

Dead Artists Are Easy To Work With And It Will Get Worse

Has the arts bureaucracy forgotten about art and artists. **David Patten** enlarges on a theme familiar to many artists.

Art is
everything
and not
everything
that is
not art

Ad Reinhardt

'Ad says....' **David Patten**, 1990

It started with Keynes.

'I do not believe it is yet realised what an important thing has happened. State patronage of the arts has crept in. A semi-independent body is provided with modest funds to stimulate, comfort and support.... The task of an official body is not to teach or to censor but to give courage, confidence and opportunity. Artists depend on the world they live in and the spirit of the age.'

This post-Keynes world we live in has brought us: The Arts Industry - This Small But Successful Part of Great Britain Inc - The Incentive Funding Scheme - Three Year Funding And The Three Year Plan - The Regional Plan - The Local Authority Plan/Initiative - Positive Trends - Maximised Potential - Impact Studies - The Wilding Report - Responses To The Wilding Report - and so on.

What the spirit of the age has not brought artists is: Courage - Confidence - Opportunity - Stimulation - Comfort - Support. And it will get worse.

The real failure of state patronage has been its

bureaucracy and the actions of that bureaucracy.

'...multiplying layers of bureaucrats have developed to attend the 'supporting' of the arts and these complex systems' which have grown ever larger as the actual consistency of the arts has shrunk, have in a curious way come to replace art itself'

John Pick: The Arts in a State

In the last ten years the unwritten principle of 'arms-length' state funding of the arts has been replaced with a Thatcher-sharp state intervention through the notion of accountability - an accountability of bureaucratic process in which the role of artists could be replaced by Smarties and no difference would be noted. The Smartie Council - the Regional Smartie Association. And it will get worse.

'Indeed it is possible to argue that in many cases the entirety of government subvention in the arts goes to the bureaucrats and the bureaucratic systems concerned with subsidy and that when governments increase the 'arts' grant, bureaucracy expands to take up the slack.'

John Pick: The Arts in a State

Peter Palumbo (Chair of the Smartie Council) in his 'effective' keynote speech at the one day conference on training and standards development in the arts last October said:

'...for creative talent to flourish there must be those who appreciate that talent and are eager to be associated with it. There must be skilled agents and administrators.....The arts industry must demonstrate its ability to run itself on business-like lines. Just as every front-line soldier in a great army needs a logistical back up of five to one, so too creative talent requires the same ratio of supporting skills. Government expects every industry to examine itself.'

A ratio of five to one means either logistical back up on a monstrous scale or very few front-line soldiers.

And it will get worse.

Bureaucratic accountability requires the formation of policies which by their nature are interventionist on behalf of both government and bureaucrat. When the language of accountability moves away from the 'subtle, allusive, ironic and value drenched language which artists use' to a language of 'optimum production, efficiency, marketing and appraisal of management' the potential for anything other than a middle-of-the-road culture is lost.

In the UK, the impact of ten years of Thatcherism on the state funding of the arts has been critically, and accurately, summarised by John Pick in 'The Arts in a State':

- The aims and purposes of policy are extrinsic to creation and enjoyment
- The resources offered to implement policies are plainly inadequate to the task
- The metaphorical language in which the policy is couched implies that economics matters more than art
- The policy constantly alludes to arts management practices as if they are an entire substitute for art.

The danger in basing arts policies upon the acceptance of the new bureaucratic definition of art and basing policies upon the glib assumption that there is something, readily perceived and understood, called an 'arts industry' is that 'policy-making' will boil down to being a simple question of how the 'arts industry' is to be 'funded'. Then all questions about the nature of creativity, about interpretation and criticism, about freedom and complexity, about diversity and choice, about value and excellence, will take second place to the supposed higher truths of economics.

David Patten will open a discussion on the forgotten artist at the Artists Gathering in Ironbridge on November 24&25. the Gathering will also look at the role of the artist and their work, whether artists are taken seriously as professionals and whether art criticism really reflects what artists do.

More information from Artists Concern, Nadi Kinarey, Dale End, Buildwas Road, Ironbridge, Shropshire. Before 24 October tel: 0952 583118/680218 (office hours) 0952 581448 (evenings). After 24 October tel: 095245 2095