

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

This interview was conducted online via Zoom on 14th April 2021 as part of the Live Art in Scotland research project at the University of Glasgow.

The following is an 'intelligent verbatim' transcript that is intended to be an accurate record which omits some small, repeated phrases or false starts (where someone has spoken and then rephrased themselves) for readability. Text presented in [square brackets] has been added during transcription to clarify meaning and/or to include details offered by the interviewee(s) during the review process.

For further details of this process and guidance on conditions of use, please visit the Live Art in Scotland project website: <https://liveartscotland.org/index.php/about-the-las-collection/>

Stephen Greer (SG): I've been starting these conversations by inviting people to talk about their first encounters with performance or with performance art, whether it was seeing or studying it, and using that as a route in to talking about people's individual practices or their histories. As I said in my email, I'm wary of neat origin stories, but I do like the idea of first encounters or first impressions, so maybe we start there.

Craig Richardson (CR): That's a good question, I think. Certainly Joseph Beuys of course was important, and not just the Scottish context of his work. As a student I had become very aware of his international prestige and that was the topic of my undergraduate dissertation so it's something I got very involved with. I guess I was vaguely aware of Alastair MacLennan, so many artists we were told to look at, or people talked about them. You often heard about them before you saw the work given there were so few places to show art in Scotland. I'm talking about a world before Tramway etc. I kind of was hazily aware, probably through David Harding, of Mark Boyle's infamous naked lady Traverse theatre event, but history tends to embroil that with the history of Richard Demarco through in Edinburgh, which was a whole other territory for a Glaswegian. And then Nigel Rolfe, I don't know if you know his work, the Irish performance artist, he did this piece on *The Late Show* in the mid-eighties. When I say he did a piece on *The Late Show*, if you remember it after *Newsnight* they would have this arts programme, it was an incredible piece of work. They explained that he'd be doing this work, they wouldn't show it for the duration of the show,

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

but they'd go back to him every ten minutes or so. He had a ball of twine in his hands, and he was wrapping his head with that over the half-hour or forty minutes and by the end, his head was encased in this ball of twine, which looked horrific on one level because you wondered how he could breathe, and there was nothing really like that that I'd seen before. It was about time, object, material, performance, but it wasn't about theatre, it was something completely unscripted in the sense that it didn't rely on a script and I thought that was really amazing. There's Bruce McLean of course, but I mention that really to exclude him. He definitely wasn't in any way an influence. Oddly he became my external examiner on my MFA which meant I had to deal with him, and also Douglas [Gordon] ended up being taught by him at Slade, but he definitely wasn't an influence. Later on he did a piece at Tramway in 1990, which was something to do with a gazebo, it was just quite weak I thought, silly. That's not what I was trying to do as a young person.

SG: Okay. So maybe the question there is, when you first started making work, what was it that you were trying to do? We're talking here about the context of GSA, you mentioned David Harding, so we're talking about Environmental Art at GSA as well.

CR: I came to it with other baggage, I suppose, which was The Citizen's Theatre. By the time I'd gone into Environmental Art, I'd started doing performances. I was doing them through the period [of my undergraduate studies], but I didn't really know how they fitted in, except that they would sometimes be in the public realm. There was space in the Environmental Art curriculum because it was a fairly undeveloped curriculum, so you had lots of space to invent your own curriculum as it were, and that's partly what I did [with others on the course]. Part of that for me was also influenced by The Citizen's Theatre, which I was able to go to during that heyday, you know that period with Giles Havergal and so on. I saw these incredible plays before I even went to the art school. I saw *Rosenkavalier* twice, once in Edinburgh and once in Glasgow, with Gary Oldman and Juno [and the Paycock], it was absolutely amazing. Then, you know Karl Kraus's *The Last Days of Mankind*, it was four hours long and Giles Havergal is sitting there through the duration of this play. What was happening there for me was I guess I was seeing this theatrical environment that was quite studied, but also had these incredible uses of objects. There was a semi-derelict aesthetic within these plays. It looked like the sets hadn't quite been finished sometimes which was good. I took to that in some way. So, by the time I had gone to Environmental Art, I was in

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

my second year because you do the general first year, I had a kind of keen sense of something performative or something theatrical that was a bit sort of left field or outside the norm. Of course, at Glasgow School of Art in the mid-eighties, the 'norm' was very normal. It was very much representational painting, which I've criticised in the past (but I wouldn't now). I wanted to be outside of that and performance was a way of being outside of that. Then there was this secondary thing that was happening at the beginning of my art school time. My brother had been in art school and he studied painting in fact, and he had become really good friends with Malcolm Dickson so I'd met Malcolm through that friendship of his. We would go to the Transmission Gallery openings and things like that just as I started art school. He was my brother's friend, but I had this connection. I started hearing about stuff that they were putting on, particularly later on with Stuart Brisley and so on in the old, cobbled space of Transmission and began to imagine it as an ideal performance space in my head. That's what I would want to emulate one day, this kind of abandoned space or cold space, a space that wasn't like a gallery.

SG: Not the white box space of the gallery.

CR: Exactly. And because of that, different types of things would happen and you would have a different experience of an artwork. Luckily, I got to live out that dream! That was the incredible thing. There were a lot of things in the mix at that time. Also, not having anyone to teach that stuff which I thought was a blessing [laughs]. It was really good to be an art student trying to do something that's different, but also being completely unguided and trying to find your own way there and through that, you find something that's really meaningful for you. You're not trying to please anyone, there's no audience for the stuff as far as I could see. I was hearing about this stuff at this time, you know Stuart Brisley at Transmission who I mentioned, but these were almost like hidden events. You'd get a photocopied invite a week after the thing had happened, or you weren't quite sure what the thing was that you were going to see. Then there was some other stuff happening, quite small things. Really, it was the National Review of Live Art that brought things to the fore, I think. They really put Glasgow's position in terms of performance art at the fore and [Nikki Millican] asked how are we going to engage with this, what are we going to do? That's really down to Nikki.

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

SG: It sounds like you're describing a bit of a shift there, or a new pattern of work which shifts from more underground or unmarked spaces to something which is attached to Third Eye, has a far greater profile, and is, as you say, being led by Nikki who was newly in post there.

CR: Neil Bartlett is obviously the kind of MC of [the National Review then], but Nikki's in charge. Quite quickly there was lots of discussions between all of the participants and there was a sort of, semi-artificial but nonetheless important, divide between people who thought they were doing something ostensibly theatrical and those who definitely felt they were doing something fine art based. There was a lot of discussion [of that] at that festival, it was really lively. I remember having a really long discussion with Neil Bartlett about him saying it didn't matter and I thought it really did matter. The way I saw it, and by this point Douglas [Gordon] and I were working together with Euan [Sutherland], we were making objects and we were creating things and we were in that space providing a bodily element to that creation and the spaces themselves weren't minor, they'd often be in rooftops or cellars or dark places or cold places, that was the sort of theme of our work. It was very rarely a gallery and only once in a theatre. In a way what we were trying to do was something a bit different from theatre, it was improvised and it was completely open-ended. We sometimes didn't even know how long we'd perform for and the audience would be invited to drop in. It was a different kind of thing. These kind of debates were really important insofar as it helped you craft what you were trying to do and understand what you weren't trying to do. All of that was in the mix at the beginning.

SG: This is when you made performance underneath central station in what would later become known as the Arches. It has one life during Glasgow 1990 and then becomes the Arches.

CR: Yes, well that was one of the later pieces. What happened was we had access to various spaces in the Girls' High School which was the home of Environment Art. The gGirls' High School at that point was a kind of crumbling school. It had this double helix staircase so if you went down the wrong staircase you could never physically meet somebody, it was really amazing. We had an enormous amount of space. Douglas and I didn't really know each other, we'd done the first year together but that was with one hundred and fifty students. We were lumped together at the back of some space and the first thing we did was clean it

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

up to get the light in. The windows were covered in filth and you couldn't actually see the space, so we kind of renovated the space. At the time we'd say we could do work about this, everything is kind of open to the possibility of being turned into a piece of work. So, we ended up being together and chatting and we were individually working. Within the curriculum situation in an undergraduate course, the minute you start collaborating people get very worried and confused and how are we going to assess this, and 'who did what?'. So, quite early on, when we started working [collaboratively], it was outside the work that we had to do for the programme and the work that we had to do for the programme wasn't set by anything in a curriculum. It was a strange situation to be in, but great if you felt like you had the ideas you wanted to deal in. The performance work came about firstly because we had access to these incredible spaces in this building, [the Girls High School], that weren't used by the programme. For example, there was a back door that led to an even bigger space. This was like a dream. You went into this enormous space and it was used by the Glasgow Council I guess to store their census materials. It had a sign on the door which said strictly no entry, which of course is an invitation. Bit by bit, we colonised this space to make work and some of that work was performative. One day, Nikki was coming round to potentially select pieces for NRLA and clearly wanted Glaswegian people to be involved and myself, Euan and Douglas all put on separate works. She wanted all of them but she couldn't give us that so she said 'why don't you three work together?' So, ambitious as we were, we decided to go for that. That was at Riverside [in London], that performance first of all was at Riverside and then came to Glasgow. In Glasgow she said can you restage the thing in the theatre, so that was the only kind of theatre thing we did. That didn't really work to anyone's benefit I don't think. It was a slightly confusing piece of work.

SG: The transplanting it into the theatre space do you mean?

CR: Yes, I mean if you know the old Third Eye Centre, it had this vegetarian café and there were lots of cultural figures there and they had this theatre that everyone knew, I'd been a few times as a student. It was cheap and quite small, it was a sort of blacked out space and it had lighting and great acoustics, so we played around with all of that but that's not what we ended up doing ever again. That wasn't really what we were interested in. We were more interested in a candle in the corner somewhere. We ended up in this space and then she asked us to come back the following year to do the NRLA in Glasgow and that was much

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

more interesting because we got access to the roof of the Third Eye Centre, which no one had ever been allowed to go up to for an art event. It was an amazing space. It's gone now because of the renovations to that building. It had a kind of roof light which was lit from underneath so you had this incredible light effect, and we found a room in the roof that was slightly above the roof and people could climb up and go along and then see us in this tiny space. That was the year later [after our first NRLA performance]. Nikki was core to all of that and these first invitations.

SG: You mentioned there those conversations and meeting Neil Bartlett. I guess that was a space where you were encountering that wider community of people both in the UK and internationally.

CR: Well yes and no. As far as I experienced it, there was a divide in the National Review of Live Art between those who were involved in the theatre world and those who were much more involved in the fine art world. When we were at Riverside we ended up at a table with Mona Hatoum who was at that time a fairly unknown artist, and has subsequently gone on to do amazing work. She did a kind of installation performance where you looked through a kind of spy hole and it looked as if you were looking down at her, but everything was against the wall including her, so I'm not quite sure how she did that. You were looking down at her even though you were looking at her. That kind of work was going on. In that space at the first of the performances that Euan, Douglas, and I did on the roof of the Riverside, that's when we first saw Alastair MacLennan doing his work. Alastair, Mona, all of that kind of thing, that was very much the kind of performance we were interested in. It was sort of fine art, non-scripted, in awkward spaces, durational, visual, often with some additional sensory stuff like sound, smell, dust. When we got to the 1989 NRLA in Glasgow there was a divide I suppose. But anyway, we were nicely catered for and they gave us what we wanted and that was great and hopefully we created something that they were interested in. Then we had this other longstanding thing that happened where we were doing one of the performances where this group of people from Arnhem and they were doing this enormous audio-visual experimental festival [AVé Festival] which had performance and video. This is really early days for video art and there was this whole festival which was looking at it and also at performance. They really liked what we did so we went back there a couple of times to this space called Ocean Gallery which was amazing. It was like Tramway before it was

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

renovated, it was really derelict. It was an amazing space. Douglas and I had a room that we could stay in which was above, it was almost a residential piece of work where you fly out to these places, you don't really have a budget, you can't stay there a long time because you haven't got any money so you've only got three days. These were the ideal conditions, we'd arrive and have this concentrated time in this space. It was more like a warehouse in terms of what it would be used for normally. We did things like that and eventually we found the space at the Arches. We'd heard there was a car park somewhere underneath central station but we couldn't really figure out how that existed and so we ended up writing a letter and they amazingly responded and we met this chap who said well we've got this space but no one's been in it for decades. Even going into it with him was quite scary. Going down this stairwell in complete darkness and unbelievable smell of dampness and then he lit it up with a torch and we saw this incredible space. We only had access to that for a few days and we could only have a few people in for about six hours so that was the sort of length of the performance. I know afterwards that people felt kind of uncomfortable in the space and I wasn't sure about that. I was aware of Andre Stitt doing performances at the time where [people felt threatened] and that's not really what we were after. We did want people to think it was spooky but not feeling threatened. There was a sense of threat in that place because it was so derelict, but it was an amazing space and we also had amazing reactions from people. It was a very good piece of work.

SG: There's a thread running through all that work which is about an engagement with, I think you've used the phrase neglected sites, so in this slightly derelict, abandoned, or ignored state.

CR: We had a kind of manifesto which was sometimes published in press release things. We talked about unloved spaces, that was the phrase we used. That's what we were after, a space that was kind of strangely unloved. As you're making these works of course you're picking up details from the people you have to deal with, or the groups or organisations you have to engage with. Quite a lot of our work was object-based so we had to source these things and with no budget often we would have to do that quite cheaply and we ended up knowing the best Salvation Army recycling places and we'd go there and pick bits of furniture and bits of everyday stuff in the later pieces. One day we needed to get lots of coal for a work that we did in Transmission Gallery, so we found a really cheap coal supplier but

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

it wasn't that circular coal for home use, it was really craggy bits of coal that we wanted. The chap who was looking after that coal depot, and this was Glasgow in winter a few days before Christmas that we were doing this work, he was in a strange, almost a sentry box garden shed and completely enclosed in this space with a little electric fire and some coal on the ground but obviously not using that to warm himself and outside was lots of coal. It was like a tailor-made, performance place. We knew at that point that this is what we'd been trying to achieve [laughs]. Going back to when we first did the piece in the theatre, we had six single-bar electric fires and sawdust on the ground. Of course, the first time the health and safety person came in they just said this can't happen. We were doing things like this all the time up in our Girls' High School building but we had the space do to that which you couldn't in these heavily policed spaces. Finding somewhere where you didn't have to worry about the normal standards was absolutely amazing.

SG: There's a sense there of what goes along with institutional or institutionalised spaces.

CR: Yes, and also that kind of squalid. We wanted people to really look at the space and for instance, with the Arches, to go around the space. We never really felt that people would stay for the duration, but actually we found that more and more people were doing that which was really interesting. They were staying in the space for quite a long time and talking about that. I think partly because the spaces were so interesting. Sometimes we lit them and we also had a very strong acoustic element to the work. We created these kind of musical pieces that were done on a four-track, it was quite cheap. We had these endless loop tapes repeating every six or seven minutes and we'd take a lot of samples from many sources. Ross Sinclair would have a lot of the technology. He didn't get involved with making it but he was sort of there in the background [and the acoustic element] helped people stay as well. Lots of things going on there really. There was another thing that was happening and we never talked about this, [Douglas] and I. There was a kind of psychological thing going on in terms of what we were trying to create. We used to go to places like Paddy's market, or the Salvation Army and places where there was a lot of poverty. That's my background, I was from a very poor part of Glasgow and six of us lived in a two-bedroom flat until I was twelve. No one had a room with a bath, that was the same for everyone in Partick. It was like trying to go back there, to that memory. I had seen people who were so poor that they had become somnambulant, they were sort of shuffling around [which was

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

how we moved around in our performances]. This sounds like something from a Beckett play and in a way, it was like that. We were trying to create that sense of something that was changing, it was definitely disappearing from the 'sense of' of Glasgow, that kind of everyday encounter with real poverty and dereliction, collapsing environments and the end of industrialisation, and people just simply having nothing and finding residence within Paddy's Market. We wanted the spirit of that to come into the work, which I think it did quite strongly. Spaces out of sight were important, stuff that was outside of everyday experience. There was a rawness to it that we were after. We didn't want people to be so perturbed by it that they didn't want to stay. People took to that, that and the sound and the space. There were some times when we were really just incidental to the whole thing, where we were completely static but providing a presence. It was the space that people often really liked.

SG: There's a turn of phrase I think Alastair MacLennan uses in talking about his own work, he talks about actuations and there may be a resonance there about the human presence in those works as being really significant, but maybe not the central figure of attention as might be in a more theatre-based tradition.

CR: I saw him do the opposite of that once in Glasgow in the 1990 festival event that he was part of with a group and he was in a rocking chair. I wrote about this in *Scottish Art since 1960*. It's just him in a rocking chair, but he's rocking beside a manhole cover that's been opened. The manhole cover looked bigger than the chair and as he was rocking, the chair was moving backwards and we were all just watching aghast that he was about to fall through a hole in the ground and he did. He didn't fall all the way through, the chair sort of got lodged halfway in and we all saw this image of him being halfway in and momentarily being stuck and then the light went out. It was just him and you were up close and it was an absolutely astonishing piece of work. We never had that relationship with our audience ever, we never acknowledged the audience and they were never that close in the sense that that would've been rude, but also we were just doing our thing. Usually, our performances were shuffling around ignoring each other and ignoring them, just being inward looking I suppose, which after six or seven hours happened anyway! You weren't acting it, that's how you felt.

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

SG: The thing I was going to ask about before, I'm interested in the kind of work that you were making then and that particular moment. I'm really conscious that this is when Glasgow Council and cultural authorities are doing a push towards all kinds of if not gentrification, it's Glasgow's Miles Better and the push towards Glasgow 1990 in an attempt to reframe the cultural image of Glasgow or Glasgow as a kind of cultural location. I'm really aware of lots of different discussions and debates, particularly folk attached to Transmission being involved in some of them, the Workers City collective or movement. What was your sense of those discussions or debates? Was that something that you were part of at that moment?

CR: Oh, absolutely. A few years ago, I had a chance to go back and look over all of this again because I went over to Galway where they asked me to come and speak to the people putting the bid together for their City of Culture and they were asking what they should learn from Glasgow. Various people have written about the City of Culture in Glasgow, Beatriz Garcia and so on, talking about how good it all was. It didn't necessarily feel like that at the time. This was 1990 and by that point, Douglas and I had stopped making these performances but we were working in a slightly more expanded group and all of that stuff was really problematic. I think the people involved themselves running it felt that it was problematic because people have noted since, there's a really good PhD on this by Clare [Edwards], the City of Culture came about through an economic policy and not cultural policy. They didn't have a cultural policy in Glasgow in 1990 or before it. That's what drove the whole development and the need to change the image of Glasgow towards a more positive image. That had been going on for a while with Glasgow's Miles Better and all that stuff. I don't feel that anything I was involved with in the City of Culture year except one thing which was a group exhibition which happened in the Third Eye Centre, pretty much before the place went bankrupt and then had to become the Centre for Contemporary Art. It was great to be part of that season of exhibitions at the Third Eye, but I don't feel in any way that I was contributing to cultural policy. I think that would be anathema to most artists. I was also involved with Transmission both being outside of it but being very connected with some of the people like Malcolm Dickson. There was a lot of criticism of what was going on. Mostly I would say through Variant more than Transmission, which was always in this complex arrangement because it's a client of the city but it has also critiqued

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

these developments. At Variant it was no holds barred. By that point I was working a bit for Variant doing the marketing and I was interested in what Malcolm was putting together in terms of response and the hidden parts of the city being even more hidden, the poverty being pushed to one side. I absolutely agreed with that but I wasn't entirely sure myself how you could directly address that in my own practice. It was a debate. I think the 1988 Garden Festival was more pivotal. Douglas and I were asked to put something together for that [Festival] and it was one of those classic moments where we went down and we had a tour and couldn't quite understand how they were going to turn this into a festival. At the end we were asked how much money we were going to bring to this [laughs] and we were like well, nothing. We understood you were sort of paying to get into this in a way. You had to raise your own funding and there was no support so that was a non-starter. Certainly the City of Culture probably did change the reputation of Glasgow to some degree, but it wasn't driven by culture. In the aftermath of course, in 1991, lots of things went bust. That's why we ended up doing this group show *Windfall* in a derelict building in the Clydeside. That building was available because of the great recession that happened in that period and Glasgow was really affected by that.

SG: I've had conversations with a few artists who suggested that a lot of what 1990 did was, because of huge amounts of money coming in or being spent in that year on cultural programming, it had a sort of accelerant effect on some aspects of what was already happening but one of the things that it did partially was recreate infrastructure which would outlive that year. It led to things being full of energy for that year and then following it, as you say, there's a period of recession where there was a sense that things which had been put into motion suddenly run out of steam. I don't know if that would reflect your experience?

CR: I think there was an energy in the year. Certainly having the British Art Show 1990 at McLellan Galleries was great just at that moment in time as well given the work that was happening in London. To see some of that work, to see that kind of exhibition was really good, and various events happened at Tramway that probably wouldn't have happened. The homegrown stuff would've happened and it would've happened in other venues, it just got to happen in these more prestigious venues, some of which were very underfunded after the City of Culture. [The City of Culture] was a caravan that moved on, it really was,

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

and it didn't leave behind a lot of infrastructure for art. In a way, it all seemed to have happened in the past, like in the formation of the Third Eye Centre, a lot of the things have happened have come through individuals themselves either working in concert or they've just had a kind of vision. Somebody like Toby [Webster] with Modern Institute. It's his vision and he was convinced it could work and it has worked for him and that's really great. I suppose Glasgow International maybe is the one true thing that developed. It was probably possible after a City of Culture to imagine Glasgow International into being taken for what it is in its attempt to be an international festival. The immediate aftermath of the City of Culture was pretty dire. For some people it's an opportunity but it's not a disaster for everyone. You must have seen Malcolm Dickson's piece called *Coals to Newcastle*, which is in *The Drouth*, which I think sums things up really well. The Bellgrove Billboard Project happened round about that time, Alan Dunn's project. That was a great response to what was happening. He doesn't talk about it like that but what became a derelict train station ended up being firebombed and is no longer staffed by anyone and we had this billboard and it was great. It had an aesthetic which I love, one of ruin and a bit of despondency and how do you respond to that. Whereas if you go into the Third Eye Centre it's a big white cube, great to have that space but it's a different kind of audience that sees the work.

SG: We've been talking a lot about Glasgow for really obvious reasons, but I'm curious about your perception of the slightly wider landscape.

CR: Okay, so it's quite varied. Richard Demarco is obviously key here in some ways. He's sort of always there. We all went to see Marina Abramović at the Third Eye Centre, which was absolutely amazing, and Ricky appeared after the performance to say hello. I think he missed the point [laughs], he missed the incredible chance to see the work, maybe he'd seen it already.

SG: Was that the snake piece?

CR: Yes. Abramović just lit up when she saw him, it was like a display of his connectedness and the trust that people have in him, but also the sort of chaos that he sometimes brings. He asked Douglas and I to do a work and there was going to be this so-called Beuys space. David Harding had seen and it had come back after performance and I don't know who did this work, but it sounded incredible. You went into this very large, derelict space and there was nothing there, just a sound of a heartbeat, and then somebody noticed in the middle of

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

the floor there was a hand sticking out of the floor beating at the same time as the heart. It was an absolutely amazing sounding piece. We heard this rumour and then we had it semi-confirmed that he was interested in us doing something, but we even knew as young people that he was kind of unreliable. There are enough stories, but incredible impresario and we went off to visit and the visit didn't happen. It was kind of chaotic. At the same time, George Wyllie was a real fan of our work and we were a fan of his work. *The Straw Locomotive* had recently happened.

SG: So, when you were invited to do the piece, I suppose it was the Society of Scottish Artists because he was the president by that time?

CR: Yes, he was. That was 1990 and George invited us to do that. That for me was the culmination of what we were doing. Not that space, but the work that we did for that, which was the only non-performed work that we did together. We've done lots of exhibitions together Douglas and I, but that was the one work that we've actually collaborated on making [a work] that wasn't a performance piece. I'd always had this hankering after using a disability car and I don't know why, probably the colour on some level and probably it strangely resonates with Beuys's *The Pack*, you know he uses the Volkswagen. There's also something anachronistic about it, but just alien as well and something also bodily as well. There are lot of references to the body in my sculptures and the idea that would it be possible to drive this through the Scottish Royal Academy and the complications that would lead to. True enough, the people that looked after these cars, they did agree because we said it was a homage to the fortieth anniversary of the NHS, but a slightly different homage. We set up ramps going up the stairs and obviously it's a listed building, and then ramps going further up the marble stairs through to the back. It was kind of nightmarish what might have happened. We found the old picture lift, which had been hidden for a long time. We managed to have this huge space opened up and then inside this space that we all knew as the gallery, was this other space that's this very large, very old picture lift that was hand operated by ropes. The doors would become part of the work that we would make and we'd put stuff on there. That was a great opportunity, and George was on hand during the installation as you'd expect and kind of constantly goading us to do more, you know, be more outlandish.

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

SG: I'd read that he was instrumental in broadening the remit of the SSA's annual and saying it needs to include installation art and performance-informed art.

CR: Yes, we did get to do a performance afterwards. Not in the work itself, but we also found the normal lift and we said okay, can we do a performance in a small lift and that's the only space that we'll perform in. We won't move the lift you know, you just have to come up and you'll be looking at various paintings and suddenly there two people in a lift [laughs] doing this performance. That was a really strange piece because of course, people didn't tend to hang around, they felt quite awkward staring at people in a lift. It was fully sanctioned and labelled and all of that but it was still quite a strange experience for people. That was the kind of thing we wanted to bring to that environment. I've never submitted any work to these kind of open exhibitions either as a student or as a graduated artist. That's not my space, but it was really great. George also did a piece with Environmental Art. He did a kind of performance piece; I wasn't involved with it but other people were. He was one of a number of people that David Harding and Sam Ainsley had brought into the department. So Bow Gamelan, they did a piece of work with my year group, and Richard Wilson and Anne Bean, Anne who at that point had done a swimming down the Thames piece was well-known for that so that was amazing. Paul Burwell too, of course. And also Malcolm or Billy Clark, I think it was Malcolm, had invited Charlie Hooker to do a piece [at Transmission]. This was before Douglas and I started working, but we ended up doing a piece [under his direction] with him in Transmission, one of his sound pieces banging sticks together. There were four of us including myself and Douglas. Also, Roland Miller. Miller was interesting because David Harding had seen that I was interested in performance and sent me down to Sheffield to stay with Roland and his partner Shirley [Cameron]. It was uncomfortable and I didn't like what he was doing. It was overt activism and it was also mostly scripted, although he'd been part of the Basement Group and all of that, it just wasn't my thing. He wanted to dress up Ronald Reagan at a march that was happening and people would be dressed as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher at the front and I'm not interested in that. If you see a parody of Ronald Reagan, you don't think critically about Reagan, it just confirms what was a very commonly held view that he was a slightly dangerous, deranged, old president. It doesn't get you thinking about life. Roland's partner Shirley Cameron came into the department and did a week of work that was very

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

productive for some people. Again, I didn't take part in it. I guess what I'm trying to say is it was quite odd in a way what we were doing, Douglas and Euan and I. We were slightly outside of the curriculum. First of all, it was collaborative and difficult to assess. Secondly, we had to do the same work as everyone else in addition to the performative works which were always contingent anyway, they might never happen, and sometimes they were off-site in places people couldn't go to assess it, so we had to do this extra work. In a way that was a really good push to work really hard, but it didn't really fit in with what was a good integration of performance with other media in Environmental Art. We had this wonderful building and space to do it in and we trying to keep a bit outside of that and also work with professional organisations, probably because we were very ambitious. We were trying to find spaces that we felt were relevant to what we were doing. Glasgow 1990 came and went.

SG: The last thing I was interested in was asking you about – this is a bit of a jump and maybe you will or will not be able to speak to this – I was looking through the catalogue and the information about *Generation: 25 years of Contemporary Art in Scotland*, which would've been 2014.

CR: I've got it here if you want me to check?

SG: I was looking through it and thinking about the way in which it narrates a particular history or offers a particular snapshot, and it talks about the influence of Environmental Art and Sculpture at GSA and it talks about the growth in artists using video. I was starting to work through the artists who had presented there and I'm conscious that it was a really huge programme of events across lots and lots of galleries and that I have a job of work to trace them all, but I was struck by the absence of performance or any indication that there might be artists engaging with performance over those twenty-five years. Maybe I'm doing a disservice to that exhibition, but it did feel to me like there was a sort of absence.

CR: I think you're right. I mean *Here and Now* [2001], which happened twenty or fifteen years before had the same kind of absence. Certainly the prevalence of video art really was the thing that took over. We're talking about my generation here, people started making video work while there was no digital interface, or that which did occur took a long time to process the digital images. I made a couple of videos in the early nineties and the last ten seconds of my video I wanted slowed down and that took about three days of processing to

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

get that slow motion effect. Accessing certain digital technology is now very commonplace and I think that the ease of that and the ease of access to a phone with a camera has overtaken the live performative element. I have lots of students that I teach now who are always doing performance works, but it's on camera rather than in a space or with relation to objects in real time, but that's the world they're in. I think they're in a much more digital world and there's an audience of course for that as well, which there wasn't really before. What was interesting with performance, one thing we definitely noticed was the more we did this, the bigger the audience got. That wasn't because we were becoming well known, there was something happening where people thought I'll go and see them again because I liked the last thing, so you were forming your own audience made up of people who wouldn't normally go and see that kind of work. In time you were creating a situation where people would come and see you, I'm not talking thousands of people of course or anything like that, but it was enough people to sustain us for three years and to make us feel like it was doing something. I think video had the same trajectory quite quickly in the early to mid-nineties to the point now where it's still the thing, that and painting. That leaves a space for people who want to try new things, to genuinely experiment, to go to the disciplinary areas that are ignored and to play around with these to see if there's something else to be done there. There is a space there that can be used to challenge people's perceptions. I think that is what has happened, personally speaking, that video has become the thing. I suppose the other thing is there is much more of an institutional idea around commissioning non-art sites. It's become much more commonplace in the sense that the experiments that people like Declan McGonagle were involved in in the late eighties/early nineties have become mainstream. That kind of use of public sites to create critical environments and to bring an incidental audience to the work where people didn't know they were looking at art as well as people who have actively sought to look for the work, who have got on a plane to look at the work. That was really radical and now it has become a fairly commonplace idea.

SG: Over the last few days I've been reading and thinking about the different public art projects which were developed by TSWA and the Four Cities Project. I've been thinking there may be a historical line there which hooks up with public art and live art which is in public spaces or is socially engaged because it's in non-theatre spaces.

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

CR: That would be a really fruitful area to look at and certainly, that kind of experimental atmosphere around public art in the late eighties and early nineties and Declan as I say is absolutely pivotal. That brings into it a whole other set of agendas that people can work with. A lot more of what we're seeing now is activist art and public performance, that's what people are calling the new public art genre. There's something within that that invites a performative element, but that's a bit different from what we were doing in that period when we were struggling with theatre and wondering if we could do it without a script, which seems quite mild now as an issue [laughs]. In terms of representation probably, public work is not well represented in any forum that I can think of. I can't remember a time other than with Nikki Millican that we got involved with Lois Keidan and people like that. I don't think I ever imagined having any engagement with any kind of public art agency or any advocate for performance art. I wasn't interested in that side of things in terms of feeling it needed to be better represented because we were doing it as far as I was concerned. We were able to do these things and we would get some kind of support through space and promotion from organisations and they seemed quite doable and possible. But yes, I take your point, I think it's probably not as prevalent. I was looking at Alberta Whittle's work yesterday. I went to the Lisson [Gallery] and she has a piece there. Obviously, we would have been going to Venice next week to see the new piece that she would have made had Venice happened in the way that it should have happened a year ago. Maybe that's what you're going to see more of, performance through video.

SG: There's a performance festival in Glasgow which you might have come across, Take Me Somewhere, which has been based out of Tramway for the last four or five editions of it. It got cancelled last year and is now online entirely this year, but it's an interesting mixed programme in that some of the works were filmed within Tramway and some of them are going to be live durational performances, I think, which will be performed live in Tramway but streamed. I think we're all going to learn through that programme what the next few steps of that development of work are. I guess we're also thinking about the form that GI is going to take and also the Edinburgh International Festival is going to be interesting to see.

CR: I think the conditions that we've all been under recently give us the chance to look back and reframe some ideas. Certainly over the last few I've been thinking a lot about durational performance, not the work that I was involved with but rethinking people like Abramović's

Live Art in Scotland: Craig Richardson

meet the artist at the Guggenheim. That now in the context of covid in that separate space only staring at each other and not speaking has new resonance. I think it's a bit artificial reflecting back the current pandemic onto past work, but it does provide a new way of reading endurance and how we endure. How do we experience what has been for all of us this long endurance period where things have been very controlled and thinking what that means for art and for performance art. There is a really important question there that could be asked. I wasn't aware of what's happened in Glasgow in terms of that [performance] festival. I had been aware of Glasgow International being delayed and then cancelled and put back a year and now it seems a bit curtailed. They seem to be really worried about having visitors.

SG: I think it's everyone trying to find, in lots of different ways, formats which will allow a meaningful opportunity for the artists and their work in whatever form to exist. I think maybe where festivals have fallen down is because they have been unwilling to make any decisions [laughs].

CR: Yes, that's right. They don't want people turning up and the week before they've had to cancel. I have the same with students I teach now. I just said at the beginning of the academic semester, we're doing a degree show, it doesn't matter if no one sees it, it's going to happen. We might end up in that situation, nobody might see it, but it's still happened and there is something quite important about having that as a principle. That you make art work outside of the needs of an audience and that you make it because it's really important to you, so people might see it but there is no guarantee that these things will happen but you're going to pursue it anyway because it's who you are. It's what you know.