“Culture, Art and European Identity”, a speech by Paul DUJARDIN, CEO and Artistic Director of the Centre for Fine Arts (BOZAR)
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(Check Against Delivery).

Does a European culture exist? If you mean one static, monolithic and overarching culture, then the answer is clearly: “no”! But first, I would like to answer another question: what are we exactly talking about when we use the word “Europe” as an idea? The sociologist Richard Swedberg has traced 14 fundamental milestones behind the historical ideas of Europe: from the myth of Europe and the bull, Napoleon’s Europe to the creation and the development of European contemporary institutions. It goes without saying: not every idea of Europe is peaceful. In this regard, the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize gives the European Union a huge responsibility.

But let us start with the creation and the development of the European institutions after the Second World War, which have stimulated many studies on the European identity. European federalism was inspired by the idea of a deep-routed common destiny and a shared culture. For this, European thinkers like the Swiss writer Denis de Rougemont mention the legacy of Greek rationality, Roman law, Judaeo-Christian ethics and the Renaissance rediscovery of antiquity - with its strong emphasis on humanism, democracy and science.
To paraphrase de Bono, this is excellent but not enough. It does not correspond to modern intercultural societies any longer. Indeed, the reality is more complex. In this sense, the **EUROBAROMETER** released by the European Parliament in August 2013 gives more evidence. To answer the question, “**what are the key elements of the European identity**”? : 42% of respondents mention the euro, 40% mention the values of democracy and freedom. Only 26% mention culture.

So there is still some work to be done! Europe is an idea, a project. We have to translate constantly this project to citizens. Within a civic community, culture plays a major part – popular culture included. Culture is one of the three pillars of social order – together with politics and economics. Only when a society finds a good balance between economy, politics and culture, there is social order. To achieve this balance, I also believe the role of education is key, as imagined through the Greek concept of “**paideia**”, which is the common etymology for education and culture.

As CEO and artistic director of the Centre for Fine Arts, a cultural institution in the capital of Europe, I see it as my responsibility to stimulate the importance of cultural heritage and the living artists within the European project.

What can artists do for Europe? From my point of view, they contribute to building bridges with civil society and a variety of different stakeholders. But let me better answer the question with a book: “**Made in Europe. The art that connect our continent**”, written by the Dutch historian and literary critic, Pieter Steinz. His introduction goes as follows – I quote: “**When I think of Europe, I think of Chartres Cathedral and the Sistine Chapel. I think of Shakespeare’s plays and Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring. I hear the final chorus from Bach’s St. Matthew Passion and ‘Back in the U.S.S.R.’ by the Beatles.**
I see Fellini’s Satyricon and the Tintin album King Ottokar’s Scepter. I think of French cuisine, Greek tragedy, German Romanticism, the Dutch Masters, Scandinavian design, the Russian novel. [...] When I think of Europe, I think of shared culture, from Dublin to Lesbos and St. Petersburg to Lisbon: literature and art that transcends borders.”

I agree on different points. Even though Art is not a religion, religion is part of Arts – as a metaphoric representation, which belongs to our European cultural heritage. Art also transcends borders…. Art works and artists are not confined to a native country. For instance, the works of our exhibition “Rubens and his Legacy” came from museums of no less than 39 cities, all over Europe and the United States: from Aachen, Amsterdam, Antwerp and Berlin to Vienne, Washington, New York and Zurich.

The same is true when you look at major contemporary artists such as the Belgian painter Luc Tuymans (who recently exhibited not only in Brussels at BOZAR, but also in the USA, China and Russia), the Italian theatre maker Romeo Castellucci, architects like Jean Nouvel and Rem Koolhaas or the books of Rushdie and Rowling.

As said the German filmmaker Wim Wenders – who has lived and worked for years in the USA: “cultural diversity is not the weakness of Europe, in the future it’s going to be our biggest asset”. Other continents envy the cultural richness of Europe – Asia and America for instance. Indeed, people who look to Europe from the outside appreciate the most its diversity and internal coherence. Europe is the melting pot America keeps dreaming about.
After the attack on the French satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, President Obama referred immediately to “the culture of Paris that is so central to our imaginations”. From Paris to Europe: what about us, Europeans? As Herman Van Rompuy, our former and more modest president, said it nicely in the catalogue of the BOZAR exhibition “Sense of Place. European landscape photography”: “Is it only possible to feel at home in our own city, region, or country? Or can people also feel at home on our small section of planet Earth – this western end of Eurasia to which we have referred, since the ancient Greeks, as ‘Europa’? Is Europa only a ‘space’, or can it also become a ‘place’?”

The European Union should rely more on culture and the arts, within and outside the borders of the European continent. It is true that the *European External Action Service* is still young. But I do really have high expectations for the second “High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy”, Federica Mogherini.

My feeling is that you can only understand Europe when you go beyond its borders; when you are abroad; when you miss the common values and stories of Europe. But for that, we need stronger images for Europe than the Euro. We need more narratives that can unite us.

Artists are acting on different levels: locally, nationally and internationally. They are ambassadors for Europe. As chairman of the cultural committee of “A New Narrative for Europe” (a Pilot Project of the EU, initiated by the European Parliament and implemented by the European Commission), I can witness: many artists are prepared to do their job as European citizens.
This is particularly the case in the exhibition “We-traders, swapping Crisis for City”, currently showcased at BOZAR, in collaboration with the Goethe Institute and many artists, designers, activists and citizens from Lisbon, Madrid, Toulouse, Turin, Berlin and Brussels. Citizens across Europe are currently taking the initiative to re-appropriate the urban space. We call them “We-Traders” because they redefine the relation between value, profit and public good and are able to motivate fellow citizens to follow suit. We-Traders respond to crisis in several arenas of urban life, be it economic, social or ecological – paving the way for a new culture of responsibility in Europe.

How important is culture for the future Europe? Let me answer again with a book. This time with the provocative title: “No Culture, No Europe”, by Pascal Gielen. We will present the book on the 31st of March 2015, in the presence of the Hungarian writer Gyorgy Konrad.

Culture can help to create a stronger European common. The editors of “No Culture, No Europe” introduce the word “communism” – not to be confused with communism. Europe proclaimed already in an early stage the word “Community” as a political entity. The word “common” stems from the Latin word “communis”, which has as its Indo-European root “mei”: meaning to exchange.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, the meadows (where cattle could graze freely) and the forests (where people could collect wood) in Europe were gradually privatized. “Common land” is not exactly public land. It is land owned by private people that some persons can use: the so-called “commoners”. This is something to keep in mind: the common is not given; it’s a good you have to fight for, or at least try to obtain.
The common consists not only of natural resources such as air, water and fuel, but also of cultural resources such as language, traditions, knowledge and information. Culture is indeed a common good.

Culture shapes communities, also the European Community, which is not only an economic and political entity but also a cultural reality. The cultural model is the model of collaboration, dialogue, listening and mutual respect – not of clashing entities. Culture as a model is inclusive: you can share a cultural space without necessarily sharing the same ideas or opinions. In order to survive and develop cultures also need *dissensus*. Art and science are by definition also exclusive. Otherwise they cannot make the difference. To have *dissensus*, we need discussions, expression and freedom of speech. However, we are not all Charlie. At least, not all in the same way.

As European cultural diplomats, we have to be attentive for the values of other cultures, especially in our cities. Let us have an open debate on values with people who think differently - and certainly avoid moralising and patronising them. Let us, however, say clearly where we - as Europeans - draw the line: violence, mutilation, strong censorship... Cultural and religious differences may not be used as an excuse to harm human rights. Let us be comprehensive to people who feel offended by artists and cartoonists. It is the consequence of exclusivity: some people will feel excluded.

The question is: how do you react, when you feel excluded? Muslims in Europe can react differently on cartoons: They can enter the debate. They can feel indifferent. They can feel strong emotions. But the answer to satire in our open secular society may never be violence.
To put it in a nutshell, Europe is an idea, which was built on tensions. It resulted in a project aimed at reuniting and restoring peace. Art and artists are here to help to recreate this sense of community. And when these tensions appear again – be they inside or outside of our borders - culture is not to be seen as a matter of subsidiarity, but rather as the founding element of our European project.

Thank you.