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Hans Paalman, netherlands section

SOME ASPECTS OF DUTCH GOVERNMENTAL AIDS FOR THE ARTS

My contribution to this congress is to define some aspects of the social-cultural aids geared to the essential requirements of the visual artists in the netherlands.

Due to the fact that in Holland the art-dealers are not able to function in the sense of fully taking responsibility for the artists who 'belong' to their gallery, since they themselves have a too small economical basis, the dutch government created in the years 1945-1946 the start of a social aid scheme for visual artists (beeldende kunstenaars regeling).

This aid enabled an important number of dutch artists to live more or less economically independent, thus having the possibilities to devote themselves entirely to the development of their artistic work.

The ministry of social affairs is responsible for this social aid the ideas for its formation originated in the thirties, as mr. Van Velzen mentioned some minutes ago, growing out into a fully regulated system after world-war II.

This social regulation for visual artists has expanded into one of the most important governmental supports for approximately 2500 artists between 25 and 65 years old and this costs the state over 80 million Dfls per annum.

The financial help consists of purchasing works of art (paintings, sculptures, graphics and even video and films) from the artists. The municipal authorities appoint experts in a committee (proposed by the artist-organizations as well as by the authorities themselves) who determine professional status, quality, admittance to the regulation and the price of the artists' work.

There exist possibilities of appeal for the artist who is refused admittance.

This system gives the artists possibilities to be active as professional visual artists on the so-called free-market. The purchased works are exhibited in official buildings as town halls, schools, public libraries and in many cases in local museums.

In comparison with the Norwegian system which aims at an equal income for artists without the 'contra-prestation' (that is our social regulation for selling works), this dutch system is a very unique one.

In these coming weeks political discussions will take place in the Netherlands regarding the social supports in general. Political parties, artists' unions and the man in the street will have their ideas about it.

Of course we are fully aware of the climate for the arts in the Netherlands. As art-critics or museum-directors we all notice the power that makes artists leave Holland for France, the United States etc. We think of Jungkond, Van Gogh, Mondriaan, Willem de Kooning, Corneille and Appel. All these painters did not find the right climate at all for their art in the Netherlands and even now it is very difficult to get sufficient support for contemporary art.

Though many artists in Holland do not always find the kind of appreciation they are looking for, we must state as well that we are very aware of the influence of the dutch social regulation on foreign artists. Many of them come to Holland in the hope of finding there social security. Of course admittance of foreign artists to the regulation is an exception.

The original intention of this social scheme was to provide means for living and work to younger artists who were temporarily unable to retain their (material) independence and in order to enable them to develop their artistic personality in their first postgraduate periode (though auto-didact artists were admitted as well) to help and encourage them to enter into the professional opportunities as exhibitions, commissions etc.

In recent years however the scheme became for many of the growing number of artists a long-period provision only interrupted by short periods of independence in which the artists were able to live from their own sales from exhibitions or have their own income from commissions, teaching posts etc.

I want to stipulate that although this social regulation for artists still remains the responsibility of the ministry of social affairs the cultural importance is immense.

Nevertheless the dutch artists strongly maintain that this social attainment born from ideas of artists in the resistance in world-war II should remain under the responsibility of the social affairs ministry, since they are fully aware of the fact that by this ministry they are cared for as individuals in budget which has the possibilities of a yearly increase. This forms a contradiction with the budget of the ministry of cultural affairs which is essentially much more dependent on the attitude of the changing political governing powers. The ministry of culture tends to emphasise the social relevance of art and artists in society rather than the development of the arts in a more general way.



In addition to the social scheme for artists (the mentioned social regulation) the artist providence fund cares for all the different kind of artists in the Netherlands (actors, musiciens, writers etc. and also visual artists). The fund has affiliated organisations, to which members pay an additional contribution for the fund. This contribution is substantiated by the local authorities and also by the ministry of social affairs. In addition the ministry of cultural affairs subsidizes this kind of insurance-system for artists, and several private funds do subsidize as well. For the benefit of visual artists the fund supplies on accomodation for professional needs, help for paying health-insurances, atelier-equipment, exhibition-costs etc. Artists who are not supported by the general social regulation can be helped in their living costs up to 13 weeks per annum. Younger and elderly artists (also above 65 years) have rights to apply for help.

The third important help to visual artists is the material fund for visual artists entirely sponsored by the ministry of culture. This fund gives loans (without interest and costs) to visual artists in order to enable them to execute sculptures in precious materials (bronze, rustless steel etc) to make prints, the building up of environments etc.

Apart from the three kinds of helps I mentioned, the governmental support is also given in the form of travel-grants, working-grants, purchases of artworks for the national collection etc.: all falling under the ministry of culture.

Regarding the fact that visual art and artists are of essential cultural importance for our society, essential as well for the cultural future I do hope that in the future whatever political formations may govern our country, they will realize their immense responsibility to the arts in general and to the artist as an individual.