

FINDING THEIR VALUE: ARTISTIC SURVIVAL AND PUBLIC POLICY

Focus Thematic Session at

International Conference on Cultural Policy Research (ICCPR)

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REPORT

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The 9th edition of the International Conference on Cultural Policy Research (ICCPR) took place at Sookmyung Women's University, Seoul in July 2016. At ICCPR 2016, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) supported a panel discussion focused on the status of the artist, complexities of artists' labour and possible policy prescriptions regarding artists' work conditions and pay, with a focus on Europe and Asia. Speakers included Dr. Hyein KIM, Director, International Cultural Exchange Center, Korea Culture & Tourism Institute; Dr. Kate OAKLEY, Professor of Cultural Policy, University of Leeds, United Kingdom; and, Dr. Stevphen SHUKAITIS, Lecturer, Centre for Work and Organisation, University of Essex, United Kingdom. The discussion was moderated by Dr. Ruth BERESON, Dean (Academic), Arts, Education and Law Group, Griffith University, Australia.

For Ruth Bereson, the essence of the problem is the growing number of artists identifiable only in the context of the industrial production of creativity. Artist's labour became a dominant part of discourses on creativeness, with artists themselves epitomised as creative geniuses or simply, people with skills. In fact, defining artists' labour is a complex effort, when seriously considering the multi-faceted nature of the artist and the challenge of possibilities the artist must



face. This is even more difficult when implemented as public policies, and urgent in the case of retirement age regulations for artists (such as dancers or singers).

For moderator Dr Bereson, the essence of the problem is the growing number of artists being identifiable only in the context of an industrial production of creativity. Panellists Dr Oakley (center) and Dr Shukaitis (left) look on during the discussion.

To Kate Oakley¹, the notion of artists' work as 'inherently good' is problematic: "offering justification of self-exploitation and blindness to questions of representation". Public policy has tended to ignore the problems of cultural labour markets. The cultural labour market rather kept promoting the assumption that such work is inherently good, desirable, enjoyable, socially valuable, intrinsically motivated and psychologically satisfying. The labour and economic compensation dimensions were missed in cultural policies. There is the question as to "why arguments about artistic work as 'good work' have proved so resilient, despite the weight of evidence about the psychological and economic toll of its precariousness"? An inspiring answer is to be found in the way that the cultural workforce has organised itself in recent years: in the form of 'art labour' organisations and anti-precariousness organisations. These were linked to existing trade unions with their organisational strengths and limitations.

An interesting paradox then appeared: "as policymakers started to show some concern with the unrepresentative nature of the workforce, arts workers have been slow to follow or even resisted calls for greater equality". The interesting alternative case is a type of 'freelancers union' of individuals not looking for a full-time permanent work, but only to make other unrepresented work forms sustainable. The challenge for both Asian and European cultural policies is how to resolve the problem of low pay or no pay for artists and creative workers in a highly oversupplied cultural sector and creative industries field. This is not only the question of aesthetic freedom of expression, but also that of more social liberation among creative workers.



The challenge for Asian and European cultural policy-makers is to resolve the problem of low pay or no pay for artists and creative workers in a highly oversupplied cultural sector and creative industries field: Dr Oakley at the ASEF panel.

¹ Dr. Oakley's presentation is based on her paper, *Artists as Precarious Workers: Policy, Inequality and Resistance*

“I don’t know how to stop working” is a dilemma expressed by a majority of artists today. Stephen Shukaitis² recalled this in the context of the reality of artists’ labour, which must constantly manage “tensions between creating spaces for creativity and imagination while working through the constraints by economic conditions”. The perfectly self-motivated, passionate labour of the artisan increasingly becomes the model for a “self-disciplining, self-managed labour force that works harder, longer, and often for less pay” because of its attachment to personal fulfilment and engagement in meaningful work. Artists would need to have their work-life balance well managed. However, there is no space to stop work as an artist: “how do you put down your tool, if this is about your existence”.

Hyein KIM³ enriched the discussion with the context of public policy solutions for artists labour in Asian countries. In recent years, Korean artists’ satisfaction with the economic compensation for their art activities was surprisingly low. This was reinforced by a lack of understanding about the “concept of labour performed by artists and the characteristic of the artistic labour market, including hours of labour, and its intensity committed into the art



activities”. The degree of compensation and recognition for artistic labour was much more determined by the position and status of the artist and his/her works and was often based on a constantly negotiable honorarium concept.

Dr KIM (left) discussed the possibility of institutionalising artists’ fees to break away from an honorarium-based approach, changing the focus from artwork-oriented to artist-oriented payment models. Dr SHUKAITIS (2nd from left) asked a compelling artists’ work/life balance question: how do you put down your tool if it is about your existence?”

² Dr. Shukaitis’ presentation is based on his paper, *Wages of Dreamwork, or the Social Reproduction of Artistic Labour in the Metropolitan Factory*

³ Dr. Kim’s presentation is based on her paper, *Institutional Approach to the Payment of Artist's Fee Based on Understanding of Artists’ Labor*

Intensely discussed at the panel were the unusual cases of a few artists' deaths from starvation, which motivated the government to initiate welfare policies for artists in Korea. The government arranged fixed criteria and provided grants for low-income artists. However, there was limited awareness about the necessity for specific criteria to be set for economic compensation of artists labour in institutions and organisations such as museums or theatres. Despite the fact that artists' fee often involves many complicated and sensitive issues, the institutionalisation of artist's fee is one of the measures that could resolve the problem of economic instability in the art labour market. The codes of practices for artists in other countries were discussed. Serious considerations on institutionalising artist fees is an attempt to break through the existing concept of an honorarium-oriented approach. Through this approach, the payment model would become more artist-oriented than artwork-oriented.

The discussion in the room focused on diverse dimensions of artists' labour, including cultural work as a paradigm for all kinds of workers or a 'being-flexible-like-artists' model, and its role in the critique to capitalism. The voice on power struggles appeared again in the context of artists' labour related policies in Asia. There was also a comment on artists who are leading alternative practices to resolve their problems with social insecurity, such as through self-organised collective care, artists groups owning places of work and practicing joint mentorship. Some other discussants mentioned the value of mentoring by senior artists to help art schools students manage their future life as artists and maintain work-life balance. On the other hand, however, the discussions also took note of the danger of the traditional approach to this issue: namely, the teaching of self-sacrifice and thus inculcating young artists into the tradition of learning to be self-exploitative.

This report was commissioned by the **Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)** and prepared by **Dr. Marcin POPRAWSKI**, ENCATC Vice President, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland. It is based on the presentations and discussions at the Focus Thematic Session on *Finding Their Value: Artistic Survival and Public Policy* at the International Conference for Cultural Policy Research 2016 (6 July 2016, Seoul, Korea). This report can be downloaded at: <http://tinyurl.com/ASEFiccpr2016>

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The **Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)** is a not-for-profit intergovernmental organisation located in Singapore. Founded in 1997, it is the only institution of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)⁴. In the field of culture, ASEF promotes various forms of cultural co-operation between Asia and Europe, including artistic collaborations, bi-regional networks and policy dialogue. In addition to fostering sustainable partnerships between Asian and European arts organisations, ASEF also facilitates dialogue between the arts sector and government agencies responsible for culture.

In the area of cultural policy, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) aims to stimulate dialogue and analysis on current debates in Asia and Europe, including the cultural agenda of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). In particular, ASEF facilitates conversations between cultural professionals and government officials across Asia and Europe. ASEF also commissions national cultural policy profiles for the WorldCP-International Database on Cultural Policies (worldcp.org). WorldCP aims to make up-to-date policy information publicly accessible. For more on ASEF's work in cultural policy, visit: <http://tinyurl.com/asefculturalpolicy>

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⁴ The **Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)** is an intergovernmental forum for dialogue and cooperation established in 1996 to deepen relations between Asia and Europe, which addresses political, economic and socio-cultural issues of common concern. ASEM brings together 53 partners (21 Asian and 30 European countries, the ASEAN Secretariat, and the European Union). The 53 ASEM Partners are Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, the Lao PDR, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the United Kingdom, Viet Nam, the ASEAN Secretariat, and the European Union.