

Edinburgh Art Festival: The Travelling Gallery at 40

'I believe in art calling out to the world' (Shaun Gladwell)

In 1978 Katriana Hazell became the curator of a very unusual collection. An arts graduate with an HGV licence, Hazell became the first driver of the Travelling Gallery, a former Glasgow Corporation bus transformed by designers James Grimes and William May into art on wheels.



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Pictured Curator Claire Craig With a Framed prints by Rachel Maclean 'The Baptism of Clyde & It is Finished

The bus set out to bring exhibitions to isolated communities, originally covering the Borders but soon extending its itinerary to all parts of the country. Forty years later the Travelling Gallery is miraculously still on the road, and now

an excellent new exhibition at the City Art Centre celebrates its history, its place in today's Scotland, and its hopes for the future.



Photo John Preece

The Travelling Gallery has always shown contemporary art, and the second floor of the exhibition focuses on the many people who have contributed to it over the years, from up-and-coming artists to internationally famous practitioners. Some exhibitions have concentrated on one person, some on a selected theme, others on an issue of special relevance to certain communities (*Wish I Was Here* represented displaced people with more than one culture and language; *The Park* was of particular interest to the local authority areas it toured, Argyll and Bute, Stirlingshire and West Dunbartonshire.)

[Left: Ross Sinclair *The Real Life Rock Opera Vol 1* (detail)]



Photo John Preece

The Travelling Gallery's overriding aims have always been to create highly engaging exhibitions and to provide a unique platform for arts education; there is no dumbing down here, no sense of being secondary to the big name galleries. From Turner Prize winner Douglas Gordon to Venice Biennale representative Rachel Maclean, the gallery's range of artists is impressive; Christine Borland, Brody Condon, Martin Boyce, Ian Hamilton-Finlay, Callum Innes, Jim Lambie, Ciara Phillips, Hanna Tuulikki, Charles Avery, Tania Kovats, Lucy Skaer, Jacqueline Donnachie and David Shrigley have all been here.



Photo by John Preece

Two photographs by Dundee-based Dalziel + Scullion, *Edith* and *Valerie*, date from their 1995 Travelling Gallery exhibition *The Most Beautiful Thing*. Engaging narratives accompany each image; we learn that the author almost did not adopt Edith ('after Edith Piaf, whom she reminded him of'), a beautiful rescue dog whose paws 'smell like basmati rice'. Valerie stands with her back to us, her hands clasped behind her back. She holds a bunch of green herbs. Is she healer, witch or both?



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Pictured Artist Mike Ingles



Photo John Preece

The Travelling Gallery's shows include all kinds of media, from painting to sculpture and film. Ilana Halperin's *Geologic Intimacy* was first shown in her solo show *We Form Geology* (2012), for which she transformed the gallery into a miniature hall of gems and minerals. The micas on display here sparkle and shine in the sunlight, taking us to the Western Isles and the shores of Argyll & Bute, all stops on the gallery's route.

Katy Dove's *October* is an animation from 2011, again referencing locations the bus would visit while touring her

exhibition. Here they are overlaid with drawing and paint; yellow lines appear to float over the sky; the sea is gradually overwritten with angular shapes, diamonds forming over diamonds; red paint strokes hover over trees in a forest.



Photo John Preece

One of my favourite works in this show is Jacqueline Donachie's *The First Mobile Disco in Airdrie*. Her photographs of working men's clubs – plastic chairs, beer mats, ashtrays – are accompanied by a soundtrack of seventies' pop songs, but the best bit of all is the narrative by Donachie's friend, the artist Jim Lambie, for it was Lambie's own parents who started this ground-breaking enterprise. They began with a single deck record player; Jim's Mum copied down dance steps from *Top of the Pops*' Pan's People; the lights were bulbs screwed into breadboards. There's a priceless story about a conversation between Jim's Dad and a social convenor at one of the clubs – it's worth visiting the exhibition for this alone.



Graphic (c) Henry VIII's Wives

Henry VIII's Wives is an artists' collective that began life in the Environmental Art department at GSA; its members, now based in Scotland, Norway and Germany, include Lucy Skaer (currently exhibiting at Talbot Rice Gallery here in Edinburgh) and Rachel Dagnall. Their film *Newton's Cradle* was made for the Gallery's 1999 group show *This Was Now*, and shows the artists swinging apathetically from ropes, just like the steel balls of the then popular executive toy, in pointless, eternal motion.

Another skilful animation is Jacco Olivier's enigmatic *Run* (2008) [still from video, Travelling Gallery], which uses paint – thick strokes of primary colours – with film to follow a country bus as it travels through its day. As passengers come and go, they fade and disappear; the soundtrack mixes half-heard snippets of conversation with the sound of the wild weather outside. A child gets off the bus and is hurried home through the storms by a waiting parent; inside the last passengers of the day are insulated from the wind and rain – their soundtrack is the radio, playing on.



Still from video
Travelling Gallery

Australian artist Shaun Gladwell's video *Storm Sequence* is another highlight of this wonderful show. Gladwell uses skateboarding, hip-hop, graffiti, BMX riding and breakdancing to interrogate 'the fast and furious jump-cuts of past MTV footage', but for me the real beauty of this slow-motion film of Gladwell, simply skateboarding at the edge of the sea as the waves roll in, lies in his graceful, poetic movements, at one with the both his own body and the ocean. It's mesmerising:

'I was standing at the edge of the continent, I had not yet left. I was dancing before a world lying beyond, that I had not visited....How wonderful for this digital video of a performance on the Australian coastline to tour the dramatic landscape of Scotland...'



Photo John Preece

Rachel Maclean is an artist whose works always reward repeated viewing. Here we see *The Baptism of the Clyde* and *It is Finished*, both executed in her trademark acid greens, blues, pinks and purples. *It is Finished* has at its centre a grotesque animated thistle; it carries the rotor of a wind turbine just as Christ carried the cross, while at each side Mary Magdalene figures pray and weep, their lips painted with

the Saltire, their hair artificially red, their dresses made from lager adverts. Commissioned by Edinburgh Printmakers for *I Heart Scotland*, a 2014 pre-Scottish Referendum Travelling Gallery show, the pictures now have a special air of poignancy.



Photo John Preece

On your way down to the floor below, take time to enjoy Craig Coulthard's beautiful wall hanging. Made of red, blue, white and black triangles and squares, it was inspired by the floor tiles still found in the halls of many Victorian villas. In the excellent accompanying film Coulthard explains that the tiles are both artistically and culturally interesting;

'People might think about our connections to other parts of the world, and how they exist.'

Other artists interviewed in the film include English/Finnish vocalist Hanna Tuulikki, who performs one of her haunting melodies and expresses her pleasure in knowing that 'this work that I've made from the Highlands and Islands is somehow going back into those spaces.'



Photo of Ross Sinclair by John Preece

The lower floor of the exhibition is occupied entirely by *Settlement*, a large-scale installation by Mike Inglis, the Scottish artist who created a new design for the latest incarnation of the Travelling Gallery's bus in 2015. *Settlement* seeks to examine and explore the gallery's own values: access, learning, equality and enjoyment, and it does so in a series of structures set out around the room.



Photo John Preece

The first is the *SHACK*, which is based on the basic needs approach to measuring poverty. Inside the shack are items needed for the artist's local food bank; these will be donated at the end of the show.

The next shelter is *FURTHER*, a kind of archive of the gallery's own history; the journeys and workshops are reflected in a TV showing a film of a gallery visit and a diary kept by one of its assistants. On the table and around the room are cards, photos, animal skulls, rocks, even a toy model of a caravan – all items which an artist might collect as inspiration.

In the middle of the room, the *DANCING CIRCLE* (above, with artist Ross Sinclair rehearsing for the opening night performance) represents a collective meeting place; it will be used for talks and performances throughout the exhibition's run. In making *Settlement* Inglis was greatly influenced by the 'jungle' at Calais; the final two structures in the room, *FRAME* and *FRAGMENT*, look at the building and destruction of these temporary settlements. Finally, on the ground floor of the building, Inglis has installed the huge *Windmill/Learn to Love Yourself*, the idea being that the values written on its sails fuel the Settlement upstairs.

Back on the third floor, a long glass cases houses items from the Travelling Gallery's archive; posters, catalogues, photos, schedules and, most fascinating of all, letters and notes from some of the people who have visited the gallery on its travels:



‘My class appreciate the bother you’ve gone to’ (P7 child)

‘All the stuff is weird and cool’ (Pupil, Secondary School, Highlands)

The staff of the bus also keep diaries, noting how many people visited, how busy they were at different times of day, and anything special that happened;

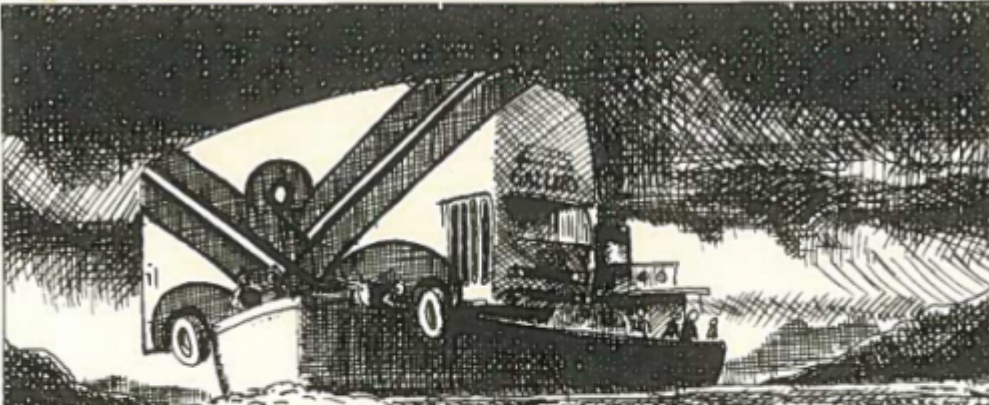
‘one small boy managed to get his finger stuck in the pull rings of the front bench, however some Fairy Liquid was applied...’

Claire Craig, curator of the gallery, finds it interesting that the bus is received differently in different parts of the

country; some schoolchildren are wildly enthusiastic, others take a little while to warm up. Access to art is, she says, not just dependent on physical distance; many communities around cities never step foot inside a traditional gallery because they feel that art is 'not for the likes of them' – it's something posh or clever and bears no relation to their lives. The Travelling Gallery visits places as remote as Lochgilphead and as close as Leith; it opens its doors and lets people in, so that wherever they live and whatever their preconceptions, they can engage with art and discover new possibilities.


Elizabeth Ann MacGregor OBE, a previous curator/driver, said : 'being on the bus, talking to the public and hearing their response, informed my belief that it's not art that puts people off – it's the context in which it's presented. The bus removes all barriers to access.'

Or, as the Scottish Arts Council said right back in 1978 : 'We take the gallery to the people.'



IF THE PEOPLE CAN'T GET TO THE GALLERY, WE TAKE THE GALLERY TO THE PEOPLE.

The Travelling Gallery is just one way we go out of our way to make art more accessible to people.	and concert tickets is paid for before you pay for them.
Another is the fact that, thanks to subsidies, most galleries are free.	The rest is met by the Scottish Arts Council, local authorities and private sponsors.
And much of the real cost of theatre	Arts subsidies aren't just for artists. They're for everyone.

Scottish  Arts Council

Travelling Gallery at 40 is at [City Art Centre](#), 2 Market Street until 4 November. The Centre is open 10am-5pm daily in

August only, then 10am-5pm Wednesday-Saturday, 12 noon-5pm Sundays.

Travelling Gallery at 40 is a partner exhibition of [Edinburgh Art Festival 2018](#), which runs until 26 August 2018.

The Travelling Gallery will start a new tour on 18 August, visiting locations in Edinburgh, Argyll & Bute, the Shetland Islands, Findhorn, East Lothian, Central Scotland and Renfrewshire. For full details visit the gallery's website here: <http://www.travellinggallery.com/currentlocations>.



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Pictured Musician Ross Sinclair 'Real live is dead'