



**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.**

<b>Artist:</b>	<b>Bill Viola</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Pier Arts Centre, Orkney</b>
<b>Title of Event :</b>	<b>Being Time</b>
<b>Type of Event:</b>	<b>Exhibition</b>
<b>Date of Visit:</b>	<b>27<sup>th</sup> August 2009</b>
<b>Overall Rating:</b>	<b>Excellent</b>

*(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.)*

Name: Arabella Harvey	Date: 27 <sup>th</sup> August 2009
Scottish Arts Council Officer	Specialist Advisor

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"> <li>• Quality of ideas, execution of work and installation</li> <li>• if you have seen other work of this artist(s) before, please comment on any relevant comparisons</li> </ul>	<p>Excellent</p>	<p>This exhibition is part of the Artist Rooms tour – a country-wide series of shows from the collection of Anthony D’Offay which was sold to the Tate and National Galleries Scotland in 2008. <b>Being Time</b> contains four works by the seminal American video artist, Bill Viola. Two D’Offay pieces (<i>Hands</i> and <i>Catherine’s Room</i>) are accompanied by two works on loan from Viola – <i>Silent Mountain</i> and <i>Ascension</i>.</p> <p><i>Catherine’s Room</i> is a work across five lcd screens, wall mounted in a neat line that suggests a narrative playing out over the course of a day. We see ‘Catherine’ practicing yoga in the morning, struggling to overcome a ‘writer’s block’, lighting an altar-like bank of candles and finally sleeping. The skeleton of the room remains, yet none of the elements are static. The room adapts and is recontextualised as its function and composition changes and develops in tune with the activities of its inhabitant. It is a sort of universal space to ‘be’. On the basis of a simplistic reading I found the work to be sailing dangerously close to pastiche in it’s almost saccharine, painterly depiction of life in environment, but there is also something dark about the work that strikes a bit of a sinister chord, catching it from falling into cliché. This work was clearly a very popular exhibit with visitors to the exhibition and was being watched intently by several people on each of my visits to the space.</p> <p><i>Four Hands</i> is a black and white polyptych shown on small lcd screens sited uniformly along a shelf. Two pairs of middle aged hands are flanked by a young and an elderly pair, suggesting a generational, perhaps even familial link between them. The hands continually move, engaged in fluid gestures that evoke unconscious betrayals of thought, supplications, religious gesture or sign language.</p> <p><i>Silent Mountain</i> shows two figures, side by side - each on a separate lcd screen. The interpretation text from Viola tells us we are seeing the figures as they are overcome by waves of emotion they can barely withstand, before they recover composure. They are intended symbols of the resilience of the human spirit in its capacity to emerge and progress out of devastation. We watch the figures, a man and a woman, contort with feigned grief, rage, despair. They shed tears and clutch their bodies in dramatic convulsions played out in slow motion. The work does not have a sound track.</p> <p>I found this work uncomfortable and fascinating</p>

Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
		<p>viewing on two counts. Partly it fostered a convincing sense of vicarious intrusion on my part, and for the other part a squirming sense of cynicism about the integrity of the work based on the underlying awareness that the piece is essentially contrived (in terms of its being acted and choreographed).</p> <p><i>Ascension</i> is probably one of Viola's instantly familiar works, and of the work in this show, it operated most successfully both in terms of a visitor experience and as a complete work for me. The space was cool, dark and quiet – creating a perfect environment for this film. The gallery feels oddly 'dry', and the sound has a dampened quality. The absence of an echo and the quality and clarity of the sound in what is a comparatively large space creates a real sense of solitude for the viewer. This work does come close to creating perfect conditions for the sort of transcendental experience Viola is reputed to arouse in his audiences. I have seen this particular work before, in a much larger space and felt the Pier Arts Centre showed it more successfully and sensitively by comparison.</p> <p>In all, the installation and presentation of this work is meticulous and the Pier has excelled in showing this exhibition to the very highest of standards.</p>
<p>Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does it fit within the artistic vision of the organisation?</li> <li>• If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme.</li> </ul>	<p>Excellent</p>	<p>The Pier Arts Centre has built an impressive reputation of showing exhibitions of an extremely high calibre and often of international importance. The permanent collection there is of very high quality, including artists operating on a local, national and international scale.</p> <p>In this respect the exhibition fitted in well with the scale of other operations there, although the programming originated by the in house team is of an impressive quality that would be hard to improve upon.</p>
<p>Success of event against stated aims of exhibition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does it relate to information contained in the programme, the website or other printed material?</li> <li>• How well did it communicate the artistic themes?</li> <li>• How did the event originate eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, from the artist or from commission?</li> </ul> <p>Education events – see <sup>1</sup>below for definition</p>	<p>Excellent</p>	<p>The interpretation leaflet contained texts which appear to have been supplied/sanctioned by Viola that provided a standardised reading of each of the works. The printed material was well designed and clear.</p> <p>The exhibition was part of the Artists Rooms series and I assume therefore the Pier were bound by set protocols relating to design and content of interpretation material by the organisers.</p> <p>Activity sheets were available for children visiting the exhibition, and established groups of young participants were being engaged in workshop activity relating to the show.</p>

<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.

Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
<p>Quality of Public Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of space and overall layout/hang?</li> <li>• What interpretation or support materials were available?</li> <li>• Were labels/maps available and how appropriate were they?</li> <li>• Was a Visitor Book available or opportunities for audiences to comment/interact? What were the comments like overall?</li> <li>• What activities were available to enhance the experience of the event eg workshops, artist's talks, discussion groups programmes, on line info?</li> </ul>	<p>Excellent</p>	<p>The installation of this show was absolutely flawless. Each piece was contained within a separate area of the space, giving visitors the opportunity to spend significant amounts of time with each work distinctly. There was a DL sized letter folded leaflet with an interpretation text supplied by Viola on each work.</p> <p>Works were labelled with white text on the wall in each space. This was a little hard to read when entering from a lighter space before your eyes adjusted to the dark, but clear enough after spending a moment or two with the lower light levels.</p> <p>There was standardised logo signage in the corridor on the approach to the galleries advertising the exhibition as part of the Artist Rooms series which seemed rather uncompromising in relation to the very subtle installation practices evidenced within the remainder of the building, but which was clear and recognisable, creating a strong branding for the exhibition,</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																
<b>Location and suitability of the venue for the event</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is it easy to find?</li> <li>Is it on a main transport route?</li> <li>Are the spaces clean?</li> <li>How suitable was it for the exhibition?</li> </ul>	<p>The venue is discreetly branded on the exterior windows, and has a recessed frontage that naturally draws visitors in from the street. It is immediately accessible from the ferry terminal in Stromness, being within a couple of minutes walking distance. The spaces are impeccably presented – clean in and in good order. The venue was ideal for an exhibition of this kind.</p>																
<b>Information/ interpretive material at venue</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there programmes, posters and displays about the event?</li> <li>Is there information on the venue's website?</li> </ul>	<p>The exhibition was advertised using venue signage also included in the gallery's own website. Each work was labelled using white vinyl wall text and there was a DL folded leaflet containing images and short interpretation texts.</p>																
<b>Publicity/ pre-publicity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What leaflets, posters, websites, did you see the event listed in?</li> <li>What publicity materials are produced?</li> <li>Is it easy to understand/appropriate to the intended audience?</li> <li>Where can you get the information?</li> <li>Is there Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding<sup>2</sup>?</li> </ul>	<p>The exhibition was extremely well advertised as part of the Artists Rooms series in a wide number of publications throughout the country. I also saw an impressive press pack when I was at the gallery that contained several major articles reviewing the exhibition in the local, national and specialist press.</p> <p>The exhibition was being visited by large numbers of people and each time I visited there were several other people spending lengthy amounts of time in the building.</p>																
<b>Signage and signposting</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the entrance clearly marked?</li> <li>Is there clear internal directional signage?</li> <li>Is there Braille signage or signage for audio loops?</li> </ul>	<p>The entrance to the building is discreetly marked, however this is entirely appropriate for the conservation area in which the gallery is situated, and the entrance is recessed from a narrow street creating a natural invitation to enter.</p> <p>A sign on the reception desk indicates interpretation materials are available in large print on request.</p>																
<b>Access and provision for disabled people</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Please insert yes/no in the boxes to reflect what you notice about the venue/event</li> </ul> <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>No</td> <td>Audio description</td> <td>No</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Captioning</td> <td>Yes</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 eg large print, Plain English</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Yes/No		Yes/No	BSL interpretation	No	Audio description	No	Captioning	Yes	Lift/ramp	Yes	Accessible toilets	Yes	Accessible marketing materials eg website or alternative formats eg large print, Plain English	Yes
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<b>Customer service</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How was the quality and efficiency of staff (invisitors etc)</li> <li>If possible, comment on how responsive they were to the needs of disabled customers?</li> </ul>	<p>The quality of the staff was excellent. I was extremely impressed by their encouragement of people to see the exhibition even at the very end of the day. One couple came back just before 5pm to spend the last part of their day in the space as they had enjoyed the exhibition so much during an earlier visit.</p>																

<sup>2</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 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.