

Dundee lecturer Ellie finding Glasgow Effect taking its toll

ARTS: Artist critical of public reaction to £15,000 project

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Dundee artist and lecturer Ellie Harrison has hit out at the “lazy artist myth” attached to her controversial £15,000 publicly-funded Glasgow Effect project.

Ellie – who is taking time out of her job at Dundee University – is in the 10th month of her “action-research” experiment, which involves her living in Glasgow for a year without leaving the city.

So far, she has published an essay calling for a radical shake-up of higher education, as well as a report calling for the return of British Rail, which was to be presented at the Houses of Parliament on October 13.

She has also given a number of talks, including a presentation at the recent AGM of the Scottish Artists Union.

Since the Glasgow Effect launched in January, Ellie has been heavily criticised

for apparently using Creative Scotland funds to “go on a sabbatical”, with some accusing her of not having created much art so far.

But at the union AGM, she said she could “count on one hand” the number of days she has taken off since the start of her project, adding that it has exacerbated the issue of loneliness and long hours faced by most freelancers.

Ellie said: “Unfortunately, these two things have got worse for me this year, as I’ve been working on a little project called the Glasgow Effect. Firstly, because of the weight of responsibility and the sheer volume of scrutiny that I received as a result of accepting that public money. I successfully aligned the interests of an entire city with a common goal of taking the p**s out of me.

“The one thing that annoyed me the most was the myth that was being perpetuated of the lazy artist, because it could not be further from the truth.

“I can easily count on the one hand the number of days I’ve had off this year; and because I’ve taken on so much I’m just going to have to work and work until December, ploughing through until the very end when I’ve got the privilege of going back to my actual work.”

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Artist and lecturer Ellie Harrison. Picture: Joanna Craddock.

The duty of artists to ‘stick their neck out’

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When Ellie Harrison’s Glasgow Effect came to the public’s attention, it was initially an innocuous Facebook page explaining the premise of the experiment: not to leave Greater Glasgow for a year.

“By setting this one, simple restriction to her current lifestyle, she intends to test the limits of a ‘sustainable practice’ and to challenge the demand-to-travel placed upon the ‘successful’ artist/academic”, the description read.

Within hours the page was flooded with hundreds of comments accusing the artist of wasting public money (she was granted £15,000 by Creative Scotland), embarking on a “poverty safari” and “trivialising” the real Glasgow Effect, which refers to Glaswegians’ increased risk of dying younger.

So far, Ellie has declined invitations to have her say in the mainstream media but has spoken to a number of independent arts publications, where she has defended the project.

Ellie has argued that artists need to “stick their neck out” and that her aim was to explore the “tale of two cities”, despite the issues of class the project would throw up.