

STANDING THE TEST OF TIME AND INTEGRITY: PACE/ARTSLAB

By Linda Blincko, Creative Director, Depot Artspace

Well-known and widely quoted politicians are often haunted by a past of broken promises which competing parties and mischievous reporters are wont to exploit. George Bush' famous "watch my lip...no new taxes" is such an example, never to be forgotten or lived down.

If there's someone who can't be faulted when it comes to standing by their commitment, especially in the creative sector which is often under-represented and overlooked, it's Helen Clark. I came across this piece in Art News of Summer 1998, written during Helen's time as PM and which showed her passion for and commitment to the arts. She comments on the distinctiveness of Aotearoa NZ creativity and the need for government to invest in the arts and culture both locally and internationally.



Photo credit: Fairfax Media <https://www.radionz.co.nz/programmes/the-9th-floor/story/201842639/the-commander-helen-clark>

Our personal experience of her commitment was the establishment of PACE (Pathways to Arts and Cultural Employment) in November 2001, a visionary programme which supported artists into employment in their chosen career. Depot Artspace has been running PACE/ArtsLab since 2002 with considerable success for its creative sector clients. It's fantastic to see wise investment continue to bear fruit after so many years. We have worked with around 2000 creatives over nearly 18 years, supporting at least 70% into employment. That's a goodly proportion of talented people contributing to the creative economy along with a \$28,000,000 benefit saving to government.

"Through our art a more rounded image of New Zealand and its talent can be communicated. And with greater recognition of our artists will undoubtedly come greater economic benefits."

Helen Clark, Art News, Summer, 1998



Power & passion

P E R S P E C T I V E

When asked to write this commentary, a thousand thoughts rushed through my mind. Visiting galleries and exhibitions has been an important part of my life for more than twenty years.

In 1976 I first travelled to Europe courtesy of a University Grants Committee Scholarship. My professor, Robert Chapman, advised me not just to work on my research but to educate myself more broadly by visiting the great galleries and collections. I took his advice and have been a dedicated gallery visitor ever since.

I remember the thrill of those first visits to the Louvre and standing on tip toe to peek at the Mona Lisa from a distance; and of marvelling at the colour of Van Gogh's work in Amsterdam and at the cerie sculpture gardens of Vigeland Park in Oslo and the Milles Garden in Stockholm.

Alas, art and artistic appreciation had featured little in my education or upbringing in New Zealand. I was scarcely aware of how our own artists were portraying and reflecting our own lives and times. I returned home with a renewed interest to find out more. And indeed there was so much to be found.

Of the painters, I identify most with the women of my own generation who reflect on issues relevant to me. Carole Shephard's willingness to express feminism in her art appeals to me. So does Claudia Pond-Eyley's work on the Pacific and our nuclear-free identity. Brenda Hartill provides images of Spain through a New Zealander's eyes.

And there are the photographers. The legendary Robin Morrison's work will always enthrall me. I love most his photographs of provincial New Zealand – of the shell house at Bluff, of the South Island cribs, and of the old couples. He captured an almost Appalachian quality about aspects of our rural life.

The indefatigable Gil Hanly's portfolio is for me like a personal photo album. At so many of the meetings, rallies, and demonstrations I've attended over three decades, Gil has been there to record the occasion for posterity. She records positively what in the mainstream media has been so often dismissed as the causes of a rabble! So be it: the rabble in the end entrenched New Zealand's nuclear free policy and our support for a democratic South Africa.

Recently I attended the annual Telecom arts awards in Auckland. It was invigorating to see among the work of the finalists so many different perspectives on Auckland and its hill, beaches,

refurnished Town Hall, Sky Tower and homes. Each encouraged us to look at our city through new eyes.

One is conscious of the fact that those who labour through their creativity to bring the rest of us pleasure generally do so for only the most modest remuneration in their lifetimes. This is so not only in the visual arts but throughout the performing arts as well. As a nation we have not overendowed the arts with support from the public purse. The role of the private patrons in the visual arts like James Wallace and Jenny Gibbs is therefore all the more important.

One of my main interests at present is how to diversify New Zealand's domestic and export economic base. There is surely a larger role to be played by our creative communities. Already my own party has made proposals for local content quotas on radio and television and for restrictions on parallel importing to encourage our musicians, playwrights, film makers, and authors. With a stronger domestic base established, an export base becomes feasible.

Now Gary Langsford's column in the previous issue of *Art News* has drawn my attention to the potential of the export market for our visual artists. Our domestic market for works of art is severely limited by our size. As Gary suggests, the main growth opportunities are beyond our shores. But to cultivate that potential the whole profile of New Zealand art overseas has to be raised.

I agree that more consistent representation of New Zealand galleries at major international art fairs would help. So would ensuring that art gets recognition in our diplomatic and trade drives. So often in Wellington foreign embassies sponsor significant exhibitions of their nationals' works. How often do our embassies and commissions abroad do that these days given their exceptionally narrow focus on short term trade goals?

Through our art a more rounded image of New Zealand and its talent can be communicated. And with greater recognition of our artists will undoubtedly come greater economic benefits. Perhaps its time Creative NZ, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade, and the Trade Development Board got together? Now there's a thought.

Rt Hon Helen Clark

Helen Clark will receive a
selection of wine from
St Jerome Wines



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