



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:
Venue: Stills, Edinburgh

Title of Event: Peter Hujar

Type of Event: Exhibition

Date of Visit: 26 April 2008

Overall Rating: 4

(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.)

This was a very interesting exhibition and presented the work of Peter Hujar, a photographer not so familiar to many people. The work shown was of high artistic quality and was well-presented. Despite been a touring show originating from the ICA in London, the exhibition fitted in with Stills' commitment to show work of historical figures in the context of contemporary photographic practice. Given the forthcoming exhibitions, and the similar themes that these exhibitions will explore, it demonstrates clever and careful programming and curating. This careful consideration and the work itself was a strength of this exhibition. I would have perhaps preferred to see all the works in the main gallery spaces and not on the stairwells and in the reading room area. It would have also been beneficial to have a bit more information about the artist in the additional material provided and perhaps an introductory panel in the main gallery to introduce the public to Peter Hujar as they entered the space. These, however, are only minor criticisms.

Name: Helen Monaghan **Date:** 19/05/2008

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. | 4 | <p>This exhibition of photographs sought to highlight the work of the influential American photographer, Peter Hujar. Working in the 1970s and early 1980s, his work received little recognition during his lifetime yet he was an important influence on other photographers including Nan Goldin and Robert Mapplethorpe.</p> <p>The exhibition featured square-format, black and white photographs including nightscapes of downtown Manhattan, images of homeless people, striking portraits of transvestite performers, two images of animals and a series of photographs of the catacombs in Palermo in Sicily. All photographs were beautifully executed and built up a picture of New York during the 70s and 80s.</p> <p>Whilst looking at the images, I experienced an overriding feeling of death and melancholy. From Hujar's ghostly images of deprived areas of New York to his portraits, in particular, of Candy Darling on her deathbed, and to the fact that the photographer himself died of AIDS complications. Death is ever present in the works, but Hujar's approach is sobering and reflective. He chose to photograph most of his subjects in classical, reclining poses. There is something quite restful and peaceful about these images.</p> <p>The overall tone of the exhibition was inevitably sombre and the starkness of the hang reflected the subject matter. This, however, is not a criticism. It was great to experience such wonderful photographs in such a melancholic atmosphere.</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> | 4 | <p>This was a touring show from the ICA in London but it fitted in with Stills' programme framework as outlined in their business plan, which stated that they wanted to contextualise contemporary photographic practice by exploring the work of historical figures. Peter Hujar is a prime example of this thinking.</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> | 3 | <p>The exhibition sought to present the work of the little known, but hugely influential, photographer Peter Hujar. It was successful in bringing the work of this photographer to the public's attention. The Gallery had produced a leaflet which gave you a brief insight into Hujar's work. As labels were kept to a minimum, with just the title of the works, details about each individual sitter was available in the Information Pack folder in the main gallery. This also included an essay by Klaus Kertess. However, there could have been more information about Peter Hujar himself. I left the gallery wanting to find out more about the artist.</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 | <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> | | |
| Dance, Theatre | Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc | | |
| Theatre | Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed. | | |
| Theatre, Dance | Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation. | | |
| Dance, Theatre | Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production. | | |
| 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. | | |
| 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, including genre.</p> | 3 | <p>On the whole, I thought the overall layout of the exhibition was good and atmospheric. However, I would have preferred to have seen the images of the catacombs in the main gallery space and not in the reading room area in the lower ground floor of the gallery. Also, it was very difficult to view the photographs of animals that Hujar took as they were positioned on the stairwell.</p> <p>There was also a wall-based information panel about the artist on the stair, together with details of the related events. As the artist is unknown to many people, I think it would have been better to have had this information panel in the main gallery.</p> |
| All | <p>Audience</p> <p>Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/participants; estimate</p> | 4 | There was one other visitor when I viewed the exhibition. Many previous visitors had left very positive comments in the Visitor's book. |

| Artform | Criteria | Rating | Comments and key reasons for rating |
|---------|--|--------|--|
| | <p>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> | | |
| 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>Stills organised two public events including a session with their Reading Group and a talk by Christine Nippe in response to the Hujar exhibition, looking at the work of Dan Graham and Dulce Pinzón and how they reflect the urban conditions of New York.</p> <p>There were tours for the following groups: Re-Crete (12 made up of artists and staff from Edinburgh Printmakers and Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop) Edinburgh College of Art MFA graduates (10) Glasgow International: International Curators Visit (15) Active Arts (50+ group) East Lothian Council (12) Instep - Craigmillar Youth Group (5)</p> <p>Keyworkers introduced to Stills with a quick tour: Artlink, Whale Arts, North Edinburgh Art Centre, Edinburgh International Science Festival, Polmont Young Offenders Prison</p> <p>A discussion for the Spin group (the National Galleries' contemporary art members group)</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> | 4 | <p>Feedback from the tours and discussions has been very positive.</p> <p>Due to the nature of their programming, the themes raised in the Peter Hujar exhibition will be followed up in their forthcoming programme: Nicky Bird (place, community, urban change) Festival exhibition (urban reflections and photography) Martha Rosler Library (New York arts scene, the urban, community)</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? **There are Equalities² issues with several boxes eg signage, interpretation, ease of booking and publicity. Do they publicise Stagetext / BSL interpreted performances? What provision is there for visually impaired people? Is the interpretation intellectually accessible (available in Easy English)?**

| Criteria | Comment |
|---|---|
| Suitability of the venue for the event | Very appropriate |
| Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc. | <p>Stills had produced an in-house leaflet giving information about the artist, a list of works in the exhibition and where they were situated in the gallery.</p> <p>There was also an Information Pack available in the main gallery which had more detailed information about the sitters in the photographs, as well as an essay about the artist and the artist's CV.</p> <p>In the reading room area of the Gallery in the lower ground floor, there were a few books left on the coffee table on Peter Hujar and also a books on Weegee, the Somnambulists and the Naked Portrait exhibition. There were books on Nan Goldin and Robert Mapplethorpe but there were harder to find.</p> <p>The only book I found on Peter Hujar was 'Portrait of Life and Death'. It would have been great to see the book 'Peter Hujar: A Retrospective' (edited by Urs Stahel and Hripsime Visser) on prominent display. I found this book in the Beyond Words bookshop just up the road from Stills. In it were a series of quotes by artists who knew Peter Hujar, or artists commenting on his work (including Goldin). This was very helpful in building up a picture of the artist.</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. | Due to a limited marketing budget, Stills was only able to send out internet-based communication. They sent out 2 e-flyers to their entire database and posted updates on their website. The exhibition was listed in the usual listings magazines but there was no press reviews of the exhibition which was a shame. The information sent out was clear and informative. |
| Ease of booking and payment | n/a |
| Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route? | yes |
| External signage and signposting | yes |
| Internal directional signage | Yes there is signage but if you were a new visitor to the gallery, you may have missed the works on the stairwell and lower ground floor. |

² For more information look at Getting There <http://www.scottisharts.org.uk/1/information/publications/1003364.aspx>

| Criteria | Comment |
|--|--|
| Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see? | Yes, access and lift. |
| Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience? | n/a |
| Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering) | Very friendly gallery staff |
| Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ³ | Yes on leaflet, e-flyer and website and at venue |

³ 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 Reply (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 disparity of response between the organisation and the evaluator, 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, defamatory or inaccurate.

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**. The Scottish Arts Council will require any response back within 15 working days of your receipt of this evaluation.