



# **STEERING COMMITTEE FOR CULTURE, HERITAGE AND LANDSCAPE (CDCPP)**

CDCPP-Bu(2015) 26

Strasbourg, 9 November 2015

**9th meeting of the Bureau**

**23-24 November 2015: 9h30 – 17h30**

**Council of Europe, Strasbourg**

**Agora Building, room G06**

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## **Rethinking Council of Europe Art Exhibitions: Towards a revised concept**

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Secretariat Memorandum  
prepared by the  
Directorate General of Democracy  
Democratic Institutions and Governance Department

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## **Introduction**

In the framework of the programme and Budget for 2014-2015, the CDCPP is expected to develop proposals for possible new Art Exhibitions. At its June 2015 meeting it invited the Secretariat to prepare a discussion paper for initial consideration by the Bureau.

This document – see Appendix – provides some reflections on the historical background, justification, results and possible way forward for future Art Exhibitions in the framework of a reformed Council of Europe.

The Bureau is invited to consider these initial thoughts and give guidance to the Secretariat as to the next steps to be followed with regard to drawing up proposals for consideration by the CDCPP.

## **Action**

The Bureau is asked to give guidance to the Secretariat in the process of drawing up formal proposals on Council of Europe Art Exhibition.

## **Appendix**

### **The Council of Europe Art Exhibitions: towards a revised concept**

#### **I Historical background<sup>1</sup>**

Rooted in the ethos of European integration after World War II and the desire for reconciliation, the Council of Europe Art Exhibitions since 1954 were intended to increase knowledge and appreciation of European art as one of the highest expressions of Europe's culture and common values. Indeed, the exhibitions contributed to advancing the awareness of European identity and unity by illustrating most of the great epochs or the contributions of great European personalities who left an indelible mark on their time<sup>2</sup>.

The methodology required proposals for exhibition themes to be submitted to the Council of Europe secretariat, which referred them to a group of consultants composed of the directors of eight leading European museums: British Museum, London, Museo del Prado, Madrid, Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna, Hermitage Museum, Saint-Petersburg, Musée du Louvre, Paris and Bundes- und Ausstellungshalle, Bonn.

After the Council of Europe's competent Steering Committee (Culture) had given its agreement, the exhibition was incorporated into the series of Council of Europe Art Exhibitions. A European organising committee was set up to liaise with the museums concerned. Scientific and technical issues were dealt with jointly. The Council of Europe would offer the Council of Europe Art Exhibition label and financial support to the best projects.

While making sure that the exhibition themes complied with its quality standards, the Council of Europe did not instigate specific exhibition projects on particular themes, or suggested priorities in order to extend the geographical scope of the projects and facilitate new partnerships. The financing of exhibitions was secured through the Council of Europe's Ordinary Budget and substantial contributions by member states, i.e. the host countries and institutions presenting respective exhibitions.

#### **II Shifting priorities from 1989**

Since 1989, however, Europe's situation both internally and externally has changed considerably. Consequently, the traditional format of Council of Europe Art Exhibitions and their historical themes were no longer seen to necessarily meet new demands as they had in the past. The Council of Europe reviewed its exhibition program in the 1990s, and described as follows its changing priorities: "Today, the Council of Europe priorities have shifted towards safeguarding European values. Democracy, human rights, a respect for difference and diversity may need to be embedded in public institutions and policies but their ultimate strength depends on how firmly they are rooted in people's minds."<sup>3</sup>

Three new approaches meant to pursue the new Council of Europe priorities for Art Exhibitions: (1) a new thematic approach: culture as a vector of values and citizenship, (2) a pro-active approach and (3) reaching out to a wider public. Council of Europe Exhibitions and Cultural Events should thus contribute to the Organisation's wider social and political aims while at the same time retaining the excellence, integrity and power of the previous exhibitions.

The 30<sup>th</sup> exhibition "[The Desire for Freedom](#)" (2012-15) serves as an example of this new approach. Twelve chapters actually explored artists' reflections on the ideals of universal human rights, freedom, equality and democracy. The exhibits of 113 artists came from 28 European countries, encompassing art from regions in Europe to which less attention had been paid and thus transcended the usual separation

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws from a reflection undertaken by Jaroslav Andel, Artistic Director of the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, Prague

<sup>2</sup> See the full list of exhibitions in the appendix.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Events/exhibitions\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Events/exhibitions_en.asp).

of art from the East and West, North and South. A wide outreach policy was attempted by involving a multitude of partners under the leadership of the Museum of German History in Berlin and via related exhibitions events and workshops in participating countries<sup>4</sup>.

### III Today's context: Are Art Exhibitions a useful tool to promote Council of Europe values?

While the above shift was overall welcomed, it was not officially validated as a new way of managing Council of Europe Art Exhibition. Indeed, while opening some challenging and promising prospects for future work, no further reflection was engaged as to its adequacy with Council of Europe's most recent priorities for action. It is to be noted that in the last few years no requests or offers for hosting Art Exhibitions were made to the Secretariat thus implicitly confirming that member States too hesitate as to the best way forward.

The starting point of a fresh rethinking would be the consensus that seems to be prevailing in Europe – in the Council of Europe at least – that democratic security much depends on vibrant, influential *civil societies* and on *inclusive societies*. Both are areas where education, youth work and culture and the arts have a special role to play. Culture and the arts are indeed great connectors between people, if accessible and meaningful to them.<sup>5</sup>

The Secretary General's Report on Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law amply develops recommendations and ideas towards building vibrant civil societies and inclusive societies, promoting civic participation and respect, tolerance, understanding and genuine curiosity and interest in the other.

What role for Art Exhibitions in this? What kind of exhibition events? The power of visual culture in terms of pictures, images, videos, arte facts seems uncontested. The potential outreach of an arts activity could be huge given the use of new technologies, social media and co-operation agreements with leading media outlets.

### IV Rethinking exhibitions

#### *Initiative*

Assuming that Art Exhibitions could feature among the tools enabling “democratic security” to consolidate, three basic scenarios emerge in this respect: (1) The Council of Europe may proactively seek to organise an exhibition event, (2) the Organisation may react to proposals made by individual member states, cultural institutions or consortia of these, or (3) the Secretary General may allocate his patronage or a specific label to selected events and according to a set of specific parameters.

#### *Methodology*

Whatever the formula, the following criteria should be adopted with a view to deciding what kind of event should be promoted: they should be organized “bottom up”, not “top down”, they should encourage

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<sup>4</sup> The exhibition was initiated and coordinated by the Museum of German History in Berlin. The main exhibition was launched in Berlin and subsequently shown in Milan in the Palazzo Reale, in Tallinn at the Kumu museum and in Cracow at the contemporary art museum. Ancillary exhibitions and conferences were organised in: Berlin at the Collegium Hungaricum, Prague at Dox contemporary art centre, in Thessaloniki at the Macedonian Contemporary Art museum and Sarajevo National Gallery and at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Brussels (Critique and Crisis, in Image and Idea). The Council of Europe did not provide any budget for the 30th Art Exhibition, except for some expert travel and one ad-hoc support staff. The “Desire for Freedom” was financed through the Commission's Culture Programme 2007-13 and administrated by the Museum of German History in Berlin.

<sup>5</sup> At a time where rapid technological, economic, social and cultural changes need to be accommodated, the arts and culture are becoming ever more important: “They have a direct bearing on our capacity to face today's complex issues and bring multiple benefits to the well-being of democracy. Art safeguards a long-term view: not only does it provide a counterweight to the fast evolving world of technology, but also helps to make sense of it. Art invites participation and so surpasses the division between observing and doing. Art inspires trans-disciplinary collaborations as it transgresses boundaries of specialised disciplines more easily than other human activities. Art is the agency of imagination and creativity, capacities that are crucial in its impact on the individual and the community” (Jaroslav Andel “Why Democracy needs the Arts and Culture”, Background Paper to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Council of Europe Platform Exchange on Culture and Digitisation, Linz, 4-5 September 2015).

participation, bridge the gap between cultural producers and consumers and initiate sharing in production and distribution, they should reach out and build new audiences as participants and partners across different communities. In short, the new generation Art Exhibitions should connect issues, networks, and generations and support trans-disciplinary exchanges and collaborations.

### *Themes*

While it would obviously be too soon to think of themes for exhibitions – whatever their format – current reflection on topical issues facing the whole European *demos* points to diversity, intercultural dialogue, solidarity, dialogue and mutual understanding as grounds for democratic security based on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

At first glance, the “construction of identity” (more specifically, the idea of the modern self that originated with modernity, its import to culture, economy and politics) and our “relationship to nature” (including climate change seen as an issue in which cultural social and political concepts and interests coalesce) would seem more attuned to current challenges to and concerns of European society but others, of course, could be suitable for consideration.

### *Financing*

Funding for any new exhibition activity would have to be secured through various sources, including voluntary contributions by member states, EU grants and possibly, a small BO allocation to guide the process of activity re-framing. Staff of the Directorate of Democratic Governance would oversee a possible new Art Exhibition activity, ideally assisted by a seconded specialist on cultural, arts and educational matters in the implementation phase.

## **V Thinking, deciding, moving ahead**

This paper is meant for discussion at the Bureau of the CDCPP on 23-24 November 2015. The Secretariat will follow up Bureau’ recommendations on drafting a more comprehensive paper possibly with the assistance of a small group of experts – should the Bureau agree.

Such a group – up to five people – could advance initial ideas outlined in this paper, possibly in collaboration with a leading cultural organisation (museum, agency or foundation). One Bureau member could also take part in it. Experts should be in the forefront of addressing societal issues and represent potential partner organisations in different sectors.

The group should further address the following topics (1) procedures/rules for initiating a Council of Europe Art Exhibition or event, (2) choice of key themes, (3) new participatory formats and multiple dissemination platforms, (4) key art organizations to collaborate with and (5) other key players in individual sectors.<sup>6</sup>

The first meeting of the group could be convened in early 2016 and prepare (mostly through online exchanges) proposals for consideration first by the Bureau then for approval by the 2016 CDCPP Plenary.

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<sup>6</sup> E.g. educational institutions, academia, professional organizations, NGOs and civic organizations, European institutions, private foundations, etc.

## **Annex**

### **List of Council of Europe Art Exhibitions 1954-2012**

1. Humanist Europe, Brussels, 1954
2. The triumph of mannerism from Michelangelo to el Greco, Amsterdam, 1955
3. The 17th century in Europe: Realism, classicism and baroque, Rome, 1956
4. The Age of Rococo, Munich, 1958
5. The Romantic Movement, London, 1959
6. Sources of the 20th century: The Arts in Europe 1884-1914, Paris, 1960
7. Romanesque Art, Barcelona and Santiago de Compostela, 1961
8. European Art around 1400, Vienna, 1962
9. Byzantine Art, Athens, 1964
10. Charlemagne – His life and work, Aachen, 1965
11. Queen Christina of Sweden, Stockholm, 1966
12. Gothic Art, Paris, 1968
13. The Order of St John in Malta, Valletta, 1970
14. The Age of Neo-Classicism, London, 1972
15. Trends in the 1920s, Berlin, 1977
16. Florence and Tuscany under the Medici, Florence, 1980
17. Portuguese discoveries and Renaissance Europe, Lisbon, 1983
18. Anatolian Civilisations, Istanbul, 1983
19. Christian IV and Europe, Denmark (10 venues), 1988
20. The French Revolution and Europe, Paris, 1989
21. Emblems of liberty – The image of the Republic in Art, Bern, 1991
22. From Viking to Crusader – Scandinavia and Europe 800-1200, Paris, Berlin, Copenhagen, 1992
23. Art and Power, Europe under dictators 1930 à 1945, London, Berlin, Barcelona, 1993
24. The dream of happiness – The Art of Historicism in Europe, Vienna, 1996
25. Gods and heroes of the Bronze Age, Copenhagen, Bonn, Paris, Athens, 1998
26. War and Peace in Europe, Münster and Osnabrück, 1998
27. Otto the Great, Magdeburg and Europe, Magdeburg, 2001
28. Universal Leonardo, Florence, London, Oxford, Munich, Milan, 2006
29. The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation 962-1806, Magdeburg and Berlin, 2006
30. The Desire for Freedom. Art in Europe since 1945 (Berlin, Tallinn, Milan, Cracow, 2012-2014)