

*Strategy: Get Arts*

**Reaction to Joseph Beuys in Scotland, 1970**

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## **Abbreviations**

*3PP* — *Three Pots for the Poorhouse*

*3PPAO* — *Three Pots for the Poorhouse - Action Object*

*CKRSS* — *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch) Scottish Symphony*

DEAF — Demarco European Art Foundation

ECA — Edinburgh College of Art

EIF — Edinburgh International Festival

FIU — Free International University

ICA — Institute of Contemporary Arts

NGS — National Galleries of Scotland

RDG — Richard Demarco Gallery

SAC — Scottish Arts Council

*SGA* — *Strategy: Get Arts* exhibition, Edinburgh College of Art, 1970

SNGMA — Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art

## **Synopsis**

This dissertation examines and analyses the contrasting and often polarised reaction to Joseph Beuys in Scotland, concentrating primarily on his work in the *Strategy: Get Arts* exhibition held at Edinburgh College of Art during the Edinburgh International Festival in 1970.

### **1.0 Introduction**

Contextualises the work of Beuys in relation to the very differing art worlds of Düsseldorf and Edinburgh, the former offering a more avant-garde setting, with a well developed system of patronage and a flourishing avant-garde artistic community. By contrast, Edinburgh is seen as representing a more traditional scene, dominated by the French tradition of *belle peinture*.

### **2.0 Administrators**

Examines the influence of Richard Demarco in bringing Beuys to Scotland and illustrates why this working partnership represented a challenge to the accepted order. It also offers an insight into Demarco's role as a promoter during and subsequent to Beuys' 1970 visit. The role and reaction of Douglas Hall as Keeper of Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art is also examined and analysed.

### **3.0 Critics and Public**

Generally these two groupings offer polarised views on Beuys and *SGA*. On the whole critical reaction to Beuys was positive although not always entirely comprehending. Public reaction as far as it could be gauged was negative and hostile.

### **4.0 Artists**

Many artists acknowledge a profound debt to Beuys, not stylistically but as *example*. There is also dissent and the reasons for this are examined and analysed

### **5.0 Other Observers**

Beuys attracted a high number of unquestioning acolytes. The views of two of them are considered, as are the reasons for Beuys' appeal. These views are contrasted with a more sceptical reaction.

[Word Count:15,998 words]

## 1.0 Introduction

This study is an analysis of *attitudes* and *reaction* to Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) and his work during his visits to Scotland, focusing primarily but not exclusively on the year 1970. In this year Beuys presented three works at an exhibition of thirty-five other Düsseldorf-based artists with the title — as palindrome — of *Strategy: Get Arts (SGA)* which was held at Edinburgh College of Art (ECA). Beuys' contribution consisted of *Arena* (1970), *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch) Scottish Symphony (CKRSS)* (1970) [**Plate 1.0**] and *The Pack* (1969) [**Plates 2.0 and 3.0**]. *Arena* consisted of several hundred framed photographs of Beuys' activities up to that date: a life and work documentation. *The Pack* — a complex tableau consisting of an assemblage of ready-made objects (a Volkswagen camper van, sledges, rolls of felt, fat and torches) — had been conceived the previous year and had been transported to Edinburgh, complete, and installed *in situ*. By contrast, *CKRSS* was a performance 'action' involving Beuys himself as principal 'actor'. A film — made by Mark Littlewood and Rory McEwan, consisting of footage of Beuys on Rannoch Moor in which he buries a lump of margarine in a peat bog — was accompanied by music by the composer Henning Christiansen<sup>1</sup>.

Between 1970 and 1982 Beuys made a total of eight visits to Scotland<sup>2</sup>. All of these visits were at the request and invitation of Richard Demarco<sup>3</sup>. Beuys made two visits to Scotland in 1970; the first in May to undertake preparatory work for the exhibition; and the second as part of a large group of artists invited under the auspices of the Richard Demarco Gallery to take part in *SGA*.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2 for full description

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1

<sup>3</sup> Professor Richard Demarco, OBE. (b. 1930) Formerly Director of The Richard Demarco Gallery (1966-1989); Director of the Demarco European Art Foundation (1990-) and Professor of European Cultural Studies at the University of Kingston (1992-)

In order to examine the very differing and polarised attitudes and reactions to Beuys and his work during the first years of his visits to Scotland, it is important to understand two things: firstly, the specific artistic, cultural and social context from which Beuys and the other artists were emerging; and secondly, the general cultural and artistic climate of Edinburgh during the 1960s and 1970s.

### **1.1 Post-War Düsseldorf**

In the post-war years, the emergent economy bolstered by the Marshall Plan sought to recreate an infrastructure devastated by war. Düsseldorf, as a major centre on the Rhine, had been particularly affected by Allied bombing. However as a strategic rail, road and river nexus, situated in the Ruhr, Germany's major industrial centre, the city became the focus for intense economic generation in the post-war years. This was important on an artistic level for a number of reasons. Firstly the city's wealth, with a burgeoning bourgeoisie, provided a source of patronage which could sustain artistic activity. However, as well as patronage, there was also a strong interest in cultural activity — what the critic Georg Jappe has described as a “craving”<sup>4</sup> — created by long years of deprivation during and after the Nazi era. The two, both necessary to sustain artistic activity, made it possible for artists to survive and thrive. Düsseldorf attracted not only native artists, but also those from other countries, notably Switzerland and the United States. No longer was it necessary for artists to travel to New York or Paris in order to make their living and pursue their careers.

Beuys was attracted to this milieu. He enrolled at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie in 1947 and in 1949 entered the class of the sculptor Ewald Mataré; between 1952 and 1958 Beuys had a studio in the Heerdt district of the city. In 1961 he was appointed Professor of Monumental Sculpture at his *alma mater*, a post which he held until 1971 when he was dismissed for allowing universal access to his classes.

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<sup>4</sup> Jappe, Georg, 'The Republic of Individualists', *Strategy: Get Arts* (Catalogue of Edinburgh International Festival Exhibition August 23 to September 12, 1970) p.5

In Düsseldorf there was therefore a well established, well supported and numerous community of critics, artists, teachers and curators which created an atmosphere of augmented cultural confidence, surpassing Paris as an attractive location for avant-garde artists and able to mount a meaningful challenge to the supremacy of New York.

## **1.2 The Edinburgh Art World**

Beuys, a figure of the European avant-garde with an a highly visible international reputation, found himself in an Edinburgh which, in 1970, retained a highly traditional artistic and social milieu. The site of Beuys' first appearance, Edinburgh College of Art, was dominated by a pre-war school of "colourist" painting characterised by the work of artists and teachers such as Robin Philipson, William Gillies and William McTaggart. Other institutions, such as the Royal Scottish Academy and the National Galleries of Scotland were likewise highly traditional and cautious in their approach to the visual arts, the latter favouring French painting of the late 19th and early 20th century, and members of the former showing similar influences in their exhibited work. The term 'art establishment'<sup>5</sup> used by the critic Cordelia Oliver, perhaps neatly summarises the Edinburgh situation. Elsewhere, Douglas Hall, former Keeper of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, has written that "...the Royal Scottish Academy, is the organ by which the world of artists takes its place in the social framework...They are said to be parochial; the RSA despite its national claims was said to be an Edinburgh Society...."<sup>6</sup>

The influence of French painting on the Edinburgh school was marked. The work of these painters was highly decorative. They eschewed any intellectual or theoretical

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<sup>5</sup>Oliver, Cordelia — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, May 13, 1999

<sup>6</sup> Hall, Douglas 'Painting in the Twentieth Century' in *The New Companion to Scottish Culture* pp.240-242

content in their work, preferring the immediate sensuousness of colour and form to make an impact. Their work could in this sense be said to be intuitive, but it carried no social purpose other than to be “itself” and to be appealing. According to Hall these artists were “...empiricists, uninterested in any theoretical development of art or extension of its boundaries, or in provoking critical discussion.”<sup>7</sup> Hall adds that these painters were “...less troubled by theoretic modernism” and were more concerned with “...transmitting pleasing echoes of the French masters to whom most of them were devoted...”<sup>8</sup> Because of their positions as teachers and artists these painters exerted considerable influence on the younger artists who were their students and assistants.

To many — usually young intellectuals, artists and students — Beuys represented all that opposed these traditional values. As much a teacher as a performer and artist, he believed that the role of the artist was important and could be an instrument for change far beyond the normal confines to which art had traditionally linked itself. As such, he represented a threat to the ‘establishment’ and a role model on a prophetic scale to his acolytes and followers.

One critic, Edward Lucie-Smith, summed this up when he wrote that “Beuys is clearly a great teacher of the young and his doctrine can be summed up in the phrase ‘Everything is art’ except perhaps the created object which is only evidence that action of some kind has taken place...”<sup>9</sup> There can be little doubt then that the Düsseldorf ‘school’ which Beuys represented and the Edinburgh tradition of *belle peinture* represented two views of art which lay at almost diametrically opposing ends of the aesthetic and ideological spectrum. Whereas the Edinburgh school on the one hand seemed to shun critical theory and any notion that art could be other than

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<sup>7</sup>Hall, *The New Companion to Scottish Culture* pp.240-242

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Smith, Edward Lucie ‘A Great Subversive’, *The Sunday Times*, August 30, 1970

anything but a pleasing aesthetic experience, Beuys clearly believed that the artist could make a deep impact on the world on a political or social level.

Another commentator, Marilyn Smith, points out the existence of this ideological divide in relation to *SGA* which took place within the neo-classical splendour of Edinburgh College of Art:

The academic siting of the exhibition was to prove an ideal arena for challenging established authority. Artists, students, administrators and public all had to make decisions and take sides. The classic art confrontation presented fundamental principles for the expression of opinion and persuasion through art criticism. Initial skirmishes between the German artists and the Scottish establishment ensured that serious attention would be focused on the subsequent conflict of art ideologies.<sup>10</sup>

Smith clearly delineates the discrete, and often opposing, “sides” (students, artists, administrators and the public) in what, retrospectively, was a defining moment in the cultural life of Scotland. Smith identifies the emerging conflict between the German artists on the one hand and the Scottish “establishment” on the other. Additionally, she identifies the role of art criticism and hence the art critic in the presentation of these divergent views.

In a sense this sets out the scope and purpose of this study: 1) to identify the various groupings who expressed opinions on Beuys’ activity 2) to present their views 3) to discuss and analyse these views 4) to draw conclusions on these views, and lastly and perhaps most importantly 5) to discuss the long-term effects Beuys’ activity has had in Scotland, particularly given the fact that at the time of writing, a major exhibition of Beuys’ editions<sup>11</sup> has opened in Edinburgh.

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<sup>10</sup> Smith, Marilyn ‘Joseph Beuys: Life as Drawing’, *Diverging Critiques*, p.177

<sup>11</sup> *Joseph Beuys Editions*, Schlegel Collection, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art July 3 - September 12, 1999

## **2.0 Administrators**

The views and reactions of arts administrators towards Beuys' work in Scotland are of special interest. Here, the views of two of them are considered — Richard Demarco and Douglas Hall. While the former was responsible for initiating Beuys' visits to Scotland, the latter (as a member of staff at the National Galleries of Scotland), dealt with Beuys in a more official capacity. While acknowledging that it would be simplistic to state that the views of Demarco are those of the outsider and the views of Hall those of a member of the “art establishment”, it is possible, nevertheless, to see Demarco as an impassioned supporter unable to distance himself from the object of his admiration, while Hall retains a more objective and sceptical distance.

### **2.1 Richard Demarco**

It is likely that without Demarco's intervention — as well as the added enticement of the Edinburgh International Festival — Beuys would never have visited Scotland. Demarco is a figure of considerable importance on the Scottish and international cultural scene. He opened The Richard Demarco Gallery in 1966 with the aim of internationalising the visual arts in Scotland. He pursued this policy rigorously and by 1976 had organised more than 100 exhibitions involving more than 800 artists from more than 20 countries<sup>12</sup>. Notably, in 1966 Demarco had exhibited the work of Günter Uecker, Heinz Mack and Otto Piene of the Group Zero.

As part of his international policy, therefore, Demarco had travelled to Germany at the invitation of the German government in the winter of 1969-70 and visited various cities, including Cologne and Düsseldorf. In Düsseldorf — which he recognised as a major artistic centre with a network of galleries, dealers, critics and practitioners —

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<sup>12</sup> See Richard Demarco Gallery, *Catalogue of 10th Anniversary Exhibition, 1966-1976*

he met such artists as Günter Uecker and Gerhard Richter, as well as the critic Georg Jappe and the director of the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle, Karl Ruhrberg.[**Plate 6.0**] Demarco also visited Beuys at his home in the Oberkassel district of the city. It was during this visit that the seeds of the *SGA* exhibition were sown. Demarco's account of his first personal contact with Beuys is of some importance:

When I eventually did get to know Beuys, in the winter of 1969-70, he was fully occupied with half-a-dozen friends, who filled the small studio which served as reception area and office....I wondered what I could offer that would make him concentrate his attention upon Scotland, the very periphery of the international and contemporary art world. I decided not to ask him to make a new and special art work at this time, but to concentrate instead upon the simple, obvious and unique nature of Scotland's physical beauty defining the sea-girt Western extremity of Europe.<sup>13</sup>

Demarco's description of his encounter with Beuys defines and characterises his subsequent approach to the artist and his work. Undoubtedly the description is dramatised and romanticised. The choice of subject matter which Demarco used to interest Beuys in Scotland tapped into that great seam of German Romanticism concerning all things "Celtic".<sup>14</sup> It is important to note Demarco's intuitive notion that postcards of Scotland which he showed Beuys — with their appealing Celtic and Romantic themes — would capture his attention. The acknowledgement of Scotland as a place on the "edge" of Europe also underlines a subsequent contention held by Beuys that nothing could be created at the centre, only the periphery. Demarco's subsequent habitual use of first-name terms with Beuys also signifies the nature of the

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<sup>13</sup> Demarco, R. 'The Artist as Explorer' in Reilly, J. N. (ed.) *Another Book to Burn: The State of Scotland*, p.178

<sup>14</sup> Scotland had been the inspiration for Mendelssohn's great work *Fingal's Cave* (1832) or the "Hebrides" overture. Fingal's Cave on the Hebridean island of Staffa was part of the same geological formation — with its distinctive basalt columns — as the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland which Beuys visited and where he was memorably photographed by Caroline Tisdall. The basalt columns subsequently inspired Beuys to use the same material as part of his *7,000 Oaks* (1982-1986) in Kassel, Germany.

The formation of Goethe's views also owed a great deal to his readings of Sir Walter Scott whose Romantic vision of Scotland's history and topography did a great deal to inform a widespread perception of Scotland as a wild and mysterious land. Goethe (a friend of Mendelssohn) was, in turn, a major influence on Rudolf Steiner, whose theories subsequently exerted a great influence on Beuys himself. The area is obviously a subject worthy of further serious study.

perceived relationship. The seeming portentousness and pre-destined nature of the meeting all add aura to the circumstances surrounding Beuys' visit.

Demarco had first encountered the work of Beuys at the 1968 *Documenta* in Kassel when Beuys presented his work *Raumplastik* (1968). Demarco described the experience as "...at one and the same time the most disturbing and the most beautiful memory I have of that historic exhibition."<sup>15</sup> He goes on to describe it thus: "At a distance of 25 yards an extraordinary man unexpectedly imposed his presence upon the room and everything in it by merely walking through the room, adjusting and examining the objects with precise and dignified movements....I know now that this was the moment of truth which I could not have denied because this was the way the Fates had arranged for me to meet Joseph Beuys."<sup>16</sup>

It is of note that in the above description, Demarco chooses to focus not on the art work, but on Beuys himself — a feature which characterises much commentary on Beuys. The language and tone of Demarco's descriptions of his early encounters with Beuys and his subsequent reports and analyses of Beuys' work are not characterised by the impartial distance of the art historian. They are, instead, the views and impressions of an involved supporter, promoter and, as Demarco saw it, participant in Beuys' work. For Demarco has stated that that he does not see himself in the role of impresario or traditional gallery owner, but rather as an active "collaborator" in Beuys' projects in Scotland<sup>17</sup>. The nature of this relationship, which Caroline Tisdall has defined as "a brotherly friendship full of warmth and mutual recognition of the essential role of the outsider"<sup>18</sup> is crucial to any understanding and analysis of reaction to Beuys' work. Much of the interpretation of

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<sup>15</sup>*Strategy: Get Arts* (Catalogue of Edinburgh International Festival Exhibition August 23 to September 12, 1970), p.1

<sup>16</sup> Demarco, Richard, 'Memories of Joseph Beuys', *Studio International*, February, 1986, p.54

<sup>17</sup> Demarco, Richard — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, December, 1998. See also 'The Artist as Explorer' Reilly, J. N. (ed.) *Another Book to Burn: The State of Scotland*, p.174

<sup>18</sup> Tisdall, Caroline — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, August 23, 1999

his activity was mediated through Demarco whose response influenced the way in which others approached the artist and his work.

Demarco did not merely arrange for Beuys to visit Scotland. He also to a great extent determined how Beuys responded to the country and therefore to the art he made there. As Tisdall notes, “Demarco offered more than the art-world to Beuys. He took him to the landscapes of the Celtic imagination, to nature and to mythologies which inspired Beuys.”<sup>19</sup> This applies not only to Beuys’ meetings with Jimmy Boyle<sup>20</sup> and the subsequent dialogue with Beuys, but also to the transformation and sale of the “Poorhouse Doors”, later given the title *New Beginnings are in the Offing*.<sup>21</sup> Most importantly, however, it applied to Beuys’ earliest, “site-specific” work in Scotland, *CKRSS*, a point which the critic and writer Cordelia Oliver makes when she comments that “Ricky [Demarco] had this great thing about the Holy Grail and Arthur and the Round Table. Rannoch Moor was the last great wilderness. He had a Romantic idea of Scotland.”<sup>22</sup> Demarco’s view, which he reinforced in Beuys, was certainly mystical, centred on myth, legend and a particular orientation towards

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<sup>19</sup> Tisdall, Caroline — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, August 23, 1999

<sup>20</sup> Jimmy Boyle (b. 1944) was serving a life sentence for murder and was transferred to the Special Unit of HM Prison, Barlinnie. The Special Unit was an experimental facility which allowed extensive freedoms for inmates and was based on a regime of mutual trust and co-operation between inmates and prison officers. At the Special Unit, Boyle began making sculpture and other artworks which expressed his experience of incarceration. See Boyle, J., *The Pain Of Confinement : Prison Diaries*, Edinburgh, 1984 and *The Hard Man* by Tom McGrath and Jimmy Boyle, Edinburgh, 1977. Demarco became involved with the Special Unit and Boyle in 1974. In 1980, the decision was taken to remove Boyle from H.M. Barlinnie Special Unit to H.M. Prison, Saughton, Edinburgh. Beuys and some followers went on hunger strike in protest at this decision and Beuys raised a court action against The Secretary of State for Scotland which he lost.

<sup>21</sup> The “Poorhouse Doors” originally formed the doorway to a former plumber’s workshop which Beuys and Demarco referred to as the ‘Poorhouse’ because of its siting on the former medieval “Bedlam” or asylum adjacent to Greyfriars Kirk in Forresthill. Beuys performed his ‘Three Pots for the Poorhouse’ action there in 1974. It was used by the Polish director Tadeusz Kantor as the venue of two of his productions, in 1973 and 1974. When Beuys returned to Scotland in 1982 the doors were still intact along with posters advertising his and Kantor’s performances. The doors were removed and with the help of Dawson Murray and George Wyllie, two Scottish artists, they were installed at Inverleith House in Edinburgh’s Royal Botanic Garden, then the location of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art. The doors were altered by the addition of a single red light bulb which was placed underneath one of them. The doors were renamed *New Beginnings are in the Offing*. This piece was subsequently purchased by Johannes Cladders for Städtisches Museum, Mönchengladbach, Germany.

<sup>22</sup> Oliver, Cordelia — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, May 1999

aspects of Scottish and “Celtic” history and culture, although the idea of “Celtic” is never adequately defined.

Demarco’s particular vision of Scotland, which it would appear Beuys was ready to accept, was rooted in his Italo-Scottish cultural background which was deeply Catholic, and also to his training as an artist. Demarco’s Catholicism is also something he shared with Beuys. Beuys came from the Catholic and Celtic enclave of Kleves in a Protestant and Teutonic country. These parallels may have reinforced the notion of the “outsider”, a factor which surely created an empathy between the two men. Beuys certainly identified Catholic Celtic culture as being antithetical to Protestant Anglo-Saxon, and its values appealed to his artistic instincts. The adoption of Celtic mythology also allowed Buys to sidestep involvement with Germanic mythology which still bore the taint of Nazi association.

Demarco cites figures such as the American art critic Jack Burnham as a significant influence on his own thinking, for Burnham has written in relation to art history: “...my interests are more aesthetic and intuitive than scholarly.”<sup>23</sup> In discussing Demarco’s reaction to Beuys it is therefore crucial to understand Demarco’s own sense of the aesthetic and spiritual. Burnham’s view places the linear version of history in opposition to the cyclical, the male to the female, and the scholarly to the intuitive. The cyclical, female and intuitive values Burnham ascribes to Celtic cultures as expressed in the various manifestations of art and in megalithic stone circles. It was precisely the kind of thinking which appealed to Demarco and strongly influenced his sense of cultural aesthetics. It is a view which also appealed to Beuys. In discussing this, Duncan Macmillan has written that “It was a timely reminder of the place of spirituality in art, the relationship of spirituality to place and of place to history.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Burnham, Jack, Letter to Richard Demarco, quoted in Reilly, J. N. (ed.) *Another Book to Burn: The State of Scotland*, p.178

<sup>24</sup> Macmillan, Duncan, *Scottish Art in the 20th Century*, p.106

Demarco wanted to take Beuys on a journey, not in the usual sense of a trip around Scotland which took in the major sites and attractions, although on the surface this is how it would appear to most observers. Instead, Demarco wished to initiate Beuys into the kind of mystery which, as he saw it, lay below the visible surface. This particular view of the journey was given a semi-formal, tangible existence from 1972, in the form of 'Edinburgh Arts', defined as a "7,500 mile journey into 'The Expanded Present', a search for Pre-Renaissance European peripheral cultures particularly that of the Celt."<sup>25</sup>

It was as a specific response to Beuys that Demarco's gallery evolved from that of a conventional organisation, selling and promoting artists' work, to a more extensive and experimental body, fulfilling what Demarco saw as broader educational roles and which sought to present a broader spectrum of artistic media in a more integrated and "holistic" manner. As Demarco notes: "...the experience of art does not necessarily happen in a neat and tidy fashion as a framed art object within the walls of a Bond Street-style art gallery....the Demarco Gallery learned to adapt itself, to accommodate the space needed by Joseph Beuys and all the other artists who made *SGA* a turning point in the development of 20th century art."<sup>26</sup> Despite the rather over-inflated claims regarding the significance of the exhibition it is nevertheless clear that Beuys' part in it forced a radical reappraisal in Demarco's thinking and the way in which he steered his organisation. Referring specifically to *CKRSS*, Demarco wrote: "It was a traumatic experience....It rid me of all the dead wood that I had been, until then, reluctant to cut away from the structure I had built in the name of the Demarco Gallery. A new Gallery had to be created to deal with an artist such as Joseph Beuys — the embodiment in this one art work of the composer, dancer, musician, sculptor, painter, teacher and priest."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Demarco, R. *Another Book to Burn: The State of Scotland*, p.178

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

Demarco's first prolonged encounter with Beuys was also important. Demarco chose to show Beuys a selection of postcards: "Their subject matter was a mixture of heather and heath; mountain stream and waterfall; forests and fields; deer, sheep and highland cattle; the midsummer sunset over islands; Celtic and Pictish standing stones. After a long silence, Beuys remarked: 'I see the land of Macbeth; so when shall we two meet again in thunder, lightning or in rain, when the hurly-burly's done, when the battle's fought and won.' On a thundery May day soon after this, Joseph arrived at Edinburgh airport..."<sup>28</sup>

These cards offered a very specific view of Scotland. This perspective, while consisting of a certain reality, was also that of the received notion of Scotland. It was in essence the "picture-postcard", tourist-oriented view, devoid of the trappings of modern life and urban-industrial reality. Beuys was undoubtedly aware that Scotland possessed those characteristics of late twentieth-century industrial society which paradoxically he was able to find in great profusion in Düsseldorf. However, by choosing to ignore at this stage these aspects of industrial Scotland,<sup>29</sup> his work dealt only with prescribed areas of its character, history and landscape.

As well as initiating *SGA*, Demarco was one of its main interpreters. His writings on the subject, both contemporaneous and subsequent, offer voluminous commentary on the significance of the event. For example, in 1970, shortly after the exhibition, Demarco, referring to *The Pack*, wrote: "Beuys was right — the Germans had finally come by night — by sledges. Certainly they had come before Edinburgh had expected them."<sup>30</sup> Referring to *SGA* generally he adds "...it was intended not to make

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<sup>28</sup> Demarco, R. 'Memories of Joseph Beuys' *Studio International*, Feb. 1986, p.54

<sup>29</sup>In 1974 Beuys participated in an event organised by Demarco entitled *The Black and White Oil Conference* which included a contribution from the leading environmental thinker, Buckminster Fuller. The purpose of the conference was to consider the environmental, social and economic impact of North Sea oil on Scotland.

<sup>30</sup> Demarco, R., *Strategy: Get Arts*, 1970

definite statements but to call into question the general direction being taken by the visual arts today”<sup>31</sup>.

Elsewhere Demarco offers an analysis and interpretation of *CKRSS*, which he describes as

...sculpture as well as music, painting, and art in progress. It was an art lesson *par excellence* and it recalled long forgotten Celtic rituals. Joseph Beuys was then regarded as an “Avant-gardist” but this work reassured me that he...is a traditionalist perfecting and understanding the countless generations of artists’ spirits who touch upon his own work. The work was a kind of requiem, hinting at the ritual of the Catholic Mass, praising the still effective and living reality of the artists Joseph Beuys needs and admires to extend his own art....The whole room reverberated with the sound of long-forgotten European cultures linked to the voices of these artists. It was a sounding board for the past, present and future of art activity<sup>32</sup>

It is notable in the literature relating to Beuys’ work in Scotland, that Demarco is the only commentator to link the ritual aspects of Beuys’ performance specifically to the Catholic Mass, although in alluding to earlier forms of Celtic religious ceremony he does not specify which kind and to what aspects of Beuys’ performance these relate. What this commentary does is reinforce the notion that Demarco saw in Buys a kindred spirit whose views of and approach to art reflected his own, although Beuys denied the religious aspect of his work and in particular a specifically Catholic interpretation.<sup>33</sup>

## 2.2 Douglas Hall

At the time of Beuys’ first visit to Scotland, Douglas Hall<sup>34</sup> was Keeper at the SNGMA and in this capacity dealt with Beuys and Demarco on a number of occasions<sup>35</sup>. His views form a contrast to those expressed by Demarco, and those

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<sup>31</sup> Demarco, R., ‘Strategy: Get Arts’, *Student*, November 3, 1970

<sup>32</sup> Demarco, R. *Another Book to Burn: The State of Scotland*, p.177

<sup>33</sup> See Mennekes, Friedhelm, *Beuys on Christ*

<sup>34</sup> Douglas Hall (b.1926) Keeper, SNGMA 1961 - 1986

<sup>35</sup> Beuys exhibited at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in 1974 and 1982 (See Appendix 1)

associated with him, in relation to Beuys. Hall attempts greater impartiality for he has stated that, concerning Beuys, he has been "...cast...in the role of sceptic, which I broadly accept."<sup>36</sup> Hall observes that Demarco acted as a medium through which views on Beuys were passed on: "He [Demarco] appropriated Beuys and it was impossible to approach him without seeming to accept Ricky [Demarco] as his spokesman or interpreter."<sup>37</sup> Hall describes this coterie in religious terms stating: "With Ricky [Demarco] as a prime example, he attracted to himself disciples, a church and a theology..."<sup>38</sup> Hall continues: "A further parallel between a religious priesthood and the way Beuys behaved besides the unprovability of his assertions, is that the meaning of his actions could not be understood without the Word, of Beuys himself or of his 'church'...the 'word' and hence perhaps a priesthood, remains essential for the understanding of avant-garde art."<sup>39</sup>

The Beuys-priest parallel is a useful one, because it illustrates Hall's contention that "initiates" are able to make sense of proceedings from which "non-initiates" are excluded. Tisdall however refutes this claim stating that "No knowledge is exclusive."<sup>40</sup> In the case of *CKRSS* for example, there could be no fixed "meaning," only generalised observations about content and purpose. The interpretation of the work was presumably greatly enhanced by Beuys' own pronouncements on the work, what Hall refers to as the "Word". It is also worth noting Hall's use of language, echoed by a number of commentators, including Edward Gage, when the latter states that "It is impossible to describe his [Beuys'] qualities without resorting to a vocabulary that sounds religious or scriptural."<sup>41</sup> This also illustrates the paradox of Demarco's desire to present Beuys to a general public, whom he felt perhaps had a limited capacity to understand the type of activity in which Beuys was engaged; as

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<sup>36</sup> Hall, Douglas — *Letter to Giles Sutherland*, March 31, 1999

<sup>37</sup> Hall, Douglas — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, April 8, 1999

<sup>38</sup> Hall, Douglas — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, April 8, 1999

<sup>39</sup> Hall, Douglas — *Letter to Giles Sutherland*, March 31, 1999

<sup>40</sup> Tisdall, Caroline — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, August 23, 1999

<sup>41</sup> Gage, Edward, 'Of making and believing — and make-believe' *The Scotsman*, September, 1974

Hall comments: “How much simpler it would be if we all honestly admitted that the general public is not a factor in determining the worth of either avant-garde or “traditional” art.”<sup>42</sup>

That Demarco saw comprehension of “meaning” as a problem is presumably why he therefore embarked (with many others) on numerous attempts to interpret Beuys’ work. From Hall’s comments, it is clear that Demarco felt privy to Beuys’ work and ideas in a way that other commentators were not.<sup>43</sup>

Hall’s stance as a reasoning sceptic was nevertheless offset by his obvious respect for and interest in Beuys:

Those of us who met Joseph face to face must have learned more than we knew before about how legends are born. When I first met him in 1970 I was already acutely aware of the mythic character of contemporary art, with its claim to sanctify all that it chose to touch. Joseph had already designed the vestments for his particular priesthood, and they were hardly to change until his death. All this, like the constant presence of acolytes, made me resistant. But when a few years later he climbed with a single friend the stairs to the small flat in Rose Street where I was then living, and doffed his fedora for the evening, I recognised the magnetism of a founder, and felt the honour-conferring power of his attention and his deep knowledge of human affairs. He was a polymath in the German tradition, for whom European history and culture was a book to be opened and read at will, much of which he had remembered. With his millenarianism went a saving ribaldry and cynicism.<sup>44</sup>

Hall’s clearly found aspects of Beuys’ public persona “very difficult to handle,”<sup>45</sup> a situation probably not helped by the circus-like entourage which was encouraged by Demarco, who had a talent for courting maximum publicity. It is significant — and probably quite an achievement — that Hall invited Beuys and a “single friend” (who was, in fact, Caroline Tisdall<sup>46</sup>) because Hall wished to have direct contact with

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<sup>42</sup> Douglas Hall — *Letter to Giles Sutherland*, March 31, 1999

<sup>43</sup> Demarco, Richard — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, December 16, 1998

<sup>44</sup> Statement by Douglas Hall, August 1 1986, in Tisdall, C. *Bits and Pieces*, 1986

<sup>45</sup> Hall, Douglas — *Letter to Giles Sutherland*, March 31, 1999

<sup>46</sup> Hall, Douglas — *Letter to Giles Sutherland*, March 31, 1999

Beuys, without interpreters such as Demarco. It is obvious Hall wished to disentangle the hype from the reality. The removal of the hat was symbolic, distinguishing Beuys the public figure from Beuys the man. Hall's deeply respectful description of Beuys as a "founder" and "polymath" confirm Hall's opinion of Beuys as someone whose reputation was entirely deserved. Additionally it could be argued that Hall's desire to have personal contact — in the privacy of his own home — with Beuys puts paid to Demarco's observation in reference to the "art establishment" that "...none of these people wanted Beuys... it was only me who wanted him."<sup>47</sup> However, it is possible that Demarco did not view Hall as being a member of the real "establishment", for Hall served for many years as Chairman of Friends of the Richard Demarco Gallery.

There is a wide gap between the various commentators in their perception — if not the reality — of the situation. The critic Cordelia Oliver and Demarco, on the one hand, felt that the "establishment" — in the form of NGS — was at best cautious of Beuys and at worst hostile, an attitude which manifested itself in the lack of willingness to purchase Beuys' work. Hall on the other hand felt that he was being as supportive as possible of Beuys and that his purchasing policy was a reflection of Beuys' international importance.<sup>48</sup> It is likely however that the truth lies somewhere between these two polarised views. Hall no doubt had to tread a careful line balancing the enthusiasm of Beuys' supporters on the one hand with the more cautious — both financial and aesthetic — approach of his "masters" in the NGS on the other. Although it is clear that the then Director of the National Galleries of Scotland, David Baxendal, felt a measure of sympathy for Demarco's activities in general and Beuys' in particular.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Demarco, Richard — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, December 16, 1998

<sup>48</sup> Hall, Douglas — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, April 8, 1999

<sup>49</sup> Oliver, Cordelia, — *Interview with Giles Sutherland* May 13, 1999

There can be little doubt that Hall ultimately held Beuys in high esteem and his views on *CKRSS* in particular offer an appraisal which is balanced by the art historian's training. Hall describes *The Pack* as "a tableau" — tracing an historical development from Duchamp through to the American sculptor Ed Keinholz — and sees *CKRSS* as an extension of this idea:

Here the symbolism was concentrated in Beuys' own figure and actions and was in fact much more obscure. The normal time-scale was broken down, for each session took many hours and Beuys would stand immobile for long periods.....In repose, he often struck the pose of a sentinel, leaning on a staff. The effect was a highly ritualistic taking possession, and imbuing of this space with his own personality and sense of time/place. Beuys also made a symbolic extension of this space to include the body of Scotland by showing a film....in which he offered fat and jelly to the elements on Rannoch Moor.....In moving from an object-based sculpture to a static tableau and from there to performance centred on himself, Beuys was tracing a development followed by other artists of the avant-garde in the 1960s.<sup>50</sup>

As well as displaying the need to contextualise properly the work, Hall's interpretation offers a useful contrast to Demarco's. Demarco wished to portray Beuys as a unique figure whereas it was clear, according to Hall, that in relation to Keinholz and Duchamp, for example, "Beuys knew all about both traditions."<sup>51</sup> This mitigation of uniqueness is surely the point at issue, for although there is an overlap of shared interpretation — for example in relation to the performance's ritualistic aspects — Demarco saw something entirely different and certainly more original than Hall did: a type of art work which had no progenitors. This is surely partly what Hall meant when he described Demarco as having the "Word," for access to special information from Beuys himself would surely have formed part of Demarco's interpretation.

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<sup>50</sup> Hall, Douglas, *Joseph Beuys in Edinburgh*, (catalogue note to exhibition) Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, May 1979, p.4

<sup>51</sup> Hall, Douglas, *Joseph Beuys in Edinburgh* p.3

### 3.0 Critics and Public

There is a wealth of critical response — both contemporaneous and subsequent — to Beuys' activities in Scotland. *SGA* received extensive coverage in the English press strategically placed in its annual coverage of events during the Edinburgh Festival. The Scottish press, and correspondents based in Scotland, also covered *SGA* in general and Beuys' activities in particular. In addition, a number of published critical responses appeared subsequent to *SGA*, among them Caroline Tisdall's *Joseph Beuys*<sup>52</sup>. In the catalogue for *SGA*, an essay by the critic, Georg Jappe, throws light on aspects of the exhibition from a German perspective.

#### 3.1 The public

Beuys' reception by critics in the press was, in general, highly favourable although elsewhere his reception, and that of the other artists in the *SGA*, was less than complimentary. Cordelia Oliver recalls that, for example, on a radio programme devoted to the arts, the reception was hostile: "There was a BBC discussion<sup>53</sup> chaired by Maurice Lindsay<sup>54</sup> about the "Strategy: Get Arts" exhibition. The person who talked about it was Nicholas Fairbairn<sup>55</sup> — a painter? He damned it right, left and centre and said it was a travesty of exhibitions. At the end Maurice Lindsay said: 'Thank you Nicholas Fairbairn, that needed saying'."<sup>56</sup>

Lindsay and Fairbairn were demonstrably representatives of that "establishment" which was so hostile to Beuys and the general tenor and content of *SGA*. Arguably, they were representative of general public opinion, or more accurately, of the middle-class opinion of "taste" and "common decency" which was, and still is, such a

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<sup>52</sup> The catalogue for Beuys' major retrospective exhibition at The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York in 1979

<sup>53</sup> BBC Radio Scotland — *Art Review*, August 1970. No written transcription or recording of the programme is extant

<sup>54</sup> Maurice Lindsay (b. 1918) Poet, writer and broadcaster

<sup>55</sup> Nicholas Fairbairn (1933-95) Conservative MP for Perth and Kinross.

<sup>56</sup> Oliver, Cordelia, — *Interview with Giles Sutherland* May 13, 1999

common characteristic of the Scottish and particularly, the Edinburgh “art world”. During *SGA* a letter appeared in the correspondence pages of *The Scotsman* which seemed to sum up and encapsulate these values. The writer, a B. J. Chambers-Crabtree, describes the exhibition as “sad,” “sick” and “decadent,” characterised by “permissiveness” and “nihilism” and concludes:

A strong psycho-pathological overtone is demonstrably present in almost all of the exhibits, two of which are outrageously obscene and demonstrably so. Many are no more than the crude creations that one would associate with moronic inhabitants of hospitals for the mentally disturbed. By all means let us have exhibitions of this nature in their proper place, as subjects for study by psychiatrists, but let us not mis-spend Arts Council funds, provided from the public purse, on such exhibitions at such a time.<sup>57</sup>

The writer does not specify which of the exhibits he or she believes are “outrageously obscene” but it must be presumed the general remarks also include Beuys, as the most controversial and “difficult” artist in the group. What is characteristic and instructive about this outburst of public indignation is that, in essence, it is no different from the type of remarks levelled at current practitioners of conceptual art. From this point of view it would appear that public taste has not evolved to any great extent, confirming Douglas Hall’s belief that the public are not really considered a factor in determining the worth of this kind of art.

The letter received a provocative response, highly supportive of *SGA*, which suggested that the exhibition was a general reflection of society of which artists were a constituent part: “I suspect strong pathological overtones, outrageous obscenity and gentle associations with our brothers, the moronic inhabitants of hospitals for the mentally disturbed. But is this not true of myself...J. Chambers-Crabtree and the rest of mankind.”<sup>58</sup> The letter was part of that well-rehearsed argument about many art

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<sup>57</sup> Letter from J. B. Chambers-Crabtree, *The Scotsman*, August 28, 1970

<sup>58</sup> Letter from Jon Schueler, *The Scotsman*, September 9, 1970. Schueler was not a disinterested member of the public, but an artist who had “invigilated” at *CKRSS* at Demarco’s behest.

forms: do they merely reflect society or contribute to it, and does art therefore have a moral dimension and artists a moral responsibility?

While this minor drama was being played out in the letters page of *The Scotsman*, some professional art critics, not surprisingly, held views divergent from those of Chambers-Crabtree, Fairbairn, Lindsay and many others. Edward Lucie-Smith described Beuys as a “great teacher” and asserted that he made most English artists look “provincial” and the New York avant-garde “tame”. He continued, “To put it mildly, Beuys is going to create problems in British art schools. He points in precisely the direction which currently most attracts their brightest pupils, and which most dismays the teachers and organisers who have to justify the money spent on art education to the suspicious paymasters of the State. Edinburgh has come up with a great subversive.”<sup>59</sup>

The move to Conceptualism by the British art colleges was already under way, and it may be the case that Beuys contributed to this shift of emphasis although the extent of his influence is not quantifiable. Douglas Hall disagrees, pointing out that the shift “...had much less to do with Beuys, than with Charles Saatchi, D’Offay and the Lisson Gallery among others — in other words with fashion.”<sup>60</sup> It is significant that the issue of justification of funding is again singled out by Lucie-Smith. For although he is hugely supportive of Beuys, he also foresees a problem which, with the advent of a Conservative government in 1979, became an accurate analysis of the situation.

### **3.2 The English Press**

SGA attracted the attention of other London-based publications such as *The Times*, *The Observer* and *Time Out*. The last publication felt that the exhibition stood out as “an example of what the public galleries in London [were] failing to do...[and]...made

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<sup>59</sup> Lucie-Smith, Edward, ‘A great subversive,’ *The Sunday Times*, August 30, 1970

<sup>60</sup> Hall, Douglas, — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, April 8, 1999

quiet mockery of the staid teaching that normally goes on in the college.”<sup>61</sup> The writer added: “I have never been to a more vital exhibition....To anybody unable to get out of Britain [it] was a revelation; it gave a glimpse of a vitality we are only used to accepting from the States; it also presented artists, particularly Joseph Beuys, as important as anybody in the US. This was a show the ICA should have put together several years ago.”<sup>62</sup>

The comparison with the situation in London — and its implicit tone of surprise that such an event should be happening in Edinburgh and not in London — and the observation that *SGA* was, amongst other things, a veiled challenge to the out-moded values of *ECA*, is both perceptive and indicative of the stance of the London critics. Certainly the idea that *SGA* was a threat to the established order was on the agenda of the participating artists. One of them, Claus Bohmler, thought that Edinburgh was “probably very conservative,”<sup>63</sup> while another, Klaus Rinke, believed that the city was “probably paralysing when you have to live there. Very conservative.”<sup>64</sup> This point was reinforced by Georg Jappe who discussed Beuys’ 1961 appointment at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie (Beuys was dismissed in 1971 for occupying the building in protest at the authorities’ decision not to allow unrestricted student access to his classes). Jappe explains that “...the first thing he [Beuys] did was to arouse the wrath of even high government officials....and shook the ancient and venerable Academy by his acceptance of all who were willing to learn.”<sup>65</sup> This is of course not without relevance to the situation at *ECA*, and so although Beuys’ work was not *per se* a “site specific” challenge to the College, Beuys by his presence and reputation was equally if not more confrontational to the Edinburgh authorities. As Douglas Hall puts it, “Edinburgh College of Art was made to look silly.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> ‘Exhibitions,’ *Time Out*, September 19 - October 3, 1970 (the article is unattributed)

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Strategy: Get Arts* (Catalogue of Edinburgh International Festival Exhibition August 23 to September 12, 1970), p.4

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *op. cit.* p.6

<sup>66</sup> Hall, Douglas, — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, April 8, 1999

This implicit pressure for change to the established order extended well beyond accepted pedagogical and academic practice, a point emphasised by Nigel Gosling, who felt that the reverberations of *SGA* had “aggravate[d] nagging doubts about the whole gallery set-up.”<sup>67</sup> As well as discussing the cross-over of different media exemplified in particular by Beuys’ contributions, Gosling foresaw the increasing popularity of performance as an artistic medium, which again, did become increasingly prevalent, partly due to Beuys’ influence.

Guy Brett, *The Times* correspondent, concentrated — as did other critics — on Beuys’ contribution. He broadly outlines the formal qualities of *CKRSS* which he intermingles with his own feelings and response to the work: “....you are liable to find yourself gripped by an indefinable, intent atmosphere.....things seem to impress themselves upon you by different media blending to form a strange, long drawn-out opaqueness and density. Each film sequence, real action or sequence of sound lasts a long, long time.”<sup>68</sup>

It was precisely this last quality which Douglas Hall, by contrast, found off-putting in Beuys’ work, pointing out that “...the loss of any idea of measure, especially the measure of time.....has long been an extremely difficult aspect...”<sup>69</sup> Brett, like other commentators, was at a loss to find specific “meaning” in *CKRSS* and wrote only in the most generalised terms about the work: “....he works in an area of dumbness, of colourlessness and finds a lot of energy there.”<sup>70</sup> But in a way this was surely the point Beuys wanted to make, and which Demarco had also realised, that there was no “meaning”, only association. Caroline Tisdall explains Beuys’ approach in relation to the material he used in *CKRSS*, which included gelatine and margarine: “....they

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<sup>67</sup> Gosling, Nigel, ‘Performing Creations,’ *Observer Review*, September 6, 1970

<sup>68</sup> Brett, Guy, ‘Up in Beuys’ room,’ *The Times*, September 3, 1970

<sup>69</sup> Hall, Douglas, — *Letter to Giles Sutherland*, March 31, 1999

<sup>70</sup> Brett, Guy, ‘Up in Beuys’ room,’ *The Times*, September 3, 1970

are not presented as narrative elements, nor as demonstrations of material, but as elements of a theory to do with the potential and meaning of sculpture...”<sup>71</sup>

### 3.2 The Scottish Press

The Scottish press, in particular *The Scotsman*, devoted considerable space in its reviews and in its letters pages to SGA and to Beuys’ contribution to it. The activities at ECA occupied the attention of three separate writers, including Michael Pye, who was persuaded by Demarco to accompany him, Beuys and a number of others to Rannoch Moor, where Beuys made the film that was later incorporated into *CKRSS*.<sup>72</sup> Pye’s resulting article is long, generally perceptive and highly sympathetic. He observes the installation of *The Pack* and, like Douglas Hall, comments on Beuys’ “mythical” quality: “Beuys has become a legend, one of those indefinable influences on the art world... [who]...refuses to talk about himself in ordinary terms.”<sup>73</sup> Pye discusses Beuys’ legendary plane crash in the Crimea where he was rescued by Tartar nomads and brought back from the brink of death by the use of felt, fat and light. These elemental qualities recur in Beuys’ oeuvre and formed part of *The Pack*, with its sledges, torches, rolls of felt and lumps of fat. Interestingly, Pye did not question the veracity of this story which, ten years later, caused one critic, Rosalind Krauss, to remark, cynically but tellingly: “I love the plane crash!”<sup>74</sup> It was an essential part of Beuys’ myth-making which permeated the general lore concerning his work. Pye noted that, given this information in relation to *The Pack* in particular and Beuys’ work in general, “...the idea suddenly becomes real.”<sup>75</sup> The ability to lend meaning and force to objects and situations, what Douglas Hall describes as his ability to

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<sup>71</sup> Tisdall, Caroline, *Joseph Beuys*, p.17

<sup>72</sup> These included Ewa Beuys and her children Jessyka and Wenzel, and the film-makers Rory McEwan and Mark Littlewood

<sup>73</sup> Pye, Michael, ‘Joseph Beuys,’ *The Scotsman*, August, 1970

<sup>74</sup> Krauss, Rosalind, ‘Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim’ *October*, No. 12, Spring 1980, p.8 — quoted in Alain Borer, *The Essential Joseph Beuys*, p.12

<sup>75</sup> Pye, Michael, ‘Joseph Beuys,’ *The Scotsman*, August, 1970

“...endow what he touched in varying degrees of strength, with a sacramental quality,”<sup>76</sup> was an essential and remarkable aspect of Beuys’ force as an artist.

Initially admitting to feeling sceptical and “intensely foolish,”<sup>77</sup> Pye appears to be gradually won over by the Beuysian magic when he writes: “We come to Rannoch Moor. It is there that Beuys’ ideas, at which he laughs himself, begin to turn serious.”<sup>78</sup> After describing Beuys placing quantities of fat and margarine on the moor, Pye describes the making of a forty-minute tracking shot with its close-up attention to detail, and its tight concentration on the flora, colour and texture of the moor. Pye felt Beuys regarded Rannoch as “ a place where life could, now, be beginning, not as something desolate and dead.”<sup>79</sup> Demarco himself picked up on Beuys’ interest in detail, describing the film of Rannoch Moor as “...a drawing using film as a medium.”<sup>80</sup> Elaborating on a theme noted by other writers, Pye, who was not a professional art critic but a general features writer, comments: “Quite irrationally, his [Beuys’] presence creates significance in things. It is no accident that he will be, most days, with his exhibits in the Art College; without him they are nothing. They are risible.”<sup>81</sup>

Although Beuys’ work was in fact lent an added aspect by his presence, and a proportion of his work was centred around and integral to himself, it would be wrong to categorise all of his work thus. Indeed, if Pye’s observation is applied to Beuys’ work subsequent to the artist’s death, it is patently wrong, for all material objects made by Beuys would be rendered meaningless. Where Pye’s statement is more accurate is in relation to Beuys’ transient work, like his actions and performances.

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<sup>76</sup> Hall, Douglas, — *Letter to Giles Sutherland*, April 8, 1999

<sup>77</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>78</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>79</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>80</sup> Demarco, Richard, *Synopsis of proposed book on Joseph Beuys*, 1987

<sup>81</sup> *op. cit.*

If Pye's comments are generally supportive and encouraging, those of another *Scotsman* writer were almost entirely condemnatory. Noting the public commotion created by SGA, Alison Lambie went on to observe that "...the decadence, the crudity, the poverty of ideas, the ugliness of some of the exhibits no doubt mirror (*sic*) the age we live in..."<sup>82</sup> The writer points out that a "disturbing" feature of the exhibition was the "...uncomfortable feeling that we, the spectators, were as much part of the show as the exhibits themselves."<sup>83</sup> She concludes: "...there is a slackness here, surely, a reluctance to make any effort to please or impress that links up, perhaps, with the movement taking place in many modern art-forms — a shifting away from any established discipline, a flight from assuming authority.....if every artist is a law unto himself, and if the resulting work is, in itself, neither beautiful, meaningful nor amusing, might not the audience vanish altogether?"<sup>84</sup>

The writer's notion that art should necessarily be connected to "discipline" (the discipline of craft, perhaps?) and a respect for authority, seem out-moded sentiments even for 1970. The anti-authoritarian stance was exactly the point, as was the idea of Anti-Art. To criticise something because of its stated intentions is acceptable, but it seems as if the writer had missed the very purpose of SGA, which was to challenge those very qualities which she had enumerated as being necessary to good art. The further preoccupation with aesthetic worth as the main determining factor in the success of a work of art is additionally an argument partially founded, surely, in the Scottish tradition of *belle peinture* as practised at ECA.

### 3.3 Edward Gage

Edward Gage<sup>85</sup> had been principal art critic for *The Scotsman* since 1966 and contributed numerous articles over the years concerning the activities of the RDG.

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<sup>82</sup> Lambie, Alison, 'Art for whose sake?', *The Scotsman*, September 14, 1970

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Edward Gage (b. 1925) Author of *The Eye in the Wind - Contemporary Scottish Painting Since 1945*

Gage was generally supportive and encouraging if at times a little cautious: in the three-week period of *SGA* he contributed three lengthy articles — a feature, a profile of Demarco and a general appraisal of the exhibition. In the first he states that “...only a blinkered reactionary would attempt to find success or failure in its total impact. Such terms are impossibly irrelevant to such an event and it is perhaps astonishing that it has happened at all.”<sup>86</sup> The article attempted, with a measure of success, to define the premise of *SGA* as encapsulating “...two current art philosophies....the concept of art as play....and the cult of the idea...”<sup>87</sup> In short, in relation to the latter notion, conceptual art.

As did other critics, Gage focuses on Beuys whom he describes as a “...remarkably vibrant and poetic personality...whose very presence seems to spark off creative thought.”<sup>88</sup> Acknowledging Beuys’ “Dada and surreal inheritance,” Gage also points to the “abrasive” elements in the show which he found “introvertive” and “disturbing” adding, “...even Beuys...is constantly haunted by the basic necessities for survival...”<sup>89</sup> Gage further observes that “...it is hardly surprising to find some protest in the form of Dada and surreal and elements....for the ridiculous tensions, pressures and social behaviour that appalled artists in the teens and twenties of this century are with us more dramatically today and racial characteristics change little over the years.”<sup>90</sup>

Gage saw, in the majority of the *SGA* artists, hints of and precedents in other art movements, most of which had originated in Germany. The idea that this was a “racial characteristic” is a moot point. The art movements Gage cites were responses to an entirely different set of social, economic and political circumstances which existed in Germany and elsewhere, rather than any overarching and defining aspect of

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<sup>86</sup> Gage, Edward, ‘Germany floods college with massive happening,’ *The Scotsman*, August 24, 1970

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*

race. Caroline Tisdall has warned of this as a current tendency in relation to Beuys “...the recent *Multiples* and *Secret Block* shows have made it clear that Beuys is being ‘Germanised’...”<sup>91</sup> The dissident nature of *SGA* was a feature which Douglas Hall was also well aware of, describing the artists as “agitators, subversives, technocrats, satirists, neo-surrealists”<sup>92</sup>. Like Gage, Hall singles out Beuys as being in a category of his own: “None of these words is appropriate to Beuys.”<sup>93</sup> Interestingly, Gage believed that many of the exhibits — he does not single out Beuys for special mention — would have benefited from a “more spotless and clinical gallery atmosphere.”<sup>94</sup> This was precisely the opposite opinion to that held by Demarco who, perhaps referring to Gage, explains why Beuys preferred to perform and exhibit in such a working environment: “Why did he like the life room? Because it was redolent of human energy. Some bloody idiot said, shall we clear the paint bespattered floor, tidy it up like some stupid architect, right. Paint it white, clean it. No, leave it, that’s the sign that people have been working here, making art.”<sup>95</sup>

On the same day as Gage’s feature article was published, a profile of Demarco appeared by the same author arguing for a greater priority to be given to the visual arts within the context of the Edinburgh Festival<sup>96</sup>. In it Gage describes Demarco as a “dynamic little man with boundless energy and enthusiasm although it may seem too prodigally expended at times...”<sup>97</sup> In terms of the Scottish media, however this was a remarkable coup for Demarco even by his own standards, and one of his finest hours in terms of publicity and attention. In fact, the level of publicity and attention has led commentators like Duncan Macmillan to describe *SGA* as “...the high point

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<sup>91</sup> Tisdall, Caroline — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, August 23, 1999

<sup>92</sup> Hall, Douglas — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, April 8 1999

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>95</sup> Demarco, Richard — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, December 16, 1998

<sup>96</sup> The argument continues to be rehearsed. See Macmillan, Duncan, *Caledonia*, Issue 2,

<sup>97</sup> Gage, Edward, ‘Demarco: Art as an adventure’ *The Scotsman*, August 24, 1970

of his [Demarco's] career."<sup>98</sup> Gage's second article is, in effect, background to SGA and Demarco's thinking is clearly and uncritically delineated, his main aim being "...to make Edinburgh a Mecca for the visual arts, and to confront Scotland with the latest happenings elsewhere....They [the Edinburgh Festival organisers] have created a situation where Scotland has seen a great deal of modern art but comparatively little contemporary work."<sup>99</sup>

In his final essay on SGA Gage looks back over the EIF visual arts events declaring, that there were "...a certain amount of debris to be cleared up."<sup>100</sup> Part of this was inevitably the furore the show had caused and it is instructive that this was the same edition in which Lambie's damning article had appeared, illustrating, perhaps, *The Scotsman's* enlightened editorial approach which held that two more or less opposing views by its columnists might be a productive exercise. Gage believed that SGA's "...principal effect was to make us think again about the nature and function of art in society."<sup>101</sup> Claiming to speak for "quite a few Scottish artists," he notes that "...with one spectacular exception many of the individual performances in the exhibition must have left quite a few ...[of them]... uncertain and unimpressed."<sup>102</sup> The exception is, presumably, Beuys. Retreating slightly in relation to his Demarco profile and defending the supposed cosmopolitanism of the Scottish art scene, Gage continued: "Despite current talk, this is not the first time Scotland has seen contemporary foreign work."<sup>103</sup> Gage was, however, unreservedly approving of Beuys, stating "...what was indisputably novel and extraordinary was the presence of Joseph Beuys. Without him, the whole point and purpose of the exhibition would never have been crystallised..."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Macmillan, Duncan, *Scottish Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, p.104

<sup>99</sup> Gage, Edward, 'Demarco: Art as an adventure' *The Scotsman*, August 24, 1970

<sup>100</sup> Gage, Edward, 'Of making and believing — and make believe,' September 14, 1970

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*

While there are astute observations regarding Beuys — e.g. “He carries in himself a highly original, personal and intimate kind of theatre...”<sup>105</sup> — Gage’s approach seems unable to deal with some of the major issues concerning Beuys; his writing and hence a clear sense of what he is attempting to state, becomes lost and confused. He says for example that Beuys “...tries to inspire us all to think with the imagination and creativity of the poet or artist...”<sup>106</sup> and counters this notion with the following: “Is it, however, enough to look and think with the eyes and mind of a poet? Must not these thoughts be communicated to others?”<sup>107</sup> Beuys did not *necessarily* wish to make others see with the mind of a poet or artist. He did, however, want to alter perceptions and to make others look at the world afresh — as Douglas Hall notes, “Beuys’ objects and drawings have always kept their distance from the viewer and have to a powerful degree the strangeness and otherness by which art tries to enlarge experience and not just reflect it.”<sup>108</sup> Gage had surely misunderstood Beuys’ most repeated dictum, “Everyone an artist”. For as Caroline Tisdall has pointed out, the phrase meant, “A widened concept of art in which the whole *process of living* itself is the creative act....it means farewell to narrow definitions and to the restriction of art to the products of a specialised group of professionals. More importantly, it implies an intensified feeling for life....”<sup>109</sup>

Gage makes a distinction between “lesser mortals” on the one hand, and Beuys on the other, whom he sees as a possessor of specialised skills. He goes on to state that this creates a problem of comprehension between the artist and the audience: “Depth of thought if it is to be shared requires mastery of language on the part of the thinker.”<sup>110</sup> Given that the “thinker” is part of the audience, Gage contradicts himself by claiming that “...scales do fall from the eyes of his audience and his language

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<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Hall, Douglas, *Joseph Beuys in Edinburgh*, (catalogue note to exhibition) Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, May 1979, p.2

<sup>109</sup> Tisdall, Caroline, *Joseph Beuys*, p.7

<sup>110</sup> *op. cit.*

looks readily available to all hands...”<sup>111</sup> He believes that the important issue is what Beuys’ work will do for the audience: “This is surely a matter of therapy, of absorbing play and involvement, of making and believing, and of make-believe. The question is — if art as a diversion is a marvellous therapy, can it produce more than trivia and can it still be called art? Or doesn’t it matter?”<sup>112</sup>

The claim that Beuys’ work is merely a question of therapy with questionable artistic worth appears to contradict strongly Gage’s sentiments expressed earlier in the article and elsewhere. Was Gage — after stoutly defending Beuys, Demarco and the whole ethos of *SGA* — now “back-peddalling,” and perhaps covering himself from the inevitable criticisms which would befall any supporter of these events?

### 3.4 Cordelia Oliver

Cordelia Oliver<sup>113</sup> has been a staunch — but not uncritical — supporter of Richard Demarco and his activities for many years [Plate 6.0]. In 1970, she and her husband, the photographer George Oliver<sup>114</sup>, were heavily involved in events surrounding *SGA*. George Oliver photographed the installation of *SGA* and his record is now an important archival and historical document. His photograph of Demarco and Beuys [Fig. ?] which appeared alongside Cordelia Oliver’s article in *The Guardian* with the headline “Napoleon in a Scottish pond” exemplified what was a remarkable working partnership. The photograph has subsequently been reproduced many times, and forms part of the Demarco-Beuys iconography by which so much of the former’s career has been bolstered [Plate 4.0].

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<sup>111</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>112</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>113</sup> Cordelia Oliver was arts correspondent for *The Guardian* in Scotland between 1961 and 1990. Oliver also written numerous catalogue essays, articles and other publications about the Richard Demarco Gallery.

<sup>114</sup> George Oliver (1920 - 1990)

In contrast to Gage, Cordelia Oliver's work forms a less cautious, more articulate and intellectually rigorous critique of the arts in Scotland. Oliver believes that an "establishment" was and to some extent still is in charge of the arts in Scotland, which was largely hostile to Demarco and his undertakings: ".....Edinburgh has an 'establishment' ....It's the Church, the law, the arts and the University and they are 'in charge'. It is maybe getting better but it is still very strong. Ricky [Demarco] was never in favour, he really wasn't. I can remember him being really castigated like mad behind his back."<sup>115</sup>

Additionally, Oliver believes that part of the reason for Demarco's non-acceptance by this 'establishment', was snobbery: "He's 'ice-cream' Italian ... 'Wrong side of the tracks'. No question! He knows that — but he kow-tows to people who don't take him seriously.....He'll never 'make it'. ....Edinburgh still looks on him as that 'wee nuisance.'"<sup>116</sup> Demarco's Mediterranean ebullience and devout Catholicism (the "establishment" in Scotland has always been broadly Protestant) may also be reasons for his rejection. As has been noted, this latter characteristic is also one of the common links Demarco felt he shared with Beuys.<sup>117</sup> It may well have been this link, as well his avant-gardism, his outlandishness, his unusual attire (fedora, game-keeper's jacket and Levi jeans) which the "establishment" found equally unpalatable about Beuys, an attitude which Oliver found was typified by the behaviour of the Head of Painting at ECA, Sir Robin Philipson: "Ricky [Demarco] was running after Robin Philipson who was preparing for an exhibition of his own in his studio.... 'Come and meet Joseph!'. Robin wouldn't meet him. He didn't meet him before the opening although he must have met him when the exhibition was on officially but he certainly wouldn't come and talk to him. Ricky was desperately trying to bring them together."<sup>118</sup> Another critic, Caroline Tisdall,<sup>119</sup> believes that an art "establishment"

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<sup>115</sup> Oliver, Cordelia — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, May 13, 1999

<sup>116</sup> Oliver, Cordelia — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, May 13, 1999

<sup>117</sup> Demarco, Richard— *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, December 16, 1998

<sup>118</sup> Oliver, Cordelia — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, May 13, 1999

existed in Edinburgh “as everywhere”<sup>120</sup> and found its reaction to Beuys predictable and “normal,”<sup>121</sup> but feels strongly that the “lack of recognition/support for Demarco [was] unforgivable.”<sup>122</sup>

This view was not the impression given by Gage when he wrote about *SGA*: “It is pleasing to find that the Festival Society has given its blessing to this experimental show...”<sup>123</sup> The Festival Society, as the official body of EIF, may have in fact been more interested in keeping up appearances and being seen to be politic, than in lending any real support to the venture. The majority of the enterprise was funded by the German authorities, not those in Edinburgh, a point Demarco makes: “I must also thank my...friends....Without their generous financial support, the Scottish contribution to the cost of mounting the exhibition would have been sadly inadequate.”<sup>124</sup> Certainly Cordelia Oliver believes that the Festival authorities felt obliged to take note of the *SGA* because of highly official status accorded the event by the West German authorities: “...the German Ambassador<sup>125</sup> came to open it — so that Edinburgh couldn’t ignore it. Ricky got the German Ambassador! **[Plate 5.0]** All the Festival grandees came down from St. Giles’ [Cathedral] in their glad-rags....”<sup>126</sup> Elsewhere Oliver has commented on the hostile reception given to Beuys

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<sup>119</sup> Caroline Tisdall, as the London-based art critic of *The Guardian*, met Beuys in 1970 but it was, as she records “...only through Edinburgh and Ricki’s [Demarco] determination to effect encounters between people that I got to know him well.” Although she was not present at *SGA*, the fruitful friendship culminated in Tisdall’s authorship of the seminal *Joseph Beuys*, the catalogue for Beuys’ major retrospective at the Guggenheim Foundation in New York in 1979. It is one of the curiosities of this book that her description and investigation of Beuys’ contribution to *SGA* consists almost entirely of a verbatim quotation of Alastair Macintosh’s article which had appeared in the journal *Art and Artists* in November 1970. Tisdall explains that the reason to use it, rather than attempting her own description and analysis, was because it was “to hand.” [All quotations, Tisdall, Caroline — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, August 23, 1999]

<sup>120</sup> Tisdall, Caroline — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, August 23, 1999

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Gage, Edward, ‘Germany floods college with massive happening,’ *The Scotsman*, August 24, 1970

<sup>124</sup> Demarco, Richard, *Strategy: Get Arts* (Catalogue of Edinburgh International Festival Exhibition August, 23 to September 12, 1970), p.1

<sup>125</sup> His Excellency, the West German Ambassador, Herr Karl Gunter Von Hase

<sup>126</sup> Oliver, Cordelia — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, May 13, 1999

and SGA: “...the art establishment....found itself in a state of shock. The College of Art authorities [were] deeply disapproving...made life difficult....”<sup>127</sup>

There is no doubt in Oliver’s mind that the Düsseldorf artists were reacting against the ‘establishment’ as they saw it: “They were doing site specific work....they thought Edinburgh College of Art was the most pompous place with a pretending-to-be-classical building and they were reacting to it. ...[but]...Beuys wasn’t doing that I think.”<sup>128</sup> So while most of the artists were, in the words of Douglas Hall, acting as “agitators” and “subversives,” Oliver, like Hall, does not place Beuys in the same category.

Oliver recalls that when *The Pack* was unloaded in readiness for installation in college, its siting within the building was forbidden by the ECA Secretary on the grounds that it was not “art”; a similar reaction was given by the janitors. This accounted for the unusual placing of the work, which was originally to have been shown in the main sculpture court of ECA; instead it was placed in what in effect was a corridor allowing access to the Sculpture Department. Beuys seemed perfectly content with this space, which in no way appeared to lessen the impact of the work. As Oliver observes, there was a degree of difficulty in siting the work: “...before we realised what was happening, he [Beuys] had seized a wide floor brush and was ‘mucking out’ the space. But the VW sat sulking, insisting that not enough space existed for manoeuvring....Beuys solved the problem with no display of temperament: with the students (now his acolytes to a man) he began to ‘bounce’ the recalcitrant VW, which promptly gave in and slowly ‘danced’ its way round the sharp-angled bend and in through the narrow doorway....”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Oliver, Cordelia, ‘Strategy: Get Arts’ *Edinburgh International Festival*, [undated] (Unpublished memoir of SGA)

<sup>128</sup> Oliver, Cordelia — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, May 13, 1999

<sup>129</sup> Oliver, Cordelia, ‘Strategy: Get Arts’ *Edinburgh International Festival*, 197? (Unpublished memoir of SGA)

This accords with an observation Demarco makes in relation to Beuys: “He loved a space that was wounded, so that he could help us see that it had the possibility of life, a place that was not loved, a place that he didn’t want to be in.”<sup>130</sup> It seems then that even before the official opening of the *SGA*, *ECA* had done its utmost to reject Beuys, even to the extent of denying his work as “art” and according it space within its walls.

Oliver also recollects the impact on her of *CKRSS*: “You couldn’t be but impressed by the man. He was an actor....you couldn’t keep your eyes off him. He was really electric. He was expressing creativity in a way and the kind of dangers in being creative and the ways it made you feel put upon....It was certainly mesmerising...I can’t remember a great deal about it except that I will never forget it. Great theatre certainly was there...He knew how to hold his audience.”<sup>131</sup>

Beuys’ magnetic presence — as well as disconnected fragments of the overall performance — therefore remained in Oliver’s mind. However, she was honest enough to admit, “....you really didn’t know what it was about”<sup>132</sup> — which is how, in truth, most commentators reacted to the work. Importantly, there was an underlying sense to Oliver of its startling novelty and its deep significance, although on a sub-conscious, archetypal level, rather than a coherent intellectual one.

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<sup>130</sup> Demarco, Richard — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, December 16, 1998

<sup>131</sup> Oliver, Cordelia — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, May 13, 1999

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*

## 4.0 Artists

Discussing *SGA*, Douglas Hall believed that, “Beuys seemed to project the spirit of the show, which had a catalytic effect on the art scene in Edinburgh.”<sup>133</sup> Although Hall does not define what he means by the term “art scene,” it can be taken to include not just the official bodies like the RSA, NGS etc., but also ECA itself, as well as individual artists. The term “catalytic” is certainly instructive, if slightly inaccurate, for a catalyst creates reactions, some foreseen and others unpredicted, while remaining unaffected itself. Beuys’ experience of Scotland changed his work, as many commentators have observed — and *CKRSS* was in itself, first and foremost, a reaction to Scotland.

Demarco’s influence in the Scottish art world has been pervasive — almost every Scottish artist of any note from that generation born in the ‘20s, ‘30s and ‘40s has had some dealings with him, either in the form of an exhibition or in some other way. Because of this, inevitably, many artists from Scotland and beyond came into contact with Beuys at *SGA*. Some were students and some were already established in their careers; others, again, were in a transitional phase from studying to teaching. Subsequently, Demarco organised a number of exhibitions — notably in 1986 (the year of Beuys’ death) and 1994 — in which he asked various artists to pay tribute to Beuys both in writing and by some visual means.

### 4.1 George Wyllie

All of the invited artists in these forums acknowledge some kind of debt to Beuys, usually as an inspiration as a creative thinker and his credo that life could not be separated from art. Although George Wyllie<sup>134</sup> did not meet Beuys at *SGA*, he did observe his work in the form of *The Pack*, and he subsequently became involved in

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<sup>133</sup> Hall, Douglas, *Joseph Beuys in Edinburgh*, (catalogue note to exhibition) SNGMA, May 1979

<sup>134</sup> George Wyllie (b. 1921) Sculptor

the project to install the “Poorhouse Doors” at the SNGMA<sup>135</sup> in 1982 and later visited Beuys in his home in Düsseldorf. Wyllie is one of a number of Scottish artists who, according to Duncan Macmillan, felt the “indelible” influence of Beuys.<sup>136</sup> Discussing Beuys, Wyllie notes that “...we were both interested in monetary reform — for the institutions which control money control the energies of us all. Beuys understood how this perverts all energy, human and planetary. It often seems to me that this message behind his great art is obscure to those who do not examine it beyond its visual level...”<sup>137</sup> Wyllie was right to point out that Beuys’ work is misinterpreted if only considered at the visual, aesthetic or analytical level, a point which Caroline Tisdall endorses when she writes that “...Beuys’ early sculptures built up a vocabulary of form as a vehicle for meaning. Right from the beginning this, rather than aesthetic effect, was the motivation...”<sup>138</sup>

In 1986, as a tribute to Beuys, Wyllie built a wooden spire [**Plate 7.0**] which was erected on Rannoch Moor.<sup>139</sup> He has stated: “The ‘Spire’ is a slender importance. In time it will decay. Rannoch Moor is the strength. Enter it like Joseph Beuys, and plod across its bogs and tufts and rocks and pools and mounds. Get the wild and good feel of it under your feet — respond to it like a real human — for You, like Beuys, and like Rannoch, are part of this Planet....Baptise yourself.”<sup>140</sup> The transience of the art object is a direct reference to Beuys’ original act of placing energy (margarine) within the moor, “to give it a little warmth.” The invocation of baptism recalls Beuys’ performance *Celtic+^^^* (1971) a — modification of *CKRSS* — in which he performed a mock baptism. Wyllie’s statement also recalls the climax

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<sup>135</sup> See Appendix 1 — Joseph Beuys in Scotland

<sup>136</sup> Macmillan, Duncan, *Scottish Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, p.147

<sup>137</sup> Wyllie, George, Statement in Tisdall, Caroline *Bits and Pieces*, p.53

<sup>138</sup> Tisdall, Caroline, *Joseph Beuys*, p.18

<sup>139</sup> Robert McDowell writes: “As an act of remembrance, on 27th September 1986, Demarco led a group of about thirty people to Rannoch Moor to pay tribute to Beuys’ love of Scotland. George Wyllie, who knew Beuys well on his visits to Scotland.....erected a wooden spire close to the site of the Rannoch Moor Action in 1970. A stone bearing Beuys’ name and dates of his birth and death was suspended from the centre of the spire.” *Beuys/Demarco: The Secret Scottish Block - 1 : Beuys in Edinburgh (1970-1986)* p.6

<sup>140</sup> Wyllie, George, *Joseph Beuys: A Tribute on Rannoch Moor - 27th September 1986*

of *CKRSS* — an immersion ritual in which Beuys emptied a tray of gelatinous material over himself.

And it is instructive that Wyllie found common ground with Beuys in the area of monetary and economic reform; Wyllie had worked for many years as an inspector for H.M. Customs and Excise and therefore had much experience of how money “perverts” different kinds of energies. Wyllie’s interest in the economic aspects of Beuys’ work was well-founded, for one of Beuys’ best known axioms, “*Kunst=Kapital*,” was in fact a formulaic synthesis of a more complex theory. At its root was his conviction that the real worth of society’s collective output was not economic, but creative. This term Beuys extended to all areas of human activity, so that economic output was as “creative” an act as making a piece of “art”: “Beuys subordinated everything to the ‘expanded concept of art’ — [including] economics...”<sup>141</sup> Wyllie, in common with a number of other artists, was therefore engaging with Beuys’ work, not on an aesthetic level, but on a philosophical one. The placing of the ‘spire’ acted as a focus for these concerns and was deliberately sited in the place where Beuys had felt a direct spiritual and philosophical connection with the Scottish landscape.

#### **4.2 Demarco European Art Foundation — Beuys Exhibition, 1994**

In the 1994 exhibition at DEAF, a number of artists who had been present at *SGA* and who subsequently went on to teach at *ECA*, presented their responses to Beuys. William Brotherston,<sup>142</sup> for example, exhibited *Hat — (For Joseph Beuys)* (1986) which he described as “...an archetypal hat, based on a hat of my father’s (he died 1985).”<sup>143</sup> Brotherston adds: “I... was present at some of the riveting performances Beuys gave in Edinburgh in the early ‘seventies....since then I have been conscious of

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<sup>141</sup> Stachelhaus, Heiner, *The Dictionary of Art*, p.893

<sup>142</sup> William Brotherston (b. 1943) Lecturer, Dept of Sculpture, *ECA*

<sup>143</sup> Brotherston, William, *Statement by artist accompanying exhibition, July 1994*. Source: DEAF Archive

Beuys as a great figure in contemporary art and have admired the sense of natural connection between art and life in his work, although his influence on my own work hasn't been very direct (in fact someone like Erwin Heerich, also shown in "Strategy: Get Arts," is a more obvious link."<sup>144</sup>

Brotherston's response obviously records Beuys' appearances as highly memorable events — a common, even universal, reaction. However it is Beuys as *example* which acquires primacy in this, as in so many other artists' reactions, illustrating the notion that "stylistic" influence, as it is often perceived in art historical discussions of connection, did not always apply to the way in which Beuys affected the work or other artists. Heerich's work was, by contrast, able to be influential in terms of style because of its formal qualities: geometric, abstract, self-contained and "about" itself.

Kenneth Dingwall<sup>145</sup> had trained at ECA but was no longer a student in 1970. He attended *SGA* as a young artist and again records the great impression Beuys left on him: "I wondered how long I could endure squatting on the life-studio floor. The paint-spattered floor Beuys talked of as a memorial to generations of young artists. Beuys climbing up and down a ladder, gathering in blobs of gelatine from the walls, gathering in the souls of the dead artists, on and on, and has gone on in my mind ever since."<sup>146</sup>

Again, the impact of Beuys was far-reaching, but as a phenomenon and an event, as much as an artistic or aesthetic experience, for Dingwall's painting — highly abstract and stemming in part from a Scottish painterly tradition — has no intrinsic formal link with Beuys' work. The art work which Dingwall contributed to Demarco's

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<sup>144</sup> Brotherston, William, *Statement by artist accompanying exhibition, July 1994*. Source: DEAF Archive. Heerich's sculpture, essays in geometric structure, are described as "examples of plastic thinking".

<sup>145</sup> Kenneth Dingwall (b. 1938) Professor of Painting, Cleveland Institute of Art, USA

<sup>146</sup> Dingwall, Kenneth, *Statement by artist accompanying exhibition, July 1994*. Source: DEAF Archive

exhibition was entitled *A Lament* (1982) — an ink and water-colour on paper — and was based on Dingwall’s memory of tearing letters he had written to a bereaved friend, frustrated at their inadequacy. For him this “...evoked memories of other letters, written and unwritten, on the deaths of my father and of another friend, Jack Ronder, and of Beuys’ ‘gathering in’ piece.”<sup>147</sup> The reference recalls *CKRSS* and Beuys collecting the gelatine from the walls of the life-room studio in ECA. Dingwall equates the individual fragments of gelatine with the souls of the dead artists and therefore with loss. The fact that Dingwall connects this with his own father’s death — as well as the fact that this was the first time the *A Lament* had been exhibited — testifies to the very personal associations the work had for him, and by association to the depth of Beuys’ influence. It is significant that these works were not made for the specific purpose of Demarco’s exhibition, but had both been made several years earlier, illustrating that Beuys’ influence had permeated their work for some time. It is not without relevance that Brotherston and Dingwall connect the death of their fathers in some way with their memories of Beuys, for in artistic terms and as example, Beuys surely acted as role-model for a whole generation of artists in Scotland and beyond.

In 1970 Michael Docherty<sup>148</sup> had graduated from ECA and was about to begin a job as a teaching assistant at the college. He recollects in clear detail the room in which Beuys performed *CKRSS*.<sup>149</sup> Docherty recollects that some members of the ECA teaching staff appeared hostile to Beuys. However he does not recall Robin Philipson displaying any particular reluctance to meet Beuys, as Cordelia Oliver recollects.<sup>150</sup> He does believe that Beuys’ example was responsible for generating a good deal of imitative art whose “...influence was obvious, but not always acknowledged by

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<sup>147</sup> Dingwall, Kenneth, *Statement by artist accompanying exhibition, July 1994*. Source: DEAF Archive

<sup>148</sup> Michael Docherty (b. 1947), Dean of School of Drawing and Painting, ECA

<sup>149</sup> Docherty, Michael — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, July 26, 1999

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*

those...forever in his debt (shadow?).”<sup>151</sup> According to Docherty, the vast majority of this art was poor,<sup>152</sup> a point which Douglas Hall echoes when he says that: “...one must hold him [Beuys] responsible for fathering an immense amount of blarney.”<sup>153</sup> This is surely an illustration of how Beuys’ work has come to be mis-understood generally, for the physical form of his work was not the end in itself, but a means to an end. To stylistically imitate or be influenced by the material substance of the work was to miss the point entirely. Demarco makes a related point, in discussing Beuys’ *Three Pots for the Poorhouse — Action Object* (1974) when he insists that “...there’s a big danger in putting on the *Three Pots* all alone, all on its own.... You cannot put that on as if it’s a trophy....You can’t just have people focusing on that action, you’ve got to show echoes of all the other actions — exactly the same kind of activity — so it makes sense.”<sup>154</sup>

In discussing the effect of Beuys’ teaching and presence at Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, Georg Jappe wrote that it “...emerged from the crisis as more aware, more liberal and less dependent on the state — just as all the politically motivated actions of Beuys antagonise, but eventually lead to the realisation that an exposed abuse must be rectified.”<sup>155</sup> Michael Docherty believes Beuys’ presence in ECA effected a similar, if slower and less radical transformation, on teaching practices. He also notes that by 1970, the transformation of values was already underway. However there can be little doubt according to Docherty that Beuys’ presence was partially responsible for — and certainly catalytic in — the process of change. This affected, for example, teacher-student relationships, as Docherty describes, which had previously been characterised by distance and little contact: “...teachers actually

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<sup>151</sup> Docherty, Michael, *Statement by artist accompanying exhibition, July 1994*. Source: DEAF Archive.

<sup>152</sup> Docherty, Michael — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, July 26, 1999

<sup>153</sup> Hall, Douglas — *Letter to Giles Sutherland*, April 8, 1999

<sup>154</sup> Demarco, Richard— *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, December 1998

<sup>155</sup> *Strategy: Get Arts* (Catalogue of Edinburgh International Festival Exhibition August 23 to September 12, 1970), p.6

began talking to students.”<sup>156</sup> Part of the reason for Beuys’ impact was the fact that a considerable number of his audience were teachers at ECA; these young teachers absorbed some measure of Beuys’ ethos and passed this on to a younger generation.

### 4.3 Merilyn Smith

Merilyn Smith<sup>157</sup> who, as a young artist, witnessed Beuys at SGA, presents a dissenting voice to those of the artists already mentioned, although she does concede that “...thanks to the sensibilities and the hard work of Richard Demarco, the imprint of Joseph Beuys is on Scotland and Scotland is imprinted on the work of Beuys.”<sup>158</sup> Smith offers a view of Beuys based on her experience as a sculptor and teacher, and her response is tempered by, amongst other things, the way she perceived Beuys’ response to her own work. She has written:

In 1972 he [Beuys] came to an exhibition of mine in Edinburgh: he stopped at one of my works. It was a mountain of Scottish clay in a slatted wooden crate to protect it from its subsequent travels in Europe. Beuys laid both hands flat upon the crate, planted his feet astride, and assumed his fixed, distant gaze. He then held the pose for the uncomfortably-long time necessary to imprint the action. Like the Pope kissing the airport tarmac, it was at once benediction and territorial claim.<sup>159</sup>

Part of Smith’s perception of Beuys’ response is questionable, in that she clearly believes he was attempting conceptually to appropriate her work. There seems to be little basis for this belief in objective reality, given Beuys’ well-known and universally acknowledged desire to help liberate the creative energy of the individual and his numerous and well-publicised collaborative works with others — *CKRSS* being but one example, where Beuys worked with the Danish composer Henning Christiansen.

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<sup>156</sup> Docherty, Michael — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, July 26, 1999

<sup>157</sup> Merilyn Smith, Reader, Dept. of Fine Art, Liverpool John Moore’s University

<sup>158</sup> Smith, Merilyn, *Statement by artist accompanying exhibition, July 1994*. Source: DEAF Archive.

<sup>159</sup> Smith, Merilyn, ‘Life as Drawing’ in *Diverging Critiques*, p.183, n. 2

Smith's aim is to place Beuys within a given context and to present what he did "...not as pioneering, but [as] representative."<sup>160</sup> She does this by drawing numerous parallels between Beuys' diverse activities and those of other artists. She writes that "...*Arte Povera* was strong in Italy, with artists using cheap, everyday materials, including detritus. In the USA Robert Morris was making felt structures and in the UK Gilbert and George declared themselves to be living sculpture. Questions posed by Duchamp were being addressed."<sup>161</sup> These examples relate to some of Beuys' use of unconventional material (including himself) as the raw matter for sculpture; and the reference to Duchamp alludes to Beuys' *The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is Overrated*(1964). But many of Smith's objections and qualifications had already been anticipated and countered. In relation to Morris, for example, Alastair Macintosh had observed, "...it is difficult to see how the question of who stole what from whom ever arose."<sup>162</sup> For Macintosh, Morris' use of felt concentrated on the material itself, whereas for Beuys it was an element of autobiography.

Similar rebuttals and refutations of Beuys' essential "representational" rather than "pioneering" status can be found and formulated. If there is any mileage in the fact that Beuys used similar materials and addressed the same kind of themes as other artists, then that is surely to miss the point. Where some artists specialised, Beuys was expansive; where others drew a line between "life" and "art"— either consciously or not — Beuys pushed back the boundaries. There could be no room for any distinction, because for him, the one became the other. In this sense, Beuys' shift of emphasis was not aesthetic, but a philosophical altering of a point of perception.

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<sup>160</sup> Smith, *Diverging Critiques*, p.183

<sup>161</sup> Smith, *Diverging Critiques*, p.179

<sup>162</sup> Macintosh, Alastair, 'Proteus in Düsseldorf', *Art and Artists*, November 1971 p.26

Referring to Beuys' philosophical stance, Macintosh felt "Duchamp...considered Art to be separate from 'Life', not because he wanted it to be, but because it was inevitable."<sup>163</sup> He contrasts this to Beuys' position, in effect the opposite belief, and concludes, "But if one realises that Duchamp consciously and deliberately avoided that particular issue, because these consequences did not interest him, then the position of Joseph Beuys becomes clearer."<sup>164</sup>

Beuys' position is a result of the fact that he wished to engage in the debate, whereas Duchamp's "silence" surely resulted from his belief that there was no debate in which to engage. Beuys did not move the boundaries of the discussion further into life; rather, he expanded the concept of art. The beginnings of this idea can be traced to the motives of the Fluxus movement in the 1960s — of which Beuys was a member — but from which "...he soon became isolated and was able to develop the artistic potential....with an ever expanding theory of sculpture."<sup>165</sup>

Part of the expanding theory included discourse, what Beuys termed "social sculpture". On a philosophical level it could be argued that discourse is *part* of the art work. Beuys was often reluctant to verbalise his intent for, as he said of his action, *Manresa* (1966): "The meaning of the title was not stated at the time, since I hoped my intentions would transfer through feeling, rather than words."<sup>166</sup> But Beuys increasingly found verbal explanation necessary, partly because of the frequent mis-interpretation surrounding these theories, often at the hands of his acolytes. Smith takes issues with this: "...Where Duchamp was silent Beuys talked and the quality of his discourse was in inverse proportion to the quantity."<sup>167</sup> There may have been a

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<sup>163</sup> *op. cit.* p.24

<sup>164</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Stachelhaus, Heiner *The Dictionary of Art*, p.891

<sup>166</sup> Tisdall, Caroline, *Joseph Beuys*, p.110

<sup>167</sup> Smith, *Diverging Critiques*, p.179

number of reasons for this perceived lack of penetrating analysis, among them the fact that in 1970 Beuys' mastery of English was poor.<sup>168</sup>

Any reaction to the type of debate generated by Beuys will be to some extent subjective. Smith's response on the one hand, and that of the other artists on the other, inevitably anticipates the type of polarised reaction to Beuys which Caroline Tisdall detected in Scotland but which she ascribes as "universal."<sup>169</sup> Smith raises a number of additional points regarding Beuys, but space does not allow for their exploration here.

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<sup>168</sup> John Martin writes: "For the 1970 exhibition Beuys stayed at my house overlooking the Forth but communication was difficult because his English was very sketchy then.." See: Martin, John, *Statement by artist accompanying exhibition, July 1994*. Source: DEAF Archive.

<sup>169</sup> Tisdall, Caroline — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, August 23, 1999

## 5.0 Other Observers

Aside from the groupings already discussed, there were a number of other observers of Beuys' work in 1970 whose opinions are worth noting. They offer a valuable insight in that they are not the views of the professional critic, the lay public, artists or promoters.

### 5.1 Robert McDowell

After meeting Beuys through Caroline Tisdall and Richard Demarco, McDowell<sup>170</sup> became involved in plans to establish a branch of the Free International University in Ireland and contributed to the FIU 100 Days conference at Documenta 6 in 1977. Since then McDowell has continued to support many of the causes Beuys espoused. He offers an “insider’s” view of Beuys and can fairly be described as one of the members of the Beuys “church” to which Douglas Hall, perhaps a little disparagingly, refers. Certainly the term “acolyte” seems most appropriate in delineating McDowell’s stance in relation to Beuys.

In 1994 McDowell contributed an essay entitled *Beuys/Demarco: The Secret Scottish Block - I* which accompanied Demarco’s commemorative Beuys exhibition. As its title implies, the essay sets out to document Demarco’s involvement with Beuys in Scotland, and draws on the title of an exhibition of drawings by Beuys which toured Ireland, Scotland and England — *A Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland* (1974). If opinion of Beuys in Scotland, as elsewhere, was generally polarised then McDowell’s views represent the “positive” end of that polarity.

Although McDowell’s viewpoint in relation to Beuys is one of unquestioning admiration — no doubts are expressed and no reservations held — he does make

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<sup>170</sup> Robert McDowell (b. 1945)

some observations which are worthy of consideration. He writes that, for example, “Joseph acknowledged many times the importance of his connections with Scotland, but which curiously has received very little acknowledgement in many publications about Beuys’ life and work.”<sup>171</sup> While this observation may be true to some extent, it should also be noted that two of the main publications on Beuys — Tisdall’s *Joseph Beuys* (1979)<sup>172</sup> and Adriani’s, Konnertz’s, and Thomas’s *Joseph Beuys: Life and Works* (1979)<sup>173</sup> — give extensive coverage to *CKRSS* in particular. Certainly, no extensive publication or study has been devoted exclusively to Beuys’ work in Scotland.

Although McDowell was not present at *SGA* he nevertheless makes a number of comments which apply generally to Beuys’ work in Scotland. For example, he states that “...Demarco’s specific challenge to Beuys was the same as that which Beuys issued to others, if you choose to live and work somewhere, not just as an ‘artist’, do not try to neutralise the context of your work in an ‘art gallery’ or an institution (not even a prison as in the dialogue with Jimmy Boyle), or in a narrowly defined field of work or study, but reach out to embrace all that is available to give your own creativity its fullest personal and social power.”<sup>174</sup> This is of relevance in relation to *CKRSS* — and to Beuys’ other actions and performances in Scotland — where Beuys drew particular attention to the paint-splashed floor of the life-studio, saying that it represented a place of labour and creativity and should be honoured as such. Equally it was a factor in Beuys’ action in the “Poor House” in 1974, where Beuys took specific account of the location. According to Demarco:

[Beuys] loved the idea it was a plumber’s workshop. He loved it because he said it was blessed by honest labour, by workers... he loved the dignity of people just working, making things like pipes and taps. Beuys had the gift of

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<sup>171</sup>McDowell, R., *Beuys/Demarco: The Secret Scottish Block - 1 : Beuys in Edinburgh (1970-1986)*,

p.2

<sup>172</sup> *op. cit.*, pp.190-205

<sup>173</sup> *op. cit.*, pp.202-205

<sup>174</sup> *op. cit.* p.2

the great teacher, who could let you see something that was under your nose and he could show you how to look at it properly.<sup>175</sup>

Additionally, McDowell is at pains to emphasise the close collaborative relationship between Beuys and Demarco, focusing on their shared belief in the spiritual basis of art: “Richard and Joseph worked with many of the same questions to which they were constantly drawn, such as the values of a spiritual and even mythic or generative power of special places and the people who nurtured them.”<sup>176</sup> Elsewhere McDowell stresses the sharing of a common approach and an adopted ideological stance between Beuys and Demarco: “To Richard and Joseph and their many close friends, recognising and honouring the quality of places and the individuality of people and their ideas is a powerful antidote to the impoverishment of creative individuality and spiritual values in what is for many an increasingly profane and over-consumerist world.”<sup>177</sup>

In essence McDowell can be seen not only as a supporter of Beuys’ teaching but also as a propagandist for Beuys’ ideas. As an insider, he has promoted the Beuys-Demarco partnership in an attempt to counter, as he sees it, the lack of adequate coverage and study which he feels the collaboration merits.

## 5.2 Charles Stephens

In many ways, the position of Charles Stephens<sup>178</sup> is similar to McDowell’s in relation to Beuys. While at student at Oxford at one of the Demarco Gallery’s ‘Edinburgh Arts’ summer schools in the early 1970s Stephens was introduced to the work of Beuys. He describes the impact of this encounter as “....decisive and yet also quiet, ungraspable and almost impossible to conceptualise.”<sup>179</sup> His reaction to Beuys

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<sup>175</sup> Demarco, Richard — *Interview with Giles Sutherland*, December 16, 1998

<sup>176</sup> *op. cit.* p.2

<sup>177</sup> *op. cit.* p.2

<sup>178</sup> Charles Stephens (b. 1955 ) Writer and researcher

<sup>179</sup> Stephens, Charles, Statement in *Bits and Pieces*, p.51

is — like McDowell's — deeply reverential, again recalling Douglas Hall's comments concerning a "theology" and a "church". In one particular eulogy to Beuys, Stephens describes the artist in terms that verge on the messianic, so that the impression gained is not of an artist at all, but of someone of quasi-religious import:

Beuys' was the voice of humanity's long struggle for redemption and transcendence. His was a voice which spoke out of the souls of a humanity burning with its vision of how the world could and must be. To feel the passion of such a being in the twin wastelands of contemporary society and contemporary art was to grasp the full meaning of the word Revelation.... Those who have heard his voice and witnessed his presence will know that he could make water run in the rocks and green leaves unfurl in the desert.<sup>180</sup>

The tone and substance of Stephens' panegyric owes a great deal to Demarco's influence for he has often described Beuys in similar ways. The treatment of Beuys is indeed characteristic of the disciples and acolytes he attracted, often from among the ranks of the young and the idealistic. However, it is somewhat paradoxical that in the same document Stephens goes on to caution against what he has himself done previously: "Our debt to him is not one of reverence, still less of orthodoxy or canonisation....If we respect and value and honour what he did, then we must simply follow where he led."<sup>181</sup>

While discussing the "twin wastelands of contemporary society and contemporary art," Stephens appears reluctant to place Beuys in either category — but he was surely part of both. However this throws light on the reasons for the Beuys' appeal. His followers found in him spiritual, ecological and "human" values which they calculated to be lacking elsewhere, particularly in the so-called "art world". A "theology" and a quasi-religion sprang up around Beuys precisely because both art and religion were not providing the kind of answers or even asking the appropriate questions in which Beuys' followers were interested. Marilyn Smith implies that this

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<sup>180</sup> Stephens, *Bits and Pieces*, p.51

<sup>181</sup> Stephens, *Bits and Pieces* p.51

was a calculated gesture: “Beuys’ visual communication was strongly rooted in emotive, religious imagery. He recognised the almost universal expectation of a risen messiah...”<sup>182</sup> It is therefore symptomatic that — as Edward Gage had made clear — “It is impossible to describe his [Beuys’] qualities without resorting to a vocabulary that sounds religious or scriptural.”<sup>183</sup>

Again, using Biblical (and Classical) comparison, Stephens offers a view of Beuys which places him in a prophetic role: “In the sense that he made himself into a vessel through which, by means of words, rituals, actions, gestures, interventions, statements and example, the protean shiftings and changings of the primal speech of energy could be heard by men and women. Beuys, like Aaron the brother of Moses, was an interpreter of the tongues and intentions of divinity.”<sup>184</sup>

Such elevation often precludes the possibility of criticism or impartial analysis on the part of such observers. So while some, like Douglas Hall, may have been put off by the presence of Beuys’ followers, rather perhaps than by the man himself, this does not wholly detract from the merits of the arguments of Stephens and others like him. Beneath the breathless eulogising there is often some measure of reasonable and reasoned analysis.

In offering up his breakdown of the action which was later incorporated by way of film into *CKRSS*, Stephens states: “In a landscape which was seemingly inhospitable to men, it was redundant and ridiculous for an artist to attempt to impose his own small individuality. Beuys was content to acknowledge the reality of the moor...by simply donating to it a little warm energy.”<sup>185</sup> And again in relation to *CKRSS* Stephens articulates — again with attendant religious terminology — Beuys’

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<sup>182</sup> Smith, *Diverging Critiques*, p.180

<sup>183</sup> Gage, *The Scotsman*, August, 1970

<sup>184</sup> Stephens, Charles, ‘The Poetry of Space’, *Chapman* 57, 1989, p.58

<sup>185</sup> Stephens, Charles, ‘I See the Land of Macbeth: Joseph Beuys and Scotland (1970-1986)’, *Variant* 6 (1989), p.9

essential acknowledgement of *genius loci* which, for many observers, gave the work its particular resonance: “In the course of a long elaborated ritual, Beuys’ ideas about the nature of energy, his dialogue with the animal world, his presence in Scotland and the resonances of Rannoch Moor, which he deemed to be Celtic, were revealed in a dense, and strangely beautiful pattern. The images and physical material of Beuys’ ritual seemed to possess particular meaning and weight in Scotland. Elsewhere they might have generated more stupefaction than sense.”<sup>186</sup>

That site-specificity is necessarily linked to increased “understanding” on the part of the audience is a contentious claim, for Stephens has already stated that the impact of Beuys was impossible to conceptualise — and hence presumably to understand — through any rational or logical process. Did the presentation the following year in Basle of *Celtic*<sup>187</sup> which was based heavily on the Edinburgh performance and which, according to Caroline Tisdall<sup>187</sup> had even more pronounced ritual aspects, “mean” any less to its audience? Additionally, the notion that Beuys conducted a “dialogue” with the “animal world” cannot go unchallenged, given that the term implies a two-way process.

### **5.3 Alastair Macintosh**

If the views of Marilyn Smith and members of the public whose opinions found their way into the columns of *The Scotsman* letters page represent one extreme of polarised opinion and those of Demarco, Stephens and McDowell the other, then the views of Douglas Hall and Alastair Macintosh lie somewhere in the middle. They are characterised by a more objective, sceptical and traditionally art-historical view of Beuys, with all the hallmarks of a training which stresses the value of impartiality and academic distance. Macintosh was apparently Visual Arts Officer at the SAC at the time of *SGA* and as such could be deemed a member of the so-called “establishment”.

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<sup>186</sup> Stephens, *Variant*, p.9

<sup>187</sup> Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, p.199

However, as a commentator he did not offer his views in this capacity, but rather as a curious spectator.

Initially Macintosh remained a sceptic, in almost exactly the same manner as Hall. After hearing about Beuys' refusal of a retrospective at MOMA in New York, Macintosh writes: "The flow of information continued and it strengthened my misgivings...I was now sceptical and rapidly becoming hostile. Then...he came over to Scotland and decided that Rannoch Moor would be *his* art work (he didn't actually but that's the way it came through)."<sup>188</sup> However, after his initial cynicism, Macintosh is gradually won over: "I didn't see him at first, so my initial contact with the man was the sledges. All the defences I had prepared caved in...the man I had expected, the art-historians (sic) delight, could not have made this. It was much too rich and too personal..."<sup>189</sup>

After meeting Beuys, Macintosh highlights some of the difficulties in appraising his work: "Already, you see, I am assessing the man by himself rather than by his work."<sup>190</sup> He then delineates another important Beuysian issue (already raised in relation to Marilyn Smith's approach): "...Joseph Beuys' greatest work is Joseph Beuys, or rather the presentation of Joseph Beuys. He once remarked 'the silence of Duchamp is over-rated', emphasising the vast difference between the two men: Duchamp trying to erase himself, Beuys trying to erase everything but himself."<sup>191</sup>

After giving a broad outline of *CKRSS* Macintosh adds: "Thus told it sounds like nothing; in fact it is electrifying. And I am not speaking for myself alone, everyone who sat through the entire performance is converted."<sup>192</sup> Macintosh — like Gage and Hall — highlights the problem of assessing Beuys' work because "...current art

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<sup>188</sup> Macintosh, A., 'Beuys in Edinburgh', *Art and Artists*, November 1970, p.10

<sup>189</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*

language cannot describe it without distorting its essential character.....[which] makes for the creation of a series of...myths...that leads to the Beuys cult”<sup>193</sup> Macintosh then concedes, somewhat paradoxically: “His actions do have a quality of myth, the same invisible logic”<sup>194</sup>

Macintosh makes two valuable points: the first relating to descriptive and analytical terminology and the second to the Beuys “cult”. The first is not a phenomenon which relates solely to Beuys; any evolving discipline requires a new vocabulary. This is often appropriated from existing terminology. What Macintosh refers to as “art language” had a similar genesis: disparate terminology appropriated from other areas, viz. “performance”, “ground” etc. There were also neologisms coined from existing terms. In the case of Beuys the association of particular aspects of his works with religious terminology has probably become accepted practice. Additionally, it is instructive to note Macintosh’s “conversion” to Beuys — the parallel in religious language is no coincidence. He shared Hall’s belief when Hall wrote “...[I]...recognised the magnetism of a founder, and felt the honour-conferring power of his attention”<sup>195</sup>

What Macintosh calls the “Beuys-cult” — something caused by language unable to describe adequately Beuys’ work — is an important consideration. Macintosh, Hall and Smith all refer in one way or another to the Beuys “cult” and give it as one reason for their scepticism. However once the outer layers of confusion surrounding Beuys are penetrated both Hall and Macintosh admit to being won over, and Marilyn Smith also concedes Beuys’ “important place” in the world of art.

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<sup>193</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Hall, *Bits and Pieces*, p.50

## 6.0 Conclusion

There can be no doubt that reaction to Beuys' work in Scotland was — as elsewhere — deeply polarised. That may be to over-simplify the case however, because a number of observers attempt (not altogether successfully), to distance themselves from his work. The reasons for this polarisation are complex but some of the root causes can be attributed to the particular traditions and established forms of art practice in Scotland. In essence, it stems from a way of viewing art as an aesthetic experience, not as some kind of tool for political, social or economic change. These two conflicting ideologies lie at the root of the polarity.

There were other reasons. Beuys' essential foreign-ness and "outsider" status found an parallel with that of Richard Demarco. Demarco was Beuys' closest acolyte and interpreter . This pairing — with their shared Catholic background, their essential belief in the spiritual value and role of art and its high moral seriousness and their view of the expanded role of the artist in society — were all deeply challenging to an "establishment," whose values were almost the converse. The siting of the *SGA* exhibition within the Edinburgh College of Art was a deliberate provocation, and many of the artists rose to the challenge of deflating academic pomposity. Beuys' challenge was more subtle but more profound. By querying the very purpose of art and suggesting that it was not about the production of aesthetically pleasing objects, but rather a radical process of altering perceptions and values, Beuys challenged the very basis and existence of the College. The challenge was not, of course, aimed specifically at the College but at all institutions, including his own Düsseldorf Kunstakademie.

This radical and exciting agenda made Beuys enormously popular among the young. In a very real sense he was a leader and spokesman. The reasons for this are complex but the basis was that Beuys showed that art could be a vehicle for change, not only

in terms of aesthetics, but in all other areas of human activity, principally the economic, political and ecological fields. The fact that his performances contained ritual aspects, and that there was a high spiritual content to his works, filled a vacuum left by the seeming irrelevance of orthodox religions. Beuys' work also established a role for spirituality in art. These values appealed in particular to younger intellectuals and especially to art students. As with every new generation, different values were being formulated, different questions asked and different answers sought. As well as asking new and demanding questions, Beuys provided the answers to many of his followers.

The views of younger followers of Beuys demonstrate their total allegiance to his ideals beliefs and values. Many of these followers still remain unquestioning in their attitudes to Beuys. It is no coincidence that the type of language used to describe Beuys and his activities is borrowed from a religious context, and is part of the reason why a type of "cult" grew up around him.

The public — a difficult category to define adequately, and equally difficult to canvas — seemed generally to oppose *SGA*. As a representative of this grouping of artists Beuys cannot be exempted from the generally disparaging but ultimately misinformed views of the public. In essence, the reaction to avant-garde art in 1970 seems little different from the present day. The attitude of art practitioners to the "public" is a complex one. Part of the picture is that the public are not always considered a factor in determining the worth of much avant-garde art. The impression one gets of Beuys was that he was willing to engage in debate with anyone who cared to do so. His explanations — or "social sculpture" — have been criticised for getting in the way of his art, but this misses the point — these were part of his art work and a necessary part of the discourse surrounding art. Indeed some may argue that the discourse is part of the art work in its broadest terms.

Among the artistic community in Scotland, Beuys initially made a profound impact. This has been described as “catalytic” but this implies a one-way process, and is therefore inaccurate because it is clear that Beuys was also affected by Scotland — not just its landscape and history, but also by its culture in the broadest sense. His art works were on the whole specific responses to Scotland, *CKRSS* being no exception. Almost all artists of a particular generation admit to being profoundly moved by their experience of Beuys, even those who later formed a more sceptical and impartial distance.

Quite what Beuys’ enduring impact has been is difficult to discern. Stylistic influence is not an issue, but Beuys *as example* is of paramount importance— both as artist and human being. However, these categories are perhaps irrelevant in discussing Beuys, because “life” and “art” for him merged into one integral whole. In essence, the belief that the concept of “art” could be almost infinitely expanded to include other areas of life was the basis for Beuys’ attraction to most artists. This does not only apply in Scotland, but elsewhere. Additionally, Beuys’ impact was decisive on Demarco who was forced to redefine the whole concept of a gallery in line with an organisation which he felt could adequately reflect and accommodate Beuys’ work.

Beuys’ reception by the so-called “establishment” in Scotland is a complex and interesting issue— two of the commentators here admit to initial scepticism, and even hostility, but admit to being eventually won over by Beuys, demonstrating perhaps the depth of his seriousness and his much discussed magnetic presence. In these examples, the normal constraints of examining art using “art historical” terminology — and a particular methodology — break down and seem inadequate in wholly defining Beuys’ approach. A “new” language of description was formulated, appropriated in large part from existing spiritual and religious sources. The attempt to place Beuys in some kind of art historical tradition demonstrates the training of the

art historian, but perhaps in the case of all truly *revolutionary* figures, an analysis of this sort is only partially satisfactory, given the uniqueness of Beuys' contribution.

Beuys' impact extended well beyond artists, and permeated the pedagogical practices and structures of academic institutions. Beuys' presence at Edinburgh College of Art undoubtedly had an enduring impact given the fact that a number of individuals who saw his work were teachers at that institution. It must be stressed again that this influence — when it did occur in a profound and meaningful way — was not stylistic but as example. Beuys showed that art could embrace wider and more complex issues than had hitherto been the case.

## 7.0 Appendices

### Appendix 1 — Joseph Beuys in Scotland

#### May 1970

Beuys' first trip to Scotland in preparation for his contribution to the *Strategy: Get Arts* exhibition of contemporary German art at Edinburgh College of Art presented by the Richard Demarco Gallery in collaboration with the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle.

Trip organised by Richard Demarco to Argyll and Loch Awe. On a separate trip Beuys visits the Moor of Rannoch, accompanied by various people including Michael Pye of *The Scotsman*, film-maker Mark Littlewood and artist Rory McEwan.

#### August 1970

Beuys installs *The Pack* (1969) in the corridor leading to the sculpture department at Edinburgh College of Art. Additionally Beuys exhibits photographic documentation of his work (later entitled *Arena*) in a large life studio adjacent to where he performs *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch) The Scottish Symphony* (26th-30th August) with Henning Christiansen.

#### August 1973

*12 Hour Lecture — A Homage to Anacharsis Cloots* given by Beuys as part of the Demarco Gallery's 'Edinburgh Arts' summer school in Melville College. Blackboards used in the lecture subsequently purchased by Dayton Gallery, Minneapolis.

Beuys meets Tadeusz Kantor.

#### May 1974

Beuys performs *Three Pots for the Poorhouse* in "The Poorhouse" — a disused plumber's workshop in Forresthill, Edinburgh. Demarco had previously presented Tadeusz Kantor's Cricot 2 theatre in this site in 1972 and 1973. *Three Pots for the Poorhouse - Action Object* (1974) (consisting of three blackened cooking pots, two blackboards and a length of string) used in the 'action' subsequently purchased by Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.

Beuys visits Douglas Hall, Keeper of the Scottish National of Modern Art, in the company of Caroline Tisdall.

#### August 1974

Beuys participated in Demarco Gallery's 'Edinburgh Arts' summer school. Three hour lecture as contribution to *Black and White Oil Conference* in the "Poorhouse" with Buckminster Fuller. Beuys meets Jimmy Boyle. Documentation of *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974) by Caroline Tisdall.

Exhibition of *A Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland* (1974) at SNGMA

#### January 1976

Beuys and Tisdall represent Jimmy Boyle at a press conference for Boyle's sculpture *In Defence of the Innocent* (1976) at the Demarco Gallery in Monteith House. Beuys visits Boyle in the Special Unit of HM Prison Barlinnie

#### 1979

Demarco visits Beuys at his studio in Düsseldorf as part of Demarco's planning of a 10th anniversary exhibition for 'Strategy: Get Arts'. Demarco also visits other artists studios in Cologne, Düsseldorf, Stuttgart and Berlin.

Exhibition of Beuys' work at SNGMA

#### February 1980

Meeting with Richard Demarco, Joseph Beuys, Anthony D'Offay and Heiner Bastien at D'Offay's gallery in London.

#### August 1980

In celebration of the 10th anniversary of SGA Demarco invites Beuys to define the spirit of German art in the 1980s. Beuys responds by discussing his concept of the Free International University (FIU). The exhibition is sponsored by the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle and the German Ministry of Culture and is presented as part of the Demarco Gallery's 1980 'Edinburgh Arts' exhibition.

Beuys goes on strike in protest at Jimmy Boyle's removal from Barlinnie Special Unit. Beuys commissioned by Demarco Gallery to make three suites of limited edition prints: *New Beginnings are in the Offing*, *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch) Scottish Symphony* and *Joseph Beuys Meeting Buckminster Fuller*

#### April 1981

Demarco visits Beuys at his studio in Düsseldorf accompanied by John Martin (graphic designer) and George Wyllie (sculptor). Beuys signs three suites of prints made in collaboration with the Richard Demarco Gallery.

#### June 1981

Demarco visits Beuys at his studio in Düsseldorf to finalise 'Poorhouse Doors' project

#### March 1982

Demarco interviews Beuys for *Studio International* at the Brookes Club in London about *7,000 Oaks*

Demarco visits Beuys' house and studio in Düsseldorf to discuss the 'Poorhouse Doors Project'. Demarco meets Anthony D'Offay and Heiner Bastien at D'Offay Gallery, London

#### June 1982

Demarco visits Venice Biennale and sees *Is it about a Bicycle* by Beuys.

#### August 1982

Beuys visits Edinburgh accompanied by Anthony D'Offay, Heiner Bastien and Johannes Cladders to install the "Poorhouse Doors" (later entitled *New Beginnings are in the Offing*) at the SNGMA, and later purchased by Johannes Cladders for Mönchengladbach Museum.

The “Poorhouse Doors” originally formed the doorway to a former plumber’s workshop which Beuys and Demarco referred to as the ‘Poorhouse’ because of its siting on the former Medieval “Bedlam” or asylum adjacent to Greyfriars Kirk in Forresthill. It was used by the Polish director Tadeusz Kantor as the venue of two of his productions, in 1972 and 1973. When Beuys returned to Scotland in 1982 the doors were still intact along with posters advertising his and Kantor’s performances. The doors were removed with the help of Dawson Murray and George Wyllie, two Scottish artists, and installed at Inverleith House in Edinburgh’s Royal Botanic Garden, then the venue of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art. The doors were altered by the addition of a single red light bulb which was placed underneath one of them.

## Appendix 2 — *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch) Scottish Symphony (1970)*

The performance took place in a life studio at Edinburgh College of Art at 11-00 am and 4-pm daily from August 26-30.

The following materials were used for this action: two film projectors at different distances from the back wall (the first projected the film onto a silver board; the second projected a large picture directly onto the back wall), two portable tape cassette recorders, four tape recorders and a tuner, one microphone, one piano, one ax(sic), one blackboard, one round piece of tin, two bottles with clay water, one spear, one staff, a plastic mass (gelatine), and a long black angle board covered with felt (felt angles).

To the left in the room were the film projectors; behind them was a silver board on the back wall. In the middle of the room was the microphone with the ax leaning against it; to the left of this were the tape recorders and the tuner, behind on the wall were the spear and the bottles with clay and water, to the right of them was the piano, behind it was the angle board, to the right against the wall was the ladder. The shades were drawn.

Beuys pushed the blackboard, half covered with a diagram, across the floor with a staff, placed the bottles of clay water on it and then placed it again near the spear, from whose tip blood flowed (symbolised by the thick red thread). He took a piece of chalk from the top left pocket of his vest and drew a new diagram on the board, and, lying flat on the floor, pushed the board with the staff in front of him, went across the room, beat a measure on the floor and turned the light out. On the silver board on the back wall the film *Eurasianstaff* was being projected, and accompanying it was the music “fluxorum organum” on a tape recorder. After the recording finished the film was stopped, and while Henning Christiansen very slowly changed the tape, Beuys again drew a diagram on the blackboard. After this was finished he let the board glide carefully over the lead cable onto the floor and leaned it against the piano, squatted next to it and pointed with the staff to a certain part of the diagram. As Christiansen let the film *Eurasianstaff* run again, in which Beuys with great difficulty balances the staff and carefully keeps his balance on one leg, Beuys, leaning on the staff, proceeded to smoke a cigarette at the back wall of the room. Finally, he threw the plastic mass (gelatine) against the wall, went again to the back wall and continued to smoke; suddenly he went to the middle of the room and began to catch the scent, forced his bent left leg between his arm and the staff while hopping on the other foot, brought the staff with both hands to his back, pulled it again over his head to the front between his legs, moving faster and more hectically, snarling, grimacing and laughing.

The film *Eurasianstaff* had ended and Christiansen let the film *Vacuum <—> Mass, Simultaneous Iron Chests, Halved Cross* (filming of the action in the Art Intermedia Gallery, Cologne, 10/14/1968) run onto the silver board, while at the same time next to it on the wall in a larger format he projected the film *Rannoch Moor* which had been filmed just a few days before by Beuys, Rory McEwan and Mark Littlewood in the Highlands, with a composition by Arthur Kopcke. Beuys leaned the long gray angle board next to the film picture of *Rannoch Moor* on the wall, came forward, two cassette recorders on his shoulder, from which came “yes, yes, yes, yes, no, no, no, no.” The film *Vacuum <—> Mass* came to an end, the Moor film

continued on alone; from the amplifiers droned organ music, splashing and screams. Beuys took the ladder and the round piece of tin and slowly collected the plastic material from the wall piece by piece and put it onto the piece of tin, which he carried with his fingers spread out like a waiter; he pulled the ladder, clamped it under his left arm, and leaned it against the wall in order to be able to collect the pieces of gelatine that were beyond his reach. After he had finished, he put the ladder aside, and then lifting the piece of tin over his head, he shook the plastic mass over his head and shoulders onto this floor, lifted the board with the diagram over his head and sang “o, o, o, o” into the microphone; finally he set it on the floor, held the spear, and placed himself in a straddling position, the spear on the right side of the picture ending behind the board with the diagram, while Henning Christiansen turned off the electrical equipment.

Source: *Joseph Beuys: Life and Works*, Adriani, G., Konnertz, K. and Thomas, K. pp 203-205

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