

Learning to be silent: Environmental Art 1986-89



I kept notes and journals throughout my whole time at GSA (Glasgow School of Art) between 1985-1991 and with the 25th anniversary of my *Bellgrove* project approaching, I dig these out for the first time since writing them. What follows is written from those notes over a five-day period and re-reading it for the first time now before uploading, it's obvious that it starts very brokenly then picks up and

becomes coherent, very much mirroring my time in Environmental Art. This isn't written for anyone in particular but it is apparent that the text is a snapshot of a rigorous and progressive art education at the very beginnings of what would become, for some, an emergence onto the (inter)national art scene. It is also about a pre-digital time of cassettes, vinyl, phonecalls and written communication. I was never really part of the 'in' crowd, later to be dubbed the *Scotia Nostra*, or what David Harding called 'the socialisation years' but it is not my intention to dispel any myths about Environmental Art. I certainly was not an easy student to converse with at the time but what strikes me now is how hard some of us worked, how far we were all pushed, the range of artistic practice we were exposed to, the patience and faith of the tutors and how much those Environmental Art studio spaces became our home, with all the ups and downs of any family. On that point, I've left some personal material in as that's how it was recorded at the time, blurring some lines between the everyday and studying art.



When asked about his time in Environmental Art, Douglas Gordon says that he learned how to sing. In an article for *Corridor 8*, I write that I learned how to be silent, how to observe, to absorb and to play the long game. The Environmental Art Department may now be synonymous with Turner Prize nominees but for me it began during my first year at GSA with a talk by Department Head David Harding.

I was all set to go into Graphic Design at the time

but when he showed slides of Daniel Buren's work, the minimal tromp l'oeil murals of Richard Haas and Fabio Rieti and spoke about "the context being 50% of the work" I was intrigued and hooked. Sam Ainsley interviewed me and she asked which books I had been reading and which music I listened to. When I started to talk about the *ran* Super 8 movie I was doing with Dr Bob and the experimental music I was listening to, she asked about John Cage but in my nervous state, I heard "John Cale" and spent the next ten minutes talking about how The Velvet Underground changed my life. My recently completed PhD coincidentally enough was in parts about John Cage, John Cale and how pupil Graeme Ainslie playing The Velvet Underground changed my life.



Perhaps it is useful before the start to put the period in context. The BA was a four-year Degree with a general first year in the famous Charles Rennie Mackintosh building followed by a specialised three years in one of five Departments based in annexes. Environmental Art for example was based in the former Girls' High School, about a five-minute walk from the Mackintosh. I then stayed on to do a two-year full-time MFA, also with a studio in the Girls' High. When I started art school in September 1985 I had just turned 18 and went straight from school, turning down a good placement with Britoil with a guaranteed Glasgow University scholarship in doing so. Since seeing the Mackintosh from the bottom of Scott Street one time as a kid when visiting the cinema on Sauchiehall Street, I knew I wanted to go to art school. At the end of my first year, I received the JD Kelly Award for Best First Year Studies and I ended my studies six years later with the much-acclaimed *Bellgrove* project in the pages of *Artscribe International*. In between these was Environmental Art, a genuine passage of discovery, envy, loss, music, lectures, blunt tutorials, confusion and bloody hard work. Environmental Art did encourage us to *document everything* and if I hadn't written this stuff down, I would have forgotten a lot of it. When I struggled, I was very honest and angry with myself and it certainly was not all roses, but I can now read with pleasure some of the seeds of what became lifelong research interests.

February - May 1986

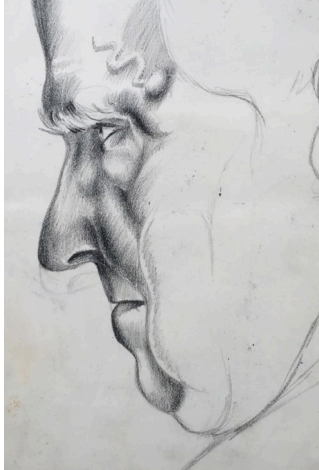
Despite the Cage/Cale mix-up, I am offered a place in Environmental Art. It is a new course only in its second year with the arrival of David Harding and Sam Ainsley and it's a course that was formerly known as Stained Glass & Murals, but not Mixed Media. I think at the time its most famous alumni was Jill Bryson who was in *Strawberry Switchblade*, once managed by Bill Drummond. I'm happy that I'll be studying alongside the goths Stephen Penders and Ruth Greer but in the end both of them change their minds and go to Sculpture. Penders talks a lot about the Inca Babies and the Dead Kennedys and was friendly back at Castle Toward, the regional pre-Art School fortnight art trip for those expected to go onto GSA. Unperturbed, I celebrate my place by going down to The Griffin to with fellow ex-Castle Towarders Craig Richardson, already in EA, and flattop psychobilly Stephen Falconer who'll be studying alongside me.



The (self) education begins and over the next few months I devour as much as I can. I take in *Eraserhead*, *Head*, *Nosferatu* and chat a lot with Nathan Coley. We drink Furstenberg and I'm listening to a lot of Black Flag, Hüsker Dü, Johnny Cash, Einstürzende Neubauten, Psychic TV and The Stooges which is all pretty macho in hindsight. I create a weird angular drawn Super 8 sound art

box thing with self-portraits at the end of first year and manage to rip the snooker table upstairs in The Vic playing against flattop Alan who's now going out with Suzie H. I also build up the guts to say hello again to Lorna Buchanan but she goes into Fashion I think and

everybody's talking about The Cramps' imminent gig at the Barrowlands. They are phenomenal, with *Georgia Lee Brown* and *Lonesome Town* particular standouts, alongside Lux screaming *GLAYZGA* to huge roars. Dalglish wins his 100th cap and I visit my Grandpa Dunn in Barlanark to sketch him. He's frighteningly thin. He will become my first big death and I know it even then. Uncle Willie the Blue Nose is also visiting, just as they announce Souness as the new RFC manager. Uncle Willie seems to know the revolution is coming.



I am 19 and these are the kind of days I dreamt of. Reagan bombs Libya and my Gran doesn't want to see my sketch of Grandpa. Knowing which departments we'll go into, we wind up our first year in relaxed mode to a soundtrack of The Smiths trying to drown out The Pogues (Euan Sutherland!) and we all attend Pete Seddon's farewell lecture that concludes with a forty-minute history of the portrayal of Jesus' penis in painting. I write: I WANNA DRAW UP PLANS FOR A REVOLUTION. Instead, I buy the Cocteau's *Victorialand* from Savoy. I also buy the Soup Dragons 7" and Dr Bob lends me some early Hüsker Dü (*Land Speed Record* and *Zen Arcade*) and plenty of 60's garage punk on cassette. I then get seriously into Blast First's new American noise of The Butthole

Surfers, SWANS, Big Black, Dinosaur Jnr, Sonic Youth and Big Stick. Every Sunday evening I go to the GFT (Glasgow Film Theatre) on Rose Street to see stuff I don't necessarily understand such as *Hail Mary*, *Vagabonde* and *Subway*. Nobody else seems to appreciate *Subway* but it begins my love of Luc Besson's films and in 2008 I name my sound art

moniker after one of his movie series. I spend the summer with Nathan Coley in town painting a huge Garden Festival mural, although the Festival doesn't open until 1988. The homeless from Cadogan House keep asking us for slurps of turps. I spend the money down the Barras on cheap Cabaret Voltaire and Clock DVA singles (the sound of Sheffield!) and pulp fiction paperbacks on voodoos, surfing and nymphs, all in preparation for Environmental Art.

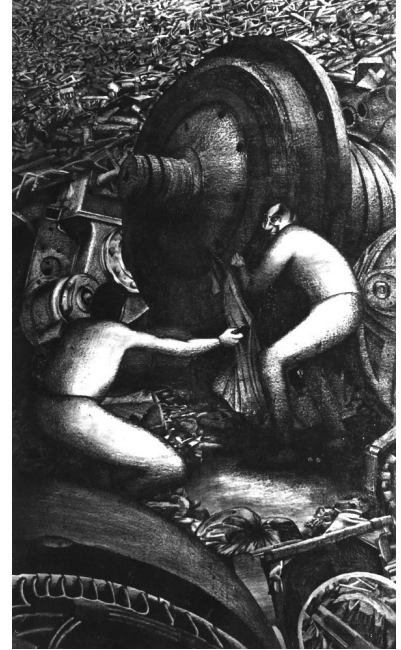


September 1986 – May 1987



We're in the Girls' High School on Garnet Street, up the double helix stairs on the top floor, with a staff team of David Harding, Sam Ainsley, Stan Bonnar, Brian Kelly and Shiona McCubbin. We do some stained glass and welding and video filming/editing workshops and life drawing and it's weird. Right from the start, I don't fit in, I don't feel comfortable and I withdraw. The difficult second album syndrome perhaps. I start doing large angry

black & white wall drawings of weird twisted figures fighting in east end scrapyards (*Scrap Yard Scrap* being a favourite) and I avoid all the 2am drinking sessions, which doesn't endear me to my peers. I write: THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO AVOID HYPOCRISY and I quote Jello Biafra in my notebook: I'M NOT TELLING YOU, I'M ASKING YOU. It's the era of C86 and *There is a light that never goes out* and The Fall's amazing *Bend Sinister*, Ciccone Youth and the Age of Chance. My Grandpa dies. We work in the darkroom and I angrily inscribe texts on the back of photographic paper with biros then expose them at angles to create shadows. I call them things like *Silver theatre of the absurd* and even Roger Palmer and Thomas Joshua Cooper seem to like them. This surprises me as Roger will be one of my harshest critics over the next four years.



I get hit by a car at night while I'm walking listening to The Fall on headphones but I escape with minor leg bruises. From the outset, Environmental Art staff are carrying out what I describe at the time as *disciplinary actions* against some students who are not up to speed. I struggle to find my identity. I'm not sure what I am meant to be doing or who I am meant to be. I am not in a band and I definitely don't have the quality that George Wyllie later demands of *pizzazz*. This leads to issues around the relationship between artist and audience, something I will take a few years to resolve. Many of my works produced during Environmental Art include a self-portrait, but it's the back of my head looking into the pictorial plane. Or my own hand reaching in. What was all that about?

Roger calls my sketchbooks *relaxed, but intense*, but I walk out to have coffee with Meg McLucas and Andy Chung before we go to a stuttering Keith Nash lecture. The first AIDS adverts appear on TV and the Barlinnie Prison siege continues. Some of my photos go wrong and my Canon camera jams while wandering Barlanark and Easterhouse. I think it's to do with the low temperatures but my Dad, the amateur photographer, introduces me to *Farmer's Reducer* and that salvages many of my wrongly exposed prints. I see Maurice Johnston, then a Celtic player, in our local Co-Op down at Barrachnie lights and I bend down to pick up a tin that he knocks off the shelf. Mo thanks.

Nathan Coley is the hardest working student in our year, alongside myself, and I admire that. Our relationship will be strained over the years but I respect what he does. Laura Hudson and Leslie Macfie both seem to be struggling a bit already. I pop in to see Sam Ainsley's exhibition at Kelvingrove Art Gallery - they give some staff studio spaces at the back of the Girls' High - and I get the first of many of what I describe as a BRAINGRINDER OF A TUTORIAL from Roger. They are intense, they interrogate you, push you, tell you when something is crap, they tell you you'll never be an artist, they rip stuff up and tell you to do it again and they demand more all the time. They leave you questioning everything and feeling you know nothing. A few are already falling by the wayside and it's only January. Louise Bradley has an epileptic fit in the studio. I can still hear her saying "I think I've something in my eye, something in my eye" before she collapses. Euan S is amazing and knows exactly what to do. I write that it's already easy to resent people in this fucking weird Department.



Our third years work with George Wyllie and I immediately like him and we speak very briefly about 'installations' of all things. For our murals workshop, we all have to painstakingly copy a life-size Stanley Spencer (*SHIP BUILDING ON THE CLYDE - WELDERS*), which I love. I am on repetitive but precise RIVET PAINTING DUTY and we distort the whole image like a Siqueiros. My Grandpa Dunn worked for John Brown & Co Shipbuilding

on The Clyde and the connection doesn't pass me by. I collect money for the third years' Dada Dance Event but don't go and get the cold shoulder. Douglas says it was amazing and I begin to question myself and my sociability. There's an ArtAngel-commissioned Barbara Kruger billboard (*WE DON'T NEED ANOTHER HERO*) installed out in London Road and I make a 7am trek to take a polaroid of it. Billboards, even in the east end, are for established artists such as Barbara Kruger.



Later that week, Andy Warhol dies. I take some photographs of the TV screen in honour and then, in the coldest month, we all go to Berlin. We travel Graphics and stay in the Olympic Hotel in the snow. I remember waking to tanks in the street and finding the Käthe Kollwitz Museum and Bauhaus Archives with Nathan. I am REALLY quiet in those days and it is genuinely hard for my peers. Nathan, Euan, flat-top Stevie and I share a room. I mean no

animosity, I am just observing stuff and don't really know what to talk about. Everybody seems so much more articulate. But I like the sharpness of Berlin. I go up to The Wall with a marker pen to write something on it but then glance up at the gun aimed at me from the watchtower. We make eye contact and I back off. We have a day in the east and it looks like the east end of Glasgow and we nearly don't make it back to the west for midnight, making a drunken sprint for Checkpoint Charlie.

I return and suffer a real crisis, unable to relate to David, Brian, Sam, Shona or Stan. My sketchbooks are full of fiery and bitter sarcasm, which is not healthy, except that Shona actually likes the sarcasm. I even do a "Thou shalt" list of ten things to be a successful EA student I find solace in work and the east end and spend a lot of time in the Barras and wandering about Shettleston, Easterhouse, Parkhead, Garthamlock and Carntyne. It looks like East Berlin. Most of my aunts and uncles and cousins live in the east end and they will stay there most of their lives. I learned to swim



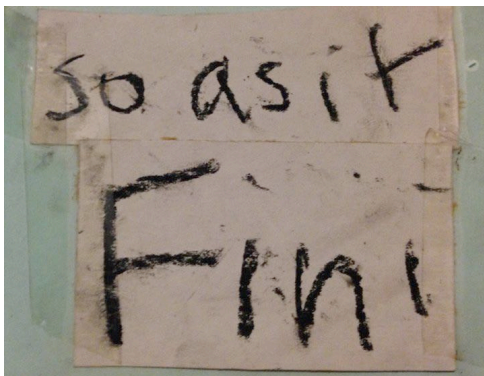
there, I tried to learn to drive there, I was the only protestant in a catholic team there (St. Bridgets FC 1979-81), I got mugged there and it feels comforting but ugly.

At the same time I am mail-order purchasing publications such as *TOUCH T5: MAGNETIC NORTH* from Mike Harding whom I will later share a pint with in Liverpool and he'll remember my order because of my unusual address of Barrachnie Road. It's exciting but I don't really understand it all. There's a book and a cassette that includes Neubauten and New Order and field recordings and Cabaret Voltaire and Gilbert & George, all around the single theme of ritual. What's the relationship between this curated underground and the east end?



We have to select a venue to do our public sculpture project. I choose Bellgrove Station and spend Easter painting a 2D work of shadows and surreal figures with distorted arms and magnifying glasses to be bolted to the retaining wall. David likes it a lot but laughs and writes on my report: "Alan does 2D work even when asked to do 3D. So be it!" It's true. I am useless at the welding and casting and woodworking and don't really get on with old Bob who runs the work workshop. I head down to the Finnieston Crane with Louise, Meg and Debbie to see Wyllie's straw locomotive being set on fire. There's a lot of Pastels, BMX Bandits and Biff Bang Pow! sneaking into Environmental Art with Douglas, Ross and Ian 'Oor Wullie' Kettles who's joined our year. I enjoy the Mark Boyle talk and we chat later in my studio. I note that The Boyle Family's *Earth Studies* seem to fuse the avant-garde with the everyday and the conceptual with the literal.

In EA we all get studios made from chipboard panels, spaces of around 12x9ft, initially shared between two. There are only about eight in my year and eventually with comings and goings, ten of us will graduate in 1989. Teaching at this stage involves workshops, set projects, lectures and regular tutorials. The studios are open long hours and the years are mixed, which allows a genuine cross fertilisation of ideas and rumours. I buy a 12" by the JAMMs because the cover has a graffitied billboard and I start reading about Bill Drummond and making the Bunnymen Liverpool connections. I find myself thinking a lot about Liverpool

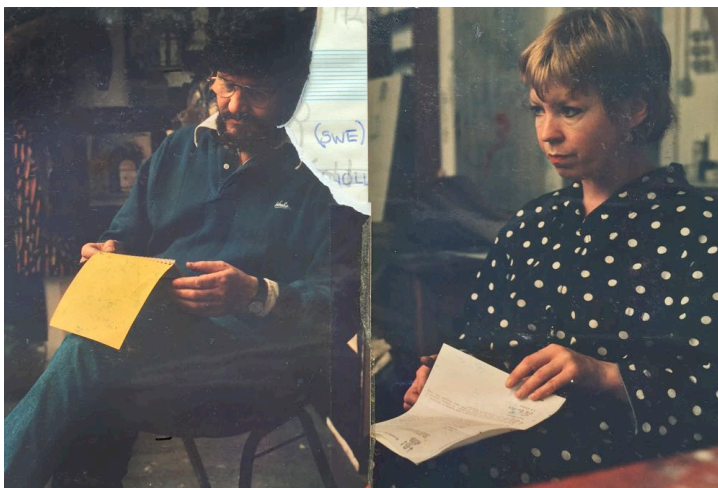


and I finally move there in 1994 and remain there to this day. Diego Rivera's daughter appears on the Ruby Wax Show, I think, talking about Federico Fellini's balls (my notes say no more). I do a painting of Terry Waite but then British Rail say no to my Bellgrove installation. I make a mental note to try again. I write: WORK WILL FALL APART. EVERYTHING WILL FALL APART, but I think that's just a Hüsker Dü reference. I go to Kelvingrove, an east end boy up west with wine and culture and Euan Sutherland's work gets stronger. He's working almost

as hard as Nathan and me. Keeps us on our toes. I want to see Fini Tribe but they're in Edinburgh, a whole different world.

We go to Metropol with Kettles' work installed in public without permission and the police arrive and we all have to give our names. David stands and observes, a bit as I imagine McLaren and Westwood did with the Sex Pistols. I help Stevie F carve out his *PHOENIX* piece which is a bit of a Douglas rip off to be honest. Euan Hunter gets angry at David not being in and puts his hand through a glass door, thinking it is wood. These are dark, weird times. It was, in retrospect, never enough to *be lost*. You had to be looking for, and finding, your own way out. Staff helped with the occasional signpost, which often just had question marks on them. Or were blank. George Wyllie introduces the '?' to the title SCUL?TOR, but I think a lot of us are in some form of darkness. What does it mean that the context is 50% of the work? How can we produce and grow up and make mistakes in the public realm? What is environmental art?

I help out setting up the Degree Show with Virginia Colley's stained glass and Andy *Fini Tribe* McGregor's rough installation. My notes refer to a beautiful etched glass piece by Stephen (Hurrell or Beddoe?) that documents all the gangs of Glasgow and I check to make sure he's included all the ones that chased us as kids, namely the BAR-L, TOI, TOTR and DRUMMY. I do a collage called *WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON?* and somebody buys it for £40 in The Vic. Roddy Buchanan is around more during his year out and Craig Richardson is creating these weird rooms, part Beuys part Hundertwasser. I remember seeing little ants crawl around spirals of sand down in the Girls' High basements that used to be changing rooms. Stevie F struggles to finish anything original and will fail and Laura Bradley returns but only to transfer to Photography. Our year shrinks. My final year cryptic crit tutorial says: YOU HAVE TO BECOME THE CENTRE OF YOUR UNIVERSE. I take pictures of Sam and David and recreate that very tutorial in a photomontage later, which in retrospect seems quite avant-garde and postmodern.

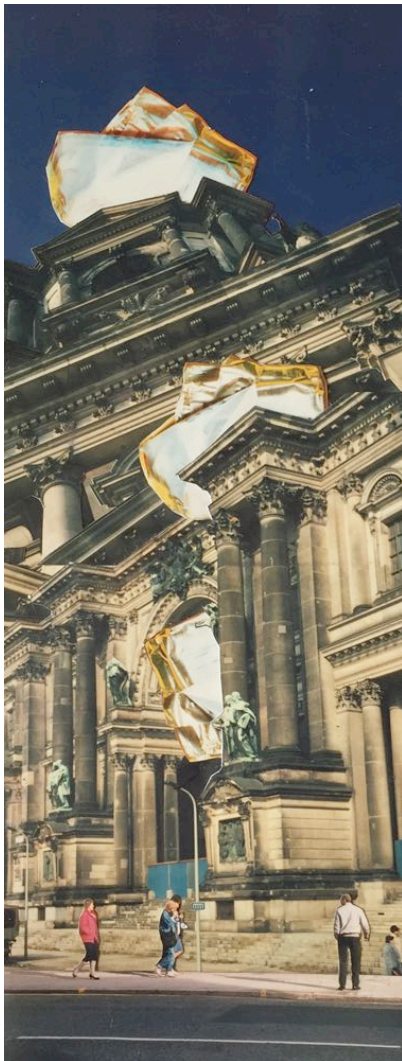


I chat with Peter *The Mackenzies* Gilmour who will later do a billboard for *Bellgrove* and we go to a performance by Euan, Craig and Douglas who use the name Puberty International. I write: DARKNESS, DEATH, FIRE, RITUAL, VIOLENCE, WATER, CANDLES, PIBROCH, SLOW, SMOKE, WILD PLANET. The day ends with Sam storming out in tears, David telling Roddy to fuck off, Euan S telling

Helen to fuck off, David getting pissed and falling down the stairs and spraining his ankle. I write: IN A RUT. I head down to Transmission Gallery in Chisholm Street for *Desire in ruins*. It's a confusing scary place but oddly exciting. Desire in ruins indeed.

I lend Douglas my *TOUCH* cassette and book as he's writing about ritual for his dissertation and I get a sneak preview of Ross' new Soup Dragons sleeve design. A few of us take part in Euan Hunter's *Human Zebra Crossing Performance* on the busy Sauchiehall Street. At lunchtime. We have to wear black or white bin bags and lay down on the busy street and pray that the traffic stops. David turns up to watch with a cool walking stick and we all laugh for the first time in a while. I go to vote for SNP and the Conservatives win and I buy *Can't*

take no more with Ross' design. David puts me in touch with Stow College who want a mechanised mannequin display (best ask a 2D artist, David!) and so starts summer.



Summer 1987

I sign on, avoid being picked up by perverts at Queen Street while sketching and meet up with Nathan who doesn't seem too enthusiastic about my new work. I turn 20, listen to Culturecide, AR Kane, Mark Stewart & The Mafia and Foetus. I smoke too many Benson & Hedges. I write: KEEP IN MIND RADICAL BOOKS. I get hold of some mannequins but give up on making them move and Stow College cancel the event anyway. I take pictures of the mannequins instead. I write: PISSSED OFF WITH WORK, NEED SOMETHING TOTALLY FRESH, SOMETHING SENSUAL AND EMOTIONAL. I start doing photomontage, initially using up the photos of the mannequins, and head back in to Environmental Art with a spring. "These are the best things you have ever done!" says David on the first day back, a huge smile under his beard. Sam concurs.

September 1987 – June 1988

I start researching The Hielanman's Umbrella for a possible public art commission at Central Station. Apparently, men from the Highlands seeking work in Glasgow used to keep dry under this walkway part of the station. Wimps. I was drawn to working in 2D and on a large scale but really lacked a bigger picture and maturity and experience. I worked up some ideas using photomontage but I think in the end old Jim in first year got the gig with some fairly conservative designs. He gave the client what they wanted when in fact David was constantly preaching "educate the client."

The key record shop at this time is A1 and they provide an endless and affordable stream of independent, underground and obscure vinyl, including imports. I try to broaden my diet with Alan Bennett's *Me - I'm Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and *Bedazzled* and Truffaut's *The Bride Wore Black*. I write odd things like: MISERYMIND + SST = SST/NS (no idea who or what NS is; SST would be the record label).

I continue with the montages and talk to Craig and try to work out how to enlarge these lovely surreal and strange images. I hear *Birthday* on Peel sung by Bjork and the Sugarcubes and I've never heard anything like it. I keep half an eye on the football as Trevor Francis makes his debut at Ibrox. I write: SUMMER'S ALMOST GONE. WHAT'S NEW? PHOTOMONTAGE? MUSIC? REVOLUTION? I wake with a terrible headache at 7am and there's a fucking live wasp under my cheek, I re-awaken to *Release the bats* and the Young Gods at full volume, courtesy of my goth brother who is studying Maths at Glasgow Uni. I listen to John Peel every evening and write NO GIGS JUST CIGS. The art school introduces new regulations in regard to cuts and blood and AIDS. Douglas plays Tackhead cassettes all

day in the studio and two London trips are announced, both squatting with Chelsea students, so we can see the Diego Rivera exhibition and Puberty International at The National Review of Live Art. Another great crit suggests I've to focus on "murals derived from the photomontages" and three of us are chosen to start on a live mural project in Blackhill right away.

I wander London Road in the sun with childhood memories. I see McCoist and Durrant in Union Street and regret giving up football at the age of 15. I watch the Apollo Theatre being pulled down. I went to my first ever gig there, the Cocteau Twins in 1983 with the frightening small Liz Fraser coming onto stage and opening her mouth to produce this astoundingly beautiful sound. I hate the use of the word *alternative*. There's a trip to Barcelona too and the year is looking up. My money now solely goes on scalpel blades from Millers in Queen Street, train fares and records, I gradually master the montage technique, edging the cut photos with marker pens to hide the joins. TV is full of anti-smoking propaganda so I retreat into Cocteau Twins and montaging. I start to average five really good montages each day and around fifteen B&H. I remember reading Calvin Tomkins book on Rauschenberg's work ethic and I work harder. I realise I need a broader range of source photographs so I head to Edinburgh and New Lanark while listening to Throwing Muses on the Walkman by the Falls of Clyde, which is just one of those moments. I chat with Douglas about *Songs about fucking* and I really admire Nathan's new sculpture. The studio has a new atmosphere of hard work, focus and music, which is mostly good, except for Spoony G's *The Godfather* on loop. I bring in my pile of 747 cassettes, gifts from *the uncle I always though was a spy* from the Saudi Cassette Supermarkets: Talking Heads, Grace Jones and The Tubes. I chat with Craig and Yorik tells me that Andy Chung has left to join The New York Pig Funkers, although Discogs says that they only released one 12" in 1986. I don't see much going on in the First Year part of the studio. Pull your socks up, Martin Boyce, Jackie Donachie, Helena Maria Nugent et al.



David, Nathan, Meg McLucas and myself make our first visit to Blackhill. We are to work with the locals on a 30ft gable end mural. I love this. We used to pass this spot every Sunday when visiting my Gran Strang who lived in Mingulay Street. I know these streets. We sit in a desolate community centre with wild green or blue clad kids and as Irvine Welsh later says "a blue McEwans lager top means no imagination." They have some drawings we can develop. Welcome to community art. The Molendinar Burn runs near the gable wall so we do some research and work up some vague ideas of a huge hand wiping away the bricks. A bit of *tromp l'oeil* and Brian advises me to use gouache on water colour board for the first time to create the proposal. I love doing this. I write: NO FURTHER MONTAGE AS MY MIND IS ELSEWHERE AND STILL HAVEN'T MADE THE CINE FILM. I visit Blackhill with Nathan and we wrangle a ride up in a cherry picker, and I write of my design: IT IS

COMPUTERLY PERFECT. IT FULFILLS THE BRIEF BUT LACKS A SPARK OR

MYSTERY. *Computerly?* I visit the Ken Currie 'mural' in the Peoples' Palace as Rangers buy Gough and Celtic buy McAvennie. At this time my world is very small. It is Glasgow. I listen to Pussy Galore and my Uncle Stewart, *the uncle who I always thought was a spy*, leaves to work in China. I help Meg break into her locker while discussing The Ramones. She has a Mohican and will later join the police. I tape obscure (ie expensive) stuff off John Peel – Squirrel Bait, Charles Bukowski, Dinosaur Jnr, Giorno Poetry Systems, Virgin Prunes, Golden Palaminos, Firehose and The Descendents. Not a single female voice in there, it's always just Liz Fraser. And Bjork and Nancy Sinatra.

We all get the coach down to London, My notes are blurred, but I think I hang out with Martin and Chris from the year below, as we visit Rough Trade shop. We see Douglas and Craig perform slowly at the National Review of Live Art at the Riverside. I enter an adjacent room and there's a naked man shoving a pencil in his cock hole. I glance at Sam and my face says "I'm out of here." I think we stay with students called Tracy and Nick from Chelsea's mural department that is run by a Scot called Alan (Potter?). I think we stay in Hackney, me and Douglas and Nathan and Craig on some hard floor and we pass Genesis P. Orridge as we wander about and I think I get sick pissed in some bar (Pink Piano? Google says there is none) while talking to David Harding's son. I didn't make notes, KILLER HURRICANES DEVISTATE ENGLAND. I have an awkward tutorial with David ("re-do the colour ones") and Brian ("do a life-size version") and I head, confused, for the Alistair McLennan talk. I smoke too much and montage too much into the wee small hours. I tell David I wasn't planning to go the Third Eye Centre Performance Party and he sighs "Oh, darling". We both grin though, inside, with a trusting dark and honest humour and care. Rangers and Celtic fight on the pitch. I plan to go see SWANS but Rooftops cancel the gig for fear of the volume damaging their building. I move into a better studio space and Alistair McLennan wanders around slowly the studio to the sound of the Pixies. We get our designs accepted for Blackhill and are warned about glue sniffers jumping off our scaffolding to sue us. They talk about the gangsters along the road, of Arthur Thompson, Tommy Campbell and the Ice-Cream Wars. David takes us straight to the pub, downs many whiskys and gives the three of us a very close to the bone pep talk about some of the aggression or violence we may encounter. I guess that is the Risk Assessment done.



I chat more to Craig and I begin on one of my breakthrough pieces, namely the large *London Road Postman (Ministry of Defence)* one based on a photomontage. I think it's about the London Road postman passing the MOD building when in fact he is thinking of digestives and chicken rather than warfare. I love doing it, pastel on paper in my own large space, long hours. Opposite the Girls High are some hoardings and we discuss doing

some painting on them. I think this comes from a drunk Meg, who I think was from Stranraer, and Joe Matunis from Chicago. I think Meg did go out to paint a cow on them and we head back down to London to see the Diego Rivera exhibition and I drink in the *Hole in the wall* (?) with Douglas and Joe. I'll visit Joe later in New York but he's in a terrible post-relationship

mood and we'll never talk again. We pass Marc Almond in London and David guides me through the Rivera show, pointing out various techniques.

Back in our studio, it's all industrial with the Reverend Jim Jones suicide recordings, Laibach, Head of David and James Chance & The Contortions. And a Terry Atkinson lecture. I discuss the masons with Douglas as most of my uncles are high up in it. I hadn't yet been invited but I'd been shown some of the ritual objects. Sadly, AK Records closes and I'm there at the end to salvage some displays and remember the greats bought there, including *The Queen is dead*, *The Nightingales*, *Christ on parade*, *Bedtime for democracy*, *God's favourite dog*, *Blasting Concept*, JAMMs, Shop Assistants, Crass, Talulah Gosh, Annie Anxiety et al. On the same day, Carmel plays at GSA.



We assemble upstairs in the attic of the Girls' High for Douglas' *post-manual* performance with candles and straw all over the floor and no windows and lots of smoke and we stand there with the slow movement and suffer as much as we can. It's mesmerising, but the coughs start. A few start to exit. It's durational on the lungs and, thinking back, dangerous beyond belief. Thinking back, these are hard working and hard listening days. I am clear

what I am doing and reaping praise for the brave and ambitious direction. In the first year in EA, Sam says to me "Alan, if you feel you're hitting a brick wall, step back and picture what is on the other side of that wall. What is it you really want to do?" I felt I had come through the wall and was chatting and sharing ideas in the studio. Almost social. Sam even trusts me with her personal photographs to cut up and montage.



I am initially hesitant but soon attack them with a confident knife and she loves them. I write: PAIN IN THE BRAIN but it's a good pain of energy, ideas, sounds and discoveries. I borrow Neubauten and Laibach stuff from Douglas and observe how he works away in his little space at the other end from me. He and Craig are the hardest working students, alongside myself and Nathan. Yes, hard work seems important to me. I notice it. Claire Barclay, Anne Quinn and Martin Boyce are also hard workers.

And so, in the grey rain, we start in Blackhill. It's freezing and it's a really good idea to start a Glasgow mural in November, David. We are there for two weeks and I dress "like an extra from a Dostoevsky" (Harding) and I love it; big areas to paint, details to paint, half an eye on the locals, a couple of young brothers helping us (Hugh and Brian) and shaky scaffolding 30ft up. Back in the studio, I eavesdrop on a heavy Craig, Anne and Roddy crit on death, prison, illness, torture racks, holocaust and

black holes. David emerges singing "Everything is beautiful" and I get on with montages and large drawings. Back up the scaffolding the winds are howling and the in-jokes develop ("talking to a brick wall" was funny at the time). The kids laugh and swing from the telephone wires.

One of our external examiners, Caroline Tisdall, gives a talk on Beuys. Roland Miller, Richard Demarco, George Wyllie and Lys Hansen wander the studios and love my drawings. There's something comforting in EA about older artists visiting. We're in this for life. I think we have a lecture on Japanese theatre. There are loads of other talks but I have forgotten them if I haven't written them down. I sometimes presume that my own students now take

everything in, but that clearly has never been the case. Meg storms out of the studio and there's a fire at Kings Cross.



One day I contact a billboard company called MnA (Mills & Allen) to see if they have any old posters I could collage with. For some reason, I get stopped and questioned by the police en route but I pick up a big bundle of adverts. I get an empty room right at the damp back of the Girls' High to try to cut up and collage these 48-sheets. It doesn't really work as well as I had hoped but I now know where MnA are. Skatepunk is big on Peel and I listen to The Stupids and Frankfurter and will later meet and work with the records' producer Andrew Fryer in Leeds. On the scaffolding, I get nominated to paint the huge hand. Meg is on rhubarb, Nathan on arches. Only stained glass to do. I love the new LP from the brilliantly-named Expand-o-brain. Craig and Douglas head off to an Amsterdam performance festival and I go to a lecture about Richard Long's *Stone Field: Coracle Allotment 1*,

in Renshaw Hall in Liverpool. The following week, it's the amazing French urbanist/architect Bernard Lassus talking about our shift from horizontal to vertical living. Then Ted Ninnies on memory. I bump into Dr Bob in the GSA shop and it's a shame he went into jewellery, he'd have made a great EA student. Claire Barclay in the year below starts to make some interesting work. There are lunchtime talks on the American Dream.

We spill paint from the scaffolding and Father Gerry visits as we near the end. He invites us for drinks in the Provanmill Inn, but Nathan and I decline. At one point, Nathan grabs a little ned by the ear. We are pushed to limits. GSA announce a new Masters Degree in Fine Art and a bearded Ross Sinclair, taking a year out to pursue his Soup Dragons drumming,



pops in for a visit and Euan gets raves reviews from his performance in Paris. We finish the Blackhill mural and pose in the rain for STV, Evening Times and the Daily Record. My Gran phones me to tell me I am on the telly, the first in our family to ever achieve that. I borrow Ross' tape with *I am superman* and Hüsker Dü and The Who and it's pop times all round. I smile and pop a Twix into my mouth, not realising a stray scalpel blade has stuck itself to the bottom of it. I wonder what the crunch is. Near death by photomontage. I watch *Man of flowers* and Mick Jagger in *Performance*.

We continue to do life drawing in Environmental Art. We groan and moan a bit and try to get out of it but I actually enjoy the sensible groundedness of it. It balances out the madness. I quickly find a new record shop called Grip, served by Gail. We start to write our dissertations. Mine will be written on an electric typewriter and is something to do with a relationship between William James' pragmatism of 1907 and early 1970's photorealism. My dissertation tutor John Calcutt seems to get it and helps a huge amount over the next twelve months. In the end, I get a commendation for one of the top ten dissertations and almost all of that is down to JC, who is still at GSA. Fellow H&C (Historical and Critical Studies) tutor Ray



McKenzie, he of the reindeer pullovers, gives me a great tutorial about photomontage and Martin Y makes me up a tape with lots of rare Sonic Youth. He has those connections but gets into trouble when he starts producing and presenting gratuitous nude photographs of his girlfriend.

The local celebrity Dean Park officially opens the Blackhill mural and it stays there pretty much untouched for about twenty years. The family on my mum's side all live near it and report with pride on it. I learn a lot about working on a large scale in public but the

square 30ft format irritates me a bit. David encourages us to keep a project folder with all the sketches, correspondence and documentation and this is a habit I maintain to this day. I present this *Black Book Archive* and documentation as part of both my BA and MFA



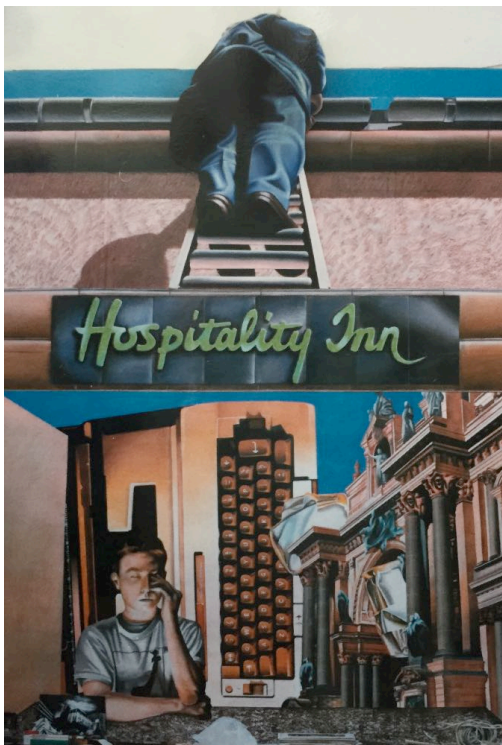
exhibitions. I start reading books on Fluxus. I then have a tutorial with Sam and Dave sat in front of the MOD and others and Sam turns to me says "Have you ever thought of producing billboards?" It's a cliché to say that in a blinding flash a lot of things come together, but they do. That's what tutors can do.

I walk the east end again with renewed focus, photographing billboards but surprised at how few there actually are. We presume we live in a media saturated landscape. I discuss this with Brian later and he instead goes over the top with enthusiasm for my proposed full-wall drawing. George Wyllie gives us all a brief to develop works that celebrate the French Revolution and I develop a series of works which I think are to do with *hospitalité*. Myself and new EA recruit John Oliver and

Jane Alston then win £200 each in a stained glass design competition run by Lovell

Lawrence, the same developers who will later say no to my hoardings intervention, and we are photographed for the Evening Times peering through some Mackintosh stained glass. I visit the ominous Red Road flats to wander with a camera. I used to see them every Sunday when visiting Gran Strang on the same trip that passed the Blackhill site. I carry on montaging and reading Dada (Dawn Ades) and Fluxus. I skip another Department Party but they seem to take great delight in finding me the next day to regale me with tales. In the end, I know more tales than anybody else. I see Trevor Francis nipping into the Garnethill off licence and bump into hippy Fiona in town, fucked out of her head. I think she went into Painting. John Peel plays a bit too much Public Enemy for my liking as I stick with my white men with guitars, but I love how Peel sequences recent releases, new session tracks, rare 78s, reggae, hardcore punk and some spoken word from the likes of Ivor Cutler or Joolz.

I am very sober these days but I still smoke too much, especially in the studio. I montage too much but my eyes are in, I can cut the most delicate and complicated of shapes, even trees. I head into the studio between Christmas and New Year and only Douglas, Christine Borland (two years above) and Fiona are in. I am working on huge *Hospitality Inn* wall drawing. *True Faith. Everybody thinks he looks daft. Hit the north.* I hear mum and dad crying and arguing and wonder what's up. I write: A GUY JERKED OFF IN A BATH, THEN SOME UNSUSPECTING MAIDEN WENT INTO THE BATH. THEN THE SPERM WENT UNEXPECTEDLY INTO THIS MAIDEN, AND JESUS WAS BORN (THE SUGARCUBES, FROM JEAN-LUC GODADE, MELODY MAKER 24.10.87). I write: (French) REVOLUTION: BOULEVERSEMENT, COUP D'ETAT, DEBACLE, TRANSILIENCE, SPASM, LEGERDEMAIN, CONTUMACY. I write:



IF I WERE A SWAN
THE DEATH OF MARR
FILL A SPACE WITH XEROX
IMAGE ON NEXT PAGE
"SUNNY" GLASGOW
EAST END VERIFICATION

Things start to fall apart, montage, collage, SKULL-FUCK CRACK ATTACK, (no) art badges, PINS, DARKLANDS, AWOL (John Hyatt), *El Dopo*, Eugene Chadbourne, SCRATCH ACID, DUB SEX and I write: DAVID KEEPS CATCHING ME WORKING WHEN I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO BE. I go west to get a cheap haircut and John Oliver bursts into "I wanna be your drill instructor" when I return. Workshop Bob is "acting like a dirty old man" but I don't need him any more. I found my place, my hovel, my studio hole. The next time John laughs at my short hair I retort "yeah, I decided to save time and get next month's done at the same time." I

watch as many Isabelle Adjani films as Channel 4 and GFT can show: *One Deadly Summer*, *Possession*, *Camille Claudel* and *Subway* (again). And Woody Allen ("You can't rob a bank wearing beige") Stan and Brian give me a bloody rigorous crit about the "lack of meaning" in my work as Euan wanders about the studio in his suit covered in feathers. We're listening to

Test Department, Captain Beefheart and the Fire Engines a lot. I spend hours on the *Hospitality Inn* wall texture, under the ladder, up the ladder, balanced on a table and of course it starts to slip and I'm about 20ft up and sliding down. Douglas and Craig come strolling along to see what the noise is. There's definitely a dark simmering humour in the studio, to lighten what is a very serious working environment. We discuss writing the word *communal* on the (not Ian) kettle.



Ian Kettles' making skills are astounding, his little globe piece especially. I nearly get mugged late at night near Charing X. Glasgow at night sucks. I get chicken pox. Nathan phones to check on me and tells me he's passed his driving test. I recover and start on new drawing, the romantic car park. Bruce McLean wanders around the studio, drunk. He talks of his new idea for a Stooshie Bar but I don't get it. Visitors talk to you like you are their peers, or artists. We often work from around 8am to 10.30pm in the studio. It is our lives. We all have keys to the building. Walter Grasskamp gives a lecture on the public art of Munster and Berlin and we visit the *Reason & emotion* symposium in Edinburgh. I go with Brian to Oddbins to drop off some glasses and he shows me some of Roddy's graffiti works that he took a year out to do. There's one near the Mitchell Library documenting the coming together and drifting apart of consecutive American and Russian leaders. Both Craig and Brian really like the new *hospitalité* piece, which suggests to me I'm on the right track. What is it about? Perhaps it's proposing hospitality to go alongside liberty, equality and fraternity? Possibly not, as I wasn't exactly hospitable, but I did appreciate it in others. I'm not telling you, I'm asking you. It was also Romantic, with moody skies, obscure objects (well, postboxes) and brutalist car parks. Perhaps it was the relationship between the everyday and something more idealistic?

The inspectors are coming to review the Girls' High so David asks me to get rid of all my big billboard collages from the back of the building. Laura Hudson works on her big Tyne Bridge piece and appears with a Garage Punk cassette of all things. John Calcutt thinks my dissertation is developing just fine but the Regional Authority put the Girls' High on month-by-month observation. Bits of the building are certainly damp, possibly dangerous, but we don't really notice. David takes a few of us to Barlinnie Prison to see how the Special Unit experiment has evolved. We meet some of the lifers, including "know whit a mean, son?" Bill (best just to nod back) and big burly fashion designer Pete who has the full fashion dummy in his cell. The warden Chris is interested in us maybe doing a mural in there with the inmates but in the end it doesn't happen, which is a shame as my other Grandpa had just been moved into a home next door to the prison. I think this notion of the city as a *playground of possible collaborations* is something that stays with me, in particular my later work with

tenantspin. We head back to the Girls' High to do life drawing with Lys Hansen but there's no model so she asks us to do self-portraits without mirrors. I'd kind of forgotten how traditional EA was at times, while the 'real painters' like Alex Dempster and Jenny Saville are working away in the turps drenched Mackintosh. With my newfound confidence, I speak up and suggest a different way of doing the class to Lys. More things are set on fire in the GH, mostly by pyro-Douglas, and the wearing of dungarees has become compulsory. I decline that, favouring the practical jeans and cardigans and hang-dog expression. The poet Stephen Mulrine gives a talk. We seem to go to every talk. David takes a few of us to meet Ian Hamilton Finlay in Little Sparta and I listen but it's over my head.

I'm doing a bit of logo design work on the side for ScotComs and this feeds the vinyl habit which is going through an indie-MOR phase of REM, Jesus & Mary Chain and Primal Scream. Sam is in the studio a lot and always encouraging and amenable. She is a voracious reader and is always talking to us about Japanese poetry and quantum physics. She quotes from Carole Hanisch's 1970 *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*: the personal *is* political. We're in the studios on weekends and it's usually David, Craig, Douglas, Nathan and myself. We listen to football or cassettes. One Sunday I am working away, freezing, and David takes me into his office for a coffee to warm me up. He lends me his precious Jimmy Boyle books and speaks fondly (!) of the BAR-L gangs, the same BAR-L gangs that scared the shit out of us in The Dump as kids.

Brian points out that Louise, Craig, Jane and Douglas' year are mostly vegetarian non-smokers, whereas our year seems really unhealthy. We all shrug and can't deny any of it. Then my Gran Dunn, while paying her rent at the Housing Office in Easterhouse, asks the man behind the counter (Robert Auld) to give me a job as he's on the board of the Easterhouse Arts Project. Simple. For the next three years or so, I do a huge amount of workshops, demonstrations, murals, spray-painting and festivals across the whole of Easterhouse, just as *the yellow eggs* are arriving. David had been Britain's first Town Artist in Glenrothes between 1968-78 and I remember him telling us that it's only after three years working with any given community or context that we start to really learn and reveal things.



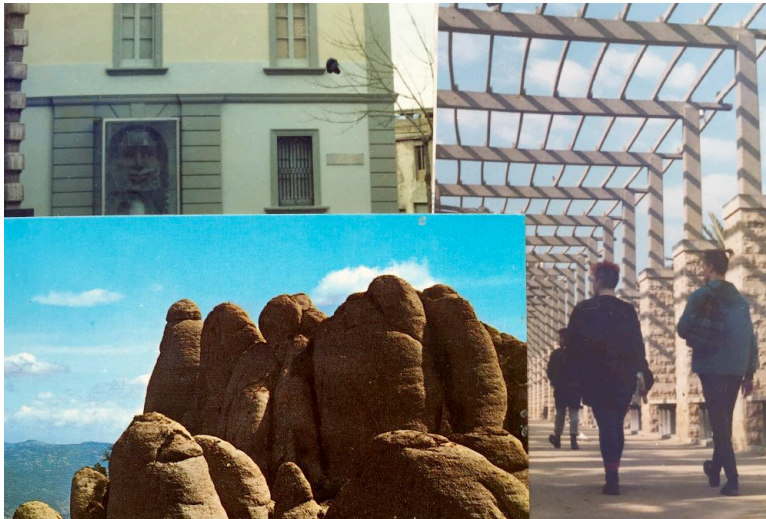
He really encourages me to wet my feet there and as I grew up near Easterhouse, albeit on the other side of Edinburgh Road, I have just enough shared background, work ethic, diplomacy and sense of humour to survive.

David criticises the way I draw the hand in *hospitalité* and I strive to fix it. I later use a photo of this detail, a hand caressing the JAMMs LP on a turntable, for the

picture disc 7" with the Bluecoat. I go to the Ken Currie lecture and David feeds me a question to ask about the validity of his 'murals' that are actually painted on panels. I hated speaking amongst groups bigger than two people but I did it. David then asks me to be *the hospitality* for some unemployed folk from Port Glasgow that George Wyllie brings around. I

find myself being favoured, or 'groomed', but it is really being pushed, as a person and as a student. If we are not social by nature, we are pushed to be so. Any perhaps vice versa. What is our (future) place in society and is it in Glasgow? I get the train in to art school each day, glancing at the Bellgrove retaining wall every time. One morning I sit opposite Gary Nicholson, who was the first one to buy the Dead Kennedys singles when we were about 13 and he actually wears the swastika armband into school. He's making moves to work in the oil industry in Uzbekistan. I like that his world is moving beyond Glasgow. John Latham gives a lecture that makes my head hurt, but it's about book burning and slag heaps and it's all oddly addictive. We're forced to deal with all this content and discuss it. We receive the expected news that the back of the building is going to be closed down, like amputating a leg while letting the rest of us crawl on. Lys Hansen takes us down to Lynburns on Buchanan Street for a farewell drink. I talk to John Latham in the studio, about my work and about the Artist Placement Group. What exactly did you mean in Düsseldorf in 1971 when you wrote *The context is 50% of the work*? I listen to beauty (This Mortal Coil's *Tarantula*) and the beast (Black Flag's *Damaged*).

Brian rips in to my work saying that it's all a step backwards. I hate early Monday morning tutorials but I tend to agree and decide to put more focus into and take more risks with the next pieces. I go to a Lindsay John performance. He is painted blue. It is primitive and Neil the new janitor calls him a drunk Rangers fan. I occasionally feel threatened by things I see. I go to Craig's "excellent two-hour diseased whispering potato" performance and I exhibit *hospitalité* at the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh. We're constantly pushed into non-studio experiences and for this I am grateful. Staff can spot a comfort zone a mile off. Meg tells David to fuck off and the studio's a bit strained. We go to the Garden Festival to help Stan erect his crazy man with fish Mohican. He takes us all to the Vic after and buys us pints and then we all head off for a much needed break in Barcelona.



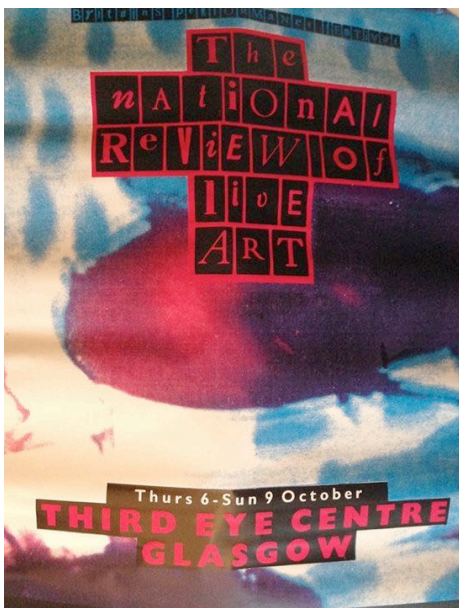
I share a room with the returned Andy Chung and old Jim Harvey. We get along fine and Barcelona is gloriously sunny and the beer is less than 50p. We take in Gaudi, the Miro Foundation and make an trip to Dalí's amazing Theatre-Museum in Figueres. There's a blind man walking around it, over and over again as the huge golden eggs loom above. A day in Montserrat. Blue blue skies. Roddy sitting on a

protruding rock reading *The ragged trousered philanthropist*. Plenty of street propositions and photographs for montage. I am drunk but incredibly sober at the same time, constantly scanning for montage material. I love the hard crisp precise shadows, the sort you don't really see in Glasgow. They are easy to cut out for montage.

Back in the Girls' High studios we buy and appear in Variant Magazine. We listen to The Fall, a lot. I read *A sense of freedom*. We share cassettes. I work a lot in Easterhouse alongside

Angela Reid (related to Nathan) and Colin Gordon (related to Douglas). I learn a lot from Angela over the next few years about how to deal with the politics of community art. She also grew up around Easterhouse and is obsessed with words ending in *-cide*. I then have the shittiest tutorial ever with Sam and Brian and the work gets lost again in a fog of indecision. But it's worked through in the studio, rather than taking it away to stew. There's no place to hide. I spend time at Cranhill Arts Centre designing and screen-printing some Easterhouse posters, with permed Alistair and his tales of going to the 1974 World Cup. Then, *The Great Tape Robberies* of Girls' High begin. Our tapes simply start to go missing so we listen to the radio as six South Africans are to be hung in Sharpeville, but then get a last-minute reprieve. We discuss elaborate plans to trap the perpetrators. Nobody steals Nancy Sinatra and gets away with it. I go to see the Hannah Hoch exhibition. Occasionally the locals chuck stones at the roof of the Girls' High but you work through it and turn the cassettes up.

I try to get permission to put work on some building site hoardings but Lovell Lawrence say no. In retrospect, hoardings have always been a tricky context, too legitimised, physically too close to the public and too corporate. It's depressing and a bit desperate. Work through it. On 21st March, I take a deep breath and force myself to just walk right into the MnA (Mills & Allen) offices to explain what I want to do. I meet a nice lady called Cathy Doogan and she says they could offer me a billboard that hadn't been used, free of charge, to paste up one of my artworks. They'd have to do the pasting for me but they'd even give me the right weight of grey-backed paper to use. I left them buzzing and crystal clear about what I would do for the next few years. I went straight from there to Easterhouse to do an evening workshop.



Everybody's excited about this MnA news. I get a phonecall and the first billboard will be a 16-sheet in Govan. I rush out to see it and although it's a pretty bland billboard on a bland wall, it will be mine, at least for two weeks. I keep montaging, but start to work to a vertical format. They send me a letter confirming the site. I call in to McCann's who promise me some free waterproof inks I could use to hand paint the billboard. Life is split between this and Easterhouse. Angela and I work well together. Our boss arrives in mediaeval gear as we do collaborative 12ft banners in the rain with wild kids. The same photographer from the Blackhill mural turns up but he just wants smiling kids and at least I'm getting regular pay. Sam asks if I would design some posters for the National Review of Live Art to be hosted by the Third Eye Centre so I get on with this too, using a blurry pic of

Hüsker Dü's drumkit taken from the TV as the basis. The new medium of *Colour Laser Copies* arrives and I love it. I'm writing the dissertation too and trying to read Gregory Battcock and getting really knackered from long days. There's a great pic of our banner in The Herald though. I start montaging from Barcelona pictures, thinking of Govan. I start working in the Rogerfield area of Easterhouse where I'll eventually get some Prince's Trust money for them. I watch Kathy Acker's *Variety* with Nan Goldin. I'm still wearing dodgy cardigans and Fred in our local shop keeps asking if I'm into the Housemartins. No, I reply, New York Dolls, Bowie, Alex Chilton, Big Black and The Primitives. I do some more montage and focus in on one for Govan, which has nothing to do with the French Revolution but does

have some kids peering over a bland brick wall which is being 'shaved' by roll-on deodorant and becomes a sunny Barcelona building. Yes, *Alan*, but what does it all mean? I don't know, I'm not telling you.



Angela and I work on a huge mural in Wellhouse. At lunch we're having some junk food when a little lad, perhaps 9, sits on a step nearby and tells us of killing his dog, leaping off roofs, drawing huge He-Man pictures, owning a pet snake and getting up at 4am everyday. This is the same building where my mum used to teach craft to the locals back when I was 6 or 7 and I would sit and watch and doodle and play. I head home, thinking about stuff, to finish the design for the Third Eye Centre. Our four-thousand word dissertation draft gets handed in. I start the Govan billboard using the inks and then oils but it's shit and the materials won't do what I want them to. Top studio cassettes at the moment are Bond themes, McLaren's *Madam Butterfly* and somebody's Prince compilation after the thief seems to have been scared off, or his/her tastes changed. Ian Hamilton Finlay gives a talk about

revolutions and Liverpool put in one of the best displays I've ever seen as Nicol, Barnes, Aldridge, Haughton and Beardsley obliterate Forest 5-0. Uncle Willie the Blue Nose dies. I put in a 12-hour day on the billboard and Old Bob asks where my girlfriend is. Using wax pencils on the billboard, Brian queries the lack of colour, I push on. New territory. Six hours at Easterhouse on Saturday. Brian keeps talking to me and guiding me along in his own critical way. Calcutt says my dissertation needs a lot of work, and I agree. Craig complements the billboard in progress, using the word 'lovely' which encourages me no end. I miss gigs by Tackhead and James Blood Ulmer but Martin proudly shows off the sleeve to *Hairway to Steven*. I finish the billboard, roll it up and carry it to hand in to MnA and then watch *The initiation of a Shaman* and read some more William James. Laura starts talking about Situationism and I borrow her copy of Stewart Home's *SMILE*. I write: THE ANSWER LIES IN WRITING AND PHOTOMONTAGE. I buy a word processor and write and write. I go



to GFT with Douglas, Ian and Peter Gilmour for *An evening of Surreal Shorts*.

Tuesday 26th April

I get the call from MnA and bomb out to Govan to see the billboard shortly after it has been pasted. It is pissing down of course but the poster looks great; a change of scale and colours against real colours. David quickly

hires a little van and everybody piles in to go out to see it. Roddy shakes my hand. David is a bit critical of the image but Sam loves the whole thing and gives more great advice. Everybody senses it is the beginning of something. We return to the Girls' High and David invites me deeper in to the inner sanctum of their office and speaks of other mural projects he'd like me to consider. I nod and head out to Easterhouse and get stopped in the street by

young folk from the banners and they are so out of it they ask if I'd mind bending down to tie their laces for them. I do, then we part our ways, silently.



Ross' *THIS IS OUR ART* illuminated star sculpture is in the studio and I order a whole load of obscure vinyl from TOUCH, including Kathy Acker and the *Dada For Now* LP curated by Colin Fallows in Liverpool. The Garden Festival opens and Prince Charles tries to speak Glaswegian. We listen to The Slits, Scritti Politti and The Pop Group in the studio. I start to read Amanda Lear's *My life with Dali* and I meet with Nikki

Milligan at Third Eye Centre and they're happy with the poster. I'm then asked to do the Environmental Art Degree Show poster. There's seven of them (Craig, Douglas, Ian, Fiona, Jane, Louise Scullion and Peter Gilmour) so I collage their faces onto the sleeve of the Madness 7 LP. Looks great. I rummage through my Dad's record collection to make up a compilation of Orbison, Nancy S, Cash and Simon & Garfunkel. Everybody roars to get it off, but the cleaners love it. The work in Rogerfield continues, under the watchful eyes of Ambo, only 17 but already a father, Adam Love ("Alan, it's basically between the Trotskyites and Stalinists to decide Easterhouse's future") and the wild Morrison sisters. Gormley talks about "reorganisation/sexual connotations/breathing" and I feel sick. I start to pick up cheap books and maps about Glasgow's east end and both Rhona and Elsa get kicked out of EA's first year. Not up to speed. Russell might get booted out too and there's a really bad atmosphere



in studios. I start using spray paint, much to everybody's interest and there's a big meeting to air grievances and clear the air. Some students talk of leaving GSA. I think I meet Malcolm Dickson around this time, then editor of Variant Magazine, and the magazine will be a supporter of the later billboard projects. David also brings Marlene from the Goethe Institute around and we form a good relationship and they put on evenings of weird movies (Klaus Maeke's *Decoder* being a particular favourite).

The final year students are all pleased with the Madness poster but then Louise is in tears after harsh tutorial from David. Somebody sneaks in a cassette of Prince's *Black Album*. I head all the way out to Easterhouse in the rain and the fucking kids don't turn up so I just kick a football about with staff. Craig asks me to help him with his Degree Show. We all get fed up with our work and play basketball in the studio and I bide my time until I get a

bloody positive constructive level-headed crit from the whole staff team! Yes, we all agree that I am to pursue a campaign of east end billboards, exploring some social myths and trying new techniques. I am reading about a Victorian character called The Shadow who

roamed the east end documenting the squalor. Staff encourage further research and even suggest that my work can remain “ritualistic, mysterious and interventionist”.

I head out on a real high to Rogerfield to spray with Robby, the drugged up hippy with, as The Specials sang, one art ‘O’ Level. We are joined by Lillas who bemoans the lack of support for addicts and Ambo who stays for five minutes before politely saying he has to go to sniff some glue. At GSA we help the final years set up their Degree Show which is always staged in the Mackintosh, but then Sam and Dave have a go at me because the poster says *MIXED MEDIA*, which the course was called when the year started, rather than *ENVIRONMENTAL ART* and they refuse to reimburse me any costs. Hey, don’t have a go at the messenger etc. After some discussions, the text is changed to EA and is all sorted and I wander to Mecanorma to get more colour laser copies. I get a 63 mark from Calcutt for my dissertation with “room for improvement to get it up to a first” and I hope it’s ok to share that at this stage Nathan is on 59 at this stage and Lesley on 53. For doing the poster, the final years chip in to buy me a ticket to see the SWANS but, once again, their gig gets cancelled due to fear of their volume damaging the architecture.

Bob and Brian have a physical and verbal fight in the studio. That’s staff. Meg awakes from a three-day sleep. Somebody is storing sour milk bottles somewhere in the studio. The studios smell of milk, wax, chipboard, spray paint and damp. John Menzies stock the new Timelords 12”. I read Jack House’s *Heart of Glasgow* and talk to my Gran about old east end tales. I wander Duke Street, London Road, Edinburgh Road, Shettleston Road and the Gallowgate. I watch the Euros as England are dire and lose all games and I watch *Rumblefish* (again), *Desert Hearts*, *Suburbia*, *Salvador* and Alex Cox’s *Repo Man* (again). I’ll later collaborate with Alex in Liverpool, dressing him as a priest as he walks up and down Bold Street for *tenantspin*. The Puberty Institution (Douglas, Craig and sometimes Euan) stage a performance with candles and eggs and slowness in the huge underground carpark that becomes The Arches. Everybody who is anybody at the time is there, including the slightly scary Transmission crowd. Glasgow is hotter than Majorca and I can’t stand it. I spend time researching in the amazing Mitchell Library and smile as The Jesus & Mary Chain cover *My Girl* on a Peel session. Our boss at Easterhouse is on verge of breakdown and resigns on the day Van Basten gets that hat-trick. I get followed at night from the station and mugged for £20 but they leave the Walkman and Canon camera alone. A few punches but I escape otherwise unscathed. Fucking east end suburbia. Bad headaches. I narrowly avoid getting hit by a van in West Nile Street. Weird days. Timelord Bill Drummond is all over the TV. I visit all the other billboard companies and More O’Ferrall offer me some free ones. That’s summer sorted.

Summer 1988

All I really do over summer is work, smoke and buy records. I learn how billboard companies such as Maiden, Primesight and MnA operate. I produce about seven hand-painted billboards across the east end that summer. Some are posted upside down, some on the wrong site, but I make little invites for each and post to staff and students and learn from each one. The Tollcross billboard gets ripped, possibly by TOTR. There is a mysterious figure in each of them (The Shadow) and small references to local landmarks or myths. For example, I connect Pyramidology with the new Pyramid-shaped shopping centre at the former Forge steelworks. There are ‘hidden’ but legible messages to some specific local



people I know will pass the billboards. I get invited to lunch with Magnus Magnusson but have to decline as I'm working in Easterhouse. I buy a Pink Industry LP with Liverpool's Jayne Casey singing. Students keep in touch over summer. Roddy's billboard interventions appear in Variant and Euan gets offered a project at Transmission. Despite the tensions, I spend more time in Easterhouse. Roddy likes the Gallowgate billboard, the one in the bottle that references the big Barras mural.

September 1988 – June 1989

Brian immediately rips into the flatness of my Tollcross work (it's a fucking billboard). Rogerfield is full of violent dogs and overweight kids in Bros t-shirts fighting with the Drummie on the pitches known as 'the killing fields', spending their every



penny on the 'spacey' and the kids are being thumped. We paint away, covering walls, amidst all this. J. Lamb provide me with grey backed paper free of charge, no hassle. John Calcutt and Brian Kelly continue to really push and interrogate the dissertation and studio practice. David presses me again to professionalise and "become a business, a self-employed community/public artist." Mona Hatoum spends the day with us. Stan is excited about billboards,

suggesting shaped ones or performance ones, whatever those are. I do some research and Steven Campbell once did a live billboard painting in Liverpool. I listen to Joy Division while walking through the cold grey desolate Easterhouse. *New Dawn Fades*. I start to consider staying on to do the MFA but David isn't so sure. Not sure what he thinks, but we chat almost every day.



I book the two billboards by Bellgrove Station and there's a Prince's Trust skinhead billboard in the middle of them and I do a strong outline of the two Camlachie flats as the design, an image of the very bus shelter that stands before the billboards and a seated figure. The billboard contractor contrives to install BOTH of them UPSIDE DOWN. I write: BELLGROVE DISASTER. I'm really pissed off and angry and the grey and cold doesn't

help. Peter McCaughey gives a slide talk as part of his MFA and Andy Chung visits us, totally out of it and talking of free love and revolution. I meet Mark Trainer of Trainer Outdoor who have some billboard sites but instead he offers me the chance to hand paint some adverts for a hypnotherapy company run by his sister Angela. I'll later collaborate with Angela on one

of the most minimal and poignant billboards at *Bellgrove*. I am filmed by Channel 4's *Signals* programme in the rain by my two upside down Bellgrove billboards. God knows what I said and I'd love to see the footage one day. We head through to Dundee to see their MA Public Art show. I think David Jacques may have been in that year. A plane falls on Lockerbie. Harvest Therapy are delighted with my first billboard mock-ups, a pair of relaxed feet up as some paper aeroplanes drift by on a mustardy ground. They give me a bottle of whisky for my efforts. I shall drink this over the Festive period and not touch whisky again for twenty years as a result. I start work on our new public art project for which I propose a long mural



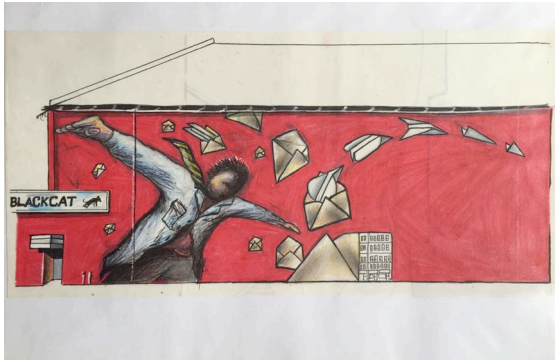
on the side of the BlackCat Film Studios in deepest darkest Parkhead. I work on the paper aeroplane hypno billboard in the studio and David pushes me to meet Paddy Higson, the 'Godmother of the Silver Screen in Scotland.' I do so and we chat about prisons, cinema, murals and studios. I chat with Douglas about his attempts to buy an Erik B single ending up with a Derek B 7". The Harvest billboards get installed and they ask me to do another one. I don't really

know what I'm doing but I'm saying yes to things and seeing where it takes me, with people obviously trusting my integrity and commitment.



Willie Doherty gives a lecture. Tim van Laar from Chicago loves the hynpo Harvest billboard and he'll later invite me, with Barbara Kendrick, to give a talk at The University of Illinois in Champaign. David even offers to buy (!) some Harvest documentation slides from me.

I attend a Community Council meeting out at the Forge to float the idea of a BlackCat mural. It would be the image of a young kid running along after floating paper aeroplanes and he'd have his arms stretched out pretending to fly like my Dad said he did every time he left the cinemas after seeing planes. Joe Nevin was at the meeting and I remember him from his time at GSA and his family lived a few doors down from my Gran in Barlanark. His brother played a bit of football for Chelsea and Everton. David Hill was also there, older brother of Ann, and he was a few years ahead of me at secondary school and the first person I ever knew who went to GSA He used to paint walls with giant images of Mick Jagger and Rod Stewart. I remember being 12 and seeing him paint these big hairy murals during our art trips up to Rannoch Moor and Bridge of Orchy.



Brian wants me to do more Harvest billboards. David wants the BlackCat project pushed. Calcutt wants more words. Easterhouse want me to work more hours. Stan wants to see more montages. Roland Millar and Shirley Cameron give talks and do a workshop with us. I do something with a white lampshade and Roddy reads a tale involving a lighter. I present my ideas to Paddy and BlackCat. I book more billboards and take any criticism on the chin and work fucking harder. David lets us set up a TV in the upstairs office to watch the World Cup Qualifier as we hammer Cyprus 3-2, away from home with a winner six minutes into injury time. Stan helps me develop my BlackCat design which will now be presented as a proposal on a billboard on the wall of the film studios. Roddy's working on a lot of stuff, his Social Security metal ring amongst others. David summons me

for a drink in The Vic on the eve of my MFA interview. "You do realise" he says, "that you'll have to stand up and talk in front of big groups." I nod and tell him that I can do it. I have to wait for 45 minutes for my MFA interview and I'm nervous until I start showing slides of the billboards and talking about The Shadow and my future plans. Thomas Joshua Cooper seems enthralled and they offer me a place a few days later. They see the potential if not the delivery yet. I am confident, happy and content. I immediately book a whole raft of 48-sheet billboards and work up the skinhead tower block designs, based on an article describing the UK as an 'environmental skinhead.' I read more William James and like his title *An old name for some new ways of thinking* as the dissertation reaches 6,000 words. I get threatened in Rogerfield by somebody whom I've never met claiming he got paint on his £25 jacket.



The studio is filled with music from Palestine and the Band of Holy Joy are on TV. Roddy doesn't get into Belfast MA and Nathan doesn't get a Glasgow place, which upsets me. Martin Boyce makes his *SOAP ON A ROPE* sandwich board and Claire Barclay works quietly away with chemicals. Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir, Karen Vaughan and David Shrigley are also working away in the studio downstairs. Maybe Barbara Droth too, and Rachel Mimiec, Jonathan Monk

and Toby Webster. Robert Auld intervenes in the £25 jacket situation and there's a big train crash at Bellgrove. One passenger and one driver killed as two trains collide. That is the day I accept my MFA place. I pass through Bellgrove the next day. Channel 4's *Signals* drop their plans to show the footage as "the Department is too controversial." The billboards go up at an alarming rate. I wander to see them, with My Bloody Valentine loud in my ears under blue skies. The Red Road skinhead flats one, always David's favourite billboard: *Feed me with your kiss*. John C starts the tutorial with "You've got yourself a dissertation here!" and I

breathe a huge sigh of relief. We then just chat about The Fall. Another billboard goes up the next day. Ross and Roddy are in the studio a lot, working hard. As are Helen Maria Nugent with her gold research and Anne Quinn. None of us are paying any student fees of course and we receive termly maintenance grants. Very few students that I remember have jobs in the real world.

Laura Hudson is chatting with Adele Patrick in the studio, years before Adele founds the Glasgow Women's Library. In the studio we listen to Wire, Camper van Beethoven, XTC and Roddy's Irish rebel music. I go to the John Heartfield exhibition at Washington Street Arts Centre. There's a lecture by Jasia Reichart in Edinburgh on art and the machine and I go to a talk by educator/designer Victor Papanek. We all hang out afterwards in Demarco's gallery. More montage, more Easterhouse, more billboards, more records. I bump into Douglas who's now studying at the Slade and he asks about getting hold of some billboards. I sit and watch the Hillsborough disaster unfold on TV. The Girls' High is burgled and weird things nicked. David suggests that Tessa Jackson from the Glasgow European Capital of Culture 1990 team may want to commission a billboard from me. I spend Saturdays up the ladder with the gang in Rogerfield, extending the mural, but we are constantly interrupted by the Evo-Stik-sniffing Vulcan, chanting his IRA songs. The art school crisis is all over the news. Over £200,000 in deficit and Director asked to resign. David is on the front page of the Herald. I pass commentator Arthur Montford in Sauchiehall Street. His catchphrase for almost every Scotland goal was a shocked *IT'S THERE! IT'S THERE!* The Girls' High locks are changed, without notice and other buildings are being looked at in case of eviction.



A show of staff works is sabotaged and Roger Palmer pulls his work out. Weird times of rumour, paranoia and counter-rumour. It's then Anne Quinn's turn to nearly burn us and the whole building down. Mo Johnston signs for Celtic. I try to do some work to go into the window of FLIP on Queen Street. I devise a series of clever pixelated portraits in greyscale with a guide as to

how they could rearrange the squares to make new portraits. They don't go for it as "we'd prefer recognisable faces, like James Dean". Pete, bass player with The Mackenzies (*Mealy Mouths 12*) asks me to take part in the Festival of Plagiarism at Transmission in summer. A new 48-sheet is installed near Charing Cross. It's a prime site, and I prepare all the documentation for my Degree Show. I know I'll get a 2:1 and Roddy will get a First but I'm content and playing the long game. David and Sam maintain the almost constant flow of interesting people passing through Environmental Art. There's a talk by architect Isi Metzstein and then I chat with Larry Riccio from the European Special Olympics who invites me to work on a banner project with them. He'll later invite me to Washington DC to do schools workshops. There's also some potential buyers of the Girls' High wandering about

with clipboards. We try to sneer, I guess, and turn up the cassettes louder with the Monochrome Set, Neneh Cherry, Big Stick, Dinosaur Jnr, Happy Mondays and SWANS. Katrina Brown pops around for a chat. We were in Nürnberg together before art school on a regional art exchange but I think she opted to do languages rather than GSA. We next cross paths in Liverpool when she is working for the Tate and going out with Nathan. All three of us will site in the Post Office in Liverpool and watch McAllister miss that penalty during Euro'96.

Arsenal win *that* last-minute Michael Thomas game at Anfield and I see Adjani in *Quartet* for the first time. Roddy and I wander out to MnA to get a whole stack of old billboards and I chat with David about visiting Artangel and ProjectsUK to discuss billboard projects. A Heartfield print gets stolen from the Washington Street Art Centre and the papers say "We're looking for two males, student types, in their 20s." I wander the east end and see only billboards, kind of hallucinating and transferring other images over the existing adverts; the ease with which the white billboard frame can become the window onto any 2D image. Photomontage opens up the idea of the billboard proposal. Four quick precise cuts, lay an image behind it and you have a possible billboard. We all gather, ironically, on the Mackintosh steps for our end of year group photo. I open the Herald and am shocked to find a photo of our Rogerfield mural in an article on 'urban deprivation' and the fact that "you wouldn't find such graffiti in Milngavie." We make a stencil of the article and spray it over our Rogerfield walls and I head out to Milngavie to photograph all the graffiti and post it to the Herald journalist. And so, I hang the Degree Show, get a 2:1, the commendation for the dissertation and attend Graduation in my gown, smiling. David says to my mum "He's done ok, but we're looking for him to reach his full potential on the MFA."



And that was Environmental Art. Over the next two years on the f/t MFA I will get a big ground floor studio in the Girls High and maintain a relationship with EA. Much of EA was perhaps about reinventing yourself, identifying your niche and then unpacking it over time. It was about finding your way out of being lost and it was about developing strategies for practice. I think those public projects, in a city that lacked any real other opportunities for presenting your work, genuinely helped train many eyes and brains for opportunities. But beyond that, it is not my intention in this first text to make any sweeping observations about EA and its impact. I do plan to write next about my First Year and MFA either side of EA before hopefully reflecting on EA in relation to contemporary art school delivery, off-site curating, collaboration and the crucial role of the compilation.



EA 1989, l to r: AD, Meg McLucas, Nathan Coley, John Oliver, Anne Quinn, Laura Hudson and Roddy Buchanan (not in picture: Ian Kettles, Lesley Macfie and Euan Sutherland)



Fabio Rieti *Les piétons des halles*, 1979



Alan Dunn & Dr Bob *ran*, still from Super 8, 1986



Alan Dunn, end of first year *BOX*, pastel drawings, Super 8, soundtrack, 8x8x8ft, 1986



Alan Dunn *Portrait of Alexander Dunn*, 1986



Alan Dunn & Nathan Coley *Garden Festival mural*, 1986



EA video workshop (Dr Bob, Stevie F, Laura, Nathan, Lesley), 1986



Alan Dunn *Scrap Yard Scrap*, wax crayon on paper, 5x3ft, 1986



EA mural workshop (Kettles, AD on rivets, Lesley, Nathan), 1987



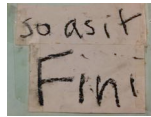
Warhol dies, February 22, 1987



Berlin montage: Virginia Colley, Meg, Laura, Laura B, Nathan, Euan S, Andy Chung, 1987



Alan Dunn *Proposal for Bellgrove*, 1987



Douglas Gordon *Fini Tribe note*, 1987



David Harding and Sam Ainsley recreating tutorial, 1987



Alan Dunn *Berlin cheese montage*, 1987



Location of Blackhill mural, 1987



Alan Dunn *London Road Postman (Military of Defence)*, pastel on paper, 5x3ft, 1987



Alan Dunn *Sam Ainsley montage no.9*, 1987



Blackhill mural meets Dostoevsky, 1987



Blackhill mural *The Molendinar Burn*, 1987



Blackhill: Brian, Meg, AD, Nathan, 1987



Evening Times, 1987



Alan Dunn *Hospitalité*, pastel on paper, 5x3ft, 1988



Alan Dunn *Hospitality Inn*, pastel on paper, 20x12ft, 1988



Alan Dunn *Hospitalité tunnels*, pastel on paper, 8x2ft, 1988



Alan Dunn & Angela Reid, *Easterhouse workshops*, 1988-



Barcelona: Meg, Martin Young, 1988



Alan Dunn *The National Review of Live Art* poster, Third Eye Centre, 1988



Rogerfield brothers, 1988



Alan Dunn *Hospitalité*, billboard, Govan, 10x6'6ft, 1988



Rogerfield (Ambo far left, next to Lillas), 1988



Alan Dunn *Environmental Art Degree Show* poster, 1988



Alan Dunn *The Shadow*, Gallowgate, 10x6'6ft, 1988



Alan Dunn *Shaving the east*, Tollcross, 10x6'6ft, 1988



Alan Dunn *Bellgrove Skinhead* (upside down), each 10x6'6ft, 1988



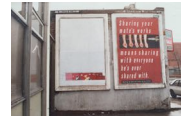
Alan Dunn *The Harvest billboard*, Girls' High studio, 1989



Alan Dunn *The Harvest billboard*, Charing X, 20x10ft, 1989



Alan Dunn *Proposal for BlackCat*, 1989



Alan Dunn *Proposal for BlackCat*, 10x6'6ft, 1989



Alan Dunn *Red Road Skinhead*, 20x10ft, Royston, 1989



Alan Dunn *Degree Show*, Mackintosh Building, 1989



Alan Dunn & The Rogerfield Art Project, 1989-90

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 August 2015

