



Updated June 2007

## ARTISTIC EVALUATION

It should be noted the views expressed in this evaluation are intended to represent, as far as possible, an objective aesthetic judgement. Specialist advisors and officers should avoid making judgements based on their own personal tastes and preferences.

<b>Artist/Company:</b>	<b>Spencer Finch</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>DCA - Dundee Contemporary Arts</b>
<b>Title of Event:</b>	<b>Gravity Always Wins: Spencer Finch</b>
<b>Type of Event:</b>	<b>Exhibition</b>
<b>Date of Visit:</b>	<b>2 November 2008</b>
<b>Overall Rating:</b>	<b>4</b>

*(Please rate the event 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. 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.)*

This is a strong and enjoyable exhibition by an artist developing an international reputation and the work was witty, intelligent and provocative. Its consideration of the Scottish Enlightenment and Hume made it nicely pertinent. The subject matter – colour, scientific and poetic understanding of the physical world – and execution – offered rich material for engaging contextual interpretive and education activities that wasn't taken up to the degree that it might have been.

Name: Gary Thomas      Date:   1   /   12   /   2008  

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 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 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 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:**

- 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.

## 1. Artistic Assessment

Please evaluate the artistic quality of the event, with particular reference to the strengths and weaknesses of the following:

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
All	Vision and imagination of work - Quality of ideas, skills in execution; if you've seen the work of this artist(s)/ company before, please comment on the comparison.	4	This was a solo exhibition of five works by American artist Spencer Finch, including two new pieces. Finch makes work that "merges scientific method and poetic sensibility", and which illuminates, and raises questions about, both those approaches to understanding the world. Gallery 1 was given over to one large scale installation that used fluorescent lights and a 'cloud' of light filters to replicate the light in the yard of Emily Dickinson's home in Massachusetts on a specific date. Another work uses 401 lamps, organised as the molecular structure of a pigment that matches the colour of an Arizona night sky. In 'Sky', an ice making machine and pigment are utilised to create a 'glacial ecosystem' to recreate the colour of sky from a specific location in New Zealand. I thought this was the least effective work on show - relatively contrived and unconvincing, it felt awkward and somewhat stranded in the middle of the large space of Gallery 2, and not operating (i.e. generating a glacier) as well as it might. Otherwise, this was a consistently engaging, surprising and provocative - the works carefully poised between the conceptual and intellect on one hand, beauty and poetics on the other. It is confident, thoughtful work, accessible, playful, and intriguing.
All (if relevant)	Curatorial/ programming vision/ selection Please indicate how the event originated eg from the exhibiting/ producing organisation, artist-led or commissioned.  If the event is part of a Festival, please say how it contributes to the overall programme.	4	It is a delightful and intelligent show, and the first substantial exhibition in the UK by an artist with a strong and developing international profile and reputation. The two new works aren't described as being DCA 'commissions', but the exhibition leaflet indicates that discussions with the artist - about the Scottish Enlightenment and David Hume - helped shape the exhibition. My thoughts about 'Sky' aside, the selection and presentation of works felt considered and effective. I thought the positioning and installation of the works allowed connections to be made and themes to resonate.
All	Success of event against stated aims - in the programme or other printed material, including how well it communicated the artistic themes.  Education events – see <sup>1</sup> below for guidance	3	This is a successful exhibition - the works, the curation, execution and exhibition guide text all coming together to offer an experience of high artistic merit. I do think that there was potential in some areas that wasn't realised, and the reasons for this might be particular to this project, or more general. The exhibition guide has a very good introduction and notes on the individual works, but the 'edited conversation' between the curator and the artist adds little. The leaflet refers to talks, events and screenings, but on the website only one talk is listed. A couple of weeks before the exhibition opened; there was very little information about it on the DCA website.  The leaflet promises talks, events and associated cinema screenings, and the exhibition really lends itself to imaginative film and talks programming, but only one talk

<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.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
		2	<p>is listed on the website. The themes and issues that the exhibition explores offer a very rich starting point - touching on landscape, ecology, light, and the relationship between science and art - and I am surprised that there wasn't a more extensive talks/screenings programme.</p> <p>The DCA brochure lists an artist's talk that took place before the exhibition opened, and a gallery tour on 27 November - this isn't mentioned on the website, and may have been replaced by the 7pm talk on the same night.</p>
All	<p>Performers/tutors - technical standard, performance skills and ability to communicate and engage.</p> <p>Where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.</p>		
Dance, Theatre	Choreography/Use of choreography - originality, use of space, number and use of dancers, length of piece, etc		
Theatre	Script — particularly in relation to new work or second productions. Relevant to classics where the original has been substantially changed.		
Theatre, Dance	Direction - Concerns issues of interpretation, casting and presentation.		
Dance, Theatre	Use of music — appropriateness and effect of sound or music (whole/part, live/recorded) to the production.		
Dance, Theatre	Design — costume, set, lighting. Take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue and, where appropriate, the touring schedule.		
All	<p>Quality of Presentation/Engagement</p> <p>Performing Arts - technical presentation of the production (eg lighting and sound cues, etc).</p> <p>Crafts/Visual Arts - Use of equipment, space and overall layout/hang</p> <p>Education events - relevance/appropriateness of presentation and teaching methodology (one to one, group, child centred); details of participant group and activity,</p>	4	The exhibition installation and the general presentation of the gallery, signage, etc, were of a high standard.

Artform	Criteria	Rating	Comments and key reasons for rating
	including genre.		
All	<p><b>Audience</b></p> <p>Performing Arts - appropriateness of the production for the audience/ participants; estimate the size and reaction</p> <p>Crafts/Visual Arts — time spent, interest, activity, and visitors' books comments, number of visitors/ participants at the time of visit</p> <p>Education/learning – pre-event involvement, participants/ schoolteachers reaction, understanding, commitment, enthusiasm, number involved, etc</p>		Over about half an hour I saw only five other people in the galleries, on a Sunday afternoon, whilst the café downstairs was very busy.
All	<p><b>Additional Interpretative activity</b> – what activities were available to enhance the experience of the event eg workshops, artist's talks, discussion groups? Please indicate age-groups targeted.</p>	3	<p>An exhibition guide provides a brief introduction to the exhibition, and some explanatory text about the works, and was very useful, and downloadable from the website. The 'edited conversation' between the curator and artist felt a bit truncated. There's a list of 'further reading' suggestions, but no link to the artist's website, and I would have appreciated something more - perhaps something that placed the artist's work in relation to other artists exploring similar interests. A 10' filmed interview with the artist is on the DCA site and You Tube, in which he talks about each of the works.</p> <p>Whilst these interpretative materials - the leaflet and interview - were informative and effective, the contextual programme seems very limited, and failing to exploit the potential.</p> <p>Newspaper reviews of the exhibition were on display.</p>
All	<p><b>Outcomes of education activity</b> – what learning/skills development took place? What did participants take away with them? Are education resources being provided for follow up work? Is it strategically linked to the curriculum (formal or informal)?</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
Suitability of the venue for the event	The galleries are excellent spaces, and the standard of presentation is high.
Information/ interpretive material at venue - programmes, displays etc.	I only came across the exhibition leaflet having assumed there must be one, and having looked for it - on a table in an education area where there was an activity taking place - so, not very obvious. I only saw one poster for the exhibition at the entrance to DCA. In the 'forecourt' there's a large six panel information board, with cinema/film information, but no information about the gallery exhibition.
Publicity/ pre-publicity –leaflets, posters, websites, etc. What is produced, is it easy to understand and where can you get the information? Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event and comment on the company/organisation's website.	There was no information about the exhibition on the DCA website at the beginning of October. The exhibition provided the cover image for DCA's Oct-Dec Programme booklet.
Ease of booking and payment	
Location of venue – eg is it easy to find? Is it on a main transport route?	DCA is near the main shopping area of Dundee, within easy walking distance from bus and train stations.
External signage and signposting	DCA is signposted from the main shopping centre and not hard to locate - though approaching from the city centre, the building is set back from the road. It would be hard to miss it though.
Internal directional signage	Inside, the galleries are obvious if you're looking for/at them, but there could be better, upfront signage. In the busy cinema foyer/café downstairs I couldn't see any display material informing and encouraging people to visit the gallery.
Access and provision for disabled people – what can you see?	The website provides details of access and emphasises willingness to assist. There's a lift. The website has its own accessibility support.
Timing of the event – was the length appropriate? Did the start and finish time seem to be appropriate for the audience?	Opening hours are reasonable. The centre is closed on Monday, but there's late opening on Thursdays.
Customer service - quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering)	

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding <sup>2</sup>	On the website, I can't find a logo or any other reference to SAC funding. There's no acknowledgment on the video/YouTube. The SAC logo is properly displayed on the programme booklet, exhibition leaflet, and in the centre itself.

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<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.



Scottish **Arts** Council

### 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.

