

Creatives to learn the art of business

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With the concept of artists as entrepreneurs emerging globally and gaining attention, artists are becoming more business savvy and finding new ways of sustaining their artistic livelihoods - the UCT Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB) is this August running a course specifically-tailored to help local artists find their business feet.

The course, called Business Acumen for Artists, will assist artists of all kinds - from painters, designers and writers to photographers, musicians and performance artists - to become more self-sustaining through business skills and to find new ways of sustaining their artistic livelihood in the long-term.

Elaine Rumboll, Director of the UCT GSB Executive Education unit as well as programme designer of Business Acumen for Artists, said trends globally are beginning to reflect a significant change in the way artists see themselves and their creative output.

"It's time to leave the 'starving artist' notion behind in favour of the 'business savvy artist', and artists can do this without compromising their creative integrity. Lighting the way for artists as fully-fledged entrepreneurs are several leading business schools and universities, like the UCT GSB. In many of these business schools, business and the arts are no longer mutually exclusive, but in fact mutually dependent disciplines that need each other to survive - and thrive," said Rumboll.

Cases in point in the US, for example, are the University of Michigan, which recently announced plans to offer a dual programme that will combine a Master of Fine Arts and Master of Business Administration degree, as well as New York University and Yale University, which already offer similar joint programmes.

The *New York Times* recently picked up on this trend, and in a feature presented some successful artists changing the game. According to Elliot McGucken, who teaches the course Artist Entrepreneurs at the University of North Carolina and was quoted in the feature, the advancement of business skills "rests on the principle that those who create art should have the skills to own it, profit from it and protect it".

Rumboll said that the GSB's Business Acumen for Artists course takes freelance creatives on a thirteen week journey, exploring the elements required to hone the business acumen vital to make their artistic endeavours sustainable and profitable.

"Today's artists can, and they believe they can, make a living out of their talent. We want to give them the business skills and confidence to do so. Designed with artists in mind, the course is very practically-orientated and we want delegates to walk away with tangible, measurable benefits," she said.

The programme, which is run in partnership with the Observatory Community Centre, will cover the basics of business - from marketing to finance - as well as the finer points needed for business success, such as negotiating, pitching ideas and products, drawing up a comprehensive business plan and even understanding the ins and outs of intellectual property law.

This curriculum will be reinforced by personal coaching for each student on the programme for a period of six months.

"The practical learnings will be underpinned by a meaningful coaching programme," said Rumboll. "The coaches will be drawn from the world of business as well as the arts, and will enable the delegates to turn their new-found knowledge into powerful actions."

She added that the course would be of particular benefit to younger artists who may find it tough to find a platform or are vulnerable to exploitation because of their inexperience.

Tracey-Lee Scully, a freelance graphic designer, illustrator and writer who attended the 2008 Business Acumen for Artists programme, described the course as a profound learning opportunity that entirely changed her outlook on business.

"I went to the course expecting to learn some basic business skills, but I finished having learned so much more than that. I learned the value of my work and to let go of my creative insecurities. I gained a whole new perspective on my reality - largely as to what was holding me back from following my dreams to succeed as an artist in a commercial world."

Patrick O'Meara, a photographer and film director who was on the inaugural programme, said the course gave him a new outlook on his work. "The course really demystified the world of business and money for me in a way that just learning about the technical side didn't. It gave me confidence in the way I present myself to the world. It took the evil out of money for me."

The Business Acumen for Artists programme runs from August to November 2009. SMS 'Art' to 31497 or contact 021 406 1268 for more information.

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