



ARTISTIC EVALUATION: Visual Art and Crafts

This evaluation is intended to represent an objective aesthetic judgement. **Specialist advisors and officers should avoid making judgements based on their own personal tastes and preferences wherever possible.**

Artists: Barbara Probst
Venue: Stills (Edinburgh)
Title of Event : Barbara Probst
Type of Event: exhibition
Date of Visit: Saturday 3 July 2009
Overall Rating: Very Good

(Please rate the event overall, taking into account your ratings for each section. Please state the key reasons for your overall ratings – ie 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 an exhibition of interesting, intelligent and theoretically informed work by a newly emerging international artist not widely exhibited in the UK. This is challenging and original work which clearly demonstrates the ambitious artistic vision of Stills and how it is fulfilling it's remit, rightly, as a photographic centre of national significance.

Name: **Helen CADWALLADER**

Date: 04/07/09

Scottish Arts Council Officer

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 on 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 future 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:

Very poor- standard falls well below what is acceptable.

Poor - not well conceived and executed

Satisfactory

Good - well conceived and executed

Very Good – well conceived and executed to a very good standard

Excellent – Inspiring and executed to an exceptionally high standard

1. Artistic Assessment

Please evaluate the artistic quality of the event, with particular reference to the strengths and weaknesses of the following:

Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
<p>Vision and imagination of work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of ideas, execution of work and installation if you have seen other work of this artist(s) before, please comment on any relevant comparisons 	<p>Very Good</p>	<p>Barbara Probst is an emerging early career German artist whose work has been widely exhibited and distributed internationally through high quality publications.</p> <p>Probst's work interrogates the technical process of photography and the moment of viewing and meaning construction. The resultant work relies heavily on a wide range of technical production skills and processes to explore a single moment of time from a range of different positions. The artist explores contexts and actions, staged and un-staged, in the studio and on the street, using different camera formats and a range of mixed quality black and white and colour media (photographic printing stock). In this way, the work questions the viewing position and the role of the photographer as documenter and photography as a form of documentation and media.</p> <p>The artist has taken the very basic function of photography – to record a moment in time – to expose the complexities of this medium as process and art-form. This single concept was endlessly and imaginatively reworked to produce a wide range of thought-provoking work.</p> <p>The installation was thoughtful and sympathetic to the formal and conceptual complexities of the work serving to enhance the viewing experience and engagement. The images were either twinned, in series or grouped in large-scale grid style layouts or informally arranged together. In this way, the installation of the work implicated the viewing position and revealed the hierarchies of knowledge in looking at the presented subjects or scenes.</p>
<p>Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does it fit within the artistic vision of the organisation? If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme. 	<p>Excellent</p>	<p>This was high quality, conceptually sophisticated and critically-informed work. As such, the work fitted perfectly into the artistic vision of the organisation through the gallery. Whilst the emphasis on technical processes of photography in Probsts' work, also referenced the production/training operation of Stills.</p>
<p>Success of event against stated aims of exhibition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does it relate to information contained in the programme, the website or other printed material? How well did it communicate the 	<p>Very Good</p>	<p>The stated aims of the exhibition as detailed in the programme information and website were achieved.</p> <p>The programme information summarised the key premise of the exhibition and work of the artist as,</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.

Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
<p>artistic themes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did the event originate eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, from the artist or from commission? <p>Education events – see ¹below for definition</p>		<p>“The resulting images reveal a number of diverse realities and undermine the notion of photographic truth.”</p> <p>The selection of work shown and it’s installation served to fulfil this aim.</p>
<p>Quality of Public Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of space and overall layout/hang? What interpretation or support materials were available? Were labels/maps available and how appropriate were they? Was a Visitor Book available or opportunities for audiences to comment/interact? What were the comments like overall? What activities were available to enhance the experience of the event eg workshops, artist’s talks, discussion groups programmes, on line info? 	<p>Satisfactory</p>	<p>The exhibition was simply laid out with the largest scale work presented on point of entry into the gallery. This provided an immediate point of engagement with the exhibition for the visitor before being drawn into smaller scale and more subtle works positioned towards the back area of the gallery space.</p> <p>An A5 fold-out to A4 black and white leaflet was freely available in the venue providing a short but detailed account of the work and a full listing of related events. This leaflet was essential to view and engage with the exhibition by presenting a map the layout of the hang and titles of the works. On entering into the gallery, an invigilator did ensure I received a copy.</p> <p>A number of events were detailed over the three and a half months that the exhibition was on view. The events were wide-ranging and diverse aimed at a mixed audience from specialist informed to general interest. The events included a talk by Barbara Probst, other artist presentations, a monthly reading club, book launches and related screenings, including the imaginatively conceived ‘Magic Lantern: Performance & the Lens’ all designed to complement the exhibition. However, the layout of this information in the main exhibition publicity leaflet was a little confusing repeating information or giving too few details against other events. There appeared to be a lack of consistency as some events had date/time details and others did not.</p> <p>Overall, this appeared to be a diverse programme of educational and audience development activities aimed at a range of audiences from specialist interest to general interest. Although the lack of detail and confusing layout of information created a lack of clarity about who the intended audiences were for the events. This is something that could be reviewed by the organisation.</p> <p>The exhibition was further supported by a collection of artist monographs freely available in the gallery as reference materials.</p> <p>A Visitor Book was available and filled with mostly positive comments in support of the exhibition. Many visitors clearly engaged with and understood the complex meanings of the work as demonstrated by one contribution, “The work is strangely but superbly thought provoking. It</p>

Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
		seems so simple at first glance, but I look for longer and find so much more.” One or two did object to the work citing a preference for more pictorial and, therefore, less conceptual work. However, these comments were significantly outweighed by those in support of the work.

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
<p>Location and suitability of the venue for the event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it easy to find? • Is it on a main transport route? • Are the spaces clean? • How suitable was it for the exhibition? 	<p>Stills is in Cockburn Street, which functions as a thoroughfare route from Edinburgh Waverley train station and links the old and new parts of the city. Main bus routes across the city are nearby. Cockburn Street also serves as a cultural hot-spot with Collective just opposite and The Fruitmarket Gallery located nearby and offers a host of coffee bars, eateries, life-style boutique and specialist interest shops. Given the easy access to transport routes and the cultural milieu of Cockburn Street, Stills is in an excellent location.</p> <p>Stills is a small to medium sized gallery space with good ceiling height, natural light from one source, a simple lay-out and ideally suited to wall-mounted work such as photography. The back area of the gallery is reached by some steps and a small lift offers wheelchair access.</p>
<p>Information/ interpretive material at venue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there programmes, posters and displays about the event? • Is there information on the venue’s website? 	<p>The A5 fold-out to A4 black and white leaflet was available as an in-depth exhibition guide. Two information packs containing the exhibition press release and related artist bibliography and lists of works (title and dates) on view in the exhibition.</p> <p>The Stills website strongly promoted the exhibition and featured information about the artist Barbara Probst. Generally, the Stills website serves as a useful and in-depth source of information about the organisation.</p>
<p>Publicity/ pre-publicity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What leaflets, posters, websites, did you see the event listed in? • What publicity materials are produced? • Is it easy to understand/appropriate to the intended audience? • Where can you get the information? • Is there Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding²? <p>Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event and comment on the company/organisation’s website.</p>	<p>The black and white A5 fold-out leaflet appeared to be the only available material promoting the exhibition. The short text was clearly aimed at specialist audiences assuming a degree of specialist knowledge about visual theory, the viewing subject and how processes of meaning are constructed. The text was well written and deftly covered a complex arena of contemporary theory with reference to the related work.</p> <p>I was unaware of any other exhibition based publicity materials. When I sought out further material I found four other pieces of publicity, mostly A5 single sheet flyers, relating Stills as a training and production space aimed at a range of potential users. One was in colour promoting the digital production facilities, one in black and white promoting editing and short training courses, one promoting short courses for children and in-depth production course and a further A5 fold-out to A4 detailing more courses.</p>

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.

Criteria	Comment																
	<p>I found the range of material to be confusing, densely packed with information and a little ad hoc lacking some clarity about who some of the materials were aimed at. The A5 exhibition leaflet was essentially poorly designed with large blocks of single spaced text in a type-face and smallish font size that proved visually taxing and hard-work to read through.</p> <p>It's worth noting that an audience questionnaire was available suggesting that a review of publicity was in place which is to be supported.</p> <p>The Scottish Arts Council logo was prominently displayed alongside other key funders on all publicity materials including the website.</p>																
<p>Signage and signposting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the entrance clearly marked? • Is there clear internal directional signage? • Is there Braille signage or signage for audio loops? 	<p>Stills is clearly visible at street level with side-ways signage and façade front titling. An 'A' frame sign was also located at pavement level with one side detailing the many varied activities on each floor of the building, whilst the other side made a handwritten reference to a forthcoming 'Magic Lantern' event. A friendly invitation 'Admission free, please come in and explore.' maximised the potential to attract those passing by. A screen was presented in one of the gallery windows showing footage of participants of all ages engaged in various educational and training events. Again this sent out a clear message that Stills is a space that is open and accessible to all, particularly those interested in training and participating in production.</p> <p>Given this, street level visibility is good and the general message communicated is one of welcome and openness.</p>																
<p>Access and provision for disabled people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please insert yes/no in the boxes to reflect what you notice about the venue/event <p>Please add in any additional comments below the table</p>	<table border="1" data-bbox="571 1167 1394 1534"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="571 1167 842 1200"></th> <th data-bbox="842 1167 995 1200">Yes/No</th> <th data-bbox="995 1167 1262 1200"></th> <th data-bbox="1262 1167 1394 1200">Yes/No</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="571 1200 842 1267">BSL interpretation</td> <td data-bbox="842 1200 995 1267">Not known</td> <td data-bbox="995 1200 1262 1267">Audio description</td> <td data-bbox="1262 1200 1394 1267">No</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="571 1267 842 1350">Captioning</td> <td data-bbox="842 1267 995 1350">No</td> <td data-bbox="995 1267 1262 1350">Lift/ramp</td> <td data-bbox="1262 1267 1394 1350">Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="571 1350 842 1534">Accessible toilets</td> <td data-bbox="842 1350 995 1534">Not known</td> <td data-bbox="995 1350 1262 1534">Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English</td> <td data-bbox="1262 1350 1394 1534">No</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Yes/No		Yes/No	BSL interpretation	Not known	Audio description	No	Captioning	No	Lift/ramp	Yes	Accessible toilets	Not known	Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English	No
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<p>Customer service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was the quality and efficiency of staff (invigilators etc) • If possible, comment on how responsive they were to the needs of disabled customers? 	<p>The staff were friendly and welcoming. On entering the gallery I was immediately offered an exhibition guide.</p>																

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.