



9th WORLD SUMMIT  
ON ARTS & CULTURE  
STOCKHOLM 2023

# Summit Report

Safeguarding Artistic Freedom







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# Safeguarding Artistic Freedom

Summit Report



SWEDISH  
**ARTS**COUNCIL

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### **ifacca.org**

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).

### **kulturradet.se**



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Top; L-R: Kajsa Ravin and Simon Brault - Official Opening; Panellists for Bridging Gaps - Creating Opportunities Plenary Session; Panellists for Many Dimensions of Complexity Plenary Session (LASTESIS presenting); Delegates at World Café; Delegates at Official Dinner, Stockholm City Hall; In Conversation with Shahidul Alam and Alexandra Xanthaki; Svetlana Mintcheva and Patrick Sam at World Café; Delegates at networking space. Photo: Susanne Kronholm.



# FOREWORD BY THE SWEDISH ARTS COUNCIL



Photo: Susanne Kronholm.

## Reflections from the host country.

**It takes extraordinary courage to avoid waking up one day to find our freedoms limited because we have slowly adapted to a new political landscape. It's time to move from urgency to agency. We have a responsibility to defend, ensure and strengthen artistic freedom as a fundamental human right. Leveraging our collective mandate and the agency we jointly possess, we have the potential to accomplish significant results and bring about change to uphold artistic freedom as a fundamental human right together. This entails promoting the full spectrum of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and recognising them as indivisible and interrelated, where one set of rights cannot be enjoyed fully without the other.**

The World Summit in Stockholm offered a vibrant forum for colleagues from across the world to learn from each other and the challenges we face in our respective countries. Together we created an atmosphere of openness, curiosity, and inclusivity, reflecting respect for our diverse experiences. We identified crucial issues to safeguard artistic freedom, such as reconciling rights to and responsibilities of artistic freedom; that artistic freedom must be inclusive for it to be strengthened and sustainable; and that dialogues with many stakeholders must continue. We also understood the importance of global solidarity and were reminded that what happens in one part of the world impacts us all.

Imagining improved conditions for arts and culture is not enough; we also need to take action, becoming ambassadors advocating for a world in which artists can express themselves freely, thrive and where creativity flourishes.

The vitality of artistic creativity is essential for the development of vibrant cultures and the proper functioning of democratic societies.

The Swedish Arts Council is profoundly grateful for the opportunity to have co-hosted the 9th World Summit with IFACCA, bringing together representatives from 90 countries. We could not have created this World Summit without the many funders, partners, and collaborators, to whom we would like to express our deepest gratitude for their unwavering trust and generosity. Our deepest thanks also to all the speakers, workshop leaders and artists who created such a nuanced and thought-provoking programme, urging us to take action.

We will rely on the IFACCA network and other cultural platforms to continue our dialogue until we meet again at the 10th World Summit on Arts and Culture. Remember, the strength of this endeavor lies in the power of our collective efforts to improve the conditions for artistic freedom. Finally, our heartfelt thanks to IFACCA, for this incredible opportunity and remarkable journey.

**Kajsa Ravin**

*Director General of the Swedish Arts Council*

# INTRODUCTION BY IFACCA



**The World Summit on Arts and Culture is a global forum to discuss and debate complex issues of the time. It is a place to share ideas among policy makers, cultural leaders, academics and other stakeholders; to listen and exchange; and to learn and reflect. On 2 May 2023, we welcomed to Stockholm more than 420 delegates representing 90 countries for the 9th World Summit on Arts and Culture, which took place over four days, co-hosted by the Swedish Arts Council and the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA).**

Since 2019, when we held the 8<sup>th</sup> World Summit in Malaysia, the world has changed significantly. As we gathered in Stockholm the energy was palpable, as we came together for a much-awaited reunion with a warm and generous atmosphere. As we gathered, it was also clear that we needed to talk – face to face – to share our experiences and our mutual concerns about the status of arts and culture; the fragile condition of the cultural and creative sectors; the impact of the digital era on diversity and freedom of expression; the implications of multiple crises worldwide; and how to advance universal artistic freedoms in a complex landscape.

As a federation of ministries of culture and public agencies advancing arts and culture, we come together in a spirit of dialogue and respect, recognising that we can only tackle such complex and diverse issues in open collaboration as a global community. IFACCA holds the stewardship of the World Summits on Arts and Culture with profound duty since its inception in 2001. At each summit in collaboration with our host partner, we hand

over collective custodianship of the Summit to all speakers and delegates to start the real conversation. The 9th World Summit exemplified this – and extended it to speakers and delegates – with due care and diligence, which we trust is reflected in this report.

The 9th World Summit programme was premised on artistic freedom as a fundamental pillar of cultural policy that we must examine and safeguard. It was designed to be highly participatory, to create multiple entry points to discuss, debate and exchange. In my opening remarks, I proposed that as custodians of the World Summit we must acknowledge our privilege and influence; that we each have roles to play, as individuals and as part of a collective; and that – despite any differing views or discomfort – the Summit remains a space in which we commit to listen to one another. Artistic freedom entails complexity, and the programme allowed us to explore different opinions, experiences and viewpoints, and to leave with an enriched and multidimensional understanding. This was supported by different session formats that allowed for engagement, such as livestreamed vs closed sessions, safe spaces, open discussions and quiet rooms.

The Summit made it clear that artistic freedom is both universal and contextual, a dichotomy that must be negotiated as we work to safeguard it. Together, we recognised that artistic freedom cannot be addressed in isolation. It must be part of a wider conversation to recognise culture, dignity, and the people who dedicate themselves to its expression.

Moreover, in the context of crises and change, we must fight for artistic freedom to be recognised and given space and attention. As such, our conversations considered related, interconnected issues like working conditions, inclusion, access and rights and responsibilities (both individual and collective). Our discussions also made clear that threats and barriers to artistic freedom can be blatant and overt, but they can also be subtle and covert, which can make it difficult to identify them and drive systemic change for the better.

This report is not intended as an exhaustive treatise on safeguarding artistic freedom. Rather it captures the energy and breadth of discussion and debate that took place during the 9th World Summit on Arts and Culture in Stockholm in May 2023. We chose to avoid a chronological order of the days and topics. For that, we encourage readers to review the programme and video recordings available online. The report shares ideas and conclusions – where they were possible – on risks and urgent actions required. Two of these stand out: the need to redistribute power and resources; and the need to decolonise our language, mindsets and approaches. The former encompasses access to financial resources, as well as opportunity and information. If access is limited through isolationism or gatekeeping, there will be hierarchies that inhibit artistic freedom and creative expression and imperil creative dynamism and cultural rights. This is something against which we must all be vigilant. The latter is equally important, particularly the need to avoid unproductive distinctions between the mainstream and margins, which reinforce hierarchies and undermine inclusion. This is something that IFACCA will carry forward and we hope it is something that delegates and readers of this report will embrace too.

To all those who participated in the Summit, we thank you for your openness, care, honesty, and vital contributions. To the International Programme Advisory Committee led by Olu Alake, and our many wonderful partners in Sweden and beyond, thank you for your support and generosity. And to the IFACCA Board – especially outgoing Chair Simon Brault – and the exceptional Secretariat team, thank you. Most importantly, we express our deepest appreciation to the Swedish Arts Council, led by Kajsa Ravin. Your trust, dedication and hard work made our shared vision for this much anticipated World Summit a reality.

We firmly believe that when we come together and collaborate, we strengthen our vision for a world in which arts and culture thrive. Artistic freedom and its rights and responsibilities are integral to this vision. Let us continue to work together and effect transformative positive change.

**Magdalena Moreno Mujica**  
*Executive Director of IFACCA*

# THE SUMMIT - AT A GLANCE



**The World Summit on Arts and Culture is the flagship event of the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA), which is generally convened every three years in different parts of the world. It is a highly participatory platform that fosters exchange between stakeholders within the global cultural policy field, including representatives of government, cultural and non-cultural sectors, and civil society. Through the World Summit, the Federation provides a platform for global thought leadership and explores key issues, in a spirit of openness, pluralism and curiosity.**

From 2–5 May 2023, IFACCA and the Swedish Arts Council co-hosted the 9th World Summit on Arts and Culture in Stockholm, Sweden. The Summit brought together more than 400 people from 90 countries, including leading policy makers, researchers, managers and practitioners from the arts, culture, and related sectors. Featuring a diverse range of discussion formats, the Summit programme explored the theme ‘Safeguarding Artistic Freedom’.

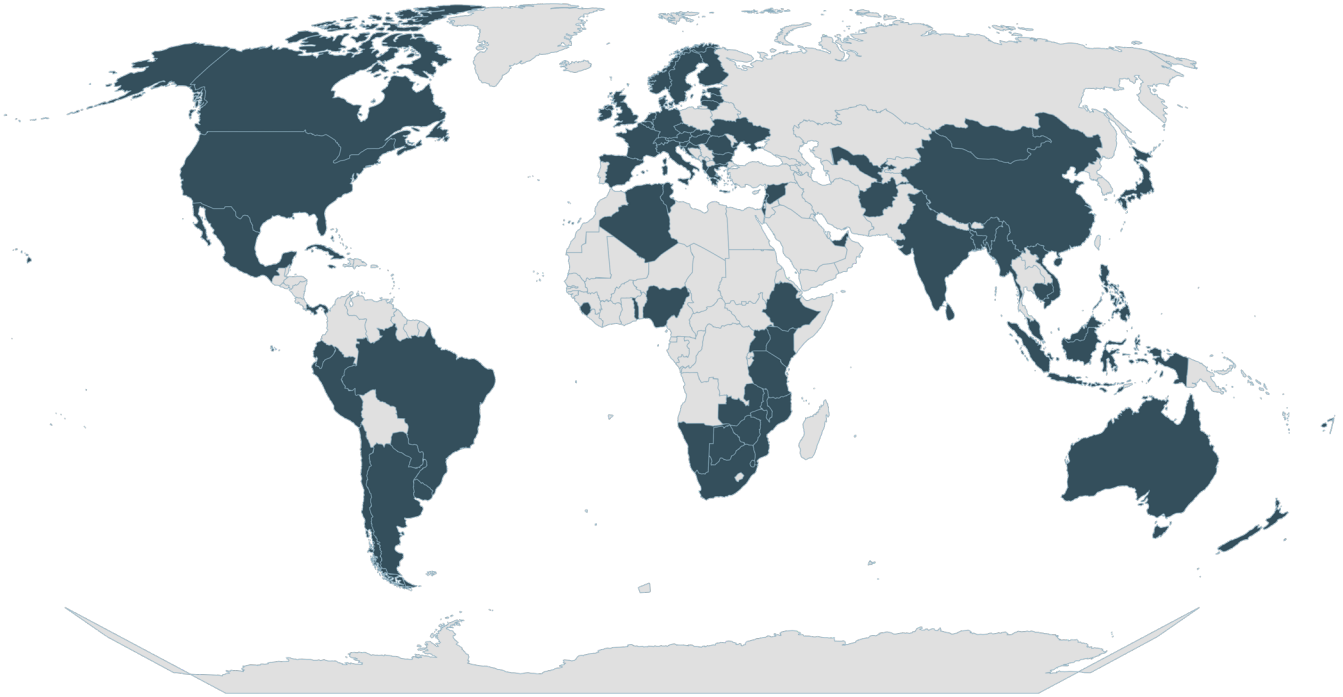
With a spirit of mutual respect and openness, the event enabled a nuanced, versatile, and thoughtful navigation of a complex and multifaceted theme.

While guided by [UNESCO’s definition of artistic freedom](#), this three-day journey allowed us to map various approaches to artistic freedom applied across the world. The programme included a review of existing frameworks and tools to safeguard artistic freedom. It explored and acknowledged the gaps and similarities between states and communities and highlighted the responsibilities that come with exercising artistic freedom. Building on the diversity of global stories and perspectives, the Summit examined various factors that undermine artistic freedom in many parts of the world today. Finally, we envisioned pathways towards a better future, where universal freedom is advanced and enhanced, and defined our collective duties and individual responsibilities in making this future a reality.

# Delegates

Representation by country<sup>1</sup>

90  
Countries  
represented



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Countries represented by delegates include Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, The Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, China, Cook Islands, Croatia, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Mexico, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Romania, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Tanzania, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom (including England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales), Uruguay, United States, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

1. Country data based on registration form. For those speakers who specified more than one, both countries were represented in calculations.

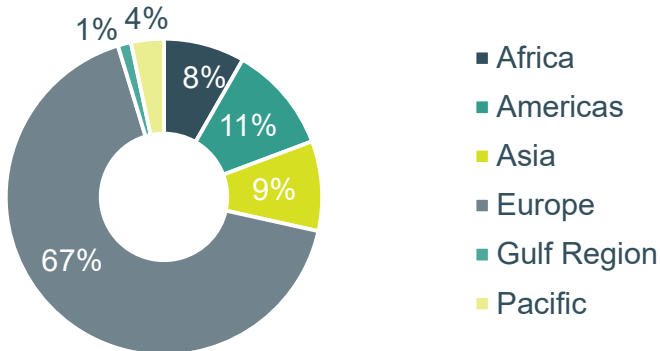
# Delegates

424

Delegates

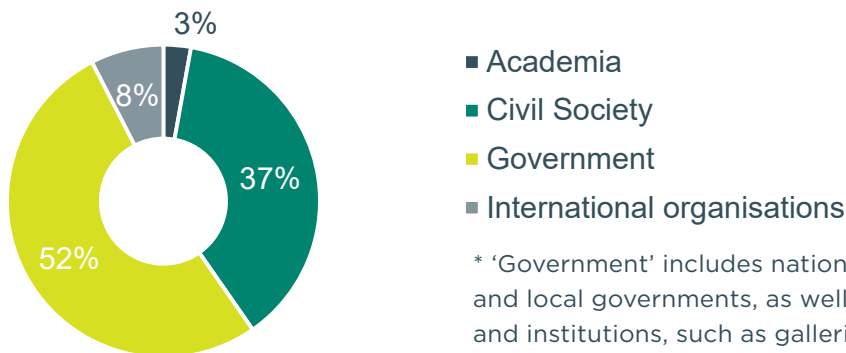
## Representation by region

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## Representation by sector\*

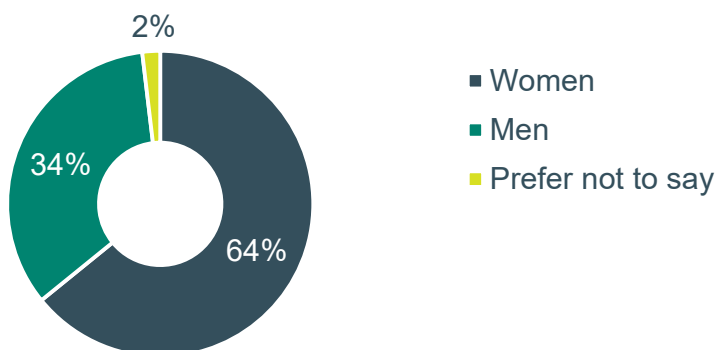
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\* 'Government' includes national, state, regional and local governments, as well as national agencies and institutions, such as galleries, museums and libraries. 'Civil society' includes artists, organisations and private foundations.

## Gender balance

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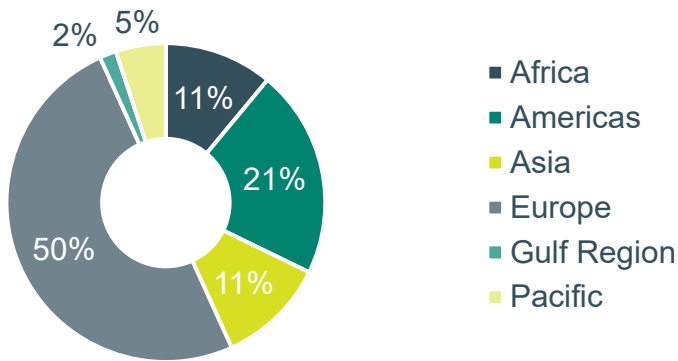


# Speakers

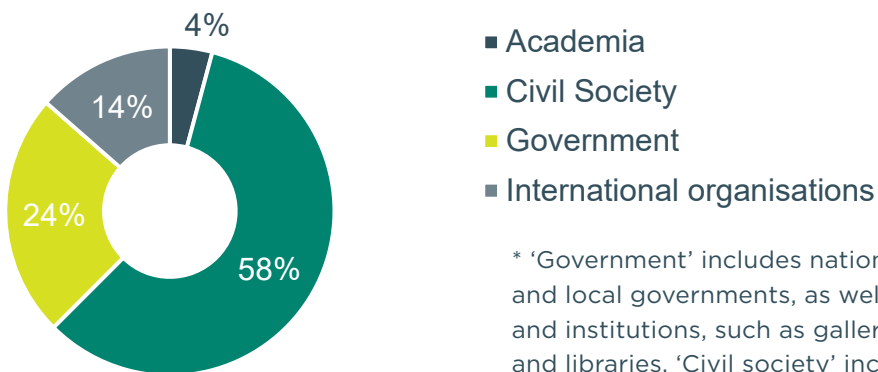
96  
Speakers

55  
Countries  
represented

## Representation by region

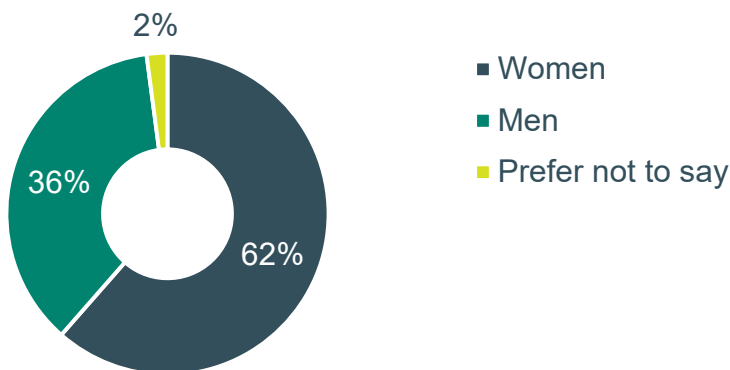


## Representation by sector\*



\* 'Government' includes national, state, regional and local governments, as well as national agencies and institutions, such as galleries, museums and libraries. 'Civil society' includes artists, organisations and private foundations.

## Gender balance



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

### 1. Artistic freedom as an ecosystem of rights

Artistic freedom is a complex notion that encompasses various rights, such as the right to create and express oneself freely without censorship, interference or persecution; the right to have one's work remunerated, supported, and distributed; the rights to freedom of movement and freedom of association; social and economic rights; and the right to participate in cultural life. Safeguarding artistic freedom requires a comprehensive approach that considers and addresses all these elements.

### 2. Understanding contextual differences

Artistic freedom should be understood as a universal right that has undeniable social value. At the same time, approaches to understanding and defining artistic freedom, risks, pressures, tools, resources, opportunities, and when to advance the agenda for artistic freedom vary from context to context, both across borders and within countries. Therefore, to undertake meaningful debate and take effective action to examine and safeguard artistic freedom, it is crucial to acknowledge that artistic freedom is both universal and contextual.

### 3. Increased challenges in times of polycrisis<sup>2</sup>

The value of artistic freedom is especially significant as the world goes through the turmoil of multiple challenges, such as geopolitical instability, climate crisis, human displacement, growing inequality, decline in democratic values, and unregulated technological transformation. However, this reality of polycrisis currently poses multiple threats to artistic freedom in various countries across the globe, including those that have traditionally excelled in safeguarding rights and freedoms.

### 4. Multiplicity of overt and covert threats

There are numerous obstacles to the exercise of artistic freedom. Some threats are conventional and sometimes more easily observed, such as censorship, repression, attacks, and restrictive legislation. However, there are also more subtle and elusive ways to obstruct artistic freedom, such as denial of access to infrastructure, opportunities and sustainable economic conditions. The combination of these and other barriers fosters an environment conducive to self-censorship, which often arises from oppression, polarisation, inequality, and a dearth of diversity and plurality in debate.

### 5. Balancing rights and responsibilities

The exercise of artistic freedom is a delicate balance between rights and responsibilities. Artistic freedom carries various obligations, including creating circumstances so that artists can express themselves freely without censorship, political interference and persecution. It also includes respecting the rights, privacy, and ethics of individuals who may be impacted by the work of artists, the authorship of the content, as well as ensuring the safety of everyone involved. Artists frequently need to weigh the significance and responsibility of truth-telling against the potential risks it may bring. On the other hand, they also must weigh in the rights and responsibilities in their actions and provocations. Reconciling rights and responsibilities is a challenging task, but it is crucial for establishing boundaries and creating a secure environment for one's work, its presentation and experience.

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2. The term 'polycrisis' was introduced in the late 1990s by Edgar Morin, a French philosopher and sociologist, and referenced at the Summit by Simon Brault, at the time Director and CEO of the Canada Council for the Arts.



Top L-R: Delegates networking; DG Hilmar Farid (Indonesia) at Closing Plenary; Delegates at World Café discussion. Photo: Susanne Kronholm.

## 6. Urgency to redistribute power and resources

Inequities, power imbalances, and colonial legacies are major barriers to the exercise of artistic freedom. Multiple entry points should be created for underrepresented groups by redistributing power, narratives, access, and resources. This can be achieved by increasing self-awareness about privileges and gatekeeping roles, reevaluating dominant models and definitions, and shifting the structures of the centre to multiple open and porous entry points for a broader engagement, particularly for those who are underrepresented to engage on their own terms.

## 7. Building alliances as the only way forward

Collaborations and alliances established across borders, and between cultural and creative sectors (CCSs) and sectors outside them, as well as between policy areas are vital for advancing and safeguarding artistic freedom. Dialogue and collective action are

especially important for bridging policy fields, designing overarching and effective whole-of-government strategies, sharing knowledge and resources, and raising awareness about pivotal issues at both governmental and societal levels.

## 8. Artistic freedom as our collective duty

Advancing artistic freedom is a collective responsibility that can be achieved through various avenues of action, including advocacy, investment, legislation, protection of human rights, data collection, activism, alliance-building, and the power of artistic creation. There are multiple stakeholders in this collective endeavour, such as international institutions, governments, funding bodies, civil society, CCSs, artists, academia, the scientific community, other rights-based organisations, media, and the private sector (including the digital industries).

# FRAMING THE THEME – UNDERSTANDING ARTISTIC FREEDOM

### **Artistic freedom: its elements and relationships with other rights**

The 9th World Summit on Arts and Culture adopted UNESCO's approach to framing artistic freedom as a set of rights under the protection of international law: the rights to create without censorship or intimidation; to have artistic work supported, distributed, and remunerated; to freedom of movement; to freedom of association; to the protection of social and economic rights; and the right to participate in cultural life (UNESCO, 2019). This approach embraces the entire cultural value chain that fosters conditions in which artists can create, present, distribute and share their work; and in which citizens can participate in cultural life, which is a cultural right shared by all.

The interrelation of the various rights that constitute artistic freedom was repeatedly emphasised during Summit discussions as an essential requirement for its advancement and enhancement. The different components of artistic freedom mutually reinforce and influence one another in diverse ways; acknowledging one aspect alone can result in fractures and gaps in strategies, regulatory frameworks, public debates, and other instruments and avenues for action.

From the outset, panellists stressed that artistic freedom must be framed in relation to other rights, including those that address basic human needs. This was a constant thread that ran throughout the Summit. For example, in situations of armed conflict, violence, or natural disaster where people lack access to food, safety and shelter, their artistic freedom cannot be effectively addressed as a stand-alone right. At the same time, it was highlighted that freedom is fundamental to a

life worth living, and people cannot be satisfied with merely having shelter and food while being deprived of their freedom.

Furthermore, artistic freedom was viewed through the lens of cultural freedom – the right of individuals to express their true identities and engage in their cultural practices. Åsa Simma, CEO of the Sámi Theatre (Sweden) emphasised that for the Sámi community, the concept of art is intricately entwined with their way of living. Ms Simma explained that the continuous practice of their culture, such as traditional singing, is crucial for the Sámi people to safeguard their cultural integrity and ensure their survival as a population. 'Through the Sámi lifestyle, each moment in life becomes an artistic experience', she stated.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Vice President and Artistic Director of Social Impact at the Kennedy Center (USA) extended the notion of artistic freedom to dignity, people's right to be valued and respected for who they are. He spoke about the right to feel good about being yourself while having to reconcile your multiple identities: 'If I take everything that I love about being black and everything that I love about being an American, are those things themselves in a right or loving relationship?' This question alludes to one complex element of artistic freedom – embedding one's identity into dominant paradigms while feeling self-value and worthy of respect.

In these ways, discussions at the Summit demonstrated that artistic freedom is a multifaceted concept, comprising multiple rights and interconnected with other spaces of freedom. They also recognised that this complexity necessitates integrated, mindful, and inclusive approaches to advance artistic freedom.



## Regulatory contexts and instruments

Several international, regional and national regulatory instruments which safeguard artistic freedom were noted at the Summit.

Article 19 of the [United Nations' \(UN\) 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#) stipulates that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Article 19 of the [UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#), signed in 1966, protects everyone's right 'to freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds', including in the form of art. The UN Member States report to the UN Council on Human Rights every five years on their adherence to the ICCPR, as part of the [Universal Periodic Review procedure](#). Furthermore, Article 15 of the [UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#) protects the right to take part in cultural life and freedom of creative activity.

In addition, the UN Human Rights Council [appoints](#) a Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, whose mandate includes gathering information about the situation of cultural rights worldwide, working with governments to further the promotion and protection of cultural rights, and submitting annual reports to the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner n.d.). Freedom of artistic expression is also featured in the [UNESCO 1980 Recommendation Concerning the Status of the Artist](#), which states that governments should develop and support 'a climate encouraging freedom of artistic expression' and highlights the duty of member states 'to protect, defend and assist artists and their freedom of creation' (preamble; part III, art. 3).

As aforementioned, freedom of expression is recognised as a fundamental right by the [UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Promotion and Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#) (art. 2.1). State signatories must report on their

adherence to the 2005 Convention every four years; these quadrennial reports include a section on artistic freedom.

There are also several regional frameworks that aim to strengthen artistic freedom. The [Charter for African Cultural Renaissance \(2016\)](#) of the African Union promotes cultural democracy and freedom of expression and stipulates that governments shall guarantee the freedom of artists (art. 3, art. 16). Member States of the African Union ratify and implement the Charter through national frameworks and policies. Another regional example is the [Ibero-American Cultural Charter \(2006\)](#) that lays the foundations for Ibero-American cultural cooperation. 'Recognition and protection of cultural rights' is listed as the first of the Charter's eight principles. Finally, the [European Convention on Human Rights of the Council of Europe](#) guarantees everyone's right to freedom of expression (art. 10). Citizens can bring complaints about breaches of the Convention before the European Court of Human Rights (Council of Europe, 2023, p. 9).

Several countries protect artistic freedom or freedom of expression within their national legislative frameworks. Some are constitutional or basic laws such as in Germany, Sweden and Tunisia; or instruments covering a broad spectrum of rights, such as the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms \(1982\)](#), and the [Living Standards Framework 2021 in New Zealand](#); or laws specifically regulating the fields of culture and the arts, such as the [General Law of Culture and Cultural Rights in Mexico \(2017\)](#), the [Artist Welfare Act in South Korea \(2011\)](#), and the [Status of the Artist law in Togo \(2016\)](#). These and other national instruments address artistic freedom in a variety of ways: as part of a broader notion of freedom of expression, through the lens of cultural rights, or in relation to artists' economic and social rights. Legislative, historical, and sociocultural contexts differ, hence this diversity of regulatory mechanisms.

### **Precarity of artistic freedom in times of polycrisis**

Many contributors stressed that artistic freedom is particularly important today, as the world experiences turmoil due to multiple challenges such as geopolitical instability, the climate crisis, human displacement, growing inequality, and rapid technological development.

In this era of polycrisis, culture and the arts possess the potential to ignite hope, restore the social fabric, and offer ideas for constructing a better future. They inspire individuals to perceive things from diverse perspectives, foster curiosity about others, acknowledge differences among people and communities, and establish common ground. It was emphasised that engaging in cultural life helps individuals to find comfort and stability during times of turbulence and division. Moreover, Enrique Avogadro, Minister of Culture of Buenos Aires (Argentina), spoke about the power of the arts to unite people, while at the same time enabling them to accept and celebrate differences that exist in multicultural societies. This is particularly crucial in today's context, where social divides are expanding, and political polarisation is intensifying.

Culture and the arts can also disturb the status quo and challenge dominant conceptions. As Cecilia Ruthström-Ruin, Sweden's Ambassador for Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law stated at the Opening Plenary, 'artistic freedom challenges - but also possesses - power.' She underlined the ability of the arts to shed light on controversial cultural, political, and social issues and to question prevailing narratives.

This perspective emerged as a crucial element in several interventions. Numerous participants stated their firm belief that art encompasses more than just comfort and stability as evident during crises; it also

entails vigilance and critical thinking. Artistic freedom serves as a powerful tool to confront the misuse of power, expose injustices and inequalities, and raise awareness about developments that harm the environment and undermine other freedoms. This is particularly crucial in current times, marked as they are by rapid change and diminishing space for debate and diversity of opinion.

At the same time, during times of turbulence, the pressures that restrict artistic freedom seem to increase in proportion to its value and power. Deeyah Khan, Norwegian film director, founder of Fuuse and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for artistic freedom and creativity, identified that it is the power of the arts to challenge prevailing norms that makes those who seek to curtail artistic freedom so fearful of its potential. 'Are we comfortable with this freedom?' she questioned, 'in principle we are, but once it manifests itself in society, can we actually stomach it?'

Therefore, there is a dual experience of artistic freedom in the context of the world's current polycrisis. On the one hand, it is increasingly recognised as a torch that helps societies navigate dark times; on the other, societies find it more challenging than ever to guarantee and safeguard it.

### **Why context matters**

While international instruments may seek to establish universal definitions of artistic freedom, the interpretation, value, and practical implications of these instruments vary depending on the region, country, community and context. Countries experience significant economic, social, and digital disparities. These complexities are further amplified by specific disturbances such as armed conflict, unrest, or climate catastrophe. Moreover, many communities may face issues of systemic inequality that hinder their ability to exercise their rights.

In light of these complexities, Summit contributors reiterated that artistic freedom must be considered within a contextual framework. For many, it seemed vital to stress that artistic freedom, as both a right and a value, is universal. At the same time, approaches to comprehending and defining artistic freedom – as well as the risks, pressures, tools, resources, opportunities, and timing for advancing the artistic freedom agenda – vary from one context to another, both across borders and within countries. To engage in meaningful debates and implement effective action to examine and protect artistic freedom, it is vital to understand and acknowledge these contextual differences.

Several contributors spoke about how armed conflict can be a change factor for understanding and positioning artistic freedom. Vicensia Shule (Tanzania), Senior Culture Officer at the African Union emphasised the fundamental importance of artistic freedom for the African continent. However, she also acknowledged that in certain African countries, people are currently deprived of basic needs such as food and shelter, amid fighting for their freedom in broader sense. In such context, prioritising artistic freedom as a separate agenda would be futile.

Furthermore, a change in social agenda can also transform the understanding of artistic freedom and the terrain for its exercise. For instance, an artwork that has for a long time been well received by the public can become an object of public scrutiny or anger, signalling a shift in social values. In this regard, one of the panellists cited the example of Roald Dahl's book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) which was revised in 2023 to erase potentially offensive elements, such as those related to characters' gender, race and appearance. This illustrates how perception of the same artwork evolves with the context of time and may even lead to what some perceive as censorship.

Finally, it was discussed that frameworks and tools that capture, and measure violations of artistic freedom must also be tailored to specific contexts. For effective data collection, there is a need for regional and local platforms that are aligned with the realities on the ground and are sensitive to the unique challenges faced by artists and cultural workers in a particular area.

### **Balancing individual and collective rights and responsibilities**

The Summit fed into collective reflection on responsibilities as boundaries framing the terrain for the exercise of artistic freedom. It was consistently emphasised that if artistic freedom is regarded in isolation from the bigger picture, this can create conditions for undermining other rights and freedoms. 'The fixation on freedom is like staring at the sun' noted Haris Agic, scholar, anthropologist and Strategist, Democracy and Inclusion, Culture and Leisure Office, Norrköping Municipality (Sweden), alluding to the risk of adverse effects of pushing for freedoms in a contextual vacuum.

Delegates discussed the delicate balance between the right to convey truth through artwork and the responsibility to safeguard individuals involved. Summit deliberations also explored the tensions between expressing ourselves in public spaces while respecting ethical and privacy boundaries. Additionally, they examined the interplay between exercising artistic freedom and taking responsibility for driving social change, as well as the juxtaposition of freedom of movement and the responsibility to protect the environment.

Several powerful stories and ideas were shared by speakers to illustrate these uneasy balances. Liwaa Yazji, a filmmaker, screenwriter, playwright and poet from Syria based in Germany, spoke about her personal

situation, in which by cherishing one of her rights – freedom of expression – she potentially compromises another right, to enter her homeland. Based outside Syria, Ms Yazji expressed her feeling of being responsible to use open platforms for speaking up against the current regime, yet acknowledged the dangers that speaking up could entail if she tried to return to Syria.

Later, Ms Yazji spoke about how she started filming her documentary *Haunted* in the wake of the uprising in Syria, which featured voices of people and their stories about the repression they suffered under the regime. She shared that when people spoke on camera, they believed the regime would no longer be in power when the film was released. This was not the case, however, and Ms Yazji was faced with the challenge of balancing her duty to tell the truth and the responsibility not to put her protagonists at risk.

The ethical exercise of artistic freedom was another consideration exemplified at the Summit, which is often related to the privacy of individuals involved in a work of art. One of the stories shared involved featuring deceased bodies in a film. In this situation, the crew faced a difficult decision between not crossing ethical boundaries and still using a powerful tool to convey the truth about war and the atrocities of dictatorship.

Summit delegates also discussed the delicate balance often faced by funders between the responsibility to redress access to finance and the duty to ensure everyone's freedoms. Simon Brault, then Director and CEO of the Canada Council for the Arts spoke about his responsibility as a funder to grant everyone the opportunity to exercise artistic freedom, in a context where some members of society have been structurally and intentionally deprived of access to funding, infrastructure, and visibility platforms. As Mr Brault stressed, there is an urgency to empower those people

who are under-supported and restore their rights. For this, however, the funder might need to 'decentre those that have been loud and visible' for too long, while striving to ensure that their right to free expression is not undermined either.

Hilmar Farid, Director General for Culture at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia, spoke about another balance between advancing science-based policies – for example in fields of health or environment – and not stifling voices that do not trust these policies. 'Is there freedom for climate denial or anti-vaccination movement?' he wondered. It was emphasised during several conversations that it is our shared responsibility to create safe spaces for an evidence-based dialogue among various viewpoints and perspectives, as ignoring and stifling the voices of those we disagree with is counterproductive in the long run.

Many delegates acknowledged that there are no one-size-fit-all solutions for establishing balanced relationships between rights and responsibilities; however, it is essential to engage in ongoing discussions about these different balances, as they play a crucial role in how we comprehend artistic freedom, establish necessary boundaries, and foster a secure environment for all involved.





Top: Panellists for Many Dimensions of Complexity Plenary Session; Delegates at Open Discussion; Panellists for Tools and Resources to Advance Artistic Freedom, Closing Plenary. Photo: Susanne Kronholm.

# BARRIERS AND THREATS

**No country in the world is immune to the frailty of freedoms. This was one of the key takeaways of Summit conversations, which consistently emphasised that the state of artistic freedom has deteriorated in various regions across the globe in recent years. Reflecting on this, Kajsa Ravin, Director General of the Swedish Arts Council observed: ‘Regrettably, artistic freedom and artistic expression often come under attack due to political, religious, cultural, moral, or economic interests. We have seen an increase in censorship, prosecution, imprisonment, and the killing of artists.’**

There are numerous obstacles to the exercise of artistic freedom. Some threats are conventional and easily observed, such as censorship, repression, attacks, and restrictive legislation. However, there are also more subtle and elusive challenges, such as denial of access to infrastructure or fragile economic conditions. Campaigner and researcher on freedom of artistic expression, and the author of the Council of Europe report [Free to Create: Artistic Freedom in Europe \(2023\)](#), Sara Whyatt defines these groups as ‘above the radar’ and ‘under the radar’ pressures (p. 6).

The combination of these and other barriers can foster an environment that breeds self-censorship. Multiple contributors spoke about self-censorship as a by-product of weak justice systems, polarisation, abuse of power and unequal distribution of resources. Self-censorship often occurs when there are other types of barriers and threats. It is hard to measure and thus one of the most harmful forms of curtailment to artistic freedom.

Summit conversations featured multiple stories of how these impediments and forms of restricting artistic freedom play out in different countries, including those that usually rank highly for ensuring freedoms and rights.

## 1. Global turmoil in times of exponential change

The 9th World Summit on Arts and Culture was the first IFACCA World Summit that has been held post-pandemic. The global context in which this Summit took place is complex and challenging. In her opening remarks IFACCA’s Executive Director Magdalena Moreno Mujica referred to the polycrisis as the fragile backdrop against which arts and culture must coexist. Various stories shared at the Summit illustrated that human rights do not flourish when there is deprivation, cataclysms, violence, and scarcity of resources. Thus, the backdrop of polycrisis further weakens the foundations for safeguarding artistic freedom, because it leads to fragmentation of mechanisms and resources, shifts the focus and in some cases allows powerholders to use emergency mode to curtail freedoms.

One of the most destructive elements of the polycrisis is armed conflict, such as those currently happening in countries like Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Ukraine. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine was referred to as an attack on Ukrainian culture, history, and identity that has led to the destruction of cultural heritage and infrastructure as well as deaths and displacement of culture professionals.



Volodymyr Sheiko, Director General at the Ukrainian Institute and Vladyslav Berkovski, Executive Director at the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation provided a snapshot of the profound impact of war on artistic freedom in Ukraine: artistic creation, production and touring have been severely disrupted; artists are suffering from emotional distress and many are unable to work or remain in the profession; and there is major uncertainty that contributes to a drain and loss of talent.

Ahmad Naser Sarmast, Founder and Director at the Afghanistan National Institute of Music spoke about the dire situation in his country where people are deprived of their cultural rights and the Taliban group is destroying artistic monuments.

At the Open Space (sessions for delegates to address additional issues in a safe space), participants expressed concerns about the growing militarisation of the world and the deterioration of global peace. Several contributors reminded us that in the discussion on armed conflict, climate must also be regarded as a major factor for peace and stability. As global populations fail to prevent rapid environmental degradation, the climate crisis leads to the depletion of resources and manifests in natural disasters. These cataclysms lead to poverty, human displacement, social unrest, violence, and geopolitical tension. One of the major takeaways of the Long Table on Artistic Freedom and the Climate Crisis was how urgent it is to understand and affirm the relationship between art and climate and make climate justice central in our thinking about artistic freedom to avoid scattered efforts and tools leading to ineffective strategies.

### **2. Fragmented approach to artistic freedom**

As stated above, artistic freedom is an integral element of other freedoms and rights, and it should be framed within an ecosystem of multiple political, environmental, social, economic, and cultural factors.

However, artistic freedom is frequently excluded from important regulatory frameworks and policies. For example, certain laws focusing on disadvantaged groups may protect people as citizens but do not recognise their cultural rights, which hinders their access to culture and artistic careers, and undermines their rights to participate in cultural life. Furthermore, artistic freedom is sometimes addressed as a stand-alone issue, without considering the broader ecosystem that enables and supports its exercise, including factors such as climate, equality, intellectual property, international relations, and labour.

This disconnection also manifests when states advance certain public policy agendas, for instance those centred on peace, growth or development, without considering the needs of cultural and creative sectors. Prioritising such agendas can overshadow the importance of artistic freedom and leave major issues ignored. On this matter, several contributors spoke about the impact made by poorly regulated advancement of market economies or digitalisation on artistic freedom and artists' working conditions.

Moreover, several delegates pointed out that individual elements of artistic freedom – like social rights, freedom of expression, or the right to participate in cultural life – are often addressed in isolation, with some receiving disproportionate attention while others are neglected. Explanation for this fragmentation may lie in a lack of understanding of artistic freedom, divergent approaches, and the constant evolution of the concept itself. Professor Alexandra Xanthaki, UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, also expressed concern that states might choose to see only the parts of artistic freedom in which they are interested, rather than having a wider and more inclusive understanding of what artistic freedom entails.

These forms of fragmentation undermine crucial connections between policy areas, which results in gaps and ruptures in the frameworks and strategies for safeguarding artistic freedom.

### 3. Misuse of authority

In recent years, there have been numerous instances worldwide of states restricting human rights, including artistic freedom. This seems to occur particularly when those in power perceive artistic freedom as a threat to their authority and intentionally suppress it under the guise of other agendas, such as promoting national interests in the international arena, combating terrorism or poverty, or protecting religious values. Several stories shared by delegates at the Summit exemplified the various forms of state power that turn artistic freedom into a hazard – from overt cultural genocide to more under-the-radar state intervention in arts funding decisions.

Ahmad Naser Sarmast, Founder and Director at the Afghanistan National Institute of Music spoke about the dire situation of artistic freedom in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime. Dr Sarmast referred to Afghanistan as the only place in the world where an entire nation is silenced and deprived of their cultural and artistic rights, as people can no longer freely take part in artistic, cultural and, more specifically, music practice. ‘I wish we had the luxury to speak about censorship in Afghanistan today’, Dr Sarmast stated. He identified the current events in Afghanistan as ‘cultural genocide’, underlining the depth and gravity of the current existential threats to the Afghan culture coming from within the country.

During the panel ‘Artistic Freedom in an Era of Rising Nationalism’, Liza Alexandrova-Zorina, a writer and journalist based in Sweden, discussed the shrinking space for pluralism in

Russia. She indicated that over the past few years, the Russian state has instrumentalised culture to solidify its nationalistic agenda. The opportunity for alternative voices has been eradicated, forcing people working in the arts to make personal decisions regarding the continuation and nature of their artistic careers. László Upor, a dramaturg, literary translator, essayist, and professor from Hungary reflected on the divisive discourse – ‘us against them’ – used by the Hungarian Government to strengthen its power, and the incompatibility of such discourse with artistic freedom. Marlon Ariyasinghe, an actor, director, writer and journalist from Sri Lanka, used concrete examples to demonstrate how religion secured by legislation is an overt expression of nationalism and a barrier for artistic freedom in his country.

In parallel, leading the workshop ‘Confronting Threats to Artistic Freedom Together’, Anna Koch and Thierry Mortier, from the Swedish art movement KVADRENNALEN, spoke about the evolution of political discourse in Sweden after national elections in September 2022. They addressed a tendency to justify greater government involvement in decisions about what kind of art can and should be created.

These and many other examples demonstrate the uneasy balance between – and in some cases distortion or collapse of – consolidating state power and strengthening artistic freedom.

### 4. Dominant power dynamics and inequities

Throughout the Summit discussions, inequity emerged as one of the major barriers to the exercise of artistic freedom. Inequities are shaped and manifest in various interconnected ways, from how we shape key concepts and definitions – like art, knowledge, quality and excellence – and create hierarchies in how we institutionalise representation, governance and ownership, and how we distribute resources and create access.

Caren Rangī ONZM, FCA, Chair of the Arts Council of New Zealand, spoke about the struggle of Pacific peoples in New Zealand: 'The arts of Pacific peoples are often received as crafts, not as real arts.' She stressed that this creates a difference in value, has direct impact on resource allocation and erodes people's confidence in their work.

This exclusionary pattern is also experienced by minority groups, such as migrants and people with disability, as their artistic expression is often perceived as not excellent or good enough. The problem lies not only in a lack of appreciation for their work within the established quality ranking, but even more so in the rigidity and exclusivity of the valuation system itself. This also applies to international funding and collaboration schemes when states with more economic and political power impose their understanding of arts and cultural policy. Funders and policymakers can advertently or inadvertently reinforce a non-inclusive understanding of what 'real art' is, and representatives of the art field – especially those taking part in evaluation panels – often contribute to such mindsets.

Lack of recognition of other knowledge systems is another factor that undermines the exercise of artistic freedom and rights. As acknowledged during the Long Table 'Culture Wars: The arts on the front line', knowledge systems across cultures are diverse but when contextualised in dominant paradigms, many of them are not considered valuable. On this matter, Åsa Simma, CEO of the Sámi Theatre in Sweden and Liisa-Rávná Finbog, Sámi Indigenous scholar, duojár and curator from Norway pointed to the historic neglect and undervaluation of Sámi knowledge. Ms Simma emphasised that the Sámi community has sounded alarms about climate change for a long time, but they were not heard until young people generated media attention and started to voice the same concerns.

Dr Finbog referred to Western education systems as rigid mechanisms of validating people's knowledge, citing her own example: 'I am a doctor of museology, which means I have achieved a ranking within the Western educational system. Suddenly what I say about my people's knowledges and practices is recognised. My words have suddenly become valid not because they have changed, but because now I have the backing of the Western educational system.'

Oppressive hierarchies of definitions and ranking systems are often a byproduct of poor representation of diverse communities in governance structures, leadership positions, and investment mechanisms. Unequal access to power does not only produce exclusionary definitions and perceptions; it also generates support systems that fit only a narrow part of society. In many countries the problem of underrepresentation has been acknowledged, but not all methods of tackling it are effective. As multiple delegates pointed out, minorities are often brought into decision-making processes in a tokenistic way, in low numbers, and as temporary and external contributors but they are rarely granted ownership, agency or leadership. 'We are visitors and guests, but never the hosts', Dr Finbog affirmed.

The lack of regulation in the digital industry brings another layer of complexity to issues of power imbalance. Many contributors voiced concerns that technological justice has not been achieved, and that the algorithms of many dominant platforms marginalise and alienate certain narratives and perspectives. Elaborating on this thought, Alfons Karabuda, a Swedish composer and President at the International Music Council, expressed regret that instead of using digital space to democratise culture, 'we have added a few privately owned giants that decide what can be heard and who can afford to be visible – often at the expense of others.'

Such imbalance is reflected in unfair distribution of resources and unequal access to infrastructure, information, opportunities, education, and cultural life. In this context, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, people with disability, women, racialised and other discriminated-against groups – such as LGBTQIA+ communities – are structurally excluded from exercising their cultural rights, creating art, presenting works and ideas, reaching audiences, shaping shared narratives, and contributing to the construction of leading notions of art and knowledge. During the parallel session ‘Interrogating Gatekeeping in Decision-Making’, the issue of who is entitled to make decisions was unravelled. Renata Carvalho, Founder of MONART - National Movement of Trans Artists (Brazil), expressed concern about how others seem to be entitled to define her body and her aesthetic: ‘why is my body considered violent, why can I not present my art?’

### 5. Erosion of debate in the public domain

During the Plenary session ‘Provocation and response: Many Dimensions of Complexity’, Svetlana Mintcheva, a USA-based Independent Strategy Consultant, spoke about the multiplication and fragmentation of ‘cultural gatekeepers’ – such as digital platforms, media organisations, art venues and museums – as a hallmark of our times. She affirmed that ‘on the one hand, these platforms help democratise the cultural field and circumvent government censorship, but on the other hand, their dominance and platform / venue specific restrictions on content contribute to the fragmentation of the public sphere into multiple echo chambers’ (physical or virtual social environments in which people are exposed only to the information or opinions that are in line with their beliefs). Discussions at the session ‘Freedom of Expression in the Era of Social Media’ highlighted that social media – and its algorithms – play a particularly important role in fostering those opposing bubbles of values and views.

The disintegration of the public domain reflects and reinforces the polarisation of political debate and public opinion mounting in different parts of the world. Political polarisation is often played out on the cultural stage, where art becomes a symbolic target. Both conservative and progressive waves trigger clashing debates on burning issues, such as harassment, racism, the right to abortion, and the rights of LGBTQIA+ people.

In this context, cultural platforms are under pressure from both sides of the political spectrum. In a fractured public sphere, cultural institutions must deal with constant dilemmas about which artists are granted prominence and legitimacy and which artists, on the contrary, should not be given visibility for content that may be considered offensive or violent. Artists may face pressure to conform to a particular ideology, aesthetic, or narrative, which limits their creative freedom. This exposure to multiple pressures creates fertile ground for cancel culture, wokeism, peer- and self-censorship.

In the meantime, public space for disagreement – where different points of view can coexist and influence each other – is diminishing and the ability of individuals to interact with opposing perspectives atrophies. This is detrimental for artistic freedom, as arts thrive when artists and society at large are exposed to a wide range of viewpoints, feedback, and criticism, as it helps them refine their work, challenge their assumptions, and push boundaries. As Kristin Danielsen, Executive Director at Kulturdirektoratet - Arts and Culture Norway put it ‘good art is not made on consensus.’

### 6. Precarious working conditions

As conversations deepened during the Summit, several discussions interrogated the fragile working conditions in the arts and their impact on the state of artistic freedom. Lázaro Rodríguez, a cultural policy expert

(Cuba/Panama), pointed out that artists and cultural operators are not sufficiently protected as workers; their incomes are often low and unstable; and social security systems are inadequate or non-existent. This limits the scope and reach of artistic endeavours and thus impedes the exercise of artistic freedom for many, even in countries where artistic freedom is guaranteed by law.

The precarity of working conditions in the CCSs undermines artistic freedom in different ways. Firstly, due to irregular and low income, artists often combine their artistic work with other jobs, which requires time and energy and hinders their ability to explore their creative vision. Furthermore, several panellists spoke about specific challenges faced by certain arts disciplines, as some are particularly dependent on public support and often structurally underfunded. Regarding this issue, Paula Tuovinen, Director of the Arts Promotion Centre Finland (Taike) stated that small dance companies in her country face a shortage of funding, salaries, social security and spaces to produce work. She also shared her personal experience of having to abandon a dance career due to these challenges.

People who are involved in socially engaged artistic practices also face specific challenges, some of which were discussed during the panel 'Artistic Freedom Through Socially Engaged Practice'. In such projects, boundaries between cultural workers and audiences may blur, and many people involved in conceiving and delivering work are unpaid. In addition, some arts practices are multifaceted and continual, which may not fit funding modalities or working agreements.

Therefore, unsustainable working conditions can prevent many from entering or continuing an arts career or limit artists' ability to fully explore and fulfil their artistic values. Moreover, poor working conditions in the arts lead to self-censorship. Without economic

stability, artists may feel pressured to create works that conform to mainstream expectations or funders' guiding values that do not necessarily fit their artistic vision. Furthermore, they may avoid controversial subjects or modify their work as they fear offending potential audiences.

### 7. Fractures of exile

Relocation is often the only viable solution for an artist facing danger to continue their work. However, displacement presents significant challenges related to artists' legal status, socioeconomic conditions, mental health, and ability to continue their artistic careers. Speakers at several sessions, especially panellists at the session 'Disruption, Displacement and Safe Spaces' and leaders of the workshops 'You Are Not Alone - General Safety Training for Artists' and 'Key Patterns and Trends in Protection Work', addressed the various difficulties artists go through when trying to flee their countries, find safety and resume artistic work abroad.

The Summit programme featured the work of many organisations that support artists' relocation to safer places, such as [Artists at Risk Connection \(ARC\)](#), [PEN International](#), [International Cities of Refuge Network \(ICORN\)](#), and [Safe Havens Freedom Talks \(SHIFT\)](#). However, many participants noted that departure from their place of origin remains a solution for a limited number of artists only. And while many artists worldwide find safety abroad, others lack access to information about existing support platforms, endure precarity, and do not have visibility or support from an international peer community. Moreover, relocation can be particularly challenging for artists fleeing armed conflicts or natural disasters, as traditional evacuation routes like airports or railways may be damaged or inaccessible, which further complicates the rescue process.



Furthermore, artists may encounter bureaucratic red tape and long waiting times before reaching their intended destination. Obtaining visas and resident permits can be an arduous task, which is especially challenging in cases when displacement becomes chronic, and artists endure journeys through multiple countries before finding safety. Such prolonged instability undermines their ability to continue working and focusing on their artistic ambitions and aspirations. On top of that, trauma experienced during exile can have a lasting impact on mental health.

When artists become refugees, they often face challenges when integrating in host countries and continuing their professional path. Elaborating this point, Basma El Hussein (Egypt), Founder at Action for Hope, observed that while artists in exile may be treated well by their host countries, there is often pressure for them to create certain types of artworks. Additionally, they lose connection to their home context and community, which formerly played an important role in their artistic development. Tapping into the expectations of their host country and detaching from their cultural contexts can make artists question their artistic values, which ultimately limits their artistic freedom.

### 8. Knowledge gaps

To effectively tackle the multiple threats and barriers that curtail artistic freedom, it is vital to identify them and grasp the scale of their impact. However, many delegates flagged that there is a profound lack of awareness, knowledge, and data. There are also great disparities in terms of the awareness of the multiple threats that exist and their damaging effect on the CCSs and society at large, including across different levels and areas of government. Civil society representatives and CCSs also do not have enough data and evidence of the violation of artistic freedom, nor of action being taken. Moreover, artists and

cultural workers often do not know about risks, rights, support mechanisms, and rescue options.

Kathy Rowland, Managing Editor and co-Founder of ArtsEquator.com remarked that in Asia censorship and other violations of artistic freedom often remain at the level of media stories triggering emotions for a short period and fading away when other events come up. She flagged that there are a few dedicated international platforms that register those cases in a more systematic way, to help investigate patterns and define the scale of the problem and its impact. These platforms, however, do not always fit diverse local contexts and many country-specific issues remain unseen. 'Without accurate data, we can never really develop solid and long-term strategies to support artistic freedom', she concluded.

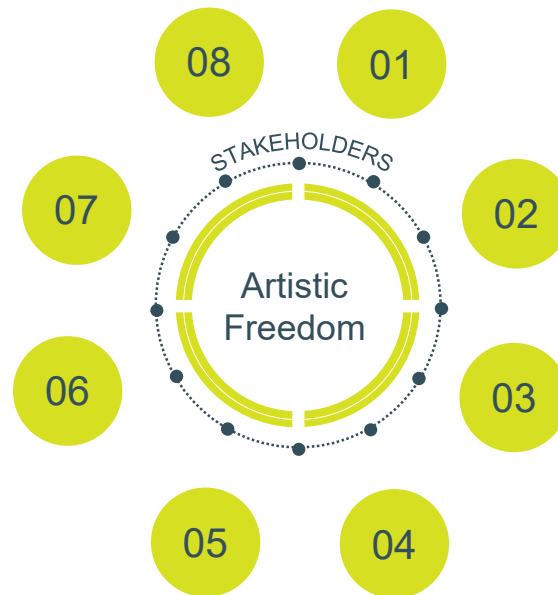
Further to this issue, Ben Evans, Head of Arts and Disability at the British Council stressed that it is especially problematic when knowledge and awareness are lacking at decision-making and institutional levels. The study *Time to Act: Two Years On* commissioned by the British Council reveals that a majority of arts funders<sup>2</sup> surveyed for the research are not confident that the programmes they support are accessible to artists with disabilities (On the Move / British Council 2023, p. 13). This knowledge gap leads not only to non-inclusive policies and programmes but also creates an exhausting duty for artists with a disability to constantly explain the scale and essence of the problem to funders and to programmers.

Furthermore, it was emphasised that one of the key threats to artists, mostly those less privileged, is their lack of awareness about their own situation, including the risks they face and possible ways out. As the co-founder and General Manager at SH|FT Fredrik Elg (Sweden) noted, many artists that are unheard do not have access to support systems and do not know that there is a global community of artists at risk and networks of solidarity.

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2. As defined in the original study *Time to Act* (2021), those are 'professionals working as a staff member of a local / regional / national / European institution, a local / regional / national / European institution agency, an Arts Council, a Foundation, or a funding body, including those supporting export and mobility programmes' (On the Move / British Council 2021, p. 27).





01

### Global turmoil in times of exponential change

Polycrisis weakens the foundations for safeguarding artistic freedom; fragments resources; and allows those in power to restrict rights, operating in emergency mode and rapid change

02

### Fragmented approach to artistic freedom

Artistic freedom is often addressed as a stand-alone issue and excluded from important regulatory frameworks and policies that do not consider the ecosystem that enables its exercise

03

### Misuse of authority

Those in power may perceive artistic freedom as a threat to their authority and intentionally suppress it under the guise of different agendas

04

### Dominant power dynamics and inequities

Across the world, inequities exist at multiple levels. They have the power to shape key narratives; institutionalise representation and agency; affect the distribution of resources and information; and limit access to power

05

### Erosion of debate in the public domain

In times of polarisation and lacking public debate, multiple pressures create fertile ground for cancel culture, wokeism, peer- and self-censorship

06

### Precarious working conditions

Precarious working conditions limit the scope and reach of artistic endeavours and impede the exercise of artistic freedom, dignity and fulfilment, even in countries where such freedom is guaranteed by law

07

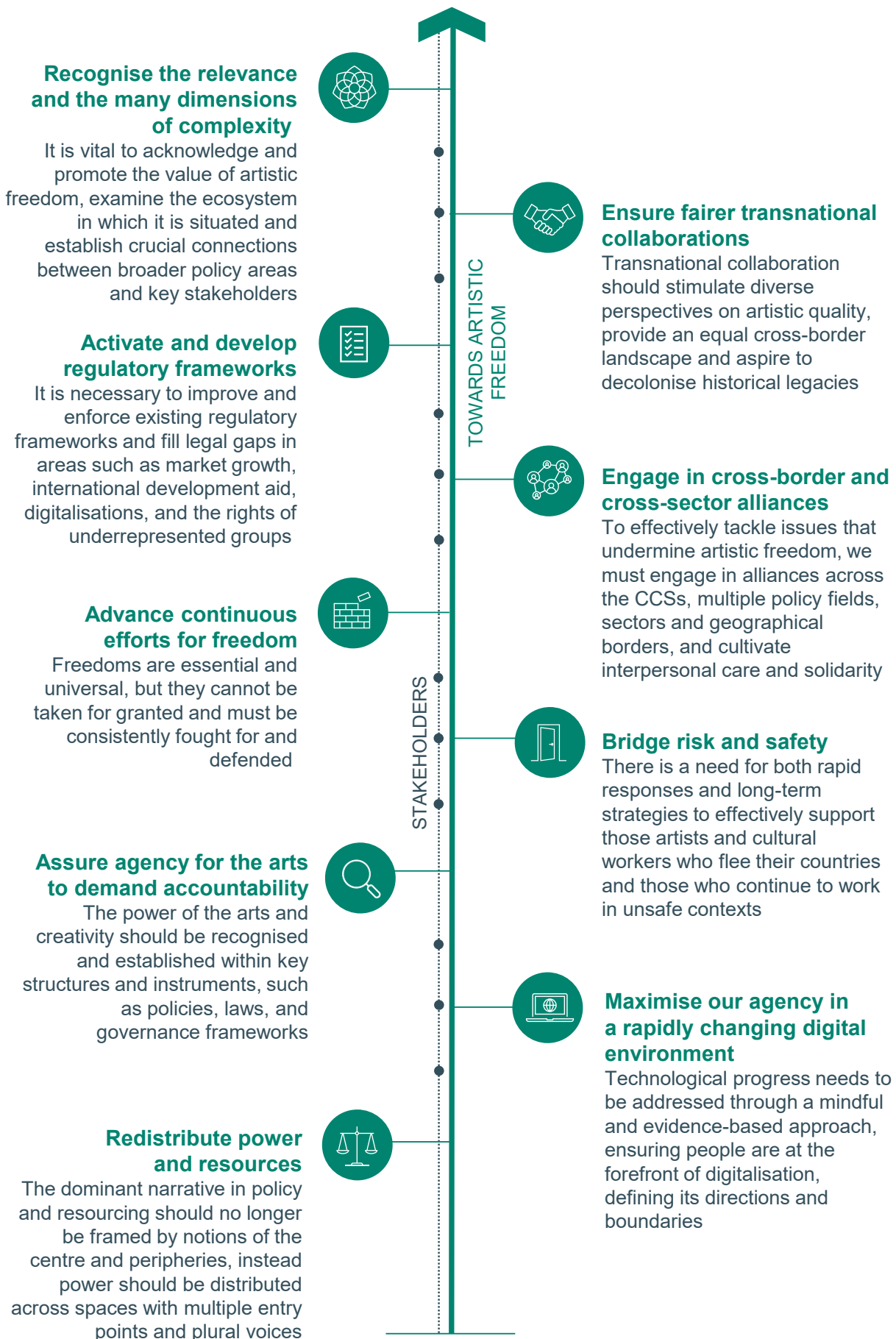
### Fractures of exile

Relocation can entail multiple challenges, such as trauma, difficulties integrating in a host country, loss of connection with peers, lack of resources, and administrative hurdles

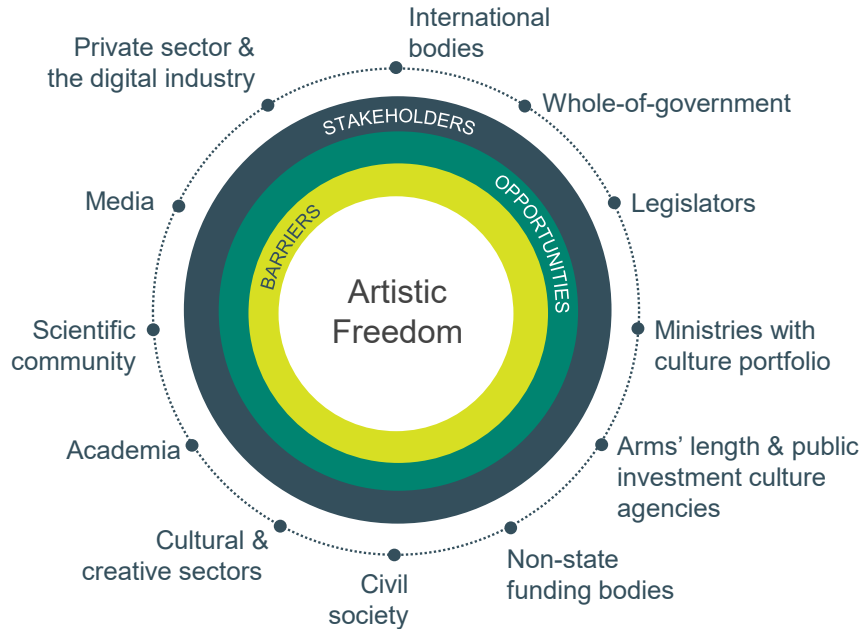
08

### Knowledge gaps

There is a lack of reliable and longitudinal data about the state of artistic freedom across the world and a profound gap in awareness about people's rights, threats, legal frameworks and solutions



# OPPORTUNITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



**While acknowledging the great diversity of challenges that people across the globe face, the Summit aimed to affirm our collective duty to enhance and safeguard artistic freedom. It was stressed repeatedly that safeguarding artistic freedom is an issue for all countries, not only those in which it is overtly undermined.**

Countries that typically rank highly in terms of ensuring freedoms must be mindful about how they use those freedoms to protect and exercise their own rights and be the ‘voice of the voiceless’, as Dr Sarmast from the Afghanistan National Institute of Music expressed when calling for global solidarity with Afghan people.

Summit delegates collectively explored various mechanisms to safeguard and strengthen artistic freedom, as well as areas of opportunity and pathways to solutions. The avenues of action discussed at the Summit focused on

advocacy, investment, legislation, protection of human rights, data collection, activism, alliance-building, and artistic creation. These and other areas involve numerous tasks for government and society as a whole, including stakeholders across international organisations (both cultural and cross-portfolio), ministries with culture portfolios, arms’ length and public agencies that invest in culture, non-state funding bodies, legislators, civil society, CCSs, academia, the scientific community, media, and the private sector, including the digital industry.

Many panellists spoke with conviction about the possibility of taking collective and individual steps towards safeguarding artistic freedom, including Kajsa Ravin, who implored: ‘Let us not just imagine a world where we can improve conditions for arts and culture. My vision is that we can take decisive actions together to make it a reality.’

The following clusters highlight the key areas of action emerging from opportunities and responsibilities discussed throughout the Summit. These are not exhaustive but do start to sketch possible pathways via which we can all play a part.

### **1. Recognise the relevance and many dimensions of complexity**

As one starting point, there is an opportunity to maintain focus on why the arts and artistic freedom matter. Any alliance, dialogue, or collective action in this field can be possible, strengthened, and effective when there is shared belief and recognition that artistic freedom holds value for society. No matter who we are, we can all play a role to advocate for the central role of arts and culture to benefit all. Reinforcing this message strengthens the recognition of arts and culture that was heightened during the pandemic. Another essential step is to develop a solid and profound understanding of the concept of artistic freedom that encompasses all its constituent elements, and its relationship with external domains. Viewing artistic freedom as multifaceted helps to identify gaps and specific problems within different contexts. On the contrary, if only one aspect of artistic freedom is emphasised, such as state censorship or other forms of institutional oppression, many countries may genuinely believe they have no concerns over artistic freedom and take it off the agenda. However, by recognising that other issues – such as economic fragilities or inequities – and other types of subtle barriers also pose threats to artistic freedom, the debate encompasses a far larger number of countries, if not the entire world. Alexandra Xanthaki made this point on the first day of the Summit, stating ‘take a mirror and look at yourselves. Maybe the violations are not going to be as massive or as extreme, and the rule of law works well, but artists may suffer from financial and social insecurity.’

Therefore, a comprehensive approach is crucial to reveal and acknowledge problems and thus initiate the debate and search for solutions. The more aware we are of the issues and the opportunities to debate them collectively, the more likely we will be able to address them holistically.

The recognition of complexities, gaps and fractures is an important step towards embedding artistic freedom in a context of larger issues and broader agendas. One of the key findings of the Summit deliberations was that artistic freedom relies on other rights and policy fields to be realised. For instance, peace and climate justice are key providers of the fundamental conditions for the exercise of artistic freedom. Therefore, it is vital to examine the ecosystem in which artistic freedom is situated and establish crucial connections between policy areas and key stakeholders.

### **2. Activate and develop regulatory frameworks**

A combination of international, regional, and national laws helps shape a comprehensive regulatory system that provides a solid basis for promoting and protecting cultural rights and artistic freedom. Delegates highlighted the importance of implementing and enforcing existing regulatory tools, such as rules, laws, policies, and guidelines aimed to safeguard artistic freedom. The implementation of existing regulations can be ensured through dedicating resources to specialised bodies, enhancing their expertise and rethinking monitoring mechanisms. During the panel ‘Building the Case from Action to Law’, litigation was mentioned as one of the tools that can help citizens establish precedents and anchor artistic freedom in public and policy discourse as an essential right that cannot be ignored or curtailed.

A common concern at the Summit was the need to embed artistic freedom in existing overarching policy and regulatory frameworks.

To this point, at the closing plenary Ernesto Ottone R., Assistant Director-General for Culture at UNESCO called for a stand-alone culture goal to be embedded in the post-2030 United Nations international agenda for sustainable development. Others also emphasised the importance of integrating artistic freedom as an indicator to measure sustainable development at international, regional, and national levels.

Several discussions highlighted that the improvement, enforcement, and implementation of existing frameworks may not be sufficient, as numerous crucial laws and policies are yet to be developed. Digitalisation has emerged as a critical area with various regulatory gaps in the fields of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and copyright. Across the world, new regulations are needed to transform the digital domain into a space that promotes cultural diversity and fairly compensates artists for their work. Many states need to create new or better regulatory tools to protect intellectual property within and outside the digital world and to grant exclusive rights to artists over their works. In addition, other areas emerged where legal gaps exist, such as heritage, market growth, international development aid, and the rights of various minorities. It is essential to consider artistic freedom as a fundamental right and a crucial value in the recognition of culture, integrating it in both existing and new regulatory instruments.

### 3. Advance continuous efforts for freedom

A solid perspective emerged at the Summit: freedoms are essential and universal, but they cannot be taken for granted and must be consistently fought for and defended.

Hilmar Farid, Director General for Culture at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia reminded us of the very origin of freedom: 'Freedom is a product and result of struggle. It does not come because of the goodwill of the powerful, but because there is pressure to grant it.'

Further to this point, Shahidul Alam, artist, photojournalist, educator and social activist from Bangladesh emphasised the continuous nature of our fight for freedoms: 'it is not something that once you get it, you can relax and step back and it will be there forever.' He asserted that the struggle for freedoms is an individual responsibility for every one of us, and our collective duty is to reinforce each other to be able to endure this perennial fight.

Several speakers reflected that when those in power oppress citizens, it indicates that their legitimacy is unstable, as legitimate regimes do not need to resort to threats and repression against their citizens. In such situations, it is important to empower people to engage in a collective struggle to defend their freedoms. Tools of resistance can vary, ranging from open campaigns to more subtle forms of expressing disagreement, such as carrying a tote bag or using a mug with a controversial slogan.

Various sessions featured the sharing of experiences in leading public campaigns and mass movements. Marlon Ariyasinghe discussed successful movements in Sri Lanka in 2022. He highlighted the power of uniting people and demonstrated that such unity can result in concrete changes. KVADRENNALEN also affirmed that one needs specific skills and knowledge to succeed in organising and undertaking a successful act of resistance. In this regard, they referred to the training of the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation '[Organising for Power](#)', a programme that offers courses on organising successful campaigns.

Governments, in general terms, are not the only powerholders that need to be monitored and challenged by citizens. Delegates debated the issue of technology companies that exercise their power through dominant social media platforms and algorithm manipulation. Concerns were strongly expressed on the role of these platforms in fragmenting and polarising the public space and swaying public opinion.





Top: ADG for Culture, UNESCO, Ernesto Ottone R.; Marc Bamuthi Joseph (USA); Minister of Culture of Sweden, Parisa Liljestrand; Delegates engaged at the Summit. Photo: Susanne Kronholm.





Top: Pamela López (Chile/Argentina) & Olu Alake(UK/Nigeria); Magdalena Moreno M.; Farai Mpfungya (Zimbabwe) & Jozef Kovalčík (Slovak Rep); Kristin Danielsen (Norway) & Kajsa Ravin (Sweden); UN Special Rapporteur Alexandra Xanthaki; Delegates at the Summit. Photo: Susanne Kronholm.

During the panel 'Freedom of Expression in the Era of Social Media', Ouafa Belgacem, founder and CEO of Culture Funding Watch (Tunisia) called for citizens' vigilance and readiness to challenge dominant platforms by abandoning them and even creating alternative spaces. Digital activism requires the courage to step out of our comfort zone and the determination to lead change.

#### 4. Assure agency for the arts to demand accountability

Several interventions addressed the urgent need to recognise and unleash the power of the arts. Marc Bamuthi Joseph from The Kennedy Center claimed that artists can be more powerful than systems of law and politics. Mr Joseph referred to artists' intellect as a 'natural sociology resource' which is unspoken and underused. He called for art to be converted into a tangible practice of imagining and designing what society lacks – freedom and equity. Shahidul Alam addressed another aspect of artists' unique power – using creativity to expose the blind spots in all fields of public life and consequently challenge and subvert authority. 'Our job is to ensure that you're disturbed in your sleep. As an artist, I have taken on that responsibility of pointing out all the things that are wrong and that will cause problems for me and for others around me.'

Beyond exposing injustices, art can also be a tool to unite people across borders to act. This was illustrated by the performance piece *A Rapist in Your Path*, presented by LASTESIS member Daffne Valdés Vargas at the Summit. In 2019, the collective of female artists LASTESIS took over the streets of Valparaiso, Chile moving in unison and chanting words that condemn violence against women and LGBTQIA+ people. These words resonated with thousands of women all over the world, and the performance was reproduced in many other countries in Latin America and beyond, including France, Kenya, Poland and the UK. This case illustrates how

the art of performance can empower an act of activism to loudly deliver an urgent message that can go global, to break fears and overcome language barriers.

However, there also seems to be a lack of confidence about the power of the arts, in both society and in the arts community itself. Vicensia Shule from the African Union noted that the power of the arts remains imaginative rather than tangible, as it is not sufficiently institutionalised in power structures. Many delegates acknowledged that it is important to define pathways to activate, exercise, and demonstrate this power. Maria Rosario Jackson, Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts (USA) pointed out that 'when creative process is understood as valuable alongside creative product and integrated into various facets of our lives and communities, the arts are most powerful.' She argued that it is important for artists to have many kinds of relationships with the public, not only as the makers of art products but also as key collaborators and leaders in a range of contexts. Then artists can truly fulfill their multifaceted potential 'to help us lead artful lives, see things from different perspectives, ask questions, tell our truths, reckon with harm, be curious about others, [and] see our common humanity and meaningful differences.'

Furthermore, several delegates suggested that the power of the arts is anchored within key structures and instruments, such as policies, laws, and governance frameworks. For instance, to unlock culture's potential for environmental action, cultural policy should be aligned with the [Paris Agreement](#), and the [Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#) should have a specific working group on culture.

Finally, it was emphasised during several sessions that in order to strengthen leadership and the impact of the arts, it is crucial to establish supportive conditions for artists and





Liwaa Yazji and Simon Brault In Conversation: Bridging the Gap Between Rights and Responsibilities in Artistic Freedom Session. Photo: Susanne Kronholm.

cultural workers. This entails implementing sustainable structures that improve their working conditions, guarantee stable incomes and fair remuneration, facilitate access to social security and pension plans, offer educational and training opportunities, and provide diverse funding and investment opportunities for their work.

### **5. Redistribute power and resources**

Across the world, the cultural rights of various disadvantaged groups are structurally undermined. Those include Indigenous Peoples, migrants, women, people with disability, LGBTQIA+ communities, and racialised groups, among other communities. On this matter, delegates observed that it is urgent for marginalised groups to be given centre stage and agency. For this to happen, it is necessary to redistribute power and resources, and action is required at different levels.

Several discussions affirmed that the responsibility for rebalancing power starts at an individual level: everyone should recognise and acknowledge their own privileges. Several panellists observed that sometimes people in power should ‘decentre’ themselves to give space to those who are currently at the periphery.

Furthermore, this rebalancing exercise should be seen as part of larger systemic change. Delegates in different panel sessions affirmed that it is urgent to redistribute power in favour of those who have been intentionally and structurally excluded. At the same time, it is important to prevent those who are granted power from perpetuating dated patterns of leadership and creating new disparities and margins. To prevent this, rather than focusing solely on the rights of the majority, we should recognise every person’s rights, create space for everyone and actively respect every individual within the community.

Several speakers emphasised the importance of bringing marginalised communities to the forefront on their own terms. One way to achieve this is to move away from notions of margins and mainstream by directly providing resources to artists for their own agency. This means that resources should not only be allocated to mainstream programmers who would otherwise maintain decision-making power and dominant narratives, even when encouraged to showcase the work of others or minorities. Instead, communities at such margins should also be able to build their own spaces that will last even if financial support dwindles. Having created their own sustainable structures, artists at the margin would strengthen their agency and eventually become new and multiple 'centres'. On this matter, Mr Brault explained how the Canada Council for the Arts puts these notions into action by changing its funding model to open it to Indigenous communities. For this, they changed selection criteria, timelines, definitions, and assessment models.

Several contributors stressed that opening governance structures to underrepresented individuals is crucial for making programmes and policies truly inclusive. Participatory and inclusive governance should guarantee agency and self-determination for all people involved. For this to happen, governance structures themselves need to change. On this matter, an example of the [Access All Areas](#) theatre (United Kingdom) was cited: the company practices different ways of being a board member, for instance, putting less pressure on board members to execute conventional governance tasks. This ensures people with disability can be full-fledged governance agents.

Diverse contributions emphasised that access for people at the margins can be provided by changing the larger environment, such as education systems and regulatory frameworks, as well as by providing and rebuilding infrastructure. Dulamsuren Jigjid,

Executive Director at Culture Centre of the Deaf (Mongolia) stressed that it is necessary to provide reasonable accommodation to people with disabilities, which allows them to compensate for the disadvantages they experience due to non-adaptive environments. Components of reasonable accommodation can differ from person to person and include various forms of logistical support, appropriate infrastructure, and other ways of adapting everyday environments to the needs of a person with a disability.

Finally, rebalancing the margins and mainstream should be accompanied by a profound collective revision of key definitions and concepts – such as 'art' and 'artists' – and reshaping of the artforms themselves, to be more plural and inclusive. It is particularly vital that funders are attentive to how they define 'excellence'.

### **6. Ensure fairer transnational collaboration**

Several speakers asserted that unbalanced power dynamics also define the modalities of transnational collaboration. These dynamics stem primarily from colonial legacies, which impose unified perceptions of artistic quality, create an uneven landscape of cross-border collaboration and mobility, and erode the valuation of local culture and knowledge. Ultimately, this stifles the global diversity of cultural expressions and restrains artistic freedom and exchange of ideas.

During the panel 'Ensuring Fairer Transnational Collaborations', it was acknowledged that it is time for artists in the Global South to explore and reclaim their own needs and assets, rather than attempt to align with the priorities and definitions of the Global North. Letila Mitchell (Fiji), artist, creative director and Culture Advisor at the Pacific Community reflected that the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the revitalisation of local and regional relationships in the Pacific region, noting that

it is crucial to capitalise on this momentum and further enhance the focus on the local while strengthening regional ties. Ammar Kessab, Governance Expert at the African Development Bank affirmed that international collaborations can empower African cultural and creative players, but it is also important to strengthen the CCSs locally, so that they enter the international market as competitive players whose voices are respected.

Several contributors voiced a pressing need to tackle the multiple barriers that impede South-North and South-South artistic mobility, which should be done through facilitating visa regimes and implementing international legal frameworks, such as the [UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#), particularly through its Article 16 on preferential treatment which is legally binding<sup>3</sup>. Other crucial aspects of fostering fair trans-border collaboration include providing training programmes and creating an accessible information ecosystem that promotes equitable opportunities for artists. Several cross-border mobility platforms were mentioned, such as [On the Move](#), which help artists to overcome limited access to information to ensure that artists from diverse regions can collaborate on a level playing field.

Furthermore, delegates discussed various steps and elements of dismantling colonial legacies, noting that the needs of countries and communities vary depending on their context and history. Many First Nations people are calling for recognition and truth telling to acknowledge historical mistreatment within their country as a result of colonialism; and for many in the Global South, the return of artefacts and sacred objects that constitute their cultural, traditional, spiritual, or historical identity is of particular importance. This was also strongly perceived as an important element when safeguarding artistic freedom. It was acknowledged that repatriation and restitution processes face many challenges, including but

not limited to differences between national and international legal systems. It is also vital to ensure that local Indigenous peoples and the affected communities are involved in the process and culturally appropriate negotiations take place on what happens to returned artefacts. Contributors to the panel 'Traditional Knowledge, Heritage and Culture: Rethinking rules of engagement' referred to this process as 'rematriation', which aims to involve local stakeholders in the restitution process and focuses on the healing dimension of it.

### **7. Engage in cross-sector and cross-border alliances**

Multiple speakers emphasised the need to engage in alliances across policy fields and geographical borders, to effectively tackle issues that undermine artistic freedom. As Mika Romanus, Director General of the Swedish Arts Grants Committee put it 'protecting artistic freedom calls for continuous efforts and requires contributions that cross borders between policy domains and disciplines, as well as between nations and continents.'

Many panellists underlined the importance of building coalitions across sectors for more effective and impactful dialogue with a range of government stakeholders. Alliances at the intersection of human rights, science, academia, media, and the arts can provide a strong base to identify shared values and challenges and consolidate a collective voice to advocate for various freedoms. Furthermore, panellists of the session 'Dignity of Work: Equity, Rights and Agency', underscored the relevance of intersectional approaches to defending the rights of disadvantaged groups – such as people with disability, women, migrants, racialised groups, LGBTQIA+ people, and other underrepresented groups – as boundaries between identities are not rigid and the root causes and mechanisms of exclusion often overlap.

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3. 'Developed countries shall facilitate cultural exchanges with developing countries by granting, through the appropriate institutional and legal frameworks, preferential treatment to artists and other cultural professionals and practitioners, as well as cultural goods and services from developing countries.' (UNESCO 2005, art. 16)

International and transnational collaborations are vital in efforts to advance and protect artistic freedom. Firstly, international bodies like UNESCO or regional entities like the European Union or African Union, can be vital platforms for raising awareness about violations of human rights and thus amplifying the voices of the unheard or repressed. They also serve as spaces for consensus among states, which can be used to spark and effect positive change at national and local levels. Moreover, operating internationally or regionally not only helps those in government, it also helps civil society and human rights organisations to amplify their voice, share resources and knowledge, and build solid support networks.

Alongside cross-sectoral and cross-border collaboration, delegates spoke about the value of interpersonal care and solidarity. On that note, a few speakers imagined our society as a village, where people live as a collective, continuously share, and give strength to each other.

### 8. Bridge risk and safety

There was an urgent call to provide safety for vulnerable people in places of conflict, as many discussions revolved around cross-border movement as a key pathway to escape danger. In many situations, artists can overcome barriers to their artistic freedom and continue working safely only if they leave their countries. On this matter, PEN International, a key transnational network which ran a workshop at the Summit, explained how it provides temporary safe spaces where artists can continue their work without fear and collaborate with peers.

Several experts spoke about key actions and tools for protecting and rescuing artists whose safety is under threat. When artists face immediate danger, there is a need for a prompt response, which may include

evacuation to neighbouring countries that are easy to reach and accessible without a visa. At the same time, it was emphasised that alongside immediate action plans, there is a need for long-term strategies and sustainable frameworks. Precisely, international dialogue and action is needed to facilitate the bureaucratic hurdles of relocation, including visa procedures and integration to local life. Furthermore, it was indicated that networks and platforms that help artists seeking safety need stronger support as many of them rely on solidarity of cross-border volunteer networks, which is the case for PEN International.

In the workshop 'You Are Not Alone – General Safety Training for Artists', Julie Trébault, Director at Artists at Risk Connection (ARC), PEN America (USA) referred to several tools that artists can use to navigate challenging environments, based on ARC's [Safety Guide for Artists](#). When artists are operating in dangerous circumstances – whether due to political unrest, personal threats, or armed conflicts – it is essential to establish a robust framework to ensure their personal safety and security. This encompasses various aspects, including developing an escape plan and conducting a risk assessment before a critical situation occurs. It is essential to create a network in the future host country, and secure financial and legal support, while prioritising psychological wellbeing. Finally, artists should consistently document attacks and violations of their rights, to collect evidence for potential legal action, raise awareness about the situation in their country and create a base for advocacy.

As it was pointed out, not all artists are able nor want to flee their countries, and many continue to live and work in fragile circumstances. For some, this also becomes a pathway towards exploring their relationship with their context and further developing their artistic form. For instance, during the session 'Disruption, Displacement and Safe Spaces', Sarah Abdu Bushra, curator from Ethiopia



talked about how the collective Contemporary Nights – of which she is a co-founder – changed the focus and form of its art practice in the context of conflict.

It was emphasised during the same session that artists working in conflict zones need help from outside their countries, and it is crucial to hear directly from them what support they require. Vladyslav Berkovski, Executive Director at the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation specified that artists remaining in Ukraine require financial assistance, especially for creating new work, and access to opportunities to present their work abroad, to stay on short-term residencies and to continue developing their networks. Mr Berkovski noted that access to capacity building and training is also crucial, which can be provided through online platforms.

### **9. Maximise our agency in a rapidly changing digital environment**

Digitalisation was also discussed at length as one of the most pivotal themes tackled at the Summit. For many, digitalisation triggers uncertainty and concern, especially in relation to artificial intelligence (AI), copyright, virtual echo chambers, and visibility. At the same time, several contributors voiced optimism that the digital world may hold enormous potential to foster diversity and innovation.

Speakers stressed that technologies could help us overcome censorship, access restricted content and boost circulation of artistic work. They also confirmed that digital tools are vital for connecting artists, writers, publishers, and translators across the globe; to support artists in challenging places, distribute their work and amplify their voices. They also posited that technology can be used to give access to information about cultures, tangible and intangible artifacts, particularly in the process of transferring knowledge to young people.

Alfons Karabuda reflected that there is room to turn digitalisation into an opportunity for artists to strengthen their business models and benefit from new sources of remuneration. For this to happen, regulatory gaps need to be filled and general awareness about copyright needs to be enhanced. Mr Karabuda further observed that digital spaces can become ‘enablers for a diversity of artistic expressions’, which should be achieved through a dialogue between the CCSs and technology companies.

Svetlana Mintcheva elaborated on this perspective, reminding us ‘that the digital industry is a powerful player, whose role needs to be recognised and whose autonomy from government repression must be strengthened. The arts sector should develop alternative virtual networks, but also, through civil society pressure, incite and help technology companies to transform and diversify their platforms’. Ms Mintcheva stated that it is important that the digital world opens more avenues for circulation of artistic expression, rather than becoming a ‘tool of surveillance and repression.’

Many delegates agreed that the potential of technological progress must be tapped, but with a mindful, optimistic, and evidence-based approach. For this to happen, it is essential that citizens are at the forefront of digitalisation, defining its directions and boundaries. As it was stated during the Open Space discussions, ‘we need to be conscious about what we want to preserve as humans and where we want to rely on technology.’

# CONCLUSION

**Our world faces unprecedented turmoil, as peace deteriorates worldwide and climate catastrophes and social divides make our context more fragile. In such an environment, people's ability to exercise their freedoms is undermined globally, even in countries that typically rank highly in terms of ensuring citizens' rights.**

In this situation of precarious rights and freedoms, artistic freedom is no exception and we witness multiple barriers that impede its exercise. Some states intentionally curtail artistic freedom, while others fail to effectively address major issues. The latter occurs when approaches to artistic freedom are fragmented and its integral elements – cultural, social and economic rights – are disregarded or isolated from broader ecosystems.

Olu Alake (United Kingdom/Nigeria), Director of November Ventures and the Chair of the International Programme Advisory Committee of the 9th World Summit, further unpicked this notion of fragmentation in his summary remarks for Day One. He cited a 'lack of collaboration and unity in civil society, fragmentation of information in the digital age, and the multiplicity of pressure points'. Mr Alake stressed that the fragmentation is worsened by data and awareness gaps which lead to a lack of value being accorded to artistic freedom and a lack of awareness of the obstacles to its practice.

Our Summit deliberations highlighted that artistic freedom is a universal right that holds undeniable value in today's world. It was acknowledged that the world is incredibly

diverse and uneven, and artistic freedom is subject to contextual interpretations. This context sensitivity is further complicated by the vital and intricate relationship between artistic freedom and responsibilities, which triggers debate on the boundaries of freedoms and creating a safe environment for all to exercise.

Safeguarding artistic freedom is a collective duty. Here, it is key to acknowledge the role of civil society as equal partners and create necessary structures for their active engagement to protect artistic freedom; and, as a larger goal, advance participatory and inclusive governance with multiple stakeholders. To advance artistic freedom, it is crucial to recognise its multifaceted nature, as well as its relationship with other freedoms and systemic issues. To strengthen connections across sectors, policy domains, communities, and between individuals, it is vital to form alliances and foster a spirit of solidarity. Safeguarding artistic freedom thus calls for a long-term and holistic approach to build an ecosystem of freedoms through institutional and legal frameworks with multistakeholder and multisectoral commitment. It is time to address regulatory gaps, in order to create a sustainable working environment in the CCSs and transform the digital world into a space of freedom and diversity. It is our shared responsibility to advocate for the value of the arts while recognising that the struggle for freedoms is perpetual.

While embarking on long-term endeavours, we must also remember that thousands of artists and cultural workers need our help, as they seek

to escape dangerous environments or continue to work under risk. Importantly, we need to redistribute power by shifting the focus away from the current mainstream and elevating underrepresented voices on their own terms.

Even though the global context through which these pathways will pass is challenging, the stakes for artistic freedom are too significant for us to be discouraged. On the contrary, the only way forward is one where 'optimism becomes a form of rebellion' as Pablo Raphael de la Madrid expressed it in his summary remarks.

Throughout the Summit, three rapporteurs – from Chile, Slovakia and Zimbabwe – attended sessions and reflected on their journeys to provide key takeaways, which they shared with us at the close of the programme.

Pamela López is an independent academic and performing arts manager from Chile. She spoke about what it takes for artists to be free to express themselves, emphasising fundamental aspects of dignity, such as the right to fair compensation and equal opportunities. Ms López also pondered the challenges that each of us face in transcending the various limitations imposed on our freedoms by our environment, institutions, and roles. By her reckoning, it is crucial to surpass these constraints and participate in open dialogues to fulfil our responsibility of instigating change.

Farai Mpfunya, the Executive Director of the Culture Fund of Zimbabwe Trust expressed his thoughts on the 'dangers of a single narrative', emphasising the multitude of perspectives present worldwide. Mr Mpfunya reflected on how the global approach to culture, which he believed prevailed at the Summit, views it as an autonomous, dynamic, and challenging force. He contrasted this with the way his home community defines culture, highlighting its role as a source of energy that encompasses communal relationships, love, and empathy.

Jozef Kovalčík, Director at the Slovak Arts Council, highlighted three essential threads that resonated with him throughout the Summit: the responsibility of funding agencies to broaden the concept of arts and move away from elitism; the importance of fostering a sense of community, including through digital technologies; and the urgency of embedding an environmental dimension in the development of cultural and creative sectors, through connecting cultural and environmental policies and empowering the arts to take a lead in promoting climate justice.

Closing the Summit, Parisa Liljestrand, Minister of Culture of Sweden conveyed an important message: 'We must be prepared to work hard in these difficult times. We must ensure a vibrant cultural life, flourishing cultural and creative industries, as well as the safety and responsible working conditions for cultural professionals. And not least, let us never take artistic freedom for granted. The fight for freedom is a fight that must be won by every generation.'

While this report captures the essence of the Summit, it mainly details the discussions that were openly shared. It must be remembered that important Summit conversations also happened during the closed sessions and in-between spaces. These exchanges, though unrecorded, remain key to the spirit of safe spaces the World Summits aim to create.

Recognising the stakes and challenges ahead, the 9th World Summit aimed to bring together and help equip the global cultural policy community with courage, vigilance and determination to pave their own way – collectively and individually – towards a brighter future, in which culture and the arts thrive and everyone's rights are recognised, protected and enhanced.

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# SIDE EVENTS ON ARTISTIC FREEDOM

Throughout the Summit, a suite of complementary side events took place showcasing new publications related to artistic freedom at the Waterfront Congress Centre.

- On Day 1 (Wednesday 3 May), Avant-Garde Lawyers (AGL) launched their White Paper on *Artists Under Boycott* calling upon cultural institutions and arts event organisers to respect the rights of Russian artists and to show leadership in defending the universal right to freedom of artistic expression without discrimination.
- On Day 2 (Thursday 4 May), a/nordi/c presented *Should I/ Should I Not - an anthology on artistic freedom*. This anthology explores current issues concerning artistic freedom, shedding light on the subject from several different perspectives through a wide range of texts. The anthology is the final publication of the think tank a/nordi/c, which in recent years has worked to open the dialogue and knowledge development on new perspectives on art and cultural policy in the Nordic Region.
- Also on Day 2, UNESCO launched its report, *Defending creative voices: artists in emergencies, learning from the safety of journalists*, presented a roundtable to discuss the report's findings and announced the recipients of the UNESCO-Aschberg programme call for projects. Based on a comparative analysis, the *Defending creative voices* report aims to strengthen the protection of artists and cultural professionals during emergencies

by drawing lessons from the experience, challenges, and achievements in the field of journalists' safety.

The roundtable, moderated by Mr Ernesto Ottone R., UNESCO's Assistant Director General for Culture, presented an intersectoral perspective, duly noting that the protection mechanisms available to artists are less robust than those available to journalists despite the many challenges they share. During the session, projects selected for financing under the UNESCO-Aschberg programme were also announced. A total of US\$ 1 million will be invested towards the enhancement of artistic freedom in countries around the world.

- On Day 3 (Friday 5 May), the German Commission for UNESCO presented the actions taken in line with the recommendations of their study, *Fair Culture - a Key to Sustainable Development*, published in cooperation with UNESCO Chair on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, Laval University, Canada. This initiative explores options of 'fair culture', i.e., the transfer of the concept of Fair Trade, its values, and principles, to the cultural sector and the creative industries. In particular, the development of a Fair Culture Charter was presented, which aims to build on existing legal frameworks and commitments and offer concrete tools for ensuring fairer cultural relations.

# CULTURAL PROGRAMME

**The cultural programme was curated specifically, on behalf of the Swedish Arts Council, to facilitate a dialogue with the conference programme and to let artists respond in their own voices to the theme of artistic freedom, creating an additional layer to the summit experience.**

It is premise on the vision that artists are in a unique position to reshape our perception of the present moment. This is particularly relevant in an era marked by war, closed borders, climate change and democracy on decline, when the need to test other ways of thinking, living and coexisting becomes more pressing. Doing this, artists are also at the frontline, directly facing censorship, exclusion, persecution, violence, imprisonment and sometimes death because of their artistic expression.

## **Opening Ceremony**

The Opening Ceremony took place at the Stockholm Concert Hall. Riksteatern (Sweden's National Touring Theatre) curated a rich cultural programme, with diversity of voices that spoke to the Summit theme. The programme reflected urgent perspectives, including from children who have concerns about the global climate crisis; from politically oppressed artists who are unable to practice; from minority, Indigenous and LGBTQIA+ people; and people who communicate with minority languages, whether verbal or non-verbal, like sign language.

Alongside the opening, we celebrated the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, where Her Royal Highness Crown Princess Victoria presented the 2023 award to laureate Laurie Halse Anderson, a celebrated young adult author in the USA who has experienced censorship. The evening was led by actress and

director Josette Bushell-Mingo and included performances by artists Rana Mansour, Sofia Jannok, Lindy Larsson, Louise Dahl, Amina Ouahid, Jamila Ouahid and Theatre 16.

## **A Cultural evening at Moderna Museet**

The second evening of the cultural programme took place at Moderna Museet where performances by ICORN-residential artists Arya Aramnejad, Justina, Duaa Kamel and Abdalla Basher highlighted artists at risk; a fully improvised dance battle that showcased groups of dancers from different genres on the same stage; and tours of the museums' famous modern art collections.

## **Exhibitions**

Several exhibitions took place in the main World Summit venue. The exhibition Land of None/Land of Us gave focus to the common borderless understanding of Indigenous People living in the, supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, Inuit Futures in Arts Leadership and the Inuit Art Foundation.

The Swedish Institute presented three exhibitions, including Art on Screen, which was curated by Kalmar Konstmuseum and showed video works by Salad Hilowle and Santiago Mostyn that examined – in different ways – the experiences of non-white and non-Christian immigrants in Sweden.

The exhibition Bibylon by Thierry Mortier/Kvadrennalen celebrated democracy, collaboration, education, culture and the future of humankind in a library collection that demonstrates our international differences – different nations and cultures – and our shared and universal sameness, including our care for children's education.





Top: Opening ceremony at Stockholm Concert Hall with host, actress and director Josette Bushell-Mingo; Cultural Programme Dance battle at Moderna Museet; Official dinner music courtesy of the students of the Stockholm School of the Arts. Photo: Susanne Kronholm.

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**Note takers** (guided by Elena Polivtseva, who diligently summarised the many discussions): Toni Attard, Francisca Bórquez, Ulrike Blumenreich, Malaya Del Rosario, Ann Catrine Eriksson, Nike Jonah, Erwin Maas, Søren Merrild Staun, Dean Molebatsi, Johanna Övling, Pavla Petrova, Johanna von Bahr, Isabel Thomson, Hiroko Tsuboi-Friedman and Ana Zuvela.

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Please access biographies here: <https://www.artsummit.org/programmeparticipants>

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