



Scottish **Arts** Council

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – DANCE

Artist/company: National Review of Live Art

Venue: The Arches

Title of Event: National Review of Live Art

Type of Event: Performance/installation

Date of Visit: 19 March 2004

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:

Very Poor – standard falls well below what is acceptable.

Poor – not attaining acceptable standards of conception or presentation.

Competent – routine rather than especially interesting.

Good – well conceived and executed

Excellent – conceived and executed to a high standard.

1. **Artistic Assessment** - please evaluate the **artistic quality** of the event taking account of the following:

1.1 **Vision and imagination**

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

The curator of the Festival ensures that work from established international artists, UK artists and emerging artists share the same platform, this provides the audience with an extraordinary opportunity to view a range of Live and Performing/Performance Art. The NRLA consistently provides one of the few opportunities for audiences and artists to view a range of work in this field and to engage with the debate concerning the body and emotion in ephemeral art.

1.2 **Clarity of communication**

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent	X	
Good		
Excellent		

A difficult area to comment on as the communication varied with each performer. The installations tended to lack an introduction to the work beyond the brochure, so audiences were often nervous at entering, not always clear whether they could join at any time. If you were not used to this type of artistic intervention it might be intimidating. Other artists, such as Liz Aggiss, made sure that audiences felt part of the performance. Ian Smith as MC meant that there was a guide to help audiences find the next work, and also encouraged talks etc to keep to time.

1.3 Quality of production

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: Given the constraints of the venue (sound often bleeding from other areas, technicians stretched to deliver the various demands of the many artists) the productions had incredibly high production values, good lighting, strong sound and projections. Some performers seemed under-rehearsed (Reckless Sleepers performed “on script”, which weakened the impact of the “eat your own words” moments). In general, though, for an artform that often lacks funding, most pieces were well executed, had a strong use of props, environment and costume. The film installation by Franko B was not well formed, and could have benefited from more variety and skill in editing to strengthen the messages.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

You are also asked to **assess the strengths and weaknesses** of the event with specific reference to the following:

1.4 Choreography (including originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc)

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: [Partially relevant] On the day I attended, I only viewed a few pieces using choreographed movement as the primary form of expression. Divas has moved in to very interesting territory, confronting the audience with the fact that there is a fourth wall, that they are seeing work which has been scripted, the difference therefore between Live and Performance Art, and then further, the difference between
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	

<p>Excellent</p>	<p>filmed work and the physicality and immediacy of a performance. This work showed the artists' maturity, understanding of how to connect with audiences, and a clarity of communication which is borne from an understanding of their practice, as well as the roots of their artform. Liz Aggiss and Billy Cowie are able to explore a range of emotions with the audience, encouraging the audience to feel safe enough to move from laughter to near tears, enjoying in the strength and control of the choreographed movements and absurdness of performance. It is fascinating to see a performer who has such maturity and ability to control not only their physicality but the audience too. To view the new solo work followed by the film piece (4 men) enabled the audience to engage with the breadth of Divas' work.</p> <p>I listened to Riamund Hoghe speak about his process of creation and choreography, it was illuminating, inspiring and reassuring to hear someone talk with a history and understanding of his genre, reflecting on Peter Brook and Pina Bausch's approach to working with performers and audiences, the need to invite people in to a space and ensure all are aware of the ways of behaving as a guest. He reported that he had altered the beginning of his performance so that he could allow the audience to settle, which was particularly important to him as he had been rushed and was worried about the technical support for the his work. This maturity and integrity was so refreshing, and the opportunity to hear him was an important part of the whole Festival. Ensuring that debate about creating and communicating was given a central place for a short while.</p> <p>Until Thursday, part of the Elevator element, were young and energetic, borrowing more from the physical theatre traditions than performance or live art. The performance used movement to punctuate or bring humour to the work; the movement phrases lacked originality, but were well timed and used the space well and did add energy to the work.</p> <p>Paul Hurley, painstakingly licked the inside of a glasshouse in his installation "becoming a snail", while not choreographed in a conventional sense the piece used movement with integrity and the sparse movement lent an emotional impact to the work.</p> <p>Robert Franciszy used minimal movement, but it lacked innovation, the simplicity did not give a gravitas to the piece and was overshadowed by the images of vivisection and animals being slaughtered.</p>
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1.5 Performers – including technical standard, performance skills, and ability to communicate.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: All performers were able to communicate with strength, integrity and clarity. I was impressed at the level of technical skill and strength of performance. It was disappointing that Reckless Sleepers were performing with their script, while the text was complex, it would have strengthened the impact if it could have been totally without script and just used the final words as the only read text. However, with this slight concern, each artist I watched throughout the day, was fully engaged with their work, showed a strong understanding of how to communicate with simplicity and honesty.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

1.6 Sound – appropriateness of sound/music to the production. Please also indicate whether the music was performed live or recorded, in whole or in part, and what effect this had on the quality of the production.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: This varied, although the majority used recorded sound with live text/voice. I felt that Franko B had not considered varying his soundtrack or using sound which had less of a direct correlation with the images (e.g. jet engines/propellers over images of war and bombs), and the level of the soundtrack could have been varied, if there were alterations in the volume it might have “pulled” the audience in to the work. Divas used a range of music, some specially composed, some from previous works, other installations and performances did not have Sound, and the silence often seemed to encourage the audience to treat the work with a reverence.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent	X	
Good		
Excellent		

1.7 Design – including costume, set, lighting design.

Rating for this section (Please tick)		Comments and key reasons for rating: In particular, Rosie Ward created a strong performance/gallery space, although audience members were sometimes not certain whether they could just take a seat at any time or whether there were set performance times. Lighting was basic, little variation in colour, and I assume this is because of the need to accommodate so many performers, but overall it worked. All performers had considered and developed strong visual imagery and this included costumes, projections and set design.
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	X	

1.8 Technical standards – comment on the whether the production was technically well presented (e.g. lighting and sound cues, etc)

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating
Very Poor	X	
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
Excellent		

Overall the performances/interventions/installations appeared well supported technically. I spent some time talking to a number of artists, all of them mentioned that the technicians appeared to be over-stretched and were working in an almost “crisis management” manner, so technicians were only available when desperately needed, most practitioners told me that they had not been able to have a tech run, and had, therefore, not felt completely in control (although this was not communicated to audience members, in the performance; and I only found out about this because I know a number of the programmed artists). The performers recognise that this is often an inevitable part of being involved in such an event, but all felt that they could have been briefed about the paucity of support, and that they could have then been spared some stress.

I also understand that there is some lack of clarity in terms of the equipment the venue/programmer provides and that which the artists will be charged for. Given how many companies/practitioners use digital projection perhaps the NRLA could consider investing in capital equipment so that artists are reassured that they can be supported technically and will not have to pay for their technical requirements.

1.9 Overall production – assess the success of the production in relation to any stated aims (e.g. in the programme or other printed material)

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	X	
Excellent		

The Festival provides one of the only opportunities to view a range of Live and Performance Art; it programmes international work and provides an eclectic, exciting and aesthetically and intellectually stimulating range of work. The move to present Elevator rather than a Platform opportunity for artists is probably wise, and it has ensured the organisation has developed its regional partnerships to support this.

This area of practice is one that can be difficult for audiences to find an access point to, and it can often be isolating for practitioners. There was a feeling of community, performers supporting each other, there was, however, little opportunity for discussion without missing performances, and I understand that programmed artists have to buy tickets to view others work (that the discounted ticket price is deducted from their fee). This concerns me as it could discourage people from attending, although there were a large number of performers/artists in the audience, so at best it means that artists are subsidising the Festival.

1.10 Audience – assess the appropriateness of the production for the audience, estimate the size of the audience and record their reaction.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		

Throughout the day the performances were always over subscribed, with audience numbers exceeding the 39 Reckless Sleepers could accommodate, and other performances attracting capacity audiences. I did not see more than 4 – 8 people in an installation at any one time.

The audience appeared knowledgeable about Live and Performance Art and had often seen other work by the artists. It did not appear to have attracted people beyond

Excellent	X	<p>the existing audience, and many of them had travelled to attend the Festival.</p> <p>The audience was appreciative; it seemed to enjoy the work and also engaged with discussion about the work.</p> <p>The piece by Robert Franciszty did not seem appropriate for the audience, it did not warn audience members of the nature of the work about o be viewed, and also appeared to be showing gratuitous images to an audience which was in general agreement with his message that cruelty to animals is not good. On audience member who became ill in the performance and left was not supported by staff, this concerns me greatly.</p>
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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.

2.1 Suitability of the venue for the event.

Great to see The Arches used in this way, particularly with the two café/bars and the opportunity to use it as a Festival Club to continue the discussion of work. The mixture of dark brick spaces and white boxes provided a good range of spaces for artists to interpret. There was often “bleeding” of sound from one space to the next, particularly when installations were being completed next to Arch 3 West.

2.2 Information/interpretive material provided at the venue (e.g. programmes, displays etc), including the range of materials, quantity and clarity.

When I arrived the day’s timetable had not yet been produced, and there had been a number of alterations from the brochure that had advertised NRLA. Staff were helpful however and informed us of changes. The brochure that had been available in advance held the most information on the artists and work, and the rooms that showed performances or installations, in the main, merely used the paragraph cut from the brochure to inform audiences of the work inside. This did not allow for work to have altered from its initial publicity. The overall level of information was strong.

- 2.3 **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.*

Posters advertising the Festival had been displayed around Glasgow in the weeks running up to the Festival and it had gained some mention in the press. The images selected were all strong and representative of the work to be seen.

The website seemed to have operational problems in late 2003, but when working included lots of information on the programme and performers/artists. The site was easy to navigate and well displayed.

2.4 **Accessibility of the venue, including:**

- Ease of booking and payment

I booked online and this was easy, the box office seemed understaffed and at times there were delays in dealing with audience members.

- location of venue

Central Glasgow and easily accessible and well known.

- external signposting and signage

Well known and the Arches has good signage, if you know which street it is in.

- internal directional signage

Make-shift photocopies were used to guide the audience members, although a few spaces were not signed, front of house staff were helpful, and Ian Smith as MC gave directions.

- access and provision for disabled people

The Arches has access for people with physical disabilities. None of the work was made accessible for people with hearing impairments.

- timing of the event

The event ran for over 12 hours, it gave audience members opportunities for breaks, and was strongly programmed to provide that. Running over a number of days enabled people to view a wide range of work.

2.5 Customer service, including: quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering).

The catering is good and the staff were keen to give accurate information on waiting times for food at peak times, I was impressed at how well able they were to cater with the volume of people ordering food and drink. The front of house staff was informed and welcoming.

3. Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding (if applicable)

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.

These conditions were well met, and I think SAC received strong and appropriate acknowledgement of its funding.

4. Scoring

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.

Overall: Good to Excellent

The NRLA is a much needed resource for artists and audiences who are interested in the representation of humanity and the place for ephemeral art and the depiction of "self". Scottish Arts Council as well as the Director of NRLA should be congratulated for ensuring that this event maintains its profile and scale.

The work was overall of an interesting quality, there are, of course, questions about the range of work that should be included in such a festival. Overall the work curated was of high quality and at least provoked discussion and thought. The Associate Artists and Elevator events ensure that there is a range of experienced and emerging work.

Although, it would be interesting to see more work from Scottish practitioners and also performers who are just beyond the Elevator element. To be fair, some of the work shown by performers such as Franko B was not exploring new territories, but revisiting his concerns.

I felt the Festival would benefit from more facilitated discussions, as well as the talks.

Name: Sian Prime

Date: 22 March 2004

Advisor ✓

Scottish Arts Council Officer

