# Arts and culture from the female perspective

Going for Broke:
Women's Participation in
the Arts and Cultural
Industries, *Gillian
Swanson and Patricia Wise*
, the Australian Key
Centre for Cultural and
Media Policy, Griffith
University, 1998

The title "Going for Broke" is energetic and enthusiastic. It reflects the conviction and enthusiasm found in the study for the proposition that the arts and cultural industries can become self-sustaining, viable and wealth generating.

"Going for Broke" is the book resulting from a study commissioned by Arts Queensland (now the Queensland Government Arts Office) and the Australia Council in 1994, and its use of language and the nature of its recommendations suggest that these bodies are its primary audience. For example, the chapter about patterns of arts consumption characterises women as a "key client group for the cultural industries". The most specifically focused recommendations and suggestions are those which relate to funding policies and practices. It is also worth noting that the research concerns the arts and cultural industries in Queensland only, not nationwide.

A central proposition underpinning the study is that an examination of women's participation in these industries requires more than an examination of whether there is equal representation in the "specialised areas of professional practice". It requires more than evaluating women's performance against men's. Rather it is important to discern a picture of women's involvement including their working patterns and forms of expertise. This may then point "to ways the industry could become more flexible and efficient in maximising its resources as well as more adapted to the market, and more relevant to women's tastes and involvements as clients and members of the community".

The first chapter is devoted to an outline of the key findings of the research and the resulting recommendations. This chapter is difficult to understand without reading the full study and is not assisted by the density of the prose. For example, there is a proposal that a "more nuanced and inclusive conception of professionalism be deployed towards enhancing developmental options for a range of distinctive constituencies by regional or cultural factors and demonstrated by specific objectives and working patterns and identified values and aims". It is a shame if this chapter is off-putting because the rest of the report is easier to follow and, therefore, more interesting.

The second chapter is useful as it explains relevant issues and perspectives and we begin to see the emergence of the authors' thesis. Nevertheless, the brief and the objectives of the commissioned study are not explicitly referred to until the end of the second chapter and even then they are not clearly set out. This omission is disorientating.

Chapter three profiles women's participation in the arts and cultural industries. It is chock-a-block full of facts and figures - some surprising, some expected. The subsequent chapters provide facts and figures about sources of revenue including levels of income, the degree of professionalism and perceptions of professionalism, and avenues for professional development. The study also provides findings about regional and rural Australia and deals with the issue of cultural diversity. There are a lot of interesting facts, revealing a more detailed picture of women's involvement than is commonly known. For example, we learn that "women in small rural communities are...twice as likely to achieve national exposure as women in country towns and have achieved a greater proportion of national exposure than women in regional cities".

Throughout the study there is a challenge to the current practices of government funding in particular the directing of funding to the "professional". The authors propose a "horizontal model of cultural development" which has its base in local communities and regional conditions. A case is clearly made out for the role of professional organisations and networks in industry development. So too for the role of the local library. Skills development and resource sharing are addressed.

The study does not place its findings and strategies about women's participation in and consumption of the arts and cultural industries in a broader context in any substantial way. Given that it makes recommendations which touch on marketing and advocates "wealth generation" it would have been interesting to know about relevant current trends in consumption. How realistic are the recommendations?

This study is a useful reference document containing significant new information. The proposals for rethinking the manner in which governments support the arts and cultural industries are timely and warrant broad consideration. It would be handy to have a short accessible document which describes the key arguments for the average punter. Perhaps this is the next step.

**Vic Marles**