

Barbara Kruger - 120805 – by Rosita McKenzie

ARTISTIC EVALUATION – Visual Arts / Dance

Organisation/Venue: Tramway 2, Glasgow

Title of Event: Barbara Kruger 12

Type of Event: (e.g. exhibition/workshop/screening/lecture) Exhibition

Date of visit: Wednesday, 10th August, 2005

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).

Over All Rating: 2.

This was a very disappointing visit, especially as I was really looking forward to learning more about Barbara Kruger and her work. In addition, I rang to make a prior arrangement with the organisers two weeks before it took place.

I had also explained that I would be accompanied by two other visually impaired people besides being visually impaired myself and that we would require a Knowledgeable guide for what I understood to be a highly visual exhibition. Equally, I enquired about information in alternative formats and whilst Braille was not available, large-print was but there was a question mark over audio information.

On arrival, we were informed that the person, who was to be our gallery guide, was not available. However, both the staff members who were told to assist us were clearly poorly trained and demonstrated no empathy with us or the work we had come to see. In fact, by the end of our visit, I was forced to conclude that the staff members we spoke to, including the receptionist, were all lacking in basic disability awareness, especially awareness of the needs of visually impaired visitors. For this reason, I very strongly recommend that all the staff at the Tramway is given disability equality training as a matter of urgency. Also, until such training has taken place, I would recommend visually impaired people do not visit this particular venue as the customer service is so poor and inappropriate!

Finally, this treatment which we felt bordered on rudeness resulted in a very negative experience. Therefore, we decided not to stay for the talk that was due to be given by the artist later that evening. Consequently, this was a double disappointment and I personally felt my time and that of my companions had been totally wasted attempting to visit this event.

Name: Rosita McKenzie **Date:** Monday, 15th August, 2005

Specialist Advisor: YES

Please circle the relevant title

1. Artistic Assessment

Please evaluate the artistic quality of the event, with particular reference to

The strengths and weaknesses of the following:

Criteria

Rating: 2.

Comments and key reasons for rating vision and imagination of artist's work:

Judging by the information I gleaned from the Tramway web site, this promised to

Be a very innovative and inspiring exhibition.

Nonetheless, from the perspective of a totally blind person or even that of someone with some useful vision, to be left in a totally blackened-out gallery space where gigantic video images are screened on each wall and where the noise level is so high, the sound track becomes distorted and very difficult to hear clearly, the experience was disorientating and even somewhat terrifying. Thus, we could make no sense of the art or its messages. Had our personal requirements been taken properly into account by the gallery staff however, I'm sure I would have been able to give this exhibition a much higher rating as I would have been able to evaluate the work on display more thoroughly.

Curatorial vision/ selection - also indicate if the event has originated from the exhibiting organisation, part of a festival, artist-led, or commissioned information not available to me!

Events available/ groups targeted - workshops, artist's talks, discussion groups, pre-school/ primary/ secondary students, >18,>60 etc when I asked about any special events associated with this Exhibition, staff could not answer my questions with any confidence. Neither could they say whether there was to be more than just one talk on the subject.

Standard of Presentation - use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang:

I feel had staff alerted us to the style of presentation before we entered the blackened and noisy room, the and use of gallery space would have proved very effective indeed. For instance, we would have been prepared for the loud, shouting voices (some of which seemed very distressed) and the extreme lack of light and been able to ask for assistance to prevent possible accidents occurring, in fact, it was very irresponsible to take three visually impaired people into such an environment and leave us there with the instruction that we should find our own way out after the video performance had finished!

Foot Traffic - number of visitors/ participants at the time of visit:

Again, this information was not available to me, partly because the room was darkened and partly because there was no one with us to ask.

Audience Reaction - time spent, interest, activity, and visitors' books comments:

Information not available. However, one young woman who had been asked to take over from the young man who left us in the gallery space, suggested we 'write' in the visitors' book when she realised we were not pleased with the service we had received. Again, this was an inappropriate suggestion as we were all visually impaired!

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.

Criteria

Rating: 1.

Comment and key reasons for rating:

There was a complete lack of staff appreciation or understanding regarding the requirements of visually impaired visitors in relation to this Event. Although I had specified the need for large-print, audio information and especially the assistance of a well-informed gallery guide, I felt these needs and our visit generally were not taken seriously by the organisers. For instance, despite making two telephone calls prior to the visit to request additional information to be sent to me by Email, this information was never sent. Also, when we arrived, no apology was given for the last minute change of gallery guide or for the fact that the staff members were inexperienced and very clearly untrained in

disability matters or the art on display.

Suitability of the venue for the event:

I feel this was a suitable venue for this event as the Tramway is a physically accessible building. But the gallery space, Tramway 2 was not accessible under these particular circumstances for visually impaired visitors.

Information/ interpretive material at venue:

Information in alternative formats had been produced for this Exhibition, yet the audio and large-print information was not offered to us at any time - I had to ask for it. Also, we were not advised to read/listen to the information before going into the gallery, instead we were expected to use it without assistance in the gallery space. Clearly we were not able to use it under the exhibition conditions! Equally, we were not shown how to use the audio guide equipment, plus the lead for the headphones was very badly tangled and it took me more than five minutes to untangle it before we could try to listen to the commentary. However, this took so long and the noise in the gallery so loud, that it was impossible to make out clearly what was being said. Then the video came to an end.

Publicity/ pre-publicity:

I found the Tramway web site remarkably accessible! I therefore had very little difficulty finding basic information about this Exhibition or about the venue in general. Thus, it is an excellent example, at present, of a web site that is accessible to disabled internet users, it is just a pity the customer service doesn't reach the same standard!

Ease of booking and payment: There was no admission charge.

Location of venue:

The Tramway is situated in Albert Drive, Glasgow. Detailed travelling information is given clearly on the venue's web site.

External signage and signposting:

The public street sign indicating the street name was not positioned at the end of the street but some way down the road, so that we spent several extra minutes locating the correct turning. The external signage for the venue however, was clearly defined.

Internal directional signage:

This appeared to be good, although the gallery, Tramway 2, is situated on the ground floor, so there was no need to search for it.

Access and provision for disabled people:

"Tramway reopened to the public in June 2000 following almost two years of major Scottish Arts Council National Lottery funded redevelopment. This work has ensured that Tramway is now a fully accessible space. There is level access to Tramway 1, 2 and 4 and lift access to the Project Room and Upper Foyer Gallery, the Cafe Bar and Stables. Tramway welcomes guide dogs. The theatres are equipped with the latest infra red systems which may be used by people with hearing difficulties for both audio description and sound amplification. Please contact Tramway prior to your visit if you have any additional requirements." (Taken from the Tramway web site).

I understand that there are three accessible toilets in the building - one on each floor.

in addition, the building is very large and therefore can accommodate the requirements of wheelchair users easily.

Lighting in the public areas of the ground floor is also good.

I could not discover whether there was a hearing loop system installed throughout the building or just in the theatres.

Also, information was not available regarding text phone facilities for enquiries from hearing impaired people.

Equally, I do not know whether any staff members are trained in the use of BSL or if there is special equipment installed to alert hearing impaired people in the case of an emergency.

There was no extra seating in the main public area on the ground floor for visitors requiring a rest or who needed to read/listen to information in alternative formats.

Nonetheless, the main entrance is well designed and can accommodate taxis and other vehicles, which mean disabled visitors, can be dropped or collected easily at the front door.

Please Note: it should always be remembered that breaking down the barriers to disability social inclusion does not merely mean providing good physical access into and around a building. It depends equally on a high standard of customer care and full access to information!

Opening times/ timing of the event:

The opening times for this exhibition were Tuesday - Friday 10am - 5pm, Saturday & Sunday 12 noon - 5pm.

However, on the day of our visit, the opening time had been extended to accommodate visitors who also wanted to attend the artist's talk held at 7pm.

Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. welcoming/ informed):

We found the customer service at this venue seriously lacking, staff appeared both ill-informed about our visit, the facilities available for visually impaired visitors in general and uninformed about the Exhibition in particular.

For instance, the first person told to help us wasted a lot of time talking about the history of the building without being asked for it. In stark contrast, he told us nothing about the exhibition we had come to see and in no way prepared us for the artistic conditions we were about to experience. Then, when he did finally lead us to the Tramway 2 exhibition space which, like a cinema, was a pitch-black environment, he shone a small torch in front of him and told us to follow. He did not offer any of us an arm for reassurance at any time, we were then told to sit down and that he would be waiting for us when we came out. But he wasn't there when we emerged. He had told someone else to take over because he had reached the end of his shift!

Again, when we asked the receptionist to order a taxi for us, this request was met with 'what?' as though she had never before been asked to provide such a service. Nevertheless, she complied with my request when I repeated it but not with very good grace. This demonstrated that she was not used to dealing with the transport needs of disabled visitors.

I do not know whether the staff members who dealt with us, were given prior notice of our visit or whether they were simply told to attend to us without any preparation.

Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding:

This acknowledgement appears on the Tramway web site but I do not know whether it also appears on other posters and brochures given out at the venue.

Barbara Kruger-120805 Rosita

- 1 Quality of ideas, skills in execution, if you've seen the work of this artist(s) before - particularly in relation to new work or second productions
- 2 These include wall panels, labels, catalogues, leaflets, artists CVs etc., assessing the range, quality and clarity
- 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
- 4 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, and 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.

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.

Valuators 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.

