Hong Kong Arts Development Council
International Arts Leadership Roundtable 2017

Plenary 3: Exploring Boundaries of the Arts

Developing Frameworks the Support Genuine Collaboration across Cultures and Disciplines

Full transcript of speech by
Dr. Richard GRANT, Former Chair of Creative New Zealand

I want to start as my colleagues have done by thanking the Hong Kong Arts Development Council for the generous invitation to be here, for their hospitality, for their organisation. The great advantage of talking on the second day of meetings like this is that before taking to the podium you've learned here a lot from the people who have preceded you. And that is very interesting but also meant that I have to work very late last night to recast my remarks.

I am invited to talk about "Exploring the Boundaries of the Art". And this is a question which I have to approach much as Mr. Rupert MYER (Chair, Australia Council for the Arts) and Mr. Simon BRAULT (Director & CEO, Canada Council for the Arts) yesterday from the perspective who one until very recently as Chair of Creative New Zealand had to develop public policy about funding the arts.

In our case in New Zealand, this means not only upholding the freedom of expression of the arts in New Zealand society, but also acknowledging the place and role of Maori and current part in New Zealand, and also the place of Pacific people in New Zealand. And the last point is particularly interesting because in some cases for some of the cultures of the South Pacific, their culture today is expressed by people who lived in New Zealand more than people who live on the –Pacific nation from which they came. So, New Zealand is, if you like, a laboratory which nourishes those cultures from remote islands of the Pacific.

I want to divide my presentation into two parts. The first is to deal with the public policy issues of arts funding in a modern society, and the second is far more prosaic and far more detailed. And I just want to hold up for a moment, one very small part of Creative New Zealand work to see if it meets the test of exploring the boundaries. So, you're going to get the big picture stuff and a very little piece of detail.

Before I start, I want to talk about five occupations that didn't exist in 2006. Amongst the occupations that didn't exist in 2006 according to Forbes magazine, one is an app developer, second is a social media manager, third is a cloud computing specialist, the fourth is YouTube content creator, and the fifth probably not surprisingly an Uber driver. And as a reminder of how rapidly things change in such a short space of time and how that change has been accelerating. And the discussion yesterday was about how that affects the arts and what shapes the arts should be in the future.

As artists become more connected globally, their influences and experiences are shifting and transforming. Technology is not just about defining art and creativity at the creative end of the process, and we haven't talked very much about those. But, it is also at the receiving and consumer end of the process. We talk about how art is going to be created in the technological age. Do we talk very much about how art is going to consume in the technological age? That's not the only change. Our society is changing as well that has very widespread implications for arts policy.

When I was 10 years old, 83% of the New Zealand populations was Pakeha, European. Today, that's 66%. That's in the space of 55 years, two generations. This trend will continue in New Zealand as I suspect to continue in other places. And that's one of the reasons why Creative New Zealand is so committed to developing partnership in this region of the world. Because New Zealand is becoming more and more diverse in their backgrounds and we are expecting art funding organisation is to reflect that, and to reflect their culture in what we do in New Zealand. We also have an aging population though not as dramatic as in some countries, but it's still a very important factor. Technology is not always a factor that helps an aging society. We have to take account of that in making policy. We should note that a 83 year old who can do virtual reality, as somebody who I think is pretty competent, but not everybody is on that category.

So, I want to turn really, now, to what we have done, and there's one programme. It was an attempt - to see if we could push the boundaries out a bit and do something new and also include international cooperation. So, this is the International Col-lab HK-NZ-UK, a recent pilot programme which was supported by funders and curators in three territories: New Zealand, Hong Kong and Scotland. It's global from our point of view. It's a good example of cooperation between artists, curators and funding agencies. The objectives were to create a strongly-linked network in different countries of practitioners who can work effectively together across regions and develop artistic work in common. The programme is supported by the British Council, Creative New Zealand, Creative Scotland, and West Kowloon Cultural District Authority, and co-curated by the UK's Edinburgh Fringe, Basement Theater in New Zealand, and Hong Kong's West Kowloon Cultural District Authority. 9 performing artists, 3 from each country came together during this year's Edinburgh Fringe Festival for a two-week programme. This was not a commercial operation. They didn't have to sell their work. This was a collaborative exercise.

The pilot ended in August but we have an ongoing commitment. We've done the first phase in Scotland and we will do the second phase in New Zealand and the third phase in Hong Kong. And we've learned some lessons so far. I just want to give you 3-4 of them.

Time. You can't do this in a short frame of time, so 2-3 years is the minimum. The programme may have to be renewed and it may have to go longer. Secondly, the programme had to be artists-led. The administrators couldn't decide what it was, the artist has to decide what they had to do. Multidisciplinary was important but not essential, but we did get multidisciplinary participants. It was a commitment to raise reciprocity, so what we did in Hong Kong, or Scotland, and in New Zealand was reciprocal. And how did we as an arts organization respond to the opportunity.

So, these are the list for the funders. First, we had an open mind. Second, we consult with funders and developers. We didn't write the prescription ourselves. We agreed on shared objectives. And finally, and obviously, most importantly we put our money where our mouth was and funded it. So, we may have to twig the programme as it goes forward to get more people in from different disciplines, so that we have different collaborative experiences. But the commitment to that international cooperation is very deeply embedded in our programme.

So, that's just a very small example of what you can do to push the boundaries if you're prepared to put some money into thinking about new ways of funding. That's a funder's point of view. Taking risks is very important. You can't just expect that these things will happen because you want them to happen. You have to take risk. And if you lose some money, you lose some money. Listening to the creators, getting the participants to self-define the programme; these are all very important parts which are changed from the way traditional art funders have operated. I'm not saying that Creative New Zealand will want to extend that to its whole programme, but it's as if a way of seeing and testing of what the organization does.

Can I come back just to where I started about those new occupations that have emerged since 2006? I guess in 2017 if you drew up a list of 10 occupations that don't exist 5 years ago, you'll be even more confused. But, the point of yesterday, and I think the point of today is what is the narrative, the new narrative of the arts in this technologically-driven society? We know that we need the arts, how do we define what others do in 2017 or 2026? And as I said before, one of the key things that we have to address is not just the creative side. It's the consumption side and the audience side. So, thank you very much.

-   END   -