

Considering art

The role of De Brug, the ASB and the Socialistische Kunstenaarskring in the production, distribution and reception of notions on art and the position of the artist



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Preface

This thesis, which forms the conclusion of the research master *Art History of the Low Countries in its European context*, could not have been written without the adequate and pleasant supervision of Dr Sandra Kisters, for which I would like to express my gratitude. I also want to offer my sincere thanks to Dr Hestia Bavelaar for being the second reader of this piece. And last but not least, I am grateful to my family and friends for their constant support and endless patience throughout the last five years.

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Introduction

‘Es ist bezeichnend, dass die Jüngsten immer in Rudeln auftreten.’¹

With this quote in the German periodical *Kunst und Künstler*, art critic Karl Scheffler (1869-1951) expressed the apparent urge of young artists to form collectives in the period before the First World War. History shows however, that this phenomenon was not limited to this period or Germany. For example, a considerable number of artists throughout Europe were united in artists’ societies during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Given the fact that so many artists were affiliated with these societies, it appears that these organizations have played an important role in the contemporary art world. This observation is however, not advanced in the existing art historical literature, in which relatively little attention is devoted to the subject of artists’ societies. In her thesis on the Dutch artists’ society De Onafhankelijken (1998), art historian Anja M. Novak suggests that this situation may have been caused by the long persisting tradition of modernism within the art historical field, by which art was regarded as a product of the individual’s genius.² Presenting artists within the context of a group was obviously not consistent with this perception, and therefore the subject of artists’ societies was often ignored. If an artists’ society was discussed, it primarily concerned an avant-garde group, which was treated as an independent phenomenon or, in the case of monographs, membership of such a collective was presented as an early, dependent phase in the career of the artist.³ Nevertheless, during the last decades the general interest in artists’ societies has increased due to the challenge of modernist views on art history, and the growing awareness regarding the importance of the social context for the development of the artist’s oeuvre.

Within this thesis, the phenomenon of artists’ societies will be taken as point of departure. The next paragraph provides an overview of the important literature regarding this subject. Since it is impossible to consider all literature on artists’ societies, the following discussion will be limited to Dutch artists’ societies of the first half of the twentieth century. An extensive overview of the literature concerning nineteenth-century Dutch artists’ societies

¹ Cited from: Karl Scheffler, ‘Die Jüngsten’, *Kunst und Künstler*, vol. 11 (1912-1913), no. 8, p. 406.

² Anja M. Novak, *Vereniging van beeldende kunstenaars De Onafhankelijken. Aspecten van artistieke vrijheid in Nederland 1912-1941*, master thesis Leiden University 1998, p. 3.

³ Christoph Wilhelmi, *Künstlergruppen in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz. Ein Handbuch*, Stuttgart 1996, p. VII.

is thus, not provided here. The observation that these organisations are generally not extensively researched yet, will suffice for this thesis.⁴

The artists' societies of the twentieth century are often discussed within the context of the introduction and development of modern art in the Netherlands during the first decades of that century. This approach is visible in art historical publications as *Moderne kunst in Nederland 1900-1914* (1959) by Aleida B. Loosjes-Terpstra, *Van Gogh tot Cobra* (1980) by Geurt Imanse, and *De ontvangst van de moderne kunst in Nederland* (2001) by Jan van Adrichem. A broader perspective is provided by the publication *Berlijn-Amsterdam 1920-1940. Wisselwerkingen*, in which the relation between German and Dutch artists' societies, the interaction between artists of both countries, and the role of Dutch artists' societies in the presentation and distribution of German art in the Netherlands, are explored in various articles. Two other approaches are represented by the exhibition catalogue *Magie en Zakelijkheid* (1999), edited by art historians Carel Blotkamp (1945) and Ype Koopmans, in which artists' societies are discussed within the framework of one artistic movement, that of neo-realism, and within the biographies of individual artists.⁵ The German art historian Christoph Wilhelmi is the only scholar that has provided a concise overview of Dutch twentieth-century artists' societies in his lexicon *Künstlergruppen in West- und Nordeuropa* (2006). Unfortunately, the descriptions of the concerning artists' societies are relatively short and not always accurate, as will be demonstrated in the next chapters. Nevertheless, with this publication and the previously published lexicon *Künstlergruppen in Deutschland*,

⁴ Examples of publications on nineteenth-century Dutch artists' societies are: Bart Peizel, *Vereeniging St. Lucas 1880-1940*, Amsterdam 1940. H.E. van Gelder, *Honderd jaar Haagse schilderkunst in Pulchri-studio*, The Hague 1947. Ad Blom, *De Haagsche Etsclub 1848-1860*, The Hague 1976. Marjolein van Delft, 'Kunstbeschouwingen by Pulchri Studio 1847-1917', in: *Jaarboek die Haghe 1980*, The Hague 1981, pp. 147-169. Ellen Fleurbaay and Mieke van der Wal, *Koning Willem III en Arti. Een kunstenaarsvereniging en haar beschermheer in de 19^e eeuw*, Amsterdam 1984. Jan Jaap Heij et al, *Een Vereeniging van ernstige kunstenaars. 150 jaar Maatschappij Arti et Amicitiae 1939-1989*, Bussum 1989. John Sillevius, 'Van plint tot plafond. De presentatie van eigentijdse kunst in de negentiende eeuw', in: Riet van Leeuw (ed.), *De kunst van het tentoonstellen. De presentatie van beeldende kunst in Nederland van 1800 tot heden*, The Hague 1991. Richard Bionda, 'De afzetting van eigentijdse kunst in Nederland', in: Richard Bionda and Carel Blotkamp (eds.), *De schilders van Tachtig. Nederlandse schilderkunst 1880-1895*, Zwolle 1994² (1991), pp. 53-74. Saskia de Bodt, 'Pulchri Studio. Het imago van een kunstenaarsvereniging in de negentiende eeuw', *De negentiende eeuw*, vol. 14 (1990) no. 1, pp. 25-43. Annemiek Hoogenboom, 'De status van de beeldende kunstenaar en de oprichting van de maatschappij Arti et Amicitiae', *De negentiende eeuw*, vol. 14 (1990) no. 1, pp. 6-23. Boudien de Vries, 'De kunstlievende leden van Arti et Amicitiae en Pulchri Studio 1850-1914', *De negentiende eeuw*, vol. 14 (1990) no. 1, pp. 43-58. Marlies van Riet, *Van Felix Meritis tot de Haagsche Kunstkring. Een onderzoek naar negentiende-eeuwse kunstenaarsverenigingen, hun organisatie, kunstzalen, tentoonstellingen en publiek*, master thesis Leiden University 1995. Harry van Vondel, *Blauw en bruin. Kleine geschiedenis van de Vereniging Sint Lucas 1880-2005*, Nieuwegein 2005.

⁵ This catalogue accompanied the exhibition *Magie en Zakelijkheid. Realistische schilderkunst in Nederland 1925-1945*, held between the 13th of November 1999 and the 6th of February 2000 in the Museum voor Moderne Kunst in Arnhem.

Österreich und der Schweiz (1996), Wilhelmi has contributed to the general comprehension of the phenomenon artists' societies and its international character.

Publications where the artists' society is taken as point of departure are relatively rare.⁶ Moreover, within the few existing examples, the subject is always approached in the same manner, in that they provide a descriptive account of the society's establishment and members, the organised exhibitions and their reception in the press. Analytical considerations of artists' societies, for example by approaching the subject from a special focus point, are exceptional.⁷ Moreover, an extensive publication devoted specifically to the theme of Dutch artists' societies during the twentieth century has still not been written.

Approach

In order to avoid the danger of merely providing a descriptive account of the existence of Dutch artists' societies within this thesis, the subject will be approached from a particular angle. Given the importance of these societies for the contemporary artistic climate, and the fact that this climate was partly shaped by circulating ideas on art matters, it will be particularly interesting to examine the role of artists' societies within this circulation. In turn, this will provide more insight in the actual functioning of those organizations, and their position in the art world. Hence, the role of Dutch artists' societies in the production, distribution and reception of notions on art and position of the artist, will be the subject of this thesis.

Due to the impossibility of considering this with regard to all artists' societies that existed during the first half of the twentieth century, the scope of this thesis will be limited to the discussion of three artists' societies: *De Brug*, the *ASB* and the *Socialistische*

⁶ Examples of these individual approaches are: Bart Peizel, *Vereeniging St. Lucas 1880-1940*, Amsterdam 1940. Adriaan Venema, *De Ploeg 1918-1930*, Baarn 1978. Cornelië Lagerwaard, *Lou Loeber en de Socialistische Kunstenaarskring*, master thesis University of Amsterdam 1979. *De Populisten. Kunst voor het volk uit de jaren 1925-1940*, exh. cat. Bergen op Zoom (Markiezenhof) 1981. Ad Petersen, *De Ploeg. Gegevens omtrent de Groningse schilderkunst in de jaren '20*, Den Haag 1982. Els Brinkman, *De Branding 1917-1926*, Rotterdam 1991. Arnold Lighthart, 'Het Signaal 1916-1922', in: *Jong Holland* vol. 8 (1992) no. 8, pp. 27-40. Jan Jaap Heij et al, *Een Vereeniging van ernstige kunstenaars. 150 jaar Maatschappij Arti et Amicitiae 1939-1989*, Bussum 1989. Anja M. Novak, *Vereniging van beeldende kunstenaars De Onafhankelijken. Aspecten van artistieke vrijheid in Nederland 1912-1941*, master thesis Leiden University 1998. Ype Koopmans, *Architectuur, Schilderkunst, Beeldhouwkunst. Nieuwe Beelding en nieuwe zakelijkheid 1926-1930*, exh. cat. Arnhem (Museum voor Moderne Kunst) 2004 (Arnhemse Cahiers). Harry van Vondel (?), *Blauw en bruin. Kleine geschiedenis van de Vereniging Sint Lucas 1880-2005*, Nieuwegein 2005. Karlijn de Jong and Nora Hooijer, *Wat je ziet ben je zelf. Catalogus van de jubileumexpositie ter gelegenheid van het honderdjarig bestaan van De Onafhankelijken 1912-2012*, exh. cat. Amsterdam (CBK) 2012.

⁷ Novak 1998 (see note 2), p. 4. With her master thesis Novak provided an analytical consideration of artists' society De Onafhankelijken by focussing on the relation between this organization and the concept of artistic freedom.

Kunstenaarskring. In 1926, De Brug was established in Amsterdam. The society, that consisted of several artists that primarily worked in a figurative style, such as Dirk Nijland (1881-1955), Sal Meijer (1877-1965), and Johan van Hell (1889-1952), continued to exist until 1996. The activities of the ASB, an abbreviation of *Architectuur Schilderkunst Beeldhouwkunst*, were also centred in Amsterdam. The society, which existed between 1926 and 1930, focused on the visual arts and architecture, and contained artists of various avant-garde movements, for example Charley Toorop (1891-1955), Carel Willink (1900-1983), Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), John Rädecker (1885-1956) and Gerrit Rietveld (1888-1964). The Socialistische Kunstenaarskring, which will be designated with the abbreviation SKK from now on, was established in 1927 in Amsterdam, and existed until 1934. The activities of the society, which comprised of artists from different art disciplines, such as visual artists Peter Alma (1886-1969), Meijer Bleekrode (1896-1943), Lou Loeber (1894-1983), poet Jan W. Jacobs (1895-1967), and musician Paul F. Sanders (1891-1986), primarily concentrated on the connection between art and socialism.

The selection of the above mentioned artists' societies was determined by the fact that they were all established during the Interwar period, an age which was characterized by various radical changes in the artistic field, and a vigorous debate on the nature of art and the position of the artist. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, De Brug, the ASB and the SKK formed representative examples of these developments due to their different orientations. Another reason for selecting these particular organizations, is that the role of artists' societies in the Interwar period in general is relatively underexposed in comparison to the period before the First World War.

One of the most important Dutch artistic movements of the early years of the Interwar period, *De Stijl*, appears to be lacking in these considerations. It was however, a conscious decision not to include this movement within the here discussed examples of artists' societies. In the extensive publication *De beginjaren van De Stijl* (1982), art historian Carel Blotkamp observes that *De Stijl* differed from other artists' collectives, such as artists' societies, in terms of their organisational structure. During the period of its existence no exhibitions were organized, in which all members of *De Stijl* participated. Moreover, the contact between the members was primarily maintained by written correspondence. Meetings, attended by more than four members, never took place.⁸ As will be demonstrated by the first chapter, the organization of collective exhibitions and general meetings were, however, essential

⁸ Carel Blotkamp (ed.), *De beginjaren van De Stijl 1917-1922*, Utrecht 1982, p. 9.

characteristics of artists' societies. Instead of referring to a close artists' collective, *De Stijl* appears to have been foremost a periodical, published between 1917 and 1932, that provided a forum for the exchange of artistic ideas. Nevertheless, in the subsequent publication *De vervolgjaren van De Stijl* (1996), Blotkamp justly observes that this definition is not totally satisfying. Thus, within *De Beginjaren* and *De Vervolgjaren* the consideration of *De Stijl* as an idea was preferred. Within the second publication, Blotkamp appends that in order to do justice to the individual interpretations of *De Stijl* by the various involved artists, *De Stijl* should be regarded as 'a cluster of ideas'.⁹ Given its significance for the development of the artistic climate after the First World War, it would be odd to completely exclude *De Stijl* from this thesis because of its deviating character. Consequently, *De Stijl* is occasionally discussed in order to provide a more nuanced view on the concerning period and the here discussed artists' societies.

As a result of the above mentioned considerations, my main question will be: what was the role of artists' societies De Brug, the ASB and the SKK in the production, distribution and reception of notions on art and the position of the artist during the Interwar period? In order to answer this question, the theory of art sociologist Hans van Maanen concerning art worlds will be employed. According to this scholar, an art world is a system, which consists of the production, distribution and reception of art.¹⁰ As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, his theory is valuable for the study of the concerning artists' societies' role in the production, distribution and reception of notions on art and the position of the artist. Within this thesis, this subject will be researched according to the specific domains of production, distribution and reception. Although this will occasionally appear an artificial construction, it proved to be the clearest manner to analyse this matter.

Sources

The research for this thesis will be based on primary as well as secondary sources. An impediment in this respect is the lack of the societies' own archives. Due to water damage, the archive of De Brug has been partly lost. The Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD) in The Hague solely possesses the society's documents from the period between 1945 and 1996. With regard to the ASB, correspondence regarding the society's establishment and the organization of the exhibitions, are gathered within the archive of the architect and

⁹ Carel Blotkamp (ed.), *De vervolgjaren van De Stijl 1922-1932*, Amsterdam/Antwerp 1996, pp. 10-11.

¹⁰ Hans van Maanen, *How to study Art Worlds. On the Societal Functioning of Aesthetic Values*, Amsterdam 2009, p. 12.

member of the ASB Jacobus J.P. Oud (1890-1963) at the Nederlands Architectuurinstituut (NAi) in Rotterdam. Unfortunately, the archive of Charley Toorop, one of the establishers of the ASB, at the RKD does not contain any information about the society. The archive of the SKK has been lost around the period of the Second World War. Certain important documents, such as the society's regulations, are however preserved at the International Institute of Social History and the City Archive in Amsterdam.

With regard to the role of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK in the production of notions on art and the role of the artists, the above mentioned archives and the societies' own publications, for example exhibition catalogues, are significant. Particularly in the case of De Brug, of which little historical material is handed down, two so-called 'gelegenheidsbundels' are very helpful for establishing the society's notions on art and the position of the artist.

The research into the societies' role in the distribution of notions on art and the role of the artist will be primarily based on exhibition catalogues, announcements of activities in newspapers, and in the case of the SKK, regulations. These sources all provide insight in the societies' intended and performed activities in order to distribute their notions. Moreover, the exhibition catalogues also offer information on the exhibitions, organized by these societies, in terms of the selection and arrangement of artworks. Due to the lack of detailed information regarding the artworks, it will be difficult to determine which works were exactly exhibited.

The role of the societies in the reception of notions on art and the role of artist will be primarily researched by means of reviews, published in newspapers and periodicals. The lack of historical material concerning the public reception of the notions, produced and/or distributed by the societies, may impede the analysis of this subject.

The information deduced from exhibition catalogues, regulations, correspondence and reviews, will be often completed by information from secondary sources, such as artists' monographs, publications on artists' societies, and handbooks on the art and the artistic climate of the Interwar period. With regard to the ASB, of which also little historical material is handed down, the publication of art historian Ype Koopmans on this society, *Architectuur, Schilderkunst, Beeldhouwkunst. Nieuwe Beelding en nieuwe zakelijkheid* (2004) is extremely helpful.

Structure

The first chapter of this thesis primarily forms a more comprehensive introduction to the subject, in that it provides an exploration of the term ‘artists’ society’, a brief history of the phenomenon in general and the Dutch variants in particular, and a basic description of the artistic climate during the Interwar period. Moreover, the theoretical framework of this thesis, the theory of Hans van Maanen concerning art worlds, and its relation to artists’ societies, will be considered here in depth. In general, this chapter will offer insight into the general characteristics of artists’ societies, such as De Brug, the ASB and the SKK, the specific contemporary circumstances, in which these societies were established, and the questions concerning art and the role of the artist that were important during that period.

In the second chapter, the role of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK in the production of notions on art and the position of the artist will be considered. Within this context, it is important to establish how the general production of such notions was related to the existence of those artists’ societies, what the societies’ specific notions on art and the position of the artist were, and how they mutually differed and resembled each other. In general, this chapter will demonstrate that artists’ societies played an important and active role in the production of notions on art and the position of the artist. Moreover, it will turn out that despite certain ideological similarities, the artists’ societies considered here all occupied a distinct position within the contemporary artistic debate.

Within the third chapter, which considers the role of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK in the distribution of notions on art and the position of the artist, it will be demonstrated that these artists’ societies distributed their own notions, but also those of individual artists. This chapter will specifically focus on the question how this distribution was ensured by the societies. With regard to this aspect, it is important to establish whether the here discussed artists’ societies aimed to address a certain audience and employed particular strategies to distribute their notions among them. In general, it will appear that the concerning artists’ societies quite purposefully organized their activities.

The role of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK in the reception of notions on art and the position of the artist, is discussed in the last chapter. Within this context, it will be established whether these artists’ societies were successful in reaching their intended audience and distributing their notions, and to what extent their notions influenced contemporary society.

The findings of the various chapters will ultimately be connected within the conclusion, in which the main question of this thesis regarding the role of De Brug, the ASB

and the SKK in the production, distribution and reception of notions on art and the position of the artist during the Interwar period will be answered.

Chapter 1 | Exploring the subject

Before considering the role of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK in the production, distribution and reception of notions on art and the role of the artist, it is necessary to provide more background information on the definition, nature and origination of artists' societies in general, and the specific historical circumstances that contributed to the emergence of the here discussed artists' societies. Besides this, the theoretical framework of this thesis, the theory of Hans van Maanen on art worlds, also deserves a further elaboration. Hence, within this chapter the definition and the history of the phenomenon 'artists' society', the artistic climate of the Interwar period, and the theory of Van Maanen, will be successively considered.

The definition of an artists' society

*'Niets heeft in de kunstgeschiedenis tot zoveel problemen en verwarring geleid als de geschiedschrijving van groepen van kunstenaars.'*¹¹

With this quote, Dutch art historian John Sillevius (1946) has summarized the problematic nature of the historiography of artists' collectives. Although he focusses here on artists' groups, his expression is also applicable to the theme of artists' societies. An indication that there exists no general consensus on the nature of this last phenomenon, is the lack of a clear definition of the term 'artists' society'. None of the publications on the subject consulted for this thesis, provide a concise definition or specific characteristics of an artist society in general. Moreover, the matter is further complicated by the fact that various terms are used for the same phenomenon and that, in the case of German or English publications, these terms cannot be translated easily.¹² In order to gain insight in the nature of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK, the handling of the term 'artists' society' is therefore discussed in the following paragraphs.

Within the publication *Muzentempels. Multidisciplinaire kunstkringen in Nederland tussen 1880 en 1914* (1998), professor in Dutch literature Ton van Kalmthout discusses the phenomenon of Dutch multidisciplinary art circles between 1880 and 1914. In the publication, in which Van Kalmthout devotes special attention to the Haagsche Kunstkring and the

¹¹ John Sillevius, *Verve 1951-1957*, exh. cat. The Hague (Haags Gemeentemuseum) 1974.

¹²The Dutch term 'kunstenaarsvereniging' or the German term 'Künstlervereinigung' can be translated as 'artists' society' in English. The Dutch term 'genootschap' or the German term 'Genossenschaft' can also be translated as 'society'.

Rotterdamsche Kunstkring, he provides a definition of the term ‘multidisciplinary art circle’. According to Van Kalmthout, the term refers to a ‘genootschap’, in which diverse art disciplines were represented. He states that around 1900 the artistic domain was divided into four parts: the visual arts, music, architecture and arts and crafts, and literature and drama.¹³ The idea that these different disciplines were closely connected was one of the most characterizing aspects of the multidisciplinary art circle.¹⁴ In order to be considered a multidisciplinary art circle in Van Kalmthout’s publication, a society had to devote itself to three or four of these disciplines.¹⁵ Then, he provides a definition of the more general ‘vereniging’ or ‘genootschap’, which is also applicable to the multidisciplinary art circle. He describes such collectives as ‘formalised cooperations’, meaning that they were officially established, were given a name and place of permanent establishment, that they had members, and that they held regular meetings at a certain time and place and with specific purposes.¹⁶ Van Kalmthout appends that such collectives were regulated, and established and maintained by private persons for reasons other than financial gain.¹⁷ Within the group of members of a multidisciplinary art circle, the art lovers usually outnumbered the artists.¹⁸

How does Van Kalmthout’s description of multidisciplinary art circles relate to artists’ societies? Unfortunately, the author does not provide a definition of the latter or a clear distinction between the two. His simultaneous use of different terms as ‘kunstkring’, ‘vereniging’ and ‘genootschap’ further complicates the matter. Nevertheless, the general definition of a ‘vereniging’, provided by Van Kalmthout, is applicable to artists’ societies. This type of organization was also characterized by a ‘formalised cooperation’, which was established and maintained by private persons. The artists’ society differs however, from the multidisciplinary art circle in the balance between artists and art lovers. Whereas the art lovers outnumbered the artists in multidisciplinary art circles, the member group of artists’ societies usually comprised of more artists than art lovers. In his publication Van Kalmthout discusses *Arti et Amicitiae* (1839), an organisation which in other literature is often referred to as an artists’ society. He describes *Arti* however, not as an artists’ society, but as a ‘kunstvakgenootschap’, which can be distinguished from the multidisciplinary art circle in its

¹³ Ton van Kalmthout, *Muzentempels. Multidisciplinaire kunstkringen in Nederland tussen 1880 en 1914*, Hilversum 1998, p. 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 22.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 21. Van Kalmthout based his definition on C.B.F. Singeling, *Gezellige schrijvers. Aspecten van letterkundige genootschappelijkheid in Nederland 1750-1800*, Amsterdam/Atalanta 1991.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 78.

focus on one art discipline, the visual arts.¹⁹ Given the fact that Arti is often designated as an artists' society, it may be assumed that the term 'kunstvakgenootschap' corresponds with the term 'artists' society'. This is, however, not satisfactory. Albeit to differing extents, most artists' societies were composed of different art disciplines. For example, the ASB consisted of visual artists and architects, and within the SKK different art disciplines were united. The activities of De Brug were primarily focussed on the visual arts. Nevertheless, various members were also active within other art disciplines.²⁰

In *Künstlergruppen in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz seit 1900* (1996), art historian Christoph Wilhelmi considers this multidisciplinary character as one of the most significant hallmarks of artists' groups and artists' societies.²¹ Herein, these types of organizations distinguish themselves from the 'Künstlergenossenschaft' and the Secessions, which usually focussed on one art discipline.²² In his subsequent publication *Künstlergruppen in West- und Nordeuropa* (2006), Wilhelmi also regards the artists' group or society a typical product of the big city, in contrast to artists' colonies, that consisted of artists that had escaped the city.²³ Moreover, in order to be considered an artists' group or society, the pertaining collective has to be an artists' initiative, which goes beyond the joint organisation of exhibitions due to economical motives.²⁴

The defining characteristics of the artists' societies discussed here are deduced from the above discussed publications. It appears that De Brug, the ASB and the SKK, were multidisciplinary artists' initiatives, related to the city of Amsterdam, whose member groups consisted of more artists than art lovers. The activities of these organizations were particularly focussed on the stimulation of the development of contemporary art and representation of the artists' interests. Moreover, they contributed to the organization of artistic life, for example, by enabling

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 20. Kalmthout admits in footnote 37 that according to its constitution Arti also facilitated architecture and arts and crafts. However, he considers Arti a monodisciplinary movement, because of the fact that architecture was classified with the visual arts in the organisation for a considerable time. Furthermore, the amount of art lovers outnumbered the artists within Arti. However, this group of art lovers also consisted of artists, that were not fully acknowledged yet.

²⁰ For example, the painter Johan van Hell was also an active musician, and Nico Eekman (1889-1973) worked as an architect and sculptor, besides his painting activities.

²¹ Wilhelmi 1996 (see note 3), pp. 9-10. Wilhelmi does not distinguish between the terms 'artists' group' and 'artists' society'. He states: 'Der Begriff der Künstlergruppe oder Künstlervereinigung ist gängig, obwohl ihm keine verbindliche Definition zugrunde liegt.'

²² Ibid, p. 10.

²³ Christoph Wilhelmi, *Künstlergruppen in West- und Nordeuropa einschliesslich Spanien und Portugal seit 1900. Ein Handbuch*, Stuttgart 2006, p. XXI. Regarding this observation, Wilhelmi's inclusion of the Bergen School in his overview of West European artists' groups, appears to be a bit odd. The Dutch village of Bergen traditionally formed an artists' colony, and the artists that worked in this area during the first half of the twentieth century did not form a close, coherent group.

²⁴ Ibid, p. XXXV.

contacts between artists. In his first publication, Wilhelmi provides an overview of the features of artists' groups and societies, which are generally applicable to De Brug, the ASB and the SKK. They were all characterized by an idealistic impetus, a strive for artistic and/or social innovation, an international outlook, a desire for public attention, the organisation of exhibitions, and an emphasis on the importance of interaction between artists.²⁵

Artists' societies in history

Within the context of this thesis it is impossible to consider the whole history of artists' societies extensively. Therefore, this will be limited to some general remarks. Wilhelmi observes that groups or collectives emerge when the individual does not think himself capable of achieving his objectives on his own.²⁶ Although the establishment of artistic organisations can be traced back to the period of medieval workshop communities and guilds, the modern artists' society, which the artist could voluntarily join, originated in the nineteenth century.²⁷ With the fall of the Ancien Regime, the inherent abolition of guild regulations and the emergence of the middle class as new art patrons at the beginning of that century, the position of the artist became increasingly insecure.²⁸ Moreover, the dominance of the academy and the contemporary salon exhibition praxis, excluded a lot of artists from the regular art market. In order to prevent the isolation of the artist in general and to provide a platform for artists that were refused by the academy and the salon, certain artists' collectives emerged, for example the German Secessions and the French Société des Indépendants (1884). As opposed to their twentieth-century counterparts, these organisations restricted their activities to the organisation of exhibitions. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the generally felt desire of artists to unite and interact.²⁹

This was also one of the main motives for the artists Jan Willem Pieneman (1779-1853), André Taurel (1794-1859), Jan Adam Kruseman (1804-1862), Martinus Gerardus Tetar van Elven (1803-1882) and Louis Royer (1793-1868) to establish the society *Arti et Amicitiae* in 1839 in Amsterdam.³⁰ During a period wherein the Dutch government had little

²⁵ Wilhelmi 1996 (see note 3), pp. 3-18.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 2 and 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2 and 5-6. According to Wilhelmi, these organizations also distinguished themselves from the twentieth-century artists' groups and societies with regard to their focus on one art discipline, their large amount of members and their inherent lack of contour. Nevertheless, it appears that a large member group and style pluralism were also characteristics of particular artists' societies during the twentieth century.

³⁰ Margriet de Roever, 'Verbroedering en kunstzin 1839-1875', in: Jan Jaap Heij et al, *Een vereeniging van ernstige kunstenaars. 150 Jaar maatschappij Arti et Amicitiae 1839-1989*, Amsterdam 1989, p. 13.

interference with the arts, which was verbalized by statesman Johan Rudolph Thorbecke (1798-1872) in his famous 1862 statement ‘Kunst is geen regeringszaak,’ their objective was to increase contacts between artists, improve the artist’s social status and advance the visual arts in general.³¹ In order to achieve these objectives, they organised various exhibitions, set up a club and an art library, provided social security by establishing a fund for widows and orphans, and attempted to influence government policy concerning the arts at various occasions.³² Particularly, during the first three decades of their existence they fulfilled a leading role in the Dutch art world. Nevertheless, their general aversion to modern artistic developments caused difficulties in their association with younger generations.³³

Due to the impossibility of considering every Dutch artists’ society here, the following discussion will be limited to the most significant examples.³⁴ Approximately ten years after the establishment of Arti, Pulchri Studio (1847) was founded in The Hague. Out of discontent with the opportunities for artistic training in the Netherlands, this artists’ society particularly focused on this aspect by organising drawing classes. The society predominantly comprised of painters of the Hague School.³⁵

Dissatisfied with the conservative character of Arti and Pulchri, a group of young artists, known under the name ‘The Tachtigers’ or the ‘Amsterdam Impressionists’, established in 1880 St. Lucas.³⁶ This artists’ society also proved to be important for the introduction of the subsequent modern art movements of luminism and Amsterdam modernism to the general public.³⁷ Nevertheless, disagreements about the future course of the society lead to a split between the modern (blue) and the more conservative (brown)

³¹ Ibid, pp. 15 and 21.

³² Ibid, pp. 17-22.

³³ Jenny Reynaerts, ‘De club der woelingen 1875-1914’, in: Jan Jaap Heij et al, *Een vereniging van ernstige kunstenaars. 150 Jaar maatschappij Arti et Amicitiae 1839-1989*, Amsterdam 1989, pp. 41-44.

³⁴ Although they made a significant contribution to the development of modern art in the Netherlands, the Haagsche en Rotterdamsche Kunstkring are beyond the scope of this discussion. Given the fact that the amount of art lovers outnumbered the artists and that they did not focus on the representation of the artists’ needs, it is difficult to designate them as ‘artists’ societies’. For more information on the nature of these organizations, see Van Kalmthout 1998 (note 13), p. 78.

³⁵ S. de Clerq, ‘Uit de geschiedenis van het schilderkundig genootschap Pulchri Studio, in: F.W.G. Leeman, S. de Clerq, J.P. Glerum, *Schilderkundig genootschap Pulchri Studio. Kunstnijverheid, schilderijen, aquarellen en tekeningen*, The Hague 1998, p. 8.

³⁶ Reynaerts 1989 (see note 33), p. 30.

³⁷ Geurt Imanse, ‘Die Entwicklung der abstrakten Kunst und das künstlerische Klima von 1900 bis 1915’, in: Geurt Imanse et al, *Van Gogh bis Cobra. Holländische Malerei 1880-1950*, Stuttgart 1980, pp. 112-116. This situation and the character of these modern art movements are also extensively treated in A.B. Loosjes-Terpstra, *Moderne kunst in Nederland 1900-1914*, Utrecht 1988² (1959). The term ‘Amsterdam modernism’, which designates the early semi-abstract, colourful work of Piet Mondrian, Jan Sluijters and Leo Gestel, is deduced from this publication.

members in 1913. During the same year, the blue members founded the *Hollandsche Kunstenaarskring*.³⁸

According to Wilhelmi, young modern artists found themselves in a difficult position at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although he describes this situation within the German-speaking area, this observation can also be applied to Dutch artists of that period. In general, artists who devoted themselves to contemporary art had little exhibition opportunities in the established art world.³⁹ This was partly due to the overall conservative character of the existing artists' societies and their strict judging systems. This situation caused the establishment of two artists' societies with a more modern character: the *Moderne Kunstkring* and *De Onafhankelijken*.⁴⁰

Influenced by his contacts with the so-called cubists of Montparnasse, Dutch artist Conrad Kickert (1882-1965) founded the *Moderne Kunstkring* in 1910, in order to provide a platform in the Netherlands for the new French artistic movement of cubism. Within the society's exhibitions, organized in 1911 and 1912 at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Kickert also aimed to establish a connection between this artistic movement and contemporary developments in Dutch modern art, represented by artists as Piet Mondrian, Leo Gestel (1881-1941) and Jan Sluijters (1881-1957).⁴¹ In 1913, the society demonstrated the growing interest in expressionist art within Dutch art circles by exhibiting works of contemporary German and Russian artists.⁴² In general, the significant influence of Kickert on the society's course and the selection of its members, made the *Moderne Kunstkring* an exclusive organisation. This situation ultimately caused internal conflicts, and together with the outbreak of the First World War, which impeded the contacts with Paris, this resulted in the society's disbandment in 1914.⁴³

As a reaction to the strict judging systems of other artists' societies and the exclusive character of the *Moderne Kunstkring*, the Amsterdam artists' society *De Onafhankelijken* was

³⁸ A.B. Loosjes-Terpstra, *Moderne kunst in Nederland 1900-1914*, Utrecht 1988² (1959), p. 117.

³⁹ Wilhelmi 1996 (see note 3), p. 6.

⁴⁰ Loosjes-Terpstra 1988 (see note 38), p. 108. With regard to this observation, it should be noted that St. Lucas was less conservative in their exhibition policy in comparison to *Arti and Pulchri*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 117. The growing interest in expressionist art during this period is, for example, represented by the large number of Dutch artists that visited the 1912 *Sonderbund*-exhibition in Cologne, which featured, amongst others, works from artists gathered in *Die Brücke* and *Der Blaue Reiter*. Besides this, various exhibitions of German expressionist art were organized in the Netherlands, such as the large 1912 Kandinsky-exhibition at art dealer Oldenzeel in Rotterdam, and the 1916 exhibition in *Kunstzaal d'Audretsch* in The Hague, which featured German artists that were connected with the German art periodical *Der Sturm*, led by Herwarth Walden (1878-1941).

⁴³ John Steen, 'Moderne Kunstkring', in: Jane Turner, *Dictionary of Art*, 34 volumes, New York 1996, vol. 21, p. 77.

established in 1912. Based on the viewpoint that every artist had the right to present his work to the public, the society organised jury free exhibitions.⁴⁴ Consequently, these exhibitions were characterized by style pluralism and often criticised for the mixed quality of the exhibits.⁴⁵ In her previously mentioned master thesis on *De Onafhankelijken*, Anja Novak emphasizes that the organization was never solely an exhibition society, but rather represented the social interests of artists and aimed to advance the national art policy, which was still practically non-existent at that period.⁴⁶ Moreover, the society's members valued and stimulated contacts between Dutch and foreign artists.⁴⁷

The increasing international orientation within Dutch modern art is an essential characteristic of the period before the First World War. Through exhibitions and art periodicals, Dutch artists became acquainted with new artistic movements as cubism, futurism, German expressionism and abstract art, which in turn resulted in exiting formal experiments within the artists' individual oeuvres.⁴⁸ Given the fact that several of these exhibitions were held at the *Moderne Kunstkring* and *De Onafhankelijken*, these societies appeared to have played a significant role in this international exchange and, consequently, in the development of Dutch modern art.

The First World War marked the end of these productive, international contacts. During the war, in which the Netherlands preserved its neutrality, Dutch modern art developed quite isolated. Influenced by the nineteenth-century Dutch socialist-orientated symbolist art, the principles of theosophy, and the publication *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1915) from Russian expressionist Wassily Kandinsky, the art of that period was characterized by a mystical world view and an utopian socialism, which in turn was expressed in the symbolic use of colour and form in abstract expressionist artworks, and the development of geometric abstract art with artists, that gathered within *De Stijl* in 1917.⁴⁹ In general, all the divergent art movements were united by their aim for 'vergeestelijking' of the arts. Inspired by Kandinsky's emphasis on the necessity of modern art to affect the human

⁴⁴ Novak 1998 (see note 2), p. 10.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 15.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Loosjes-Terpstra 1988 (see note 38), p. 115.

⁴⁹ John Steen, 'Realistische tendenzen in de Nederlandse schilderkunst 1915-1930', in: Kathinka Dietrich, Paul Blom, Flip Boel (eds.), *Berlijn-Amsterdam 1920-1940. Wisselwerkingen*, Amsterdam 1982, p. 280. Until 1916 there were still a few international exhibitions organised in the Netherlands, for example the 1916 Sturm-exhibition mentioned in note 42. Nevertheless, their numbers were considerably decreased compared to the pre-war-situation.

emotions, and the significance of the ‘innere Klang’, many Dutch artists were convinced that their inner life should constitute the point of departure for their art.⁵⁰

The artistic climate of the Interwar period

In order to explore the context in which De Brug, the ASB and the SKK were established, it is important to discuss the artistic climate of the Interwar period within this subchapter. Despite the fact that international contacts between artists were re-established after the war, the period of intense, formal experiments was over.⁵¹ The great diversity of the art of the Interwar period demonstrated however, that its effects were still noticeable. This is, for example, visualised in the publication *Palet* (1931), edited by artist Paul Citroen (1896-1983), in which different artists provide various views on the nature of art. The divergent character of these views demonstrate the lack of consensus regarding this subject. In the previously discussed publication *Magie en Zakelijkheid*, art historian Maaïke Buijs describes the Interwar period as a ‘style-seeking period’. Contemporary painting was determined by moderate forms of expressionism and a new form of realism. As opposed to the period before the war, during the Interwar period the term ‘modern’ meant not turning away from nature, but another attitude towards reality.⁵² Modern art was represented by artists that abstracted or distorted reality on behalf of expression as well as artists that remained true to visible reality.⁵³ In his lecture ‘Het classicisme en de kunst van heden’ of 1926 for the university of Utrecht, curator of the Haags Gemeentemuseum Gerard Knuttel verbalized the new attitude by stating that the contemporary visual arts and architecture represented a concentration of forces opposed to the anarchy and purposeless aiming for effect, which he connected with early modern movements as expressionism. He described the new attitude as controlled, anti-individualist and non-romantic, and connected this with the general ‘zakelijk vitalistische’ attitude to life of that period. According to Knuttel this new attitude was expressed in various divergent artistic movements as Mondrian’s neoplasticism, constructivism and neo-realism.⁵⁴

Knuttel’s lecture demonstrates that abstract art was still an important component of the general artistic supply during the 1920s. For example, the new international avant-garde

⁵⁰ Loosjes-Terpstra 1988 (see note 38), pp. 200-201.

⁵¹ Geurt Imanse, ‘Die Jahre 1915-1918. Entstehung von De Branding und De Stijl’, in: Geurt Imanse et al, *Van Gogh bis Cobra. Holländische Malerei 1880-1950*, Stuttgart 1980, p. 183.

⁵² Maaïke Buijs, ‘Het nieuwe realisme in relatie tot het verleden en in internationale context’, in: Carel Blotkamp and Ype Koopmans (eds.), *Magie en Zakelijkheid. Realistische schilderkunst in Nederland 1925-1945*, exh. cat. Arnhem (Museum voor Moderne Kunst) 1999, p. 40.

⁵³ Ibid, pp. 40-41.

⁵⁴ Ype Koopmans, *Architectuur, Schilderkunst, Beeldhouwkunst. Nieuwe Beelding en nieuwe zakelijkheid 1926-1930*, exh. cat. Arnhem (Museum voor Moderne Kunst) 2004 (Arnhemse Cahiers), p. 15.

movement of constructivism emerged around this period as one of the artistic movements that desired to contribute to the creation of a new world after the end of the First World War, which had caused the destruction of the established political and social order. The constructivist movement, which was particularly centred in the Soviet Union and at the Bauhaus in Germany, was characterized by a preference for order and rationality, and an enthusiasm for the scientific and technological possibilities of the industrial society. The machine was regarded as a means for the emancipation of the human spirit and body, and consequently, the creation of a new environment and a new type of human being. The constructivists' faith in technology, that echoed the mechanic atmosphere of contemporary existence, was represented in their formal language, which was characterized by clear, precise, taut geometrical forms, that emphasized the flatness of the picture plane and the expressive characteristics of form and colour.⁵⁵ Although emerging fairly isolated, the ideas of the artists surrounding Dutch periodical *De Stijl* regarding the possible cooperation between the visual arts and architecture, and their desire for a new, universal art, denoted by the term 'Nieuwe Beelding' or neoplasticism, connected them with the utopian views of the international avant-garde movement of constructivism. Acknowledging these similarities, leading member of *De Stijl* Theo van Doesburg (1883-1931) was actively involved in constructive circles in Germany, grouped around the Bauhaus.⁵⁶

During the second half of the 1920s, the climate for the international avant-garde and abstract art became less propitious in Europe. Within the Netherlands, *De Stijl*, one of the Dutch representatives of the avant-garde, was last published in 1927, apart from a single publication in 1932 on the occasion of the death of Van Doesburg, who had been the driving force behind the periodical. *I 10*, another periodical that was of importance for the international avant-garde and abstract art in general, existed until 1931. In general, the tradition of modernism solely survived in a small circle of architects and designers.⁵⁷ The decline of interest in the international avant-garde and abstract art was caused by increasing feelings of insecurity and scepticism among artists and intellectuals in general, as a result of the far reaching social consequences of the First World War, the economic crisis of 1929 and the rise of fascism in

⁵⁵ Christina Lodder, 'Constructivistische visies op Utopia', in: Doris Wintgens Hötte, *Utopia 1900-1940. Visies op een Nieuwe Wereld*, exh. cat. Leiden (Museum de Lakenhal) 2013, pp. 94-95.

⁵⁶ Frank Gribling, 'Tussen De Stijl en het constructivisme. Duitsland-Nederland, een schakel in de internationale avant-garde betrekkingen', in: Kathinka Dietrich, Paul Blom, Flip Boel (eds.), *Berlijn-Amsterdam 1920-1940. Wisselwerkingen*, Amsterdam 1982, p. 270.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 279.

the 1920s.⁵⁸ By (re)committing themselves to perceptible phenomena, and by representing these objectively, modern artists attempted to get a grip on the ever-changing, contemporary world. Nevertheless, behind these impersonal representations a subjective experience of reality was hidden.⁵⁹ These developments were not limited to one country. Throughout the western world, movements as the Italian Pittura Metafisica, the German Neue Sachlichkeit, the French Retour à l'ordre and American Precisionism showed that artists returned to recognisable motives and forms.⁶⁰ In the Netherlands, this return to figurative art was demonstrated by the emergence of various new realist tendencies, which ultimately continued to exist for two decades. These tendencies represented different types of realism, such as neo-realism, neo-classicism, new objectivity, magic realism and surrealism.⁶¹ According to Carel Blotkamp in *Magie en Zakelijkheid*, these 'new realists' created an image of reality based on detailed observation and cool analysis. This could concern an illusionistic reconstruction of the visible world as well as a pure construction of the mind, as was the case with surrealist artists. The definition of reality remained an important point of debate within these different realist movements.⁶²

The new realist tendencies were also connected to the reconsideration of the national and/or classical art tradition and a desired return to the national identity, and durable norms and values.⁶³ In the Netherlands, this reconsideration of the national art tradition resulted in a general renewed attention for Dutch realist painting of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in terms of its study of human anatomy, the incidence of light, the depiction of space by means of perspective, and the illusionistic expression of matter.⁶⁴ Also the large, simplified forms, the lack of depth, and the sober, strictly ordered composition of Italian art

⁵⁸ H.H. Arnason and Peter Kalb, *History of modern art. Painting, sculpture, architecture, photography*, New Jersey 2004⁵ (1969), p. 267. For more information concerning the contemporary pessimist attitude towards life among intellectuals, that found its expression in the publications *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918-1922) by German philosopher Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) and *In de schaduwen van morgen* (1935) by Dutch art historian Johan Huizinga (1872-1945), see F. Boterman, 'De bange jaren '30 en '50 en de huidige crisis', in: Ype Koopmans and Mieke Rijnders (eds.), *In de schaduw van morgen. Neorealisme in Nederland*, exh. cat. Arnhem (Museum voor Moderne Kunst) 2012, pp. 13-26.

⁵⁹ Buijs 1999 (see note 52), p. 37.

⁶⁰ Arnason and Kalb 2004 (see note 58), pp. 239-387.

⁶¹ Carel Blotkamp, 'Voorwoord', in: Carel Blotkamp and Ype Koopmans (eds.), *Magie en Zakelijkheid. Realistische schilderkunst in Nederland 1925-1945*, exh. cat. Arnhem (Museum voor Moderne Kunst) 1999, p. 7. During the Interwar period, these terms were not consciously employed. Rather, they were regarded as modalities of the new realist movement. This approach is also visible in the publication of Blotkamp and Koopmans. Given the fact that defining these terms will be a whole different research, their approach will be employed in this thesis.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶³ Ype Koopmans, 'Realisme in Nederland. Werkelijkheid en onwerkelijkheid', in: Carel Blotkamp and Ype Koopmans (eds.), *Magie en Zakelijkheid. Realistische schilderkunst in Nederland 1925-1945*, exh. cat. Arnhem (Museum voor Moderne Kunst) 1999, p. 28.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were taken as point of departure.⁶⁵ This new affinity with artistic expressions from the past, which was accompanied by a renewed appreciation of the traditional painters' metier, was demonstrated in the form, chosen subjects, and motives of contemporary art, and the general rehabilitation of genres. Nevertheless, the past achievements were combined with modern inventions, such as the use of sharp contours, an angular design, a clear use of colour and paradoxical space constructions.⁶⁶

The establishment of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK are to varying extents connected with the new realist tendencies. They all accommodated artists that worked in a figurative manner, and, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the societies' notions on art were, albeit in different ways, related to the contemporary return to figurative art.

Due to the contemporary political and social circumstances, a lot of artists also developed strong leftish sympathies during the Interwar period, which eventually caused some of them, among whom Peter Alma, Johan van Hell and Chris Beekman (1887-1964), to turn to the creation of so-called 'tendenzkunst' or ideologically determined art. This type of art constituted a representation of their socialist views concerning the position and the desired emancipation of the working class. Convinced that these artworks functioned as a weapon in the class struggle, they were regarded as contributions to the establishment of a new world order.⁶⁷ In practice, these works primarily represented the daily life of workers and social wrongs.

The artists' concern for the working class was not new. Around the turn of the century, the emancipation of labourers was a central concern in the so-called 'gemeenschapskunst', a type of monumental art committed to communal ideals, created by Dutch artists as Richard Roland Holst (1868-1938) and Antoon Derkinderen (1859-1925).⁶⁸ Nevertheless, opposed to their counterparts from the 1920s, these artworks primarily represented the worker as a hero.

The emergence of 'tendenzkunst' during the Interwar period was strongly related to the Russian revolution of 1917, which was considered a breakthrough to a new world order by sympathizers in other European countries. Around 1918, the chance that a similar revolution would break out in the Netherlands and Germany seemed realistic.⁶⁹ A considerable number

⁶⁵ Buijs 1999 (see note 52), pp. 45-46.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 46.

⁶⁷ Frank Gribling, "'Tendenzkunst.' De politisering van Nederlandse kunstenaars tussen twee wereldoorlogen", in: Kathinka Dietrich, Paul Blom, Flip Boel (eds.). *Berlijn-Amsterdam 1920-1940. Wisselwerkingen*, Amsterdam 1982, p. 324.

⁶⁸ Steen 1982 (see note 49), pp. 281-282.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 281.

of artists had a positive attitude towards the developments in Russia. For example, the members of *De Stijl* regarded the revolution congruent with their rejection of individual expression and their aim for a universal style. When ultimately the revolution did not spread throughout the rest of Europe, differences between *De Stijl*-members became apparent. Within the group a debate arose on the question to what extent, the by *De Stijl*-members favoured, geometrical abstraction could serve the class struggle. Van Doesburg and Mondrian advocated the idea that geometrical abstraction was based on a mystical idea and in order to create a universal form language, they had to represent cosmic order and harmony in their paintings. For others, such as Bart van der Leek (1876-1958) and Peter Alma, who was indirectly affiliated with *De Stijl*, abstraction was a simplification of reality towards a level that was understandable for everyone.⁷⁰ Alma thought that, despite its utopian aim, full abstraction would solely lead to aestheticism, which in turn could not be comprehended by the masses, and therefore, not serve the class struggle. Thus, his proposition was to develop a formal language specifically for the masses.⁷¹ Alma's statements caused Van Doesburg to distance himself from political views altogether. Within two manifestos published in *De Stijl*, 'Tot een nieuwe wereldbeelding' (1921) and 'Anti-Tendenzkunst' (1923), he claimed that art was autonomous in that it solely obeyed its own laws and that it had nothing to do with political interests.⁷² By making these statements he positioned himself and *De Stijl* opposed to left-wing artists, such as Alma, that regarded the link between art and political issues as self-evident, and believed that progress in art should not be measured according to autonomous form innovation.⁷³

Within his article 'Tendenzkunst' (1982), art historian Frank Gribling connects the emergence of the Dutch politically committed art with artistic developments in Germany. Disappointed in the revolution of 1918, the poor performance of the Weimar republic and the not forthcoming artistic revolution, promised by artists' groups such as the Novembergruppe (1918-1933), certain artists, for example Otto Dix (1891-1969) and George Grosz (1893-1959), resorted to politically committed artists' societies.⁷⁴ In general, these artists advocated solidarity with the proletariat and aimed to make themselves useful for the class struggle by

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 282.

⁷¹ John Steen, 'Realismus', in: Geurt Imanse et al, *Van Gogh bis Cobra. Holländische Malerei 1880-1950*, Stuttgart 1980, p. 96. Alma made these statements in his article 'De schilderkunst in Frankrijk en Hier', published in *De Nieuwe Amsterdammer* on the 6th of March 1920.

⁷² Gribling 1982 (see note 67), p. 324.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 324.

⁷⁴ Anneliese Schröder, *Freiheit, Gleichheit, Brüderlichkeit. Künstlergruppen in Deutschland 1918-1933*, exh. cat. Recklinghausen (Städtische Kunsthalle) 1989, p. 2.

means of their artworks.⁷⁵ Within the contemporary leftish periodicals, for example the communist magazine *Die Rote Fahne*, there emerged a debate on the question how this should be realised. According to the artists' societies, associated with the German communist party KPD, for example the Rote Gruppe (1924-1926/27) and Assoziation Revolutionärer Künstler (ASSO, 1928-1933), art should be social realist and directly serviceable to the interests of the party. Other artists' societies, that were not directly associated with the KPD, such as the Gruppe Progressiver Künstler (1920-1933) from Cologne, rejected the narrow-minded, realist style of the previous mentioned ASSO, and advocated instead a more abstract connection between the construction of a new society and the work of art.⁷⁶ Dutch artists became acquainted with these developments through art periodicals,⁷⁷ exhibitions of German art held by amongst others artists' societies,⁷⁸ and more directly by becoming a member of those leftish artists' societies in Germany. For example, Peter Alma was a member of the Novembergruppe and the Gruppe Progressiver Künstler. The establishment of the Dutch SKK in 1927 should be perceived in the context of the international increased political commitment of artists. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the socialist notions of the members largely determined the course and activities of the society.

Around 1930, the nature of the politically committed art fundamentally altered. During this period the focus of German left-wing artists' societies shifted from the socialist class struggle to the resistance against the upcoming Nazi-party.⁷⁹ Due to the high degree of organization of the communists, these protests dispersed rapidly throughout Europe, receiving support from a large group of disturbed artists and intellectuals.⁸⁰ In the Netherlands, various anti-fascist organisations were established, who attempted to mobilise the public against fascism by means of publications, congresses and exhibitions.⁸¹ One of the most striking initiatives was the international exhibition *De Olympiade Onder Dictatuur (DOOD)* of 1936, organized by the Bond van Kunstenaars ter Verdediging van Culturele Rechten (BKVK).

⁷⁵ Gribling 1982 (see note 67), p. 324.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 324.

⁷⁷ For example, Peter Alma found his inspiration in the German periodicals *Die Aktion*, *Der Eulenspiegel*, and *Die rote Fahne*. Reproductions of German art were published in the Dutch periodicals *De Zaterdagavond* and *Weekblad voor Revolutionaire Volkscultuur*. See Gribling 1982 (note 67), pp. 325-326.

⁷⁸ The following exhibitions featured German art: *Erste Russische Kunstausstellung*, Stedelijk Museum, 1923. *Neue Sachlichkeit*, De Onafhankelijken, 1929. *Architectuur, Schilderwerk, Beeldhouwwerk*, ASB, 1929. *Otto Dix*, Haagsche and Rotterdamsche Kunstkring, 1930. *Socialistische Kunst heden*, SKK, 1930. *Käthe Kollwitz*, Voor de Kunst Utrecht, 1934. For more examples of exhibitions, see Kitty Zijlmans, 'Duitse tentoonstellingen in Nederlandse musea en kunstenaarsverenigingen', in: Kathinka Dietrich, Paul Blom, Flip Boel (ed.). *Berlijn-Amsterdam 1920-1940. Wisselwerkingen*, Amsterdam 1982, pp. 287-293.

⁷⁹ Gribling 1982 (see note 67), p. 324.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 326.

⁸¹ Examples of these anti-fascist organizations were the Nederlands comité van Kunstenaars en Intellectuelen (1933) and the Anti-fascistisch Comité tot directe Steun aan de Slachtoffers der Duitse Terreur (1933).

The society, which consisted of supporters of potent ‘tendenzkunst’ and artists that aimed to protect the autonomy of art against Nazi-barbarism, was established out of resistance against the Nazi’s oppression of cultural values. The *DOOD*-exhibition, which was organized as a protest against the official German *Olympiad*-exhibition of 1936, featured artworks, created by anti-fascist artists, that were politically committed to varying extents. Works of art that constituted a visual protest against the Nazi-regime were also shown at the exhibition of *De Onafhankelijken* in 1934, in which both Dutch and German artists participated. The event provoked considerable controversy, due to the removal of the painting *Tijdsbeeld 1934* (1934, ill. 1) from the artist Harmen Meurs (1891-1964) by the direction of the Stedelijk Museum, because of its alleged offensive nature against a friendly head of state.⁸² To a certain extent this was imaginable, because the painting represented members of the SA burning a swastika on a worker’s chest.

During the last years before the war, it appears that artists such as Peter Alma, who at first strongly reacted against the political situation in Germany lost their illusions about the effectiveness of art as a weapon and turned instead to everyday life and innocent dreams and allegories for their artistic inspiration. In general, ‘tendenzkunst’ was not considered productive anymore.⁸³

This subchapter has demonstrated that during the Interwar period realism in the visual arts revived and that artists became increasingly politically committed. Visualised by the example of the polemic between Theo van Doesburg and Peter Alma, these developments were not approved of by all artists. Rather, there existed a vigorous debate on the nature of art and the position of the artist. Significant questions at the time were, for example, does art have a certain social aim and does art, perhaps in order to serve this aim, have to be abstract or figurative? Is cooperation between different art disciplines necessary and/or desirable and for what purpose? And considering the role of the artist: what position should he/she adopt? What are his/her duties? And how should art and the public relate to each other? The following chapters will demonstrate that Dutch artists’ societies during the Interwar period

⁸² John Jansen van Galen and Huib Schreurs, *Het huis van nu, waar de toekomst is. Een kleine historie van het Stedelijk Museum 1895-1995*, Naarden 1995, pp. 62-68. A similar situation had occurred one year earlier, when the museum direction raised objections against the painting *Selig sind die Armen* (1933, ill. 2) by the German artist Horst Strepel (1904-1975), due to its critical attitude against the contemporary capitalist and militant role of Christianity, and the painting *Namiddag* (1932) by Joop Moesman (1909-1988, ill. 3), because of considerations of morality. In contrast to 1934, the subsequent events ultimately resulted in the premature closure of the exhibition.

⁸³ Gribling 1982 (see note 67), p. 331.

actively engaged themselves in these debates by playing a significant role in the production, distribution and reception of notions on art and the position of the artist.

The concept of art worlds according to Hans van Maanen

The theory of art sociologist Hans van Maanen concerning the phenomenon of art worlds will be employed in this thesis in order to analyse the role of Dutch artists' societies in the production, distribution and reception of notions on art and the role of the artist. Due to the fact that Van Maanen elucidates the functioning of the different domains within the art world, his theory, which is described in his publication *How to Study Art Worlds. On the Societal Functioning of Aesthetic Values* (2009) will provide several interesting starting points for this research.

Within his book, Van Maanen aims to connect 'the thinking on the organisation of art worlds and an understanding of the function art fulfils in a culture,' in order 'to find out how the organization of the art worlds serves the functioning of the arts in society.'⁸⁴ For this purpose, he provides a critical overview of various scholars, primarily sociologists, that have considered the theme of art worlds, and philosophers that have devoted attention to the supposed values and functions of art. A critical note regarding this overview is that the author's own contribution to this research area tends to recede into the background due to the comprehensive character of this survey. The following paragraph will provide a brief overview of the most important authors that have published on the subject of art worlds.

The notion of art worlds was introduced by art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto (1924-2013) in 1964 in order to explain the changes in aesthetic production during the 1950s and 1960s.⁸⁵ According to Danto, the definition of art depends on the contemporary existing theories and knowledge of art history. This collection of theories and art history constitute an art world.⁸⁶ In other words, the art world is a context in which a work can be seen as an artwork.⁸⁷

After Danto, a significant contribution to the understanding of art worlds was made by the American sociologist Howard S. Becker (1928). In his publication *Art Worlds* (1982), he described an art world as 'a network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joined knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of artworks that

⁸⁴ Van Maanen 2009 (see note 10), p. 7.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 7.

⁸⁶ Arthur Danto, 'The Artworld', in: *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 61 (1964) no. 19 (October), pp. 579-580.

⁸⁷ Van Maanen 2009 (see note 10), p. 8.

art world is noted for.⁸⁸ An artwork is, thus, created by means of a number of essential activities, executed by various participants in terms of individuals and institutions.⁸⁹ In his theory, Becker acknowledged the existence of many different art worlds, divided according to their discipline, as well as one art world, because all the different art worlds are influenced by the same external factors and have to deal with the same themes.⁹⁰

Opposed to the rather descriptive theory of Becker, the French structuralist sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) aimed to build a theoretical construct of concepts through which the working of the artistic field or other fields could be analysed. In general, he attempted to discover general structures, laws and mechanisms in these areas. In his analysis, he rather employed the term 'field' instead of Becker's 'world'. According to Bourdieu, the first term provided opportunities for a broader analysis of objective relations, whereas the latter term solely concerned a population or the sum of individual agents linked by relations of cooperation.⁹¹ Van Maanen provides a concise description of Bourdieu's definition of the artistic field.⁹² According to Bourdieu, the artistic field is as 'a structure of objective relations between positions which, with the help of several forms of capital, on the one hand, and based on a joint *illusio* and their own *doxa*, on the other hand, struggle for specific symbolic capital or prestige.'⁹³ The positions, which respectively designate the type of art produced, and a place in the hierarchy based on the distribution of specific capital in terms of resources, are occupied by agents, who take these positions on the basis of their *habitus*: the set of permanent structures of perception and evaluation which govern how people act. These agents can refer to individuals as well as organizations.⁹⁴ The theory of Bourdieu is particularly useful, in that it reveals existing relations between the different actors within the artistic field and its connection with influencing external factors. Moreover, it provides a framework for the research of the societal functioning of art.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, Berkeley/London/Los Angeles 1982, p. X.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-6. The activities contain the development of an idea, its execution, the manufacture of needed material and equipment, the distribution of artworks, supporting activities, the activities of response and appreciation, and the creation and maintenance of the rationale. Within Becker's view on the creation of an artwork, the acts of distribution and reception are included, because all these acts contribute to the existence of an artwork.

⁹⁰ Van Maanen 2009 (see note 10), p. 33.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁹² In his consideration of Bourdieu, Van Maanen solely mentions the artistic field. It is however plausible, that this concept corresponds with Bourdieu's field of cultural production.

⁹³ Van Maanen 2009 (see note 10), p. 55. The '*illusio*' pertains 'the involvement of people in the game, based on the belief that the game is worth playing, because of its stakes.' With the term '*doxa*', a 'set of rules, values, conventions and discourses' are meant, that 'governs the field as a whole and is experienced or presented as a common sense.' Cited from Van Maanen 2009 (see note 10), p. 62.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-58.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

Dissatisfied with Bourdieu's theory of objective relations, French sociologists as Bruno Latour (1947) and Nathalie Heinich (1955) developed the Actor Network Theory (ANT), which can be regarded as a sociology of associations.⁹⁶ An important element of this approach, which is not a theory in the classic sense, but rather an anti-essentialist movement, is the term 'network'. Whereas in other theories the term denotes sets of relations that have to be described, within ANT it forms a tool to describe communications between different actors.⁹⁷ It is an unstructured structure, constructed by the researcher, which changes and expands continuously.⁹⁸ The contribution of ANT to the understanding of an art world lies in its emphasis on the actions and reactions of the different actors as the determining factors for the nature and functioning of an art world.⁹⁹

After the consideration of the various scholars, certain conclusive remarks are provided by Van Maanen in his publication. According to the author, the discussed scholars are connected by the thought that works of art 'do something', that production and reception are inextricably bound to each other, and that art worlds are autonomous, but open. They appear to disagree on which term to employ to designate the area of research: art world, field, network or system. Moreover, they entertain different opinions on the magnitude of the social element within the respective research areas.¹⁰⁰ Due to the fact that all scholars hold the view that art 'does something', Van Maanen criticizes the general lack of research concerning the reception of art, and the manner in which this is organized by distribution organisations. According to Van Maanen, all the scholars tend to focus on the production of art.¹⁰¹ However, it appears that these scholars do address these subjects, albeit to varying extents. For example, Bourdieu does provide interesting insights in the relation between art and different types of audiences. Nevertheless, Van Maanen generally distinguishes himself from other scholars in his more practical approach of the art world by elucidating the various processes that occur in the production, distribution and reception of art. This practical approach made his theory particularly interesting for this thesis. The following paragraph will be devoted to the exploration of Van Maanen's theory and its relation to the subject of this thesis.

Although Van Maanen has offered an illuminating overview of the views held by different scholars on the phenomenon of art worlds, he unfortunately does not provide a concise

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 83.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 85.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 86.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 102.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pp. 125-142.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 142.

definition of the term himself. He does not even address the question whether he considers one or multiple art worlds in his theory, and according to which criteria these could be classified. The terms ‘art worlds’ and ‘the art world’ are simultaneously employed. Nevertheless, from his publication can be deduced that he considers an art world a system, which consists of the production, distribution and reception of art. The choice for the term ‘system’ is justified by Van Maanen through his observation that this term refers to ‘the entire organization of artistic communication within a culture, with a certain accent on the institutional patterns.’¹⁰² Opposed to the general term of ‘art world’, the term ‘system’ provides more opportunities for the understanding of the art world, according to Van Maanen.¹⁰³ For the discussion of the art world, the author regularly employs three concepts. The first is the ‘value of art’, which refers to the capacity of artworks to generate aesthetic experience in the act of reception.¹⁰⁴ The second is the ‘function of art’, which provides an indication of art’s importance for, for example, society. And the third is the term ‘functioning’, which concerns the operation of a system in terms of structures, processes and outcomes.¹⁰⁵ According to Van Maanen the functioning of art can also be understood as a realization of its potential values.¹⁰⁶ The author’s employment of these terms in his publication seem occasionally obscure due to the lack of a clear explanation and practical examples. Consequently, these terms are solely employed in this thesis when they contribute to the analysis of its subject. With regard to the clarity of Van Maanen’s theory in general, it also has to be remarked that his frequent use of diagrams not necessarily contributes to a better comprehension of his observations.

Despite the occasionally obscure nature of his publication, Van Maanen provides valuable insights in the functioning of art worlds that proved to be relevant for the subject of this thesis. In order to demonstrate how an art world functions, Van Maanen divides it in four domains: production, distribution, reception and context, which are mutually interrelated. These domains can be subdivided in organizational structures, processes and outcomes.¹⁰⁷ In general, the organizational structures generate processes, which in turn generate a certain output.¹⁰⁸ The specific organisation of each domain is considered in the following chapters. It will suffice to note that the output of the production domain is the aesthetic product or work

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 142.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 141.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 10.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 11. According to Van Maanen, the term ‘functioning’ is applicable to art as such as well as an art world.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 291.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 11.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 241.

of art, within the distribution domain this artwork is presented within an aesthetic event to the audience, and within the reception domain the confrontation with that work can result in an aesthetic experience with the viewer. The domain of context refers to the possible mutual influences between art and other areas. The four domains can be studied on three levels: the individual, institutional and societal.¹⁰⁹ In his publication, Van Maanen solely provides explanatory diagrams for the individual and societal level (ill. 4 and 5). The nature of the institutional level remains therefore rather vague.

The rest of the publication is devoted to an exploration of the functioning of art worlds. In contrast to publications of other scholars, a considerable emphasis is herein placed on the domain of distribution, for Van Maanen considers it the most important part of the art world. According to the author, the functioning of art in society can solely be analysed by studying the systems of distribution, because they organise the encounter between art and its users.¹¹⁰ Although the other domains also provide information on the functioning of art in society, the distribution domain indeed appears to play an important part, for it connects art and the artists with the audience. Therefore, Van Maanen justly observes that the production and reception of art cannot function adequately without the distribution domain.¹¹¹

For this thesis, the theory of Van Maanen concerning the organization of art worlds will be applied to the role of artists' societies De Brug, the ASB and the SKK in the production, distribution and reception of notions on art and the position of the artist. Within his theory, Van Maanen primarily discusses these mechanisms in relation to art or more specific, art works. Nevertheless, particularly with regard to the influence of art on the larger context, he also implies that by means of art certain ideas are communicated. Van Maanen however, does not address this subject directly. Within this thesis, this subject is treated by focussing on the production, distribution and reception of notions on art instead of art itself. Given the fact that these notions pass through the same stages as art, Van Maanen's theory appear to have been equally applicable to the thesis subject. Nevertheless, the following chapters will demonstrate that the here considered artists' societies, which are usually regarded as distribution organizations, were not solely engaged in the distribution of notions on art and the position of the artist, but also directly influenced the other domains of production and reception.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 11.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 128.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 245.

Chapter 2 | Producing and exchanging notions

*'De Vereeniging van Nederlandsche Beeldende Kunstenaars De Brug wil een hechtere band als dit tot op heden het geval was, tusschen kunstenaar en publiek.'*¹¹²

The above cited quote demonstrates that the members of the artists' societies considered here, in this case De Brug, had ambitious notions on art and the position of the artist. These notions appear to have been the basic elements of the existence of these societies. Hence, this chapter will focus on the role of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK in the production of notions on art and the position of the artist. Within this context, it will be established how the general production of such notions were related to the existence of those artists' societies, what the societies' specific notions on art and the position of the artist were, and how they mutually differed and resembled each other. For this purpose, the theory of Hans van Maanen concerning the domain of production and the general role of artists' societies in the production of notions on art and the position of the artist, will be considered first. Secondly, the notions on art and the position of the artist of the De Brug, the ASB and the SKK are discussed according to each society, after which the chapter will be concluded with some final remarks.

In the publication of Van Maanen, the domain of production is described as consisting of organizations and their processes, that generate the aesthetic product: the work of art. According to Van Maanen's diagram (ill. 5), the artists' society, creating aesthetic events in the form of exhibitions where encounters take place between art and its audience can be classified under the domain of distribution. Nevertheless, when this diagram is applied to the production, distribution and reception of notions on art and the role of artist, the role of artists' society does not appear to be limited to the distribution domain. Rather, artists' societies play a significant role in the production of ideas.

Before considering this role, it has to be pointed out that the fundamental basis of an artists' society is constituted by notions on art, shared by its members. These notions are generally deduced from the contemporary artistic debate, which in the case of the Interwar

¹¹² Cited from: *De Vereeniging van Nederl. beeldende kunstenaars De Brug*, Amsterdam 1927, p. 2. This document is one of the two so-called 'gelegenheidsbundels', published by De Brug. Both documents contain a description of the society's intentions and activities, reviews of their exhibitions, and regulations pertaining membership. Due to the lack of a good English translation, these documents will be designated as 'gelegenheidsbundels' throughout this thesis.

period was formed by artistic themes, but also by political and social circumstances. The feeling that already existing artists' societies do not fulfil the prevalent idealistic needs of artists, usually result in the establishment of new societies.

After this process of establishment, the active role of the artists' society in the production of notions on art actually starts. In general, the artists' society contributes to the production of notions on art and the position of the artist by providing a forum where artists can develop and exchange these notions, which respectively can influence the development of the individual artist and the artists' society as such. The development and exchange of notions can occur in a direct manner, for example, within the context of the activities organized by the members of the artists' societies, such as meetings, lectures and debates evenings, but also more indirectly within written correspondence between members. The notions on art and the position of the artist developed within the context of the artists' society and the ones that formed the basis of its establishment together constitute a body of ideas, shared by its members, which, thus, represents the society as such and causing the society to occupy a position in the contemporary artistic debate .

De Brug

In 1926, artists' society De Brug was established in Amsterdam. Due to a lack of archive material, little is known about the exact circumstances in which this took place. Nevertheless, the establishment of the artists' society was motivated by a dissatisfaction with the position of art and the artist in contemporary society. According to the establishing artists, among whom Otto Hanrath (1882-1944) and Dirk Nijland, art had become estranged from the public.¹¹³ Moreover, they criticized certain contemporary societies that supported the visual arts on the grounds that these organizations were led by persons that were not artists themselves, and thus, were not able to represent the needs of artists adequately. For the distribution of material support among artists, these organizations relied on the recommendations of certain 'art-advisers', that, according to the members of De Brug, usually selected the same small group of artists that were eligible for support. This practice deprived upcoming talents of opportunities for public recognition. Within the text published in the society's so-called 'gelegenheidsbundel' of 1926 (sic), in which these statements are made, these societies are

¹¹³ According to Wilhelmi, the artist Jacob Bendien was co-founder of De Brug. See Wilhelmi 2006 (note 23), p. 94. Within the exhibition catalogue *Jacob Bendien 1890-1933* (1985), it is observed that the artist became a member of the society in 1926. Bendien is, however, not mentioned as one of the establishers. See: Elina Taselaar and Thorn Metcuur, *Jacob Bendien 1890-1933*, exh cat. Leeuwarden/Utrecht (Fries Museum/Centraal Museum) 1985, p. 9.

not specified.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, this practice was, for example, applicable to the Amsterdam city authorities, which employed a special commission for the acquisition of artworks, consisting of, amongst others, members of the more traditional artists' society *Arti et Amicitiae*.¹¹⁵ The continuing limited involvement in art matters by the Dutch government in general was also regarded by the artists of De Brug as a negative influence on the contemporary relation between art and society. To maintain the status of Dutch art nationally and internationally, they stressed the necessity of private initiatives, of which the establishment of this artists' society formed an example.¹¹⁶

Aiming for a better position of art in society, the artists of De Brug focussed on the improvement of the relation between artist and public. This orientation is already apparent in their choice for the name 'De Brug', which reflects the society's desire to form a bridge between the public and the artist.¹¹⁷ According to art historian Koosje Hofman (1970) in her article on artist, and member of De Brug, Johan van Hell, the society's desire to (re)connect art and public was also reflected by their introduction of a 'new objective art', which was characterized by the detailed depiction of recognisable objects, and the implementation of certain financial measures, that enabled less prosperous persons to acquire art.¹¹⁸ In contrast, within the publication *Kunstbeleid in Amsterdam 1920-1940* (1983) of historians Tony Jansen and Jan Rogier, it is stated that the members of De Brug aimed to achieve their objective of connecting art and the public solely by removing financial barriers for the acquisition of art. They did not intend to make art more accessible by means of the clear depiction of comprehensible subjects.¹¹⁹ Due to the lack of archive material regarding the establishment of De Brug, it is difficult to retrieve the original intentions of the artists' society. According to the earlier mentioned 'gelegenheidsbundel' from 1926 (sic) the members of De Brug aimed 'aandacht te vestigen op de nieuwe objectieve kunst,' which emerged in Germany, France, but

¹¹⁴ *De Vereeniging van Nederl. beeldende kunstenaars De Brug*, Amsterdam 1926 (sic), p. 4. According to the title description of the RKD, this document was published in 1926. Nevertheless, given the fact that the same document contains reviews of 1927, it is impossible that the 'gelegenheidsbundel' was published in 1926. For more information on the 'gelegenheidsbundels', see note 112.

¹¹⁵ Tony Jansen en Jan Rogier, *Kunstbeleid in Amsterdam 1920-1940. Dr. E. Boekman en de socialistische gemeentepolitiek*, Nijmegen 1983, p. 172.

¹¹⁶ *De Vereeniging van Nederl. beeldende kunstenaars De Brug* 1926 (see note 114), p. 4.

¹¹⁷ Koosje Hofman, 'Johan van Hell. Kunstenaar in crisistijd', in: Caroline Roodenburg (ed.), *Johan van Hell 1889-1952*, exh. cat. Arnhem (Museum voor Moderne Kunst) 2006, p. 63. According to Jan Batterman in *De Brug 1926-1986. Vereniging van beeldende kunstenaars* (1986) and Ed van Wingen in 'Zeventigjarige, het is mooi geweest' in *Kunstenaarsvereniging De Brug 1926-1996* (1996), the name derived from Die Brücke. According to the authors, the new objective art of De Brug was a reaction to the expressionism of this artists' group. Unfortunately, the authors do not further elaborate on this statement. The connection is however, not mentioned in the 'gelegenheidsbundels', published around the founding year. Their explanation appears thus, to be a bit far-fetched.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 63.

¹¹⁹ Jansen and Rogier 1983 (see note 115), p. 184.

also in the Netherlands.¹²⁰ Within the text this statement is not directly related to their aim of connecting art and public. Nevertheless, whether deliberately or not, their focus on figurative art with recognisable objects certainly could have contributed to the achievement of their objective. During the period of the establishment of De Brug, this type of art was regarded by, amongst others, artists and art critics, as a solution for the growing gap between art and public due to its immediate character. Whatever their intentions may have been, De Brug provided a meeting place for primarily young, not well-established artists that worked in the new objective style.¹²¹ According to the members of this artists' society, this type of art could be described as 'een kunst waarin men niet zoeke enkel een constructieve geest, een kunst die niet bedoeld *alleen* gevoelens en gedachten weer te geven, maar die het objectieve verbindt aan groote innerlijkheid.'¹²² These utterances appear closely related to statements, expressed by Gerard Knuttel in his previously mentioned lecture 'Het classicisme en de kunst van heden' of 1926, in which he described the new attitude towards art as controlled, anti-individualist and non-romantic. The fact that this lecture and the establishment of De Brug took place in the same year does not seem a coincidence. According to Ype Koopmans in his publication on another artists' society, the ASB, De Brug focussed on figurative art, which was characterized by a careful, detailed way of depiction and a preference for sober still lifes and industrial landscapes.¹²³ This observation is largely consistent with the type of artworks shown at the exhibitions of De Brug. The titles of the works, mentioned in the exhibition catalogues, frequently refer to landscapes, town views, portraits and still lifes. Nevertheless, not every artist that exhibited with De Brug fits the description of Koopmans. For example, the members Joseph J. Isaäcson (1859-1942) and Jan Grégoire (1887-1960) often depicted Biblical subjects, and Jacob Bendien (1890-1933) exhibited his semi-abstract works at the society's exhibitions. In general, it appears that the exhibited artists were selected on the basis of their discipline, the visual arts, and their style, an objective depiction of recognisable objects. The quality of the exhibited works, thus, varied immensely, which appears to have led certain already established artists, such as John Rädecker and Charley Toorop, to leave the

¹²⁰ Cited from: *De Vereeniging van Nederl. beeldende kunstenaars De Brug* 1926 (see note 114), p. 2.

¹²¹ Various artists of De Brug, such as Dirk Nanninga (1868-1954), Wilm Wouters (1887-1957), Christiaan Schaaf (1890-1969), Johan van Hell and Otto Hanrath, were connected with the the so-called 'Bremmer school', a group of artists surrounding one of the most important individuals in the art world of the first half of the twentieth century, art teacher and critic Henk P. Bremmer (1871-1956). The notions on art of the members of De Brug corresponded with Bremmer's vision that art was an 'objectified emotion'. For more information, see Maaïke Buijs, 'Het nieuwe realisme in relatie tot het verleden en in internationale context, in: Carel Blotkamp and Ype Koopmans (eds.), *Magie en Zakelijkheid. Realistische schilderkunst in Nederland 1925-1945*, exh. cat. Arnhem (Museum voor Moderne Kunst) 1999, p. 40.

¹²² Cited from: *De Vereeniging van Nederl. beeldende kunstenaars De Brug* 1926 (see note 114), p. 2.

¹²³ Koopmans 2004 (see note 54), p. 15.

society at an early stage.¹²⁴

In his article ‘Tendenzkunst’ (1982), Frank Gribling claims that most progressive, socialist artists were a member of De Onafhankelijken and De Brug during the 1930s.¹²⁵ Certain artists that exhibited with De Brug held strong socialist or communist views. For example, the artists Jan Mulder, Huub van Lith (1908-1977), Henk Henriët (1903-1945) were all a member of the communist party.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, their political orientation does not become immediately apparent from their submitted artworks, which primarily consist of a-political landscapes and still lifes. Solely the works of Johan van Hell, Ger Gerrits (1893-1965) and Chris Beekman demonstrate a certain political commitment. Since politically committed art does not constitute the majority of the artworks exhibited with De Brug, it appears that this artists’ society was not particularly focussed on this type of art. Instead, politically committed art was exhibited with the SKK and during the 1930s with De Onafhankelijken and other organizations, such as the Bond van Kunstenaars ter Verdediging van de Kulturele rechten (BKVK). Nevertheless, due to the lack of strict selection criteria for members, De Brug offered a platform for artists who created politically committed art. Most artists, however, limited themselves to a-political representations of the social economic reality.

In general, the notions of the members of De Brug on the position of the artist are not immediately apparent. Nevertheless, besides their emphasis on the improvement of the relation between artist and public, their publications and exhibitions demonstrate that, according to the society’s members, the artist could contribute to society, or Dutch culture, by its artworks.

According to Christoph Wilhelmi in his publication on artists’ groups in Western Europe, the active phase of De Brug lasted until 1931. After that, De Brug functioned more as an exhibition society. This observation appears plausible. For example, in comparison to its first years of existence, the society did not accommodate many important artists during the 1930s. Moreover, the exhibited artworks did not attested to a high artistic quality and an innovative character.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 14. Charley Toorop only exhibited in 1926 and 1927 with De Brug. John Rädecker only exhibited with the society in 1927. Although he is mentioned in the 1926 exhibition catalogue of the Stedelijk Museum, he did not submit any works.

¹²⁵ Gribling 1982 (see note 67), p. 327.

¹²⁶ Ger Harmsen, *Chris Beekman. Een kunstenaarsleven 1887-1964*, exh. cat. Otterlo (Kröller-Müller Museum) 1999, p.105.

¹²⁷ Wilhelmi 2006 (see note 23), p. 94.

The ASB

Around 1926, the idea emerged within a certain group of artists, amongst whom Charley Toorop, John Rädecker and Jacob Bendien, to establish a new artists' society. This was caused by a dissatisfaction with the character of contemporary artists' societies, such as De Onafhankelijken and the Hollandsche Kunstenaarskring (HKK), regarding the artistic quality of their exhibitions, the dominance of expressionism within the HKK, and presumably the distinction between disciplines, drawn by these societies.¹²⁸ Moreover, with the increasing isolation of Theo van Doesburg and *De Stijl* around 1924, a need was created for a new forum that engaged itself with modern art.¹²⁹ During the same year, 1926, the previously discussed artists' society De Brug was established, with which Bendien, Rädecker and Toorop were connected as exhibiting artists. Given the fact that around the same period, ideas emerged concerning the establishment of a new artists' society, and Toorop and Rädecker left De Brug, it appears that this society did not totally satisfy the needs of the concerning artists.

In a letter to fellow artists, which was meant to find out whether there was interest in a new artists' society, the intentions of the new artists' society, titled ASB, were expressed:¹³⁰

‘Daar de beste jongere kunstenaars van verschillende richtingen steeds verspreid op tentoonstellingen exposeeren, willen wij trachten hen te verzamelen in één vereeniging om op deze manier de onderlinge band te vergrooten en betere tentoonstellingen te organiseeren. Tevens gelooven wij in dit nieuwe verband de belangstelling voor de jongere kunst te kunnen vergrooten en in bredere lagen van het publiek belangstelling te wekken. (...) De nieuw op te richten vereeniging zal ook contact zoeken met buitenlandsche kunstenaarsvereeningen en de band tusschen de verschillende kunsten trachten te bevorderen.’¹³¹

The letter was signed by Toorop, Bendien, Rädecker, sculptor Johan Polet (1894-1971) and Peter Alma. On the 13th of December 1926, the ASB was established at the house of

¹²⁸ Koopmans 2004 (see note 54), pp. 12 and 15. Before the establishment of the ASB, Toorop was involved in the HKK and De Brug.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 19.

¹³⁰ As previously mentioned, ASB was an abbreviation of Architectuur Schilderkunst Beeldhouwkunst. The choice for the name ASB was determined by a contemporary preference for abbreviations within artistic circles.

¹³¹ Cited from: *Invitation Charley Toorop, Jacob Bendien, John Rädecker, Johan Polet, Peter Alma to J.J.P. Oud*, 8 December 1926, Nederlands Architectuur Instituut, Rotterdam, Archive J.J.P. Oud, document B.35.26.251.

Toorop.¹³² Apart from this ‘declaration of intent’, there are no texts of the ASB, wherein the intentions of the society as such are presented. Consequently, their notions on art should be deduced from texts by individual artists that were connected with the ASB, and which are representative of the notions of the society as a whole.

As in the case of De Brug, the establishment of the ASB may have been inspired by ideas on the nature of contemporary art verbalized by Knuttel in his earlier mentioned lecture ‘Het classicisme en de kunst van heden’. His assertion that the figurative and abstract art of that period was characterized by the same objective vital life attitude, was shared by ‘intellectual key figure’ of the ASB Jacob Bendien, who also considered art an expression of a certain attitude towards life, and emphasized the interrelatedness between figurative and abstract art in his posthumously published book *Richtingen in de hedendaagsche schilderkunst* (1935).¹³³ Consequently, these ideas found their expression in the intentions of the ASB. With the establishment of the society, the ASB-artists intended to provide a qualitative overview of the artistic movements that at that time were topical in the Netherlands: from geometric abstraction and constructivism to new objectivity, neoclassicism and surrealism.¹³⁴ As Gerrit Rietveld stressed in his short opening lecture for the society’s first exhibition in 1928, the ASB thus, represented two general movements: abstract and figurative art.¹³⁵ The fact that between those two types of art no qualitative differences were made, is demonstrated by the ‘declaration of intent’, in which is stated:

‘De vereeniging zal bestaan uit schilders, beeldhouwers en architecten. De oprichters stellen zich niet op het standpunt, dat het karakter der Vereeniging door één enkele kunstrichting bepaald wordt. Zij gelooven dat voor iedere belangrijke uiting van dezen tijd plaats is en bedoelen de nieuwe vereeniging als een verzamelplaats van de beste jongere kunstenaars, die gezamenlijk het karakter van de vereeniging bepalen.’¹³⁶

¹³² The artists Carel Willink, Kasper Niehaus, Bernard Richters (1888-1966), Gerrit Rietveld, Jan F. Staal (1879-1940), Piet Mondrian, Bart van der Leck and J.J.P. Oud were invited for this meeting, of which the last three ultimately were absent. With regard to the society as a whole, Koopmans does not provide a concise list of members. Thus, it remains unclear which artists were a member and which artists were just invited to exhibit on the exhibitions. Nevertheless, Koopmans designates Charley Toorop as the ‘organizational motor’ and Jacob Bendien as the ‘intellectual key figure’ of the society. See Koopmans 2004 (note 54), p. 12. From his publication can also be deduced that Mondrian, Oud and Van der Leck were primarily exhibiting members. In general, the members of the ASB consisted of artists, such as Toorop, Willink, Rädecker and Van der Leck, that were promoted by H.P. Bremmer. For more information on Bremmer, see note 121.

¹³³ Jacob Bendien and An Harrenstein-Schröder, *Richtingen in de hedendaagsche schilderkunst*, Rotterdam 1935.

¹³⁴ Koopmans 2004 (see note 54), p. 9.

¹³⁵ Anonymous, ‘Tentoonstelling ASB’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 5 February 1928, p. 3.

¹³⁶ Cited from: *Invitation Charley Toorop et al* 1926 (see note 131).

As demonstrated by the name of the society, the artists of the ASB regarded architecture and the visual arts as two interrelated art disciplines and aimed to improve this mutual connection. In a lecture held on the occasion of the first ASB-exhibition, architect Sybold van Ravesteyn (1889-1983) emphasized this relation by stating that both types of art were determined by a certain amount of artistic freedom in its creation process. Moreover, contemporary architecture and the visual arts were mutually connected by the same objective attitude towards life.¹³⁷ The architects associated with the ASB, such as Van Ravesteyn, Rietveld and J.J.P. Oud, particularly admired the visual artists Bart van der Leck and Piet Mondrian, who exhibited on both the ASB-exhibitions, for their schematized formal language and their ideas on the interrelatedness of the two disciplines. Both artists were regarded as examples.¹³⁸

One of the defining characteristics of the ASB is the selection of artists on the basis of their artistic quality. This distinguished the ASB from other artists' societies, such as De Onafhankelijken and De Brug, in which artists were selected according to style and discipline.¹³⁹ In general, possible new members were recommended by artists that were already engaged in the ASB. The exact selection criteria are unknown, but it is plausible that artists were chosen for their progressiveness, the interplay of form and content in their works, and their future potential.¹⁴⁰ This resulted in the situation that most modern artists of that moment, for example Mondrian, Willink, Rädecker, Toorop, Van der Leck, Rietveld and Van Ravesteyn were accumulated in this society. Due to their emphasis on artistic quality, it appears that the members of the ASB aimed to exhibit the best examples of the contemporary avant-garde, for which they hoped to generate more public recognition and appreciation.¹⁴¹

The notions of the ASB on the position of the artist are not immediately apparent. Nevertheless, from the 'declaration of intent' and lectures can be deduced that, according to the society's members, artists, specifically the architect, could have a positive influence on the development of society and culture in general by providing the public with a view on reality or the desired future. Moreover, it appears that artists had a task in maintaining and developing the level of Dutch avant-garde art. For this process, and the development of

¹³⁷ (Sybold van Ravesteyn), 'Architectuur', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 9 February 1928, p. 7.

¹³⁸ Koopmans 2004 (see note 54), p. 16.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ Consequently, certain artists, such as Chris Hassoldt, were not included due to a lack of artistic quality. Moreover, the artist Erich Wichman (1890-1929) was not invited to join the society, because of his fascist orientation and his strong connection with expressionism. See Koopmans 2004 (note 54), p. 14.

¹⁴¹ *Invitation Toorop et al* 1926 (see note 131).

individual artists in general, the society's members regarded an international orientation, the cooperation of different art disciplines, and support of artistic quality essential.¹⁴²

During the society's existence, solely two exhibitions were organized by its members. Although these will be discussed more extensively in the next chapter, it needs to be observed that the notions on art and the position of the artist that informed those two exhibitions respectively, differed. The first exhibition, held in 1928, was an illustration of the ASB's notions on art as described above. Being regarded as the embodiment of the same life attitude, figurative and abstract art were equally represented on the exhibition. Moreover, the exhibited works demonstrated the society's aim to establish a connection between the visual arts and architecture, and their strict selection of artworks according to artistic quality.¹⁴³

Around the period of the second exhibition, held in 1929, the climate for abstract art became unfavourable. This was, however, not directly reflected in the design of this exhibition. Both types of art were represented, although the amount of figurative artworks outnumbered the abstract ones.¹⁴⁴ The composition of the exhibiting artists had also changed considerably.¹⁴⁵ Despite the fact that they were mentioned in the exhibition catalogue, sculptors Rådecker and Polet did not submit any works to the exhibition, which resulted in the lack of a sculpture department.¹⁴⁶ In general, architecture formed the largest part of the exhibition. Moreover, the inclusion of 'lesser gods' as Rudolf Bremmer (1900-1993) and Henk Wieggersma (1891-1969) within the exhibition demonstrates that the selection on the basis of artistic quality was not that strict anymore.¹⁴⁷ The second exhibition also showed an increasing focus on politically committed art, which may be attributed to the growing influence of Peter Alma, a communist orientated artist who was also engaged in the SKK. Due to his strong connections with the German Kölner Progressive, two of its members, Gerd Arntz (1900-1988) and Franz Seiwert (1894-1933), who were known for their schematized representations of the working class, were invited to exhibit on the ASB-exhibition.¹⁴⁸ Under the influence of Alma, the name of the ASB was also changed in *Architectuur Schilderwerk*

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Koopmans 2004 (see note 54), pp. 37-39.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 43-46.

¹⁴⁵ For example, painters Johan van Hell and Douwe van der Zweep, and sculptors Johan Polet and Bernard Richters did not submit any works to the second exhibition. Among the newcomers were Dirk Nijland, who was also a member of De Brug, and Raoul Hynckes.

¹⁴⁶ Koopmans 2004 (see note 54), p. 45.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 43.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 45-46.

Beeldhouwwerk.¹⁴⁹ The transition from the word ‘kunst’ to ‘werk’ appears to demonstrate his aversion to the term ‘art’, which was associated with the bourgeois middle class and the individualist artist, and his desire to present himself and the other artists involved in the ASB as art labourers. These changes in the course of the society may not have been met with approval by other members, and ultimately even may have dispelled certain members, for which the original intentions of the ASB formed the motivation to join the society.¹⁵⁰ Exact details concerning the disbandment of the ASB are lacking. Nevertheless, this situation, the declining health of ‘intellectual key figure’ of the society, Jacob Bendien,¹⁵¹ the departure of John Rådecker for Paris,¹⁵² and the fact that certain artists, such as Carel Willink, wanted to present themselves as an artistic individual,¹⁵³ may have caused its early end.

The Socialistische Kunstenaarskring

The SKK was established at the house of poet Jan W. Jacobs on the 6th of March 1927. One or two months before this date, an announcement, written by Jacobs, musician and journalist Paul F. Sanders and musician John F. Keja (1881-?), was placed in socialist newspaper *Het Volk*, in which they expressed their desire to establish an organization, which accommodated literary, visual and executing artists that were dedicated to the socialist ideal. Apart from Jacobs, Sanders and Key, fifteen artists eventually attended the meeting and became the first members of the SKK. During the subsequent years of its existence the number of members increased to 80 persons.¹⁵⁴ The SKK was open for every artist that endorsed the socialist cultural ideal and therefore constituted of social democrats, affiliated with the Sociaal Democratische Arbeiders Partij (SDAP), communists, who were united in the Communistische Partij Holland (CPH) and members of the Revolutionaire Socialistische Partij (RSP), a secession of the CPH.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, in retrospect we could say that the SKK

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 45.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 46. Particularly, ‘intellectual key figure’ of the society Jacob Bendien may have been opposed to the inclusion of qualitatively less artists and the dominance of socialist art, of which he was very critical, in the society’s exhibition. However, he was presumably not able to influence these developments due to his declining health. Bendien suffered from tuberculosis, which made him bedridden, and ultimately died in 1933.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 46.

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 45.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 49.

¹⁵⁴ Marie-José Buck (ed.), *Links Richten. Tussen partij en arbeidersstrijd. Materiaal voor een theorie over de literatuur en arbeidersstrijd*, 2 volumes, Nijmegen 1975, volume 1, p. 75. The announcement is untraceable.

¹⁵⁵ According to Harmsen, communist members of the SKK were not affiliated with the CPH, the later Communistische Partij Nederland (CPN), but a communist faction led by David Wijnkoop (1876-1941), designated by the name CPH-Wijnkoop (1926-1930), that was not officially acknowledged by the Soviet Union. See Harmsen 1999 (note 126), pp. 74-75. Given the fact that Wijnkoop returned to the CPH in 1930, the members of the SKK appear to have been connected with this political party after all.

was social democratic with a strong left wing of SDAP-opposites.¹⁵⁶

The *Statuten en huishoudelijk reglement* of 1928 provides a concise description of the general aim of the SKK. With the organization its members intended:

‘de kunstenaars die de verwezenlijking van het socialisme als beginsel aanvaarden vereenigen, ten einde de socialistische gedachte in de kunstuitingen van onzen tijd te bevorderen en te streven naar de opheffing van de bestaande scheiding tusschen kunstenaar en maatschappij. Zij stelt zich voorts ten doel, de socialistische arbeidersbeweging te dienen en de geestelijke en stoffelijke belangen harer leden te behartigen.’¹⁵⁷

In the regulations, certain means are proposed in order to achieve these objectives. Some of these means, such as the organization of meetings, exhibitions and performances, and the publication of a representative periodical and brochures are related to the distribution of the notions on art of the SKK-members, and thus, discussed in the following chapter. The other means, which are primarily intended to improve the position of art and the artist in society are treated here. With regard to the improvement of the position of art in society, the SKK aimed to fulfil an advising role in the labour movement and her institutes in relation to art matters. Moreover, they strove to advance competent art journalism and art education with the general public, for example by the introduction of obligatory art education on primary schools.¹⁵⁸ Regarding the economic position of the artist, the SKK intended to stimulate the organization of contests, the granting of bursaries and subsidies, and the making of honorarium arrangements. Furthermore, the SKK wished to function as a mediator in the distribution of official commissions.¹⁵⁹ Besides this concise description of means, other statements are made within this document of regulations, which relate to the desired social emancipation of the artist and his profession. For example, the SKK was against the use of dilettantes for honoured art activities and stimulated artists to join their own professional organizations.¹⁶⁰

The notions of the SKK regarding the position of the artist in society are further elaborated upon in a second document of regulations, titled *Reglement en begeleidend schrijven*.¹⁶¹ This document is undated, but presumably produced before 1928. In comparison

¹⁵⁶ Buck 1975 (see note 154), p. 75.

¹⁵⁷ Cited from: *Statuten en huishoudelijk reglement Socialistische Kunstenaars Kring*, 1928, City archive Amsterdam, collection Small Materials, document 15009/12719, p. 1.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 7-8.

¹⁶¹ *Reglement en begeleidend schrijven Socialistische Kunstenaars Kring*, undated, City archive Amsterdam, collection Small Materials, document 15009/12719.

to the first document it is formulated less concisely and there are differences regarding the subjects treated. For example, within the undated document the socialist struggle against capitalism and the desired elevation of the mass are emphasized.¹⁶² These subjects are virtually absent in the document of 1928.¹⁶³

Concerning the improvement of the social and/or economic position of the artist, it is stated within the undated *Reglement en begeleidend schrijven* that the SKK aimed to secure the rights of the artist by preventing that these become the property of capitalist persons and/or bodies. Although, this statement is not further elucidated, it appears that the SKK desired to represent the social and economic interests of the artist, thereby guaranteeing his/her independence from so-called ‘capitalist’ organizations.¹⁶⁴ In order to effect this, the SKK intended, for example, to support needy members by means of a financial fund.¹⁶⁵ Within the document, it is also stated that the SKK demanded financial support for artists that were forced to practice another profession in order to provide an income. These financial measures, by which an income is provided by the SKK or the government, appear to have vanished in the document of 1928. Instead, the focus is on the mediating role of the SKK with regard to the distribution of art commissions.

According to the members of the SKK, the improvement of the position of the artist in society required a close cooperation between artists, but also between socialist organizations, in order to exchange ideas and seek support. In this respect their aims corresponded with the general socialist emphasis on the importance of the community and cooperation.¹⁶⁶ According to the *Statuten en huishoudelijk reglement* of 1928, the SKK attempted to achieve this objectives by ‘het plaatselijk zowel als landelijk bijeenkomsten, tot het houden van besprekingen en het wederkerig kennis nemen van elkanders arbeid.’ This written intention demonstrates that the society aimed to provide a forum for the development and exchange of notions on art among artists.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 1. With regard to this aspect, it is stated within the document: ‘De SKK stelt zich ten doel, de kunstenaars uit de Socialistische beweging te organiseeren in een verband dat scherp stelling neemt tegenover alles, wat de kapitalistische maatschappij manifesteert en propageert in haar kunstuitingen, voor zooverre deze door het monopoliseeren van de kunst ten behoeven van een kleine groep bezitters, vijandig staat tegenover de socialisatie van de maatschappij.’

¹⁶³ Within the undated *Reglement en begeleidend schrijven*, the idea of a ‘Centraal Bureau’ is introduced. The specific tasks of this organ in comparison with the society’s board and the society in general, is relatively vague. The ‘Centraal Bureau’ is no longer mentioned in the regulations of 1928.

¹⁶⁴ *Reglement en begeleidend schrijven Socialistische Kunstenaars Kring* (see note 161), p. 8.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 8.

¹⁶⁶ Andrew Heywood, *Political ideologies. An introduction*, Houndmills-Basingstoke/New York 2007⁴ (1992), p. 102.

¹⁶⁷ Cited from: *Reglement en begeleidend schrijven Socialistische Kunstenaars Kring* (see note 161), p. 2.

The two documents of regulations show that the improvement of the artists' position in society was an important focus point within the program of the SKK. According to its members the artist occupied a crucial role in the socialist aims of the elevation of the masses, the class struggle, and the subsequent creation of a new society. This social task was further elaborated upon by Jan W. Jacobs, one of the establishers of the SKK, in his article 'Eenige overdenkingen bij de oprichting van de Socialistische Kunstenaarskring' (1927) for *De Socialistische Gids*, the periodical of the SDAP. In his article Jacobs criticizes the still existing individualism and often self-chosen social isolation of artists.¹⁶⁸ Instead, artists should employ their capacities to contribute to the creation of a new society, which the author, inspired by the general socialist emphasis on equality,¹⁶⁹ describes as 'een staat waar geen heerschers en overheerschten zijn, (...), maar als een gemeenschap, waar geleefd wordt in den hoogsten zin des woords.'¹⁷⁰ How this should be brought about does not become clear from Jacobs' article. Nevertheless, he urges the artist to leave his ivory tower and to become involved in society.¹⁷¹ The article demonstrates that for Jacobs and other members of the SKK art and socialism were inseparable concepts. They believed in a socialist art.¹⁷² Nevertheless, this type of art and the new, socialist society, did still not exist. Jacobs claims in this respect: 'Van een socialistische kunst en socialistische kunstenaars kan geen sprake zijn, zolang de socialistische maatschappij niet is gegrondvest.'¹⁷³ However, the members of the SKK recognized symptoms of its coming in contemporary artistic expressions. Within the catalogue of their exhibition *Socialistische Kunst Heden* (1930), which will be discussed in the next chapter, it is stated that the members

'worden in hun overtuiging gestaafd door de overweging, dat eenerzijds de maatschappelijke bewustwording van den kunstenaar, zijn groeiend inzicht in oorsprong en wezen der klasse-
 tegenstellingen, zijn politieke partijdigheid in den klassestrijd, het besef van het
 onverbreekelijk verband tusschen kunst en maatschappij, anderzijds zijn strijd voor de
 verheffing der arbeidersklasse en zijn onverzettelijk geloof in de toekomst eener betere
 samenleving, het aanzijn MOETEN geven aan een ideologische gezindheid, die de

¹⁶⁸ Buck 1975 (see note 154), pp. 76-77.

¹⁶⁹ Heywood 2007 (see note 166), p. 105.

¹⁷⁰ Cited from: Jan W. Jacobs, 'Eenige overdenkingen bij het oprichten van den socialistische kunstenaarskring', *De Socialistische Gids* vol. 12 (1927) no. 5 (Mai), p. 400.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

¹⁷² *Socialistische Kunst Heden*, exh. cat. Amsterdam (Stedelijk Museum) 1930.

¹⁷³ Cited from: Jacobs 1927 (see note 170), p. 402.

levenwekkende factoren in zich draagt voor de vrije ontplooiing der nieuwe socialistische kunst.¹⁷⁴

This quotation demonstrates that the members of the SKK were particularly occupied with the relation between artists and the working class, and believed in the solidarity between these two groups. Important and relating concepts in this respect were the elevation of the masses and the class struggle. Both were regarded as preconditions for the emergence of a new socialist society and in both cases the artist had an important role to fulfil.

Concerning the elevation of the masses, this is expressed within the undated *Reglement en begeleidend schrijven* of the SKK by the following statement:

‘De kunst aan de massa om haar, al dienende, op te voeren tot die hoogere beschaving welke den mensch over de onredelijke tegenstellingen en wreede wetten en begrippen brengt tot een nieuwe, schoone gemeenschap, tot een betere maatschappij.’¹⁷⁵

Influenced by a general belief in the beneficial effect of culture participation and art enjoyment,¹⁷⁶ art was regarded as essential for the health, civilisation and enrichment of human beings.¹⁷⁷ According to Jacobs, the task of the artist was herein: ‘den mensch het menschzijn in volkomenheid doen beleven’ and ‘hem innerlijk te verrijken.’¹⁷⁸

It appears that these rather elitist notions of the SKK were drawn from social democratic views on art, which found their expression in the SDAP-society *Kunst aan het Volk* (1903-1928), in which artists and well-to-do citizens devoted themselves to the education and elevation of the masses by means of art.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the notions of the SKK on the relation between artist and the working class diverged from the views held by *Kunst aan het Volk*. To what extent the members of the SKK dissociated themselves deliberately from this organization, which was disbanded a year after the establishment of the SKK, remains unclear due to the lack of archive material concerning this subject. An important difference between the two organizations, however, was their solution for the question how to bridge the gap between art and the masses. Whereas *Kunst aan het Volk*

¹⁷⁴ Cited from: *Socialistische Kunst Heden* 1930 (see note 172).

¹⁷⁵ Cited from: *Reglement en begeleidend schrijven Socialistische Kunstenaars Kring* undated (see note 161), p. 4.

¹⁷⁶ Marc Adang *Voor sociaal-democratie, smaakopvoeding en verheffend genot. De Amsterdamse vereniging Kunst aan het Volk 1903-1928*, Amsterdam 2008, p. 14.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 7.

¹⁷⁸ Cited from: Jacobs 1927 (see note 170), p. 403.

¹⁷⁹ Adang 2008 (see note 176), pp. 14-15.

aimed to help the workers to adjust to bourgeois art and taste, the SKK advocated that artists themselves changed their artistic practice by adjusting to the needs of the working class.¹⁸⁰ According to the members of the SKK this could only be achieved by making art accessible for the masses, in terms of content and style. Moreover, artists had to focus on the representation of contemporary themes, in which criticism on the ruling society system was the main concern.¹⁸¹ The differences between the SKK and Kunst aan het Volk are further elucidated by an article of sociologist and prominent SDAP-member Willem A. Bonger (1876-1940). In a review of the publication *Zur Psychologie des Sozialismus* (1926) by Hendrik de Man (1885-1953) for *De Socialistische Gids* in 1927, Bonger asserts:

‘Proletarische kultuur is eigenlijk een contradictio in terminis: een onderdrukte klasse op laag materieel niveau heeft geen eigen kultuur en kan ze niet hebben. Iedere onderliggende klasse tracht in haar worsteling omhoog eerst de kultuur van de heerschende klasse over te nemen. Bij een nieuw gevestigde maatschappelijke orde kan dan een nieuwe kultuur ontstaan.’¹⁸²

Opposed to Bonger, who, as a former director of Kunst aan het Volk, implied that the adaptation to the culture of the ruling class formed a precondition for the suppressed class to emancipate, the members of the SKK thought that the artist, as part of the ruling, bourgeois class, should adjust his practice to the needs of the suppressed working class, thereby indirectly acknowledging the possibilities of a proletarian culture. The assertion that a new culture or true socialist art was solely possible within the context of a new social order, was shared by Bonger and the members of the SKK. Nevertheless, the latter believed that socialist art was already developing in the present society.

With regard to the relation between artist and working class, the differences between the SKK and the SDAP became striking with the so-called ‘Art documents-matter’ in 1929. The concerning documents, which contained propositions for a socialist art policy on a municipal level, were produced by certain SKK-members as a protest to the contemporary social-democratic art policy in Amsterdam. They primarily criticized the council’s individual instead of programmatic approach to art matters, their reformist policy that maintained the existing bourgeois capitalist culture and the lack of subsidies. The most significant proposition of the SKK was the establishment of an art council, consisting of artists and

¹⁸⁰ Buck 1975 (see note 154), pp. 78 and 92.

¹⁸¹ Jansen and Rogier 1983 (see note 115), p. 184.

¹⁸² Cited from: W.A. Bonger, ‘Het boek van De Man’, *De Socialistische Gids* vol. 12 (1927) no. 8-9 (August-September), p. 686.

workers, that should offer advice with regard to art education, the granting of subsidies and other policy matters. Particularly the suggestion of providing the workers with a participation say in art matters, caused a controversy between the SDAP and the SKK.¹⁸³ Within this thesis, this situation will not be elaborated upon extensively. It will suffice to say that the SDAP-council dismissed the ideas of the SKK as utopian and even communist, and that the propositions of the SKK were never realised.¹⁸⁴

Besides the elevation of the masses, the class struggle was also regarded as a necessary pre-condition for the emergence of a new society. Within the *Beginselverklaring*, formulated by the members of the SKK in 1931, an elaboration on the nature and necessity of the class struggle, and the solidarity between artist and proletariat, is provided. According to this document, art could function as a possible weapon in the class struggle, if it focused on the support and encouragement of that struggle, unimpededly exposed the errors and consequences of the capitalist society, and represented this in a matching form.¹⁸⁵ With regard to this last aspect, it is stated that the artist cannot ignore proletarian traditions and the past technical experiments of bourgeois artists. Nevertheless, the artist

‘zal ze altijd met het kritische oog van de klassenstrijder moeten beschouwen, hij zal slechts datgene mogen overnemen en toepassen wat wezenlijk kan bijdragen tot het verkrijgen van een passende vorm voor den inhoud van een revolutionair kunstwerk.’¹⁸⁶

A debate between the artists Peter Alma and Lou Loeber, organized in January 1930 by the SKK, demonstrates however, that these views not represented all members. Whereas Alma asserted that art had to contribute to the class struggle by representing class relations in a clear, figurative manner, Loeber advocated a socialist art that was an expression of ‘het algemeen menselijke’, by which she acknowledged the necessity of new forms.¹⁸⁷ This example demonstrates that there was no general consensus regarding the nature of socialist art within the society.

Apart from these mutual disagreements on content, the future course of the society also caused internal struggles. With regard to the society’s organizational structure, social

¹⁸³ Buck 1975 (see note 154), pp. 80-84.

¹⁸⁴ The publication *Links Richten* (1975) provides an extensive description of the ‘Art documents-matter’.

¹⁸⁵ *Beginselverklaring van den socialistischen kunstenaarskring (S.K.K.)*, 1931, Institute of Social History Amsterdam, Archive Jan W. Jacobs, pp. 5-6.

¹⁸⁶ Cited from: *ibid*, p. 6.

¹⁸⁷ Gribbling 1982 (see note 67), p. 326. At the end of 1930, another debate on the subject of art as a weapon in the class struggle with the title ‘Kunst is een wapen in de klasse strijd’ was organized by the SKK.

democrat and member of the SKK, Marie de Roode Heyermans (1859-1937), publicized in *De Socialistische Gids* the article ‘De Socialistische Kunstenaarskring. Een levensvatbare organisatie?’ (1931), in which she criticized the dominance of communist elements within the organisation, and the undemocratic course of events with regard to the earlier mentioned ‘Art documents-matter’ in 1929.¹⁸⁸ During the beginning of the 1930s, the SKK indeed seemed more orientated towards the communist party instead of the SDAP, which was already demonstrated by the ‘Art documents-matter’. In 1934, these events resulted in an official declaration of the SDAP that its membership was incompatible with the membership of the SKK, which in turn caused certain social democratic SKK-members to leave the society.¹⁸⁹ Congruent with international developments, the members of the SKK also changed during this period their focus from the emancipation of the working class to the struggle against the ‘culture fascism’ of Nazi-Germany and the SDAP, whose art policy was responsible for the removal of certain politically committed artworks from the exhibitions of *De Onafhankelijken*.¹⁹⁰

Due to a lack of archive material it is difficult to determine the exact factors that caused the disbandment of the SKK in 1934. It is, however, plausible that internal struggles with regard to the nature of socialist art and the future course of the society contributed substantially to this process. Moreover, members of the SKK became increasingly engaged in other organizations that struggled against ‘culture fascism’.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ Marie de Roode-Heijermans, ‘De Socialistische Kunstenaarskring. Een levensvatbare organisatie?’, *De Socialistische Gids* vol. 16 (1931) no. 2 (February), pp. 122-124.

¹⁸⁹ Buck 1975 (see note 154), p. 95.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 95.

¹⁹¹ Wilhelmi 2006 (see note 23), p. 526.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the role of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK in the production of notions on art and the position of the artist during the Interwar period. Through their activities, these societies all provided a forum for artists to develop and exchange their notions on art. These communication processes could contribute, for example, to the artist's individual professional growth, but also the further development of the society as such.

The character and the position of the artists' society within the contemporary artistic debate was determined by the notions on art that were developed within the context of the artists' society and the ones that initially formed the basis of its establishment. By having their own focus points, De Brug, the ASB and the SKK all occupied a distinct position within this artistic debate. The artists of De Brug particularly represented the contemporary return to figurative art, which was characterized by a detailed depiction of recognisable subjects, and labelled by the term 'new objectivity'. In contrast, the founding members of the ASB did not want to restrict themselves to certain art disciplines and styles, but aimed to accommodate the best artists of various contemporary avant-garde movements. Influenced by contemporary ideas on the shared attitude towards life as a basis of all artistic expressions, they did not distinguish between figurative and abstract art. Moreover, they emphasized the connection between the visual arts and architecture. Although both societies exhibited politically committed art, the strongest representative of this type of art was the SKK, which was established with the intention to unite artists with the same political orientation and advance the development of socialist art. Moreover, its members desired to contribute to the development of a new social system, by playing an active part in the elevation of the masses and the class struggle.

Despite their mutual differences, the artists' societies were united in their concern for the position of art in society, and in particular the connection between artist and public. In an age where the government played a limited role in art matters, all societies appear to have regarded the collective, in other words the joining of artistic forces within one society, as a necessary condition for the improvement of this relation. Nevertheless, they advocated different solutions. The members of De Brug aimed to improve the relation between artist and public by removing financial barriers with regard to the acquisition of art. The activities of the ASB were rather focussed on the presentation of high-quality modern art to their audience in order to improve the public appreciation of this type of artistic expressions. Most of the actions of the SKK in relation to this theme were directed towards the improvement of the

position of the artist, by means of, for example, financial arrangements, the stimulation of the mutual cooperation between artists and cultural, socialist organizations and a change of art itself in terms of form and content. Most members of the SKK regarded figurative art with recognisable objects as the best means to reach the public. Besides the improvement of the relation between artist and public, the members of the SKK also intended to influence a certain part of their audience itself, which was visible in their aim to contribute to the elevation of the working class.

The above mentioned examples demonstrate that according to the three artists' societies the artist in general occupied a precarious position in society that had to be improved. Besides this view, the notions of the concerning artists' societies also pertained the supposed tasks the artists had to fulfil. Albeit sometimes indirectly, all artists' societies acknowledged the beneficial influence of art on society. In this respect, the task of the artist according to the SKK is clear: the artist had to employ his particular skills for the development of a new, socialist society. With De Brug and the ASB the desired role of the artist is not immediately apparent. However, it appears that within both artists' societies the main task of the artist was to provide the public with his/her views on reality and/or the desired future in order to make a positive contribution to society, culture and/or art in general.

To conclude, it is important to note that various artists were engaged in different artists' societies at the same time. For example, Charley Toorop and Johan van Hell exhibited with all three societies discussed here. It appears that the notions on art and the position of the artist of the different societies were not regarded as dogmatic by the artists. Rather, the societies were considered as different opportunities to exhibit their work to the public and to attract potential buyers.

With regard to the societies' individual notions on art and the position of the artist, it is also important to observe that these societies formed a collection of members, that all had their own view on art. Although these views often corresponded, the image of the artists' society with one coherent set of notions on art and the position of the artist is an illusion. This situation ultimately appears to have had consequences for the societies themselves. In the case of the ASB and the SKK, mutual disagreements regarding the vision and future course of the organization has contributed to the societies' disbandment. With regard to De Brug, the lack of a coherent set of notions appears not to have hindered the existence of the society. Instead, the less dogmatic attitude of the members of De Brug, in comparison to the other two societies, may have contributed to the fact that the society subsisted until 1996.

Chapter 3 | Expressing and distributing notions

‘Wij stellen ons voor dit niet alleen door exposities, maar ook door lezingen, uitgave van geschriften en reproducties te doen.’¹⁹²

According to the ASB’s ‘declaration of intent’, the activities mentioned in this quote were primarily intended to increase the interest for modern art among larger segments of the population. Nevertheless, the same activities also provided opportunities for the distribution of notions on art and the position of the artist. This chapter will focus on the question how this type of distribution was ensured by De Brug, the ASB and the SKK. For this purpose, the theory of Hans van Maanen will be connected with the distribution activities of the here discussed artists’ societies. Moreover, it will be established whether the here discussed artists’ societies aimed to address a certain audience in order to distribute their notions on art and the position of the artist, and employed particular strategies to effect this. The chapter will end with a short conclusion.

In Van Maanen’s publication, distribution is defined as the process of putting potential users of art, the audience, in contact with aesthetic utterances.¹⁹³ The domain of distribution comprises of organizational structures, for example the museum, theatre and the concert hall, processes or in other words the ways of programming, offering an marketing aesthetic works, and its outcomes: the types and numbers of aesthetic experience situations.¹⁹⁴ The outcomes, which are designated by Van Maanen with the term ‘art events’, can be defined as a communication processes organized in time and space on the basis of an aesthetic utterance. Examples of such art events are exhibitions and theatre performances. Distributing institutes function as a kind of ‘translation centres’ in making the works of art available, creating audiences for it, bringing both together, and thereby organizing aesthetic communication in society.¹⁹⁵ With regard to this last aspect, the organization of the distribution domain contributes to the functioning of art in society by providing it with various types of aesthetic events.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Cited from: *Invitation Charley Toorop et al* 1926 (see note 131).

¹⁹³ Van Maanen 2009 (see note 10), p. 292.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 12.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 143.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 265.

According to Van Maanen, the artists' society is one of the organizational structures of the distribution domain: it offers and markets works of art within an art event, for example an exhibition, thereby connecting the artworks and/or the artist with the public, and contributing to the organization of aesthetic communication in society. Applying Van Maanen's theory on the subject of this thesis, the production, distribution and reception of notions on art and the position of the artist, it appears that the role of artists' societies in the distribution domain is more complicated than that. Apart from propagating their own notions on art, the artists' society provided a platform for artists to express their individual ideas. For example, the exhibitions of the ASB offered Mondrian opportunities to present his views regarding neoplasticism to the general public, and the exhibitions of De Brug included artworks with socialist content, although the society itself was not necessarily politically committed.

The notions of the individual artists and the artists' societies were distributed by means of the form and content of the artworks themselves, and their selection and arrangement on the exhibitions. Moreover, these notions were communicated through publications and lectures, written and held by the society's members. Particularly during the first decades of the twentieth century, often referred to as the 'period of manifestos', artists' groups and/or societies accompanied the presentation of their artworks with written or verbally expressed statements on the nature and objective of their artistic expressions.¹⁹⁷ Although a manifesto in the classical sense was published by none of the artists' societies discussed here, considerable effort was devoted to the communication of their notions to the public by their members. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, particularly the members of the SKK showed passionate enthusiasm in defending their artistic standpoints.

The activities of artists' societies were not limited to exhibitions and these verbal and written expressions. Corresponding with their often multidisciplinary character, artists' societies also organized debate evenings, concerts, theatre and dance performances, and poetry recitals. In general, all the above mentioned activities provided opportunities for the artists' society to present their notions about art and the position of the artist to the audience, to generate interest for certain specific art matters, to guide the artistic debate, to recruit new members and supporters, and to gain influence in art institutions and government circles. In this manner, artists' societies eventually aimed to influence the societal functioning of art, that is the improvement of its position in society, an objective pursued by the members of De Brug as well as the ASB and the SKK. According to Van Maanen the artistic position of a

¹⁹⁷ Wilhelmi 1996 (see note 3), p. 16.

distribution organization is determined by the totality of its events.¹⁹⁸ With regard to the here discussed artists' societies, this is partially valid. De Brug, the ASB and the SKK distinguished themselves by means of their activities. Nevertheless, the character of the societies was particularly determined by the members' notions on art and the position of the artist, which in turn shaped their activities.

At this point it is important to consider the distribution activities of the De Brug, the ASB and the SKK in depth. In order to analyse the 'core activity' of these artists' societies, the organization of exhibitions, the theory of Van Maanen will be employed. According to this author the organization and the final character of such events are determined by four types of input: the habitus of whoever is artistically responsible for the event, the material, personnel and facilitating conditions, the supply of types of aesthetic utterances, and the presence and needs of potential audiences in the environment.¹⁹⁹

The first factor, the habitus of the person artistically responsible for the event, determines the way the other three categories are assessed and deployed.²⁰⁰ Van Maanen employs the term 'habitus' differently than Bourdieu originally did. In contrast to Bourdieu's theory, where the term refers to the set of permanent structures of perception and evaluation which govern how people act,²⁰¹ Van Maanen describes the habitus of the artistically responsible person as the intentions that person has with art and artists on the one hand, and with potential audiences on the other. In other words, does this person support the development of art and the artist or does he/she serve the needs of the public? With regard to the exhibitions, held by the here discussed artists' societies, usually a group of people instead of one person was artistically responsible for the event. Often this group primarily consisted of artists. Regarding the question whether to serve art and the artist or the audience, artists' societies generally tended to focus on the interests of art and the artist. Nevertheless, the audience played a significant part in this. The exhibitions held by all three artists' societies, were intended as opportunities for the public to become acquainted with and learn to appreciate certain types of art, thereby establishing a closer relation between art and the public, and contributing to the improvement of the social position of the artist. With regard to the distribution of the society's notions on art on the exhibition, the habitus of the initiators was particularly important, as it determined the notions that had to be communicated and the

¹⁹⁸ Van Maanen 2009 (see note 10), p. 265.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 246.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 247.

²⁰¹ Ibid, p. 58.

manner in which this had be done, for example, by means of the selection and arrangement of certain artworks and their physical arrangement in the exhibition space.

The second factor that influences the organization and eventual character of an exhibition, are the available materials, personnel and facilities. Due to its rich artistic life and the availability of an audience receptive to modern art, Amsterdam functioned as the principal location for the activities of the artists' societies. Albeit to varying extents, the exhibitions of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK were held in the Stedelijk Museum, an institute which stimulated contemporary Dutch art by lending exhibition room to artists' societies.²⁰² The members of the societies themselves were primarily responsible for the organization and physical design of the exhibitions.

The organizational process and the final exhibition are also influenced by the supply of types of aesthetic utterances, the works of art. Distribution organizations make a certain selection from the artistic supply, which they want to present to the public.²⁰³ Generally, this supply can be divided into decorative, comfortable types of art, and challenging, artistic types of art, which all generate their own type of reception with the public, for example, a stimulation of creative and imaginative thinking, a change in perception and a need to share these experiences with others. This process is influenced by certain characteristics of the artwork: the sort material and how it has been employed, its content, the degree of abstraction and its artistic appeal.²⁰⁴ Before selecting aesthetic utterances, distributors should thus first establish what type of reception they wish to elicit and what type of artworks will actually contribute to this.²⁰⁵ It is questionable whether the here discussed artists' societies always selected the potentially exhibited artworks in view of their possible reception. Rather, the selection process and the arrangement of the artworks were determined by the general intentions of the society, in other words, the artworks and their arrangement had to be a representation of the society's notions on art and the position of the artist. These notions were not solely communicated by the selection and the arrangement of artworks, but also by means of written material available at the exhibition, such as exhibition catalogues and magazines.²⁰⁶

The last factor that determines the organization and eventual character of the exhibition is the presence and needs of potential audiences in the environment. Various

²⁰² Jansen and Rogier 1983 (see note 115), p. 169.

²⁰³ Van Maanen 2009 (see note 10), p. 253.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, pp. 267-268.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 255.

²⁰⁶ Within the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, a reference is made to a reading table at the first ASB-exhibition. See Anonymous *Algemeen Handelsblad* 1928 (see note 135), p. 3.

sociologists have distinguished between different types of audiences.²⁰⁷ Van Maanen borrows this classification in his own publication. He distinguishes between a professional audience, which consists of colleagues and other professionals in the art sector, experienced audience members, who often visit aesthetic events, in search of an exceptional artistic experience, and an occasional audience, which refers to a part of the public that, based on various reasons, occasionally visit such events.²⁰⁸ The type of audience is determined by their interest, socio-graphic position and their aesthetic competence, in terms of their imaginative power and command of the aesthetic language.²⁰⁹

The selection of an audience is connected to the mechanics of marketing. According to the rather complex definition of Van Maanen, this concerns ‘the activities an organization undertakes which are aimed at influencing the interaction between one or more stakeholders to promote the exchange of values between one or more target groups.’²¹⁰ One of the principal questions in this process, which has to be addressed by the distribution organization, is: does the nature of the artwork and the aesthetic event in which it is presented, determine the type of audience or, conversely, does the audience preferences determine the character of the event? The choice depends on the intention of the distribution organization in relation to art, artists and audience, the objectives the aesthetic event is intended to achieve, and the position of the intended target group in relation to events in terms of competence and needs.²¹¹ According to Van Maanen marketing should be directed towards the development of a desire among potential visitors. This requires an analysis of the already existing artistic supply and the potential audience, in terms of presence and size, competence and need, reachability and organisability, and interest.²¹² With regard to this thesis subject, it is questionable whether the artists’ societies discussed here performed such comprehensive analyses in order to select their potential audience. Nevertheless, it appears that artists’ societies aimed to attract a certain audience with their exhibitions, and employed particular strategies to reach them. This observation can also be applied to the total of the societies’ distribution activities. In this case, the exhibitions and the other activities, organized by the societies, functioned as strategies to distribute their notions on art and the position of the artist among their intended audience.

²⁰⁷ Van Maanen 2009 (see note 10), p. 268. For example, Becker distinguishes between a well-socialized audience, a serious and experienced public, and present and former art students.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, pp. 268-269.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, pp. 268-271.

²¹⁰ Ibid, p. 258.

²¹¹ Ibid, p. 259.

²¹² Ibid, pp. 260-262.

De Brug

During the Interwar period, De Brug annually held one or two exhibitions. Because it is impossible to consider each one extensively, the scope of this thesis is limited to the discussion of the society's first two exhibitions in 1926, respectively held in Kunstzaal Pictura in The Hague and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Because the character of the exhibitions, organized by De Brug, did not change considerably over the years, these examples are representative for the society's exhibition activities.

Due to the lack of archive material, the exact intentions behind the exhibitions of De Brug are unknown. Nevertheless, with regard to Van Maanen's first factor, the habitus of the artistically responsible people, the earlier mentioned 'gelegenheidsbundels' of 1926 (sic) and 1927 demonstrate that the society's members foremost aimed to support the development of art and the artist instead of serving the needs of the general public. The exhibitions were primarily intended as possibilities for artists to present their work to the audience in order to receive public recognition. In this respect, the members of De Brug particularly aimed with their exhibitions to form a meeting point for the developments in the domain of figurative art, in particular the 'new objective art'.

The first exhibition of the society was held between the 14th of September and the 5th of October 1926 in the Kunstzaal Pictura in The Hague. The reason for exhibiting at Pictura instead of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, which was quite common for artists' societies in those days, is unknown. Between the 20th of November and the 13th of December 1926, De Brug held its second exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum. Although the future exhibition activities of the society were primarily concentrated in this museum, De Brug also exhibited on other locations. For example, in 1927 the society organized an exhibition tour throughout the Netherlands.²¹³ Moreover, between 1926 and 1927 the society possessed permanent exhibition rooms in the Frans Halsstraat in Amsterdam.²¹⁴ Both initiatives can be regarded as means, employed to generate more publicity for De Brug and the notions on art shared by its members, and to establish a better relation between artist and public, the society's most important aim. Particularly the permanent exhibition rooms were intended as opportunities to establish direct contact between artist and art lover.²¹⁵ In order to finance their exhibitions, the

²¹³ Exhibitions were held in Amsterdam, Overveen, Den Haag, Dordrecht, Amersfoort, Enschede, Leeuwarden, Groningen. *De Vereeniging van Nederl. beeldende kunstenaars De Brug* 1927 (see note 112), p. 2.

²¹⁴ *De Vereeniging van Nederl. beeldende kunstenaars De Brug*, Amsterdam 1926 (see note 114), p. 12. A sticker in the 'gelegenheidsbundel' of 1927 shows that these rooms were already closed in 1927.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 12.

society primarily depended on membership fees and private funds. With regard to this aspect, within the ‘gelegenheidsbundel’ of 1927, it is stated that De Brug desires to attract Dutch art lovers, that aim to provide the youngest Dutch visual artists with the possibility to organize exhibitions, lectures and artistic evenings.²¹⁶ Whether they were successful in attracting these well-to-do individuals, is unknown. Nevertheless, the financial means appear to have been sufficient to the extent that it was possible to organize exhibitions twice a year.

With regard to the selection of aesthetic utterances for their exhibitions, it appears that these works were selected according to their discipline, the visual arts, and their style, a detailed depiction of recognisable objects. The society’s first exhibition at Pictura consisted of paintings and graphic arts, which can be classified as town views, animal paintings, portraits, and landscapes. With regard to this exhibition, it proved to be difficult to establish which artworks were actually exhibited. One of the artworks that could be retrieved, was the painting *Drie figuren* (1926, ill. 6) by Charley Toorop, a depiction of two women with a procurer in a Rotterdam bar.²¹⁷

Besides paintings and graphic arts, the second exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum also included sculpture from Chris Hassoldt (1877-1956) and Jules Vermeire (1855-1977). The exhibited artworks primarily comprised of portraits, landscapes, city views and still lifes, such as *Standbeeld van Jacob Cats te Brouwershaven* (1922, ill. 7) by Dirk Nijland and *Stilleven met eieren* (undated, ill. 8) by Sal Meijer.²¹⁸ These chosen examples all demonstrate the society’s members preference for recognisable subjects, depicted in an objective manner.

Given the fact that these exhibitions solely featured figurative artworks, created from traditional art materials, with a relatively common and a-political subject matter, it appears that De Brug primarily provided their audience with comforting instead of challenging artistic

²¹⁶ *De Vereeniging van Nederl. beeldende kunstenaars De Brug 1927* (see note 112), p. 2.

²¹⁷ The following artists exhibited at the first exhibition of the society: Rudolf Bremmer, Otto Hanrath, Johan van Hell, Arend Hendriks (1901-1951), Truus G.M. van Hettinga Tromp (1872-1962), Jan Heijse (1882-1954), J.J. Isaäcson, Dirk Kruizinga (1895-1972), Dirk Nanninga, Jacob Nieweg (1877-1955), Christiaan Schaaf, Walter Smith, Charley Toorop, Jan Visser (1879-1961), Jan Wittenberg (1886-1963), Wilm Wouters, and Sal Meijer. *Tentoonstelling van Werken door leden van de Vereen. Van Nederlandsche beeldende kunstenaars De Brug in de Kunstzaal Pictura*, exh. cat. Den Haag (Pictura) 1926.

²¹⁸ The following artists exhibited at the second exhibition of the society: Marinus Adamse (1891-1977), Jacob Bendien, Rudolf Bremmer, Aart van Dobbenburgh (1899-1988), Johannes H. Fekkes (1885-1933), Otto Hanrath, Chris Hassoldt, Johan van Hell, Arend Hendriks, Truus G.M. van Hettinga Tromp, Jan Heijse, J.J. Isaäcson, Dirk Kruizinga, Sal Meijer, Dirk Nanninga, Jacob Nieweg, Dirk Nijland, Christiaan Schaaf, Wout Schram (1895-1987), Walter Smith, Charley Toorop, Valentijn van Uytvanck (1896-1950), Karel van Veen (1898-1988), Leen Verhoeven (1883-1932), Jan Visser, Jan Wittenberg, Wilm Wouters, and Jules Vermeire. John Rädecker is mentioned in the exhibition catalogue, but ultimately did not submit any works. *Catalogus van schilderijen, beeldhouwwerken, teekeningen en grafische werken tentoongesteld door de Vereeniging van Nederlandsche beeldende kunstenaars De Brug in het Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam*, exh. cat. Amsterdam (Stedelijk Museum) 1926.

expressions. Their faithful representation of the contemporary socio-economic reality made the artworks highly accessible and agreeable to the public, in that it did not challenge their perception on art and/or their world view.

To what extent can the selection of artworks for the exhibitions be regarded as a visualisation, and thus distribution, of the society's notions on art? In general, the selection of artworks in terms of discipline and style, represented the society's desire to form a meeting point for 'new objective' art. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, it is questionable whether this focus on figurative art was an expression of the society's aim to establish a better relation between artist and public. Nevertheless, the high accessibility of the exhibited artworks may have contributed to the generation of more public interest in their art.

In its capacity as organization, which primarily focused on the needs of artists, it appears that the character of the society's exhibitions was not determined by audience preferences. Rather, the nature of the selected artworks and the exhibitions determined the type of audience. Despite the members' aim of improving the relation between artist and public, the content of the exhibitions, thus, appears to be primarily formed by the preferences and needs of the artists, affiliated with the society. With regard to the intended audience for these exhibitions, the society has not left behind any information. Nevertheless, it appears that with these events, the members hoped to reach a cultivated public that was able to appreciate their artistic expressions. As we have seen, they also aimed to attract art lovers that were inclined to financially support Dutch art. Given the fact that the exhibited artworks were highly accessible in terms of content and style, the audience did not have to be professional or particularly well-experienced.

In order to attract an acquisitive audience to the exhibitions, certain strategies, such as the 'hire purchase system' and the organization of art lotteries were employed. The 'hire purchase system' was created to enable less prosperous individuals to acquire art, by providing the opportunity to pay in instalments. With the art lotteries, artworks, purchased by the artists' society, were raffled off among the art loving members of De Brug. Both initiatives were initiated to encourage the development of the visual arts, to establish a better relation between art and public, and to improve the financial position of the artist.

Besides the organization of exhibitions, the society also undertook other activities to reach their intended audience, attract new members, and distribute their notions on art and the position of the artist. For example, during the first two years of its existence, two artistic evenings were organized for the art loving members. The first evening, held on 4 November

1926, consisted of music and dance performances, and poetry recitations.²¹⁹ During the second evening on 24 November 1927, the comedy *Dokter Stieglitz* was performed by the famous Dutch actor Nap de la Mar (1878-1930) and his company. Apart from the exhibitions, the notions of De Brug were also communicated by the two ‘gelegenheidsbundels’ of 1926 (sic) and 1927.

The ASB

The members of the ASB organized two exhibitions during the period of the society’s existence. Both the exhibitions, held in 1928 and 1929 respectively, will be considered here. Like their fellow artists of De Brug, the members of the ASB primarily intended to support the development of modern art instead of directly serving the needs of the public with these events. The exhibitions, which provided a qualitative overview of the tendencies in contemporary art, were particularly intended to generate interest and appreciation for modern art within larger segments of the population. However, the needs of the public did not form the point of departure in these considerations.

The two exhibitions of the ASB were held in the Stedelijk Museum, respectively between the 4th of February and the 1st of March 1928 (ill. 9), and the 2nd and 24th of November 1929. With regard to the organization of the exhibitions, it appears that Charley Toorop occupied a key position. Particularly for the first exhibition, she generated the financial means, maintained the contacts with artists, the museum and the printer of the catalogues, collected the works that had to be exhibited, and physically arranged the exhibition with the help of other artists.²²⁰ For the organization of the exhibition, the initiators had a generous budget at their disposal, which consisted of, amongst others, private funds and a financial contribution of the Amsterdam city authorities.²²¹

In contrast to De Brug, the exhibiting artists for the first ASB-exhibition were selected according to their artistic quality instead of their discipline or style. Thus, the exhibition constituted an assembly of the most significant abstract and figurative artists of that period. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, this quality criterion was applied less strict for the second exhibition.

²¹⁹ The artistic evening contained a piano concert by Alida van Uytvanck, dance performances by Abraham (1899-1961) and Elisabeth van der Vies, and a poetry recital by Chef van Dijk. *De Vereeniging van Nederl. beeldende kunstenaars De Brug*, Amsterdam 1926 (see note 114), p. 13.

²²⁰ This is demonstrated by the correspondence between Charley Toorop and J.J.P. Oud, preserved in the Archive of Oud at the Nederlands Architectuurinstituut in Rotterdam.

²²¹ Anonymous *Algemeen Handelsblad* 1928 (see note 135).

Within the first exhibition the artworks were distributed over five rooms. The first room contained the larger paintings, among which *Uitgaan van de Fabriek* (1910, ill. 10) by Bart van der Leck, an artist who was regarded as a source of inspiration by the members of the ASB. The graphic arts and less sizeable paintings were exhibited in two smaller rooms. Among the exhibited paintings were, amongst others, abstract compositions by Piet Mondrian and the drawing *Menschen en dieren* (undated, ill. 11) by Jacob Bendien. A separate room was devoted to sculpture, in which the established artist John Rädecker exhibited his *Orpheus* (1925-1926, ill. 12), a visual commemoration of the recently deceased conductor Anton B. Verheij (1871-1924). The architectural discipline was represented in the last room by complete interiors, designed by Sybold van Ravesteyn and Gerrit Rietveld.²²² Moreover, the exhibition contained photographs of diverse architectural projects, for example the housing project in Hoek van Holland (1924-1926, ill. 13) by J.J.P. Oud, and the *Rietveld Schröderhuis* in Utrecht (1924, ill. 14) by Rietveld.²²³ The room, dedicated to architecture, also contained a reading table with relevant literature and magazines (ill. 15).

With regard to the second exhibition, the exact arrangement of the artworks is unknown. Despite the mentioning of the sculptors Rädecker and Johan Polet in the exhibition catalogue, solely two disciplines, architecture and painting, were represented. Among the exhibited visual works of art were the *Self-portrait* (1928, ill. 16) by painter and new asset of the ASB Raoul Hynckes (1893-1973), and the socially committed graphic print *8 Uur* (1928, ill. 17) by Peter Alma. Due to the departure of abstract painter Douwe van der Zweep (1890-1975) from the society and the fact that Carel Willink solely exhibited figurative works, such as *Meisje met duif* (1929, ill. 18) at this exhibition, abstract art was only represented by the compositions of Mondrian. The architecture department consisted of photographs, designs and furniture, for example the tubular frame chairs (1929, ill. 19) by Van Ravesteyn.²²⁴ A

²²² Koopmans 2004 (see note 54), pp. 37-38.

²²³ The following artists exhibited at the first exhibition of the society: John Rädecker, Johan Polet, Bernard Richters, Bart van der Leck, Peter Alma, Charley Toorop, Carel Willink, Wim Oepts, Jacob Bendien, Mondriaan, Douwe van der Zweep, C.F. Roelofz, Johan van Hell, J.J.P. Oud, Gerrit Rietveld, Sybold van Ravesteyn, Jan Duiker (1890-1935), Jan F. Staal (1879-1940), and J. Klijnen (1887-1973). *Tentoonstelling van Architectuur, schilderkunst & beeldhouwkunst*, exh. cat. Amsterdam (Stedelijk Museum) 1928.

²²⁴ The following artists exhibited at the second exhibition of the society: Gerrit Rietveld, Sybold van Ravesteyn, J.J.P. Oud, Cornelis van Eesteren (1897-1988), Mart Stam (1899-1986), Johannes Brinkman (1902-1949), Leendert van der Vlugt (1894-1936), Piet Elling (1897-1962), J. Duiker, Han van Loghem (1881-1940), Piet Mondriaan, Bart van der Leck, Gerd Arntz, Franz Seiwert, Peter Alma, Jacob Bendien, Raoul Hynckes, Charley Toorop, Wim Oepts, Dirk Nijland, Rudolf Bremmer, Carel Willink, Henk Wieggersma, and Valentijn van Uytvanck. *Tweede tentoonstelling A.S.B. (A.S.B.: architectuur, schilderwerk, beeldhouwwerk)*, exh. cat. Amsterdam (Stedelijk Museum) 1929.

separate room was devoted to the travelling Werkbund-exhibition from Stuttgart, which featured designs by foreign architects.²²⁵

In general, the exhibitions of the ASB provided its audience with a rich diversity of challenging, artistic expressions. Although their materials were quite traditional, the exhibited artworks were fascinating in terms of their content, their various degrees of abstraction, and the interplay between form and content. Nevertheless, the real challenging aspect of these exhibitions was the fact that these different artworks, which were regarded by the members of the ASB as representations of the same contemporary attitude towards life, were exhibited together. With regard to the audience reception, the individual works, but particularly their combination within the same exhibition, may have resulted in the stimulation of their imaginative and creative thinking, and a change in their perception regarding art and the world in general. However, it remains questionable whether all the artworks were perceived in this manner. For example, the neoplasticist works of Mondrian were solely comprehensible for a select group of people. The reception of these works and the exhibitions in general will be discussed in the next chapter.

The total selection of artworks for the ASB-exhibitions can be regarded as a visualisation, and thus distribution, of the society's notions on art, in that the particular combination of works by the best Dutch visual artists and architects of that period demonstrated their desire for artistic quality, the interrelatedness of the visual arts and architecture, and the equality of abstract and figurative art. With regard to the second exhibition, the invitation of the German socialist artists Gerd Arntz and Franz Seiwert and the change of the society's name demonstrate the increasing socialist orientation within the society. Particular artworks on both exhibitions also expressed artists' individual notions on art. For example, the events formed opportunities for Mondrian to present his ideas regarding neoplasticism to the public, and for Alma to demonstrate the connection between art and socialism.

As was the case with artists' society De Brug, the character of the exhibitions of the ASB was not determined by audience preferences. Instead, the nature of the selected artworks and the exhibitions determined the type of audience. Within the society's 'declaration of intent', it is stated that the members desired to stimulate acknowledgement and appreciation for modern art in broader segments of the population. Unfortunately, this statement is not further elaborated upon, and thus, it remains unclear to what extent the society aimed to

²²⁵ For example, Le Corbusier (1887-1965), Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), Walter Gropius (1883-1969), and Adolf Loos (1870-1933).

stimulate this public interest. Nevertheless, given the fact that the viewer had to have a certain aesthetic competence, in terms of imaginative and command of the aesthetic language, to comprehend the meaning of particular artworks on the exhibitions, it appears that the ASB, whether deliberately or not, focussed on an audience with a particular amount of experience or potential interest regarding art. To attract this cultivated audience to the exhibitions, certain strategies were employed by the members of the society. For example, various other activities were organized in connection with the exhibitions. During the first exhibition, lectures were given by Sybold van Ravesteyn and journalist Nico Rost, respectively devoted to architecture and revolution art from the Soviet Union.²²⁶ According to Ype Koopmans in his previously mentioned publication on the ASB, the lecture of Van Ravesteyn, already discussed in the previous chapter, in which the architect presented the visual arts and architecture as two interrelated phenomena, can be regarded as the society's declaration of intent.²²⁷ In this respect, the lecture thus, functioned as means to attract visitors to the exhibitions, but also to distribute the notions of the ASB as a whole. Besides these lectures, two concerts were organized. During the first, female vocalist Berthe Seroen (1882-1957) performed songs by modern composers, and the second consisted of chamber music played by avant-garde composer Willem Pijper (1894-1947). The complex nature of these activities again demonstrates that, despite their initial intentions, the ASB predominantly focussed on a cultivated, experienced audience with its activities. In order to generate publicity for these activities and to attract potential visitors, advertisements were placed in newspapers and periodicals. Apart from the exhibitions and the accompanying lectures, the members of the ASB aimed to distribute their notions on art and the position of the artist among their intended audience by means of written publications.²²⁸ Due to the short existence of the society, such writings that represented the society as a whole were never published. This short existence may also account for the lack of activities, organized outside the context of the society's exhibitions.

²²⁶ Koopmans 2004 (see note 54), p. 38. The lecture of J.J.P. Oud was cancelled due to illness of the speaker.

²²⁷ Ibid, p. 38.

²²⁸ *Invitation Charley Toorop et al* 1926 (see note 131).

The Socialistische Kunstenaarskring

During the Interwar period, the members of the SKK organized various exhibitions. Due to the lack of information concerning these events, solely their most important exhibition, *Socialistische Kunst Heden* (1930, ill. 20), will be considered here.²²⁹ Consistent with the aims of the artists of De Brug and the ASB, the members of the SKK intended to support the development of contemporary art and to establish a better relation between artist and public with this exhibition. Nevertheless, in contrast to the exhibitions of the other two organizations, this exhibition was also intended to serve the needs of a particular part of the public: the working class. With this event and their activities in general, the SKK aimed to contribute to their elevation and the class struggle.

The exhibition *Socialistische Kunst Heden* was held between the 8th of November and the 8th of December 1930 in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and formed the society's only event organized in this institute. The strong political character of the society's exhibitions may not have been regarded appropriate for the 'neutral' Stedelijk Museum by the museum staff. Nevertheless, it is also plausible that the SKK's organization of exhibitions on various locations may have been motivated by their desire to generate interest for their activities among a larger group of people, but also to reach that part of the working class, that was not accustomed to museum visits. For the organization of *Socialistische Kunst Heden*, the members of the SKK appear to have given preference to the Stedelijk Museum due to its renowned status of providing young artists' societies with exhibition opportunities, and, thus, the possibilities for the generation of considerable publicity.

Due to the lack of archive material, the exact organization of the exhibition, for example the division of tasks among the members and the generation of financial means, remains obscure. Nevertheless, the strong defence of the exhibition in the press, which will be discussed in the next chapter, demonstrates the active involvement of Paul Sanders and, former member of the ASB, Peter Alma in the organization. With regard to the financial means, the exhibition may have been funded by membership fees, private gifts and income generated from the society's other activities. Pertaining this aspect, within the undated *Reglement en*

²²⁹ At least two exhibitions, respectively in Groningen in 1927 and in Amsterdam in 1928, were organized by the SKK. See Cornelië Lagerwaard, *Lou Loeber en de Socialistische Kunstenaarskring*, master thesis University of Amsterdam 1979, p. 40. In 1929, there was also an SKK-exhibition dedicated to the graphic arts in the Humanitaire School. It is unclear in which city this took place. For the exhibition poster, see website *Institute for Social History* <http://search.socialhistory.org/Record/819847> (28 March 2014).

begeleidend schrijven, it is stated that the SKK aimed to function independently of capitalist organizations. When necessary, they only sought support from the workers' movement.²³⁰

The exhibition *Socialistische Kunst Heden* was characterized by a strong international orientation, in that it constituted aesthetic expressions from, amongst others, the Soviet Union, Germany and France.²³¹ In this respect, the exhibition represented the general perception of socialism as an international movement.²³² The selection of the potentially exhibited artworks from these various countries was performed by different juries. For example, amongst others Peter Alma was responsible for the judging of the Dutch exhibits, and a gathering of German art critics and artists, among whom Adolf Behne (1885-1948), Fritz Schiff, John Heartfield (1891-1968), Otto Nagel (1894-1967) and Werner Scholz (1898-1982) selected the German exhibits.²³³ In general, the principal selection criterion for an art work to be exhibited on the exhibition *Socialistische Kunst Heden* was its congruence with socialist thought. Moreover, the ultimately exhibited artworks were united by the resistance to artistic expressions that idealised or obscured current social life.²³⁴

The artworks were distributed over different departments according to their country of origin. The Dutch department featured, for example, political posters of Fré Cohen (1903-1943) and Meijer Bleekrode, such as *De rooden roepen* (1929, ill. 21) created by the latter for the SDAP. Among the exhibited artworks were also paintings by Johan van Hell, such as the socially engaged *Arbeidsongeval* (1930, ill. 22), and the portfolio *Sociale 'Portretten'* (undated, ill. 23) of Peter Alma, which consisted of woodcuts that depicted stereotype representatives of the capitalist order. The Dutch department also contained works of former ASB-members Charley Toorop, Gerrit Rietveld and Wim Oepts (1904-1988).²³⁵ Germany

²³⁰ *Reglement en begeleidend schrijven Socialistische Kunstenaars Kring* undated (see note 161), pp. 5-6.

²³¹ Austria, Tschecho-Slovakia, Poland, Belgium, Spain, and the United States were also represented at the exhibition.

²³² With regard to this aspect, it is stated within the exhibition catalogue: 'De gedachten, die in het socialisme leven, zijn aan geen landsgrenzen gebonden: de gedachten, die het socialisme wekt, heffen grenzen op.' Cited from: *Socialistische Kunst Heden 1930* (see note 172).

²³³ Gribling 1982 (see note 67), p. 326.

²³⁴ Buck 1975 (see note 154), p. 86.

²³⁵ The Dutch department contained works of: Peter Alma, Piet Begeer (1890-1975), Herman Bieling (1887-1964), Meijer Bleekrode, Willy Boers (1905-1978), Tjerk Bottema (1882-1940), Johan Briedé (1885-1980), Henk Bruintjes (1903-1986), Fré Cohen, Walter Colb, Albert Fiks (1908-1945), M.de Groot, Albert Hahn jr. (1894-1953), Johan van Hell, Pau van Hell-Wijnman (1889-1930), Herman Heijenbrock (1871-1948), Wout van Heusden (1896-1982), Jan Jans (1893-1963), Francois Kloek (1891-1956), Dirk Koning (1888-1978), Hildo Krop (1884-1970), Albert Funke Küpper (1894-1934), Bart van der Leck, Lou Loeber, Henk Melgers (1899-1973), Chris de Moor (1899-1981), Wim Oepts, Willem Papenhuijzen (1886-1973), C.M. Plomp, Thom Posthuma (1893-1941), Engelen Reitsma Valenca (1889-1981), Marie de Roode-Heijermans, Huib de Ru (1902-1980), Nico Schrier (1900-1989), Gerrit Rietveld, Andreas Schotel (1896-1984), Frits Sieger jr., Leo Stracke, Elly Tamminga (1896-1983), Quirijn van Tiel (1900-1967), Charley Toorop, Kees van Urk (1895-1976), J. Veerman, Toon Verhoef, Dries Vermeulen (1901-1959), W.A. van de Walle (1906-1995), and N. van Zalinge.

was, amongst others, represented by the controversial artists Otto Dix, of which the painting *Der Salon I* (1921, ill. 24) was exhibited, and George Grosz, which was represented by the photo-lithograph *Schwimme, wer schwimmen kann* (1921, ill. 25). Both works constituted direct acts of criticism toward the distressing social situation in the Weimar Republic. The geometric movement in German socialist art was represented by Franz Seiwert, of which the painting *Diskussion* (1926, ill. 26) was exhibited.²³⁶ Given the fact that the Soviet Union was generally regarded as an superb example by West European socialists, the Russian department consisted primarily of political posters, photomontages, and architectural models, by which an image was presented of the ideal socialist society. Besides these international sections, the exhibition also contained a historical department, wherein works by socialist artists from the previous generation, such as Albert Hahn sr. (1877-1918), were shown.²³⁷

In terms of the audience reception, the exhibited artistic utterances can be regarded as comforting as well as challenging. The last designation is particularly applicable to the exhibited art forms and materials, and the content of the artworks. Besides the traditional art forms of painting, sculpture and the graphic arts, the exhibition also offered photographs, photo-montages, posters, dust jackets, and architectural models.²³⁸ The artworks at the exhibition may also have been regarded as challenging due to their often controversial political content, which is particularly applicable to the German and Russian exhibits. The above mentioned examples demonstrate that these were characterized by a militant and critical-expressionist nature, whereas the Dutch contributions were quite tame.²³⁹ Apart from the individual artworks, the exhibition also possessed a challenging quality as a whole, in that it provided an international overview of the diverse forms in which this socialist ideals has manifested itself in the visual arts.²⁴⁰ Given these characteristics, the artworks and the exhibition had the ability of producing alterations in the audience perception regarding art and the world in general, and creating the need of sharing these experiences with others. Since the members of the SKK aimed to contribute to the class struggle and the subsequent development of a new society, these possible results were particularly desired. Besides

²³⁶ Other artists that exhibited within the German department were, amongst others, Gerd Arntz, Conrad Felixmüller (1897-1977), Heinrich Hoerle (1895-1936), Otto Nagel (1894-1967), Oskar Nerlinger (1893-1969), Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), and Walter Gropius.

²³⁷ Other artists that featured the historical department were Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen (1859-1923), Pieter Josselin de Jongh (1861-1906), and Elie Neuberger (1891-1972).

²³⁸ In the exhibition catalogue, this choice of art forms is justified by the following statement: 'Het spreekt van zelf, dat bij de directe werking, die de socialistische kunstenaar vaak beoogt, het schilderij niet die plaats inneemt, welk de de burgerlijke opvatting er aan toekent. Men vindt op onze expositie dus veelmeer grafiek en teekwerk dan schilderkunst.' Cited from: *Socialistische Kunst Heden 1930* (see note 172).

²³⁹ Gribling 1982 (see note 67), p. 326.

²⁴⁰ Buck 1975 (see note 154), p. 86.

challenging, the artworks on the exhibition can also be regarded as comforting with regard to their degree of abstraction. The SKK's general preference for figurative art as means to reach their intended audience, the working class, resulted in highly accessible artworks, which relatively required little from the viewer's creative and imaginative capacities.

The exhibition *Socialistische Kunst Heden* can be considered a visual representation, and thus distribution, of the SKK's notions on art and the position of the artist. The selection of artworks demonstrated the society's emphasis on the strong connection between art and socialism, and the solidarity between artists and proletariat.²⁴¹ Moreover, various exhibited artworks were a visual contribution to the elevation of the masses and the class struggle, the necessary conditions for the establishment of a new, socialist world order.

Consistent with the exhibitions of De Brug and the ASB, the nature of the exhibited artworks and the aesthetic event did determine the type of audience for *Socialistische Kunst Heden*. Nevertheless, to a certain extent the event was also shaped by the needs of a particular part of the audience: the working class. In this respect, it is important to observe that those needs were determined by people outside the working class, in this case the members of the SKK.

With their exhibition, but also their other activities, the society's members aimed at artists and other intellectuals with a socialist orientation. In addition, the SKK also intended to reach the masses in order to contribute to their elevation.²⁴² Nevertheless, it is questionable whether the SKK aimed to address the whole mass. For a labourer to engage in the activities of the SKK, he had to have certain financial means, a certain amount of leisure time, and a certain degree of education at his disposal. This orientation left out large parts of the proletariat, which were not well educated, not continuously employed, often had large families and lived under abominable circumstances. These 'uncivilised' individuals needed all their time and energy to survive, whereas the 'semi-civilised' workers had the opportunity to devote their attention to other things, such as art. Despite their wish to elevate the masses, it appears that, just as the SDAP-organization *Kunst aan het Volk* had done before her, the SKK aimed at the 'semi-civilised' labourer or in other words the workers' elite, which had a certain potential to be elevated according to the paternalist views of those organizations.²⁴³

²⁴¹ With regard tot his aspect, it is stated within the exhibition catalogue: 'Met onze tentoonstelling *Socialistische Kunst Heden* beoogden wij wederhalve een manifestatie te geven van socialistische strijdbaarheid en socialistische verlanen, dat op dit oogenblik leeft in de kunstenaars, die met de daad waarover zij beschikken, dat wil zeggen met hun kunst, demonstrenen, dat zij in de politieken en maatschappelijken strijd de zijde hebben gekozen der arbeidersklasse.' Cited from: *Socialistische kunst heden 1930* (see note 172).

²⁴² *Reglement en begeleidend schrijven Socialistische Kunstenaars Kring* undated (see note 161), p. 5.

²⁴³ Adang 2008 (see note 176), p. 281.

In order to attract visitors to the exhibition, the SKK organized a considerable amount of activities, such as guided tours, lectures, a cinema morning and a performance of the play *Ora et Labora* written by the socialist playwright Herman Heijermans (1864-1924).²⁴⁴ All these activities were advertised in various newspapers and periodicals.²⁴⁵

In general, certain of these activities, and the exhibition as such, can be regarded as the society's strategies to distribute their notions on art and the position of the artist among their intended audience. For example, the lecture of Alma, in which the nature and necessity of socialist art was expounded, was an expression of the society's intentions. The guided tours at the exhibitions were often specifically organized for workers, and therefore provided opportunities for the society's distribution of their notions among this group. One of these guided tours, given by Alma, was even transmitted by the VARA, the Dutch social-democratic radio broadcasting station, which in turn ensured a widespread distribution of the society's notions. Moreover, the extensive declaration of intent in the exhibition catalogue, and the verbal explanations of artworks given by artists themselves on the actual exhibition, did also contribute to the distribution of the society's notions on art and the position of the artist.²⁴⁶

Besides the organization of exhibitions and accompanying activities, the SKK also employed other strategies in order to establish contact with their intended audience and to distribute their notions on art and the role of the artist. For example, the members of the society intended to publicize their own periodical, which due to the short existence of the society, never have been realized. Moreover, in order to reach a particular part of their intended audience, the 'semi-civilised' workers, and to contribute to their elevation and the class struggle, the SKK aimed to be active outside the established art world.²⁴⁷ Within the undated *Reglement en begeleidend schrijven*, it is stated for example, that the society desired to participate in the organization of popular festivals and parades, and to contribute to the improvement of the workers' theatre.²⁴⁸ Whether these activities really have taken place remains obscure. Members of the SKK were also obliged to engage themselves in the workers' movement, in terms of participating in demonstrations and giving lectures, which in turn contributed to the distribution of the society's notions on art and the position of the

²⁴⁴ Advertisement of activities connected with the exhibition *Socialistische Kunst Heden*, *De Tribune. Dagblad der Communistische Partij Holland*, 17 November 1930, p. 4.

²⁴⁵ For example, *Het Volk*, *De Tribune* and *De Notenkraker*.

²⁴⁶ *Reglement en begeleidend schrijven Socialistische Kunstenaars Kring* undated (see note 161), p. 5.

²⁴⁷ Gribling 1982 (see note 67), p. 328.

²⁴⁸ *Reglement en begeleidend schrijven Socialistische Kunstenaars Kring* undated (see note 161), p. 5.

artist.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, the artists of the SKK also went outside the established art world by employing different media, such as posters and book illustrations, by producing reproductions of their work, and by working for Dutch periodicals, such as the political-satirical magazine *De Notenkraker*, and publishing house Boekenvrienden Solidariteit.²⁵⁰ In turn, all these activities offered opportunities for a cheap and massive distribution of their artworks, and thus, their notions on art and the position of the artist.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the role of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK in the distribution of notions on art and the position of the artist. It appears that, apart from propagating their own notions, the artists' society also provided a platform for artists to express their individual notions. In general, the position of the here considered artists' societies in the art world was determined by their notions on art and the position of the artist, and the totality of their activities, in which these notions were distributed.

The society's 'core activity', the organization of exhibitions, was analysed by means of four types of input: the habitus of whoever is artistically responsible for the event, the material, personnel and facilitating conditions, the supply of types of aesthetic utterances, and the presence and needs of potential audiences in the environment. The exhibitions of De Brug primarily functioned as a meeting point for the, by the society promoted, 'new objective' art and consisted of rather comforting works of art, that were selected according to discipline and style. Whether their focus on figurative art represented the society's desire to establish a better relation between artist and public, remains questionable. In contrast, the exhibitions of the ASB constituted a rather challenging combination of artworks, created by the best Dutch avant-garde artists of that period, due to their selection according to artistic quality. Particularly their first exhibition formed a visualisation of the society's notions on art regarding their desire for quality, the interrelatedness of architecture and the visual arts, and the equality of abstract and figurative art. Opposed to De Brug and the ASB, who in their selection process generally focussed on formal aspects, the SKK selected the artworks for its exhibitions according to their content, or in other words, their consistency with socialist thought. With their internationally orientated exhibition *Socialistische Kunst Heden*, the SKK provided its audience with a combination of comforting as well as challenging figurative

²⁴⁹ *Statuten en huishoudelijk reglement Socialistische Kunstenaars Kring*, 1928 (see note 157), p. 8.

²⁵⁰ Gribbling 1982 (see note 67), p. 328. For example, Albert Hahn jr., Meier Bleekrode, Johan Hell, Albert Funke Küpper, and Henk Henriët were particularly active outside the established art world.

artworks, that visualised the society's notions on art regarding the connection of art and socialism, the solidarity between artist and proletariat, and the necessity of the elevation of the masses and the class struggle for the establishment of a new, socialist society.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the artists' societies were united in their concern for the improvement of the position of art and artist in society. In general, the exhibitions were regarded by the members of the artists' societies as means to achieve this objective, because they enabled the public to become acquainted with and learn to appreciate certain types of art, and provided opportunities for the artist to present his/her works to the audience and, thus, obtain public recognition and attract potential buyers. Moreover, with these exhibitions they generally desired to influence the public debate on art matters and even political policy, which in turn could result in a better position for art and the artist in society.

Despite their aim of improving the relation between artist and public, but corresponding with their capacity as organizations that primarily focused on the needs of artists, it appears that in the case of De Brug and the ASB, the character of the exhibited artworks and the exhibitions as such determined the type of audience. Although this suggestion is also applicable to the SKK, the character of their exhibitions were also shaped by the assumed needs of a part of their intended audience: the working class. Nevertheless, it appears that all artists' societies aimed to attract a certain audience to their exhibitions, and employed particular strategies to reach them. For example, the societies often organized extra activities in connection to the exhibitions, such as performances and concerts. Publicity for these activities was, amongst others, generated by means of advertisements in newspapers and periodicals. The exhibitions as such and the other activities can also be regarded as the societies' strategies to distribute their notions on art and the position of the artist among their intended audience. In other words, the distribution of these notions was ensured by means of the selection and arrangement of artworks on the societies' exhibitions, occasionally the form and content of the actual exhibited artworks, publications and lectures, and other activities, such as guided tours through the exhibitions, and debate evenings. These activities were often adjusted to the intended audience. The members of De Brug appear to have focussed on a cultivated and acquisitive audience, that desired to contribute to the development of Dutch 'new objective' art. In order to attract this type of audience to their exhibitions, and thereby establish a better relation between artist and public, the Brug employed financial strategies as the 'hire-purchase system' and art lotteries. The society's notions on art and the position of the artist were primarily distributed by means of their exhibitions, which constituted a visualisation of the society's desire to form a meeting point for 'new objective' art, and

written material, such as the 'gelegenheidsbundels'. In the case of the ASB its members desired to generate interest for modern art in broader segments of the population. However, the rather complicated nature of their exhibitions and the surrounding activities implies that they, deliberately or not, focussed on a cultivated audience with particular capabilities regarding the comprehension of art. Apart from lectures, the distribution of the society's notions on art and the position of the artist was primarily ensured by means of their exhibitions, which visualised their desire for artistic quality, the interrelatedness of the visual arts and architecture, and the equality of figurative and abstract art. Apart from the cultivated audience, that De Brug and the ASB aimed to reach, the SKK also focussed its activities on the 'semi-civilised' part of the working class. To a high extent, the nature of these activities was determined by the assumed needs of this social group. The majority of the activities, organized by the SKK, were dominated by the society's wish to reach the working class and to distribute their notions on the connection of art and socialism, the necessity of the class struggle and elevation of the masses for the development of a new society, and the solidarity between artist and proletariat. This resulted in the organization of activities specifically for workers, and even encouraged the members of the SKK to be active outside the established art world. Whether the above mentioned strategies of the societies to distribute their notions on art and the position of the artist among their intended audience were always successful, is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 | The reception of notions

*'Dit is een tentoonstelling, die ieder arbeider moet bezoeken.'*²⁵¹

*'Het was, op eenige, niet zeer talrijke, gunstige uitzonderingen na, een demonstratie van onmacht, grofheid en leelijkheid en veel van het ten toon gestelde had bovendien met socialisme niets te maken.'*²⁵²

These two quotes concerning the SKK-exhibition *Socialistische Kunst Heden* (1930), respectively published in the communist newspaper *De Tribune* and its social democratic counterpart *Het Volk*, demonstrate that the activities of the artists' societies considered here were differently received. This may also have concerned the reception of the notions on art and position of the artist, produced and/or distributed by De Brug, the ASB and the SKK, the subject of this chapter.

Within the previous two chapters, the role of these artists' societies in the production and distribution of notions on art and the position of the artist was considered. This demonstrated that these societies aspired to influence the public's notions on art and the position of the artist by their engagement in these two domains. Moreover, it appeared that they strove to guide the public reception of their notions by aiming at a certain audience and by employing particular strategies. Within this chapter, it will be elucidated whether they were successful in their attempts.

Due to the lack of historical material concerning the public reception of notions on art and the position of the artist, produced and/or distributed by artists' societies, it will be impossible to consider this subject extensively. For example, it is practically unknown what kind of public visited the exhibitions held by De Brug, the ASB and the SKK, what their individual opinions were on what they had seen, how they received the societies' notions on art and the position of the artist, and how this affected their perception of art in particular or the world in general. Hence, this part of the research is occasionally based on assumptions. For a large part, the information on the public reception of notions on art and the position of the artist, produced and/or distributed by the here considered artists' societies is extracted from reviews in contemporary newspapers and periodicals. Due to the amount of the time, it

²⁵¹ Cited from: Anonymous, 'Socialistische Kunst Heden! De tentoonstelling geopend', *De Tribune. Dagblad der Communistische Partij Holland*, 11 november 1930, p. 4.

²⁵² Cited from: Henri Polak, 'Kunst van Socialisten en Socialistische Kunst', *Het Volk*, 6 December 1930.

proved to be impossible to research the whole reception history of the concerning artists' societies. Future research should, thus, focus on reviews published in other contemporary sources, the state of art criticism in that period, and the type of audience that visited the societies' activities, in order to get a more complete view of this history.

In order to explore the role of the concerning artists' societies in the domain of reception, it is necessary to establish how this process actually functions in the art world. Hans van Maanen provides a description of this aspect. In the case of reception on the individual level, this begins with an individual with his/her own perception and communication schemata. When confronted with a work of art or a series of artworks within an aesthetic event, certain cognitive processes, such as perceiving, imagining, experiencing, and the need to communicate, are stimulated. The course of these processes determines the ultimate aesthetic experience. In turn, this aesthetic experience can affect the total mindset of the individual, induce the use of this aesthetic experience in other mental domains, and lead to the development of new mental schemes to perceive the world (ill. 4).²⁵³

According to Van Maanen, the act of reception can also occur on the institutional and societal level. The author particularly devotes considerable attention to this last approach by investigating how art obtains a function in society.²⁵⁴ The act of reception on the societal level begins with various social groups that all possess their own structures and needs. When confronted with a work of art or a series of artworks within an aesthetic event or events, certain participation and reception processes are stimulated within the particular social group. Unfortunately, Van Maanen does not provide a concise description of these processes. Nevertheless, to a certain extent they resemble the processes within the individual act of reception, albeit in a collective form. These processes eventually result in different types and numbers of aesthetic experiences within the various social groups. In turn, these events can influence the position of art in society, induce the employment of these art experiences within other social systems, and result in new collective perceptions of the world (ill. 5).²⁵⁵

The reception of activities organized by artists' societies is usually approached from the individual or the institutional level, which respectively concerns the individual visitor, for example the art critic, and the total amount of visitors of an activity. These approaches can also be applied to the reception of the notions on art and the role of the artist, produced and/or

²⁵³ Van Maanen 2009 (see note 10), p. 13.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 275.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 12

distributed by the here considered artists' societies. Nevertheless, given the fact that De Brug, the ASB as well as the SKK aimed to improve the position of art and the artist within society, it will be particularly interesting to investigate the reception of their notions on the societal level. Within the following subchapters, it will be established whether De Brug, the ASB and the SKK were successful in reaching their intended audience, whether they were able to distribute their notions on art and the position of the artist among these people, if these notions had an effect on society, and if this ultimately resulted in the improvement of the social position of art and the artist? With regard to the effect of the societies' exhibitions, solely the events discussed in the previous chapter will be considered.

De Brug

In general, the members of De Brug intended with their society to form a meeting point for artists that worked in the 'new objective' style. This intention was represented in their exhibitions, which constituted artworks with recognisable subjects depicted in detail, and their written statements in the 'gelegenheidsbundels' of 1926 (sic) and 1927 regarding the society's objectives. Reviews of the 1926 exhibitions demonstrate that the society was successful in conveying this message by means of their activities. Within these articles, the exhibitions were connected to the contemporary return to figurative art, the emergence of the new objective art movement, and the attitude of artists of that period toward their profession.²⁵⁶ For example, art critic Just Havelaar (1880-1930) of the liberal newspaper *Het Vaderland* remarked in connection with the second exhibition that this concerned an 'ernstige tentoonstelling, die onomstootelijk bewijst, dat een geest van oprechtheid, ernst, eenvoud, onze jongere kunstenaars bezielt.'²⁵⁷ Although the society's second exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum was better received than their first at Pictura, both exhibitions provoked mixed reactions. In general, the critics were particularly critical of the lack of unity and artistic quality of the exhibited works. Regarding this supposed lack of unity, one of the most important art critics of that period, Albert Plasschaert (1874-1941), who published in the left-liberal periodical *De Groene Amsterdammer*, observed that De Brug was 'een eigenaardige vereeniging in dien zin, dat zij een verzameling is van zeer verschillende beeldhouwers en

²⁵⁶ This is, for example, visible in the following reviews: Just Havelaar, 'De Brug. Stedelijk Museum te Amsterdam', *Het Vaderland. Staat- en letterkundig nieuwsblad*, 29 November 1926, p. 2. Albert Plasschaert, 'De Brug. Vereeniging van Nederl. Beeld. Kunstenaars (Pictura, den Haag)', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 25 september 1926, p. 10. Anonymous, 'Kanttekeningen', *Opgang* vol. 9 (1926) no. 6.

²⁵⁷ Cited from: Just Havelaar, 'De Brug. Stedelijk Museum te Amsterdam', *Het Vaderland. Staat- en letterkundig nieuwsblad*, 29 November 1926, p. 2.

schilders en tevens van rijp en groen.²⁵⁸ The art critic regarded this situation a threat for the society's future existence by openly wondering whether a society

‘niet iets gemeenschappelijks (moet) voorstaan, wil zij den onwil van het publiek overwinnen: moet dat gemeenschappelijk niet met groot talent worden verdedigd, willen wij er in gelooven, en is afwezigheid van deze dingen bij de meeste leden niet onmiddellijk het gevaar van een actie zonder vrucht, dus zonder werkelijkheid en zonder toekomst?’²⁵⁹

In contrast, Havelaar considered the inclusion of different artistic personalities within De Brug a merit. Convinced that art could only exist by means of constant change, he believed that a dogmatic commitment to uniform ideals could result in a society's disbandment. According to Havelaar, a society as De Brug could, nevertheless, solely be successful when the key members shared similarities in terms of the style of their artworks.

The art critics that reviewed the exhibitions agreed that the exhibitions featured artworks of varying quality. An anonymous critic of the catholic periodical *Opgang* states in this respect: ‘Er is goed werk, er zijn ook ’n massa dingen die het vermelden niet waard zijn, benevens wat rariteiten, welke we toch wel langzamerhand beu geworden zijn.’²⁶⁰ Additionally, Kasper Niehaus, art critic from *De Telegraaf* en fervent advocate of the contemporary retour à l'ordre,²⁶¹ claims:

‘Er zijn nog te veel van die angstige talenten aanwezig, die koude nauwkeurigheid met kunst verwarren en vergeten dat als men een ding slaafs imiteert, met twee dingen, maar altijd nog geen kunstwerk heeft.’²⁶²

Within his review of the first exhibition, Plasschaert particularly criticized the lack of persuasiveness and passion of the majority of the artworks. He asserts:

²⁵⁸ Cited from: Albert Plasschaert, ‘De Brug. Vereeniging van Nederl. Beeld. Kunstenaars (Pictura, den Haag)’, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 25 september 1926, p. 10.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 10.

²⁶⁰ Cited from: Anonymous, ‘Kantteekeningen’, *Opgang* vol. 9 (1926) no. 6.

²⁶¹ Koopmans 2004 (see note 54), p. 16.

²⁶² Cited from: Kasper Niehaus, ‘Tentoonstelling Vereeniging “De Brug”’, *De Telegraaf*, 4 December 1926, p. 9.

‘Bijna alles wordt gekenmerkt door een zekere bedaagdheid in den vorm, die niet uit overwonnen aandrif en hartstocht ontstond. Er is hier en daar iets van volhouden en volharden, maar niet veel pulseeren van bloed.’²⁶³

At both exhibitions, the contributions of Charley Toorop were reviewed as the best artworks, which even induced Plasschaert to question why this artist was inclined to exhibit with these ‘lesser gods’.²⁶⁴

Besides aiming to provide a meeting point for the ‘new objective’ art, the members of De Brug also strove to improve the relation between artist and public, in order for art to (re)gain a better position in society and to stimulate contemporary Dutch art in general. The reviews of the exhibitions demonstrate that this notion was communicated well by means of these events and accompanying catalogues. For example, the previously mentioned anonymous art critic of *Opgang* states:

‘Op zichzelf beschouwd is het doel dezer nieuwe vereeniging, wier eerste expositie uit al te zeer heterogene bestanddeelen gevormd is, sympathiek. Zij doet een poging om buiten de coterietjes om, opkomende en reeds erkende talenten, die niet tot de omgeving van Rijks-, Gemeente- of Verbond-Adviseurs-van-kunst behooren, in de gelegenheid te tellen door particulier initiatief, mede te werken den naam der Nederlandsche Beeldende kunst zoowel in binnen- als buitenland hoog te houden.’²⁶⁵

The financial strategies of De Brug for the improvement of the relation between artist and public, such as the art lotteries and the hire-purchase-system, are not extensively treated in the reviews of the exhibitions. It is therefore difficult to establish, whether these activities were successful and well received. Due to the lack of the archive of De Brug and other historical material concerning the reception history of this society, it remains obscure whether the above mentioned views of the art critics were shared by the general public. For this reason, it is also complicated to answer the question whether the members of De Brug were successful in reaching their intended audience of cultivated and acquisitive lovers of Dutch art, and if they were able to distribute their notions on art and the position of the artist to the public. For example, there are no accounts of the numbers of visitors to the exhibitions and the artistic

²⁶³ Cited from: Plasschaert 1926 (see note 258), p. 10.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 10.

²⁶⁵ Cited from: Anonymous *Opgang* 1926 (see note 260).

evenings, organized by the society, and the audience's reactions to these events. Moreover, it remains unclear to what extent the society's notions on art were distributed by means of, for example, the 'gelegenheidsbundels' and the exhibition catalogues, because the amount and type of individuals that read these publications, and their subsequent reactions, are unknown. With regard to the reception of society's notions through the reviews of the exhibitions, published by art critics, the character of these newspapers and periodicals, and their reading public should be researched. This, however, proved to be a too extensive task for this thesis.

The ASB

The exhibitions of the ASB, which provided a qualitative overview of the tendencies in Dutch contemporary art, were a visualisation of the society's notions on art, as it demonstrated their desire for artistic quality, the interrelatedness of the visual arts and architecture, and the equality of abstract and figurative art. These notions were also distributed by means of the lectures held by members in connection with the exhibitions. Reviews of these events demonstrate that to a certain extent the ASB was successful in conveying this message by means of their activities. Particularly with regard to the first exhibition, art critics generally agreed on its significance for the development and presentation of contemporary art.²⁶⁶ An anonymous journalist of the *Algemeen Handelsblad* praised the modern character of the exhibition, by observing that it possessed 'een eigen karakter, een uitzicht van jeugd en frischheid, dat den bezoeker dadelijk voor zich inneemt.'²⁶⁷ The interrelatedness of the visual arts and architecture was acknowledged by Kasper Niehaus, who regarded this aspect as one of the innovating features of the exhibitions and the society as such, by stating:

'Het nieuwe van deze 'vereniging' en deze tentoonstelling is niet, dat zij ons onbekende talenten openbaart, het nieuwe is de combinatie van kunstenaars, die men van vroeger kende, doch thans in ander, nauwer verband terugziet en het is niet in de laatste plaats: de aansluiting bij de architectuur, de moeder der kunsten. Deze expositie is de eerste sterke manifestatie van de moderne beeldende kunsten: schilder-, beeldhouw- en bouwkunst, als totaliteit.'²⁶⁸

Despite Niehaus' enthusiasm concerning the society's effort to demonstrate the connection between the visual arts and architecture, the critic did not, however, consider the latter's

²⁶⁶ Koopmans 2004 (see note 54), p. 39.

²⁶⁷ Cited from: Anonymous *Algemeen Handelsblad* 1928 (see note 135), p. 3.

²⁶⁸ Cited from: Kasper Niehaus, "'A.S.B.' en zijn idealen', *De Telegraaf*, 7 February 1928, p. 9.

contribution. A striking detail in this respect is the fact that in his capacity as an artist, Niehaus was briefly involved in the establishment of the ASB. Given his positive review of the 1928 exhibition, he presumably did not leave the society due to a lack of affinity. Rather, his departure may have been connected to the incompatibility of his membership of the marked society with his writing activities for the more neutral *Telegraaf*.²⁶⁹

The aim of the ASB to present an overview of the contemporary tendencies in art by gathering various artists, disciplines and styles within one exhibition did not solely induce positive reviews. With regard to the first exhibition, the apparent lack of unity was criticized by art critic and poet Jan Engelman (1900-1972), who described the event in the catholic periodical *De Nieuwe Eeuw* as: ‘(...) een heterogene verzameling van modern werk, met eenige belangrijke figuren, met een teveel aan tijdelijke theorie.’²⁷⁰ With regard to the second exhibition in 1929, this point of criticism was shared by other critics. For example, Plasschaert claimed:

‘Eén hoofdfout van deze verzameling is niemand ontgaan: dat is het gebrek aan eenheid dezer tentoonstelling: realisten van velerlei soort (innerlijke en uiterlijke) werden onder één dak gebracht met abstracten en schematiseerenden, tot een niet willig en elkander niet zeer waardeerd gezelschap.’²⁷¹

Even Niehaus, who initially wrote positively about the innovative collection of artists of the ASB and their demonstration of the interrelatedness between the visual arts and architecture, stated concerning the second exhibition: ‘In welk opzicht de andere schilders, die deelnemen aan deze expositie, eensgezind zijn, is een mysterie, waarin ik niet ben doorgedrongen.’²⁷² In this case, he solely discovered a connection between the exhibited examples of architecture and the works of Piet Mondrian, Peter Alma and Bart van der Leck. This opinion was shared by female art critic Maria Viola (1871-1951), who stated in her review for the newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* that the relation between the exhibited paintings and pieces of architecture was not obvious. Moreover, the exhibition generally offered little innovation

²⁶⁹ Koopmans 2004 (see note 54), pp. 20 and 51.

²⁷⁰ Cited from: Jan Engelman, ‘Tentoonstelling van architectuur, schilderkunst en beeldhouwkunst, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam’, *De Nieuwe Eeuw*, 9 February 1928.

²⁷¹ Cited from: Albert Plasschaert, ‘Schilderkunstkroniek. A.S.B. Tentoonstelling, Gemeente Museum, Amsterdam’, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 30 November 1929, p. 12.

²⁷² Cited from: Kasper Niehaus, ‘Harmonieën en contrasten. ASB Expositie’, *De Telegraaf*, 12 November 1929, p. 9.

according to the often highly critical Viola.²⁷³ In general, the lack of unity in the exhibitions may have impeded an adequate distribution of the society's notions on art and the position of the artist.

Nevertheless, particularly with regard to their first exhibition, the ASB appeared to have been successful in presenting the public a selection of talented artists and interesting artworks, which was congruent with their general desire for artistic quality. The art critics were especially positive about John Rädecker, Charley Toorop and Bart van der Leck. The artist Carel Willink was regarded by most as a promising talent. The compositions of Mondrian received mixed reactions. For example, an anonymous critic of the social democratic newspaper *Het Volk*, who consistent with his political orientation predominantly appears to have favoured figurative artworks with socialist content, described his work as 'zoo dood als een pier.'²⁷⁴ In contrast, critics as Niehaus and Plasschaert expressed their admiration for the painter. This admiration even induced Plasschaert to openly question why Mondrian did not exhibit alone.²⁷⁵ The remarks made by Plasschaert imply that Mondrian was not shown to his full advantage at the exhibitions of the ASB. Hence, it is questionable whether Mondrian was able to adequately distribute his individual notions regarding neoplasticism. Did a diverse collective as the ASB provided the right opportunities for artists in general to communicate their individual notions? Or did they run the risk of being superseded by the larger whole? Given the fact that certain artists, for example Hynckes and Willink, ultimately preferred to present their work within solo-exhibitions at art dealings instead of collectively within an exhibition organized by an artists' society, it appears that particular artists did not felt well-represented by these societies.²⁷⁶ Nevertheless, it must also be observed that besides the ability to communicate their notions adequately, solo-exhibitions at an art dealing also provided better commercial prospects.

The considerations mentioned above are connected to the general questions, whether the ASB was successful in reaching their intended audience, and generating interest and appreciation

²⁷³ M.V. (Maria Viola), 'Tentoonstelling ASB', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 20 november 1929, p. 9.

²⁷⁴ Cited from: D., 'Tentoonstelling van Architectuur, Schilderkunst en Beeldhouwkunst', *Het Volk*, 15 februari 1928.

²⁷⁵ Plasschaert, 'Nieuwe Zakelijkheid. De Tentoonstelling A.S.B. in het Stedelijk Museum', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 16 november 1929, p.10. With regard to this subject, Plasschaert states: 'Ik begrijp het niet, dat Mondriaan zich nog wil laten zien, met zijn gekleurde, eenvoudige planken tusschen een verzameling van zoo veel realisten, als hem hier omgeven. Ik vraag mij dan ook steeds af, waarom Mondriaan (de Parijsche) niet liever zich de weelde, de koele weelde, veroorlooft om ernstiger eerlijk te zijn (dat kan nog!) en niet liever een aantal zalen vult van het Stedelijk Museum met zijne Composities alleen! Dat zou laten zien hoe vol subtiliteit dit werk is; hoe veel schakeeringen het bezit, en dat het onovertrefbaar is.'

²⁷⁶ Koopmans 2004 (see note 54), p. 49.

for modern art within larger segments of the population? In his publication on the ASB, Ype Koopmans observes that the first exhibition of the society and the surrounding activities were well visited and consequently a financial success. Moreover, the exhibition generated interest in various circles.²⁷⁷ Unfortunately, the author does not elucidate what kind of circles, but given his further statements, this claim appears to refer to the art critics. Due to the lack of historical material concerning, for example, the exact amount and type of visitors of the exhibitions, it is difficult to establish how the activities and the notions of the ASB were received by the rest of the public. Were they able to stimulate the acknowledgement and appreciation for modern art in broader segments of the population? The observation made by Engelman, that the first exhibition possessed a ‘on-gewichtig, on-officieel’ character, implies that the first exhibition had a certain potential to attract visitors outside the usual exhibition audience. Moreover, he states: ‘Zij ruikt niet naar de academie, niet naar het succes en niet naar den snob.’²⁷⁸ Due to the nature of their activities, it appears that the ASB, nevertheless, continued to predominantly attract the traditional audience of exhibitions for contemporary art. For the viewer had to have a certain aesthetic competence, in terms of imaginative power and command of the aesthetic language, to comprehend the meaning of particular artworks on the exhibitions. Moreover, the lectures held by members of the society also required a certain amount of knowledge concerning art matters. Consequently, it also remains highly questionable whether the members of the ASB were successful in distributing their notions on art among a broader audience.

The Socialistische Kunstenaarskring

With their activities, the members of the SKK aimed to actively distribute their notions regarding the close relation between socialism and art, the solidarity between artists and the proletariat, and the necessity of art for the elevation of the masses, the class struggle, and the subsequent establishment of a new society. The reception history of this society demonstrates that these notions were not always met with approval. With regard to the exhibition *Socialistische Kunst Heden*, social democrat W.A. Bongers forcefully asserted in *De Socialistische Gids*: ‘Wie de gruwelkamers in het Stedelijk Museum te Amsterdam doorgeworsteld heeft en buiten gekomen is, weer de gewone menschen op straat en den hemel

²⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 39.

²⁷⁸ Cited from: Engelman 1928 (see note 270).

boven zich ziet, voelt de benauwenis van zich afglijden.²⁷⁹ According to Bongers, the exhibition did not have anything in common with socialism or art, rather it formed an example of the ‘barbaric’ movement of Bolshevism.²⁸⁰ One of the SKK-members and initiator of the exhibitions, Paul Sanders, responded to this bitter criticism by devoting a separate article to the expressions of Bongers, titled *Tegen het nihilisme in de kunstbeschuwing*. Herein, he questioned the man’s expertise concerning modern art, and whether he had comprehended the nature of the exhibition.²⁸¹ In general, Sanders aimed to defend the young socialist art against the nihilistic approach of critics, such as Bongers, by asserting:

‘Neen professor, gevaarlijker dan de hersenschimmen, waartegen gij in uw artikel over het ‘Bolsjewisme in de kunst’ te velde meende te mogen trekken, zonder voldoende kennis van zaken, zonder gevoel van verhoudingen, zonder te weten waar het in wezen om gaat, is het *Nihilisme in de kunstbeschuwing* ,dat gij en “de talrijken die het met u eens zijn” op deze wijze bedrijven. Daartegen de arbeidersbeweging in bescherming te nemen is het doel van mijn verweer. Daarom roep ik u nog eens met alle kracht, die in mij is en met alle verontwaardiging, waarover ik beschik, toe: Handen af van de kunst!’²⁸²

In general, it appears that the exhibition functioned as an apple of discord in the contemporary struggle between social democrats and communists. Whereas the social democrats, among whom Bongers, accused the initiators of the exhibition of being communist,²⁸³ the communist criticized the event’s lack of revolutionary militancy.²⁸⁴ The communist suspicions regarding

²⁷⁹ Cited from: W.A. Bongers, ‘Over het Bolsjewisme in de kunst. Een sociologische opmerking naar aanleiding van de S.K.K.-tentoonstelling’, *De Socialistische Gids* vol. 16 (1931) no. 1 (January), p. 51.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 53-54.

²⁸¹ Paul F. Sanders, *Tegen het nihilisme in de kunstbeschuwing. Eenige sociologische en andere opmerkingen naar aanleiding van Prof. Mr. W.A. Bongers’s artikel “Over het bolsjewisme in de kunst” in de Socialistische Gids van januari 1931*, Amsterdam 1931, p.13. With regard to this subject Sanders states: ‘Uit de hoogte van uw hoogleeraarschap hebt gij u klaarblijkelijk te verheven gevoeld om het voorwoord te lezen, hetwelk de ‘jongeren,’ die deze tentoonstelling organiseerden, in hun catalogus lieten afdrukken. Ge hadt daar kunnen lezen, dat zij met deze expositie niet wilden zeggen: ziehier wat wij onder socialistische kunst verstaan, doch ziehier een aantal voorbeelden, hoe de, in het socialisme levende, cultuur-idealen zich op dit oogenblik in verschillende vormen, al naar den land-aard, in diverse Europeesche cultuurcentra, uiten.’

²⁸² Cited from: Sanders 1931 (see note 281), p. 16.

²⁸³ H.J., ‘Socialistische Kunst Heden. De Duitsche afdeeling (schilderijen)’, *Het Volk*, 3 December 1930. With regard to this aspect, it is stated within the article: ‘De meesten der Duitsche exposanten zijn communisten, en hun werk draagt de typische kenteekenen van uitsluitend op vernietiging gericht te zijn. Het wordt voornamelijk gedragen door woede en haat, door een blinde drift om alle bestaande waarden kapot te slaan, door een volkomen gebrek aan respect voor schoonheid en waardigheid van geest.’

²⁸⁴ Anonymous *De Tribune. Dagblad der Communistische Partij Holland* 1930 (see note 251), p. 4. With regard to the Dutch department, it is stated: ‘Het is, of men uit het strijdgewoel der groote stad is aanbeland in een negory, waar de tijd een paar eeuwen heeft stilgestaan en waar oude besjes in een kanariepiet het toppunt van

the supposed social democrat orientation in the exhibition found expression in the polemic between Peter Alma, one of the initiators of the event, and Vanter, pseudonym for Gerard van het Reve (1892-1975), who was a journalist for the communist newspaper *De Tribune*. Vanter particularly criticized Alma's praise of social democrat, or according to Vanter social fascist, artists during the guided tour that was broadcasted by the VARA, and the society's refusal to exhibit the drawing *Het sociaal-fascistisch kruidenhuis* by communist Arry Jansen (1906-1996) due to its strong political content.²⁸⁵ In order to defend the intentions of the exhibition, Alma published various reactions in the same newspaper, in which he stated that the concerning artwork was dismissed due to aesthetic faults and that the exhibition consisted of various anti-social democratic works of art.²⁸⁶ Moreover, he regarded the accusations of Vanter 'onkameraadschappelijk', because he was discredited in front of the workers, who, according to Alma, showed an interest in the exhibition. To a certain extent, Alma may have been right. The polemics between the SKK-members and respectively the social democrats and communists, may have had a negative influence on the public's reception of the exhibition, and their view on the SKK and its notions on art in general. In contrast, these debates may also have contributed to an increase of public's interest. Historical material concerning the public's reception of these polemics is unfortunately lacking.

An interesting detail is that the exhibition was not extensively covered in other newspapers, such as *De Telegraaf* en *Algemeen Handelsblad*. Its content may have been regarded as too politically controversial by these more neutral publication organs. Moreover, the debate about the exhibition between social democrats and communists also concerned the nature of socialism, a subject not particularly interesting for differently orientated newspapers. Moreover, many art critics also generally regarded politics and arts as irreconcilable concepts.²⁸⁷

Besides the supposed political orientation, the exhibition, particularly the Dutch department, also received criticism regarding the quality of the exhibited artists and artworks.

vermaak vinden. Het is droevig...zeker, maar het toont de impotentie van de sociaal-kleinburgers, die voor het meerendeel hier exposeeren.'

²⁸⁵ Vanter, 'Een Protest', *De Tribune. Dagblad der Communistische Partij Holland*, 17 November 1930, p. 4. This state of affairs was also criticized in the general announcement of the exhibition, published on the 11th of November (see note 250).

²⁸⁶ Peter Alma en B. Jacobs, 'Tentoonstelling "Socialistische Kunst, Heden"', *De Tribune. Dagblad der Communistische Partij Holland*, 13 November 1930, p. 4. And: Peter Alma, 'Een "Protest" tegen een Protest', *De Tribune. Dagblad der Communistische Partij Holland*, 18 november 1930, p. 4.

²⁸⁷ Jan de Vries, 'Het is een richtingloze tijd. Moderne Duitse kunst in Nederlandse tijdschriften', in: Kathinka Dietrich, Paul Blom, Flip Boel (eds.), *Berlijn-Amsterdam 1920-1940. Wisselwerkingen*, Amsterdam 1982, p. 297. This observation, which De Vries made in relation to the reception of German politically committed art in the Netherlands, also appears applicable to the reception of the Dutch variant of this type of art.

According to an art critic in *Het Volk*, designated by the abbreviation H.J., certain artists were characterized by ‘geen of weinig vakbekwaamheid gepaard aan een opdringerige maar gene innerlijke beteekenis hebbende moderniteit.’²⁸⁸ In general, the Dutch contribution was considered quite tame in comparison to its Russian and German counterparts.²⁸⁹ According to Plasschaert, this was induced by the supposed poor selection of the artworks with regard to beauty and political offensive character.²⁹⁰

The exhibition was attended 5500 visitors in total. Moreover, various artworks, primarily posters, lithographs and woodcuts, and 1200 exhibition catalogues were sold.²⁹¹ According to the publication *Links Richten* (1975), edited by professor in literature Marie-José Buck, the exhibition *Socialistische Kunst Heden* generated considerable interest. Although the publication does not elucidate among which social groups this interest was generated, it can be assumed that this was foremost among intellectuals and artists, given the just observation that the exhibition resulted in various debates in different periodicals concerning the value of the exhibited works in relation to the socialist cultural ideals.²⁹² These observations lead to an important question: was the SKK successful in reaching their intended audience, the working class, and distributing their notions on art by means of the exhibition and their other activities? In order to distribute these notions, and to contribute to the elevation of the masses and the class struggle, the SKK regarded actual contact with the working class a necessity. This is expressed by the society’s organization of direct contact moments in terms of exhibitions and other activities, the members’ activity outside the established art world, and their proposition for the establishment of an art council, consisting of artists and workers, that had a right of say in art matters. Nevertheless, despite their good intentions, it remains highly questionable whether they were successful in achieving their objectives and distributing their notions on art among the working class. According to the publication *Links Richten*, the opportunities for organised contact with the workers were minimal. Firstly, the proposition for

²⁸⁸ H.J., ‘Socialistische Kunst Heden. De Nederlandsche afdeeling’, *Het Volk*, 22 November 1930. The lack of quality was also criticized by art critic Cornelis Veth (1880-1962), who stated that ‘(...) velen van de tentoonstellers, vooral in de Hollandsche afdeeling, hoog trachten te reiken, inderdaad boven hun macht!’ and Plasschaert, who asserted: ‘Het wezentlij-revolutionnaire is in Holland zeldzaam, dat blijkt uit deze tentoonstelling.’

Respectively extracted from: Cornelis Veth, ‘Aanteekeningen over beeldende kunst’, *De Socialistische Gids* vol. 16 (1931) nr. 1 (January), p. 49, and Albert Plasschaert, ‘Schilders en Beeldhouwers. Socialistische Kunst in het Stedelijk Museum’, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 29 November 1930, p. 10.

²⁸⁹ Gribling 1982 (see note 67), p. 326.

²⁹⁰ Albert Plasschaert, ‘Schilders en Beeldhouwers. Socialistische Kunst in het Stedelijk Museum’, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 29 November 1930, p. 10.

²⁹¹ Anonymous, ‘Sluiting tentoonstelling S.K.K.’, *Het Volk*, 8 December 1930.

²⁹² Buck 1975 (see note 154), p. 87.

the art council proved to be impracticable, due to its dependence on the social democratic municipal art policy. Secondly, the organization of activities did not provoke real communication with the workers. With regard to this aspect, within *Links Richten* the example is provided of the literary evenings, arranged by the society, where socialist writers and poets recited their work in the presence of an audience, that consisted primarily of members of the leftish literary world.²⁹³ It is also known that the lecture on the nature and necessity of socialist art, held by Alma for the exhibition *Socialistische Kunst Heden*, was not well visited.²⁹⁴ Apparently, a large part of the working class did not feel attracted to such events. With regard to this subject, Marc Adang observes in his publication on society *Kunst aan het Volk* (2008) that changes occurred in the working class' leisure activities around the turn of the century. Apart from having more spare time and financial means at their disposal, the public developed different interests and the nature of the amusement on offer changed. Traditional forms of popular culture, such as fairs, were suppressed from above or abandoned by certain parts of the working class due to, for example, their desire to assimilate with higher social classes. Regarding the new leisure possibilities, the majority of the public was attracted to theatre and music. Activities where one could acquire knowledge, such as lectures, courses and exhibitions, were appreciated as long as they offered a combination of instruction and entertainment. Activities that demanded too much intellectual effort were generally not very popular.²⁹⁵ In general, the interest for the visual arts, architecture, and the arts and crafts were relatively small.²⁹⁶ This situation still existed during the 1920s and 1930s, the period of the SKK's existence. Due to the lack of historical material, it is unknown how many members of the working class did actually visit the exhibition *Socialistische Kunst Heden* and the society's other activities. Nevertheless, given the fact that these events demanded a certain amount of intellectual effort and were not particularly entertaining, it is plausible that these events did not attract a large part of the working class. Moreover, it is not unthinkable that the activities of the SKK and their aim to elevate the masses were regarded as paternalist by the labourers themselves. With regard to the exhibition *Socialistische Kunst Heden*, it seems, however, extremely unlikely that all the excursions and guided tours for workers were organized if interest was generally lacking. Thus, a certain part of the working class must have been interested in the activities and notions of the SKK. Given the fact that the excursions were promoted in *Het Volk* and *De Tribune*, and, apart from the SKK were also

²⁹³ Ibid, p. 114.

²⁹⁴ Anonymous, 'Socialistische Kunst Nu. Peter Alma voor den S.K.K.', *Het Volk*, 21 November 1930.

²⁹⁵ Adang 2008 (see note 176), pp. 281-282.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 272.

organized by other communist and social democrat organizations, it may have been that these events predominantly generated interest among politically committed members of the working class.

Affecting society: the influence of the societies' notions on the larger context

Besides affecting individuals and groups of visitors, artists' societies also aimed to influence society with their notions. This subchapter will consider to what extent and how the notions on art and the position of the artist, produced and distributed by artists' societies, did influence society.

In his publication on art worlds, Hans van Maanen provides various observations regarding the societal functioning of art, or, in other words, the manner in which art influences society. In general, the author argues that aesthetic experiences from social groups can influence the position of art in society, induce the employment of these art experiences within other social systems, which ultimately can result in new collective perceptions of the world. If an artist wants to ensure that the way in which she betokens or represents reality, functions in society, he/she has to ensure that the artistic observation and concepts that it encompasses are useable in that it can be applied in the perception and understanding of, and in dealing with the world in which the people using art must live.²⁹⁷ Moreover, they should address the right audience, which is largely dependent of the actors in the distribution domain.²⁹⁸ His other observations do not really contribute to the subject of this thesis and are therefore are not taken into consideration.

Due to the lack of historical material and the fact that it is difficult to objectify the influence of notions, it appears to be quite complicated to determine the extent and manner in which the notions on art and the position of the artist, produced and distributed by artists' societies, affected contemporary society. Because this is dependent on many factors, further research is needed in order to answer this question adequately. Nevertheless, some general observations can be made. Many notions of the members of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK pertained the position of art in society and the relation between artist and public. Consequently, many of the societies' activities were aimed at the improvement of this position. Whereas De Brug and the ASB strove to achieve this by the organization of exhibitions and (in the case of De Brug) financial measures, the activities of the SKK were primarily focussed on the representation of the artists' demands against the labour movement

²⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 283.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 284.

and the authorities. It is difficult to establish whether the notions, produced and distributed by the artists' societies, indeed had a direct effect on the position of art and the artist in society. Nevertheless, it appears that the artists' societies considered here have contributed to a growing awareness concerning the difficult position of art and artist in society, and the conviction that practical measures were needed in order to improve this. This is, for example, demonstrated by the following statement of the Amsterdam arts councillor Emanuel Boekman (1889-1940), which was expressed during a council meeting: 'Hoort men bij de opening eener schilderijtentoonstelling de rede van den voorzitter eener schildervereniging, dan blijkt het dat de kunstschilders, niet alleen te Amsterdam, doch overal, moeten leven op een wijze die eigenlijk een caricatuur van leven is.'²⁹⁹ From the 1920s on, certain administrative measures were taken in order to support the visual arts and improve the situation of artists. For example, the state and city authorities acquired artworks and gave special commissions to artists for the decoration of the public space.³⁰⁰ These commissions were distributed in consultation with artists themselves, united in, amongst others, *Arti et Amicitiae* and the *Amsterdamse Federatie van Beeldende Kunstenaarsverenigingen*, which was initiated by *De Onafhankelijken*.³⁰¹ In comparison to the state, the Amsterdam city authorities allocated a relatively large budget for this.³⁰² From 1931 on, the city council, however, also had to reduce their expenses due to the consequences of the economic crisis.³⁰³ This situation did not restrain them from the establishment of a 'Voorzieningsfonds voor Kunstenaars' in 1935, which was intended as a collective social insurance for destitute artists.³⁰⁴ Although the here considered artists' societies were not directly connected to the introduction of these measures, the notions on art and the role of the artists of these organizations certainly contributed to their origination.

²⁹⁹ Cited from: Jansen and Rogier 1983 (see note 115), p. 169.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

³⁰² Between 1926 and 1928, the Amsterdam city authorities reserved f 15.000 for the arts. This sum increased to f 30.000 between 1929 and 1931, opposed to state, whose budget for art amounted to f 20.000.

³⁰³ Between 1931-1934, the Amsterdam city authorities reduced their expenses to f 25.000. From 1934 on, solely f 20.000 was reserved for the arts. This state of affairs was particularly criticized by the communists, which expressed their indignation on congresses, such as 'Kunstenaars in crisis' (1933), to which also former members of the SKK participated. For more information on this congress, see Buck 1975 (note 154), pp. 404-408.

³⁰⁴ Jansen and Rogier 1983 (see note 115), p. 175.

Conclusion

Within this chapter the role of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK in the reception of notions on art and the position of the artist was considered. In this context, it was attempted to elucidate, whether these artists' societies were successful in the distribution of these notions among their intended audience, and to what extent their notions influenced contemporary society.

It appears that the here considered artists' societies were successful in distributing their notions on art to varying extents. In general, these notions are often expressed in the reviews of the activities, organized by these societies, which demonstrates that, in general, they were able to adequately communicate them. The same reviews, however, also show that this process occasionally was impeded by the heterogeneous character of the societies' exhibitions in terms of content, style and artistic quality, and the large amount of exhibited works. Plasschaert connected this situation with the organization of such societies, by stating:

‘Langzamerhand begint bij hen, die tentoonstellen, het juiste inzicht te komen, dat een tentoonstelling niet ten eerste moet zijn een groote hoeveelheid van min of meer goede werken, maar dat zij wezen moet: niet veel werken, maar goed; dingen dus die kostbaar zin, als kostbare dingen uitgestald. De kunstgenootschappen zijn in dit opzicht in een ongunstige positie, omdat daar uit hartelijkheid of uit nonchalance gaarne een groot getal leden wordt gekweekt, zonder dat daarbij bedacht werd, dat deze leden (eenigszins toch terecht!) ten toon willen stellen voor hun goeie geld, dat contributie heet.’³⁰⁵

According to Plasschaert, the best exhibitions were, thus, organized by art dealers and societies that did not have such ‘obstructing’ members. Although the critic connected the faults in the societies' organization of exhibitions with their general quality of such events, his observations are also applicable to the distribution of notions on art and the position of the artist. The situation in which large groups of different members were able to exhibit their various works, may not have contributed to the unambiguous presentation and distribution of a society's notions on art.

Whether the here discussed artists' societies were able to reach their intended audiences, remains obscure to a certain extent. Nevertheless, this chapter has demonstrated that, despite their shared aim to generate more interest for art in larger segments of the population, the reach of the notions and activities of artists' societies was often limited to a

³⁰⁵ Cited from: Albert Plasschaert, ‘Schilderkunst. Tentoonstellingen’, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 23 October 1926, p. 18.

circle of cultivated, experienced audience. This may have been due to the complicated nature of their activities, that generated this type of audience, and the deviating preferences of the intended audience.

With regard to the influence of the societies' notions on art and the position of the artist on contemporary society, it appears that these organizations have primarily contributed to a growing awareness of the its/their difficult social position among governmental entities, and the conviction that practical measures were needed in order to improve this. The importance of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK for the position of art and artists within society lay in these contributions.

Conclusion

In this thesis, the role of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK in the production, distribution and reception of notions on art and the position of the artist during the Interwar period, was considered, in order to provide a fresh insight in the organization and functioning of these artists' societies, and their importance for the contemporary artistic climate. The matter, which was researched according to the specific domains of production, distribution and reception, will be connected within this conclusion.

For the consideration of the relation between the here discussed artists' societies and notions on art and the position of the artist, the theory of Hans van Maanen on art worlds was employed. Given the fact that these notions pass through the same stages of production, distribution and reception as art, the scholar's analysis of the organization and functioning of these different domains within the art world, proved to be a useful analytical tool for this thesis. Nevertheless, not every aspect of Van Maanen's theory appeared to be relevant for this research, and thus, per domain a selection was made from the information, offered in the scholar's publication. Furthermore, the application of Van Maanen's theory to the thesis subject, and the research process in general, was also occasionally impeded by the lack of historical material, particularly with regard to the reception domain.

This thesis has presented De Brug, the ASB and the SKK as multidisciplinary artists' initiatives that played an essential role in the artistic life of the Interwar period, because of their focus on the stimulation of Dutch modern art and the representation of artists' interests. Given the fact that these societies were all founded around the same period, their establishment met a general need for this kind of organizations among young, modern artists in an age where modern art received relatively little support from the state, museums and traditional artists' societies. In general, the art of the beginning of the Interwar period was characterized by a great diversity in styles, which were all expressions of the same 'objective-vital' attitude towards life according to contemporaries. Nevertheless, increasing feelings of insecurity and scepticism among intellectuals as a result of political, social and economic circumstances, and an accompanying reconsideration of the national identity and art tradition, resulted in an increasing aversion to the formal experiments of the international avant-garde and abstract art in general, and a return to figurative art. Moreover, the age witnessed a rapid emergence of politically committed art. These changes were accompanied and also induced by a vigorous debate on the aim and nature of art, the desirability of cooperation between different art disciplines, the position of the artist, and the desired relation between art and

society. This thesis has demonstrated that De Brug, the ASB and the SKK were products of this debate, in that the herein circulating notions on art and the position of the artist influenced their establishment and character. The ultimate nature of the artists' societies and their position in the artistic debate was determined by these founding notions, the notions that were subsequently produced within the context of the artists' society itself, and the totality of activities, the society undertook to ensure their distribution. The nature and position of the respective artists' societies were elucidated within this thesis. In general, De Brug represented the contemporary return to figurative art by its members' desire to form a meeting point for 'new objective' art, which was characterized by a careful and detailed depiction of recognisable objects. Their notions particularly focussed on the visual arts. In contrast to De Brug, the position of the ASB was determined by the member's aim to gather the best artists of various contemporary avant-garde movements in their society. Given the members' vision that architecture and the visual arts were interrelated and complementary disciplines, the society accommodated painters, sculptors as well as architects. Moreover, inspired by the contemporary notion that all types of art, created during that period, were influenced by the same 'objective-vital' attitude towards life, no distinction was made between figurative and abstract art. Consequently, the ASB can be regarded as a typical representative of the artistic climate of the mid-twenties, when those two types of art still coexisted. With regard to the notions of De Brug and the ASB on the position of the artist, it appears that the artist's main task was to provide the public with his/her views on reality and/or the desired future in order to make a positive contribution to society, culture and/or art in general. According to the members of the ASB, an international orientation of the artist and the society, the cooperation between art disciplines, and support of artistic quality were necessary conditions for this process. Whereas De Brug and the ASB acknowledged the importance of art for society, art had a particular political and social aim according to the artists of the SKK. The members of this multidisciplinary society, whose establishment can be connected with the increased political commitment of artists around the second half of the 1920s, considered art and socialism as two interrelated concepts. Out of solidarity with the proletariat, the artist had the task to contribute to elevation of the masses and the class struggle in order to enable the development of a new, socialist society. The resulting preference of most members for artworks with clear, recognisable subjects in order to convey the socialist message, connects the society with the general contemporary return to figurative art.

This thesis has demonstrated that De Brug, the ASB and the SKK influenced the contemporary artistic climate by playing an active role in the production, distribution and

reception of notions on art and the position of the artist. For example, all these artists' societies actively contributed to the production of these notions by providing a forum for the development and exchange of ideas, which in turn influenced individual artists, the further development of the artists' society, and, after being distributed through their exhibitions, lectures and publications, the artistic debate or the society in general.

In general, the activities of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK proved to have functioned as the societies' strategies to distribute their notions on art and the position of the artist among the part of the public they aimed to reach. The activities, which were purposefully organized, often formed a direct expression or visualisation of the society's notions. Moreover, artists' societies also provided a platform for artists to distribute their individual notions. Inspired by the shared view that art and artist occupied a precarious position in society, the activities of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK were to a certain extent all intended to contribute to the improvement of this position. Although they advocated different solutions for this problem, the collective was regarded by all as a necessary condition for the improvement of the social position of art and artist. Moreover, the members of all three artists' societies considered the organization of exhibitions as one of the most important means to achieve this objective, because these events enabled the public to become acquainted with and learn to appreciate certain types of art, and provided opportunities for the artist to present his/her works to the audience and, thus, obtain public recognition and attract potential buyers. Besides this, the exhibitions also provided opportunities to influence the public debate on art matters and even political policy, which in turn could result in a better position for art and the artist in society. These positive aspects of the artists' society were also acknowledged by individual artists themselves. Despite the previously expounded distinctive characters of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK, various artists were affiliated with these different artists' societies at the same time. The artist's membership was, thus, not primarily motivated by the society's orientation, but rather by the opportunities such organizations offered for the exhibition of their work, receiving support, and interaction with other artists.

Due to the lack of historical material and already conducted research on the reception history of artists' societies, it was difficult to determine whether De Brug, the ASB and the SKK were successful in the distribution of their notions on art and the position of the artist. The description of these notions in exhibition reviews nevertheless, demonstrate that the societies were able to adequately communicate them. However, those same reviews also show that a proper distribution of the societies' notions, and thus reception, was regularly impeded by the large, often heterogeneous group of artworks, which featured the exhibitions of De

Brug, the ASB and the SKK. In connection with this aspect, it appears that, despite the societies' efforts, their often large, diverse member groups, generally hindered the production and distribution of a coherent set of notions on art and the position of the artist, which ultimately affected the reception of the societies' notions, their influence on the contemporary artistic climate and society in general, and also their individual existence.

This thesis has also demonstrated that the reach of their activities, and thus the distribution of their notions on art and the position of the artist, was largely limited to the traditional audience of contemporary art-exhibitions, consisting of professionals and experienced art lovers. Amongst others, the occasional complicated nature of their activities and, in the case of the SKK, deviating preferences of the desired audience, may have hindered the distribution of their notions among their intended audience, and the generation of more interest for art within larger segments of the population in general. Nevertheless, De Brug, the ASB and the SKK, or actually artists' societies in general, have contributed to the improvement of the social and economic situation of artists, by raising awareness of the precarious position of the art and artist in society in, amongst others, government circles.

To conclude, De Brug, the ASB and the SKK have made a major contribution to the development of Dutch art, the organization of contemporary artistic life, the maintenance of a vigorous artistic debate after the First World War, and the improvement of the social position of art and the artist, by their strong engagement in the production, distribution and reception of notions on art and the position of the artist. The same observation could also be made with regard to other artists' societies that existed during the same period, and with some adjustments to artists' societies in general. All these organizations helped shaping the contemporary artistic climate by influencing the production, distribution and reception of notions on art and the position of the artist. Nevertheless, this thesis has also demonstrated that a considerable amount of essential knowledge concerning the organization and functioning of De Brug, the ASB and the SKK, and artists' societies in general, is still lacking. Given the fact that art historians are increasingly convinced of the general importance of these organizations for the artistic climate, the subject of artists' societies will hopefully receive the scholarly attention it actually deserves in the near future.

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Wilhelmi, Christoph, *Künstlergruppen in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz seit 1900. Ein Handbuch*, Stuttgart 1996.

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Wingen, Ed van, 'Zeventigjarige, het is mooi geweest', in: Jan Batterman, Henk Hesselius, Leo Poelmeijer (ed.), *Kunstenaarsvereniging De Brug 1926-1996*, Amsterdam 1996.

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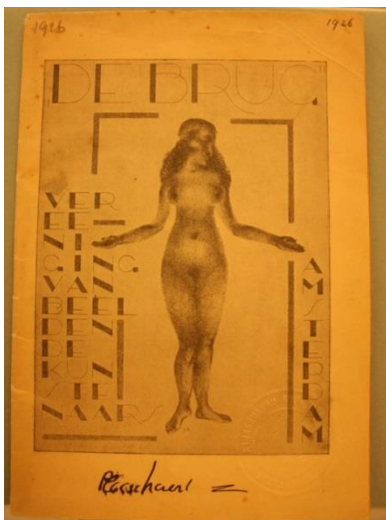
Photo: Agnes Grondman, *Sal Meijer. Zo naïef nog niet*, Amsterdam 1986, p.84.



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Photo: website *Koninklijke Bibliotheek*

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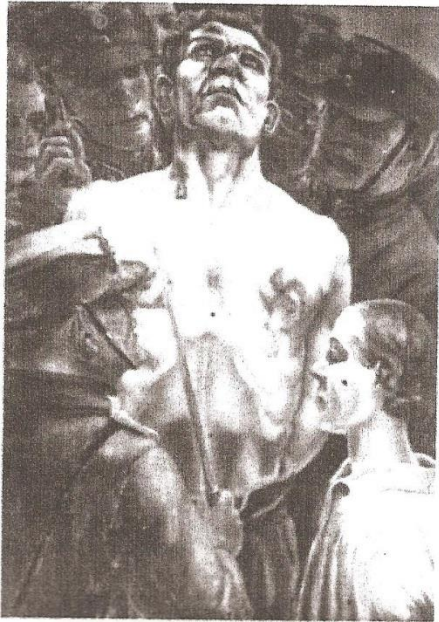
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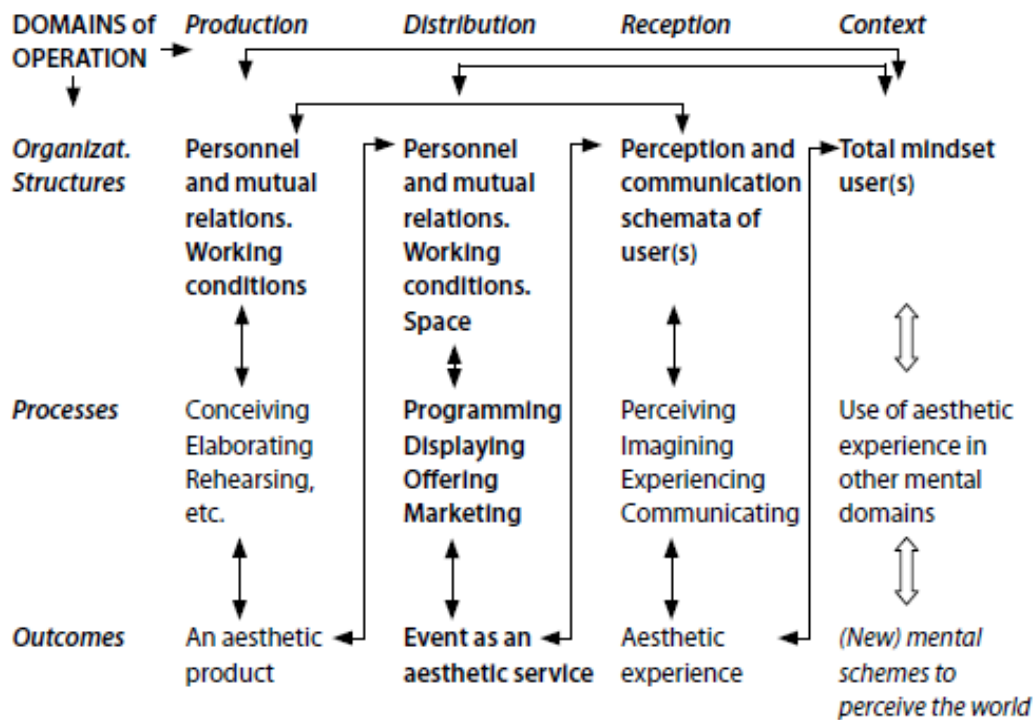
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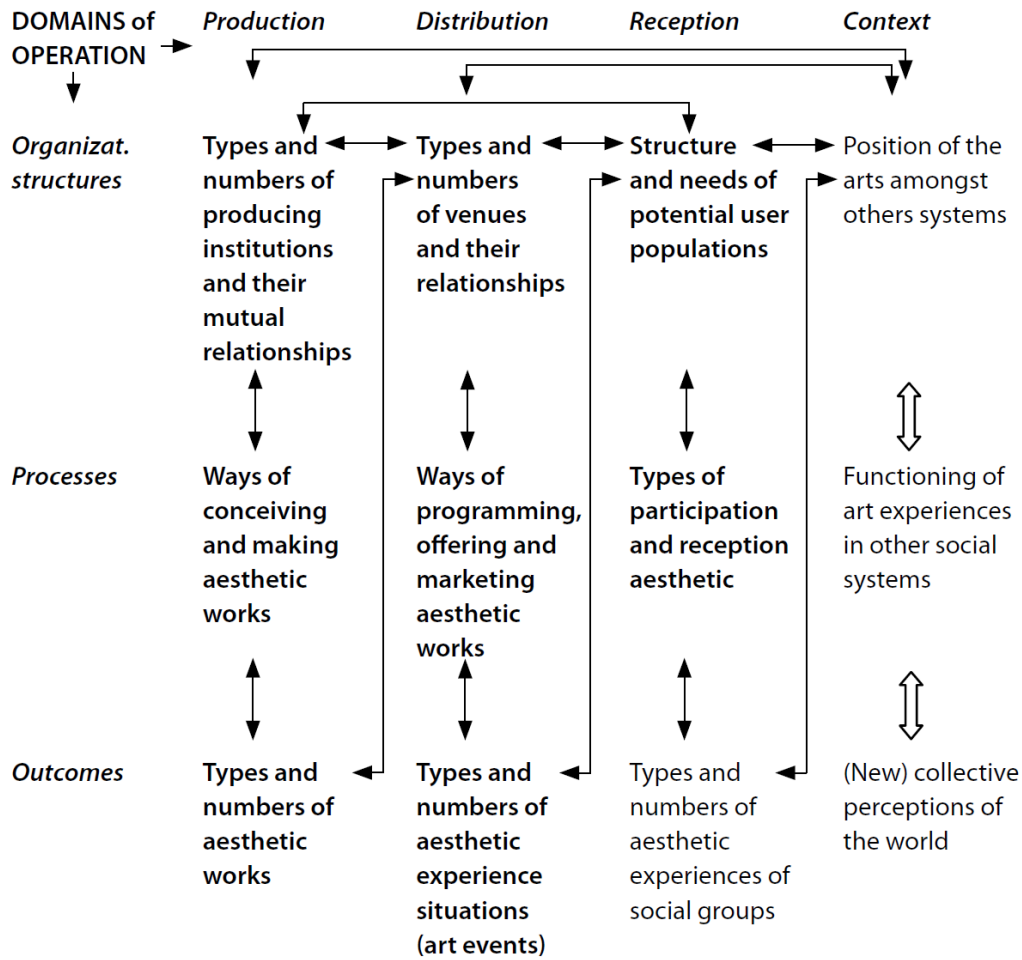
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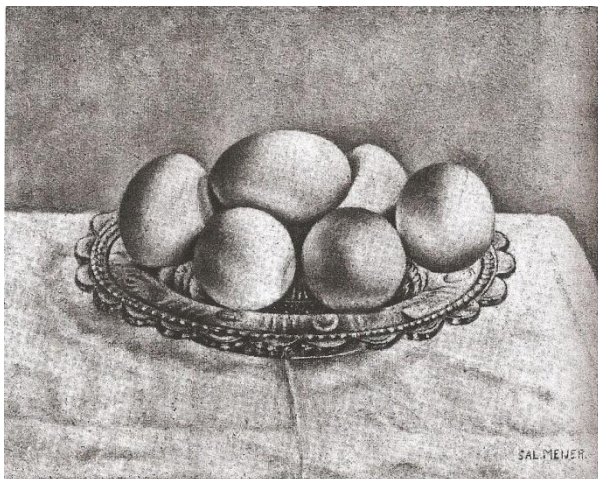
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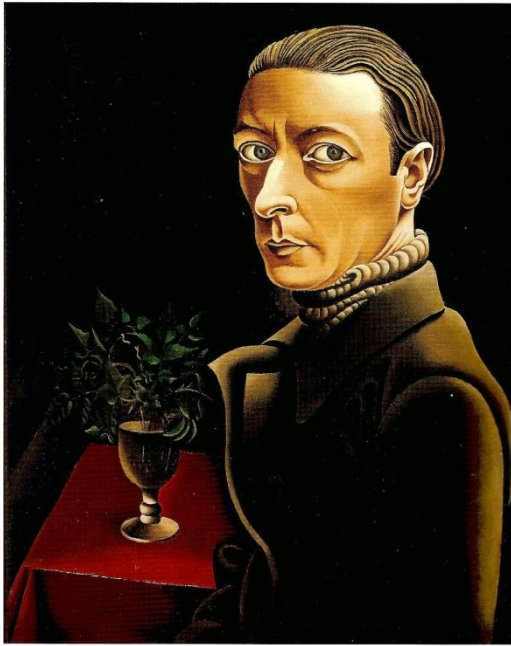
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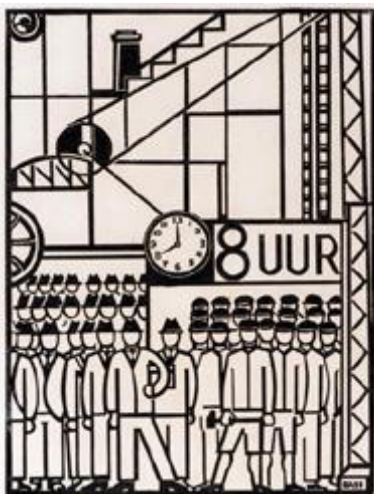
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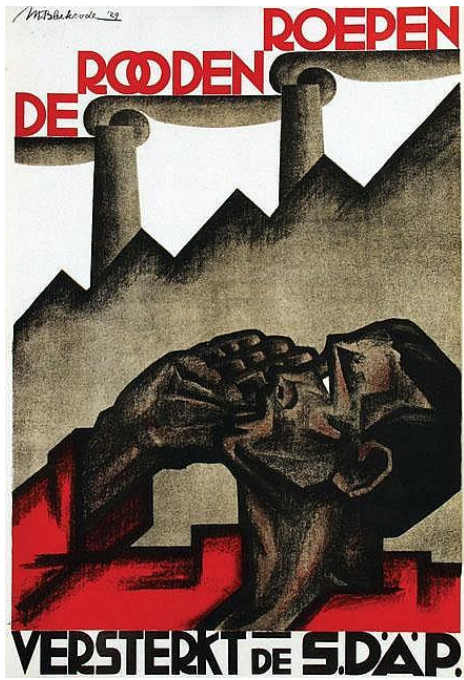
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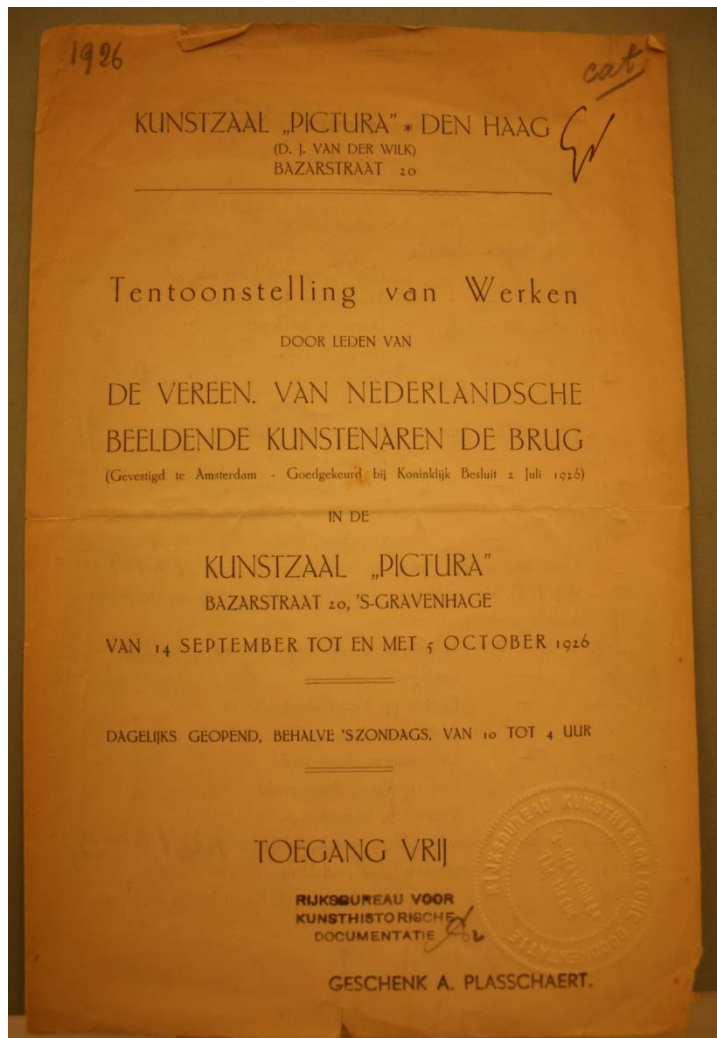
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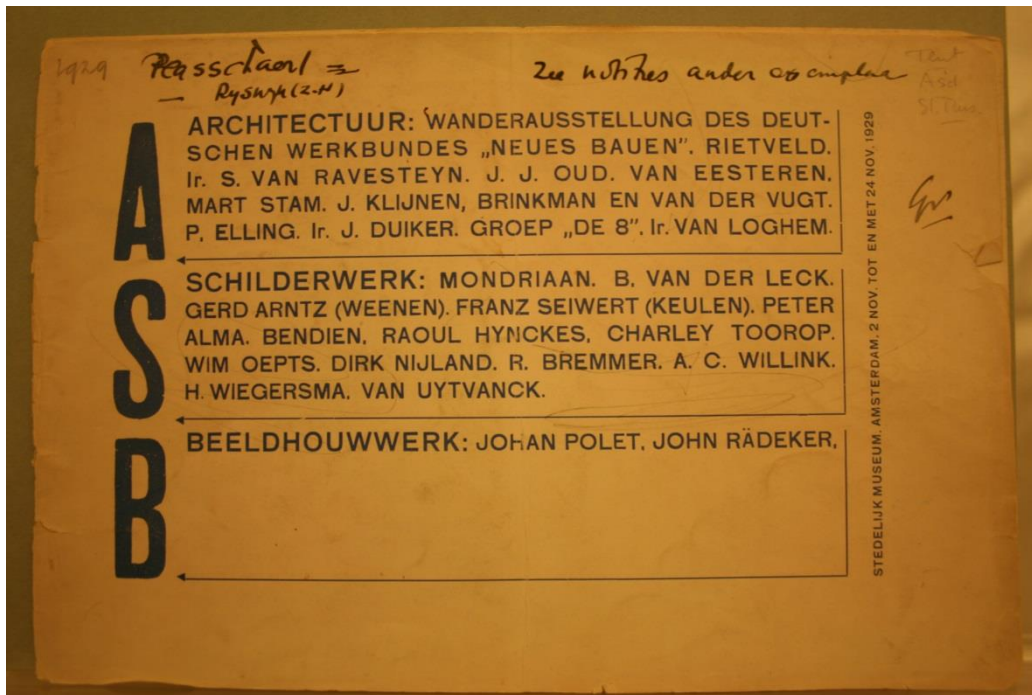
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Photo: author.



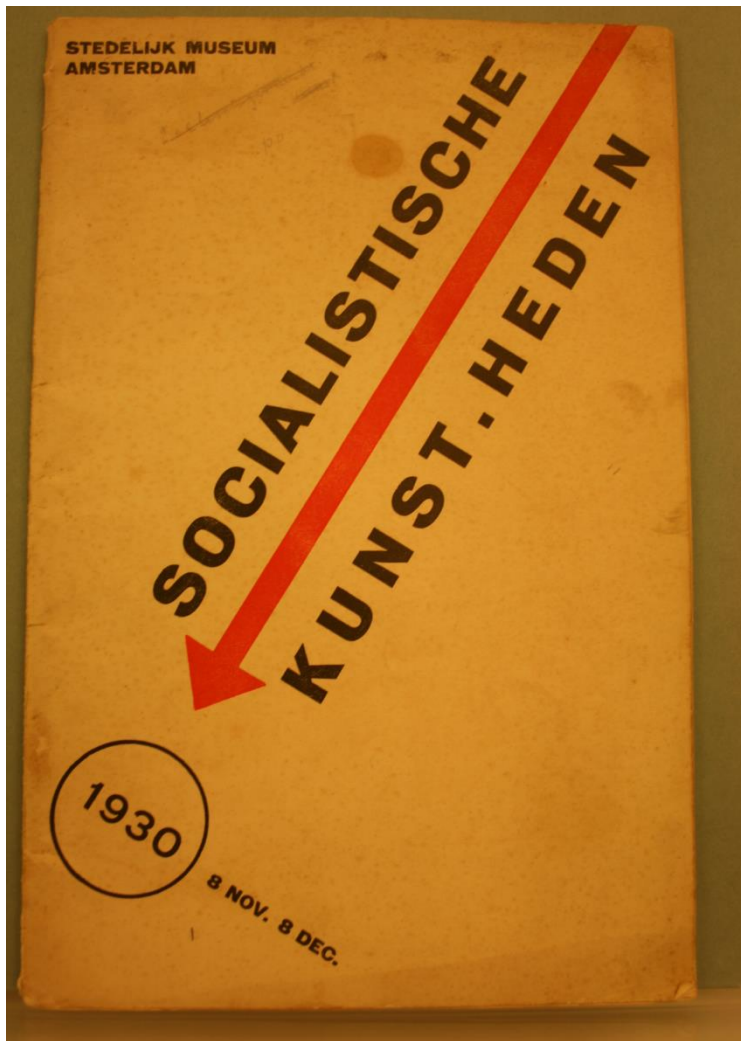
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