Creative Entrepreneurs and Artists: Is There A Difference?

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Abstract
It’s an almost outdated or inappropriately romantic notion to question the role of economics in art. Yet many artists still revolt against the idea of making money from their work. Such sentiments are not based on a lack of understanding of economics, nor a purposely quixotical attitude, but rather an acceptance of an alternative value system to the mainstream capitalist sensibility. This paper is based on research conducted with creative practitioners associated with Arts.Biz™ Ltd – an arts business coaching and consulting company based in New Zealand. The resulting discussion considers where non-commercially orientated artists fit within the economically driven creative industries framework.

Biography
Dr. Suzette Major is the director of Arts.Biz™ Ltd – a company that offers workshops, one-on-one coaching, and consulting services for artists interested in developing a career in the creative industries. Arts.Biz™ Ltd, and its sister company Artemiz Ltd, hold a range of contracts with government departments, arts organisations, and tertiary institutions to deliver arts/business related services. Suzette has held various academic appointments with Waikato University in New Zealand, Deakin University, Melbourne and Waikato Institute of Technology, Hamilton and has published work on arts marketing, film marketing and creative industries.
“To be, or not to be, a creative entrepreneur?” is a question currently being asked by many New Zealand artists. Over the past decade, New Zealand governments and in particular the Labour led government of 1999-2008 wholeheartedly embraced the ideology and frameworks of creative industries. But what impact has such creative industries policies had on creative practitioners? This paper presents a contextual discussion of the New Zealand creative industries, followed by findings from exploratory research conducted with sixty-eight creative practitioners, which together suggest a growing division between commercial and non-commercial creative practitioners within New Zealand. Such a division between “creative entrepreneurs” and “artists” is not overly surprising – indeed distinctions of this sort have been extensively documented by scholars such as Raymond Williams and Pierre Bourdieu for decades. Nonetheless, the current research again highlights that rhetoric around the success of New Zealand creative industries should perhaps be tempered by the realities of some artists who choose not to engage with what they perceive as the economically driven philosophy of a creative industries policy.

In New Zealand, as in many other developed economies, innovation and creativity are seen as fundamental components for prospering in the increasingly competitive global age. This focus on creative sectors became most apparent in the post-1999 era when a Labour-led government came into power. For the following nine years, the Labour government, led by Prime Minister Helen Clark who personally took on the arts and culture portfolio, developed policy and implemented frameworks specifically targeted to developing the New Zealand creative industries. Their push began with a significant investment into the arts and cultural sector, known as the ‘Cultural Recovery Package’ in 2000. Announced within six months of their election, the Cultural Recovery Package injected an initial NZ$80 million New Zealand dollars into the arts and culture sectors and promised an extra NZ$20 million dollars every year for the next three years. Previously struggling organisations 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 the formation of new bodies, including NZ$22 million establishment grant to a new Film Production Fund and NZ$2million to establish a Music Industry Commission. The package also assigned 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. A cash injection of up to NZ$27.9 million was also allocated to cover NZ On Air's shortfall in 2000 after the previous national government's abrupt abolition of the Broadcasting Fee (Creative New Zealand 2000).

Such a capital boost emphasised both the Labour government’s 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 after many years of a non-intervention approach through the 1990s, also initiated a re-imagining of these sectors in terms of their economic potential. A shift was beginning to emerge from considering the arts and cultural sectors as necessary and honourable areas to support, towards arts and creativity as being fundamental to the emerging creative economy. Think-tanks and conferences transpired. Speakers invited to events such as the “Creative Industries
Forum” in 2000 and the “Knowledge Wave Conference” in 2001 included dignitaries such as Chris Smith – the chairperson of the United Kingdom’s Creative Industries Task Force. At the Creative Industries forum, jointly hosted in Auckland by the British Council and Creative New Zealand in September of 2000, Smith argued that government support of the arts was not enough. He emphasised that governments had to understand how the arts did and could contribute to a country’s economy:

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 and the government’s direct adoption of the definition of the creative industries from the British Task Force document, New Zealand was eager to learn from and imitate the creative industries policy set out by Tony Blair’s government in Britain. Indeed statistics indicated that the two economies held some similarities.

In the UK, the economic contribution of the creative industries was estimated in 2001 to be around 5% of the GDP and growing (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2001, p. 8). Similarly, the relative size of the New Zealand creative sector is small but growing, with the GDP contribution estimated at 3.1% in March 2001 (NZIER 2002) after 8.7% per annum growth for the creative sectors over the 1997-2001 period. Such growth was phenomenal relative to the acceptable but nevertheless smaller 3.7% growth of the overall economy (NZIER 2002). Such statistics, and cross-country comparisons, however are fairly suspect. As Roodhouse correctly points out, the very definitions and classification systems of the creative industries is questionable, and often leads to unreliable and unsubstantiated data (Roodhouse 2008). What such research and resource investment into the creative sectors did indicate however, was the desire of the Labour-led government to progress the arts and cultural sectors towards being central components in an emerging creative economy.

The cultural recovery package and resulting establishment of new arts agencies, together with the subsequent conferences, forums and research, laid a solid foundation upon which to build the “Growth and Innovation Framework” – a macroeconomic policy released in 2002. The Growth and Innovation Framework, “Growing an Innovative New Zealand”, identified three industry sectors key to New Zealand’s future strategic direction: information and communication technology, biotechnology and creative industries. In many ways, this policy document marked the final step towards wholeheartedly embracing the creative industries in New Zealand. It emphasised the link between arts, creativity and innovation, and formally acknowledged the creative sector as being a leading potential contributor to the future economic growth and global positioning of this country. It states:

Creative industries is the third target area. Creativity is at the heart of innovation and creative industries input into many other sectors...New Zealand has also clearly established competitive advantage in some niches, such as film and television production and post-production.

(Ministry of Economic Development 2002a, p. 10).

This specific mention of the film and television sector signalled the next developmental stage in the New Zealand creative industry policy: the ‘Three Horizon Strategy’. This strategy, implemented from 2004 onwards, considers niche development, cross-sector
partnerships and innovative leadership. Particular creative sectors, including film, design and fashion, have gained particular prominence and attention.

While the Labour government was removed from power at the November 2008 election, the new National-led government similarly appears to be embracing creative industries ideology. At the release of the “Employment in the Cultural Sector” report in February 2009, newly appointed Arts, Cultural and Heritage Minister Chris Finlayson highlighted the importance of the creative industries, particularly during the current economic downturn. He stated, “…the government's key focus right now is on employment, and so we recognise the importance of supporting our creative industries” (Finlayson, 2009). While it’s early days, it appears that creative industries thinking will be maintained under this new government.

So, what has all this got to do with the artist? In short, for many, not much. As an academic and business women working in the New Zealand creative industries during this vibrant period, I have become fascinated by the impact of such policy development on the arts community. Such fascination was largely a result of witnessing various artists questioning or even criticising, often publicly, the so-called creative economy. In some cases, there was particular disdain or anger, such as an artist standing up during a public lecture by Peter Biggs, chairperson of Creative New Zealand, in 2003 stating abruptly “I am an artist. You have industrialised everything else. Are you going to try to industrialise me now?” Other artists that I met were simply unaware of what had unfolded. They regularly read *Art New Zealand* or the *Artist Alliance Art All* magazine, attended arts events and workshops, yet the very concept “creative industries” appeared foreign or largely irrelevant. On the one hand, I was reading the proliferation of creative industries publications and attending conferences where creative industries ideology was being thoroughly debated, yet on the other hand, I was mixing with artists that seemed far removed from those very conversations. Research was obviously in order.

An exploratory study was therefore conducted with creative practitioners associated with my company: Arts.Biz™ Ltd. Arts.Biz™ Ltd, established in 2004, is a small business coaching and consulting company for artists working in the creative industries. We work with creative practitioners across all creative sectors, including visual arts, sculpture, publishing, music, theatre, film, television, photography and Maori art and craft. Arts.Biz™ Ltd is contracted to various arts organisations and government agencies including Arts Waikato, Hamilton Community Arts Council, Artstation, Uxbridge, Creative Tairawhiti and Turanga Ararau. We are also contracted to “Work and Income” to assist beneficiaries on the ‘Pathways to Arts and Cultural Employment’ (PACE) government-initiated employment scheme. Our clients range from emerging and mid-career artists, to established practitioners creating work directly for the international marketplace.

The research conducted with ArtsBiz clients occurred over a six month period during 2008. A questionnaire was distributed at various workshops and seminars, with an effort to cover a range of creative sectors and stages in career development. Questions focused on definitional issues; for example asking participants what they understood the term “creative entrepreneur” or “artist” meant. Motivational questions were included exploring why they create. And finally, contextual questions regarding their knowledge of the New Zealand creative industries policy were included. The questionnaire design was open-ended, with primarily qualitative questions, in an effort to elicit unguided thoughts and attitudes towards the New Zealand creative industries. In all, sixty-eight questionnaires were completed. While this exploratory research was somewhat limited in that the participants were also clients of Arts.Biz™ Ltd, the results do offer some solid evidence to the anecdotal comments that I had heard over the years.
Firstly, the findings suggest that there is a clear distinction between those that saw themselves as “creative entrepreneurs”, central to the New Zealand and global creative economy and creating primarily for financial gain, and those who referred to themselves as “artists” or “artisans”, who expressed an internal desire to create that was not motivated by money. As noted earlier, such distinctions are not new: as Ted Snell well points out in his paper “Some More Thoughts on Creative Industries and Creative Wealth”, some artists have been entrepreneurial and distinct from the elite art world for centuries, such as renowned 19th century Parisian artist Gustave Courbet. Recently established creative industries incubator SODA Inc., located in Hamilton, New Zealand, interestingly delineate ‘entrepreneurship’ and ‘artist’ in terms of their individual focus. If a business or artistic career is based on the individual creative skill and the business would cease if the individual stopped working, then SODA Inc. would classify them as an ‘artist’. If however, those creative skills can be developed into a business beyond the individual and could therefore continue whether or not the individual was present, then SODA Inc. would classify them as an ‘entrepreneur’ (Grant Collier 2009, pers.comm, 31 July). Interestingly, such a distinction is blurred somewhat relative to the government definition which refers to creative industries having their origin in “individual creativity skill or talent”.

Both self-identified groups appeared knowledgeable about the creative industries – this is no doubt in part however due to my personal and academic interest in this field, and discussions with various clients about the New Zealand creative industries. But what is significant is that their ideas were not coming from an uninformed or misguided place – rather it was by understanding creative industries frameworks that they were able to choose to either embrace or reject that ideology. In essence, they were internally classifying themselves as being non-commercial or commercially motivated in their artistic endeavours and resultantly saw themselves as being separate from or central to the New Zealand creative industries. For example,

As a filmmaker, I am a creative entrepreneur. I make films to make money, although I’m not making as much as I would like!

In today’s arts environment you have to be entrepreneurial to evolve – if you want your art to be something other than just a hobby. I’m not just an artist; I’m a businesswoman who likes making art.

An artist creates. A creative entrepreneur sells ideas.

Conversely, some respondents spoke negatively about the idea of making money:

I don’t want my art to become my job. I’m a creative soul. I create art so people can enjoy the products of my creative passion. Making money from that seems wrong.

I DON’T do this for the money!!!

Beyond such critical statements however, most spoke positively about the creative industries in terms of their arts practice. This is well summed up Stella Brennan, a mid-career artist who was interviewed by Gareth Shute for the book Insights: New Zealand artists talk about creativity:

While I’m uncomfortable with all the talk about “creative industries” and the “knowledge economy”, one part of that has been that it’s made it more acceptable to be an artist. It feels like our culture has matured. In New Zealand nowadays, it’s okay to say you’re a musician or an artist or a film-maker and people don’t say – “Oh yeah, but what do you really do? Don’t be so pretentious!”

(Shute 2006, p. 6).
What was perhaps most disturbing however in this exploratory research with ArtsBiz clients, was the negative views of those who took a different stance. Non-commercially orientated artists spoke of creative practitioners who embraced creative industries as “selling out”, while some with an entrepreneur spirit appeared largely condescending towards those who rejected the idea of economics and art:

*I have all these paintings within me bursting to come out! But when you talk about them as my products for a marketplace, the creativity stops. I don’t want to be one of those people.*

*I just wish all artists learn to be professional. I’m tired of hippies giving us a bad name.*

*I don’t want to be part of the capitalistic world. I’m an artist, not a capitalist. Nowadays everyone thinks they’re an artist. And it’s making it hard for those of us that are real artists. Just because you are creative, and entrepreneurial, doesn’t mean you should be privileged with the title “artist”.***

This last extract highlights what may be at the heart of this research – that it’s largely about labels, and those who feel entitled to call themselves “an artist”, a “creative entrepreneur” or any other such term. It may be simply a matter of self-definition and self-identity. Indeed, what this research is perhaps emphasising is the importance of choice. Just as creative individuals have always had choice to create for a market or not, creative practitioners in the contemporary creative industries era can choose to “work outside the market and ignore the creative industries rhetoric, or they can work within it to find a place for themselves and their practice” (Snell 2008, p 7). Presenting this as a freely made choice ensures that one approach is (hopefully) not positioned above or as superior to the other – i.e. that it is not a hierarchical relationship between “creative entrepreneurs” and “artists”. Rather, allowing for both approaches helps ensure, as David Throsby (2001) points out, that “cultural value be admitted alongside economic value in the consideration of the overall value of cultural good and services”.

So, what does this exploratory research suggest for the continued development of creative industries in New Zealand and globally? Is there an acknowledgement of the need for choice? Perhaps more obviously, is there room for the “art for art’s sake” argument in the creative industries era? The answers are unlikely to be simple. Yet, perhaps most importantly this research has indicated that the debates still exist. 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. Yet, for some, it appears almost quaint to still question the role of economics in art in today’s burgeoning creative economy. Embedded in creative industries thinking is the importance of making money from creative practice – we apply (sometimes unsuccessfully) economic models and measures; we celebrate economic success stories like Weta Digital and Lord of the Rings, and we encourage creative practitioners to become professional and business-like through schemes such as PACE. But, in so emphasising the economic potential of the creative industries, are we unconsciously alienating many of those who are creative in New Zealand? By talking up the significance of the creative economy, are we minimising the option to choose to be a non-commercial artist in today’s environment? Or can both exist, side by side, within the creative industries frameworks?
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