

Creating an International Dialogue for Design

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The need to compare and assess our position by an international measure has been an important one within New Zealand culture. Our comparative geographic isolation in the Pacific Rim has not lessened the desire to place our ideas and goals within an international context. With the advent of increased lines of international communication, it can be argued that a purely nationalistic position is hard to uphold. In many cases the position is one that is held by default, because creating some kind of global component is seen as too hard.

New Zealand designers should have an international component to their work, one that considers the richness of opportunities and ideas within the global environment. This implies that networks of relationships be established in other countries. Having a focus which includes the international, offers a clarity to ones identity. It helps to identify what is truly local and what is the result of an international influence.

In many respects the legacy of our isolation is still with us and has resulted in a do it yourself mentality. 'Strong and sturdy' is still expressed as a primary feature of desire. It can be argued that meaningful, successful participation in an international sense will demand that those pragmatic views be challenged and that Issues of intellect and emotive appeal be considered.

The present correspondence of design issues is one way into New Zealand,

with an apparent lack of vision from local designers to be involved with the international. For New Zealand designers to absorb ideas of the international and not provide a response back through their work to the international is to say that the margins don't have a contribution to make, when in fact they do. Through dialogue and the exposure to new ideas and ways of thinking, like many of the activities that New Zealanders participate in, designers can add to the rich tapestry of a global culture.

This paper as a starting point, considers the present role of designers in New Zealand and the lack of activity in the area of three-dimensional design. The ways in which those in the art world and film industry have participated in an international sense, have been illustrated as models of the pathways that designers may take.

Being active in an international environment requires that designers hone their skills, not just in the area of creativity but in the way they interconnect with all the issues that relate to the business environment. This paper addresses some of the key areas that designers need to focus on. Some of the comments outlined in this document are subtle, but they suggest a level of commitment and attention to detail that is required if designers are to have a valid contribution in an international sense.

International Dialogue and the Arts

New Zealand artists and designers have always felt the need to examine the work of overseas artists and designers. In the past the paths of information were more limited than today. In the 1940s and 1950s artists and designers based in New Zealand were only able to reference black and white images on an annual basis. The Studio Yearbook which featured some of the work of New Zealand based designer John Crichton, were eagerly awaited by the likes of himself and the potter Len Castle. With the reintroduction of the Matson Line cruise ships in 1956 we see the ideas of an international or American culture directly influencing New Zealand design. For local designers these ships represented a tangible connection with contemporary overseas design in the style and luxury of the American West Coast. Home and Building drew comparisons between John Crichton's interior of the Odeon theatre and the theatres on board the visiting ships, the Mariposa and the Monterey.

However in addition to these influences, a few people in the art world got out and went overseas, but the likes of Colin McCahon not doing so until the 1950s.

Justin Paton

Justin Paton, art history lecturer outlines that it wasn't until the late 1950's and early 1960's that in New Zealand, grants and fellowships started to be set up. Before that, prizes and Art Society grants, provided limited opportunities for travel. For example the Cuthbert Art award for landscape painting. Artists

did however go over to the Royal College of Art, but that was in essence through scholarships funded as a result of New Zealand being part of the British Empire.

In 1964 the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council was enacted. With it came an increase in the exchange of ideas and in the experience of the artists involved. Funding for travel became available for New Zealand Artists, through the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council and took a form similar to the Professional Development Grants available through Creative New Zealand today. The basic purpose of these grants is to provide the opportunity for people to go and be exposed to new ideas. It was in the early 1960s that the advanced artists and modern artists were able to exchange ideas through a fellowship system. In 1961 Don Peebles, an abstract painter, received a New Zealand Arts Societies Fellowship and went to London.

Paton suggests, "It was the strongest kind of axis between New Zealand and the wider world at that time".¹ He outlines that these contacts initiated a professionalised art world and assisted with the breaking down of the alienation, that the New Zealand public had experienced with modern art. As a result more prestige was given to modern art, the flow on effect being that more fellowships were offered, many of which were funded by private individuals who liked the coudos of sponsoring arts projects. Recently the 'Distance Looks Our Way' show was funded to a large extent by the Gibbs family.

In the 1980s, art like the economy, was booming and with it corporate

sponsorship and funding awards like the 'Moet and Chandon' award — an award where by artists are funded in private residencies.

One area of concern is that often those making the selections are seen to be pushing an agenda of their own, which often results in accusations that dice are loaded. There has also been disagreement with the premise, “that you can have a pool of artists, photographers, installation artists and cut a path through them and say that this person is the best”², when they are examined in the same category. Paton, favours “funding for research and professional development for people who are obviously in need of the money as opposed to these giant sweepstakes...”

Another issue when it comes to selection of work in funding situations is that it often comes down to opinion, which is shifting ground. Taking this view Paton sees an argument for separate cultures of research and criticism that are primarily concerned with the work and less affected by the claims of dirtiness of hand.

It can be argued that without a critical design culture, the importance of design is diminished. One of the mechanisms to achieve a strong critical design culture is through designers having their work written up in national and international design publications. Because of the importance of magazines as a forum for criticism and debate, it could be considered vital that New Zealand designers have access to a design publication, that is more than a front for picking up

new business. An example of one such publication that engages with art and design issues at a critical level, is the Australian magazine, 'Object'.

Wyston Curnow

Wyston Curnow, English lecturer and art critic, outlines that very few New Zealand artists ever have the experience of being in anything other than a New Zealand exhibition. From their point of view he suggests they may hope to be seen in 'Art New Zealand'. The idea of having work in the international publications, 'Flash Art' or 'Forum', may for them be unthinkable.³

Curnow believes that magazines are important regarding flows of information and suggests that New Zealand work should be represented in international magazines. He sees magazines as vital to a critical culture. "If you don't have venues for a critical culture to develop, you don't have a critical culture, it is as simple as that. If there are no places where people can discuss design issues, they won't get discussed and that's what has happened in the art world. Before there were art magazines there were no art critics, basically there were reviewers but no art critics".

Designers should consider the art worlds' international exchanges as a model of what they might also do. These concepts of international exchange have been brought about in the main by a desire to experience a wider library of ideas, which are in many cases inaccessible in New Zealand. Even when the information is available, many of the subtleties that come from personal contacts and the actual environments are lost.

Curnow believes that artists in residencies are very valuable, but outlines that New Zealand has not been that successful in that area. Australia on the other hand has about ten international residencies, this is ongoing and not simply one offs. It was suggested that exchanges between institutions be encouraged at both a staff and student level, particularly those which involve a movement from undergraduate programs to graduate programs of high quality internationally.

Of course the amount of graduate programs for design in New Zealand is very low, so before an exchange can occur this area needs to be addressed.

The value of an international dialogue has been recognised by Curnow. Two years ago John McCormack (Director of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery) and Curnow helped organise an art conference on the question “ Is Art a European Idea?”. This was brought about by the desire to organise some international art events as it was felt there was a need to gain an international perspective to art practice in New Zealand. Curnow and McCormack were aware that Australia had as it were, captured the action with the Sydney Biennale and that many New Zealand artists were travelling to this event. Curnow outlined that at the time there were no such events in New Zealand. As an alternative to the Sydney Biennale a conference was held, followed by an exhibition in 1996, titled ‘Art in the Age of Globalisation’.

Curnow was looking for a way of pre-establishing a New Zealand connection with international practice. It was decided to take a subject that was related to

New Zealand and to make an exhibition out of it. He suggested that it was important to understand the relationship with the international scene and how it works. Curnow outlined that if in America, an international exhibition is organised it will be around an American theme. The same can be said of France or Germany, where the issues that are discussed will be those of interest in that country. This has the effect of bringing about an international view point which is always being negotiated by those countries participating. Of course if you are not a player, then there can be a big gap between the international and local. Curnow considered that ideas of identity were problematic. Situations may arise when it is hard to determine whether the 'local' is in fact local and not simply the result of an imported idea. He suggested that in order to define the local content, one must have an awareness of the international. Curnow outlined that from 1960 until about 1980, what was considered international was simply American.

The international was seen by Curnow as something that could be misunderstood, but was really a dialogue, a process of negotiation and discussion between a whole variety of centres, that was constantly under construction. Whilst Curnow acknowledges that the marketplace, as well as individual regional interests and styles have a role to play, he considers that a "dichotomy of the local and the local identity verses some amorphous international is just a misconception of the situation." He saw the issue as whether you are engaging with what is happening or simply trying to exclude it from the equation. Curnow sees this as a kind of laziness, justified on the basis that we are only interested in what we decide to be interested in, which

is what is at hand. He sees this as an example of not being seriously engaged with what you are about.

Curnow doesn't dismiss issues of identity and outlines that there is character to the work that is done in New Zealand. Having interests as opposed to others, was seen as the way in which one moves into the negotiation. However it was suggested that an identity should be sought in the best work. On the question of whether it is necessary to have work that is identifiably New Zealand work, Curnow did not think so.

Globalisation appears to be a catchword of the nineties. Curnow suggests that through the exhibition 'Art in the Age of Globalisation', there may be ways of examining this phenomenon as it relates to the visual arts. He outlines that globalisation can be seen to have positively affected the careers of some of the younger artists who have sought to take advantage of both communication and the freedom of cheap travel. Channels of opportunity are not based on a system of graduation and issues of age and reputation are not barriers to obtaining overseas experience. This is illustrated by a younger generation of artists who have used cheap air-fairs to form alliances with other artists, in what are often inexpensive gallery situations. Over the last year exchanges between galleries in Sydney and Auckland have been considerable, with exchanges taking place almost every month or two. These initiatives are coming from individuals, who do not let issues of money and power impede moving ideas around. Curnow considers that these opportunities are developed because

of the strong attitudes of those involved. Because they give priority and commitment to making it happen.

Paton suggests that with the advent of globalism and the freer flow of ideas that there is a blanding out of art across the world. He believes the irony of the new internationalism is that art-work being made by students in New Zealand, looks a lot like that of students in Europe. He suggests that this situation arises because they are all reading the same art magazines, abiding the same theories and absorbing the same influences.⁴

Curnow however felt that this blanding out of art across the world was not occurring because there is not the domination that used to occur with particular movements. He outlines that when strong styles exist, there is the opportunity for a blandness to emerge, but because there has not been any particular dominating movements for the last ten years this was not the case. There is no longer the dominance of the centres, America and before that Paris.

There is a trend of interest in the margins. Curnow suggests that to take advantage and to get the most out of this interest, requires that we have the attitudes, the work and the ability to make the best decisions.

Unfortunately the art scene has been focused inwards rather than outwards for quite along time, together with their resources. Proportionately there have been less international exhibitions and less art bought in New Zealand than in the 1950's. The lack of international art purchased in New Zealand, in the

opinion of Curnow lets down the New Zealand public and has served to maintain the focus inwards. He sighted the reason for this as a lack of knowledge and experience. Regarding the issue of financial restrictions he considers that whilst we have been priced out of certain markets, we have not been priced out of the business of buying international artwork.

'Art in the Age of Globalisation', evolved as a collaboration between Europe and New Zealand, is however, setting out to establish a dialogue between the centre and the periphery.

The exhibition is taking place in Wellington and simultaneously in Amsterdam at the Stedilyc Museum. The absent works from each museum are linked via interactive sites on the internet. Part of the concept was that it would be a show that spanned the world and the Stedilyc is a central site in terms of the international art world. Having a version of the same show in New Zealand enables the exhibition to occupy and engage the centre, but to cut out the issues of exhibitions being packaged and sent by someone, for the artists. Curnow believes that with the packaging of art for an international show, many possibilities are excluded, the package becomes a kind of commodity.

The sense of developing a dialogue is important, so that the position is able to be negotiated and is not fixed.

Curnow quotes a newspaper article, "under sixteen year old soccer team lacks international experience."⁵ Here was an example of how we think about sport

and how we do well at sport. He considers that we have to reach the stage when our art is viewed in the same manner. One of the important issues of 'Art in the Age of Globalisation', was that New Zealand artists have the opportunity to hang their work alongside artists of substantial reputation and of roughly the same age group. What this does is to alter the artists "sense of their own standing, what they are really about".

In many respects having an international dimension to a design career is imperative. As Curnow points out, film is so internationally orientated because the investment cannot be covered by the New Zealand audience. The same situation exists with the arts, the New Zealand public and the market has very limited resources to provide support. A career in the visual arts is easy to start, but very difficult to sustain, "so they suck a lot of people in and then they keep them all poor, that's the arts business in New Zealand and that's because we're small. The only way out of that I can see, at least for some artists, is adding a kind of international layering to their career. That really hasn't emerged yet, that's something in terms of all these developments I think needs to emerge. As I said with sport, or any other endeavour, one of the things about living in a small country, if you are to have hopes and with high expectations, to set your standards or hopes simply by a New Zealand measure, is to set them lower than you need to and that's not because this is a bad place, it is a great place. It is just that there are fundamental limits to what a population of three and half million is prepared to do in these areas, or capable of doing in these areas." 6

New Zealand Film an International Model

Those within the New Zealand film industry have demonstrated what can be achieved through passion, determination and dedication to a vision. Geoff Murphy described his first feature film 'Wild Man,' released in 1977, as "an opportunity seized.....we had a chance, so we went for it and got it". Those involved did not let a lack of funds deter them from their goal. During this period film makers used "all manner of deviousness and imagination to fund these films."⁷

With films like 'Sleeping Dogs' it was realised that the New Zealand industry demonstrated skill and energy that could lead on to bigger things. It was also recognised that the industry was too small and that it could not exist without patronage. With this realisation, the government was lobbied directly and public meetings were held, newspaper articles written to help bring about the establishment of a Film Commission, that could provide financial support for feature films. By 1977 the 'Interim Film Commission' was formed. Its function, as outlined by its first Chairman Bill Sheat was to "encourage, participate in and assist in the making, promotion, distribution and exhibition of film". At times when there has been almost no production happening, the Film Commission has solely financed a number of films to get the industry back into life. Peter Jackson considers it a distinct advantage when the Film Commission will put up at least half of the budget. However funding for films is often a partnership involving overseas investors, for example 'Heavenly Creatures' was more than half funded by a German company.⁸

The importance of having the public's awareness of a film before it is seen in local theatres can be illustrated with the success of 'Footrot Flats', 'Goodbye Pork Pie' and 'Came a Hot Friday.'⁹ 'Goodbye Pork Pie' had its release held back twelve months. In that time the New Zealand public were hearing of its international success and when it was released locally, everyone went. The situation where the international market is targeted for the initial release of a film, suggests the power that international recognition has on the national market. In many respects it comes down to the perception, that if the rest of the world considers it is good, then it must be. So whether this perception is a conscious one or not, there is often a bench marking by New Zealanders that references the international.

One of the problems faced by the industry is the talent drain. It has been suggested that the decision to move off-shore is not necessarily because of the money, but instead in the pursuit of opportunities and the careers people want to have. Jackson believes that some people may feel that their careers can go no further in New Zealand, the result being that many film makers have left and taken up opportunities in America and Australia. The film industry is seen by Jackson as "...perpetually new, its infancy is never ending". The situation exists where film makers take two or three films to build their confidence and start to learn from their mistakes, then they move off-shore. He believes there should be a base of experienced directors who stay in New Zealand, who go on to make better and better movies.¹⁰

Jackson sees the four or five features a year done in New Zealand as constituting

a cottage industry. He suggests that generally New Zealand film is run by individuals and without a real industries formal structure. Although we cannot compete with the Americans, Jackson sees New Zealand's strength coming from the fact that "...ours are individual movies, made by people who really badly want to make films." He outlines that the situation exists in New Zealand where there is uncertainty having made a film, whether you will make another.¹¹ He contrasts this with America where he suggests that you can get films made easier.

Phil Pryke, recent Chairman of the New Zealand Film Commission (1993-96) believes that when talent leaves, they still carry the New Zealand flag. He considers it advantageous when the likes of Jane Campion, who was trained for the most in Australia, comes back to film the 'Piano' in New Zealand with French funding. Lindsay Shelton, Director of Sales and Marketing for the New Zealand Film Commission, suggests that even when movies are being funded outside of New Zealand and the responsibility for their sale is with those people, "we can rest happily in the knowledge the directors are clearly recognised internationally as New Zealand directors."¹²

The issue of finding investment partners off-shore may be critical to New Zealand designers if they are to be based in New Zealand. If the necessary investment for a project is not forthcoming in New Zealand, rather than dropping the idea, it can be argued that sponsorship should be sought off-shore.

There is a worldwide view that the primary role of public funding for film making should be to launch young film makers onto the international stage. This outward thinking acknowledges that film making is primarily an international activity.¹³ A similar argument can be made for public support to assist New Zealand designers onto the international arena.

It can be argued that without the New Zealand Film Commission the film industry would not have had such a high degree of success. The opportunity to tap into the wealth of advice and experience regarding such issues as audience identification and the use of calculated marketing strategies, is something that could greatly assist New Zealand's designers when seeking to establish an international perspective to their work. However it is important that a body, especially a funding body is not permitted to force an agenda or create a model of desirable outcomes that will restrict the uniqueness of individual projects.

Pryke outlines that "A film's audience must be considered from the outset and made an integral part of every package and presentation from the script treatment on. Thinking about marketing when a film is finished, as can be the case, is far too late. He has stated that he would like to see clear and detailed marketing plans at the application time for a project.

There has also been an importance placed upon the issue of how talent might be marshalled entrepreneurially and creatively. Another issue of relevance to

designers is the way Pryke identified the need to be able to place talent into “very specialised hot-house environments” where they can learn how to bring the whole deal together.¹⁴ Designers in New Zealand also need to consider the issues of bringing the whole package together. This highlights an advantage of the Film Commission, in that it accesses a wide knowledge base and is able to advise in areas other than actual film making.

Pryke outlines that in New Zealand there isn't a shortage of ideas, but of the creative skills that are necessary to package those ideas. He made the comment that he was amazed that people in the communication industry communicated their ideas so badly and that generally the presentations were poor. He suggests that the idea and the package must be given a lot of thought, as well as the way it will be delivered and how it will look.

Another aspect that is really important is the vision of the people who are going to bring the idea together. Pryke outlines, “ One of the best presentations I have come across was given by Peter Jackson.....I came away thinking, “Yeah, not only do I think I know what it might look like in the end, but I'm absolutely convinced that Peter knows what it is going to look like.” He believes that although film making is a living process and subject to change, your chances of developing a product are greater when you have a very clear picture of what you are trying to produce. He suggests that when the vision is articulated, you have more opportunities to use a range of disciplines to effect the result.

Pryke suggests from his experience of industry structures, that the stronger

an industry, the more a country will benefit from it, often in a myriad of sometimes unquantifiable ways. “The very fact that people are marching forward and trying new ideas is what we have to have in this country”.¹⁵

Lindsay Shelton who has been selling and promoting New Zealand’s films for 14 years has some valuable insights into the industry. He outlines that people find it genuinely extraordinary that we develop so many great films and producers. New Zealand’s seven selections for Cannes over a ten year period is certainly impressive when countries with similar population bases, on average will have one. There is a modesty about the successes Shelton acknowledges, but outlines that we no longer have an inferiority complex.

Even though New Zealand film has not always been successful locally, he believes that New Zealanders are aware of what is happening and see it as positive. Shelton has promoted these films, as ‘New Zealand Films’. He suggests that there is considerable advantage to be achieved by this collective position that alludes to a larger industry than actually exists.

He believes that the marketing would be more difficult if they did not have so much of a hands on approach. Shelton outlines that their approach is direct in its nature, they are in a position to say, “You can actually buy it from us and we will work with you on the release”.

According to Shelton, festivals and markets are tied together, with participation at the festivals of AFM, Cannes and Mifed being essential. A lot of use is made

of direct mail, both before and after events. Distributors are continuously being made aware of titles and successes. Shelton explains that when at Cannes every effort is made to get potential buyers to come and see the film, “Every little bit of achievement that you can muster is part of the initial aim.” One of the initial problems for the industry was building up credibility.¹⁶ He outlines that it was a continuity of participation, in the case of French distributors that eventually drew their attention.

The New Zealand Film Commission offers programmes for Industry Support under three main programmes. The Commission’s ‘Festivals and Awards’ programme will provide financial assistance towards the costs of attending festivals which will encourage informed debate and which gives opportunities to new talent. Assistance is also given to attend awards which recognise the excellence and achievement. The ‘Resource and Industry Organisation Support Programme’, gives assistance to film resource organisations to be active in the development and dissemination of film culture in New Zealand. Thirdly is the ‘Professional Development Programme’ to support initiatives by groups and organisations which are aimed at increasing the skill levels within the film industry. It also serves to promote increased levels of networking and the dissemination of information through conferences and forums.¹⁷ The Film Commission offers assistance in other areas including marketing. This area focuses on ensuring that New Zealand films receive the maximum attention from audiences, distributors and media and maintains a high profile at the major international festivals.

Many of the issues that have played a part in the success of the film industry can be used as models for what could be, a design industry in New Zealand. Presently design in New Zealand, seems to be at the stage film in New Zealand was twenty years ago. One of the important factors affecting the success of the film industry was that enough individuals wanted to make films badly enough, that they made it happen, funding or not. They were passionate and active. It was realised that support was required in certain areas and the New Zealand Film Commission was set up to assist. The film industry displays the individual components of a wider, 'package of considerations' that have been addressed to attain both national and international success.

Directions for Design

Outlined are ideas and observations that may offer an alternative to the small scale, one-off, craft-type production that presently exists in New Zealand. The scale of design activity appears to be that of a fledgling industry, one that occasionally comes to life through efforts of individuals and special events. It is important to set your goals high and to be involved in many forums of design debate. As with other activities to achieve high goals usually involves international participation. Designers should be initiating opportunities that enable them to place their work alongside that of other designers and to be forming associations that enable them to be a part of 'hot house' design environments.

Outlined are a selection of experiences, observations and suggestions which

may suggest directions for the creation of a rich, national and international design culture.

Matthew von Sturmer

Matthew von Sturmer is a designer based in New Zealand and has the experience of putting his ideas into production. He was involved with the 'Artiture' exhibition that went to Japan. The exhibition had funding and support from the Arts Council, the External Board of Trade Relations and the manufacturing company 'Dee Dee Cee'. The Japanese provided huge support and according to Sturmer, those who sent work were some of the brightest names in New Zealand contemporary furniture.¹⁸

Yet, in the eyes of Von Sturmer the whole thing went nowhere. The exhibition was covered in Japan by all the most prestigious industry magazines. There was also an incredibly positive public response to the show. But after the exhibition, the connections went no further and the relationships between the Japanese and New Zealand partners were dissolved. Von Sturmer cites that there were disagreements between the New Zealanders and a lack of vision.

Von Sturmer suggests that one of the first things that should have taken place was to have a critical analysis of the work, discussing issues of structurality, aesthetics and outlining the possibilities of manufacture. "The nuts and bolts weren't dealt with and there wasn't an acknowledgment that there isn't a manufacturing infrastructure for a bunch of craft designers, who were small

workshop-based serial manufacturers.”

An exhibition of this nature can be seen as an excellent start point to a larger plan. It is therefore vital to articulate in advance what future outcomes are desirable and to try and forecast possible scenarios, so that decisions are made with a future plan in mind.

Von Sturmer believes that the Japanese market is one of the most exciting because it is affluent, very international and that the Japanese have an interest in what they call, a ‘Fusion’ culture. This refers to the fact that in New Zealand we are non-mainstream in our traditions, not American or European, without a legacy of inherited culture. Von Sturmer outlines that as an island nation with a developing culture, we are seen in a sense as being very contemporary.

Support for a design focus in Asia is supported by the Australian design consultancy Blue Sky Design¹⁹ and by the Parisian based Australian designer, Marc Newson.²⁰

Von Sturmer suggests that this freedom from a culture of predetermined ideas was important in the works that went to Japan and the fact that the work was quite crafted. Von Sturmer outlines that issues of passion and ingenuity are aspects of New Zealand design which need to be embraced. He suggests that we need to do something with them that is constructive in terms of creating a design culture, together with manufacturing-export industries based on an appropriate scale of production.

He sees this as requiring a shift in thinking, one that involves “a real meeting ground between the manufacturing sector, designers, artists and those parties where you need to understand the nature of each other”. He draws the comparison with the Italian craft based studios that developed a fusion between design and manufacturing, whilst retaining a real commitment to aesthetic principles.

Overall Von Sturmer felt that the exhibition in Japan was an overwhelming success in the way it represented New Zealand products and for the cultural exchange that took place. He feels that the Japanese connection is far more meaningful, than it is with Europe. He sees a relevance and an intimacy to the relationship due to our shared position in the Pacific Rim.

Von Sturmer outlines that the Artiture exhibition held in New Zealand gave the public a huge impression of this countries contemporary furniture design industry, whereas the reality is that there are not a lot committed people out there. He felt that finance, marketing and production issues had not been considered. These are the areas that Von Sturmer has had to consider, in order to get his objects into production. He does however find it frustrating, that he is unable to commit himself to being just a designer.

Discussing the aspects of product distribution to international markets Von Sturmer sees it is a matter of putting yourself out there. He suggests that there are potentially huge opportunities that may result from ‘international trade fair’ participation. “There is a huge opportunity internationally and that

sort of direct naive approach could result in anything". He sees global export as really dealing with a group of personal relationships.

Von Sturmer believes that if you are not using agents and middle men you simplify the process and reduce the risk, as there is often difficulty in accessing the credibility of an agent. He outlines that in many cases you have to try and break into somebody who is already established, or you have to take a risk with a person who may turn out to be all talk and promises. That puts a huge liability on all the hard work undertaken in New Zealand.

Von Sturmer suggests that the ground work must have been done, with the necessary infrastructure in place, in order to make the most of international opportunities. He sees the value of organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Japan External Trade Organisation, JETRO.

Resulting from the 'Artiture Japan' exhibition and having made prior contact with Marc Newson an Australian designer, Von Sturmer was given a warm welcome by Teuro Kurosaki at the Japanese design house 'Idee'. Idee had assisted Newson in the early part of his career with an investment of money and resources. According to Von Sturmer it did huge things for Idee and acted as the launch pad for Newson's career. It occurred at a time when a recession of confidence was hitting Japan and the 1980's, 'Design-Star' phenomena was ending.

The Japanese treat relationships in very civilised manner and Von Sturmer

sees that there are potential opportunities to form meaningful relationships with companies similar to Idee. However Von Sturmer felt that Kurosaki was not about to offer any one designer, the level of support, given to Newson. He suggests that there is a lot more realism in the Japanese market. Idee is now embarking on many individual projects as opposed to taking on one designer in entirety.

Von Sturmer outlines, having seen Idee's set-up with their small workshops and design room, that it may be possible to have a similar physical set up in the back of Grey Lynn. However, he suggests that the actual logistics of such an operation are complex and beyond the resources of any existing New Zealand company.²¹

He reiterates that before a distributor is sought, the infrastructure must be in place and you have to be certain that the product will work. "With each new product, material and process there's a liability involved and it takes along time to research". From his experience he believes that if the commitment is to your work regarding issues of design, manufacturing and quality, then the rest will follow. "Participation in any international design sense is easy, we have actually got a huge invitation by the rest of the world, because this is a region that is interesting to people." Von Sturmer considers that it is a critical time when something really good could happen, especially if a commission was to be set up. However he feels that if it is not going to happen, designers still need to get on with it. "We actually have an almost better opportunity because of that hardship so to speak, through the nature of doing it under adversity you get stronger".

Von Sturmer has sent work to Canada and to Japan, but pulled back from those markets because there were aspects of the manufacturing that needed to be resolved. He found that it was a big jump to get his designs to a stage where anyone could assemble them, as opposed to being individually assembled, crafted ideas. He was faced at one stage with being in the position where he had a few lamps with an enthusiastic distributor in Los Angeles, but then had his credibility shot as it took another three months to get the next one right. After that he pulled back and stopped putting his credibility at risk. Instead preferring to put more emphasis on research and development, coupled with refinement.²²

Mark Armstrong

One of the important aspects for the New Zealand designer is to have a global focus. This is recognised by Mark Armstrong, one the directors of the Australian design consultancy 'Blue Sky Design', a company with a significant off-shore client base.

Armstrong outlines that even if a client is making a product in Australia for the domestic market, they will inevitably have to compete in a global way. This occurs because the market consists of international competitors, who will be looking at how they can bring in their product, in a way that makes it competitive with the Australian product. He suggests that it doesn't matter who the manufacturer is, it is essential that they maintain a global competitiveness.

Armstrong outlines that being located in Australia and having international

clients, necessitates that you travel and subscribe to all sorts of information to know what is going on. However, if you can do that, you can be located anywhere. The other main consideration is that in order to get commissions offshore it is vital to have a network of connections. This is the only way that Armstrong has found to work, "I have met designers at Phillips, that quit and got jobs at General Electric in Hong Kong. That led us to getting commissions with known companies in Australia, with suppliers in Taiwan. We've made the link with the Taiwan supplier and picked them up as a client. It has got to go through word of mouth, friendship, networking and trust . Then you can work for those outside companies". This is emphasised by the Chinese way of doing business, 'word of mouth'. Armstrong has tried cold calling in China and has not been able to secure any commissions. He outlines that it comes down to making contacts, "if you put together a beautiful portfolio and you go and see them and everything else, you'll get none... be someone's friend for six months and then it can happen, that's my experience."

In many cases the overseas client is in a position to obtain design services around the corner. What Blue Sky tries to do, is to provide a higher level of expertise, ensure that the client feels that they can be trusted and set up communications that are as good as if they were around the corner. To do this they use the fax, modems and the internet to transfer CAD files, but even then communication can still be an obstacle.

Armstrong felt that in only certain product categories could their position in the Southern Hemisphere be used for competitive advantage. He also felt that

their work wasn't representative of an Australian sense of design. However Armstrong has found that working for a range of international clients has increased their desirability to the local manufactures. ²³

Professor Desmond Freeman

Professor Freeman was the Chairperson for the National Design Review Steering Committee, responsible for 'The National Design Review Report', 'Competing By Design'. He was in New Zealand recently and spoke to both designers and manufacturers.

Freeman saw a lot of similarities between Australia and New Zealand in terms of the manufacturing sectors maturity, together with their understanding of design. He saw that manufacturers, although willing to use design, firstly did not know where to get it, secondly did not know what to do with it when they got it and thirdly didn't have an understanding of the design process, or how it could benefit them. ²⁴

On the basis that the manufacturers apparently knew so little about design, it can be argued that their apparent willingness to use design is questionable.

Freeman suggests that there is a need to bring designers and manufacturers together. He supports upcoming graduate 'Design Management' programs that may facilitate this. Having addressed various sessions to explain what the design process is and how it can be managed to obtain competitive advantage, Freeman felt that people were willing to put it in place, but lacked the means of

actually accessing it. He suggests that government assistance for these types of programmes is really not going to help. Freeman suggests that as manufactures find their backs against the wall, being unable to compete on price, they are going to have to understand what design and quality is — “ are just going to have to find out about it.”

However in contrast, the findings of the ‘The National Design Review’, outlined that most of Australia’s leading global competitors have substantial government and industry programs in place to assist firms in the use of design.²⁵

On the issue of New Zealand designers being able to service off-shore clients Freeman considers that it is a very big ask, that people currently using Italian, Swedish, British or American designers would come and use New Zealand designers. He suggested that people don’t think of New Zealand any more than they think of Australia as a design centre.²⁶

It should be remembered that the New Zealand wine and film industries have only recently been regarded as among the worlds’ best. New Zealanders have shown that they can lead the world in many activities. If the designers in this country consider that the task is too great, it is unlikely they will achieve great things.

Freeman doesn’t put emphasis on the nationalistic side of things in terms of there being New Zealand or Australian design. He does however encourage that New Zealand and Australian designers form associations with each other,

so that they can tap into a larger pool of experience.

He outlines the importance for designers, of starting small and getting rungs on the board, taking advantage of support organisations like TRADENZ. However where support from the government isn't there, Freeman suggests that we shouldn't sit back. He suggests other avenues, for example involving the 'Chamber of Manufacturers', as they have a vested interest in lifting their members game.

Freeman recognises that international experience definitely helps the way designers are perceived by local manufacturers and outlined that international experience is to be encouraged at any level.

Brian Richards

According to Brian Richards, consultant and marketing strategist, there are lots of different aspects of marketing which go into making a good product with a good story. However he suggests that, "design is one of the most undiscovered elements in the whole marketing book". He outlines that often designers don't understand the strategic insights that they need to, in order to do good design for business. Often the designers are putting forward ideas before they have ascertained what the business is all about. ²⁷

Even in the so called design publications, Richards observes a lack of any real discussion on the business solutions. They do not feature for example, a gross margin analysis as affected by design. The importance of finding a new position

in the marketplace through a research driven intellectual process is suggested as something that designers need to understand.

Although establishing an off shore position may take a few years, Richards believes that there is no reason why you can't design a stunning piece of furniture in New Zealand and have it manufactured in Europe. He outlines that the issue is about fresh ideas and fresh design treatments. If the designer is unable to find a manufacturer that thinks the same way, he would not try to educate them as often it is hard work.

However when establishing overseas connections, Richards outlined the importance of having local contracts to provide short term cash-flow.

Richards suggests that there are benefits for designers that are clustered together — that share information and that are able to spark ideas off each other. He expressed his concern at the lack of fellowship within the design fraternity. Richards suggests that the design institutes need to let in some fresh air, get some controversial issues out onto the table and initiate seminars about design at a business level. Although he has been trying to encourage a coming together of design and business he sees that one of the problems is that designers discuss issues amongst themselves.

Richards believes that the government should take an active interest in supporting design as a means of creating global competitiveness. They should champion the good performers, and form joint action groups to promote good

design and encourage the formation of clusters of designers together with hard business networks between designers and industry, “We can only go up, but if we can’t get through the door we are only going to be an also ran country.”

Richards sees that the only way to enter the competitive area of furniture design is to present at exhibitions and to be storied in clever ways. The actual product needs to have a story behind it, one that works with the strategic insight and fulfils the identified need. Richards encourages designers to think about the ‘solutions’ and ‘impacts’ upon the area they are designing for, the furniture world for example. He suggests that it is important to think in terms of the whole market position, that could be claimed for the item. In terms of promoting New Zealand designers, Richards believes they should sell the story, that they are fresh designers from a fresh country.

Richards believes that there are ‘Eco’ values that New Zealand designers should not turn their backs on.

One example is the stationary company, ‘Nature First’ who recently had success at the Frankfurt Gift Fair. David Kerr, marketing director, outlines that all stationary in Germany now has to be made from recycled paper and that as a nation they are very environmentally conscious. He suggested that the New Zealand companies main strength was its green image. He outlined that ‘Eco’ issues used to be for the greenies, but now they are for everyone, “ The world is getting greener and greener and will continue to do so”.²⁸

According to Richards, New Zealand is in a key position but to take advantage of this, he stresses we need to be driven by intellect, not by accounting. “The country is waiting for the chisel of the mind, absolutely waiting for it. We have just mined the land for a hundred years, there is no more land to mine, now we have to learn how to sell less for more”.

He outlines that as we are living in an increasingly global village, it is vital that designers be globally competitive and up there with the worlds best. ²⁹

Peter Haythornthwaite

Peter Haythornthwaite, arguably New Zealand’s most successful product designer, has been saying for along time that our design schools need to be training interested students to be entrepreneurs. He recognises the fact that many designers who graduate, will not end up working directly within the field. He sees that some of the opportunities lie in the areas of design-manufacturing.

He outlines that there are not many consultancies like his and that the large scale projects do not exist in this country. Instead of training students for jobs in non existent consultancies, Haythornthwaite advocates that some students be educated so they are in a position to create their own design-focussed businesses. He suggests that entrepreneurially orientated students, should in addition to the normal design programme be instructed in such areas as finding financial backers, forming business structures and establishing an enterprise.³⁰

Haythornthwaite outlines that Auckland, with so many specialised industries in such close proximity to each other, is a resource paradise and a great place to conduct product development.

An area that concerns Haythornthwaite is that the culture or understanding of 'making things better', is not well recognised in New Zealand. "In places like Germany, they realise that they have to make things extremely well because if they don't the man next door will". He outlines that in such countries, the threat of someone taking over your market share, forces those associated with the product from the installer to the wholesaler, to look for every single advantage, to sell a better product more easily. "The consumer is demanding more of the end result and the reality is that in New Zealand we don't". Haythornthwaite suggests that until we take on the mentality of 'doing it better' and 'demanding more', New Zealand will never be really successful.

Haythornthwaite outlines that in places like Italy, although the creators and the makers work very closely with each other, their individual roles are quite clear. He has a passion that one day manufacturers will use designers for something that is not even thought about as design, because it is so natural to design better things .

The 'product design' is only an object unless you do something with it. Haythornthwaite explains that you need to know how to get it to whom in the most creative and expedient manner, or you do not have a product at all. There also needs to be an honesty and integrity that is reflected right through the

whole company, “every component must reinforce the whole”.

Haythornthwaite advises writing a very good plan that defines particular areas to go after, but suggests looking for the soft options. He outlines the need for self promotion and suggests that public relations people can play an important role in making the right connections. “That is what Philippe Starck does, he has three or four public relations people on the go all the time and he gets the right contacts.”

You need to communicate your certainty and to work with the clients very closely. Haythornthwaite outlines that it also is important to communicate your uniqueness and to make sure you have a good knowledge base that is supported by reading widely.

On the issue of international experience, Haythornthwaite believes that many New Zealanders would not have had the same level of acclaim if they had stayed in New Zealand. “New Zealanders like their own to be successful, I think the world does, we like the few people that stand out shining lights”. He suggests that every market has opportunities for designers and that design is a transportable skill.

Having completed a Masters in the United States, Haythornthwaite supports overseas study. “It is hard to place a value on it. It took me from a little place to a big place in terms of thinking. You come across all these crazy people who are making things happen”.

As far as being a designer and choosing a mode of operation, Haythornthwaite suggests it comes down to how big your vision is and how badly you need to feed your family. "Its up to you whether you have the goods, the ability, whether you have the drive, whether you are prepared to take the knocks on the head....whether you are passionate about it, you are honourable and ethical.....all those things together, then you can do it, I don't doubt it. I think it just boils down to you." 31

Conclusion

New Zealand designers have a contribution to make to the fabric of global ideas and our relative isolation means that we come to the table with a freshness of ideas and viewpoints.

As with other activities, international participation enhances the abilities of those involved. Being in the position where, as New Zealand designers we look to the rest of the world without providing a response, is saying that we have no contribution to make to the debate. If we don't enter into the negotiation then it can be argued that we fail to place our ideas into any meaningful context.

New Zealand designers can participate in the international forum of design. This paper has illustrated some of the pathways that designers may choose to explore. There is an interest in the margins and in many ways New Zealand has an open invitation from the rest of the world. The opportunity to respond lies with us.

Footnotes

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- 3 Wyston Curnow, Interview with Author, 1996.
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