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## Arts and creative industries

**Australia should seek new and liberating ways to bring together the arts, popular culture and the creative industries, according to *Arts and creative industries*.**

The report, funded by the Australia Council for the Arts and prepared by Professor Justin O'Connor of the Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology, looks at ways in which the policy relationship between these often polarised sectors of arts and creative industries might be re-thought and approached more productively.

The report is in two parts, commencing with *An Australian conversation*, in which Professor O'Connor, with Stuart Cunningham and Luke Jaaniste, document a series of in depth interviews with 18 leading practitioners across the creative industries. They discuss their perceptions of the similarities, differences and connections between the arts and creative industries. The interviews frequently returned to the fundamental question of what was meant by 'art' and 'creative industries'.

The second, larger part of *Arts and creative industries*, addresses this question through an extensive review of the discussions of art and its relation to society and culture over the last few centuries. *A historical overview* highlights the importance that art has had in developing our comprehension of the modern world. It also examines the enthusiasm for the creative industries over the last 15 years or so and the impact this has had on creative policy-making.

*Arts and creative industries* suggests there is no dividing line between publicly-funded arts, popular culture and the blossoming businesses of the creative sector – and national policy should reflect this.

This study was commissioned by the Australia Council as part of a long-running and productive relationship between the council and the ARC Centre of Excellence on Creative Industries and Innovation at the Queensland University of Technology.

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## Comments

- [Dr Ian Shanahan](#) 4:47pm on 28 Mar 2011

Exactly who are the 18 interviewees? Regardless, such a small number is hardly representative of the Australian Arts \*in toto\*. In any even, the report smacks of doctrinaire postmodernism - as if the people were chosen to reflect a predetermined outcome. There will ALWAYS be an unbridgeable gulf between High and Low culture: they have fundamentally different aims.

- [Dr Nick Herd Director Research and Strategic Analysis Australia Council](#) 4:48pm on 28 Mar 2011

The interviewees are identified in the report. They are eighteen individual practitioners, micro business operators, curators, managers, directors, lecturers and consultants across the creative industries. No claim is made as to the representativeness of their views. The subjects were asked what they thought about the similarities, differences and connections between the arts and creative industries. The responses demonstrate that there is indeed a need for some historical and conceptual clarity about the role and meaning of the arts and its relationship to the creative industries. In the main report Professor O'Connor has put this conceptual confusion into historical context. He argues that ...whilst our ideas about art have been challenged and transformed over the last 250 years, without it we have found it hard to articulate what it is we value in our culture. Through a necessarily long essay into this subject he demonstrates where our ideas about art, its role in society and its centrality to modern conceptions of the cultural have come from. He also puts the development of ideas about the creative industries into an historical context that moves their consideration beyond the purely economic. In relation to the distinction between so called high and low culture, O'Connor also points out that from the nineteenth century with the development of new forms of mediated communications the boundaries between art worlds and popular cultures were fluid and permeable.

- [Maurice Frenkel](#) 4:50pm on 28 Mar 2011

"There will ALWAYS be an unbridgeable gulf between High and Low culture: they have fundamentally different aims." No, "high" and "low" culture - they do not exist. We need high quality debate in this important area. I recommend you read the report and then return with a response if you have one. I would like to thank the writers, this has given me a fresh perspective on the role of art in the making of the nation. I am interested in the way that governments align themselves with the cultural view they feel is the most main stream. I wonder then what this may mean for our next cultural policy given this week's exposure of political exploitation of ill-feeling toward cultural minorities? If there is no unitary culture then how do our governments make cultural policy and making sure that it is diverse?

- [Donald Richardson](#) 2:00pm on 12 Jul 2011

The inquiry was very much needed and it was well designed. But Ozco asked the wrong people to conduct it. Truly they 'put Dracula in charge of the blood-bank.' The Executive Summary reveals that it was not conducted with a desire to discover the truth, but to justify the position of the aficionados of the synthetic concept of 'creative industries.' 'The main argument is that "art" as an idea...cannot be restricted to what is now known as "the arts"', it states. Whose 'main argument'? That of the researchers, of course! How scientific was their research? Did they do a statistical analysis? Were their subjects chosen randomly? None of the human activities it lists are really 'arts.' ID, label-design, advertising etc are design, not art. And the assertion that there can be no distinction between high and low art must also be applied to the so-called 'creative industries.'

- [Sam Walker](#) 6:52am on 13 Jul 2011

This report is an ill-conceived cobbling together of hearsay, generalisations and repetition of tired cliches read elsewhere. The terms 'art' and 'creative industries' were never defined. If the authors of the report meant nothing more than any and all possible associations with the terms 'art' and 'creative industries' in any and all possible contexts. It is absolutely no surprise that those interviewed were unsure what, if anything, they were referring to. The authors could have defined their terms at the beginning. The bulk of the report is superfluous semantics, peppered with many more ill-defined terms. This is followed by an assertion that an (ill-defined) abstract model based on the terms 'art', 'media' and 'design' would be better (for some unstated reason) and should have government funding at the center of it's abstract layout because commerce destroys pure creativity and therefore value to society. It is not explained why commerce is singled out as the supposed destroyer of pure creativity and value, as opposed to other agendas such as moral or political agendas. The underlying (unsupported) message was that there should be increased government intervention in business to 'control the quality' of their activities. There seems to be a lot of animosity from the authors towards commercial art in the absence of extensive government intervention, with phrases referring to things like 'the failure of art in the market' and 'the squalour of the market'. The report was very poorly done. It's too bad the authors couldn't have shown more originality, clarity of expression and sound reasoning based on plausible propositions.

- [Justin O'Connor](#) 4:08pm on 16 Jul 2011

It's a shame that the possibilities of this kind of feedback forum, greatly conducive to dialogue and engagement, is so often reduced to intemperate abuse - like shouting on somebody's telephone answering service. It appears that on the one hand I've attacked (high) art in the name of the creative industries and on the other that I have attacked commercial culture in the name of (high) art. I suppose it might be possible that I did both. I did suggest that the concept of 'art' could no longer be restricted to those publicly funded activities known as 'the arts'. I also suggested that whilst 'commercial culture' could boast some of the most powerful statements of contemporary culture, tendencies within this commercial culture - and the urban spatial context in which they operate - were less welcome and could be addressed by public policy. It was a fairly basic re-statement of social democratic justification in the context of this expanded notion of 'art'. Donald Richardson is right to identify 'the main argument' as my main argument. It was not based on the interviews entirely, and certainly it has no statistical authority. I'm not sure what a statistical investigation of the attitudes to the relationship between art and creative industries might reveal; it could be interesting but it is not this study. The interviews testified to the confusions surrounding the concepts 'art' and 'creative industries' - something not to be dispelled by giving them a definition (based on?) but to be used to elicit a deeper uncertainty and hopefully a subsequent greater understanding about these terms. Sam Walker suggests the terms art and creative industries were not defined. I suggest Sam read the report, where I devote over 100 pages to questions of definition. Wood. Trees. Terms such as 'art' cannot simply be 'defined at the beginning' when it is precisely the status of such a definition which is in question. Donald Richardson and Ian Shanahan assert that I illegitimately reject the dividing line between 'high' and 'low' art; or is it culture? They use both terms. Are they the same? How do they differ? Is all culture art? See it's started again, I should define my terms..... These two seem to think that rejecting the distinction of high and low art/ culture is a bad thing. The report suggest that much work across the political spectrum began to question the grounds of this distinction - linked as it had been in many ways to issues of social class. I not only outlined these arguments in some detail I also suggested some real problems with reducing 'high' and 'low' to elite/ popular and commercial/ non-commercial. I also devoted a section to arguments as to whether rejecting high/low necessarily meant a) rejecting judgments of good and bad and b) that only the market could decide good and bad. I argued against both conclusions. I'd be happy to engage with you on whether you think my account is fair and clear and/ or whether you agree with the substance of my conclusions. But accusations of 'doctrinaire post-modernism' (I assume this is a deliberate and ironic oxymoron) or "ill-conceived cobbling together of hearsay, generalisations and repetition of tired cliches read elsewhere" and so on are not very helpful unless a) one has read the report and b) one actually engages with its arguments.

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