

Ellie Harrison should wrap up The Glasgow Effect and move on



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Of course she will not have had any of the £15,000 she has been promised by Creative Scotland. That's not the way it works. Not even the first tranche of funding, however the payments have been divided up, will have found its way from the arts allocation of Lottery receipts to the bank account of Ellie Harrison, and the reservations expressed by the agency about the way the money is being used to give her time off from her teaching job at Duncan of Jordanstone suggests that any agreed schedule will be stalled. I reckon the artist would be best to call a halt to her project, The Glasgow Effect.

That is not because I do not think it is Art. There are few more reductive and pointless arguments than that one, even if much of the abuse heaped upon Harrison and her work has assumed that was the issue. Nor is it possible to trot out any sort of meaningful argument about taste, although finding part of your inspiration in contrasting the so-called postcode lottery of life

expectancy in the Dear Green Place with Glasgow's "miraculous" success in contemporary art competitions is certainly dubious. There are many examples in the art world of taste much worse than that, even employing the broadest understanding of the term. It is hardly useful to talk about whether it is Good or Bad Art either, not only because all such judgements are necessarily subjective, as I regularly tell young folks attempting their first critiques, but because Harrison's Glasgow Effect is not even out of the starting blocks, so deciding it is valueless is as valid as commenting on a portrait or landscape painting before the artist has made a mark on the canvas.

Except that in this case (whether a new direction in art or a pointless cul-de-sac) the noise on social media is very much the message. Harrison's Glasgow Effect is envisioned, as I understand it, as a bridge of community and political activism, with herself as the keystone, between public health's "Glasgow Effect", as explained in Carol Craig's book *The Tears That Made The Clyde*, and the Glasgow School of Art-nurtured "Glasgow Miracle". The world wide web

was her chosen conduit to communicate its process, initially that controversial Facebook page with its picture of a poke of chips. As the artist herself has acknowledged, she could not have anticipated the level of engagement (not to mention appalling abuse and vitriol) her project would attract online, albeit with thoroughly ill-informed coverage in the old-school press.

That is the problem with the supposedly free and uncontrollable world of social media though, when it runs away with something all shades of

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opinion are instantaneously available, and the hysterical clamour precludes the sort of reasoned debate one might want, never mind leaving room for the sort of "action research" or "durational performance" that Harrison had hoped to create. There are old-school phrases for what has happened to Harrison's proposed art work, like "hoist by her own petard", although I don't think either she, or the arts quango, can really be blamed. But the furore, far from accelerating the progress of her project, seems to me to have scampered round its

course, crashed and burned, exhausting a vast proportion of the available raw material in the process. Packing up and moving on to something new appears the only sensible course of action.

There are, however, interesting issues raised about how the personal can now be used in contemporary art. The debate occasioned by Tracey Emin's messy bed or the applied tent memorialising everyone she had slept with, or when Michael Landy's *Break Down* destroyed all his personal belongings as a public spectacle, would these days be limited to a few days of concentrated shouting on the internet, which leaves no-one wiser and few entrenched opinions altered.

Behaving Ourselves was a fine series of short programmes on modern manners on BBC Radio 4 this week, wittily presented by David Mitchell and ranging from online etiquette to golf club dress rules.

At one point a contributor boldly observed that there are a disproportionate number of poorer people among those living a "second life" on the web, because they are the ones who cannot afford to buy tickets, travel and attend live culture.

I've no idea whether that is true, but it won't need action research to see that it does preclude any geographical limitation called a postcode lottery.