

9<sup>th</sup> World Summit on Arts and Culture  
Safeguarding Artistic Freedom

# Discussion Paper







9th WORLD SUMMIT ON ARTS & CULTURE • STOCKHOLM 2023

# Safeguarding Artistic Freedom

Discussion Paper

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The Swedish Arts Council is a government authority whose principal task is to implement national cultural policy determined by the Parliament. The Council distributes state funding for arts and culture, provides the Government with data to inform cultural policy decisions and spreads information about culture and cultural policy. The Swedish Arts Council's mission is based on the national cultural policy objectives, decided by the Swedish Parliament. The objectives state that: "Culture is to be a dynamic, challenging and independent force based on the freedom of expression. Everyone is to have the opportunity to participate in cultural life. Creativity, diversity and artistic quality are to be integral parts of society's development." Some of the Swedish Arts Council's special government remits are to promote the role of culture for freedom of expression and democratisation, as well as to promote the expansion of safe havens for persecuted artists. The Council is the national focal point for UNESCO's 2005 Convention and promotes artistic freedom globally through a partnership with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

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# Welcome

Freedom of expression is a corner-stone of democracy. As one of Sweden's four constitutional laws, this human right lies at the core of our cultural policy. It is manifested by the parliament in our main cultural policy objective that culture should be a dynamic, challenging and independent force based on freedom of expression.

In our remit, this explicitly signifies securing artistic freedom, an important assignment which does not come without challenges for us. One question that we grapple with is how we can enable equal access to artistic freedom. Another question is how we can make sure that we as funders are not perceived to expect a certain artistic content from grant applicants. Further goals are that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in cultural life and that creativity, diversity and artistic quality should be integral to the development of our society.

In order to assure artistic freedom, Swedish cultural policy is guided by the arm's length principle. This entails the Government delegating decisions regarding funding in the arts to its national agencies in order to avoid charges of political interference with artistic content. Artists are at their best when they are enabled to work freely.

Freedom of expression and artistic freedom are also key elements in our international cooperation and engagement. We support a number of Cities of Refuge for writers and artists from different parts of the world who are under threat. Recently, we initiated a global Programme for Artistic Freedom that supports

organisations internationally, aiming to improve conditions for artists to create, display and distribute their work without being exposed to threats or harassments. The Swedish Arts Council is also the national focal point for UNESCO's 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, which resulted from worldwide mobilisation within the cultural sector, and the foundations of which were supported by the 1998 Power of Culture conference that Sweden was proud to host.

Then as now, safeguarding and strengthening artistic freedom is vitally important, as it is continually challenged across the globe by (self-) censorship, threats, imprisonment and, at times, death. We are honoured to have been given the opportunity to cohost the 9<sup>th</sup> World Summit on Arts and Culture with the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA), to bring together members of the international arts and culture community and explore artistic freedom as the Summit theme, to share our experiences working in this area and to learn from the experiences of others.

This *Discussion Paper* marks our first step in this shared journey. It places some of the complex issues surrounding artistic freedom in a wider global context. It also offers perspectives from different voices, countries and regions, with a view to challenge and inspire our thinking as we prepare for the 9<sup>th</sup> World Summit. The essays present a wealth of insights from the world of artists, activists, curators, educators, researchers and policymakers, spotlighting the many

# Safeguarding and strengthening artistic freedom is vitally important, as it is continually challenged across the globe.

different dimensions of artistic freedom, what such freedom means in law and in practice, where barriers lie, and new approaches to its safeguarding. We hope this journey will also lead to improved conditions for artists to work freely and for more people to be able to participate in arts and culture on their own terms.

We are extremely grateful to Sara Whyatt (UK), Lead Author of the *Discussion Paper* and a researcher and advocate for freedom of expression and human rights, and to our contributing authors Irene Agrivina (Indonesia), co-founder of the House of Natural Fiber (HONF); Basma El Hussein (Egypt), a cultural manager and social activist; Dr Katalin Krasznahorkai (Germany), an art historian, author, curator and researcher; Maria Lind (Sweden), a curator, writer and educator; Roxana Miranda Rupailaf (Chile), a Mapuche-Huilliche poet and academic; Letila Mitchell (Fiji), a Rotuman performing artist; and Patrick Sam (Namibia), journalist, artist and Chairperson of the National Arts Council of Namibia.

We look forward to welcoming you to the 9<sup>th</sup> World Summit in Stockholm in the spring of 2023. The Summit will provide us all with a

safe space to engage in open, informed and thought-provoking discussions on this important theme, which is so vital to artists and people around the globe to thrive and find hope, trust, provocation, inspiration and human dignity. Arts and culture are an essential part of our future.

My vision is that artistic freedom will be more widely recognised as a human right and thereby will be more accessible to people. The *Discussion Paper* provides us with valuable contributions to a diversity of voices with different experiences, knowledge and perspectives. We also hope to vitalise our national discussion and iterate arguments through the international context the World Summit provides.

Artistic freedom is at the heart of what makes the world more humane. In the meantime, we encourage you to delve into, contemplate, and take inspiration from this *Discussion Paper*, as we prepare to share and learn from one another in Stockholm.

**Kajsa Ravin**  
Director General  
Swedish Arts Council

# Introduction

In early 2020, as the world began to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, the cultural and creative sectors were on high alert as governments introduced lockdowns in an attempt to contain infection rates. These measures were meant to be temporary, as governments, businesses and people adjusted to what was expected to be a short pause. However, it became rapidly evident that the ability to tackle the individual and collective challenges of the pandemic depended on your location and access to resources, including in terms of finance, public services and social safety nets.

The extent of the pandemic's impact continues to unfold, as new waves hit and as we continue adapt and respond to new circumstances with some insight, knowledge, and data, thanks to science. In this context our rights and freedoms to create, present, distribute works, and participate in cultural life have been – and continue to be – severely challenged, if not threatened. However, the challenges and threats we have experienced in the last two years are not wholly new; rather they have laid bare diverse realities and heightened inequities that have existed for decades. This requires urgent attention from actors across the arts and cultural ecology, including but not limited to policy makers, and it could not be more timely for the 9<sup>th</sup> World Summit on Arts and Culture to address the theme of Safeguarding Artistic Freedom.

Definitions are perennially slippery, but as a starting point to frame the concept of artistic freedom, it is worth considering the definition

offered by UNESCO in relation to the *2005 Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, which has attained consensus among the 149 signatory Parties, which includes 148 States and the European Union. UNESCO states that artistic freedom entails human rights recognised and protected under international law, including the rights to create without censorship or intimidation; to have artistic work supported, distributed and remunerated; to freedom of movement; to freedom of association; and to the protection of social and economic rights. It is the freedom to imagine, create and distribute diverse cultural expressions free of governmental censorship, political interference or the pressure of non-state actors. It includes the right of all citizens to have access to these works and [it] is essential for the wellbeing of societies (UNESCO 2019, p.2).

This definition aligns with the four nodes of the cultural value chain – creation, presentation, distribution, and participation – all of which must be considered and recognised as interconnected if we wish to create and implement effective cultural policies. Similarly, we must consider each of these nodes when we speak of artistic freedom; and acknowledge the different meanings and weights given to each in various contexts around the world, the interpretations and cultural nuances of which have been brought to the fore during the pandemic. The World Summit on Arts and Culture provides a unique platform for people from across these contexts to come together;



to acknowledge that difference is a strength for dialogue and exchange; to create safe spaces to debate complex issues; and better prepare ourselves to act collectively and individually.

We acknowledge that the concept of artistic freedom and its lived experience – or lack thereof – differs across geographies and cultures. However, these multifold meanings and experiences can only be unlocked if we first lay common ground for our discussions. For this reason, we suggest as a base the notion that artistic freedom is the ability to express oneself freely or to present an artistic vision without fear of persecution or for one's life; it is the ability to access resources and platforms that do not discriminate, whether based on gender, sexuality, ability, age, race, culture, belief or citizenship; and the ability to see oneself reflected in society and the public domain.

This *Discussion Paper* seeks to open the conversation and unpick some interpretations and lived experiences of artistic freedom. As such, the cohosts have invited thought leaders – including our Lead Author Sara Whyatt (UK) – to share their perspectives on artistic freedom and consider actions that governments and people could take to safeguard it. These perspectives are not intended as definitive statements; rather they are intended to inspire delegates participating in 9<sup>th</sup> World Summit on Arts and Culture, and to spark thought and discussion when we come together in Stockholm in May 2023.

In the opening essay, Sara Whyatt offers a personal narrative of her professional trajectory and deep commitment to defend and advocate for artistic freedom over recent decades, which considers challenges, opportunities, and insights into alliances that have emerged over time to safeguard artistic freedom. Read alongside the cultural value chain, this foundational piece brings to the

surface three key policy considerations: the freedom and right to create; the freedom and right to present and distribute artistic works; and the freedom and right to participate in cultural life.

The freedom and right to create is the policy area that is most commonly focussed upon in relation to artistic freedom – particularly freedom of artistic expression – and censorship is a notable area of concern for Whyatt. The freedom and right to present and distribute artistic works is closely connected to social and economic conditions – including fair remuneration and access to presenting platforms – particularly for artists and creators working in the cultural and creative sectors, whether formally or informally, which is a recurring concern throughout the essays in this *Discussion Paper*. While the freedom and right to participate in cultural life considers the wider context in which people experience works, find fulfilment, and see themselves and their experiences represented; and which offers possibilities for social cohesion, belonging and understanding.

In the essays that follow, our contributing authors present personal and contextual accounts of artistic freedom, identify challenges and opportunities for policies for its safeguarding, and pick up on recurring themes including agency, decolonisation, difference, movement, visibility, equity, access and freedom of expression. Both Letila Mitchell (Fiji) and Roxana Miranda Rupailaf (Chile) draw on their Indigenous cultures and knowledge to explore the fundamental role of agency and voice for artistic freedom. They foreground the need for self-naming and the right to not be named by others; the power of speaking in one's own language, whether literally or symbolically; and the freedom to author one's own culture without imposed external narratives, which often carry Western aesthetic standards. The right to set one's own trajectory and cultural priorities is a concern shared by several

## Introduction

authors, who variously argue for the right to adopt alternative models for development that are based on local cultural knowledge, informed by connection to land and nature, and across generations.

Several authors also put forward the idea that artistic freedom requires us to accept that all cultures are different, without placing them – or works produced by their artists – in relative value. This idea emerges as deeply connected to the right to dignity, which demands we recognise the connection between artistic freedom and the right to be different and have different ways to create works (which may be tangible or intangible) and to organise, including through collectives, as explored by Katalin Krasznahorkai (Germany) and Irene Agrivina (Indonesia). Artistic freedom as the celebration of difference takes different forms for different authors, from cultural restoration and resistance to dominant narratives of colonisation, to freedom from the moral strictures and hegemonial structures of one's own culture.

## Distribution of power can be a major obstacle for artistic freedom.

The ability to traverse social boundaries in the artistic journey – whether from the peripheries to the centre or vice versa – is a central tenet of artistic freedom for our authors, who consider this in terms of freedom of movement; geography; gender; the colonised,

displaced and diasporic; and the cancelled, under- or misrepresented. This freedom relies on visibility, representation and access to resources, places and spaces, both physical and digital.

Distribution of power can be a major obstacle for artistic freedom. This is a notable concern for Patrick Sam (Namibia) who addresses the need for equitable access to resources and opportunities, especially for people who have been historically marginalised; as well as Sara Whyatt and Maria Lind (Sweden), who both highlight as central to artistic freedom the right to decent and sustained work, which requires paid employment and social security.

Naturally, at the heart of the issue is the freedom and right to creativity, expression and innovation, whether individual or collective. However, as Lind points out, this does not ensure expression without constraint, as there are responsibilities, complexities and tensions that we all must negotiate. This may take the form of self-censorship to protect oneself or others, to secure income, or to have the opportunity to share works publicly; or it may require bridging traditional and contemporary cultural practices, as Mitchell notes, or trading local acceptance for international visibility, as touched upon by both Basma El Husseiny (Egypt) and Agrivina. And last but not least, we must all negotiate the nuanced interpretations, relevance and value placed upon the very notion of artistic freedom which, as our authors show, are far from universally agreed.

Of course, the nodes of the cultural value chain do not exist in isolation and the chain does break. This is relevant in the context of threats to artistic freedom and raises important questions on how best to safeguard such freedoms: should we solely direct resources to protect individual artists, which in some cases may require them to be taken out of their own cultures and countries; or should

**The World Summit provides a unique platform to come together; to acknowledge that difference is a strength for dialogue; to create safe spaces to debate; and better prepare ourselves to act collectively and individually.**

we also direct our resources to build enabling infrastructure for the long term that will benefit a greater number of people? Furthermore, in 'saving' an individual so that they may have the freedom to create, what effect does this have on the other nodes of the value chain in which they work? Will the individual be socially and culturally isolated as a result; will they be able to access or understand the codes of their new context in order to present, distribute and find audiences for their work; and will they be able to generate income and find new opportunities to develop their practice?

The rights of artists and cultural workers must also be addressed in the context of freedom to present and distribute. There is a serious need for greater knowledge and education among

artists on their rights as creators and legal recourses available to them if their freedom is violated, or when they are not compensated fairly. Moreover, the impact of the pandemic on artistic freedom needs to be addressed in terms of jobs and human development, as mentioned by Sam in his essay. These issues are further exacerbated in the digital space, which must be addressed in the context of the rise of virtual connectivity, which can endanger safety via online threats and attacks; Artificial Intelligence; algorithms that dictate discoverability; and above all, a lack of digital equity, access, and fair remuneration. We may also question if the digital space offers greater opportunities for artistic freedom, or if it furthers divides and exacerbates existing inequities?

# Our societies are not monocultural, nor do they contain one viewpoint, experience, or field of references. Ensuring that all people can fully participate in cultural life is central to the sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors.

Over the centuries, the development of artistic practice and expression has informed peoples, governments, and humanity as a whole. Today, our societies are not monocultural, nor do they contain one viewpoint, experience, or field of references. Ensuring that all people can fully participate in cultural life is central to the sustainability of the cultural value chain. Cultural access and participation benefit the artistic community, as well as the societies of which they are a part, both familiar and non-familiar. For First Nations cultures, the distinction between arts and culture is not separate in the way it is for many dominant Western cultures; and artistic freedom and cultural freedom for many across the world, particularly in First Nations cultures, are interwoven. To break down these barriers and broaden Western notions and aesthetics may provide a key to expand freedoms of access and participation. Mitchell speaks to the importance of such freedom not only to create but to practise one's Indigenous culture; while in other cultural contexts there is a greater distance between the artist, the audience and the public. Participation in cultural life is an essential cultural right; in the context of artistic freedom, it is also an

invaluable part of the value chain that creates a sustainable arts and culture ecology. As the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations states

Cultural rights protect the rights for each person, individually and in community with others, as well as groups of people, to develop and express their humanity, their world view and the meanings they give to their existence and their development through, inter alia, values, beliefs, convictions, languages, knowledge and the arts, institutions and ways of life. Cultural rights also protect access to heritage and resources that allow such identification and development processes to take place.

As this *Discussion Paper* makes clear, the theme of Safeguarding Artistic Freedom provides rich material for debate and throws open almost endless questions. Who has the freedom and right to create? Who has access? Who has the privilege to exercise artistic freedom and what are their responsibilities? Where does the right to offend tip into hate speech, defamation, or discrimination? What rights and responsibilities are associated with

receipt of public funds? What effect do external expectations have on the freedom of artists with particular life experiences? And – most importantly – who defines the answers to these questions?

As we prepare for the 9<sup>th</sup> World Summit on Arts and Culture, it is clear also that the theme of artistic freedom is highly complex and cannot be understood or interpreted through a single prism. Rather, it should be understood as a dialogue situated in a particular space and time and consider the particularities of the people that are involved and affected, as they are interconnected and do not exist in isolation. We trust that the journeys shared by our contributing authors demonstrate these complexities and multifold interpretations.

At minimum, we hope that participants in the 9<sup>th</sup> World Summit will agree that artistic freedom should afford all people the right to voice an opinion or a vision through artistic and cultural language; and the opportunity to create and participate in cultural life without the threat of being persecuted, imprisoned, harmed or killed. We hope participants will agree that we should work towards social and

economic conditions that allow for artistic freedom. The cultural and creative sectors are part of the fabric of society. They contribute to social dynamism, critical reflection and imagination; they generate jobs and career pathways; and, as our recent experiences throughout the pandemic have shown, they offer much needed societal benefits. We hope that we may all agree that artistic freedom should allow for freedom of movement and for the exchange of ideas and artistic dialogue, regardless of people's access to resources, particularly in the context of a playing field that is significantly more uneven post-pandemic, including in terms of vaccines and international agreements and conventions. Finally, we hope we may all agree that artistic freedom should be exercised with awareness and respect for our responsibilities to others. It is this responsibility to others that will be key to building communities and a shared future that is just, equitable and sustainable for all.

**Magdalena Moreno Mujica**  
Executive Director, IFACCA

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# Sara Whyatt

United Kingdom

Ms Sara Whyatt is a campaigner and researcher on freedom of artistic expression and human rights, notably as the director of PEN International's freedom of expression programme for over 20 years and previously as the coordinator of Amnesty International's Asia Research Department. At PEN, she worked with its global membership mobilising its campaigns for writers at risk as well as on other issues affecting freedom of expression including anti-terror legislation, criminal defamation laws, and actions by non-state entities, among others.

In 2013, Ms Whyatt took up freelance consultancy, working on projects for Freemuse, Culture Action Europe, PEN International, and the International Freedom of Expression Exchange. She also works with UNESCO, developing training programmes for governments and civil society organisations (CSOs), as well as monitoring and reporting strategies to promote artistic freedom under the UNESCO *2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*.

# Artistic freedom: A journey with the Cinderella of Rights<sup>1</sup>

Four decades ago, I had an early insight into the power and precariousness of artistic expression when I worked for Amnesty International on a campaign for a country amid deep repression of dissent. There were hundreds of people in prison, maybe more, where torture was rife. Protestors were beaten and even killed. Among those dissenters, an artist produced a series of prints depicting the abuse of students and workers and celebrating their courage. He, of course, was imprisoned, and I took up his case as a prisoner of conscience, amongst many others. His images were powerful, visceral, and shocking. I used them in our campaign, and they caught the imagination of activists across the world in a way that our reports and statements could not. They were reproduced on posters, in articles and leaflets, bringing attention to the dire situation. The country is now a democracy; the artist was freed many years ago and continues to practice with relative freedom. These changes came out of a confluence of circumstances, courageous and persistent people who took great risks, as well

as a network of international organisations and supporters. The print series was a part, illustrating how it actually felt for the artist to be at the centre of what was going on around him, in a way that the often-dry texts and statements issued from my office could not.

## **A personal journey: human rights to freedom of artistic expression**

My human rights career began in 1980 with a Dutch documentary company making films on human rights; I then went on to join Amnesty International's East Asia team. There, my brief was to monitor abuses in a wide range of countries in Asia Pacific. This introduced me to the myriad ways in which human rights can be suppressed: from mass imprisonments and torture of activists, through to death row prisoners and the deaths in police custody of Indigenous people. Wherever the abuses and whoever the abused, it was clear that power mongers – of whatever political shade or criminal, religious or other background – were

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Kearns, a legal expert specialising in the arts has described artistic freedom as 'the Cinderella of liberties, seldom in the spotlight, never in the limelight' (Kearns 2013)



# It is only recently that artistic freedom has been brought to the fore to be recognised as being equally important as media or academic freedom.

fearful of people who challenged the status quo, who saw things differently, and spoke up against oppression. All too often, this would turn into suppression, sometimes brutal, but other times less obvious. Thus far, the right to freedom of expression, in all its forms, has been the common thread that runs through my career.

When I started out, the rights of artists were seldom, if ever, mentioned. Over the years, I have worked on a wide range of cases involving assaults on human rights that have affected people of all professions and backgrounds, in countries that spanned political regimes, religions, and cultures. Over time, I began to realise that attacks on artists were under-reported and advocacy on their behalf was patchy. It is only recently that artistic freedom has been brought to the fore to be recognised as being equally important as media or academic freedom. It is encouraging to see the growth of interest and engagement in creative freedom, yet there is more work to be done to understand the intricacies that lie behind the suppression of creative freedom, to raise awareness and to form strategies to protect this right.

## **PEN International - writers for writers**

In 1990, I joined the writers' association, PEN International, to head up its freedom of expression programme. At any one time, my team was working on hundreds of cases in countries across the globe. All were writers - poets, publishers, playwrights and journalists, anyone dealing with the written word - who had come into conflict with those in power and suffered backlash. We staged global campaigns through PEN's network of writers. We lobbied the United Nations, the European Union, and other international and regional bodies. We wrote to, and often met face-to-face with, government officials to question why they were suppressing their writers. We attended trials. We worked with embassies and other NGOs to find places of safety for writers most at risk. We ran an emergency aid fund. PEN members staged readings of imprisoned writers works, translated banned works, created awards, welcomed refugee writers in safe havens, and so on. Now a century old, PEN still stands up for literature as central to humanity and a creator of bridges of understanding between opposing ideologies and ideas, and



demands that its writer members use their influence towards these goals (PEN International).

But what of artists apart from writers? While I was at PEN, I noticed that if a journalist was arrested there were numerous international, regional, and local media rights groups that came to their aid with a wellspring of activity, appeals, statements, articles, escape routes to places of safety and other support. Similarly, when we were approached by lawyers, academics and human rights defenders who were in trouble, PEN was able to put them in touch with their professional networks and associations.

For artists, these options were scarce. When a musician, painter, film maker, actor, or any other person involved in the arts came to us there were very few, if any, organisations that we could direct them towards. We could and did, of course, advise them to go to Amnesty International and the other major human rights groups. Yet what these organisations lacked, even those with significant resources such as Amnesty International, was an understanding of the special needs of artists, or of the different ways in which their rights are curtailed compared to people working in other professions. Nor did they necessarily have the networks of support tailored to artists' needs.

### **Building understanding**

In the late 1990s, this began to change with the emergence of the first global organisation dedicated to artistic freedom. Freemuse was set up in Denmark to campaign for musicians' rights worldwide, inspired by PEN's work for writers. Soon after, Freemuse extended its advocacy to all artists by hosting the first World Conference on Artistic Freedom in Oslo, Norway in 2012, where artists from all sectors, from across the globe who had suffered suppression came to present their work and

share their experiences. From there the debate gained momentum, notably following the seminal 2013 report on freedom of artistic expression by the then United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Farida Shaheed. In her report Shaheed explores the various ways that artistic expression is curtailed, from laws and regulations, through to financial and economic influences, with motivations ranging across politics, religion, cultural and moral values, as well as economic interests. It is one of the earliest reports to refer to the full scope of ways in which creativity is stifled.

Since then, interest in artistic freedom has grown, with more organisations working for artists at risk being set up or extending existing work, to carry out research, advocate, raise public awareness and find safe havens for threatened artists. International and regional organisations such as UNESCO, the European Commission, and the Council of Europe – among others – have expanded their work on artistic freedom, commissioning studies, staging workshops and training programmes, and extending their existing freedom of expression programmes to artists. In 2013, Paul Kearns, a legal expert specialising in the arts described artistic freedom as 'the Cinderella of liberties, seldom in the spotlight, never in the limelight'. This was certainly the case in the 1990s and 2000s when I was looking for support for artists that PEN was unable to help. Today things are changing, and the topic of artists rights attracts attention that was barely conceivable just 10 years ago.

That said, there remains a paucity of research and analysis of the extent and impact of restraints on artistic freedom. There are two main reasons for this. The first is the lack of consistent monitoring, as already mentioned. The second is that artistic freedom is still not well understood, either within or outside of the arts and cultural sectors.

## Artistic freedom: A journey with the Cinderella of Rights

Most people will first think of freedom of artistic expression as the right to produce and share work that is challenging, that questions traditional values, confronts political elites, or is offensive to some. Beyond that, it is the right to create without fear of reprisal, be it through the courts, direct government censorship, or attack by individuals who want to shut down ideas. Even where there may be disagreement on the content of artistic work, most if not all people will agree that it is overly harsh to imprison someone simply for expressing views through artistic expression. Physical attack, whether by government goons or angry crowds is condemned; and I would challenge anyone to agree that a person should be killed because of an artwork – as indeed we have seen over the years.

Some works of art are problematic, of course, yet judging what is allowable or not is a fraught pass time. As has been seen repeatedly over the decades and centuries, what is taboo at one point in history, can become mainstream and accepted in another. What is acceptable in one culture, may not be in another. There are artworks that encourage violence, which are racist, misogynistic, and call for extremism. These can be countered through criminal laws. Most countries have, or should have, legislation that protects against hate speech, xenophobia, and calls to violence or other criminality. Too often, laws designed to tackle terrorism are so vague in their definition of ‘terrorism’ that they are applied against legitimate questioning of government actions, especially where it relates to minorities and groups calling for self-determination. Similarly, obscenity laws are applied beyond what may, or may not, be applicable to protect vulnerable people, and instead function to shut down expressions around gender and women’s rights in the name of preserving ‘traditional values’. Defamation and insult can indeed be harmful to the lives of the people targeted, yet prison terms and their use by leaders and the powerful to penalise those who critique them through satirical means is entirely inappropriate.

### The broader scope of artistic freedom

Censorship is one of the most understood issues related to artistic freedom. However, the full scope of challenges to artistic freedom goes well beyond censorship and into the wider environment in which artists and cultural workers live and practice. Looking at the struggle for creative freedom solely through the lens of the human rights framework misses the bigger picture.

While most human rights instruments focus narrowly on freedom of expression as an inalienable right, UNESCO, in keeping with its remit to protect culture in the broadest sense, has a wider view. Its *1980 Recommendation on the Status of the Artist* deals with what I like to describe as the *right to be an artist*. It refers to the full scope of what is necessary to enable a person to consider a career and thrive as an artist or cultural worker in all aspects of life.

In summary, UNESCO sees artistic freedom as:

- the right to create without censorship or intimidation
- the right to have artistic work supported, distributed, and remunerated
- the right to freedom of movement
- the right to freedom of association
- the right to the protection of social and economic rights
- the right to participate in cultural life.

(UNESCO 2017)

When I am told that there are few artists in prison and, by implication, that there is little to be concerned about, I reply that there are several hurdles that need to be jumped before an artist’s work gets noticed by the authorities or angry mobs. For example, if you are, say, a playwright who wants to put on a controversial piece of work, you need the cooperation of so many others before it can even be staged and brought to public attention, for good or bad.

# Artistic freedom matters in all its forms, not only to creators but to the whole of society.

Actors need to be willing to put themselves on stage and risk a negative public response and damage to their reputation. Technicians and producers may have similar worries. A theatre owner may love the play but would not want to risk damage to the building, or attacks on their staff and audience should a threatening crowd gather outside. They could also be concerned about losing government or private funding, which is vital for theatres that put on non-commercial works that explore social and political issues. Audiences themselves may be reluctant to expose themselves as supporters of a tricky topic by simply turning up at the theatre.

There are also subtle, difficult to quantify ways in which access to the widest forms of culture is curtailed. Heads of cultural institutions, museum curators, festival organisers, gallery owners, publishers – anyone providing spaces for the public to enjoy culture – need to have one eye open not just for their immediate security, but also for the risk of losing sponsors, publishing deals, or access to display and performance spaces. They also face the threat of public attack by government and the media when presenting works that diverge from mainstream narratives, notably on interpretations of history, on immigration, gender rights and traditional values. This has led to numerous cultural and arts leaders losing their jobs for refusing to

bend to pressures. Avoiding such a fate can lead to under-the-radar removal of ‘difficult’ material from the public sphere.

Adjusting creative output or even choosing not to take on certain difficult topics is intrinsic to work in the creative sector, where work is amended so as not to upset the audience, funders, sponsors, and/or commissioners. This is reasonable pragmatism, bearing in mind the feelings of the audience, and the political climate of the time. The question is where does this tip into self-censorship? Can this caution lead to important, challenging ideas and expressions never coming to the surface?

The right to be remunerated and properly paid for creative work also appears not to be fully recognised. There is a public perception that to be an artist is not to have a ‘proper job’. Artists’ work is play, a labour of love, something that is done for one’s own pleasure, leading to the idea that cultural work can be done for little pay, and sometimes, no pay at all. This can have a corrosive effect on the status of an artist in the wider workplace. Artists’ work is often low paid, with periods of inactivity, or considerable periods of time spent developing work that may not see future financial benefits. Around half of creative workers are freelance, according to the International Labour Organization, doing work that is by its nature intermittent and precarious (Galian et al 2021). Following the emergence of COVID-19 in 2020, a pandemic that still rages as I write, many artists were forced to move their work into the digital space, which offers even less chance of remuneration. Even outside pandemic times, many artists have been forced to take on other work to enable them to cover their day-to-day costs. This can often suck away their capacity to create new works, having lost essential time that artists need to workshop, experiment, pitch for grants, and compete for contracts. No wonder elites dominate the arts and creative worlds.

## Artistic freedom: A journey with the Cinderella of Rights

Closely linked to fair remuneration are artists' rights to social security, health, and other benefits that the general workforce can expect. Social benefits are intricately linked to how much income a worker has earned, and little or no income means less access to pensions, health, unemployment, or sickness benefits. The low pay, short-term and insecure nature of this sector not only affects the immediate capacity to survive as artists, it also has long-term negative impacts on their lives. In some countries, France being one, these periods of 'inactivity' are recognised as part of the creative process and artists can claim unemployment benefit to enable them to survive at times of unpaid work. Elsewhere, including in the United Kingdom, there are measures being put in place that will provide basic minimum wages for cultural workers. These measures show how social and economic rights in the cultural sector can be supported and will go some way to redress precarity and encourage wider inclusions.<sup>2</sup>

In a sector that is bedevilled by poor pay, shoddy or even non-existent contracts, and sometimes dangerous work conditions, it is essential to have someone to turn to who will fight your corner and take collective action towards better pay and conditions. During the pandemic, professional bodies and syndicates have been essential to push governments to provide emergency support packages for workers and institutions in this particularly vulnerable sector. However, some professional bodies act to the detriment of their members' interests, and there are examples of some syndicates that, although run by artists, are in practice acting on behalf of the state, granting artists' status for employment or work contracts, and access to social welfare. As such, care needs to be taken to ensure that

artists are not discriminated against because of their ethnic, cultural and minority groups, that women are not barred from practising, nor those whose politics run counter to the prevailing government, or for any variety of other reasons.

Linked to the right to earn a decent income is the right to be able to move freely across borders. Showing work at an international arts biennale, a film or music festival, taking up a residency, being part of a workshop, or staging a performance abroad can make or break an artist's career. Yet cultural workers from the Global South have long found it difficult to travel to take up these opportunities. They face complex, lengthy, and expensive visa application processes, and requirements of proof of income that can be onerous. Their situation is made harder in the face of growing hostility against immigration. As the director of the Edinburgh Festival put it, his festival was in danger of 'drifting into an event for middle-class British, Western European and American young people for whom it's viable to turn up and perform' (UNESCO 2017, p. 115). This already difficult situation has become far more acute under the pandemic, with many people - notably in the Global South - facing new barriers to mobility related to traveller vaccination status and countries being 'red listed', further restricting South/North opportunities for cultural and artistic exchange.

Being able to participate in cultural life serves to not only to enrich our inner lives, but it is also a means through which to share one's own identity, and to explain it to others. This understanding works towards greater tolerance and respect between people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs. Diversity of cultural expressions not only brings vibrancy

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<sup>2</sup> More information on artistic freedom, its protection and promotion by the author can be found in Chapter 10 of the 2022 *Global Report: Reshaping Policies for Creativity - 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/> [viewed 9 February 2022].

to cultural life but can also bridge chasms of misunderstandings. As such, obstacles to artistic freedom not only affect artists, but they also deny audiences and the public general access to ideas and experiences that fall outside the mainstream, and leave a cultural sector dominated by an elite. Censorship and blocks to practising as an artist affect the marginalised most, denying the full expression of their culture.

Artistic freedom matters in all its forms, not only to creators but to the whole of society. It is heartening to see growing interest and engagement among organisations such as IFACCA to explore this complex and challenging issue. A lot of work still needs to be done and no doubt there will be differences of opinions and approaches at this Summit and beyond on how to achieve artistic freedom.

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# Roxana Miranda Rupailaf

Chile

Ms Roxana Miranda Rupailaf is a Mapuche-Huilliche poet. She is a lecturer of Spanish Language and Communication at the Universidad de Los Lagos, Chile. She holds a master's degree in Contemporary Hispanic-American Literature from the Universidad Austral.

In 2006 and 2008, Ms Rupailaf was awarded writers grants by the National Council of Books and Reading, Chile for her unpublished book *Seducción de los venenos* [Seduction of Venom] and *Invocación al Shumpall* [Invocation to Shumpall] respectively. In 2012 she received the Municipal Literature Prize of Santiago for *Shumpall* (Del Aire Editores, 2011).

Ms Rupailaf has published *Las tentaciones de Eva* [the Temptations of Eva] (Chile, 2003), *Seducción de los venenos* [Seduction of Venom] (LOM Ediciones, Chile, 2008), *Shumpall* (Del Aire Editores, Chile, 2011; republished in 2018 by Pehuen Editores, Chile), *Kopuke Filu* (Pakarina, Peru, 2017), *Trewa Ko* (Del Aire Editores, Chile, 2017) and *Antología Zewpe Mapu* [Anthology] (Editorial Aparte, 2021).

# Artistic freedom in the (re)construction of Indigenous memory

From personal experience, artistic freedom is related to the possibility of escaping oppression and silence, to have language, a voice and power. The opportunity to publish books is also the possibility to show others what we imagine, feel, dream, think. It is the possibility to name ourselves and exist before others. Literature allows us to be free, to imagine what we cannot be, to build and weave ourselves collectively.

I will go back some 25 years, when my interest in declaring myself through poetic practice began. My name is Roxana Miranda Rupailaf. Indigenous on my mother's side, my last name means *the one that crosses, the one that passes through the sea*. I come from an Huilliche family from the South of Chile, Lafquenmapu, San Juan de la Costa, Los Lagos Region. An area impoverished by the extractive action of large forestry and mining companies. A highly evangelised area, which meant that my first library belonged to the catechism: my first

book was the Bible. My Indigenous identity was overtaken by Judeo-Christian discourse and by the prohibition of speaking the Mapuche language in the community.

Dispossession in our Indigenous communities has not only been territorial, it has also been cultural. This has led to the loss of language and, through that, the loss of ways to imagine the world from our culture. Many of us Indigenous writers have sustained our identity through another language, another tongue: Spanish. Learning to write in the expropriated language has been an act of decolonisation. *In che ta Mapuche*; saying, writing 'I am Mapuche'; recognising oneself as Indigenous is not an easy process in a highly discriminatory society. Indigenous writing has had the courage to speak out and transform the heart it touches. The word advances like a wave, lifts us up, challenges us, opens the future for us. *Wiño suam* means that in looking to the past we advance.



## Artistic freedom in the (re)construction of Indigenous memory

In my family, the women who precede me did not finish any kind of formal studies; and they built their lives in violently patriarchal spaces. Before writing entered my life, the image I had of women was totally different, since women were relegated to housework. Until I began to read Mapuche authors such as Graciela Huinao, Adriana Paredes Pinda, María Teresa Panchillo, among others. Indigenous women writers have the strength to write outside of imposed cultural narratives. Writing is located in highly besieged regions, becoming part of the Indigenous resistance. Thus, it speaks of the context, the stories, of being an Indigenous woman today.

In Chile, Mapuche women are leading highly relevant artistic and political processes to generate a new constitution. Today, Mapuche women are seen as *weichafe* (warriors), they are spiritual and political leaders in their respective territories and have become dreamers of a new country. Examples of this are: Elisa Loncón and the machi Francisca Linconao. Indigenous art has contributed to shape and decant this constituent process. Writing and art provide possibilities to imagine a future in which our diversity is possible. As Mapuche people, we have lived constantly under siege by a nation state that does not recognise our differences. Thus, the practice of art is also

**From personal experience, artistic freedom is related to the possibility of escaping oppression and silence, to have language, a voice and power.**



transformed into a political event because our self-denomination as Indigenous is itself a political act, through which we recognise ourselves as others.

Indigenous authors transformed my creative experience, as I saw my own experiences in the *Wallmapu* (Mapuche Territory) reflected in their writings. I understood that the practice of writing gave account of our identity and of our living heart, beating in the *Futawillimapu* (great lands of the south). And if Mapuche literature transformed me and my creative decisions, I could contribute to generate a Mapuche consciousness in others, because literature can, through language, modify the ways in which we conceive our reality. My freedom then consisted in deciding to become part of this creative and political process, that is collective and libertarian. Indigenous writers of the Americas are carrying out a beautiful task to give testimony of our multiculturalism, of our beautiful brownness, as our recent Chile National Prize for Literature winner, Elicura Chihuailaf, says. To give an account and transform the path for future generations, because we are the grandparents of the future.

In that sense, artistic freedom for the Mapuche people consists of making that difference, in reflecting on our ways of imagining the world, ways that come from our own vision called *intro fill mogen*, a concept in which all diversity exists in the same space. Our creative processes

are collective, since they are anchored in orality, in *ülkantun* (singing) and in *nütram* (conversation). We have a history and a community conscience.

That is why it is so important to practice creative freedom with responsibility, with knowledge and wisdom, because as Indigenous artists we represent our ancestors, our sisters and brothers who have not been able to speak for many years. Writing is also the voice of the spirits of nature, inhabited by our grandfathers and grandmothers. Being Mapuche means being people of the land; and to be people of the land, we must defend it. It is part of our responsibility. It is the soil that speaks through our words. Our tool is art in all its manifestations.

Safeguarding our traditions, our Mapuche language, our own ways of conceiving art is our task. Today's Indigenous artist recurs to writing, performance, audiovisual, new media, creating bridges between the traditional and the contemporary. Today, technologies are part of the spreading process of our cultural and artistic practices. We want to sing our poems to the grandchildren of the future, so that they can be free and proudly create, feel, and call themselves Mapuche.

*Pewkayall*

*Marichiwew*

(See you soon and until we meet again)



# Basma El Hussein

Egypt

Ms Basma El Hussein is a cultural manager, an activist for social change and a defender of cultural rights.

For the past 30 years, Ms El Hussein has been involved in supporting independent cultural projects and organisations in the Arab region. In 2004, she founded Al Mawred Al Thaqafy (Culture Resource), the first non-governmental regional cultural organisation in the Arab region. In 2007, she initiated and co-founded the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC), the region's first independent cultural foundation. She currently leads the organisation, Action for Hope, which she founded in 2015 to address the cultural and social needs of distressed and displaced communities in the Arab region.

Between 1988 and 2003, Ms El Hussein worked for the British Council in Egypt and the Ford Foundation in the Middle East and North Africa.

Ms El Hussein is a UNESCO expert in cultural governance since 2011. In October 2018, she won the UCLG Agenda21 for Culture International Award in Mexico City for her contribution to the relationship between culture and sustainable development.

# A social environment that nurtures censorship

The concept of freedom of expression is widely perceived as a right for artists, writers and creative people, rather than a right for society at large. This perception contradicts the letter and spirit of Article 27 of the Universal Human Rights Declaration, which says that: 'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits' (1948).

To emphasise freedom of expression as a right for artists and writers represents only part of the concept: the part that is often recognised and defended by artists and cultural activists. However, to fully understand and appreciate the value of freedom of expression, one needs to see it in a social context. I believe that it is impossible to defend and protect freedom of expression in a social environment that is oblivious, or indeed hostile, to it. In such situations, campaigns to release a censored film, book or play – or to free an imprisoned artist or writer – will probably yield modest results or fail. More importantly, such campaigns do not usually result in any legislative or structural changes to promote

and protect freedom of expression. In many social environments, the majority sees the right to freedom of expression as a right of a small elite and, sometimes, even as an offence to social values and traditions.

Recent controversies in Egypt and Jordan around two new films clarify this argument. The first, *Feathers*, is the debut feature film of Egyptian director Omar El Zohairy, which won the Grand Prize for Best Film in the Critics' Week at Cannes Festival 2021. Later, the film was screened at El Gouna Film Festival in Egypt, where it was attacked severely by the official media for 'defaming Egypt' and 'presenting a gloomy and false picture of the society that does not exist in the new republic'<sup>3</sup>. The film tells a fantastic story of a father who turns into a chicken when a magic trick goes wrong during his son's birthday party; his wife then has to deal with his absence, and with the debts he has left behind. The film eloquently narrates everyday poverty and is sarcastic to the point of cynicism at times. *Feathers* was produced and mostly funded independently, with some support from European producers, in a national

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<sup>3</sup> Two examples from Al Youm Al Sabei and Akhbar Al Youm, State owned newspapers

## A social environment that nurtures censorship

context in which almost all artistic production and distribution is controlled by the State and its media arms. In the weeks following the film screening at El Gouna Festival, an orchestrated media campaign against it escalated to a point where the freedom and safety of the director seemed to be at stake. This was luckily contained, leaving behind only a very distorted public image of the film and its makers, and the fact that the film will not be allowed to screen publicly in Egypt.

The second film, *Amira*, directed by mainstream Egyptian director Mohamed Diab and produced by the Royal Film Commission of Jordan, was Jordan's official nomination to the 2022 Oscars. The film was screened at festivals in Tunisia and Egypt, but then news about its Oscar nomination triggered greater public interest, and consequent widespread public condemnation saw Jordan withdraw the nomination. The film tells the story of a teenage Palestinian girl who was conceived after the sperm of her imprisoned father was smuggled out of prison. She then discovers after a DNA test that the sperm in fact belonged to an Israeli prison guard. The Palestinian and Arab public saw this as an insult to Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and to the just Palestinian struggle for freedom. The campaign against the film did not only succeed in its nomination to the Oscars being withdrawn, but it practically means that the film will not be screened in Jordan, nor possibly anywhere else in the region.

These two sad stories, not uncommon in other parts of the world, shed light on the relationship between violations of freedom of expression and society's perception of this right. In the case of *Feathers*, the screening of the film in Egypt – after it received high-level international recognition at Cannes Film Festival – was somehow seen by the political

institution as a defiance of its control over public discourse in the country, a discourse that emphasises economic achievements and presents a picture of prosperity and success. The strong portrayal of poverty in *Feathers* was therefore regarded as dissidence, something that cannot be tolerated in today's Egypt. The campaign against the film did not meet with any public defence of the film or freedom of expression, except for a few individual voices. For most of the population, the film did not deserve to be defended, since they largely regard art as entertainment that is supposed to cheer them up rather than raise questions or doubts, and freedom of expression is a luxury that could cause instability.

For *Amira*, it was the general public that stood up against the film, forcing its producer to withdraw its Oscar nomination. Across social media, many voices, including those of public figures and officials, called for the film to be boycotted and put pressure on its producer to withdraw the Oscar nomination. The argument against the film was so strong that people suspect it will never be screened in Jordan. In this case, it was not the political institution that adopted censorship techniques, but rather the political institution succumbed to popular will calling for censorship.

One might think that these two examples are essentially different, but in fact, they are more linked than they initially appear. The root cause for such forms of censorship is the same: a social environment that does not value freedom of expression. To reverse this situation, many years of work are needed to open the public space for discussions of the role of art and the value of freedom of expression, and to provide access to arts and culture to all.

In many social environments, the majority sees the right to freedom of expression as a right of a small elite and, sometimes, even as an offence to social values and traditions.

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# Letila Mitchell

Fiji

Ms Letila Mitchell is a practising multimedia and performance artist. She is the Artistic Director for RakoPasefika, an Indigenous Oceanic creative company working with artists from around Oceania. She is also currently undertaking her Doctorate in Creative Industries at the Queensland University of Technology, Australia and focusing her work on mapping and revitalising Rotuman Indigenous creative practice.

Ms Mitchell is an experienced cultural producer, artistic director, artist and performer. She is dedicated to creative projects that deliver positive social change for Indigenous peoples. Recent career highlights include: First Nations producer at the Sydney Opera House; segment director for the Edinburgh Tattoo in Sydney in 2019; and opening and closing segment producer in 2017-2018 for the Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast, Australia (4 April to 15 April 2018).

Ms Mitchell was the founder of a Pacific regional network, the Pacific Arts Alliance and is the former Director of the Fiji Arts Council. She is an arts leader in the Pacific region and has undertaken pioneering work on several major projects including *Te Mana O Te Moana*. She has served on several boards and committees including the Uto ni Yalo, Commonwealth Group for Culture and Development, Auckland Museum Board and the Global South Arts and Cultural Initiative.

# Artistic freedom: A voyage of enquiry

For me, artistic freedom is about the ability to explore, experiment and challenge the status quo, including the perspective that being an artist has little value and the perception that being a practicing artist is a waste of time. For me, artistic freedom is to be innovative, to be able to experiment, to tell stories and investigate, while balancing a consideration of those around me and a conscious effort to respect our elders. Artistic freedom also enables the opportunity for enquiry, to have the courage and spirit to navigate, explore and voyage beyond what is known and what has always been done, and to be constantly excited by what could be. I equate artistic freedom to that same spirit and courage of our ancestral voyagers who were deeply connected to the land, to the sea and the sky, and who – because of that deep connection – were able to voyage out into the world and explore, knowing where they came from and how to find the way back home.

In the early 2000s, I co-founded a social creative enterprise, Rako, to address our connection to place and loss of language and creative practice; to contribute actively to environmental and cultural advocacy; and to fulfil the need for safe, supportive, and creative spaces that provide sustainable livelihoods. Rako, which in my language means *a place of sharing and learning*, was created to be a

safe space that enables freedom of expression while also connecting to place, to language, and to our stories. Cultural and creative enterprises, collectives, and community-based initiatives like Rako are spaces that have brought together youth and elders to address ongoing social and economic influences that affect our communities.

The ongoing impacts of colonisation, extensive migration, and assimilation into dominant cultures for the purpose of ‘progress’ and ‘development’, have further contributed to the loss of language and creative and cultural practices. Centuries of the imperial and colonial project have marginalised the feminine voice, devalued the *mana* – the spirit of women – and disregarded the feminine roles of guardianship and custodianship of the land, ocean, and sea. And so, as women, as artists, we have even more barriers, and a bigger battle for artistic freedom.

Our Indigenous Oceanic artists are keepers of the ocean, voyagers, visionaries, way finders, innovators, creators, knowledge holders and storytellers. For thousands of years, our artists held the knowledge of our lands and oceans, and our ancestors would pass this on from one generation to the next through their music, their dance, their paintings, their weavings, their stories. In just 200 years, much of this was



## Artistic freedom: A voyage of enquiry

fractured. Colonisation, forced displacement of Indigenous communities, desecration of sacred sites, and the abolishment of cultural practices were enforced as part of the colonial project, which initiated decades of devaluing culture and disconnecting from our Indigenous knowledge. Borders created and imposed by foreign governments have fragmented Oceania, and created the Pacific Islands, which split Oceania into three regions – Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia – racially categorising our peoples based on their skin colour.

Many of our elder Indigenous artists remember living in a time of oppression, restricted from speaking their language, and their artforms and cultural practices abolished. The freedom that is at the heart of every artist's practice was denied to our ancestors, and today many of our Indigenous Oceanic artists still struggle to regain the freedom to practice their ancient cultures, to revitalise their languages and to truly have the freedom to be their true Oceanic selves.

We continue to work in a world that is dominated by external forces. Continued exploitation of our resources and devaluation of our knowledge systems are realities of the Oceanic region. International development policy and education systems that prioritise Western knowledge have deemed the Pacific Islands underdeveloped, small, vulnerable, and isolated. We feel the repercussions of globalisation, economic and environmental impacts, pollution, climate change and global pandemics. Oceania has for the past 200 years been steered towards dependence on the Western world, its model of development, and its aid. For many artists, their creative practice is driven by tourism, because for many Oceanic artists it is the only source of income. This external prioritisation reinforces the devaluation of our knowledge and capabilities and facilitates exploitation. The lack of job growth in many traditional sectors such as health,

public service, and tourism, has seen increased unemployment. In Fiji, where my company is based, we have one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in the region; women earn less than men; many artists live below the poverty line; and our master artists and elders are even more marginalised and disadvantaged.

In much of my own work throughout Oceania, I have seen that – while there are high levels of creativity – trauma, poverty, and economic barriers often hinder the ability of creatives to reach their full potential. And with low value attributed to local resources, material and content, there is a high level of dependence on external knowledge, resources, raw materials and inappropriate technology, and a lack of financial support and investment. There are limited arts and creative industry structures and support systems in place. Artists and creative entrepreneurs work hard to survive in the creative sector; they hope to engage in the international art sector but – without any access to investment or support and limited infrastructure – their aspirations are often hindered. Many times, when I have worked with major arts institutions, I have asked why there are not more Oceanic, island-based artists exhibited in major galleries, presented at festivals or programmed into major venues. Often the answer is 'they aren't cutting edge enough' or 'we can't find any quality artists'. Every day, I encounter exceptional artists from throughout Oceania, whose work is based on ancient knowledge, intricate skills passed down from generation to generation and imbued with ancient wisdom. But their work is not accepted because it does not fit into someone else's conception of exceptional and cutting edge.

Despite this, Indigenous artists and creatives are actively advocating for change globally. They are mobilising and engaging with their Indigenous knowledge and their language, which informs and is at the foundation of their



# As leaders, we have the responsibility to not only safeguard artistic freedom, but to lift up our artists and cultural knowledge holders, and advocate for the revaluing of the artist.

exploration, experimentation and practice. This has seen a huge revitalisation of Indigenous practice. This revaluing of Indigenous knowledge and practices is a movement of resistance, renewal, and revitalisation. More and more Indigenous artists are producing work for themselves, staging their own shows, and creating their own pathways. At the heart of these movements are diverse and innovative practitioner-focussed models that consider the holistic capabilities of the artist and a creative confidence, which is linked intricately to the health and wellbeing of their communities.

As creatives, as knowledge holders and change makers, it is more important than ever to ground our work in our Indigenous knowledge systems, to consult with and uphold our communities' voices, and to ensure we actively contribute to effecting social, economic, and environmental change through our practice. For real and sustainable social, cultural, environmental, and economic change to take place, our Oceanic voices and knowledge must be our priority. As leaders, we have the responsibility to not only safeguard artistic freedom, but to lift up our artists and cultural knowledge holders, and advocate for the revaluing of the artist.

With increasing globalisation and environmental impacts, there is a need to develop sustainable place-based arts models that strengthen our

custodianship of our lands and sea. Models that consider ecological principles and sustainable practices at all levels of the creative process and production, including appropriate digital technology, will open new opportunities to connect to place, to build knowledge and create new work.

Effective contribution to our peoples includes revaluing and relearning our own knowledge systems and decolonising our existing ideologies and systems of education. Creating a community of practice, trust and intergenerational sharing is central to this change. While there is little support, incentive or priority given to the arts by our governments and institutions, I believe as artists we are the change makers, the innovators, healers, activists, researchers and explorers. The more we reflect on realities and create critical dialogue about the social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities that continue to threaten our existence, the more we can make those changes for ourselves. As we deepen and strengthen creative practice - interwoven with Indigenous knowledge, cultural activism, and biodiversity conservation - there will be cultural revitalisation, recovery, healing and restoration, all of which will be crucial to address the ongoing issues that affect both our present and future.



# Katalin Krasznahorkai

Germany

Dr Katalin Krasznahorkai, a Gerda Henkel Senior Researcher at the University of Zurich, is a Berlin-based art historian, author and curator. In her research and curatorial work, she analyses diverse aspects of artistic freedom.

In her current research, Dr Krasznahorkai investigates *Black Power in Eastern Europe: Angela Davis, the State Security and the Arts*. Most recently, she curated the exhibition *Artists & Agents. Performance Art and Secret Services* with Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse, which was awarded *Exhibition of the Year 2020* by the German AICA (German section of the Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art). Together with Sylvia Sasse, she is the editor of the book of the same name, published by Spector Books in 2019 (forthcoming in English in 2022).

Dr Krasznahorkai's forthcoming monograph, *Operative Art History or Who is Afraid of Artists?* is to be published by Spector Books in 2022. Currently, she is also the Lead Expert and Curator for the Council of Europe's digital exhibition on artistic freedom *Free to Create-Create to be Free*.

# Decolonialise it!

There is No Such Thing as Solid Ground — in 2020, the Nigerian-born, Antwerp-based artist Otobong Nkanga transformed, re-planted, excavated and renewed the ground of one of the most prominent museums for contemporary art, the Martin Gropius Bau in Berlin. A landscape of rocks and marble pebbles, full of historical and geological traces, occupied the solid marble floor of one of the exhibition spaces. Within the installation grew rootless plants that would feel at home almost anywhere. They thrive by absorbing water and nutrients through the air and their leaves, pointing to the idea of displacement: if it is not possible to take root, then adaptability is crucial for survival. ‘The questions that plants and stones ask can also be extended to us: Where are our roots? Where do we come from?’ (Nkanga 2020). But an even more important question is: how can we ensure the ecosystem of adaptability, so crucial for survival? In *The Taste of Stones*, Nkanga asks what stones reveal about land and soil, when taken and delineated from their own territory, or taken as a souvenir from their original location, narrating their own diasporic dislocation. In Europe today, the question of artistic freedom is directly connoted with how these rolling diasporic stones can find solid ground again and a soil that nurtures, empowers, and enables them to roll.

Artistic freedom is one of the elements that keep the stones rolling. Artistic freedom guarantees its actors unbound, fierce, and limitless independence: independence from political, religious, artistic, historical, economic, and yes, even moral, standards of respective societies’ hegemonial structures.

However, there is an urgent need to decolonialise the definition of artistic freedom. No art historian, no artist, nor theorist would ever seriously claim to know what art is. Or what an artist is. Or thus, what artistic freedom means. But the outlines of the assumptions of what artistic freedom could mean originate in and circle around the very heart of the French Revolution and European Enlightenment, with the Declaration of Human and Civic Rights stating that: ‘free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man’ (Marquis de Lafayette & Jefferson 1789). In one breath, the declaration limits and provides the grounds for legal definitions of artistic freedom: ‘Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law’ (ibid.).

As this definition of artistic freedom has its roots in the outdated assumption of the universality and distinct validity of so-called European values for the whole world, the Eurocentrised enlightenment narrative must be rethought in today’s context. Bénédicte Savoy, the leading French art historian, fighting for the breakup of Eurocentrist canons, urges us to shift the focus of what is called art: certain artifacts claimed to be ‘art’ in the European context are not considered as such outside, and vice versa (Savoy 2021). Savoy speaks of historical artifacts. However, in contemporary art, globalised non-European art production has fundamentally shaped the definition of art, artists, and thus artistic freedom in Europe in the last decades. Causing also tectonic shifts of the definition of an ‘artist’, and artistic freedom.

## Decolonialise it!

These tectonic shifts are shown, for instance, in the disappearance of the singular (male, white) artist and/or curator-genius. A prototype of a dominant patriarchal artist, claiming a form of artistic freedom for him/her/itself, that is deeply rooted in the doctrines mentioned above of the Eurocentrist Enlightenment. As the Romantic individual artist-genius increasingly dissolves, artists are getting organised in collectives; and today, major art prizes, like the Turner Prize, are increasingly awarded to art collectives. Singular curator-genies are also disappearing. The most influential contemporary art exhibition worldwide since the 1950s, Documenta in Kassel has appointed the Jakarta-based curatorial collective Ruangrupa, reflecting collectivity in its concept of *lumbung*. 'A lumbung - or rice barn - is a place to store communally-produced rice as a common resource for future use. If Documenta was launched with the noble intention to heal European war wounds, this concept will

expand that motive in order to heal today's injuries, especially ones rooted in colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchal structures' (Ruangrupa 2021).

So, in the definition of artistic freedom today and for the next century, inclusive, global, non-Eurocentrist approaches to subjects and objects must be fundamentally reconsidered. This is particularly pertinent for enabling parties. Public sector governmental bodies in charge of cultural policies must rethink their funding structures, criteria, terminology, and categories of artistic production; so too must those in the private sector, including the art market, private foundations, and collections. Equally, it is crucial for receiving bodies such as arts education institutions, academies, and universities to decolonialise the notion of artistic freedom in their acceptance and enabling policies; and for presenting bodies, like museums, biennials, and public spaces to consider art beyond museum walls.

**[For] artistic freedom today and for the next century, inclusive, global, non-Eurocentrist approaches to subjects and objects must be fundamentally reconsidered.**

Decolonialising concepts of what art, an artist, and thus artistic freedom is, leads to breaking with hegemonial structures, which have remained structurally untouched since World War II in most European countries. This means there is no further dynamic in changing the narrative by pouring money over existing cultural and artistic fields, hoping that watering will yield new plants. Old soil does not produce the diversity so often claimed and repeated in speeches and grant applications. The soil

itself must be tilled, refilled, and watered again. Organic, 'living' soil is still prohibited in museums. Asad Raza, an artist from the USA, promptly fills exhibition spaces with 'sterilised', 'dead' soil; then adds organic and inorganic matter during the exhibition period, to process, compost and create new soil. Raza calls this 'Neosoil' (Raza 2020). It is this neosoil we need to decolonialise the definition of artistic freedom and enable dislocated rolling stones to roll unhindered on this new ground.

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# Irene Agrivina

## for House of Natural Fiber – HONF

Indonesia

Open systems advocate, technologist, artist and educator, Ms Irene Agrivina is one of the founding members and current directors of HONF, the Yogyakarta-based arts, science and technology laboratory. Created in 1998, HONF aka the 'House of Natural Fiber' was born out of the social and political turmoil against the nepotism and corruption of the Suharto regime.

In 2013, Ms Agrivina co-founded XXLab, an all-female collective focusing on arts, science and free technology as a second generation of HONF's spin-off communities. One of XXLab's projects, SOYA C(O)U(L)TURE was awarded *[the next idea] Art and Technology Grant voestalpine* by Ars Electronica in 2015. In 2019, Ms Agrivina was chosen by Asialink, Australia as one of six women pioneers from south-east Asia and Australia.

# Collective as the catalyst for freedom of expression

## Catalyst for the collective

In Indonesia, art collectives and cultural initiatives have become vital spaces of learning, connecting spaces, collaborative platforms, and drivers of innovative practice within the arts, cultural and creative sectors. Collectives play their role to create an open society where a spirit of tolerance and acceptance of differences are always underlined. Thus, collectives foster freedom of expression, which is in some instances under duress. Therefore, collectives also provide an important stage for presenting crucial civil society gestures of openness and courage.

Collectives are the driving force of the cultural sector and catalysts for social and economic development in Indonesia. Several reasons have emerged as to why collectives must continue to exist, namely as expressions of cultural celebration, to showcase the latest innovations, a means to expand and create new social networks, and maintain and animate the arts ecosystem. It can also be said that the presence of collectives is directly and indirectly

connected with people's need to produce culture and to carry out cultural exchanges and sharing with each other.

## The rise of the collectives

A collective can offer various perspectives on society. In Indonesia, art collectives have become vehicles to tell stories of struggle, change, ideas and hopes. Through collectives we can delve deeper into history, identity, cultural expressions, and other important causes that inspire the creation of cultural events.

Many collective and cultural initiatives – such as Taring Padi and Mess 56 in Yogyakarta, Ruang Rupa in Jakarta, Common Room in Bandung and many more – were born during and after the Reformation Era, as an expression of free voices. Previously, collective or cultural initiatives were known as 'Sanggar' (Juliastuti 2017) which refers to a platform for cultural expression and creativity. There was a dark secret that the New Order Regime of dictator Suharto controlled cultural expression, and

## Collective as the catalyst for freedom of expression

banned one million strong movements, including art movements that emerged and pushed for autonomy and artistic freedom.

The heart of the Reformation's movements was born in Yogyakarta, known as one of Indonesia's art hubs, and it is unique for its density of art spaces and artists. Home to Indonesia's oldest art institute, the Indonesian Institute of Fine Arts, Yogyakarta now boasts over 50 art and cultural spaces. In this city, one can find groups associated with fine arts – including painting and sculpture – as well as puppet and theatre troops, photography and film collectives, and cultural studies centres. Today, artists and young people can find their niche in one of Yogyakarta's many creative communities (Bruhn 2015).

HONF – also known as the House of Natural Fiber – is one of many collectives that was born in Yogyakarta; born out of social and political turmoil against the Suharto regime, its nepotism and governmental corruption. It was created in 1998, as a place of open expression, art and cultural technologies, in the wake of the Indonesian 'revolution'. The founding members – Venzha Christ, Irene Agrivina and Tommy Surya – run HONF's alternative

curriculum 'Education Focus Programme' (EFP) which focusses on the application and practical use in daily life of collaborative, cross-disciplinary and technological actions responding to social, cultural, and environmental challenges. In response to the needs of societies in development and transition, HONF and EFP apply open, collaborative, and sustainable actions that systematically expand or convert accessible technologies to be used as multifunctional tools and methodologies.

### Recognition of the collective

After the Reformation, digitalisation, information and communication technology brought in their wake a big impact for the freedom of expression. Even though people experienced trauma and suppressed secrets, collective grief and sadness cannot remain silenced forever. Internet technology brought a new world for the movements in Indonesia, including the art world.

Very successfully so, as we see, with Indonesian artists and culture workers playing an increasingly important role in the international art scene. They are being

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listened to. Indonesian artists have won important media art awards, such as HONF for Transmediale or XXLab, the spin-off project from HONF that won the Ars Electronica prize. Indonesian authors have been in the spotlight of the world's largest literature fair, with Leila S. Chudori, Eka Kurniawan and Laksmi Pamuntjak at the Frankfurt Bookfair in 2015. And in 2022, the Indonesian collective Ruangrupa will curate one of the most prestigious art shows in the world, Documenta in Kassel. None of this is a coincidence. It is the glocal strategy of Indonesia's digital avant garde showing its effect: low profile to the national public, largely visible in the international arena, and taking care of commons online and offline to foster autonomous resources. Digitalisation supports these liberal critical minds in self-expression, intensifies their networking efforts, and empowers original thinkers to be heard (Wustchitz 2019).

### The role of the collective

In Indonesia, collectives also reflect on the shared memory, knowledge and experience of a particular group of people. Collectives contribute to celebrating, constructing and passing those memories to their members over the years. This has been the case for HONF,

where sharing gives a sense of continuity, besides building the collective identity, to overcome social challenges.

Since the founding and establishment of HONF, discussions have honed on the importance of the collective and its role to influence various sectors and aspects in society, especially for openness and freedom of expression.

HONF has been able to survive for close to two decades now and has also contributed to the sustainability of Indonesia's collectives by inspiring a second generation of spin-off communities, including XXLab, an all-female collective founded in 2013. HONF and XXLab illustrate that Indonesian collectives encompass more than the objects bought and sold in the art market. They have moved aesthetics beyond tangible works of art, by facilitating collaborative, laboratory-like experiments that seek solutions for some of the most urgent issues of our times (Jurriëns 2016).

"HONF is underground and arrogant as always. HONF is avant garde. We are breaking the system and we do not want compliments on the wrong side. As an underground, we do not necessarily become overground" – HONF

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# Patrick Sam

Namibia

Mr Patrick Sam is a Namibian thought leader, born and raised in a marginalised community in the capital, Windhoek. He is the chairperson of the National Arts Council of Namibia (NACN) and has been driving the transformation of the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) in Namibia and southern Africa.

Mr Sam is a Board Member of the International Federation of Art Councils & Cultural Agencies (IFACCA), where he is also the Chair of the African Regional Chapter.

Mr Sam is a development consultant, broadcasting journalist, TV anchor and arts activist. As a Fulbright scholar, he completed an MA in International Education Development from Columbia University Teachers College and a BA from University College Utrecht in the Netherlands. Along with the NACN, he founded and hosted the first Art Summit of Southern Africa (ASSA) focused on strengthening the CCI in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) along with the IFACCA Africa Regional Chapter meeting.

# Artistic freedom: Dignifying culture to fuel human development

Arts, culture and heritage are public goods fundamental to human beings and human development. The African Union (AU) declared 2021 as the AU Year of the Arts, Culture & Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want in recognition of the importance of the cultural and creative sectors (CCS) in achieving its Agenda 2063 objectives of regional integration, inclusive and sustainable economic growth as well as the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (AU 2020). Moreover, the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides a unique opportunity for African countries to re-strategise, rebuild, and reinvest in the CCS.

But good seeds do not grow in bad soil. They need fertile ground to flourish; and artistic freedom can fuel this growth. Artistic freedom allows individuals, collectives and communities the right to imagine, create, distribute, produce and consume cultural content. For this reason, developing a cultural and creative ecosystem that dignifies the lives of artists and cultural practitioners is essential to the wellbeing of our societies.

Dignity safeguards artistic freedom by recognising the value of artist and cultural practitioners in our society. In a growing crisis of culture, artists and cultural practitioners are denied access to dignity through a lack of decent and sustainable work. The roots of the cultural and creative sectors are embedded in intellectual property and its protection and promotion. In 2019, the International Labour Organization's Global Commission on the Future of Work called for a human centred agenda for the future of work, one that strengthens the social contract by placing people and the work they do at the centre of economic and social policy and business practices (Gruber 2019). These practices will have to be promoted in the CCS if we are to achieve the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or the African Union's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.

Another important international commitment has been made to safeguard artistic freedom in the form of the UNESCO *2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*. This Convention recognises the dual nature, both cultural and

## Artistic freedom: Dignifying culture to fuel human development

economic, of contemporary artistic expressions (UNESCO 2007). Since 2019, UNESCO has included artistic freedom in its monitoring framework for the Convention, the guiding principles of which include respect for human rights, artistic freedom, gender equality and media diversity as fundamental to mitigating the increased polarising effects of populism, poverty and, more recently, the pandemic (amongst other crises). The fulfilment of these principles are fundamental to artistic freedom, and therefore, artistic violations must be tracked systematically. Further, the *1980 Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist* must be followed up with urgency to ensure greater equity and equality in local and global communities and markets.

Today, however, the status quo does not safeguard artistic freedom for all. Rather it reserves this right for a few with privilege, power or supremacy. Violations of artistic freedom impede on the ability of artists and cultural practitioners to access opportunities for personal and professional growth and upward mobility. Access to opportunities is unfortunately further marginalised for women,

youth, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA, Indigenous people, migrant populations and other vulnerable groups.

Recently, in many countries human development has been negatively affected by the World Health Organization's (WHO) declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic. In its 2020 report *Culture in Crisis: policy guide for a resilient creative sector*, UNESCO notes that 'crisis and lockdown measures have... had a significant impact on employment in the CCS because many artistic institutions and organisations have been forced to close or cut back on staff' (p.11). It is undeniable that the prevalence of COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenges of development. The National Art Council of Namibia (NACN) provided a limited relief fund for artists and established a multisectoral forum, Cultural & Creative Namibia, as an essential intervention to ensure that diverse stakeholders cooperate in the spirit of collaboration, coordination and partnership. However, developing nations continue to face the macro-economic challenge of development as government, private sector and civil society efforts are

**Today, however, the status quo does not safeguard artistic freedom for all. Rather it reserves this right for a few with privilege, power or supremacy.**

unable to meet the demands of the population, due to a lack infrastructure, resources and skills to ensure creation, production, exhibition and participation; as well as an inability to prioritise and transform the digitalisation of diverse cultural expressions.

Regional and national development strategies, institutional arrangements, laws and policies, capacity, resource allocation, technology, education, tourism, labour markets, gender parity, racism, patriarchy, ableism, inequality, inequity, migration and urbanisation. These are all key factors that must be interrogated in an intentional and intersectional manner in order to uncover the bottlenecks that limit the impact of the CCS on human development. Current opportunities fail to maximise new and contemporary sectors as

possible pillars to accelerate achievements against the triple baseline of economic, social, and environmental development, as well as cultural development. Impact must focus on achieving the triple baseline by eliminating humiliation and ensuring the wellbeing of people, the sustainability of the planet and manifestation of prosperity in the livelihoods of humanity. There is an imminent need to fast track development because worsening conditions could garner a mass of unemployed youth, which could further risk political stability and limit economic opportunities. Therefore, activists must influence and inform society and its policy makers on the inherent value of arts, culture and heritage; and how culture and creativity need to be cultivated with dignity by safeguarding artistic freedom.

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# Maria Lind

Sweden

Ms Maria Lind is a curator, art writer and educator. Since 2020, she is the Counsellor of Cultural Affairs at the Embassy of Sweden in Moscow. In 2016, she was the Artistic Director for the eleventh Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju, and in 2019 co-curator of The Art Encounters Biennial in Timisoara. She was Director of Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm (2011-2018); Director of the Graduate Program at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College (2008-2010) and Director of Iaspis (International Artist Studio Programme in Sweden), Stockholm (2005-2007). During the 2010s, she also held the position of Professor of Artistic Research at the Oslo Art Academy.

From 2002 to 2004, Ms Lind was the Director of Kunstverein München, Munich. She was a curator at Moderna Museet in Stockholm from 1997 to 2001. In 1998, she was co-curator of Manifesta 2, Luxembourg. In 2009, Ms Lind received the Walter Hopps Award for Curatorial Achievement. She has been an art critic at the Swedish national dailies, Svenska Dagbladet and Dagens Nyheter. Among her publications are *Selected Maria Lind Writing* (2010) and *Seven Years: The Rematerialization of Art* (2019), both Sternberg Press, and *Konstringar: Vad gör samtidskonsten?* (2021) Natur & Kultur.

# Artistic space to manoeuvre

The first premise: artistic freedom is a basic right that must always be defended. But just as equal right – to anything – does not guarantee equal opportunity, artistic freedom does not ensure expression without constraint. The pragmatic conditions for artistic work certainly set the stage for what is possible, from the economy of the arts to other support structures, and they are crucial for what can be done and by whom. And so do other restrictions, including convoluted ones which are not necessarily publicised.

Even more importantly for this discussion, formally democratic societies which rarely figure on agendas of artistic freedom have their limits too. This situation, and the circumstances that underpin it, are typically less considered, although the practitioners themselves usually know very well what is acceptable and permitted and what is not. There is an awareness of what is conceivable and what is not. For example, criticising your funders might not be a great idea, especially if you only have one funder, whether public or private.

Where straightforward censorship hinders certain types of expressions and topics at face value, this leads to other forms of censorship which actually tend to be more efficient, most prominently self-censorship. This way of suppressing artistic output presents an extensive number of obstacles to what gets made and what ends up going public. Self-

censorship happens more or less everywhere, both in countries with explicit censorship and those that are understood to be open and democratic. And it is notoriously difficult to pinpoint self-censorship, especially in public.

For example, when I was directing a state agency in Sweden, use of the word ‘bureaucracy’ was banned within the umbrella organisation. Management was keen on restrictive policies. As can be imagined, this led to a more cautious attitude both in language and behaviour on the part of the team regarding what was voiced about the effect of certain administrative measures on what artists can and cannot do. Similarly, notions such as ‘anticapitalism’ and ‘struggle’ have met with red lights in related contexts.

The second premise: shifting the terms of discussion can sometimes change the situation. How about trying another figure of thought, namely ‘artistic space to manoeuvre’? On closer inspection, there has never been total artistic freedom, just as unconditional freedom of speech does not exist. For well-known reasons, hate speech and defamation are illegal. However, most of the time, even under the harshest of conditions, there is some space to manoeuvre, artistically and otherwise. This space shrinks and grows depending on how the limits are negotiated, which in turn varies depending on where, whom and what is in focus.



## Artistic space to manoeuvre

### **‘Artistic space to manoeuvre’ emphasises that powerful artistic work is being carried out everywhere, despite everything.**

In fact, the notion of ‘artistic space to manoeuvre’ might offer some interesting features: it avoids the bluntest dichotomies between those who are considered to have access to artistic freedom and those who do not. Everybody is navigating on the same ocean, if not in the same boat. By emphasising a shared area which is continuously variable, even malleable, ‘artistic space to manoeuvre’ moves away from preconceptions about ‘the strong and the weak’, those ‘helping or rescuing’ and those receiving ‘help or rescue’.

Furthermore, ‘artistic space to manoeuvre’ emphasises that powerful artistic work is being carried out everywhere, despite everything. Artistic agency and artistic intelligence are omnipresent. It is the borders of the possible that are shifting, to a large extent thanks to cultural producers themselves. Without in any way romanticising tough conditions or repression, it is worth thinking about 19<sup>th</sup> century literature in Russia, one of many historical and contemporary examples. This particular literary legacy blossomed and is embraced across the globe because of its high literary quality combined with social and political critique. This would not have happened, at least not in the same way, if the tsarist autocracy had had other public spheres

where such critique would have been allowed. Culture, in particular literature and visual arts, took on that function; the sphere of culture simply allowed for ‘artistic space to manoeuvre’.

The third premise: obstacles can be removed but removing them is only the beginning. The writer Germaine Greer famously argued in her 1979 book *The Obstacle Race* that the reason for there not being any ‘great women artists’ in art history was the obstacles on their way; women were not allowed to attend art academies until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were prevented from state commissions and so forth. But once those obstacles were removed, women artist were still not counted as ‘great artists’, not even as artists – something else was needed, as art historians Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock claimed slightly later in their work *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (1981). It was necessary to dismantle the value systems underpinning the concept of the ‘artist’ as a male prerogative, and one full of mythology. It was equally important to question the presumptions on which ‘greatness’ was based, for instance seeing textile as a worthy medium and cherishing the intimate and personal in art.

At the same time, it was vital to construct new, parallel, criteria through engaging in an ongoing debate about what, where and when art is, and who gets to be the maker of it. Similarly, such unceasing negotiations create fluctuating borders for ‘artistic space to manoeuvre’ too, here and now.

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