



samag
Seminars for Arts Professionals

AUGUST 2010 SEMINAR SUMMARY

Collaborations and Creative Partnerships

6.00-8.00PM, Monday 30 August 2010
Australia Council, 372 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills

Chair

Tim McGarry, actor and founder of Monkey Baa Theatre for Young People.

Panel

Kate Champion has worked as a director, choreographer, dancer, teacher and rehearsal director for various companies including The Australian Dance Theatre, Belvoir Street Theatre, Legs on the Wall, Dance North, English National Opera and London's DV8 Physical Theatre. Kate is the Artistic Director of the Sydney based dance-theatre company, Force Majeure. Productions are based around a collective of multi-disciplined artists.

Libby Gleeson is an Australian children's author who has written over 30 picture books, novels for young children and older readers, *Mahtab's Story* for example. She has also written scripts for the ABC's *Bananas in Pyjamas* and *Magic Mountain*.

Judith Blackall is the Head of Exhibitions and Artistic Programming at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) and is involved with the MCA's C3 West Project, an ongoing collaboration between Penrith Regional Gallery, Casula Powerhouse, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Centre for Cultural Research UWS and the MCA. Through this project artists are commissioned to work in collaboration with the MCA, communities and local businesses.

Collaborating can be an exhilarating and artistically rewarding experience. It can be a great way to nurture artists, share knowledge, build new relationships, combine resources and give companies a new profile. These days, creative partnerships are largely taken for granted as one of the many ways that artists can choose to work.

But why collaborate? To increase artistic success or revive our art? Or to explore different ideas through multiple mediums?

At their best collaborations can be invigorating experiences leading artists into unexpected new territories and creating extraordinary melting pots of ideas. Or they can be disastrous, with participants having wildly differing expectations. Whichever way they progress, they should be entered into with enormous care.

For its August seminar SAMAG convened a panel to discuss these issues.

To kick off the seminar Judith Blackall described the MCA's C3 West Project, an ongoing collaboration between Penrith Regional Gallery, Casula Powerhouse, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Centre for Cultural Research UWS, the MCA and local businesses.

C3 West is a long term partnership that is developing new ways of working between cultural institutions, artists, businesses and communities in Western Sydney. Artists are engaged to work with businesses and communities to develop creative solutions to problems. The artwork is integrated into the work of the business and community, rather than being located solely in a gallery. Some examples are listed below and more can be found by visiting <http://www.c3west.com.au/> :

Sydney Arts Management Advisory Group E info@samag.org T (02) 8250 5722 W www.samag.org P PO Box 18, Leichhardt NSW 2040



Communities
arts new



SAMAG is assisted by the NSW Government through Arts NSW
and by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding advisory body



The 2010 SAMAG Seminar Series is supported by the City of Sydney



samag
Seminars for Arts Professionals

AUGUST 2010 SEMINAR SUMMARY

- In 2006 Craig Walsh worked with Panthers Entertainment Group to develop a series of twelve large scale photographs of fans and players called *Heads Up*. These were displayed at the MCA, bringing a new audience to the gallery. Ten of the photographs are now on display at the Panthers new club.
- International art collective Campement Urbain, a collective formed by video artist Sylvie Blocher (who has worked on previous C3West projects) and architect/urban designer Francois Daune, has been working with Panthers Entertainment Group since 2007. Their architectural consultancy titled *The Panthers of the Future/The Future of Panthers* focuses on the redevelopment of a 70 hectare site in Penrith.
- *Talking Trash personal relationships with waste* is a project with artist Jeanne van Heeswijk and Veolia Environmental Services Australia which explores a range of personal approaches to waste from wasting water, toothpaste or DVDs to wasting time, through interviews with 25 households in Goulburn and Liverpool.
- In 2009 Melbourne artist Ash Keating worked with SITA Environmental Solutions to develop *Activate 2750* a public art project which set out to raise awareness about our relationship to the production and consumption of waste by creating an artwork that reused material collected by the artist from the acres of dumped waste at SITAs Wetherill Park Transfer Station.

Commenting about these projects, Judith noted that they take a long time to establish and require a high level of assistance to keep them going, including the involvement of Elizabeth Ann McGregor as the Director of the MCA. She also identified the following as the keys to successful collaboration:

- Trust between the collaborators
- Active participation by all the parties
- Setting realistic timeframes
- Choosing artists who have experience working with communities and businesses.
- Identifying a champion to drive the project within the business partner and the local council.
- Early and regular communication with the community. When, as part of the *Activate 2750* project, three tonnes of 'rubbish' was dumped in the Penrith Council precinct many members of the public contacted the Council to complain. The situation was managed by providing additional signage and brochures and a team from UWS who were conducting evaluation interviews talked to visitors about the project, but it highlighted the need for earlier and better communication.

Tim asked Judith "Is it hard for artists to collaborate with non-arts focused commercial businesses?" Judith responded that it's very challenging to get everyone working together in a creative and productive relationship and to come to a common understanding of a project. Business partners, for example, will often want a sculpture on a plinth and it takes time to convince them that that's not what the project is about. Business people may also speak a different language so it is important to tailoring your language appropriately.

Sydney Arts Management Advisory Group E info@samag.org T (02) 8250 5722 W www.samag.org P PO Box 18, Leichhardt NSW 2040



Communities
arts new



SAMAG is assisted by the NSW Government through Arts NSW
and by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding advisory body



The 2010 SAMAG Seminar Series is supported by the City of Sydney



samag
Seminars for Arts Professionals

AUGUST 2010 SEMINAR SUMMARY

Judith was also asked “How do you find the champions?” She replied that they are usually easy to find, they are the people who get excited about the project and will usually “jump up” to be involved. Usefully, champions understand what the project is about and recognise its benefits.

Kate then talked about the experience of Force Majeure where all of the projects are collaborations. Each production is “built from the ground up” with performers, composers, photographers etc. Indeed Kate emphasised that whenever you’re working with other people (a stage manager, a producer, a group of actors) it’s useful to think of it as a collaboration.

Talking about who you work with, Kate said that some people have worked with Force Majeure over a long period of time. They also bring in new collaborators. Kate said it helps to work with people that you’ve worked with before because there’s a shared language and you don’t feel like you’re starting from scratch every time. But it’s also helpful to have new “blood” to keep things fresh. She acknowledged that it can be a challenge to keep the long-term people fresh and not alienate the new people.

In response to a question about how you know and what you do when collaboration is not working, Kate suggested that by staging the development of a project (e.g. by having two research and development stages before they go into rehearsal) there is time to resolve issues or, if necessary, end the collaboration. She also noted that it’s important to set out clear expectations at the beginning of the process (while also being open to the project evolving), and to continue to communicate and remain sensitive to the other parties. Kate noted that it’s important to stay true to “the heart of the project” and to listen to all of collaborators, rather than as happened with one project, allowing it to be lead by one person.

Asked if arrangements are put in writing, Kate commented that Force Majeure adds a paragraph to a standard contract which states that the person understands that its part of the process to contribute creatively, that there is no obligation to continue working together and that Force Majeure owns the copyright in the work. She noted that copyright issues can be difficult to resolve, but generally certain conventions are followed e.g. the artist retains ownership of the intellectual property and the photographer has copyright of any images.

Kate also noted that, while generally their productions do not generate a lot of profit, Force Majeure is working on a way of splitting the balance of any profit from a production among collaborators. She emphasised that even if there are no profits it is important to acknowledge every artist’s input.

This raised a question about whether one person, or organisation, makes the ultimate decision about the direction of the collaboration. Judith commented that through the planning process everyone should know where they’re going and their roles. Kate responded that it depends on the project. For example, for a current project with the Sydney Theatre Company they are “working it out as we go”. Tim commented that in collaborating when communication wasn’t clear from the beginning things can get “a little bit tense”. It is important to clarify roles and expectations at the beginning of a project.

Another person asked how a ‘group’ chooses what to work on. In Kate’s experience she and her Artistic Associates, Geoff Cobham and Roz Hervey, might talk and agree on an issue to explore then she might do the research and come up with a more concrete proposal which then goes back and forth for further development.

Sydney Arts Management Advisory Group E info@samag.org T (02) 8250 5722 W www.samag.org P PO Box 18, Leichhardt NSW 2040



Communities
arts new



Australian Government



SAMAG is assisted by the NSW Government through Arts NSW
and by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding advisory body



The 2010 SAMAG Seminar Series is supported by the City of Sydney



samag
Seminars for Arts Professionals

AUGUST 2010 SEMINAR SUMMARY

For Libby collaboration usually involves working with an editor and an illustrator. Libby says she didn't know anything about the process of putting a book together when she started. She gave an example of an early project with artist and illustrator John Winch. When she suggested that he use the same format for the images throughout the book he replied "don't you think that would be a bit boring". After that, Libby decided to "hand the work over to the illustrator and trust them to do their job" (although there may still be occasions when she needs to discuss changes with them).

Long-term collaborations can result in greater acceptance of a piece of work. For example, Libby has been collaborating with illustrator, Armin Greder, for a number of years. In the book *The Great Bear* (1999) images replace the words half way through the story. This would normally not be acceptable to a publisher, but because Libby and Armin had a strong history of collaborating the book was accepted by the publisher. Libby also collaborated when writing *Mahtab's Story*, the account of a family forced to leave their home and Afghanistan, and their journey to Australia. After 9/11 Libby visited a Sydney high school to interview Muslim girls. She was particularly attracted to the story of one of the girls, Nahid, and spent time with her and her family in order to gather authentic details story. Libby spent time with the family to get an understanding of how they lived, details of their house in Afghanistan, their journey to Australia and the family's emotional life (to see a video of Libby and Nahid talking about this book visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6Ykw6ehfPI>).

In conclusion, the panel noted that the keys to good collaboration are respect and trust, putting your own ego away, testing ("auditioning") the collaboration and ending it if it's not working and, most importantly being specific about what's expected at the beginning of the project.

Sarah Evans

Sydney Arts Management Advisory Group E info@samag.org T (02) 8250 5722 W www.samag.org P PO Box 18, Leichhardt NSW 2040



Communities
arts new



SAMAG is assisted by the NSW Government through Arts NSW
and by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding advisory body



The 2010 SAMAG Seminar Series is supported by the City of Sydney