

Institution: University of Oxford
Unit of Assessment: UOA 34 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
Title of case study: <i>THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979</i> : widening public awareness and appreciation of contemporary art
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Elizabeth Price's research into historical archives and collections of film and photography generated an innovative video called <i>THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979</i>. Through presentations of the work, Price influenced public awareness and appreciation of contemporary art, both among art enthusiasts and non-specialists. The impact of the video on opinion formers, expert and public audiences led to the artist receiving the 2012 Turner Prize; through this award, Price was able to instil in a wide international audience the value of public funding for the arts and arts education. Important national and international public collections have since purchased the video, which has increased the reach and longevity of its public impact; also supporting the artist and her commercial representative, which has benefited from introduction through Price's work to prestigious international art collections, and publicity beyond normal art world outlets.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Elizabeth Price was awarded the final Arts Council England Helen Chadwick Fellowship in 2010/11. This annual fellowship was established in 1997 by the Ruskin School of Drawing & Fine Art in partnership with the British School at Rome to help emerging and established artists make new work by spending periods of time in Oxford and Rome. Price was on leave from her post at the Royal College of Art when she took up the fellowship at Oxford (September 2010-April 2011).</p> <p>During her fellowship, Price carried out research towards a narrative single-screen HD video of 25 minutes' duration called <i>THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979</i>. Price's research concentrated on historical archives and collections of film and photography, and how these might be translated and understood through contemporary digital media and its complex processes of dissemination. All of the still and moving images that appear in the video exist in publicly accessible archives and collections, and were digitally captured or recaptured by Price for the purposes of the work.</p> <p>Three distinctly archival sources were referenced, each of which varies in form, logic and subject. The first source was the National Monuments Record, which is a public archive of architecture photography. Within this extensive archive, Price focused on the photography of church architecture, particularly images of the ecclesiastical choir. The second source was the informal repository of moving image on YouTube from which Price appropriated sequences featuring gestures and postures from televised performances of girl groups from the 1960s through the 1980s. The third source was a collection of varied materials relating to the notorious Manchester Woolworths fire of 1979, which Price accessed from the BBC Motion Gallery, BRE Global and the North West Film Archive.</p> <p>The research method involved the selection and digital replication of material from each of these sources, which was undertaken in such a way as to capture evidence of the technical and ideological provenance of the featured artefacts. Software was then used to compose these varied materials into a single edit, generating a coherent narrative that allows for a knowledgeable progression through disparate bodies of material.</p> <p>The insights of the research relate to formal innovations within the moving image, most particularly in the combination of didactic and affective compositional and narrative forms, which are used to deal with varied and complex materials and reflect on the impact of the digital in relation to historical materials.</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>[1] Elizabeth Price, <i>Choir (Parts 1 & 2)</i>, HD video, 9 minutes, 2011</p> <p>Funded by an award of £25,000 from the Arts Council England Helen Chadwick Fellowship.</p> <p>'The film is expertly cut with hi-res images and slick architectural animations, sometimes resembling a TV advert, infotainment programme or industrial documentary. It's this proficiency</p>

with the language of editing that allows Price to collage together a wide range of material creating a convincing, at times bewildering narrative that alternates between seducing the audience and commanding it' (Nathan Budzinski, *Wire*, September 2011, no. 331, p.75)

[2] Elizabeth Price, *THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979*, HD video, 25 minutes, 2012 [REF output no.2)

Winner of the Turner Prize 2012. The Turner Prize is one of the world's most prestigious visual arts award and helps to draw attention to new developments in contemporary art in Britain. The video has since been acquired by Tate (the national collection of British art from 1500 to the present day), Arts Council Collection (one of the largest national loan collections of modern and contemporary British art) and other public and private collections nationally and internationally.

Selected reviews:

'[As] I watched it with mounting excitement, I began to realise that I was in the presence of an artwork that has the potential fundamentally to change the way knowledge is transferred, the way we teach and the way we learn... Elizabeth Price isn't just a good artist she's something much rarer, an important one.' (Richard Dorment, *The Telegraph*, 1 October 2012)

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/turner-prize/9578907/Turner-Prize-2012-Tate-Britain-review.html>

'The artist's exquisite editing manages to conjoin very disparate elements into something strangely involving.' (Sam Phillips, *RA magazine*, 3 October 2012) <http://www.royalacademy.org.uk/ra-magazine/blog/review-turner-prize-2012,294,BAR.html>

'At once visual and acoustic it is a testament to Price's characteristically intelligent handle on the medium of video and language of editing, which has resulted in her being nominated for this year's Turner Prize.' (Paul Hobson, Director, Contemporary Art Society)

<http://membership.contemporaryartsociety.org/news/hobsons-choice-elizabeth-price-at-mot-international/>

4. Details of the impact

The output of Price's research fellowship was a video intended for presentation to audiences as a gallery- or museum-based installation. The first iteration of the film called *Choir (Parts 1 & 2)* was shown in 2011 at Chisenhale (London), Edinburgh Art Festival, New Museum (New York) and the Bielefelder Kunstverein. The film attracted positive media attention with reviews appearing in the *Guardian*, *Wire*, *Art Monthly*, *thisistomorrow* and *Frieze*, and Price was named Artist of the Week by Skye Sherwin in the *Guardian* on 21 July 2011^[i].

Price used the proceeds from the sale of three editions of *Choir (Parts 1 & 2)* to fund the third and final chapter of the narrative and the completed work was retitled *THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979*. *THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979* was one of three films that featured in Price's solo exhibition *HERE*, which was held at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead in spring 2012^[ii]. It was this exhibition that gained her the nomination for the Turner Prize 2012, which the artist went on to win with a showing of *THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979* at Tate Britain in winter 2012-13^[iii]. Adrian Searle, art critic for the *Guardian* wrote that the Turner Prize 2012 exhibition was 'one of the most demanding and thoughtful [exhibitions] in the show's history'^[iv].

THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979 has had an enormous reach both nationally and internationally. Total visitor numbers for *HERE* were 126,735. As a point of reference, only 25,000 more people visited the Turner Prize exhibition when the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art hosted it in 2011^[1]. The total number of visits to the Turner Prize exhibition at Tate Britain in 2012-13 was 70,547, up by 20,000 on the Turner Prize 2010, when Tate Britain last hosted it. Analysis showed that it attracted a young audience of regular visitors with specialist art knowledge, but that a quarter of visitors were new to Tate Britain^[2]. The BALTIC show attracted a similarly young audience mainly from the local area, but it also brought in lots of new visitors to the gallery many of whom had no specialist knowledge of contemporary art^[v].

The Turner Prize exhibition and announcement were covered by all the major British and European newspapers^[3]. The ceremony was transmitted live on Channel 4 television (BARB reports an average daily reach of 13.2 million viewers for that date^[vi]) and Price's work attracted massive

social media attention with over 26,000 tweets bringing it to enormous audiences. Counting only the Twitter accounts with over 50,000 followers, comments on Price's Turner Prize win were distributed to over 15.5 million followers^[2]. Through all this exposure Price's work has had a huge influence on the public awareness and appreciation of contemporary art and the coverage of her win in the print and broadcast media and online has had a demonstrable impact on opinion formers, expert and public audiences as described below.

Analysis of Tate Britain visitor feedback reveals that *THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979* provoked comments mostly about its emotive subject matter and the manner in which the film was installed^[3]. The BALTIC Bites podcast of an interview with Price, which has been viewed over 8,000 times on YouTube, generated similarly engaged comments e.g. 'Saw this last April. Probably the most immersive, evocative installation I've ever seen. The use of sound, darkness and high definition film is just awe-inspiring' and 'Yes there is a lot of bullshit in art, but the thing is, this is not an example of it... The quality of [Price's] work is very high, both conceptually, technically, aesthetically... Really powerful stuff to experience...'^[vii]. The Turner Prize YouTube video was viewed over 10,000 times between December 2012 and July 2013 and the newspaper coverage attracted a lot of reader comments e.g. Guardian features writer @kiracochrane tweeted 'Elizabeth Price wins the Turner Prize - her Woolworth's Choir of 1979 video is brilliant, well worth seeing if you can.'^[viii]

THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979 has had a significant impact on audiences for reasons relating to the artist's choice of subject matter and juxtaposition of content. Price's skilful editing of still and moving images, graphics and sound has allowed her to bring together seemingly disparate elements in the service of a coherent story. One Guardian reader commented online 'I think this is the crux of it, and why [the film] works in my opinion. The slick presentation and assertive insistence of the text. The way the content collides and collapses. There is an unsettling cadence to it all, it makes for disturbing viewing.'^[ix]

While the work has attracted the esteem of industry professionals, it has also proved to be extremely popular in the eyes of the general public. Twitter users commented 'Very pleased Elizabeth Price has won #TurnerPrize #eprice. Raises video editing to the highest pinnacle, art.' (@skirrid 03/12/12); 'I never used to enjoy video art, but I loved Elizabeth Price's film in the Turner Prize. Really captivating and striking stuff. #EPrice' (@graphitegrey 22/10/12); 'Turner Prize winning artist Elizabeth Price shows how archives can be used to create new work' (@TWARchives 04/12/12); and 'Wow. Elizabeth Price's work The Woolworths Choir of 1979 so intense and absorbing.' (@ThisMortalMagic 04/11/12).

Chris Sharratt, news editor for a-n wrote 'For Price, an emotional as well as intellectual connection is clearly paramount – her work gets you in the gut as well as the head.' [x] Richard Dorment in The Telegraph (01/10/12) said 'The Woolworth's Choir of 1979 is not only a visual tour de force, it is 20 of the most exhilarating minutes I've ever spent in an art gallery.'^[xi]

To further enhance the impact of seeing *THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979* the artist designed bespoke environments for each presentation of the work. This approach was not lost on audiences. 'The first thing that will strike you about Elizabeth Price's exhibition at the Baltic is the drama of its presentation [...] a large, dark room [...] via a corridor of fading light [...] the artist's work will suck you in visually, aurally or both,' said David Whetstone in a piece published in both The Journal, 29 February 2012, p.51 and Metro North East, 5 March 2012, p.40.

In Price's acceptance speech for the Turner Prize she emphasised the importance of public funding for the arts and art education^[xii] and she has committed to make *THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979* more publicly accessible in the long-term by selling editions of *Choir (Parts 1 & 2)* and *THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979* to major national and international public collections, including the Arts Council Collection^[xiii], Tate, Stedelijk Museum and Hallen, Haarlem and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston^[3].

The impact of the revenue generated from Price's research is huge relative to the size of the original award from Arts Council England. The sales of *Choir (Parts 1 & 2)* raised £28,000, which Price used to fund the final iteration of the film. The sales of *THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979* raised a further £114,000. Including the income generated from the Turner Prize, £25,000 of

research funding from the Arts Council England Helen Chadwick Fellowship has leveraged approximately £200,000 of income for the artist, which has allowed her to sustain her practice and support the commercial operation of her gallery MOTINTERNATIONAL^[3].

MOTINTERNATIONAL said that the success of Price's work had impacted positively on them by providing the gallery with an introduction to prestigious international art collections and generating reports in the print and broadcast media beyond normal artworld outlets^[3]. The Managing Editor at ArtReview tweeted 'Going up in the world: @MOT_Intl ditch the eastend highrise for Bond Street premises. Elizabeth Price is the opening show. 24 April.' (@olibasciano 09/03/12).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Testimonial evidence

- [1] Email statement and reports from Curator of Exhibitions and Research, the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art 08/07/2013
- [2] Email statement and reports from Information Assistant, Tate 21/06/2013
- [3] Email statement and reports from Curator, MOTINTERNATIONAL 14/06/2013

Other sources of corroboration

- [i] Link to the Chisenhale exhibition webpage and link at bottom of page to press coverage http://www.chisenhale.org.uk/events/interim_event.php?id=44
- [ii] Solo exhibition *HERE* at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art 03/02/12 – 27/05/12 <https://www.balticmill.com/whats-on/exhibitions/detail/elizabeth-price>
- [iii] *Turner Prize 2012* exhibition at Tate Britain 02/10/12 – 06/01/2013 <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/turner-prize-2012>
- [iv] Adrian Searle, Turner prize 2012 exhibition review: is this the best one yet?, *Guardian*, newspaper article (01/10/12) <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/oct/01/2012-turner-prize-exhibition-review>
- [v] Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 'The BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Audience Profiling, January 2008' available from <http://culturehive.co.uk/resources/who-visits-the-baltic-centre-for-contemporary-art-and-why>
- [vi] Channel 4 showing of Turner Prize 2012 <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/turner-prize/episode-guide/series-2/> BARB weekly total viewing summary for week commencing 03/12/12 <http://tinyurl.com/p55e45a>
- [vii] Youtube Baltic Bites video showing viewing figures plus user comments used in the narrative <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7NnbXjJr8o>
- [viii] Tweet from @kiracochrane (03/12/12) [remaining tweets referenced in-line using username and date] <https://twitter.com/KiraCochrane/status/275692283343540224>
- [ix] 'Xendless' online reader comment on Guardian article 04/12/12 <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/dec/04/elizabeth-price-turner-prize-2012#comment-19903087>
- [x] Chris Sharratt, Elizabeth Price and the Turner Prize Spotlight, a-n, online review (04/12/12). <http://new.a-n.co.uk/news/single/turner-prize>
- [xi] Richard Dormont, Turner Prize 2012, Tate Britain, review, The Telegraph, newspaper article (01/10/12) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/turner-prize/9578907/Turner-Prize-2012-Tate-Britain-review.html>
- [xii] Charlotte Higgins, 'Turner prize winner Elizabeth Price warns against marginalisation of the arts', *Guardian*, newspaper article (04/12/12) <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/dec/04/turner-prize-elizabeth-price-arts>
- [xiii] Arts Council England, 'Arts Council Collection, New Acquisitions 2011-12' <http://issuu.com/fallingupbrochure/docs/2011-12/?e=3230683/1582033>