

DCA: How does the group dynamic operate in Ganghut? Is it a democratic gang?

G.01: Naturally and obviously! Yes... though not everyone can be pleased all of the time.

G.02: Sort of, we just trust whoever takes the lead on things. Too complicated to make group decisions on every detail.

G.03: GANGHUT is democratic most of the time and then occasionally it needs a decision maker to take the lead. Usually there is one person responsible for managing a project, maybe because they have found out about it, or they have the most free time to dedicate to it, or their skills are the most suited. We trust and support each other and back each other up.

G.06: I would have to say no. We all discuss matters and give opinions on things but leave the decision making up to the person whom chooses to run with that specific question/task. We trust that person to do what they have to do and if we do not agree then we discuss some more and if we still don't agree we just get on with it and concentrate on doing the best we can.

DCA: Are there specific qualities about Dundee and DCA that have informed this exhibition?

G.01: Dundee holds a special place in all our hearts, it's where many of us met for the first time, wrestled, laughed, danced and cried. And it's maybe a chance to try something in the DCA we've never seen before or wanted to see - or think is funny!

G.02: It's a home amongst others.

G.06: For me, no.

G.03: A sense of homecoming. All of us studied in Dundee, some of us moved away and some of us stayed, but in a lot of ways I consider GANGHUT to be grounded in Dundee. The show pulls together elements of our individual practices, drawing upon past projects, stories, experiences, journeys. Conceptually, the show pivots on practice. What happens if we all get given a big gallery space to do what we like in? We don't really have an answer until the opening. GANGHUT is an escape from the art world; a community or support network or gang, that doesn't look for justification or conceptual alignment within a critical art context. It just is what it is.

DCA: How would you like to see Ganghut developing in the future?

G.02: Maybe open the membership up like when you were wee and joined the Beano fan club... get a furry Derek badge! And maybe compulsory facial tattoos!

G.02: Turn a profit.

G.03: I'd like GANGHUT to open a retreat in the countryside somewhere for tired artists.

G.06: Getting more members and groups based around the world. Kind of like the McDonalds of the art world but more ethical and tastier. Then we can do placements in different parts of the world and make art / music in communities with other international Ganghutters. Then there is space exploration. We will hopefully achieve a manned space flight by 2020.

DCA10

Dundee Contemporary Arts

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GANGHUT

Hands Across the Fire

INTERVIEWED BY DCA

Seven members of GANGHUT responded to the following questions. To preserve the group's collective identity we have numbered rather than named the respondents.

DCA: GANGHUT is a collective of artists built on friendship, tell us about the camaraderie within the group?

G.01: Trust is the key element to GANGHUT, we will back each other up. The idea is to put egos aside and work as one unit... one vision... one goal. The friendship part outweighs anything else. If we weren't making art I'm sure we'd have a small-holding somewhere breeding llamas.

G.02: The camaraderie is what's in our lives and when we're together. The ideas that take legs and turn into permanent buildings or durational performances are about trust. Trusting the decisions we make individually and collectively are positive and worthwhile. Maybe something just makes us laugh or maybe it hints at something deeper, probably both. You can't build on loose foundations or you'll end up with a wobbly house.

G.03: It's because you know you're not on your own. GANGHUT professes to be built on friendship because, like a lot of gangs, that's the starting point. From there - stories, ideas, ideals and ambition grow arms and legs. Out of that other stuff grows, and GANGHUT becomes increasingly difficult to define. If you were to ask us all individually, you get a variety of responses; some of which would be thought out, considered and reflective, but would sit next to a quip about boabbies or something. We don't dress it up in a tasteful art-suit that fits comfortably, it all spills out the sides and just is what it is. It's about the interplay of relationships, between ourselves and whoever we work with, either by choice or the situation we find ourselves in - like DCA. The generosity isn't just on our part; it's also about other people's hospitality or willingness to roll their sleeves up. It's with this spirit that GANGHUT operates, give someone a hand and they'll probably help you out later.

G.04: We all know each other because of being in Dundee, with some friendships stretching back even further. If we weren't bound by a similar sense of humour we couldn't be a gang. It's not easy sometimes especially when you are trying to build stages in the rain, sleep on a camp bed in a gallery or organise a gala day whilst living in each other's pockets. GANGHUT projects can be all-encompassing and quite a challenge so if you didn't have a good laugh at the end of the day you'd most definitely cry.

G.05: We're like the gobots when they joined together to become one big robot. Friendship is our fuel and the comfort in not censoring what and how you communicate with each other greases the cogs of the creation station. Huffs are temporary, good times shared; bad times shared and out-of-order behaviour is pulled up, humiliated then forgotten.

G.06: GANGHUT is full of people doing different things at different times. Certain members have commitments - jobs / families - which prevent us from taking part in every aspect of GANGHUT. I would like to think that we are all aware of people doing too much and let them know if help is needed.

DCA: Which other artists influence you, individually?

G.01: Max Wall, Reeves and Mortimer, Norman Collier.

G.02: My friends, people I meet. No over-riding influence. Just whatever music, books, buildings, whisky, stuff, art, activities, things are floating my boat at a certain time. It's all valid forms of influence of equal importance.

G.05: Oskar Kokoschka, Tintoretto, Hieronymus Bosch, Ivor Cutler, Guy Debord, Ilya Kabakov, Andre Derain.

G.04: I'm into various artists / musicians / gangs including R. Stevie Moore, Captain Beefheart, Laurie Anderson, The Residents.

DCA: And collectively as Ganghut?

G.01: The A-team... the Red Hand Gang... 'Why don't you?' kids... and the Manson Family!

G.05: The A-team, Challenge Anrika, Star Wars, Transformers, Spinal Tap, AC/DC, Robot Wars, Team America, Rocky, Rambo, Auf Wiedersehen Pet.

G.04: For the gang inspiration - the rubbish bikers in 'Every Which Way But Loose'.

DCA: Have you been influenced by other collaborative practice groups, such as Los Carpinteros, The Royal Art Lodge, Henry VIII's Wives or Gelitin?

G.05: No.

G.01: NO! Not sure who half of this lot is... spend my time reading books about ferreting and carpentry! We're more influenced by each other.

G.07: Not personally but what about Atelier van Leishout?... I am narrow minded and don't look out for work any more, I only pay attention to what my mates are making.

G.02: Nope. I was going to Google them, but what for? I've heard of Henry VIII's Wives. I think I stole/borrowed a catalogue of theirs from Tramway when I was working on the install crew for a different show.

G.03: As far as influences go – I think we all draw from a diverse pool that is more likely to include film, music and literature rather than other artist collectives.

G.04: As far as I'm concerned GANGHUT hasn't been influenced by other collaborative groups. We never planned to be an artists collective, or really put any label to it other than GANGHUT, it just kind of happened organically. As Derek relates beautifully in his GANGHUT intro song, Kevin needed some back up so called up his mates. I guess everyone has their own influences/ideas that get mixed in the big GANGHUT soup.

DCA: GANGHUT is a very practically minded organisation: fewer members in Melbourne (away), more in Dundee (home); skills to the fore, building, carpentry, printmaking...

G.03: Like you said, 'skills to the fore', as a collective we all have different strengths and abilities and we're good at locating these and giving each other space and opportunities to do what we do well.

G.01: YES... more tools, less fools! More skills... more thrills! And the idea of building a community is to gather many skills under one roof and break them out when needed.

G.07: I am good at holding things.

G.02: Every project thus far has been dictated by: 1. Where it is, 2. Who can be there, 3. The budget, 4. What the expectation/outcome is. From these parameters we devise multi-headed projects and activities that are just about at the limit of what is achievable based on the core skills of who is about and who we can call upon.

G.04: You have to be practically minded. There's only so many bodies you can fit into one room on bunk beds. People have different skills to be utilised for different scenarios. We're yet to find a project that will fund us all to go to the Bahamas, or some exotic location, but hopefully this will happen.

G.05: Yes but its origins are informal and chaotic therefore this happens in a very intuitive unstructured way. Nobody does GANGHUT full time and everyone has to balance the needs of their individual practice, earning a living and GANGHUT. Decisions are often made for us as a consequence of personal circumstances. Do what you can when you can. Life constantly gets in the way. How could you be anything other than practical?

DCA: Your collective practice is also about providing opportunities for other artists...such as inviting our technical crew to get involved with design as well as fabrication, and Scottish Sculpture Workshop, Lumsden with whom you have developed a project space for other resident artists to utilise... these are generous approaches... examples of Pay It Forward?

G.07: Interesting work is worth sharing.

G.01: What does this mean? I'll scratch your back, you scratch mine? More we can't be bothered with axxx-hole artists just telling gallery staff/install crew what to do and being all 'prima donna'. We have seen the art game from all sides being install, invigilating, curating, managing, organisational within the art context at some point ourselves. So we can see the importance of the creative thing as a 'whole'. A huge part of all our art practices is 'play' and 'chance' so you need various veg in the broth for this to be fruitful.

G.02: Well if you think about it, GANGHUT only occurred as Kev was generous enough to share his opportunity at Spike Island with other folk/or depending on how you look at it, Kev has very generous and talented mates willing to go to Spike as back up. This spirit continues and should continue within GANGHUT.

G.04: It's nice to be nice. GANGHUT is about inclusion and we constantly aim to keep our ego in check. Utilising skills and creating a working environment which is democratic and less about hierarchy.

G.05: I think within GANGHUT we try to cancel out each others egos a little (no mean feat). 'Ask not what GANGHUT can do for you...' Having limits to who is involved and who's a member is more a question of legality and practicality than a philosophical one. GANGHUT temporarily assimilates nearby and like-minded souls on a given project. We are often on the receiving end of help so it's nice to be able to offer opportunities in return. Plus you can't just leave the shaping of the cultural landscape to professional curators.

DCA: Hands Across The Fire, where does this title come from? Kevin mentions 'ah'm a human bridge across the burning fire' in his foreword to the Spike Island publication...

G.03: The title alludes to generosity, friendship and heroic myth making, where you would stick your neck out for fellow gang members, put your hands across the fire so they could cross it. A gang can do things that are bigger, better, more ambitious and diverse than is possible when you're doing stuff on your own.

G.01: Simple: 'You need back up - with GANGHUT you got it!' You hurt one - you hurt us all... be prepared for a GANG backlash! In times of need we'll be there for each other. There's always a pie, a bed and welcoming arms (sounds dodgy!). GANGHUT's my family and goes beyond some dudes/dudettes I make artwork with.

G.02: It's about love, friendship and support. And what you can do if you've got that.

D: For me 'Hands Across the Fire' is about friendship and the sacrifices you make for the people you care about most. At Scottish Sculpture Workshop a lot of our evenings involved us all round the fire enjoying the camaraderie... a place to gather; eat, sing, tell stories and drink whisky (some of our favourite things).

G.05: Project ends. Tired. Satisfied. Tipsy. Bantered out. Music's gone off and nobody's bothered changing it. Part-time revellers have gone to bed. Sharing stories. Sun's thinking about rising. Birds. Crackles 'n' that. Love youse. Hands across the fire.

G.07: Shared art is easier to make, a shared failure is easier to take.

DCA: The original title was going to be Ganghut versus DCA until we started crying...

G.01: Yes this isn't like we are going to burst you DCA... more fun, like Big Daddy vs. Fit Findlay or something... not aggressive but playful. Like RUN DMC vs. Jason Nevins... a gallery remix.

G.02: You should hear some of the other titles we thought of. But really it's a generic title we have started to use, a good quick way of giving a clear identity to a project.

G.05: Yeah you bottled it. Live with it.