

Speech opening academic year Codarts 2016-2017

Thom de Graaf, president of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, Rotterdam, 12 september 2016

Ladies and gentlemen,

It's a privilege to be here, taken part in this inspiring program tributed to the opening of the academic year. I'm impressed to see such great talent performing and also delighted to speak to such a divers public. That's exactly how I know Codarts: an international university of the arts, firmly rooted in the city of Rotterdam, offering high-quality professional art education in the fields of music, dance and circus arts.

Codarts resembles a small multicultural community in the multicultural city of Rotterdam. From all continents you as students come to Codarts to realize your dream of becoming a professional artist in the discipline that suits your passion and talent.

We all know that Codarts has a strong reputation both in the Netherlands and abroad, earned by offering high quality education in a wide range of study programs. I know no other institute with such a diversity of music genres anywhere else in the world. And the circus arts program, for example, although operating for only ten years, has already produced a number of alumni who are now performing in major companies such as Cirque du Soleil and Les 7 doigts de la main.

Rotterdam is known as a city of getting things done, open for opportunities. That is, by the way, also how I know your president, Wilma Franchimont. Open for opportunities and innovation and realizing it. An example of that we just saw in the presentation of the Rotterdam Arts & Sciences lab. The joint partnership with Erasmus University and Willem de Kooning Academy is unique in its sense. The first double degree program of a research university and universities of arts. And for the first time students can choose between various complementary, in-depth, and artistic interdisciplinary study paths.

The University of Ottawa had already such a program as you discovered on a higher education-trip to Canada in the slipstream of a State-visit of the king and queen in May last year. After that it went fast. The expectation was that the development of such a program would cost at least three years, because it was feared that the binary system would stand in the way. But in fact the first students are already starting this very academic year! Congratulations to you all! And especially to you Wilma and your team, you've been really a pioneer. I have been told the Education and Culture-ministry considers to adopt this format as a fine example of cooperation between universities.

The purpose of the Rotterdam Arts & Science Lab is to promote exchange of knowledge and the use of art as a source of innovation. That is a challenge that call for a cross-discipline approach. Different perspectives from science and the arts come together, forming a linking pin for Arts & Sciences in Rotterdam. The bundling of those forces of science and arts will absolutely lead to new insights, and provide the ability to shift borders in the areas of education, research and cultural entrepreneurship.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The arts-universities form an important element in our higher education-structure. And they contribute in various ways to our society. Not only by training highly qualified artists and performers and other professionals in the field of fine arts, but also in research and valorization. Enterprises and societal institutions alike are profiting of the results of that research, mostly done in close cooperation with the professional practice. Finding innovative solutions to societal problems.

The joint research agenda which our Association presented to the minister just three weeks ago contains beautiful examples of that kind of research. Research with an impact. The importance of our research is widely acknowledged and it is therefore time to fiercely invest. Later this week the research- and knowledge-institutions in our country together will present an agenda for such an governmental investment, in which our branch of practice-based applied science forms an integrated element.

The research programs contribute to the quality and renewal of the professional practice, they stimulate the knowledge circulation between (international) professional and educational practices and offer our students the opportunity to familiarize themselves with basis research principles and required skills and develop an exploring attitude . So it's time to accelerate and grow in number of research programs and professorships. I was struck by the example at Codarts of Excellence and Wellbeing Program, in which research is conducted on the physical and mental strain encountered by dancers, musicians and circus artists, in order to improve the quality and duration of the

artistic careers. No better example of research with a clear impact on professional practice and with a direct benefit for the students than this. In my opinion we must accelerate on this research-impact. Therefore we should experiment with a so-called third cycle in which professional doctorates can be obtained within the universities of the arts. I noticed that at least one of the electoral programs of the political parties mentions such a possibility, let others follow...! Experience in other countries, like for instance Sweden, proves this to be worthwhile.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Talent development programs are an ambition of Codarts, but not alone of Codarts.

Dutch universities of the arts together will present the KUO-NEXT agenda in a couple of weeks.. Connectivity will be the leading theme of this agenda.

The Arts sector has shown to be able to regulate itself. In the meantime, the sector makes a huge step to the next phase of innovation by joining forces and do so in close connection with various parties in society, at a time when the cultural sector is under some pressure.

I like to stress, as so many people have already done before me, that supporting artistic talent is a huge contribution to the future of culture and society. Global society is, as we are all aware, in transition and answers have to be found for new persistent questions. On the relation between man and technology, on the extension of life, on the ecological footprint of mankind, on ethnical and religious segregation, what have you. Arts contribute because of the unsuspected alternatives and unexpected solutions they can provide.

Artists as the critical friends of our imperfect world.

Having said that, perhaps that is a good moment to conclude my speech and with that officially open the new Codarts academic year 2016-2017. I wish you all, teachers, researchers, staff and especially students – artists in their hearts and by training, a very successful and innovative year. Enjoy!