

May 17<sup>th</sup> 2016

Dear Minister Sven Gatz,  
Dear members of the Cabinet of Culture,

We, the 16 artists represented by the management & production office Hiros, gather in the form of this letter to address our communal concerns regarding the disappointing artistic advice received by the Hiros production office about their application for subsidies for the coming period 2017-2021.

We are: Andros Zins-Browne, Dolores Bouckaert, Bernard van Eeghem, Alix Eynaudi, Myriam Van Imschoot, Heike Langsdorf, Sidney Leoni, Jaime Llopis, Sara Manente, Simon Mayer, Christophe Meierhans, Gaëtan Rusquet, Thomas Ryckewaert, Fabrice Samyn, Manon Santkin and Leentje Vandenbussche. We are Belgian citizens and/or residents and all artists who are accompanied and supported by the Brussels-based production house Hiros. Together, we represent a rich anthology of artistic projects and practices within the fields of performance, choreography, dance, theater and visual arts, that have been produced and diffused throughout Belgium and internationally. While several of us are quite early in our careers, many of us have been working as professional artists for more than a decade. As internationally active artists, we write you personally today to express our views on the importance of maintaining support for a structure such as HIROS.

With the recent subsidies advice for Hiros (category 8, artistically sufficient and financially very good), the survival of a unique production house harbouring 16 professional artists is at stake. The disappearance of Hiros would have these artists scattered out into an inhospitable landscape, left to survive on their own, each one looking for his/her own production manager, administrator, seller, spokesman and sparring partner, generating more overhead costs and unproductive competition. With the disappearance of Hiros these artists and their network would lose a reliable partner, a professionalized context, a home base. It is from this home base that these 16 artists operate, and thanks to this home base that they can focus on their artistic activities.

Many of us have been working within the structure of Hiros (built upon a fusion of two independent, subsidized and successful Brussels based production houses: Margarita Production & Mokum), for many years. Others of us are only at the beginning in defining modalities of collaboration and production with the Hiros team. For those of us who just started to collaborate with Hiros, Hiros represents a key organizational structure helping us to transition from working as isolated artists towards more solid and outreaching forms of production. For emerging artists who will eventually quit the structure in order to create their own production company, HIROS represents a transitional model and provides a sustainable solution for a wide range of more experienced artists whose work intrinsically requires a lighter and more flexible production support.

One of the important factors that makes Hiros especially helpful for us independent artists is precisely its partial financial autonomy. Because HIROS receives subsidies to support its own sustenance on the longer run, it can afford to engage with us artists at the moment where we need them the most: during the productions but also before and between them, rather than only when an individual project has received funds. If -as it has been announced in your art decree- the intention is indeed to support independent artists, we would like to insist on the fact that supporting

structures such as Hiros is a highly beneficial, and indeed efficient means to achieve such support (Hiros currently supports 16 artists, 31 other artists received the guidance of Hiros before that and many more if we count as well those who receive periodic professional advice).

Hiros enables independent artists to undertake and realize projects on a scale that on the level of projects and number of people employed far surpasses what a single company/subsided organization could manage. We want to stress the fact that Hiros is one of the few production offices that feeds the artistic scene and its larger network, not the least including the audience- by producing quality works within the precarity of the short-term financial support system that we are all relying on. The stability of such production platforms independent from other kinds of missions such as programming for instance, is a crucial anchor amidst the floating conditions contemporary artists are forced to work within. We cannot stress enough the importance of organizational structures that function on a longer term than that of the project-based model. It is vital for independent artists to have at least a form of organization to rely on, consistently running underneath their fragmented, a-rhythmical working conditions. It is what allows artists to take risks, engage in diverse endeavors, and ensure that their work is given the right conditions to create quality projects.

Hiros also provides a model for, and practical advice vividly demanded by other management structures in Belgium and internationally. Because they collaborate closely with artists, as intermediaries between the realities of creation and the realities of production and diffusion, they have acquired specific hands-on experience of the needs and demands of producing performance artworks.

For several years, Hiros has worked on the frontline to help locate and create spaces and concrete resources for the promotion and diffusion of new forms of art within the large and diverse network of art professionals (curators, residency venues, administrators, diffusion and marketing teams, technicians), presentation venues (such as galleries, museums, concert halls, cinemas...), artistic teams, and audiences. The efficacy of Hiros' know-how in the production business is rather obvious, as experienced from most sides of the field itself. The high demand for their services only proves that the number of production houses is already too few for the richness of artistic endeavors the Belgian scene produces.

By sharing the services of Hiros, artists mutually profit from the experiences made by each of them individually. In terms of networking and promotion, this represents an asset for all artists involved, as Hiros is able to connect to a much wider range of contacts than any of the artists alone, representing a multiplication of national and international contacts for each individual artist.

Since the employees at Hiros are involved with different artists in projects of very different natures, they are able to acquire and develop a versatile and multi-faceted set of productional skills and experiences. Being able to share these resources through Hiros represents an invaluable help for artists in the creation of new works. Having access to such a support basis empowers artists in their artistic choices and encourages them to explore unknown territories.

How can such an active structure, so well embedded on so many levels in the contemporary artistic scene of Brussels and Flanders and so representative of the professional quality and aspirations of this field be dismissed so suddenly? How can a model that serves as a standard in the field for the organization of diverse, individual artistic practices and the facilitation between many institutions supporting

such work internationally be revoked without seriously injuring the health of the whole network? How can quality work be expected without the organizational, logistical, and indeed financial tools that artists need to produce and effectively reach audiences?

The rich artistic biotope that makes Belgium an acclaimed orchard needs its mutualized platforms of production and experienced production managers that work in them as dedicated gardeners. Because they are limited in the numbers of artists they can take care of, such houses should multiply, not disappear.

Besides being the direct victims of the potential loss of the Hiros services, we think that the disappearance of a structure such as Hiros would tremendously contribute to drying out the production landscape of Brussels and Flanders. Hiros marks a reference in the landscape of artistic creation in Brussels and Flanders, offering an organizational model even for artists they do not formally support. Their existence encourages young artists at the start of their career to pursue their artistic endeavors energized by the possibility of receiving future help from management offices like HIROS. This simple prospect represents a significant morale fuel for the artists and should not be underestimated. The potential event of the HIROS management office closing down for lack of governmental support would also have the secondary effect of spreading a wave of discouragement amidst the whole Performing Arts community. It would likely lead towards a further de-professionalization of the field-back to the days when artists and their teams were poorly paid, poorly organized, and regarded their political representatives antagonistically rather than as potential partners to collaborate with. One island of stability less in the precarious sea of so-called artistic 'fluidity'.

Mr. Minister, we believe that Hiros advocates for your own vision which you announced at the beginning of your legislature: Hiros supports individual, project-based artists often working on the borders between performing, visual and audiovisual arts – one could say 'transdisciplinary.' Moreover, Hiros is an excellent example of a synergy reducing (administrative) overheads as its small, motivated team completes a multiplicity of tasks for 16 artists. It is thanks to Hiros that these artists can focus on exactly that which you have been supporting them individually: creating art.

Therefore we, the artists, sincerely hope you will honor the organization and allow it's continuation.

We thank you for your time and attention,

Signed,

Andros Zins-Browne, Dolores Bouckaert, Bernard van Eeghem, Alix Eynaudi, Myriam Van Imschoot, Heike Langsdorf, Sidney Leoni, Jaime Llopis, Sara Manente, Simon Mayer, Christophe Meierhans, Gaetan Rusquet, Thomas Ryckewaert, Fabrice Samyn, Manon Santkin and Leentje Vandenbussche.