

Live Art in Scotland: Steve Slater

This interview was conducted online via Zoom on 22nd April 2021 as part of the Live Art in Scotland research project at the University of Glasgow.

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Steve Slater (SS): Where to start. Obviously, I went to art school so there's something there, but that journey itself was complicated in that while I was quite good at art at school, like a lot of kids I was never encouraged to do art back in the 1970s. I left school at sixteen to get a job on the behest of my parents and I ended up working in a quarry, which was the local economy round here. For about four years I was working in a quarry, and I had no ambition to go to art school until punk arrived. I got into punk and ended up in a band playing bass and doing the artwork for the gigs. My fellow bandmates said oh, you're quite good at this, have you ever thought about going to art school? Nobody ever mentioned art school to me, my art teacher never mentioned art school. I started looking into it and there was a foundation course in Chesterfield which is just up the road and I went to see them and asked how do I get into art school and they said you'd need a portfolio. I said what's a portfolio and they said well, it's a big envelope with lots of drawings and paintings in it. I didn't have anything so I had to then work at night. They were brilliant and they let me sit at the back of the life drawing class for free and let me get some drawing in. Over a year, I amassed enough drawings and paintings to apply for the foundation course and got into the course at Chesterfield and that propelled me haphazardly towards a degree. I didn't even have enough qualifications, I had to do an A Level to get enough qualifications to apply for a BA.

Stephen Greer (SG): Where did you do that BA?

Live Art in Scotland: Steve Slater

SS: At Cardiff, it was a higher education college, it was Howard Gardens college of higher education. There were some really interesting teachers there. Mona Hatoum was one of my teachers. I went there as a painter and performance art hadn't even registered, I don't know if I came across it during my foundation year at all. Music was still a big part of my life at that point. During the foundation year, I got together with my flatmates and we ran a fanzine. We were heavily into going to see gigs at The Leadmill in Sheffield and in Derby and the whole punk music scene. So, all of that was still in my head. I think the fanzine actually got me into Cardiff college because I took them along in my portfolio when I went for my interview and said I'd been working on a fanzine during my downtime and they were really impressed by that, so I think that got me in. I went there with these high ideas of being a painter and then hit a brick wall in my first year. The teacher at the time basically said you're obviously struggling with painting; I'm going to put you in the expanded media department. Basically, it was where all the odds and sods who didn't quite know what they were doing were put and we could play with film and installation, anything we wanted really. That is probably where I started to connect with performance a little bit more and saw other students doing performance and read about it. That's probably where I came into contact with artists like Joseph Beuys, who I think died in '86 and it was a big thing at that point and his death inevitably focuses you on his work and that fascinated me. At that point there were these inklings of what I do now. I was always someone who liked organising other people. In the second year I organised a trip for a bunch of students from my year, including myself, with their work and we all applied to do the National Review of Live Art platform in Nottingham. We hired a minibus and drove to Nottingham and showed our work at the platform there alongside companies like Dogs In Honey who were on the same bill and we shared a dressing room. Obviously, the person programming National Review in Nottingham at The Midland Group was Nikki Millican. We had a few conversations because I'd organised this vanload of oiky Cardiff students to come up and do the platform and that was it really. Then I finished my degree. My head of department in third year was Anthony Howell which was an interesting influence on me at that time. He was quite a difficult guy to deal with. My degree show was almost ready to present, and he basically came in and smashed it up and said I could do better and gave me two days to pull it together again. I had a girlfriend and Chapter Arts Centre was an important place for us in Cardiff and she took me to see a couple of shows. She was really into theatre and so she was taking me to

Live Art in Scotland: Steve Slater

see shows by IOU Theatre and Impact in the 80s. I'd never seen anything like that, while it worked in a framework of theatre, it was very performative and devised and I had never seen any work like that. All these things were settling in my brain without registering that they were influencing me at the time, but you look back and realise that those are key moments. I left and moved to Brighton because I had this idea that I'd eventually go to London, but I never quite got out of Brighton. I think because of the times in the early to mid-eighties, I just went and ended up hanging out in Brighton. I answered an ad by a guy called Greg Pope who was into filmmaking because I'd worked with a lot of installation works at college. I met up for a drink with him and that night we formed a company called Situation Cinema, which was heavily influenced by situationists. That grew arms and legs and within a year, there were about thirty of us. The only proviso you needed to join was that you had to have a Super-A camera. We were doing these big projects around Brighton which were sort of performative, where we'd all meet and film the same things and then show all the films together as huge installations with dozens of projectors in small rooms as kind of kaleidoscopic films. We actually made a film; it was a kind of thriller. That was a great time. Around that same time, I started working with a friend from college in Cardiff and that's when we formed StanSlat.

SG: Was that John Stanton?

SS: Yes, I don't know if you can see, but one of our posters is actually on the wall.

SG: I could see the lower half of it. I think I've seen that image either in an archive or in *The List*.

SS: I've got a whole bunch of those posters if you want one?

SG: Oh, I'd love one, yes!

SS: [Laughs]. You'll have to send me your address. I'll send one to you. When I moved, I found a big roll of posters.

SG: What kind of work were you making with John?

SS: We started doing performances with just the two of us working together. Weirdly, we hadn't worked together before. We shared a studio space at college, so we were pretty close, but John had focussed on photography, and I was into installation work. I think

Live Art in Scotland: Steve Slater

coming out of college, we needed a more immediate form of presentation. I think we just decided together that performance might be the way to do it. From memory John was a bit more reluctant to perform, he didn't particularly enjoy being in front of an audience whereas I was quite comfortable doing that. We started gigging and it was a bit like being in a band again, again going back to that very early analogy of being in a punk band. For us, it was just like we got together and made shows and we did gigs and travelled around. We did The Leadmill, in fact, the poster on the wall behind me is a poster from The Leadmill, where we did a piece called *Split* which was a ridiculous performance about Thatcher's Britain and mid-eighties riots. We had one hundred house bricks wrapped in newspapers and we sort of created a tower of Babel and smashed it down with riot shields. It was what it was. The other one, *Five*, was a piece where we worked on trampolines and tried to fly.

SG: That ended up coming to the Third Eye, didn't it?

SS: Yes. That National Review gig that we did at The Midland Group came back to bite me because in Brighton, I went for a part-time job at The Zap club because that was the place where everyone hung out. Again, it was high on the performance network in the eighties. Anyway, they ended up giving me a full-time job running this thing called Art Reach. I don't know what it was really, maybe it was a scam, but basically to get some money out of the government. I was charged with taking Zap programme out into the community and finding spaces that were not designated as theatres, so they had to be youth clubs or church halls. We had a van and it was a very funny job, it was good. During that period, I was doing Situation Cinema, StanSlat and I was working for The Zap. Then, lo and behold, Nikki turned up again in my life and she came to Brighton to talk to Neil Butler who ran Zap and said she wanted to do an NRLA platform in Brighton. I don't know if Neil couldn't be arsed to do it, but he asked me to run it so I then created a mini festival within it called the Demystification of Performance Art [laughs] and we programmed the platform for Nikki. Then Nikki came to see it and for some reason, she was impressed that I'd whipped this up into a little festival and she offered me a job working for her as a performance co-ordinator in Glasgow. She had just moved to Glasgow because The Midland Group had gone down the tube and she'd arrived maybe a year before that at the Third Eye. I had an interview and I'd never been to Glasgow other than for the interview, and I moved to Glasgow. It was 1988 and Glasgow was gearing up for its year as City of Culture in 1990 and I became part of Nikki's team with

Live Art in Scotland: Steve Slater

Bob Pringle as the technical manager. The three of us were responsible for the performance programme at the Third Eye Centre between '88 and its eventual demise in '91. That was an amazing period where I learned a lot from Nikki and the programme and the artists that she was bringing. For the first time I encountered a lot of the Belgian artists that I would end up working with during my Tramway period. That was a huge influence on me. I carried on working with John with StanSlat and then that became more difficult. I've always found my practice as an artist is compromised by the amount of work that I've got to do to earn a living. It's a real struggle to do both. I put all my creativity into whatever I'm doing, so if running a programme, that's where all my creative thinking goes. It's very difficult for me to be an artist at the same time. So, the StanSlat stuff sort of faded away. John retrained as a video editor up at Duncan of Jordanstone and then he moved away with his wife and he got a job with Sky Arts. He's now running a B&B in Cornwall. So, basically that period at Third Eye was hugely influential in terms of the kind of artists I was seeing such as Derek Jarman. There were several NRLAs that I wasn't programming, but I was co-ordinating and meeting those artists. I learned a lot in terms of programming up until Third Eye went down the tube and we were all thrown out on the street.

SG: Before we maybe get onto that next step, I guess 1990 is the first time that Goat Island comes across and there are a whole number of people who were in Scotland for the first time because of Third Eye.

SS: I think it was Third Eye and it was also Glasgow. You can't really separate the two because I was one of those people as well, everyone was sucked into that vortex of creativity around the build-up to 1990 and then the year itself. It brought a huge amount of creative people to the city. It's rarely said or shouted out, but it did an amazing job of bringing people together. It was an amazing time. Obviously les ballets C de la B came, Wim Vandekeybus, there was The Wooster Group, all these incredible artists were around and we were hanging out with them. Third Eye centre was a brilliant organisation. Sadly, last week, Chris Carrell who was the director passed away. I had such an amazing time there working with the wider team, it was a brilliant organisation to work for and sad that it failed through slight mismanagement of funds really by the management team. For me as a young creative person, I just had a brilliant time there seeing amazing work.

Live Art in Scotland: Steve Slater

SG: In other conversations I've had with other people about that period of the Third Eye, people talk about the café and the space of the building as one that you could hang out in and you weren't going to get chased out of it.

SS: It was amazing. It was very different. I love the CCA, and maybe I'm looking at it through rose-tinted glasses, but the Third Eye was a product of the seventies I guess, and it was coming out of that hippie, commune-type thing, but it was trying to find a new way of doing things. The café was a great place to hang out, there were some great gigs in there. It was a multi-purpose space, and we did some amazing stuff. Marina Abramović came before she was famous and she lost her snake. There was this brilliant photograph of me and the house manager that was in *The Evening Times* we found the snake six months later in the wall, still alive so it was eating the rats or the mice. Things like that, we lost an eight-foot python in the building.

SG: I'd heard the story of the python, but I didn't know there was a photo of it having been found and I will now go looking into that archive.

SS: Good luck, I cannot find it. I had a copy that was in my dad's loft for years and I think he threw it out sadly. I had a brief look on *The Evening Times* archive website last week hoping that if I put a search in for lost snake, python, that an image would come up. It was a big photograph in the paper, but it didn't work. It's things like that and I've got strong memories of Alastair MacLennan coming and doing one of his durational pieces. He was in what was then Gallery Two for National Review of Live Art for a week and he was really poorly. He'd got the worst flu and he'd spend every day with his balaclava on standing around in the space all day, not talking to anybody, just moving stuff around. At one point he went out, I remember he had a shopping trolley and he'd put skinned sheeps' heads on the front like headlamps. I got this message saying Alastair has left the building and I was like what! He'd just got bored I think, and he'd taken this trolley and put the sheep's heads on the front and pushed it through the bookshop and out onto Sauchiehall Street and had gone down Sauchiehall Street until the police had stopped him. He was all in black with this face paint and he explained what he was doing and they just asked him to go back, and he came back down the street really slowly pushing this trolley. You sort of miss that kind of activity, I guess. There are so many memories. One of my first gigs when I moved up there was the Garden Festival and Third Eye had a presence there. Nikki had programmed the Bow

Live Art in Scotland: Steve Slater

Gamelan Ensemble to do this big gig floating on a raft where the science museum is now. They had this big firework thing going off while they were playing and we got into trouble because one of the fireworks shot off into the crowd and hit this guy in the mouth and broke his false teeth, thank god it was only his false teeth. These days we would've been sued for millions.

SG: I had a conversation with Nikki last year or before that, where she mentioned George Wyllie's *Straw Locomotive* being a really distinct moment of that time. Was that part of the Garden Festival?

SS: Yes, that was part of the Garden Festival and George was always around. That's probably the same for the CCA now, you get a lot of artists hanging around in the café and coming in for meetings. George would come in. Third Eye relaunched at the end of 1991 before it got into difficulty. We had a re-fit and they reconfigured some of the spaces downstairs and rebranded with a new logo, which I think is on that poster behind me. It was three bands of colour for the Third Eye and George did a design for a t-shirt which we had on sale in the bookshop. I did have one, but it fell apart in the end. It was a George Wyllie t-shirt with one of his artworks on it which incorporated the Third Eye logo. It was a little sort of bird. It was that kind of intimacy with artists. It was kind of natural, it was a very easy space to work in. Nikki created the space at the top in the lofty areas of Third Eye at the time. They were really interesting spaces, there was nothing amazing about them, we just painted the floorboards black and painted the walls black. It was just a black space, but it was a beautiful space to see work. It was a difficult space because it wasn't designed as a theatre space, but that's kind of part of the fun of it. All these things are kind of key. Nikki commissioned DV8 and Lloyd Newson to do *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* and they were in the studio theatre for several weeks working on that. It was a harrowing piece of work about the Dennis Nilsen murders. Amazing performances. You mentioned in your email about dance and performance and the synergy between them, I think you see that with the kind of work that was being presented at that time with DV8, les ballets C de la B, Wim Vandekeybus, all companies that merged choreography and elements of performance within their work. I think it is a key element and something that I took with me as I learned. My journey from doing the posters for a band ten years before to working on shows like Lloyd Newson's is quite an amazing journey for me personally and I was learning all the

Live Art in Scotland: Steve Slater

time. It was like college never stopped and I think that's an important thing for me, that you have to keep on learning and being creative. It's about being creative all the time if you can.

SG: When the Third Eye closed, I guess it was maybe a year or a few years later that you went to work in Paisley at Paisley Arts Centre?

SS: It was only six months, actually. I was unemployed for six months wondering what to do. At that point I was thinking do I leave Scotland, or do I stay, and a job came up as an administrator at Paisley Arts Centre and I went for it. It was a huge change. It felt like I'd gone from the centre of everything to Paisley Arts Centre, it was like I'd been sent to the Russian front. Having said that, the people were lovely, and I had a great director, Paul Hogan, who was really supportive. I think he knew that I wasn't a natural fit for Paisley's programme. It was very much about touring theatre and comedy, but he let me have a little space and so I created a dance programme there, which they hadn't done before. I convinced them that we needed a bigger stage, so we extended the stage by two metres and luckily, they had flexible seating which we could push back and lose four rows to do that, but it also meant that we could do things like Scottish Ballet who could tour there. I took over the building and we did a whole weekend of performance. We also had people in the graveyard outside. I think all of that and my history with Third Eye was helpful when the job came up and it wasn't actually at Tramway at the time.

SG: It was Glasgow Council, I guess?

SS: Yes, they were looking for senior producers, which is an interesting term. Producing as we know it now was very different then. We just sort of did stuff. There were no courses to teach producing, so it was all experience based. I applied for one of these posts. The context for that is that at that time around 1990, the city had its own performing arts department, a unique thing run by Bob Palmer who is a massively influential person in this story because he was someone who got the arts and was interested. In the aftermath of 1990, inevitably there was a kind of pulling away of support and money and he was trying to shore up the department and what it did and what Glasgow did and keep that momentum going. He was looking for a team of new producers that would work across the council buildings, so Tramway, King's, The Old Fruitmarket, basically programming all the council-held assets. We had a central office and the idea was, and this was very much Bob's early-nineties thinking, we'd have hot desks and we'd do meetings standing up. I always think you're better

programming what you know that what you don't know. I really had a go and I programmed stuff into King's, but of course, the stuff I like is probably not the right kind of stuff for the King's. I programmed *Plan 9 from Outer Space* with one of the Bros twins as the star. It would've been funny if it was like the film *The Producers*, but this just bombed massively. That kind of theatre is not the sort of space for me to programme. Don't let me anywhere near something with a huge budget. I sort of gravitated to what I knew best, which was Tramway, working with Susan Deighan who is pretty high up in the council now. Susan and I worked as a team programming Tramway from 1995 until Susan left in '98 or '99, or she went for a job internally and started down that career path and pretty much left me to programme Tramway. When I started working at Tramway, it was in a bit of a mess after the huge budgets they'd had in 1990 under Neil Wallace's tenure. It was very much a site-specific space for large productions like *The Mahabharata* and *The Wooster Group*, but it wasn't what it is now. It was a project, and we'd go there to have meetings with an artist and then we'd come out and not stay there. The only people who actually lived in the building were the technicians. When it rained, water came in through the roof and it was in a pretty sorry state. The focus then became about what to do with Tramway. The lottery refit was tabled and gained traction and was successful and we got that refit between '98 and 2000. At that point, the building was closed and we ran a Tramway at programme and that was really successful. Again, all the expertise and influence of previous work I'd done kind of came to bear and I did a piece in Govanhill Baths with Stewart Laing. We did a piece under the Kingston Bridge, we did stuff in shops, and it was a really interesting two years working around the city. I really enjoyed that. Then we came into a brand-new building in 2000 which people had sort of forgotten about a bit. It was also very much an architect's building. They'd come in and done stuff which looked great on paper, but just didn't work when we opened the doors and that led to lots of problems in trying to get people back. To counter that, *The Hidden Gardens* was a project that led to try and get local people into the building by enticing them into the garden. There were huge battles, it sounds very boring now, but just to get the council who had obviously spent a lot of money on this building to move the café. They'd got this beautiful café upstairs, which is where the art classes take place now, and I was saying that we needed to move the café downstairs and make another bespoke café by the back door that would feed into the garden and support that. You think oh my god, so much of my life has been spent in these meetings trying to arm wrestle

Live Art in Scotland: Steve Slater

people and get them to buy into these ideas. Again, that proved really successful, and The Hidden Gardens is a thing in itself now and hugely successful, I think. I'm very proud of that actually. That was working with Angus and NVA who we'd worked with before and had a relationship with, but that propelled them off in a different direction as well in terms of what they subsequently did and do.

SG: I'm just thinking, would the encounter with NVA have been through their earlier incarnation?

SS: Yes, Test Dept. was something we'd worked on them with.

SG: With Brith Gof maybe?

SS: Yes, we did work with Brith Gof as well.

SG: I'm just thinking that Test Dept. worked together on *Gododdin* maybe?

SS: Yes, they did. *Gododdin* may have been before my time. That may have been under Neil just before I joined the department, but I knew Angus. I think that relationship was there, and we just started talking about the landscaping of that rear area which was just a bit of wasteland at the time. There was somebody living on it in a tent for a year, you'd see smoke rising from the bushes. It's just amazing to see how it's changed. Alongside that was the programme. The thing for me was that I'd been in Glasgow for ten years by then and I was seeing the kind of ups and downs of the sector if you're talking about performance art.

We'd retained links with Nikki, and we were presenting the National Review. It was also key that we continued to support artists and make artists central to the programme there, and how to do that, and how to keep that going. Very early on we created a programme called Dark Lights, which came out of the first season that we did, that Susan and I programmed at Tramway. We created this season called Dark Lights, partly because we didn't have any money. We created a programme that would support young, local artists. It was a response to difficulties the city was having with the finances for Tramway. We had to refocus locally, rather than being about big international headline events. We couldn't do The Wooster Group every month because the budgets weren't there, so we kind of turned around and looked at what we had locally as a resource. We started working with lots of young companies such as Suspect Culture, Vanishing Point, Stewart Laing, Nic Green, Marisa Zanotti all these local artists that were living in Glasgow. Very few of them lived in

Live Art in Scotland: Steve Slater

Edinburgh. It was a home-grown network of artists. The idea was really simple, it was a kind of framework. So, if you're an individual artist, we might commission you with a fee of two or three thousand pounds and then we would also back that with a similar amount of money for technical and give you space in the building. I think the offer was that if we were going to support you, even if the piece didn't work, the commitment was to the artist rather than the piece of work. We would have another shot the following year and then maybe a third go before we called it quits.

SG: Before you moved to support another artist.

SS: We were doing a lot. We were doing about five of those a year with different artists, all of them coming in for periods of between two to four weeks to develop work. That process was quite hands-on: we would sit in on rehearsals, we'd talk to the artists, we'd give feedback, we'd encourage them and give them ideas and suggestions. It was a very hands-on commissioning programme. In a way, it was hugely successful because it seed funded a lot of those young creatives who went onto bigger and better things and that was the whole process, we wanted them to do that and we wanted them to move on and develop and grow. There was some amazing work that came out of that programme during that time. We worked with Ken Davidson, who's sadly no longer with us but Ken was an amazing artist, but also incredibly difficult to work with. That was part of it as well, looking back, it was those difficult artists that you remember the most because you're fighting for them. I remember having huge battles internally with my own team. Tramway itself wasn't perfect, it wasn't set up like a normal organisation. There was no board because it was a council organisation and there was no director, so it was basically a flat organisational structure. I was programming stuff and then I had to fight to convince the technical and operational staff to do these damn shows. I remember one internal Tramway staff meeting, it was a weekly programme meeting, where the house manager asked the marketing manager outside for fight! [Laughs] That's what it was like, it was like tooth and nail internal fighting for that programme all the time. Where would that happen these days, you would not get a fight between the house manager and the marketing manager that you have to kind of pour water on.

SG: Heated.

Live Art in Scotland: Steve Slater

SS: It was like that all the time. It was a kind of weird period where it was a dysfunctional building in some ways but operating with this high quota of artists and interesting projects. It was a phenomenal period of time in a way, but it just wouldn't happen now I don't think.

SG: It was interesting looking through the range of stuff that got programmed over that period. I found Hit and Run which was a performance arts season and Zanotti was in that, and I think Robert Lepage coming, although that's maybe when the building was closed so that would've been staged elsewhere, I think.

SS: We did several with Robert, he came a few times during that period.

SG: Then Blast Theory and The Wooster Group and obviously Stewart Laing's work, which we've already been talking about. As I've gone through a lot of the reporting about the building, it's interesting the things that stick out. I'm conscious that around 2003, and you were still there in 2003, there were conversations about Scottish Ballet and their plans to take over T2. Obviously, there was a strong response, not just from the visual art community who I think maybe were the loudest, from a lot of people including Stewart Laing. I found a letter from Stewart in *The Herald* saying this space had been foundational to his career.

SS: You've got to understand that apart from the programming, a lot of my time was spent fighting internally for Tramway to be autonomous. We were lucky at that time in that technology wasn't as slick as it is now and the problem with Tramway was that it was cut off from the main frame within the council because the lines didn't work and there was no connection electronically, therefore we argued that we were standalone, we had our own website which we ran ourselves. I would report to cultural services on what we were doing but there was nobody for many years that could get a toehold in the building. We were always keeping them at arm's length to make sure that we could do what we did and maintain this image of Tramway. During that period nobody would have guessed that Tramway was a council venue. I think if you go on the Tramway website now, I hate looking at that website that they've got, it's awful.

SG: What I find peculiar about it is that you might not realise it's council attached, but then you start trying to find out who the programmer or the artistic director is, and all that information for one reason or another is totally opaque.

SS: You're not allowed because the director is the director of the council. It's the way it operates. We fought that tooth and nail through all those years. The whole ballet thing was a nightmare. We lost a member of staff who was basically fired because of mismanagement from above. I remember the ballet did a show and there was an after-show party and myself and Andy Lindsay who was the marketing manager went to that for a drink and we were the only two Tramway staff there. The chairman of the ballet stood on a table and basically announced that Tramway was theirs. I remember looking at Andy and going 'what is going on, what is happening?' because obviously the council were talking to the ballet and not including us at all in that conversation. It was really difficult. We were being given these plans for Tramway 4 to be turned into a dance studio with a big glass wall so that people could see the dancers in rehearsal. I think the compromise works now because it's a benefit for Tramway to have the ballet attached the way it is because while I was hugely lucky to work when I did there and do the stuff I did, I don't think that could exist again unless there was a huge swing in funding. I don't blame anybody. It's not the same building that it was, and it can't be really.

SG: It's interesting that one of the other things that came out of that specific tussle is The Work Room, a support structure for independent dance which emerged out of that agreement to have the extension built.

SS: The dance community basically said we really need a space of our own, why are you putting all this money into the ballet, so a negotiation had to be done to give them a space. You just work all the time. The difficulty with local government in any city is that they have a lot of power, but they don't necessarily understand the arts. That continues now, even for me in Derby I'm still doing the same things.

SG: It's really interesting hearing the context that you and the Tramway team were working within to try and sustain that space maybe at arm's length from the council. I look at what was being programmed like Victoria and other Belgian companies coming back through that period. Maybe that's that link there to some of those earlier influences or those earlier encounters you were mentioned. And there was Quarantine, Cryptic, and Tim Etchells and Forced Entertainment, it's an amazing programme.

SS: It is. When you reel it off now, it reminds me of what an amazing programme it is. Weirdly, I'm actually working with Tim at the moment and I'm also working with Marisa, so

Live Art in Scotland: Steve Slater

I'm still kind of dragging these people with me. I'm working with Tim not with Forced Entertainment but on his neon pieces for Derby.

SG: Oh, lovely. It's interesting you mention the neon pieces because that's his visual art has often been one of the ways in which his work has ended up being connected with Scottish venues. I know that Forest Fringe in Edinburgh showed the neon pieces, and obviously his poster works turned up at the Arches. I'm keeping an eye on the time, the last thing I was really curious about was your sense of the slightly wider scene and the way in which spaces like the Third Eye and then Tramway were part of a broader ecology. One of the other things that came out of 1990, which also benefitted from lottery funded rejuvenation, was the Arches. I'm wondering what sense you had of that and other spaces in the city or across Scotland.

SS: Yes, I think that the Arches is a key venue, as were all the others like the Tron and the CCA. We continued to work with them all during that period. I think scale was a thing. We had the space that the Arches didn't. There was a bit of competition I guess as well. NRLA would flip for a few years to the Arches and then come back and we'd renew our relationship with Nikki and NRLA. There was a kind of healthy competition. The difficulty was because we were council and I was paid by the council, that when we started back in '95/'96 as the senior producers that Bob wanted to bring in, that we were sort of like the art police. We would go and chat with the other venues because we were the city council. We were programming Tramway and other venues, but we'd also engage in other conversations with other venues, and I think that kind of coloured the relationship with the Arches and others. There was a sense of healthy competition. I think there was an acknowledgment that our commissions fed into and were part of an ecology for the artists that sat alongside the stuff that they were doing at the Arches. I think we had more money, even in our diminished state our budgets were still much larger than anybody else's and that enabled us to bring in those big shows two or three times a season as well as interspersing them with smaller commissions, which the Arches couldn't really do. Their business model was very different to ours because it was based on the nightclub fund, which we didn't have. It was an interesting time. I was there for fourteen years, and I think I was there a little bit too long in the end. It was hard to keep up that energy and the continual fighting against the inevitable council behind the scenes trying to make it a council venue. In the end, they

Live Art in Scotland: Steve Slater

managed to dislodge us from our positions. Andy was removed from his position as marketing. He wasn't removed but he was sucked into a kind of central marketing thing which was untenable, we needed somebody in the office working with us all the time. Weirdly, my Tramway team has a really close bond. Two weeks ago, we got together on Zoom and we catch up every now and again. Lorraine who did visual arts and Andy who is now wherever he is, Vietnam or something teaching English, and Heather who did the education outreach. We're all pretty tight as a team still, which is nice.

SG: That's lovely, yes.

SS: It's funny talking to you now, I do miss that because the kind of work we were doing back then is still relevant now and I do wish there was more of it. The difficulties with Brexit just pile on the difficulties with seeing work and trying to present work that is interesting and engaging. In some ways, I'm a terrible programmer because I programme stuff that I really like. It was never done out of a financial matrix that this would make money. We didn't make money, we made artists and I think that was the important thing. The work we did was about informing and showing other local, Scottish artists, our own community, what was happening. It was a window on Europe, if not further afield, that allowed artists to go, wow there's some amazing stuff going on in Germany or Belgium or wherever and that it was on their doorstep, and they could come and see it without having to get on a plane or a train and we part of that wider network. I think all that was really key to the power that Glasgow had as a creative city and the artists that came out of it. I think that what we were trying to do was really feed into that and support that ecology. I think it's sad that it's not necessarily there all the time now. I know that you've got Take Me Somewhere which does a pretty good job of bringing stuff. I do keep my eye on things in Scotland. It makes me feel sad that it's not there anymore. It's my opinion obviously but it felt very much like an internal battle to maintain Tramway's integrity for the arts community, and it wasn't something we could shout about, it was just something we did. I think the fact that we did it for so long was probably the most amazing thing. We managed to hold onto that through a lot of difficulties. They were different times and these things come and go. Nothing is there forever, you know. The Third Eye Centre was amazing in its time, but it went. The Arches was amazing in its time, but it's gone. I think the Tramway we had between '95 through to 2009 was an amazing period, but there were three Tramways within that. There was the

Live Art in Scotland: Steve Slater

derelict Tramway phase, there was a lottery re-fitted Tramway which struggled to find its identity for two or three years, and then there was a really strong run between 2003 and 2007 where we hit a rhythm and things were really working and then it all started to slide again because of the internal pressure to change became too much and we lost members of staff. We were undermined and it became inevitable that I would have to go. It was probably a good thing in a way.

SG: If we do have another conversation, knowing that you ended up producing the IETM which is again a really interesting snapshot of a programme if I think about Scottish performance, theatre and dance at that moment.

SS: Yes, there is that. Between 2010 and 2015, I started performing again and doing stuff and there was the whole Berlin thing with performance art in Berlin coming out of the IETM connection. In 2015, as a freelance producer, I created this project called Über Teaüchter which took four Glasgow artists to Berlin to work for Berlin-based artists for two weeks and that was an amazing project. Since then, I've just been dealing with life, which is why I've ended up down here, but that's a different story.