



Updated June 2007

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: Nicky Bird – Beneath the Surface/Hidden Place

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

gallery exhibition

Date of Visit: Wednesday, 2 July 2008

Overall Rating: 5

(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 thought this was an exemplary project, well presented, and striking a remarkable balance across the personal and political; emphatically collaborative and, I expect, meaningful to its participants. Stills is an inviting and easy place to visit, without compromising the presentation of the work, and the space for the viewer's engagement with it.

Name: Gary Thomas Date: 29 / 8 / 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.	5	<p>A solo exhibition of work by Nicky Bird, with around 20 photographs, and two 'table' maps, identifying the 'sites' of the project. Commissioned by Stills, this is an emphatically collaborative project, in which personal/family photographs are presented with alongside/within images of the same subject (place, people), today. The project continues, and develops, themes that the artist has previously explored, using 'found' family photographs. It is strong and affecting work. Works are credited to both the artist and the 'collaborator'.</p> <p>Harnessing the emotional power of domestic photography in a familiar artistic tack, but here the personal material, is set against and resonances with a broader social/political context, and specifically, 'regeneration' initiatives. The work is social engaged and politically attuned, but the collaboration and the relationship between personal and political are finely judged and balanced, so this is not at the expense of its artistic effectiveness.</p> <p>Additional work will be developed in a further phase of the project, with site-specific exhibitions "in the areas where the collaborators are based", and both phases are to be brought together in a publication in 2009. I think it's rare to get something like this so right.</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	The project is a Stills commission, and the exhibition is evidence that points to a successful process.
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>	5	The exhibition leaflet states the aim of 'unearthing personal histories whose physical traces are on the brink of erasure', and the work delivers this.

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>	4	<p>The exhibition is very well presented, and the hang considered, with photographs grouped, spaced and hung so that they're easy to engage with. A leaflet provides a list of the works, and this helps understand the grouping, as well as offering an aid to understanding – giving dates for the original photograph, and the current work. The exhibition continues beyond the main gallery spaces, with two works in the stairwell, and a work in the downstairs library/reception space. I'm not sure showing work in stairwells works, but that's a small point, but, not to overstate this, what it does achieve is providing a sense that Stills in a dynamic and friendly organisation that makes things like this exhibition happen.</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>I saw five other people. The downstairs library was well stocked, and felt more inviting, less intimidating, than 'study' spaces can be. A small group of workshop attendees on a coffee break, and the Still staff, made for a good atmosphere.</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	Education/learning – pre-event involvement, participants/ schoolteachers reaction, understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc		
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.	4	<p>I was greeted by the invigilator as I entered the gallery, given handouts that listed the works, and gave useful background to the project, and shown a folder with maps, notes and streetplans of locations that usefully revealed the collaboration and process.</p> <p>A talks programme of four events included the regular Reading Group discussing a text selected by the artist. Also, there was an excellently curated screening of films related to the themes of the exhibition. These activities were for adults.</p>
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)?		

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	Absolutely appropriate.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Informative handouts, although modestly produced, were illuminating and useful. A folder of related materials placed the work in its real world/collaborative context, and the downstairs library interesting and inviting.
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.	The gallery website is stylish, informative and easy to navigate, with address and map on the front page.
Ease of booking and payment	n/a
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	The gallery is a short walk from Waverley Station and Princes Street. The website map is clear.
External signage and signposting	An A-board outside the gallery made it easy to locate.
Internal directional signage	This was clear – and useful in indicating that the exhibition continued downstairs.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	The gallery has flat wheelchair access and a lift, and the website offers guided tours.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Opening hours are 11-6, every day.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	I was greeted, and given information. There was no listing for the film programme, but it was easy to ask, and it was printed out for me.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	Appropriately sized/positioned logos on leaflets, and logo/link on the website.

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.