



Scottish Arts Council

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: Ursula Biemann

Venue: Peacock Visual Arts

Title of Event: Black Sea Files

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

Date of Visit: 2/08/07

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.)

My overall rating is a 4.

The exhibition of 'Black Sea Files' by Ursula Biemann is an excellent curatorial choice for Peacock Visual Arts. Firstly its subject matter, the politics of oil in the Caspian Region, is of particular interest and significance to the local context of the gallery in Aberdeen; secondly it builds on Peacock Visual Art's overall programme, which has been exploring the theme of oil as well as other social, political and economic issues.

The main weakness of the exhibition was the missed opportunity to provide background information about the artist and the significance of contextualising the theme for the arts organisation in the lack of any additional interpretation in the gallery space.

Name: _____ Jenny Brownrigg _____ Date: 3 / 08 / 07 _____

Specialist Advisor

Scottish Arts Council Officer

Please circle the relevant title

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.	5	I had never seen the work of Ursula Biemann before and as a visitor to this exhibition found the work to be rigorous, thought-provoking and of a high quality in terms of ideas, presentation of research and execution. The work itself purposefully put the artist on the front-line, documenting the human cost and upheaval behind the decisions made by super powers of the global economy to access oil resources in the Caspian Region. The artist followed local developments in the creation of what she termed video 'files', comprising of investigating the pipeline itself as it was being built and through her interviewing farmers, oil workers, and prostitutes who live alongside the trajectory of the pipe line. Through these methods she commented on urban and rural transformations. She also contextualised the issues by focusing on a number of the files on the history of the region and politics of oil. What was also of interest was Biemann's own questioning and analysis of her role as an artist in adopting the methodology of field work and research normally the remit of journalists or anthropologists.
All (if relevant)	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned. If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme.	5	The selection of Ursula Biemann's 'Black Sea Files' for the organisation is an excellent one – it rigorously contextualises the politics of oil in a global economy, uncovering the local effects on the populations that the pipeline cuts through in the Caspian region. It is of course of particular significance and interest for Aberdeen, a city with its own particular connections to oil and production and the local economy. 'Black Sea Files' is a further exciting development in Peacock Visual Arts' curatorial programme, which has increasingly been finding innovative ways for exhibitions and artists to explore social, political and economic issues that have relevance firstly to the context of Aberdeen, then the wider arena of Scotland, UK and abroad. Peacock Visual Arts are one of an international network of organisations and events working with Ursula Biemann and B-Zone to exhibit 'Black Sea Files', other events including Istanbul Biennial and at WUK, Vienna, this year.
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 ¹ below for guidance	3	The only full interpretation material about the exhibition was on Peacock Visual Arts website and was not available in the gallery itself, making it difficult to evaluate the success of the event against stated aims through printed material available on the gallery visit. On the website there was an introduction to the video installation and a link to

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

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			<p>Ursula Biemann's website which had more information about her area of research and projects. The description of the project on the Peacock Visual Arts website did communicate the outline of the project.</p> <p>In terms of education events, there was an Artist's Talk by Ursula Biemann in the gallery on 30 June.</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>		n/a
Dance, Theatre	<p>Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc</p>		n/a
Theatre	<p>Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.</p>		n/a
Theatre, Dance	<p>Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.</p>		n/a
Dance, Theatre	<p>Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.</p>		n/a
Dance, Theatre	<p>Design – costume, set, lighting. Take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue and, where appropriate, the touring schedule.</p>		n/a
All	<p>Quality of Presentation/Engagement</p> <p>Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).</p> <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,</p>	4	<p>The overall atmosphere captured in the installation of the gallery space was well-considered and really transformed the space from other exhibitions I have seen at Peacock Visual Arts– it had a real contemporary museum feel to it with muted lighting, purple walls in the main space and a long plinth with ten monitors with headphones and seating. The vinyl lettering on the wall behind the monitors stating the file no, subject, and running time was highly effective. There were three very minor things to comment on in use of equipment. One of the monitors was not working when I viewed it – the monitor set up was complex as each pair of monitors were showing double screen work; the</p>

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
	including genre.		projection on the end wall was not totally exact in the space, with part of it going onto the ceiling; and speaker wire could have been clipped up in a neater way than with thick bits of masking tape – it was abt in your sight line when you were sitting down and looking upwards at the end projection.
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>		<p>In the 70 minutes I spent in the gallery space there were two visitors that were in the over 50 agegroup – they spent 20 minutes in the space and interacted with the exhibits well, spending most of the time watching the Black Sea Files on the monitors.</p> <p>The comments book at the entrance to the space had very positive comments, including 'Impressive' on several occassions and 'interesting subject matter'.</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>	4	<p>In terms of additional interpretative activity, there was an Artist's Talk by Ursula Biemann in the gallery on 30 June, attended by 15 people. The event had been targeted at a wide audience of those interested in the themes of oil aswell as the art audience.</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>		n/a

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	Peacock Visual Arts was an excellent venue for 'Black Sea Files', with the subject focused on in the work being of particular significance and interest for Aberdeen, a city with its own particular connections to oil and production and the local economy.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	<p>There was no interpretive material available in the gallery space. The exhibition itself required the visitor to spend time watching the Black Sea Files which are the records of the artist's research (the video running time adds up to approx 1hr). In this way I could understand why the organisation had not wanted to make the installation interpretation heavy as the work spoke for itself, providing much satisfaction as each file was watched. However, without an interpretation sheet in the gallery, there was nothing to give background information on this international artist, nor how this project fitted into Peacock Visual Arts programme or the oil production context of Aberdeen – I felt this was a missed opportunity as I understand that Peacock Visual Arts have been a main partner in the wider 'Oil and the City' programme taking place in Aberdeen. It was also a missed opportunity to show that Peacock Visual Arts was one in a network of international spaces showing the work, including Istanbul Biennial and WUK in Vienna.</p> <p>A brief summary available at the entrance of the gallery could also have encouraged the viewer to engage further with the space by providing an introduction.</p> <p>As a visitor to the gallery it also took me several minutes to work out how the double screen monitors should be visually read – initially I thought each screen was a separate 'file' video work, as there were 10 files and 10 monitors therefore I thought the pairs of headphones at each monitor pairing, which had the same soundtrack, were not operating as they should. An indication of how the monitors were staging the work in provided interpretation could have been helpful.</p> <p>On asking the gallery attendant in the print area for more information about Ursula Biemann, she brought me a copy of the publication 'B Zone' which gave more information on the wider research project 'Black Sea Files' is part of.</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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitation card directly sent to 3,000 people on the gallery's mailing list + 2,000 distributed to arts venues, schools, libraries, café's and shops across Aberdeen • A3 full colour posters: sent to various arts venues across Scotland + distributed to arts venues, schools, libraries, café's and shops across Aberdeen (+ displayed at 'public information pillars' in city centre) • Information included in Peacock's quarterly brochure, directly sent to 3,000 people on our mailing list + distributed to arts venues, schools, libraries, café's and

Criteria	Comment
	<p>shops across Aberdeen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertisements in: Variant and Art Monthly. Paid listings in an magazine, free listings in Art Monthly and news papers national and local • Information included in monthly email listings, sent to around 1,000 people on e mailing list + press contacts • Email invitation to exhibition, preview night & artist's talk directly sent to around 1,000 people on e mailing list + press contacts • Press release sent to all press contacts and published on www.allmediascotland.com • Information clearly published on front page of Peacock's website with clickable links to full details and in-depth article • Information published on Peacock's myspace page: www.myspace.com/peacockvisualarts + invitations sent directly to all 'myspace friends'
Ease of booking and payment	n/a
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Peacock Visual Arts is a 10-15 minute walk from main train and bus stations and is located on Castle Street which follows on from Union Street, the main thoroughfare. What makes it slightly trickier to find for someone that does not have background knowledge, is that the venue is located down an alley off Castle St. The entrance to the alley has a sign however.
External signage and signposting	There is a finger post for Peacock Visual Arts which is located in the main square on Castle St – it has the old name for Peracock on it but is recognisable. There is a sign for Peacock Visual Arts on the entranceway to the alley.
Internal directional signage	Internal directional signage is clear and adequate.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	The exhibition space has disabled access – there are steps in the gallery into the second space but this did not effect this exhibition layout as the work in this space could be viewed from the main room.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Black Sea Files runs 30 June – 11 August. The gallery's opening hours are Tuesday - Saturday 9.30am - 5.30pm. This is appropriate for the gallery audience.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	The gallery invigilator was pleasant and was able to answer my questions and direct me to the right information on the artist when asked.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Scottish Arts Council is acknowledged on all print.

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.

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.