

**Artistic Evaluation – Visual Arts**

Organisation/Venue: **Edinburgh Printmakers**

Title of Event: ***The Celtic Islands* by Norman Ackroyd**

Type of Event: **Individual exhibition of etchings**

Date of Visit: **Wednesday, 7 April 2004**

**Overall Rating:** *(Please rate the production 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)*

***The Celtic Islands* by Norman Ackroyd is an exhibition, which at first sight seems well selected and equally well presented. It clearly deserves an excellent rating. It is only when examining the individual ingredients leaving this initial impression that some of the routinely executed points transpire including the range of interpretative material; the scope and choice of special events; the effectiveness of internal and external signage; acknowledgment of financial support and the curatorial vision/selection/partnership. I would like to believe that the experience of the high artistic standards set by the exhibited artwork of Norman Ackroyd could only be enhanced if some of the issues are addressed.**

This report has been commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council to evaluate the artistic quality of the production named below. 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 may be made available to Scottish Arts Council Officers, Council and Committee members, and specialist advisors as appropriate. It will 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 Council to report on the overall performance of its Core 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.

This form is available electronically. Please word process/type response.

Assessment will depend of nature of event/exhibition reviewed but we anticipate it should take between 30 - 45 minutes to fill this form in.

## 1. Artistic Assessment

Please evaluate the **artistic quality** of the exhibition/event and assess the strengths and weaknesses with specific reference to the following:

### 1.1 Vision and imagination

|   | Rating            | Comment and key reasons for rating  |
|---|-------------------|---|
| Artist's Work<br>(include quality of ideas, skills in execution, if you seen the work of this artist/ artists before - particularly in relation to new work, or second productions) | Excellent         | <p>Arguably, Norman Ackroyd's etchings are very Turner-esque and the artist is one of Britain's foremost printmakers today. The endangered, often romanticised, remote landscape of Scotland (and Ireland) seems to be the inspiration of this ongoing series of etchings (1996-2003). Ackroyd's choice of warm sepia and adventurous field trips contribute to the powerful impression left by almost photographic realism and new pointillism applied to bleak mountain tops, dingles, lochs, blackbirds, Celtic crosses, rainstorms and isles.</p> <p>I first came across Ackroyd in a recent exhibition at Tate Britain alongside a major survey of Turner's landscapes in the Prints and Drawings Rooms extended for viewing modern prints.</p>                    |
| Curatorial Vision/Selection   | Good to Excellent | <p>The artist reputation alone seems to secure a safe, coherent show with a wider, commercial appeal. The work selected for the Edinburgh Printmakers exhibition carries the vibrancy of Turner's multi-layered vision of nature. What is more, the etchings 'feel well at home' as they apparently started their journey from the islands of Scotland and Ireland.</p> <p>I wonder whether there is a particular institutional policy of not commenting on the curatorial vision and selection. It is difficult to see what is the benefit of not attributing the curatorial work to a particular individual or a team within the organisation. Telling the story of how Ackroyd's exhibition came about could be of interest to visitors and professionals alike.</p> |
| Please indicate, as far as you are aware, if the event has been originated by the exhibiting organisation, hired, a collaboration, part of a festival, artist led                   | Competent to Good | <p>One can only assume how the exhibition originated as there is hardly any reference in the publicly available information. Similarly to the comments above, viewers can benefit from knowing about the making of the exhibition unless there is a particular institutional reason not to disclose such information.</p>   |

### 1.2 Clarity of communication

|  | Rating            | Comment and key reasons for rating  |
|--|-------------------|---|
| Please indicate range, quantity, clarity, tone and level of Interpretative information/ material provided at the venue (wall panels, labels, catalogue, leaflets, artists CVs) | Competent to Good | <p>The information directly relevant to <i>The Celtic Islands</i> included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Compact exhibition guide as A4 Photocopied Handouts with a brief mention of the exhibition ethos, quotes about the artist's style of work, a short CV, events diary and the Edinburgh Printmakers 'mission statement'</li> <li>- Display copy of an artist's catalogue featuring some of the exhibited works available for sale</li> <li>- Price list of the etchings on display as an A4 Photocopied Handout</li> </ul> |

|   |                   |   |
|---|-------------------|---|
|   |                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Press clippings in a general Press Coverage folder</li> <li>- A Folder with a glossary of printmaking terms</li> <li>- A folding board as street furniture with a small-size poster</li> </ul> <p>Although the above provided the minimum of interpretative material, the expectation of today's visitors of a contemporary art exhibitions are much higher and an attempt to be more comprehensive and interactive would be welcome. Additionally, it will be helpful if there is further reference about all the current activities Edinburgh Printmakers is involved in such as: participating in Glasgow Art Fair; Edinburgh International Science Festival and <i>Pressing Forward</i> Exhibition at Crawford Art Centre.</p> |
| Please indicate events available and groups targeted ( <i>workshops, artist's talks, discussion groups, primary, pre-school, secondary, students, over 18, over 60, other</i> ) | Competent to Good | I was aware of only one special event – a studio demonstration possibly targeted at fellow artists and scheduled to coincide with the public preview. From all accounts the demonstration was well received but documentation about it wasn't readily available. However, it is tempting to imagine that such an exhibition can be a pretext for a variety of events also tailored to attract more new users to the facilities. A potential yet to be explored.   |

### 1.3 Quality of production

|  |                   |  |
|--|-------------------|--|
| Suitability of the venue for the exhibition/event  | Good to Excellent | See above comments in section 1.1  |
| Standard of presentation ( <i>include use of equipment, use of space and overall layout/hang</i> )                         | Excellent         | With no technological challenge the presentation appeared as straightforward and classical in the use of the gallery wall space. The frames and the mats also seemed very professionally executed.   |
| Please indicate the number of visitors/participants at the time of your visit  | Good to Excellent | <p>My professional visit lasted about 45 min with the added value of a guided tour in the studios and storage of Edinburgh Printmakers. This prompted me to think about the possibility of a 'customer-friendly' offer – a guided tour to the studios for visitors if they would like to take a glimpse behind the scene on certain dates.</p> <p>Wednesday afternoon is perhaps not the busiest of times with no visitors but one. A better monitoring system is probably in place keeping track of audience numbers.</p> |
| Please indicate the audience reaction ( <i>please include time spent, interest, activity and visitors' book comments</i> ) | Good to Competent | The other visitor seemed to have spent much less time failing to appreciate the artistic quality and dismissing it as a routine show. Perhaps interpretative 'hooks', more interactive display and special events would contribute to reviving and maintaining the interest to what some viewers may consider as the 'ancient' technique of printmaking.   |

## 2. Management of Event

Please evaluate the way the event was presented/organised by the organisation and by the venue. Please answer, where relevant, with reference to the checklist below adding any other comments/observations you may have.

|   | <b>Rating</b>     | <b>Comment and key reasons for rating</b>   |
|---|-------------------|---|
| Publicity/ pre-publicity <sup>1</sup>                                       | Good to Competent | Please refer to my comments in section 1.1  |
| Accessibility and location of venue   | Excellent         | Housed in a converted laundrette, centrally located, Edinburgh Printmakers is well-positioned to attract new audiences and maintain its core visitors.      |
| Ease of payment (if applicable)   | Excellent         | Credit card facilities were available which made eased the process of payment.  |
| External signposting and signage  | Good to Competent | The folding board and the permanent signage seemed a bit tired and may benefit from upgrading.  |
| Internal directional signage  | Good to Competent | Minimal vinyl text applied direct to the wall served as the only in-house navigation.   |
| Opening times/ timing of the event  | Good to Competent | In the way of recommendation, I'd welcome explicit reference to the opening times on the exhibition guide sheets.   |
| Attractiveness for children/families  | Good to Competent | I haven't been able to find a particular reference to family-oriented events.   |
| Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (eg welcoming/ informed) | Excellent         | Having had the privilege of being guided around by the venue's Director, I can only assume that staff is as efficient and well-informed.                    |
| Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>               | Poor              | I failed to see any formal acknowledgement in any of the free handouts. The leaflet printmaking courses Oct 2003 – Sept 2004 carried an explicit reference. |

**Name: Iliyana Nedkova, Advisor**

**Date: Monday, 12 April 2004**

<sup>1</sup> Publicity/pre-publicity (leaflets, posters, etc), including the range, content, and when and where available. Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event. Please also view and comment on the company's website where one is advertised. Comment on the ease of use, and quality of content and presentation, and currency of information

<sup>2</sup> The following is an extract from the Scottish Arts Council's conditions of grant for funded organisations:

"The company should acknowledge Scottish Arts Council funding in press releases, at launches, on all published materials (including leaflets, brochures, programmes, posters, notices display, exhibition materials, websites and advertising). Acknowledgement of the Scottish Arts Council grant must also be made in any secondary or indirect products arising from the revenue funding such as recordings, publications, video, broadcasts, computer programmes etc."

Please comment on whether these conditions of grant were met, including use and prominence of the Scottish Arts Council logo on the company's website.