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CASE STUDY

Leading Through Practice, Artwork and Photographs by Reiko Goto, artist and researcher for On The Edge Research. © Reiko Goto 2007

The Artist as Leader: constructing a national network to support research into the creative competencies of the artist as cultural leader

DR ANNE DOUGLAS, ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY, ABERDEEN

"How to exploit the nation's creative skills more fully" was the key challenge facing Sir George Cox in his Review of Creativity in Business, prepared for the Chancellor in 2005 ("*Cox Review of Creativity in Business: building on the UK's strengths*"). His findings have won the support of Gordon Brown, who announced, "we must recognise the role of our cultural leaders in delivering [economic] success and ensure the emergence of a talented and diverse group of future leaders".

Funded by the AHRC in collaboration with the Arts Council England, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Department for Trade and Industry, the Research Networks and Workshops - Nature of Creativity scheme seeks to enhance understanding about the nature of creativity and its relationships with innovation. In response to the Cox Review Dr Anne Douglas, Robert Gordon University, is constructing 'The Artist as Leader', a practice based network within the Nature of Creativity scheme. Douglas has started to research the role of creativity in culture using the concept of 'leadership', posing questions such as 'When is an artist the leader?', 'How does the artist's critical thinking influence practices of leading?' and 'Who can be leader in addressing new and emerging challenges in the social public sphere?'. These questions are forming part of in-depth interviews taking place with artists across art forms and managers who work with artists. Both groups are able to draw on the experiences of real life practice to inform the research.

Four established organisations have been brought together to form the basis of the network: On the Edge Research, directed by Douglas and launched by a previous AHRC award, which is a practice-led visual arts research programme at Gray's School of Art, part of the Robert Gordon University; Performing Arts Labs, London, which provides action-based developmental laboratories for the creation of radical thinking; Cultural Enterprise Office, Glasgow which offers business support for artists and creative micro businesses; and the Scottish Leadership Foundation which focuses on raising the quality of leadership in Scotland's public services. Contacts of each partner's distinct sectors are drawn upon and unite to provoke truly collaborative discussions.

Douglas clarifies the background to the work: "Artists lead through their practice. One quality of experiencing art is that artists enable us to see the world differently. Our focus is on the ways in which this may constitute a different understanding of leadership from that of organisational models." The most recent output has been commissioned as a co-authored research edition by 'a-n' featuring artists such as Suzanne Lacy, Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison, Reiko Goto and Francis McKee (*Leading through practice* Douglas A. and Fremantle C. (2007), commissioned by a-n Commissions fund).

Noting Cox's recommendations, Douglas' project addresses issues of raising the profile of creativity through networks and broadening the creative understanding and skills of tomorrow's leaders. "Chris Smith, the Director of the Clore Leadership programme, described the project as 'unique, unprecedented' in its grasp of the significance of the artist's role in leading", related Douglas. Ultimately, the project will help develop new critical insights into the artist's role at a time when creativity is being seen as vital to economic growth.

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