



ARTISTIC EVALUATION

It should be noted the views expressed in this evaluation are intended to represent, as far as possible, an objective aesthetic judgement. Specialist advisors and officers should avoid making judgements based on their own personal tastes and preferences.

Artist/Company:	NVA
Venue:	Kilmartin Glen
Title of Event:	HALF LIFE
Type of Event:	Installation / performance
Date of Visit:	8 September 2007
Overall Rating:	Competent

Overall, HALF LIFE was disappointing given the anticipation and build-up. It failed to match its vision quite profoundly and lacked depth. HALF LIFE failed to meet its potential.

DAYTIME PROGRAMME – competent: not enough creative interpretation – it needed to be much more than a walk in the hills being directed (through installation as much as signage) to points of interest.

PERFORMANCE – competent: the appalling script provided a poor base; this coupled with unexciting direction meant that the stronger elements (music, design, performers) were simply unable to sufficiently compensate. It was disappointingly presented, given the experience of the company and the gift of the site.

Name: Chloë Dear – Specialist Advisor Date: 10 October 2007

This report has been commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council to evaluate the artistic quality of the production named above. It has been prepared by either a specialist Advisor, or an officer of the Scottish Arts Council, as indicated at the end of the form. The report will be circulated to the organisation which produced the work and to the management of the venue, if the venue is core funded by the Scottish Arts Council.

The report will form evidence for the Artistic Leadership and Public Engagement sections of the Quality Framework and be taken into account in assessing the work of the producing company in relation to applications for funding to the Scottish Arts Council. It may also be used by the Joint Board to report on the overall performance of its funded organisations.

Evaluators should enter their rating under each section, explaining briefly their reason for the rating with reference to their comments under each section. Ratings should be given in accordance with the following:

- 1 - Very Poor** – standard falls well below what is acceptable.
- 2 - Poor** – not attaining acceptable standards of conception or presentation.
- 3 - Competent** – routine rather than especially interesting.
- 4 - Good** – well conceived and executed
- 5 - Excellent** – conceived and executed to a high standard.

1. Artistic Assessment

Please evaluate the artistic quality of the event, with particular reference to the strengths and weaknesses of the following:

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
All	Vision and imagination of work - Quality of ideas, skills in execution; if you've seen the work of this artist(s)/ company before, please comment on the comparison.	Competent	<p><u>Daytime programme</u></p> <p>The overall vision was very interesting and packed with potential but the presentation, although technically adept was lacking in depth and enough ingredients to sustain curiosity. The installations were neither subtle nor particularly challenging. They acted simply like great big arrows pointing at marks in the landscape rather than offering any real stimulation of thought and imagination.</p> <p>Although it was a pleasure to be taken on a guided (via map) walk through the landscape (it is stunning after all), there was not enough at each point to maintain interest. It is not enough to just be taken to something that is there anyway. This is the work of heritage / environmental organisations. I expect something more from arts organisations: to be engaged at a different level - not with straight-forward historical / anthropological interpretations but something that pokes our imaginations and evokes other ways of seeing. These installations failed to do that.</p> <p>Of the list of 16 destinations marked on the interpretive map, only 7 were augmented by installations. I visited 6 of these. I expected more.</p> <p>It did cross my mind that the money might have been better spent by giving it to Kilmartin House Museum directly for spending on interpretive material for a permanent "trail" that could be appreciated for longer than just over two weeks.</p> <p><u>Performance</u></p> <p>Other than the design itself, this was a production that could just have well been mounted indoors. There was much expectation generated by the thought of being taken on a journey into a forest. This sense of anticipation evaporated very quickly by having to sit on a seating bank (if wonderfully constructed) to watch a lack-lustre, weak performance. Perhaps there were many in the audience for whom this was a new experience – but this was a timid example of outdoor work.</p> <p>Overall, HALF LIFE was a huge disappointment, especially knowing what is possible with work outdoors and given the company's own track record. I have seen much of NVA's work, both set within the landscape and their more theatrical productions and have literally followed them uphill and down.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
All (if relevant)	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.	Good	This was a self-promotion by the company in conjunction with the National Theatre of Scotland. The vision itself was strong enough to stand on its own and did not need the support of an existing event.
All	Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes.	Competent	The lead-up to HALF LIFE raised a lot of expectations and it has to be said that the resulting programme / performance did not meet these.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage.	Good	<u>Performance</u> The performers were on the whole good and engaging, although I found the character of the child somewhat annoying and unbelievable. The physical performers gave the piece a dynamism it was otherwise lacking.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	Good	<u>Performance</u> The work of the two physical performers was interesting to watch – particularly when they mirrored the other performers who were on top of the structure at the time. I would have liked to have seen more of the physical work as it created a strong counterpoint to the text and was much more effective at communicating some of the central ideas than the text.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Poor	<u>Performance</u> The script was weak and it was hard to work out what the story actually was. The difficulty in following the narrative was not due to its cut-up structure but rather the vagueness of the overall storyline. The text was clunky and uninteresting. The Neolithic period is fascinating but this script wasted an opportunity to truly invoke much excitement about the subject matter. It did not go much beyond a rather repetitious pondering about the meaning of cup and ring marks.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Competent	<u>Performance</u> I am not sure what went wrong but the direction was neither coherent nor dynamic. A lot of blame can surely be laid with the script which was overly and unnecessarily dominant. The interpretation itself was flat – there was little tension in the production with only brief moments of pace. The performers were capable of showing much more physicality and emotionally, neither of which would not have been out of place. More use could have been made of the space and the incredible structure at its heart.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/	Good	<u>Daytime programme</u> Music is not the correct term for the sound installations but this is best discussed here. The

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			<p>possible to encourage those visiting to be more sensitive to the spaces.</p> <p>Those out on the trails seemed to be enjoying themselves.</p> <p>The installations / walks had broad appeal but I do have comments about accessibility, not just with respect to physical mobility. I have made further comments about audience below – under Location.</p> <p><u>Performance:</u> The night I attended it was sold out (I couldn't estimate numbers) with the audience snuggled closely together on the seating bank. Audience response was muted and not effusive although I overheard positive comments on the return bus journey.</p> <p>There were a few children in the audience but the performance did not hold much interest for these younger audience members. It is recognised that this show was not specifically geared for family audiences but it was a shame that the performance did not do more to fully engage younger people, especially given the "event" nature of the experience.</p>
All	Additional Interpretative activity	n/a	I did not attend any additional interpretative activities.
All	Outcomes of education activity	n/a	I was aware that there were educational activities running alongside the main programme but I was not asked to assess these.

2. Management of Event

Criteria	Comment
Suitability of the venue for the event	<p>Kilmartin Glen and the surrounding environment is an evocative setting for outdoor work and offers many possibilities.</p> <p>Kilmartin House Museum is a good starting point as it is easy to find and recognisable. There are also other facilities there to be made use of and to provide a respite to the day.</p>
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	<p>The book (interpretive guide) and map handed to ticket holders were very well presented, particularly the map. This was hardy enough to survive a day's use.</p> <p>It was difficult to appreciate the book en route and I wonder how many people actually read it. And I did question how much the book compensates for the lack of depth to the event itself – i.e. the interpretation is all in the book rather than where it should have been: outside in the environment – live rather than words on a page.</p>
Publicity/ pre-publicity – leaflets, posters, websites, etc. What is produced, is it easy to understand and where can you get the information? Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event and comment on the company/organisation's website.	<p>The pre-publicity was widespread and striking making this a much anticipated event. Posters and flyers were spotted in all sorts of places, not just the usual ones.</p> <p>I was aware of much media interest in the form of previews but did not see these directly.</p> <p>The advance information provided to audience members was detailed and explained the nature of the event, the transportation difficulties etc.</p> <p>The website augmented the information sent out with tickets.</p>
Ease of booking and payment	<p>Straight-forward – I did it on-line.</p>
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	<p>The starting point for the event is well known. NVA then provided audience members with high quality information in the form of a map showing how to find the installations within the landscape.</p> <p>Kilmartin Glen is very difficult to get to without a car, making this event pretty inaccessible to those without access to a car unless they were hugely motivated to attend. It is impossible to visit almost all the installations without a car. NVA did provide information about bus services to the area but these provided limited access to the sites. Information was provided about bicycle hire and this was certainly an option for those fit enough.</p> <p>I did wonder about the effect this had on audiences and who would be likely to turn up in the face of transportation difficulties. This, combined with the high ticket price for the evening performance and of course the cost / logistics of getting there, staying / eating, puts this experience beyond the reach of a huge number of people, almost into the realms of elitist/exclusive. The fact that the daytime programme was free only partially made up for the enormous cost of attending.</p> <p>These factors are not conducive to attracting diverse audiences.</p> <p>Although of course, I must not forget that for local people, this is something unique and special, on their doorstep and therefore very accessible – this perhaps makes up for the difficulties / barriers for those coming from elsewhere!</p>

Criteria	Comment
External signage and signposting	Fine
Internal directional signage	The entire area was superbly sign-posted so it was possible to follow the routes even without a map.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	The nature of the work and their location meant that most installations were not accessible for those with mobility problems. It would have been good to have created one installation that was easy to get around, to give those unable to enjoy the more demanding walks an opportunity to experience the work.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	It was not possible to see all the installations in one day unless you started early in the morning. The evening programme had two start times. The later time was very off-putting if you then faced a drive back to central Scotland.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Excellent. Friendly and efficient.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ¹	The Scottish Arts Council was appropriately acknowledged on all material.

¹ In press releases, at launches, on all published materials (including leaflets, brochures, programmes, posters, company's website, notices display, exhibition materials, websites and advertising, recordings, publications, video, broadcasts, computer programmes etc.) Where the event is publicised in the programme brochure of another organisation (eg venue, gallery, etc) then SAC acknowledgement should appear against the particular programme entry for this event.

3. Organisation's Comments (optional)

This is the organisation's opportunity to respond to points raised within this assessment. Please do not feel obliged to fill this section in. In the spirit of the Quality Framework, we would ask that any comments are self-evaluating, providing an insight as to why, if there is, a major disagreement of response between the organisation and the evaluation, in a constructive way.

This will not alter the rating given by the assessment, but will allow the organisation the opportunity to give their opinion/feedback. The Scottish Arts Council reserves the right to edit comments if they are deemed to be libellous or defamatory.

As the Scottish Arts Council implements the Quality Framework internally, we intend to publish artistic evaluations on organisations that we support regularly on our website. The final artistic evaluation, including the organisation's response will be published on a quarterly basis on our website.

Please keep your response to max 500 words. If we do not hear from you in 15 days, we will assume that you do not want to respond.