

We all need to speak up for the Arts, Culture and Heritage sector

By **Veronica Van Dyk MP** – DA Shadow Deputy Minister of Sports, Arts and Culture

Agbare Voorsitter, Lede van die Huis

Die Covid-19 pandemie het enorme wêreldwye uitdagings vir die kreatiewe kunste sektor veroorsaak. Terwyl kreatiewe en kulturele bedrywe soms gesien word as 'n luuksheid, word die waarde wat die kunstesektor tot die ekonomie voeg en sy potensiaal om die werkloosheidskrisis aan te spreek, sowel as die bydrae tot demokratiese groei, geweldig onderskat.

Minister, your tweet in January suggested that South African theatre is alive and well, yet the arts and culture sector has been brought to its knees. With no Covid-19 relief funding support towards independent theatres, a vital part of the economic development of their communities, as well as museums and heritage sites, world-renowned heritage sites like The Apartheid Museum, visited by thousands of school children every year and Liliesleaf Farm, had to close their doors. At this rate, our children will be left growing up without any real connection to their history. The DA requested an action plan from the Department to save independent and state-owned museums, institutions and historic sites as a matter of urgency. The ANC government's incompetence and lack of vision and strategy are erasing our country's collective memory. Minister, your silence on these issues is deafening.

For the past four years, the Department has underspent its budget. R227.5 million was underspent in 2019/20 – an increase from R100.7 million in underspending in 2018/19.

Die onderbesteding laat 7 uit 9 provinsiale gemeenskapskunsprogramme net gedeeltelik befonds. Die jaarverslag toon dat minder as 2/3 van die kuns en kultuur promosie-en-ontwikkeling-uitkomst bereik is, ten spyte daarvan dat 94.4% befondsing hier gebruik is.

According to the AG 51% of irregular expenditure was incurred by the National Art Council and relates to transfer payments made irregularly. The NAC's clean audit is therefore questionable if you take the Public Protector's report on the Surplus Funds and the SARA issue into consideration. Fruitless and wasteful expenditure incurred by entities in the portfolio is R67.9 million of which 53% (R36 million) was incurred by the DAC for overcharged work and substandard work on infrastructure projects.

The National Heritage Council regressed to a qualified opinion, with the Minister removing the Council recently.

PanSALB too has been flagged by the AG as an institution requiring intervention relating to governance.

PACOFs has not improved their audit outcomes for the past 5 years. The committee oversight confirmed major management problems.

Freedom Park also needs intervention.

The AG highlighted the lack of consequence management as one of the top non-compliance areas for the portfolio.

It is clear that Covid-19 is not the reason why the Arts, Culture and Heritage sector is in the dire financial situation it finds itself in. It has merely sped up the disintegration and demise of the sector, with the second wave funding for art projects that were supposed to be completed between January and March 2021, still not fully paid out. The staged sit-in of artists at the NAC for 60 days, seeking answers on the mismanagement of the Presidential Economic Stimulus Programme fund, should indicate that things are indeed not well. Breach of contracts with artists by the NAC leaves a bad taste, but still, the Minister of Congratulations and Condolences is dead quiet about the crisis in the sector.

Dringende kwessies wat die sosiale en ekonomiese regte van kunstenaars beïnvloed – kopiereg-beskerming, digitalisering van inhoud, en vryheid van kunstenaars en van uitdrukking – moet polities aangespreek word. Die Departement behoort indiepte konsultasies met alle dele van die sektor te voer. The DA wants to extend its congratulations to the creators of the South African documentary My Octopus Teacher for winning the Academy Award in the Best Documentary Feature category.

Kunswaardering moet gekweek word deur verhale wat relevant is tot die teikengehoor. Meer plaaslike inhoud in inheemse tale moet genereer word. Afrikaans as een van die 11 inheemse tale en moet gelyke erkenning kry en nie misbruik word as 'n slaansak vir politieke agendas nie.

Die ingesteldheid van die regering teenoor die kreatiewe sektor moet verander, anders sal ons nooit die vrugte van hierdie enorme potensiaal kan pluk nie. Without the creative sector, Minister, you would have been naked today, without designer clothing and glasses, and no speech prepared for you to deliver. We all need to speak up for the arts, culture and heritage sector and, instead of posting political campaign photos with people not wearing masks in the middle of a pandemic on your ministerial Facebook page, you need to recognize that #ArtistsLivesMatter.