

SHAPING NEW ATTITUDES

The Department of Innovation, Industry Science and Research is calling for a review of the national innovation system. As a lead up to this review, the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS) held a one day forum called The Arts and the Innovation Agenda in Sydney on Monday 31 March.

The arts sector came together to address the implications the new Government's innovation agenda has for people working in practice, in research and education and in cultural institutions. Catrina Vignando, General Manager of Craft Australia presented the paper, [Shaping new attitudes](#) at the workshop.

Craft Australia is the National peak advocacy organisation for Australian contemporary craft and design. As a national peak industry body representing the sector we see a broad picture of the directions that artists pursue in establishing sustainable arts careers and how they engage with the creative industries. From this position we are seeing a great deal of change taking place in the arts sector. Changes in the way artists carry out their practice and changes in the market's demand for cultural products.

In each instance the communication revolution through new information technologies has had a major impact on both these areas of production and demand. The web 2.0 consumer is savvy and wants to be involved in determining their cultural consumption. The web 2.0 artist has access to markets that are not bound by physical geography. Increasing numbers of designers, craftspeople, and artists are making use of digital technologies in the conceptual development, design, prototyping and production of their work.

The outcome of this change and its ramification on sustainable arts practice in Australia is one of the principle issues of this seminar. The key question we face is defined by Prof Stuart Cunningham in his introduction to *The Arts and the Innovation Agenda* program, 'how do we better support the diffusion and take up of new technologies and innovative processes across industries and the community?'

For me this translates to *how do we shape new attitudes and whose attitudes do we need to shape?* All of us in the arts know that we are innovative; it is after all, the very nature of creative practice to be so. We have all read the statistics that point to the rapid growth of the creative industries as one of the areas of fastest economic growth in the developed world.

So if we know all of this, why do we have to shape new attitudes?

Put simply, the field of practice is changing, but government policy to support this development is not keeping up with practice.

In the first instance we need to reshape our thinking and see ourselves as an industry. To paraphrase Narelle Kennedy, from the National Innovation System Review Panel, our individual sectors, together, form one of the largest industry footprints in the country. By identifying as a broad industry made up of many sub-sectors we become a louder voice to assert our needs to government. This is a role currently performed by ArtsPeak, a network of peak arts organisations that could grow to be more representative of the arts sector.

In the case of craft and design Craft Australia works very closely with the network of Australian Craft and Design Centers, ACDC.

<http://www.craftaus.com.au/coa/acdc.php>. This is a network of publicly funded agencies based in each capital city of Australia. ACDC organisations promote exhibit and lobby for the needs of Australian craft and design practitioners through exhibitions, touring programs and sector capacity building initiatives.

As a sector that represents creatives that readily engage in the take up of new technologies and innovative processes, we need to re-shape the public's perception of this sector's dynamic practice and its capacity to lead in the development of new design, manufacturing and distribution models. A case that was clearly articulated by the exhibition and symposium organised by Dr Grace Cochrane for the Powerhouse Museum in March last year titled *Smartworks, design and the hand made*.

<http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/smartworks/index.asp>. Similarly, the

Freestyle, new Australian design for living exhibition

<http://www.freestyledesign.info/>, organized by Object, Australian Centre for Craft and Design, and touring to the Triennale Design Museum in Milan in May this year, presents new models of innovative practice. Both demonstrate the effectiveness of national and international touring exhibitions in reshaping the public's perception about the nature of current arts practice in Australia.

An example of cross sector collaboration and research, another key aspect of innovation, is evidenced through the *ReSkin* project <http://www.anat.org.au/reskin/> held in February last year at The ANU Canberra School of Art. This was a three week intensive laboratory on wearable technologies developed by the Australian Network for Art and Technology, ANAT, in collaboration with Craft Australia. This immersive laboratory brought together key international artists in the field of wearable technologies with Australian new media and sound artists, jewelers and fashion designers. Outcomes from this project are continuing well beyond the time frame of the laboratory and have reshaped the attitudes of the artists about cross sector collaborations. The public's perception of the viable outcomes generated through integrated practices, such as *ReSkin*, is also reshaped through the presentation of this work in exhibitions and fashion catwalks.

Another program that has begun to shape new attitudes about craft and design for government agencies has been the *Maker to Manufacture to Market* Strategy by the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts.

http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/the_arts/features/maker_to_manufacturer_to_market

Seeded from input by the ACDC network through the Applied Ideas program, this strategy provided venture capital for the selected artists to invest in high volume production of their successful prototypes. Based on the success of this model, the Australia Council for the Arts successfully bid for funding from AusIndustry to deliver the next generation of this program called Project springboard: entrepreneurship for designers. <http://www.australiandesignunit.com/springboard/>

Such programs provide assistance to these micro creative businesses that bear all the risk for their creative output both creatively and financially. Despite being highly flexible and responsive to niche market demands, many such companies fall by the wayside under such pressure because of their low working capital. We need to shape new attitudes about the value of this research and development to culture, industry and the economy so that makers are better supported to manage the risk of their creative production.

What would help to grow this sector and increase returns to the economy?

The opportunity afforded by the review of the innovation agenda is a tremendous start and Craft Australia welcomes the Government's initiative in this direction. In many ways this is an opportunity to reshape Government attitudes about the role of the arts in the innovation economy.

How craft Australia will work to respond to the innovation review

- Research into the productivity generated by this sector. This will give strong statistical data that can then be used to gain further support from industry and the community for the outputs generated by the craft design sector.
- Identify current barriers to the sector, for instance access to R&D programs and R&D tax concessions for industry to enable the development and growth of new products and ideas.
- Access to patent information and support that currently is not favoring small scale creatives with low working capital to invest in their design development.
- Recognition of the role that public agencies, such as the ACDC network, play in facilitating and enabling growth in the sector by providing infrastructure support to small companies that are punching way above their weight in their achievements.
- Increase access to international markets for Australian creative products.
- Recognition of arts based research through the introduction of relevant metrics in order to increase academic research in the practical arts.

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