

NGĀ TOI ADVOCACY HUI - NOTES (FULL) // 27 MAY 2021

PARTICIPANTS...

Allan Xia - Chromacon

Alice Shearman - New Zealand Writers Guild

Alison Taylor - Te Taumata Toi-a-Iwi

Amber Curreen - Te Pou Theatre / Te Rēhia Theatre

Amy Saunders - Depot Arts Space *

Andrew Clifford - Te Uru

Ashley David - Auckland Arts Festival

Ataahua Papa - Auckland Arts Festival

Briar Monro - Creative New Zealand

Cathy Livermore - NZ Dance Company (Tentative)

Chantelle Whaiapu - Facilitator

David Inns - Auckland Arts Festival

Ema Tavola - Vunilagi Vou

Esther Cahill-Chiaroni - ??

Eynon Delamere - Te Taumata Toi-a-Iwi

Harry Silver - Auckland University of Technology *

Helaina Keeley - Auckland Live

Hiraani Himona - Te Tuhi

Janine Dijkmeijer - NZ Dance Company

Joanna Maskell - Auckland Council

Judy Darragh - Arts Makers Aotearoa

Kerryanne Nelson - Te Taumata Toi-a-Iwi

Kylie Sealy - Facilitator

Martin Sutcliffe - Corban Estate Arts Centre

Meijing He - Arts Space Aotearoa

Michael Brook - Auckland Unlimited

Narelle Jackson - Te Taumata Toi-a-Iwi

Nigel Borell - Speaker

Rachael Trotman - Weaving Change

Richard Orjis - Arts Makers Aotearoa

Shona McElroy - Facilitator

Tara Pradhan - Greenstone TV *

Tash Christie - NZ On Screen *

Tracey Monastra - Creative New Zealand

** Acknowledging and welcoming Amy Saunders, Harry Silver, Tara Pradhan and Tash Christie to the Ngā Toi Advocacy Network*

Introduction

The hui began with a karakia from **Eynon Delamere**.

Amber Cureen welcomed participants on behalf of Te Pou Theatre. **Eynon Delamere** welcomed participants on behalf of Te Taumata Toi-a-Iwi.

Chantelle Whaiapu shared the kaupapa for today, noting that we would hear kōrero from artist-curators [Ema Tavola](#) and [Nigel Borell](#) about their experiences of innovation before we collectively explore *What next for innovation in arts and culture in Aotearoa?*

Chantelle Whaiapu then asked participants to share a song that comes to mind for them.

Kōrero

Chantelle introduced **Shona McElroy** who collaborated with Chantelle, Eynon and Jane Yonge on [The Future Emerging: Innovation in Arts and Culture in Aotearoa](#).

Shona McElroy:

When we first came to start thinking about innovation, one, it was an absolute privilege to actually use your head space to do it, because it's one of those things that we do, but don't get to spend time thinking about. When we first started these conversations, we realised that innovation gets a couple of different reactions. It can prompt a sparkle of excitement, or it can get a big eye roll, which is to say "what do you really mean by that?" And so although we initially thought this would be one article, it ended up being five and partly because we wanted to really start to redefine what it means within our context, so what does it really mean for arts and culture? What does it mean in the context of Aotearoa?

We found that really the conversations live around the edges, personal examples were the things where it all came to life. So the articles themselves are kind of a summation of where we've got to in our thinking, but the real magic is in your living it day to day. And we wanted to get the kind of privilege of a bit of space to think about the broader context of that and how we might define innovation for ourselves.

I think one of the key messages that came through all the articles is really, sometimes innovation can be brought to from the concept of point in time, or a product or something that pops out at the end. But actually, for us, we start to think about it really, as a process of review. One that takes all of our audiences, past and combines things, in new ways. It's all about the context in which we are. So people, the conditions in the environment in which we're operating when we're creating new things.

And so we wanted to start to articulate what does that really look like? which is, what is it the articles aim to do? We do live it every day. So that's why we're inviting you to come to tables to draw on your own personal experiences. So where you've seen it work well, where you see the barriers to that, where you've seen the best conditions for it to come alive. I think as well, we did want to spend a bit of time thinking about Mataranga Māori, and the wisdom that Te Ao Māori could bring to this conversation around innovation. And if we set ourselves to the task of finding innovation for ourselves, what will the process be?

Chantelle introduced artist-curators **Ema Tavola** and **Nigel Borell**

Nigel Borell:

It's a pleasure to be here. To be honest it's a bit daunting. But it's great. Innovation - you can come from it from so many angles. One of the angles that, for me, and for Māori, I think often comes from innovation from the point of adversity and challenge. That can be a beautiful platform to prompt innovative movements and responses. COVID has been sort of a bit of that for everybody in different ways and thinking through where to next, and how to make the best out of the situation.

I often find that a beautiful platform to do the unexpected and to really see innovation in action is when a challenge is before us because it asks us to move around it in a way that we can. But for the creative sector that should not be a news flash, and it shouldn't really be a problem. I can only speak from my own perspective, but beyond that, it's how we are able to innovate. What's the playing field in terms of how we innovate? How are we allowed to come to that conversation? And often, you know, for Māori, we are having to navigate visibility, and how we want to be part of that conversation, or to realise what innovation means on our terms. And really, we're trying to intersect the dominant culture's hold on the playing field.

If I think about the exhibition Toi Tū, part of its underlying success is that it's a Māori worldview, it's a Māori driven process. I was given the opportunity to really shape and map out a way of thinking about not just Māori, but a Māori worldview that invites people into it - unabated by the power structures that often dictate or want to have a say in how we do that. Sometimes to talk about innovation is to just get out of the road, and let people do their thing and bring new things to the table. Sometimes being a partner is actually just about giving over the platform, and allowing and trusting that project and that thinking to manifest and to be a supporter of it, and to own it, when it comes to fruition - just like the art gallery is the owner of that exhibition, but they did the wise thing and allowed me to present the landscape.

Sometimes the blocks are there, we just have to allow and trust people to bring and shape it with us, for us, but don't feel like we have to intervene all the time. Part of our job sometimes is to be the silent partner, and let them tell you when you need to come in with the support. I know lots of change makers that are Māori in the sector that have amazing ideas, but don't have the patronage, they don't have the funding, or the funding doesn't fit the structures to allow it to come into being.

That's a real shame, because I feel like we're missing out on seeing what real innovation looks like, because it has to fit within these really awkward structures of bureaucracy and of power dynamics. So you know, the structures which we talk about innovation taking place, are part of the problem, and sometimes we're so driven by the structure telling us how we can do the outcome. Sometimes we need to think about how the structure can be reformatted to better suit what people are saying and want to do and be. Sometimes it's about being wise enough to just step aside and support that process into being.

I do also feel when I think about Toi Tū and its premise, having a Māori worldview - it's clear that what's good for Māori is good for everybody. So no one's left out of that conversation. When I think about some of the success of the exhibition and people's feedback, Māori were very proud and very empowered by the show, but so were non-Māori. They were just as proud about being a New Zealander. So I think we underestimate that the outcome feeds all of us. It's just that the centre of it is slightly different to what we're used to. But we've got to get better practiced at that. We've got to get better practiced at not being at the centre and understanding what it means to be on the periphery of the dynamic for a change.

Because the dominant culture is always at the centre. We're at the periphery even when we're innovating, or even when we're trying to be the change maker. Sometimes you guys have to just be quiet and let us take the lead. Then you can see how it might manifest as an outcome. Just like those non-Māori audience goes to the exhibition. They have a profound relationship with the show that I'm really proud about and really, I had only hoped would happen. It shows me that you know, what's good for Māori is good for all of us. I think we live in that space a bit longer and allow Māori and indigenous people to lead that, to be brave about what that might mean. And maybe reconsider what the structures are that are limiting that type of outcome.

We often talk about the rhetoric of partnership, the rhetoric of working collaboratively, and I think we have the rhetoric down, we all know the rhetoric, but we're really bad at the practice of it. We need to do the practice part more. We need to be more invested in the practice of seeing that happening. Because that's where it's falling down. The practice of it and the structure. We all know the rhetoric, we all know the practice rhetoric, but we don't 'practice the practice' on it. We need to be more invested in what that means, what are the implications of being invested in the practice? It means sharing the power. It means really taking a step back and trusting your colleague, or finding a colleague to help realise that project, letting them lead it, and being the other partner to the project sometimes, and don't feel that you're being neglectful. You're not. You're just empowering the partner to take the lead.

On a question around collective practice:

I think that's just the Māori way of working. It's that everyone's visible, everyone's equal, even when they're not, because everyone has an equal say. That goes a long way to people feeling made visible in any process. Beyond that, it's a very Māori-centric way of being in the world that everyone gets to contribute. Again, we know the rhetoric around that but we don't practice it. We don't practice it well. But we're all familiar with the rhetoric of everybody contributing. I just feel where I'm at in my career at this moment in time, I'm more about the practice. I want to see the practice because everything else comes out of that. The experience of the practice, the understanding of what it means to be in partnership. You will talk about the rhetoric differently once you allow that to take place in a real way. I believe the rhetoric is dictating the practice. And actually the practice needs to dictate the rhetoric a bit more. Māori can't do it any other way but be people-centred so you know, that's the nature of our own cultural philosophies and most indigenous culture - is that it's people focused. There's no way around it, then, nor what nor would we want it to be.

Emā Tavola:

Thank you everyone for having me, alongside my mate. I was participating in some of these last year. I said to Chantelle that I started to feel quite disillusioned by this discussion. And that just reflects the disillusionment basically I've had of the art world for about 20 years. And then I was thinking about this type of innovation for me. I can't separate innovation from having a social bottom line. My innovation comes from a social need. You understand social needs when you experience inequality, and you experience inequality every single day in South Auckland.

I've been living on this land for 20 years. I came here to study at MIT. I studied Fine Arts in a former chippy factory which was a building in the Otara back streets. Everyday leaving that building was a realisation that nothing that I was learning in that building had any roads of connection to the community that I was walking out into. So it became very evident very early on that there was this real disconnect between living in South Auckland in a community like Otara which was about 70% Polynesian at the time and 21% Māori. And knowing that the inverse of that was the reality in the art world. Social need, for me, comes from a personal experience. I was born into service. I am the child of two public servants. I'm Fijian and Pākehā, but as a Fijian, like Nigel was saying, you are a collective being, there is no such thing as individual pursuit. You take your community with you. When I talk about social need, it's tapping into what a collective social need is. When you live in spaces like South Auckland, there's a difference between people who come to South Auckland and do programming, or work on community funded projects and government funded initiatives. When you live in South Auckland, and you go to our doctors, and you go to Middlemore Hospital, and you experience the gross inequality of Māori and Pacific experience in this country, in relation to health and services, your experience of social need is just different. When I engage with the art world, this is what I bring. And so this is why it's difficult to translate this position into essentially a different language of the environment where we are minorities.

As tauiwī, as people of the Pacific, like Nigel says, if things aren't being done well, for Māori then we have nothing. We are absolutely standing in the shadow of the indigenous people here. The measure, the gauge of innovation in this country is how much I believe Māori are leading that conversation. So exhibitions like Nigel's show are real milestones in the development of our collective arts and culture. They are ways that things are moving forward.

But it's interesting being here Amber, because I remember we met when I did a brief stint at Creative New Zealand, managing the Auckland diversity project. And the work that Te Pou was doing was really groundbreaking. And it's wonderful to see you in space. I think Creative New Zealand brought in the diversity policy in 2015. You know, responding to diversity is something that the sector is definitely trying to do more and more. But in the case of Te Pou in the case of Toi Tu, like it's when Māori lead, when power sharing is done effectively. That's when I believe true innovation happens.

I think there is a sea change that's sort of happening at the moment. But like Nigel says, the rhetoric of it is not enough. I think because of COVID, because of like Black Lives Matter, because of this global shift in our human consciousness. We see things now, like what the Māori Party is doing in Parliament. These are really strong moves to try and move us forward to confront us about the systems that we live within. I think it's an exciting time. But it is a time for people with lived experience to lead the conversation.

This was a big kaupapa to talk about. I honestly think that innovation comes from where there is no investment. I've spent the last 20 years working in South Auckland. I graduated from an undergraduate degree and got a job straight away with the Council, a full time permanent role. The opportunity to innovate existed there. Because we had Māori and Pacific managers leading that change. We had a Samoan woman leading the arts unit at Manukau City Council. All of our managers, bar one, were Māori and Pacific locals. The innovation that came out of that space, in what I call the golden era - a really beautiful blend of Māori and Pacific leadership that was so unique to South side.

The innovation came because of the leadership and the opportunity, because there was nothing. Now I run a gallery and movement called Vunilagi Vou. I'm just about to move into a third premises celebrating our second anniversary next week. Our third move is going to be to join forces with a cafe in Otara which is a refurbished factory. So the innovation here is because when I know my community has my back, I feel unstoppable. And when you go into battle, you need an army. You have this like blind faith in the unknown. I have no idea how it's gonna go with Alexander cafe, but we'll see. The disillusionment I have from the wider mainstream art world is that I don't feel like I've got my community with me. I don't feel protected. I don't feel safe. I don't feel confident to try and bring my community into that space if I don't feel safe. And so I do things out South because the environment out South - when we create environments where communities can thrive, we thrive. The opportunity allows us to thrive.

Nigel:

When you're empowered, you can do amazing things. And you empower yourself, in your, in your work, in your individual practice, that in turn empowers others. Whether it's Vunilagi Vou or Toi Tu, it's the ability to dream, to blue sky things. We're often told "here's the box, make it work within the box", but you just put the structures aside for a second and if we ambitiously blue sky what we want to do from that empowered position, even if people aren't giving it to us. You've got to empower yourself to see things that aren't there yet, we would never achieve these types of parameters and wider goals and visions and horizon if we didn't have that. There's food for thought in allowing us to be empowered. To see further, to do bigger projects, and to do it with you all - but we're leading it, you know. Can you handle that? Can the sector handle that? That's my question.

We say we're all about partnership. But I'll tell you when it plays out in positions of power, and positions of back and forth about how we, who gets to have the final say on stuff. We don't, we're not practised at it. We need to be more honest about that. How we share power for the outcome and be part of being in the taxi, not the taxi driver, or the director of where the taxi is going, but the passenger. Be more practiced at owning one of those other spaces, not just the front.

Question about governance, structures of governance, and learnings around that.

Nigel:

I think in terms of governance, if we're not there, we're not affecting the next part. I'm not talking about one person. I'm talking about how do we actually have equal say in some of these things at a governance level. That doesn't mean one person. I think often in our experiences we get brought in as the one Māori, cool, we've checked the box. And that's it. They can bring all those aspirations for Māori to the table. Governance is not about that. It's actually about seeing how we own partnership. That might mean you might have 50/50. Let's reconfigure what that might mean. Be bold and brave about what that means today.

That might be 50% Pākehā and 50% Māori in terms of that make up. Those are bold statements, I understand that. But they're definitely not reflected in governance. So what would it look like if we didn't do that? We don't even allow ourselves to have that conversation. We don't even dare to even say those types of things. But we need to start doing that. Because what would that structure look like? What would the outcomes be? I don't think we even look at the structure, and reconfigure the structure, and say this is the outcome we're looking for. How would we get that through the structure? Oh actually, we can't get it through that structure, then re-configure the structure.

Then let's be brave about those conversations and honest about the outcomes we want to see. And let's get on with actually making the changes to make that happen and be brave about the decisions that need to be made.

Eynon:

I think we have quite a Eurocentric view of what governance is. We've got to have health and safety policies. But actually, the whole governance system flipped upside down. Especially for arts organisations, it doesn't work following the same board of directors institute rules and regulations, it just doesn't work. So we actually need to flip the whole model. So it doesn't matter about the numbers, because we still use the same model. I think how do we flip the model upside down that actually works for us as practitioners or as organisations. I know it's easy when you're indoctrinated into a way of thinking, but for all the policy, you can't look sideways.

Nigel:

Governance is also about having a vote and a way forward. And if you've only got one person sitting there driving the innovation of a way forward, then that's not equal. There's got to be more than one person that's Māori at that table, being able to affect a change. Because sometimes a change is unpopular. Sometimes a change needs to convince the rest of the group. You can't do that when you're the one voice.

Ema:

If the structure is Pākehā, then the voice that we have at the table is always going to be framed by that. There's so many problems in that because for communities to be historically subjugated and oppressed, when those who do get opportunities to have agency at the table, There's often a perversion that happens with power. And that's throughout the Pacific community. That happens all over the show. I mean, we have Pacific arts organisations who have really clean pakeha governance, but are a shit show, because there's a really problematic power dynamic going on.

So I think governance is here, but organisational culture is bigger than that. If organisational culture is sick, then nothing in it is gonna fly. When you sit at that table, and I have had two decades of being the only Pacific Islander at too many tables. you know, being asked in my British accent to represent South Auckland Pacific communities. It's a fucking joke. It's so deeply problematic to have these allocated numbers to represent the breadth of our communities. Governance in terms of like, board over here, and operations over here, absolutely needs to be completely reformed if Māori and pacific voices are going to be actually significant in the organisational culture of the company.

Nigel:

I think to you know, just think to yourself, how comfortable or uncomfortable does that conversation sound, because that's going to give you some idea of how it sits within your organisation. And I think it's something to think about in pondering that as well.

Question around whether current governance structures even work for Te Ao Pākehā

Nigel:

You know, if it doesn't work for Pākehā, then what do we have to lose by trying something different? I just find that it's like, is it spite of it, because it is about giving over power, is it because it's about a new way of seeing it? You know, get over it. If it's not working, then what do you have to lose and try not to embed a new approach. It may not work either, but why not try it?

Chantelle thanked Nigel and Ema for sharing their insights, knowledge and experience with the network.

Session One

Kylie Sealy asked participants to move into groups and together create a poster on one of the following three questions that could be understood without verbal feedback. Noting the poster should highlight the most important concepts and discussion points from their table, and show where there was agreement and where there were tensions.

Questions for small group discussions:

1. What is innovation to us and how do we recognise it in our context? (Re)defining it for arts and culture in Aotearoa.
2. What is our dream of a sector where innovation is thriving, and we thrive through innovation?
3. How might we action system change?

Chantelle then asked each table to feedback to the wider group, sharing the most vital points from their discussions.

Verbal feedback from the tables is noted below, and the visual table maps are included on the following pages.

- Systems Change - the need to change the subscribed outcomes and success measures
- Innovation - need a generational change, a circuit-breaker

- Innovation in governance. How do we socialise and influence change in governance? Change the membership of the privileged?
- How do we enable/ allow this change?
- The need to change Trust deeds and include empowering language within this (e.g. Arts Space)
- Co-leadership models, working in partnership

- How do we break the cycle?

- Need for a movement - need an agreed shared voice for our sector.
- System is broken, though it is not designed for us - What are the opportunities? What shall we keep?
- How do we continue to advocate for the value of the arts and culture sector?
- No more box ticking. Disruption

- Ecosystem with TRUST at the centre (trust in art, as a verb)
- Guiding process not controlling. Allowing it to be messy. Overlapping.
- Example - Dutch [Fair Practice Governance Code](#)

- Calling out the white elephant in the room
- Not walking the walk - need to be more active
- Not the right structures that are safe for diverse groups to be part of
- Invest in Māori and Pasifika to bring people through

- Difference in language/ funding structures between arts and culture (passive) and creative sectors (actions)
- We've got each other's backs - how do we change the game?
- Change in language needed . Show that we have each others back
- Given permission to play as practitioners, with the new values, models and systems. Then tell the story of this.