

# Money for art-sake!

THE Community Arts Project (CAP) monthly meetings continue to provide a forum for interesting and controversial debate.

Last week's focus on funding and the arts made one thing apparent — while there are no clear-cut solutions emerging, people are beginning to grapple with the post February 2 era in an honest and refreshing way.

Participant on the panel Donald Parenzee, the Western Cape chairperson of Cosaw, argued that while the funding of culture was important, he believed more pressing issues like mass homelessness, health and poverty would become more important in the future.

Fred Abrahamse, director of the Baxter Theatre, provided statistics on present subsidies that state-controlled cultural bodies received. Abrahamse also examined practicalities facing the development of a democratic cultural infrastructure.

He said the state spent about R125-m on state cultural bodies annually. Government plans to refurbish the state civic centre in Pretoria at the cost of R100-m was an example of "gross wastage of funds".

While both the private sector and the government pump capital into the cultural sector, Abrahamse argued that most of the funds were controlled by unrepresentative government trusts and boards.

"We need a democratic, representative arts council that is not dominated by a state," said Abrahamse. He felt democratic arts councils could be implemented and that one of their

major focuses should be education and skills.

Director of the South African National Gallery, Marilyn Martin, said: "State money is regarded as tainted money. Surely the source of the money is less important than how the money is actually used." Qualifying her statement, Martin said her contribution to the debate should be seen against the background of political crisis in education.

According to Martin, Glasgow receives R265-m for a cultural festival annually; in America, the arts were subsidised and the West German government gave about R12-b a year for the arts.

While in other countries the contributions made by the business sector to the arts were substantial, business contributions to the arts in South Africa remained minimal, she said.

Responses from the floor, while sometimes humorous, were also a poignant reflection of the diverse perceptions of future cultural development in South Africa.

When someone raised the issue of cutting the excessive state subsidies for ballet and opera, an anguished cry responded: "If we did that, we would destroy ballet and opera."

"Wonderful," followed a response.

While the participants did not seem to agree on every issue, the majority agreed that the most wonderful art can come about without any funding.

Which begs a stupid question: so what's all the fuss about?

—Krisen Pather

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