



Scottish **Arts** Council

## ARTISTIC EVALUATION - VISUAL ARTS

Organisation/Venue: WASPS Artists Studios, Patriothall, Edinburgh

Title of Event: WASPS Open Studios

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

Open Day comprising workshops and special talks given by resident artists.

Date of Visit: Saturday, 8th October, 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).

Overall rating: 4.

My husband and I agree that this was a highly enjoyable event to attend. The work on show was extremely varied in artistic style and approach. We also found the individual artists we spoke to, engaging and very welcoming. All in all, the two hours or so we spent at the Studios, resulted in a most stimulating and uplifting experience.

However, the Patriothall Studios are not easy to find even with directions, being situated through a vennel at the back of Hamilton Place. Consequently, we arrived about half an hour late for our appointment and I began the visit feeling rather nervous and confused. This feeling increased when it wasn't immediately clear who was going to assist us around the various studios and workshops. In the end, we were introduced to the artist who had apparently agreed to be our contact. She took us to her studio and from there we were introduced in turn, to other artists working in the building.

The lack of an official WASPS member of staff at this point, could have easily spelt disaster for our visit, especially as there was a great deal happening and I needed to gather more information regarding the organisations' disability access facilities. Nevertheless, the informal arrangement meant everyone appeared more relaxed and happy to talk to us.

Name: Rosita McKenzie

Date: Tuesday, 25 October 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: Overall rating 4.

Comments and key reasons for rating:

During this visit, we experienced the work of various artists currently in residence at this venue. In all, there are 50 studios in the building and I understand, 32 artists took part in the Open Days.

The artwork and materials used were all very different and therefore, it would be inappropriate to make comparisons regarding individual style or approach. Nonetheless, the breadth of artistic vision and sensitivity to chosen subject matter, was inspiring and made, in various ways, a strong, lasting impression.

The dedication of individual artists to their particular art form was also striking and it was a privilege to discuss the work personally with each separate creator. This was important for me, because I was not previously familiar with any of the artists we met.

Vision and imagination of artist's work:

The first artist we met was Andria. She paints in water colours. These adorn her large and airy studio and even the corridor outside her room. Here, she showed us her paintings of red and white roses. Andria is particularly interested in and inspired by the plight of children around the world. The roses represent the grief of the adults who have and are still experiencing the loss of their children, especially as a result of violent circumstances. To emphasise the poignancy and tragedy of these innocent lives, she has incorporated actual rose petals into some of her paintings. She has worked on this theme for a year and still draws great inspiration from it.

The second studio we visited belonged to Michael who is also a visual artist. He explained that he is particularly interested in contemporary architecture and is especially drawn to the straight lines of geometrically shaped buildings. He has travelled all around the World, taking photographs of buildings that interest him. Michael then went on to explain what seemed to me a very complex technical and artistic process by which he creates his artworks.

As I recall, he reproduces his photographs onto a computer and then creates the image he wants. He selects features of the buildings that appeal to him and then paints These images in oil onto aluminium. Finally, he turns them into plaques that he hangs on the wall. A significant design element of his pieces is that when they are hung, they appear as though they are floating in mid air, giving them a more unworldly appearance.

Next we visited Fiona who works in tapestry. Her favourite theme is the sea. Apart from being highly tactile and textured, her art is also produced in bold and very bright colours. Fiona has also worked previously with visually impaired artists and used her experienced to skilfully describe her art and her methods of working. She even offered to provide me with developing my rug making skills to a higher level - an offer I greatly appreciate.

Fiona's tapestries hung in the corridor as well as in her studio. There was even one immediately outside the lift that she encouraged us to feel and discuss. I felt that Fiona's work and her approach, encouraged a rather joyful response to the Open Day experience.

We then moved on to David's studio. He was previously a biochemist and I felt his former profession influences his work on various levels including the pleasure he clearly derives from studying the Natural World and how we interact with it. In fact, David is currently producing work based on the theme of how Society grows out of Nature. He feels this is particularly noticeable in Edinburgh. I felt this was an attractive notion and it excited my imagination. He also incorporates quotations regularly in his paintings and draws these from many different sources including Darwin.

David proved a very enthusiastic 'tour guide' and provided good, clear descriptions of his work. He also invited us to touch his work. The paintings on display showed different scenes that also reflected different moods. Some were rather dark and brooding whilst others were created with very vibrant colours and therefore, were more uplifting.

Then we were introduced to Robin who works in oil paints, chalk and pastels. Again, we were encouraged to touch his work, especially those where the paint had been thickly applied.

Robin produces very colourful paintings. He also seems to approach his varied subject matter with a deep sensitivity. I felt this was strongly demonstrated by the language he used to describe his work to us and the warmth with which he encouraged our complete involvement.

Finally, we met Lorna who makes spiky sculptures. Her studio was full of them. To me, they were reminiscent of plants and would not be out of place in the Royal Botanic Gardens. I found Lorna's work especially fascinating and wonderfully tactile. In fact, her triptych of pieces was particularly

intriguing and judging by the response of other visitors to her studio, I wasn't alone in thinking that way. Again, experiencing Lorna's art was an absolute delight for me!

Curatorial vision/ selection - also indicate if the event has originated from the exhibiting organisation, part of a festival, artist-led, or commissioned

I understand that this venue has recently been purchased and refurbished by WASPS. Therefore, the Event was organised by WASPS as an integral part of their annual 'Open Days' which took place at the same time and in various locations throughout Scotland.

In my opinion, it is an excellent executive decision as it gives these artists immediate contact with new and existing audiences as well as providing the public with an opportunity to engage with living artists.

Events available/ groups targeted - workshops, artist's talks, discussion groups, pre-school/ primary/ secondary students, >18,>60 etc:

As this was a special weekend comprising two open days, it was designed to give the public maximum access to the artists, their working practices and artwork.

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

Excellent use was made of all the studio, corridor and gallery spaces in the building for this event.

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

This Event was very well attended. In fact, more visitors were arriving as we made our departure.

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

This event received a very good response from the public on the day of our visit. I was particularly interested to note how many young children were in the building and encouraged by the way they were engaging with the art. Many of the adult visitors too, were very vocal in their appreciation of the work on display.

## 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: 3.

Comment and key reasons for rating:

My main reason for giving a rating of 3 is simply because I feel more could have been done to publicise this Event to the disabled public. Also, whilst individual artists were very welcoming and helpful throughout our visit, WASPS staff seemed either unavailable or unable to provide the essential disability information I was seeking. I feel this was due to a lack of awareness, especially in regards to sensory impaired access to the Event and to some of the artwork.

For these reasons, I would strongly recommend the staff and interested artists should have the opportunity to undertake disability equality training. Also, the Organisation should be given advice/guidance in relation to marketing all its events to a much wider public.

Suitability of the venue for the event:

Overall, I feel this was a suitable venue for the Event, particularly as the building has been refurbished and now provides wheelchair access into and around the venue, both for disabled artists and the public. However, I do not know whether there is good parking facilities adjacent to the building which is a major consideration for all kinds of disabled people.

Information/ interpretive material at venue:

There was no information provided at all in alternative formats. As a result, I had the strong feeling that this aspect of disability access had been totally overlooked and it caused some embarrassment when I enquired about it.

Publicity/ pre-publicity:

I understand that WASPS is an artist led organisation where each artist is responsible for marketing their own exhibitions. For this reason, it is very difficult for the individual artists to publicise their individual exhibitions and work efficiently. We were told that the issue of attracting larger audiences would be discussed at their next committee meeting as a matter of urgency. I suggested perhaps they should contact The Audience Business for assistance and guidance.

Finally, I was not aware of this Event until I was asked to evaluate it. I also discovered that from some residents living in the Stockbridge area that they, too, were unaware of the existence of the WASPS studios at that location. Nevertheless, the Event was well attended which suggests the publicity was certainly effective on this occasion.

Ease of booking and payment:

I simply telephoned the WASPS administration in Glasgow to make this booking. A more local contact would have been useful however, in regards to accurate directions to the Event. Also, there was no admission charge.

Location of venue:

Although I had been given the address and some directions, the main entrance to the building is situated off the main thoroughfare and can only be reached by entering a vennel. Thus, it is not immediately visible to anyone who is not familiar with the district.

External signage and signposting

Again, as I understand it, external signposting was quite difficult for my husband to distinguish and follow. This meant that we had to wait for other people to come along and then discretely follow them, before we could find our way to the main entrance of the venue. Equally, paper posters had been stuck up outside the building, publicising the Event. However, these were torn down by a very strong wind and had to be replaced by staff members to ensure that potential visitors did not miss the Open Days.

Internal directional signage:

We didn't have any problem with the internal signage because we were escorted around the building throughout our visit. This was particularly helpful as the venue was bustling with visitors and rather noisy.

However, under other circumstances, I imagine the upper floors of the building would normally be closed to the public with just the large exhibition space on the ground floor providing public access. If this is the case, the exhibition space should be reasonably easy to negotiate as it would be on only one level and limited to one specific area.

Access and provision for disabled people

This is a bright building with lots of natural daylight.

It has also recently been refurbished and now provides wheelchair accessible facilities including a large lift to the upper floors/studios and workshop areas. The lift is also fitted with speech and tactile/braille button indicators.

In addition, we were told that there is an accessible toilet on the ground floor, although it wasn't visited.

In contrast, there is no text phone facility at the main reception desk or anywhere in the building for hearing impaired people seeking information, so they are immediately excluded from major art exhibitions held at this venue. To remedy this situation, a designated contact point or person should be available to help with enquiries or assist with the transport needs of disabled visitors.

Again, there was no hearing loop system installed within the gallery space which automatically places hearing impaired visitors at a severe disadvantage.

Extra seating for anyone who needed a short rest was not immediately evident either.

Opening times/ timing of the event:

This event took place during the weekend of Saturday 8 & Sunday 9 October, 2005.

The opening times were: Saturday 11am - 5pm Sunday 12noon - 5pm

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

We were warmly welcomed at this Event. However, I feel everyone associated with this Organisation would benefit from disability equality training. It is my belief that such training would raised confidence and communication skills and thus improve the delivery of good customer service for disabled visitors and visiting disabled artists.

Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding:

I found an acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council funding is given on the WASPS web site.

- 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, 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.

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.