

Billedkunstneres Forbund / Danish Visual Artists

National Committee Report

IAA General Assembly, October 2015, Pilsen, Czech Republic.

Freedom of expression under pressure

The most famous example in this millennium of freedom of expression in Denmark is, of course, the so-called Cartoon Crisis – caused by the publication of drawings of Mohamed in 2005 in a Danish newspaper. Ten years later, the effects of the crisis are obvious: No Danish newspaper chose to re-print the drawings. Some explained this as a sign of fear of the reaction from Islamic fundamentalists, others as a sign of good taste, due to the poor character and execution of the drawings.

In any case, the Cartoon Crisis has changed the pictorial landscape for good. Professionals in the graphic arts field are wary of touching religious and nationalist topics, especially after the tragic events in Paris in January this year. An outspoken self-censorship has limited certain artists from exercising their talent in satirical drawings.

The government is also imposing laws to limit the freedom of expression. A law that forbids anyone to praise a terror attack has been passed because, as the proponents of the law put it: The border between praising and urging someone else to carry out a terrorist act (which in Denmark has been outlawed for years already) is blurred.

Danish Visual Artists are concerned that the law is not clear about what praise really is, and that therefore, at some point of time, it may be used to limit the freedom of expression of anyone who is defined as opposition, religiously, politically, racially or sexually.

Cut-backs on National Museums

A new right-wing government is rarely good news for artists living and working in Denmark and, after the election in June 2015, cutbacks totaling 8 % of the budget for cultural activities were announced for next four years. The support through grants and production support for art works were exempted this time, allegedly the government wanted to be spared for the uproar and trouble from the artist themselves. But it is undeniably a big set-back for the exhibition institutions in general and anyone delivering work to them.

We see the cutbacks as an erosion of the cultural environment. Already there is a very poor will to pay artists for their work in the national museums; on their part the museums stress the fact that the mere exposure given by exhibiting in a national museum will make up for a salary.

These problems Danish Visual Artists expect to be more widespread and harder to battle in the years to come.