

## University of Dundee

### Circuits, Reels and Actions

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***DOWSER*, notes on  
artists' moving image  
in Scotland.**

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**2.**

**Circuits, Reels  
and Actions  
Adam Lockhart**

Edited by Marcus Jack

DOWSER

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Frontispiece: David Hall, *TV Shoot-Out Piece* from *TV Interruptions* (7 TV pieces), 1971. Courtesy of Debi Hall.

Back cover: Paul Neagu, *Going Tornado* performance for Grampian TV Production "Images," production still, Aberdeen, 1974. Courtesy of Demarco European Art Foundation & Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee.

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**DOWSER**







**DOWSER** is a series of newly commissioned essays, interview transcripts and archival materials which makes available, for the first time, a collated set of resources from which we might begin to plot a history of artists' moving image in Scotland. Conceived as the necessary groundwork for a critically underreported field, this series hopes to share fragments, positions and testimonies that articulate the development of a now ubiquitous artform with a vivid and unique history in Scotland.



For this second issue, in a new essay titled “Circuits, Reels and Actions,” media archivist and researcher Adam Lockhart considers the history of artists’ moving image as it developed in the Edinburgh of the 1970s.

Scotland’s capital, Edinburgh has long endured a second-class perception in terms of artistic contribution and radical thought. Despite housing the country’s international arts festivals and national institutions, the city remains deferent to its west coast rival, Glasgow, a more dynamic, gregarious and politically engaged centre of art production. At the outset of cultural devolution in the 1970s, however, helmed by determined promoters like enfant terrible Richard Demarco and the staff of the nascent Scottish Arts Council, Edinburgh became the original seat of an avant-garde in Scotland.

Demarco’s annual Edinburgh Festival exhibitions featured unprecedented exchanges with countries including West Germany, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia, welcoming the influence of a pan-European cognoscenti and their pioneering film, video and performance

practices to Scotland. Just 500m from Demarco's gallery at Melville Crescent, the Scottish Arts Council was deeply engaged in rethinking the exhibition from their premises on Charlotte Square. Their early projects included commissioning the first video artworks broadcast on television in the UK, and a pair of milestone exhibitions which subverted the staid conventions of fixity and order through sprawling live video projects, expanded cinema interventions and an evolving programme of moving image works.

Illustrated by a number of archival photographs, including a selection of some otherwise unpublished images from the Demarco Digital Archive, Lockhart's commissioned text maps a series of key turns in this decade, offering a set of historical fieldnotes for further study and celebration.

Marcus Jack, Editor



**Circuits, Reels and Actions:  
Artists' Moving Image in  
1970s Edinburgh**

Adam Lockhart



Richard Demarco with camera, Alberobello, Puglia, Italy with Edinburgh Arts, 1977. Courtesy of Demarco European Art Foundation & Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee.

The 1970s were a fruitful period for experimental moving image art in Scotland. The Edinburgh Festival was by then well established and much activity took place within its sphere of influence. The European Avant-Garde was being promoted by Richard Demarco and the new technology of video was coming into the hands of artists. A number of seminal events and happenings took place in Edinburgh during this decade, an overview of which now follows. This is not by any means comprehensive but highlights some of most significant and groundbreaking activities to have taken place involving artists' moving image.

## **Richard Demarco**

Richard Demarco, an Italo-Scot, was born in Edinburgh in 1930. In his early years, WWII affected him deeply, particularly the persecution of Italians in Scotland after Mussolini declared war on France and Great Britain in 1940 and the subsequent sinking of the SS Arandora Star, when 100 interned ethnic Italians from

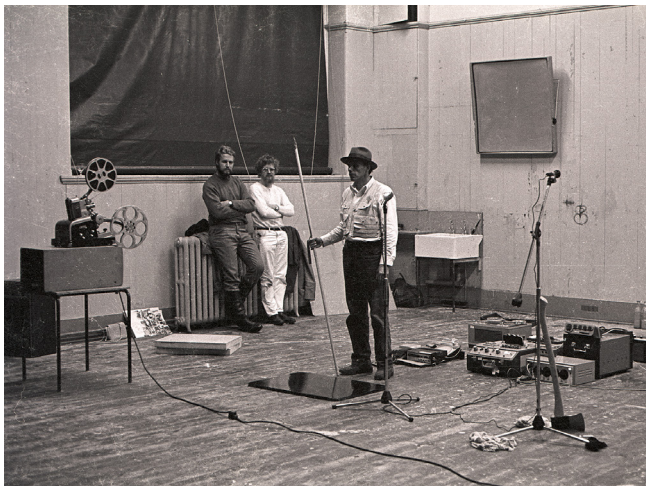
Edinburgh died. The first Edinburgh Festival of 1947 gave him hope that Scotland could again welcome and be expanded by international influence.<sup>1</sup> Since then, he has worked tirelessly to show that art can be a unifying force by promoting Scottish artists and welcoming international creative practitioners to Scotland.

Always understanding the importance of being present in and capturing the moment, Demarco sought to document events and happenings as best he could with the technology available to him. He would take 'snaps' of everything and anything he came into contact with, normally with his personal instamatic camera, much in the same way as people do nowadays with phone cameras, amassing a huge collection of photographs in the hundreds of thousands, a number of which were digitised and are now available online.<sup>2</sup> He also collaborated with others to photograph and record film and video of important events and performances. Some of these moving image documents have become synonymous with the artworks themselves, being, in a few cases, the only record of the happening to exist.

## Strategy: Get Arts

*Strategy: Get Arts* was one of the most important postwar exhibitions in the UK, bringing Joseph Beuys, amongst others, to Britain for the first time. Organised by Richard Demarco with the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, it was held at Edinburgh College of Art in August 1970.<sup>3</sup> The exhibition featured artists from the so-called ‘Düsseldorf School’ such as Blinky Palermo, Gerhard Richter, Gunter Uecker, and Imi Knoebel—known for his literal ‘moving image’ performance pieces, including *Projection X* (1971) in which he projected a giant ‘X’ across the buildings in Darmstadt, Germany, from a moving vehicle whilst at the same time recording to video.<sup>4</sup> The most significant film pieces that featured in the exhibition were those made for and connected to Beuys’ action *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch): The Scottish Symphony* (1970). Before the exhibition, Beuys made a trip from Edinburgh to Rannoch Moor where he performed his *Action on Rannoch Moor* (1970). The journey from Edinburgh was documented on colour 8mm film by artist Rory McEwan, entitled *Joseph Beuys in Scotland*. The film, whilst only 13.08 minutes long—





Joseph Beuys & Henning Christiansen, performance as part of *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch): The Scottish Symphony at Strategy: Get Arts*, Edinburgh College of Art, 1970. Photograph by George Oliver. Courtesy of Demarco European Art Foundation & Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee.

also referencing 13.08.70, the date it was made—captures key segments of the route that the convoy of cars took and finishes with the action itself. Years later in 2002, the artist duo Alexander and Susan Maris made *13.08 (after McEwan)*, a recreation of this same travelogue, retracing it as closely as possible to the original, including all camera movements and shots.<sup>5</sup> Also on the original journey was cameraman Mark Littlewood who was commissioned to record on 16mm black & white film, views of the moor from the side window of one of the vehicles. He then filmed the action, which involved Beuys forming a piece of gelatine into the shape of a heart, lifting it aloft and squeezing it in a pumping motion. This was then left in a bog on the moor along with ball of margarine. Back at the exhibition, this *Moorfilm* was double-projected on top of the existing film *Eurasienstab*—made in 1968 with Henning Christiansen—as a new expanded cinema piece which formed part of the multiple performances of *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch)*. Christiansen also collaborated with Beuys on the performance, providing an accompanying live soundscape.<sup>6</sup>

## **Forresthill Poorhouse**

Demarco's close relationship with Beuys continued, with Beuys visiting Scotland many times after *Strategy: Get Arts*. Another of his actions that has come to define his time in Scotland, moments of which were captured on colour 8mm film, was *Three Pots for the Poorhouse*. This took place in the Forresthill Poorhouse in 1974, a semi-derelict building now part of Edinburgh University. The action comprised Beuys' signature blackboard drawings, three cast iron cooking pots and cord, followed by an explanatory lecture by Beuys.

The same year at the Poorhouse during the Edinburgh Festival, Demarco organised the three-day *Black and White Oil Conference*. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, viable oil fields were being discovered in the North Sea and were starting to move into production. The oil crisis of 1973 caused the prices to quadruple, potentially unlocking huge wealth which was expected to benefit Scotland in the way the industrial revolution had done before. In light of this, Demarco sought to bring together thinkers from various backgrounds to discuss these issues. Keynote lectures were given by



Buckminster Fuller at the *Black and White Oil Conference*, Forrethill Poorhouse, Edinburgh, 1974. Courtesy of Demarco European Art Foundation & Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee.

Joseph Beuys and Buckminster Fuller along with presentations by politicians, religious leaders, artists, scientists, gallery directors and industry professionals. Sections of this were recorded onto black and white ½" EIAJ reel-to-reel video, the format that became ubiquitous at the time for artists and community groups due to ease of use and relatively low cost.

The venue became a favourite of Demarco's with a number of events and happenings taking place there in the 1970s. In 1972 Demarco invited Tadeusz Kantor, the Polish stage director to bring his Cricot 2 theatre group to the Poorhouse to perform their chaotic interpretation of Stanislaw Witkiewicz's *Water Hen (Kurka Wodna)* in Polish. This was part of *Atelier '72*, an exhibition of contemporary Polish artists. At the time, Demarco had the foresight to commission a company to video record the performance on the professional reel-to-reel 1" IVC format which had become obsolete by the early 1980s. The reels were left unseen for years until researchers from DJCAD (University of Dundee) digitised, restored and subtitled the footage.<sup>7</sup> This video then formed part of a major exhibition, *The*

*Water Hen: Kantor, Demarco and The Edinburgh Festival* at the Royal Scottish Academy in 2015, subsequently touring venues in Poland, Germany and Brazil. This remains the only known moving image record of this particular piece by Kantor.

Also present as part of *Atelier '72* were a group of avant-garde filmmakers from Łódź Film School known as the Workshop of the Film Form (Warsztat Formy Filmowej), who intended to make a film on Edinburgh and the Edinburgh Festival. Among them was Wojciech Brusewski, who later became an important pioneering Polish video artist, film director and digital artist.<sup>8</sup>

## Central Europe

Richard Demarco became well known for his connections with Poland, but his links with other Eastern and Central European countries were also strong. His close relationship with the Romanian artist Paul Neagu resulted in two important events captured on film and video. As part of *Romanian Art Today*, held at the Richard Demarco Gallery (RDG) in 1971 during the Edinburgh Festival, Neagu performed the piece *Horizontal Rain*. Recorded on colour 16mm film, the performance started with the artist walking on stilts wearing his Cubist-influenced three-dimensional suit based on his 'Impulses & Vectors' concept in the streets around the RDG on Melville Crescent. He then drew on the pavement and walls of a building using chalk and stencils of more Impulses and Vectors. *Horizontal Rain* forms the middle part of the three stages of awareness in Neagu's philosophical system, the others being *Blind Bite* and *Going Tornado*.

In 1974 Demarco devised and presented "Images," a series of five television programmes directed by Alan Franchi for Grampian Television. Neagu was the subject of one these



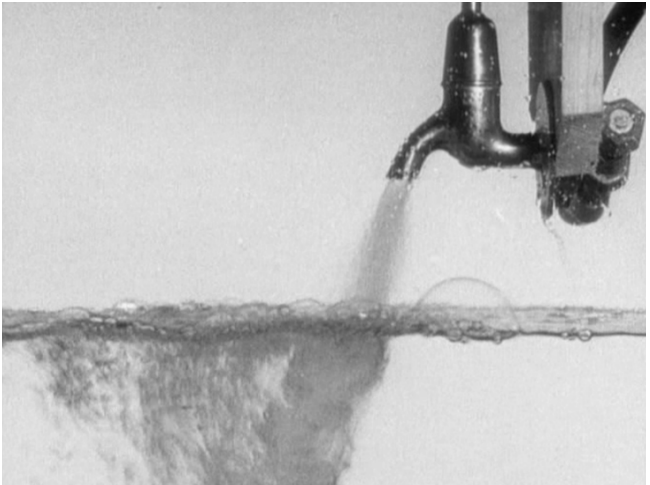
Paul Neagu, *Going Tornado* performance for Grampian TV Production "Images," production still, Aberdeen, 1974. Courtesy of Demarco European Art Foundation & Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee.



programmes, focusing on a live performance of *Going Tornado* filmed in the Grampian studios in Aberdeen. This was followed by a discussion with Demarco, art critic Cordelia Oliver and Neagu. The performance began with Neagu drawing large circles with chalk on the floor whilst wearing roller-skates, then performing actions whilst gradually attaching objects to himself with rope, and finally 'Going Tornado' by spinning on the spot. This programme is the sole episode to survive from the original series. The only known recording was made on a consumer Philips VCR tape, the original broadcast masters are presumed lost.

*Aspects '75* took place at the RDG, Monteith House and the Fruitmarket Gallery, organised by Demarco in association with the City Art Galleries, Zagreb, and bringing 48 contemporary artists from former Yugoslavia to Edinburgh. In the early 1970s, little was known of Yugoslav contemporary art outside of the country. After Demarco visited in 1972, he was prompted to exhibit *Eight Yugoslav Artists* in Edinburgh the following year. It was during this exhibition that Marina Abramovic, at Melville

College, gave her first performance of *Rhythm 10*, in which she plays the Russian knife game 'Five Finger Fillet.'<sup>9</sup> Abramovic then returned for *Aspects '75*, with the piece *Warm/Cold* at the Fruitmarket Gallery, which she performed to camera and recorded on ½" CV reel-to-reel video, the first 'prosumer' video format also used by Nam June Paik in his early career. In the piece, Abramovic is seated facing the camera with her hand on a large block of ice whilst at the same time an electric heater is above her hand, simultaneously melting the ice and burning the back of her hand. During the 18 minutes of video she is reasonably static, except at one point, when she starts to scream and bangs her hand on the ice, breaking off a shard which falls to the floor.



David Hall, *Tap Piece* from *TV Interruptions* (7 TV pieces), 1971.  
Courtesy of Debi Hall.

## Locations Edinburgh

The Artist Placement Group (APG) was formed in London in the 1960s, initiated by John Latham and Barbara Stevini. The purpose of the group was to place artists into organisations with an open brief, setting out to encourage the artists to make work in response to their involvement in the socio-political context of the organisation. This was a radical approach compared to traditional artist in residence schemes.<sup>10</sup>

In 1971, five artists associated with APG along with three others were invited to participate in the project *Locations Edinburgh* curated by Alastair Mackintosh of the Scottish Arts Council. They were asked to intervene in some way in the city during the Edinburgh Festival using various methods of communication. One of the participants, the sculptor, film and video artist David Hall, was placed with Scottish Television (STV), where he made *Television Interruptions (7 TV pieces)*. As the title suggests, seven stand-alone artworks were developed by Hall in conjunction with STV, with the assistance of artist Tony Sinden and producer Anna Ridley, who also appear in some of the pieces. These pieces were then broadcast unannounced on

the STV network during the festival, uncredited and with no forewarning, at Hall's bequest. This was unprecedented and even less likely today. These works were ground-breaking in that they were the first examples of video art to be shown on television in the UK.<sup>11</sup> Although for practical reasons they were shot on 16mm film then telecined, rather than directly on video tape, their broadcast intent has appropriately designated them 'video' works. Two of the better-known examples include *Tap Piece*, which involves a tap which appears to fill up the viewers TV with water, and *TV Shoot-Out Piece*, shot on Edinburgh streets, which alternated the roles of the viewed and the viewer from within the TV and the camera. These pioneering works were Hall's first venture into video art, he is now recognised as the 'Godfather' of British Video Art. A documentary was made and broadcast on STV in the same year, written and presented by Alex Dickson, featuring all the *Locations Edinburgh* artists, including Hall.

## **Open Circuit & Open Cinema**

Two film and video events, *Open Circuit* in 1973 and *Open Cinema* in 1976, were organised by the Scottish Arts Council and held at their gallery in Charlotte Square during the Edinburgh Festival in each year. These exhibitions showcased works by cutting edge artists working across different types of moving image media.

Running for three weeks, *Open Circuit* placed an emphasis on the 'new' technology of video, which although having been around since the 1950s, had only really come into the hands of artists and community groups in the late 1960s with the release of the Sony Rover 'portapak.' The Scottish Arts Council had previously bought video equipment, which was used in this exhibition, highlighting its benefits and function. For one part of the exhibition they hired a camera crew comprising Peter Warrilow, Jon Schorstein, Mike Radford and Colin Nicholson with an open brief to capture moments with video from the festival, playing back the results in the gallery. The Glasgow-based group Artefactory worked with the gallery visitors demonstrating the potential and 'magic' of video, allowing people to use the equipment



David Hall & Tony Sinden, *Edge*, 1972-73. Courtesy of Lulu Quinn.

and watch it back on monitors. Visitors were also invited to make video portraits of themselves with the artists David Hall and Tony Sinden. All of this fed into the dynamic concept of the event, moving away from the idea of a static exhibition where the viewer is passive, into one where they become part of it.

In a different area of the gallery, an experimental film programme showcased conventional projections and expanded cinema work. This included five films by Hall and Sinden made between 1972 and 1973 which question and parody the conventions of mainstream cinema; *One* (1971) by Ian Breakwell and Mike Leggett, a film about Breakwell's previous live CCTV satirical exhibition of the Apollo moon landings; and films from John Lennon & Yoko Ono. Also screened were American artist Stan VanDerBeek's 'computer films' which he made in conjunction with computer scientists, showcasing the potential of the new burgeoning technology of computer graphics. It was VanDerBeek who first coined the term 'expanded cinema,' which takes the idea of cinema beyond the conventional film theatre



experience, through the use of multiscreen, live performance or viewer participation. A number of these expanded works were shown by artists from the London Film-Makers Co-op (LFMC), under the guise of a 'Film Action Show.' Malcolm Le Grice's two-screen signature piece *Berlin Horse* (1970) with soundtrack by Brian Eno was shown alongside other works by artists William Raban, Gill Eatherley and Annabel Nicolson.<sup>12</sup>

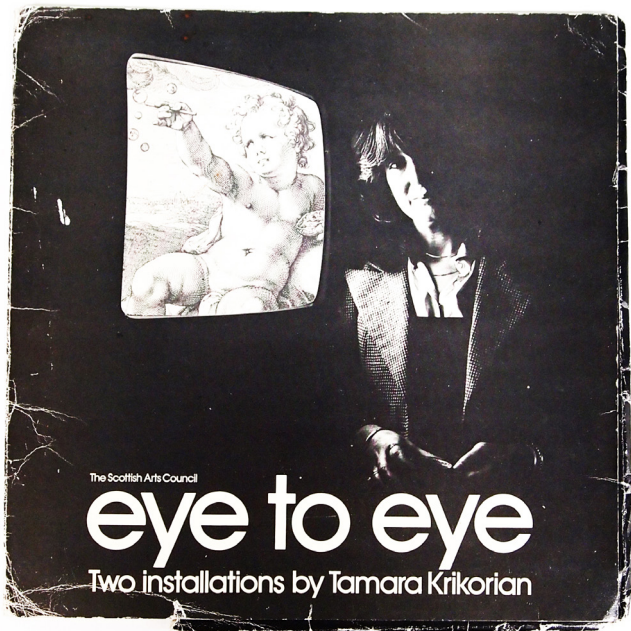
Three years later, the five-day exhibition *Open Cinema* focused primarily on expanded cinema, again inviting members of the LFMC to exhibit/perform their work, this time with the addition of Nicky Hamlyn, Jane Rigby, Tony Hill, Robert Fearn and Marilyn Halford.<sup>13</sup>



Malcolm Le Grice, *Berlin Horse*, 1970.  
Courtesy of Malcolm Le Grice and LUX, London.

## Eye to Eye

Tamara Krikorian was one of the first women artists to work with video in the UK. After moving to Edinburgh in the mid-1960s, she began working with the Scottish Arts Council archive in the early 1970s where she adopted video to record interviews with artists. Seeing its potential, she started to make video installations and her work was exhibited as part of *The Video Show* at the Serpentine Gallery in London in 1975, the first survey of video art in the UK.<sup>14</sup> Along with David Hall, Stephen Partridge, Jonnie Turpie, David Critchley and others, she founded London Video Arts (LVA), an organisation established for the promotion and distribution of artists video. Krikorian was a central figure in organising *Video: Towards Defining an Aesthetic* in 1976 at the Third Eye Centre (now CCA) in Glasgow, which included some of her work. This was the first group exhibition dedicated to Video Art in Scotland. In 1979 she held two solo exhibitions in Scotland, the first featuring her seven-monitor video installation entitled *An Ephemeral Art* (1979) at the Third Eye Centre, and the second, *Eye to Eye*, at the Fruitmarket gallery in Edinburgh.



The Scottish Arts Council

# eye to eye

Two installations by Tamara Krikorian

Exhibition catalogue for *Eye to Eye: Two installations by Tamara Krikorian*, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, 1979.

*Eye to Eye* comprised of two installations, both based on her recurring theme of 'Vanitas' objects, used widely in Dutch 17th century painting. The first work *Tableau* (1979) references the painting by David Bailly, *Self-Portrait with Vanitas Symbols* (1651). Bailly's painting portrays the artist with an untidy table of still life objects highlighting the ephemeral nature of life. Krikorian's installation featured modern day still life objects and included a mirror behind the table, making the viewer a participant in the work. A video monitor placed the artist's portrait into the piece, along with another displaying broadcast television.

Unlike the original painting, which captured a moment in time, this was truly time-based. The living objects (fruit and flowers) were left to rot, the objects on the table could be moved, the images on the monitors and the participants in the mirror changed. The accompanying installation, *Vanitas or An Illusion of Reality*, was the second version of this piece, originally exhibited in Coventry the year before. It comprised of two video monitors back-to-back on plinths, one with a recorded still life scene

in black and white, and the other with a video self-portrait in colour of the artist holding a mirror, reflecting changing shots of newsreaders from an off-screen TV. This monitor faced a mirror which was attached to a wall at close distance, reflecting the image back out to the viewer. Although these two video installations referenced art history, they also set out to contrast the real world against the manipulation of broadcast television.

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The avant garde scene in Edinburgh in the 1970s was vibrant, with the Festival as the main catalyst. The cross pollination of events and activities added to the whole zeitgeist. David Hall visited *Strategy: Get Arts* with Anna Ridley; Tamara Krikorian frequented many Demarco events; and Ian Breakwell attended the RDG-organised *Edinburgh Arts '73* during *Open Circuit*. The curators of *Open Circuit* also encouraged their video camera crew to record activities that Demarco was involved in.<sup>15</sup>

Documentation of important happenings formed a large part of the film and video output produced at the time. Combined with pioneering work like Hall's *TV Interruptions*, the expanded cinema performances and the experimental use of video technology, they are testimony to a remarkable period in Edinburgh for artists moving image. It should be noted that none of this took place within the established Edinburgh art institutions, but in disused buildings, art schools, on television, outdoors and in new contemporary art galleries. This decade also challenges the assumption that Glasgow was the sole cradle of contemporary art in Scotland.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Richard Demarco, *The Road To Meikle Seggie*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2015), 11–12.
- <sup>2</sup> [www.demarco-archive.ac.uk](http://www.demarco-archive.ac.uk)
- <sup>3</sup> Richard Demarco and Joseph Beuys, *A Unique Partnership* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2016), 25.
- <sup>4</sup> Christiane Fricke, "Projection X," in *40 years videoart.de*, ed. Rudolf Frieling and Wulf Herzogenrath (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006), 122.
- <sup>5</sup> Stephen Robb, "Alexander and Susan Maris An Artists' Dialogue with Rory McEwan & Joseph Beuys," in *10 Dialogues: Richard Demarco, Scotland and the European Avant Garde*, ed. Euan McArthur and Arthur Watson (Edinburgh: Royal Scottish Academy, 2010), 17.
- <sup>6</sup> Arthur Watson, "Beuys is Here: Collaboration, Transformation, Publication," in *10 Dialogues: Richard Demarco, Scotland and the European Avant Garde*, ed. Euan McArthur and Arthur Watson (Edinburgh: Royal Scottish Academy, 2010), 19.
- <sup>7</sup> Adam Lockhart & Euan McArthur.
- <sup>8</sup> Richard Demarco et al., *Atelier '72*, exhibition catalogue (Edinburgh: Richard Demarco Gallery, 1972).
- <sup>9</sup> Jon Blackwood, "Richard Demarco and the Yugoslav Art World in the 1970s," in *10 Dialogues: Richard Demarco, Scotland and the European Avant Garde*, ed. Euan McArthur and Arthur Watson (Edinburgh: Royal Scottish Academy, 2010), 31.
- <sup>10</sup> Tate, "APG: Artist Placement Group," [tate.org.uk](http://tate.org.uk), [www2.tate.org.uk/artistplacementgroup](http://www2.tate.org.uk/artistplacementgroup) (Accessed 13 July 2020).
- <sup>11</sup> *Entering* (1974) by Peter Donebauer was the first artist's video to be nationally broadcast in the UK, *TV Interruptions* was broadcast only in the STV region.
- <sup>12</sup> Scottish Arts Council, *Open Circuit*, exhibition catalogue (Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council, 1973)
- <sup>13</sup> Deke Dusinberre et al., *Open Cinema*, exhibition catalogue (Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council, 1976)
- <sup>14</sup> Michael Tooby, "Tamara Krikorian Video Artist Obituary," *The Guardian*, [www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/aug/06/tamara-krikorian-obituary](http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/aug/06/tamara-krikorian-obituary) (Accessed 16 July 2020).
- <sup>15</sup> Scottish Television, "Open Circuit," television new report, 1973.



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Marina Abramovic, *Warm/Cold*, at *Aspects '75*, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, 1975. Courtesy of Demarco European Art Foundation & Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee.

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