

## Association of Norwegian Visual Artists – annual report

The Association of Norwegian Visual Artists (NBK) is a membership organization working to promote and support contemporary visual artists nationally and internationally. With its 20 sub organizations and 3 000 members nationwide, the association represents a significant number of professional artists in a country of 5.2 million inhabitants. The association is as such recognized by the government as a negotiation and consultive body regarding issues related to art and artists conditions. It has its historical roots in similar artist associations from the midst of the 1860s, but considers its official establishment to be the same year – and in relation to the first annual fall Exhibition – in 1882. It's current «trade union» establishment has its origin from 1974, in line with several other similar associations in this field. Amongst its 20 sub organizations are 14 regional organizations, and nation-wide skill-based associations, as well as the Young Artist' Society (UKS).

The Association of Norwegian Visual Artists' main purpose and long term commitment has for many decades been «*to promote and secure the intellectual, social, legislative and economic interests of professional visual artists*» – which means that the major concern of the association is, to relate to the specific problems and challenges the visual artists are facing in their daily work, as artists.

Several government reports and surveys have through the later decades, confirmed the solidity of the assertion stated by the Association of Norwegian Visual Artists, concerning the economic and social restraints of artists. It has been thoroughly stated that only a small percentage of artists are able to live from sale of their artworks alone, and that a majority of professional visual artists – at least in periods of their lives, are forced to seek other arts – or non arts related work. A main task for the Association of Norwegian Visual Artists has thus been to document the need for public support and regulations of different kinds, and work in favor of different means of solutions to the economic challenges.

### **Administrative tasks**

The annual state exhibition – Høstutstillingen – is arranged by the Association of Norwegian Visual Artists, it is set up on the basis of free submission and held every fall. The National Jury, selected amongst the members of the association for a two-year period, counts six artists who assesses the submitted work. This year the total number of applicants was 1 919, from which the jury selected 110 works from 82 artists/ artist groups. The 131st annual exhibition was held from September 8th–October 14th and visited by 20 000 people.

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The Association of Norwegian Visual Artists allocates grants from two funds – The Relief Fund for Visual artists, a fund which ensures the collecting of the five per cent tax from all public sales of fine arts with a minimum price of 2 000 NOK, and the Norwegian Visual Artists Fund, which gets remuneration from Kopinor (licences the use of copyright protected works on behalf of right-holders) and Norwaco (copyright organisation that enters into agreements on secondary use of audiovisual works). The remuneration received by the association of Norwegian Visual Artists are, in the same way as the collective money received from the compensation for the display of visual art, distributed to artists as grants and other support through the Norwegian Visual Artists Fund.

A grant committee of ten members, elected every other year by members of the association, consisting solely of artists, allocates the grants among the applicants, based on the criteria of quality alone. This committee also allocates state grants.

Billedkunst – a professional journal published by the Association of Norwegian Artists – has a circulation of 3 860 with six editions per year. This year has seen the journal reaching a wider audience, with proper launches of each edition, including panel discussions and artist talks.

In addition to the activities carried out on a central level from the administration of ten people, some sub organizations carry out exhibition programs in their own galleries, as well as programs with travelling exhibitions on a regional or national level. Some of the skill-based organizations publish their own specialized magazines; and the regional organizations run art centres with an extensive program aimed to promote visual art throughout their region.

## **Artists' fees for exhibition work**

«Many artists are working for free, and it needs to end», Minister of Culture Thorhild Widvey said in 2014 when launching a pilot project on paying fees to artists exhibiting. In this context an artist fee is not payment for the exhibition content itself but for its provision, meaning payment for the time, work and skills involved in making content for exhibitions in publicly funded galleries.

By the time the pilot was launched, organizations representing visual artists had been advocating to get legislators to establish structures to secure payment for artists who exhibit, since 2008. Shortly after the launch, the Association of Norwegian Visual Artists started the campaign #utstillingsavtalen in 2015, in an effort to expand the pilot to include galleries receiving funding at a regional level. The campaign eventually proved fruitful.

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The pilot project initially included four publicly funded institutions, and by the end of the pilot program period in 2018, counted 24 state financed art institutions. Each institution received NOK 500 000 (€ 52 300) over a two year period, to test out how artist fees could work in practice, what consequences paying the artists have in the role and responsibility of the institutions and in relation to programming. In total the pilot project budget for artists' fees in 2014 was 2 million NOK ( € 212 000) over a period of two years, and doubled the next year to 4 million NOK (€ 424 000). In 2016 the budget increased again to 6 million NOK (€ 668 000), and has remained on the same level in 2017 and 2018.

The Association of Norwegian Visual Artists is continually advocating to make funding earmarked for artist fees a permanent line in the state budget. Indeed, a reference group evaluating the pilot project, consisting of representatives from two visual art organisations (ours and for Arts and Crafts) as well as directors of two art institutions, has recommended the Minister of Culture does exactly this.

The reference group was formally asked by the The Royal Norwegian Ministry of Culture to evaluate the pilot project, as well as provide recommendations. The report applauding artists' fees as a welcoming arrangement for all parties involved, was received by the ministry in March this year, along with the recommendations that it should be permanent and financially strengthened in order to fairly reimburse artists for their contributions workwise to publicly funded galleries.

For the coming year we ask that artist fees are raised by 20 million NOK, as a step towards a full financed scheme. It is a considerable raise if it would become reality, considering today's budget of six million. Because of our lobbying and campaigning, many of the Norwegian political parties have artist fees as a separate goal to strengthen the artists economy in their party program, along with other schemes. The artists' economy has become a stronger focus for many politicians, since the report on artists income in 2015. The Association of Norwegian Visual Artists will continue to lobby and campaign to better the artists income.

## **Exhibition remuneration**

The artists associations have an agreement with the Norwegian state since 1978 on the exhibition remuneration for publicly funded exhibitions. The remuneration agreement compensates artists and craftsmen for the display of works in the artist's possession, as well as a compensation for the artist not being able to dispose of the work during the exhibition period. According to the agreement, the remuneration is calculated on the basis of the number of works, the duration of the exhibition and the estimated value of the works. The remuneration is to be paid individually to the artist by the institution exhibiting the works.

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Artist organizations believe there is a great need to modernize and streamline the exhibition remuneration scheme. Since 2015, the organizations in the visual arts field have surveyed how the scheme works in practice. The mapping has revealed that the follow-up of the agreement is not satisfactory and that artists do not receive the compensation they are entitled to. In addition, the scheme is a little transparent, and works poorly for new art forms and in a gender equality perspective. Artist organizations are convinced that channeling the remuneration through the Norwegian CMO for visual artists, BONO, will be the best solution for a well functioning scheme and have suggested a new model.

Convinced that our new model is the only model that actually will ensure that artists receive the exhibition remuneration they are entitled to, we are working on several fronts in order to change the Ministry of Culture's view on this. We have reason to hope that we might have a breakthrough soon, maybe in the work on the white paper on artists, that have been launched by the Ministry of Culture, and where we will be participating fully and eagerly!

## **A big step towards a reform on artists work grants**

In 2015 the Association for Norwegian Visual Artists suggested the government implement a three-year salary reform for artists work grants given by the State. The plan was to increase the level of each 1–5 year, 10-year working grants and an older scheme called *guaranteed income* – to equal 50 percent of the average Norwegian annual salary. The scheme also stated that the grants should follow the same index rate as the state employees, in the regulations for State grants. After four years of budget negotiations and extensive campaigning by the artists organizations, political protests and press coverage, each year saw a raise towards our goal. This year the reform finally reached 50 per cent of the average income, while there is still the need to secure the index rate in the regulation of State grants.

We are now advocating to do that and also raise the allocation percentage by approximately five percent, meaning over 100 more grants to all artist groups. This claim has been put forward by 19 artists associations within all fields of art.

## **Other issues**

Important issues for the association at the moment, in addition to a better income, is to fight for a better social security scheme and pensions and to accommodate international exchange in the field of visual art. We are also working to strengthen the education of school children in visual arts, by for example statutory competence requirements for teachers of visual arts.

We have also been working to strengthen our own organization and modernize how we communicate with members and our sub-organizations, and to recruit more and

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also younger professional artists to become members of our association. New members join through our sub-organizations, which then become automatic members of NBK. If you hold a master degree in fine arts, you can automatically become a member. Artists with lesser degrees or autodidact professional artists must apply. NBK have over the last years gotten a profitable insurance scheme tailored for members and are working to get other individual member benefits.

### **More knowledge, research and surveys in our field**

Despite the goals we have reached in the last years, there is still a long way to go in order to reach the target of providing artists with fair working and living conditions in line with other professions. As this is the case, we welcome and endorse more and better surveys and research papers on different aspects and conditions the artists are working under and the value artists give society.

A white paper on artists are under way in 2019 by the Department of Culture. A 3-year research project by the Norwegian Arts Council is just starting up, and it is going into the ecosystem in the field of arts and culture in Norway as a whole, and show what symbioses artists economy, institutions economy and creative arts economy make up together. Their main goal is to strengthen the value chain in the whole culture economy and contribute to that arts and culture reach a bigger market are are more widely received by the public.

On behalf of the Association of Norwegian Visual Artists,



Hilde Tørdal  
Chairwoman