

Developing an Artistic Career in the Era of the Creative Industries

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Dr. Suzette Major is a senior lecturer with the Department of Screen & Media Studies, University of Waikato. Her teaching and research activities are centered on the creative industries, arts marketing, and New Zealand film. With a background in management, Suzette is interested in the relationship, connections and tensions between commerce and culture, as well as career management and development in the arts. Suzette has published work on film marketing, arts marketing and creative industries, and is currently conducting a longitudinal study mapping artistic careers in the era of creative industries. Suzette is also the co-director of the company Arts.Biz Ltd.

Abstract

This paper outlines a long-term study investigating career management and development in the arts. Framing this study is the emergence of creative industries policies, which rest artistic ventures on economic foundations. This research is interested in how artistic careers in New Zealand are changing in this new era. A participatory action research approach, mirrored on a career project undertaken by Gatenby and Humphries, is being conducted with artists throughout New Zealand in order to explore how individual artists are affected by government policies on the arts. The findings will help us understand how artists develop and manage careers in the new era of creative industries.

Keywords

Artistic careers, creative industries, participatory action research, creative workers

Introduction

“What do you do?” “I’m an artist” “Yeah, but what’s your *real* job?” Not long ago, to identify yourself as an artist was often met with such a negative response. To be an artist, was to stand outside of mainstream society; more concerned with creative expression than commercial success. Such perceptions, which often existed both within and outside artistic communities, perpetuated the ‘myth of the artist’ – the idea that an artist is “vague and non-material”, and at it’s extreme, starving and suffering for their artistic work (author unknown, 2005, p7). More recently however, such perceptions are being challenged. Working as an artist (or within an arts related industry) is increasingly seen as a viable profession. The artists’ myth seems to be crumbling, and with it, artists are becoming professional business people, developing economically successful careers in their respective field. So what has changed, and how is the new era impacting on artists? This paper outlines developments that have occurred in the New Zealand arts environment, and the impact of these changes for artists in this country. Based on this contextual discussion, the paper then outlines a long-term New Zealand study, that is currently underway, investigating career management and development in the arts. This study aims to map artistic careers over a ten-year period, in order to determine how the new era of creative industries is impacting on individual artists, and their career choices, in New Zealand.

The change towards validating the arts as a viable career choice in New Zealand is multi-faceted. Firstly, changes have occurred over recent years in our secondary and tertiary education system. Over the last ten years in particular, the secondary school curriculum has developed to enable young people to begin education and training in the arts at an early age. Courses like Media Studies, Graphic Design, Drama, Dance and Photography, as well as the traditional subjects such as painting and printmaking are now an integral part of the secondary school curriculum. To cope with the rapid rise in young people wanting to pursue their creative practice at a tertiary level and to meet the increasing demand for creative skill in the workplace, most tertiary institutions now also offer a huge range of practical and theoretical courses across many arts based disciplines. Allowing students to focus their study on the arts, both at secondary and tertiary levels, helps position this field as a more viable career option.

However, arts students are not alone in studying creative pursuits. The more widely defined field of creativity is also attracting attention (and students) across a range of subjects including management and commerce. This trend is a reflection of the increasing demand for creative skills in the so-called knowledge economy; an era where “creativity [should be seen as] the core competency of a nation” (Florida, 2002). The rise of creativity-type courses within business schools is just as strong as creative or artistic courses within the arts faculties.

The most significant development that has impacted on the changing arts scene in New Zealand however relates to government support, particularly since 1999 when the current Labour government came to power. In 1999, Labour’s newly elected Prime Minister Helen Clark took on the arts and culture portfolio signaling the priority of arts and culture in New Zealand of the then-new government. In a move away from the policies of the outgoing National government, who had practiced non-intervention in relation to the arts, the new Labour government began initiating a series of policy and funding changes, the largest of which was the Cultural Recovery package.

Announced in May of 2000, the Cultural Recovery package injected an initial eighty million New Zealand dollars into the arts and culture sectors and promised an extra twenty million dollars every year for the next three years. Previously struggling organizations like the Royal New Zealand Ballet, the New Symphony Orchestra and the New Zealand Film Archive received a much needed boost in funding. The package allocated funding for establishment of new bodies, including NZ\$22 million establishment grant to a new Film Production Fund and NZ\$2 million to establish a Music Industry Commission. The package also allocated an extra NZ\$7 million dollars of annual funding to NZ On Air, including NZ\$2 million for its music-related work, and NZ\$5 million for New Zealand TV programmes, especially children's TV. A cash injection of up to NZ\$27.909 million was also allocated to cover NZ On Air's shortfall in 2000 after the National government's abrupt abolition of the Broadcasting Fee (Creative New Zealand, 2000).

The funding allowed existing government agencies like Creative New Zealand, established in 1994 to promote and develop arts and culture in New Zealand, to play a more powerful role in decision making. Creative New Zealand is now the country's primary funding body for arts organisations and artists in New Zealand. The announcement re-emphasised both the Labour governments and Clark’s own personal commitment to the arts and cultural sectors:

A nation can be rich in every material sense, but, if it fails to provide for and nurture creative expression, it is impoverished in immeasurable ways. Our arts, our culture and our heritage define and strengthen us as a country, as communities and as individuals. This sector expresses our unique national identity. Our government has a vision of a vibrant arts, cultural and creative sector which all New Zealanders can enjoy. This sector can also provide

sustainable and rewarding employment, and contribute a great deal to economic growth and prosperity. (Creative New Zealand, 2000)

The re-focus on the arts and cultural sector led to a re-imagining of these sectors in terms of their economic potential. This development is encapsulated in government policy on the ‘creative industries’, a term which has come to represent the core of the arts/business interface. The term, ‘creative industries’, arrived in New Zealand, via Australia, from the United Kingdom. The first use of this term was in the United Kingdom after Tony Blair established the Creative Industries Task Force in 1998. The task force’s key goal was to look for ways of maximising the economic impact of British goods and services in the creative sector.

The Creative Industries Task Force defined the creative industries as: “Those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (Creative Industries Task Force, 1998). The industries included were advertising, architecture, arts and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, performing arts, publishing software, television and radio.

The chairman on the Creative Industries Task Force was Chris Smith, an MP in Tony Blair’s government. Smith spoke at a Creative Industries forum jointly hosted in Auckland by the British Council and Creative New Zealand in September of 2000. At this forum Smith, argued that government support of the arts was not enough. He emphasized that governments had to understand how the arts did and could contribute to a countries economy.

While the most important element of any sensible arts policy, of course, is to ensure that you are supporting the arts as a government. They speak to the life of the spirit and the imagination. They help to make life worth living. They are part of the fullest expression of human intellect. At the same time, however we needed to understand how the arts and cultural and creative activity more generally had a major impact on the national economy as well. That not only were the arts and creative activity important for what they did for the individual, for the individual spirit, but they were also important for what they did for the national economy. (Smith, 2000).

As evidenced by Smith’s appearance at the Creative Industries Forum in 2000 and the current governments direct adoption of the definition of the creative industries set out in the British Task Force document, New Zealand has been eager to learn from and imitate the creative industries policy set out by the Blair government in Britain. At this stage there has been no major examination of whether the British framework is the most suitable for this country. There may be an arguable case that there are conditions that are unique to both countries artistic environments and, as such, direct importing of frameworks and policies needs to be more closely examined.

The semantics of the term ‘creative industries’ have inspired academics and art practitioners in both the United Kingdom and Australia to debate the origins and implications of this phrase. Stuart Cunningham, director of the Creative Industries Research Center in Brisbane, provides one of the most comprehensive discussions on this debate in Australasia. In his paper *From Cultural to Creative Industries* he attributes the adoption of this term by governments in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, above other such similar terms like cultural industries to way it captures an “economic enterprise dynamic” (Cunningham, 2002, p1). Cunningham (2002) argues that for governments the term has a more international feel to it, as opposed to ‘cultural industries’ which seemingly focuses only on the individual country, as culture can be considered

specific to each separate nation state. The term 'cultural industries' seems to denote tradition, nationalism and to a certain extent a reliance on government funding. Cunningham (2002) maintains that replacing the term 'cultural industries' with 'creative industries' removes the connotations of tradition and state funding while reflecting the global trend towards technological, economic and organizational innovation.

In New Zealand there is a clear link being established between innovation and the creative industries. The creative industries have been included in *Growing an Innovative New Zealand* (Ministry of Economic Development, 2002a) the governments framework for innovation and technology. Innovation has become one of the cornerstones of the current Labour government's policy and fostering innovation is seen as a fundamental part of this countries future direction. It can be summarized as follows:

New Zealand's real per capita income fell below the OECD average in 1970 and has remained there ever since. Drawing on international research the New Zealand government recognises the need to invest in factors of production other than capital and labour. Growing international trends suggested the importance of innovation in the development of economic growth. Knowledge has become a valuable commodity and the New Zealand government sponsored the Knowledge Wave conference in 2001. (Ministry of Economic Development, 2002a, p13-14).

Five years on from the hype surrounding the 'knowledge wave' and the age of information, it is possible that we are facing the promotion of a new age, the age of creativity. The head of Creative New Zealand, Peter Biggs, has suggested we have moved beyond the age of information and are about to embark on an age where creativity, not knowledge, is the most valued commodity. Biggs (2003) suggests that New Zealand needs to undergo a metamorphosis as a nation, whereby we identify ourselves as creative instead of agrarian or industrial. Biggs (2003) goes so far to say that creativity should be the new nationalism and suggests that those industries traditionally associated with creativity and therefore the arts have a huge role to play in the future economic well being of the country.

This new era of the creative industries means artists are now being primarily valued in economic ways, and are treated as much as business people as they are artists (worthy of investment for example, rather than funding). Arts and creative activities are seen as potentially economically viable, and correspondingly, these sectors are increasingly perceived as a valid profession. But what does this shift towards creative industries thinking mean for artists, in particular individual non-commercially orientated artists? How are the changes that have occurred in recent years in the New Zealand arts environment affecting artists themselves, particularly in terms of their career development? In an effort to understand the changing nature of the arts scene, and the impact on artists, a long-term study has been designed that attempt to map the development of artistic careers over a 10-year period.

Specifically, this research aims to examine how artists are developing careers within the emerging framework of creative industries. The shift from valuing their work for its intrinsic or intangible qualities, towards evaluating the arts in economic terms, provides the lens within which to examine career management and development in the arts. Such an objective demands a long-term research approach that maps artistic career development over a period of time, and would naturally fit a more qualitative approach that allows artists to express how their individual career decision-making is being affected by the macro changes at a governmental level.

In New Zealand, much of the current research undertaken into artistic career management and development is highly quantitative. An example of such research is the Creative New Zealand's survey entitled *Te Whakaahua o te Tangata Pukenga - Portrait of the Artist* (2003). This survey involved over a thousand New Zealand artists and was designed to "paint a picture of New Zealand artists in a changing world". The survey set out to investigate a number of areas including artists' early interest in the arts; their career paths, education and training; their business skills; their professional development; their international experience; the marketing and promotion of their work; and their income and expenditure. *Portrait of an Artist* (2003) presents the findings in a primarily quantitative manner by identifying major themes and providing a large amount of statistical information. Included in the results of the survey was a section entitled 'Why artists do it' which identified what artists value about their work and how they view their contribution to New Zealand society. Given the changing arts environment in New Zealand and the increasing focus on the creative industries as an area for the development of economic growth, the questions surrounding value and the artist are incredibly complex and they warrant closer examination using a more qualitative and dialogic method of investigation.

A qualitative approach to studying artistic careers is supported by the work of John Tusa (2003), and Paul Allen and Hugo Glendinning (2001), who in their recent publications *On Creativity* and *Art not Chance* have advocated one-on-one open interviews as a means to understanding the artistic process and practice. Tusa's (2003) book, *On Creativity* provides a qualitative approach to examining artistic process and creativity. Tusa (2003) interviews fourteen artists about their working lives and creative practice. Each chapter in the book tells the story of a different artist currently living and working in the United Kingdom. The activities that these artists engage in include performance, painting, music and architects. Tusa (2003) allows the artists to tell their own story about their creativity, and draws the conclusion that "creative, creation and creativity are some of the most overused and ultimately debased words in the language" which are "liberally applied by everybody from bureaucrats to politicians to think tanks". Tusa (2003) cites the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in the United Kingdom and its 2001 paper, *Culture and Creativity: the Next Ten Years* as a prime example of this liberal application. In Tusa's (2003) introduction, he suggests that everybody is *not* creative - that the artist's creation is an 'exceptional act'. It is the work of striving for perfection that "sets it and those who engage in it aside". Tusa (2003) is suggesting that artists are "special" in a way most of the population may never be. *On Creativity* demonstrates that the creative process is often painful, isolating, and extremely difficult to channel, manufacture or produce on demand. Tusa (2003) argues that the current focus on the industrialisation of creativity, with connotations of exploitation, manufacture, reproduction and sustainability negate the unique, special and turbulent characteristics of creative and artistic labor. It is important to note that Tusa writes this book in direct response to the work of Richard Florida (2002) whose book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, has influenced policy development on the creative industries. By directly choosing to do in-depth interviews with a small selection of artists, Tusa's (2003) qualitative approach contrasts with the quantitative, statistical representation of artistic labor presented by Florida (2002) and those who have embraced his theory (for example, Landry 2000).

This research similarly contrasts with the quantitative, statistical representation of artistic labor inherent to the work of Florida and others, and the surveys of government agencies like Creative New Zealand, and attempts to explore artistic careers in the era of creative industries through a long-term qualitative research approach. Such a long-term, individually focused, qualitative research project on career management has been conducted with women in management organizations by Waikato University colleagues Bev Gatenby and Maria Humphries. This study with artists aims to mimic the Gatenby & Humphries project, which took a participatory action research approach.

In the Gatenby and Humphries (1999) career project, a group of woman in a university school of management studies were ask to join a long term study that examined how their careers were shaped by gender and how their gender was shaping their careers. That study lasted over 10 years and included over 100 participants. Each participant was sent a questionnaire every 6 months that consisted of a range of open-ended questions about their paid and unpaid work, career decisions, commitments and social concerns. In asking such questions, the questionnaire inevitably prompted each respondent to reflect on their career decision-making, as well as set goals for the next 6 months in terms of their career. Every 2 years, participants were then brought together for career workshops, held by Gatenby and Humphries, which included career planning and reflection exercises, discussions about direction of the research and opportunities for joint interpretation.

Applying the Gatenby and Humphries (1999) framework to artists in New Zealand allows for a participatory action, qualitative, long-term research approach, which can map artistic careers in this new era of creative industries. While this framework provides some useful methodological guidelines, it also raises some challenges, particularly in terms of who the participants might be. Throughout this paper, the term 'artist' has been regularly used, however, who exactly is 'an artist'? What art forms should be included in this study? Obviously, the creative industries policies outlined above position the arts as part of a broader economic agenda, and the traditional arts including visual and performing arts are listed alongside more commercially orientated sectors such as film, computer software and design. Given that the creative industries include the more profitable film, television and design sectors, it is important to note that while the creative industries may be economically healthy, the arts in the traditional sense may not necessarily share this prognosis. The ease at which the government and media slips between one term and the next creates the impression that 'the arts' and 'the creative industries' are the same thing. This could generate a false impression of how financially secure those involved with artistic practice in areas such as theatre, visual art, dance and literature for example may be. No doubt, to speak of the benefits of creative industries initiatives for commercially orientated sectors seems more logical – the 'poster child' included in the *Growing an Innovative New Zealand* document is Weta for example, the company responsible for creating the special effects for Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Yet, individual visual artists, who may paint in their home studio, endeavoring to exhibit their work through galleries for example, seem far removed from the glamorous (and profitable) world of major motion picture production. It is clear that the government output on the creative industries relates to, but is not solely focused on 'the arts'. Rather much of the focus is on channeling the forces behind artistic endeavor, like creativity, into wealth production within the creative industries. So where do the traditionally defined arts, like theatre, visual art, literature, music and dance come into play?

This conceptual issue, regarding who an artist is and therefore who the participants of this long-term study may be, is a current challenge. Such definitional challenges are outlined by Roodhouse (2005) in which he rightly questions the classification systems of the creative industries, and suggests, "a fundamental structural failure of the creative industries concept as defined generally by DCMS and others; in that the visual arts are not represented, but, instead demoted and primarily located in the arts and antiques trade as products" (p1). This research is interested in addressing this challenge, with a particular focus on the non-commercial visual artist, who interestingly are those "creative workers" often ignored in creative industries rhetoric.

The *Mapping Artistic Careers in the Creative Industries Era* research project is in its early stages. Funding has been received to initiate this long-term study, and explore the contextual, conceptual and methodological challenges outlined in this paper. Over the next two years, the primary

research with artists in New Zealand will commence (once the selection criteria is determined), and their career development will be mapped over the next decade. It will be particularly interesting to consider how possible changes in government, and the resulting shifts in creative industries policies, might affect these participants over the course of the study. Equally, in that the arts is regarded as a more valid profession (due to shifts in education, as well as government initiatives), how artists may now view or value their work will be interesting to study. The economic measures inherent to creative industries policies might also raise questions regarding the 'arts for arts sake' argument, or the 'myth of the artist'. Has this now become extraneous as artists are seen more as business people contributing to our national economy? This long-term, qualitative research study will attempt to explore such issues in-depth, in order to track how artistic careers develop as creative industries frameworks are implemented in New Zealand.

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