

Business course aimed at getting artists to sell art not sell out

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The Business Acumen for Artists course run by the UCT Graduate School of Business celebrates ten years of boosting creative entrepreneurs across South Africa.

In a recent interview local poet, Vangi Gantsho stated: “Artists should create. Perform. Be artists. Some people make better administrators than others. And the two cannot exist in the same space at the same time. If you’re thinking rands and cents... You compromise your art...”

Many in and outside of the art world share this sentiment and variations akin to it. Some take it as far as saying that selling one’s art is tantamount to selling out. The doctrine is simple – a true artist struggles for their work. They don’t do it for the money but for the freedom of expression. But what if the two could co-exist? In fact, they already do. There are many artists and creatives who are shamelessly making money from their work. Visual artist Loyiso Mkize (29) is one of them.

He says: “The idea that you’re selling out because you’re successful is a learned mindset – you must ask who’s selling that idea... In the past it seemed to be an attractive prospect to be a struggling artist... We live in a different world now where it wouldn’t hurt to have money in your pocket.”

“There is a mindset that distinguishes between great art and commercial endeavours. But making money doesn’t make you a bad artist,” agrees Elaine Rumboll, founder and convenor of the Business Acumen for Artists (BAA) short course at the UCT Graduate School of Business.

The course, which celebrates its tenth year this year, has been working to contradict this myth for many years with considerable success. It boasts amongst its graduates some of the country’s leading creative entrepreneurs including: Suzelle DIY; Dear Rae Jewellery and the late Paul du Toit.

According to Rumboll the course challenges the myth of the struggling artists. She says business isn’t just a linear paint-by-numbers experience. There’s a growing realisation that business is creative. She quotes Andy Warhol when speaking about BAA: “Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art.”

A blues singer and poet; Rumboll also has an MBA and is the managing director of The Creative Leadership Consultancy. In 2010 she won the Business Women’s Association Regional Business Achievement Awards in the Professional category. She comfortably straddles the business and creative worlds and describes the life she’s leading as being “congruent”.

The course is custom-made for any artist, regardless of their discipline and encourages its participants to challenge and change their own personal constructs.

“There’s a personal mastery we encourage, a challenging of the voice of judgement, of self-doubt, of cynicism... Instead we embrace what we call the voice of grace – which tells you you’re fabulous. It’s the inner coach,” says Rumboll.

Artists get a 13-week crash course in everything from defining a product, marketing, branding, and making money online to developing negotiating skills, pitching ideas, closing deals and entrepreneurial finance and tax. Participants are also assigned a mentor for the duration of and after the course. Lianne Burton who coordinates the mentorship programme says pairing creatives with the right mentors can have an accelerating effect on their development.

“Everyone who applies to BAA has to spend time writing their motivation; why they want to do the course, what success

looks like for them. I'll sit and read through each one trying to get a strong sense of the key thing that could make a difference in this person's career and try to link them to a relevant mentor."

Rumboll says they never tire of the joy of working with emerging artists and giving them the tools to define their careers.

"I am incredibly proud to be celebrating ten years of empowering creative South African entrepreneurs. Every successful creative is a boost for the country both in terms of the economy and the richness of its society."

For more information about the [Business Acumen for Artists](#) short course contact the UCT Graduate School of Business on 0860 UCT GSB or email execed@gsb.uct.ac.za. The course runs on Monday evenings from 29 August – 28 November 2016.

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