

INTERPRETATIONS

Action Research for Interpretation Practice in Contemporary Art

Report written by Maureen K Michael drawing on work by
Kirstie Skinner (Collective Gallery)
Sarah Derrick (Dundee Contemporary Arts)
Carol Dunbar (Pier Arts Centre)
Zoë Fothergill (Talbot Rice Gallery)

August 2008

Supported by
 **The National Lottery**[®]
through the Scottish Arts Council

 Scottish
Arts Council

engage
Scotland

Contents

Acknowledgements	Page 2
Overview	Page 3

Part One **Introduction, Context and Methods**

Part One introduces *Interpretations* and the four participating gallery projects. There is a description of the project context and the methods used to support the projects.

Pages 4-11

Part Two **Case Studies, Discussion and Comparison**

This section describes each of the four projects as case-studies exploring the action research processes. A Comparison Table concludes Part Two.

Pages 12 - 31

Part Three **Observations, Reflections and Conclusions**

In Part Three the report reflects on emerging themes and suggests conclusions. The report finishes with recommendations for the development of *Interpretations*.

Pages 32 - 37

References	Page 38
List of Tables	Page 39
List of Images	Page 40
List of Appendices	Page 41

Acknowledgements

Interpretations has been made possible with the funding and support of the National Lottery through the Scottish Arts Council; engage Scotland and the Hugh Fraser Foundation. Special thanks to the Advisory Group and the engage Scotland Coordinator, Sarah Yearsley for their commitment to the concept, funding and dissemination and feedback of each stage of the project.

To the extended network of staff, freelancers, academics and audiences of the participating galleries; a warm and grateful thanks, in particular the project coordinators,

Kirstie Skinner, Collective Gallery, Edinburgh
Sarah Derrick, Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee
Carol Dunbar, Pier Art Centre, Orkney
Zoë Fothergill, Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh

And to those artists working in the field of contemporary art whose work has contextualised the interpretative practice in each of the projects:

Matthew Buckingham
Enrico David
Richard Deacon
Freee
Colin Johnstone
Camilla Løw
Jason Nelson
Bill Woodrow
Artur Zmijewski

Overview

Interpretations gave four galleries in Scotland the opportunity to affect change in their interpretation practice through action research. Drawing from their own specific circumstances, gallery teams developed innovative ways of working with staff and audiences towards fresh interpretation practice for contemporary art. Through a variety of interventions each project shifts the authorial voice from the expert to the visitor. In using action research the projects promote participation and critical reflection as key values in developing new and existing audiences for contemporary art.

This pre-evaluation report presents each project as an individual case-study and characterises them as iterative, strategic, holistic and responsive, respectively. The case-studies describe the various research questions, methods and outputs and offer a brief analysis of process. Interviews, experiential workshops, questionnaires, document surveys and focus groups were all used as tools in the action research process but investing time in critical reflection emerges as a possible cornerstone of the *Interpretations* project.

Interpretations tentatively concludes that whilst action research offers a creative process for affecting individual and organisational change, the challenge of documenting and presenting diverse and complex projects cannot be overestimated: sensitive, sustained support is required for optimum results. The visual literacy of practitioners in the field of gallery education and interpretation could be further championed through the use of image-based methods in the research process. Again, sensitive but rigorous support of practitioners is required to build confidence with existing visual skills towards an action research context. The report concludes by proposing five areas that could structure future evaluation, assessing the success of *Interpretations* and its importance to the fields of gallery education and audience development.