



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/National Theatre of Scotland

Venue: Kilmartin Glen Argyll

Title of Event: Half Life

Type of Event: (e.g. performance, exhibition, informal showing, work-in-progress, workshop, screening, lecture etc)

Environmental Art Event with performance

Date of Visit: 13 and 14th September 2007

Overall Rating:

(Please rate the event overall, taking into account your ratings for each section. Please state the key reasons for your overall ratings – i.e. the particular strengths and weaknesses. If the management of the event affects the overall enjoyment of the event, please comment, but the overall rating should be based on the artistic merit of the event.)

Good

I thought this a brilliant idea that was not fully realised as an event due to lack of full communication about how the audience were to engage with it. The event was let down by the poor script that was a disappointment. The conception was ambitious and inspired and it was a pity that it did not form a satisfying whole.

The choice of locations was very successful and the Performance Structure, Lighting Design and Music were significant elements. Overall I am glad that I experienced it and it stimulated a range of thoughts and emotions that continue to resonate. I was familiar with this area of Argyll and do feel that the event added something of significance to my understanding of it.

Name: _____ David Taylor _____ Date: _17_ /10_ /07_

Scottish Arts Council Officer

Please circle the relevant title

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.	Excellent	<p>This was a major large scale project that ranged over a large area of mid Argyll and built on a sense of place in order to provoke thoughts and feelings about the past and the people that inhabited the area through their monuments, contemporary installation and performance. If the job of the artist is to point, then this work did that- directing the audience member's attention to the archaeological sites and features. Experiencing these pre-historic traces over an extended period (necessitated by their location and number) created a slow burn effect over (in my case 2 days and 15+ miles walked).</p> <p>There are so many variables involved in experiencing such a work- weather, midges, fatigue to name but a few – that it is hard to place credit and/or blame fully at the door of the artists. This is acknowledged in the theory of Land Art in that the spectator is taken to create the work to a greater degree than aesthetic theory may claim for other forms.</p> <p>That said, the level of intervention at some sites was very minimal, with the artistic input being largely the linking of the sites as part of the work. The most worked-up intervention that I visited (aside from the performance structure) was the Mill Cottage, and I thought this the most intriguing of the extant sites. There was a real ambience achieved and opportunities for meaning created by the uprooted and inverted tree within the deserted shell of the cottage. This evoked thoughts of displacements and disorientation which resonated with the nearby deserted village. Thoughts of Diaspora and social deracination arose. This was the closest one felt to a realisation of lives unseen, as though the purism of archaeological propriety (expressed repeatedly in the accompanying booklet) had been suspended. Perhaps the relative modernity of the site and therefore the proximity in time of any attendant stories made this permissible.</p> <p>The handsomely produced book accompanying the event also set the context and reflected on the range of meanings implicit in the sites and their situations.</p> <p>My experiences of <i>The Path</i>, and <i>The Hidden Gardens</i> and <i>Radiance</i> are difficult to contrast and compare with <i>Half Life</i> as the works are radically different. They share an elliptical means of expression that relies on significant levels of commitment by the spectator/protagonist, and can be taken at a number of different levels. The deeply</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			<p>felt sense of place is common to all of these events and is a powerful through-line. The sense of people is however abstract and ultimately de-humanised and therefore does not lend itself easily to an empathetic response. <i>Half Life</i> seems to self consciously avoid projecting contemporary ideas and mores onto the unseen architects of the prehistoric sites and artefacts, and in so doing denies the audience a way in to the imagined emotional experience of other human beings. Without that empathy, however speculative, the artist is handicapped.</p> <p>Similar productions by the NTS include the series of inaugural productions under the title of <i>Home</i>. Of these a number demonstrated a significant level of evident local participation and local experience appeared to make a significant contribution which was shaped successfully by professional writers. The dramaturgical aspects of <i>Half-Life</i> lacked the vigour and immediacy of the <i>Home</i> texts.</p> <p>I believe that the vision was bold and significant, based on an appreciation of a unique landscape. The execution of the 'climax' of the work was not well achieved. The presentation and design of the evening performance were impactful and impressive. However the actual drama was disappointing. A generous critic would call the content of the performed work elemental and simple, the less generous would call it banal (and I met those who did). I struggled to make sense of the text and only found links to my experience of the day in odd snatches of the dialogue.</p>
All (if relevant)	<p>Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.</p> <p>If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme.</p>		
All	<p>Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes.</p> <p>Education events – see ¹below for guidance</p>	Good	<p>NVA's manifesto (as stated in the accompanying booklet) is to work "with pioneering artists to produce highly complex and ambitious site-specific events, artworks, festivals and permanent interventions." I would agree that this was ambitious and pioneering but would question whether the capacity of the scriptwriter (Thomas Legendre) to create a satisfying narrative, or drama was demonstrated.</p>

¹ 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.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.		The actors in the performance piece were competent but laboured with an intractable piece of writing and the overall impression was of a lack of engagement with either the text or the audience.
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	Good	There was some interesting movement involving vertical tree-walking and some mirrored movement. The effect of this was a little gratuitous and did not add to the meaning of the work.
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	Poor	As mentioned above this was the weakest element of the entire work. It failed to engage or illuminate.
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	Competent	The casting was reasonable, but it is hard to judge the actors' capabilities given the nature of the text. There was imaginative use of the set/installation.
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	Good	The music was interesting and well performed. It lent a powerful atmosphere to the piece.
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	The intervention in the forest or 'Performance Structure' was in itself a thing of beauty as well as a (more or less) practical stage for the action. The setting was superb, creating the illusion of an indoor space through the use of lighting- an illusion broken only by the periodic fluttering of a bat across the stage. The realisation of this theatre in the forest was a significant achievement and was a highlight of the event.
All	Quality of Presentation/Engagement Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc). Crafts/Visual Arts - Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang Education events - relevance/ appropriateness of presentation and teaching methodology (one to one, group, child centred); details of participant group and activity, including genre.	Good	Technically the performance was very well presented
All	Audience Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction		The audience for the event was of course dispersed across a wide area during the day and one encountered groups on a regular basis who seemed to be enjoying the experience- the weather was overcast but dry on day one and light rain only

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	<p>Crafts/Visual Arts – time spent, interest, activity, and visitors' books comments, number of visitors/ participants at the time of visit</p> <p>Education/learning – pre-event involvement, participants/ schoolteachers reaction, understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc</p>		<p>on day two. There were some difficulties underfoot on the climb up to Castle Dounie which were clearly challenging to some participants some of whom were not well shod for a walk of this nature. The majority seemed weel equipped and capable. The evening performance was full and there was a buzz of anticipation as one walked from the buses to the site. The audience was attentive and responded reasonably volubly at the end. Anecdotally I heard a generally positive response to the daytime events and to the Performance Structure, but a poor response to the performance writing. There was a very positive reaction to the area from those unfamiliar with it with many appreciating its beauty and interest.</p>
All	<p>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.</p>		<p>Tickets were accompanied by a booklet and a map. The book contained 15 articles or meditations on the themes and background of the work and the area. These were of a good quality and included some writers of standing. I found this a valuable accompaniment to the work. The map was well produced but not terribly user-friendly. In general terms the structure and logistics of the event took some getting to grips with and actually required a deal of pre-planning to get the most out of the time and money that one had to commit to it. I think that more guidance in advance of the event would have been valuable. As it was, one did not get a true sense of the scale and how best to approach the event until there, and by then it was too late to actually take it all in. I think communication of the elements could have been clearer and this would have allowed one to get more out of it. Work with the community and local young people was referred to but I had no experience of this.</p>
All	<p>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)?</p>		Not assessed

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	Very- in so far as the venue in many senses was the event.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	The quality of the booklet was high- the introductory and guiding material not so clear.
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.	Good quality print and website material. There were many small banners evident in Mid Argyll in various strategic points by roadsides. While tasteful, the style was a little under-stated and did not really communicate much without background information.
Ease of booking and payment	Fine. Parking at the museum where tickets had to be collected was very restricted.
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Easy to find.
External signage and signposting	Good
Internal directional signage	Fair – occasional missing signs were problematic, but the map helped.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	This was problematic. Few of the sites would be accessible to people with walking difficulties. I am not aware what special arrangements were made – these would have had to have been customised to peoples needs. I expect that the evening performance would have been accessible to wheelchair users with assistance.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Timing was largely at one's discretion and the evening performance was at two times- 730 and 1030. I expect the earlier (I went to the late one) might have been compromised by a lack of darkness.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Good
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Good

² 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 (e.g. 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.