



Scottish Arts Council

## 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:** Alex Pollard

**Venue:** Talbot Rice Gallery

**Title of Event:** *Black Marks*

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

**Date of Visit:** Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> June

**Overall Rating:** 28.5 out of a possible 30

*(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.)*

A major new exhibition from Alex Pollard which includes an excellent body of new work, and forms part of an impressive programme at Talbot Rice committed to a new generation of established artists.

Name: Kirstie Skinner

Date: 05/06/07

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	<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>	5	<p>I have found that Alex Pollard's work has got more and more interesting with each new show – and he has been able to occupy increasingly large spaces with confidence. The pencil figures in his Art Statement at Basel were striking; and his work for Scotland and Venice developed this theme in myriad intelligent and affecting ways (drawing a humorous parallel between the uncanny reanimation of extinct or inanimate figures and his own artistic development and art historical negotiations). Most impressive for me, are Alex Pollard's audacious contractions of different types of cultural reference in one practice – it looks so simple, yet it is never glib.</p> <p>It was exhilarating, then, to see a new set of themes in <i>Black Marks</i> – related to past themes, certainly, but bringing a new lode of cultural material to the fore. Following a previous interest in art materials, mechanical animation sensibilities and the anti-art gestures of early modernism, this time around the re-animated clowns are New Romantic Pierrots from the post-modernist 1980s – their materials are cosmetics (feminine, gothic, theatrical) and their lines are sinuous and airbrushed, rather than drawn with rulers and compass.</p> <p>Since the beginning, Pollard's work has been beautifully executed in a number of different, often challenging materials. This exhibition was no exception.</p> <p>Pollard exhibited a number of different types of work – wall-paintings, sculptures, collages, and oil paintings – which appeared to be elements in a total installation (a performance of sorts) as much as a series of individual pieces. This gave the exhibition a hard-won conceptual coherence, despite the apparently abrupt discontinuities between, say, monstrous (scatological?) coins and seductively beautiful black and grey paintings. While this approach (which is now being deployed by a number of Pollard's contemporaries as well) is going to be a challenge for museum acquisition, I think it makes for a particularly stimulating exhibition experience.</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	<p>See above</p> <p>This is the latest in a number of important solo shows that have been offered to newly reputed Scottish contemporary artists in the last couple of years, (taking over, perhaps, from the Fruitmarket Gallery now that their programming is focussed on international and established Scottish artists?). In</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			pursuing this curatorial focus, and putting a serious education programme in place as well, the Talbot Rice is currently offering audiences an invaluable opportunity to see such artists develop their practice on a large scale.
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>	5	<p>I really liked the use of the photo for poster and publicity. Instead of offering a preview of the work, it elucidated on one of the artist's sources.</p> <p>Although a couple of people in the visitors' book seemed to have been perplexed by the leaflet commentary, I thought the text (provided by Dr Neil Mulholland) was very skilful and concise in drawing out important themes: the parallels with 'clowning around the studio', the references to the bohemian figure, the Commedia dell'Arte, the New Romantic clubs etc. Even the style of the text seemed in close sympathy with the artist's style – possibly because they have been such close associates for so long. Overall, I felt that the work and the commentary were satisfyingly in sync.</p>
II	<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>	n/a	
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	n/a	
Theatre	Script – particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.	n/a	
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.	n/a	
Dance, Theatre	Use of music – appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.	n/a	

<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
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.	n/a	
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>	4.5	<p>Very well hung, and well paced as an exhibition – giving the impression that different sections of work may even have been made with the space in mind.</p> <p>Having visited twice, I think I preferred arriving on the second floor and seeing the paintings before going downstairs to the medallions and the wall-paintings.</p> <p>Clearly though, what goes where is dictated to a large extent by the architecture, and there are certain aspects of this (the lift, the vents etc) that are less conducive than others, but they can't be helped).</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>Education/learning – pre-event involvement, participants/ schoolteachers reaction, understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc</p>	4	<p>There were 8 other visitors in 40 minutes. The majority stayed for around 20 minutes. As it was the end of the run, there were several pages of entries in the visitors' book. Although some were unsure of the work, the vast majority were extremely positive. This was of course gratifying, but also a little surprising - the work was far from 'easy-listening' and many visitor books are usually more harsh – but this may be because there is a smaller degree of 'general' passing trade than Inverleith House, say.</p>
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>	5	<p>An excellent strategic programme of education opportunities was offered: talks by the artist, the curator, and 'clownish' guides; aimed at general public, families, adult audiences, school pupils and community groups.</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>	n/a	<p>Wasn't possible to establish this on my visit.</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 Equalities<sup>2</sup> 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	Excellent
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	Folded photocopied handout, large wall panel (with the same text), poster.
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.	Emailed invitations, plenty of previews and listings, and several substantial reviews in the List and various Scottish papers
Ease of booking and payment	n/a
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Easy to find
External signage and signposting	Posters outside the quad, gallery banner in the far corner.
Internal directional signage	Adequate – two routes – lift to gallery and stairs.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Lift to both floors of the gallery.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Tues to Sat, 10 -5
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Good – friendly and helpful.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>3</sup>	Yes, on posters, printed material and website

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

<sup>3</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 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.