



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: Alan Michael
Venue: Talbot Rice Gallery
Title of Event: Touch Void
Type of Event: Exhibition
Date of Visit: 29 February 2008
Overall Rating: 3

This evaluation has been made based on viewing the exhibition, visiting the gallery website and in-gallery resources, and communications with gallery staff. This was my first visit to Talbot Rice, though I'm quite familiar with their programme through their press profile.

The primary focus of this evaluation is the exhibition itself. Alan Michael is an upcoming internationally exhibiting artist, and hosting a large scale solo show of his work at this time in his career is a kudos, both for the artist and gallery. It was exciting to see Michael's latest developments and these works were exhibited alongside a selection of recent paintings to create a good 'survey' introduction to his practice. Michael's work is of high standard, both aesthetically and conceptually although there was a very generous amount of work, this show didn't appear to be a cohesively conceived/planned project.

It was still a successful showcase, and a well deliberated event to enhance the gallery's and artist's flourishing reputations. Michael's practice is quite eclectic and a reflection of this may have been attempted through the selection process. The effect was something of a compilation and the interpretation/contextualisation of his work could have been more strongly directed or considered through a more rigorous/interested curatorial approach.

In addition the general status of the venue detracted from the overall impact/ quality of the work. Talbot Rice's challenge is in the quality of venue presentation with potential to improve lighting, wall surface, finish of architectural details, and modernisation of fittings, placement and quality of presentation for supporting/educational info.

Talbot Rice's great strengths are its consistently ambitious programming and ability to host very large scale projects by sought after emerging and established artists. Talbot Rice is strongly placed to compete as an internationally recognised and respected contemporary art venue. These attributes are reflective of a proactive and confident curatorial vision.

Some of my feedback about the venue is critical but these factors are largely surmountable and there may be valid considerations for why they have not been previously addressed.

Touch Void has been evaluated as 3. Competent: Though an ambitious project, it was routine rather than especially interesting.

Name: Patricia Ellis Date: 17/03/08

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.	4	I am very familiar with Alan Michael's work and have seen previous exhibitions both in Glasgow and in London. Michael is a respected artist working at an international level and his work is of very high quality – both physically and conceptually. The works presented in this exhibition were to Michael's usual standard, but not in my opinion examples of his best pieces. As an exhibition, this appeared to be a 'secondary' project, which may be venue/career status appropriate. There were some interesting new works which were accompanied by recent works; but the selection seemed somewhat random, as if it were struggling to fill the vast space rather than to create a cohesive show. Though this made for a good general overview of his practice it didn't necessarily work as a well planned exhibition concept. There were concerns regarding the presentation (outlined below) – it was the best possible technical installation given the condition of the space, but the problems with the space itself were detrimental to his work.
All (if relevant)	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned. If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme.	3	Talbot Rice Gallery's overall programming vision is very strong and competitively ambitious. In the case of the AM exhibition more could have been done to engage with a more in-depth/challenging research base in planning and selecting the show: With the 'survey' selection of works the AM exhibition didn't provide a strong platform for consideration of established (or introduction to new) ideas about his practice. There were new works using new techniques, but these weren't pivotal contextual developments. The show seemed more a timely/strategic opportunity rather than a rigorous curatorial endeavour. A more apparent curatorial thesis would have been a benefit to give the show context, criticality, and direction. Though widely exhibited in commercial venues, AM is relatively new to exhibiting solo on this scale and this show may have been a valuable developmental process. It's my understanding that the event originated through the gallery's invitation to the artist to do the show and that no special commissions were involved.
All	Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes. Education events – see ¹ below for guidance	4	Talbot Rice Gallery's stated aims are located on their website. The gallery provides a progressive curatorial programme and a unique venue to see quite large scale projects by very exciting artists. Alan Michael's show fits well into the gallery's remit and intent.
All	Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage. Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.	N/A	
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc	N/A	

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
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	
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>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>	1	<p>The evaluation of this section is not reflective of the artist's work or the conceptual integrity of the exhibition: these as addressed earlier, are of good or competent standard. The problem with the quality of the presentation is entirely down to the technical aspects of the space and the way the supporting exhibition accompaniments have been dealt with. These fall in my opinion below the basic standard for exhibitions featuring artists at this professional level. If possible a proactive strategy should be implemented to improve the technical presentation of the space to the level of the curatorial vision. The overall venue impression is of neglect and make-shift.</p> <p>The architecture of the space is really excellent – large, airy, great natural light, and has the potential to be a beautiful institution; recent alterations to the lower gallery are very effective.</p> <p>Changes to the lighting system and a good plaster and paint job (and on an immediate level a consistent attention to detail) would do wonders.</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>Education/learning – pre-event involvement, participants/schoolteachers reaction, understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc</p>		
All	<p>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.</p>	3	<p>Education and events accompanying this exhibition were listed in the exhibition pamphlet and on the website: These included a talk by Alan Michael, a Network Lunch, a Primary Schools Programme, and bookable gallery tours. More could potentially be done to make the gallery a centre of activity.</p>
All	<p>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)?</p>	N/A	

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	Location, scale, architecture, University affiliation make for a venue with very strong potential. TR is obviously motivated and ambitious through quality programming; however, the impression on this visit was that this venue is in a period of transition and is striving to – but not yet capable of -- exhibiting artists of AM's calibre to professional standard. It's a very positive attribute that TR is working with accomplished artists and raising the gallery profile.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	<p>With a more informed and professionally engaged audience, it is possible for interpretive information to be kept to a minimum – the resource centre and book shop provide more than adequate supporting material for the exhibition if accompanied by a well written press release.</p> <p>If other information is made available a more professional and considered display would be a benefit. The viewer survey forms and announcements (2nd floor) might be more appropriately placed in the resource centre; the wall text might be better placed within the pamphlets or in an accompanying press release located at the reception desk. This would both 'tidy up' the space and encourage interaction with gallery staff. The resource centre upstairs hosts a good selection of information about the artist and show. This area is uninviting however: shabby furnishings, everything 'craftily' tied down with string, publications dog-eared, or inappropriately bound in student folders.</p>
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.	Talbot Rice has good press communications, with regular email notifications. Their website is easy to navigate and includes press info and photos.
Ease of booking and payment	N/A
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Is located very centrally, and in a landmark building.
External signage and signposting	There is very prominent external signage within the University courtyard, but this is not visible from the street.
Internal directional signage	The elevator is well labelled both inside and out, and signage inside the gallery is very prominent.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Is wheelchair accessible, and interpretive material is in large type.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Is the normal length of this kind of exhibition, is appropriate.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	It's usually my experience with other galleries that staff are keen to meet visitors, talk confidently and enthusiastically about the programme and show, give info about the artists, provide press packs, and actively promote a positive view of the gallery. Talbot Rice Gallery's staff were polite but could be more assertive/confident.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	SAC logo is prominently displayed on the website, and on published material.

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

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.