SUBMISSION FROM ANDY SCOTT

Creative Exporting

Experiences:

My practice designs and produces large-scale public artworks from a studio in Maryhill, north west Glasgow. For further details see www.scottsculptures.co.uk and www.thekelpies.co.uk

The Kelpies, the world’s largest equine sculptures, at The Helix Park in Falkirk.

I am a one-man operation, and hire teams of subcontractors as and when required. My wife (Hanneke Scott van Wel) is a director of my company and looks after financial and management aspects of my business as well as her own architectural / educational practice (www.stone-opera.com).

I have had very little assistance in my attempts to export. Like most creative businesses I know, I operate off the radar of officialdom.

Until I received the invitation to participate I had not really counted my exported projects. Like most small companies I know, I am too busy doing it to have time to review it.

Now I have, and these are the ball-park turnover figures stretching back over the last few years or so:
USA, approximately £520,000
Australia around £250,000
Europe around £200,000.
Total of £970,000.

If England is counted as an export market in your survey, the figures for south of the border are around £700,000.

That takes it to just over £1.6 million.

I’ve also exhibited in Sydney, Queensland, New York, Chicago, Indiana, Spain and Holland. At one point I operated a studio in Australia which resulted in 15 commissions across four states.

![Arabesque, at Currumbin Beach, Queensland](image)

I currently have four overseas projects at the enquiry stage: two in USA, one in Germany and one in Dubai.

This has been achieved with next to no official assistance by one man, operating out of a big shed in Maryhill, Glasgow. There are a couple of exceptions:

**For Research:**

I am a member of SCDI, and thanks to them and their partnership with Glasgow City Council I received a total of £1,200 split over three trips to assist in exploring new markets (USA twice and the Gulf).
These were extremely useful missions, well organized and very rewarding in terms of building an understanding of the regions visited. I still pursue projects through links made on the US trips. The Gulf visit was not successful directly in terms of commissions, but gave invaluable insight into those areas (Dubai & Doha) which has served me well since.

**For Exhibition:**

Creative Scotland awarded £20,000 towards an exhibition in New York, which was shared with my partners in the Kelpies project, Falkirk Council / Scottish Canals. This was towards freight costs for the exhibition of The Kelpies maquettes. (1/10th scale versions of the full scale monuments)

However these were not for sale, and as such was not strictly a commercial enterprise, aimed at raising the profile of The Kelpies and my practice in the USA.

*The Kelpies 1/10th scale maquettes on exhibit in Grant Park Chicago. This opportunity arose as a direct consequence of an SCDI delegation to Chicago.*
Challenges:

On the few occasions I have considered seeking assistance for exporting, I’ve given up. I don’t have the time to wade through the websites. A cursory glance tells me I don’t relate to the organisations, nor they to me.

For example Scottish Enterprise offers information graded as SCQF level 8 worth 80 learning hours and 8 credit points...? What does that mean to a sculptor trying to send giant steel horses to Dubai or launch a book in New York?

There are no items on the websites of SDI or Scottish Enterprise which appear relevant to my business exporting in any way. Whisky, golf, digital, textiles, oil... the usual suspects. But not small-scale creative / manufacturing such as my practice.

Given the creative nature of my business, one would assume that Creative Scotland would be first stop. While always helpful and courteous, they require detailed submission paperwork, and have extremely long assessment processes. That is too challenging in the real world where a business has to be agile to react to opportunities and enquiries, and certainly more appropriate for exhibitors & performers working on long-term agendas rather than commission-based artists.

Therefore considering I have to run a studio, pay the bills and make the artworks, it is easier and quicker to just do it myself. So I do. Apart from once:

Case study: The Kelpies

When I did get involved in seeking assistance to exhibit in New York, showing The 1/10th scale Kelpies sculptures in Bryant Park in central Manhattan during Scotland Week, my first stop was Creative Scotland. This was a joint proposal with my client team at Falkirk Council and Scottish Canals.

However Creative Scotland operate to glacial timescales in making their assessments for larger funding requests, and although very polite and as helpful as they could be, proved to be of no help.

(I’d already approached them when I sent the sculptures to Chicago two years previously. They couldn’t help so I paid for that myself. Not cheap, as you can imagine.)

In order to access funding though other branches of Government, I had to attend four meetings in Edinburgh, (which meant considerable away from my studio: time is money for a small business) repeating the same message to
varying casts of officialdom, until finally meeting with Fiona Hyslop (ironically in charge of Creative Scotland where I’d started my journey)

I am delighted to say she offered us a very generous £20,000 towards the costs. (which basically covered the costs of returning the sculptures to the UK) However this was tied to very restrictive conditions relating to Scottish Government messaging and pr, and bound us to only using their allocated pr company in New York.

This caused various problems and challenges and led to only minimal exposure tied to government branding messages and prohibited any wider pr or media coverage. In true Scottish style, we missed an open goal.

The Kelpies again, this time in Bryant Park in the middle of Manhattan, NYC

I have to say though everyone in the process was very nice, politely heard us out and reassured us they’d consider our idea. It simply seemed that the assessment system did not allow for anything outside the “norm” of funding assistance.

The representative from Visit Scotland said outright that they would not help, which was frustrating, given the nature of our proposal.
Perhaps worth noting that at present The Kelpies still do not feature on the Visit Scotland website, other than as a buried “news” item over a year old.

I should point out that The Kelpies are the biggest equine sculptures in the world and have had 800,000 visitors in less than a year.

Advocacy is as essential as funding for a practice such as mine. Small companies need be promoted, and to know they are doing a good job, not just for themselves, but for the country.

I will continue, if I may, with The Kelpies as an example.

While the sculptures were being displayed in New York, we were tentatively offered exhibition opportunities as far afield as Toronto, California, Florida and Atlanta. One can imagine the publicity this might have generated, as the sculptures acted as ambassadors for the full-scale project in Scotland.

Their potential as ambassadors for tourism and culture in Scotland was, I think, immense. We had no budget to engage with those opportunities, so instead, the sculptures languished in a storage depot for months until returning to Scotland.

I’d personally already spent in excess of £40,000 of my own money in exhibiting the artworks in Chicago, New York and Indiana. Bear in mind the sculptures did not belong to me, so I couldn’t sell them.

This was an exercise to promote my practice and to showcase the full-scale sculptures. Ambassadors for Scotland if you will, and for a hard-working Scottish creative practice.

Our experiences in achieving the £20,000 support mentioned above was so arduous and time consuming that we decided to cut our losses and return the sculptures to Falkirk.

So instead of flying the flag for Scotland and for the nation’s newest cultural landmarks in cities such as San Francisco, they currently sit outside the entrance of Queen Margaret University in Musselburgh. Preaching to the converted, as it were.

So, would I seek assistance from Government for future events in US or elsewhere, such as our imminent book launch? I doubt it. Experience tells me it’s not worth the hassle.

We have a new book out about The Kelpies. It’s proving very popular. We have a US distributor lined up to sell in America, and we had ideas to do launch events in Chicago and New York, possibly elsewhere. But after considerable debate, we’ve decided not to pursue this.
It would cost us too much. We’re already hugely out of pocket in the book’s production. So, spending money on a book launch in the US is sadly not an option.

A pity when you think of what a good publicity, tourism and cultural opportunity this could be, not just for my practice, but for the full scale Kelpies and indeed Scotland as a country. And, given our experience outlined above, the idea of onerous endless meetings and paperwork... well, like I said, I have a studio to run and sculptures to make.

In terms of spends on oil, whisky, golf, gaming industry etc I imagine these are relatively small sums of money. But to me, and to studios, practices and businesses like mine across the creative sector, these are the sums that can make or break a business. At very least they can mean the difference between staying at home, or opening doors to new opportunities and mixing it up with the rest of the world.

I am now well-established and not going to go bust of course. (I hope.) But I believe we are missing a fantastic opportunity due to the overly complicated, time consuming, box ticking hurdles that seem to be part and parcel of seeking assistance.

My latest exported project: a group of horses to a private residence on Long Island, New York
Obviously I can’t offer solutions to the malaise afflicting Scottish exporting.

All I can do is offer reflections on my own experiences and suggest what I think would help me with future export plans. I’d hope then that if enough other individuals and small companies express their opinions, a consensus and plan of action can be realized. I don’t know how much of this is do-ble but here are my (blunt) opinions...

- Be more agile and respond quickly to assess whether or not a project is worthy of assistance. Small creative companies must be flexible and quick-witted to respond to opportunities, yet the system that is there to help them seems to move only at the pace of the juggernauts of big business.

- Take risks on creative companies, and be flexible in their assessment criteria. Currently all I hear of is organisations who are already funded receiving grants to attend art fairs, do theatrical tours etc.

  ![Installing "Argestes Aqua" at Byron Bay, NSW, Australia. This and other Australian exhibitions and projects were entirely self-funded.]

- Don’t ask creative practices for onerous business plans, or strategy documents or cashflow projections because they’re not worth the paper they’re written on. Instead look at their portfolios. (Just this week for example I had enquiries for major works in the Gulf and Germany, which I knew nothing about and could not have predicted
the week before.) Instead look at their products, where they started from and where they’re at now. The right export expert with the right knowledge of the right sector will be able to tell within half an hour meeting if they’re worth backing.

- Change your game. I’ve been to and spoken at export seminars and they are invariably very boring. The official message should be as simple as this: “get professional help from an accountant and a lawyer, here’s the contact details of folks who can help…. Now here’s some folks who are doing it, to tell you how they’re doing it” Export seminars will be infinitely more appealing and educational if folks hear speakers who are actually doing it, not bureaucrats who are paid to talk about it.

- Broaden your horizons. I read lots of reports about the value of creative industries and the number of folks employed therein. Yet until now I have never been asked to contribute to any surveys, and I don’t know any creative company who has. And I know lots of creatives.

- Don’t wait for small businesses to come to government / SDI / Scottish Enterprise / whoever it is we’re meant to go to, because we’re too busy doing what we do and trying to succeed as a business to fill in forms and attend endless meetings. Think of a way of reaching out. Advertise, shout out “we want to help”

- Re-think your websites. While the SE and SDI websites certainly lay out the facts, they are a bit dull. Sorry. They show pictures of men and women in suits and refer to lists of statistics and big companies. With the usual pr stuff about how great Scotland is. They look like websites for banks, and are equally as enticing. You need to show the real stuff, granted, but why not show products, and the success stories, and what they do and what they’ve achieved. That is more likely to make aspiring exporters think “I want a piece of that action” than lists of possible meetings and paperwork to fill in.

- Advocacy. Fly the flag and celebrate smaller practices, the folks in the trenches, at the coalface, actually doing it. Network, reach out and seek the rising stars, and the established ones in unusual businesses… not the usual suspects in the usual sectors.

- Don’t just highlight the businesses you support, celebrate the ones you wish you had, or that you want to in future.
Thanks for asking me to get involved in your survey to improve Scottish Exports. I hope the above is of some interest.

Apologies again for the anecdotal nature of the writing, and the fact that it is late. Good luck with the review and please feel free to get in touch at any time if you think I can be of assistance

Andy

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