



Wednesday, 5 October 2011, 11:00 am.

## **Panel session: Outside the Comfort Zone**

### Speakers

**Paul Komesaroff**, Director of Monash Centre for Ethics and Society, Morocco

**Lucina Jimenez**, Director, ConArte, Mexico

**Mike van Graan**, Secretary General, Arterial Network, South Africa

### Moderator

**Amanda Smith**, Presenter, *Artsworks*, ABC Radio National, Australia

### Rapporteur

**Atul Joshi**, Director, Key Organisations, Australia Council for the Arts

## **Description of the session**

This session focused on art and security and the speakers spoke from their personal perspectives and practices of creating, presenting and experiencing art in environments of physical and spiritual danger.

Moderator **Amanda Smith** started by saying that life is dangerous in many parts of the world but that in those parts, art plays a crucial, yet often covert role, in communicating and healing. The session highlighted the fact that many of us as artists, administrators and bureaucrats, live in a comfort zone that is significantly different to the experience of artists across the world. It asked the question, how do we respond to these inequalities in the experience and creation of art?

**Paul Komesaroff** commenced the session by speaking of Global Reconciliation, a network of people and organisations that is facilitating dialogue across all borders promoting reconciliation as an ongoing process rooted in daily processes as contrast to mere “outcome”. He provided numerous examples of how art can serve in a process of reconciliation, from the writing of poetry by children in Sri Lanka to imagine a world that could be different to their war torn experience, to Australian artist Catherine Larkins’ work in promoting culture as a shared process of making things together.

**Lucina Jimenez** spoke specifically about her organisation ConArte's work in Ciudad Juarez, a Mexican city on the US border affected by severe crime, lack of structures and services and social inequalities. Con Arte works in arts education and social development in public schools and urban and indigenous communities in Mexico. She acknowledged the importance of place but reflected on the fact that many dispossessed and migrant communities such as those in Ciudad Juarez have No Place and people exist in a context of invisibility, inequality and disconnection. Con Arte works intersectorially and interinstitutionally to create collaborations aimed at developing links, capacities and sharing experiences, to create a new narrative for the symbolic spaces created where no physical space exists. Ultimately, it uses art to create a culture of peace and transformation in Ciudad Juarez.

**Mike Van Graan** highlighted the repercussions and danger artists face working under insidious regimes around that world that neglect basic human rights. He reflected that 90 countries respect basic human rights but 133 fail to observe basic standards. As a result, in over half the world, artists live in danger and the continual murder and detention of artists in these regimes amounts to the ultimate form of artistic censorship. Many of these regimes are supported by the world's biggest democracies. Given this situation, how then do we support artists in this regard? How do we respond as arts policy makers whose governments do business with or have proactive policy and programs and agendas with governments who censor and persecute artists? Mike left the audience with the question, "*do we have the courage to move out of this comfort zone?*"

## **Creative intersections discussed in the session**

This session highlighted that place may exist physically or may not, but it is the symbolic place that is created within a geography or spiritually that matters in bringing people together and connecting them. It also served to highlight that when we refer to place, we start at the level of the whole globe. Across this globe people live in situations of vast inequality and danger is a fact of life for many, including artists. Despite this, the arts can be a vehicle for communication, reconciliation and healing.

## **Examples of good examples and practices**

- Give publicity and mileage to artists working in danger zones as a way of protecting them and shaming their governments (Mike van Graan)
- Continued international pressure (Mike van Graan)
- A national arts policy that not only reflects current practices but allows for new possibilities (Paul Komesaroff)
- Not working with just one method, or one agent or one institution. Complexity demands flexibility in working with communities (Lucina Jimenez)

## **Identified problems**

- A lack of global monitoring of artistic censorship (Mike van Graan)

- How can artists be protected in their work as doctors and journalists are across the world in danger zones (Mike van Graan)
- People becoming more disconnected from their heritage and communities (Lucina Jimenez)
- Violence as a global business and humans as its merchandise (Lucina Jimenez)
- In many contexts there is no “place” to work in (Lucina Jimenez)

## **Recommendations for future actions**

- Develop an international protocol on artistic censorship
- Facilitate transfer of learnings from community best practice (e.g. ConArte methodology) through case studies etc
- Promote artistic practice as a valid platform for promotion of reconciliation to policy makers and governments
- National and international arts bodies (such as IFACCA and the Australia Council) use diplomacy to pressure international governments and allow free movement of art and artists

## **Other additional comments**

### New Government Relationships with arts

- Artists and arts as vehicle of international relations and pressure, not just an accompaniment to trade
- Break free from support of just heritage and tradition, allow for new possibilities

### New educational approaches working with communities

- The need to work not just with one method, or one agent or one institution.
- Complexity demands flexibility in working with communities.
- Space can be created symbolically.