

= K Foundation Burn a Million Quid =

K Foundation Burn a Million Quid was an action on 23 August 1994 in which the K Foundation (an art duo consisting of Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty) burned cash in the amount of one million pounds sterling in a disused boathouse on the Ardfin Estate on the Scottish island of Jura . The money represented the bulk of the K Foundation 's funds , earned by Drummond and Cauty as The KLF , one of the United Kingdom 's most successful pop groups of the early 1990s .

The incineration was recorded on a Hi @-@ 8 video camera by K Foundation collaborator Gimpo . In August 1995 , the film ? Watch the K Foundation Burn a Million Quid ? was toured around the UK , with Drummond and Cauty engaging each audience in debate about the burning and its meaning . In November 1995 , the duo pledged to dissolve the K Foundation and to refrain from public discussion of the burning for a period of 23 years , but Drummond spoke about the burning in 2000 and 2004 . At first he was unrepentant but in 2004 he admitted to the BBC that he regretted burning the money .

A book entitled K Foundation Burn A Million Quid , edited and compiled by collaborator Chris Brook ? was published by Ellipsis Books in 1997 , compiling stills from the film , accounts of events and viewer reactions . The book also contains an image of the house brick that was manufactured from the fire 's ashes .

= = Background = =

As The KLF , Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty were the biggest @-@ selling singles act in the world for 1991 . They had also enjoyed considerable success with their album The White Room and a number one hit single ? " Doctorin ' the Tardis " ? as The Timelords . In May 1992 , The KLF staged an incendiary performance at the BRIT Awards , and retired from the music industry shortly thereafter in typically enigmatic fashion .

By their own account , neither Drummond nor Cauty kept any of the money they made as The KLF ; it was all ploughed back into their extravagant productions . Cauty told an Australian Big Issue writer in 2003 that all the money they made as The KLF was spent , and that the royalties they accrued post @-@ retirement amounted to approximately one million pounds :

I think we made about £ 6m . We paid nearly half that in tax and spent the rest on production costs . When we stopped , the production costs stopped too , so over the next few months we amassed a surplus of cash still coming in from record sales ; this amounted to about £ 1.8m. After tax we were left with about £ 1m . This was the money that later became the K Foundation fund for the ' advancement of kreation.'

Initially The KLF 's earnings were to be distributed by way of a fund for struggling artists managed by the K Foundation , Drummond and Cauty 's new post @-@ KLF art project , but , said Drummond , " We realised that struggling artists are meant to struggle , that 's the whole point . " Instead the duo decided to create art with the money . Nailed to the Wall was the first piece of art produced by the Foundation , and the major piece in their planned art exhibition , Money : A Major Body Of Cash . Consisting of one million pounds in cash nailed to a pine frame , the piece was presented to the press on 23 November 1993 during the buildup to the Foundation 's announcement of the " winner " of their " worst artist of the year award " , the K Foundation art award .

= = Decision and burning = =

During the first half of 1994 , the K Foundation attempted to interest galleries in staging Money : A Major Body of Cash , but even old friend Jayne Casey , director of the Liverpool Festival Trust , was unable to persuade a major gallery to participate . " ' The Tate , in Liverpool , wanted to be part of the 21st Century Festival I 'm involved with , ' says Casey . ' I suggested they put on the K Foundation exhibition ; at first they were encouraging , but they seemed nervous about the personalities involved . ' A curt fax from ... the gallery curator , informed Casey that the K Foundation 's exhibition of money had been done before and more interestingly " , leaving

Drummond and Cauty obliged to pursue other options . The duo considered taking the exhibition across the former Soviet Union by train and on to the United States , but no insurer would touch the project . An exhibition at Kilmainham Jail in Dublin was then considered , but no sooner had a provisional August date been set for it than the duo changed their minds yet again . " Jimmy said : ' Why don 't we just burn it ? ' remembers Drummond . ' He said it in a light @-@ hearted way , I suppose , hoping I 'd say : ' No , we can 't do that , let 's do this ... ' But it seemed the most powerful thing to do . " Cauty : " We were just sitting in a cafe talking about what we were going to spend the money on and then we decided it would be better if we burned it . That was about six weeks before we did it . It was too long , it was a bit of a nightmare . "

The journey from deciding to burn the money to deciding how to burn the money to actually burning the money was a long one . Jim Reid , a freelance journalist and the only independent witness to the burning , reported the various schemes the K Foundation considered . The first was offering Nailed To The Wall to the Tate Gallery as the " 1995 K Foundation Bequest To The Nation . " The condition was that the gallery must agree to display the piece for at least 10 years . If they refused , the money would be burnt . A second idea was to hire Bankside Power Station , " the future site of the Tate Gallery extension and an imposing building downstream from the South Bank " , as a bonfire venue . In typical KLF ' guerrilla communication ' style , " posters were to appear on 15 August bearing the legend ' The 1995 K Foundation Bequest To The Nation ' , under which would have been an image of Nailed To The Wall on an easel and two flame @-@ throwers lying on the floor . On 24 August a new poster would go up , exactly the same as the first except that this time the work would be burnt . "

The K Foundation 's final solution for their one @-@ million @-@ pound " problem " was rather less showbiz , but dramatic nonetheless , the Foundation having decided that making a public spectacle of the event would lessen its impact . On 22 August , Reid , Drummond , Cauty and Gimpo touched down at Islay Airport in the Inner Hebrides and took a ferry to the island of Jura , previously the scene of a wicker man burning ceremony by The KLF . Early in the morning of 23 August 1994 , in an abandoned boathouse on Jura , Drummond and Cauty incinerated the money . The burning was witnessed by Reid , who subsequently wrote an article about the act for The Observer , and it was filmed on a Hi @-@ 8 video camera by collaborator Gimpo . As the burning began Reid said he felt guilt and shock . These feelings , he reported , quickly turned to boredom .

The money took well over an hour to burn as Drummond and Cauty fed £ 50 notes into the fire . According to Drummond , only about £ 900 @,@ 000 of the money was actually burnt , with the remainder flying straight up the chimney . Two days later , according to Reid , Jimmy Cauty destroyed all film and photographic evidence of the burning . Ten months later , Gimpo revealed to them that he had secretly kept a copy .

= = Watch the K Foundation Burn a Million Quid film = =

Watch the K Foundation Burn a Million Quid starts with a short description of the event , and then consists of Drummond and Cauty throwing £ 50 notes onto the fire . Burning the entire amount takes around 67 minutes . NME wrote :

At the start , Cauty is agitated and says he doesn 't think the money will burn because it is too wet . The camera shows 20 thick bundles of £ 50 notes , each bundle containing £ 50 @,@ 000 in new bank notes and sealed in cellophane . When the money ignites , Drummond starts to laugh as he and Cauty stand above a small fireplace throwing £ 50 notes on to the fire . Cauty constantly stokes the blaze with a large wooden plank and at one stage burns his hand on a flaming note . As the fire starts to dim , he scuttles around the floor sweeping stray notes into the flames . The cameraman shows a view from outside the building with charred £ 50 notes billowing out of the chimney .

In November 1995 , the BBC aired an edition of the Omnibus documentary series about The K Foundation entitled A Foundation Course in Art . Amongst the footage broadcast were scenes from Watch the K Foundation Burn a Million Quid . Thomas Sutcliffe , reviewing the programme in The Independent , wrote :

The Omnibus film about this intriguing pair was in part a rear @-@ guard action in their continuing

battle for recognition (and a victory ? for some people , after all , art is what appears on Omnibus) . It was also a peculiarly modern fable about what constitutes an artist ? will the artist 's say @-@ so do , or do you need the validation of the galleries ? " You can 't simply decide you 're going to become an artist , " said one gallery owner haughtily , which left you wondering how else the vocation might operate . A lottery system ? Secret @-@ ballot election ?

For my money (meagre though it is) , the video which recorded the laborious process of immolation was a decidedly intriguing work ? rather more provoking than some contemporary work I 've seen . For established galleries , the medium used (video , bank @-@ notes , fire) is obviously an embarrassment , but if poverty of material is not to disqualify artworks (bricks or lard , say) why should the expense of material ?

= = = Screening tour = = =

The first public screening of Watch the K Foundation Burn a Million Quid was on Jura on 23 August 1995 ? exactly one year after the burning . " We feel we should face them and answer their questions " said one of the duo . Two weeks later an advert appeared in The Guardian (pictured right) , announcing a world tour of the film over the next 12 months at " relevant locations " . The second screening was at In The City music industry convention on 5 September in Manchester . After the film was shown , Drummond and Cauty held a question @-@ and @-@ answer session with the theme " Is It Rock 'n'Roll ? " . A week later , the pair travelled as guests of alternative radio station B92 to Belgrade , where the post @-@ screening discussion was titled " Is it a crime against humanity ? " An unauthorised screening at the BBC Television Centre was curtailed and Drummond and Cauty were escorted from the building .

On the weekend of 3 November 1995 , the film was screened at several locations in Glasgow , including at football matches involving Celtic and Rangers ; a planned screening at Barlinnie prison was cancelled after the Scottish Prison Service withdrew permission . Glasgow 's artistic community broadly seemed to welcome the screenings . A further public screening on Glasgow Green on 5 November was announced by various newspapers , but there is no record of the showing having ever occurred . The K Foundation disappeared from Glasgow ; they later issued a statement that on 5 November 1995 they had signed a " contract " at Cape Wrath in northern Scotland agreeing to wind up the K Foundation and not to speak about the money burning for a period of 23 years .

Despite the K Foundation 's reported moratorium , further national screenings of the film organised by Chris Brook took place as planned . At each screening , Drummond and Cauty announced they would not answer questions after the film ; instead , they would ask questions of the audience . These screenings were held in Bradford , Hull , Liverpool , Cheltenham Ladies College , Eton College , Bristol , Aberystwyth , Glastonbury Tor and Brick Lane , London .

The Brick Lane screening ? on 8 December 1995 ? had been previewed in NME , and was chaotically busy . It was originally planned for a car park , but freezing conditions and snow forced a rethink and the screening was moved indoors , to the basement of the nearby Seven Stars pub . Hundreds of people crammed in to watch the screening , which was eventually abandoned partway through due to the cramped conditions . The NME preview had claimed that after the screening the film would be cut up and individual frames sold off to the public . Gimpo , the owner of the film , had no intention of doing so , but after the screening was nearly overwhelmed by a mob of people wanting to take home a piece of the film .

Gimpo has continued to show the film at events such as literary festivals and underground film evenings over the years since the initial tour . On 23 August 2007 , after a screening in Berlin , Germany , the DVD briefly disappeared . A few hours later , the film was released on several BitTorrent trackers .

= = Burning as a theme = =

Ritualistic burnings had already been a recurring aspect of Drummond and Cauty 's work . In 1987 , the duo disposed of copies of their copyright @-@ breaching debut album ? The Justified Ancients

of Mu Mu 's 1987 (What the Fuck Is Going On ?) ? by burning them in a Swedish field . This event was pictured on the back sleeve of their second album , Who Killed The JAMs ? , and celebrated in the song " Burn the Bastards " . During the 1991 summer solstice , they burnt a 60 feet (18 m) wicker man . This was chronicled in The KLF movie The Rites of Mu .

As the K Foundation , Drummond and Cauty threatened to burn the K Foundation art award prize money (Gimpo was fumbling with matches and lighter fluid when , at the last moment , Rachel Whiteread accepted the prize) . In the seventh K Foundation press advert they asked " What would you do with a million pounds ? Burn it ? "

= = Reaction and analysis = =

Jim Reid 's piece appeared in The Observer on 25 September 1994 . This is " one of the most peculiar stories of the year " , he cautioned readers . " Peculiar because pretty much everyone who comes across this magazine is going to have trouble believing a word of it . Peculiar because every last dot and comma of what is to come is the truth . " " It took about two hours for that cash to go up in flames " , he added . " I looked at it closely , it was real . It came from a bona fide security firm and was not swapped at any time on our journey . More importantly , perhaps , after working with the K Foundation I know they are capable of this . "

The Daily Express ran the story on 1 October 1994 . They reported that charred £ 50 notes were being found by islanders , who did not doubt the burning had really taken place . Drummond and Cauty had been seen eating in a hotel bar on Jura before leaving with two suitcases , the newspaper reported .

The Times followed with essentially the same story on 4 October 1994 , adding that the burning " [had] left many on the island bewildered , incredulous and angry " . £ 1500 had been handed in by a local fisherman to Islay police : " Sergeant Lachlan Maclean checked the money with both banks on Islay and with Customs and Excise , who pronounced it genuine . ' I telephoned Mr Drummond in London and told him the money had been found . I asked him if it was his . He said he would get in touch with his partner , Mr Cauty . So far he has not telephoned back ' " .

The media returned to the story in earnest in October and November 1995 , previewing and then reviewing Foundation Course In Art , and reporting on the K Foundation 's tour screening Watch the K Foundation Burn a Million Quid .

An October 1995 feature quoted Kevin Hull , the BBC documentary maker responsible for the Omnibus item , saying he had found " the boys rather depressed , and almost in a state of shock " . " Every day I wake up and I think ' Oh God , I 've burnt a million quid and everyone thinks it 's wrong ' " , Cauty told him .

A piece in The Times on 5 November 1995 , coinciding with the Glasgow screenings , reported that the K Foundation had no solid reason for burning the money or view of what , if anything , the act represented , but concluded " The K Foundation may not have changed or challenged much but they have certainly provoked thousands to question and analyse the power of money and the responsibilities of those who possess it . And what could be more artistic than that ? " In the same issue , the newspaper 's K Foundation art award witness , Robert Sandall , wrote that the Foundation 's award , million @-@ pound artwork and the burning were all " entertaining , and satirically quite sharp " , but " the art world has chosen not to think [of it as art] The general view remains that the K Foundation 's preoccupation with money , though undoubtedly sincere , simply isn 't very original . Although they didn 't blow their entire life 's savings along the way , other artists , notably Yves Klein and Chris Burden , have been here before . "

The Guardian 's TV reviewer was sceptical . " Snag is , the K men have always dealt in myth and sown a trail of confusion , so nobody quite believes they really burned the money . And if they did , they must be nuts . Confucius says : Aston Martin dealer will not accept suitcase full of ash as down payment . "

= = = Later reaction = = =

In the following years , the burning would be mentioned regularly in the press , with Drummond and Cauty often relegated to a cultural status of " the men who burnt a million quid " .

A February 2000 article in The Observer newspaper again insisted that the duo really had burnt one million pounds . " It wasn 't a stunt . They really did it . If you want to rile Bill Drummond , you call him a hoaxer . ' I knew it was real , ' a long @-@ time friend and associate of his group The KLF tells me , ' because afterwards , Jimmy and Bill looked so harrowed and haunted . And to be honest , they 've never really been the same since ' " .

A 2004 listener poll by BBC Radio 6 Music saw The KLF / K Foundation placed second after The Who in a list of " rock excesses " .

Drummond 's former protégé Julian Cope was unimpressed , claiming that Drummond still owed him money . " He burned a million pounds which was not all his , and some of it was mine . People should pay off their creditors before they pull intellectual dry @-@ wank stunts like that . "

= = Legacy = =

On 17 September 1997 , a new film , This Brick , was premiered . The film consisted of one three @-@ minute shot of a brick made from the ashes of the money burnt at Jura . It was shown at the Barbican Centre prior to Drummond and Cauty 's performance as 2K .

On 27 September 1997 , K Foundation Burn A Million Quid (ISBN 0 @-@ 9541656 @-@ 5 @-@ 9 , ISBN 1 @-@ 899858 @-@ 37 @-@ 7 paperback) was published . The book , by Chris Brook and Gimpo , contains stills from the film and transcriptions of various Q & A sessions from the tour . It also includes a timeline of K Foundation activity and sundry essays including one from Alan Moore . Publisher Ellipsis promoted the book with an advert modelled on those of the K Foundation ? " Why did Ellipsis publish K Foundation Burn A Million Quid ? " they asked .

Initially , Drummond was unrepentant , telling The Observer in 2000 that he couldn 't imagine ever feeling regret unless his child was ill and only " an expensive clinic " could cure him . By 2004 , however , he had admitted to the BBC the difficulty of justifying his decision . " It 's a hard one to explain to your kids and it doesn 't get any easier . I wish I could explain why I did it so people would understand . "