

Steyn Bergs and Rosa te Velde

Changes in cultural policy in the Netherlands received a fair amount of attention in newspapers and in public debates following the severe budget cuts of 2011–2012. However, the form that these changes have most recently taken seems largely to have escaped critical attention. For this reason we were very pleased when Lara Garcia Diaz and Cristina Marques Moran approached us with the idea to edit a *Kunstlicht* issue that would delve into the historical grounds and present implications of arts and culture funding policies and programmes, such as *The Art of Impact*. We would like to warmly thank them both for working together with us, and we are confident that *Cultural Policies: Agendas of Impact* offers a counter perspective to the under-theorized and under-examined rhetoric that all too often accompanies cultural policies.

This publication also marks the stepping down of Jesse van Winden as editor-in-chief, whose vivacity has been fundamental to *Kunstlicht* since 2009. This became all the more important with his promotion as editor-in-chief in 2012 and his premiere issue *The Public Market* in 2013. We are extremely grateful that Jesse will remain on the editorial board. A single editor-in-chief could by no means possibly substitute Jesse's inexhaustible energy and *joie de vivre*. We, Steyn Bergs and Rosa te Velde, have therefore decided to take up this challenge together and will henceforth share the position of editor-in-chief.

More changes on the editorial board include the resignation of Marlies Peeters, Tim Roerig, and Veerle Spronck. We thank them for their contributions and hard work. Fortunately, we also have the privilege of introducing a number of new editors: Fabienne Chiang, Isa Fahrenholz, Juliette Huygen, Rosa Mulder, and Iris Pissaride.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Your Co-Editors-in-Chief,
Steyn Bergs & Rosa te Velde

Lara Garcia Diaz & Cristina Marques Moran

The usage of terms such as 'collectivization', 'participation', 'social value', and 'impact' in political discourse surrounding artistic practice has grown exponentially since the 1980s. Notions about art as a producer of utopia, with the institution as its engineering platform, and the artist as the initiator, have resulted in the problematic of state-funded art as the proposed provider of social progress. In the Netherlands, the use of art as an effective practice of intervention in situations of 'crisis' is also being tested.

On December 1st, 2014, the Dutch Ministry of Culture (OCW) announced the new temporary Art and Culture programme, *The Art of Impact*, which over the two years to follow would delegate seven million euros to multidisciplinary art projects that have a 'clear' social effect. It asks: "[h]ow can art make a difference for the quality of life in the neighbourhood and the city, for energy and the climate, for healthcare, welfare and the life sciences, and for the circular economy?"¹ *The Art of Impact* seeks to fund initiatives that are

able to enforce and highlight the relation that art can have with other social, political, environmental, and economic domains and establish solid connections with mediators from inside and outside the cultural sector. Artists, designers, mediators, as well as cultural institutions and commissioners are funded as agents of change or 'impact producers'. As the question above foreshadows, the programme demands from these agents that they produce beneficial results in one of the following domains: 'society', 'circular economy', 'energy and climate', 'the quality of life in the neighbourhood and in the city', 'healthcare, welfare, and sport', 'cultural participation', 'privacy', and 'the refugee crisis'.

With this programme, the government declares that it has a renewed faith in art, and acknowledges its importance to society. Certainly, minister Bussemaker seems to conceive of art as an agent for change and cohesion, leaning towards a liberal conception of art and culture that highlights its universal benefits.² Art is no longer regarded as a mere hobby of the elite, and it is publically supported by the minister as a beneficial tool that can intervene in domains outside the cultural sector.

However, in our current period of economic austerity, where creativity and innovation are fuelling neoliberal agendas, one wonders if art is really conceived of in liberal terms as politically and socially beneficial; or, despite

¹ "Hoe kan kunst verschil maken voor een leefbare wijk en stad, energie en klimaat, zorg, welzijn en life sciences en circulaire economie?", trans. by *Kunstlicht*. Rijksoverheid, 'The Art of Impact: kunstprojecten met een maatschappelijk effect', 1 December 2014. Accessed through: www.rijksoverheid.nl/nieuws/2014/12/01/the-art-of-impact.html, on 10 March 2015.

² By using the expression 'liberal conception of art' we are making a direct reference to the political philosophy and doctrine of liberalism based on the idea of freedom, equality, and liberty. Expressed in the 18th century by authors such as John Locke or Thomas Paine, and prominent in American and English discourse in the 20th century, the basic principle is based on the protection of the freedom of each individual by laws, judges, or the state. It is believed, thereafter, that the government is a necessary institution to protect the individual from being harmed by others. However, as Thomas Paine argues in his pamphlet 'Common Sense' (1776), government is at best a "necessary evil". That is, the government itself can also pose a threat to liberty. The aim of liberalism is hence to devise a system in which government assures the liberty of the individual while also preventing those in power from abusing their positions. A 'liberal conception of art' appeals then to the idea that art can universally promote ideas of liberty as well as improve social relations.