

brokering the intangible: The art of cultural brokerage

Representations of peoples, cultures and institutions do not just happen. They are mediated, negotiated, and yes, brokered through often complex processes with myriad challenges and constraints imposed by those involved, all of whom have their own interests and concerns... like other forms of brokerage, cultural dealings rely on an extensive base of knowledge, formal and experiential, but they are, in the end, an art.

Richard Kurin from *Reflections of a Culture Broker, A View From the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution, 1997.

We have heard of stockbrokers, mortgage brokers and wool brokers. But what is a 'cultural broker'?

Cultural brokers present to the public a culture that is not their own. Many of us who work in the arts act as cultural brokers, perhaps without even realising it.

The Australia Council is bringing the creator of the term 'cultural brokerage', Dr Richard Kurin, to Australia on a public lecture tour. In his recent book, *Reflections of a Culture Broker, A View From the Smithsonian*, Kurin looks back on the professional challenges of delivering major cultural presentations as well as national and international touring exhibitions and high-profile events. To illustrate the concept of cultural brokerage, Kurin presents a fascinating selection of case studies and suggests a code of conduct for individuals and agencies involved in this work.

According to Kurin, the principles of cultural brokerage involve direct negotiation and collaboration with the people whose culture is being represented. The protocols of the community as custodians of heritage need to be observed. The work of the cultural broker should also be transparent and supported by scholarly research that provides a context for the practices or traditions represented.

He believes the best outcomes are achieved when the process is viewed as an exchange of knowledge and skills which empower both parties and encourage cross-cultural understanding and continuing meaningful exchanges. This leads to issues about

authenticity. When the work of the cultural broker is transparent and founded within a coherent and scholarly context, establishing authenticity for cultural practices and traditions becomes more achievable.

Richard Kurin is the director of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage at the Smithsonian Institution in the United States of America, and has recently been appointed director of National Programs for the Smithsonian. He will be negotiating a \$US200 million deal with Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft, to develop the largest online archive of roots, folk and heritage music.

Culturally, Kurin is a New Yorker, born in the South Bronx and raised in Queens. However, he gained some of his deepest insights into the interpretation of culture in Pakistan, where he studied indigenous kinship systems in the late 1970s.

He undertook fieldwork for his doctoral dissertation in cultural anthropology in Chakpur, a settlement of about 1,500 people in the Punjab province of Pakistan. Initially he was seen as an outsider by the community, but gradually the locals gave him a role and an identity in the community, which enabled him to participate in, and be accepted into, Punjabi village life.

Issues of cultural theory and representation have been the focus of Kurin's professional life and scholarship. In 1999, the American Folklore Society awarded Kurin the Botkin Prize for Lifetime Achievement in Public Folklore. He has worked with public officials, cultural organisations, sponsors and the media across America and in more than 50 nations.

The Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage promotes the understanding and continuity of contemporary grassroots cultures in the US and other countries. 'Grassroots culture', or folklife, is living cultural heritage as expressed through the beliefs or customs of communities of people.

Established in 1963, the Smithsonian's Festival of American Folklife has become a model for other cultural institutions, putting into practice the concept that 'tradition bearers' are central to cultural presentations and public discourse about culture.

The Festival is thus at the nexus of scholarship, cultural community advocacy and public education. Its founding mission – 'To take the things out of their glass cages and connect them to real life' – means that the festival engages the public and connects them to the stories and people who made and used the objects preserved in the Smithsonian Institution.

The Festival is the largest annual cultural event in Washington DC and attracts about one million visitors to the city each year.

Rani Austin

Rani Austin is the Accessibility Development Project Officer at the National Archives of Australia. She is a participant in the 2004 Multicultural Arts Professional Development Program, supported by the Australia Council.

Dr Richard Kurin's public presentations

Melbourne: Tuesday 9 November, 2.00-3.30pm, National Gallery of Victoria

Canberra: Wednesday 10 November, 3.00-4.30pm, National Gallery of Australia

Sydney: Thursday 11 November, 10.30-12.00pm, Art Gallery of New South Wales

Refreshments will be served following the presentations. For more information visit <www.kape.com.au>. Dr Kurin's visit to Australia and New Zealand is supported by the Australia Council and the US Consulate.



The new context of art

The Empires, Ruins + Networks: Art in Real Time Culture conference aimed to facilitate discussion on key issues affecting contemporary art. The broad context for the conference was defined by developments in new media on the one hand, and the post-Tampa, post 9/11 debates about cultural difference on the other.

The Empires Ruins + Networks: Art in Real Time Culture conference in April 2004 was a sell-out success, with delegates and speakers travelling from Australia and overseas to participate in the three-day program of events and workshops. Over 300 people attended the keynote address by Okwui Enwezor.

Following the conference, the Australia Council held a roundtable discussion to analyse the main themes of the conference program, and identify issues pertinent to the future of our Arts in a Multicultural Australia (AMA) policy.

Facilitated by Teresa Crea, creative director of South Australia's performance company, parallelo, the roundtable gathered a cross-section of international and national curators, producers, artists and policy makers – a rare opportunity for experts in a range of artforms to analyse the role of diversity in the arts, its value in shaping local culture, and emerging trends in artistic practice. A summary of the roundtable discussion is below.

The role of the artist

Participants discussed the ways globalisation is leading to new artistic relationships. Artists and producers are questioning their roles and artists are seeking to work more closely with their communities. There appears to be a reintegration of social issues and values within their practice. Different artistic relationships are being forged at both micro and macro levels – with local communities and via transnational collaborations and networks.

Changes are occurring in the way artistic works are viewed by audiences. For example, some visual artists are now including social rituals as

an integral part of their work. The conventional mechanisms for presenting artistic works – the so-called 'white box' gallery spaces – are often no longer appropriate or relevant.

The focus on collaborative practice has significant implications for artistic authorship, product distribution, cultural representation and negotiation. In particular, it questions the current emphasis on product rather than process.

The role of the organisation

The participants sensed a growing crisis within the field, accompanied by inadequate organisational frameworks and funding structures. Some frameworks have become too rigid and there is a perception that some structures are struggling to respond to interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches.

New opportunities need to be created to enable organisations to respond to a diversity of cultural forms and artistic practices. Funding 'boxes' and artform categories need to be more open and the creation of flexible structures is required to ensure sustainability for the future. Simplifying structures and categories was seen as one way to allow for the complexity of artistic responses and needs.

The role of critical language and theory

Participants affirmed the importance of maintaining creative and open spaces for discussion, such as the Australia Council initiated conferences: Empires, Ruins + Networks (2004) and Art, Globalisation + Cultural Difference (2001). Both conferences had been valuable in developing a theoretical

platform to position diversity within critical debates in a broader arts context.

The roundtable showed an underlying need for the field to re-appraise how theoretical debates occur, and how language is used to make the ideas explored at the conferences more accessible to the sector and, in particular, to new generations. It is felt that there is a history of critical theory and practice which is not accessed by many emerging artists in Australia, and there is a need to inform them of its value.

Overall, roundtable participants found that cultural institutions and individual artists appear to be operating in a climate of instability and crisis, fed by a volatile global environment. This is leading to new forces of conformity and assimilation and a loss of diversity in artistic process and product. As local communities fracture, the cultural voices of diversity are at risk of being silenced or marginalised.

The roundtable identified an urgent need for cultural agencies and policy makers to respond coherently to these issues to ensure the demographic reality of Australia as an increasingly multicultural society is being reflected through our artistic practice.

The full text of this summary is available at <www.ozco.gov.au/multicultural>.



● Delegates at The Empires, Ruins + Networks: Art in Real Time Culture conference



● Pictured far left: Fotis Kapetopoulos; Pictured left: Lee Christofis

Postcard from Chicago:

Fotis Kapetopoulos reports on the Australian connection at America's major arts marketing conference

Being in Chicago for the 2004 National Arts Marketing Conference, 'High Touch/High Tech: Cutting Edge Strategies for Reaching and Keeping Today's Arts Customers', with friend and fellow traveller Lee Christofis, was a little weird.

After 15 years of advocating for culturally diverse strategies in arts marketing in Australia in Multicultural Arts Victoria, and after years of working with Lee on the Multicultural Arts Marketing Ambassadors Strategy (MAMAS) and later the Multicultural Arts Professional Development (MAPD) program, we were now talking to the crème de la crème of arts marketing in the centre of the marketing universe: the United States.

Chicago is a city engulfed by the arts. As we began, a conference titled Embrace Art in Chicago: Summer 2004 had just finished. As a marketing initiative of the Chicago Office of Tourism in collaboration with the Tourism Bureau and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, it had been five months of tours, exhibitions and interactive demonstrations at museums, galleries, art fairs, cultural centres and public spaces throughout the city, including the city's newest attraction, the massive Millennium Park. Australian composer Lisa Lim had been commissioned to write a symphony for the opening of the park, so there was a strong Australian creative connection.

We were the only Australians at the High Touch/High Tech conference, organised by the Business and Arts Council of America, which brought together over 300 delegates from mainstream, independent and community arts organisations. There were 40 of America's key arts managers, thinkers and marketing experts (or 'clinicians' as they were called in the conference).

Some of the 40 speakers included: Stefanie Y Wong, marketing director of the East West Players, the US' premier Asian American theatre organisation, who implemented strategies to increase subscription and ticket sales to Pacific Islander communities; Carlo M Cuesta manager for Creation In Common, a fundraising and communications firm for nonprofits and foundations, who has trained over 300 arts leaders on how to establish and promote effective techniques for building arts participation; and Jacqueline Flinker, CEO of Artsmarketing Service, an expert in fundraising for the non-profit arts world, who presented on her role in making Artsmarketing a leading telemarketing/telefundraising organisation.

Donna Walker-Kuhne joined a panel discussion with Lee and me. We felt that this was the second stage (after Donna's visit to Australia in 2003) of a real relationship that will yield results for the Australian

arts sector – and, in turn, we can provide marketing approaches which can be used in America.

America has a highly decentralised approach to policy in the arts and culture. Most organisations and institutions are responsible for their own approaches to project delivery, and are less defined by the over-arching policy aims of any major funding body or institution, as is the case in Australia. Policy in the US depends on non-government institutions, philanthropic trusts and cooperative cross-industry partnerships. The delegates and clinicians were therefore fascinated by the Australia Council and its active support and endorsement of our work in MAMAS and MAPD.

Two things had a profound impact on me in Chicago – first, the excellence of our policies, and second, the effective partnerships across industry, business, arts, communities and institutions which the Americans seem to foster. We have a long way to go in developing such successful partnerships. I wish key Australian businesses, community arts and mainstream arts organisations were able to experience the discussions which profiled the impact of philanthropy, business and industry integration and multicultural marketing.

For more information on the National Arts Marketing Conference, go to <www.artsmarketingconference.org>.

Fotis Kapetopoulos and Lee Christofis were invited to the National Arts Marketing Conference in Chicago to present on the Council's AMA policy, MAMAS and MAPD. Their participation was made possible by the Council's Audience and Market Development division; the Business and Arts Council of America, and the advocacy and assistance of Donna Walker-Kuhne of Walker International NYC.

Transformations: Locating cultural diversity in sustainable development

Experience shows that arts, culture and heritage are vital to the development of strong communities and individuals. These elements improve the way we approach community harmony, our relationships with the environment and how we use the physical and human world to develop the economy.

A conference in February 2005, Transformations, will bring together artists, community members and policy makers to look at ways to build a global understanding of the immense value of culture and to develop strategies which integrate culture into future planning for Australia.

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity will provide a context for the conference, which is co-hosted by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia and the Australian National University.

The Universal Declaration, which was signed in the 'post September 11 world', argues for a new global understanding of the value of cultural diversity and is designed to protect the international intellectual, economic, spiritual and moral values of cultural diversity. It affirms cultural diversity as the vital resource to protect cultural rights, bio-diversity, individual self-value, social harmony, cross-cultural communication and to 'humanise globalisation'.

Transformations is a unique opportunity for artists, cultural workers and planners to come together with government, community and business bodies. It will explore current practice and future directions to integrate culture into planning, and forecast strategies to maintain individual and group cultural identity. The conference will find ways for artists and others to promote greater awareness of the role of the arts in sustainable community development.

Transformations will be held at the Australian National University in Canberra from 7-9 February 2005. Visit <www.fecca.org.au/transformations.html> for more information.

Who's on ACMAC?

Members of the Australia Council Multicultural Advisory Committee are nominated from the artform boards of the Australia Council. The chair of the committee is a Council member. All appointments to the Council and its boards are made by the Minister for the Arts and Sport.

Christine Pulvirenti, Australia Council member and chair of ACMAC

Christine lives in Far North Queensland. She is a board member of the Queensland Arts Council and far northern regional director; president of the Hinchinbrook Arts Council, vice-president of the Hinchinbrook Regional Arts Development Fund and president of the Townsville region of the Music Teacher's Association of Queensland. Christine has been a professional music teacher for 34 years and was a member of the Council's Regional panel between 2000-01.

Anita Maynard, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board

Anita is a visual artist, curator, playwright and teacher. She is deputy chair of the Riawunna Advisory Board, University of Tasmania, a member of the Tasmanian State Training and Authority Board, and a committee member of The Cape Barren Islanders Aboriginal Association. One of her two plays was nominated for an award at the First National Black Playwright's Conference in Sydney.

Rose Cantali, Community Cultural Development Board

Rose lives in Sydney and is from an Italian background. She is closely involved in the Italian community through festivals, filmmaking and other cultural activities. She works as a child and adolescent psychologist, in particular with teenagers considered at-risk.

Shane Carroll, Dance Board

Shane is based in Sydney and is chair of the Council's Dance Board. She has taught classical and contemporary dance and contributed to major companies across Australia and internationally, such as The Australian Ballet, Australian Dance Theatre, Sydney Dance Company, Companie Angelin Preljocaj and Bangarra Dance Theatre. She served as chair of the NSW Ministry for the Arts' Dance Committee between 1999 and 2001.

Glyn Parry, Literature Board

Glyn was born in the northeast of England and now lives in Perth. He writes fiction for adults, children and young adults. His award-winning novels for children and teenagers include *LA Postcards*, *Monster Man*, *Radical Take-Offs*, *Spooking the Cows*, *Stoked* and *Scooterboy*. Glyn serves on the State Library Board of WA and the National Advisory Council of the ABC.

Dr Marie Siganto, Major Performing Arts Board

Marie lives in Brisbane and is a board member of the State Library of Queensland and a member of the University of Queensland Senate Art Collection Committee. She is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, has served on the Queensland Government Arts Advisory Committee and the Senate of the University of Queensland.

Paul Petran, Music Board

Paul studied classical guitar at La Trobe University. During his more than 20 years' work with ABC Radio as a music producer, he has produced in excess of 1000 recordings for broadcast, over 60 public concerts around Australia, and presented regular music programs. Paul initiated Music Deli in 1986, a program which has become an influential part of the Australian music scene. Two of the albums produced by Paul have won ARIA awards. He lives in Melbourne.

Wojciech Pisarek, Theatre Board

Wojciech lives in Adelaide where he lectures in digital puppetry at Flinders Drama Centre. He was born in Poland and studied at Ludwik Solski State Academy of Theatre Art in Krakow and Leon Schiller State Film, Television and Theatre Academy in Lodz. He is currently a doctoral candidate exploring the use of real-time animated mask in theatre. His most recent work was on the Snow Queen with Windmill Performing Arts in Adelaide, where he developed the concept, created real-time 3D characters and a virtual environment.

Vacant – New Media Arts Board and Visual Arts/Crafts Board

Diversity is the third in a series of newsletters about the Australia Council's work in the area of arts in a multicultural Australia.

Want to know more?

For more details on AMA please visit
<www.ozco.gov.au/council_priorities/multicultural> or e-mail <ama@ozco.gov.au>.

Letter from the chair

The Australia Council's Art in a Multicultural Australia (AMA) policy is now coming to the end of its implementation phase, and an evaluation of the policy began in July.

Effective Change and University of Victoria were selected from a strong field to undertake the evaluation, which will assess the policy's implementation and achievements and advise on future direction. Clare Keating from Effective Change and Santina Bertone from the University of Victoria, who worked on the Council's publication *The Taxidriver, the Cook and the Greengrocer*, are leading the evaluation team.

Their approach is a wholistic one: looking at the policy within its current and historical context, and tackling the social impacts of cultural diversity in communities and societies. The methodology of the evaluation demonstrates a deep understanding of the issues and objectives outlined in the AMA policy, as well respect for the added dimension multiculturalism brings to the arts sector and to society in general.

As part of the evaluation process, focus groups will be interviewed in most states and territories, with companies, artists and artworkers invited to participate. I strongly encourage you to take the time to complete and return the evaluation survey if you receive it, and therefore contribute to the process.

The AMA policy evaluation is being monitored by an external reference panel consisting of Professor Ien Ang (NSW), Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney; Mirna Heruc (SA), manager, Arts and Heritage Collections, University of Adelaide; Felicia Wai Min Kan (NSW), visual artist and recently retired Visual Arts/Craft Board and ACMAC member; and Bagryana Popov, performing artist and former Community Cultural Development Board and ACMAC member. The outcomes from the evaluation will be released in mid 2005.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to those who have contributed to AMA since its inception – to those who were there at the very beginning, those who worked to develop the policy and inform its focus for this phase, and current members of ACMAC. I would like to especially thank Lisa Colley, Cecelia Cmielewski and Carin Mistry at the Australia Council, who are tireless in their efforts and support.

It is a pivotal phase for AMA and an exciting time to chair ACMAC. It's a time to celebrate what has been achieved since the policy was released, to forecast what is possible over the coming years and to look to our long-term goals for arts in a multicultural Australia.

**Christine Pulvirenti, Chair,
Australia Council Multicultural
Advisory Committee**



Australian Government



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