

**Interview with Ross Sinclair Regarding the Artwork
*Journey to the Edge of the World – The New Republic of
St. Kilda* (1999/2002), Hamburger Kunsthalle**

questions by Barbara Sommermeyer

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Interview with Ross Sinclair

The interview was held at the artist's studio in Kilcreggan near Glasgow on the 8th November, 2005. The artist was interviewed by Barbara Sommermeyer (conservator) and photographed by Barbara Eismann. The transcription of the document was carried out by Dr. Kristine von Oehsen (curator).

Points of discussion were

The history of the installation (Edinburgh, Portsmouth, Basel, Hamburg)

The comparison of the set ups - which changes were made?

Details of the set up finalisation - is it a frozen state?

Details about lighting, technical equipment, sound, video, slides?

The deterioration of the artwork and their materials in general.



Barbara Sommermeyer: What was the first set up of the piece?

Ross Sinclair: It was in Edinburgh, at The Fruitmarket Gallery, 1999. It came about, in two parts, really. I'd made this piece 'Real Life Rocky Mountain' in Glasgow in '96, which takes perspective of a small country like Scotland, it wasn't specifically mentioning Scotland, but since '94 I had this tattoo on my back [REAL LIFE], so a lot of the things I've done have been looking at this whole new life question. In this one I looked at stuff, and there is also this question about Scotland, like people wanting to be independent and all this being part of the UK and all this tension and I really mythologize this in a romantic way, because you know, for 300 years, there's never been a serious proposition. It's not like the Balkans, it's really just this fantasy almost, which everybody wants to believe in a little bit, so instead of looking at it in terms of ideas of history in a new sense, I plotted that 300 year perspective through popular songs, which I sang myself, all in a particular bluff kind of way, which made them sound all the same. So looking at that - I mean I could have done it with poetry maybe, or some aspects of literature - but I did it with songs, because I wanted to have this kind of relation with an audience, although I just had my back to the audience, like in a zoo, and everything's fake: the grass is plastic, the animals are stuffed, even the trees are fibreglass, you know, and obviously I am asking: am I real, am I fake? Am I whatever?

BS: That was the starting point...

RS: Yeah, and in that, I made this series of videos, well, I've travelled around various places, which these traditional songs were written about, and made videos in places, where there were no signs of civilisation, so of course there is a suspension of disbelief, you could imagine it was some period within that 300 years of history... and this was going on in my head, when I was doing this project. I was looking at a lot of research and information, just things I'm interested in; about St. Kilda, this little archipelago of islands, which is, actually more like a torn off laguna in different ways, but the whole story of that always intrigued me.

BS: Was the video on the monitor, which shows you with your tattoo, from that time?

RS: No, that was actually shot in Iceland.

Most of the videos from '96 were shot in this island called Eigg, realm of Muck, small isles in the Hebrides. So from that, a few projects down the line the Fruitmarket asked me to do a project there, while this was all still at the back of my mind. One of the interesting things about St. Kilda was this idea, that people had this non-democratic decision-making-process, that's been linked to an indigenous North American Indian thing, where you just talk about things all day, to work them out and accept them, which was called St. Kilda-parliament. This also

featured in the discussions about this place, you know the whole utopia and dream of it; I don't know how much you know about the basic story of it.

BS: A little, such as that they've lived there without having contact with other societies, and that no other people were visiting, so about 700 years they were living on their own.

RS: Well, 2000 years pretty much. Something like an indigenous society formed there. Obviously it had come from other places, but they were largely cut off until the Industrial Revolution, when it became easier to get there, on steam ships.

BS: And at some point illness started, which they could not handle.

RS: Yeah, in about 150 years really, the whole society was destroyed. Small pox nearly killed everybody off, but also money, religion, the influence of the state really destroyed this society. They did not have money, they did not have clocks and they didn't have crime, rabbits and rats even. So all that was at the back of my mind. In the first installation in the Fruitmarket, this was also linked to the question of the Scottish Parliament. Devolved power-sharing had been going on in the UK, when eventually people voted for this new Scottish parliament, which we have. There've been various votes in the last 30 years, one significant one in 1979, where people had to vote "yes", to devolve from the UK. More than half voted for it, but not 2/3, and that was a relevant one, because then the oil from the North Sea would have gone to Scotland. So, all these political questions are all part of the background. But the key thing after the election that the Scottish people decided was: they demoted the Scottish parliament. It is still run by Westminster, and the money comes from central government, but it can raise separate taxes, and it has a new building now, which I am sure you have heard of. It is in Edinburgh and was designed by this Spanish architect Morales, who died. It's incredible, quite complicated, and it was supposed to cost GBP45.000.000 and it cost GBP450.000.000, so ten times its budget! Anyway, the parliament had just reconvened that same year, after a break of about 300 years from the time the last Scottish parliament had assembled. It symbolised the union with England, and the United Kingdom. They spent 3 years building the parliament, so at the beginning all the MSP's [Members of Scottish Parliament] convened in an old Church of Scotland assembly building in Edinburgh, which is about 500 yards off the Fruitmarket gallery, just behind Waverley Station. So it is about 500 yards down the street from where this new parliament was being assembled. That was really the start of it for me, the two ideas of parliament, the so-called parliament in St. Kilda 1, which is now seen as this utopian haven, but like all utopias it only became this when all the people moved away, because in reality they could not survive there. So these two ideas of parliament and the point of view they represent were the starting point for me.

BS: Was that the time when you created the set up of the installation and the chalk drawing of the map of the world? Did you do everything on your own?

RS: It was a completely new project; it did not come from anything else. I did it all myself. I'd always been quite interested in maps, so I looked at them in various ways and I was interested in various ideas, like Peters projection, it's just slightly different from a regular map of the world. Everything's much thinner; it is a more accurate reflection of actual size on the ground.

The Northern hemisphere is not bigger, so Africa and South America are relatively bigger. Maps from most schools have different ways of looking at or describing the same thing. Simply speaking, the map in the installation is upside down and the other way round, which is a fresh way of looking at things. The work is also in my new book 'If North Was South and East was West', Badischer Kunstverein.

When everyone asked me whether I'd been to St. Kilda's, suggesting it would be interesting, I was more interested in the popular idea about the place. I'd been working on this, when it was still not known, and now there is more awareness in this country. But I was more interested in a collective imagination/utopia for the show. There is the factual history, and then what films offer – something else, and the maps are another way of that. You just change the point of certainty of where you are. You look from a different angle, nothing complex.

BS: Did you deliberately place St. Kilda off centre in the corner?

RS: No, I just wanted to deal with the image of the map, as most people know it.

BS: You did not want St. Kilda to be in the middle, to be easily found?

RS: That's not really how I looked at it. I'm trying to remember how I actually did it.

BS: The slides from earlier were from taking it down?

RS: No, they are from building it up.

BS: But that would mean you painted something different. I would have assumed you would have made this big black wall and then started painting.

RS: Yeah.

BS: But this looks like...

RS: ... it all exists already. But that had come from Edinburgh first, Portsmouth second and then Basel, so it was all stored

flat in a palette. And this is Basel! Maybe it's more interesting to see. These are some pictures from Portsmouth; there is an entirely different map on it apparently. I am just trying to see, if I did anything different to it then? They were stored flat with boxes in between, I obviously always asked people to be careful with it, as the maps are the most fragile part. But I think every time they went flat, they basically smudged.

BS: You can't really avoid it.

RS: The Apex Gallery [Portsmouth] was a church and again a smaller space, that's why the set up is different. But on a more formal level, I am just interested in the issue of space, like your home-town-space, and my home-town-space, I just approach it in a slightly different way.

BS: Is it a site-specific work, then? If you leave out parliament etc in Basel, as there is not much space either, I guess putting it up in Scotland is giving it more emphasis on these issues.

RS: For the first time, yeah, but I think there are more general points there. These themes are fairly universal in the West in popular imagination. While that was my impetus for making the work, as I developed it in the mind, I think once it exists, I think this text [Catalogue, Fruitmarket Gallery], that I wrote, discusses the idea of parliament. But for me that is in the work, and it is not so important that you all see Scotland. And in fact, I remember in Hamburg, because this idea of St. Kilda is even more remote in Germany, let's say, I kind of liked the idea that there is almost another level, as it can be seen as something I made up, like a little fancy, which is fine.

BS: So it developed in that way?

RS: For me, yeah. It has this basis in truth and reality, but a lot of the work is asking the audience, whether they believe in it, or whether they think it is part of reality, of history. So: What am I drawn to, the singing, the films? Although, ironically this is one of the few projects, that I've made in the last ten years, that didn't consider the 'real life' thing so much.

BS: It's just in a very small corner, kind of hidden. It's a very poetic work, I think, and I was very surprised when I looked at your other pieces, they are not so subtle, if you can say that. Very different. Although in some other works, you have used card board boxes, too. So, for Basel and Hamburg it is set up similarly in terms of the choice of cores you were using, like the slides, the two videos and the film of the evacuation, the mountain... and then the drawing.

RS: Yeah, and this video was on the side of the monitor, which was good.

BS: It wasn't in the boxes, was it?

RS: Yeah, it was kind of, I think we tried it first, but it was too hot actually. It was overheating and then going on standby. Yeah, so they were the same, in Hamburg the mountain thing is vertical as well, isn't it?

BS: Upside down. It's kind of mirrored.

RS: Aha, in the first time in Edinburgh it was side by side. It is still similar of course because you still get this slightly sea-sick thing. But there was slightly more space in Edinburgh, so it was more like a big mouse inside wheels or so..

BS: This is the mountain of St. Kilda, no?

RS: It's actually one of the little islands and archipelagos, called 'Stac Lee', it's just a sort of plug, that sticks out like 700 m or so from the sea.

BS: So Portsmouth was a similar set up in terms of the cores, but different in terms of architecture? The drawing was protected quite well through the distance and the green boxes in front of it?

RS: Yeah, as it was in Edinburgh also. It was sort of the same.

BS: And in Basel it was very exposed?

RS: That's true.

BS: People must have damaged the drawing a lot.

RS: Now that you mention it that makes complete sense.

BS: Did you have any assistance? If anything happened, did you redo it? In Hamburg you had Laura Honse and James Cabot help you to paint boxes.

RS: I had help, but I don't think anyone did actually any drawing on this. Because it was just from the gallery, I think we just did it with the two women who were at the gallery at that time. The gallery is called The Agency, in London. It's my gallery, but I think because it is such a small space I did not remember how much to take, and it was all lying flat on the palettes, I don't think though there was any necessity to do too much work.

BS: It was just in those two rooms?

RS: No, it is just one room. There is a plan of the place. [Looking at a floor plan of the Basel set up:] I think it is just like that, with that monitor there and the map here.

BS: It looks like you can only look into the second room. Is this part covered, so it is darker in there?

RS: Yeah, it is on top here, so it's just one space, and one projector was built into a little bit; this was an image from Basel. Unfortunately I don't know why I don't have any from the outside.

BS: So this is like a chimney? And it was like a fireplace in relation to that? [Looking at pictures of the Basel set up.]

RS: Yes. Can you see the door there? The whole problem in Basel was to get enough distance to get the scale on the projector.

BS: And you probably had the same scale of room in Hamburg?

RS: Yeah, but Hamburg is a kind of amalgamation of what it was in Basel and what it was in Portsmouth, the thing with the Fruitmarket was that there was another little room off the main gallery, where I could have the information, the 'history' part, ... so it was secluded and you would come up some stairs. Basically this was the top and this was the first thing you saw in Edinburgh, and it was more scholastic, with the screens and this going on and with this and the voice-over thing also.

BS: The history-slides are discolouring. We've made copies, but we are wondering what the right colour might be. The catalogue image of the screening [Fruitmarket Gallery, text of slides] is obviously yellow, probably because of the light sensitivity of the film it was photographed with. But on the next page there is an image of the slide text only, without any colour.

RS: There is a sequence of slides that just goes through chronologically.

BS: Should they change at the same time?

RS: I wanted them to be in sync at first, but I could not work out how to do it in the show so they got all mixed up... but it is just a straightforward chronological order, which you can see. In the end I decided that synchronisation did not matter, as long as in each carousel the slides come chronologically.

BS: There is a timer with the carrousel? I am not sure how to set it up the same time.

RS: Neither did I and gave up. I also quite liked the idea of it not being too accurate.

BS: It would not match the idea of the whole installation, of how to think upside down and vice versa.

RS: I can picture in my mind a list of all the dates of the history of the world and St. Kilda, and it may be in this box somewhere.

BS: I could do an index print of all the slides and then you could have a list and find out which sequence you would prefer. We could do that some point and I'll send it back to you, if you like.

RS: Yeah... This is some of my research from working out all the history dates. It's been more difficult than the world history! All of that's been interesting, depending on what book you look at, there is a different history of course. This is the handwritten version from my assistant. I think she did some research on the world history for me. There was a finished list of them both... And of course I haven't looked at it in a while... Normally I throw it all out. I had a bit of a thing about theme parks at some point.

BS: We've got two sets of slides and I guess you've given us some copies of your masters. Or did we end up having some of those, which had been displayed at a previous venue already? I'm asking because there are some labels on the top...

RS: I honestly can't remember. I don't think I have a master set. It's possible they've been on display. These here have never been on display.

BS: The text was printed on champagne-coloured paper?

RS: Yeah. They were just done with a little fixed camera with lights on the sides, and...

BS: ... what about the colour?

RS: I don't think I ever intended for it to be anything.

BS: Well first they were projected on white screens, and now they are projected on green cardboard boxes. If it got a colour shift, how would you feel about that?

RS: Doesn't make any difference to me. For me it is about the format, and with any format, I suppose the way I put them together formally, it is always an impression of one way of looking at this authoritative historical line, like an excerpt of an encyclopaedia or something.

BS: Is the speed of the slides so that they are legible? I did not think that it was all meant to be read, but that it was more to give an impression of the history. Otherwise it would be really slow.

RS: I 'm not sure about the criterion; I would have just set it up, as I thought it was right. It would be about being able to read it to a certain degree, but also feeling that maybe you don't get quite enough time, because it's just a bit too fast. I suppose in a sense, not that I thought about it particularly, at the time. There is this chunk, like 1930, that was the day evacuation started, but like that 120 AD it is like Roman

something or other. But St. Kilda is so apocryphal, that this is slightly emphasised. But really, even when I was in Hamburg, it was more about what felt right.

BS: That is difficult to put in words, and the feeling changes as well.

RS: Definitely.

BS: I thought one should not be able to read everything, as also texts vary in length. Is it just to get an idea?

RS: I would say so.

BS: To get it right, the idea was to have it chronologically, not with varying times?

RS: Yes, originally I wanted it like that, but it's never been like that. But if it was like that in the end... If it gets shown again, it would be nice if they were together. But I can't remember if all the dates correspond. I think the carrousel are both full. Like the one from St. Kilda is arbitrary, as there are so many slides in one carrousel and the world history is condensed into 80 slides, which is hilarious. If the carrousel had taken 100, it would have been 100. But I think again there may be one slide from 2000, like pre-history. Well, I can't even remember, but I think they start at 70 AD or so, so after Christ.

BS: What would you say about technical issues such as the slide projectors going out of production at some point?

RS: I suppose that was not so much on my mind then, but still to be honest, I deliberately wanted, I mean even then, I could have made a video, but I wanted it to have that slightly didactic feel to it, you know, now, and then slide projectors are slightly anachronistic. I suppose you still used them alongside video-projectors, but now of course they are not so much used. But I wanted to emphasise that feel with the slide-history, the St. Kilda-history, so it was almost like a 1930s feel.

BS: We might have to consider what to do if we have no projectors at some point. We could buy some now to have them as replacements.

RS: Yeah.

BS: And then we have to consider what it is about the projectors. They seem important, as they are very visible.

RS: And the sound element is important, too, the mechanical progression of them is like a projectional grinding forward of history. Not that I was so upfront about it, but that is why I chose to use projectors. I could have done it in a book, or in some other format of information.

BS: It draws your attention immediately, with the sound and the automatic change of slides. It does have this school association. That is a generational thing, though, so it is important to think of it.

RS: There is also another element, the idea that there is a little station. It is almost about definition with the boxes, but it is modular. There are these different elements: I could cut this one and that one - like in Basel the parliament was not there - but there is still a critical mass, that holds it together; the basic conceptual premise for it, so it is somehow alive. And I think, with the projectors and the little 'history' thing there is also an aspect of the touristy feel. You can go and are held there for a few minutes and then you go and see another part. Like a little tour or a tour guide, that can show you the way.

BS: It is very easily accessible. As everyone can choose what concerns them.

Let's look at the pictures I brought:

I have made reports when it was de-installed. I made lots of drawings, gave each wall a name and got everything transferred onto a computer programme. During the process of editing the computer-drawings, mistakes finally cleared up some details of the set up.

RS: A bit like archaeology.

BS: And the floor plan shows that we have two different sizes of boxes, as in England the boxes are measured outside, in Germany they are measured inside. The slightly darker German boxes are a bit larger, so that gaps were amended or added here and there.

RS: This is so crazy!

BS: Here are some damages on the green boxes of the front row. Visitors sometimes sat on them, which caused the damage. We later filled each box with large foam blocks as a support.

Here you can see the wooden board on the top of the cinema room that was used for the floor as well as for the ceiling. With these images it is much easier to understand the set up.

RS: It's just incredible because with all these bigger scale things that I do, it's so reliant on me being there, and it's just great to see this. It would be great to have this for all my installations. But it would take some years work to transpose all the other ones into this format.

BS: You could do it for Wiesbaden or Karlsruhe; you're using cardboard boxes there, too?

RS: I'm doing a wee sculpture project for Wiesbaden next year [2006], too, but I don't think it will be cardboard boxes.

BS: [Looking through the pictures again:] this is the set up from Hamburg. When we took it down, I found out that a lot of the boxes are reused. On the back they are painted blue, so they've been reused from the parliament or so. I've marked them with pencil on the top. Every box has a number given in the plan, so it can be rebuilt. But this damage for instance you can already see in the images from the Edinburgh catalogue. And I think they've actually done some retouching of black paint as well, which are matt.

RS: I think when I did it at first, I am almost certain I painted with actual black-board paint, but subsequently it was touched up with grey paint or something.

BS: You must have used Windsor & Newton Acrylic black paint, some which you left in Hamburg ...

RS: It has this completely matt thing.

BS: I have worked with black board paint. This Windsor & Newton paint is matt, but not as matt.

RS: Maybe it's not quite as matt as a flat acrylic, perhaps it takes the chalk better, but the definition is you can wipe it off again, so it would not be totally matt.
[Brings in a tin of commercial blackboard paint...]

BS: Is this the one you would have used, or different brands? This is 'Blackboard Paint' and 'Foxmore'.

RS: There are so many brands... To be honest it is possible that each time it got set up again, if there was something in my imagination; I may have added a few other things. Looking at this again, one of those has to be redone. [Pointing at the white painted letters of 'geography'.]

BS: One of the letters is slightly pink.

RS: Maybe that is what I am remembering of things having to be done again, maybe one was lost.
That does ring a bell actually; it might have been at Basel... I think one was done again.

BS: Could you tell by the writing? Sometimes the chalk drawing is on top of the white paint and sometimes it is not. See the 'o' and the 'c' in 'Mexico' for example.

RS: The 'x' is also a different layer. The 'b' is obviously the same.

BS: Well, we found out something!
When we were de-installing it, I took pictures of before and after. Some of the technical equipment [such as the slide projector, the shelf with the video projectors, etc] is very visible, but in the first cinema room everything is hidden, CD-

Players and the monitor are in boxes. Is there a particular reason for this?

RS: Do you have the plan?

BS: [Pointing out the technical equipment in the plan:] this is the monitor and the projector, CD and everything is there. This is the Stac Lee projection set up visible on the shelf. Then there are the slide-projectors and there are holes for CD and speakers, which reminds me of sound and noises.

RS: The film itself has no sound. It was shot on Super-8 film as I did not want the other things, which are all really old stock, like the one from the evacuation, that is mostly 1930 and before, and this one here [Stac Lee] is 1906 or something. Talking about the sound again, obviously formally I wanted the monitor. If the beamer had not been built in, it would have stuck out from the wall and it would have been less inviting to go in to the cinema. By the time you get into the second cinema room, this feels slightly more cinematic perhaps, but I am trying to remember about the sound.

BS: You get the singing in both cinemas.

RS: There was another little section in the Edinburgh set up, called 'project impostor', which was a little CD that I made. I think it was with the same guy from the 'history' CD, who was an actor. Again it is a little story about Roderick, who left St. Kilda and went on to one of the neighbouring islands, which was difficult to do where he came in contact with a preacher and learnt some rudimentary Viking stories. When he went back to St. Kilda's for a little while he flourished as an eccentric almost guru or so, as there is no religious structure in St. Kilda, but in the end he just slept with everybody's wives and held everyone in some kind of thrall and finally confronted them. Again the story just demonstrated the naivety of the community and in one way the really unsophisticated relationship to the world, but in another way quite plain and straightforward.

BS: What about the original boxes? They are taped with gummed paper-tape, and I think for practicability in Hamburg we used the Hasenkamp sticky-tape?

RS: Yeah.

BS: In some places the tape is visible, as is the case with the slide-projector-boxes. First the box was taped with gummed paper-tape, which was then covered with Hasenkamp tape.

RS: I can't imagine wanting it to be like that. I think perhaps that box might have been turned afterwards. It has text on it. "No trees" or something. This is the reason, why the tape became visible in the end.

BS: My idea was to remove the Hasenkamp-tape and keep it as plain as possible.

RS: Definitely. I did spend a lot of time and effort to take it off. I actually went along with a scalpel and tried not to cut in and... James [technician] might remember better actually, but it could be that I was pushed for time and trying to get it done, but to be honest, that's kind of messy looking. I prefer not to see tape at all, and if I had had the right amount of time, I would have thought of the orientation of the box, so that these tape-bits were at the top and bottom obviously, so you would not see them.

BS: These slide-projector-boxes were positioned against the wall at the other exhibitions, here it is open at all sides, it is difficult to have it all tidy.

RS: No, the taped sides could be top and bottom.

BS: But then the text would be upside down. You would have had to make a new one.

RS: Yeah. I don't have any of those boxes, but it would almost be better to make some of them new, which I would be happy to do if we could work out how to get them.

BS: There are some spare boxes; most have some paint on them. This position is very difficult as the slide-projector-boxes are visible from all sides.

RS: But if we had fresh ones it could be absolutely straightforward.

BS: But then again you have to keep in mind that these ones are paler than new ones. It would be a different colour to all the boxes, and we already have two colours.

RS: I guess there is a lot of natural light in the Fruitmarket in Edinburgh.

BS: They discolour easily though. There is not much you can do.

RS: But that is a possibility, as I say. I can't really remember, but I can only imagine we were pushed for time, as that cable goes in for the power and this box probably got moved.

BS: The speaker and CD-player are in the middle box, between the two slide-projector boxes.

RS: But the double-taped area is really horrible, I can't imagine not noticing that.

BS: You would not see it obviously as it is not on the front.

RS: Maybe that's why.

BS: I also noticed, as assistants were involved, and everyone has different ideas of things, they were not stacked with the same orientation. So some of them are less strong in the flapped over position and are more strained than others.

RS: That is obviously a problem.

BS: Would your idea be to have it more tidy with the traces of tape hidden?

RS: If I were installing it again myself, with bits that get opened and closed so it deteriorates, I would just replace those. Are there any more replacement boxes? Definitely this one gets opened throughout its time on display [to turn on the cd-player], so it is just functional. I can't remember for sure, but that hole in the box looks so shoddy, I think, I must have done that myself. If James had done that, I am sure it would have been straighter. Probably he did it anyway.

RS: You have to stick the top opening flaps of the box to the side! From original times I would do it like this, then something like that, so it is on this plane, let's say. [Demonstrating how he would attach both top flaps with one sticky tape along the flaps, so that each end crosses the side only about 1 cm, where he carefully cuts off one end with a scalpel.] If you look at the boxes, you can see all the little cut marks. But if you just stick it in the middle, it tilts the bottom box. I think stacking them up with the wrong orientation really increases the slightly dodgy strength of the wall. You know the top of the pile is slanting.

BS: Some of them were pushed into the corner.

RS: When I did them all myself I had done it a couple of times and I knew how the boxes sat right. With assistants there is a lot of things you can't tell. But I would say just to you here, if over the years anything is damaged beyond repair all with the little bits that sometimes happen, I'm happy to do a little detail again, even if it were with a different box or so.

BS: Would you mind if it looked different, let's say a differently coloured box, or is it not that important to you?

RS: It would be better if it did not look different. If it looked different, it would add another layer to the work, which would veer too much off the other layers of the work.

BS: It is quite complex.

RS: Yeah, it is not that the gestation of the work is fixed. But no, if the boxes looked virtually identical, and the whole thing can still stand up, still that would be okay.

BS: We would also try to find a way, where you would not have to be so involved.

RS: Well, with it being modular in all the different elements, it is all about accumulation of all the different histories and all the different forms or parts of it. There is not one part of it that took 2 or 3 weeks to do. You know these parts don't really take much time to be made.

BS: [Looking at a photo:] but they have nice details. This is where I found out how to mark the boxes, the 'T' top right. You labelled some of the inscribed boxes yourself with a pencil on the front!

RS: I think I could not work out how to do the design, because they were so big. I worked with a slide projector actually and made slides of each letter and projected them. When I installed it the second time, in Portsmouth, I realised: Oh my God, how do I put it all together again. So I think I learnt my lesson.

BS: This is the timer for the slide projector, and I remember these are the original slide-carrousel. This sticker is new, I think, because it is German.

RS: I can't actually remember, did I give you the carrousel? Or did you supply those?

BS: It must have come with it, as I did not write the English labels.

RS: I think it is probably best if there was not anything on the actual top when you display the carrousel, so it looks like anonymous information, but obviously you can get these carrousel out so easily, you just put two new tops on.

BS: As long as we can get them. We do not need the label?

RS: If they had stuff on it from my hand, it would have just been for convenience, like left hand, right hand. You know they could just be kept like archivally, but two fresh tops could be screwed on.

RS: [Looking through more pictures:] I think James did all these little boxes to fill the gaps between the ceiling at the top.

BS: These are dented boxes, where the chairs were positioned. People clearly enjoyed themselves, leaning back, so we will probably put foam blocks in those boxes next time.

RS: It was installed for a pretty long time, I imagine.

BS: Yes, and in 2007 the piece will be installed again.

RS: Again, with the damaged green boxes, that have no particular detail on them apart from my kind of stagy painting.

BS: I would probably make a remake and see if I could copy all that.

This has a different colour actually.

RS: I think these green boxes were like that, when I first made them, although I think that was a first coat and I was not happy with that. Then I made a second coat over it and then did not like it, when they were so exact and blended in some darker bits. Again, I think rather than trying to painfully restore bits like that, I would rather make them again.

BS: Or we could turn them to the back.

RS: Although I remember these have been messed around so much we were trying a lot to get a good flat side of things, to create a flat wall, but certainly...

BS: Some of them had tape, which has been painted, too. This is the double projection of Stac Lee. It is mainly black and white but in the Fruitmarket catalogue it appears slightly different.

RS: There should not be a difference between the two projections!

BS: Is the colour-balance completely black and white?

RS: It should be. The pink in this photo is ridiculous. It should just be as flat a colour as possible. Almost, if the black does go a little bit green because it should be old film, and it might have something to do with the original transfer, but that's not too bad. It's such an old-fashioned feel to it anyway, as long as it's balanced. Every time I've done it the beamer was different, as that is the most expensive factor. I'm not particularly keen on those things, but they are difficult to hide in a box. Looking at it now, I would have probably covered it up a bit more, so that you could maybe just see the lenses.

BS: The shelf with the projectors is kind of a media tower. I guess we are speaking about the picture of the whole thing.

RS: It is like an expensive student's bedroom.

BS: Because of the darkness in there, people would not see much of it. As far as I understood, when you were there, it was never supposed to be too perfect, too straightforward.

RS: Sure, sure, no absolutely. I would not want like a metal frame or anything, maybe even to cover this thing, to get rid of more controls. The one thing you need is this USB thing, you could clear it so much, it could be underneath the shelf. I think it was all because it would have been too complicated to put this all in reinforced boxes.

BS: But now you would hide the equipment?

RS: Ideally in an empty room. I think in the Fruitmarket we had them upside down on the ceiling; there was also a wooden ceiling.

BS: Maybe the angle was a problem?

RS: That was it. Because they were both... we could only do them upside down, because there was a key-light-thing or whatever it is on them.

BS: We sometimes do that, too, hang them on the ceiling. However long it takes, to deal with a different technology, we can keep that in mind.

RS: Remind me - was it full frame on this?

BS: I think it was a bit smaller, I don't think I have any pictures of it.

RS: Would it be installed in exactly the same room?

BS: Yes.

BS: To show off, there are more digital pictures, which we also have in a database, so we could even make a model.

RS: They are just interesting images. In books, there are always pictures from the Fruitmarket, but it would be nice to have a different version, so in a couple of years for another book it might be nice to have some images of Hamburg, it would be nice to have some of these computerised views.

BS: I like that you have an overview of which boxes are painted and an impression of the composition.

RS: It is interesting for me to see also. Are they printed out just like that? Could I have a copy of these?

BS: I could send you a CD and then you could get them printed out as you like.

RS: I like the old style-photograph-feel.

BS: Looking at the chalk drawings, I need to know: You painted a lot with fingers with the chalk? Do you remember how you got to that point?

Did you actually use a slide and then draw the lines?

RS: I think what I did was, I used an actual map, possibly the Peters projection, which I mentioned, and I possibly drew on the back of it, and made a grid as a sort of plan for the boxes. After I painted it all black, but maybe I did not even turn it around and just had it as a reference.

I copied each bit like a transfer, I did this on a map, and had it as a drawing and knew this is roughly here and there, and then I drew into it. From a conceptual framework I wanted it as

a blackboard, a map, as an element of something, that could be changed and was not fixed, that is why I used the blackboard, and also for the pedagogic element, like an old fashioned school room or something. So yeah, I started drawing...

BS: First you painted 'geography' on it?

RS: No, I think I did 'geography' over it actually.

BS: In this picture it actually looks like 'geography' was first.

RS: Aha, but this was the one, that was probably done again, remember that 'g'. Here it definitely looks more like they are underneath. Actually looking at that now, some of them do look a wee bit different.

BS: But don't judge by the colour, because sometimes the colour just changes because of the lighting.

RS: But not in one photo. Sure, you know the 'geography', I don't remember whether I intended to have that on there first, but again that refers to the pedagogic thing - particularly in that first installation [in Edinburgh], where the 'history' was at the top of the stairs. So the first thing you saw was 'history', that was an introduction, the first thing on your mind were facts and figures. And then you went through at the side to the 'parliament' part, but that was the only way through and you did not really know what came after the 'history' room. And you then saw the drawing of the map, and in fact the 'history' was on one wall in the wee room here, and 'geography' was on the other wall, so it balanced out: school, history, geography, and the ways of looking at the world somehow. I am not sure how I came to this, it might have happened only after I put the 'history' up. But I started drawing it at first and I do remember thinking that it looked far too clean, the lines were all too defined and also it was too... I wanted it to have more body and to be a bit of up and down, like terrain... I suppose it is just aping the contours and things on maps, so I think that is how I started, rubbing in at the edges and working it in a little bit.

BS: I am looking for other pictures: Here is a detail of a landscape formation with lots of fingerprints. First I thought this is all mad, and then someone said there is this stream going through these two continents. When I realised some finger marks are on purpose, I thought it will be really difficult to differentiate them to accidental ones.

RS: I know I started off the drawing in the South Pacific, just dotting a few islands in; it is impossible to do them all, so this is an indication of all of those that are there. Is that the Alaska and America joint?

BS: Let's see. Asia...

RS: Not in any kind of conceptional way, but it is just this joint of the two parts of Russia and America, whatever that bit is called again. I remember doing it, but I mean I would not stand up in a court of law to attest this.

BS: But it shows that not all the wiped out areas are accidents, some are on purpose.

RS: When I was working on it, as I worked into it, I don't make it a habit of making chalk drawings on a board, so I just worked into it a bit and thought: okay it looks too static, still, fixed. I want to make it look more out of focus. When I look at what you've got here, I can't really see that much, where I think it has been substantially rubbed by accident. Maybe these little bits... Yes, one thing could be transport damage. To differentiate all of them we need to do a finger print test!

BS: Looking at this long line, I first thought a visitor made it, and then I thought it might be the Equator.

RS: I can't exactly remember my modus operandi, but I think at first I did have the Equator and I think even the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.

BS: Did these lines help you draw?

RS: No I think it was more like a political map, this sort of imaginary line, something else on the information on the map, that does not really exist per se, but is more a cultural thing than a geographic. But if I look at it, what I think has happened, I think I put it on, and I did not like it formally - it just looked too graphic. I think I rubbed it off, but left little bits maybe.

BS: Some outlines of the drawing look like it's been redone around the edges or wiped afterwards? Have you sometimes redrawn the outline?

RS: It might be the Alaskan snow drifting over the sea there. What probably happened was, I would do significant end points, to basically get the relationship between two parts, but I can't remember 100%, but I would probably draw in the end points to get the relationship between two parts and then, probably like sketching out, I dragged the chalk back to get the basis of the next bit or I did that quite roughly and then drew a defining line around it.

BS: You can really see the retouching. Does that disturb you?

RS: It does a little bit. It's hard to tell in the photos, as the light and dark differs in each, but with all these things, there's a critical mass with the whole work in terms of quality. It is important that it remains largely original, you know when it goes below a certain point, and the whole thing drops a little bit. But there is a lot of give and take in the work.

Particularly if the boxes can be kept quite tight together, I think your eye forgives an awful lot, because it is so open...

BS: There was an interest in keeping everything plain, but not an interest in making it perfect.

RS: I think there is a point where the work starts to look a little bit tatty. I don't remember seeing these bits looking so dark. Maybe that's not so accurate, I don't think that is.

BS: So you would say most of the fingerprints are yours?

RS: It is hard to say, but I'd say so. It's hard to tell from photos. I mean I don't see much there, but as you say there is probably little bits as results of transport and storage, but I don't see anything significant. I think that might just be more of a general flaking, little bits moving around, but certainly if I saw it like that...

BS: What about the letters on top? They are not visible in the photos of the previous venues.

RS: I can't see how that could have got there, maybe, but it is so particular, I'm sure some of that, when I was drawing it at first, I was thinking it totally disappears at the top, I just make it have a little something up there. My memory of doing it is slightly vague.

BS: And did you notice that some of the words are not properly upside down? In 'New Zealand', I think you corrected a mistake...

RS: I just did it all really quickly.

BS: I think you went over Pangea, too.

RS: Yeah, I think I went over that. Well, that might not have been on it at all, at first.

BS: Check the other slides.

RS: Ah, it is there. But the letters at the top are not. If anything, it looks like the Equator is more significant in that one. I might have rubbed it out more there.

BS: There is a definite loss of the very powdery substance in general. It is known that the chalk will fall off with airflow and humidity. In thinner areas you will notice it more. Along the edges of the boxes you very often see the loss of chalk, probably it has been handled too much and there are fingerprints. How do you feel about retouching those areas, to make them as invisible as possible?

RS: I don't have any problem with it.

BS: There are so many! The losses are often along the edge creating a line.

RS: Kind of a dark line almost.

BS: This is much different. Alaska, Canada?

RS: It is like the Siberian plains.

BS: You've redone the St. Kilda as well. In Portsmouth... you must have done this in Basel, there must have been more damage; it just sort of rubbed out. This is all very plain and straightforward; you just redid it here and here.

RS: I think I went over it. You want another hot chocolate?

BS: Yeah...

