

Glasgow School of Art Image makers.

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'... the traditionally significant role played by the amateur (in the sense of someone who does something for the love of it) continues. The dividing line between amateur and professional is necessarily blurred... the work of amateurs have played a very important role in the current renaissance.'

Peter Goldsmith, *Creative Camera* 7/1987.*

The first meeting of Glasgow Photography Group took place just over 20 years ago to discuss the project of increasing the profile of photography in the city. The meeting included a diverse coalition of professional photographers, hobbyists, historians, artists and amateurs – Oscar Marzaroli, Ray McKenzie, Stewart Shaw, Archie McLellan, Malcolm Hill, and Sandy Sharp were just some of the names recorded at the time. Recognising the need for exhibition space and access resources this was to result in the formation of the photography gallery and open access facility Street Level in 1989, with two ex-students as coorganisers - Martha McCulloch and Catriona Grant - of the Department of Fine Art Photography (DFAP), which was started in 1982 at Glasgow School of Art (GSA) by the American landscape photographer Thomas Joshua Cooper.

The history of a resource environment for contemporary art photography in Scotland as a whole is concise and intense. Following GSA, Edinburgh College of Art set up a Fine Art Photography Department, with Murray Johnstone as its first head, closely followed by Napier Polytechnic. Stills opened in 1977 as a result of the work of the Scottish Photography Group, and Portfolio Gallery and Photography Workshop Edinburgh were established in 1987 by Gloria Chalmers and Jane Brettle. The Scottish Society for the History of Photography was established in 1983 and has published a regular journal (*Studies in Photography*). The Scottish National Photography Collection was set up by The National Galleries of Scotland just over 20 years ago, and there is now talk of relocating this to a proposed Scottish National Centre for Photography on Edinburgh's Calton Hill.

In the early '90s art photography in Scotland expanded its remit, its confident presence heightened by the Fotofeis festivals of '93, '95 and '97. The inclusion of most of the contemporary art venues in that helped open up a space within art photography for a more liberated approach on the one hand, and a valued recognition of its particular qualities as a medium by the art establishment on the other. One of the plural attributes of the medium, however, is the awkwardness that many 'artists' feel about being hinged to that discipline and history. In the 1995 catalogue to 'Decade' (Street Level) which celebrated 10 years of the DFAP at GSA, it was observed that the connection to photography of many of those included was *'tenuous but taut'*. In 2000, Jack Mottram observed of one photography competition exhibition in Edinburgh that 'Few of the photographers gathered here ask the viewer to consider the photographic image in isolation and, while they may slave away in the darkroom or digital equivalent, it seems photography here is a means to transmit or provoke conceptual information, not a medium in and of itself'.

A review of the list of some of the recipients with GSA connections of the (now defunct) Richard Hough Bursary, further illustrates how many artists' work combines concerns and practices from many disciplines, be it sculpture, video, or painting: Anne Elliot, 1993 (painter turned photographer), David Michael Clarke, 1996 (sculptor turned photographer); Alexander and Susan Maris, 1997 (artists who 'use' photography), Dalziel + Scullion, 1998 (environmental art, post-graduate sculpture and Fine Art Photography), and Alan Currall, 1998 (MFA), among them. The ubiquity of photography is now absolute. Artists work across various different media and often treat photography as a secondary aspect of their work. Some artists, like Vaughan Judge, Lesley Punton, Olwen Shone, Susie Baker, and Frances McCourt

have clearly photographic concerns, others like Torsten Lauschmann, Thomas Seest, Anne Berge Hansen and Tatiana Maria Lund pursue aesthetically informed practices which fall outside the conventional history of the medium. An even more extreme example is an earlier graduate in the '80s, Ewan Morrison (who refers to himself as a 'Scottish purveyor of erudite filth'), an inventive installation, moving image maker and critic in the '90s, has now resurfaced after a prolonged period of obscurity from artistic 'circles' as one of the most gifted and accomplished writers in Scotland on the basis of his first novel 'Swung'.

It would be wrong to say that the DFAP has made a significant impact on the Glasgow art 'scene/s', but certainly at its foggy crossroads some interesting image-makers whose working practices give a sense of the spectrum of motivations that currently exist in contemporary photography have clearly emerged, and many have simply disappeared. The cosmopolitan push and pull of the city's artistic tide mean that many are contributing to the larger framework of critical and cultural activity from the local to the international. Some of that has intersected with Street Level. Early solo shows included Peter Finne more, who represented Wales at the Venice Biennale in 2005; John Duncan, a Belfast based photographer who also co-edits the reputable contemporary photography magazine Source. Harry Kerr, Callum Angus Mackay, Roger Palmer, Annette Heyer, Claudine Hartzel, Jim Harold, and Catriona Grant are just some names with former GSA links that have all had *monographic* exhibitions at Street Level.

Talking to former students, it is less about the 'teaching' per se than the departmental sense of camaraderie and peer generated vigour within a *fine art* department with a loose designation as to what constitutes photographic practice. The future promise working with a medium and its potentialities is not an opportunity to be missed, however. Some ex-students went on to form their own alternative structures and artists spaces not just for display but also to affect and have control over their artistic discourse. For an all too short period in the mid-90s, 'Exhibition Space at Java', staged a vigorous flurry of mixed exhibitions by a wide range of emerging artists, organised by Dettie Flynne (now in France), Mij Rothera and Iseult Timmermans, all ex-students in the department (the latter remains active in socially engaged art practice with the medium). Several years later the artists group Volume was formed to further the work of its members which included Kate Jo, Kate Robertson, Betty Meyer, and Barbara Wilson. More recently, Vanessa Wenwieser has been involved in Photo-Debut, a predominantly London based network which 'connects and supports talented, emerging photographers'. Wenwieser is one of a younger generation who move between commercial work and their own artistic practice as micro-creative industries, alert to new opportunities. Others include Kirsty Anderson, who graduated in 1999, was winner of both UK Best Magazine and Best Business Photographer Awards in 2003, or Andrew Lee who specialises architectural photography. As well as pursuing their own practice, artists Christina McBride, Rachel Thibbotomunuwe, Colin Andrews, Jim Hamlyn, Michelle Lazenby, are also active in either formal or gallery educational settings around lens-based media.

The contextual and cultural issues surrounding the use of photography and its continued diversity are as strong as ever. Networks such as *Scottish Photographers* have emerged in recent years to provide support to the current grassroots through print, web and events, sometimes in association with existing galleries. At this juncture, it is the knowledge of how local practice diverges and converges with international concerns with an understanding of the complexities of contemporary production and dissemination that will help more of Glasgow's 'image-makers' to shine through.

*Peter and Aase Goldsmith ran the Corridor Gallery from the late 70s onwards. The venue still exists as part of Fife Institute of Physical & Recreational Education.

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