

February 2008

Wai Art column

By Anna-Marie Kingsley

I once went to a very posh lunch function at Government House that sadly had nothing to do with me being frightfully important; my mentor was deemed to be a high powered nob and she kindly took me as her partner once I'd promised not to nick the silver. While filling out the acceptance card several months before, she asked what the official title of my occupation was... "What would they put on your employment record?" "Really crap apple technician" I replied, which earned me a stern glare over her glasses. "Hmm," she said thoughtfully "Postharvest Physiologist might be somewhat more elegant, don't you think?"

So there I am, hob-nobbing it with my spiffy official nametag and elegant occupation – the occupation tags are brilliant idea, allows you to completely bypass boring company CEO's and waffly politicians and head straight for the really interesting stay-home-mummies.

I did quite well at lunch; successfully balanced the peas on the back of the fork, didn't add sugar to my wine... It was one of those fancy do's where you are not only expected to know the appropriate cutlery and glasses to use of the worryingly extensive line up, but also which seated guest you are supposed to converse with for each different course. Dessert was served and on cue the entire table turned to face the person opposite them. My new conversation partner was a very cheery lady who after peering myopically at my nametag for some time announced loudly "Oooh, how exciting, a posthumous psychologist – do you look after dead peoples brains?" There was a momentary pause in conversation at three surrounding tables as the guests regained their composure.

I was so tempted to continue on the conversation with her definition; not surprisingly hitting apples with a stick didn't seem half as glamorous as looking after dead people's brains. Tempting, so tempting, but no, guilt got the better of me and I fessed up.

The somewhat laboured point of my story is that titles/names/brands need to be unambiguous. Rule 157 of the marketing handbook states that quite clearly. (Yes, I just made that up.) So Fab Wai Art, which no one seemed to be able to say in the right order, has rebranded to Wai Art. Nice, simple, clean, no one is going to accidentally assume we are paid to counsel corpses.

What has marketing got to do with art? Very simply it's all about getting noticed and remembered. If you want people to take notice of you and maybe even stretch to buying the odd piece of your artwork then you need to market yourself and your work. It's an ongoing process, something you need to think about everyday, every painting, every exhibition. "Arrrgh! I can't be bothered" I hear you say, "I just want to paint!" Then think of Wai Art as being there for advice, support, and promotion, so you can spend more time being creative.

Wai Art is designed to be a strong exhibition platform for Wairarapa Artists. We organise several large non-selected exhibitions per year, allowing all artists who enter to display their work. The Carterton Exhibition Centre houses a smaller gallery in the front with fantastic window space. The regular monthly exhibitions incur a low commission and attract a lot of visitors. Wai Art also provides a professional website that allows artists to economically display their artwork, including prices and contact details.

Essentially Wai Art is all about the artists. We are an incorporated non-profit organisation, so any money we make from events gets put back into promotion for exhibitions and artists. We are very aware that most artists will vigorously resist any attempts to organise them on mass. "Rather like herding cats", a fellow artist once commented. So we aim for maximum benefit for minimum buy in.

We firmly believe in "as well as", as opposed to "instead of". Wai Art values Wairarapa's more esoteric artists who are producing art that disrupts our surface tension and we think there is room in the Wairarapa for all artists of all types to be supported and encouraged. Enlarging the pool of potential buyers is one of our main goals and we aim to achieve this with careful planning and thoughtful promotion.

With that in mind the Wai Art Awards 2008 is rapidly coming up over the horizon. This year it is opening over Queens Birthday Weekend and lasting for the entire of June. We are doing a mail-out to most of the Wairarapa artists with an entry form to the Awards, the Wai Art Big Sale over Daffodil Carnival Day in September, and our new Wai Art brochure. If you are an artist then this should be arriving in your mailbox in the next week or two. If it hasn't arrived, it's because we don't have your address. If you would like to be added to our database then contact us.

All the information in the mail-out is also on our brand new Wai Art website on <http://www.waiart.org.nz> If you are an artist and would like to be featured (or linked to) on the website then email Anna-Marie Kingsley at info@waiart.org.nz or call Anna-Marie on 06 379 9177.

Once again there is big prize money at the Wai Art Awards. Suggest you get painting...