

I had hoped to make a spectacular entrance today.

For those of you who weren't at the media launch of Sala Week a couple of weeks ago, the presenters, first Fat Elvis then the elegant Maggie Beer were driven in to the Greenaway Gallery on the back of Kym Bonython's motor bike. I thought I'd get my turn today - but there may have been a problem getting the bike down the art gallery stairs!

I'd forgotten till that moment when Kim roared in to the gallery on his bike, that when I graduated from the South Australian School of Art in 1968 (a notable year) Kym came to the graduate exhibition, bought one of my paintings for his collection, then gave me a ride into town on the back of his motor bike. I think I was impressed as much by the ride as I was by the sale.

But the support that I received at the beginning of my career is still there for emerging artists. While there may not be many collectors about with Kym's vision, in fact the commercial galleries like Greenaway and Anima and all the publicly funded arts organisations offer expanded opportunities for artists at the beginning of their careers to exhibit, to curate, to write. The number of events in SALA week that include emerging artists attests to this.

But few artists make a living from sales of their work alone. There also needs to be employment in the visual arts and craft sector for artists to survive. Teaching and arts administration have traditionally offered employment for artists. But the economic constraints of recent times have limited work opportunities in these areas.

The last 5 years have been particularly difficult. There have been huge changes in state and federal support for the arts, particularly in the tertiary education sector. The absorption of art schools into the University system and the reduced funding in the tertiary sector have forced huge changes in tertiary visual arts education.

In his address last year Hossein Valanamesh pointed out that a strong art education was the basis of a strong art practice and called for arts schools to look outwards, to involve artists in their courses by offering teaching opportunities and residencies, to work in partnership with the professional arts organisations, and to develop lively public lecture programs.

Hossein articulated the concerns of many of us who work in art schools. At the South Australian School of Art we are working hard to address these issues and to rebuild our reputation as one of the best art schools in the country, by improving our courses and working with our partners, the professional organisations and other art schools. Adelaide is fortunate to have three art schools offering tertiary visual arts and craft education. I believe its important we work collaboratively, but we need to define our differences, to make it clear what we each do best, to offer real choices to prospective students.

Earlier this year I was on the interview panel for the new head of the South Australian School of Art. All the candidates spoke about why they wanted to come to South Australia. Without exception they cited the well developed visual art and craft infrastructure in the city and inner suburbs as one of the strongest incentives for coming here to live and work. They mentioned South Australia's reputation for innovation and leadership in setting up organisations like the Jam Factory, Tandanya, the Experimental Art Foundation, as well as artist run workshops like Gray St, that have become models of their kind nationally.

The concentration and mix of this visual art and craft infrastructure in the city is one of South Australia's strongest assets.

But as we all know changes are afoot.

The report on the Living Art Centre, the plans to revitalise Hindley St and the planned move of the North Adelaide School of Art to Light Square, and the South Australian School of Art back to the city are indications that this infrastructure will change over the next few years. I would urge those leading this process to keep in mind and maintain the strength of the current concentration, diversity and mix of these organisations in the city in their negotiations.

Hearing these applicants talk about why they wanted to move to South Australia reinforced my belief that this is a good place to work as an artist. It is possible to live in a regional area like South Australia with the advantages of climate and cuisine and develop an international reputation as artists like Hossein Valanamesh, Fiona Hall, Catherine Truman and Gerry Wedd. But artists don't achieve this just on their own. They need the stimulation and the opportunities offered by a strong visual art and craft infrastructure.

Organisations are only as good as the people working in them and in South Australia many artists (and former artists) have taken a leading role in making these organisations work. There is strong leadership in the visual art and craft community in South Australia at present. The initiation and development of SALA week is a prime example. This year's program of 99 venues and almost 500 events across the state is an extraordinary achievement and demonstrates the vitality and importance of the visual arts and craft to the culture of South Australia by focusing on the makers, the artists and craftspeople.

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