

THE SCOTTISH ARTISTS UNION **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2008**

'Out of the Blue', The Drill Hall, Dalmeny Street, Leith, Edinburgh.
Tuesday 9th September 2008, 7.00pm - 9.00pm

AGENDA

- 1) **Registration**
- 2) **President's Opening Remarks**
- 3) **SNP Cultural Policy - Pete Wishart MP Followed by Q & A**
- 4) **AGM 2007 Minutes**
- 5) **2007/08 Accounts – Proposed by the 07/08 Treasurer, Chris Fremantle**
- 6) **2008/09 Committee Nominations**
- 7) **Motions – Proposed by the Members**
- 8) **SAU @ The Scottish Parliament in December 2008 w. comments from the floor.**
- 9) **President's Closing Remarks**

Present:

07/08 Executive Members:

Terry Anderson, Chris Freemantle, Laura Hunter, Chris Biddlecombe, Penny Sharp, Jayne Taylor, Su Grierson, Rob Hain.

Members and Associate Members:

Ginny Hutchison, Rocca Gutteridge, Clare Galloway, Leo Hunter, Anna King, Peter Standen, Elaine Allison, Donald Milligan, Micheal Mulready, Rowena Comrie, David Cook, Susan Nuttgens, Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, Guyan Porter, Leigh French, Owen Losav, Dorothy Aitchison.

Apologies:

Joyce MacFarlane, Chris Kelly, John MacNaught, Janina Harrower, Suzanne Davies, Malcolm Davies, Rebecca Marr, Emma Butler, Rebecca Holland, Charmian Pollok, Janis Embleton, Beth Forde, Wendy Bibby, Jan Ferguson, Helen Wilson, Julia Linstead, Jennifer Stevenson, Joy Kynaston, Jenny Marshall and Patricia Gow.

2. President's Opening Remarks

Terry thanked everyone for coming to the first quorate AGM since 2006 and introduced Pete Wishart MP. He reminded the assembled members that as a Westminster MP Mr Wishart is not a member of the Scottish Cabinet and therefore does not speak for the Government, but rather the party that forms it.

Mr Wishart then expressed his pleasure at being invited to speak at this AGM, especially as he is the first Parliamentarian to accept the invitation to do so. Terry and Pete have had some helpful and engaging conversations that he hopes will continue into the future.

3. Guest Speaker: Pete Wishart MP

Mr Wishart spoke as follows about the Creative Scotland Bill and the recently announced but yet to be published Public Service Reform Bill, which he described as 'the sequel' to the first in that it will enact Creative Scotland.

The SNP-led Scottish Government are determined to get this new bill through in the next sitting of the Scottish Parliament. They believe that they have had the fullest possible debate and that the bill should be on the statute books for March/April 2009, depending on the dissolution of the Scottish Arts Council, which needs to be disbanded by a royal decree.

The SNP recognise the great cultural output of Scottish art, which is internationally renowned and unsurpassable. For example the Edinburgh Festival that once again has been a great success. Also of note have been the major visual arts exhibitions, including those taking place internationally in New York and at the Venice biennale. Allison Watt in London for example and on a more local level when recently opening an exhibition in Perthshire. The positive creative environment encountered has been impressive, as have the opportunities that the sector is developing.

As an SNP Arts and Culture spokesperson at Westminster, Mr Wishart is aware of the current turmoil in the Arts Council of England (ACE) and their relationships with Local Authorities (LAs) and arts organisations. Of course the Scottish Government makes the most decisions regarding Scottish Arts and Culture in this respect.

However the issue of Resale Rights is an example where there are no devolved powers and Westminster would affect Scottish artists. Also at Westminster there was the Copyright private members bill last year, dealing with the extension of protection of musician's copyrights for more than 50 years after their death. Mr. Wishart's own background is as a musician with Runrig, whom he described as a 'classic cottage industry', self-managing and independent.

Mr Wishart stated that he was more interested in what artists can do for politics than what politics can do for artists. He reflected particularly on the 80's, which he considered a great time for politics and art, when there was a thriving polemical exchange instigated by the Thatcher government. It was artists and musicians who publicised and promoted the SNP and Labour movements. Mr Wishart's band mate Donny Munroe stood for parliament, for Labour, unfortunately losing by a small margin.

Mr Wishart is hoping his party's future at the House of Commons will mirror recent success at Holyrood. The Scottish Parliament is responsible for the development of Scotland's artists, so if the artists are not happy, there is the power of debate and publicity to confront our political representatives with ideas. The Scottish Parliament is hopefully more accessible and has more leverage in shaping policy for Scotland than we have ever had in the past. In general the Government is in favour of the "arm's length principle" but that doesn't abdicate the responsibility to support and develop and put in place the right kind of fiscal environment for arts to thrive.

In reference to the 2006 Draft Culture Bill (Scotland), the SNP detected that there was a lot that wasn't working in the arts sector. The momentum through Jack McConnell's influential 2003 St. Andrew's Day speech and the emergence of the Cultural Commission led by James Boyle appeared to be lost and unfortunately the outcomes of the debate in the shape of the Draft Bill did not sufficiently reflect the Commission's findings. Nor did it yield inspirational feedback. The post-2007 election Creative Scotland Bill stripped away much of what didn't work in the previous administration's Culture Bill and was not- in Mr Wishart's view- a bad bill, dealing as it did primarily with the inception and not the internal structures of a new cultural agency. Its defeat was due to what Mr Wishart described as a "trap" laid by opposition parties.

Recent newspaper headlines have focused on the costs of establishing Creative Scotland. Certain figures that have been quoted are red herrings as far as Mr Wishart is aware, however he concedes it will not be cheap. Richard Holloway has said we are half way across the river with this and we

have to keep on to get the bill in place, therefore creating a frame on which future generations can build. The brief is to establish what is likely to be an instrument for developing artists' works in local and international contexts. Creative Scotland is necessary.

Mr Wishart believes politicians and policy makers need to have a vision of where they want to be going and to be self-critical. Scotland already has a very strong identity abroad and at home. This is a great advantage on which we all must build. This "calling card"- our unique style, heritage and culture- has survived despite being a small part of a larger nation. Government needs to provide the environment that rewards innovation whilst responding to the challenge of balancing the traditional arts and our newer creative industries, like gaming. Our capacity and skills in newer technologies has been financially substantial and we are one of the countries leading international activities.

Getting beyond the debate about the structure for Creative Scotland, the SNP are looking at support for artists and in particular looking at the Irish model of tax breaks, this in recognition of the fact that artists are working in conditions that are way below what we could call a national minimum wage. The SNP should be looking at other packages of support too. The model that we see in Ireland is giving artists the time and space to develop. Mr Wishart remains immensely optimistic and proud of what has been achieved in a small country of only 5 million people. We have a fantastic cultural product, and in order to move forward we need to develop new mechanisms and continue to involve all the arts groups, including the SAU.

Questions and Answer Session

Terry thanked Mr Wishart and summarised the SAU position with regard to the Creative Scotland Bill. In brief, Creative Scotland would appear to be in charge of more "creative industries" than the remits of Scottish Screen and Scottish Arts Council combined, but given less money than both. Moreover there is no recognition of the special position and contribution of artists in the Bill's language. Even the word 'artist' has been omitted. The SAU has made these points several times over during the consultation process and our full statements are available online. Terry then invited questions from the floor.

David Cook: Can I ask two questions, one personal and one political? What can Westminster Mps do for Scottish artists? And what caused one member of Runrig to run for Labour and the other SNP?

PW: Donny narrowly missed out on a seat. But we've always had strong political leanings and great debates during the time with the band and still managed to all get along together. We haven't had many artists in the parliament, which is a shame, a few musicians and broadcasters. It's hard to get the visual artists voice heard at that level, particularly the Scottish perspective. Whenever the debate arises the London-centric culture media and sport agenda tends to dominate. The Olympics bid has resulted in a particularly tumultuous period. Brian McMaster was asked to resolve some of the issues but there are still some real difficulties. Further devolution of power to Holyrood would help in the long term. In the short, there remain some issues- the aforementioned Resale Rights being a pertinent example- where Westminster's actions will be felt by Scottish artists.

Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt: Your description of musicians leading the way to Holyrood reminded me of the musicians we saw visiting Number 10 in the early days of the first Blair government. Since then, many musicians and artists have turned their back on New Labour because of the attempts to instrumentalise their practice to agendas like social inclusion. The formation of Creative Scotland amounts to the effective privatisation of culture while most visual artists don't fit the entrepreneurial "creative industries" model. Research commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council showed that a significant number of artists earn less than £5,000 pounds per year from their work. Could you address this?

PW: Thirty years ago we never talked about the creative industries, but we must accept that on a global level it is the preferred model being adopted. If we don't do it, someone else will.

Developments like White Space in Dundee and the new technology explosion have made Scotland one of the world's top five countries in digital media. However we are not expecting artists to become cottage industries. The SNP feels immense frustration that we can't do more because of our limited fiscal powers in Scotland. There is no one cap fitting all and a number of strategies and approaches are required.

Guyan Porter: Two questions, one about consultation and the other about money. Firstly a vast amount of money has been spent on the consultation process over the last few years, yet artists were left largely excluded. What is going to be different about Creative Scotland? It also seems like an organisation that will have less money to bring to the arts, or more importantly the artist.

PW: The Scottish Government detects a prevailing "consultation fatigue" and the last thing the arts sector wants is another round. When the SNP got into government it was felt that the collective will of the cultural sector was that Creative Scotland should be established so that the period of debate and inaction could end. It is important to balance supporting the traditional arts and the newer technology and media arts. We need to get a distinctive and visionary organisation. At the moment the set up costs are estimated at £7,000,000; this money will not come out of the money earmarked for artists. However the money will need to be found from somewhere. It won't be cheap but it has to be right.

Leigh French: Whilst I appreciate the anti-Thatcherite sentiments, isn't everything being proposed an explicit cut in public spending and privatisation of the arts sector?

PW: I disagree. What it is is a bringing together and streamlining of two organisations. There are legitimate issues about the cost. As yet we don't and can't entirely know what the cost will be, there will be an initial cost that will have to come out of the existing budget but we can look at other ways of offsetting the cost later.

Chris Fremantle: What will happen after the set up, you are now delivering a "blank slate" agency. Will the vision simply be Jack McConnell's?

PW: I think that is totally fair, the whole debate is presently about structure and management. To begin with we do have to see this through, and then will be able to follow through with the vision and other issues. There has been a hiatus and now we must look firstly at funding and then the agenda. We hope that we will have full engagement with arts community once the infrastructure is in place. I know Linda Fabiani has been meeting with many organisations, including the SAU.

Terry Anderson: Not true. I have asked many times, and have met with her opposition counterparts, but never the Minister.

PW: Well, I'll raise that with her. You should be able to meet with her as well as any other relevant MSPs.

Terry Anderson: Well, I've twenty or so witnesses, so I'll hold you to that!

David Cook: My understanding was that there wasn't a visual artist on the Culture Commission Transition Board. Can we be assured of having visual artist on the new board?

PW: At the moment there is no list of members, artists, musicians etc. I will certainly be arguing robustly for visual artist representation on this new body, and can't imagine there won't be. We have to ensure that we have the widest range of representation.

Guyan Porter: What will happen if the new bill is also defeated?

PW: There are no guarantees, but we hope that there will be cross-party support. Considering this ultimately the fruit of a Labour bill, it was staggering that the Labour party pulled a last minute trick on us, stalling the last version of the bill.

Chris Fremantle: Do you think you think Scotland should buy the Titians?

PW: Yes.

Chris Fremantle: The committee (SAU Executive) did have a debate about this, and we felt once the Titians are bought it would be perceived as a “Scottish arts triumph” to the extent that it could override the real needs of the contemporary visual artists in Scotland.

Jayne Taylor: Don't you think it's worrying that Highland Councils want to sell off community centres and offer £1,000 toward the annual upkeep, whilst millions of pounds are diverted to saving some old Italian paintings. We should be supporting local cultural resources above expensive museum pieces. Maybe we should offer them back to the Italians, who would like to have them back.

PW: There is concern that things of value can be lost, arts communities have to be wary about this and make sure that the powers that are being devolved are not going to be abused. The Highland Council would not get away with community centre proposal in Perth and Kinross [his constituency].

Mr Wishart wound up the session by expressing his thanks and by remarking that the assembled members had been kind to him, which he appreciated. He would recommend face-to-face engagement with us to his colleagues.

4) AGM 2007 Minutes

The President then introduced the general business of meeting, which was to be kept brief. Items were to be agreed by a simple show of hands; Terry reminded Associate Members that they couldn't vote.

There were no matters arising from the 2007 minutes. Terry Anderson proposed, Chris Biddlecombe seconded. Passed by a unanimous show of hands.

5) Accounts 2007-08

Chris Fremantle thanked Danzig and Co for auditing the minutes once again, then summarised an account of this year's figures. Due to our rising membership there had been a substantial growth in income. Membership at the end of March 2008 was 500 (176 male, and 324 female). Our income increased from £8,000 plus to £15,000 plus. Overall our income is slightly less, because we invested in new literature and website, which we have now paid off. We expect to see a move back into a small profit over the following year. As our membership grows our public liability insurance premium will increase. A representative from our auditor Danzig and Co was in attendance. Chris then invited questions from the floor.

David Cook: Considering the health of the bank balance, what kind of spend will the SAU make on promotional or advertising material in the coming year?

Terry Anderson: That has a bearing on the eighth item on the agenda, so let me come back to it.

Rowena Comrie: How many people have claimed on the public liability insurance?

Chris Biddlecombe: None.

Terry Anderson: None have made a claim in the sense that there has been an incident that has given them cause to rely upon it to compensate an injured party. But we know it has made the

difference to many members' practices in terms of getting employment, an exhibition space and so on.

Unknown: As someone who was paying £40 per month before they joined the SAU, the public liability insurance has been a really worthwhile benefit and is now a prerequisite for many artists.

Su Grierson: We don't just want to become insurance brokers; there are a lot of other valuable benefits on offer. We need a balance.

Guyan Porter: Unions are often joined purely for the services, as much as the polemics.

Unknown: The web site really shows our membership what the union is doing and involved in so it is a great tool for promoting the political work. Artists are recognising this. Before a-n/AIR we were the only organisation providing Public Liability Insurance.

Danzig and Co.: Just a word of caution following David's question. Remember that part of the money the union receives is membership dues paid in advance. That money might not necessarily be there in the next cycle, if people decide not to renew.

Accounts proposed by Chris Fremantle and seconded by Chris Biddlecombe. Passed by a unanimous show of hands.

6) 2008/09 Committee Nominations

Nominations received included: Terry Anderson, Chris Biddlecombe, Rowena Comrie, Chris Fremantle, Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, Su Grierson, Rob Hain, Laura Hunter, Ginny Hutchison, Chris Kelly and Penny Sharp.

Proposed by Terry Anderson and seconded by Penny Sharp. All nominations passed by a unanimous show of hands.

7) Motions

There were no further motions from the members.

Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt asked for clarity on the SAU's position on Creative Scotland in light of recent announcements. Terry Anderson replied that while it was difficult to make a conclusive response without having the new bill before us, the SAU would once again seek to either amend the bill to enshrine recognition for the artist or oppose its progress entirely.

8) SAU @ Scottish Parliament December 2008

Chris Biddlecombe outlined the event scheduled for the end of this year at the Scottish Parliament. The SAU has had a number of Q&A road shows in the past, but in December we will have an information stand inside the lobby of the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. SAU Exec Members will man the stand for three days in the final week before the Christmas recess. So the question is how would the members like to be represented during this period. The rules state that we cannot seek out MSPs directly and must be a passive, non-disruptive presence. However we will be situated directly in their path to and from the main chamber. We need to attract interest visually (sound is not permitted), so we need strong art and a clear and interesting message to get MSPs to interact. We need to remember that we represent the geographic and practical diversity of our membership.

Chris then opened to the floor for discussion, and a lively discussion ensued:

Can we get media interest to support this event so that there is coverage on television, radio and online? Ask the members manning the stand to write to their MSPs to invite them to come and meet us there. Blanket email all MSPs with something friendly, maybe pictures of the faces of members on the stand and include our key points. Maybe collect one image from each of our members, also text, statements, and questions. A rolling image and information film or slide show.

Movement will help to draw attention. It might be impossible to show 576 images and maintain a coherent presentation.

An exhibition of work is not possible as the space is quite limited, about 3 square meters; it's right by the door of the debating chamber. We won't be easy to miss, but they may choose to ignore us, we can't solicit. For the most part we are especially able to represent ourselves in a strong visual way. It is important to show that we are a large and dynamic organisation.

How many members would be willing to stand in front of their work for a photo. We could show the human aspect of the people who make the art comes across? A striking image may not be a montage by committee. The work should be expressive. We are trying to grab attention and make a strong impression with our ideas. The images need to express the work we do but not in an overly complicated way. Maybe a map of artwork and artists using our diversity and geography to show who we are?

Could the presentation be turned into a screen saver that we could give as CD or DVD's? What about videos, something with subtitles, changing, making it interesting to watch. What would the content be? There will be other issues requiring attention apart from Creative Scotland. We will have to wait to see how it will be raised in the new bill; it is highly unlikely that it will be passed until after Christmas. So the SAU's stand is taking place at a good time, before MSPs will be asked to vote on it.

SAU members may wish to enter the public gallery during this period, especially during First Minister's questions, as the stand will not be in a public area. Maybe we could hold a parallel event? We don't want a demo outside the building; we want to be though provoking and not abusive. The economic situation is worsening, especially coming up to Christmas. Perhaps MSPs should be asked, "If you were living on £6,000 a year how would you spend Christmas?" Focus on the lack of preparation graduates receive in the art schools for the realities of arts practice. Money for artists, not organisations; no creative industries without creators.

9) President's Closing Remarks

Terry reminded everyone to sign the register their attendance and also to take an information sheet on Credit Unions, which you may find helpful, with ideas on alternative ways of managing finances.

Terry then thanked the members for attending and invited everyone to stay for refreshments served in the Out of the Blue Café. The meeting adjourned until September 2009.