

Notes for Feminist Archive at Arts OutWest (AOW), 2015

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Notes from talk prepared for Feminist Archive about Arts OutWest (AOW) – Tracey Callinan

1. History of Arts OutWest

- a. Founding of organisation
 - i. Founded in 1974 as the Central West Community Arts Organisation
 - ii. Originally covered a larger area
 - iii. Officially changed the name to Arts OutWest in 1981
- b. The NSW model of regional arts
 - i. AOW was the first of the regional arts development organisations
 - ii. There are now 14 regional arts development organisations, until recently known as Regional Arts Boards
 - iii. Regional Arts NSW is based in Sydney and is the peak organisation for NSW
 - iv. Each of the regional arts development organisations is constituted as a stand-alone organisation, able to set its own priorities. However Regional Arts NSW work to create a network across the 14 regional organisations and also take responsibility for much of the advocacy work
- c. What Arts OutWest actually does
 - i. Our mission statement: Arts OutWest promotes, facilitates, educates and advocates for arts and cultural development for the communities of the NSW central west.
 - ii. Arts OutWest develops a strategic plan every three years which looks at core business as well as identifying a number of strategic priority areas. The core business covers three development areas:
 - 1. Artform and sector development
 - 2. Engagement and participation
 - 3. Governance and financialThe strategic priority areas in 2013-15 have been:
 - 1. Arts and health
 - 2. Aboriginal arts development
 - 3. Creative industries
 - 4. Young peopleArts OutWest delivers projects and supports work to further these priority areas in the region.

2. Issues of regional artists

- a. The market for your art work
 - i. Knowing who your market is – within the region and/or beyond
 - ii. Reaching a broader market
 - 1. Gaining metropolitan recognition for your work
 - 2. Encouraging the city market to travel to the regions
 - 3. Digitisation of the market: the challenges and opportunities for regional and rural Australia
 - 4. The different economies of the regional market: lower costs, lower prices for your work, higher costs in bringing your work to market
- b. Isolation

- i. The need for access to ideas, exposure to current practice. How do you feed and nurture this?
 - ii. Professional development. Access to workshops, training and mentoring in both art-form development and business practices
 - iii. Having someone to bounce ideas off, collaborate with, share with
- c. Clusters
 - i. Usually a metropolitan feature, but good examples of arts clusters can be found regionally, e.g. Colour City Creatives in Orange; Bathurst Arts Trail; Tableland Arts (t.arts) in Bathurst; creative communities in Hill End and Canowindra; the benefits of Cementa festival at Kandos

3. Feminist issues in the arts

- a. Artists often operate as hobbyists and the lines can be blurred between hobby and professional practice
- b. Arts Management has been an area which has employed many arts-workers, particularly women. Arts OutWest is currently staffed entirely by women which has not resulted in an particular policy other than employing on a merit basis
- c. There are more female arts-workers than male. It is often speculated that this is because the sector is not particularly well paid. However at more senior levels the percentage of men becomes much higher. This raises questions of why an industry which is considered to be quite open and progressive nevertheless seems to uphold gender bias.
- d. There are many different reasons that people are based regionally. Understanding these reasons and choices can contribute to removing some of the barriers.
- e. My recent research into regional creative industries suggests that regional areas are in fact kind to women. At this stage there are four reasons that appear to be contributing to this:
 - i. Regional creative industries are removed from the 'cool' milieu of city based creative enterprises. This means that the 'blokey' culture often associated with the city based workplaces does not prevail and women can operate on a more even playing field. Examples of the 'blokey' culture of city based 'cool' creative industries include informal recruitment practices (who you know); expectations to participate in informal social networking; expectations to work unreasonable hours
 - ii. Although regional practitioners may not have access to the same level of professional networking available to them in the city, the informal networks found in regional areas of friends, family and community can provide better support for women operating as creative practitioners
 - iii. Lower costs in regional areas may be the same for both women and men, but these lower costs give women more flexibility in the way they work, which is often more suited to their needs
 - iv. Identity. It is not uncommon for women to have settled in regional areas for reasons that are not connected to their own work. However their arts practice can often provide a much needed voice and sense of their own identity.