the project has failed. Nor do I understand it as a tribute, *Hommage à Hitchcock*. I don't even think Gordon is trying to deconstruct the legend of this infamous director. *Psycho* is only the bait. And much like the other aspects of Gordon's multi-faceted art practice, it is the bold,

larger-than-life top-line. Part of the game Gordon plays is to challenge the viewer, goading them to delve under their first impressions. If you can forget for just a minute about Anthony Perkins and Janet Leigh, in fact, ignore *Psycho* altogether, then the core of the work begins to become a little clearer...

Gordon chose this film because the basic narrative was very well known. So, in theory, it should have worked just as well with *Carry on up the Khyber* or *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. Well, almost as well, but not as cool. What is important is the viewer's relationship to their memory and understanding of the film. How does the perception of that memory change when the narrative is all but destroyed. In Gordon's version, there's really no way to understand the storyline (without which the film is, of course, meaningless) when it is stretched so badly out of shape. So you begin to see the details, you read between the lines. Every emotion and response is magnified to an almost comical degree. As a viewer you begin to construct meanings from the symbolic and metaphorical possibilities of each individual shot which really are not there. Much of the 'action' becomes abstract and formal. I think it is fair to say that these sections are Gordon's.

They comprise elements that never could have been consciously intended by the director and as such Gordon could arguably claim authorship of them.

The whole spectacle of *24 Hour Psycho* is compelling, and it only starts to wane when a single scene (often conversations between two people) continues to burn on the screen for half an hour or so. A three hour viewing slot at the end, which represents approximate-

ly the last reel of the film, is a genuinely memorable experience. And let's be honest, I can't remember the last time I spent three hours sitting contemplating an artwork *in situ*. It was a refreshing experience indeed.

It's important, however, to view *24 Hour Psycho* in the context of Gordon's other projects. It wouldn't work so well if it hadn't been preceded by the phone calls, the letters, the text works and the paintings. The audacity and spectacle of *24 Hour Psycho* is tempered by the ongoing investigation and re-contextualisation involved in his other strategies. The different elements of his practice combine to form one single thread.

There is an element of humour within this thread of work which is often ignored. In the advertising campaign for *24 Hour Psycho*, the artist is pictured standing on the central reservation of a deserted motorway holding a hand-written sign saying simply, *Psycho*. He doesn't look particularly inviting, a black hat pulled down over his eyes. In this hilariously literal analogy, he is doing his best to look awful, while hitching a lift. We, as viewers, are in the

driving seat, so to speak, but he challenges us. Do we stop to pick him up? Is he a psycho? Is he going to a place called Psycho? Do we take the chance on what could be the ride of our lives or simply drive on down the road? I don't know, I couldn't stop laughing long enough to make up my mind.

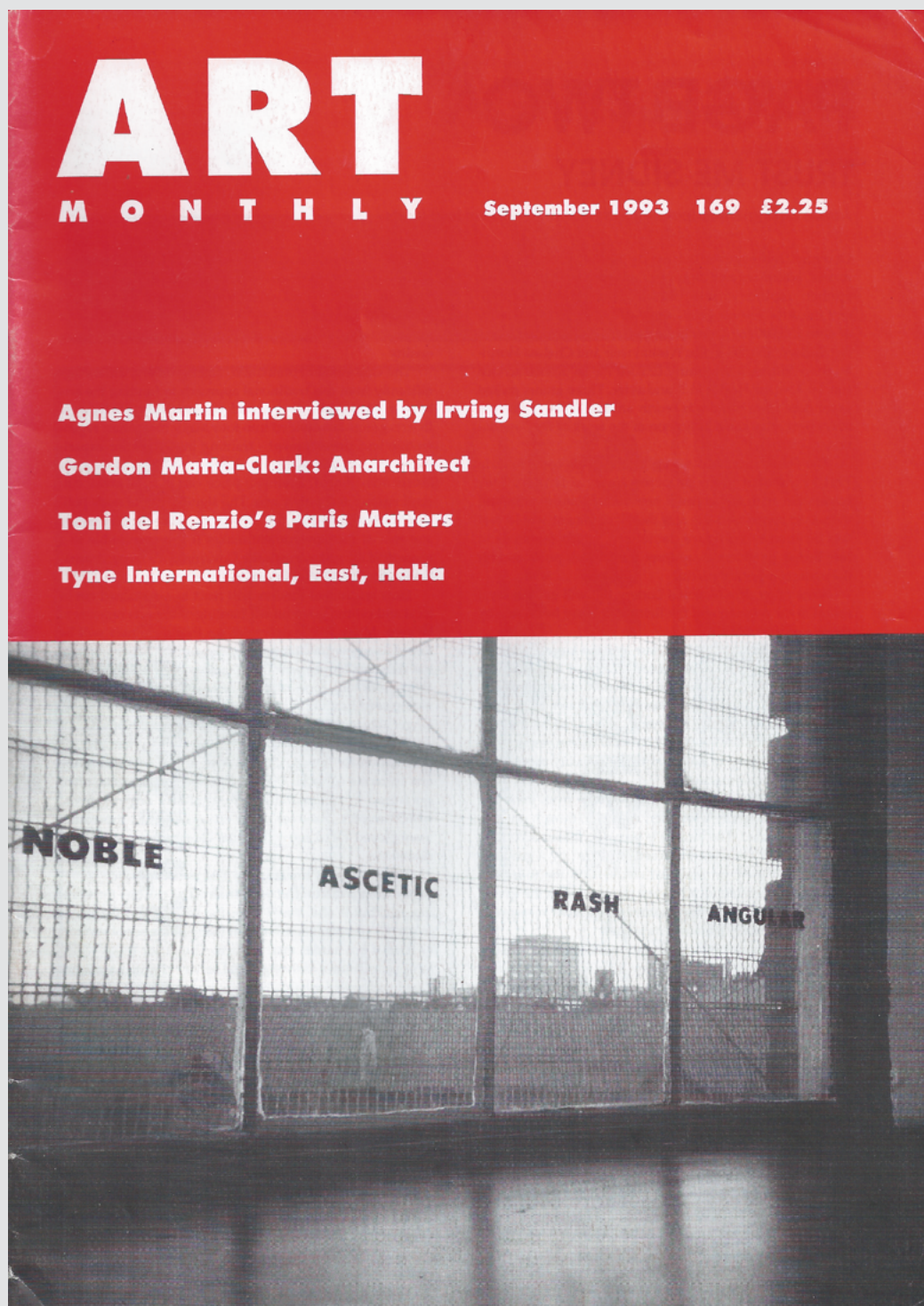
Ross Sinclair

**Douglas Gordon's 24 Hour Psycho** was at Tramway, Glasgow Apr 24-May 23.

*Ross Sinclair is an artist and critic*



**Douglas Gordon, 24 Hour Psycho, 1993**



## II TYNE INTERNATIONAL

As a keen-eyed visitor to the opening of the Second Tyne International, one felt somewhat special – like an intrepid explorer on an epic voyage, wandering the streets of Newcastle, searching for works of art by 15 artists which had been secreted at various locations around the city. One had a sense of achievement on discovering a much-sought piece of work in spite of the ambiguous and misleading information provided. As in most difficult and stressful situations, groups of people

banded together, pooling their resources, attempting to fathom the meanings encoded in these (sort of) topographical maps.

I know that with all the will in the world exhibitions are still having their last minute make-up applied as people are streaming in the door, but – come on, this was beyond a joke. Having driven down from Glasgow and slept in the van overnight, I felt a little aggrieved that none of the video work, for example, which comprised a whole floor of the central venue, the CWS warehouse, was functioning. Chaos reigned. No-one seemed to know where anything was, or who the artists were. Okay, most of it did get sorted out by the time I returned to the main venue after a few frustrating hours trying to find the other works. But even then, the programme was almost impossible to watch as the sound from half a dozen different pieces merged together in the

same echoing space. It was a pity, as the video programme looked promising. Since many of the people who travelled some distance to the opening may not get a chance to return, it was a shame things were in such disarray.

Of course it could (should!) be argued that the project wasn't supposed to be a comfy guided tour for out-of-town critics. Some of the most engaging and potent public work surfacing of late has been strategically contrived for the most obscure (and appropriate) places. This can lead to a valuable one-on-one engagement with the unsuspecting viewer, shifting responsibility towards them to decide exactly what this disruption of the regular channels of public communication could mean. I got the feeling however that the Tyne wasn't supposed to be like that. Much of the work was A-R-T, – in your face, (and some of it was labelled in large letters just in case you didn't get it). Very few of the 'public' works outside the main venue were actually outside, and certain sites were so loaded to begin with (like the Tyne Bridge Towers) that they seemed like lost causes from the start. This particular venue wasn't helped, though, by the appalling works it contained. The Brazilian, Tunga, in the south Tower, was by far the most disappointing. His work *Seeding Mermaids* was a risible attempt to 'recreate a

macabre dream-like memory' in which 'the Mandragora, germinated from the semen ejaculated from the penis of a hanged man, with sensual references to decapitation, drowning and death in a far off garden etc.' I've seen some interesting work by Tunga but what exactly he was up to here is anybody's guess. If

I hadn't known better I'd have thought the work was a piss-take by some local art students. It really was that bad.

One would have to take curator Corinne Diserens at her word when she insisted in the last issue of *Art Monthly* that there was no theme to the Tyne International and that 'if you're commissioning new work you can't have a theme'. All the better, I would take new work over 'theme' any day. It was a pity then, that while Vito Acconci was very well represented he only made one new work. The rest were reconstructions or straight documentation of work from the early 70s to the present, including *VD Lives/TV Must die* from '78 and his *Seedbed* performance from '71. Presumably this collection was to serve as an introduction to Acconci and as that it was very interesting but at the same time somewhat limited. His selection of models for urban projects on display were fascinating, a bizarre vision of large scale public art projects for sites as disparate as the Ronald McDonald house ('87) and the MOCA canopy, Los Angeles ('88).

Also in the CWS warehouse, Readymades Belong to Everyone set up shop on the first floor with their peculiar brand of post-object objects. There was an office/studio overflowing with RBTE goodies 'conceived on behalf of their clients' – postcards, packing cases, floor tiles, books, photos, etc with palletes of the 'Readymades' brand goods sitting around the loading bay waiting for distribution. Philippe Thomas has been developing RBTE in New York and Paris since 1987 but is planning to close it down in the near future. The Tyne International could be your first and last chance to see it in the UK – enjoy.

been developing RBTE in New York and Paris since 1987 but is planning to close it down in the near future. The Tyne International could be your first and last chance to see it in the UK – enjoy.

Amikam Toren showed his 'Of the Times' paintings in which he pulps one issue of the London Times (bar the dated masthead from the front page) and reconstitutes the paper and ink as a painting medium, 'painting' one letter

of the alphabet on each canvas. Also dotted around the warehouse were the Armchair Paintings. These are small paintings bought from market stalls and junk shops, usually kitsch landscapes, where Toren cuts out a particular phrase or word. These texts are drawn from a variety of sources – signs, graffiti etc., and provide an ambiguous and sometimes shocking juxtaposition with the banality of the images. It's ironic, though, that the work in the CWS warehouse (basically a gallery) was generally the most successful in a project dedicated to non-gallery venues.

Out of the warehouse there were

some memorable highlights provided by Rodney Graham, Christine Borland and Sam Samore. Graham's work, *School of Velocity*, was one of the very few works that appeared to be in perfect sympathy with its site (previously a music room in a slightly grandiose and bizarre 'folly') and as such benefited greatly. The work featured a Disclavier Grand Piano (high tech pianola) programmed to play a piece by Carl Czerny which decreased in tempo using the time-squared law of Galileo so that it lasted for one solar day. Towards the end of each cycle the piano would be silent for a few minutes to

then resound with a brief flourish of notes. It was quite something. There was also a score for the new version bound in hourly sections presented for the viewer's inspection. It was a simple idea and all the more successful for its crisp formalism.

Borland's *A Place Where Nothing has Happened* was almost impossible to find without help but this didn't seem particularly out of keeping with the piece. She worked in collaboration with Northumbria Police presenting a scientific and forensic analysis of the immediate site surrounding a Portakabin situated in a semi-derelict area of the Quayside, then presented the results like the finds from an archaeological dig. The site stands waiting, in a period of transition between its previous use, forthcoming demolition and subsequent redevelopment. Borland records the unique temporary condition of the site. Samore transformed All Saints Church with the addition of an adjective on every pane of glass in the building. As each window was made up of about thirty panes, it felt as though there were thousands of words flying around in the space, jostling for your attention. These adjectives were gathered from fairy tales, legends, hagiographies etc. relating to the All Saints Church and Northumbria.

There are a number of accompanying events to the Tyne International which sound interesting including works by Nan Goldin and a project by Rémy Zaugg, as well as a programme at the Tyneside Cinema and a residency by the Chilean Gonzalo Diaz. However, in spite of its impressive international roster and 'on paper' potential, the Second Tyne International appears destined to go down in history with the recent 'euro-art' dinosaurs documenta and The Venice Biennale as another disappointment. I wonder if there will ever be a Third Tyne International?

### Ross Sinclair

The 2nd Tyne International, curated by Corinne Diserens, will run until Sep 5. The catalogue will be available in September. See **Correspondence** on p. 30 for a letter from the curator.

*Ross Sinclair is an artist and critic*



Rodney Graham, *The School of Velocity*, 1993



# The Morning after the Eighties

Elsie Mitchell, Birmingham Billboard Project  
and Intermedia Gallery

*Ross Sinclair reports on three new artist-run projects*

In much the same way as serious rock bands like the Rolling Stones, U2 and R.E.M. serve their apprenticeship to stardom in the gritty reality of the club circuit, before gaining mainstream acceptance, the artist initiated project has become almost a pre-requisite for success in the current, post-entrepreneurial atmosphere of nineties art practice. Tucked away in the biog. of many current art-world darlings are the details of their formative artist initiated projects, and how they provided the springboard for their previously undiscovered talents. While these kind of shows/projects may have served a useful purpose in the late eighties, the climate has changed and so have artist run projects. Certain things have, however remained static. Provision for publicly funded spaces certainly hasn't improved, and the number of private galleries has probably decreased, so there still is the same incentive for getting out there and doing it yourself.

The following is a report on three new projects which could roughly be termed 'artist-run'. One is a temporary exhibition space, one a residency and one a billboard project. Each project has benefited from a first hand knowledge of the highs and lows of earlier projects, and in different ways has expanded the contextual base from which an engagement with the work begins.

Over the past year **Elsie Mitchell** has been artist in residence for the Glasgow South and South East area. Nothing new there of course. Residencies for artists go on all the time in a wide number of situations, some dynamic and some very boring. What is slightly different is the way in which Elsie Mitchell contrived her year in residence. The self-determined aims of this project was to improve access to contemporary visual art for people who fall outwith the mainstream art education

system. She viewed the works—initiated through a series of workshop situations in the Gorbals and Castlemilk—as collaborations with the individuals concerned. She rightly eschewed tired notions of permanent site-specific works and therapeutic 'hand skills' in favour of a more flexible and innovative approach. Unique to this residency was the fact that Mitchell had been invited to show the results of this year of collaboration at the Tramway, in Glasgow—a traditional 'high art' gallery space.

Most of the works, including books, tape-slide presentations, videos and light-boxes, were conceived and executed with the exhibition in mind. In that sense, Mitchell and her cohorts worked in the same way any group of artists would prepare for a show. In this

exhibition—Work from a Residency—Mitchell has exhibited the fruits of the workshops alongside new work she has made herself, in a bold attempt to democratise the gallery space. The new piece she exhibited was titled 'Language', a 16mm film installation using projected images of people using British Sign Language. The work observes the development of B.S.L. from the first words/signs of a deaf child communicating with her mother; to the fully developed language of an adult signer. Mitchell saw this work paralleling the development of a visual language in the people she collaborated with during her residence. In her introduction to the catalogue she says, *"Language is the basis of power and to deny equal access to it deliberately keeps people from realizing their own potential"*. This idea of empowerment appears central to the premise of her residence—quite the opposite of creating a dependence on the artist as is so often the case in community art.

I don't know if I was completely convinced by the premise of importing

the results of the residency into a gallery context, using materials and techniques normally associated with blue-chip gallery art. It was a little confusing and difficult to tell where the display of documentation ended and the art began. The two demand a very different viewing engagement, and if you exhibit art in this gallery context then you must expect the work to be viewed and criticised with the same rigour as any other exhibition. For the viewer to adopt an overly sympathetic position would be patronising—and by this criteria, some of the pieces inevitably look flawed.

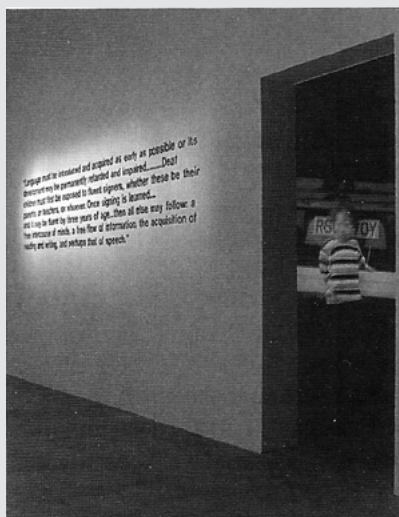
During the course of the residency, Mitchell exhibited a piece of her own work in an empty shop unit at Castlemilk shopping arcade. This proved to be an extraordinarily successful venture, proving that regular members of the public are interested in art, given half a chance. While most city-centre galleries attract about the same number of people that would normally comprise a bus queue, over 1000 people came to see Mitchell's piece in 10 days.

This impressive statistic pales slightly, however, when assessing the potential impact of the **Birmingham Billboard Project**. Its creator and co-ordinator, **Graham Fagen**, informed me that a recent survey indicated that the vehicular traffic passing the site on the Snowhill Queensway in the centre of Birmingham was 750,000 weekly, with the pedestrian count totalling 150,000.

Fagen's project appears to have been modelled to some extent on the *Bellgrove Billboard Project* organised in Glasgow by Alan Dunn in '90-'91. Like Bellgrove, the Birmingham project lasted for 12 months with a different artist contributing a work each month. In contrast to Bellgrove's particular location in an unmanned train station in the east end of Glasgow, Fagen's project was smack in the middle of Birmingham, directly across the road from the Headquarters of the infamous West Midlands Constabulary.

Fagen moved to Birmingham two years ago, just in time to see the beginning of the city's attempt to move away from its reputation as an unwelcoming concrete jungle, epitomised by the Bull Ring, a massive concrete shopping centre at its heart. Over the past couple of years, the city has commissioned a

glut of permanent public works, designed to re-focus the mental image of the city centre on Victoria Square, a kind of piazza style area stretching from the Conference Centre at Centenary Square to the City Hall. It's rumoured the city has spent £6m. redeveloping the area and it's apparent that a good chunk of this budget was spent on public art. Some of this work is nothing short of appalling, particularly near the Conference Centre. Patronising works celebrate the city's industrial history with predictable clichés and formal disasters. The worst offender is Raymond Mason's *Forward* sculpture, looking more like a slab of melting butter than the celebratory statement one would assume it was meant to be. Dhruva Mistry fares much better with his hybrid civic formalism incorporating a massive fountain piece by the city chambers. One of the reasons for its success undoubtedly being that Mistry worked with the architects from the beginning on his ambitious project for the square.



Elsie Mitchell *Language*  
16mm film loop and text  
Tramway 1993

Anthony Gormley offers a monumental and unfathomable leaning figure, 40ft high, rusting away in the piazza like a bad impersonation of the leaning tower of Pisa. Gormley's work was not paid for by the city, it was commissioned by the Bank that likes to say 'Yes'—I wonder if they like it?

Fagens' intention with the billboard was not implicitly to criticise this typically selective redevelopment of the cities image, but to join sincerely in the debate about the possibilities and potential of public art in Birmingham. After all, the project is partially funded by the city council. Showing both local and international artists, he wanted to make available a space in the city where artists could have slightly more freedom and autonomy to add their voice to the debate in progress.

Many of the works in the project reassess different forms of language. Some address dominant mass-media languages while others focused on a political agenda. **Roshini Kempadoo** addressed 'Fortress Europe' in a work entitled *ECU* and the implications for the black communities under threat therein. **Art in Ruins** constructed a work inspired by a Palestinian Intifada song, *My Homeland Is Not A Suitcase*, which expanded this concern through utilising a different formal syntax. This formal style appropriated what Barthes describes as, 'Enchratic Language'; i.e. the prevailing language disseminated under the protection of power. In other words, Art In Ruins' work (and many others in the project) mimicked the kind of sophisticated visual languages usually employed in advertising and public visual culture. This strategy often affords a much greater possibility of engaging the viewer in a genuine dialogue, even for a few seconds, before s/he realises they

are contemplating an artwork and may choose to switch off.

In contrast, one of the Birmingham-based artists, **Sylbert Bolton**, worked directly on site utilising his knowledge of the city centre to create a piece in which he responded, through the formal use of materials, to his experience as a Jamaican-born resident of 'the world culture which is Birmingham'. Bolton's work also provided a break in the relentless monotony of the dominant visual narratives.

As was the case in the Bellgrove project in Glasgow, the Birmingham Billboard on the Snowhill Queensway was erected specifically for the duration of the project and a year later disappeared. How many keen-eyed commuters will sense an imperceptible difference in the visual horizon of the Queensway now this space has gone, as they head for home after a day in the city?

**Intermedia Gallery** in Glasgow initially reflects the most easily recognisable form of artist run activity, that of the temporary gallery space. But on closer inspection it differs considerably from a pre-conceived view of a bunch of scruffy young artists mucking in to show their work in some old warehouse. It differs too from the equally familiar proposition of professional career-orientated artists displaying slick works in novel non-gallery settings for the inspection of dealers and critics.

Intermedia was born out of discussions with Glasgow funding bodies dating back almost two years. Initially it was to have been housed in a disused Victorian market, but transformed through many proposed venues and management until earlier this year when the management of the project was offered to artist **David McMillan**, when suitable premises were finally located in the heart of the Merchant City at 65

Virginia Street.

McMillan then invited proposals for the space and assembled a committee of artists to select the programme, which was scheduled for 4 months, from May to August 1993. It is interesting that Intermedia's funding is a mixture of 'culture money', and business incentive cash that has facilitated the transformation of the space into something resembling a large uptown private gallery in New York. McMillan has done a thorough job in re-fitting the space and it would certainly be worthy of a permanent programme of international exhibitions and events.

The space is funded by the **Glasgow Development Agency** and Glasgow District Council. Additionally, the organisation Breathe has put some money into the last part of the pilot programme. Breathe is a new artist run initiative currently organising a series of exchange projects in Europe and North America. The first of these exchanges is a collaboration with Danish artists who were involved with *Tæpko* in Copenhagen, and this exhibition forms the fourth show at Intermedia.

The shows so far at Intermedia have been varied, though perhaps lacking a certain edge. They have functioned as a platform for some of the most interesting young artists working in Glasgow at the moment, rather than as particularly coherent group shows. Maybe the problem is that most of the artists participating would have been quite capable of tackling the space on their own, and it's possible that four substantial solo shows would have been more exciting and empowering for both artist and viewer, than four shows of six or seven artists. It appears the understandable pressure for this approach came from the funders, a restriction which precluded artists working outside Glasgow from showing. It appears that there is enthusiasm, however, from funding bodies to enable Intermedia to continue

after the initial four month period. It's probable though, that this could be in a different space as commercial properties become leased and vacant with the ebb and flow of the recession.

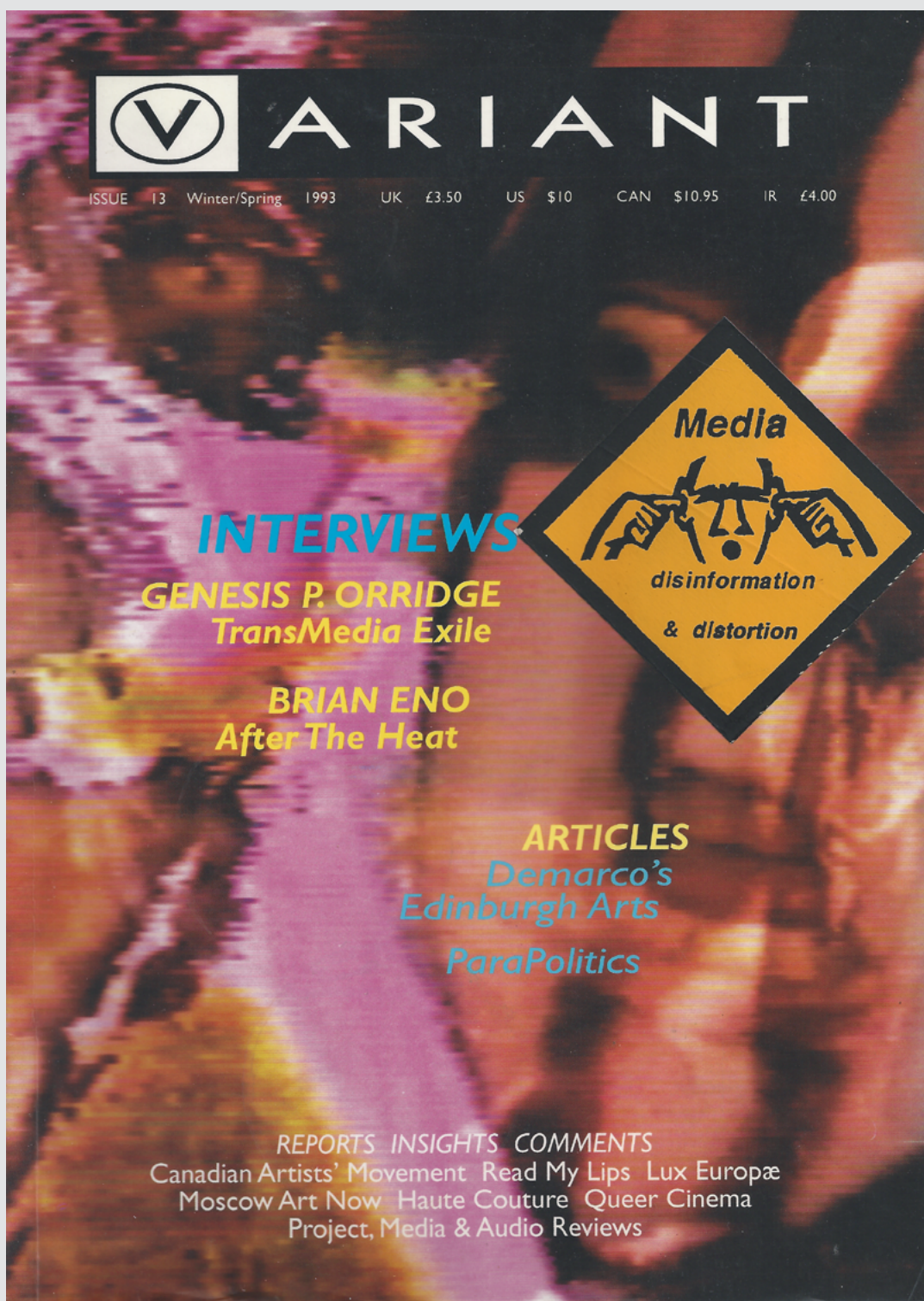
I spoke to Fiona Meechie at the GDA, about the aims of the project, and the response so far. She informed me that the agency has been delighted at the success of Intermedia so far and

there appears a firm commitment to continue this sympathetic attitude with plans afoot for sculpture courts and gardens. She added that the basic aim for the GDA, was simply to get people coming back to the Merchant City, utilising vacant premises in an attempt to give artists an opportunity to show their work. At the District Council, Pamela McMahon reinforced this satisfaction with the initial profile but added that she would like to see the space develop into what she called a "*gallery without identity*", implying a greater access to the space for a much broader section of the community. This appeared to be an implicit criticism of the type of work shown so far in the space and should sound a note of caution for those at Intermedia interested in establishing a serious contemporary art space in the city to compliment Transmission Gallery, C.C.A. and Tramway. There is a danger for Intermedia if its public funders decide that things are not progressing to their satisfaction, that it may in fact cease to operate as an artist run project. It could continue, though, with the funding bodies assuming more direct control over the programming. At that stage, the project 'Intermedia' could be made available to facilitate any kind of project those holding the purse strings may consider worthy. Presumably it would then cease to exhibit *contemporary* art and would no longer contribute to the evolving dialectic within the Scottish art world.

It would be unfortunate to say the least if Glasgow—given its size & energy—was unable to support a second artist co-ordinated space, particularly one with such potential. In keeping with most long-term gallery projects, the test for an initiative like Intermedia will be whether it can consolidate its funding position and grow in reputation as an autonomous exhibition space.

The fact that three projects of the scale and ambition of those outlined above have been active over the past year (alongside, of course, many more) indicates that young artists continue to be far from satisfied with the existing infrastructure of the arts in Britain. It can only be reiterated that the lack of money for public galleries and the simple lack of private spaces means that artist initiated projects will continue to make an important contribution to the

geography of the British art scene for the foreseeable future. Artists are *still* interested in circumventing some of the baggage normally associated with the existing structure of the art world. They want to see what happens when you have an exhibition in a shopping centre or when you erect a space for artists on a public thoroughfare passed by one million people a week. They operate professionally, attracting funding from agencies normally associated with business development—and make a gallery out of it, giving other artists the chance to exhibit in a vital and engaging context. And as long as artists continue to do so, I'll gladly endorse these attempts to push back the boundaries of accepted public discourse and keep my eyes peeled for a healthy dose of imagination and idealism in a climate where I might be least expecting it. ∞



## LUX EUROPÆ

Edinburgh

October 1992 – January 1993

The concepts and intentions which formed the core agenda of *Lux Europæ* grew from a desire of the City of Edinburgh to celebrate Britain's six month Presidency of the European Community. In particular the city wanted to mark the Occasion of the Meeting of the European Council, when Heads of State and government gather in the city in December. The exhibition consisted of outdoor installations of varying scale, placed within the central environs of Edinburgh. There were approximately 30 works by artists representing all 12 European Community member states. Lux received close to one million pounds of funding and sponsorship from a dizzying array of public and private sources.

The press release tells us that the exhibition is taking place at the darkest time of the year in Edinburgh; *"Sculpture placed in orthodox ways will therefore be unsuitable"*. For this reason the organisers have encouraged the use of light as a medium for artists to work with. The theme of light is proposed as an appropriate metaphor for the positive aspects of the European community. We are also informed that many of the works comment on the nature of the community, its diverse culture and common aims. In today's political climate this should pose a challenge.

It is very difficult to know where one can even begin to discuss something as complex and contradictory as *Lux Europæ*. *Lux* is certainly an example of a new trend of large, blockbuster type shows which are fraught with many problems. It is politically loaded, happening at a crucial and unstable

time in the history of the European Community. The celebratory premise is questionable, in this context. But it is happening in Scotland, attracting international interest and initiating relationships which could and should develop. In keeping with this blockbuster genre it is conveniently packaged in a simple and easily marketable manner. Lux has a certain novelty about it and aspires to a public 'user friendliness', a necessary requirement for fundraising.

Unfortunately this particular blockbuster appears to have been packaged to such an extent that you can't help noticing a certain *deja vous* as you wander around the installations in Edinburgh's cold night air. Neon works particularly can be seen in abundance. Ultimately a convenient package of similar work seems to have gained precedence over more complex and rewarding configurations. I was also rather disappointed that some of the more established British artists like **Ian Hamilton Finlay** could have used their 'home advantage' in a more prescient manner. His 75 ft. neon

work, *European Heads*, on New St Andrews house (home of the Scottish Office) seemed to have all the right ingredients but not much else.

While the most challenging and engaging of public art over the past decades has sought to shift responsibility and empower the viewer (which *Lux* artists like Finlay have ironically been a part of), dinosaur events like *Lux* appear to want to take it all away again. Much of the work in *Lux* unfortunately confirms criticisms that contemporary public art functions as little more than a temporary distraction, spectacular and undemanding. Can good work be produced out of such a difficult and prescriptive context?

The Italian **Vittorio Messina** contrived

some interesting relationships in his installation, *Spostamenti sulla banda del rosso*. He selected 24 windows at various points around the city which were illuminated from the inside with an even red light. The obvious inference of a house of ill-repute was offset by the implication of simultane-

ous events occurring all around the city night after night, in a variety of different locations, public and private. A kind of solidarity of illicit activity. **Bernhard Prinz's** *Three Allegories* consisted of large projections on the roof of the 369 Gallery in the Cowgate. The images showed portraits of three women photographed in the austere style reminiscent of mainstream fashion advertising. However instead of posing aimlessly they each make a subtle gesture. One appears with both arms held tightly to her chest while another mimes a knock. They appear to be trying to convey some coded message from the constraints of their representations. The images appear strange, taken from the pages of a glossy magazine and projected into the alien atmosphere of the darkened rooftop.

The works of the younger Scottish artists, each asked to collaborate with another artist from a European member state, were some of the most interesting and insightful. **Nathan Coley** and **Gerard Byrnes'** *Proposal for Portikus, Frankfurt* occupied a disused entrance way at the bottom of the High Street. Glass objects which looked like blank canvases were placed casually around the yard (separated from the street by heavy iron gates) with their appropriate packing cases stacked adjacent. The viewer

was left to decide exactly what was being proposed for the German gallery and how these 'glass paintings' related to the inhospitable context in which they sat. Interestingly, this was one of the very few works which relied on ambient light and seemed to work more effectively through the interesting use of materials and context.

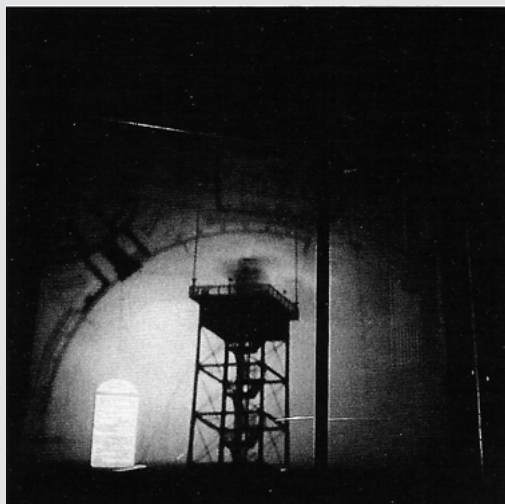
Further up High Street, the film *Festung Europæ: Shifting Peripheries* by **Louise Crawford** and **Stephan Gueneau** was projected in a High Street shop front. This intervention made an interesting break in the continuum of media imagery usually served up with numbing banality in the public arena.

The installation *End-el-echia* (a term used by Aristotle to describe reality as a continuous, unchanging truth) was constructed in a gutted shop by **Kenny Hunter** and **Petros Bazos**. This work re-

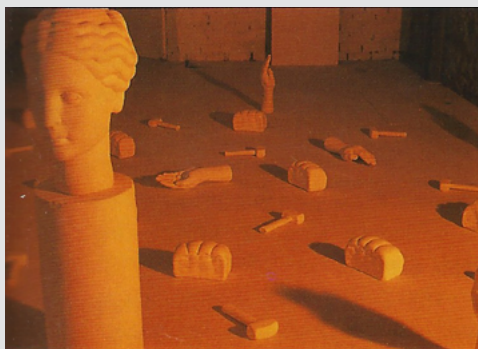
joined in a distinctly theatrical and self consciously neo-classical feel. Strewn around the floor were plaster casts of arms, hammers and loaves which could be seen through a wall of white blocks which almost filled the windows. The windows were lit with a very cool blue light while the interior was bathed in a warm orange glow. The result was intriguing and engaging, and I think accessible to the casual viewer.

There were other interesting works, notably those by **Louise Scullion**, **Patric Corillon**, **Titus Nolte** and **Juan Luis Moraza**. But when you return to the politics of why *Lux* has happened, one can only conclude with the greatest regret that the *raison d'être* of *Lux Europæ* really wasn't about ART at all, was it?

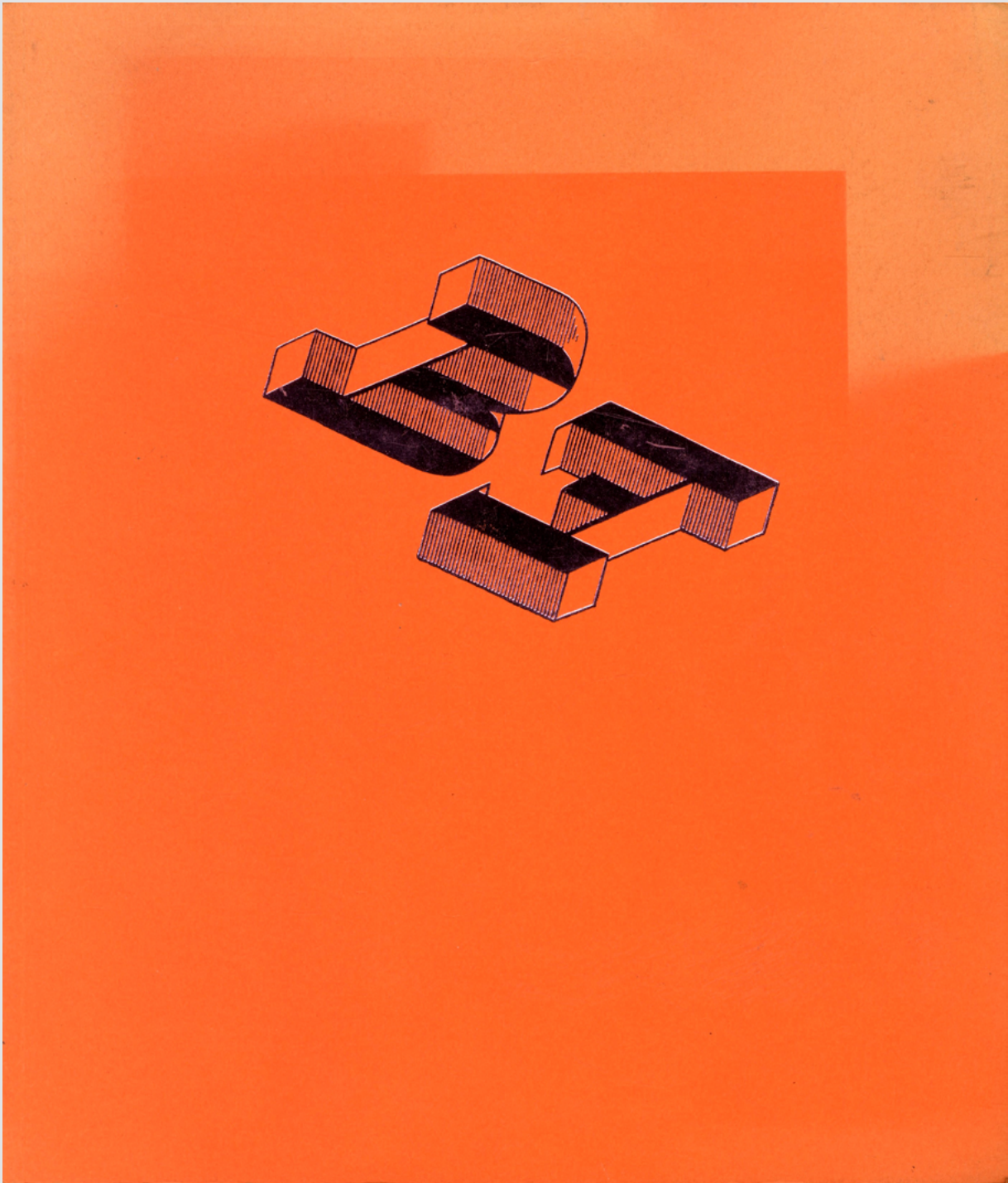
*Ross Sinclair*



Louise Crawford/Stephen Gueneau Photo: The Artists



Kenny Hunter/Petros Bazos Photo: The Artists



# GETTING CLOSER TO FAILURE

New performance in Glasgow

By Ross Sinclair

I was having a blazing argument with an artist friend of mine recently. You know the scenario, late at night after a few drinks, the usually polite guard of mutual admiration drops away and you start telling people what you really think about them and their work. In the middle of this ›discussion‹ my friend finally blurts out ›*but you can only make work about subjects which fall within a three feet radius of your bed.*‹

Well, you can imagine I was a little taken aback but when I started thinking about it it seemed to me that this idea of making work which investigated the relationships between an everyday, ›lived‹ existence and the world outside your front door, was quite pertinent to a certain group of artists who are working in Glasgow at the moment. These artists, myself included, use some aspects of performance or more accurately use themselves, their histories, and ideas enmeshed in their everyday life as raw material for their work.

It's possible that this is a cumulative response to the consistent failure of contemporary art to address the big issues of modern times. Spectacular art merely applauds the spectacle, and you just cannot simply *compete* with MTV, it's impossible. In a cultural sphere full to bursting with over-stimulated images of dizzying speed and sophistication the visual arts must, more than ever before, seek out new strategies to communicate with the global village idiots. ›*If you think you're part of the solution then you're part of the problem*‹, may sound like a dated soundbite truism but it does illustrate the need for clarity. The artists I discuss here project more modest ambitions for their work, but using first hand material they are willing to put themselves directly in the firing line. Simple but *effective*.

When I first approached these artists they seemed less than ecstatic that they were to be included in an article about *performance art*. Let's face it, performance has a bad reputation for a generation born in the late 60's. The images conjured up by *performance art* for us picture hysterical art ter-

rorists, cavorting naked while excreting all kinds of body fluids you'd probably never heard of before in a state of almost religious catharsis. It appeared these ›events‹ usually occurred in de-consecrated churches, *you know*, to evoke a kind of post apocalyptic psycho-drama where obsolete consumer detritus came to symbolize the hopeless folly of late capitalism. No?, well to be honest I never really understood that stuff either. Far too humourless and dated. Frankly, I'd rather go and see *The Evil Dead*.

But, looking a little further back it is apparent that the *performance* work coming out of Glasgow has more in common with the low key precision of late sixties ›*minimalists*‹ like Dan Graham, On Kawara and Robert Smithson than the overblown metaphorical bombast of later ›*performance art*‹.

It's really a misnomer to call this emergent body of work in Glasgow *performance art* at all. Most of the work is, in fact unedited documentary evidence of actions performed by the artists. This is not to say that the works produced are specifically and singularly concerned with the artist as an individual. The artist uses him/herself to advance a particular idea or strategy which has a wider relevance in society/culture. Much of this work documents shared *secret* histories, unvalued or ignored by culture as a whole, often because they have no marketable value. Some of these artists employ residual skills which have been built up over hundreds of hours over many years. These include soccer skills, playing musical instruments, singing and retelling stories gathered over years of late night discussions. And, Yes, these skills *do* reflect a particular and significant cultural upbringing.

Roderick Buchanan's work, ›*Chasing 1000*‹ illustrates some of these points succinctly. The work is presented in the form of a one monitor video, and was made in Scotland specifically for an exhibition in New York. It frames Buchanan and artist Paul Maguire in an anonymous gymnasium setting. The camera recording the action is fixed from above and the two weave in and out of shot. Both are dressed from head to toe in boxfresh

basketball outfits. Buchanan holds a crisp new basketball but instead of bouncing the ball, setting up a glorious slam-dunk for Maguire the two instead start playing soccer. For 90 minutes the two head the basketball to and fro while a counter in the corner of the screen advances until the ball drops to the floor. The average count they manage is a couple of hundred but eventually they do break the barrier of 1000 headers to and fro. This takes about eleven minutes. For Buchanan though, it is not these eleven minutes that are important to the work but the social and cultural premise of the hundreds of hours preparing for this moment. It's Whistler vs. Ruskin all over again. Buchanan takes soccer, the street game of his home country Scotland and collapses it with basketball, the street game of the USA, where he is exhibiting. Given the fact that the USA is also the strongest cultural force in his home country this lends the work an uneasy air of both resistance and collaboration with this occupying cultural force.

Buchanan works the fact that basketball stars are now big business for the youth style market with names like Jordan and Shaq shifting millions of dollars of merchandising annually in the global market to kids who have probably never played basketball in their lives. It's this collapsing of accepted social/cultural traditions that inspires Buchanan. He flaunts with pride his international hybrid culture. *Chasing 1000* focuses the irony that in World Cup, USA '94, the first US tournament of the UK's favourite sport, no UK teams were present because we can't play our own culture well enough to take part in its most prestigious tournament. It is important to point out that, in common with his peers, Buchanan's engagement with global culture is not cynical. The contradictions of artists criticising a culture from which they themselves were constructed is apparent, but it is this dilemma of both celebrating and criticising which gives the work a contemporary realism.

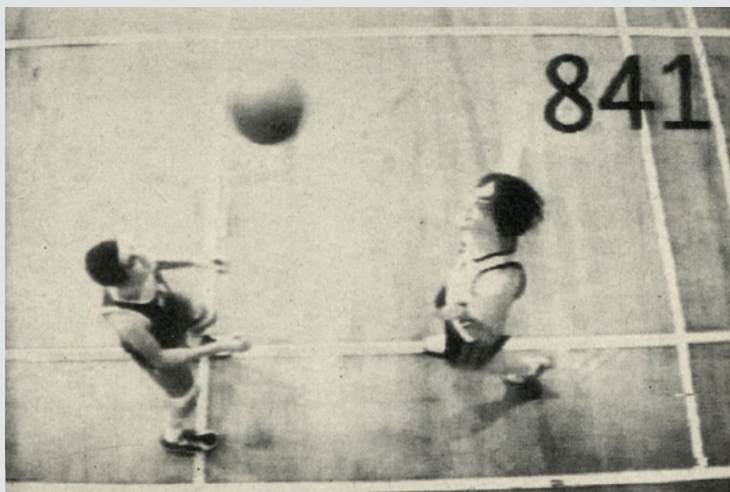
Buchanan's work is indicative of the general use of video in this milieu as, as much as possible, a purely documentary media where editing and post production are kept to an absolute minimum. The fact that the work is presented in Video form is mainly for convenience.



Ross Sinclair, *The Sound of Young Scotland*, Detail from video installation, 1994

*In a small room, one wall is completely covered by posters. These posters give up images of rock bands, drugs and a dazzlingly banal array of bedroom icons. Pinned up over this vile dirge of the popular imagination are eight t-shirts. These display the names of rock bands, spanning the thirty or so years that have witnessed the explosion of the cult of youth since the late 50's. In the centre of the room is a low stage, propped up on beer crates. There is a microphone, an electric guitar, some amplifiers and three video monitors. The room is dark and gloomy, the tableaux illuminated only by a weak spotlight aimed at the centre of the stage. On one video monitor we see a young man playing guitar in his bedroom. The scene is very domestic. He*

*is playing every tune he can remember, every fragment of music he ever sat down and painstakingly learnt from hours and hours of listening to records. In the bottom left corner of the screen the word ›rehearsal‹ is present. The other two monitors show the same man but this time he's in a recording studio. He's playing eight songs on the electric guitar which he has selected from the many he half remembered in the rehearsal. The names of the bands who originally recorded these songs are emblazoned on the t-shirts which hang on the wall behind ranging from The Sex Pistols to Glen Campbell. The songs he sings include, Anarchy in the UK, (I can't get no) Satisfaction, and Galveston. When he finishes one the screen fades to black*



Roderick Buchanan and Paul Maguire, *Chasing 1000*, Video, 1994

and the name of the next number slowly appears on the screen in garish electronic colours. When this in turn fades back to the image of the man standing amongst Marshall amplifiers, the title of the song remains though smaller at the top right of the screen. It looks like an extremely amateurish version of MTV. Maybe it's what MTV would be like if you had to make and perform it all yourself.

So this arrangement plays out, the sound of the songs recorded in the studio all but drowning out the fragile ramblings of the rehearsal.

A small crowd has gathered in this room. Suddenly the man on the video appears in the flesh. He stumbles up to the stage and turns on the amplifiers. He attempts to tune the guitar, evidently

some kind of performance is about to occur. He mumbles something incoherent into the microphone, he appears to be very drunk. Eventually someone from the audience tunes the guitar for him as he is incapable. He announces that the first number will be *(I can't get no) Satisfaction* which he can be seen playing on the video behind him. But he is hopelessly drunk. He can't remember the words and although the song consists of only two chords he's having difficulty with those. After a few painful minutes of this he appears to give up. He collapses from the stage hurling guitar and microphone to the ground. He falls to the floor and salutes the crowd before crawling off to the bar. The whole scenario is embarrassing and pathetic.



Ross Sinclair, *The Sound of Young Scotland*, Kurt Cobain tribute night, 1994

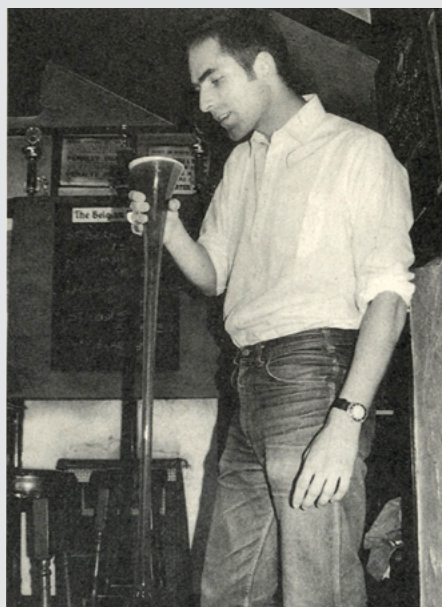


This is a description of a performance/video installation, *»The Sound of Young Scotland«* I made earlier this year in Edinburgh and at Budapest. Like Buchanan, I'm engaged with the grey area between *real life* and the aspirations offered to us over the mediated airwaves of victorious post-pop global culture. By performing in the public spotlight the kind of activity usually performed in the bedroom in front of the mirror the private is made garishly public. The sentiments are shamelessly amateurish but tap into a rich and energetic tradition of bedroom culture. It's true, as my late night friend pointed out, that the premise of this work is situated *within three feet of my bed* but the modest aspirations for the work are therefore all the easier to fulfil in an honest and straightforward way. The work is observing the duplicitous relationship of the individual with the society/culture which constructed him/her in the first place. Biting the hand that feeds you and always hurting the one you love. Of course you can never step outside of society. The individual is plugged in to it and dependent on it on so many different levels that the art which explores this relationship inevitably operates on a number of necessarily contradictory levels.

David Allen has also worked with a framework of popular music and his video work, *»Live Version«* uses as subject matter the famous Led Zeppelin song *»Stairway to Heaven«*. The work is presented as a four monitor video installation and the camera is set in a fixed position and left to record the action in an unobtrusive way. On each of the monitors Allen is shown being taught the traditional rock line up of vocals, bass, drums and guitar of what is probably the most (in)famous rock song in the history of recorded music. He is patently no singer and a woman is seen trying in vain to pull some semblance of melody from the tone deaf Allen. But that doesn't matter, the point is he is learning the song, not how well he is singing it. It's reminiscent of the footage of Johnny Rotten from *The Sex Pistols* attending voice coaching from Tona De Brett from the film, *»The great Rock'n'Roll Swindle«*. The teachers Allen has selected evidently don't seem to know the song note for note so it is more accurate to say that it is their *impression* of the song which they attempt to teach Allen. So by the time Allen has got a firm grip on each of the parts the tune has gone through such

a mesh of Chinese whispers that he now appears to be performing a popular »folk« impression of *Stairway to Heaven* in a heavily mediated manner. I'm sure John Bonham would turn in his grave if he could hear it.. The four monitors run simultaneously though not in synch so a strange phasing occurs with the different instruments. In this work Allen employs no metaphorical keys. Maybe the dematerialisation of the art object has reached the point that his work, *»Live Version«*, could be satisfactorily communicated simply by describing the idea. The video presentation is just the icing on the cake.

Allen and I collaborate on some other works; in one we made a tribute to Kurt Cobain and Clement Greenberg (who died earlier this year, a month apart), playing a set of Nirvana songs to an invited art audience. In another video work titled, *»For Those About To Rock – We Salute You«*, we video ourselves in a set up of guitars and drums and for the duration of the tape we make music together, writing slogans and lyrics from the songs on the wall till the frame is packed full of soundbites, aphorisms and rock cliché. Again there is no intended metaphor implied in the work. What is important is the development of our relationship with each other and with the camera. There was no scripting, we had no ideas what we were going to do, what tunes we both knew or what we would maybe teach each other. Only a distant end point was pre-selected, which in this case is simply the duration of the video tape. When the work is presented a text is written on the wall behind the monitor. It reflects the tone of much of the work mentioned here.



*Two men are in a room. They want to make a video. They want to play guitar. They want to have some fun. They try to remember the songs that mean something to them. They don't really know why. They can't act. They don't know how to look at the camera. They are intimidated by it and it is intimidated by them. Something isn't right. They share their knowledge of music and of life with the camera. But it doesn't look like it does on M.T.V. The camera doesn't like them very much. So they work together, searching for some evidence that their lives have been worthwhile. They don't even know whether this is the end. Or the beginning.*

*They are young and stupid. They can't sing, they look like shit, they can't play. They are too honest. It could make you weep. They are amateurs – and proud of it. Because of this, they are perfect. They sing songs, drink beer, write on the wall when the urge takes them. They share a joke – what could be better? Momentarily they have forgotten about ART and remember their lives.*

*They are 27 years old with nothing left to say. This is the sound of young Scotland.*

In his introductory essay to Dan Graham's collection of essays, *Rock My Religion*, Brian Wallis says of Graham's early performance works,

*Such quotidian works were meant to do more than simply record daily actions of course. They were designed to question the ideological and economic motivations of everyday activities to challenge the distinction between public and private space – and to shift the representation of these actions to a new context*

This new generation of performers in the U.K. are not immune to the homogenising Americana which has conquered the developed world over the last quarter century and that consequently Graham's desire to disseminate a *secret history of the transformation of capitalist culture in post war America* has become a project which can legitimately be addressed by a whole generation of artists who have known little else other than the spectacular commodification of all aspects of global life. The added confusion of the struggle of their native culture against this transcontinental hybrid results in a nomadic internationalism which often provides the punctum of the work.

Jonathan Monk is an English artist who has worked in Glasgow for 5 years who also endeavours to challenge our pre-conceptions of the everyday. He is the practical joker of this group constructing projects and events contrived to fall casually between the cracks of traditional art practice. He isolates a gap in the market and exploits it mercilessly. Continuing the rock theme Monk uses one of the favourite bands of his teenage years, *Kiss*, to create a scenario which mirrors the frustration and unfulfilled desires which punctuate everyday spectacular life. Often Monk uses dry humour as his main weapon. In Cologne recently Monk printed posters and distributed them widely advertising a performance of *Kiss Alive*. The venue was a local bar on a specific date in the near future. This created quite a bit of interest as the original U.S. Glam Rockers hadn't played live for a number of years. However, at the allotted time on the date of the show all that actually happened was that Monk set up a record player in the bar and simply played the live recording entitled *Kiss Alive* originally released in the 1970's. While Monk had not actually given any false information to the public his advertising was extremely misleading and was consequently understood by the expectant audience as a betrayal of the implicit trust of *public language*. In short, some of the paying punters were extremely pissed off.

Monk intends to exhibit some objects in the near future which propose to be the remnants of performances à la Beuys although in this case it will be uncertain whether the performance has actually taken place. In one he will present a white carpet with a large red wine stain on it implying some action has taken place and that the significance of this event has warranted the exhibition of this physical evidence.

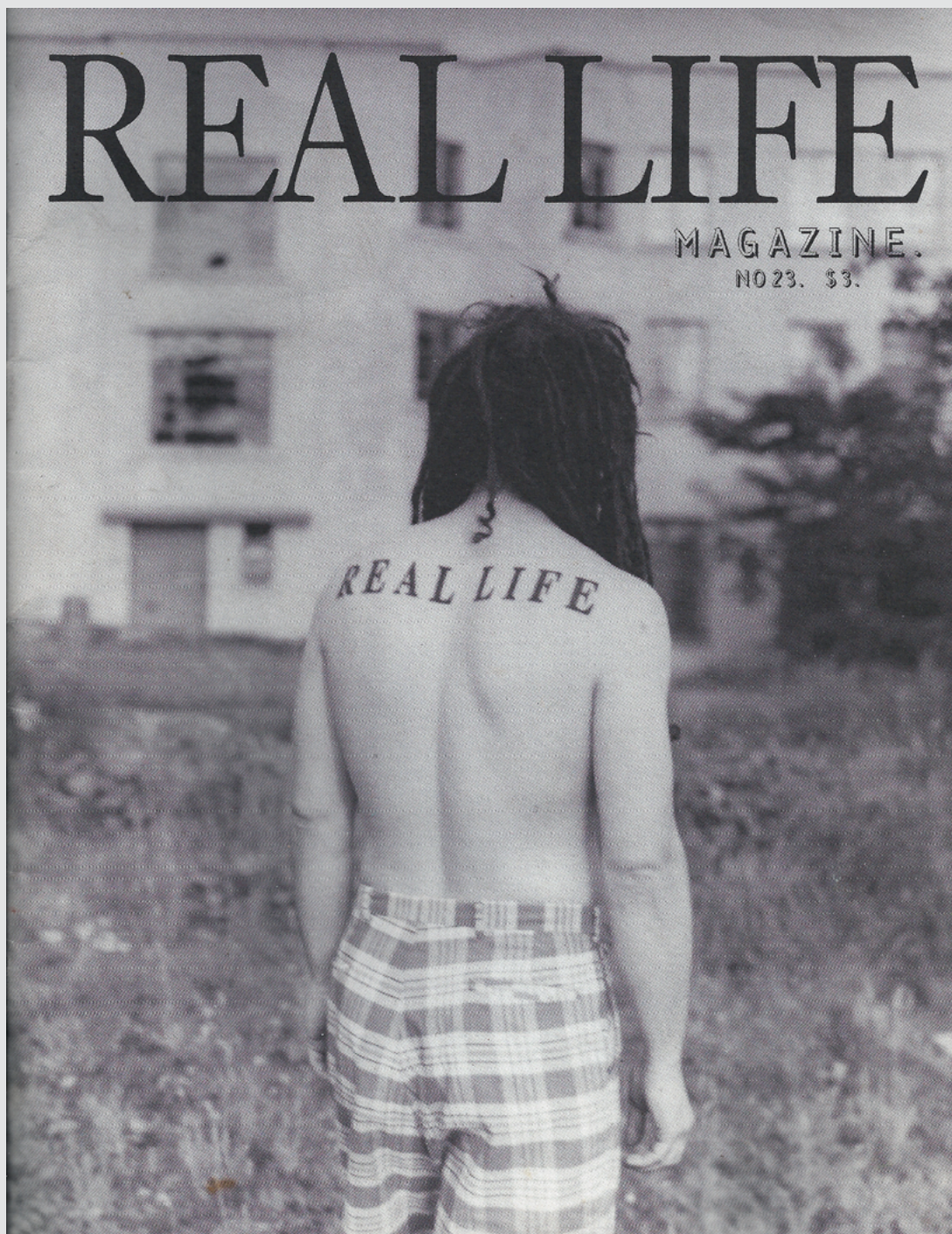
which propose to be the remnants of performances à la Beuys although in this case it will be uncertain whether the performance has actually taken place. In one he will present a white carpet with a large red wine stain on it implying some action has taken place and that the significance of this event has warranted the exhibition of this physical evidence. Although the supposed action is still proposed as the core of the work, what if it has never actually taken place? In another piece he will hire a bar and perform the quaintly British ritual of drinking a ›yard of ale‹. This is a large glass approximately one metre long which is filled with beer and then is supposed to be drunk in one gulp. For this performance Monk will wear a brand new white shirt which will inevitably be soaked with spillages from the beer drinking. This shirt will then be displayed in public exhibition. He plays with the public's faith in the institutions which extend our perception of cultural value from museums to bars. Monk is currently preparing work for a multiples show where he is making an unlimited edition of spectacles filled

with a prescription for his own bad eyesight. Thus the public will be able to purchase the glasses and see the world exactly as Monk sees it. Depending on the state of the buyers' eyes this will either improve or drastically worsen their ability to view the world. This self-deprecating humour is typical of Monk.

In Jacqueline Donachie's recent work she presents large photocopied images of herself assuming strong, confident poses. The accompanying text describes the ridiculous irony of her teenage years where she was mocked and scorned because at an early age she had grown to assume what are almost perfect proportions for cat-walk models. She could *never* find a boyfriend who was as tall as she was. Again Donachie emphasises her personal experience of the gulf between a real, lived existence and the simulacrum of the spectacle at large, then exhibits it, inviting the audience to relate it to their own lives. Unlike most other women who are supposed to feel insecure and abnormal by the spectre of the perfect woman in relation to their own *regular* bodies, Donachie *did* look like all the tall beautiful girls that gaze down at us from a zillion billboards and magazine pages

(some probably no older than Donachie herself) – but instead of inspiring confidence in her teenage years it simply made her feel like a freak.

Douglas Gordon also has recently utilised the more performative aspects in his work. As is the case with most of the artists discussed above, it's important to stress that Gordon's practice is extremely varied, using a dazzling array of formal solutions to disseminate his ideas to a broad international public. For certain ideas, performing in one way or another seems like the most precise way to communicate the idea. It's as simple as that, it's just another strategy. Gordon has shown a recent video called ›*Magic Newspaper*‹ in a number of different European cities. Once again the camera is in a fixed position, emphasising the importance of the activity taking place on the screen, not the technology which conveys it. Gordon stands in a bare room reading the morning paper of whatever particular city he is exhibiting. He casually reads through the newspaper and then carefully folds it up. Then, in what must be the most hilarious moment I've ever witnessed in an art video, he throws the paper out of the left hand side of the screen and then turns slowly when suddenly the newspaper flies in from the other side of the screen as though it had somehow flown round the room. It's all done with a straight face. This is pure slapstick but Gordon's blatant de-bunking of t.v. technology has a harder edge in this *fin de siècle* age of 120million dollar movies and the accompanying publicity hype. The imbuing of this most pedestrian of everyday objects with a supposed magic invites us to re-assess our preconceptions about the mechanics of our everyday life. This theme is one shared by all these artists in one way or another. And as Raoul Vaneigem implored in his 1972 postscript to *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, concerning the knife edge flashpoint between theory and action: ›*We have a world of pleasures to win, and nothing to lose but boredom*‹





ROSS SINCLAIR; *FOUR LETTER WORD*, 1991. PART OF THE BELLGROVE BILLBOARD PROJECT, GLASGOW.

FASTER THAN A POOL OF  
PISS ON A HOT SUMMER  
SIDEWALK...

BY ROSS SINCLAIR

**Oh**, this is just terrible isn't it? It's messed things up for everyone—left, right and centre. This bloody recession. Pissing down from on high into absolutely everything. It's as if God was taking out his revenge for the excesses of the eighties by URINATING all over the nineties. Everyone's got their umbrellas up to keep dry, so you can't see a fucking thing.

NO ONE'S BUYING, NO ONE'S TAKING ANY RISKS. Everyone's playing things safe. Safe and sound—bored and boring—and that's if you've actually managed to keep your doors open! No one knows what's going to happen next. So everyone is waiting around, treading water, just getting by, hoping that the next big thing arrives on their doorstep. And I'll tell you something else in confidence dearest readers—I haven't sold a thing for months.

Let's face it—the art market dried up faster than a pool of piss on a hot summer sidewalk.

And don't you just get sick of hearing about it?

Okay now, let's imagine for a moment in a situation where the Art Market never existed in the first place. Whaddya think of that? Where is it?—Purgatory? Nirvana? Heaven? Hell? I guess that really depends on how you manage to deal with it. But it's really only a slight shift of mind set. Being an artist isn't so different now than five years ago during the booming eighties.

You still get up, go to your studio and work. Okay so business is bad, absolutely fucking terrible in fact, but nothing so far seems to be radically different about the art of this decade *per se*. That's pretty much how things stand here in Scotland. Scotland is part of the United Kingdom—it's attached to the top of England—it has a population of around six million and is approximately the size of New York State. Okay.

So there's never really been much of a commercial market for 'serious' contemporary Art. But in the past few years Scotland, and Glasgow particularly, has generated numerous interesting exhibitions and a thriving generation of conceptually based artists. This has attracted international interest on a scale usually reserved for figurative expressionist re-runs or parochial tartan kitch (a combination of which dominated the Scottish art scene throughout the eighties). This milieu is gradually succeeding in attracting the market, or what's left of it, towards Scotland, rather than taking the work to the market—i.e. in

the U.K.—London. Maybe it's true that every dog has his day. Or maybe it's just that the artworld is so desperate for some marketable product right now that it's swallowing its pride and checking out what all the fuss is about in Scotland. It's probably a bit of both.

Many of the shows in Scotland which have generated this interest have been initiated and organized by artists. Many have involved artists associated with Transmission Gallery in Glasgow. Transmission is at this time, probably the most significant artist run space in the U.K. Artist run projects like those seen recently in Scotland have been borne out of a simple desire to get out there and do something. To create a context for initiating and exhibiting work, to show with people whose work you happen to respect and admire—on your own terms. And now that these type of shows are generating interest and excitement younger artists are slowly realizing that it might be worth staying in Scotland, at least for a while, instead of running off to London or wherever, at the first invitation.

When there's not many opportunities available via the market you either sit at home feeling sorry for yourself or get on with it and make your own. The resulting projects reflect the potential of self/co-determination. The subtext of this strategy revealed here in Glasgow and elsewhere, is an aggressive rejection of the accepted view of artists as passive and apolitical. That's not to say the work being produced is deadpan and dogmatic. Far from it. It's just that artists I'm talking about are working from a premise which demands acute awareness of the complex relationships between a Metropolitan centre and its peripheries. This has been the case in public and private art spaces alike. In short, there is much evidence here of a gently politicised atmosphere.

There's an interesting situation here, working away from the market but not entirely divorced from it. It's only an hour on the plane to London, or five to New York, or two hours to Cologne. You can keep in touch with developments in the Metropolis while having the space to develop projects and ideas where the market need only intrude if desired. In fact far from increasing feelings of isolation, this situation has fostered a passionate internationalism. This recognizes its peer

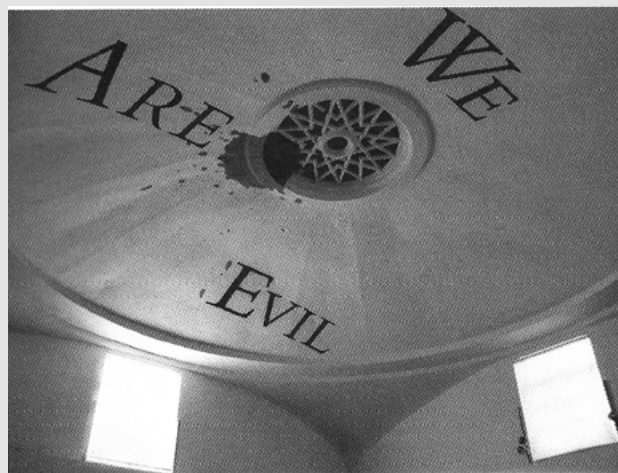
group on a global scale be it in L.A., Glasgow or Moscow, through the universal language of ideas. Generally these artists from Glasgow are now showing more often in Europe and the States than in the U.K. What is significant is that they are still returning to live and work in Scotland

The main venues for exhibiting contemporary work in Scotland are galleries and Museums funded by the Arts Council and City councils. This would appear to mirror other laudable European institutions such as the Kunsthalle/Kunstvereine network in Germany but unfortunately there just isn't enough money or commitment from the central government in the U.K. to make the two systems even vaguely comparable. The idea that a gallery could survive by selling contemporary work in Scotland is unfortunately impossible for the foreseeable future at any rate. This is quite ridiculous as there is more than enough valuable new work coming out of here to warrant it. But you can't change geography. So you accept it and work with it or you get the fuck out of there and go somewhere else.

The production of artist initiated projects is a valuable way of demystifying the business of art. Such events promote a sharing of information, skills and experience while simultaneously nurturing relationships between artists. This can often lead to a more horizontal and organically developing infrastructure of cultural activity. Often they provide resources which are outside the reach of individuals. Basically speaking, they are empowering. It unfortunately seems that there's never much time to develop these kind of relationships when you're working in a strictly commercial space.

So, what happens when you leave Art School here in Scotland? There you are, standing at the top of the steps, degree in hand, education behind you, debts in front of you. You look out over your godforsaken city (population of less than one million—non Metropolitan, no art-market, sorry) and you think, "Shit. I'm never going to make it here." Picture yourself up there, top of the heap, twenty years of education under your belt standing at the top of those stairs. Is the only way really down? Well I guess it is if you're going to retreat to your bedroom/studio for ten years piling up the canvases while you're WAITING

TO BE DISCOVERED. Crying yourself to sleep at night because you've never sold so much as a shitty watercolour sketch. Even if you keep working away, reading away, ploughing through most of what you imagine is on the Whitney Independent Studies Program reading list, it doesn't mean that when the selectors for the Documenta X come calling at your studio (which they are unlikely to do anyway) they will be knocked out by your work. Jeezus it'll probably have been in and out of fashion two or three times by then. Why wait for your work to be approved/validated/confirmed by some ex 'public' schoolboy in a sharp suit/jeans'n sneakers. You may as well learn on the job. So you get out there, put together some fucking hot shows and invite them over on your own terms. You get together with other artists and set up some shows. Staring modestly and getting more ambitious. Slowly you start to gain respect from (public) funding bodies. But it doesn't just happen on its own. You have to get out there, get your hands dirty, play around in the mud a bit. Get up peo-



DOUGLAS GORDON; ABOVE ALL ELSE... 1991.

ple's noses. You're only young once, and you'll probably never get away with it later on. So do it now. You can't be on the outside for ever but you can afford to make mistakes now—so get out there and make them!

**AND DON'T WORRY, IF YOU'RE MAKING INTERESTING WORK THE CRITICS AND CURATORS WILL COME CRAWLING OUT OF THE WOODWORK AS SOON AS THEY THINK THEY'RE MISSING OUT ON SOMETHING. THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED HERE IN SCOTLAND.**

Windfall is a concrete example of what I've been theorizing about above. The Windfall project came to fruition in the summer 1991 and was one of the most ambitious artist run projects exhibited to date here in Glasgow. Windfall '91 was housed in the old Seamen's mission on the riverfront—reclaimed office building dating from the 50's which was negotiated rent free from it's owners. Windfall '91 presented 25 artists from six different European countries and was organized and curated by the Glasgow based artists. This was achieved by sending representatives scouting over Europe to look at work and spread

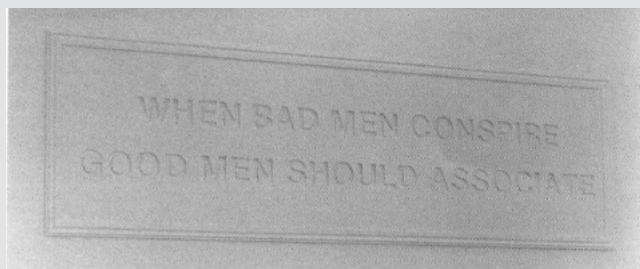
the word about the show, then applying for public and private funding, sponsorship, etc. This produced a unique blend of artists selected by artists working as curators. The first Windfall was held in London's Hyde Park in 1988, the second in the docklands of Bremen in 1990. It is a flexible and open concept. A kind of attitude more than anything else. No one owns the copyright for the idea of Windfall, its like public domain software.

Windfall '91 was successful in a number of different ways. Sure it attracted critics and curators from Metropolitan museums and galleries in Europe and the U.S.A. It was favourably reviewed in several reputable magazines and newspapers. But just as important was the 3 or 4 weeks spent building and installing Windfall which created the potential for a genuine synthesis of ideas and opinions. Like a big sand pit where everyone just played around, bouncing ideas off each other, trying stuff out, until some kind of conclusion was

reached. It brought together 25 artists of vastly different backgrounds, concerns and personalities, and managed, through a process of debate and dialogue, to produce a coherent and engaging exhibition. And all this without having to resort to artificial and banal concepts relating to fictional thematic or geographical concerns like "New Eastern/Western/Northern season," or whatever. Pretty good value for a little public money, I think.

Okay, there are problems. No one gets paid properly, all monies going to travel, materials, catalogue, etc. Things can get a bit chaotic when everyone's working on good will. So make a success of this one and next time you make sure there's enough money in the budget for everyone to get paid.

Anyway, that's a brief introduction to the kind of activity that's been happening here in Scotland. I personally believe that it is particular to a specific group of people at a specific point in time. But it can happen anywhere. The idea of artist-run Galleries and projects is not new of course. I just think there happens to be a whole bunch of exciting and important young artists coming through here. Maybe now that the atmosphere of the Market is very different we'll see a return to smaller, more intimate projects initiated from a more grassroots level. Or, hell, who knows?, maybe the big no-risk blockbuster



RODERICK BUCHANAN; G.B.A. 1992. MDF GROUTED TO WALL, PAINTED WHITE, 120"x30".

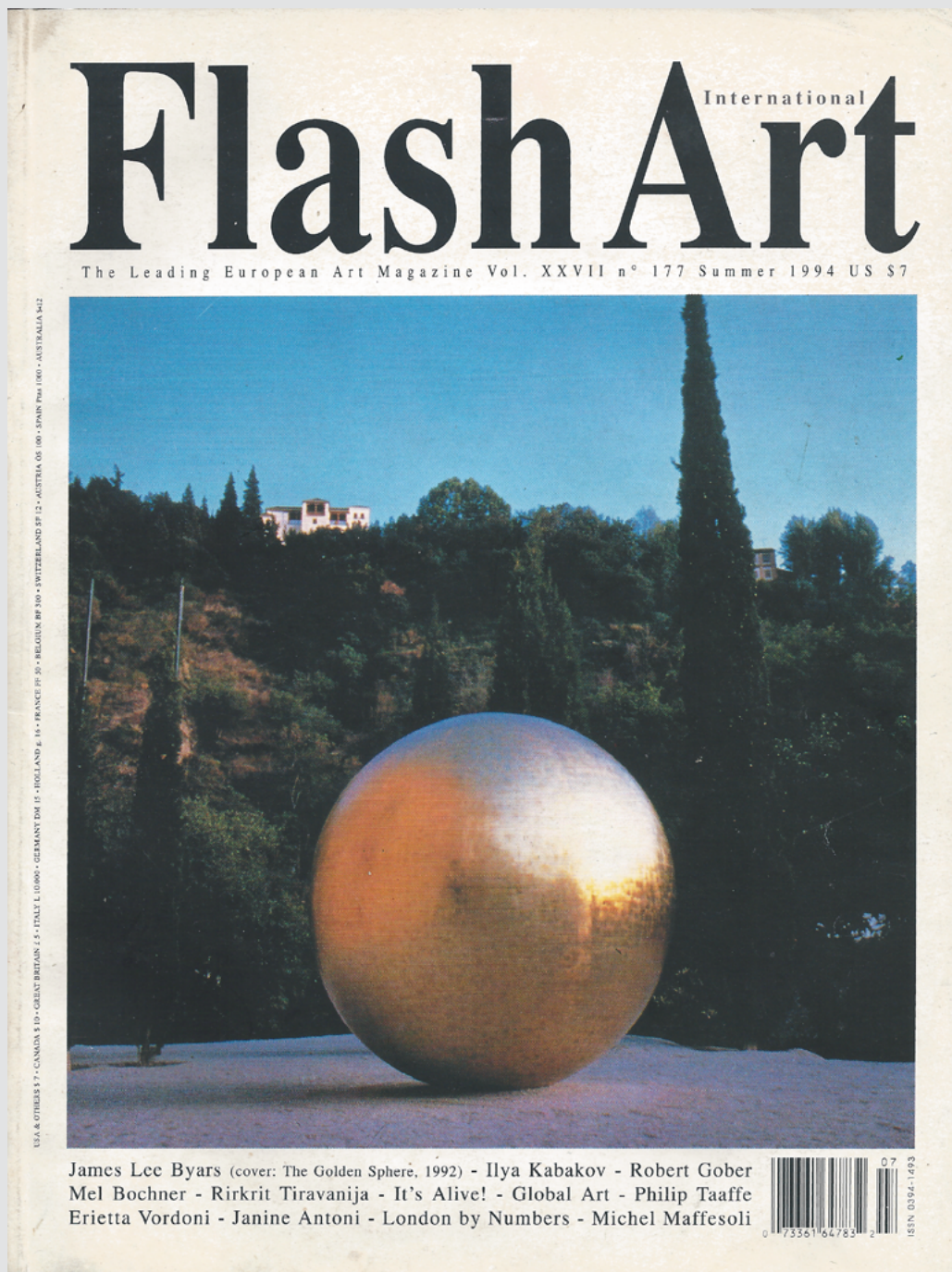
museum shows with their convenient packages of easily digestible and marketable work will destroy all competition.

Some folk would have you believe that this decade will be spent treading water waiting for the recession to end. Certainly so far things don't seem to have changed much. The fact is plain from the kinds of work proposed as "Art of the Nineties" (be it L.A., Europe or anywhere else) in shows like "Helter Skelter" or Jan Hoet's Documenta IX. Contriving Art of the Nineties at this stage seems as fictional and fraudulent a proposal as organizing a show in hell. But the collection of odds and ends (good and bad) in a show like Helter Skelter has already become history, even in Europe through the insatiable appetite of the channels of mediated—trans-national communication.

But Art isn't over just because the market is fucked. Artists are still doing it, still talking about it. Still thinking about it—IDEAS are still being born. Not being still born, as some people would have you imagine, just because of the lack of cash. In an inhospitable climate you have to know the terrain, learn to use camouflage. Having at least a cursory knowledge of guerilla tactics is no bad thing in a time of crisis. It's hard to break any habit, particularly if you were born dependant. But here we are. The eighties are finished. The market's gone—the party's over. But life goes on. So let's get on with it. We'll all be collecting our old-age pensions if we sit around waiting until the next boom decade. So let's quit whining about how shitty things are now and get a fucking life. I mean—get over it. Or better still, come visit us in Scotland. Taste that clean air, check out the greenery, and we'll give you some tips on how to get started again without the Market. And if that all sounds too much like hard work maybe you should just get the fuck outta here and get yourself a REAL job. Maybe you'd refer something safe and secure like insurance or better still, why not join the fucking army. Now there's a reliable job for life.



CHRISTINE BORLAND; DETAIL *WEAKNESS, DISASTER, OLD AGE AND OTHER MISFORTUNES*, 1992. FIVE GROUPS OF UTILITY CROCKERY SHOT WITH FIVE DIFFERENT GUNS, DETAIL SHOWS WHITE CROCKERY SHOT BY UZI 9MM SUBMACHINE GUN.

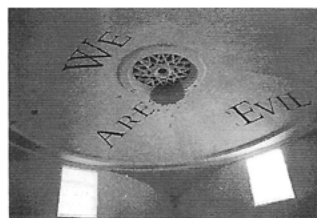


**DOUGLAS GORDON**  
TRAMWAY, GLASGOW

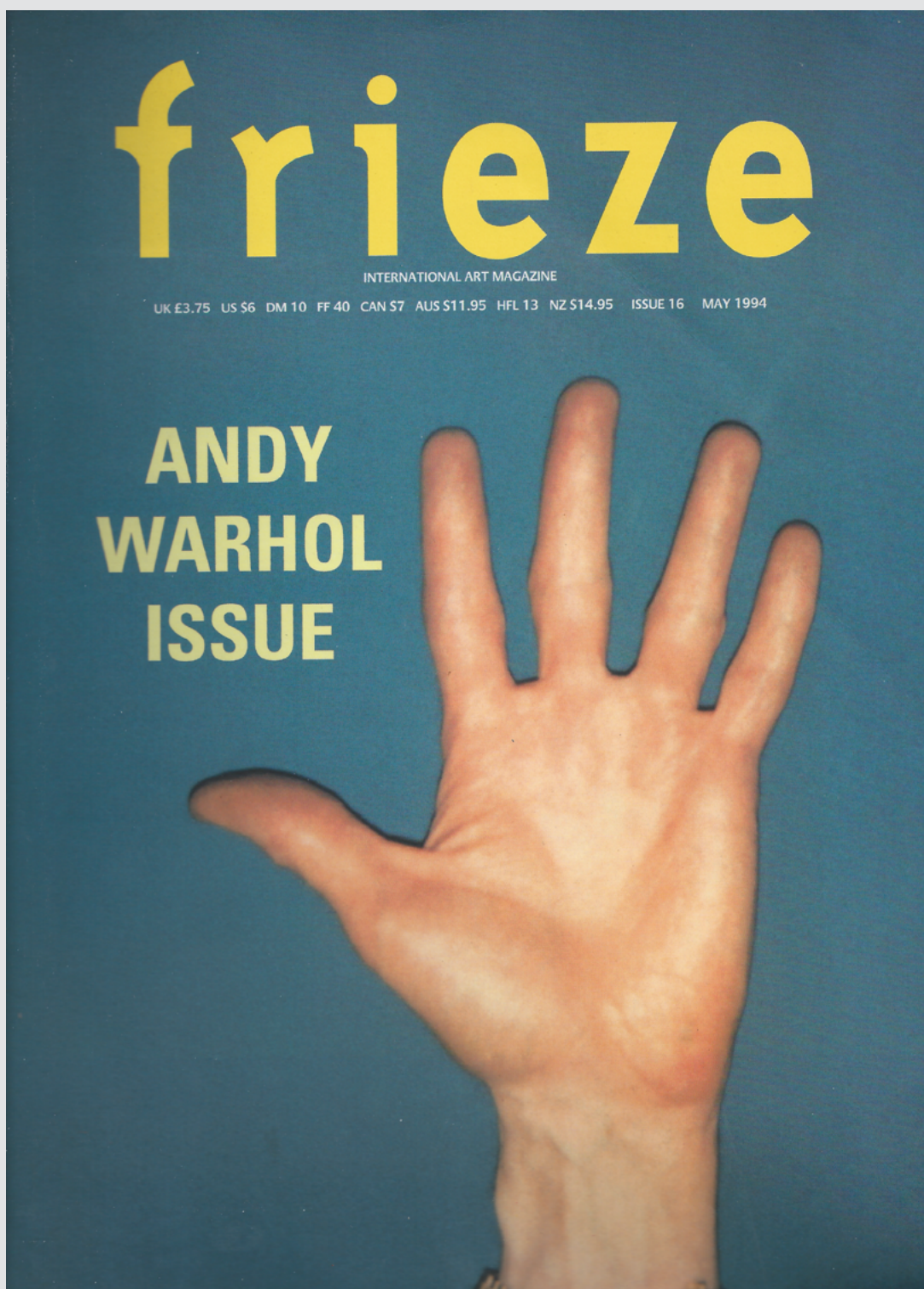
In an art magazine advertisement for a current work, *24 Hour Psycho*, Douglas Gordon is photographed standing on the central reservation of a deserted motorway. He holds up a handwritten sign saying simply — *psycho*. As there are no cars around, it is unclear whether he is trying to hitch a lift to a place called psycho, or if he is labeling himself with the sign, or indeed if he is signposting a possible destination for the motorists. It is typi-

cal of his work that we, the audience, must decide for ourselves whether or not to stop the car and give him a lift.

**Ross Sinclair**



**DOUGLAS GORDON, ABOVE ALL ELSE, 1991. INSTALLATION VIEW, SERPENTINE GALLERY, LONDON.**



# global village idiots

## Ross Sinclair on Roddy Buchanan

It's a weird time. It seems like the whole world is breaking up faster than Steve Austin's spaceship in the opening credits of the *Six Million Dollar Man*, but where's Oscar Goldman to put things back together again? When you're hanging out with a bunch of people from hotspots around the world in a neutral city, talking about shared histories of punk rock over a few beers, you wonder how things got so bad. Cultures are collapsing together all over the place, faster than the old world order can turn them to market-led mush. This bleak landscape is the geography of Roddy Buchanan's art practice.

Buchanan and I got pathetically drunk in Vienna a few months ago, on the night a show we had made together opened. At 3am we stumbled into a bar and slumped beside a table football machine. A couple of guys were playing. We had just visited a Viennese hip-hop club (honestly, there is one) and were dumbly singing the joys and pains of South Central LA – bitches and hoes, Glock 10's and Tec 9's, a 187 on an undercover cop – and without thinking, the word 'nigga' slipped out. Bad move. The two black guys playing at the table overheard. At first they wanted to settle it like men. But Buchanan managed to convince them that the best way to settle this problem was to talk about it over a few beers (on us). He wanted to get this out in the open, because this is Buchanan's research, his *raison d'être* and it turned out to be quite a session.

It started with the question, 'can white men rap?' and moved through the possibilities of cultural integration and cross-fertilisation, identification with popular culture, working-class culture, nationalism, internationalism, all intertwined with the most sensitive of nerve endings. How can white boys from Scotland be passionate about Los Angeles hip-hop in Vienna? Just when we thought things couldn't get any more complicated, some young guys walked in and the discussion exploded. They told us they were Croatian and were in Vienna to avoid getting drafted at home. It was all too much – like a UN summit meeting at your local Pig and Firkin. Buchanan kept going till the bitter end, thrashing it out. These are the experiences which construct his working methods and shape his art: unravelling the threads that bind our collective neuroses. Buchanan's method is a constant investigation, development and dialectic. A slow process, a long-term project, that's how his art practice works. This is his territory. His passion. The art is born from the social, from lived experience; real culture. For Buchanan the talking is just as important as the 'work' *per se*. It is a process-based art where the materials investigated are people.

From *Work in Progress* 1993  
Colour Photograph



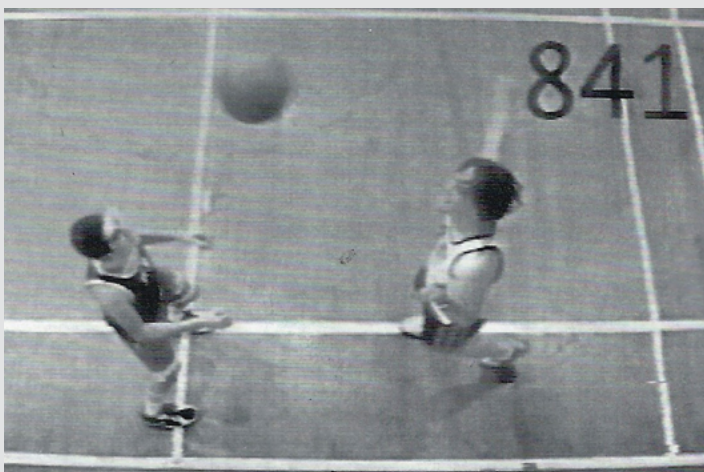
Much of the work Buchanan has made over the past five years has been politicised, utilising public spaces and billboards – always critically site-specific. It's ironic, then, that he is probably best known for works he has made over the past year which seem to be about football. In a group show in London last year, Buchanan exhibited an eight-yard length of flat metal about two inches wide. A succinct text on the wall at its end read 'Full Scale Premier League Goalmouth'. It's almost embarrassingly simple, but it isn't dumb. This 1/1 scale measurement isn't *about* football. It *is* football. From that one measurement an accurate football pitch could be constructed at Wembley Stadium. It's like Imperial measurements in brass, inset into the exterior of Victorian city halls up and down the country: the regulations are laid down. Here we have a hundred years of social history in eight yards of white-painted metal, rich and concise. In this work, football is only the enabler, the

metaphorical key.

A couple of new works bring together basketball and football but, again, are really about neither. In Glasgow Buchanan visits five-a-side football pitches, and seeks out players wearing Milanese football tops. He invites them to be photographed in his makeshift studio in the back of his van. They stand like the professionals, arms behind their backs. Buchanan appeals to their vanity – maybe for a moment they do feel like the A.C. veteran Albertini, or Franco Baresi. He has built up teams of A.C. Milan and Inter, but of course all stoutly Glaswegian. As a counterpoint, Buchanan has also been visiting gyms in New York and repeating the process with basketball players wearing Chicago Bulls shirts. These heroic amateurs, too, are photographed posing like their idols. The two sets of ersatz teams together create a pool of desire and aspiration. The current vogue in Britain for Italian replica kits is inspired by the regular Channel 4 screening of Italian football, while the basketball shirts can be seen as a result of the extensive promotion in the US of blue chip basketball stars. In these portraits, Buchanan conjures up a mid-Atlantic reification of the persuasive potential of *fin de siècle* global media. This is 90s culture in action. Don't blink, you might miss it.

More recently Buchanan has been working with video. In *Chasing 1000*, made for an exhibition in New York, Buchanan and artist Paul Maguire appear within a fixed frame, shot from above, in an anonymous gymnasium setting. They are dressed from head to toe in box-fresh basketball gear. Buchanan holds a crisp new basketball, but instead of executing some wicked slam dunks or sleek triple doubles, the two start playing football. For 90 minutes they head the ball to and fro while a counter at the side of the screen advances until the ball hits the floor. When this happens, it returns to zero, painfully. The average count is a few hundred but when they get a good rhythm going they make 1000. It takes about eleven minutes, but, to paraphrase Whistler, it's not the eleven minutes that count, but the hundreds of hours invested in preparation. What holds meaning for Buchanan is that it is their cultural history that has enabled them to achieve this. He has taken the street game of his home country and combined it with that of his host country. A mellow jazz soundtrack obscures the accents in their voices. You can't establish their nationality but something looks odd.

Buchanan works the fact that basketball sponsorship is blossoming in the UK, with names like Jordan, Shaq and Barkley selling products to a youth culture who have probably never seen a basketball game in their life. It's this disintegration of the *simulacra* of traditional social and cultural values that interests Buchanan. What represents home-grown British culture anyway? He neatly sidesteps the clichés traditionally associated with art about cultural identity, injecting a healthy dose of his native hybrid culture. *Chasing 1000* milks the beautiful irony that the first major US exhibition of Britain's most popular sport will not feature any UK teams because we can't even play our own culture well enough to take part. What does that say about accepted notions of British culture? It says 'I'm as sick as a parrot coz we wuz robbed but it's a game of two haffs and it's never over till the final whistle.'



*Chasing 1000* 1994  
Video still

# art press

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*Fabrice Hybert : projet d'entreprise / Enterprising Art*  
*Dora Maar : interview* Arnaud Claass : où en est la photo ?  
*Contre / Against Joseph Beuys*  
*Dossier : Littérature hongroise / Hungarian Literature*



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Andy Warhol

English edition

ROSS SINCLAIR

## JULIE ROBERTS

## la vie, l'univers, la science

*Life, the Universe and Science*

*Représenter le corps souffrant est une chose banale ; en revanche, montrer son environnement médical l'est moins. C'est ce qu'a choisi Julie Roberts. Ses œuvres - sculptures et peintures - ne sont que prothèses, appareillages et instruments chirurgicaux barbares qui déniaient la parole du corps et relèvent plus du désir de torturer que de celui de guérir. Ainsi s'amorce une critique du pouvoir médical et de l'institution qui le sous-tend.*

*To represent the suffering of the body is banal, to show its medical environment however is far less so. This is the approach taken by Julie Roberts in her painting and sculpture. Made up of artificial limbs, prostheses, and barbarous surgical instruments that reduce the body's expression to silence, her pieces seem fraught with the wish to torture more than to heal. Roberts thus forges a critique of medical power and the institution underlying it.*

■ Il semble approprié de parler de Julie Roberts au moment même où la dernière version hollywoodienne de ce classique du roman d'épouvante «gothique» qu'est le *Frankenstein* de Mary Godwin-Shelley, fait des ravages dans les salles de cinéma du monde entier. En regardant dans la salle obscure le film de Kenneth Branagh/De Niro, je ne pus m'empêcher de penser aux tableaux de Julie Roberts. La hantise séculaire et pragmatique de la mort, et un ter-

rible désir d'immortalité entraînant la négation explicite de notre inéluctable mortalité constituent les thèmes centraux des deux œuvres. Fondamentalement, il s'agit d'un effort désespéré pour percer le secret de notre existence tourmentée, et découvrir l'essence de l'être humain. De même, l'irrésistible évolution de la science médicale moderne, dont *Frankenstein* nous présente un aspect à la fois primitif et extrême (encore que fictif), est également reflé-

tée par les tableaux de Roberts. Nombre de ses motifs proviennent des témoignages tangibles de cette histoire. Ce qui subsiste de la médecine d'il y a cent ans, ce n'est pas, bien entendu, les patients, mais les instruments qui ont permis de les soigner. Je suppose que c'est là un des éléments qui la distinguent de bien des peintres actuels travaillant dans une manière post-conceptuelle - et en apparence *décorative*. Elle utilise certains motifs aisément reconnaissables, qui constituent la base formelle et intellectuelle de toute sa pratique.

### Des portraits en négatif

Pourtant, les parallèles avec *Frankenstein* continuèrent de s'imposer à moi. Paradoxalement, la mise en scène léchée de Branagh idéalise le mythe du monstre, au point que les thèmes essentiels du roman de Mary Shelley disparaissent sous une accumulation d'images à la fois prodigieuses et grotesques (le «monstre» De Niro parlant avec un accent new-yorkais). Je dis «paradoxalement», car il s'agit sans doute de la version cinématographique de *Frankenstein* la plus fidèle au roman. Toujours est-il que l'«esthétisation» des horreurs de la mort, de la déchéance physique et de la difformité, et la présence obsédante de l'appareillage de la médecine moderne, symbolisant l'immémoriale lutte de l'homme contre la mort, sont également des éléments centraux de l'œuvre de Roberts. Bien que Branagh comme Roberts nous présentent l'un comme l'autre une image enjolivée de vérités aussi fondamentales que déplaisantes concernant la vie et la mort, en sortant du ciné-

ma j'avais acquis la conviction que la vision de Branagh semblait être un exercice de style gratuit, tandis que celle de Roberts, pudique et retenue, paraissait plus honnête. Si Branagh avait visité en ma compagnie l'atelier de Julie Roberts, il aurait eu moins tendance à polir son film, et aurait peut-être injecté dans son *Frankenstein* une bonne dose de réalisme corrosif ; Robert aurait pu, je pense, lui donner quelques utiles conseils.

Roberts est un peintre très traditionnel. Cela ne fait aucun doute. Son œuvre ignore les caprices du débat sur la fin de la peinture en tant que forme culturelle de notre temps. Dans l'univers de Roberts, les peintres peignent, les marchands vendent et les collectionneurs collectionnent. Il n'y a pas trace dans son œuvre d'angoisse *painterly*, sa démarche est calme et assurée. Pour les jeunes artistes britanniques, les modes stylistiques se succèdent avec la même régularité que les festivals Fellini dans les salles d'art et d'essai. Ce qui est un jour «super hip» devient le lendemain embarrassant au point qu'on n'ose plus en parler. Parfois, la peinture occupe la dernière place dans la hiérarchie des écoles «post-artistiques», mais elle ne disparaît jamais tout à fait. En gros, la «nouvelle» peinture se divise en deux catégories. En premier lieu, la tendance conceptuelle, qui est souvent un peu gênée d'être encore de la peinture ; vous savez, maniant lourdement l'ironie, ces œuvres *enquêtent* sur la peinture, elles ne font que la *visiter*, comme une station balnéaire qui était à la mode du temps de votre enfance, mais qui paraît maintenant miteuse et datée ; ce type de peinture ne prend jamais de risques, il est tou-



«Tourniquet» (Garrot). Détail de «Wall to Wall», 1994. Detail from «Wall to Wall»

jours sur la défensive et ne se salit jamais les mains. La seconde catégorie évite cet aspect métaphorique ou conceptuel ; parfois qualifiée de process-art, d'art formaliste voire spirituel, sa recherche critique porte généralement, d'une façon ou d'une autre, sur les *matériaux* mêmes de la peinture... Cette démarche ne manque jamais de me surprendre, notamment lorsqu'il est question de l'œuvre d'un peintre tout frais émoulu d'une école d'art, mais qui connaît déjà un certain succès. Je ne vois pas où se situe le « message » métaphysique ou spirituel d'un gamin de 23 ans, issu de la petite ou de la moyenne bourgeoisie, dont l'expérience de la vie et du monde délirant dans lequel nous vivons se limite à cinq années de cours dans une école d'art.

L'œuvre de Julie Roberts (de même que celle d'autres jeunes artistes intéressants actifs en Ecosse, tels que Douglas Gordon, Christine Borland ou Roderick Buchanan) se situe légèrement à l'écart de certaines formules faciles constituant des impasses formelles. Ses peintures relèvent en fait d'une tradition bien plus ancienne, celle du portrait - encore que dans ces « portraits », les sujets restent toujours anonymes et sont généralement invisibles. La pré-

sence humaine est continuellement indiquée dans son œuvre, mais nous ne voyons jamais le moindre centimètre de peau. Ce que Roberts nous montre, ce sont les objets qui aident et soutiennent le corps quand celui-ci commence à se dégrader et à nous faire défaut : la légère empreinte d'un corps sur une table d'examen, un fauteuil roulant fait sur mesure pour compenser une infirmité particulière. Souvent, il semble que le matériel était encore en service quelques secondes avant que Roberts ne prenne cet « instantané », comme si elle s'efforçait de capter l'*aura* d'un être humain avant qu'elle ne se dissipe.

Indubitablement, les peintures de Roberts sont d'une grande beauté, délibérément, à tel point qu'on lui reproche parfois de peindre de « jolis » tableaux pour des collectionneurs dénués d'esprit critique. Ce reproche semble pour le moins curieux ; en faisant le tour de son atelier, je croyais me retrouver dans le magasin d'accessoires de *Frankenstein*, plein d'objets provenant du laboratoire du professeur fou, jugés indignes de figurer dans le film parce qu'ils étaient par trop extravagants. Des draps recouvrent des formes cachées ; des oreillers portant l'empreinte de corps paraissent encore chauds.



« Mortuary Slab » (Dalle mortuaire). 1993. Huile/toile. 150 x 150 cm. (Coll. privée, San Francisco). Oil on canvas

Les camisoles de force victoriennes semblent obséder Roberts (elle a même visité le vrai *Bedlam* <l'équivalent britannique de notre «Charenton»> pour s'imprégner de l'atmosphère de cet archétype de l'«asile de fous»).

Les objets dans lesquels elle puise son inspiration constituent certes un macabre attirail. Roberts me dit que l'on a retrouvé chez plus d'un *serial killer* des «matériaux de recherche» analogues. Diverses prothèses sont suspendues tels des membres disjoints ; cela va de modèles en cuir et os évoquant Dickens, à des membres artificiels des années 50, période où la tendance était à la motorisation. Des modèles anatomiques ressemblant à des cadavres trempés dans un bain d'acide voisinent avec des images de brillants tubes de métal chromé formant d'étranges meubles hérissés de sangles et d'étriers disposés selon des angles inquiétants. Nombre de ces objets à l'aspect d'instruments de torture sont en fait des exemples des plus récentes réalisations en matière de mobilier et d'appareillage médicaux. En contraste avec les implicites atteintes à l'intégrité du corps que suggèrent ces objets, Roberts peint ces derniers avec détachement, dans un style direct. Elle fait un objet à la fois, chacun étant invariablement isolé sur un grand

champ de couleur subtilement rayé. Les motifs semblent flotter dans un vide, sans lien avec la surface de la toile, comme sur une trajectoire brusquement interrompue. Les images peintes ont un aspect tellement tridimensionnel et tactile qu'un enfant demanda un jour à l'artiste si l'un des objets du tableau «tomberait si j'y touchais.»

### Le corps et l'institution

La série de toiles sur laquelle Julie Roberts travaille depuis deux ans a un étroit rapport avec la médecine gynécologique. Beaucoup de ces redoutables dispositifs ont été conçus (par des *hommes*) pour immobiliser la femme en position allongée (parfois au point de l'attacher par des sangles) pendant que l'homme l'examine. Ce qui est en cause, c'est la relation entre l'individu, et en particulier la femme, avec les institutions médicales modernes, qu'elle soient publiques ou privées, d'un haut niveau de compétences ou non. Les tableaux évoquent une situation complexe dans laquelle, jusqu'à un point de non-retour, nous nous livrons à la science. Cette relation paraît d'autant plus inquiétante que Julie Roberts utilise une technique picturale apparemment dénuée d'émotion et presque *graphique*.

«Child (Reds)». (Enfant, rouge). 1994. Huile et acryl./toile. 150 x 150 cm. (Court. galerie Ghislaine Husenot, Paris). Oil and acrylic on canvas



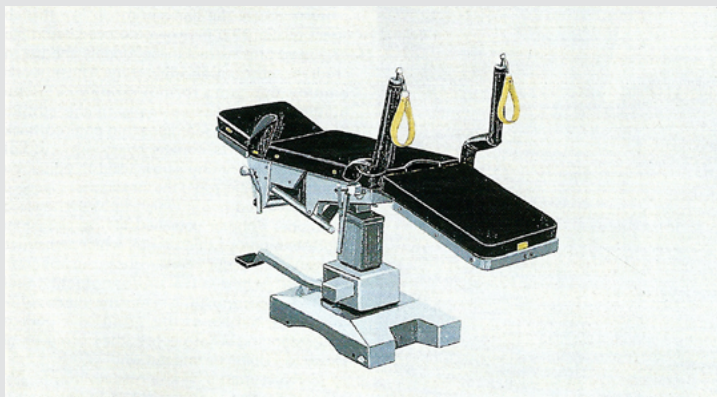
Nous devenons de plus en plus insensibles aux images télévisées de corps malades ou déchiquetés que les satellites nous envoient plus vite que nous ne pouvons lire les gros titres des journaux. La fragilité du corps humain n'y est que trop évidente. Mais, contrairement au *Frankenstein* de Branagh, les tableaux de Roberts nous montrent, non des visions de sang, de tripes et d'action, mais l'image plus inquiétante encore de notre *absence* à venir : le fait inéluctable que nous sommes tous mortels. Parfois, elle nous rappelle ce fait d'une façon particulièrement spécifique et déprimante, notamment dans la série de peintures murales qu'elle a réalisées en parallèle avec son travail à l'atelier.

### Représenter la mort

Récemment, dans le cadre de *Wall to Wall* (série d'expositions organisées en Angleterre, et consacrée à la peinture murale), elle a peint autour d'une petite salle, à hauteur d'œil, tous les objets contenus dans une trousse chirurgicale de campagne d'époque victorienne. Chacun de ces objets a rapport à l'examen ou au traitement d'une partie spécifique du corps ou d'une maladie particulière. Bien entendu, certains de ces «traitements» faisaient en fin de compte davantage de mal que de bien au corps humain. De cette façon oblique, Roberts nous donne à voir l'aspect concret de notre mortalité : le fait que notre mort aura une cause précise. Un jour peut-être, nos poumons cesseront de fonctionner, ou bien notre cœur s'arrêtera de battre ; dans tous les cas de figure, à un moment donné nous serons parfaitement vivants, et l'instant d'après, aussi soudainement qu'inexplicablement (dans le sens philosophique du terme), nous aurons cessé d'exister. Et ensuite, quoi... ? Le rendu hyper-esthétique de ce processus a apparemment pour objet de souligner la relation froidement objective entre la médecine moderne et le corps, et plus généralement entre la science et la nature, tout en fai-

sant allusion peut-être à la coupure potentielle entre l'art et son public.

Roberts prépare actuellement deux ou trois séries qui fourniront un important contrepoint à ses autres œuvres. L'une de celles-ci est basée sur la double hélice de l'ADN, selon le modèle réalisé en 1953 par Crick et Watson pour vérifier leur théorie sur la structure de cette molécule portant l'information génétique de tout ce qui vit. Roberts a dessiné et photographié les modèles dus aux deux chercheurs, exposés au *London Science Museum*. Ces assemblages de bouts de métal, d'agrafes et de tubes métalliques composent sur la toile un motif presque abstrait, qui fait écho à la relation non moins abstraite entre les objets ordinaires utilisés pour construire lesdits modèles et la stupéfiante information qu'ils transmettent. Ces œuvres utilisent la même stratégie formelle que la série sur l'appareillage médical, les motifs «flottant» sur le familier fond coloré. Roberts représente religieusement le moindre écrou, la moindre cheville, les minuscules vis servant à ajuster la longueur des tiges métalliques, les pièces hexagonales de fine tôle ternie. La distanciation presque prosaïque avec laquelle Roberts représente ce modèle dont est issue la structure la plus intime de notre être, souligne le fait important que, bien qu'à un niveau philosophique, des découvertes scientifiques d'une immense portée concernant la nature de la vie nous permettent de mieux comprendre ce que nous sommes, elles ne nous aident guère à découvrir *qui* nous sommes. Pour une autre série, Julie Roberts cherche ses motifs au *Hall of Surgeons* d'Edimbourg. Il s'agit essentiellement d'un musée d'anatomie, qui présente notamment les résultats des accidents génétiques chez l'être humain. Chaque sujet est plus macabre et grotesque que le précédent : frères siamois, tête décapitée semblable à un cyclope... Faisant l'objet de la même stratégie visuelle, cette série aura une unité formelle avec les précédentes.



Il semblerait parfois que les peintures de Julie Roberts ne soient guère plus que des sujets de conversations mondaines. Mais les apparences sont généralement trompeuses, bien que le danger existe de négliger ce que recouvre le brillant vernis et décoratif de ses œuvres. Mais en considérant ces séries ensemble, nous voyons d'abord une représentation du modèle du tissu le plus intime de notre être, l'ADN, structure même de la vie ; aux yeux du profane, ce modèle n'est qu'un assemblage hétéroclite dénué de sens. Ensuite, nous voyons ce qui arrive lorsque la nature commet des erreurs, lorsque le modèle génétique est altéré, avec des résultats horribles. Finalement, nous voyons ce que la science peut faire pour aider le corps défaillant. La vision critique de Roberts nous présente une image « objective » et sans passion du corps, considéré comme la somme de ses parties, et rien de plus. Voilà ce dont la peinture est capable - peut-être serait-il prématuré de l'enterrer. ■

Traduit de l'anglais par Frank Straschitz

Ross Sinclair, artiste et écrivain, vit à Amsterdam et Glasgow.

■ It seems appropriate to be discussing Julie Roberts at a time when the latest Hollywood production of Mary Shelley's Gothic horror classic *Frankenstein* rampages its way around the cinema screens of the world. As I sat in the darkened theater watching the Kenneth Branagh/De Niro movie unfold I just couldn't help thinking of Roberts' painting. The secular, pragmatic obsession with life and death, the awful desire to live forever, and the explicit denial of our inevitable mortality are central themes for both. Fundamentally, we see a struggle to get to the very core of our troubled existence — what is the essence of a human being? The irresistible rise of modern scientific medicine we see in its earliest and most extreme form (albeit fictional) in *Frankenstein* is mirrored in Roberts' paintings. It is from the tangible evidence of this history she derives much of her subject matter. What remains of the medicine of 100 years ago, of course, is not the patients, it is the tools that treated them. I guess that's one thing that sets her apart from a whole number of painters working today in a postconceptual — apparently decorative — kind of way. She actually has some very recognizable subject matter which are the formal and intellectual basis for her whole practice.

But the parallels with *Frankenstein* called out to me against my better judgment. Ironically the glossy directorial style employed by Branagh beautified the myth of the monster to a degree where the basic themes of the Shelly novel disintegrated under a mountain of portentous and ridiculous imagery (De Niro the monster with a *Noo Yoik* draw!!) It's ironic because it is probably the *Frankenstein* movie most honest to the original narrative of the novel. This aestheticization of the horrors of death and deformity, and resultant obsession with the apparatus of modern medicine as a metaphor of man's perpetual struggle against

death, is a pivotal force in Roberts' work also. Although with both Branagh and Roberts we encounter the beautification of basically unpalatable home truths about life and death, leaving the movie theater I concluded that Branagh's vision seemed gratuitous and stylistic while Roberts' seemed more honest for its restrained modesty. If Branagh had come along with me to visit Roberts' studio he might have been less inclined to gloss his movie to death and would instead have been more inspired to inject his *Frankenstein* with a large dose of gritty realism I think Roberts could have given him a couple of tips.

## A Modern Cultural Form

Roberts is an old-fashioned painter. This is clear. She never does anything else. Her work does not address the vagaries of the continuing debate about the validity of painting as a modern cultural form. In Roberts' world, painters are painting, dealers are dealing it, and collectors are collecting it. There is absolutely no sense of painterly angst about her work, it is calm and assured. For young artists in Britain, painting drifts in and out of style with the same regularity of old school sneakers or Fellini seasons at your local art-house cinema. Super hip one minute, toe-curlingly embarrassing the next. Sometimes painting takes a backseat in the hierarchy of post-art school priorities but it never disappears completely. Usually this "new" painting falls into one of two categories. The first is the conceptual sort, which is often a little embarrassed about the fact that it's painting at all. You know, it's *investigating* painting, heavy on irony — this work is merely *visiting* painting, as if it was an unfashionable holiday resort you used to enjoy frequenting as a child, but now seems shabby and dated — and this kind of painting never takes chances, it is very defensive and never gets its hands dirty. The other variety eschews

this metaphorical or conceptual angle and is sometimes described as process, formalist or indeed spiritual, but usually in one way or another is investigating the very materials of painting. I always find this approach puzzling when discussing, for example, the work of a painter who may have just graduated from art college but is enjoying some success. I just don't get the spiritual or metaphysical buzz from a 23-year-old middle-class kid whose experience of life and the crazy world we live in has been formed by having just attended art school for five years.

In company with other interesting young artists working in Scotland like Douglas Gordon, Christine Borland or Roderick Buchanan, Roberts' work falls slightly outside easily prescribed formal cul-de-sacs. The paintings she makes in fact fall into a much older tradition, that of portraiture, although in these portraits the subjects are always anonymous and almost always invisible. The human presence is continually implied in this work but we never ever see so much as a scrap of flesh. Roberts' work instead shows us the objects which support the body when it begins to collapse and fail us, be it the faint impression of a body on an examination bed, or a specialized wheelchair, made to fit exactly the dimensions of the specific disablement of one individual. It often appears that the equipment has been vacated only seconds be-

fore a freeze-frame image was snapped, as though she were trying to paint the *aura* of this human being before it melts away.

It's no mistake that Roberts' paintings are very beautiful, self-consciously so to a degree where she is sometimes accused of painting pretty pictures for uncritical collectors. This is a little odd because glancing round her studio I thought I was on the back lot of *Frankenstein* again, looking at the props from the lab of the mad professor that didn't make it into the movie because they were just *too* unbelievable. Draped sheets conceal hidden shapes, impressions of bodies left on pillows which look as if they might still be warm. Victorian straitjackets are a current obsession, (Roberts even traveled to the original Bedlam in London to get the real feel of the original "looney bin"). It is a ghoulish array of inspirational material. Roberts tells me that many serial killers turn out to have similar pin boards of "research material" when finally captured. A variety of prostheses hang around like dismembered limbs, ranging from Dickensian-looking models made from leather and bone to images of nineteen-fifties replacement limbs when the area was going through a heavy motorization trend. Anatomical models which look like corpses dipped in acid baths sit side by side with glossy pictures of shiny tubular metal formed into strange furniture, busy with restraining straps and stirrups which jut out at uncomfortable angles.

## A Tactile Realism

Many of the torturous-looking objects Roberts paints are, as a matter of fact, the latest versions of state-of-the-art medical furniture and apparatus. Contrary to the potential traumas implied by such concerns, Roberts paints her subjects in a detached and straightforward manner. She does one object at a time; they are presented routinely, isolated on a large field of subtly striped background tone. The objects appear to float in a vacuum unattached to the surface of the canvas, as if in suspended animation. The painted images appear so tactile and three dimensional a child once asked the artist about one of the objects in a painting, "Will it drop off if I touch it?"

The series of paintings Roberts has been developing for the last couple of years has been based on subject matter closely related to the field of gynecological medicine. Many of these intimidating objects are designed (by men) to render woman prone and immobile (sometimes to the extent of being strapped down) while the man examines. This addresses the relationship between the individual, particularly the woman, and the institution of modern medicine, public and private, amateur and professional. The paintings evoke a complex situation where, past the point of no return, we give ourselves up to science. This relationship is made all the more uneasy by the apparently passionless, almost *graphic* technique Roberts employs.

We have become increasingly immune and numbed to the TV images of diseased and broken bodies which beam down to us from satellites quicker than you can read a newspaper headline. The fragility of the human body is all too apparent. But unlike Branagh's

*Frankenstein*, Roberts presents us, not with blood and guts and action, but the far more foreboding image of our eventual *absence*. The irreversible fact that we are all dying and that one day, sooner or later, our physical presence on the planet will be surplus to requirements. Sometimes she reminds us of this in quite specific and unnerving ways, particularly in her series of wall paintings she produces in tandem with the studio work. Recently, in *Wall to Wall* in England (a series of shows specifically employing wall painting), she painted each item from a Victorian military surgical field kit, at eye level around the walls of a small room. Each of these items pertains to the investigation or healing of a specific ailment or part of the body from this particular period. Some of these "cures" of course subsequently turn out to do the body more harm than good. In this oblique way we are asked to contemplate the specifics of our own mortality, that there will be a simple and specific reason for our death. One day perhaps

our lungs will cease to function, or our heart will stop beating, whatever the reason, one second we will be very much alive and then, quite suddenly, and inexplicably in a philosophical sense, we shall have ceased to exist. And then what happens? The hyperaestheticization of this process evident in Roberts' paintings apparently serves to underline the detached relationship between modern medicine and the body, of *science vs. nature*, and maybe points too to the potential for dislocation between art and its audience.

### The Body and the Institution

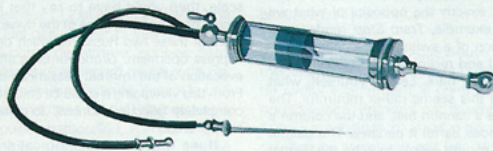
Roberts is currently developing a couple of new series which will eventually provide an important counterpoint to her existing works. One of these is a series of paintings based on the double helix DNA model built by Crick and Watson in 1953 to check their theory of the structure of DNA, the molecule which carries genetic information on all living things. Roberts draws and photographs the actual models made by the pair in the London Science Museum. The models appear quite abstract, a collection of old bits of metal, crocodile clips and metal tubes which forms an almost abstract pattern across the canvas, much like the abstract relationship between the everyday materials used to construct these models and the incredible information they relay. These works employ the same formal strategies as the medical apparatus series with the subject "floating" on the familiar plain-colored backgrounds. Roberts depicts every nut and bolt religiously, every tiny screw used to adjust the lengths of metal rods, the hexagonal pieces of thin discolored metal which form the basis of the model. Roberts' detached, almost pedestrian representation of this model, which constructs the very core of our being, focuses the important fact that while on a philosophical level, immensely important scientific discoveries about the nature of life bring us closer to understanding what we are, they bring us no closer to helping us find out who we are.

Subject matter she is researching for the other new series is gathered in the Hall of Surgeons in Edinburgh. This is essentially an anatomy museum and presents Roberts with

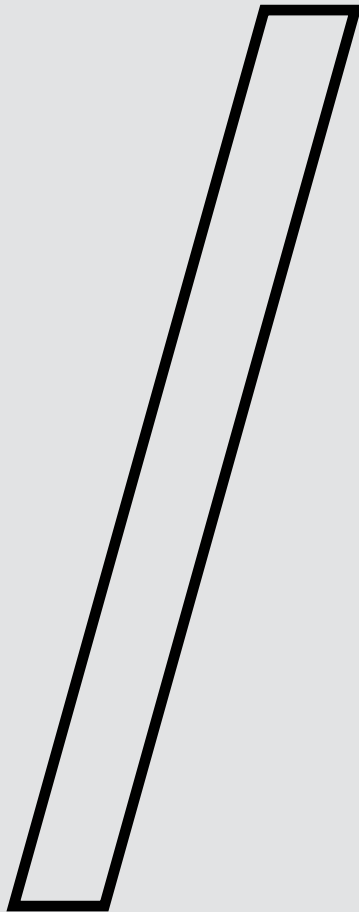
the human results of genetic deformation. The harrowing images she has gathered from there show a number of infant corpses, each with a specific genetic disorder. Thus, we have anything from Siamese twins to a cyclops-like decapitated head, each more grotesque than the last. These will be treated with the same visual strategy so the three series have a sympathetic formal relationship.

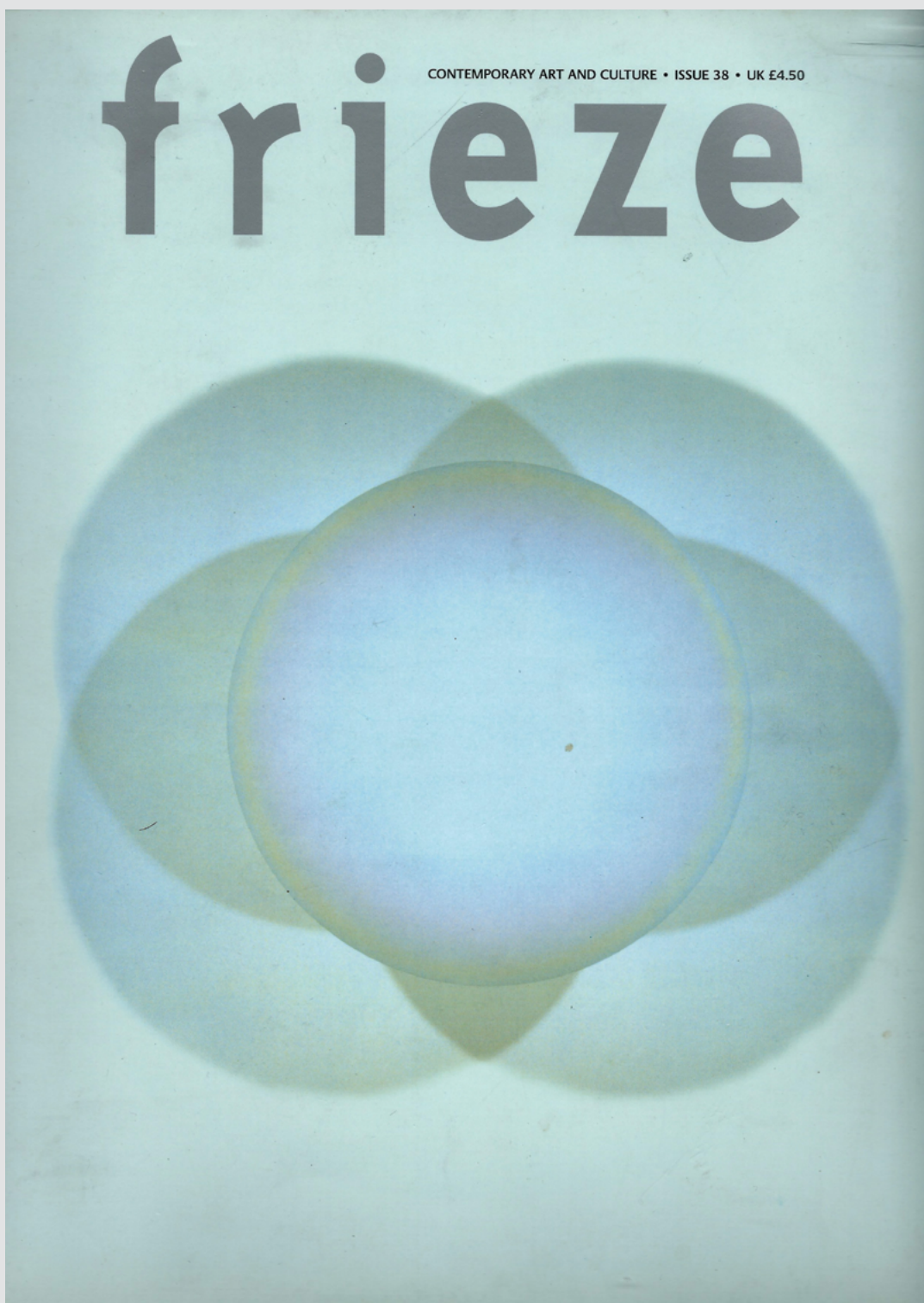
Roberts' paintings sometimes appear to be nothing more than parlour conversation points. But appearances are usually deceptive. There is a possibility of simply dismissing them without looking under their glossy decorative veneer. Considering these three series together however, we see a representation of the model of the very fabric of our existence, DNA, the structure which maps our creation, to the layman's eye a senseless construction of cheap hardware parts, and then we see what happens when nature makes mistakes, when the genetic blueprint for existence becomes corrupted, with horrific results. Finally, we are shown what science can do to support the body when it breaks down. In Roberts' critical vision this is a detached and passionless view of the body as nothing more than the sum of its parts. And painting can do all this — maybe there's life in the old dog yet. ■

*Ross Sinclair is an artist and writer based in Amsterdam and Glasgow.*



«Hypodermic Needle (Syringue). Détail de «Wall to Wall», 1994. (Toutes les photos, sauf mention contraire, court. Internm Art, Londres et l'artiste). Detail from Wall to Wall





## Simon Starling

Transmission Gallery,  
Glasgow

Simon Starling's *Blue Boat Black* (1997) launches itself into the vacuum created by the failure of the traditional tenets of Science, Logic and Museology to convince us that they can still explain the world we live in. His journey proposes a more elliptical way of looking at things.

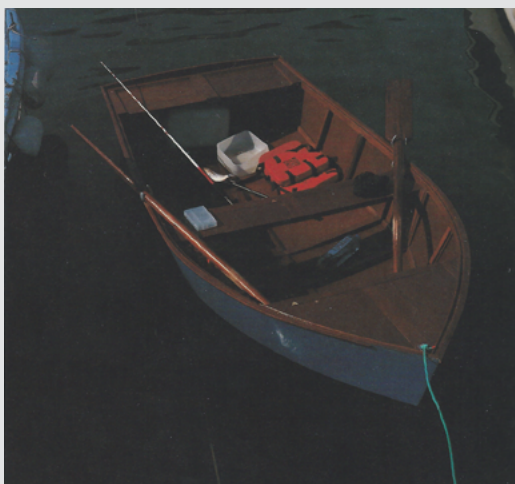
In the past Starling has re-cast a Charles Eames chair from a Marin mountain bike and vice-versa by melting down and exchanging their respective aluminium components. He has employed the same process with an aluminium Jorge Pensi chair, recasting it into an edition of nine solid Eichbaum Pils beer cans cast from an 'original' empty can found in the grounds of the Bauhaus, Dessau. Starling's method is to take two objects and perform a secular and mutual transubstantiation, melting them into each other, literally. *Doppelgänger*

who have destroyed their creator, the resultant series hybrid objects become home-made 'design classics', but he must first destroy them in order to reinvent them. While materials like aluminium can appear endlessly malleable, the objects they form never seem to work out too well. Sometimes there's not exactly the same amount of aluminium in each and there are bits left over. Sometimes the original machine finish is impossible to duplicate by hand. Whatever the flaw, something is pleasingly not quite right. Art, Science and Faith implode. This is 'Enlightenment lite'.

But this time Starling has really lost it. Though maybe you've got to lose yourself in order to find a different path. *Blue Boat Black* could be one giant red herring. In fact, that would be a more accurate title for the show. Let's look at the evidence. Starling's role is that of the stereotypical B-movie medieval alchemist. The kind that promises to turn your lead into gold but 'surprisingly' fails and gets thrown in a dungeon constructed of the

very metal they have failed to transform. Though, like the alchemist, Starling is smart enough to know that it is not the physical transformation of materials that will convince us of their new provenance as much as the belief in the process. This transformation necessitates a leap of faith, more than the physicality of an actual magic trick. The art viewer must suspend their disbelief in exactly the same way as the cinema-goer if they are to give themselves over to the metaphoric aspirations of Starling's skewed narrative. He proposes an endless restructuring of the world; he wants to tell us that change is always possible and imagining different perspectives on the world can make it so. When this conjuring act is pulled off, it can be genuinely exciting.

So to the plot of the psycho-geographic road movie that unfolds in *Blue Boat Black*: Starling picks up a redundant museum case from the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, ties it to the roof of his 1983 Mini metro and drives to Marseilles. Okay so far?



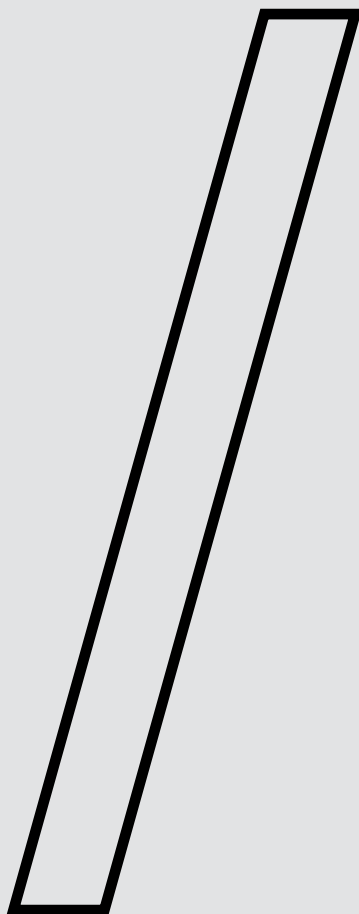
Simon Starling  
*Blue Boat Black*  
1997  
Detail of  
installation

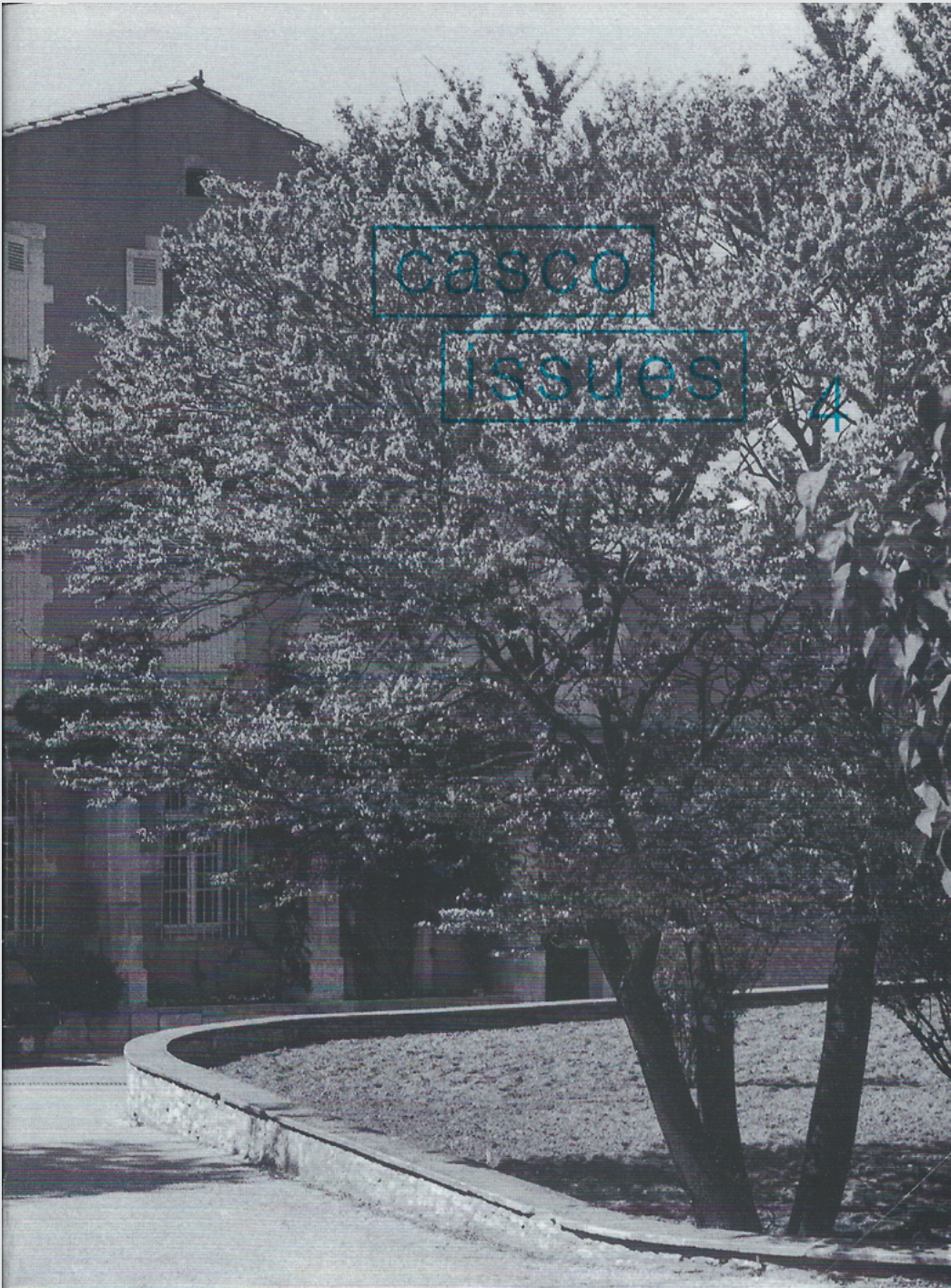
He then identifies a traditional Marseilles Barque (a small one-man fishing boat) and makes a full-size replica of it with the wood from the museum case, accurate in every detail. This takes two months as Starling first has to learn the first principles of boat building. The boat is immaculate. He then paints it blue (*Bleu de Provence*). Still following? Now the intrepid seaman Starling puts out with rod and reel (presumably not made from the museum case) and promptly catches two dorade, two red mullet, one saddled bream, one European porgy and three rock fish. Satisfied with his modest catch, Starling retires his boat to land and finds an oven large enough to burn the boat into charcoal. This reduces his two months' labour to a (just recognisable) skeleton of charred fragments. With this charcoal Starling cooks the fish he caught in the Mediterranean. Then he eats them, brings the leftovers back to Scotland and displays them at Transmission. These curious fragments are soberly displayed on plinths and shelves. They are remi-

niscent of the expensively exhumed remains of the *Marie Rose*. Once again on public view, the museum case/boat/charcoal appears reluctant to divulge its provenance.

Starling has implied that this particular journey ends here, but who knows whether he will not keep the domino effect rolling by canning, Manzoni style, the resultant shit produced from the meals of French fish. We must persevere with the relics displayed in the gallery if we are to believe this quest really took place. One can only marvel at the perverse attention to 'realistic' detail as Starling destroys his careful illusion with the obsessive desire for flux. Nothing is fixed, nothing is 'real'. The fact that the whole story is true is neither here nor there. All the props are visible, like the reconstruction of a plane's fuselage from an air disaster or a film set after the wrap. Starling is operating in a parallel universe and *Blue Boat Black* is an open invitation to join him in the realms of the unbridled imagination.

Ross Sinclair





Een open brief aan wie het ook maar aangaat over:

Schotland –  
Een korte en  
fragmentarische  
inleiding tot de  
geschiedenis  
van de periode  
1983 – 2083

An open letter to whomsoever it may concern regarding:

Scotland – A brief and  
fractured introduction  
to the history of the  
period 1983 – 2083

Ross Sinclair



Denkend over de dingen die mensen zijn vergeten omdat ze niet beschreven zijn in geschiedenisboeken. Het is het jaar 2083 n.Chr. en Transmission Gallery is nu honderd jaar oud. De plaats is de Volksrepubliek Scotia, een kleine, Noord-Europese staat met aangenaam veranderlijke weersomstandigheden. Meer dan twintig jaar zijn verstreken sinds Schotland zijn lang begeerde ideaal kon verwezenlijken: Onafhankelijkheid van Engeland en de Kroon. Maar het Schotse volk heeft hiervoor wel een prijs moeten betalen...

## De weg naar de vrijheid?

In het Stirling Bridge Referendum van 2061 besloot een ruime meerderheid van het Schotse volk om zich af te scheiden van het Verenigd Koninkrijk van Groot Brittannië. Het arme, mistroostige land, dat zo lang had gezocht onder het juk van de ene bezetter na de andere, telde zo'n vijf miljoen inwoners. En deze bevolking besloot om voor eens en altijd de Unie te verlaten en een nieuw plan te realiseren om de Staat helemaal opnieuw uit te vinden op een manier die ongekend was in de hele wereld. De nieuwe officiële naam die ze uit de suggesties kozen voor dit opnieuw bedachte Schotland was: Scotia – de levende geschiedenis van een kleine staat. Op het eerste gezicht lijkt dat misschien een vreemde naam voor een klein land, dat na 500 jaar strijd net onafhankelijk was geworden, maar deze ongekende stap kan worden verklaard: de Schotten hadden massaal gestemd voor de verandering van het hele land, met al zijn inwoners, in het eerste historische themapark op nationale schaal in de wereld. En dit moest werkelijk epische proporties krijgen...

In 2062 werd, bijna van het ene op het andere moment, een groot hek gebouwd langs de Engelse grens. Dat was niet bedoeld om het arme Schotse volk binnen te houden, zoals u misschien zou kunnen denken, maar om ieder

Thinking about the things that people forgot about because they weren't written down in history books. The year is 2083 Anno Domini and

Transmission Gallery is one hundred years old today. The place is The Peoples' Republic of Scotia, a small, northern European nation with agreeably changeable weather. More than twenty years have passed since Scotland achieved its long cherished ambition, Independence from England and the Crown. However, this occurred at some cost to the Scottish people...

#### The Path to Freedom?

At the Stirling Bridge Referendum of 2061, a handsome majority of the Scottish people decided that they wished to secede from the United Kingdom of Great Britain. There were five million or so inhabitants in this poor, damp, country, for so long under the sword of one conquering invader or another. And this populace eventually decided, once and for all, to leave the Union in order to implement a novel plan to completely re-invent the Nation in a manner never before heard of anywhere in the world. The new official name they chose for the re-invented Scotland, from those suggested, was: Scotia – The Living History of a Small Nation. At first glance this may sound like a strange name for a small country, newly

independent after 500 years of struggle, but to explain this unprecedented move: the Scots had voted en masse to turn the whole country, and everyone in it, into the world's first national scale historical theme park. And it was to be of truly epic proportions.

In 2062, almost overnight, a big fence was built along the border with England. This was not to keep the poor Scottish people in, as you might have thought, but to keep everyone else out, because now you were going to have to pay to get in – and it wasn't going to be cheap.

Most people north of Hadrian's Wall were initially very enthusiastic about this new development, as Scotland in the middle twenty-first Century was suffering

verslindende noordelijke aanhangsel af te zijn.

De meeste arme gebieden op de wereld waren verwoest door oorlog en hongersnood, en ziekten en slecht beleid hadden miljoenen mensen ongelukkig gemaakt. Alles was ontdekt, niets was nog afgelegen of ongerept. In vergelijking met de door oorlog verscheurde 'buitenwereld' was Schotland eigenlijk niet eens zo slecht af. Hoewel er heel wat arme, zieke en ongelukkige mensen woonden (vooral buiten de stadsmuren), was er geen enkele oorlog met moderne technologische middelen geweest die de natuurlijke schoonheid van het land had aangetast. Toen de voorstellen voor het park openbaar werden gemaakt, werd ook bekend dat de outsiders (zoals deze outcasts werden genoemd) bijeen werden gebracht in kampen in het noorden van het land – waar ze geen kwaad konden uitrusten – om gerehabiliteerd te worden. Het kwam de leiders van het land nu goed uit om hen te helpen aanzien er heel wat arbeiders nodig waren om het park op te bouwen. Er waren grote stukken land in het noorden van Schotland waar de meeste mensen verdreven waren door wat bekend stond als Het Zuiveren van de Hooglanden, dat in de negentiende eeuw was begonnen. Zij waren tijdens de blokkades van de Napoleontische oorlogen vervangen door schapen, omdat deze dieren in feite meer opbrachten dan mensen.

De outsiders moesten deze afgelegen gebieden nu ten behoeve van het toerisme opnieuw gaan bevolken in wat bekend werd als De Omgekeerde Zuivering van de Hooglanden.<sup>3</sup>

Het basisidee voor Scotia – de levende geschiedenis van een kleine staat was, toen het in 2062 open ging, heel eenvoudig. Iedere landstreek zou het beeld en de levensstijl van een bepaalde periode in de Schotse geschiedenis aannemen. Alle mensen die in deze streken woonden zouden de gewoonten en manieren van de hun toegewezen periode hanteren. Onze beste acteurs zouden de grote personages uit onze geschiedenis spelen, hoewel ze hen eigenlijk niet alleen zouden spelen maar hen zelfs zouden zijn, omdat ze nooit de kans zouden krijgen om het podium te verlaten en hun kostuums uit te doen. Dit moet benadrukt worden. Het hele land was opgenomen in het park en daar was geen ontkomen aan. Ieder ander die toentertijd toevallig in Schotland woonde mocht blijven als hij dat wilde. Dit moest voor de toeristen de tolerante atmosfeer uitstralen van een mengelmoes van mensen die oorspronkelijk ergens anders vandaan kwamen om zich in dit kleine land te vestigen. Aan de andere kant kon je niet de hele tijd mensen laten komen en gaan en daarom werd besloten dat de bezetting van de lagere rangen in het

stimuleren dat Schotland zou destabiliseren, moet in dit verband worden opgemerkt dat de Schotten maar al te vaak hun eigen ergste vijanden zijn geweest. De Zuiveringen van de Hooglanden waren net zo goed de fout van de op geld beluste Schotse grootgrondbezitters als van de Engelsen. Toen vele jaren later de politieke en economische situatie veranderde, kwamen de meeste mensen die weggegaan waren nooit meer terug omdat ze naar Ierland of naar Amerika gegaan waren of naar de steden

quickly. It also helped them forget about all the horror that went on outside the city walls.

At this point in the 2050's, before the park was built, the Parliamentary Monarchy of England had many problems of its own. Its coffers were much depleted after protracted wars with France and Ireland.<sup>②</sup> It simply could not afford to worry about Scotland anymore, particularly since the oil had run out. England's international reputation had sunk to an all time low and it was the popularly held belief that Westminster was, in fact, quite happy to finally get rid of its troublesome and costly Northern appendage.

Most poor parts of the world were really

wasted with wars and famines while diseases and bad planning had made millions of people unhappy. Everywhere had been discovered, nowhere was remote or savage anymore. Scotland wasn't actually too bad in comparison with the war torn 'outside world'. Although there certainly were plenty of poor and diseased and unhappy people (mainly those living outside the city walls), there had never really been any kind of modern, technological warfare to physically mar the natural beauty of the place. When proposals for the park became public, it transpired that the outsiders (as these outcast people were known) were to be rounded up and put in hostel camps to be re-habilitated out of harm's way, up in the northern parts of the country, because now it suited the

country's leaders to help them as plenty of workers would be needed for the park. There were big areas in the North of Scotland where most of the people had been thrown out in what was called The Highland Clearances which began in the nineteenth Century. They were replaced with sheep during the blockades of the Napoleonic wars because these animals were actually more profitable than people. The outsiders were to re-populate these remote areas for the benefit of the tourists, in what became known as: The Highland Clearances in Reverse.<sup>③</sup>

The basic idea for Scotia – The Living History of a Small Nation, when it opened in 2062, was very simple. Each area of the country would adopt the look

<sup>②</sup> Ireland had become very rich in the first decades of the twenty-first Century with the discovery of certain natural elements found only in its indigenous peat bogs which proved to be a panacea for many cancer based illnesses. <sup>③</sup> While the English were always willing to encourage anything that would destabilise Scotland, it should be pointed out that in this respect the Scots have more often than not been their own worst enemies. The Highland

ander buiten te sluiten omdat er nu betaald moest worden om binnen te komen – en dat zou niet goedkoop zijn.

De meeste mensen ten noorden van de Muur van Hadrianus waren aanvankelijk erg enthousiast over deze nieuwe ontwikkeling, omdat Schotland in het midden van de eenentwintigste eeuw ten prooi was gevallen aan een vreselijke depressie, de ergste sinds de Middeleeuwen in het vorige millennium. Ziekten die eeuwenlang hadden gesluimerd waren erger dan ooit teruggekeerd en tienduizenden waren eraan gestorven. Diegenen die de eenvoudige preventieve medicijnen voor deze zonderlinge ziekten niet konden betalen werden echte outcasts en leefden in haveloze, meelijwekkende groepen, zoals de lepra-kolonies uit bijbelse tijden. Daarom kwamen ze niet voor in het stemregister en deden ze niet mee aan het Stirling Bridge Referendum van 2061.<sup>①</sup> Officieel bestonden ze helemaal niet. Tegen de jaren veertig van de eenentwintigste eeuw waren ze zo'n probleem geworden dat er hoge muren om de belangrijkste steden werden gebouwd om ze buiten te houden. De mensen die binnen de muren woonden probeerden de arme stakkers daarbuiten te vergeten. Toen in het midden van de jaren vijftig het idee van het themapark voor het eerst aan de orde

werd gesteld, werd de fantasie van de Schotten erdoor gestimuleerd en dreef het de bevolking tot een intensief debat en een dadendrang zoals in geen decennia vertoond was. De publiciteit die deze debatten teweegbrachten, zette veel voormalige patriotten ertoe aan om weer terug te gaan naar hun vaderland. Tenminste twintig miljoen mensen over de hele wereld beschouwden zichzelf als Schots door afstamming, maar waren eigenlijk nog nooit 'thuis' geweest; dit pakte heel gunstig uit omdat sommigen van hen erg rijk waren en hun fortuin meebrachten om in het park te investeren. Het was het eerste goede idee in lange tijd waar wie dan ook in Schotland was opgekomen en het was dus geen wonder dat het zo snel werd opgepikt. Het hielp de inwoners bovendien om niet stil te staan bij de ellende die zich buiten de stadsmuren afspeelde.

Rond deze tijd in de jaren vijftig, nog voor de bouw van het park, had de parlementaire democratie in Engeland heel wat eigen problemen. De schatkist was zo ongeveer leeg vanwege de lange oorlogen met Frankrijk en Ierland.<sup>②</sup> Men kon het zich gewoonweg niet meer veroorloven om zich druk te maken over Schotland, vooral niet omdat de olie op was. Englands internationale reputatie was dieper gezonken dan ooit en de meeste mensen geloofden dat Westminster eigenlijk heel blij was om van zijn lastige en geld-

<sup>①</sup> Deze arme, rechteloos gemaakte mensen mochten weliswaar niet stemmen bij verkiezingen maar ze hoefden ook geen belasting te betalen. <sup>②</sup> Ierland was in de eerste twee decennia van de eenentwintigste eeuw heel rijk geworden vanwege de ontdekking van bepaalde natuurlijke elementen die alleen op de inheemse veengronden werden aangetroffen en die wondermiddelen bleken te zijn voor verschillende kankerachtige ziekten. <sup>③</sup> Hoewel de Engelsen altijd in waren om alles te

a horrific depression, the likes of which had not been seen since the middle ages of the previous millennium. Diseases which had lain dormant for centuries had returned with a vengeance and were killing off poor people in tens of thousands. Those who couldn't afford the simple drugs which prevented these grotesque diseases became truly outcast, living in pathetic ragged groups like the leper colonies of biblical times. Thus they were not represented on any voting rolls and therefore did not take part in the 'democratic' Stirling Bridge Referendum of 2061.<sup>①</sup> Officially they did not even exist. By the 2040's they had become such a problem that large walls were built round the major cities to keep them out and the people who lived inside them tried to forget about those

poor wretches who were outside.

When the idea for the theme park was first mooted in the mid 2050's it fired up the Scottish people's imagination, galvanising them into an intense debate and direct action not witnessed for many decades. The publicity generated by these debates slowly encouraged many ex-patriots to return home. There were at least twenty million people around the world who considered themselves Scottish by ancestry, but had never actually been 'home'; this turned out to be quite fortuitous as some of these folk were very rich and brought back their fortunes with them to invest in the park. It was the first good idea anyone in Scotland had thought of for quite a while so it was no wonder it caught on so

<sup>①</sup> These poor disenfranchised people may not have had the vote in any election but they didn't have to pay tax either.

park een beetje moest gaan functioneren als het vrijwilligerslegioen uit de twintigste eeuw, toen je je handtekening op de stippellijn zette en ermee instemde om voor een jaar of drie te blijven.

Alle meest spectaculaire veldslagen en gebeurtenissen werden dagelijks opnieuw opgevoerd in de heuvels en dalen van de hooglanden. Toeristen dromden samen op de kaalste en meest afgelegen plekken, op zoek naar de meest authentieke ervaringen in het themapark. Zo konden bezoekers uit China of Peru in niet meer dan een week of zo met gemak een levendige indruk krijgen van de hele geschiedenis van onze kleine staat, en dan heb ik het nog niet eens over het prachtige landschap dat ze natuurlijk te zien kregen. De hele oorspronkelijke flora en fauna was in ere hersteld: onoverzichtelijke, ongecultiveerde bossen vol wolven, wilde zwijnen en alle andere interessante dieren die ooit op die plek hadden geleefd, maar ten slotte waren uitgestorven omdat de Schotten er niet goed mee waren omgegaan.

Het Schotse volk maakte de indruk heel gelukkig te zijn met hun nieuwe rol als Levens Echte figuranten in deze nagespeelde versie van de geschiedenis. Schotland had veel succes en werd welvarend, en iedereen was het erover eens dat het een fantastisch idee was geweest om het

land opnieuw uit te vinden als themapark. Voor de Schotten was alles gratis, maar de toeristen betaalden eerlijk gezegd waanzinnige prijzen, alleen maar om dezelfde lucht in te ademen als de Schotten. Van buitenaf zag het er misschien uit als een merkwaardige situatie: het Schotse volk verleende in feite diensten aan de toeristen en bereikte daardoor dezelfde levensstandaard als zij. De Schotten zaten echter vast aan deze manier van leven in het themapark: ze konden nooit naar huis gaan, naar een echte plek, of een normale baan zoeken – het duurde 24 uur per dag en zeven dagen per week. Zelfs hun vrijetijdsbesteding was openbaar en de toeristen stonden hen ook daar aan te gapen. Toch was het een comfortabel bestaan en weinig mensen hadden klachten, vooral zij niet die eerder buiten de maatschappij hadden moeten leven omdat ze niet die paar pond hadden om goedkope medicijnen te kopen.

in de Laaglanden van Schotland. Ze waren gewend geraakt aan de plek waar ze naartoe waren gegaan en hadden het er waarschijnlijk naar hun zin; ze waren Schotland vergeten, behalve dan op een vage, romantische manier die eerder afkomstig was van de Hollywoodfilms van die tijd dan van wat ze zich daadwerkelijk herinnerden, omdat ze waarschijnlijk in geen 150 jaar terug waren geweest. Daarom bleven de meesten gewoon waar ze terechtgekomen waren. Je kunt maar beter te maken hebben

and lifestyle of a certain epoch in Scottish history. Everyone who lived in these areas would adopt the mores and manners of their designated period. Our best actors would play the great figures in our history, except they wouldn't so much play them as be them, since they never got the chance to be off set or out of costume. This should be stressed. The whole country was subsumed into the park, you couldn't escape it. Anyone else who happened to live in Scotland at the time got the chance to stay on, if they wanted. This was to reflect for the tourists, the tolerant atmosphere created by the mixture of people who originally came from elsewhere to settle in this small country. However, you couldn't really have people coming and going all the time so it was decided that

employment for the lower ranks in the park would be a bit like the volunteer Armies of the twentieth Century, where you signed on the dotted line and agreed to stay for something like 3 years at a time.

All Scotland's most spectacular battles and events were re-enacted daily in the hills and glens of the Highlands; tourists would flock to the most barren and remote places searching for the theme park's most authentic experiences. Thus a visitor from China or Peru could easily get a vivid impression of the whole history of our small nation in only a week or so, not to mention seeing the wonderful scenery. All the original flora and fauna were restored – complex deciduous forests filled with wolf, boar

and all the other interesting animals that used to live in the place, but had eventually died out because the Scots didn't take care of them properly.

The Scottish people appeared to be quite happy in their new occupation as Real Life extras in this simulated version of history. Scotland became very successful and prosperous and everyone agreed that re-inventing itself as a theme park had been a really great idea. Everything was free for Scottish people, although the tourists paid frankly outrageous prices just to breathe the same air as the Scots. From the outside it might have seemed like a bit of an odd situation: the Scottish people were basically providing a service for these tourists while achieving just about the

Clearances were just as much the fault of the money grabbing Scots landowners as the English. When the political and economic situation changed many years later, most of these folk who'd left never went back because they'd gone far away to Ireland or The Americas or to the cities in the Lowlands of Scotland. Wherever they went they had got used to it and probably quite liked it and forgot about Scotland except in a vague romantic way, based more on

## De belangrijkste steden van de Central Belt: Edinburgh en Glasgow

De stad Edinburgh koos ervoor om de pre-industriële Verlichtingsperiode van de stad te representeren<sup>4</sup>, en Glasgow nam de post-industriële of 'culturele' periode. Dit tijdperk in de geschiedenis van Glasgow besloeg oorspronkelijk een tijdspanne van tien jaar aan het einde van de twintigste en het begin van de eenentwintigste eeuw, toen Glasgow voor korte tijd zeer populair was bij het mondiale toerisme. Nieuwe musea voor kunst en cultuur werden op uitzonderlijke schaal gebouwd en oppervlakkig gezien leek alles heel goed te gaan. Deze nieuwe opslagplaatsen van de cultuur stonden een populaire kunstvorm voor die geacht werd voor iedereen toegankelijk te zijn.

Maar er was een groot probleem. De opleidingsinstituten die les gaven aan mensen vanaf vijf jaar waren er mee opgehouden om hun leerlingen te vertellen over kunst en cultuur, omdat je daarmee geen baantje in een kantoor kon krijgen als je van school kwam op je zeventiende. Op zeker moment was het zover gekomen dat niemand meer het gevoel had nog iets van kunst en cultuur te weten, wat erg jammer was omdat Schotland ooit een zeer onderlegd land

was geweest. Hierdoor wantrouwde het publiek de mensen die nog steeds kunst en cultuur produceerden – en wie zou het ze kwalijk kunnen nemen? Men probeerde de door henzelf uitgeroepen 'renaissance' aan de man te brengen door te zeggen dat ze kunst voor het volk leverde, maar het probleem was dat het volk er niet om vroeg.

De fout van deze 'renaissance' was de benadering waarvoor het stadsbestuur had gekozen om cultuur voor het publiek toegankelijker te maken. Ze simplificeerde en banaliseerde de cultuur dusdanig dat het iedereen zou aanspreken, ook diegenen die tot dan toe niets afwisten van enigerlei vorm van culturele activiteit. Toneelproducties die gecompliceerde en moeilijke thema's behandelden werden bij voorbaat al afgewezen in het voordeel van muzikale extravagante stukken à la Busby Berkley, waar iedereen van hield. Beeldende kunst werd beperkt tot ontwerpen voor wenskaarten, wel in olieverf geschilderd uiteraard. De literatuur van Glasgow, die ooit scherpzinnig, gepolitiseerd en onafhankelijk was geweest, werd nu geproduceerd door de stad zelf, ter verdediging van haar eigen politiek. Deze Nieuwe Glasgowsse Cultuur (zoals zij bekend kwam te staan) stelde geen hoge eisen aan oog en oor en zorgde voor een paar gezellige uurtjes afleiding van de regen.

met de duivel die je kent, dachten ze - dat wil zeggen, tot ze over het park hoorden...

<sup>4</sup> Dit hield de reconstructie in van de Koninklijke Mijl, die tijdens de Disney Castle-rellen van 2025 totaal verwoest was.

same standard of living as them. But the Scots were tied to this way of life in the theme park, they could never go home to somewhere real or do a normal job – it was 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Even leisure pursuits were open and available for the global tourist to gawk at. However, it was a comfortable life, and few people complained, especially the ones who had previously been forced to live outside of society for the want of few pounds worth of cheap drugs.

The Main Cities of the Central Belt, Edinburgh and Glasgow  
The City of Edinburgh elected to represent the pre-industrial Enlightenment period of the city's history<sup>3</sup>, while

Glasgow adopted the post-industrial or 'Cultural period'. This era in the history of Glasgow originally occurred during a ten year period at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first Centuries, when Glasgow was briefly very popular with global tourism. New museums of art and culture were built at an extraordinary rate and on the surface everything seemed to be going very well. These new repositories of culture championed a popular kind of art which everyone was supposed to be able to access.

There was a major problem though. The educational establishments which taught people from 5 years old upwards had, at this time in the late twentieth Century, stopped telling people anything

about art and culture because it couldn't get you a job in an office when you left school at 17. So, it came to the point where nobody felt they really knew anything about art and culture anymore, which was a great pity as Scotland had once been a very bright country. This made the public suspicious of the people who still made art and culture – and who could blame them? This self proclaimed 'renaissance' was advertised as providing art for the people but the problem was that the people never asked for it.

The flaw in this 'renaissance' was the approach the city fathers took to make culture more accessible to the public. They made all the culture so simplified and banal that it would appeal to

the Hollywood movies of the time than anything they actually remembered, as they probably hadn't been back home for 150 years. So most of them just stayed wherever they ended up. Better the devil you know, they thought until they heard about the park that is...<sup>4</sup> This involved the reconstruction of the Royal Mile, which was completely destroyed by the Disney Castle riots of 2025.

Iedereen – zelfs diegenen die zich verzetten tegen het opleggen van dit culturele equivalent van bloemetjesbehang – was het erover eens dat deze culturele plekken aardige koffiebars hadden.

Maar...

...De aanvankelijke aantrekkingskracht en opwinning van deze periode namen snel af toen de mensen begonnen te begrijpen dat ze betutteld werden. Tegen het einde van het eerste decennium van de eenentwintigste eeuw beschouwde iedereen die ook maar enig benul had van het leven en de cultuur dit tijdperk als werkelijk dwaas. Uiteindelijk raakte de lokale bevolking afgestompt doordat ze zodanig bevoogd werd, dat ze op den duur zelf meende dat ze geen enkele vorm van cultuur kon begrijpen waarover je meer dan tien seconden moest nadenken. Dit leidde ertoe dat het Schotse volk lui werd. Nadat deze misselijkmakende zoete culturele rottigheid hun jarenlang met de paplepel was ingegoten, konden ze geen enkele vorm van vast cultureel voedsel meer verteren. Ze kwijnden weg tot niet meer dan schimmen van hun vroegere kracht en werden steeds magerder, bleker en lustelozer. Internationaal gezien was de Nieuwe Glasgowsse Cultuur een gênante vertoning.

## De Trongate-affaire

Deze periode werd definitief afgesloten in 2013 door wat bekend is geworden als de Trongate-affaire. Inmiddels waren verschillende leden van de Transmission Gallery en andere onafhankelijk gezinde cultuur-ruimtes in het gebied in een aantal jaren met succes doorgedrongen tot diverse commissies en bekleedden ze een groot aantal belangrijke posities in de lokale en nationale raden van cultuur. Vanuit deze posities konden ze het hele bedroevende systeem ondermijnen. Uiteindelijk lieten ze de hele Nieuwe Glasgowsse Cultuur in scherven rond de oren vliegen van diegenen die te doof waren geweest om te luisteren naar de lasteraars die deze debilisering van het volk hadden voorzien.

De 'coup' werd helaas onwettig verklaard en resulteerde erin dat Transmission een verboden organisatie werd en ondergronds moest gaan. Daar leidde ze een bloeiend bestaan onder bescherming van een plaatselijke kunstenaar die erg rijk en beroemd was geworden door zijn werk buiten Schotland te verkopen, en die niets terug vroeg behalve dat Transmission zou doorgaan zoals ze dat altijd al had gedaan. Vlak na het debacle van de Trongate-affaire werd de Paarse Woensdag Krach van 2014 de definitieve nagel aan de dooiskist van de stadsbestuurders. Gedrukt geld raakte van de ene op

⑤ Deze tentoonstellingen vinden meestal plaats in afgelegen gebieden van de Hooglanden of op onbewoonde eilanden.

everyone, even those who knew nothing about any form of cultural activity beforehand. Productions of plays which dealt with complex and difficult issues were discouraged, in favour of Busby Berkley style musical extravaganzas – everyone loved these. Visual art was reduced to greeting card designs, though painted in oils, naturally. Glaswegian literature, which was once incisive, politicised and independent, was now produced by the city itself, in defence of its own strategies. This New Glasgow Culture (as it became known) was very easy on the eye and on the ear, and provided a cosy hour or two of distraction out of the rain, and everyone – even those who stood against the imposition of this cultural equivalent of flock wallpaper – agreed that all these

places of culture had lovely coffee bars.

However...

...The initial appeal and excitement of this era quickly dwindled when the people began to understand that they were being patronised. By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first Century this period was already seen by anyone who knew anything about life and culture to be truly daft. It eventually stupefied the locals by patronising them into thinking that they couldn't understand any kind of culture that you had to think about for more than ten seconds. This led to the Scottish people becoming lazy. After being fed this sickly sweet culture mulch for many years they could no longer digest any kind of solid

cultural food. They faded away to mere shadows of their former, robust selves, becoming thinner and paler and lethargic. They were losing the ability to think for themselves. Internationally, New Glasgow Culture was an embarrassment.

#### The Trongate Affair

This period ended for good in 2013 in what became known as The Trongate Affair. By this time various members of Transmission Gallery and other independently minded cultural spaces located in the area, had successfully infiltrated over the years various committees and held numerous important positions in the local and national culture councils. From these

de andere dag waardeloos, wat mondiaal tumult en oproer tot gevolg had, vooral van de kant van diegenen die geen creditcards hadden en daardoor van het nieuwe systeem waren uitgesloten. Omdat veel mensen in Schotland nog steeds van de hand in de tand leefden, was dit inderdaad slecht nieuws voor de stadsbestuurders. Het was gedaan met hen. De Nieuwe Glasgowsse Cultuur was voor altijd verdwenen (althans, dat dacht iedereen).

## De ironie

Hoewel de periode van de Nieuwe Glasgowsse Cultuur nu geheel in diskrediet is geraakt en in feite een aforisme is geworden om de banalisering van de cultuur mee aan te duiden, was het ironisch genoeg deze periode die de nieuwe stadsbestuurders uitkozen om uit te beelden in Scotia – de levende geschiedenis van een kleine staat, vijftig jaar na het eigenlijke debacle. Dit gebeurde simpelweg omdat het de periode was geweest die de meeste mondiale aandacht van de media had getrokken en die iedereen zich herinnerde, ten goede of ten kwade. Sommigen zeggen dat slechte publiciteit niet bestaat, maar ik ben daar niet zo zeker van.

## Epiloog

Zoals het in het Echte Leven was geweest, zo is het nu in het themapark. Transmission is nog steeds een verboden organisatie maar floreert tot op de dag van vandaag en presenteert weloverwogen, uitdagende tentoonstellingen in tijdelijke, speciale ruimtes. Sommige aspecten van de tentoonstellingsstructuur doen denken aan de populaire rave-cultuur van de late twintigste eeuw, toen je over een nieuwe tentoonstelling<sup>⑤</sup> hoorde via een ingewikkeld geruchtcircuit van vrienden en kennissen. Mensen komen illegaal bij elkaar op de dagen dat ze vrij hebben van hun werk in het themapark<sup>®</sup>; ze spreken af om elkaar ergens te ontmoeten, bijvoorbeeld op een bepaalde aanlegsteiger van een veerpont, wanhopig op zoek naar iets nieuws, echts en aangenaams. Want hoewel het park fascinerend is voor de toeristen, is het vanzelfsprekend zeer, zeer saai voor de mensen die er leven en werken.

De events en exposities van Transmission zijn een beetje 'in' geworden bij de meer ondernemende toeristen die met elkaar wedijveren over wie de meest obscure en opwindende tentoonstellingen gezien heeft, maar het is vooral de autochtone bevolking die ervan geniet. Jammer genoeg worden deze tentoonstellingen weer heel snel gesloten omdat ze illegaal zijn.

⑤ 'Illegaal', omdat het de bedoeling is dat niemand ooit 'uit zijn rol' gezien wordt.

positions they were able to undermine the whole sorry system and eventually brought the whole New Glasgow Culture crashing down around the ears of those who had been too deaf to listen to the detractors, who had foreseen this moronisation of the people.

This 'coup' was unfortunately deemed to be illegal and resulted in Transmission becoming a proscribed organisation and being forced underground. Here it flourished under the patronage of a local artist who had become very rich and famous by selling his work outside Scotland and who asked nothing in return except that the gallery continued in the way it always had. Just after the debacle of The Trongate Affair, the final nail in the

coffin for the city fathers was the Purple Wednesday Crash of 2014. Printed money became obsolete overnight, causing mayhem and revolt across the globe, particularly from those who didn't have credit cards and were therefore excluded from the new system. Since many people in Scotland still lived a hand to mouth existence this was, indeed, bad news for the city fathers. It was all over for them. New Glasgow Culture has gone for good (or so everyone thought).


#### The Irony

So, ironically, although the period of New Glasgow Culture is now wholly discredited, and has in fact become an aphorism to describe the banalisation of

culture, it is this period the new city fathers chose to represent in Scotia – The Living History of a Small Nation, fifty years after the debacle itself. This was simply because it was the period that had garnered the most global media attention and everyone remembered it, for better or worse. Some say there's no such thing as bad publicity, but I'm not so sure.

#### Epilogue

Thus, as it was in Real Life, now it is in the theme park. Transmission is still a proscribed organisation but continues to flourish to this day, presenting thoughtful, challenging exhibitions in temporary, out of the way spaces. Some aspects of its exhibition structure



Documentatie wordt nog steeds bijgehouden in de oude boekvorm; de boeken worden wijd en zijd verspreid, hoewel verboden en vernietigd als ze gevonden worden. Soms worden deze boeken zo gemaakt dat ze op een relatief onschuldige tekst of op een geschiedenisboek lijken, zodat ze clandestien in openbare bibliotheekcollecties kunnen worden ingevoegd. Op het ogenblik is het een populaire strategie om deze boeken onder te brengen in openbare verzamelingen uit vroegere tijden door het gebruik van een standaard-lineaire tijdsveranderings-documentenoverdracht. Op deze manier worden de boeken en de informatie van de toekomst dus decennia voordat de beschreven gebeurtenissen hebben plaatsgevonden al verspreid.

Voor het geval u het nog niet geraden had: hierdoor kunt u deze geschiedenis nu lezen, bijna honderd jaar te vroeg. Deze methode van documentenoverdracht verandert in technische zin gewoonlijk weinig aan de loop van de geschiedenis omdat de toekomst altijd te fantastisch lijkt om te geloven voordat hij echt plaatsvindt. Ik bedoel: wie zou de onaan-nemelijke geschiedenis van de twintigste eeuw hebben geloofd als hij in 1899 zou zijn voorspeld? Zo is het ook met de eenentwintigste en de twintigste eeuw. Laten we daarom voor een moment bij elkaar komen, het glas heffen en een toast uitbrengen op Transmission. Gelukkige honderdste verjaardag, proost op de toekomst..

(Wordt vervolgd...)

resemble the popular rave culture of the late twentieth Century, where you hear of a new exhibition<sup>Ⓔ</sup> from a complex grapevine of friends and acquaintances. People gather illegally on their days off from working in the theme park<sup>Ⓕ</sup> arranging to meet at a particular ferry terminal somewhere, desperate to see something new and real and engaging. For although the park is fascinating to the tourists, it is, of course, very, very boring for those who live and work there. Transmission events and exhibitions have become somewhat vogueish with the more intrepid tourists who vie with each other over the most obscure and exciting shows they have seen, but it is mainly the indigenous population who enjoy them. Unfortunately these exhibitions get closed down with great

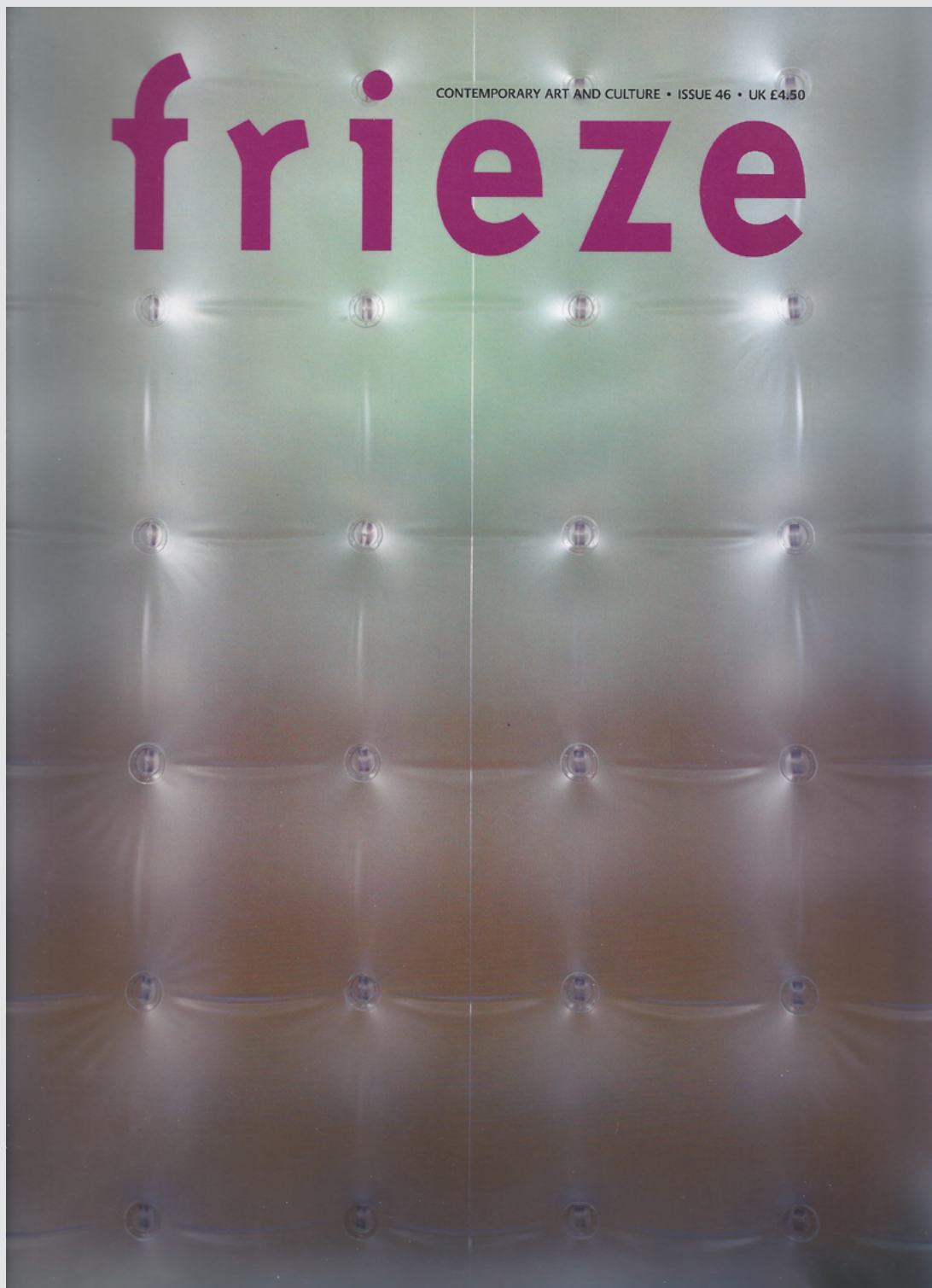
rapidity as they are illegal. Records are always kept in the old book form and these get distributed widely although they are banned and destroyed if found. Sometimes these books are produced in such a way as to look like a relatively innocuous text or history book, so they can be surreptitiously inserted into public library collections. A strategy currently popular is to place these books into public collections of times gone by, using a standard linear time shift document transferral. Thus the books and information of the future are already in circulation decades before the actual events described have happened.

If you hadn't guessed already, this is how you are able to read this history now, almost one hundred years early.

This document transferral technique usually doesn't change much of the course of history because the future always seems too fantastic to believe before it actually happens. I mean, who would have believed the incredible history of the twentieth Century if you'd foretold it in 1899? Thus it is with the twenty-first and twentieth Centuries. So let us take a moment to join together, raise a glass and make a toast to Transmission. Happy hundredth birthday, here's to the future...

(To be continued...)

<sup>Ⓔ</sup> These exhibitions are usually in the remoter parts of the Highlands or on uninhabited islands. <sup>Ⓕ</sup> 'Illegally' because no-one is ever supposed to be seen 'out of character'.



## Jim Lambie

Transmission Gallery,  
Glasgow

There used to be a rumour that Lambie covered his flat in tin-foil, like a DIY domestic version of Warhol's factory. But it wasn't him, it was his flatmate Joogs, who was in Primal Scream. Lambie too, is involved in music. He played xylophone in a proto version of Teenage Fanclub and is currently co-ordinating the visuals for soon-to-be-huge Glasgow music club survivors Superstar.

When everyone else was going to art school, Lambie didn't. But he was always around, at every party you were ever at. He finally succumbed to education five years later. Lambie doesn't talk about art in the same way as the rest of us. He wants to know why 'I could do that' is the most predictable slur the public can hurl at art when it's the foundation of all music from Elvis to bedroom techno: here's one chord, here's another, there's a third – now form a band. In short, Lambie's angle is absent-minded phone-pad doodling, let loose in glorious 5D.

His first solo show, 'Voidoid', consists of four pieces. A poster *Earth, Wind and Fire* (1999) is pinned to the gallery wall, with the outline of the band carefully filled in with some muddy kind of paint. *Psychedelic Soul Stick* (1999) a twig with a sock wound around it, leans casually against the wall, wrapped with thousands of pieces of coloured thread. A video, *Ultra Low* (1998), in the pitch-black basement shows the fragile firefly flickerings of a room full of people smoking, filmed in the dark. Nothing is visible except for the silent ghosts of a blackout party. Slowly you begin to realise that the fags are all illuminating at the same time. The image is constructed from 20 overlaid shots of Lambie sitting in a chair smoking a whole packet of Silk Cut. A complex map of the casual movements your arms and head make while your mind wanders, the video is like a witty *mélange* of Modernism and social anthropology – Richter versus Nauman, if you will.

Lambie's works are often influenced by arbitrary edges and borders. In this show, the psychedelic anarchy of the floor is created by faithful rendering the minute architectural details of the edge of the

gallery, door frames and pillars as they flow ever inwards, like the circle of ripples from a pebble, but in reverse. The lysergic floorboard alterations in the main space engulf the whole room, propelling it down into the spinning vortex created by the tens of thousands of coloured stripes that emanate from the gallery walls.

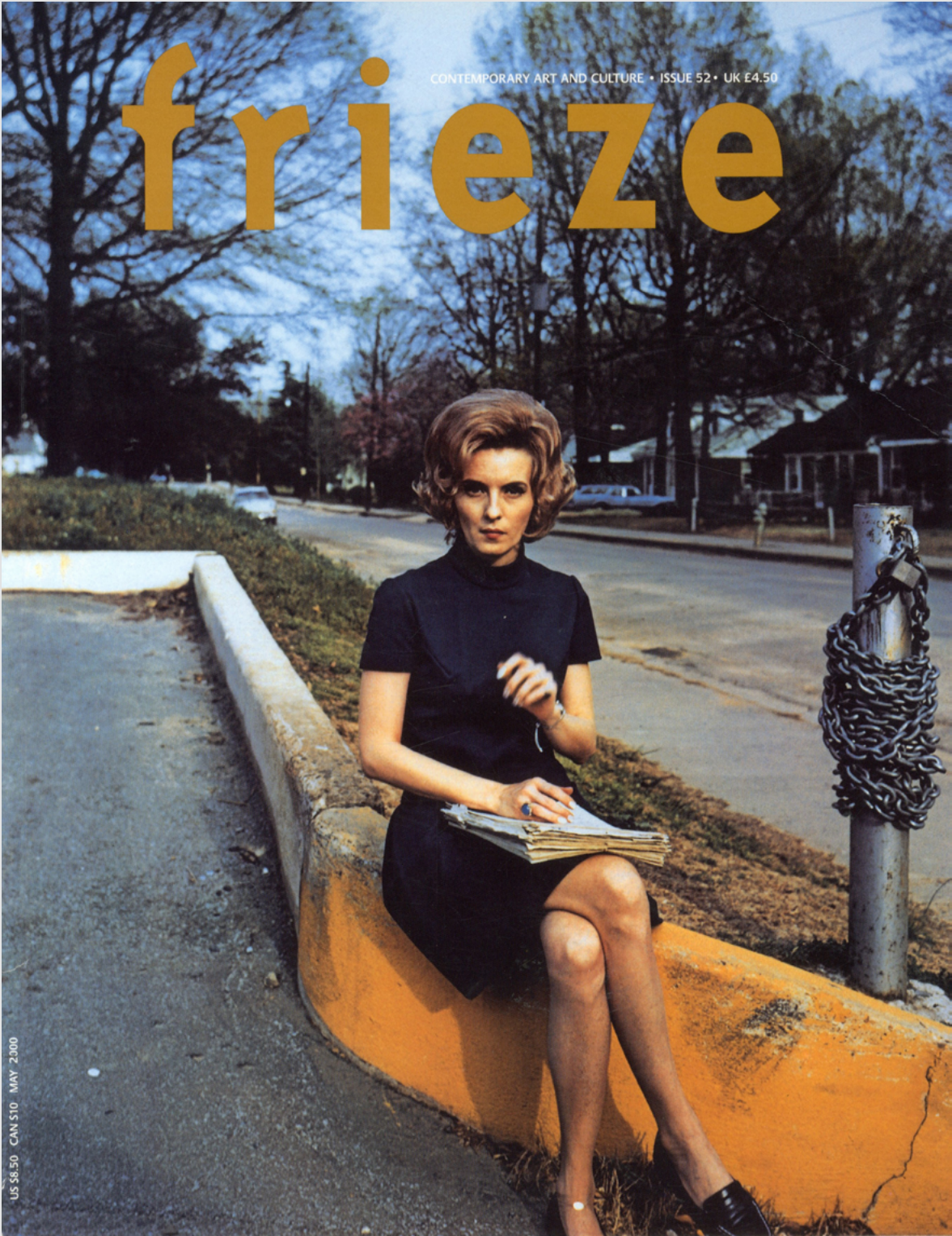
Lambie is big on transporting the viewer into seemingly unimaginable spaces, yet his work is often generated from the everyday. Out of context, most of his objects look as if they were made on the kitchen table, but when you see them in a gallery, they appear to be transported from another plane of consciousness. His is the kind of work that sounds like shit when you describe it, but explodes into life when you experience it first hand.

Lambie shares something with Tobias Rehberger: the art they make needs people in order to function. Sometimes it's just an excuse for a party, or maybe it only seems that way because they make it look easy. So pop out for some fags, stick the kettle on, sit back and enjoy the refreshing taste of Lambie. As he himself would say 'fuckin' hectic... man'.

Ross Sinclair

Jim Lambie  
ZOPOB  
1999  
Coloured vinyl strip  
1100x1100cm





## Peter McCaughey

### Tramway at ABC, Glasgow

The cinema where Peter McCaughey exhibited *Coming Soon/ARC* (2000) is in the middle of the bars and bistros of the new 'Euro-Glasgow'. It used to house the largest screen in Scotland, (one of the few especially designed for 70mm surround sound), but will soon be demolished, another victim of competition from the multiplex media-shopping experience. At the time of McCaughey's show, the cinema had only been closed for six weeks – the seats were recently ripped out and the cinematic fixtures and fittings could still be found in skips on the street outside.

McCaughey's project was split into two sections, shown a week apart. The first, *Coming Soon*, re-contextualised the everyday minutiae of cinema vernacular with illuminated poster panels which the artist had hauled out of the skips and re-installed on the outside of the building. Plastic letters used to advertise films hung forlornly on a shabby brick wall, juxtaposed with pictures from inside the projection room. These illustrated the somewhat basic, chaotic conditions which produce Hollywood's magic – hand written lists, instructions, reminders etc. *Coming Soon* effectively functioned as a trailer to the main presentation.

*Arc*, one week later, marked the building's transition from cinema into nothingness. Amongst other things, its title refers to the name of the lamp which lights the projector. The arc was originally made by sending a current between two carbon rods, which produced the brilliant light needed to project the moving image. But McCaughey's project looked further back than the building's cinematic history – 100 years ago it housed 'Hengler's Circus'. Deep in the heart of the city, a full complement of wild animals from every corner of the globe would be led up from their basement lairs into the glare of the public gaze. They were also taken into

the Mackintosh building of the Glasgow School of Art, which sits behind the ABC site, where the bemused students were required to draw the exotic creatures.

McCaughey negotiated access to this building in the grey period between the end of the cinema's lease and the sale and 'regeneration' of the building. He persuaded the cinema to sell him the 70mm projector and leave the quadra-

phonic sound system in place. The audience for *Arc* entered through a side fire-exit, which necessitated a disorienting, subterranean crawl through the 'backstage' of labyrinthine passages. McCaughey made a short looped film on 70mm,

projected it into this space and miked up the sound of the projector into the auditorium – which, with the seats ripped out and the audience displaced, was cavernous, echoing and soulless. Walking around this strange non-space conjured up feelings of watching a movie during a wartime emergency – the audience were not present to

see a film but to be with other people, even if words were never exchanged. The novelty of being able to walk around as the film was screened was a simple but significant re-addressing of the usual cinematic paradigm.

McCaughey's film presented a flying sweep around the building itself, shot from high above the city in a lyrical arc which ended the loop above the cinema where it began. It

takes a very keen eye to see that the image is, in fact, still: McCaughey's film is the result of some supple rostrum camera work. As the camera spins away from street level, soaring into the city sky, it has both the feel of a classic movie opening and a classic end shot. The noise of the whirring, clicking projector piped into the auditorium slowly became the sound of a helicopter, and when the faint strains of Wagner began, it suddenly became clear we were listening to fragments of soundtrack culled from *Apocalypse Now*, one of the last movies shown in the space.

McCaughey identified two points in the film where the word 'arc' is mentioned and he looped a version of the soundtrack between these two points, fading in and out, distant and abstract one moment, clear and focused the next... 'incoming, incoming'.

There are no simple conclusions to the various components of *Arc*, more a poignant marking of the movement of time and the

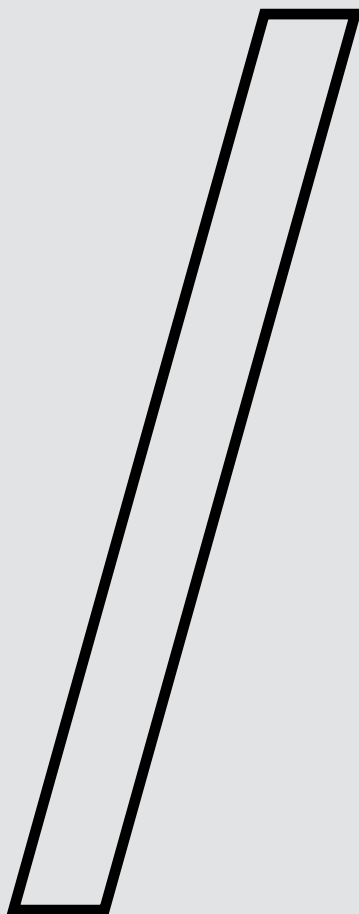
memories it leaves behind. While the work was showing, McCaughey proffered an open invitation to any projectionists who had worked in the cinema to come in to be photographed. The day I visited I saw a small group in the projection room waiting to have their portraits taken. One of them had begun working in the building in 1947. Together, these half a dozen unassuming characters had projected the greatest and most awful films imaginable, charting the breathtaking rise and fall of the last 50 years of cinema history.

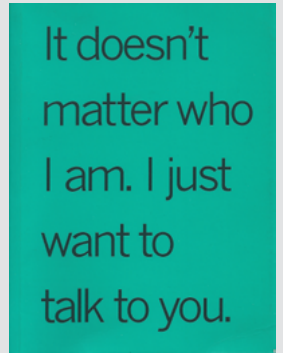
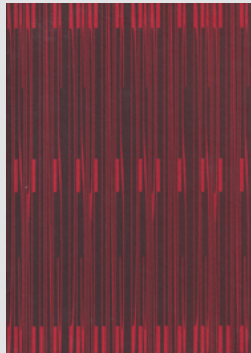
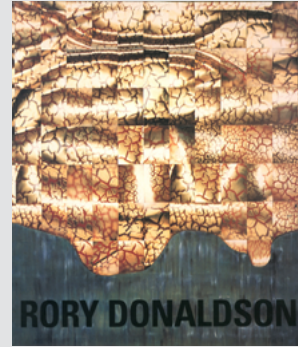
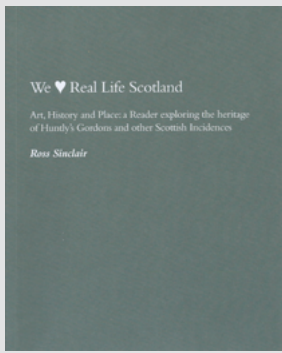
Ross Sinclair

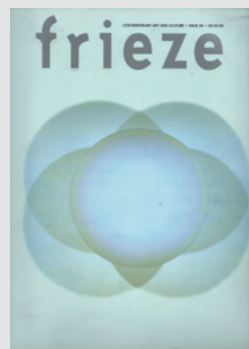
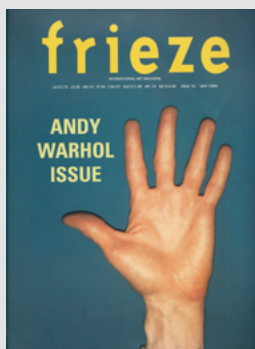
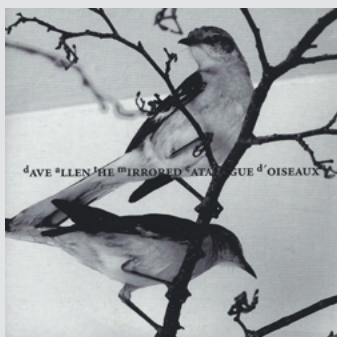
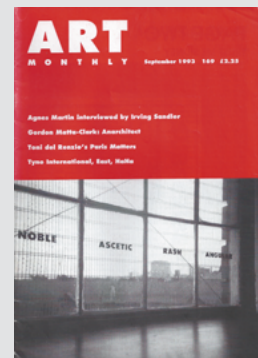
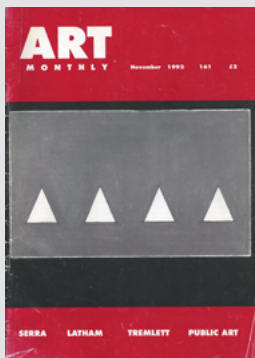
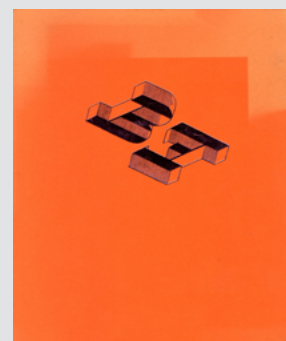


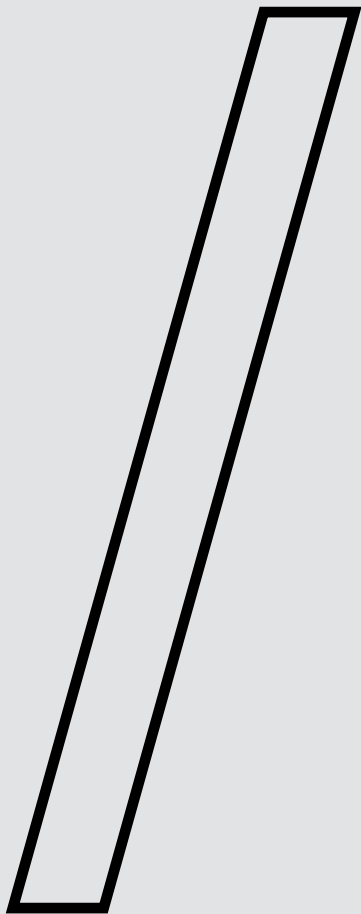
Peter McCaughey  
*Arc*  
2000  
Installation view

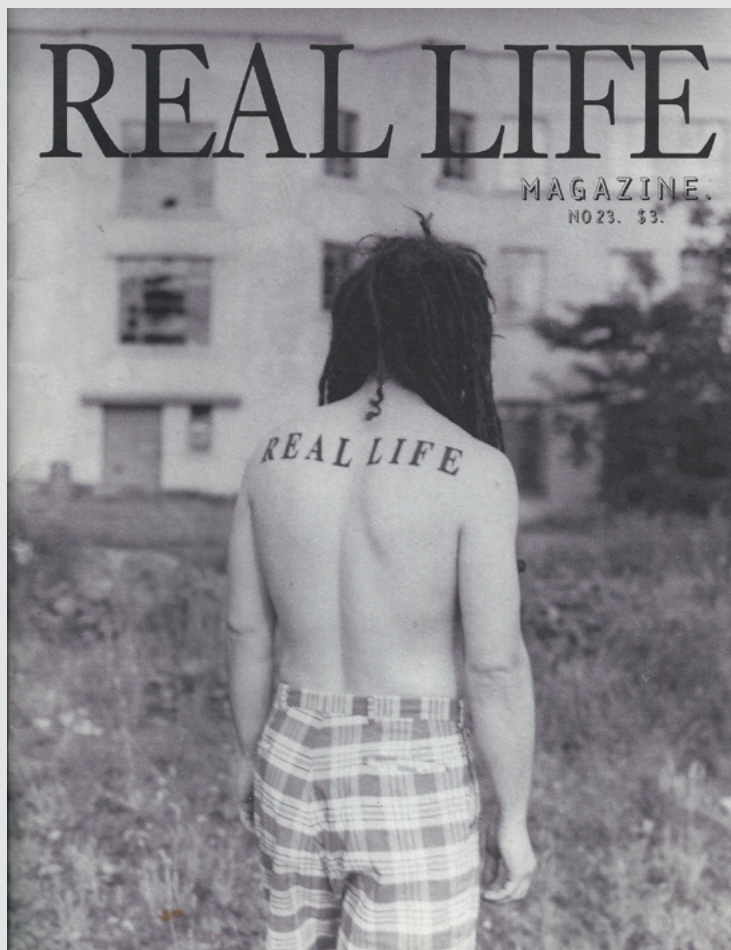
McCaughey's project looked further back than the building's cinematic history: 100 years ago it housed an indoor circus, complete with a full complement of wild animals from every corner of the globe.











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*Real Life Magazine*

*A note of thanks to Tom Lawson & Susan Morgan*

I must finally convey a debt of gratitude to Tom Lawson and Susan Morgan, editors of *Real Life Magazine*, an independent publication 'By and about artists', first published in New York in 1979/'80/'81 and periodically thereafter throughout the eighties and early nineties.

I first met Tom Lawson in '89/'90 when he returned to Glasgow to prepare a solo show at the Third Eye Centre. I must have discovered the magazine at that point, though my memory is hazy. I know Tom had deposited a few early issues of the magazine in the GSA library but it was, in the pre-internet age, impossible to access any of the others. However, in the early '90's, the very idea that Tom and Susan had published some of the first writing by Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Kim Gordon, Richard Prince and many others in their modest black and white publication was very exciting, if almost mythological in its inaccessibility and other-ness. The additional and critical fact that Tom had travelled to New York from Scotland, via Edinburgh and St Andrews in the late '70's and become an important and influential figure as both artist/writer in that dynamic milieu was quietly inspirational to me and my peer group. It demonstrated that anything was possible, and geography need no longer be a handicap. At this point it is worth mentioning that from this distance in time and perception it's sometimes hard to remember what the '80's and early nineties were really like in Glasgow as I encountered them while a student at GSA, beginning in 1984. Culture was thin on the ground, there were very few opportunities to see or show anything apart from *new image* figurative painting. With one or two notable exceptions, there was no hinterland of accessible senior artists making challenging contemporary art. There were few role models, no workable

local route maps. Many ambitious artists, like Tom had done a decade before, simply left the country. In 1988 The Glasgow Garden Festival had briefly illuminated the south bank of the River Clyde, the first major celebration of its kind held in the city since the Empire Exhibition of 1938, fifty years previously. I suppose not much had happened in the interim that was deemed worth celebrating by the civic fathers. This was followed hot on its heels in 1990 when Glasgow donned its mantle as European Capital of Culture. While some would characterise this as the start of the cities post-industrial renaissance, to many others in the city it simply represented hollow rhetoric, accelerating the development of what we understand contemporaneously as a neo-liberal, almost Kafka-esque economic model of rapacious banking madness, promoting divide and conquer, entrenching the chasm between the rich and the poor. It has been argued that this created a wedge between the old identity of the city and the new elite creating a brand new festival of problems, many of which remain disputed to this day. Of course the truth as it was lived through those years was to be found somewhere in-between the gutter and the stars. However it is worth re-stating that this was the socio-economic legacy from which Han Ulrich Obrist would conjure his *Glasgow Miracle*, illuminated in such vivid *Technicolor* against this drab historical backdrop.

I subsequently worked with Tom shortly after our initial meeting in 1991 when I was looking after Alan Dunn's *Bellgrove Billboard Project* where Tom and I made a work while Alan was away on exchange, and I helped to facilitate the production and installation of his work. Over 1991, I talked with Tom about setting up an official exchange (when our original idea for an informal visit fell

through) with Glasgow School of Art and California Institute of the Arts, where he had just begun working as Dean of Fine Art. I eventually exchanged *officially* for half a year in 1992, at the very end of my studies. Since then dozens of artists from Glasgow School of Art have studied at Cal Arts and a few have even made it in the other direction.

Over that period I had been on a voyage of discovery traversing theoretical material including Baudrillard, Barthes, Eco, Lefebvre, de Certeau, Vaneigem, Debord around which a sustained critical interrogation of the nature and existence of everyday life, spectacular life, and *Real Life* was hotly contested. I had rehearsed a dialogue central to my project in the series of T-Shirt paintings, proposing *Real Life* vs. *Spectacular Life* amongst many other slogans that could be seen in many shows around that time. (PI Ross Sinclair: *Real Life* CCA pp14/15). My practice at that point was formally diverse and was exploring relationships between *high and low* culture activated in particular contexts in relation to specific audiences. Slowly the idea came into focus that I would have the words *Real Life* tattooed on my back, creating a new *Real Life Character*, a presence to develop my nascent practice through, creating an identifiable structure to identify and protect the different threads of the project, exploring performance and live sculptural installation, drawing them together in a loose wiring loom of cultural cables in order to illuminate a path into the future.

Tom and Susan were talking about producing a final issue of *Real Life Magazine* and I discussed with them I was thinking of having a tattoo made which would serve as an umbrella concept to hold over my developing practice. They enthusiastically

proposed that they would pay for the tattoo to be made, if they could use the resultant image as the cover for the final issue of the magazine, to which it was agreed I would also contribute an essay about the nascent art scene in Glasgow, discussing the imperatives for its dynamic inception. So this is what we did, and that's how it happened.

This symbiotic collaboration marked a significant place on the timeline of the magazine and an even more dramatic one in my own practice as I brought into being this new character, a novel vehicle that would embody the complexities and contradictions churning around this broad hinterland of ideas constructing a paradigm of *Real Life* from 1994 onwards.

I would begin to test the potential of a dialogue with audiences proposed through these ideas with a project based on practical empirical experimentation translated through a permanent tattoo on my body in a practice led research project. I was sure, at Terry's Tattoo Parlour in Glasgow that day in 1994, that the tattooing of the words *Real Life* on my body would *take up the baton* of an autonomous, artist initiated, self determined practice Tom and Susan had championed so effectively through the magazine. At that point I could only imagine the hundreds of exhibitions and thousands of moments of *publication* and engagement with audiences I would take around the world with *my Real Life* project that would flow in many directions from that one simple act and inspired by their belief in the value of the voice of artists.

The texts gathered in this document should help to illuminate that journey.

**R.S. 2016**





# ***FANZINE***

***UNAUTHORISED***

**WRITING**

**ABOUT**

**ART**

**FROM**

**SCOTLAND**

**AND IN FACT MAINLY OUT OF**

**GLASGOW**

**FROM THE NINETIES ONWARDS**

**WITH MANY NOTEABLE ABSENCES AND OMMISIONS**

***ROSS SINCLAIR***