

National budget cuts threaten the arts

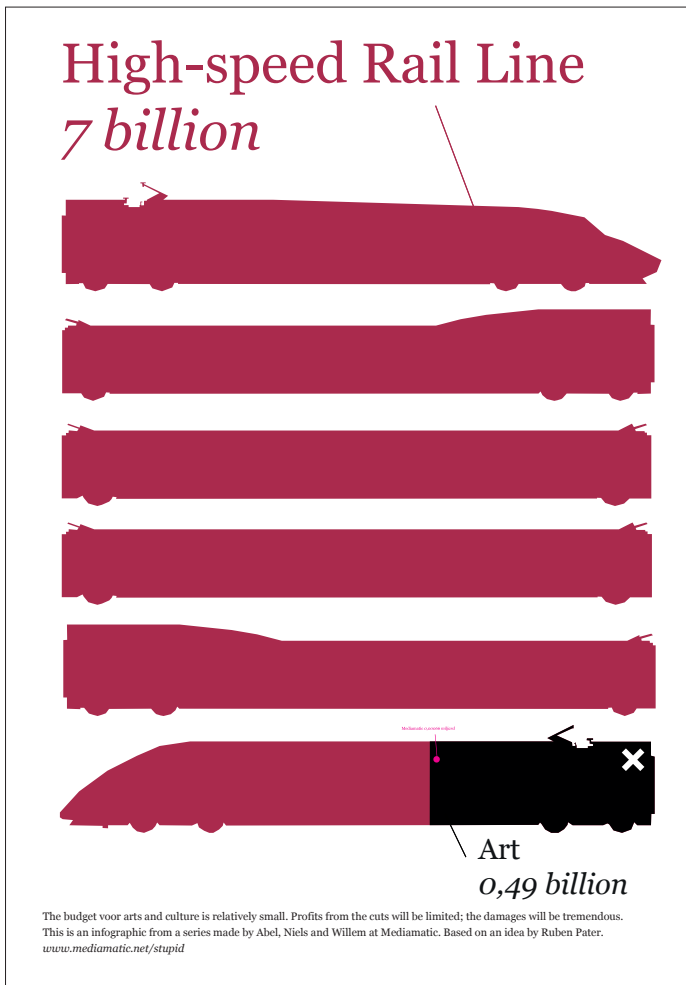
The cultural community braces for €200 million in national budget cuts, reports *Marie-Charlotte Pezé*

It's like a bad remake of 'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre', with Dutch culture playing the part of the half-naked teenage girl, scared shitless of losing a limb – or worse. On 27 June, Parliament voted in favour of a resolution to slash the nation's arts, media and culture budget by €200 million (a 25 per cent cutback from the current €800 million budget), leaving many cultural institutions fearing for their lives.

In his policy outline entitled 'More than quality, a new vision on cultural policy', the new minister of culture Halbe Zijlstra argues that the current model of public subsidies is outdated; the government is acting too much like a financier when it would rather promote entrepreneurship. His stance is that 'the government wants enterprising artists and cultural institutions who obtain a larger portion of their income by themselves', following the American system of securing funding from the private sector.

Many artists and directors of institutions, however, such as Ann Goldstein, director of the Stedelijk, say transitioning to private sponsorship takes years of restructuring the system, modifying mentalities and networking within the corporate sector. The Raad voor Cultuur (Art Council), the advisory body to the government on arts, culture and the media, advised Zijlstra to spread the cuts over several years, but these will come into effect as early as January 2013. The council's suggestion to at least subject the cuts to yearly reviews was denied because, according to Zijlstra, 'it doesn't fit the four-year system and would lead to an increase in administrative costs'.

Supporters of the arts predict that the results will be catastrophic and herald the demise of what has made the Netherlands a bastion of creativity since World War II. Els Swaab, the chairwoman of the Raad voor Cultuur, has resigned from her position in response to the government's decision. 'The damage that the cuts will cause is larger than necessary,' she says.



Picture this: These infographics are from a series made by Abel, Niels and Willem at Mediamatic LAB, based on an idea by Ruben Pater. For more images see mediamatic.net/stupid

'To me, that is unacceptable.'

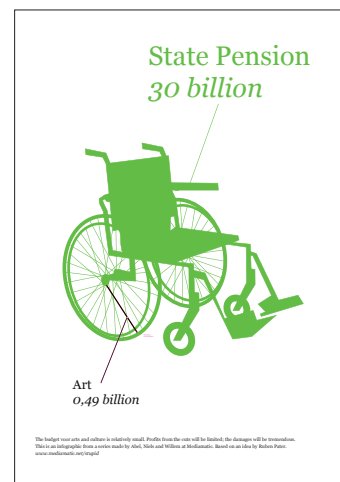
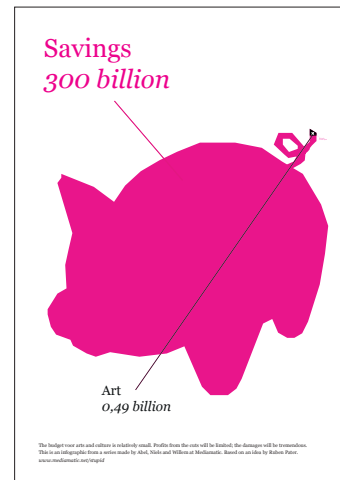
The predicted casualties range from cuts to subsidies for emerging artists and post-academic institutions, such as the Ateliers or the Royal Academy for Visual Arts, to elimination of funding for large, internationally acclaimed institutions. Many will be forced to close, merge or dramatically restructure. The list of expected victims is long: Nederlands Instituut voor Mediakunst, SKOR, Mediamatic and the Theater Instituut are facing a loss of 100 per cent of their subsidies.

While exact figures haven't yet been confirmed, institutions such as the Rijksakademie, the Muziek Centrum, the Mondriaan Fund and the Netherlands Institute for Heritage, as well as many orchestras, dance companies, festivals and art publications will also see their share of public funds dramatically

reduced or eliminated. Art dealer Ellen de Bruijne, like many in the art community, feels the cuts 'not to be about money, but about killing liberal ideology'.

'The damage that the cuts will cause is larger than necessary'

Scrambling to put together a last-minute show of force before the 27 June vote, a myriad of protests was organised, including a 20,000-person demonstration in Rotterdam on 25 June, and on 26 June a 25km walk from Rotterdam to The Hague, attended by



more than 3,000. Since the vote passed, most of these institutions have been concentrating on frantic efforts to implement new funding strategies. Meantime, other artists are looking to create an independent 'art bureau' with lobbying power and political clout to overturn the decision in the next elections.

With only 18 short months to steer a 60-year-old system in a new direction, it seems inevitable that the Dutch cultural landscape will change dramatically in the coming months. In a call for solidarity among artists, Goldstein says that fighting to save the arts is 'about our dignity, our legacy, our responsibility'. Check schadekaart.nl for a list of upcoming protests, to sign petitions and for a map of the institutions targeted by budget cuts.

OVERHEARD 'It involved some chewing gum, my bike and a thong.' Diner at De Italiaan, Bosboom Toussainstraat.