

World of Wearable Arts (W.O.W)

Suzie Moncrieff had a simple dream, to promote a small art gallery in Spring Grove, Nelson and ended up getting an international spectacular production filled with excitement and unexpected surprises plus the concept of taking art off the wall and onto a moving body.

Suzie Moncrieff, a sculptor from Nelson was thinking about ideas to promote a small art gallery in Nelson and came up with the idea of presenting it as a fashion show with a unique twist, showing off art on a moving body. She encouraged people out in the community to enter if they wanted to join in. Suzie felt that people did not fully understand the concept that she was trying to get across, though some people made some colourful creations that were wild and wacky. Even though it didn't get the desired effect she wanted, the art gallery was getting known to the public eye and had enough interest generated for another show. (1)

With the help of her sister Helen Palmer, they were able to expand Moncrieff's dream and upgrading it from the William Higgins Gallery to the Trafalgar Centre (Nelson's largest venue). (2)

With a mixture of dance, lights and colourful costumes, it was a hit with the Nelson crowd and got raving reviews. (3)

With all the hype behind it the World of Wearable Arts it's no surprise it attracted big names like Helen Clark (ex Prime Minister of New Zealand), dance groups such as Black Grace and the New Zealand Royal Dance Company. (4)

Suzie Moncrieff felt as if her "Wearable Arts kitten had grown into a lion and refused to be caged" (5). With the amount of people passing through the doors each year to watch the spectacular "WOW", the crowd had increased from over 2000 on its first show in 1987 to an amazing 17,500 by 2004. (6)

In 1999 Suzie Moncrieff had realized her dream was much bigger than expected and needed to recruit more staff as she was already under a lot of stress.

She employed three new managers in Marketing, Administrative roles and Media. (7)

Among them was current marketing manager, Donna Ching.

The year following it was re-branded to become 'World of Wearable Arts' or 'Wow' - A move that was suggested by their naming rights 'Montana' (8)

Exploring her options, Suzie requested Ching and Harvey to do

research into how much Wow meant to Nelson City. That December McDermott Miller - a consulting agency from Wellington came back with impressive figures. They found that Wow was bringing in \$6.5 million into the region from an approximated 9000 visitors. (9) Retail and restaurants were the key beneficiaries from the Wow awards. It was not all-good news though; they also continued to say 'We think you have very limited life as to what you can continue to achieve in Nelson'. (10) Information also presented by McDermott Miller, that in the audience of the 2003 Wow awards, 60% out of the 15,000 strong audiences were from out of town.

After more researching and thinking about the potential of Wow, Suzie Moncrieff decided that moving Wow from Nelson to Wellington was the smartest decision to see her dream continue to grow. 'It has been a very emotional decision to make and one that wasn't taken lightly at the end of the day, Wow had to go where it would survive and continue to grow. After 18 years of hard work, I wasn't going to sit back and watch it die'. (11)

The decision to move Wow from Nelson to Wellington triggered a lot of angry feedback from Nelsonians, explaining how 'Nelsonians have been betrayed' and letters to the editor accusing Wow of 'high treason' and 'greed and ego'. (12) Suzie stood strong with her statement and refused to give any apologies and wishes that "Nelsonians would share her dream, not try shattering it". (13) She also continued to say that some of the harshest criticism came from people that hadn't seen the show before or don't understand the company. 'People that I work with are completely behind me with this decision and have seen the frustration and hard work front on' (14)

These days, Wow is an internationally know spectacular that attracts designers from all over the world such as Canada, Japan, USA, India, Thailand, UK, the Netherlands, Israel, Fiji and Germany. It twists conventional perception of both art and fashion and weaves them together in categories such as: South Pacific, Children, Illumination illusion, Man unleashed, Avant Garde and the perennial favorite bizarre bra. (15) The Montana Wow awards show is best described as a glorious innovation against the norm, where you enter a world of dreams and fantasies and witness an extraordinary procession of incredible works of art. (16)

By Sarah Butterworth, Nayland College, 2010

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