

DAME ELISABETH MURDOCH CULTURAL LEADERSHIP AWARD

Taking the lead brings rewards

Managing creativity in the public service requires a particular lightness of touch, writes Greg Mackie

TRUE cultural leaders are those people who use their imagination and creativity at a high level: the makers of art, tellers of stories, translators of ideas into objects. We turn to them to celebrate our humanity and challenge our prejudices. Cultural leaders inspire others, and push boundaries to make room for others to flourish.

There are also leaders in the cultural sector who enable artists to work at their best and help ensure their work is seen. They include the entrepreneurs, administrators, bureaucrats, politicians and sponsors with whom I work in my role as executive director of Arts SA.

This is the state Government's arts and cultural agency. Our job is to implement government arts policy and manage funding assistance to artists and organisations.

Part of my role is to provide advice to arts ministers, navigate relationships with hundreds of individuals and organisations, and maintain a property portfolio of more than 70 buildings, nearly half of which are heritage-listed.

A textbook approach to leadership will not work in the arts, where authority is less consciously constructed and less prescriptive than in business or politics. People in the arts have highly developed bullshit detectors and can smell a "method manager" a mile away.

The cultural sector is replete with optimists and pessimists, with insecurity and ego. Leadership requires a fusion of hope, aspiration, belief, business acumen and, at times, some fancy footwork. I am reminded of the quotation from Alexandre Ledru-Rollin at the French Revolution: "There go the people. I must follow them, for I am their leader." Another reflection on leadership comes from the US writer Lance Secretan: "Leadership is not so much about technique and methods as it is about opening the heart." Cultural sector leadership is about listening.

From the mid-1980s to late 2003, I ran a bookshop in Adelaide and had an opportunity to participate in the cultural life of the city. Over-the-counter conversations with community, cultural and political leaders and onlookers provided me with insights into the aspirations and preoccupations of our state. All this was set against the backdrop of ideas and culture that books provide.

Unlike my former job, where I was master of my own time, working in the more complex system of bureaucracy requires patience and good humour. I draw inspiration from the many artists, advocates and supporters I encounter. And I remind myself it is them and the community that we ultimately serve in the public sector. I work with a dedicated team who



Scarcity and abundance: Cultural leader Greg Mackie says there will never be enough money to fund all creative projects

Picture: Kelly Barnes

DAME ELISABETH MURDOCH CULTURAL LEADERSHIP AWARD

Greg Mackie, executive director, Arts SA

BEFORE his move to the public service, Greg Mackie ran one of Adelaide's most prominent book stores, Imprints. It was more than just a shop: Mackie also opened a gallery upstairs, and is credited with helping to revitalise the western end of Hindley Street as an arts precinct. In 1992, he became chair of Adelaide Writers Week and later instigated the Adelaide Festival of Ideas, first held in 1999. This led to him being named a cultural ambassador for the state. He was elected to Adelaide City Council (2000-2003) and was executive director of Arts SA in 2003.



Mackie in 2003

consistently give above and beyond the call.

I am very fortunate to serve two ministers I like personally: the Premier and Minister for the Arts, Mike Rann, and the Minister Assisting the Premier in the Arts, John Hill.

Both are passionate about the place of the

RICHARD PRATT BUSINESS LEADERSHIP AWARD

James Strong, chairman, Australia Council

ARTS companies and Australia's cultural life have benefited from James Strong's leadership. Appointed chairman of the Australia Council last year, he has also been chairman of the Sydney Theatre Company and the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, and served on the boards of the State Library of Victoria and Opera Australia. In 2004, he oversaw a federal review of symphony and theatre orchestras, which led to \$32 million in extra funding. A former chairman of AbaF, he helped generate at least \$15 million of private sector support for the arts.



Strong

arts in civil society. Both extend generous levels of trust, respect and good humour. In some ways, my role makes me a translator and negotiator, a navigator and counsel. It is a privilege to have such an overview of cultural activity in the state, and to contribute to its future. At times, of course, bureaucracy is about anything but leadership. It is about due process, accountability and managing detail. I try to keep internal reporting at our agency to a workable minimum, preferring to relate to people and issues through conversation. There is a real tension between the competing imperatives of leadership and process. Arts SA is a lean and efficient central agency, and our focus is to direct our resources to the arts sector and not ourselves.

I believe in lightness of touch: I try to judge the appropriate degree of action and intervention for a person or situation. There are passionate people in our team, and I endeavour to provide the space for them to maximise their own creativity. Creative bureaucracy is not necessarily an oxymoron.

In the arts, we work within a paradigm of scarcity and abundance. There will always be more creative talent, potential and ideas than there is the capacity to fund. Sometimes my job is to say "Sorry, but no", and this can be gut-wrenching when you know how much soul has been invested in ideas and proposals.

And while money is invariably tight, time is our most precious resource: time to properly listen to people, to think, to enable the connections and opportunities to occur.

The arts sector in South Australia is good at collaboration, and to prosper in the future we will need to get better at forming partnerships with both the corporate sector and personal

GOLDMAN SACHS JBWERE PHILANTHROPY LEADERSHIP AWARD

The Belgiorno-Nettis family

FRANCO Belgiorno-Nettis studied art and learned English when he was a prisoner of war of the British. He emigrated to Australia in 1951, and founded the Transfield construction company. He became a leading supporter of the arts and founded the Sydney Biennale. His sons Guido and Luca have followed his passion for the arts: Guido is chairman of the Australian Chamber Orchestra and Luca chairs the Biennale. Franco Belgiorno-Nettis died last year, aged 91. In August, the family pledged \$4 million to the Art Gallery of NSW for new contemporary art spaces.



Belgiorno-Nettis

benefactors. We need to harness the under-tapped capacity of small-medium businesses by better understanding their needs, and by recognising it's not brands that form partnerships, it's people.

Another important resource at our disposal is language. As a former bookseller, words are important to me. In whatever area of cultural leadership, management or practice, how we say things is as important as what we mean.

For example, if I could wave a magic wand I would abolish the term "not for profit" as it is used to describe arts and community organisations: it seems to imply "for loss".

Coming from small business, I don't think profit is a dirty word. But the arts are not driven for profit's sake: there are other worthy motivations, other benefits. Personally, I'd prefer a more affirmative term such as "cultural benefit" to describe our sector.

Leadership in the cultural sector is motivated by heart and inspiration. Forging relationships based on integrity and trust is something that takes time. Being a good listener and having a capacity to empathise with a whole range of people and their circumstances is vital. A belief in the dignity of service is also critical to successful cultural sector leadership. Courage, political savvy, patience, respect, humour, passion and at times bravado are helpful.

There are so many people I know who could easily work in other areas of enterprise for more money and better hours, but we wouldn't. To choose a career in the cultural sector and to stick with it requires a sense of personal mission. At times it can feel like mission impossible, but the intrinsic rewards of culture and the arts make it worthwhile.

**FLINDERS
POWER**

state theatre company
OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA
CELEBRATING 35 YEARS

PARTNERS IN PERFORMANCE - ASSISTANT DIRECTOR SCHEME

Flinders Power provides more than a third of South Australia's electricity supply through its reliable and continuous Northern Power Station and Playford Power Station operations in Port Augusta and is a major generator of electricity in the competitive National Electricity Market.

Support of the arts, and specifically of the Assistant Director Scheme, is an expression of Flinders' core mission to contribute to the well-being of the communities in which we operate. Flinders Power recognises the important role that the Arts play in the health and vibrancy of the wider community and is committed to supporting this important creative development opportunity for a new generation of theatre practitioners.

www.flinderspower.com.au

**Winner of the Marsh Partnering Award 2007
Best Private Sector Arts Relationships - South Australia**

Australia
Business Arts
Foundation

AbaF

GOOD FOR THE ARTS

GOOD FOR BUSINESS

GOOD FOR THE COMMUNITY

From painters in the Pilbara to puppets in primary schools, the finalists and winners of the AbaF Awards are great examples of relationships that benefit the arts, business, and communities. Contact the Australia Business Arts Foundation to find out how you can benefit too.

www.abaf.org.au TELEPHONE
03 9616 0300

Among the national and state winners of the 2007 AbaF Awards are: **(Top)** Rio Tinto Iron Ore and the Shire of Roebourne for the Cossack Art Award, won by Pilbara artist Murinba. Photo: Christian Sprogoe; **(Centre)** Greg Mackie, pictured in Adelaide's Hindley Street, an area revived by arts activity; **(Bottom)** Aurora Energy and Terrapin Puppet Theatre, delivering electrical safety messages to Tasmanian primary school students with the help of Sparky the puppet. Photo: Peter Mathew.