

ARTS IN ACTION: VARIOUS PEREGRINATIONS

By Linda Blincko, Creative Director, Depot Artspace

1. DEPOT ARTSPACE

At the most fundamental level creating is a natural attribute of living beings. It is continuously in motion, limitless in its permutations and infinite in its possibilities.

That is why, when Depot Artspace took over the old Borough Council works depot twenty two years ago, we began what continues to be a work in progress.

At the Depot we attempt to give fertile ground to the creative by encompassing a wide range of disciplines and practitioners, from sound to the visual arts, and from established to emerging. We also support the creative journey with our professional development programme, ArtsLab,

More than 20 substantial projects have been established since the Depot's inception, each a result of observed need or opportunity and most of which strengthen capacity or a sense of cultural identity. They include ArtsLab formerly PACE (Pathways to Arts and Cultural Employment) professional development programme for artists, Depot Press where publications explore NZ/Aotearoa identity and culture, cultural mapping and creative internships, and exhibitions which touch on issues that relate to our sense of place, such as 'W'akaputanga', 'Flag It' and 'Turangawaewae'.

In 22 years the Depot has organised and hosted nearly 2000 exhibitions featuring more than 4000 artists, has supported and mentored 2000 creatives on its ArtsLab programme, welcomed hundreds of musicians into its rehearsal space and undertaken hundreds more recording projects. It has produced 70 LOUD magazines and a variety of other publications, including 'MORPH', 'Turangawaewae/Sense of Place', and 'The Vernacularist' series, all of which celebrate the significance of the arts in our society.

Each of these initiatives has been predicated upon the Depot's circular mantra, "creating an environment that encourages creating....." which we believe embodies the form and nature of the creative.

2. BARRY BRICKELL 1935-2016: ARTS IN ACTION EMBODIED

Barry Brickell, conservationist, potter, painter, writer, wrerter, engineer, railway enthusiastic, vernacularist, man of action in all creative endeavours, is one of the Depot's heroes. He embodies more than most the law of creating, unfettered by artistic discipline, or any other social constraints that often straitjacket the artist, including public opprobrium. He responded with



wisdom to the world around him, finding appropriate forms to address immediate concerns. On a scale of priorities where caring for our planet may be fairly advanced, Barry's spontaneity and active creativity is a paramount attribute.

Below is a poem, written by Nigel Brown on Barry's death, which describes his creative momentum.

A Funeral Is Not Really Needed: For Barry Brickell

Up in the mist somewhere
beyond the humdrum
and mundane.
Driving driving driving on.

In the back of beyond
where the clay is rich
the bush drips
and birds sing.
Driving driving driving on.

I can see a ridiculous
figure clad in shorts
and half a T shirt wrong.
Driving driving driving on.

No roads lead here now
no tracks are laid
the shouts of working men
are lost in wind and rain.
Driving driving driving on.
Don't call it art
don't call it craft
a working life is fun but mad
Driving driving driving on.

A slab of clay
kilns blazing still

nights a friend with
contrary states of mind
Driving driving driving on.

Don't speak
just do
don't theorise.
Find him still.
Find it. Find them.
Smoke gets in yer eyes
there's a potter on the hill.
Driving driving driving
bloody on.

Nigel Brown 2016



3. SEQUESTERING THE NATURAL INCLINATION OF THE ARTS

The creative has become conditioned by its social environment, one which over time is increasingly stifled by the imperatives of politics, economic determinism and institutionalisation.

What appears as the apex of creativity often flows forth from a university, is feted by a gallery or a festival and receives accolades to which many material benefits accrue.

The institutionalisation of the arts belies the nature of the creative, which does not involve definitive and identifiable outcomes, nor does it require for its perpetuation, awards, sales, social approval or other tangible acknowledgements; in fact these are contradistinctive to creating.

At the same time, amongst the general populous the arts are often regarded as peripheral to the true 'substance of life', the components that Maslow itemised as priorities, after which we could engage with the luxuries.

Yet all cultures find meaning in the ongoing expression of their identity, their place in time, environment, and social circumstances through art. The nature of creating is that it continues to both reflect and lead these changes, as it has since before homo sapiens appeared.(1)



(1) Study reveals earliest cave art belonged to Neanderthals, not humans. Scientists have discovered the world's oldest known cave art was crafted at least 20,000 years before modern humans arrived.

<http://www.thejournal.ie/cave-art-neanderthals-3868191-Feb2018/>

4. THE CREATIVE REVOLUTION

“A world of unseen dictatorship is conceivable, still using the forms of democratic government.”
In “The Hidden Persuaders”, Vance Packard 1957

We live in a society touted as a democracy but in which freedom is circumscribed by what Vance Packard refers to as the ‘people shapers’, for whom solely materialistic concerns prevail and are reinforced; the spectrum of choices we are able to make become the benchmarks of freedom. Unless we decide to reclaim freedom in its truest sense, we will continue to be puppets, yet believing ourselves to be free.

Art is the last bastion of freedom and the final means by which freedom can be reclaimed, for freedom arises from our capacity to explore and question the world and move within it according to guidelines generated by social ideals translated into self-prescribed values. The arts espouse and demonstrate significant expressive and conceptual freedom.

Art as the medium through which freedom is both experienced and manifest is at the cutting edge of social change. For once people are aware that they can exercise freedom of thought and expression and that it can be unique and different, then the bondage of social replication is broken and the potential for change becomes evident and exciting.

And in the place of gross consumerism, which masquerades as progress but which is merely greed by another name, are new worlds unfolding, for the creative, and not destructive and exploitative forces are at their core.





He W'akaputanga mai o te Rangatiratanga: Michele Morunga @ The Depot Artspace 2015

5. KILLING TIME

"It is utterly beyond our power to measure the changes of things by time. Quite the contrary, time is an abstraction at which we arrive by means of the changes of things"-Ernst Mach (1)

Time and Change: Time dominates our thinking and is the context within which we structure our lives and make decisions and plans; it is a primary reference point in developing knowledge and building relationships. Past, present, future is the line in life we scan when measuring our achievements and other milestones. We see the past as solid and uncompromising and the future as plastic, the place where hope is invested and optimism prevails, although (or because) to a large extent it appears to be out of our hands. The present, in which we actually continuously live, seems to suffer the most neglect. It is the repository of the future welded to the past and the place where dashed or realised plans and expectations exert themselves in our psyches.

If the Depot lived entirely within this world of structured time, as social imperatives force us, it is unlikely the potential projects which arise would ever find form. They would find no place in the strategic plan that Council, our major funder, requires us to set and fulfil.

Creative and innovative enterprises often belie the pattern that time tends to give to our lives; a project may have no obvious predecessor and it may not be possible to provide necessary measurable outcomes. Cultural Icons, The Vernacular Lounge and each of the initiatives that take place within it, Depot Press and the Vernacularist series of publications can only be proved in retrospect to have significant legitimacy. Our latest project, Nga Kuia Moko, seems to have arisen from that largely indefinable state of synchronicity, which many here can attest to but struggle to explain.

The pivotal alternative to time: What if our primary reference point was not the sequential, cause/effect, outcomes directed paradigm which presumes time is an objective and inescapable reality, but something else that transcends time and unifies the phenomenal world? What if we related more to a philosophy which is at the core of life and therefore which related to the **way** we live in the world, the focus on the quality of life lived in the present than a life focused, by way of consequences, on the future.

Here at The Depot it is our philosophy that informs our modus operandi and we consciously seek to stay true to its precepts. We are guided by vision and the law of creating; that creating is an inextinguishable force, and whatever time or circumstance may throw one's way creating will continue to find form.

We will follow this contention in our next LOUD as it is the pivotal point for the Depot's raison d'être and is represented in the Depot's circular statement (or mantra) "creating an environment that encourages creating an environment..." suggesting an infinitude of opportunities in which time is a component as opposed to a controlling force.

