



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.**

Artist: Joachim Koester
Venue: Stills Gallery, Edinburgh
Title of Event : *Poison Protocols and Other Histories*
Type of Event: Solo exhibition of films and photographs
Date of Visit: 25/26 August 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.)

An important first solo exhibition of the artist's work in the UK – with an exploration of references around *art, mind-altering substances or the occult*. A modest number of works well presented at Stills does not devalue or limit the impact or seriousness of the artist's research into what some may consider controversial subject matter. An excellent catalogue gives extensive background to the exhibition by both the curator and the artist not least to appreciate the depth of research that gives context to hidden histories and fictions surrounding for example drug culture and a newly commissioned work developed for Stills – *Time of the Assassins*.

Name: **Alastair Snow**, Specialist Adviser

Date: 3 September 2009

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 	Very good	<p>Fact versus fiction forms the tension across the exhibition and a range of subjects from urban real estate, psychedelia and resonant landscape(s) to spiders and manic dancing via 16mm film loops, documentary and conceptual photography. Reference points link ambiguous nostalgia, literary and criminal sub cultures in photographic commentary to subtly correct and question.</p> <p>Rich in history, both true and false, this is a geographical excursion in monochrome from Death Valley in California to Iran. The formal elegance of certain topographies disguise the violence, myths and altered mind-states associated with the subjects under scrutiny. This is the power of the exhibition.</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. 	Very good	<p>Stills credits itself as <i>Scotland's centre for photography</i>. While this exhibition centres on film and photographic form, the distinction of the programme is its focus and association with historic, literary and psychological subject matter.</p> <p>Works are drawn from a five year period, a retrospective selection of the artist's experiments and research from 2003 and which included a new commission <i>Time of the Assassins</i>, a photo series that stimulates contemporary (re)interpretation of archaeological and drug related elements of history, both factual and contrived. In this, Koester's intention is perhaps similar to Gordon Matta-Clark's photographic portfolio of 'Fake Estates' in Jamaica – <i>It's about engagement rather than truth</i> (Joachim Koester).</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 artistic themes? How did the event originate eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, from the artist or from commission? 	Very good	<p>The exhibition was curated by Lisa Le Feuvre, commissioned by Stills.</p> <p><i>Poison Protocols and Other Histories</i> is the first solo exhibition of Joachim Koester in the UK. It brings together photographs, 16mm film and computer generated work of the artist's practice from 2003.</p> <p>Stills' website includes a slideshow of selected works from the exhibition and outlines the range of works and approach of the artist – <i>a process that folds the past into the future and the known into the imagined</i></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>While only ten works are included in the exhibition, the layout on two levels adequately profiled the related interests of the artist from across a five year timeframe.</p> <p>This presented framed wall-based works within the first gallery and projected film-loops in a darkened lower gallery. This arrangement fitted well into the perimeters and orientation of the gallery spaces made available for the exhibition.</p> <p>Title cards were wall-mounted on both levels.</p> <p>A concise programme about the exhibition was available free to visitors. This gave details of an events programme; a brief introductory statement by the curator; a plan and list of works. Of particular merit and essential to gain a full understanding of the reference points within the exhibition was an excellent catalogue available for sale in the gallery at £3. This included an introductory foreword by the curator and a series of well written essays by the artist on each element of the exhibition. These essays gave background to the location and history of each 'work' and a critique of other artists, writers and site-specific events.</p> <p>An Artist's Talk: <i>Waking Dreams</i> was given at Stills at 11am on Thursday 6 August. 96 people attended the talk.</p> <p>7359 visitors have been registered to 31.08.09</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																
<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 a suitable venue for the Joachim Koester exhibition with a principal programme focus on photography and lens based media.</p> <p>The gallery is situated in central Edinburgh on Cockburn Street near to Waverley Station, Princess Street and the Royal Mile, close to main transport routes.</p> <p>Available spaces for the exhibition within Stills are well defined and appointed. Designated spaces are clean, specifically designed and (re-)painted.</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>Programmes, reading material and a catalogue (at £3) are available within the gallery.</p> <p>The website gives information about the exhibition, the artist and respective works.</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 Funding¹? <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><i>Joachim Koester – Poison Protocols and Other Histories</i> was promoted within the essential guide publication of the Edinburgh Art Festival and also within the 'Art Late' publicity listing for 27.08.09.</p> <p>This information gave locations, telephone numbers and website address: www.stills.org</p> <p>Programmes with times and location details plus a catalogue (for sale) were available and given to visitors by invigilation staff immediately within the main entrance to the gallery.</p> <p>Scottish Arts Council acknowledgement is included on all publicity.</p> <p>A well designed Stills website lists facilities, creative groups, workshops and courses, talks and events, current/future/past exhibitions together with opening times, social networks and information re: accessibility.</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>The entrance to Stills is clearly marked by signage on the exterior of the building. Internal signage to all parts of the building is visible.</p> <p>Gallery staff and invigilators are present at the main entrance of the gallery.</p> <p><i>* Re: BSL interpretation texts in the gallery – this is not something that we currently cater for unfortunately. We are in the process of having our artist talk available as an audio piece in the gallery via a mp3 player for visitors to listen to. We also have the majority of events filmed and available for viewing on our website.</i></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"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Yes/No</th> <th></th> <th>Yes/No</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>BSL interpretation</td> <td>See above*</td> <td>Audio description</td> <td>See above*</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Captioning</td> <td>See above*</td> <td>Lift/ramp</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Accessible toilets</td> <td>Yes</td> <td>Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats</td> <td>Yes See above*</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Yes/No		Yes/No	BSL interpretation	See above*	Audio description	See above*	Captioning	See above*	Lift/ramp	Yes	Accessible toilets	Yes	Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats	Yes See above*
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¹ 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			
			eg large print, Plain English	
Customer service <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>Gallery staff and invigilators were based within the first gallery space immediately inside the main entrance off Cockburn Street where information guides and catalogues were available.</p> <p>Assistance and advice was available to visitors especially to less able visitors as required</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.