



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:	Tramway
Venue:	Tramway (Main Gallery)
Title of Event:	Unreliable Witness
Type of Event:	Exhibition
Date of Visit:	15 November 2008
Overall Rating:	3 - Competent

This evaluation has been made based on viewing the exhibition, visiting the gallery website and in-gallery resources, and speaking with gallery staff. This was my first visit to Tramway in the last year, though I'm quite familiar with their programme through their press profile, and have visited the gallery many times in the past. As I am based in London, I was not able to observe the temporal events such as the accompanying film programme, writing workshop, or gallery talks.

Overview:

Unreliable Witness is a group exhibition featuring 6 highly acclaimed international artists: Andrea Fraser, Peter Friedl, Michael Fullerton, Susan Hiller, Nedko Solakov, Gabriela Vanga, whose work relates to the exhibition themes of narrative and subjectivity. It was accompanied by several interpretive events and a publication. Details of this exhibition are in the attached report.

The primary focus of this evaluation is the exhibition itself, and I would like to make very clear that the 3. Competent evaluation (routine rather than especially interesting) is reflective of the physical and contextual execution of the exhibition and does not reflect the gallery's intent or vision, which is of excellent standard. The feedback given in this evaluation is extremely critical and very frank – and is based on Tramway's performance in relation to other national and international venues that are comparable in scale and programming prestige – the standard is extremely high.

It is painfully obvious the Tramway is doing exceptionally good work; but it may need facilitation to achieve its goals/potential. The exhibition was extremely ambitious and considered in its concept and selection, and highly ambitious and organised in its accompanying interpretive events. The overall impression, however, is that of a gallery experiencing a resource crisis – possibly in expertise and/or finances – and this is severely impacting the gallery's performance against its stated aims, function, public responsibility, and potential.

Tramway's scale, exhibition history, and location should place it as the most important contemporary venue in Scotland, and one of the most important in Europe. Against the very high standards set by other comparable institutions (primary European kunsthalls, provincial UK art centres), this exhibition is very problematic. It appears that the basic infrastructure for Tramway to compete effectively is in place (artists, show concept, publication, education and events programme, etc.) but it is facing challenges in exhibition and interpretive delivery.

Successes: The exhibition concept was very appropriate, engaged in a very provocative dialogue, and evidenced a highly considered level of curatorial research. The selection of the artists was outstanding, and obtaining these works – several of which are some of the most iconic pieces by these artists – is an enormous achievement. The accompanying interpretive events and publications appear to be highly ambitious and of immense critical interest. In project conception

and supporting events, Tramway appears making a concerted effort to be a cultural leader. In these areas, Tramway is performing excellently.

Weaknesses: The problems with the UW execution – Installation and interpretation devices – comprise serious concerns, and serve to greatly undermine the commendable successes mentioned above. There are two main issues:

1) Utilisation of space: Tramway's large exhibition space is the 'jewel in the crown' of Scottish venues. Very few places in the UK or even Europe can compete with its palatial modern architecture. This should really be the gallery's strongest attribute, however in this show it was experienced as a glaring weakness. It was alarming that the ambition of the exhibition concept was executed in such an impoverished way: It looked more like a show designed for an artist-run space than a national venue. The hang was done quite professionally, but it seemed to be attempting to shrink the space down, and consequently diminished the impact of the work/show. Tramway has the unique and enviable ability to house projects that quite simply cannot be accomplished anywhere else. This show had a block buster line-up, but an emerging-level installation. It is understood that there may be several contributing factors to this issue including budget and curatorial resources. It may be beneficial for Tramway to engage with research and develop communications with other UK venues of comparable size/prestige to explore how the gallery could be used more effectively.

2) Interpretation: This show was very challenging to engage with, and ideas were not clearly communicated. This largely due to the approach to supporting materials. The works are quite conceptual and revolve around a theme of narrative/subjectivity, however unless the viewer is familiar with these specific works on entering the gallery, there is little that would help them understand what they are looking at. There is a large wall text written in vague art speak which does not explain or refer to the work presented, and the accompanying publication is large format and contains full length essays about the artists' practices (though not necessarily about the works presented). This is impractical for gallery viewing reference, though very useful for later reflection. The majority of the texts in this publication are of a convoluted nature, and would not be helpful to a non-expert audience. Tramway should definitely not shy away from doing challenging exhibitions; however, there is a responsibility to address the needs of a wider public – both professional and general. This should not involve 'dumbing down' but introduce the audience to these complex ideas in ways they can effectively engage with. It is strongly recommended that Tramway research how other public galleries deal with issues of interpretation, and perhaps seek consultancy from leading venues.

It is understood that these two main concerns may have several important contributing factors. Any feedback from Tramway in relation to these issues would be highly valued as it's the intent of this evaluation to highlight areas where assistance and support may be needed to achieve the gallery's full and very promising potential.

Name: Patricia Ellis Date:20/12/08

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	<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>The artists exhibited were all of extremely high international calibre, and the show provided a very rare and special opportunity to see some quite famous pieces that many people would only have read about in magazines. I have seen works by all of these artists (with the exception of Vanga [GV]) previously, and in the case of Fraser [AF], Solakov [NS], Fullerton [MF], and Hiller [SH], have seen the work exhibited at Tramway in other venues (or variations on the presented work). The quality of ideas and skills is exceptional, and several of these works are ground-breaking in contemporary international dialogue.</p> <p>The work itself is exemplary of these artists practice (and in the cases of AF, NS, and SH) the works exhibited are some of their most iconic pieces to date. How these differed to previous viewings is only in mode of presentation and contextualisation. In Unreliable Witness [UW], the works had much less impact than in other galleries, which is largely due to the challenges of the installation. (please see below)</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>	3	<p>The selection for UW is outstanding – I was beyond excited to see these works in Glasgow – is a major curatorial accomplishment.</p> <p>The exhibition is also accompanied by a very ambitious film programme curated by Maxa Zola, screening films by the Otolith Group, Al Fadhul, Christ Marker and Jean-Luc Godard, and Susan Hiller; a talks and symposium programme, writing workshop, and a free exhibition publication whose content is commensurate with a proper catalogue.</p> <p>This shows an outstanding curatorial vision and a very conscious consideration and ambition that is in-line with Tramways function as “Scotland’s most internationally acclaimed venue for contemporary visual art...” (as stated on website).</p> <p>The curatorial execution of this show, however, fell well below the expectations for a venue for this international calibre. Please see below for details. It is because of this that this section has been evaluated as Competent. As strong as the curatorial vision is, it is severely undermined by the presentation.</p> <p>I feel strongly that these are issues that can be overcome and these are areas that SAC might be able to assist with.</p> <p>The vision and concept of the exhibition are very strong but are negated by the challenges of negotiating the space and the audience. In viewing the show the impression is that the curatorial vision was hindered and poorly communicated by resource constraints – it looked like a world class kunsthalle trying to make the best of a grossly impoverished budget and/or over-stretched curatorial resources. The two areas of concern are:</p> <p>Physical utilisation of the space: a gallery of this scale and stature cannot fulfil its potential/function with ‘miniature’ installation solutions. The space is enormous - by far the gallery’s strongest asset – and requires a more confident, mature, and ambitious approach to installation. Many of the installation devices ie. PF’s viewing room, AF’s screen, and SH’s placement appear to be an economical way to ‘scale-down’ the space, but</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			<p>is problematic in that these installation devices become more prominent than the artwork. Most importantly it poses the question of why do this show in this space when it could technically be accomplished almost anywhere? How can this space be utilised to its full potential?</p> <p>Communicating curatorial vision: please see below. Again, I feel that this challenge has a very tangible solution, and may indicate a concern in regard to resources. Research trips to comparable UK venues to consult with exhibition and interpretation curators and to observe how complex exhibition strategies are communicated in other galleries might be an invaluable benefit. Comparable spaces for scale/installation issues might include Tate Modern and A Foundation.</p>
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 ¹below for guidance</p>		<p>The stated aims of this exhibition are as follows: “it looks at how artists explore the gaps between truth and fiction, and the art of telling stories.” (Website press release.) The selected work fit well into this remit on a general thematic level. On a more in-depth level, I was unclear of the critical relationships presented by this grouping of works. Was regardless delighted to see these artists, though the grouping seemed somewhat random (artworks relate well to theme, but not to each other). The textual interpretation of this show was problematic (please see below), however, it shows a very ambitious and considered approach to the multiplicity of interpretive engagement (publication, film programme, talks, workshop symposia etc). As the leading Scottish venue, Tramway has a responsibility to operate as a multi-platformed arts facilitator to both professional and wider public audiences. The professional audience is served relatively well in this exhibition, however in the exhibition installation and published material (I was not able to observe events) that the curatorial vision was made needlessly abstruse, esp. to a general audience. The show itself was exceptionally well-researched from a curatorial perspective, however further research into how to communicate these ideas to multiple audiences would be an enormous benefit.</p>
All	<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	

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, 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>	2 (Poor)	<p>Presentation</p> <p>Can't stress enough how good the work was – to view these artists, these works, for many is a once in a life time experience. However, it really felt like a lost opportunity for full 'wow factor' impact.</p> <p>In approaches to installation Tramway demands a much higher level of ambition – both from the space itself, and its intended function as a national premier venue.</p> <p>The main concern with the 'hang' is the very conscious attempt to 'constrain' the work or make it seem 'modest' – the videos especially could have provided an opportunity to utilise the space more effectively. The most prominent things in the space were the video booth and the external appearance NS's kiosk – small white cubes in a large white cube – the all the work seemed lost against this self-conscious architecture so that the emphasis was on hang devices and not the art, and none of the work was visually aligned to communicate with each other (which may have facilitated viewer interpretation of curatorial concept/rationale). More innovative approaches to installation could have been adopted –small decisions ie. AF's documents placed near her vid seemed indexical rather than considered, MF's small paintings were completely lost in the back, GV's domestic table was stylistically over-written by the minimal exhibition design, and SH's work could have been installed free standing or against a purpose built support that would bring it out from the corner. The possibilities are endless, and might have also included alternative selection with the space in mind.</p> <p>The gallery is incredibly challenging and this issue is entirely sympathetic. It perhaps might be productive to seek some consultation from curators at other galleries who have dealt with similar problems. Also, artists of this calibre really know how to capitalise on this kind of architecture – perhaps more could have been done in consultation with them?</p> <p>Engagement:</p> <p>Tramway should definitely not shy away from challenging projects – but there needs to be much more consideration of how to facilitate engagement to these ideas. When I visited the gallery, the café was packed – but no one was looking at the art. I noticed most of the visitors were families and it made me think 'how is the public meant to engage with this show?' The overall idea of narrative and subjectivity is a great topic and relatively easy to communicate, but in the textual 'educational' outlets, this is discussed in an alienating and academic way.</p> <p>Because all of the work in the show is dealing with narrative and carries a 'back story' which is essential to</p>

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
			<p>know, these could have been much more generously communicated – is almost impossible to appreciate the work without this information.</p> <p>Not having lengthy wall credits is a good choice – they're cumbersome and intrusive – but a small gallery guide booklet with a brief easy to understand paragraph about each work might really be a benefit. There was a wall text giving an overview of each artist's practice – but this was so abstruse and vacuous that it didn't explain anything. ie. AF "analyses the power plays involved in the creation of histories and exchange of information within a museum context." What you see is a video projection of a woman ranting – the text doesn't really help to engage with what's presented, how it was made, why it exists, the ideas involved, its form/context?</p> <p>There is a very comprehensive newspaper style catalogue which is free and can be used to learn more about the artists and work – but it's unrealistic to expect people to have to read 1000 words on each artist from a large-format publication while they walk about the show. And most of the texts in this publication are impenetrable as well, and the one on GV simply reproduces the text in the work with an added paragraph. The texts on PF and NS are quite good – informative and enjoyable. The two contextual essays are very interesting from a professional perspective, but I'm not sure how informative they'd be for a general viewer.</p> <p>I asked a member of staff about the show and they were very knowledgeable and helpful , but ideally viewer's should be able to negotiate a show on their own and more could be done to facilitate this.</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>		<p>On my visit it appeared that the primary audience for this show is the general public – the cafe facilities were literally packed with potential gallery goers, although no one was in the gallery. This show is very well considered in relation this audience as it's dealing with issues of story-telling and it boasts works which have been extremely popular at other venues. The comments in the sign in book appeared to be quite positive. The show however might have been better communicated through less demanding interpretive info.</p> <p>For a specialist audience this show was of exceptional importance – iconic works by some of the most important contemporary artists.</p> <p>The accompanying events evidence a very strong commitment to audience engagement and expansion.</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>		<p>The exhibition was accompanied by a publication that was commensurate in information with a full scale catalogue, a curated film programme, writing workshop, and gallery talks.</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	It is incredibly exciting to see Tramway working with artists of this calibre, and especially international artists – this is entirely suitable for TM. This event, however, was unsuitable for this venue in its presentation and contextualisation.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	The wall text and publication were very problematic and difficult to understand. I asked for a press package or any further information I could take with me and was told there was none.
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 website gives a general press release overview of the show, details of an upcoming symposium (difficult to find as it's not linked on the exhibition page), and contact details for more info. There is also a map of the gallery's location and details of its opening hours and various facilities.
Ease of booking and payment	N/A
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	Tramway is easy to find, is on main transport routes for both bus and train, and is a short inexpensive taxi from city centre
External signage and signposting	There are banners on the outside of the building visible from main road, and sign postage for the garden.
Internal directional signage	Very good
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	Fully wheelchair accessible.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	The timing of this event is perhaps too short – is only 5 weeks. Resources for exhibitions of this calibre/scale might be better utilised on an 8-12 week cycle. From a curator's perspective, a longer run on exhibitions might be desirable – exhibitions and events programmes of this scale and ambition are incredibly challenging and I really don't know how Tramway keep up – I suspect they're working WAY too hard, which might account for some of the concerns raised above. This is the type/calibre/scale of show that a wide audience would revisit many times over a longer period because of the exceptional work in the show and very active events programme.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	The staff were wonderful! Very helpful, patient, and approachable.
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding ²	SAC logo is present on all publication material and website.

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.