

London June 19, 2011

To State secretary of Education, Culture and Science Halbe Zijlstra,
Dear members of the Dutch Parliament,

The arts scene across the world is shocked to hear of the extent of the cuts to the arts announced by the State secretary of Education, Culture and Science Halbe Zijlstra, and of the disastrous impact these cuts will have on the health and reputation of the Dutch arts sector.

The Netherlands' rich and diverse arts culture has long been recognised as a beacon of excellence across Europe. In the performing arts field, it owes its outstanding reputation largely to the innovative and daring work made by its independent artists, small and medium size companies, which will now be the ones hit the hardest by the new policy. Internationally it is really exceptional that such a carefully balanced and unique structure for supporting independent artists and smaller companies in the performing arts has been developed. Dutch artists profoundly and positively influence the fabric of Dutch society and their work travels across borders to theatres, festivals and cultural houses internationally, inspiring audiences throughout the world. The cuts proposed, of 200 million a year, will adversely affect the dynamic, innovative independent sector and constitute cultural vandalism. They will have a cataclysmic impact on the Dutch arts ecology and on audiences and communities in the Netherlands and beyond. They are also extremely short-sighted: for relatively modest levels of investment Dutch artists are international standard bearers for the artistic excellence, innovation and tolerance your country can be so justly proud of. The theatre and dance will suffer the worst consequences of the cuts. The impact, for example, of an overall cut in the theatre budget of 56% and the dance budget of 40% will dramatically damage the Dutch performing arts scene for years to come.

The market and private philanthropy is not the quick win solution the State Secretary and the Prime Minister believe it is. A culture of private giving develops not overnight, but over generations and needs to be supported by structural tax incentives.

We all recognize that the arts need to share the burden of budget deficits and cannot be singled out as a special case. However cuts on this scale, which will strangle innovation, will cause irreversible damage to the arts in the Netherlands and be felt across Europe. We, the undersigned, implore Halbe Zijlstra and the members of the Dutch Parliament to reconsider the scale and distribution of these cuts and preserve the infrastructure necessary to maintain the climate of innovation and creativity.

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