

Slovakia - a response to Artist Exhibition Payment Rights

Artists in Slovakia usually get no remuneration for exhibitions. Payment fees are offered to artists only very, very exceptionally. In fact artists generally have to pay themselves to organise exhibitions: rent of exhibition space, transportation, advertising, supervision of the exhibition, refreshment and the cultural program at the opening.

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989 and the change of the political system in former Czechoslovakia, the old system in Slovakia broke apart and the new system has still not properly developed in the field of art. We cannot talk about a vibrant visual art market: it is still a young market in European standards and contemporary visual art has a marginal place in the bigger scheme.

Basic legislative tools are still missing - no sponsorship support, no way to include art purchase into your bookkeeping and reduce tax base, no support for visual art in public buildings, no specific regulations for artists in tax and social insurance system or VAT. Despite significant economic growth in Slovakia the expenditure on culture has been falling over the last 20 years.

However, the artists and the cultural community are optimistic, with the belief that a wider understanding of art in society will be a discernible positive trend in the future.

The role of the Slovak Union of Visual Arts (SVU - an umbrella organisation of Slovak visual artists) has increased in the past six years. It is now becoming a respected partner to the Ministry of Culture - the President of the Slovak Union of Visual Arts is also the President of the Slovak Coalition for Cultural Diversity, a Member of the Council for Culture of the Government of the Slovak Republic, and Vice-chairman on the Ministry of Culture Committee for the Strategy of Cultural Development. Unlike in the past, the Union of Visual Artists now initiate and debate new draft acts concerning the arts.

There are several bills on the table, which could bring real changes to the situation of visual arts for the future:

- In August 2014 the consultation process was concluded concerning the Construction Act, which will be submitted to the National Council of the Slovak Republic, to be validated from July 2015 – this law is about to re-establish (after 25 years) an obligation to use a specified percentage from public buildings' budgets for visual art - and it is going to ensure (for the very first time) the protection of existing artworks during reconstructions (previously they have been massively destroyed).
- A strategy for the development of culture during 2014–2020, approved by the Government in May 2014. This could initiate an increase spend on culture.
- Amendments to the Copyright Act to strengthen the rights of the artist as author and address issues related to digitisation.
- In September 2014, the National Council approved the establishment of a new public institution – the Fund for the Promotion of the Arts - which should improve the financing of Contemporary Art and simplify administration – valid from January 2016
- An international initiative to discuss the Status of Artists aiming to improve the social and legal position of artists in society - the SVU collected information from 4 continents and 22 countries. The working group, with the counseling body to the Ministry of Culture, will prepare a proposal in Slovakia.

All this work supports and acts as a back drop for the consideration of artist exhibition remuneration. The SVU will look toward joint action (a common recommendation for Ministers of Culture and associated European Cultural Institutions), international discussions focused on rational solutions, and the sharing of skills and knowledge from other countries.

The first step is the recognition of the principle of the right for remuneration for exhibition itself, because it is a service from the artist for society and the public – and the Swedish MU model is a good example of how this right can be upheld by cultural organisations. After getting the recognition it will be time to negotiate conditions and form an appropriate structure.

Information regarding this was published in the Yearbook of the Slovak Union of Visual Art in December 2014. In 2015 SVU will discuss how to develop artist surveys and collect data to reinforce the promotion of artist remuneration and lobby for some kind of state support.

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