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1. Flora Ritchie, *Cordelia Oliver at The Glasgow School of Art, 1944* (The GSA Archives and Collections). Image reproduced with kind permission of David Oliver.

2. Cordelia Oliver, *Cordelia Oliver*, 1960. Artist (Self-portrait), National Galleries of Scotland. Gift of Cordelia Oliver, 2008. © David Oliver GMA 5384

3. George Oliver, *Cordelia Oliver and Pavel Ilie in Ilie's studio. Bucharest, Romania, 1971.* Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee and Richard Demarco Archive. Image reproduced with kind permission of David Oliver.

4. George Oliver, *Cordelia Oliver among glass containers by Erich Reusch and photographs by Bernd and Hilla Becher, Strategy: Get Arts, Edinburgh College of Art, 1970*, Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee and Richard Demarco Archive.

5. Richard Demarco, *Edinburgh Arts group outside Third Eye Centre, 350 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow*. Cordelia Oliver (left). Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee and Richard Demarco Archive.

6. *Cordelia Oliver in her home at Sutherland Avenue, 2006*. Photograph by Malcolm Dickson. © Malcolm Dickson

‘Maker of exhibitions’: The curatorial practice of Cordelia Oliver

Abstract

The artist, critic and curator Cordelia Oliver (1923-2009) was an integral figure in the cultural life of Scotland from the late 1950s to her death in 2009. A graduate of the Glasgow School of Art, Oliver gave up her career as a painter to become a freelance critic and curator, a dual role which allowed a unique perspective on the production and reception of contemporary art from Scotland over five decades. Her

curatorial work aimed to showcase and develop the reputation of Scottish art in a British and international context.

A member of the Scottish Committee of the Arts Council of Great Britain (later the Scottish Arts Council) and a founding member of Glasgow's Third Eye Centre, Oliver curated a large number of exhibitions throughout the 1970s and 1980s which, considered in retrospect, reveal an implicit yet sustained effort to foreground and champion art by women. A close associate of the gallerist Richard Demarco, she contributed to projects which introduced avant-garde, experimental and cross-disciplinary practices to the relatively staid art institutions of 1970s and '80s Scotland. This paper focuses on Oliver's activities as a 'maker of exhibitions' looking in particular at her position as an artist-curator, a polymathic 'participant observer' of the artists she critiqued and exhibited.

Keywords: Scottish art; curating; contemporary art; art criticism; Glasgow; twentieth century

Introduction

On the inside cover of a Scottish Arts Council exhibition catalogue from 1983, there is a tiny biographical note listing the book's author as, amongst other things, 'a maker of exhibitions'.[1] It is an almost-undetectable acknowledgement of Cordelia Oliver's involvement in numerous exhibitions showcasing modern and contemporary art in late-twentieth-century Scotland and stands in contrast to the ubiquity of gallery signage often encountered today, in which curatorial authorship is perhaps too boldly stated throughout an exhibition. Rather, a key aspect of Oliver's exhibition-making was that it immediately preceded the shift described by Dorothee Richter as an 'enormous wave of desire to call oneself "a Curator"'. [2] Terminology aside, though, Oliver's work can be seen to have prefigured the kind of freelance, project-based curatorial work which became so visible in the 1990s. In recent histories and survey shows of

[1] C. Oliver, Author's note to *Jack Knox Paintings and Drawings 1960-83* (Glasgow: The Scottish Arts Council, 1983), p. 4.

[2] D. Richter, 'Propositions on Curating or How Much Curating is Involved in Social Change', in N. Krämer & P. Müller (eds.), WITH: a Bookazine on Collaboration between Cultures, Art Forms, and Disciplines, Connecting Spaces, Hong Kong – Zürich 2013 – 2017 (Hong Kong Zürich 2018) p.143

Scottish art by art historians, artists and curators including Duncan Macmillan, Murdo Macdonald, Alice Strang, Lachlan Goudie, Patrick Elliott or Bill Hare one has to look closely to find traces of Oliver's extensive work as a curator and exhibition organizer (even though, as Neil Mulholland has argued, Scottish art has been more mythologized through major exhibitions than art history or criticism).[3] Where her name does appear, it is almost always to be found within the primary sources — exhibition catalogues, gallery leaflets, and newsletters — linked to the exhibitions to which she contributed. Very often, acknowledgement of her contribution is hidden next to a catalogue's ISBN number or details of the print run.

Perhaps surprisingly, and in spite of her prolific involvement in exhibition-making between the mid-1960s to the 1990s across Scotland, including major surveys, retrospectives, solo shows, and themed exhibitions for organizations including Edinburgh College of Art, The Third Eye Centre, The Scottish Arts Council and many others, Oliver is rarely remembered as a curator. Rather, her reputation is based largely on her work as an art critic for *The Glasgow Herald*, *The Guardian* and *The Times* and many other publications between the 1960s and 1990s. In this paper, I argue that it is the range and reciprocity of Oliver's activities — as an artist, teacher, lecturer, policy maker, curator and critic — that makes her contribution so crucial to the development and reputation of Scottish art. I conclude by considering some of the possible reasons for her exclusion or erasure from the histories of Scottish art over the last few decades.

An Artist-Curator

Cordelia Oliver (née Patrick) began her career as an artist. She studied Drawing and Painting at The Glasgow School of Art between 1940 and 1944 and had intended to become a portraitist upon graduation. She was awarded the Guthrie Medal for her Diploma Show self-portrait in 1944 and continued to exhibit her work until the early 1960s. Her paintings and drawings were

[3] N. Mulholland, 'Learning from Glasvegas: Scottish Art after the '90', *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History*, Vol.7, (2002), 61.

exhibited at venues including The Royal Scottish Academy, The Royal Glasgow Institute and The Outlook Tower in Edinburgh, while her commissioned Edinburgh Festival drawings were published in *The Glasgow Herald* for over a decade. In the last few years of her life she was invited to exhibit some of her early works in exhibitions at The Glasgow School of Art including *Art Booms with the Guns* (2001) and *Cordelia Oliver: Festival Drawings 1949-1960* (2006) and in 2012, shortly after her death, her works were exhibited in *Studio 58: Women Artists in Glasgow since WWII*, also at The Glasgow School of Art, and in 2014 in *The Glasgow Girls 1920-1960* at Kirkcudbright Town Hall. After graduating from the Glasgow School of Art, Oliver worked as an art teacher in Glasgow for three years before marrying the writer and photographer George Oliver, with whom she moved to London briefly before relocating to Edinburgh. For most of the 1950s, Cordelia Oliver worked as an illustrator and commercial artist, often in collaboration with George. They returned to Glasgow in 1959 and were based in their home city for the rest of their lives. Her paintings and drawings are held by The Glasgow School of Art, the National Galleries of Scotland (Scottish National Portrait Gallery) and other major archives and collections.

FIG. 1 Flora Ritchie, *Cordelia Oliver at The Glasgow School of Art*, 1944 (The GSA Archives and Collections). Image reproduced with kind permission of David Oliver.

Although Oliver always identified first and foremost as a visual artist, throughout her career she demonstrated an interest in and commitment to 'the arts' in their broadest sense as producer, critic and audience member. In the late 1940s, she had been an award-winning solo singer in both the Glasgow Orpheus Choir and the Phoenix Choir and performed at the first Edinburgh Festival in 1947. She was also deeply involved in activities at Glasgow's Citizens Theatre, working as a scene painter for some of its earliest productions. From the 1950s onwards, Oliver became a noted critic of performing arts and was a regular contributor to publications produced

by the Central Office of Information (COI), the UK government's marketing and communications agency.[4] The intended worldwide reach of the publications reflected Oliver's subsequent approach to her critical and curatorial practice — to showcase art and theatre from Scotland in an international context whilst helping to develop a robust, networked community for Scottish artists and audiences at home.

In common with many of her peers and associates, Oliver's interest in the intersections and overlaps between creative fields and disciplines and her own endeavours to work across and between different forms could be seen as the product of a Scottish education system committed to the pursuit of 'the democratic intellect', a philosophically-informed, generalist education (not unlike a liberal arts model of education).[5] Her commitment to inter- and cross-disciplinarity may also be the result of the very particular environment she experienced as a student at the Glasgow School of Art during the Second World War, in which teaching was much more integrated across disciplines than usual because of the drastically reduced staff and student cohort.[6] Certainly, the impact of this educational experience can be seen in Oliver's critical and curatorial work – she was a vocal proponent of expanded forms of sculpture in the late 1960s and early 1970s, writing with enthusiasm on the work of artists such as Tom Marioni and Joseph Beuys and introducing Paul Neagu's television performance piece *Going Tornado*, in Aberdeen. As a painter she regularly focused on painters in her curatorial work but also showed a particular interest in artists who worked across forms and fields.[7]

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[4] S. Thompson, ''Cod Liver Oil': The Art and Criticism of Cordelia Oliver, *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol 21, Issue 1 (2020), 30-56.

[5] G. E. Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and Her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

[6] J. Brownrigg and S. Thompson, 'Early Eardley: a reconsideration of Joan Eardley (1921-1963)', *The British Art Journal* XXII (3) (2022), 64-79.

[7] See, for example, C. Oliver, 'Man of sound vision', *The Guardian*, 26 June 1972, p.8 on the work of Canadian artist Thomas Marioni or 'Ian Breakwell', *The Guardian*, 30 Nov 1978, p.10.

As I have discussed elsewhere, Oliver's career as a critic, and thereafter a curator, happened almost by chance.[8] In the 1950s an editor at *The Glasgow Herald* newspaper invited her to illustrate some of the features and reviews for the 'Women's Page'. The small illustrations for that section expanded to become a longstanding series of published drawings to accompany art, theatre, dance and opera reviews, in addition to what became a decade-long body of work depicting events and performances at the Edinburgh Festival (as noted above).[9] It was through her role as an artist and illustrator for *The Glasgow Herald* that Oliver was asked to write reviews of contemporary art exhibitions, often by younger or less established artists that the art critic did not want to review. This quickly led to commissions from UK-wide broadsheets *The Guardian* and *The Times* and cemented her career as a critic. Between the early 1960s and the mid-1990s, *The Guardian* published over 450 reviews and articles on visual art by Cordelia Oliver, representing only a fraction of her overall output as a critic. She continued to write intermittently for *The Glasgow Herald* (renamed *The Herald* in 1992), *Artwork*, *Studio International* and many other publications until the last decade of her life as well as authoring a number of books and book-length catalogue texts on visual art and theatre between the 1980s and 2000, including *James Cowie* (1980), *Jack Knox: Paintings and Drawings 1960-83* (1983), *It is a Curious Story - The Tale of Scottish Opera 1962-1987* (1987), *Joan Eardley RSA* (1988), *The Seeing Eye: The Life and Work of George Oliver* (1998), and *Magic in the Gorbals* (1999), a history of the Citizen's Theatre in Glasgow.[10]

As her reputation as a critic grew, Oliver began to regard the dual role of artist and critic as being in conflict, a tension that was never expressed in relation to her curatorial work. Her early reviews for *The Glasgow Herald* had almost always been attributed to the anonymous 'Our Art

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[8] S.Thompson, 'Cod Liver Oil': The Art and Criticism of Cordelia Oliver', *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol.21, Issue 1, 2020.

[9] See S.Thompson, *Cordelia Oliver: Festival Drawings 1949-1960*, 2006, unpaginated (exhibition leaflet)

[10] Thompson, 2020, Ibid.

Critic' but *The Guardian* and *The Times* reviews carried a byline, revealing the critic's identity. Oliver decided to stop exhibiting her work publicly after she became aware of the negative reception of exhibitions of work by her peer Edward Gage (1925-2000), painter and art critic for *The Scotsman*. Gage had continued to paint and show works while writing exhibition reviews for the Edinburgh-based newspaper between 1966-1995, but his artwork did not achieve the same level of visibility as his criticism, and some artists, who looked unfavourably on his artwork, began to regard his paintings as a disqualification for making judgements on the work of others. Oliver, writing in Glasgow in the same period, took note, though the choice was apparently painful and one to which she frequently referred in later life.[11]

FIG 2. Cordelia Oliver, *Cordelia Oliver*, 1960. Artist (Self-portrait), National Galleries of Scotland. Gift of Cordelia Oliver, 2008. © David Oliver GMA 5384

Although she continued to paint and draw in private, Oliver's withdrawal from the art world as an exhibiting artist led to an exponential increase of activity in writing, exhibition-making, policy-making, public speaking and advocacy. In relation to her work as a curator, her exhibition-making was perhaps more distinctive because of the tireless, polymathic nature of her involvement in the arts in Scotland across multiple platforms. In this respect, as Sabeth Buchmann has noted in relation to the curatorial work of Lucy Lippard, Oliver can be seen as representative of the dissolution of distinct professional fields from the 1960s onwards.[12] Oliver's understanding of art and artists in Scotland, and her interest in exhibitions as a form (she regularly critiqued the curatorial aspects of exhibitions she reviewed), was based on first-hand experience as an exhibiting artist. Her approach to curating and criticism was based on participant observation undertaken from an artist's perspective and done so in an era before

[11] K. Chambers, interview with the author, 26 Feb 2010.
[12] D. Richter, 2018, Ibid.

such expansive 'portfolio' practices became commonplace for artists.[13] But while it seems clear that the rise of Oliver's curatorial work coincided with her decision to stop exhibiting as an artist, and that much of the appeal of exhibition-making allowed for continued, professional proximity to artists and artistic production (and maintaining the networks she had established as an artist), her approach to curating never became one in which other artists became her medium, an accusation levelled at Lucy Lippard, Harald Szeemann and others.[14] Equally, as Lippard herself observed, perhaps it was the case that Oliver, aware of the climate for women artists in Scotland, sensed she would be more successful as a critic or curator because 'it is far easier to be successful as a woman critic, curator or historian than as a woman artist, since these are secondary, or housekeeping activities, considered far more natural for women than the primary activity of making art'.[15]

Early Projects: The Scottish Arts Council, *Painters in Parallel* and more

Although she had been involved in earlier exhibition projects as an advisor, by the late 1960s (with her critical career firmly in place and her own artistic ambitions set aside) Oliver began to work as a curator in earnest, most frequently for the newly formed Scottish Arts Council (SAC) which was established in 1967 under Royal Charter. The SAC was a public body responsible for the funding, development, and promotion of the arts in Scotland between 1967 and 2010. It emerged from the Scottish Committee of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) before becoming, in 1947, the Scottish Committee of Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB). Twenty years later, it was renamed the Scottish Arts Council. Oliver

[13] For example, see Alex Gawronski, 'Curated from Within. The Artist as Curator', in *A Companion to Curation*, ed. by Brad Buckley and John Conomos (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), pp. 232–61.
[14] H. Reckitt, 'Support Acts: Curating, Caring and Social Reproduction', *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, 5: 1, p. 6-30.
[15] L. Lippard in J.Bryan-Wilson, Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era (Berkeley/Los Angeles/New York: University of California Press, 2009), p.164.

had worked as a committee member and freelance lecturer for the SAC from the mid-1960s but in the 1970s and 1980s she increasingly worked (in her preferred terms) as a 'maker of exhibitions' on SAC's behalf, alongside separate projects with other galleries and organizations. In 1971 she organized an exhibition on the Scottish artist and illustrator Jessie M. King (1875-49), for which she also wrote a catalogue. The exhibition opened in Glasgow before touring ten museums and galleries across Scotland, concluding at the Fine Art Society in London in 1972. In a note in the exhibition catalogue, Oliver is simply acknowledged for 'her work in making the exhibition'[16]. Forty years later, art historian Charlotte Rostek went far further, claiming that Oliver's work on King, who had died in 1949, 'retrieved this Glasgow Girl from obscurity'.[17] The distinction between these two acknowledgements perhaps reveals something of the changing status of curatorial work in the intervening years, whereby Oliver's role in the historicization of King is more fully recognized by Rostek. As further examples demonstrate, the shift in terminology from exhibition 'making' to 'curating' in the context of the conception and production of temporary exhibitions took place after Oliver's period as an active curator.

Before the curatorial turn of the 1990s, and frequently beyond that in Scotland, 'exhibition organiser', 'exhibition officer' or 'maker-of-exhibitions' tended to be the most frequently used terms used for figures involved in what would now be deemed 'curatorial' roles. It is worth noting, though, that with the continued expansion of how curating can or should be defined, there has been a recent return to terms such as 'exhibition-maker' on the part of curators such as Jens Hoffmann, one of a number, according to Helena Reckitt, 'to disavow the job title' because of both the ubiquity of the term and the reduction in specificity regarding what curating

[16] The Scottish Arts Council, 'Acknowledgements', in C. Oliver, Jessie M. King: 1875-1949 (Edinburgh: The Scottish Arts Council, 1971), unpaginated

[17] C. Rostek, *Scottish Women Artists* (London: The Fleming Collection), p. 38.

itself entails.[18] For Oliver, the realm of the curatorial took place in museums by art historians, directors and 'keepers of art' such as her associates Douglas Hall, founding keeper of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and Chris Carrell, Director of the Third Eye Centre (both described as 'arts administrators' in their respective obituaries). In keeping with Lucy Lippard, Oliver's curatorial modus operandi 'contradicted, or simply ignored, the connoisseurship that is conventionally understood to be at the heart of curating'.[19] Similarly, while Oliver did not declare herself a feminist, her curatorial practice has much in common with feminist curatorial methodologies and concepts of 'curating as care', including her efforts to network women in the arts and produce platforms of shared interests.[20]

In 1978, she selected a major survey show at Edinburgh College of Art, *Painters in Parallel*, which was accompanied by a 170-page exhibition catalogue. Again, she features in the acknowledgements:

> The selection of work has been made by Cordelia Oliver, one of the *Guardian*'s northern critics. Had it not been for her intimate knowledge of Scottish painting and her hard work during the regrettably short time available the preparation of this exhibition would not have been possible. The selection is a personal one and no attempt has been made at an objective and exhaustive survey. This is rather a group of pictures selected by someone who has seen them all before and who liked them. Some of the painters and paintings are well known—others are not. Either way, here is an opportunity to look at a lot of recent Scottish painting in a context that has been set for us by a woman who has, over a number of years, looked critically at all these pictures, and many others.[21]

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[18] Reckitt, Ibid, p. 11

[19] L. Lippard, 'Curating by Numbers', Tate Papers, 12 (2009). https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/12/curating-by-numbers [accessed 25 October 2022].

[20] Richter, Ibid, p.145

[21] L. Gordon, Foreward to *Painters in Parallel*, by C. Oliver (Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council, 1978), unpaginated

Written by the SAC's Lindsay Gordon (who is cited as having organised the exhibition) the text emphasises the relationship between Oliver's role as a critic and exhibition selector, identifying the crossovers between the two practices. In 1982, in an introduction to a monograph of Philip Reeves to accompany an exhibition at Edinburgh's New 57 Gallery (in which her curatorial role is unclear), Oliver herself makes this comparison, reminding the reader of her background as a practising, exhibiting artist as well as critic: 'Early in the 1960's Philip Reeves held a one-man show of his paintings at an Edinburgh gallery. Although I was then a novice reviewer, I was myself a painter and experienced gallery-goer.'[22]

In 1981, Oliver curated a solo show on the work of the Scottish painter James Cowie (1886-1956), under whom she had studied on a postgraduate course at Hospitalfield House, Abroath in the 1940s. In 1980, the year before the exhibition, Oliver had published the first monograph on Cowie's work with the Edinburgh University Press. As with the Jessie M. King exhibition, the SAC toured the exhibition across Scotland and concluded at the Fine Art Society, London. Again, it is primary source material which reveals Oliver's involvement. In the exhibition catalogue, James Bustard's small note of acknowledgement reads: 'Cordelia Oliver, who first brought the exhibition proposal to us, has selected the exhibition and written the catalogue. We would like to thank her for the time and thought devoted to this project.'[23] As with so many of her curatorial projects, these acknowledgements, however brief, are useful in highlighting Oliver's role as proposer and initiator of the exhibition. Although freelance, the note emphasises that Oliver's curatorial activity was frequently determined by her, rather than being a response to an invitation or commission.

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[22] C. Oliver, *Philip Reeves* (Edinburgh: New 57 Gallery, 1982), p.9.

[23] James Bustard, Acknowledgments in *James Cowie: The Artist at Work*, by C. Oliver (Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council, 1981), unpaginated.

In spite of their extensive work for the SAC and other organizations, it is important to note that both Cordelia Oliver and her husband, George Oliver were self-employed. From their grand villa in one of the most affluent streets in Glasgow's southside, the Olivers' financial autonomy (based on far more than their employment-based income) gave them the ability to propose, initiate or choose projects they felt were important. Cordelia Oliver's freelance status gave her the agency to voice forthright opinions that would have been more difficult to express had she been a permanently employed member of staff tied to a specific organization. The Olivers could move easily from project to project, temporarily relocate when required and turn down work they wanted to avoid. Their social and cultural capital allowed them access to figures of power and influence and opened up professional opportunities rarely afforded those with lower social status in mid-late century Scotland (a situation which remains the case today). In short, the couple were not reliant on an income from the institutions or individuals for whom they worked, and this gave them an unusual degree of creative freedom. This is an important point not only in terms of thinking of hierarchical structures within organizations, or the social and economic capital of individuals in positions of power in the art world but also in thinking about the decision-making processes afforded by such freedom of choice on the part of curators untethered to a conventional career structure contingent on income. Much has been written recently on the immaterial labour undertaken by freelance curators, their susceptibility to exploitation, their exclusion from broader considerations of 'care' in the art world and so on. In Oliver's case, the flexibility, hypermobility and social capital which allowed for the accrued affective resources she utilized to garner support were born of comparative privilege, including the absence of caring responsibilities. In common with many freelance curators today, the ability to treat 'work as a lifestyle rather than a job' has clear class implications, as Helena Reckitt has observed. In return for work which they carry out for low or no pay, Reckitt has

argued, curators (and Oliver is a clear precursor in this respect) expect to find fulfilment and self-expression, to see their work as part of an ongoing practice.[24]

Richard Demarco, Strategy: Get Arts, and other projects

In spite of her dedication, commitment and prolific activity in the arts, Oliver was never beholden to an institution or particular organization and was outspoken about organizations and individuals with whom she was connected throughout her professional life. Writing in her book *The Seeing Eye: The Life and Work of George Oliver* after George's death Cordelia Oliver recounted examples of their projects as writer and photographer, including extensive travel for the 1971 Richard Demarco exhibition on Romanian art and later trips across Europe (at Demarco's behest) to visit Tadeusz Kantor and other Polish artists and performers: 'One benefit of being self-employed is the freedom to travel when opportunity presents itself'.[25] George Oliver's presence and support were also crucial aspects of Oliver's success (and, from the 1970s, vice versa). Working in partnership with George allowed Cordelia Oliver access to events and opportunities that would otherwise have been complicated to negotiate, particularly for a woman in a male-dominated cultural world.

FIG.3 *George Oliver, Cordelia Oliver and Pavel Ilie in Ilie's studio*. Bucharest, Romania, 1971.
Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee and Richard Demarco Archive.
Image reproduced with kind permission of David Oliver.

In Oliver's obituary, the filmmaker Murray Grigor observed that it was George's work as a photographer for the Edinburgh International Festival that 'allowed Cordelia to catch performers on the fly, in line drawings, many of which peppered her then anonymous reviews

[24] Reckitt, Ibid, p.8
[25] C. Oliver, *The Seeing Eye: The Life and Work of George Oliver* (Glasgow: Glasgow City Library and Archives, 1998), p. 7.

for *The Glasgow Herald'*.[26] Together, they were more powerful and influential than they might have been individually and they were often commissioned to work on projects as a team, and credited together. Where Cordelia Oliver produced exhibitions, essays and criticism, George Oliver produced valuable visual records and documentation of the same events and exhibitions. Some of these sources are the only surviving documentation we have today of a number of landmark, pioneering cultural moments in Scotland. In projects for the Third Eye Centre and for the Edinburgh-based artist, gallerist and promoter Richard Demarco, their work appears as a joint enterprise. The Demarco project *Strategy: Get Arts*, held at Edinburgh College of Art in 1970 was a ground-breaking exhibition of German art in its most expanded and expansive forms. It included work by Joseph Beuys (who would go on to collaborate with Demarco on numerous projects in Scotland) as well as Sigmar Polke, Dieter Roth, Klaus Rinke, Stefan Wewerka, Günther Uecker, Blinky Palermo, Berhard and Hilla Becher, Daniel Spoerri and many others. As the art historian Christian Weikop has noted:

> In contributions to *The Guardian*, Cordelia Oliver provided critical coverage of Demarco's SGA and a profile of Demarco, while George Oliver also played a key role in providing extensive photo-documentation of the exhibition. His photographs appeared on the distinctive cover of the SGA catalogue. Along with Demarco's own photographs and those of the artist Monika Baumgartl, they provide an important visual record of the various installations and performances that took place.' [27]

FIG. 4 George Oliver, *Cordelia Oliver among glass containers by Erich Reusch and photographs by Bernd and Hilla Becher*, Strategy: Get Arts, Edinburgh College of Art, 1970.
Image courtesy of Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee and Richard Demarco Archive.

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[26] M. Grigor, 'Obituary: Cordelia Oliver', *The Guardian*, 26 Jan 2010 https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/jan/26/cordelia-oliver-obituary {accessed June 15 2022]

[27] C. Weikop,' 'More Impact than the Venice Biennale': Demarco, Beuys and Strategy: Get Arts', *Tate Papers*, No. 31 (2019) https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/31/beuys-demarco-strategy-get-arts [accessed June 10 2022]

The Olivers' work with Demarco was a professional partnership that would continue over decades, leading to projects and exchanges throughout Scotland, Europe and North America. Demarco, like Oliver, was an artist who had worked as a teacher before taking on other roles in the arts. In his role as a founding member and vice chairman, a programmed exhibitions at The Traverse Theatre Club in Edinburgh from the early 1960s, and, from 1966 at the eponymous Richard Demarco Gallery, alongside numerous off-site, ambitious projects, both local and international. In the first four years alone, Demarco had shown exhibitions of work by artists from Italy, Poland, Romania, Brazil, Canada, Spain, Colombia and Australia and many other countries, with exchanges often organised for British artists in turn. Cordelia Oliver had reviewed many Demarco-initiated exhibitions for the national press from the very start of his enterprises and their interests aligned in that both showed a particular interest in genre-crossing art and performance (the visual aspects of theatre; the performative aspects of visual art). Much of Oliver's critical writing from the 1970s fuses theatre and visual art criticism, particularly when writing about new shifts in contemporary art practice that were yet to be clearly categorised or defined. Before they began working more closely, Oliver was already an admirer of Demarco's curatorial endeavours and often reviewed his exhibitions favourably but she was more circumspect when invited to collaborate with him directly. Demarco was known in Scotland for his persistence in pursuing people he regarded as potentially useful or sympathetic to his aims. Both recognised that Oliver's reputation and classed position could enable her to champion, and thereby validate, Demarco's projects. Initially reluctant, George Oliver encouraged her to 'hear him out'.[28] Both undoubtedly benefitted from the partnership in creative and professional terms, but Oliver's championing of Demarco was crucial, and she did much to garner support for his projects. In the rarefied echelons of galleries, arts committees

[28] K. Chambers, interview with the author, 26 Feb 2010.

and museums in Scotland in the 1960s and 1970s, Oliver's 'cut-glass' Scottish accent and privately educated background, as well as her reputation as a critic for the UK press, worked as a validation of Demarco's endeavours which she publicly and pointedly endorsed. As Helena Reckitt has written, the work of the independent, post-1960s curator expanded to include 'affective labours involved with communication, liaison and social networking' in which curators 'mobilized their personal charm as a distinctly affective power, to attract artists and venues, motivate community collaborators, appeal to donors' and so on, an observation that is undoubtedly true of Oliver's ability and willingness to network and advocate on behalf of artists and organizations she wanted to support.[29] In interviews from the early 2000s, Oliver spoke of the sectarian and class prejudice which continued to plague Scottish society and claimed that part of Demarco's challenges in soliciting support for his projects were linked to his Catholic, working-class, immigrant Italian heritage which were in contrast with the elitism of the art world. In 1972, she wrote one of many reviews that lamented the lack of support offered to Demarco's projects:

> What matters, and what was discussed with a good deal of sympathetic heat at the […] press conference […] is that once again Richard Demarco has been given the brush off. Why? Is it possible after the evidence of all his exhibitions at past festivals […] he is still considered not trustworthy in his judgements? Or is it simply that his face does not fit the tight-minded Edinburgh set?[30]

For his part, Demarco has frequently acknowledged his debt to Oliver: 'Cordelia and her husband George were both artists who shared my belief, in the '60s, that Scotland's world of

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[29] Reckitt, Ibid, p.7

[30] C.Oliver, 'Demarcotion Dispute', *The Guardian*, 22 August 1974 https://www.newspapers.com/clip/25818376/demarcotion-dispute-cordelia-oliver-the/ [accessed 10 June 2022]

contemporary arts should take advantage of the international stage provided by the Edinburgh Festival […] Cordelia supported the most demanding aspects of avant-gardism.'[31]

While she understood the power structures of the art world and often attempted to subvert them, Oliver herself was, nonetheless, a cultural gatekeeper in relation to her understanding of her role as being didactic and instructional. Both Oliver and Demarco were tastemakers to different degrees, using their voice to showcase artists in Scotland they felt should be appreciated more widely, and to introduce new artists and practices from beyond the UK to audiences in Scotland. In 1984, Oliver wrote,

> Ricky Demarco has led a double life, using the title and function of a gallery director as a front for this wide-ranging pursuit and energetic sharing of art as something greater than the pleasure to be had from contemplating fine paintings, sculpture and the best of craftwork. His has been a mission to promote art as something that embraces a heightened experience of life, a sense of place and of historical roots. In consequence his acquaintance spans the globe and his audience encompasses not just the already enthusiastic and would-be knowledgeable but, potentially at least, every single soul within his reach.[32]

The Third Eye Centre

In the same period as her work with Demarco, Oliver began a long working relationship with Glasgow's progressive, cross-disciplinary arts venue, the Third Eye Centre, which opened in

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[31] Demarco in Grigor, 2010.

[32] C. Oliver, *Richard Demarco at the Traverse 1963-66*, exhibition leaflet, (Edinburgh: the Richard Demarco Gallery, 1984) unpaginated.

1975. Two years earlier, Tom McGrath had been appointed Director of the SAC Glasgow, based in the SAC Glasgow Gallery at 5 Blythswood Square, on the site of the former Glasgow Society of Lady Artists club. From the beginning, McGrath's vision appealed to Oliver. Far more than a gallery, McGrath oversaw mural projects, music concerts, poetry readings and many other events alongside the exhibition programme, attracting internationally renowned artists and performers, often photographed by George Oliver. The Third Eye Centre opened with an exhibition on Joan Eardley, curated by Cordelia Oliver. In the foreword to the catalogue McGrath noted:

> My particular thanks are due to Cordelia Oliver, who planned this exhibition and brought all of her professional expertise and personal knowledge of Joan Eardley to selecting the works. And to George Oliver who designed this catalogue. Quite apart from their skill and devotion as exhibition-makers, they made a personal day-to-day contribution to the setting up of the centre, which I value most highly.'[33]

FIG. 5 Richard Demarco, *Edinburgh Arts group outside Third Eye Centre, 350 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow*. Cordelia Oliver (left).
Image courtesy: Demarco Digital Archive, University of Dundee and Richard Demarco Archive.

Oliver's involvement with the organisation led to some of her most significant curatorial projects over the next fifteen years and the venue played a crucial role in building the reputation of Scottish art in and beyond Scotland, not least through McGrath's successor, Chris Carrell. Carrell was instrumental in developing Third Eye publications, firmly supported by Oliver, and they regarded exhibition catalogues as a way to build a living archive, to historicise and extend the lives of exhibitions, which was a relatively overlooked aspect of art publishing at the time. Oliver published numerous catalogue texts for the Third Eye, often as book-length companions

[33] T. McGrath, Foreward to *Joan Eardley*, by C. Oliver (Glasgow: Third Eye Centre), p.2.

to exhibitions she selected, such as the 1979 *Winifred Nicholson: Paintings 1900-1978*, in which both the catalogue and exhibition credits are shared by Carrell and Oliver.

Ten years after the inaugural Joan Eardley exhibition, Oliver showcased the work of another former Glasgow School of Art classmate in *Bet Low: Painting and Drawing 1945-1985*. The catalogue acknowledgements, written by the Third Eye Centre's Exhibitions Organiser, Richard Chapman, notes:

> All credit for organising this timely retrospective of Bet Low's impressive range of paintings and drawings since 1945 goes unequivocally to Cordelia Oliver. For not only did Cordelia Oliver research and select the exhibition but also negotiated with the many lenders for the borrowing of their most treasured paintings. Third Eye is indebted to Cordelia Oliver for her essential work in the realisation of this whole project and to George Oliver for managing to cope with the workload we thrust upon him.[34]

Alongside her curatorial and writing work, Oliver's advisory and policy roles also continued in the 1970s and '80s. In February 1979 she became a member of a committee set up by Bruce Millan, Secretary of State for Scotland. Chaired by Dr Alwyn Williams, Principal of the University of Glasgow, the committee were asked to report on the future of the national museums and galleries of Scotland. In June 1981, a final report was submitted, following extensive consultation and research by the committee members. In the 1980s, perhaps because of her relationship with organisations throughout Scotland through her work with the SAC, in addition to her reputation as a critic, Oliver was invited to select or programme a number of exhibitions at publicly funded regional museums and galleries, including the McLean in Greenock, the Aberdeen Art Gallery, the Pier Arts Centre in Stromness, Orkney, and smaller

[34] R. Chapman, Acknowledgements to *Bet Low: Paintings and Drawings 1945-1985* by C. Oliver (Glasgow: Third Eye Centre), p.3.

contemporary art galleries such as Edinburgh's New 57 Gallery and Glasgow's Compass Gallery. These were undertaken as freelance projects while she continued to work as a critic for *The Guardian* and many other publications. As a 'maker of exhibitions' Oliver's role was variable from project to project. For some, she was a programmer or selector, for others, she undertook a more comprehensive role, from conceptualising and proposing exhibitions to hanging and installation. Her involvement almost always included writing gallery texts and catalogue essays but she also undertook significant, less visible roles: administration, fundraising and coordination. As a freelancer, she often worked closely with museum and gallery staff to produce exhibitions and, wherever possible, worked directly with artists to realise their retrospective and solo shows. In working on a project-by-project basis, Oliver's curatorial work perhaps foreshadows the shift in understandings of curating as moving from 'caring for objects and collections to producing and managing social networks, collective energies and professional relationships.[35]

If the 1990s saw the inexorable rise of the artist-curator as a professional field, what were the characteristics of Oliver's exhibition-making in the preceding decades? The pattern across her curatorial and critical activity demonstrates her desire to embolden audiences within Scotland, to encourage cultural confidence and foster Scotland's receptivity to experimental, innovative and avant-garde practices. When audiences were apathetic or timid, she encouraged imagination and confidence, drawing analogies with forms of art that might be more familiar to wary attendees. Writing of the *Scottish Sculpture 75* show, she praised the work of Richard Demarco for bringing neo-Dadaist German and Romanian exhibitions to Scotland and giving 'local attitudes […] a knock from which, hopefully, they might never recover'.[36] She felt that this 'shot in the arm of young artists in Scotland' had 'caught the imagination of creative

[35] Reckitt, Ibid, p.6

[36] C. Oliver, Foreward, in R. Demarco, *Scottish Sculpture '75'* (Edinburgh: The Richard Demarco Gallery, 1975), p.1.

Scots'.[37] In discussing the works themselves, she wrote that 'as recently as five years ago a home-grown exhibition such as this would have been inconceivable in Scotland where, to most people, not least to the artists themselves, sculpture still meant, exclusively, work in traditional media'.[38]

Legacy and Visibility

The longevity of Oliver's career and her prolific, indefatigable activity make the lack of research into her significant contribution to post-war British art surprising. Is this because she was working in Scotland? Because she was a woman? Because she had no formal institutional role as an art historian, gallery or museum director? Certainly, Oliver herself claimed that she had not been taken as seriously as some of her counterparts for the reasons stated above.[39] But there are perhaps other ways to account for her exclusion from histories of British and Scottish art in the twentieth century, linked more to the history and development of curatorial practice itself. Firstly, her curatorial activity took place largely before the 'archival turn' of the '90s. As a result, her role is sometimes difficult to trace in exhibition histories where curatorial labour was not yet recognized. Perhaps her status as a comparatively wealthy woman, working in a freelance capacity, also contributed to her role being undervalued or overlooked. Her age, gender and geography may also have played a part in situating Oliver as a proto-precarious curatorial worker whose labour is often uncredited and unseen, in line with recent research by Kirsten Lloyd, Catherine Spencer, Victoria Horne and others on the feminized, invisible, supportive labour of curating-as-care. As this paper demonstrates, there are almost no secondary sources which focus on Oliver's work so researchers must rely almost exclusively on primary research methods and sources: interviews with her friends and associates, archival

[37] Oliver, Ibid
[38] Oliver, Ibid
[39] C. Oliver, in discussion with the author, 2002.

material, and writing by Oliver herself. Secondly, Oliver did not describe or define herself as a curator in a professional sense, even though that is what she did. Likewise, her own understanding of curating as a field was that it was primarily an invisible 'behind the scenes' activity. As I have discussed, for Oliver, curators were specialist custodians of museum collections, exemplified by her friend and associate David Baxandall, Director of the National Galleries of Scotland. Finally, and perhaps most pertinently, the notion of curatorial authorship as it is understood today would have been anathema to Oliver. As I have noted, in many aspects, she prefigured the position taken by a number of artists in relation to the 'curatorial turn' in the 1990s and early 2000s.[40] Her affinities lay with artists, not curators. All her didacticism and desire to educate through criticism and exhibitions Oliver's work was the opposite of instances in which 'the curator's role take precedence over that of the artist, determining not only the placing of an artist's work but also, in a more extreme development, its reduction to that of a mere cypher of the curator's own overplayed authorial conceits.'[41] As an artist herself, Oliver centred artists in her curatorial work and showed little interest in claiming credit or authorship for her curatorial projects.

Oliver's frequent, vocal antipathy towards professional curators and art historians seemed almost designed to emphasize that she was, first and foremost, an artist by training who had slipped into other roles by chance. In interviews with her from the early 2000s, and in some of her later reflective, autobiographical essays, one might assume that Oliver's dislike of art historian curators masked insecurity around the fact that she had had an art school rather than a university education. She frequently reminded friends, for instance, that she had, against

[40] Such as Jens Hoffmann's 2004 e-flux project 'The Next Documenta Should Be Curated by an Artist' https://www.e-flux.com/projects/66679/the-next-documenta-should-be-curated-by-an-artist/ [accessed 12 June 2022]

[41] P. Suchin, 'Goshka Macuga', *Frieze* (2005) https://www.frieze.com/article/goshka-macuga-0 [accessed 20 June 2022]

advice, 'given up' her chance to go to university in order to attend Glasgow School of Art.[42] But she believed that her educational background afforded her insights and perspectives often overlooked by non-practitioners and academics, and felt that as curators and critics, art historians tended to be overly focused on biography at the expense of analysis of the works themselves.[43] Curators and gallerists who attempted to coin new schools or movements, or those who courted the public through dumbed-down popularism were also objects of her ire. Her 1996 profile on Julian Spalding, Glasgow's Director of Museums and Galleries, particularly his selection of works for the new Gallery of Modern Art, makes this clear.[44]

Curatorial Intentions

While Oliver's curatorial career came about through circumstance and serendipity rather than design, her activities were contingent upon one another. Combined, her aims could be summarized as an attempt to ensure the visibility and critical recognition of Scottish art in and beyond Scotland (and within Scotland, there is a clear preference for artists from the West of Scotland and Glasgow in particular) and, more stealthily and implicitly, to champion and support the creative work of women, often working in her own medium, painting. Though she rarely made direct or explicit reference to the social or political position of women in the art world, Oliver's activities demonstrate concerted and recurrent attempts to increase opportunity and visibility for artists she thought were worthy of larger audiences. Writing of Lucy Lippard, art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson has observed that in her curatorial work she 'chose her subjects based on affinities and allegiances, many of which stemmed from her commitment to women artists, writing about untested figures […] emerging artists, and other risk takers whose work

[42] C. Oliver, in discussion with the author, 2002.
[43] C. Oliver, in discussion with the author, 2002.
[44] C.Oliver ,'The House that Julian Built', *Art Review*: *Art in Scotland '96*, Spring 1996, p.22-24.

she felt drawn to for a number of reasons.' The same observations could clearly be applied to Oliver's curatorial methodology.[45] In Oliver's critical writing, women were afforded no preferential treatment beyond her efforts to ensure their inclusion. From her perspective as an exhibition-maker, when women artists were not represented in themed or group exhibitions curated by others, Oliver would ask pointed questions about their absence. Her curating perhaps offered more freedom of choice. Certainly, between 1971-1988 at least five of the exhibitions she curated were solo shows or retrospectives of women artists, as well as 1981's group show, *Seven Scottish Artists*. Writing of the show in 1993, Oliver explained:

> Women, you will have noticed, whether as exhibiting artists, conference attendees or entertainers, have never been overlooked in the programming at Third Eye. I myself was responsible for selecting an exhibition called *Seven Scottish Artists*, a title that set out quite deliberately to conceal the fact, in prior publicity, that all seven participants were female. That event, originally planned as an invited exchange with the Women's Building in Los Angeles, was refused funding by the SAC – inexplicable in view of its quality – the contributors were Pat Doutwaite, Carole Gibbons, Merilyn Smith, June Redfern, Jacki Parry, Kate Whiteford and Fionna Geddes.'[46]

Her efforts to represent the work of women were particularly evident when the artists in question were related to men working in the same profession. If she was writing about or curating the work of artist couples, she was careful to pay close attention to the work of both. For all of her admiration for the work of her former tutor, Hugh Adam Crawford, for example, she frequently referred to the work of Kathleen Mann and proposed an exhibition of her work.

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[45] J. Bryan-Wilson, 'Still Relevant: Lucy R. Lippard, Feminist Activism and Art Institutions', in C. Morris & V. Bonin, *Materializing Six Years: Lucy Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012), p.85.

[46] C. Oliver, 'A History of the Third Eye Centre', *Variant*, Issue 15, 1993, p. 19.

Likewise, she was interested in the work of E.A. Taylor but mounted a show of the work of Jessie M. King. Between Ben and Winifred Nicholson, she focused on Winifred. A friend and admirer of Tom Macdonald and Bet Low, she ensured that both artists received the same measure of critical and curatorial attention, curating separate solo shows at the Third Eye Centre. From this, we can see a consistent attempt to redress the balance of artists' reputations, to ensure the works of wives, mothers, and sisters were not overshadowed by those of their husbands, fathers and brothers. Even works produced by friends and collaborators were closely scrutinized if the woman was deemed to be less visible (the collaborative work of Margot Sandeman and Ian Hamilton Finlay was a regular example). Similarly, she paid close attention to artists she felt had been unfairly overlooked particularly if she felt that the insularity and elitism of the art world in Scotland were to blame. In the case of the Scottish painter Pat Douthwaite, Oliver remains one of few curators and critics to move beyond the well-trodden account of the artist's beauty and her 'troubled' mental health. She examined Douthwaite's paintings as more than a reflection of the artist's supposed psyche, and the selection of the solo show at the Third Eye Centre was credited to Oliver and Douthwaite together. Oliver's catalogue essay for the same show takes issue with the interpretation of Douthwaite's work by 'male critics' and attempts to situate the artist as a singular voice in the so-called 'return' to narrative figuration in Scotland.[47]

FIG. 6 *Cordelia Oliver in her home at Sutherland Avenue*, 2006.
Photograph by Malcolm Dickson. © Malcolm Dickson

As a critic and curator, Oliver's role was not, and could never be truly separate from the art market, but she was largely indifferent to it and saw the accelerated commercial success of artists in the late 1980s and 1990s as potentially detrimental to the development of their practice.[48] Her interest lay in the educational aspects of criticism and curating and in the

[47] C. Oliver, *Pat Douthwaite: Painting and Drawing 1951-1988* (Glasgow: Third Eye Centre, 1988).
[48] C. Oliver, 'Through Women's Eyes', *Modern Painters*, 12:4 (1999), p.93-94.

development of public funding for the arts. She once noted that 'twisting reluctant arms was the time-honoured way of forcing unwilling participation'.[49]

Similarly, in spite of her nationality and her focus on Scottish art, she thought the notion of an intrinsic or inherent 'Scottish' quality in art was overstated by some of her peers. But she was interested in how styles and forms of art develop over time and in particular places, often reflecting on the role of art schools in this regard along with a keen interest in the idea of art historical lineage and inter-generational influence. Two of her major group exhibitions, both from 1978, highlight these concerns, *Painters in Parallel*, mentioned earlier, which included the work of almost 80 artists, and *Crawford and Company*, at the Third Eye Centre, set out to identify the impact and influence of the work of Hugh Adam Crawford, a portrait painter who had been Head of Painting at Glasgow School of Art between the 1920s and 1940s. The exhibition brought together a selection of Crawford's paintings alongside works by his former students (and Oliver's Glasgow School of Art peers), including Joan Eardley, Bet Low and Margot Sandeman.

If (as discussed earlier in this text) recent curatorial theory has proposed that since the mid-to-late 19th century, curators have adapted from the scholarly and administrative art expert archetype to one that possesses an authorial/artistic function in which the 'making' takes centre stage, it is striking that Oliver both conformed to and contested this model in her chosen term, 'maker of exhibitions', for the activity we would now understand as 'curating'.

While she championed certain artists through her criticism and curating, Oliver also maintained an unusual level of critical integrity given the small scale of the art world in Scotland and was actively disliked by many artists who had fallen foul of her pen or excluded from her curatorial projects. Unlike some of her peers, Oliver was not interested in acting as a champion or

[49] Oliver, in discussion with the author, 2002.

advocate purely by virtue of the fact the artists were Scottish, or indeed women. She was more ambitious than that for Scottish art and more discerning. Regardless of the stature of an artist, all were subject to the same level of critical scrutiny and curatorial rigour, from art school students to Royal Scottish Academicians. She refused to flatter or defer to artists simply because of their position, an approach that made her deeply unpopular at times, another possible reason for her exclusion in many canonical accounts of the development of Scottish art in the twentieth century.

Conclusion

In 2015 the National Galleries of Scotland attempted to redress the erasure of women in their collection and exhibition history by mounting a major survey show *Modern Scottish Women*. In spite of the fact that the only primary material on some of the artists included was written by Oliver, and that her role as a curator and critic had almost single-handedly revived the reputation of both Jessie M. King and Joan Eardley, Oliver was mentioned only once, amongst others, in the foreword to the book-length catalogue as a 'pioneer in this rich and yet to be fully explored field.'[50] Her own work as an artist, including paintings and drawings held by the National Galleries of Scotland, was not included, nor was she acknowledged in any meaningful way in *A New Era: Scottish Modern Art 1900-1950*, held in 2018 or in the major Eardley exhibition held in 2017, also at the National Galleries of Scotland. Oliver was a critic and curator who had studied with Eardley, who had won the same portrait prize the year after Eardley and who, in 1975, had mounted the first solo exhibition on Eardley since her memorial exhibition in 1964 (which, as well as writing the catalogue text, Oliver had also helped to organise). Oliver curated a further show of Eardley's work in 1989 at the Talbot Rice Gallery

[50] J. Leighton and S. Groom, 'Director's Foreword', in A. Strang, *Modern Scottish Women: Painters and Sculptors 1885-1965* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland) , p.7.

in Edinburgh and wrote the first monograph on the artist's work in 1988, regarded even now as the standard account. Over decades prior to the *Modern Scottish Women* exhibition, which was hailed as a much-needed corrective to histories of Scottish art in the press, Oliver had curated both solo and group exhibitions of at least six of the 'rediscovered' artists included in the 2015 survey.

Oliver's contribution is beginning to be recognised, though still usually in relation to her writing and criticism rather than her contribution to exhibition, museological or curatorial histories. Kathleen Chambers, a former curator at The Glasgow School of Art, exhibited Oliver's work in two exhibitions in the early 2000s. Malcolm Dickson, Director of Street Level Photoworks in Glasgow, commissioned essays by Oliver shortly before her death and has done much to ensure she is remembered. Richard Demarco continues to acknowledge Oliver's role in his projects in the many accounts of *Strategy: Get Arts* and other exhibitions. Deborah Jackson's 2014 thesis *Shifting focus of the traditional centres of contemporary art: Scotland's evolving position from periphery to prominence* likewise acknowledges Oliver's contribution to the development of Scottish art. In Craig Richardson's book *Scottish Art Since 1960*, he notes that in the 1960s 'Scotland had few discrete resources and agencies for the promotion of visual arts — no public access workshops, no subsidised artists' studios. This was a desultory scene of which many artists were all too aware. Only Cordelia Oliver […] published serious attempts at widely read constructive criticism.'[51] And in the 2022 book *Scottish Women Artists*, Oliver is rightly acknowledged as 'Scotland's first leading female art critic, supporting the careers of many women artists through her influential voice'[52] In conclusion, it seems fitting here to give Oliver the last word on her approach to exhibition making, which remains just as urgent and political in a contemporary context. Writing in 1972, she observed 'It is no longer enough to

[51] C. Richardson, *Scottish Art Since 1960: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Overviews* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016) p.3.
[52] C. Rostek, *Scottish Women Artists* (London: The Fleming Collection, 2022), p. 38.

"think of a name" and put on an exhibition around it, as it were. What we now need are exhibitions to help us in the process of understanding the condition of art in the present time.'[53]

[53] C. Oliver, 'The Edinburgh Festival and the Visual Arts', *Scottish International*, August 1972, pp.12-13.