

# Reviewing Live Art

## The NRLA in Glasgow reaches thirty

Mar 2, 2010 [Gareth Vile](#)

The National Review of Live Art showcases acts from around the world- even if it is difficult to define what Live Art actually means.

For thirty years, The National Review of Live Art has been generating an annual, predictable critical response. Bringing together performers and promoters from across the world to Glasgow's Arches and, latterly, Tramway, it provokes articles that admit that while it might be rather weird and awkward, there is some interesting and inspired work contained somewhere in the complex maze of programming.

### **What is Live Art?**

Even the definition of Live Art is complicated: it can include anything from installations, eight hour long endurance works and bursts of contemporary dance. It incorporates anything that is not easily defined. The original term, Performance Art, was abandoned when refugees from the visual arts community arrived and Live Art has become more of a place-holder for work that defies genre, rather than signifying any particular process or form.

Looking over this year's NRLA line-up hardly helps to clarify matters. Since this is an anniversary celebration, it has welcomed back many of the veteran artists who have helped to define the NRLA as always imaginative and progressive, it is an impressive list. Yet Ron Athey, who is famed for working in his own blood, would seem to have little in common with Iona Kewney, recently spotted at the British Dance Edition. For the National Review, "Live Art" is more of a question than a statement.

### **Celebrities of Alternative Performance**

Like any community, Live Art does have its own superstars and celebrities: Athey has been working since the 1980s, and his presence guarantees an experienced and mature performance. Guillermo Gomez-Pena, a "post-Mexican" has been challenging cultural stereotypes within and outside the academy for over a decade and Rob La Frenais has been pushing boundaries since 1979, when he founded *Performance Magazine*, a sharp take on the business of art.

Forced Entertainment have evolved into a spellbinding theatrical force over the years: in their own right, they have filled Tramway, and their inclusion demonstrates the importance and pull of the NRLA. And Richard Layzell's wry lectures bridge the gap between stand-up satire and academic analysis.

These characters, alongside MC Ian Smith, a perennial fixture at NRLA, form a backbone of veteran and established stars: however, it is the plethora of new and left-field artists that explore the full range of Live Art's possibilities.

### **The Young Team**

Kewney may not be a newcomer to the scene, and her dance owes as much to radical contemporary choreography and loud post-rock as it does to Performance Art. Yet in her short solos, she embraces a physical freedom that goes beyond anything within British contemporary, a thrilling mix of acrobatics, grace and distortion.

Richard Dedomenici, a Watford boy with a passion for insinuating himself into unlikely venues, relies on the spoken word to deconstruct and upset the status quo. Kate Stannard, a teacher at The Royal Scottish Academy for Music and Drama, follows her interest in physical fitness and yoga with an epic act of endurance, combining a commitment to testing herself and connecting emotionally with an audience.

### **But What Does It All Mean?**

The usual suggestion for first time visitors to the NRLA is that they do not worry about catching everything: the sheer variety and scale of the programme prevents this anyway. Equally, the language used to describe Live Art can be deliberately confusing: this is a degree of mystification going on, either from a cheeky mischief or a pretentious defensiveness. The best way to enjoy the NRLA , or any Live Art happening, really is to plunge into it, allowing happy accidents to uncover the profound work, and accepting those moments of frustration as part of the process.

Live Art is best appreciated in this sort of hectic, labyrinthine context. Impossible feats, occult emotions, convoluted reasoning and forbidden ideas jostle together, ensuring that the overall experience is far more than the sum of its parts. What the audience bring to the event is what they will take away: at times meaningless, at times profound, it offers a raw emotional engagement and makes performance a microcosm of the social macrocosm.

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