



PBK

Beroepsvereniging van Beeldende Kunstenaars - Beroeps Organisatie Kunstenaars
Kunstenbond - Platform beeldende kunst

Professional Association of Visual Artists - Professional Organisation of Artists - Artists' Union - Platform Visual Arts

Platform policy for the visual arts

In Dutch cultural policy, the visual arts - compared to the performing arts - come off very poorly, and this while the Netherlands enjoys great international prestige precisely because of its rich tradition in the visual arts. But that is understandable.

Professional positions

In the performing arts (music, theater, dance), cultural policy focuses on organizations (companies, project organizations, etc.) that are reasonably manageable in number and that usually have a business component in addition to their artistic content. Grants then cover accommodation, personnel costs and fees, as well as the venues themselves (theaters, theaters, concert halls).

In the visual arts, we see a confusing and incoherent group of freelancers with very different views and starting points. According to various studies from the 1970s onward, there are about 12,000 visual artists in the Netherlands, of whom about 9,000 have an active CV (regularly manifest themselves). This number has remained fairly constant for 50 years. Entry and exit keep each other reasonably in balance. This is explainable: surviving as a visual artist is not only economically, but also emotionally not that easy: it is a lonely profession in which appreciation is not readily forthcoming.

Directions

Most artists can be divided into numerous movements and directions, which often oppose each other. The main ones are - in historical order:

- The Classical (European) tradition, with its focus on the rather realistic representation of a reality, whether or not invented;
- Modernism with a focus on abstraction, either by means of handwriting or geometric forms;
- Postmodernism with a focus on originality and with borrowings from design, advertising, comics and other visual language from everyday life;
- Conceptualism with a focus on ideas and all kinds of implementation of these ideas within society.

Side-by-side directions can keep each other on their toes: the one on content, the other on professional quality. The artisanal directions tend to neglect the expressiveness of content, the experimental directions the visual quality. By taking directions out of their own bubble, gains can be made on all fronts.

All these directions may be subject to fashion or ideology, but they also all have their own following among sections of the public and, for that reason alone, they are legitimate and equal. Directions in art are not opposed to each other, but coexist.

There is a gold mine of artistic potential waiting to be exploited.

Market

Art is produced partly for its own sake, partly for the public. The relationship between these two perspectives varies; in the experimental forms, the focus is almost entirely on the intrinsic nature of art. Experimental variants are rarely market-oriented; research in art - as in science - can only continue with government support.

In the more public-oriented form, the artist is both an inventor, producer and marketer. Some artists are very skilful in the latter, but the vast majority are not. They have to rely on intermediaries such as galleries. They are often brokers: they take work on consignment and ask commission when selling it.

It is a difficult market because the prices of unique works are relatively high, because autonomous and original variants do not yet have a market position and because personal affection plays a major role in a purchase. It is also a volatile market driven by image and fashion. And it is a market prone to crisis: with every economic dip, art is the first to go. Success is often temporary. This is not new: it was the same in the Dutch 'Golden Age'.

4-track policy

The specific characteristics of visual arts make a central top-down policy complex and difficult to implement, especially without making arbitrary artistic choices.

An alternative is a bottom-up policy, starting with the artists themselves, to be bundled by lower authorities (municipalities), these in turn to be bundled by the provinces, and with a final editorial by the national government. And in the following categories:

- Production policy

Visual art is a craft with high professional costs; artists can only survive on low fixed costs. Production policy serves to facilitate artists with affordable workspaces and thus to make the continuity of art production possible. In practice, this is called the 'Studio Policy' or, in a variant, the 'Incubator Policy'.

- Presentation policy

Does not flourish by choosing one direction, but rather by entering into confrontations, creating fields of tension and thus setting up a qualitative competition. Another advantage is that if equal attention is paid to several directions, the public reach is considerably increased: what is meaningless to one person is actually valuable to another. In this way, it also serves as an instrument for infrastructural market promotion.

- Educational policy

Both in theoretical and practical participation, various tastes and perspectives can be catered for. Artistic participation can have all kinds of goals: from individual self-realisation to the cultural elevation of population groups.

Development of cultural taste and insight is a matter of acquaintance and experience in upbringing and education. In earlier centuries, this was reserved for the 'higher classes'; it is obvious that in today's society, this circle should be widened as much as possible.

Through education policy, thresholds can be lowered and entrances provided.

- Exchange policy

Local art often remains 'locked up' within its 'own' region. Through structural exchange between regions, but also through international exchanges, the practice of art can be given a qualitative impulse, which is conducive to its flourishing.

International exchange can, of course, make use of the reputation that the Netherlands enjoys abroad as the cradle of the visual arts.