



**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.

<b>Artist/Company:</b>	<b>NVA</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	Kilmartin Glen
<b>Title of Event:</b>	<b>Half Life</b>
<b>Type of Event:</b>	<b>Site-based performance and environmental art installations</b>
<b>Date of Visit:</b>	<b>16 Sep 07</b>
<b>Overall Rating:</b>	<b>Poor</b>
<p>The work showed an enormous disparity of quality between its constituent parts. Whilst the performance was visually and sonically excellent, it was severely lacking in all other areas and thus the overall result was poor. It aimed to be a narrative-based dramatic performance but, unfortunately, the text was of very poor quality and the performers only competent. There were also serious problems, for me at least, with the poor accessibility of the piece (particularly the walk-based installations).</p>	
Name: David Leddy	Date: 21 Sep 07
Specialist Advisor <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Scottish Arts Council Officer <i>Please circle the relevant title</i>

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	Overall, this was erratic. Whilst the concept for the piece was very strong, the execution (both practical and artistic) was poor.
All (if relevant)	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.	n/a	Combination of artist-led work and curated installations. Disappointingly, I am unable to comment on the walk-based installations as I was misled by NVA regarding their accessibility without a private car (see below).
All	Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes.  Education events – see <sup>1</sup> below for guidance	Very poor	NVA aim to make 'highly complex and ambitious site-specific events' which 'transform natural landscapes and urban settings as a basis to change the way people see their environment.' This particular piece aims to 'open up a new route into the territory, disinterring the past to question the values we inherit; re-invoking belief systems which, though distant through time, might pulse again from the margins of what we remember.' The work completely failed to deliver on these grand claims.  Additionally, their website claims that, 'at the heart of this work is a commitment to continue good environmental practice in minimising impact and pollution.' It is hard to reconcile these aims with this piece which actively encourages people to drive in private cars around a 100-mile area of the countryside. All the walks begin from car parks. Indeed, the foot and cycle paths (sometime more direct than the roads) are not even marked on NVA's map. My companion (an environmental campaigner) was particularly frustrated at this, describing NVA's green credentials as 'a laughable sham'.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage.  Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	Competent	The actors were competent, but lacked the requisite skills for this style of performance and thus were ultimately unsuccessful.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	Good	Movement work in the piece was handled with more success than text and acting, with some interesting choreography and aerial work. However, this was let down at the performance that I saw by poor coordination and a lack of complicity between the performers.

<sup>1</sup> Education is a bridge between artform excellence and increased access and participation, and it is people centred. Providing opportunities for learning and progressing in an artform or using an artform to address other, non-artistic, outcomes are equally valid; in either case a high quality strategic approach is required in order to benefit the participants and the organisation. Delivery can be through workshops, post/pre-show discussions, outreach work, etc aimed at any age group.

<b>Artform</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Comments and key reasons for rating</b>
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Very poor	Thomas Legendre and Mark Murphy.  The script was the core of this piece and was well below the requisite standard. The text lacked emotional depth, psychological complexity and social insight. It was ultimately a narrative-based drama without a real plot or complex characters and without other substantive elements to replace them. Whilst I was initially interested in the alternation between poetic and daily registers of language, this ultimately failed due to the poor quality of the poetic writing.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Poor	Angus Farquhar & Mark Murphy.  Actors were poorly cast for the style of performance and directing of performance choices lacked detail, complexity and subtlety. The piece was poorly paced. Complicity between performers was inadequate, particularly during movement sequences which demanded physical mirroring. The artistic team seemed to have conceived a narrative-based drama, but actually made a visual art installation with a thin domestic drama placed in front of it.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/ recorded) to the production.	Excellent	Rhodri Davies & Angharad Davies (composers / musicians) Lee Paterson & Toshiya Tsunoda (sound artists)  The sonic / musical landscape was minimal, yet beautifully layered, atmospheric and emotionally effective.
Dance, Theatre	Design – costume, set, lighting. Take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue and, where appropriate, the touring schedule.	Excellent	Simon Costin & James Johnson (design concept, performance set design, day site design) Phil Supple (lighting design)  The set design and lighting design were by far the most successful part of the performance. They showed a very high level of artistic excellence in both concept and execution.
All	Quality of Presentation/Engagement  Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).	Excellent	The technical quality of the whole project was very high.
All	Audience  Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction		Appropriate. The performance that I attended appeared to be sold out (approx. 200?). The audience gave the performance a very muted reaction. On the bus back to Lochgilphead I could hear various complaints from other audience members.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
All	Additional Interpretative activity – what activities were available to enhance the experience of the event eg workshops, artist's talks, discussion groups? Please indicate age-groups targeted.	Competent	Half Life 'Day Book'.  This detailed book was designed to a very high visual standard, but the textual contents were less successful. One section, for example, patronisingly explained that abstract sound art doesn't have a narrative. Another condescendingly informed the reader that 'prehistory has no written records.'
All	Outcomes of education activity – what learning/skills development took place? What did participants take away with them? Are education resources being provided for follow up work? Is it strategically linked to the curriculum (formal or informal)?	n/a	I did not take part in any education activities.

## 2. Management of Event

*Please evaluate the way the event was presented/organised by the organisation and the venue, with reference to the checklist below, including additional comments/observations. Please try to view the venue and the services, and interpretative material as though you had never visited it before eg if you did not know the venue's location, how easy would it be to find your way there, and to find your way around once you had arrived?*

Criteria	Comment
Suitability of the venue for the event	This is hard to answer. The piece is made for the specific sites in Kilmartin Glen and thus is conceptually suitable. In terms of accessibility for the majority of the population, though, the performance requires either a long drive in a private car (immediately excluding 30% of the population), or using public transport and staying overnight, thus excluding those on a low wage (my trip cost around £150 for two people).
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Half Life day book, as above.
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.	Design of publicity materials was of an adequate quality, though unstimulating in design terms and poor in communicating anything about the work. Market penetration, however, seemed to be very high. Publicity was highly confusing regarding practical issues (locations, etc). Even when I called NVA directly to check, they completely misled me as to the accessibility of the work (see below).
Ease of booking and payment	Difficult.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	<p>Very difficult.</p> <p>All website information about this piece encouraged the use of private cars. I do not drive and so called NVA to check if the work was accessible by public transport. The person I spoke to strongly denied that NVA were encouraging audiences to drive. I was assured that Lochgilphead was accessible by bus (true) and that I could reach everything else by hired bike. This turned out to be completely untrue (even speaking as someone who cycles daily, in all weathers). Just collecting our day books and maps from Kilmartin involved a 20 mile return trip (£30 in a cab, as it turns out). At this point, box office at Kilmartin House told me that ALL the installation-based sites were 'impossible' to reach without a car.</p> <p>This seems particularly poor when compared to the recent (commercial) Connect music festival which immediately preceded Half Life at nearby Inverary castle. The festival actively discouraged private car use in their marketing and arranged specific buses with Scottish Citylink to take audiences directly to the festival site from all major Scottish towns.</p>
External signage and signposting	Adequate.
Internal directional signage	n/a

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Not accessible to wheelchair users or people with mobility problems.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Performance time and length were appropriate.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Very poor. Misinformation from NVA led me to spend over £150 on something which I could not fully experience.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>	SAC acknowledged on all materials that I saw.

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<sup>2</sup> 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.