

# The fabric of wealth and creation

By Louise Goldsbury

**The recipient of the Rigg Award – the 'Archibald Prize of design' – wants the value and excitement of creative thinking to become more visible in Australia through meaningful connections with investors.**

**DESIGN THINKING AND CREATIVITY CAN BE APPLIED TO EVERYTHING AND EVERY SYSTEM – DESIGN IS A POWERFUL CONDUIT FOR WEALTH GENERATION**

**Designer and artist Simone LeAmon harks back to the days when societies turned to their creative citizens for innovation and solutions to everyday challenges.**

"Throughout history, 'creatives' were called upon to assist in the creation of new ideas, new content and new ways of doing things. Our society is less practised in doing this now," says LeAmon.

It's a shame, she explains, because designers have so much to offer the community.

"Think of all the things in your home, office and even your car. I often think that Australian designers should be household names – like many artists, musicians and actors!"

Instead, our designers – and many of their ideas – remain unknown and unsupported. But now, more than ever, LeAmon wants to connect the creative and corporate worlds after receiving \$30,000 and "certainly some notoriety" in winning the 2009 Cicely & Colin Rigg Contemporary Design Award.

Offered every three years, the Rigg Award is funded by a perpetual bequest established by a former employee of ANZ Trustees. In the design sector, it's the prestigious equivalent of the Archibald Prize in terms of financial support and its impact on the invited entrants' careers.

The area of design showcased in last year's competition was contemporary seat furniture, and LeAmon won with her quirky 'Lepidoptera'. Named after the insect species, the chair is multi-layered to reflect the anatomy of a butterfly's wing, while the fabric comes from remnants discarded by an automotives textile manufacturer.



Combining the car and butterfly themes, LeAmon hopes that further philanthropy will help drive and transform other creative designs into something more useful and beautiful.

"It's terribly exciting because creative design is untapped, so people have the opportunity to contribute to really meaningful projects. There is a wealth of talent and capability in Australia that is just crying out to be partnered," she said.

Investment in creative design differs from other areas of the arts, LeAmon believes, because it allows for a more exciting and relevant relationship between all parties.

"Design is all about presenting attractive and seductive alternatives to meet people's needs and desires. It's unique because it's a cultural production that also has a commercial reality to it," she said.

"Unlike the visual arts where the outcomes are predictable, investing in design involves developing a relationship with the designer and exploring somebody's world. Designers want to have a conversation, they want to excite and inspire, so they take the investor's role far more seriously."

LeAmon would like to see the corporate sector investing in the "special brand of research and development (R&D)" offered by designers.

"Consider the R&D that you receive from an artist – it is a brand of R&D that you rarely get from an organisation or a corporate; it is free-wheeling, motivated by individual passion and personal narratives; neither censored nor informed solely by economic imperatives."

Yet the commercial side is far from ignored, she continued.

"My practice as both an artist and a designer means that I am focused on developing original, innovative and creative products and strategies. My designs always have a market in mind and I'm always trying to deliver compelling ideas to industry."

Over the past ten years LeAmon has designed motorcycle suits and helmets, jewellery, furniture, lighting and tableware, to name a few varied ventures. She has also engaged in a wide range of activities including research, drawing, painting, digital visualisations, animations and physically working with different materials. "Sometimes as the sculptor, sometimes as the craftsperson and sometimes as the manufacturer," she said.

Born in Melbourne 38 years ago, LeAmon was introduced to the concept of design by her architect father.

"I learnt that design was a process and I understood that it could deliver experiences which have the capacity to inform and shape people's lives," she said.

"Passion, on the other hand, is fuelled by a deep concern for what and why you do something. I am passionate about design because I believe it to be meaningful to our time. You need only consider many of the issues we face today around the globe and appreciate that design will perform a leading role in delivering positive solutions."

Her education has spanned from studying sculpture at the Victorian College of the Arts, to in-studio training under Australian design luminary Susan Cohn, and a Masters in industrial design at RMIT University where she now lectures. After pursuing several international projects courtesy of arts grants and studio residencies, including living in Milan, she returned home to set up her own design consultancy called O.S INITIATIVE.

According to LeAmon, the national design scene in Australia is "multi-dimensional, but some design sectors are more visible than others" – such as architecture and fashion design – "due to their healthy intersection with commercial frameworks", she said.

"For designers such as myself whose interest and expertise is in product, the visibility of our work, talents and abilities is regrettably poor. Too many brilliant ideas by Australian designers simply remain on paper, or in a computer."

The challenge for industrial/product designers lies in the manufacturing, funding and commercialising of their designs. Philanthropy is the way forward, says LeAmon.

So what can philanthropists do?

"Engage with the design sector, invest funds in design thinking and listen to designers," she urged.

"If you have a friend or family member that is an artist or a freelance creative of some sort, you will know the financial implications of funding are exhausting.

"Artists don't exist because of philanthropy, but what philanthropy does is enable the democratisation of the artist's work. Philanthropy nurtures the artist so they may continue to exercise their ideas and produce the 'work', which is evidence of it. The reality is that the pursuit of innovation costs.

"And while having an historic relationship to the established arts – such as ballet, opera, painting, sculpture – philanthropy also plays a vital role in supporting contemporary forms of creativity and artistic expression. Yes, it is important that we preserve our cultural capital of the past but we must also believe in the production that at times can be strange and challenging so that we may also see the complexity of this time reflected in our future."

**SOMETIMES I'M THE SCULPTOR,  
SOMETIMES THE CRAFTSPERSON AND  
SOMETIMES I'M THE MANUFACTURER**



Colin Rigg understood this notion when, inspired by his work on The Felton Bequest, he decided to establish his own philanthropic trust to support the arts, LeAmon observed.

"The fact that ANZ Trustees selected a strategy focused on contemporary design means that an area of creativity which is less popularised as a form of 'philosophy' can be seen as such." In this sense, the Rigg Award has immense cultural value for the community at large. It draws focus to contemporary Australian design and leverages the work of the participants in view of state, national and international audiences."

This level of exposure and appreciation of creativity is essential, she said, and its effects reach beyond art galleries.

"Creativity is important to everyone. As design mediates all forms of natural and man-made capital, it has every capacity to stimulate economic investment and growth in diverse areas. A key driver in the design process is delivering uniqueness, and a key driver in marketing any product or service is its unique selling proposition. Hence, design leads to competitive outcomes and markets – it differentiates a product or service."



As LeAmon says, it is philanthropic investment in Australian design that will unleash creative thinking and solutions in the cultural and commercial sectors.

"Design thinking and creativity can be applied to everything and every system – design is a powerful conduit for wealth generation – and it engages us on a visceral and intellectual level. Design is a value proposition that we all should be exploring if we want to create a healthier, happier and brighter future. Australian corporates perform a leading role in partnering Australian designers to deliver this brighter future."

Teresa Zolnierkiewicz, Head of Philanthropy Partners at ANZ Trustees, agrees the corporate world would itself benefit from advancing creative development.

"Visualisation is increasingly important in our society – it's vital for communication of brand, of product, of relationship. Nurturing design talent, allowing freedom of expression and boundary pushing is important for the endpoint of good design, and it's also something that corporates know is valuable to their workforce. Who doesn't need inspiration and creativity in their people and their business?" Zolnierkiewicz asked.



As a professional charitable trustee with a huge network of contacts in business and the arts, ANZ Trustees can link the two sectors, she added.

"We are a hub of information and access to people in artistic expression and innovations that require investment, and we're keen to broker possibilities for philanthropists who want to make a significant contribution to the arts," Zolnierkiewicz said.

So what of LeAmon's future? Her participation in the Rigg Award has delivered a "buoyancy" to her practice, she said, and an Italian manufacturer has proposed a deal for the commercialisation of her chair. The local automotive textile company that provided the fabric for the prototype also looks set to be contracted for its mass production.

"Then there are the benefits delivered to the 13 other exhibitors in the Rigg Award, whose work was viewed by thousands of people in the National Gallery of Victoria," LeAmon said.

"But perhaps the most profound effect of winning the award is my desire to establish my own philanthropic strategy in the future."