

Snow-dropping in the concept store

I recently curated an exhibition that was part of the L'Oréal Melbourne Fashion Festival. There was no financial re-numeration to be had but I had the urge to bring together five artists and five fashion designers in a show that brought up issues relating to both disciplines. These included identity construction, fandom, corporate identity and ethical issues. The festival found and paid for a high profile and beautiful gallery space.

Arranging the show and dealing with the artists and designers was a pleasure. I put together a fanzine/catalogue and, through selling a number of ads to independent fashion businesses that I was only too happy to have involved in the project, I was able to cover the costs of invitations, documentation and the likes. My only troubles came when organising grog sponsorship through the festival. I was not allowed to use any other sponsors except the official festival grog companies but I was made to feel that I was rather un-worthy of that sponsorship. I knew that my show would attract a large audience. It included ten high profile artists and designers who the festival had good reason to be glad were participating. I wanted the two hundred plus people who would attend the opening to come to an event that was welcoming and fun.

I began to feel uncomfortable about my relationship with the festival and sponsors. It certainly seemed that the sponsors were the centre of attention and that those producing the meat and veg of the festival were rather peripheral. I began to feel that perhaps I was sponsoring L'Oréal and Carlton United Brewery. I'm sure they need my help.

Not Invited

Being the curator of 'one of the feature events of the arts program,' I expected I would receive an invitation to the launch party of the festival. This is an event held on the picturesque lawns of Government House and involving Moët et Chandon flowing like it's going out of fashion (ha ha). It's inevitably kinda dull because most of the guests appear to be accountants for one of the sponsors but I'm totally up for suspending my disbelief and after so much champagne it's only too easy to imagine that the other guests are important fashionista or that I live in the 19th Century mansion and that drinks on the lawn with my mates is a regular occurrence.

But my fashion designer friends had all received their gold embossed invites and mine was nowhere to be seen. One night I woke in fright as I realised that the reason I had not received an invitation was not a tardy post man but my involvement in the apparently rather inferior arts program. But I thought I'd just check and rang the festival. After dealing with some dreary sponsorship business I brought up my missing invitation. The assistant on the phone said 'Oh, well I'd have to say that you won't be receiving an invitation. People in the arts program are not invited. Invitations are for fashion designers and sponsors.' I

pointed out that as someone putting in many hours of free labour, I was affectively a sponsor. My charming phone assistant told me she'd speak to the director of the festival who, being the ultimate diplomat, I felt would see I received an invitation.

Dreadful Oversight/ Maybe the list got lost

Indeed, some hours later I received a phone call saying that my lack of invitation was a 'dreadful oversight'. Well, I felt vindicated and checked the mail with renewed enthusiasm. But an invitation never arrived and fabulous fashion designer Nevada Duffy gave me hers as she would be preparing for a parade on the all-important afternoon.

The event was entirely as I anticipated with lovely sunsets, champagne re-fills every five minutes and all too many little black dresses. I spent some time with the director of the Festival's Arts Program who told me that she'd been asked to submit a list of ten participants in the Art Program to be invited to this party and that I had been on it. When I told her I'd never received one, she said that this would explain why she'd received a number of calls from directors of galleries who had not received an invitation either. Did they cut the measly ten people who they had deigned to give invitations or had the list got lost?

Stretch marks

Upon my arrival home, I tipped the contents of my L'Oréal gift bag onto the living room floor to show my loot to my housemate. But there was no joy as I went through the 'Wrinkle De-crease,' 'Perfect Firmer' and 'Stretchmark Eraser'. It was like a naggy present from your mum, the sort that might include a book on how to get a job and a very sensible and ugly singlet. It was more like chores than generosity or fun. There was an upside however, as I found myself bemused by the pressure to get rid of my stretch marks. I decided I quite liked them.

Desperate

For the first time, there was an official launch for the arts program. It was an embarrassing affair that was grossly under-publicised and consequently badly attended. Far from the glamour of the lawn of Government House, it was held in a back street in Fitzroy and after a couple of trays of free booze went around, punters were expected to pay for drinks.

I was talking to a prominent arts administrator about my discomfort about being involved in a program which ads so much to the festival but which is so under-valued. This person said, 'Oh but the arts are so desperate, we do it'. I don't know, I don't feel *desperate* at all. We have a really vibrant arts scene which is largely self-directed and run by a lot of very resourceful people who produce a massive variety of projects through whatever means they can muster.

We're worth more

Being part of the Fashion Festival left me with a bitter



taste in my mouth which was not entirely due to too much champers. As a result of being part of the Festival, my exhibition gained a very large audience and was held in a gallery which I could not have afforded. I would like to feel grateful to the Festival, but, quite frankly, being made to sweat blood for sponsorship and being told that I was not worthy of an invitation to the launch of the Festival, I feel that they should be quite a lot more gracious towards me and others who put so much work into their program.

The arts program is obviously important to the festival. At the arts program launch, the director of the festival was only too quick to say that the arts program is better attended than any other aspect of the Festival. The presence of arts events makes this a festival and not just a mammoth product launch. I also suspect it contributes to funding they receive from bodies like Melbourne City Council. So why are we being treated like lepers? I don't have an easy answer to this or more to the point how we could find ourselves better treated in the future. Whilst I'll be thinking very hard about any future involvement in an event like that in the future, I can't be all bolshie and say I'll never have anything to do with such affairs. There were clear advantages to my project. But like my new found love of my stretch marks, I want to have a better sense of the value of the art scene. We're not desperate. We're an integral, 'value adding' element of these events and we should not put up with being treated like second-class citizens. We're worth it!

Lyndal Walker is an artist, lecturer, curator, soldier of fashion and all-round good guy. Her photographic practice is concerned with issues of

Left: Tsubi, *Never Let Them See You Sweat*, 2004, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of Tsubi. **Right:** Rose Nolan, *Me Working*, 1996-2004, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne.

transience, consumerism and style. She was one of the founding members of 1st Floor artists and writers space in Melbourne.