

In the field part 1 (Squirrels, Horses and the Loch Ness Monster): Community Art 1992-4

Alan Dunn

1992

Kilmarnock 1 Ayr United 1, Rugby Park, Kilmarnock. It is a blistery 1st January 1992. It is bland and grey. It is not glamorous, but it gives me ninety-minutes to think, and the players, including an ageing Tommy Burns, make this ninety-minutes feel like an eternity. I will spend the next ten years working across the country on community, public, social and collaborative projects and break them down into neat calendar years thus:

1992 Kilmarnock, artist-in-residence at The Dick Institute

1993 The Hamilton Races mural

1995 Derby/Nottingham Community Art

1996-1999 Liverpool Community Art and Raffles Estate, Carlisle, Lead Artist

1999-2001 Newcastle Community Art

This works because many of the better contracts during the 1990s come in units of six or twelve months. During this decade, I will not have any other income. I will not sell any artworks nor have an exhibition in anything approaching a contemporary art gallery. There will be no reviews outwith local press. Billy Bragg sings "Just because you're going forwards doesn't mean I'm going backwards" and this line resonates for me during the post-Glasgow 1990s in relation to those I study alongside, described in previous texts.



What then are these texts doing?

Declan McGonagle once said to me that it is important to document and disseminate this type of non-gallery practice (which in itself is a negative phrase). Otherwise, it can get lost in the world of more tangible objects, press



reviews, catalogues and exhibition openings. These texts do not exist within any form of *keeping it real* manifesto. I see them more as reflections on a genuine existence within a professional art world that has a preference for seeking collaborative models, working with non-artists (another negative term), finding moments of irony, bewilderment, humour and working in spaces between the everyday and more avant-garde phenomena.

I am keen to see a world beyond Glasgow and I am one of 124 who apply for a one-year residency at The Dick Institute in Kilmarnock as part of the town's 400th birthday celebrations. Kilmarnock is a small town in Ayrshire with a population of around

45,000 and is famous for Robert Burns, Johnnie Walker's whisky and squirrels. Invited to undertake the residency, I am given a corner space upstairs in the musty old museum and a brief to encourage new engagement with the collection. Over the course of the year, I present two major displays and one set of large banners. In a *Sliding Doors* moment, I construct a 20x5ft billboard on the façade of The Dick, curate it and become internationally known for that for the next twenty years. But of course I don't do that. In one sense, *Bellgrove* means nothing in Kilmaronock, which oddly is what I need. I have no history here, despite it being a mere forty minutes from Glasgow. This is usually the way with *the artist in residence*, a role that can be traced in the UK back to David Harding's time as Glenrothes Town Artist 1968-78 and Marilyn Smith's early work on the idea during the foundation of Artists' Newsletter. Artists are paid to work (and sometimes live) in a particular context, but for whose benefit? You cannot create a history and instead some artists in residence make work *about the history of the host*, but they are rarely working from first hand memories. Instead, you can look around at the present and future.



The work I produce in Kilmaronock is slightly tongue-in-cheek and features flying squirrels, Elvis, obesity and musty museums. It develops a warmth over the year. I try to reinvent myself, without knowing what I can be. I suffer lots of headaches in Kilmaronock and it can be a very damp isolating place. Headache grey. From six years of shared studios at GSA to a single studio on the primarily empty floor of a museum. It is empty except for the jawbone of a whale and the half a lion exhibit. From the very first day, the caretakers downstairs complain that I

am making too much noise each time I walk across the studio floor. Hospitality.

How does one start in Kilmaronock? I move there to be truly resident. I walk, listen and take photographs. I drink there, wander there, shop there and make mistakes there. I almost stop buying records there. I read and go to the cinema a lot. I take in Anaïs Nin, Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*, Milan Kundera, Ian McEwan, Dostoyevsky, *Themen 1*, Fassbinder's *Lola*, Fleming's Bond novels, *Lanark*, Greil Marcus and Oscar Wilde. I play a lot of snooker in Kilmaronock with Big John who sits at the reception desk and badminton with The Dick staff. The Dick displays have not changed since 1968, the year after I am born. I start rummaging around in the storerooms and find an archive of Victorian portraits, full of lived-in faces trapped in little oval frames. I look at the façade of The Dick and imagine three banners hanging between the columns. In January, I write: 25 MONOCHROME CANVASES. The Dick's David Bett is overseeing the residency and he asks me to consider an exhibition in the Museum at a half-way point during the residency.

Graham Fagan sees a copy of the *Bellgrove* catalogue and invites myself and Alex Dempster to create a work for his *Birmingham Billboard Project*. I read an interview with ex-EA Louise Scullion and I love her honesty about being confused about her practice and identity. I need to just be quiet and listen to people. I start meeting local schools, historians, cleaners, photographers and storytellers, listening and floating mad ideas past them as retorts. I flick on Scotsport and James *Jinky* Gardner is playing for Motherwell against Rangers. I play against him for Bannerman in 1981 and with him for St. Bridgets. He has a last-minute chance to equalise, but it is saved. That is his moment. He will never make it and I know it at the time.



I get an order for a *Bellgrove* catalogue from The Orchard Gallery in Derry and we forget that in 1987 Declan McGonagle is shortlisted for the Turner Prize as a *curator*. Time to revisit that idea. For Birmingham I find a fantastic photograph in the newspaper of a rail viaduct being blown up by mistake. I paint this on board using Payne's Grey for Dempster to add a procession of objects on trolleys. Graham photographs this and produces a billboard from A3 (!) laser copies pieced together in the days before we could afford large-scale digital printing. I talk with Brigitte about the need to totally reject the work we did before and to reinvent oneself. We head to Brixton for Franco B's birthday party but his talk of getting his balls pierced makes me feel sick. I end up chatting to some S&M obsessive from the east end of Glasgow until he leaves around 3am.

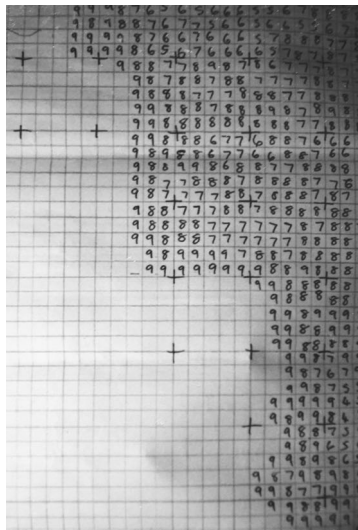


Squirrels are all over Kilmarnock. They are in the town's logo, on the football kit emblem with the motto *confidemus* (we trust) and all around Dean Castle. The Dick has one cabinet that I pass each morning with a flying squirrel in it. I photograph it and turn it into monochrome Payne's Grey, montaging it onto three banners to adorn the front of The Dick. Simple,

effective, popular, ironic, fun and slightly surreal. George Wyllie wanders in to The Dick one day. We embrace and he immediately picks up the conversation we start in the Girls' High about my anti-social headphone work.

He sits down for tea and chats away, about how Nathan is very isolated in his residency at St. Andrews and how "we must start to re-asses the whole Beuys anti-aesthetic philosophy." I chat about Kilmarnock and the weird and very dangerous spiky metal dragon made from old car bumpers located in the grounds of Dean Castle. "Stop right there!" he laughs "that is mine from the 1970s." I promise to use an image of it in my end-of-year catalogue. His parting shot is "Alan, be popular but don't forget to put the art in it."

I present my ideas to The Dick staff team and various visitors. A few of the staff say they would prefer half lion over a squirrel as a set of banners but I talk them around and get them to agree to have no logos on the banner. We



start meeting printers but the price is astronomical and I work out a way of hand-painting them. I split the image into ten thousand squares and I number each on a greyscale of 1 to 10 and painstakingly hand-paint *The Flying Squirrel*. A lot of people across Kilmarnock are now discussing squirrels, which I like, although the doubters cry that the banners will "block light coming in to The Dick." I think about how to respond to this and watch Bill Drummond, the KLF and Napalm Death on The Brits. Is it possible to get 45,000 people talking about an artwork?

I write: A CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM COLLECTION OF THE HERE AND NOW, NOT THE PAST. The squirrel will appear to leap from behind the pillars, a nod

to Yves Klein's 1960 *Leap into the void*, at least in my mind. I do some school workshops and one seven-year old complains that the powder paint offered to paint Megatrons was "not a real man's paint." I genuinely scratch my head and visit a nursing home to meet a lady who shows me her flamboyant pencil portraits of South Americans. After many meetings, the squirrel banners receive formal planning permission and David B grins at me, saying "Alan, do something with the half lion too." I write to Kilmarnock FC to ask if they would change their mascot to half a lion and don't get a reply.



I meet with Dempster and we devise the exhibition that is called *Assembly*. It consists of a modernisation of the museum displays and some new paintings. I catch up with ProjectAbility and the ceramic tiles we did with the AIDS ward of Ruchazie hospital are finally to be installed. The Dick have an Apple Mac upstairs and I sit with Angela learning SuperPaint. The Kilmarnock Standard, circulation around 11,000, ask me pose to inside a picture frame and talk about the squirrel banners. I do as they ask and go for many many pints in Gordons Lounge Bar with John McKissock before we have to suffer Kilmarnock 1 Raith Rovers 0 on a stormy February night. I pass a couple of real

troublemakers and they mutter "that's the fucker that works in the library." Perhaps the Scottish Arts Council can advertise for "Fuckers in residence." The good thing about this residency is that The Dick is also the municipal library with cassette lending and my residency is powered by the sounds of the Buzzcocks, Smokey Robinson, Pere Ubu, Happy Mondays, Cher, Public Image, Angelo Baadalamenti, Van Morrison and Ultra Vivid Scene.

The smokers sit in a tiny room and this is where the real Dick stories are told. Bryndis visits and loves the squirrel proposal, but is furious about the condition of the stuffed exhibits, the sadness and the neglect of them. We sit down for dinner in the white-tiled North Hamilton Street flat that I am renting, the one with the oval mirror in the living room, and Pavel and Alexandra Büchler arrive. Pavel has just been offered the Head of GSA post. Robert Livingston pops down for an Arts Council check up and likes the squirrels. I have an idea of ripping out all the old wallpaper from behind the stuffed animals, creating one long panoramic Payne's Grey contemporary rolling landscape and reducing the number of stuffed specimens from seventy down to under ten.



I explore the surrounding environs of Loudoun Kirk, River Irvine, Loudoun Castle and the Leigh Milton Viaduct. Of course flying squirrels glide rather than fly. More recent research suggests that flying squirrels originated 18–20 million years ago and have a sister relationship with tree squirrels. I chat about murals with ex-EA Rachel Mimiec who is in residence at Cunningham House. I correspond with Ross who is doing black flags in California and I meet with Rob Breen and Tom Eccles at Art In Partnership about some possible large-scale mural projects. I want to paint explosions, stage sets, sad scenes and ruins, in museums. In Payne's Grey. I paint the exploding viaduct and Dempster visits to paint another Elvis on wheels on it. My works slides into the background. In retrospect, I am looking at Richter's burred greyscales too much.



McKissock and I start playing snooker a couple of times a week at lunchtime in LeisureLand and I go to the now-closed Cannon Cinemas as often as possible. 1992 is the year of De Niro in *Cape Fear*, *Richochet*, *Medicine Man*, *Lawnmower Man*, *Basic Instinct*, *The Doctor*, *Night on earth*, *Unforgiven* and *Bugsy*. I meet up with Brigitte and

Aideen Cusack and her brother in the University of Southampton bar and some bloke arrives that has seen the Dalglish MA painting. The complaints



about my studio from old grump McQueen get so bad that I am relocated to the Loom Room at the other end as the Scotland U-21 team somehow contrive to beat Germany 4-3. Relationships change during residencies, from suspicion to curiosity to trust to collaboration to dependence.

I talk regularly with Margaret Murphy about all her rare Elvis recordings. In the staffroom, they say "If you are paying tax, you are ok." I read DH Lawrence on the need for foregrounds in landscapes as I start painting the five large backdrops, each one 9x5ft. I know they are exciting, minimal and safe. I try to borrow a blowtorch to add texture. I am given a production

budget of £50 for Assembly and £250 for marketing. Signs of the times. I write: I must do something with the phrase *That's the jawbone of a whale*, uttered by every visitor when they see the jawbone of a whale in the museum. Dempster moves in to the flat to do his paintings for Assembly and I crack on with the



backdrops and the squirrel squares, working through until the election results at 3am. John Major grey. Fucking McQueen complains about the mess Dempster has made in the studios but the new paintings look brilliant. Hospitality. I have an idea to start making chocolate flying squirrels and speak to Thorntons in Kilmarnock. I realise I have been four months here and not seen a single police car.

Dempster and me head up to Rannoch Moor with George Wyllie and a class of about twenty Nintendo-playing kids to bury a stuffed hare and some margarine, read Burns and erect a spire in memory of Beuys. George lends me his bunnet on the coach back. Leeds win the league and museum Charlie advises me on how to remove and store the display case exhibits. I work slowly on squirrel squares as *Speed II* opens at Transmission. The BBC run



a national billboard art exhibition with works by Roddy B and MA's Perminder Kaur. I talk about possible Leeds project with Brigitte and I rework paint over the squirrel face squares. Twisted and bloody ugly. At the last minute I slash them with thin painted orange wrinkles. We install the big landscapes at the back of the five display cases and remount the flying squirrel and friends. They look, in someone's

words, *Hitchcockian*. We hang the paintings and there is suddenly implied movement around the museum, a procession towards an assembly of sorts.



Weird call from Margaret Murphy to say I am on Channel 4 painting my Kilmarnock squirrel squares and that she names her new kittens Alan and Alex. Obrist writes for a copy of *Bellgrove* and Cruyff's Barcelona win the European Cup, before they rename it. The squirrel banners go up. They look fucking great after five months of being lost and

finding a way into and out of the Kilmarnock grey. We go see *Wayne's World* with *Ballroom Blitz*, written by The Sweet about their 1973 gig in Kilmarnock. We empty some of the flattop museum cases and notice the dark areas left by removed labels. We ask ourselves what happens if a museum has absolutely no labelling? Would it simply fill up with loud know-it-alls? In 2012 Tasmania's Museum of Old and New Art remove all labels and issues visitors with information-packed iPhones. The Dick take some of the marketing budget and arrange street signs saying *Assembly* around the town. This counters the occasional snide comment in The Dick about "wasting money on banners." Happy Birthday, Kilmarnock.



There is a note from Andrew Nairne to contribute an 85x85cm work for *Salon Glasgow* at the Third Eye but I am not interested. Roger Palmer, Alistair McLennan and Stephen Conroy are in the show. These are long days and I am really tired. Nathan's *Pure Ideas in a Wicked World* (great title) is at the Crawford Arts Centre. I continue with the weekly badminton with Dick staff but still smoke lots. David H sends a nice note on his recent heart attack and

Assembly opens for friends and family. My old secondary school art teacher and U-14 football coach Hector McLean makes the journey. We go to La Toc the next day to really scrutinise the faults in the show and make plans for six months' time. Grump McQueen takes great delight in finding me to tell me of the 11-year-olds that try to torch the squirrel banners.



Have a break: On Kawara show at Lisson, Rebecca Horn at Tate and Magritte at Hayward. Chat with Brian Catling in Winchester. Euro 1992 is shit. Imi Knoebel show in Mönchengladbach, Jürgen Klauke in Düsseldorf, documenta in Kassel, Burowsky's spire man, Lee Bryars' golden balls, Isa Genzken's x-rays and Kosuth's black and white museum. I buy an AR Penck

Animal Watch and head back to Kilmarnock to a rejection from the Alloa

mural project. Ross' black flags win the Ellis Prize for best MFA show, fuelled by his time at CalArts with Tom Lawson. Ex-EA Helen Maria and Chris W graduate from their MA in Design and Jenny Saville, Bryndis and Barbara Droth graduate at BA. Murdo M likes *Assembly* and writes of "revolutions and removed labels." I write: *THE DAY IN THE LIFE OF A REALIST*.

Kilmarnock part 2, is talking to people, sitting in the high street watching people and thinking about portraits and health. I head to Leeds for Brigitte's opening, a collaboration with Clare Charnley, and end up on some Hyde Park floor. We drink in The Palace. I chat with Chumbawamba Geoff again about Rollins, B52s, Minor Threat and Bogshed. Time to think. I am not quite sure what benefit this residency is having but by now the majority of Kilmarnock residents are at least aware of the banners and *Assembly*. Andrew Guest from the Scottish Sculpture Trust visits for a chat and Clare Henry writes a good review in The Glasgow Herald. The squirrel banners are suspiciously loosened, but I re-tighten them. The EA crowd are really starting to pick up international art press. I find a photograph from WWII when the Dick is used as a hospital and what is now the gallery space has a full-size snooker table in it. I think of recreating this, but the Dick are pushing for a more traditional end-of-residency exhibition. They are explicit about wanting things that sell and can tour. Educate the client.

One grey Sunday in July, I devise it. I have been observing people walking up and down the high street, at right angles to the walking Johnnie Walker neon



figure, he of the whisky logo. I observe low income families whose weight has perhaps rocketed. I think about using digital technology to 'thin' the population by compressing the images horizontally; from a circle to an oval. They will have the blue and yellow of the town and be like those Victorian calling cards. I will use only Payne's Grey and these slabs will lean



against walls, perhaps even be double-sided. I will learn how to prime the boards with French Chalk and I spend the next six months working on these in the studio. I become happier. I am able to play and take some risks with the subject matter, basing them on secretly-taken photographs, but in small



towns, staff start talking and word spreads on the subject matter. I am photographed with Provost Coffey in front of the exploding viaduct. I listen to Pavement and PJ Harvey. I find a catalogue with exhibitions for hire and I start pricing up a set of Miro prints to borrow to offset the grey of the paintings that will become known as *Retreat*. This is interesting as a

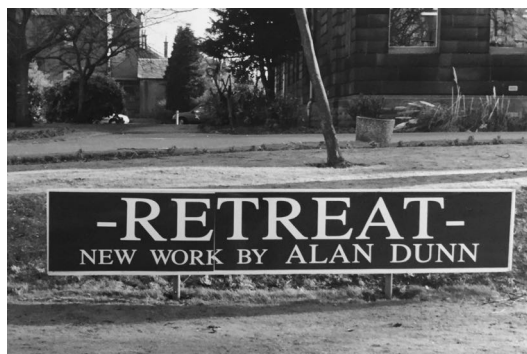
concept after *Assembly*, with the notion of thematically withdrawing from a point, a literary technique of starting in the present and backtracking and I will use this through the seven CDs that form my PhD between 2008-14. I call the South Bank and the Miro prints are only £90 but sadly already booked for January. I start buying old Richard Allen paperbacks from Dunoon, home of *Skinhead Times Publishing* as the new Morrissey material is described in the press as a cross between The Stooges and The Stray Cats. I read up on David Lean's notions of good/bad characters entering the film frame from the left or right. I write: A HITCHCOCKIAN ARMY OF ZOMBIE MONSTERS, RIGHT TO LEFT. I also make loads of lists (Kilmarnock, August 1992):



1. James Hymn from a village
2. Magnolias Reach out
3. Superchunk Slack motherfucker
4. Sham 69 Hersham Boys
5. The Cure Close to me
6. Sid Vicious I killed the cat
7. Suede The Drowners
8. Was Not Was and Kim Basinger
Shake your head
9. Sonic Youth Youth against fascism
10. Stiff Little Fingers Alternate Ulster

David Harding pops down to Kilmarnock for lunch and he lauds "Nathan's excellent organisation skills" as we discuss exhibiting the original 19th century business cards alongside the new portraits and chat about what we perceive as a decline in image-makers. And the importance, as always, of "simple ideas." In one sense, the goal is to be in the studio having made a decision and getting on with the work, as people visit, add to and endorse the project in question. I get asked by a friend of a friend of a member of staff not to use one of the images, the Budweiser rocker. I invite them in to see what I am doing and I use it.

The museum is quite isolated, like a sitcom of dodgy stories. I sit and hear of Alex being confronted by a knifed video-stealer, Ainslie receiving dubious love letters, the in-house (Robert) Burns Institute receiving explicit literature on severe burns and Porteous hearing heavy breathing in the South Museum. I start painting the Deltona lady, with each panel 7x3ft. Monasterial Blue for the outer oval. I approach Ian McEwan to write a catalogue essay or story for me.



In August and September I wrestle with demons and learn to paint in the public eye. People visit the Museum to see if they are appearing as word gets further out.

I continue to photograph on the high street but perhaps I am now being watched. I send someone else out to take some new photographs. I want a

kind of unselfconscious realism. *Everyday people*. This is not really collaboration of any sorts. I go to see a local production of *A Clockwork Orange* amidst an audience of Ayrshire skinheads. I go to see The Corries' Ronnie Browne sing *Flower of Scotland* with Big John and Poundstretcher Brian then on to West Netherton Bowling Club, but my heart is not in it. I slump down at home, reading that Julie Roberts' work is bought by Saatchi and Ian Kettles gets a show at Transmission. Neither is what I really need or want, but it makes you think. I put in ten hours a day. There is a kidnap on Kilmaurs Road with suggestions of torture and *Silence of the lambs* quotes scrawled on walls.



There are no tutorials. I mail photographs of the works to Dempster and Brigitte and briefly chat with Douglas and Christine in Kilmarnock, which is near where she is born in Darvel. I speak to all the staff about the work, and open the studio and bare my raw artistic wounds. I read more and I read anything. Ian McEwan. DH Lawrence. Martin Amis' *Dead babies* and *Time's arrow*. I read that Queen Victoria may have written *Alice in wonderland*. I get stupid comments from Dick staff while working, but I am thick skinned. What is a residency meant to be? What do they expect? David Bett and I approach Kirsty Wark to cover the work but she turns us down, saying she prefers Alison Watt. Hey, I don't use black either. But the Richter influence is too big. I read that Nick Cave works on his writing 9am-5pm and I do the same. Work through



the problems. I listen to Killing Joke. Ayrshire November is a grey I have never seen before. I start collecting names for grey:



1. Squirrel grey
2. Payne's grey
3. Headache grey
4. Battleship grey
5. Dim grey

I still play snooker with the two Johns and badminton with the two Charlies and take in many dour games at Rugby Park. I attend the local college for months to try to learn German. I sit in the staff smoking room four times a day. Perhaps after *Bellgrove* they are looking for something more outward-looking, as in national or international. Someone points out that the ovals



look like digits (000,000,000). Quadrillion. I begin work on the catalogue with Dempster as Windsor Castle burns. The front of the catalogue will be the half a lion from the front, the back will be the back of the half a lion of course. Genius. It will contain *Assembly* and *Retreat*, Wyllie's dragon, the WWII snooker image and a conversation between Dempster and me. The bleak sleet months continue but are over. What is on the other side of the wall, asks Sam. The other side is about making a statement away from *Bellgrove*, of not simply carrying those ideas of curated billboards down to a small Scottish town and imposing them. The paintings feel right, despite the risk and the learning curves. I start to feel really good about them as a set. Work in isolation and reinvent yourself.

I look around for other projects. I travel to a Probation Centre in Ashington about a possible residency. I ask my dad to photograph all the works for the catalogue. I watch football and recognise an elderly no.4 playing for Queens Park, and it is nasty old Malky Mackay Senior, our horrible old coach from St. Bridget's Boys Club. I listen to Sugar and the KLF and put in longer hours to finish the paintings. David questions the lack of text on the cover of the catalogue but from *Bellgrove* through to the CDs, it is my design preference. I sit and look at the paintings. Every town has a high street like this. There are logos and people carry things. There are no small local businesses on this high street, nothing to differentiate from hundreds of others. People promenade in small towns. As Lou Reed sings of Warhol:

When you're growing up in a small town
And you're having a nervous breakdown
And you think that you'll never escape it
Yourself or the place that you live
There is only one good thing about small town
There is only one good use for a small town
There is only one good thing about small town
You know that you want to get out
When you're growing up in a small town
You know you'll grow down in a small town
There is only one good use for a small town
You hate it and you'll know you have to leave

I sit alone in North Hamilton Street and curate a cassette on the loose theme of European art, with Beuys' spoken word, radio adverts, *Altered Images*, A House's *Endless Art*, Berntholer's *My suitor* and Tom Waits. The Dick's Chris W and David B absolutely rip into the catalogue but with GSA years of experience, I absorb and make changes



and improve it. Through The Arts Is Magic I line up some work with a housing association in Stirling. The Dick kick up a fuss about the print company in Darvel borrowing the WWII print to scan and I wonder what the year has really been about. Have I incited such doubt or scepticism, such lack of trust? We try to hire a van at some point but there are crossed wires and the Dick janitors start 1993 in a fucking furious mood with me. There is only one good use for a small town.

I visit the Margaret Blackwood Housing Association in Stirling, founded by Dr Margaret in 1972 and “now a leading national Housing and Care provider specialising in homes and care services for people with disabilities” and already it is more exciting and real. I even flat hunt in Stirling. I propose draping all the museum walls with black scrim but David B says there is no money any more for me. Margaret Murphy calls regularly with Elvis updates and her paintings that have been picked up by a Belgian gallery.



I write: NOTHING GOING RIGHT AT ALL. I retreat to draw up some visual proposals of how the show will look with black walls and David agrees to pay for 20m of it. I think of MnA and Ross' *Four-letter Word* and *the fear of black*. The Dick is at heart quite a weird institution of repressed and resentful workers. Hospitality: Jackie takes me aside to tell me that caretaker

McQueen “has been fiddling with his own mother.” Part of me likes being confided in and part of me likes the friction I have engendered with these portraits, local people made to look thinner and some with birdshit dripping down their faces and they are a little bit angry. Silent scream. This is small town. This shit happens. This is not the sanitised 400th birthday Council imagery. Museum Chris retreats into his own world and ignores my paintings but tells me that there is great commercial potential in dinosaurs. I attend the “Farewell 400” dinner and the main themes at my table are toy boys, Kilmarnock's racism and homophobia and where to get the cheapest pint. I end up in Winchester at Brigitte's Henry Moore Fellowship opening and Darren Almond gets really pissed and recounts the whole of the Velvet Underground's *The Gift* loudly in my ear. I pass Paul Morley at Euston en route and he will be important later in the story.

1993

Tom Eccles calls on Thursday 14th January to discuss a possible mural in Hamilton, with “possible mural” being a frequently heard phrase in my life. This one, unlike many, will actually come to fruition. But before that, I install *Retreat* and open it on Friday 15th January. David Harding arranges a minibus from Glasgow to bring an EA gang down and god knows what they make of this image-maker. Pavel loves the half-lion catalogue, David is astounded that I can paint like this, Clare Henry raves about it in The Herald with the



huge Mickey Mouse ears pic ("despite the patchy painting technique") and Stuart Brisley and Maya Balcioglu are on the minibus and I think they stand in the corner next to Dempster's big contingent. Brisley talks to me about Richter. I give Andrew Nairne, recently relocated from the Third Eye to Scottish Arts Council, a tour on the day that my Auntie Babs visits and that

tour sums up so much of what I am exploring. "I don't understand it" she says in one ear while Andrew suggests in my other that I am forming a New Conceptual Community Art.

My final gesture is parting with £7 to watch Kilmarnock 0 St Johnstone 0. Ninety long minutes in which to reflect and think about a year in Killiemanjaro. Caretaker McQueen's final advice to me concerns how to make a mouse sandwich. I bank it, say goodbye to him and move on.

Taking a stroll into prominence

Clare Henry
admires the
innovative work of
Kilmarnock's artist
in residence

It is a pleasure to be able to see a new work by a local artist in a gallery. For Clare Henry, artist in residence at the Kilmarnock Arts Centre, the pleasure is even greater. The artist, who has been working in the town for over a year, has just completed a new work, a large-scale painting of a man in a suit, which is now on display in the town's main gallery.



Dick Bann with some of his work at the Arts Centre, Kilmarnock in a recent and historic portrait.

The artist, who has been working in the town for over a year, has just completed a new work, a large-scale painting of a man in a suit, which is now on display in the town's main gallery.

The artist, who has been working in the town for over a year, has just completed a new work, a large-scale painting of a man in a suit, which is now on display in the town's main gallery.

The artist, who has been working in the town for over a year, has just completed a new work, a large-scale painting of a man in a suit, which is now on display in the town's main gallery.

The artist, who has been working in the town for over a year, has just completed a new work, a large-scale painting of a man in a suit, which is now on display in the town's main gallery.

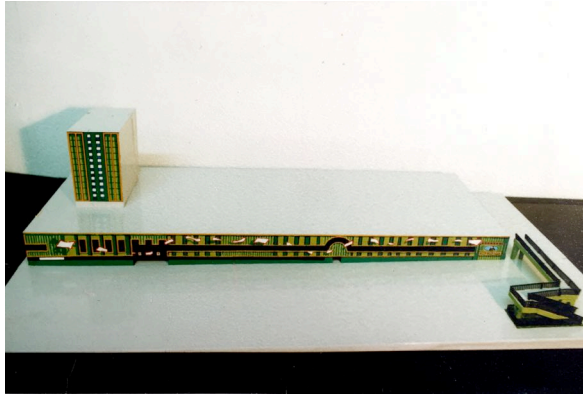
The artist, who has been working in the town for over a year, has just completed a new work, a large-scale painting of a man in a suit, which is now on display in the town's main gallery.

The next ten years are not about reflecting or looking back. They are

about saying yes. They are walking through doors into situations that I know are necessary. Andrew Lockhart phones to invite Dempster and me to take part in *Daily Planet* at Transmission. I meet Andrew Patrizio. I work on the Hamilton proposal and the budget is a staggering £70,000 and when I get it, I splash out on a west end flat near Kirsty Wark. Renting, that is. I spend time in Hamilton and the site is a fuck-ugly corrugated car park and bridge and we calculate it as the second biggest mural in Europe at the time. The local paper The Hamilton Advertiser calls it "Europe's biggest."



My original proposal includes a portrait of locally-born Jock Stein (not bad for someone brought up on the other side) but the client asks for that to be removed. I use red stencils of Muybridge's horses as a nod to Hamilton Races and I turn the grey car park green. I watch *Brewster's Millions* and use the idea of a floating white bank note flowing through the gigantic design, similar



to the floating paper aeroplanes of the Harvest billboards. As I work on it, Dempster rips it to shreds and I rework it and write: A BIG GREEN CATHEDRAL BUILDING WITH WHITE FLYING CARPETS.

The complex process and delays with the Hamilton project over almost six months nearly causes me a breakdown with the sheer amount of unknown factors and

number of agencies involved. Hamilton PR Department's Clare McGhee (sister of grump footballer Mark) asks me if I can get a real horse to the press call but I decline. We pay SPS to clean the whole car park and spray the undercoat of green. We then work along on scaffolding, adding the foliage, running horses and white floaters. There are a series of big features in The Advertiser. Cynical, angry, small town and mean.

"Ignore the papers" Brigitte advises me. "I'll be straight with you", says the old lady on our first day, "that's a mess." The Sunday Post send a reporter who only asks about the project budget and funding. We reach the dome on the long side and the months of stress take their toll and I collapse on the scaffolding.



EA gives you confidence if nothing else, although when the work gets stick in The Sun from a SNP politician (*Mural drives me car-azy*) I wonder if I should have left it grey. We put copies of the design and my detailed model in a shop window in the centre and it divides the whole of Hamilton. The local paper tears into it and then says it is the most refreshing thing to ever happen locally. I am able to employ a small team, including Dempster, Graham M, Robert J and my younger brother, on good daily rates for a lengthy period. I invest in Keim



paint for the bridge and learn a lot from project manager Vance Sinclair, who has

the first mobile phone I ever see, about contracts, insurance, astroturf and dealing with flack. I know there is a turning point, like in residencies. Ignorance



to suspicion to resentment to curiosity to respect to alignment to pride. The more we block in, the more the locals admire our design and hard work. We joke each day with the same people and get waves and toots from many drivers. Probably the ones that don't read The Sun. The white floaters are a stroke of genius and a joy and all talk of "lack of fucking community involvement" is forgotten.

I perk up. I write my second song, after 1985's *I've got something to do now*. This new one is *spin(circle)*, a positive ditty about going round it circles. It and can only be sung while rotating and the lyrics become increasingly dizzy as the song (r)evolves. We start to revel in the sheer scale of the task and the erecting and manoeuvring of scaffolding



towers on narrow pavements. The sub-contractors paint the walkway bridge green one Sunday and the design flows over to an exquisite patch of astroturf on the other side, the well of green for Hamilton.

I ask the company if they can implant various aromas in the artificial grass to reflect different times of the day. I am juggling tight cashflows and payments for £60,000 to numerous agencies. Local papers often revel in stirring up an argument and The Advertiser is no exception. It is exceptionally hellbent on constantly nipping away at us. We paint right around the sign for East Kilbride and toy with changing it to Fast for a day with our white paint. There are many daytime drinkers in Hamilton, young and old, and they prove to be our biggest fans and biggest danger. I recover my strength and coax and manage my team through the five remaining weeks on site.



We have two scaffolders, Old Dave and Young Joe. Three weeks in, Joe mutters "Nobody likes this fucking thing" and Dave gives him a clip around the ear and a lecture about being open minded and seeing what we are trying to do. We work from 8am to 6pm each day. Young Joe becomes one of our biggest defenders on the street.

We create a lovely tromp l'oeil moment around the arch and a few passers-by nod in appreciation. They call us the magicians. Hamilton District Council send some paperclipper in our final week to tell us our scaffolding tower is a



death trap. These are my commissioners. I diplomatically agree to add extra toe-boards all the way around, but he is soon revealed to be the regular bitter Council stirrer. I stand back and take in the whole design. It may lack a little mystery or drama but it is ambitious and dynamic. The mural is 600ft long and the corrugated metal doubles the surface area and is difficult to paint on. We update the Muybridge figures by adding 70s flares to some of the running men. Some bloke from William Hill stops on his way to park his car inside our artwork and asks if we would include their logo for some money. An elderly lady who lives in the attached tower block starts to leave us doughnuts each morning. Some neds pass and shout out "Look at

those painters, poofs and Picassos!" which is not bad alliteration. A couple pass and smile, "this is tremendous, just what Hamilton needs, are you all on acid?" A local vicar shouts up to us on top of the scaffolding about saints and sinners. We increase tempo and finish on time, signing it neatly about the arch and hosting a press conference in which the mood is positive all around. I celebrate by buying Sinatra's last (duets) LP and Bikini Kill. The Advertiser manage to find one fan and five critics for their big launch feature. Clare H writes a nice riposte in The Glasgow Herald in which she canvasses in the town centre and comes out 2:1 in favour of it.



BBC Radio Scotland's *Speaking Out* bases a programme on the mural with phone-ins to discuss it. "It's an absolute disgrace, a waste of money, I mean what even is it? I have a handicapped son and can't get transport and yet they waste, WASTE, money on that!" is typical of the locals. The BBC invite me

to defend it but I decline and George Wyllie steps in to do it for me. One really angry man phones in to say that because nobody local understands it, he'd like to announce that the racing horses "can only be a reference to Hamilton Races" and that "it looks like a procession to a battle, perhaps the Battle of the Boyne." Yes, that is 1690. God bless Scotland.

One of my contractors then tries to sue for £450 for "missing equipment" but I finally convince them that it was not us stealing scaffolding. Hospitality. David Harding comes down to see the finished mural and he is delighted, calling it "ambitious, classic and mythical" and adding "you really went for it, Alan." A local brings in a jacket with the wrong shade of green and tries to claim we caused it. You mean the darker green paint that is fifteen feet off the ground, Sir? Easterhouse training comes in handy and they go away. As a person, I do not lack sympathy or compassion and these projects do throw up as many beautiful new interactions as they do dark opportunists and cynics angry at other things projecting their issues onto highly visible art(ists).

Amidst all this, my Gran Dunn dies. 1916-1993. We find cash stashed all over her house totalling £1,800. Funeral costs are £1,300. We find hundreds of cuttings from The Daily Record, little sayings such as: I'll stay with you. The last Doctor to see my gran was Ian Smith who was in same class as me in Bannerman High School. It is a small east end. I take a call from Mhairi Sutherland about some workshops with the Pensioners' Action Group in deepest darkest Castlemilk, south side. It also sounds real and full of possibilities. I am revived by pensioners and murals and housing associations.

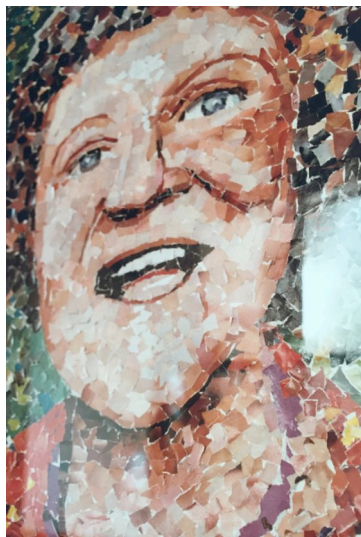


Some 12" after the triple albums, Sir?. Just say yes. I meet Pierre, son of a French woman, in a Kennishead tower block to discuss some recycling project. I bump into Stevie F who is almost bald and is co-owner of REDS nightclub and I fear he has AIDS. I see Mark Wallinger's horse canvases at the Lisson and make a note and fall asleep in some London flat to *Death in Venice*. Kounellis and Ruthenbeck, at

the Hayward, are sublime. Velvet maroon material and glass. This is the me that creates *The Unfinished Sentence...* at Bellgrove and reserves the right to do so, along with the murals and banners. Obrist sends me invites to his latest projects, Paris, museum, billboards. James Patrick Bulger is abducted in Bootle, north of Liverpool, by two ten-year-olds Thompson and Venables.



I begin work in Stirling at the amazing Margaret Blackwood housing and we use a holepunch and cut magazines to create a collage portrait of Margaret herself. I love these times. Not artistically challenging but at the same time, an overall process that challenges what a self-employed 25 year old artist can do. Huggy Bear on *The Word*. I meet Jack to discuss a Lenin mural in Manchester. Tennis Ball haircut at Alberto's in Shettleston. Dempster and me make a quick collage piece about Glasgow knife crime for the *Daily Planet* show at Transmission. 7" singles after the big concept albums, Sir? Speak to Ross about a Danish exchange that does not happen and about the text he is writing for Douglas' new work at Tramway, *24-hour Psycho*. Eccles tells me I have been short-listed for an Edinburgh hoarding with Tom Lawson and Simon Patterson. I head for Ibrox to see Scotland lose 0-1 to Germany (Riedle) but a young Duncan



Ferguson runs riot. I meet Margaret Blackwood herself in Stirling and chat about the workshops. She is embarrassed and then flattered. I chat with Clare Charnley in Leeds about her City Racing show with Brigitte. Pissed in some Düsseldorf art space talking about Sean Connery with Polish Wojcek. Hang out with Francis McKee who talks of the novel about Einstein's dream that time goes slower the higher you go. In Chicago, Marcus Akinlana is ripped off by Honda who over-use and digitally alter an image of one of his murals for an ad campaign. Dempster and me go to the packed *24-hour Psycho* opening and I briefly move into the Alexander "Greek" Thomson-designed flat at 39 Hyndland Road (1871).

1993 is mixed up with loads of headaches, mostly from Hamilton Roads Department, Councillors and wily old contractors. I start working with the Pensioners' Action Group in Castlemilk, initially helping them with their water-colours but noticing that they listen to Frank Sinatra each week. These sessions take me away from my own bleak thoughts. Am I standing still as my EA peers are appearing in Venice, art mags, major shows with TV coverage and big budgets? I scrape around for the odd £50 but know I am on the right path. I suggest we ban watercolours and draw Sinatra every week. Only Victor in Castlemilk initially gets what we are trying to do but Mhairi supports me and I talk it through with a smile and we end up with a stunning exhibition of white chalk on black paper portraits of Sinatra. Each week I



encourage them to zoom in more and more on the (old) blue eyes. Conceptual community art. This is one of my favourite projects in one of the bleakest and most depressing parts of Glasgow. We call it *Fantasy, Reality and Frank* and the pensioners start spreading rumours that Sinatra's family is from Castlemilk. The opening is packed and gets big local press coverage. 1993 is plate spinning, rushing between Hamilton, Castlemilk and Stirling and applying for projects. Life is serious. Pop down to City Racing for the opening



of Brigitte and Clare Charnley's show and catch up with Chumbawamba Geoff. He works on the *Sportchestra* LP way back in 1988. Their *101 Songs about Sport* has a huge influence on the titles of my later PhD CDs. I get invited to propose a 150ft

mural for the Glasgow Concert Hall on theme of *Planes, Boats and Trains* and I work up a Turner-esque design, seeing Adobe Photoshop at work for the first time in the Science Park. The commission is between myself and Scanachrome (!), the country's leading digital print company. In Stirling we begin work on a portrait of local hero Stephen Hendry, also using the hole punch technique. I take a call from Sarah Knox of Fruitmarket asking if I can speak at some public art forum but it is not my thing. Brigitte gets offered a teaching job at University of Derby and we decide to move there. I send in a proposal with Dempster to Liverpool's *Visionfest* for some 3D paintings we are developing that require red/blue glasses. The subject matter is something to do with the

Emperor's New Clothes and I make a series of Duncan Ferguson flags for some Düsseldorf project (*Dunc's Big Match Agony*). Possible project in Milton Primary School but I think Rachel Mimiec gets it. There is a lot of it about. A residency in Irvine. Pop in to Lisson to see *Wonderful Life* and grin as I notice copy of *Bellgrove* laying around. Stephen Pastel works in the Byres Road record shop and you always feel he is checking out your purchases. David B invites me back down to Kilmarnock to discuss a possible city centre public art project. I do the *Mind Maze* in The Herald and win one of ten prizes,



namely £100 in book vouchers that I spend on Frida Kahlo, Jon Savage, Cosgrove's *Hampden Babylon*, Lester Bangs and Greil Marcus.



We work on the Hendry collage and our local critic swans in with the bizarre "Oh, is that Gordon Banks?" but our unit is tight enough to bat off such cynicism. I chat with Margaret Murphy about her solo show in Albion Street. I

head up to Bridge of Orchy for a day and the drawings are still in the hotel.

Sam A invites me back into GSA to chat with Hilary Stirling about billboards and I bump into Francis M who is single-handedly logging the EA exploits in New York, Portugal, Japan and London. Dempster buys an Apple Mac and there is talk of me investing some Hamilton money in one, even at £2,000 including University discount. Pop into GFT for *Like water for Chocolate* on Mexico and revolutions as Bill Drummond hijacks the Turner Prize and Radio Derby ask Brigitte her opinion. I pack up fifteen boxes and leave Scotland for Derby. Within a week I have a meeting with the Groundwork Trust. I visit Halifax to succumb to James Turrell's *Gasworks (A Ganzfeld Sphere)*. I sit in Upper Bainbridge Street and watch *The Late Show* on Transmission's 10th



anniversary. On our tiny black & white TV I listen to Douglas, Christine, Roddy, Nathan, Katrina, Craig, Ross, Simon S, Malcolm D, Jackie D, Andrew N and only Ken C offers a smidgeon of opposition. I meet Alison Foote of Groundwork in Belper and she is familiar with the Hamilton mural. I get a contract to do a 200m mural with the local community in the DC Comic-sounding Ironville, a tiny model village

built in 1830 by the Butterley Company but now, like much of the area, suffering a post-mining slump into drugs and anti-social behaviour.

I celebrate with the Derby Uni crowd at the No Club with the Clockwork Orange psychobilly Pelicans. Home pissed, I get a message saying my brother has safely arrived in India. He will never quite be the same again, sadly. I get a call on some Castlemilk public art commission, one of three selected along with Claire Barclay and Stella Tobias. I sit and think about this as the Velvet Underground reunite for our TVs. I think of how The Beatles' radical *Revolution 9* sneaks into millions of living rooms on *The White Album*. Now it is *Venus in*

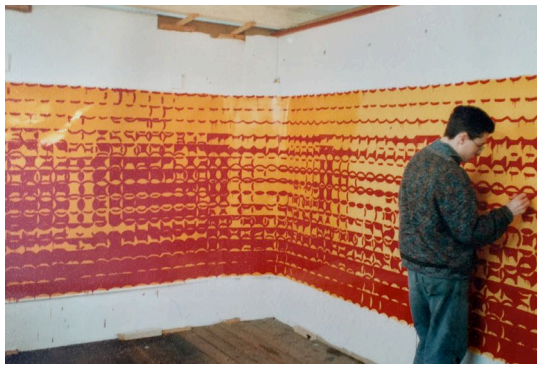


furs. I invite Dempster to collaborate on Castlemilk and we come up with the idea of a mobile billboard through the streets, an Emperor slowly disrobing until naked to see if anyone notices. My dad tells me he thinks he is possessed. I visit the uncle who *I always think is a spy* and he shows me his dodgy German satellite TV channels. Groundwork ask for further projects in Heanor that has some dodgy right-wing connection with Skrewdriver. Environmental Art, *Bellgrove*, *Kilmarnock* and Hamilton have given me a particular set of skills and experiences and I am in demand in Derbyshire from day one. I am invited out to Wirksworth but that is more of a middle class sculpture festival vibe. I don't do carving, remember? We head to Düsseldorf for Christmas and train on to Florence for New Year; Galluzzo Museum,

Museum of San Marco, Fra Angelico, Michaelangelo's *David* and Brunelleschi's Dome. Siena for the day. Colours. Train to Munich, The Alte Pinakothek, to Stuttgart, Cucchi and Cragg, Paik and Kiefer. Chat with Dempster about our *Emperor on wheels* and the Pied Piper and we start on a soundtrack cassette that the billboard-on-wheels can play through the streets: Madonna, Prokofiev, Simple Minds instrumentals, Clash dub etc. Try to develop a way of doing a mural in Heanor using only ivy. Pop up to Glasgow to work on Castlemilk but Dempster is pissed off that I left the city, or something. Our anger fuels the next few projects. I read about Perec and propose removing every single use of the letter 'e' from across D_rby. Occasionally I have these ideas and fire them off, without any invitation and without any real pressure for them to happen. I write that I do not want to sink into what I perceive as truly dull Artists' Newsletter community art and nor do I want to 'rise' to the level of Frieze, preferring somewhere between.

1994

I smoke too much and work every day. I drift from crisis to euphoria, depending on project development. I meet Colombian Gus in Derby and we later collaborate on the Escobar piece, but it is shit and a wasted opportunity. Dempster and me discuss



using the Sinatra shopping unit to coincide with our mobile billboard and Mhairi likes this idea. Working in Ironville is as chaotic as the early days in Easterhouse as we struggle to find a spark, a theme or a reason for painting these ugly concrete walls. We are loaned a studio from Uni Andrew and I start on works for Castlemilk, around processions, Emperors, yellow

and red and abstract patterns. Yes, colour. I still think about Liverpool and Roy Evans becomes the new manager and The Jesus & Mary Chain bizarrely cover The Cramps' *New kind of kick*, which would have thrilled me more back in 1986. In the empty shop, the two artists work 9 to 9 to please the Emperor, working on their magical patterns. There is something in the greyness



of Derby, in the endless car showrooms and two storey terraces off Normanton Road. I look at my work and it seems tame, where the hell is it leading?

I start working with the Ironville Womens' Group and head over to Nottingham for a Cocteau Twins gig. I stand next to Pat Nevin as Liz messes up *Sugar Hiccup*. Odd. On arrival at the coach station, I note the curious *next stop* train mural painted on the boarded up tunnel down in the grassy hole. *next stop*. Quick trip up to sort Castlemilk and call in to Wishaw to see an installation of *Retreat* but the bastards have simply hung them in an empty room and of course they have been scribbled on, including cocks drawn all



over them. Weird times. I buy my first two CDs, Cocteau Twins and the Young Americans soundtrack with Björk's *Play Dead*. Peter McDougall is on TV and everybody wants to be a writer. In Ironville, the older lads Rigger and Bacon nick all the spray paint and my shoes that I leave in the Community Centre before changing into boots, but the community soon sort it all out and it doesn't happen

again. Back up north for unveiling of Hendry collage and Stephen turns up, casual. "How you doing?" he asks me as we pose in front of it. Mr. talkative, but news that Margaret Blackwood has died a fortnight ago taints the day. And finally, I travel to Liverpool for a day; Walker Art Gallery, Gary Hill's astounding *Tall Ships* at Tate Liverpool, Ann Hamilton installation, student work at The Bluecoat, two Cathedrals, joyous. The first few months in Derby are odd, disorientating and spent listening to FM Einheit, Foetus and KMFDM again. There is loads of cheap vinyl shops but we are clueless in Ironville, working with Claire Superstar, the Skinhead Twins and Verity. Sounds Warholian.

NEWS, 65 Stirling Enterprise Park, Stirling FK7 7RP. Tel. (0786)

Snooker ace unveils his picture



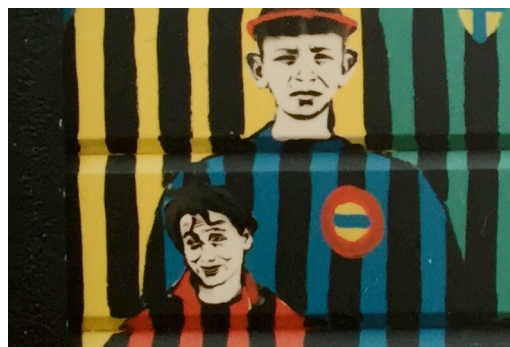
WORLD snooker champion Stephen Hendry took time out to unveil a special picture of himself at Rainbow Slides. The collage was made by disabled artists from Airlink Central which was formed in 1987 to get



Ironville is the woodchip boxes - something to get me started and eliminate the fear of doing nothing. I work on the mobile billboard and post everything up to Dempster to finish. I work on the backgrounds. In Ironville we arrive at the simple idea of photographing the whole area and making stencils and turning these portraits into a football crowd with wacky tops etc. Not bad, although the execution lacks something to be desired. The local community will watch themselves. There is of course an undercurrent to the use of portraits in community art, of using the face as a base (*Retreat*, Sinatra, Blackwood) and vehicle for talking about identities and aspirations.

How others

see us and how we see ourselves. I see Gonzales-Torres' billboard in Art & Design and am drawn to its textlessness, muteness and simplicity. A million miles from Ironville. I need a fresh start, a new Archie Gemmill. I start pinning images of the Loch Ness Monster to my studio wall after a newspaper article about Spurling and Wilson faking the famous



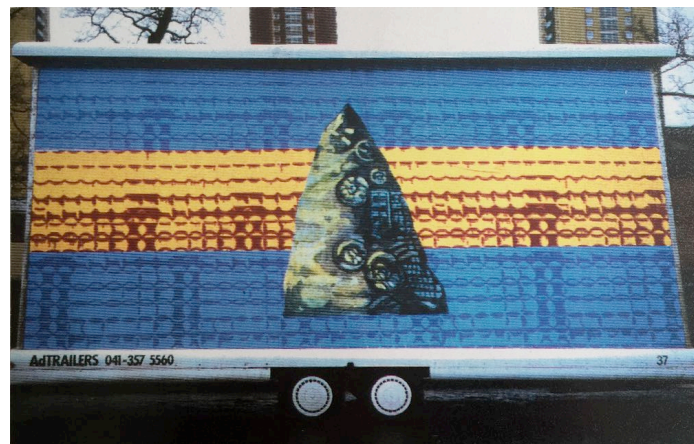
Surgeon's *Photograph* with a little balsa wood model and long lens. Brigitte's work picks up and she is offered shows at Bond Gallery in Birmingham and Café Gallery in London. I find an obscure Redskins bootleg (*The Power Is Yours... The Bootleg Excerpts Propaganda EP*) in a Derby charity shop for £1.00 - 99½ (won't do).



Drill Hall Vaults, pissed, Martin Clephane of Derby City Arts in a Celtic top, dodgy band and Dennis O'Connor with his sculpture students. Stories of Derby mafia family only dealing in Halal. Long studio hours listening to the radio and

rediscovering the Style Council and Die Toten Hosen while unsure about Aphex Twins' *Ambient Works Volume 3*. Brigitte gets offered a four-month residency at the European Ceramic Work Centre in the Netherlands.

Phone around billboard companies and get a free one near Green Lane for June. Meeting in Belper about possible Langley Mill mural, but I suggest a billboard instead. Bunuel's



Obscure object of desire. Altman's *Short Cuts* is disappointing except for earthquake scene. *Schindlers' List* is released. Dempster and me set up the joyous *Emperor* in an empty Castlemilk shop, carpets and mirrors and our mobile billboard tours the streets with dub and Simple Minds' early work and it gets followers and brings them back to the exhibition. All the Pensioner's group turn up, and Roddy and Claire and David H. I write: NEXT WORK SHOULD BE EROTIC.



Fishman of Saughton back in jail in Edinburgh. I work up a series of Loch Ness studies and propose waterproofing these and attaching them to the billboard as a solid book. Kiefer. Documentation as part of the work. Work up a proposal for a series of 4-sheet billboards at Langley Mill station. Visit the weird Matlock Bath with bikers, 2p amusement arcades and the Heights of Abraham. I start the Loch Ness billboard in the studio and soak and drip and splash the



background and mess it up until the paper almost disintegrates and it is not working until I fill the silhouette of the Monster with white paint. That moment. Done. Perfect. Monster removed by newspaper expose. Visit Nottingham to do the weird *Trails of Robin Hood* in a little motorised car that runs through office blocks and in and out of Sherwood Forest. I borrow a copy of the 1976 *Robin and Marian* with Sean Connery as Robin and take some stills from it. Our lovely glowing Castlemilk project doesn't get a mention in *The Herald* and we are no longer flavour of the critic. Keep working in Ironville and Tom tries to sell us all his cocktail-flavoured condoms but we veer him away from the kids. Derby Pride reject my application for the Loch Ness billboard but I do it anyway. Henry Rollins. Independence. Hard work. I need new stimulus and phone the Chicago Public Art Group. I put in a proposal to East Midlands Arts to create a huge Sean-as-Robin painting to go over the derelict *next stop* mural. They also say no but I do the work anyway. The practice is fuelled by burning all the rejection letters, rather than halted by any doubts. What is this about?



Loch Ness is installed and the local paper cover it and it looks glorious. The book lasts 24 hours and is then stolen. Hopefully it goes to a good home. My mum phones to say she has an interview for a job at Hampden, secretary to Ernie Walker of the SFA. I think about Loch Ness Monster and Sean Connery and wonder if they actually have any edge. Keep it simple. We take

Ironville in quite a *Yellow Submarine* direction that seems to suit the mood. Ayrton Senna dies. Duncan Ferguson is charged with assault and Hendry wins the World Championship.

Typical day. Wake early. On phone. Bill, Bill, Alison Foote, Art In Partnership, British Rail, Railtrack, Victoria Centre and Mhairi Sutherland. The Victoria Centre say that the *next stop* site is to be redeveloped into another crap car park but I react by asking if I could install the temporary work before it happens. Educate the client that doesn't know he/she is a client as I am paying for it and instigating it. That is more the reality. Cycle to studio for six or seven hours. Home to cook or sample one of Derby's curry houses. Meet local artists for drinks. Repeat. They moan a lot. I don't. In May I get the final Hamilton payment, ending a year of negotiation and the mural will stay intact and un-touched for the next ten years or so before the car



park is redeveloped. Art + car parks. The human body gets used to new things very quickly. I price up digitally printing a 48-sheet but they are still £1,000 each. In ten years the price will drop to £250. Another meeting about another possible mural, on a corrugated surface in Codnor Park. I wander Nottingham and write a short script for a movie that involves someone being strapped to the ground while others drop car tyres on him from tower block roofs. Aphex Twin *Come to daddy*. Jump on train over to Leeds the day "canny Scot" John Smith dies. See the *WALL TO WALL* show at City Art Gallery with Douglas G piece. Douglas is there and has put on the pounds and tells me "I should have been in Rome today." Bus out to Clare C's to catch up and home.

Larry Riccio calls to offer some extremely well-paid school workshops in Washington DC this summer. I am tenacious and get to see the *next stop* site up close and blow up a still from Robin with a cheeky Sean C look and paint it in three colours in sections and persuade a billboard company to paste it up for me. Meet Derby Uni's Penny McCarthy (born in Washington DC) who designs Sheffield sleeves for AC Temple and Pulp. This is the beginning of a series of north England connections across Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle, Liverpool and Manchester that I explore over the next twenty years. Bump into Derby student Rupert Clamp who will later do the MA in Leeds. Riccio says he has found another art group but I quickly work up a great proposal around *Famous Scottish Females* and I am back on the plane. In and out of London, can't stand it, but see Ruthenbeck, Art & Language, Struth, Jenny Saville at Saatchi, Sandy Skoglund (*Inspirial Carpets' Revenge of the goldfish* sleeve) and BT New Contemporaries. Taggart dies and long days in studio on Sean C. I finish Sean in 11 days and listen to S*M*A*S*H and come up with new band names (PREGNANT FROM LEGGINGS) and just a bit of the old EA mentality returns. When you are against the wall, you (a) check what's on other side of the wall and then (b) paste a billboard on the wall. There is confusion over who actually owns the *next stop* wall and Nottingham City



Council put a spanner in the works. I negotiate and push on with focus. This work will happen. Rush over to Nottingham to meet my new accountant, Stoke fan Chris Cobb, and I will retain Chris' company until this very day.

I jump on train to Manchester, Brian

McClair sits quietly so I get his autograph. Get interrogated at the airport as the World Cup is on although only Republic of Ireland qualify. Fly to New York and on to Washington DC, met by limo and taken to Washington Very Special Arts and Glaswegians Alan, Rosina and Concrete Dogs. Go with Marion and *Dedicated to Art* Ted to see The Beach Boys outdoors but they don't show up. Start work at Lafayette Elementary School. It is a laugh,



working with ten year olds to teach them how to draw Clare Grogan, Liz McColgan, Alison Watt, Dee Hepburn, Liz Fraser, Annie Lennox, Mary Queen of Scots and Margaret Blackwood. We turn them into selkies. It is good for them and good for me, in the unbelievable dry heat.

What is Washington DC in the grander scheme of things? It is a day trip to Philadelphia to see the Duchamp originals. It is seeing The Mekons and Man or Astroman? at the 9.30 club. It is a day trip to Baltimore to try and find a bar showing the shit World Cup final. It is the Hirshhorn Museum and Felix Gonzalez-Torres. It is hearing of the shooting of Escobar after his own goal. It is about working with 100 kids and thinking about how to push the notion of artists working in schools.

It is about Lemonheads, Green Day, Roberto Baggio, Smashing Pumpkins and Yordan Letchkov's header. I find some cheap Lou Reed and Meredith Monk cassettes in a shop when some bloke bursts in to shout "Prince is dead!" We stay at Trinity University and play football at night on the empty sports field. I hit a



classic left foot half-volley into the top corner. Goal of the summer. It is about a trip to Old Town Alexandria and finding a cheap Jane Bond & The Undercovermen LP. Go to Jean Dunning private view and read Studs Terkel. The other Alan is too macho and full of himself, too anxious to suggest that all Scots are like Sean Connery or something. We mount all the kids' amazing drawings on the big yellow wall as agreed then the Head has a fit and claims some misunderstanding so we spend longer removing it than we do making



it. Ted and Marion come in to help and it is cool. *24 hour mural psychos.* Excuse me, dude sounds like Scooby Doo. We all have to hire kilts for the project launches and the kids love it. We head straight from there to the Arlington National Cemetery to look at JFK and Jackie. Fly to Cleveland with Marion Levy and then on to Chicago. Catch up with Jim K, head for the Art Institute and I drag him to 233 East

Wacker, the mysterious address I explore back in 1990. It is home to numerous odd businesses and has extremely tight security. A few beers and fresh fish

from Lake Michigan and off to see some quasi-REM band called Throneberry. They are good at intros and I slur "Jim, there are bands that are good at starting songs and bands that are great at finishing them."

It is about hearing the phrase "email" for the first time. I head to the now closed Busy Bee for food with Marion and Marion and Anna and I catch up with Olivia of CPAG and join in during their mosaic workshop. Jon Pounds drives me round all the recent mural projects and the next big thing, Carlos Rolón/Dzine. We all go for a Greek meal and I think I drink too much and try to joke with Jon that he looks more and more like De Niro but I don't think he gets it. If you ever read this, Jon, I am sincerely sorry (but you do look like him, it's a compliment). Fly back for last night in Washington DC at the Felix Droese opening and fly back to Manchester, via Chicago, on my 27th birthday.



I catch up with stuff. The NME has an advert for some underground cassettes on offer from "Ian, 39 Hyndland Road." Get an ultrascan and a *no tumour* verdict. I approach Derby Football Club to include my new *Klinsmann meets Douglas Gordon meets Maradona* collage in their programme. Turn up for the Sean installation on Sean's birthday (25th

August) but Venicrest install only two panels before deciding that the whole surface needs to be painted. Disappointed but philosophical, I wander along to Broadway for *The Last Seduction* which passes me by, but is preceded by the cool Portishead short. Sean down, two to go. Cue local newspaper article: *Going back to the drawing board: non-stick nightmare for artist Alan!*

Going back to the drawing board

AN ARTIST'S plan to brighten up a street.
Non-stick nightmare for artist Alan

Group-hire Alan Dunn produced a huge mural of Robin Hood — as played by Sean Connery in the 1976 film *Robin and Marian* — to cheer the hundredth birthday of the Victoria Centre.

But, after an art installation in the Victoria Centre, and a display in the Victoria Centre, the mural was removed. Dunn says: "I was disappointed because I put a lot of hard work into it. I particularly enjoyed the fact that it was a mural of a well-known actor."

He said: "It just wasn't going to work. I was going to be happy to scrap it back off again. I have been told that the mural was a waste of time."

Birthday

It is going to have a place in the Victoria Centre, but the mural was removed. Dunn says: "I was disappointed because I put a lot of hard work into it. I particularly enjoyed the fact that it was a mural of a well-known actor."

He said: "It just wasn't going to work. I was going to be happy to scrap it back off again. I have been told that the mural was a waste of time."

Artist Alan Dunn at the site where he hopes to display his giant poster



I develop an idea for the Ironville Festival of a large board attached to some real goalposts with holes cut out in the exact spot of famous goals. Surely this has been done? I would choose Gemmill vs Holland, Francis vs Malmo, Maradona vs England, McAllister vs Rangers and Dalglish vs Wales. I think about this and wander

down to the Baseball Ground to buy a programme and watch a dire 1-0 game against Middlesbrough. Sean is re-installed by a Mitchell-brother type called Roger and it looks fucking Beautiful, Conceptual, Abstract, Realistic, Community, Pixellated, Accessible, Risky. The Nottingham Post turns up again and cue article: *At last - it's a stick-up for Alan!*



I head down to London to see a weird Brian Catlin show and Brigitte's stuffed sculptures at Café Gallery. Back to Derby to start painting some backs to go alongside Dempster's torsos for an idea we propose to Derby Playhouse. Down to Birmingham for opening of Brigitte's *TIDES* installation. Start on new work around the idea of the tortoise and the hare. I love the Joseph Wright of Derby paintings in the museum and incorporate them into a new proposal. I develop another idea to hire every single billboard in D_rby at the same time but the cost is astronomical. To Nottingham for the bizzare Goose Fair with Coney Island-esque freakshows, boxing and bearded ladies. Big Dunc gets transferred to Everton and Brigitte applies for and gets offered a teaching job at Liverpool John Moores University.

Bomb up to Glasgow in a good mood for 5-1 thrashing of the Faroe Islands. Their keeper Jens Martin Knudsen is only two months older than me and wears his infamous bobble hat. Stay for Christine's Tramway opening and chat with Tom Lawson, the Büchlers, Ross, Bryndis and some Castelmilk crew. Move on to The Scotia and who should be there but Pervaze from GSA first year. Check on Hamilton mural (all fine) and Kilmarnock (all the same) and drag my brother to see *Pulp Fiction* at the Forge. Knockbacks from Birmingham residency, Belfast Big Screen, Derby Museum and some Sunderland public commission. Propose five changing billboards for Langley Mill and it gets through the first two rounds until someone claims that my first proposed image, a bright sunny Italian beach scene with tanned males and females, is too sexist. I am angry and point out some recent British Rail adverts of a similar nature, but my mind is on Liverpool. I finish the afore-mentioned Escobar piece but it is shit. Gustavo and I go through the motions of photographing it outside the Baseball Ground but it is not even worth reproducing. As David H says, my problem is often consistency, but you have to try new collaborations like new dishes. I buy the new Cramps LP with the amazing Duchamp tribute

Naked girl falling down the stairs. They are dark horses. Cool video too - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zl98Koc9Y-I>.



I fire off a proposal to Nottingham's Bonington Gallery to do a project around Sean as Robin. I see Simon Patterson's *General Assembly* show at Angel Row. Back up to Glasgow for the 1-1 draw with Russia after popping in to the CCA and walking right into middle of an MFA crit. Roger P looks at me and asks "want to join in, Alan, for old times sake?" I decline confidently. It is the sounds

of the second Stone Roses LP and *Nirvana Unplugged*. I do line up some Derby projects, including a 48-sheet in Langley Mill working with a school and a presentation of the backs and torsos at the lovely curved brick wall of the Playhouse. Dinner with Stuart Mills and arrange to show some Dempster & Dunn works in his weird Atrium space in 1995 - *The tortoise and the hare* (that Dempster has since changed to *The tortoise and the cow*).



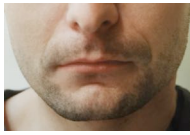
I gather up as many cheap vinyls as I can before leaving – Laurie Anderson, *Punk'n'disorderly* and Frank Zappa. I buy my first ever Mac and immediately pack it up for Liverpool. I say goodbye to the DCA folks in the Drill Hall Vaults and donate a painting of my clenched fist to them. On 13th December the powers that be close the Ironville Community Centre due to safety

concerns. I am Waiting for the Great Leap Forward that never comes, settling in (community) comfort zones and avoiding any stratospheric leaps into the void. I am avoiding the limelight and lurking in the background.

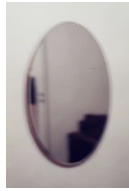
I end 1994 thinking about Glasgow a lot, wondering if I should have listened to Andrew Nairne more, wondering if I should have continued curating billboards, and amazed that my peers have quickly become entrenched in the international art world and primarily engaged with white cube galleries too. I have worked with hundreds of people, produced some shit art but also the Flying Squirrel, the floating white areas of the Hamilton mural, big Sean C and the Loch Ness Monster and the pensioners' Sinatras. But my doubts pale into insignificance at the thought of living in Liverpool. Echo & the Brookside Dalglish meet the Orchestral Beatles Liver Birds. Hillsborough, Heyssel, Bulger, Mersey, WAH!, Teardrop Explodes, Jayne Casey and of course Bill Drummond.



Images



Alan Dunn *Self-portrait without glasses*, January 1992



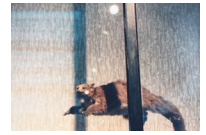
Oval mirror, North Hamilton Street, Kilmarnock



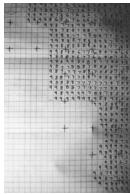
Half a lion, The Dick Institute, 1992



Alan Dunn & Alex Dempster *Birmingham Billboard Project*, 1992



Flying squirrel, The Dick Institute, 1992



Alan Dunn *Squirrel squares*, 1992



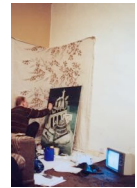
Yves Klein *Leap into the void*, 1960



Alan Dunn & Alex Dempster *Bridge*, 1992



Cannon Cinema, Kilmarnock, 1992



Alex Dempster, working on *Heap*, Kilmarnock, 1992



George Wyllie in Rannoch Moor, 1992



Alan Dunn *Assembly: Museum backdrops*, 1992



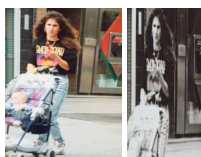
Alan Dunn *The Flying Squirrel*, 1992



Alan Dunn *Assembly: Museum backdrops*, 1992



documenta IX Kassel, 1992



Alan Dunn *Retreat*, photographs & digital prints, 1992



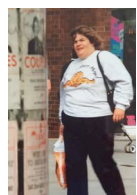
Alan Dunn and Provost Coffey, Kilmarnock, 1992



Alan Dunn *Retreat*, photographs & digital prints, 1992



The Dick Institute, 1992



Alan Dunn *Retreat*, photograph, 1992



Kilmarnock 1992



Alan Dunn *Retreat*, photograph, 1992



Alan Dunn *Retreat*, oil on board, 7x3ft, 1992



Alan Dunn *Retreat*, oil on board, 7x3ft, 1992



Alan Dunn *Retreat*, oil on board, 7x3ft, 1992



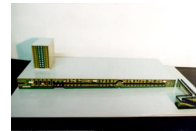
Alan Dunn *Retreat*, oil on board, 7x3ft, 1992



Clare Henry The Glasgow Herald, 23 January 1993



Site for Hamilton mural, 1993



Alan Dunn *Proposal for Hamilton mural*, 1993



The Hamilton Advertiser, 1993



The Sun, 1993



Alan Dunn *The Hamilton Races*, mural, 1993



Alan Dunn *The Hamilton Races*, mural & astroturf, 1993



Alan Dunn *The Hamilton Races*, mural, 1993



The Hamilton team: Robert Jeffrey, AD, Graham Dunn and Alex Dempster, 1993



The Hamilton Advertiser, 1993



Alan Dunn *The Hamilton Races*, mural, 1993



Artlink Central and MBHA, Stirling, 1993



Alan Dunn & Alex Dempster *Knife Crime*, 1993



Alan Dunn & Artlink *Portrait of Margaret Blackwood*, Stirling, 1993



Alan Dunn & Artlink *Portrait of Margaret Blackwood*, Stirling, 1993



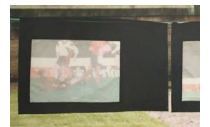
Alan Dunn & The Pensioners' Action Group *Fantasy, Reality and Frank*, 1993



Alan Dunn & The Pensioners' Action Group *Fantasy, Reality and Frank*, 1993



Alan Dunn & The Pensioners' Action Group *Fantasy, Reality and Frank*, 1993



Alan Dunn *Dunc's Big Match Agony*, Edition Klöckner, 1993



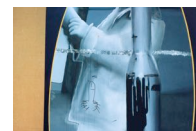
Alan Dunn *Ironville mural*, 1994



Alan Dunn & Alex Dempster *The Emperor's Soundtrack*, cassette, 1994



Alan Dunn & Alex Dempster *The Emperor*, Derby studio, 1994



Alan Dunn *Retreat*, vandalism, Wishaw, 1994



Alan Dunn & Artlink *Portrait of Stephen Hendry*, Stirling, 1994



Stirling News, 1994



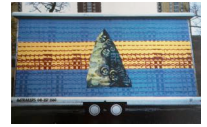
Alan Dunn Ironville mural studies, 1994



Alan Dunn Ironville mural, 1994



Alan Dunn & Alex Dempster *The Emperor*, 1994



Alan Dunn & Alex Dempster *The Emperor*, 1994



next stop, Nottingham 1994



Alan Dunn *The Surgeon's Photograph*, Derby studio, 1994



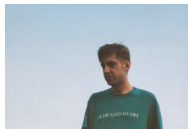
Alan Dunn *The Surgeon's Photograph*, Derby, 1994



Derby Telegraph, 1994



Alan Dunn *Famous Scottish Females*, Lafayette Elementary School, Washington DC, 1994



Ted waiting on The Beach Boys, Washington DC, 1994



Alan Dunn *Famous Scottish Females*, Lafayette Elementary School, Washington DC, 1994



The Lafayette Team: AD, Rosina, Margarita, Alan, 1994



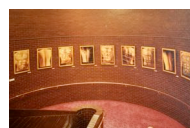
Alan Dunn *Robin and Marian*, Nottingham, 1994



Nottingham Post, 1994



Alan Dunn *Robin and Marian*, Nottingham, 1994



Alan Dunn & Alex Dempster *PIN UP*, Derby Playhouse, 1994



Alan Dunn *Farewell Fists*, Derby studio, 1994



Half a lion (back), The Dick Institute, 1992

www.alandunn67.co.uk
a.dunn@leedsbeckett.ac.uk
August 2015