



'Models' of working in the arts: Artists' profiles

Introduction



In the course of NXT – Making a Living from the Arts, the project partners have met, discussed and trained hundreds of emerging and more experienced artists with the aim of identifying and investigating the challenges they are facing when developing a career in the arts. In surveys, discussions and training sessions, artists mentioned that they have benefited the most from hearing others’ experiences in finding their path in the arts.

In this chapter, we have included some examples of artists who have developed creative solutions and found their way in the arts, with the hope that these stories can be inspirational for other professionals and academics.

The artists were interviewed by different project partners, with the interview being based upon a set of agreed upon questions. These profiles convey the different styles, interests and stages of the artists’ careers.



Gloria Benedikt

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Edited by Barbara Revelli

Art and culture will be key in helping us overcome some of the most pressing global problems we face today. Only if we manage to leave self-interest behind and cooperate, will we be able to overcome imminent threats, such as global warming, transition into a sustainable future and be able to peacefully share our planet amongst 7 billion people and more. And it is not economics, not science, but art that can help us unite to move forward. ⁷⁵

Gloria trained at the Vienna State Opera Ballet School, “so technically” she says, “I’m a ballet dancer”. But Gloria is much more: an artist, an academic, an international advocate for the arts and an innovator. “Now I choreograph scientific results and concepts” she says. “My main art form is still dance and I start most days training at the opera. But I work at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). Because I choreograph papers, publishing means performing live on stage and recording, rather than submitting to an academic journal. So, perhaps I have become a research artist.”

Education, Education and more Education

“At the opera ballet school, I trained four hours a day, while also following the normal high school curriculum.

I had to be disciplined, self-motivated and manage my time. Besides the dance training, these skills have been crucial for success later”, says Gloria. After graduating in 2001, Gloria received a scholarship to continuing studying at the English National Ballet School in London.

At the age of 19, Gloria started earning a living as a dancer and choreographer, performing all over Europe and in the United States. She was working hard but she felt satisfied and fulfilled. At the age of 24, Gloria had reached her childhood dream of becoming a successful dancer. And yet, she found herself strangely dissatisfied.

I was performing on stages across the world, re-enacting fairy tales and ancient myths and using my body to interpret music in accordance with my classical training. But I felt I was not realizing dance’s

full potential as a sophisticated form of communication and started to wonder: can I do more? That is why I started to study.

Pursuing a higher education on top of her dancing career proved soon to be difficult, not because of the long hours, but “because I was stuck between two systems’, says Gloria.

The dance world considered a dancer taking interest in pursuits other than dancing ‘unfocused’. And universities in Europe were not keen to accept and accommodate dancers. I would have had to quit dancing to study full-time to show my academic commitment. I was convinced that combining the two at the same time would enable me to innovate. I ended up moving between continents to be able to do so, but I also ended up in a place better than what I had dared imagine.

Gloria was able to take on the new challenge and study social and political sciences at Harvard University. “I continued working as a dancer through my studies. Those were 80-hours’ weeks. But it was not as hard as it sounds. I had my dream job and was pursuing my dream degree.”

At Harvard, Gloria learned how to do research across disciplines, how to write

⁷⁵ Benedikt, 2018.

scientifically and how to speak in public. “I was also exposed to the principles of change management. This helped me tremendously once I ventured out into the world trying to do things that had not been done before.”

I had to force myself not to ‘blink an eye’ and take risks. But those risks always paid off in the long run.”

After graduating and performing all over the world, at the age of 29, the real artistic



Putting the Pieces Together

“I’ve always stood by what I believed in and never compromised my values. Once I realised that artists need to get out of the ivory tower again, because the world needs them, I did. There were times when

crisis got to Gloria. “At that point I realised that if I wanted to live by what I believed in, namely that the performing arts have great potential to support transformations to sustainability, I had to start creating my own work. It was painful to realise that the only way forward was leaving

the existing system and venturing into the unknown.

From change management, I knew my success would depend upon finding people who would share and support my vision. I also knew that I would be up against an established system, whose interest is to maintain the status quo. Knowing that every innovator, no matter the field, faces this dilemma encouraged me to prevail against delays and setbacks. I think many artists lose confidence in their ideas because they take it personally when people or institutions are not supportive. Arts education typically does not teach them that this is a natural part of the process."

When asking Gloria about her thoughts on her education, she replied without any doubt that all her education had been very relevant. "But arts education alone" she continues, "would not have enabled me to do what I do now. Getting all the education I needed was tough."

Even when Pavel Kabat, Director General of IIASA, the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis invited Gloria

to join the research institute in Vienna, she did not know exactly what she could do. *I was invited to join IIASA and got to invent a position that did not exist before. I just started with one project and then, based on results, I continued to build. It was an experiment and I ended up speaking and dancing and writing with like-minded scientists and artists and became the first artist that is not merely a resident for a limited period of time, but fully integrated in a scientific institution. Dr Kabat and I could not have foreseen this. At the beginning it was only clear that we shared the same vision.*

Today IIASA has a Science & Art project. So, I'm very satisfied with what we have created over the last years. I have not only the space to innovate. Innovation is the objective. In the arts world, innovation is not so much the focus. Large parts are commercialized. Here the process is different. If I have an idea, it is first discussed with a scientific committee. If the idea is relevant, well-reasoned and innovative, I can go ahead and realise it. If not, I have to revise it until it is sound. It is a tough process, but I would not want it any other way. And the result is always rewarding.

Photo: Gloria Benedikt and Mimmo Miccolis, 2017

Photographer: Patrick Zadrobilek

Looking to the Future

There are many artists out there who would like to engage with current affairs and do what they can to help humanity get through the current bottleneck into a sustainable

up having art and science for 'art and science's sake'. I believe if we put art and science together it should be for 'life's sake', simply because we have so many complex problems to solve and little time to do so. We have collected qualitative,



future. But the current arts system does not really seem to be equipped for that. Grant applications are lengthy. Stages that could accommodate innovative, impact driven arts projects are sparse. I'd like to create more opportunities for these artists.

Every piece I create has the goal to innovate in order to create impact. There are initiatives to connect art and science merely for innovation. But then we end

but not quantitative data on the impact. Real impact will only be possible if many more artists are able to work towards sustainability. That is why, besides continuing to figure out what is possible, I see my additional challenge ahead in scaling up and empowering as many artists as possible.

50 years ago, it was not normal for a natural scientist to work with a social

scientist, for instance an economist. Today it is hard to imagine that they would not work together as their worlds are obviously interconnected. In 50 years from now, I hope the same will be true for artists and scientists. That it will be obvious to anyone that they do not live in opposing worlds but complement each other. And that, by combining their knowledge and skills they help solve the complex problems that we face. I can only hope that we will have climate change, rising inequality, population growth and migration under control and enough resources left for all people. But there will be new problems to be solved that we cannot even imagine now.

Photo: Gloria Benedikt and Mimmo Miccolis, Concert for a Sustainable Planet, Carnegie Hall 2017