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GOVERNMENT, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INITIATIVES IN THE SPHERE OF FINE ARTS
IN THE SOVIET UNION

The theme suggested for examination by the AICA General Assembly is, I believe, a very important one. The detailed analysis of the type of governmental, public and private initiatives in the sphere of fine arts, will doubtlessly be of interest both to artists and art critics.

In this paper I would like to present some information summing up and supplementing the material given in the questionnaire, and, without claiming an exhaustive solution of the problem, offer the experience of the critic's participation in the artistic process in the light of the theme under discussion.

The information offered for your attention concerns governmental and public initiatives towards the organization of the artist's creative endeavour with the aim of providing the best possible conditions for his fruitful and effective work, with account of his experience, aesthetic interests, professional training. This refers not only to material conditions, but mainly to the creation of a certain ideological and artistic atmosphere, whereby the artist and the spectator are organically united constituent parts. Here defining and securing the actual social functioning of art in the framework of a socialist society appears as the most important aim of governmental and public initiatives.

In our case we are dealing with a complex of governmental and public initiatives which organically blend with the individual initiative of the artist in his choice of themes and the representative medium of his art, in determining his participation in artistic life.

These initiatives cover two components of the sociocultural process: the creation of a work of art and its further social existence.

A special feature of governmental and public initiatives in the field of art in our country is that it is the artists and critics themselves who, through their creative associations, act as their initiators and coordinators. Many public and state organizations, having at their disposal the necessary assets, come out with a number of initiatives in the field of art: acquiring pictures for clubs and enterprises, organizing small picture galleries, erecting monuments, ordering interior decoration work, acquiring works of art for local museums. All these initiatives are carried out with the help and on the re-

commendations of artists' associations. By professional discussions the artists and critics offer help in the selection of works of art, defining the best directions for the realization of such initiatives. This allows to influence their character, to professionally shape views on the development of artistic endeavour. May I offer just one example: at present in many cases suggestions by artists largely determine the character of planning whole urban districts, their works of art (sculpture or mosaics) become the centre of the architectural-spatial environment. The councils forming museum displays, determining the character of the aesthetic environment of public and industrial premises and entire architectural complexes are also organized by artists and art critics.

The initiating and determining role of the artist in social events is due to the special status of creative workers' associations, allowing them to effectively influence various public initiatives in the field of art.

What are the special features of such associations? First of all, they possess a sufficiently strong material base for their activities. Being independent public bodies, the associations of artists have at their disposal a vast network of enterprises (factories making paint and canvases, pottery enterprises, sculpture producing combining, etc.). The profits from their activities accrue to the creative association. Besides, artists' organizations act as mediators between the artists and the client (industrial or agricultural enterprises, etc.), when large-scale art work is commissioned. Deductions from the cost of an order, together with production profits go into a fund which is placed at the disposal of the artists. The states has exempted these assets from taxation and they can be used to provide conditions for creative endeavour. Thus, the artists' associations take upon themselves the organization of various public initiatives, be it the commissioning of works of art, or participation in the comprehensive solution of architectural projects, and at the same time have their own independent means for organizing creative work. Moreover, these initiatives are directed towards the two basic components of the socio-artistic process: the creation of a work of art, and securing its further social existence.

In the first case, the artists' association, independently, or with the help of public and state organizations, provides the artist with workshops, materials for work, ensures of conversion of monumental works of art into material form. In cases, when an artist's creative plans require travelling in the Soviet Union or abroad, such travels are undertaken either at the expense of the organization concerned or, at its request, at the expense of state-owned enterprises. Artists' associations have at their disposal special centres for creative work, where groups of artists may live and work for a certain period free of charge. Plein-air of this kind provide for better acquaintance with the creative experience of fellow artists, afford a venue for broad creative discussions, greatly stimulate the creative endeavour of young artists. Soviet artistic associations practice a system of guaranteed payment for an artist's work, paying him over a certain period of time a certain monthly allowance in order to permit untroubled work on his productions. Such a system is particularly useful for young artists just starting out on their artistic careers. Widely adopted also is the system of contracts under which the artist receives an advance payment and, thereby, a real material basis for his work.

All these measures, carried out by artists' associations jointly with other governmental and public organizations, provide concrete conditions for the

maximum manifestation of an artist's individual initiative in his own work. It is particularly important that the artist can always correlate his work with the activities of all his fellow artists, since such a system presupposes the broadest participation of the members of the association in implementing various kinds of initiatives in the field of art. This is facilitated by numerous debates, discussions of works of art, scientific conferences, all of which contribute to a special kind of a professional, creative atmosphere.

The choice of the theme of a work of art, just as of its form rests fully with the artist. However, constant association with colleagues and impressions from concrete events encountered during trips across the country, largely determine his comprehension of the social significance of his work.

Public and governmental initiatives are particularly important when it comes to ensuring the social existence of a work of art. Here as nowhere else the artist's personal interests intertwine with the public interests. It is for this reason that the aim of these initiatives is to ensure the greatest exposure of the artist to the spectator, and the satisfaction of the public demand for art.

In the conditions of the Soviet Union the importance of activities by the artists' own associations is very great indeed in this regard. The large assets at the disposal of the associations are spent for the acquisition of works of art which thus make up an exhibition collection. Works of art included in this collection are widely displayed at numerous travelling exhibitions sent by the association jointly with other state organizations on specially planned routes across the country or abroad. It is of special importance that the works of art are purchased by special councils of experts, elected by the artists from among their own community. Eventually such works of art are handed over from exhibition collection to museums or other diverse cultural institutions. The expert councils composed of artists and art critics elaborate recommendations for the purchase of works of art also by state institutions, museums, etc. Throughout the country artists' associations organize both group and one-man exhibitions, and foot the bill for all the expenditures entailed. Extensive art propaganda is carried out on by magazines and publishing houses belonging to the system of artists' associations.

It goes without saying that these initiatives do not rule out opportunities for artists to sell their works directly to interested spectators. Of help in this regard are the special commission salons where works of art are exhibited and sold to the general public.

Recent years have seen private collecting assume quite a large scope in our country. These are both small collections and rather considerable ones. Here collecting fully depends on the individual initiative of the collector and the artist. The state renders all possible support to collectors, as reflected in the recently adopted state law on the protection of cultural monuments, which specifically defined, among other things, the rights of art collectors.

Besides, an artist can market his works through the system of regularly held art lotteries.

So, summing up the information on the nature of government and public initiatives in the sphere of art in the USSR, we can say that they are aimed at tackling the following tasks:

- creating the best possible material and other conditions conducive to the fruitful work of the artist, to the maximum realization of his individual initiative in tackling professional tasks.
- the maximal attraction of the artist's attention to the phenomena of social life, creating prerequisites for his active participation in it.
- measures towards the collection of the best works created by artists and ensuring their active social existence (exhibitions, museum collections, the synthesis of pictorial and architectural art, etc.).
- professional and material aid to artists at every stage of their work, cultivation of the young artists.

It should be noted that all this refers not only to professional artists. These initiatives in equal measure concern the creative endeavour of amateurs and popular craftsmen, and the artistic associations are active in assisting them in the organization of their creative work.

A special feature of this kind of initiatives is that whatever organization - public or governmental - they are started by, their approbation, professional evaluation and, in the long run, their realization is implemented by the artists' own creative discussions within the professional associations. This ensures a certain artistic standard of the works of art, uniform distribution of assets, professional assistance to organizations intending to implement one or another measure in the cultural field (be it an exhibition at a factory or a workers' club, a commission for the artistic decoration of an enterprise or the erection of a monument in a town). Thus, the artist is to a certain extent made independent of the arbitrary preference of one or a few persons, while the initiative itself assumes a definitely social character.

In the light of the above one could define the place and role of the art critic in the implementation of public and government initiatives. Under Soviet conditions the critic is not only a consultant of this or another art lover. He is capable of effectively influencing the very character of the initiatives, the selection of the executors of an artistic work. Art critics are members of the artists' associations and therefore appear as full members of various expert and art councils. Largely depending on their ability to provide an accurate, scientifically relevant analysis of art processes, on their ability to take into account the entire complex of artistic and cultural phenomena, and also on their aesthetic taste, is a correct choice of the means for the realization of this or another initiative and the very character of the proposed measures. The art critic's professional work in the press, his contributions to creative discussions also notably influence the expansion of activities by different organizations, influence their appreciation by the public.

I would like to emphasize that the outlined system of governmental and public initiatives, due to the participation in them of different artists, is by no means a uniform phenomenon. On the contrary, the end result of creative endeavour more often than not enters into a kind of artistic competition with other works of art, created as a result of initiatives of a different character. And here the scientifically relevant investigatory work of the critic assumes fundamentally important significance for determining the general line of development of art in all the diversity of individual artistic manners and stylistic trends.

The real opportunities afforded the art critic to influence art processes and the character of public initiatives makes him independent of the art market, or the subjective view of publishers, allows an objective evaluation of artistic and cultural phenomena.

Such, briefly, is the character of governmental and private initiatives in the field of art in our country.

Now, in connection with the fact that we are discussing this essential "artists" theme here, in a gathering of art critics, I would like to submit for your attention some considerations on how this material could be used in our research.

Initiatives in the field of art are an element in the system of the social organization of creative endeavour and the formation of social evaluations of works of art. Whatever form the public and private initiatives take, they influence to a greater or lesser degree the character of creative endeavour, the abatement of these or other processes in art. Suffice it to recall the influence exerted by the Venetian Biennial, or the "Documenta" exhibitions on the rise of pop-art or the "happening".

At the same time the influence of the artist on society is obvious, just as on the character of public initiatives in the cultural field. Thus, we are dealing here with a closed system of "society-artist" feedbacks, whose reciprocal influence determines the character of art processes. The present-day structural analysis of an advanced art cultur presupposes, in the formation of feedback within this system, the presence of intermediary regulating mechanisms. And it is both the art critic and the art lover that represent this kind of mechanisms. Analysing modern art, offering his system of evaluations, the art critic must doubtlessly keep in mind the regulating function of public and private initiatives. Taking them into account makes it possible to represent a picture of the independent development of representational culture, ridding it from accidental and secondary non-aesthetic influences. Knowing the types of public and private initiatives, permits the art critic to evaluate the influence on the artist of art market interests. The very quality of critical thought largely depends on the orientation of the relationships within the system: whether the critic is dependent on the regulating effects of public and private initiatives, or, on the contrary, he influences them.

This, it seems to me, is the central problem of criticism in the light of the subject we are discussing today.