

secession

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Mag. Ulrike Lunacek
Staatssekretärin für Kunst und Kultur
im Bundesministerium für Kunst, Kultur, öffentlichen Dienst und Sport
Concordiaplatz 2
1010 Vienna

Vienna, April 23, 2020

Open Letter

Dear Madam Secretary:

This worldwide crisis of unprecedented dimensions has had a massive impact on independent artists.

It is therefore with great urgency that we, as a privately-run exhibition space for contemporary art, but also and especially as an association of visual artists, direct this appeal to you.

Artists' incomes were precarious before this crisis, but now their very economic existence is in danger. For many of them, the threat is acute, as they confront the cancellation of planned exhibitions, a collapsing market for commissioned work, and constraints that prevent them from working on their art. To make matters worse, they face the prospect of declining sales over an extended period of time, as there is every reason to expect that the art market will be depressed for years by the repercussions of the crisis.

We urge you to initiate emergency as well as sustained measures that will strengthen freelance art production and the independent scene in the short and long term to safeguard the future of Austria's vital and internationally acclaimed arts and culture scene.

We speak for the visual artists we represent when we argue that the time for decisive action is now. We call on you to implement the following measures:

- unbureaucratic emergency relief for all independent artists living in Austria, to be paid retroactively from March and for the duration of the corona crisis (e.g., a basic income of €1.000 modeled on the program enacted in Bavaria)
- reimbursements to associations and independent initiatives covering all or most of their earnings losses due to the corona crisis to ensure that the platforms that artists need to present their work will continue to exist
- the tax-deductibility of purchases of art
- higher contribution caps in the social security insurance for artists

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The social situation of working artists was often dismal even before the corona crisis, as was demonstrated by the first dedicated study, commissioned by Federal Minister Claudia Schmied in 2008. A follow-up study in 2017/18 showed no significant change.

We urgently need changes that chart a sustainable future beyond the current crisis. More is needed than tokens of symbolic or representative appreciation for the work that artists do. Our creativity produces lasting cultural values. As artists, we expect a modern cultural policy to regard and honor the arts and culture scene as more than just another sector of civil society: as critical minds, we contribute to the economic life of the country.

Sincerely,

The Board of the Association of Visual Artists Vienna Secession