

How we assess artistic quality



Arts Council England works to get more art to more people in more places. We develop and promote the arts across England, acting as an independent body at arm's length from government.

Between 2006 and 2008, we will invest £1.1 billion of public money from government and the National Lottery in supporting the arts. This is the bedrock of support for the arts in England.

We believe that the arts have the power to change lives and communities, and to create opportunities for people throughout the country.

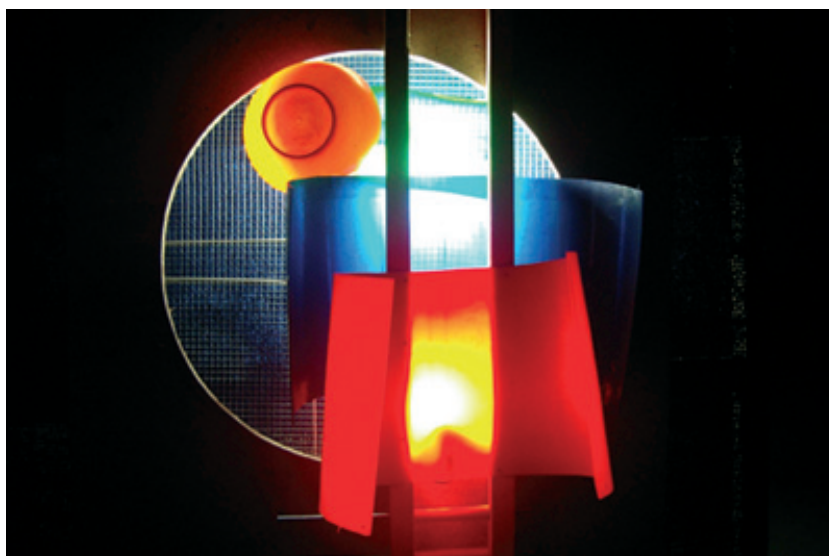
Contents

Introduction	2
Why does Arts Council England assess artistic quality?	3
What is our approach to assessing artistic quality?	4
How do we assess artistic quality?	5
For more information	7

Introduction

We recognise that there are different ways of assessing artistic quality. Different artforms and practices have their own languages, histories and perspectives. Contexts such as work with young people, in participation or in social inclusion, may have additional priorities. We are committed to promoting the highest quality in artistic work for the greatest number of people. This is why we have developed this approach to assessing quality and are sharing it with artists, organisations and the public.

Assefa Gebrekidan, A Cracking Night, 2004, courtesy of the artist. The artist received an Arts Council England International Artists Fellowship



Why does Arts Council England assess artistic quality?

Artistic quality is one of five criteria that we use in assessing applications to Grants for the arts and reviewing regularly funded organisations. It is central to our responsibility for public funding and our role as an arts development agency.

Everyone experiences artistic work in their own way, and everyone's experience is valid. People respond to artistic experiences differently too. We may be inspired, thrilled or challenged by the experience; we may respond emotionally, intellectually, physically or spiritually. The capacity to engage us directly and in different ways is one of the strengths of the arts, one of the ways in which the arts can change the lives of individuals and communities. It can also make artistic quality difficult to talk about and define.

What is our approach to assessing artistic quality?

Our approach is to consider three dimensions of artistic work:

- idea – the concept or artistic impetus behind the work
- practice – the effectiveness of how the work is put into practice and the impact it has on those experiencing it
- development – the contribution the work makes to the development of the artist, the artform and the arts more widely

This approach gives us a framework for describing artistic quality and we use it, described in different ways, when assessing regularly funded organisations and all applications for Grants for the arts.

The full list of questions, or ‘prompts’, that we apply when considering these dimensions in detail is in *Arts report form: guidance*, available from our website (see ‘For more information’ on page 7).

How do we assess artistic quality?

Self assessment

Arts Council England believes that artists and organisations are usually best placed to evaluate the quality of the work they produce, and their self-evaluation is the starting point for our own assessments. The more confident we are in the ways in which artists and organisations evaluate their work, the less direct involvement we need to have in artistic assessment.

Peer assessment

We believe in the value of peer assessment. We encourage artists and organisations to involve their peers in making their own self-assessment, and encourage our staff to engage with artistic work regularly. We recognise that at times we need the views of others to contribute to our assessments. We are developing a system for incorporating independent arts reporters as part of our processes, to add to our arts development expertise, contribute to transparency in our decisions and promote the culture of peer evaluation in the arts.

Independent arts reporters

We invite individuals to become independent arts reporters on the basis of their expertise and engagement with the arts. They are paid (currently £50 for each report) and we cover the direct costs of their experiencing the artistic work. Arts Council staff also write arts reports as part of their work. We share reports with the artists and organisations concerned. Our arts report form and guidance are on our website.

Arts reports contribute to our knowledge of developments in the arts. We do not commission arts reports on the work of every artist and organisation we invest in. To help build our knowledge we may commission reports on activities that we have not funded.

Other aspects

We consider other aspects of an artist's or organisation's work in reaching our decisions about funding. These include organisational capacity, financial viability and public benefit.

For more information

The 'Artistic assessment' section in the 'subjects' area of our website www.artscouncil.org.uk has the following documents:

- *How we assess artistic quality* (this booklet)
- *Arts report form*
- *Arts report form: guidance*
- *Artistic assessment: guidance for staff*

You may also want to read our information sheet *Grants for the arts – understanding the assessment criteria and our priorities*. You can download it from the 'Information sheets' section in the 'Publications' area of our website.

Right: *Generation* by Joe Hillier at the headquarters of One NorthEast, the regional development agency. Photo: David Williams



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