



Pyke Koch (1901 – 1991) *De koorddanser III* 1977 - 1984 olieverf en tempera op doek 111.5 x 130 cm Centraal Museum Inventarisnummer 25866

A balancing act on a tightrope

### Intro

In his column in the NRC Robbert Dijkgraaf mentions the multidisciplinary approach as a vulnerable creative process that can take years to come up with any results.<sup>1</sup> In the same column he argues for a re-evaluation of the empty (and useless?) spaces in science. It is precisely there in these empty (and useless?) spaces where creativity thrives. In this paper I will look at what the practise of art and the academic topic of art history can bring to the table when we are talking about the theme of Public Order, Safety and Security. In relation to the greater topic of this course Interdisciplinary Seminars and looking at the words of Robbert Dijkgraaf who states that the creative process of a multidisciplinary

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<sup>1</sup> NRC Handelsblad d.d. September 24, 2021, Robbert Dijkgraaf director van het Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2021/10/29/vrees-voor-een-wetenschappelijke-coronadip-a4063566> consulted on November 7, 2021.

approach can take many years, I tend to be very modest. This paper can hardly be more than a first and very general survey of the possibilities that art and art history can possibly offer.

### Research question

Governments all over the world and on many levels are challenged by the inconsistency between public order, safety, and security on one hand and protecting fundamental rights, such as the freedoms of speech and assembly on the other hand. A balancing act on a tightrope, for all the mayors and judges involved.

The question in this paper is, can the practise of art and the academic topic of art history offer anything at all in this challenging balancing act.

### Method

To find even the beginning of an answer I first looked at Monique Louise Koemans (1968) study on Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) *The war on antisocial behaviour* (2011). After that the question of tolerance in relation to art and art history is examined. Finally, the possibilities of Community Art are investigated, using the case study *Community Art in Utrecht*.<sup>2</sup> At the end I will briefly discuss too personal examples of community art.

### Koemans study on antisocial behaviour

Koemans study is titled: *The war on antisocial behaviour: rationale underlying antisocial behaviour policies : comparing British and Dutch discourse analyses*. The points I mention are a little like *cherry picking*, they are not an abstract of Koemans study. According to Koemans the solution is always a mix of hard and soft approaches.<sup>3</sup> The hard approach being the legal instruments and the soft approach being the social instruments. Perhaps there is a window of opportunity here for art and art history also. New and mere repressive policies often lead to rising crime rates (and Anti-Social Behaviour?) and is not the silver bullet for complex social issues.<sup>4</sup> Writing in De Correspondent (November 14, 2020) about covid-19 riots in the Schilderswijk in the Hague Hizir Cengiz asks why the government only invested in playgrounds and youth workers playing football. According to Cengiz, art can also be a tool. Those who live with an artist mindset will sooner choose for something new and go a different path.<sup>5</sup>

Koemans speaks of a culture of control or even a narrative of control and that over the past few decades the Dutch society is moved from tolerance to punitive populism.<sup>6</sup> The words used to describe Anti-Social Behaviour tend to get bigger and bigger sometimes comparing ASB with street terrorism.<sup>7</sup> Public and politic are less tolerant towards Anti-Social Behaviour.<sup>8</sup> Looking at these remarks, perhaps there is a lot to gain when we can become a more tolerant and open-minded society. I think so, but can art and art history be helpful there? At least art can show us that if we want to change anything it is sometimes needed to look for the boundaries and every now and then cross them. If this leads to any form of Anti-Social Behaviour, we better accept that, *you can't have your cake and eat it (too)*. That large scale and useless vandalism and violence is something of a completely different order goes

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<sup>2</sup> Community Art in Utrecht: Een kwalitatieve casestudy van het community art-beleid en de evaluatie daarvan van de Gemeente Utrecht <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/330955> consulted on November 23, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Koemans, 'The war on antisocial behaviour', 127.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 103–4.

<sup>5</sup> Cengiz, 'Waarom jongeren niet alleen trapveldjes maar ook kunst nodig hebben'. <https://decorrespondent.nl/11796/waarom-jongeren-niet-alleen-trapveldjes-maar-ook-kunst-nodig-hebben/5342046085860-48030506> consulted on November 23, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Koemans, 'The war on antisocial behaviour', 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 92.

without saying. A few examples where art challenged the understanding and open minds of its public:

Famous example is Igor Stravinsky's ballet and orchestral concert *Le Sacre du printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*) written in 1913. When first performed at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on 29 May 1913, the avant-garde nature of the music and choreography caused a sensation. Many have called the first-night reaction a *riot* or *near-riot*. Now it is widely considered to be one of the most influential musical works of the 20th century.

Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* (The Young Ladies of Avignon, or The Brothel of Avignon) from 1907. Then controversial and leading to widespread anger and disagreement, now a masterpiece and sometimes considered as the starting point of modern art.

When Bob Dylan changed his music from acoustic to electric, he was said to have "electrified one half of his audience and electrocuted the other". He was *booed* and called a *Judas* and not able to perform for a few years. Over time, his electric period has since come to be recognized by critics and fans as producing some of his best-received music, and his controversial performance at Newport has been considered a pivotal moment in the development of folk rock.<sup>9</sup>

The point I am trying to make here is, that if we can bring ourselves to be a little more tolerant and open minded towards art, perhaps that can affect our tolerance on other parts of society as well. Like *the artist mindset* that Hizir Cengiz talks about.<sup>10</sup> Or is that a too romantic point of view all together? At the same time Anti-Social Behaviour, Koemans states is less dramatic than often described.<sup>11</sup> The Dutch public looks for solutions to limit Anti-Social Behaviour in general welfare and family responsibilities, education, community centres and street coaches.<sup>12</sup> Anti-Social Behaviour is a minor problem and already targeted by various crime reducing policies. However, the heated public debate and political discourse have little to do with the facts and cannot be easily cooled down by more facts.<sup>13</sup> Koemans speaks of a current taboo on issues like soft policies towards crime (and Anti-Social Behaviour?).<sup>14</sup> So, there is a paradox there; in solving the problem of Anti-Social Behaviour next to the hard approach, the legal instruments, we will always need the soft approach, the social instruments. But in the public and political debate there seems to be less and less consideration for a soft approach. If there is, as Koemans shows, scientific proof that a soft approach can be helpful in tackling Anti-Social Behaviour. And if the public looks for solutions in general welfare, also a soft approach. Then maybe, just maybe art and art history can be helpful in solving this complex issue. The question is how?

#### Tolerance, stretching the boundaries, broadening the field. (Art History)

So perhaps art (history) can be helpful by changing towards a more tolerant and open-minded society. Although at this moment I don't know how, it surely won't be as easy as A plus B equals C. But if we cannot change toward a more tolerant and open-minded society, I am afraid we are entering into the dark side of public order, safety, and security, and we have a lot of dystopian novels and movies to show us what that can look like. Or as Oscar

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<sup>9</sup> The trio of Dylan records uniting poetry with elements of folk and rock and roll – *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965) *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965) and the double album *Blonde on Blonde* (1966) - came to be acknowledged as pop masterworks and chartered a whole new style of music. David Hajdu *Positively 4<sup>th</sup> street* (2001) 294.

<sup>10</sup> Cengiz, 'Waarom jongeren niet alleen trapveldjes maar ook kunst nodig hebben'.

<https://decorrespondent.nl/11796/waarom-jongeren-niet-alleen-trapveldjes-maar-ook-kunst-nodig-hebben/5342046085860-48030506> consulted on November 23, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Koemans, 'The war on antisocial behaviour', 101.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 122.

Wild puts it: A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.<sup>15</sup>

### Community Art. (Art)

And now for something completely different or at least a little more practical. Community Art is often described as an artistic activity that is based in a community setting and characterised by interaction and dialogue. Community Art became relevant after World War II and even more so from the sixties onwards. It is seen as a way of empowering people. The input can be from visual artists, actors, and musicians to work with communities and create; public murals (JanIsDeMan), plays (Community Art Lab – Utrecht) and compositions (Merlijn Twaalfhoven 1976). The focus is on the artwork, the effect is in the interaction and the dialogue. As Jeffrey Koppelaar states in his study *Community Art in Utrecht*, community art is an art form that cannot be captured in one concept or definition, but it does have the distinctive quality that it primarily aims to bring about social effects. With the rise of community art, more and more Dutch municipalities have started to incorporate it in their policy, but it is by no means always clear what the social effects are. To date, science has not yet succeeded in developing a good method for researching the effects of community art.<sup>16</sup> To end this paper, two examples of community art from my own experience:

#### Community Art: community centre *Schoneveld*

Making a design for a billboard for a new community centre *Schoneveld* in Houten, and realising this billboard together with the children, elderly and disabled people using the community centre. I saw how much pleasure people take in creating something of beauty together.

#### Community Art: *Azraq school* in Jordan

By chance I ended up giving a few workshops in a refugee camp in the northeast of Jordan. The two teachers I meet in Amman are convinced of *the healing powers of art*. After a few days, school and classrooms are covered with colourful drawings. Children, teachers, and staff enjoyed the workshops and the colourful results.

The results and the benefits of these workshops will be mainly in the moment. But given on a more structural basis they can offer a more permanent result. Like Jeffrey Koppelaar, I was not able to find any scientific research on the effects of community art. So that leaves us with the more romantic notions of Oscar Wilde and Hizir Cengiz and probably many others.

### Conclusion: A soft approach towards a hard problem.

Yes, I think a soft approach can be helpful, but like the hard approach it needs time and baby steps to get anywhere. And perhaps a lot of interdisciplinary interaction. About the effects of (community) art and art history on Public Order, Safety and Security we are almost completely in the dark. It is also my personal experience that it is mainly based on intuition and good intentions.

### Suggestions for further research.

If Jeffrey Koppelaar is right and there is no science-based research about the effects of community art, perhaps that is the best science can offer at this moment. Maybe in a combination of social science and art (history). At this moment it looks like we only have intuition and good intentions, nothing wrong with that, but research and evaluation can surely

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<sup>15</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891)

<sup>16</sup> Koppelaar, 'Community Art in Utrecht', 3.

be helpful in making community art a more effective tool. Perhaps as an example of interdisciplinary research and open science.<sup>17</sup>

Sources:

Cengiz, Hizir. 'Waarom jongeren niet alleen trapveldjes maar ook kunst nodig hebben'. *De Correspondent*, 14 November 2020. <https://decorrespondent.nl/11796/waarom-jongeren-niet-alleen-trapveldjes-maar-ook-kunst-nodig-hebben/5342046085860-48030506>.

Koemans, Monique. 'The war on antisocial behaviour: rationale underlying antisocial behaviour policies : comparing British and Dutch discourse analyses', 1 January 2011, 181.

Koppelaar, Jeffrey. 'Community Art in Utrecht: Een kwalitatieve case study van het community art-beleid en de evaluatie daarvan van de Gemeente Utrecht'. Bachelor thesis, 17 mei 2016. <http://localhost/handle/1874/330955>.



Pyke Koch (1901 – 1991) *De koorddanser I* 1970 O.I. inkt en zwart krijt op papier 50 x 57 cm  
Centraal Museum Inventarisnummer 26552

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<sup>17</sup> Utrecht University aims to be at the forefront of open science. Therefore, the Executive Board has launched the Utrecht University Open Science Programme. A programme that aims to stimulate and facilitate researchers to put open science into practice. Read the [most recent version](https://www.uu.nl/en/research/open-science) (pdf). <https://www.uu.nl/en/research/open-science> consulted on November 7, 2021