



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:

Venue: Talbot Rice Gallery

Title of Event: **An Entangled Bank – 24 October – 12 December 2009**

Type of Event: *Group Exhibition*

Date of Visit: 13 November 2009

Overall Rating: Excellent

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.)

Name: Mary Doyle Date: 19 / 12 / 2009

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.	excellent	<p>An historic and contemporary exhibition at the Talbot Rice gallery marked the bicentenary of the birth of Charles Darwin and the 150th anniversary of the publication of "On the Origin of the Species". <i>Darwin's Edinburgh</i> in the Georgian Gallery looked at Darwin's time as a student at the University of Edinburgh. The exhibition <i>An Entangled Bank</i> presented new and commissioned work that took its title from the conclusion of 'On the Origin of the Species' and looked at the legacy of Darwin's ideas through new work by 5 contemporary artists: Christine Borland, Ilana Halperin, Kenny Hunter, Ben Rivers and Brian Hewitt. Most of the artists in this exhibition had not made work in direct response to Darwin per se, but were included for their individual artistic practice, which is centred on the investigation of human biology, geology or sociology and often research-led. This exhibition accompanied an historic exhibition looking at Darwin's time studying medicine in the University of Edinburgh from 1825 –27.</p> <p>In the Lower gallery, Kenny Hunter continued his interest in the animal and human world and made the most direct reference to Darwinian thought in his sculpture 'The Unknown, 2009 - a giant skeletal frame of an ape is given exaggerated features with elongated fingers and an over extended rib cage. This and his second work of a grinning ape emerging out of carved stone, mimics Darwin's belief that man derived from the ape, but as the title suggests Darwin's new and radical ideas about evolution was at that time dealing with the unknown, perhaps as much as we are dealing with the unknown future evolution with advances in genetic technology.</p> <p>Ilana Halperin has long been fascinated with geology, in particular volcanoes. Her new work <i>Field Dairy (Hawaii), 2009</i> is a blend of science and performance. In the lower gallery, she presented a series of framed word pieces that give a literal step-by-step account of her journey from New York to the site of an active volcano in Hawaii. Loosely but densely written these sentences together form an image similar to her drawings of geological strata and landmass formations. Dotted with doodles and notations of her observations one thinks of the notations Darwin might have made during his studentship in geology and vulcanology in Edinburgh under Robert Jameson. In another work, <i>Physical Geology</i>, Halperin proposes to make a geological time diptych of new lava medallions - magma pressed between steel plates to form an imprint – that were inspired by a series of these</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			<p>medallions from Mount Vesuvius that Halperin came across in the Manchester Museum collections. Set within museum display cases, Halperin selected a number of these lava stamps and stamp implements spanning volcanic activity around the world identifying each one and its origin.</p> <p>In the upstairs gallery, Halperin presented a super 8 film made on board a boat which sails past the point where a volcano's burning lava flows into the sea. The film camera is held focussed on the horizon line as the boat sails past the red hot lava falling into the still water causing billows of ash and smoke to unfurl. The film has no soundtrack but its visual record conjures up what must be a thunderous roar of the meeting of fire and water.</p> <p>Ben Rivers presented two films. In the lower gallery visitors entered a wooden cabin made from doors and odd bits of wood. Inside, the film "Origin of the Species" begins with a close up of cell-like structures, rocks and spores then spanning to a craggy landscape in which an elderly man goes about his daily business of cutting wood, tinkering around his cabin in the woods and walking through the landscape. In an accompanying voiceover the man contemplates the beginning of life and his own existence with nature, his thoughts on evolution and the future. The voiceover was hard to follow because of the man's strong accent - an accompanying transcript was provided that was very helpful.</p> <p>In the upstairs gallery, Ben Rivers' film <i>I Know Where I'm Going'</i>, 2009, relayed a journey the artist took from London to the Isle of Mull. As Rivers states in the accompanying information sheet the film "takes me through an abandoned country, finding stray characters living out their dreams in the wilderness and a voice imaging the Earth in one hundred million years and what traces my be left of human society in the strata". Characteristic of a road movie Rivers created a beautifully produced film which questions our unsettled relationship with nature.</p> <p>Christine Borland continued her investigation of medicine in a display of modern medical teaching practices. In <i>SimBodies & NoBodies</i>, Borland places replica models of plaster cast heads under glass bell jars and on plinths. Used as teaching aids, such as 'CP Arlene' and 'Resusci Anne' or 'Choking Charlie' each head simulates the moment when a person is gasping, choking or barely conscious. The display created an eerie sense of what it is that makes us 'human' and an awareness of the fragility of our own mortality.</p> <p>In keeping with Borland's interest in presentation, archive and display, these sculptural portraits were</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			<p>presented in a traditional museological fashion on plinths and labelled. Alongside were displayed the original teaching aids used to resuscitate patients today, reminding us of the functional reality of being human. In the Round gallery Borland displayed a series of videos of the cast heads, set into the wall behind glass panels which appeared to be covered in condensation. I found these works least successful as they veered too much towards the theatrical.</p> <p>In complete contrast, Brian Hewitt, who studied physics, showed <i>Endosymbiont, (life is a sexually transmitted disease)</i>, 2009, as a multiple screen lcd projection: one screen projects genetic data relating to the Mycoplasma Genitalium bacteria that lives in the reproductive tract that has a destructive force but is also a key tool for genetic engineering research into new forms of synthetic life. The other screen streams real time fast moving coded genetic data, such as astronomical distance travelled and estimates of human births and deaths. Whilst this work was interesting in its use of factual information, visually it didn't engage me much beyond a degree of fascination at looking at live transmission of data activity.</p>
All (if relevant)	<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• 	Excellent	The Talbot Rice consistently produce exhibitions that are conceived with their immediate University student audience, and other audiences in mind, that aim to expand critical and conceptual thinking about art in relation to other subjects of learning.
All	<p>Success of event against stated aims - How does it relate to information contained in the programme, the website or other printed material?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?. <p>Education events – see ¹below for guidance</p>	Good	<p>The two exhibitions sat well together. The selection of contemporary artists successfully examined a diverse range of ideas and use of media relating to Darwin and his legacy, provoking us to examine and contemplate our own existence.</p> <p>The curator Pat Fisher produced a well-conceived exhibition that counterbalanced nicely with the historic exhibition.</p>
All	<p>Quality of Presentation/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 	Good	The exhibition was well displayed with each artist given a good amount of exhibition space. The gallery plan and information sheet listed a wide programme of Education and Events including: An in conversation with Ilana Halperin and Thor Thordarson; an in conversation between Pat Fisher and Moira Jeffrey on the selection of the artists for

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
	<p>how appropriate were they?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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>the exhibition; a series of lunchtime talks by curators from Talbot Rice gallery and the University of Edinburgh Collections and tailor made tours. The Education programme included a series of workshops for Primary and Secondary Schools including a Clay Workshop with a primary school led by the artist Kenny Hunter.</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>	Good	<p>In the hour I spent at the gallery there were around 5 other visitors.</p> <p>The exhibition was very accessible and engaging and I imagine would have attracted a broad range of visitors to the gallery.</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>	Excellent	<p>The gallery provided extensive written material on each of the works including a sheet of short statements text by each artist, past catalogues of their work, an overall information sheet on each work and useful transcripts from the two Ben Rivers films and a Visitor Survey sheet.</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>		

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	The exhibition has particular resonance for The Talbot Rice as the galleries were originally the University of Edinburgh's Chemistry Lecture Theatre and The College Museum where Darwin actually studied.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	As above. The gallery provided comprehensive information on the artists, the works and an extensive education and events programme.
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.	The gallery provided extensive information on the artists, the works. A handout was available to visitors as well as a free booklet on both exhibitions with interesting texts by Moira Jeffrey, at the gallery desk. In the lower gallery a space was made available to browse books on each of the artists as well as a handout sheet on each of the works in the exhibition. A visitor survey was also available.
Ease of booking and payment	N/a
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Talbot Rice gallery is easily accessible on public transport or on foot.
External signage and signposting	Signage for the Talbot Rice Gallery is not obvious until you enter the main College through the entrance on South Bridge
Internal directional signage	Good
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	There is a ramp outside the main entrance for disabled access followed by a lift to the lower and upper galleries inside the entrance.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The exhibition was on for 6 weeks.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	Invigilators were on hand to answer visitors' questions and they were very helpful.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	The SAC logo is clearly indicated on all publicity material and within the exhibition itself.

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.

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.