



## 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.

**Venue:** Stills Gallery, Edinburgh  
**Title of Event:** Martha Rosler Library  
**Type of Event:** Artist's library now presented for public consultation and study  
**Date of Visit:** 14 and 28 August 2008  
**Overall Rating:** 4 - Good

*(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.)*

### Summary

This is an unusual library installation at Stills but one which does have the power and draw for repeat public visits. Probably because of the political and cultural range of the books on offer to be read in situ not loaned. It is not an art installation and may be difficult for some people to readily engage with but there are some fine, readable books to scan and delve into as time allows especially within the photography section. It is a joint venture with Liverpool Biennale – the library was presented in Liverpool earlier in the year at Liverpool School of Art and Design and both promoters have collaborated with e-flux in New York to produce a concise, accompanying catalogue that is good value for money and sets the context for the 'work'. A personal library, began 30 years ago by the artist Martha Rosler has now travelled from New York to venues across Europe. It remains at Stills until the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

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Date: 02.10.2008

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>	Good	<p>It may not be necessary to know of either the artist's artwork or the background to her collection of over 7,000 books presented in Edinburgh at Stills for public readership. However this collection in terms of the genres it represents – 49 different bibliographic sections – can confirm the depth of the artist's research and study to inform her work and commentary on the public, political and cultural realms in which she and most other people live, some possibly constrained by disadvantage or exploitation, knowingly or not.</p> <p>It is public engagement or the opportunity for the public to engage with this reference library that is the point of this 'installation'. It may be too academic or intimidating for some people to engage with, despite potted plants and comfy chairs, but it is designed for people to engage critically with the world through the reference material of books and periodicals.</p> <p>The Martha Rosler Library promotes public research and study, without aesthetic override or artist intervention beyond the generosity of sharing a personal collection of books – that has grown over thirty years and has travelled from New York to Frankfurt, Antwerp, Berlin, Paris, Liverpool and now Edinburgh.</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>	Good	<p>The Library was presented at Liverpool School of Art and Design in association with Liverpool Biennale 12 April to 14 June 2008. A particularly good publication has been produced to mark the project's presentation in Liverpool and Edinburgh. This includes interviews by Stephen Wright with Martha Rosler and Anton Vidokle, founding director of e-flux which first presented the Martha Rosler Library in New York and Elena Filipovic, a writer and independent curator.</p> <p>It is an unusual part of Stills' Gallery exhibition programme. Relevant in that the Library includes important books on photography, documentary and film together with sections on mass culture, television and new media. The artist herself has worked with photography, video, photo-text, photo-montage and installation.</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 <sup>1</sup>below for guidance</p>	Good	<p>A tension created within the reading-room format is the absence of many orthodox artworks. There are a few by Martha Rosler herself including <i>Kitchen Interior</i> dated 2004 and a close complement to Richard Hamilton's 1992 photo-collage <i>Just what was it that made yesterday's homes so different, so appealing?</i></p> <p>But this show is not about art - as Elena Filipovic suggests: <i>Martha Rosler Library resists behaving like 'art'</i>. Determining a context or status for the installation is aided by Anton Vidokle's observation that: <i>Books are tricky things to talk about. In some cultures they are supremely fetishized objects.</i> And similarly Stephen Wright: <i>If it looks too much like art, then it is dismissed as 'just art' and stripped of agency.</i></p> <p>The integrity of the installation is that it is not about art and is open to all members of the general public - despite the admission by Anton Vidokle that: <i>the library project is aimed primarily at a certain professional audience of artists, curators, art historians etc.</i></p>

<sup>1</sup> 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><b>Quality of Presentation/Engagement</b></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>	Good	<p>The Library format fits quite comfortably and appropriately within Stills across the two principle ground-floor spaces. A series of well-used, not-new book shelves plus a number of leatherette easy chairs helps to give an accessible, down-town local library feel to the installation. Or maybe it's the plants.</p> <p>The informal rambling feel of the book arrangement is sharply contrasted by a <i>heterodox classification system</i> where the original random ordering of books has been replaced by a more ordered number and labelling system – as preferred by Martha Rosler herself. Mr Vidokle is not so sure.</p> <p>But the range of books is phenomenal – from espionage to dolls and puppetry plus a lot on war and the politics of war - and Marxism. And some very good books on photography - and a couple of novels by Ian Rankin.</p>
All	<p><b>Audience</b></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>Number of visitors 1 August – 28 September 2008 = 3693 1720 male; 1973 female; average number per day 63; age group most visited 21-25; time of most visits = 3-4pm</p> <p>The Library remains at Stills until the 9 November 2008</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	<p><b>Additional Interpretative activity</b> – what activities were available to enhance the experience of the event eg workshops, artist’s talks, discussion groups? Please indicate age-groups targeted.</p>	Excellent	<p>The library catalogue can be accessed online at: <a href="http://www.e-flux.com/projects/library">www.e-flux.com/projects/library</a></p> <p>A modest collection of books by or on Martha Rosler are included on a reading table within the installation. These include <i>Martha Rosler Positions in the Life World</i> Ikon Birmingham 1998 and <i>Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings 1975-2001</i> published by MIT in 2004.</p> <p>31.07.08 Visitors to opening preview : 374  01.08.08 Attendees of Anton Vidokle’s talk : 34  28.08.08    -:-    Art Late and Poetry Reading : 200+  17.09.08    -:-    film screening : 10  21.09.08 Participants Photomontage workshop : 5  24.09.08 Attendees film screening : 59  TOTAL <span style="float: right;">682</span></p> <p>An extensive programme of events is planned in October and November:  15.10.08 Stills Conversation about Photomontage/Collage  20.10.08 Stills Reading Group: The Poetics of Space  22.10.08 Stills Talk: Alistair Rider  29.10.08 Stills Talk: Stephen Wright  03.11.08 Stills Primer: Alex Law introduces Henri Lefebvre  07.11.08 Stills Symposium: ‘Unpacking her library.....’  13.11.08 Stills Conversation: Martha Rosler on feminism  14.11.08 Artist Talk: Marta Rosler at Glasgow School of Art</p>
All	<p><b>Outcomes of education activity</b> – 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>		

## 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	Stills Gallery was a suitable ( <u>public</u> ) venue to host the Martha Rosler Library.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Modest interpretation material provided – but there were plenty of books to read which was of course the principle focus and point of the installation.
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, concise information available within the installation. Not over-interpreted and a particularly helpful publication for sale (at a modest £5) which explains the context and background to the project. Good website regularly updated to promote the installation and other elements of the programme.
Ease of booking and payment	
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Stills is situated in central Edinburgh near to Waverley Station and close to main bus routes.
External signage and signposting	Visible and high profile
Internal directional signage	Good
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	<i>We welcome everyone and are fully accessible by wheelchair. Staff are always available to help visitors. If you prefer, please phone in advance to arrange a guided tour.</i>
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Excellent – from front of house staff, gallery assistants and Director
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>	Visible on all main exhibition material, guides and website

<sup>2</sup> 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.