



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:	NORTHLANDS CREATIVE GLASS
Venue:	LYBSTER, CAITHNESS
Title of Event:	
Type of Event:	<i>(e.g. performance, exhibition, informal showing, work-in-progress, workshop, screening, lecture etc)</i>
Date of Visit:	ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 31st August – 2nd September 2007
Overall Rating:	4 +
<i>(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.)</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Very well conceived programme with good balance of topics and stimulating theme;* Excellent range of speakers, presenting high quality content;* Well-run and welcoming conference.	
Name: <u>Louise Butler</u>	Date: <u>12th September 2007</u>
Specialist Advisor	

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	<p>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.</p>	5	<p>The good administrative team work necessary in organizing such a weekend event was evident and Jane Bruce, Artistic and Technical Director, emerged as the driving force, with a strong vision in creating and managing the conference theme. 'Expression of Self' was a very well constructed programme – starting with scientific research and data that set the base line for the weekend discussion - facts that stimulated thoughts of ones 'own' self and enabled one to debate, affirm and contest these facts against the very personal experience and interpretation of 'self' presented through the work of subsequent speaker/practitioners. The two days were well crafted, in terms of the balance of presenters – film/media, 2d/3d glass techniques, conceptual work, an international mix of influences, physical expression through the medium of dance. Even within such diversity, the central theme of the conference was firmly sustained. Sedentary periods were counter balanced with the interesting garden visit, allowing a flavour of the landscape to which one had come; an opportunity to see practical glass demonstration and, above all, the chance to spend informal time meeting new people and discovering their diverse practice, backgrounds and interests.</p> <p>Having attended the 2006 conference, I found this year's programme much more cohesive.</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>	5	<p>North Lands Creative Glass describes itself as <i>'essentially a laboratory for creativity whose goal is to stimulate the process of search and investigation...offering a secluded time and place for artists...maximum freedom with good organisation and support'</i>. The 2007 conference achieved these aims. As a weekend delegate, one had a strong sense of joining a specialist group, with high intellect, skills and particular interest. The conference sits mid-way within the Masterclass programme and the nucleus of people who have already participated in the classes leading into the conference, joining with those who are arriving for the following sessions, conveys a sense of coming into something that already has a momentum, and an anticipation, for which the conference is a pivotal point. There is a quiet buzz within the company. One cannot question the excellence of the Masterclass programme, participants are juried and these selected practitioners add to the quality of discussion and engagement with weekend conference delegates, who are a mix of makers, curators, collectors and others with more general interests.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
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 ¹ below for guidance</p>	5	<p><i>North Lands aims to stimulate a lively exchange of ideas whilst also allowing time for reflection and action in a professional environment</i>. These aims were fully achieved over the conference weekend. As already stated in this report, the theme was well interpreted, stimulating and accessible, regardless of one's own professional background or experience. The printed programme was descriptive and well produced and the website informative and the conference lived up to expectations.</p>
All	<p>Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage.</p> <p>Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.</p>	4	<p>The overall standard of presentation was good. When selecting presenters on the basis of their work, reputation and intellect, the quality of content will be predictably high – but, inevitably, some individuals will be better communicators than others. Thus, some speakers were 100% engaging whilst others were less so.</p>
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc		N/A
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.		N/A
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.		N/A
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.		N/A
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.		N/A
All	<p>Quality of Presentation/Engagement</p> <p>Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).</p>		N/A

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
	<p>Crafts/Visual Arts - Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang</p> <p>Education events - relevance/ appropriateness of presentation and teaching methodology (one to one, group, child centred); details of participant group and activity, including genre.</p>		
All	<p>Audience</p> <p>Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate the size and reaction</p> <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>	4	<p>The pitch of the conference was appropriate to the professional experience and general understanding of the audience. Speakers and audience were able to engage on a level, intellectually, which meant that things could move along quickly, retaining a lively pace – which always helps when long periods are spent sitting and listening.</p> <p>66 delegates were listed – 43 from the UK, 20 from the USA, 1 Denmark, 1 France and 1 Ireland, which lent a good international cultural mix to the audience. The delegate list was not included in the conference pack, but available from the registration desk on the first day. It would have been helpful to have had details of each persons professional practice / interest / company or organisation with their name on the list. Apparently this information was going to be gathered, but there seemed to be no evidence of this happening. Data protection is obviously an issue, but it would probably have been helpful to collect this information, with any necessary permissions, when people signed up for the conference. Unless one spoke to individuals, their 'identity' remained rather anonymous over the weekend.</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>	3	<p>A visit was arranged to nearby Dunbeath Castle Gardens at the end of the first afternoon which gave a welcome breath of fresh air, an insight to a gorgeous garden restoration and a feel for the light, space and special landscape of Caithness. Good to incorporate the opportunity to see practical demonstrations in the workshops and the chance to view Shona Illingworth's powerful video/sound installation. Evening social activity rather predictable, allows the company to divide between those who like dance ceilidhs and those who don't! This element could do with enlivening – a traditional Scottish theme is fine, but perhaps the quality and diversity of performance needs exploring. (However, it was a nice gesture to invite the local young people to celebrate their success in dancing awards, achieved earlier in the day).</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>	3	<p>Questions were contained at the end of each presentation, time limited to keep to the schedule, but seemed adequate to cover immediate concerns. The panel discussion at the end of the conference was not particularly lively, but it is a difficult time on the programme with some people having already left after the last speaker and others watching the</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			<p>clock when they know they have long journeys ahead – everyone is flagging. It's a tricky slot to handle – maybe a short themed discussion at the start of Day Two to get everyone's 'brain in gear' and some interactivity would serve a better purpose – and just have a concise summing up at the end of the final day? The conference follows a traditional structure and maybe it needs a minor re-think. All delegates would have had sufficient opportunity to question; the conference is small and the presenters are part of the company so there is ample opportunity to speak with them informally and directly over the weekend. I am sure everyone should have gone home satisfied in this respect.</p>

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	The Portland Arms Hotel is an ideal social/residential venue – easily accessible to the Community Hall for the formal sessions. The Hall facilities are ideal for the size of the conference; spacious, well heated and given the constraints of such a venue, the AV/IT worked well, with good views of the screen and clarity of sound from all points. The seats are very hard! And it could be good to suggest that delegates might like to bring their own small cushion for comfort, if they wish!
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Nothing overt; leaflets available, publications and T-shirts for sale – very low key.
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.	Very good website, pictorial, informative – good functionality. Excellent printed brochure of good quality, descriptive and well illustrated. Contains all the details one would need in legible, succinct form. Conference pack – high quality generic folder which is consistent to the overall Northlands brand. Clear conference information and helpful local facility and tourism details / brochures as a back-up.
Ease of booking and payment	Online booking, which is helpful. (<i>Cannot comment on payment process as this was handled by SAC on my behalf</i>).
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Very accessible, very easy to find. Distant location – but that is part of the appeal! Car journey is very straightforward, there seemed to be regular public service buses passing through Lybster, connecting to rail links – as described in Northlands published travel information.
External signage and signposting	Nothing noticeable. Maybe a missed opportunity for the town to celebrate and gain kudos from such an important international gathering? Presumably, all the local residents know about the centre and it's various activities, but it might be beneficial for people passing through to have it drawn to their attention in some way?
Internal directional signage	Not really necessary for an event this size.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Venue has level access and disabled toilet facilities. No hearing loop available. The Portland Arms provides assistance on request for disabled guests and has ground floor rooms available.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be	Comfortable length of programme. Good start and finish times, with the one reservation about the final session on Day Two, as referred to earlier in this

Criteria	Comment
appropriate for the audience?	report.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	A very friendly and welcoming team – visible and available throughout the conference. A relaxed, sociable and informal gathering. Catering excellent – quality of food and service very satisfactory. Wholesome fare!
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Scottish Arts Council clearly acknowledged on printed conference documentation and verbally thanked at the opening session.

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 (eg venue, gallery, etc) then SAC acknowledgement should appear against the particular programme entry for this event.