

## **Artists choose freedom and responsibility**

You might call Dutch artists old-fashioned, but they do still believe that the best days of the Netherlands are yet to come. They work towards a future that is several times more beautiful than the one that lies behind us. And why shouldn't they? Dutch artists are a breed apart. They live and operate out of a sense of revolt, a permanent struggle for freedom.

Many centuries ago artists transformed a delta marsh into a central reference point in art history, which the entire world envies. Here, behind the dikes, artists have contributed to a common wealth unequalled in the world, through freedom of expression and an age-old openness towards people with a knack for art.

Here the so-called Thorbecke doctrine was drafted in which Dutch artists put a stop to the powerful lords from the Netherlands' political capital The Hague. The elite was told that their power would come to naught if it didn't allow for a free art practice. Our artists solemnly declared that their professional endeavours have their own societal worth. Bravely, they fought for artistic freedom and they have rewarded our nation for this many times over.

For many centuries, Dutch artists have spread their wings over all continents. Our tricolour became the symbol of artistic freedom and responsibility across the globe. It became the symbol of a people where artists determine their own destinies and where the artistic production enriches the nation.

But that was long ago.

In the year 2011, ever more artists ask themselves whether they still have a future in the Netherlands. Thousands of artists are crying out that the Dutch government in The Hague no longer guarantees their artistic freedom. Thousands of artists have given up their use value for society. Our art world is going through its worst crisis since the days of Thorbecke. The urgent question presents itself as to why The Hague continues with its unfortunate cut-backs that contribute nothing to heightening the responsibility of artists. Artists are thereby delivered to whims of the institutions of the Amsterdam canals which are often out of touch with what is alive among the people.

In the meantime, many people feel that we are starting to lose art. Neighbourhood after neighbourhood, street after street, arts incubator after arts incubator, artists are retreating from society in to a deadening lack of commitment. Year after year, this mass retreat from artists into closed studio spaces reaches a new, sad high and this trend will only escalate further over the coming years. Irresponsibility is thriving. The flag of artistic freedom no longer waves and has to tolerate the flag of artistic indifference alongside it.

A lot of the problems that are wreaking havoc in the Dutch art sector share the same diagnosis: artists are totally out of touch with reality and undertake projects as atomic individuals that do not benefit the common people. Our artists have surrendered themselves to the illusion that all artistic expressions (and the concomitant values) are equal. Anything goes. There is neither value or valuelessness. All art production is interchangeable: art in the museum or in the streets, empty halls, endless repetition, artistic parties to which the neighbourhood is not invited - it's all the same.

The pride which we took for several decades in transferring a part of our salary to artists, the system of art subsidies, has become a magnet to a bunch of professional fun-seekers. It is no longer an investment in an art practice that answers the needs and desires of the Dutch citizens, but a takeaway for a disproportionate amount of fiddling artists. Henk and Ingrid are footing the bill for the personal careers of artists without receiving anything in return.

Are we, the Dutch people, powerless? Are we condemned to sit by passively while everything that is so dear to us is being mangled by uncontrolled artists?

Of course not. Genuine artists choose for action after their outcry. If we want to, we can do anything. The heroes from our nation's art history witnessed the flooded delta and thought: here art can be of significance. Filips of Marnix thought of the Netherlands as a gold mine of inspiration, possibilities and commissions and said: together we can make it or break it. Rembrandt saw the civic guards which made Dutch society into a place safeguarded from the scum. Multatuli saw the excesses in the Dutch East Indies and denounced these with pen and paper. Vincent van Gogh strikingly pictured the hard-fought life in the Dutch provinces and peat colonies.

We are a country where artists now really have to part ways for good with idleness and careerism. Everywhere, artists are again arising to tune their practice onto the concrete desires and needs of the Dutch people. With this, they enrich their city, province and state. Kamiel Verschuren mobilizes his colleague artists to bundle their strengths in the South of Rotterdam - an area where public administrators are no longer managing by themselves. Jonas Staal is breaking the silence around the countless original inhabitants of Rotterdam who are chased from the South of Rotterdam due to the influx of immigrants by erecting a monument that forces everyone to reflect. Jeanne van Heeswijk brings common people closely together through art events in neighbourhoods that are in the process of demolition and restructuring.

Those artists who want to participate are more than welcome! The outcry of artists today is that of freedom and responsibility, as well as an unshakeable belief that the best days of the Netherlands are still to come. We are normal artists communicating to the Dutch government in the Hague that the flag of artist freedom should once again be up and waving in the Netherlands. We are patriots who take action, with artistic freedom as our most important weapon, towards the inhabitability of our neighbourhoods and the prosperity of the Netherlands. Liberation Day is an inspiration to us. With a revitalized belief in

artistic freedom we march on. We are already participating in Rotterdam. Also to Amsterdam and its cultural and intellectual elites living alongside its canals, we offer our services.

We call on artists to join our march to The Hague, Almere and all provinces of the Netherlands.

Our struggle is not an easy one. Artists are locked up in their artificial incubator spaces. Their alliance with a consumer audience which is as narrow-minded as it is wealthy means that artists eschew free and public actions at all costs. The criticism that artists who do participate – such as the already mentioned artists Kamiel Verschuren, Jonas Staal and Jeanne van Heeswijk – are brave enough to endure, is an incentive to continue vigorously.

Our struggle is the right one and we stand on the shoulders of those artists who walked the same road before us.

This is what we do. We again declare our independence from the art elites and their dubious ideals – art collectors with a fine taste, art institutions with unclear curatorial agendas and governments that misuse art as a leftist hobby.

This is the time to choose sides. Artists choose for those people who have to struggle on a daily basis for their livelihood. These people are our inspiration and material. Our artistic production enriches their lives. We choose for a Netherlands where artists enrich social and economic life in their own, unique way. Let our artists have their say. They know far better than the political elites of The Hague and the Amsterdam canals combined. No arrogant disapprovals from the plush couches of enlightened politicians and intellectuals. No patronizing from high and mighty art institutions. No networks of subsidized art reserves. We choose for a Netherlands where artists come out of the closet. We choose for a living art.

Those who think that artist participation to society is just a single-issue matter, are bad at math. The withdrawal of artists has enormous consequences for all facets of our societies. It costs heaps of money, infects the quality of the art production, makes our streets increasingly unsafe and chases our people out of affordable apartments.

We ask the fundamental question: what do artists actually do with their freedom? And what are the benefits for us?

We no longer accept all the outcries in the art sector. Henk and Ingrid no longer have to foot the bill. The fault lies with artists and administrators which think that the world is as eerily indifferent as the whitewashed walls of the museum, art gallery or arts incubator. The choice which artists are facing is a simple one: to act as voluntary prisoners in the closed art circuit or to contribute to the renaissance of traditional norms and values in art. They either choose for a socially worthless art production or for an art which strengthens the faith, hope and optimism of the Dutch people. This is a time to choose. The Office for Artist Participation has made its choice. Artistic freedom and responsibility is our choice.

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