

## Achates Live! Golden Nugget: 30 June 2020

### Democratising Philanthropy

Hello!

--

Today I'll be exploring how we might consider the notion of democratising philanthropy. How do we redefine the broad understanding of who and what a cultural philanthropist could be?

--

Looking to the future, I believe that we need to review the term 'philanthropist' removing perceived barriers and allowing all access to the term, and to their power.

Philanthropy is an act of intent.

Some past understandings have problematic, colonial associations as well as a simple fetishization of the elite. This is a disservice to its true nature and a disservice to the possibilities of the act.

As per today's conversation, we know the future of philanthropy is broader than this.

With the brutalities of COVID-19 and the deaths of George Floyd and many others, a razing to the ground of past norms has the potential to take place. Certainly, communal empathic action is edging to the fore.

If empathic (or at the least, sympathetic) impetus is the foundation for philanthropy, in this moment, we have an opportunity to embrace the natural philanthropic instinct within all of us.

Whilst high-net-worth individuals are an incredibly important and valued part of our infrastructure, let's open this space - and our attention - up. Disparities in the sector have been discussed today. And indeed, reviewing disparity between the 50 biggest brands and the rest of the sector shows that (aside from anomalies) we're lucky to find many 'big donors' outside of those larger organisations.

--

At this time, incoming data (e.g. ALVA's recent report demonstrating that altruistic desires are highest among young people) and some practical innovations are occurring that point us toward new trajectories:

- On one end of the scale, NT Live now ask for donations at the end of screenings proactively exhibiting their charitable status, with an advocating and alternative call to support local theatre;
- On the other end of the scale, artist-led peer-to-peer funding has risen through social networks.

And thus, here is my Golden Nugget.

Once we have established the way we are collectively communicating our need - much of society still isn't aware of our economic models and believes the arts are simply state funded! - I believe the key to democratising philanthropy lies within two main concepts:

- 1) A radical and proactive campaign at engaging with meaningful practices of inclusion. How do we diversify the people we engage with, generating and developing relationships between audiences and the industry that go beyond transactional functions?

- 2) The concept of design iteration processes in our work here; let's aim, but not wait, for perfection. Let's keep trying things, prototyping, testing and consulting our communities. Let's be honest, open and humble when things fail. Let's learn and try again. We now know just how rapid the world can change and so must we.

With those two points in mind, what provocations can we contemplate in our own worlds in order to collectively move toward democratising philanthropy?

In this new world: you might not yet see this wave of new cultural philanthropists, but we see you.

And so, here I pose a non-exhaustive list of practical prompts:

- What can we do to reach people in our community who may have different educational, cultural or socio-economic backgrounds?
- How can we use technology to share and learn from our audiences and peers locally, nationally and internationally?
- How are we communicating our work in a meaningful way to different age groups? What assumptions are we making about them?
- How can we honestly and proactively assess and respond to the diversity, or lack thereof, within our own companies and organisations?
- What minds and bodies do we have on our boards, on our stages, in our offices or visiting the Box Office? Who is missing?

Like the eruption of a volcano, we may have had warning signs. Of course, the creative industries don't exist within a bubble; we are part of a much larger economic picture. But the current, or perhaps past, economic models in place within the cultural sector, from independent artists and cultural workers through to internationally renowned institutions, have been exposed as precarious at best, and cruel at worst.

Let's not let losses be for nought. I hope that what we are left with is a new and fertile ground to think about what we're doing and why, how we're doing it and who we're doing it for.

By expanding and welcoming new voices at every point of engagement, including and especially at the philanthropic level, we can contribute to rebuilding our communities and our industry into one that can be more robust for future generations and that must be more reflective of who we all are.