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On the Front Line: Artists at Risk, Artists Who Risk

CULTURE, ARTS AND SOCIETY



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Salzburg Global's Latest Arts and Culture Session Convenes at Schloss Leopoldskron

For its first in-person program of 2023, Salzburg Global Seminar brought together artists and activists from around the world in an attempt to bridge a diversity of perspectives, create new ideas and build commitment to strategies for action.

Aurore Heugas



Salzburg, Austria – March 25, 2023, marked the kickoff of Salzburg Global Seminar's latest Arts and Culture program, *On the Front Line: Artists at Risk, Artists Who Risk*.

In the face of spreading wars and conflicts of all kinds, artists often find themselves on the front lines of movements for change, using their power and practice to envision better futures, stimulate collective action, and drive change across sectors and scales. As agents of change, artists can become subject to a myriad of threats, whether from deliberate political misinterpretation, harassment and censorship, or physical and psychological harm.

Over five days, the program brought together 50 artists and supporters from more than 40 countries to explore the intersection of contemporary art, activism, politics, law, research, technology, ethics and organizing.

Can artists be truly autonomous,

or do they have to be supported by an institution? This was one of the first questions asked in the opening conversation *Insiders and Outsiders*. Artists are always looking for independence, but it often comes with precarity. The main takeaway from that discussion was that artists should fight to have that space as individuals, it is crucial for the nature of their craft. However, they cannot fight for it on their own.

The main theme of the program was the aspect of the front lines. But what are the front lines? Is it a "what" or a "who"? Fellows tried to provide some answers to this question throughout the week and determined that frontlines can be different for everyone. "All my life, I have been on the frontlines as a woman. When something has no voice, value, story, it doesn't exist," said one of the program participants. For some, the frontlines were more traditional, war zones and political protests, for others, the frontlines were within their own

home. Fellows determined that as people, each one of us is a facilitator and the solution to conflicts, and that to have visibility and effect change, artists should try to create alliances with those most in power, those who already have visibility - men more often.

World Café was next, meant to be a structured conversational process for knowledge sharing, in which groups of people discuss a topic at several small tables. The different themes included: Abuse of Our Rights, Structural Injustice, Care or Cancel Culture, Protection Mechanisms, Lessons from Activism, Solidarity vs Existential Threats, Tech Solutions, and Intersectoral Equity. An important thought that came out was about systems. "So much is about systems, and what I realized is that systems work perfectly as they were designed. Oppression makes money. Systems that are made to oppress make a lot of money." Effective change would require remodeling and

reconstruction from the ground up.

Power was also a crucial part of the discussions. “When we discuss power, we need to qualify it. Power can appear in many forms,” said a participant. Fellows discussed the relation between power and art and the importance of art to preserve freedom and a sense of dignity. “The power of influence is dangerous. There are many examples of artists changing minds and policies. When bringing forward resilience and joy, you scare the system of oppression. The most dangerous use of power is not using your power at all.” Whoever controls the narrative also controls the power. Fellows pointed out the importance of artists uniting for more impact.

Care was a theme that remerged throughout the duration of the

program. Many of these artists that are on the frontlines every day or who have escaped conflicts feel the guilt of their survival when so many of their peers have lost their lives fighting for what they believed in. The response to those who live with this guilt was the importance of realizing that artists and activists are only human, fighting long term fights, and that giving yourself a break will only give you more strength to continue. “Like on a plane, put your oxygen mask first, before helping others.”

On the last day of the program, Fellows came up with some recommendations, and beginnings of solutions, through a care handbook for artists, or through showing the benefits that AI and technology could have for artists. The real strength of this program though was bringing

people together. “There is such power in sharing our stories,” said one of the participants.

The week of sessions was charged with emotions, conflict, memories, and anecdotes. Some filled the rooms with laughter, and some brought the room to tears. Those few days served as a catalyst for change, forcing people from different backgrounds to compare experiences and face their own feelings in a productive way. Coming out of the program, it is up to the 50 Salzburg Global Fellows to leverage the knowledge and network for growth and for societal change.



ARTISTS ON THE GLOBAL FRONT LINE

What does it mean for artists to be at risk, and to take risks, in an increasingly perilous time? Around 50 artists and allies from more than 40 countries are convening at Salzburg

Jeremy Fugleberg

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It should come as no surprise that artists are under threat, globally. At its core, making art is about telling the truth, to become an agent for change. This often makes artists' work and their very existence a threat to those in power—and power does not like to be questioned.

So it seemed fitting for a program exploring the risks and challenges artists face to pay tribute to one who could not attend: Afghan Dari poet Nadia Anjuman, killed in 2005 at age 25, after spending her teen years honing her craft despite the repression of Afghanistan's Taliban regime.

Salzburg Global Seminar (SGS) dedicated its latest session, "On the Front Line: Artists at Risk, Artists

Who Risk," to Anjuman's memory. As an organization whose mission is to "challenge present and future leaders to solve issues of global concern" SGS convened over 50 artists and allies age 23 to 90 from over 40 countries to its home base at Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg, Austria, from 25-30 March 2023.

Where are These Front Lines?

A front line is, of course, the place at the very front of a battle. The term harkens to the trench warfare of World War I, as soldiers stood their ground and either waited for an attack or prepared one of their own. One attendee described the front line as a place where women artists stand with each other, care for and support each other, and plan together.

Many artists globally, willingly or not, find themselves on the front line: a place of conflict between authoritarianism and democracy, on the fault line of those asserting equality amid growing polarization and backlash, facing unprecedented events including a global pandemic and climate upheaval, and facing down the naked, suppressive power of police, militias, and militaries. Often, artists are driven into exile, presenting them with a whole new set of challenges.

There are shortcomings to the "front line" military metaphor, of course. It's a very fluid concept, and for the purposes of this program, that is by design. Still, one attendee remarked that while the "front line" location

was apt in placing artists shoulder to shoulder in solidarity supporting the right to freedom of expression, it failed to capture the mixed role artists must play, including doing work that reaches even those inside the supposedly monolithic belief systems of family, fellow citizens, and others. To remain empathetic and open to those on the “other side” in a hostile environment is to cling to hope and believe in a better world. Another attendee reminded those at the program of the need to never forget someone will see your art, it will make them think, and perhaps they will have a change of heart and mind. And yet, this open-hearted, chance-taking approach can come at great cost, exhausting artists who toil outside of an institutional setting or who must support their own artistic endeavors, and proving perilous for artists at risk.

SGS recognized this latter challenge for many of those assembled for the program, seeking to avoid capturing the image of those who wished to avoid being shown in photos disseminated to the public and instituting the Chatham House Rule to respect anonymity and privacy while allowing for frank dialog.

The Urgency of the Threat

But the urgency of this event is due to its timeliness and the scope of the problem. According to the latest global artistic freedom report by Freemuse, there were more than 1,200 violations of artistic freedom in 103 countries and online in 2021, and a record number of 39 artists reportedly killed that year. Also, 500 artists who faced legal consequences for challenging authority figures or traditional or religious values.

One program attendee highlighted the poem “This Valley of Death is Not My Country” by Bengali poet Nabarun Bhattacharya, which translated includes the following part: “...this is the time to write your poems / on walls, with stencils, in manifestos / this is the time to create a collage of poems / with your blood tears bones...”

As the session progresses over the rainy week in Salzburg, it is becoming clear that artists remain more than equal to the risks they face, yet many are bone-tired from the sustained onslaught of real and virtual attacks. There remains much to do to create networks of mutual support, channel broader support into artist sustainment networks, and leverage technological tools to strengthen, protect, and amplify artists at risk.



FOR GLOBAL POLICYMAKERS, A CRUCIAL MOMENT IN DEFENSE OF FREE EXPRESSION

A cathartic week heralded a critical year for global policymakers and institutions to recognize those on the front lines of the battle for the freedom of artistic expression, writes DC editor Jeremy Fugleberg.

Jeremy Fugleberg

This article was first published on Diplomatic Courier.



A historic hotel in Salzburg, Austria, played host recently to an extraordinary group of artists and activists. During a nearly week-long program, each one of them had a story to tell, and there were many similarities—stories of repression, threat, and exile. They told their stories in large groups and small, in quiet conversations and loud.

To this visiting journalist, it felt like an important cathartic moment for all those present. But to Mary Ann DeVlieg, the gathering of this group at the Hotel Schloss Leopoldskron spoke to a bigger global moment—a time for policymakers and institutions worldwide to recognize that the right to free expression is under deepening

threat. The catharsis was a “signal” of the battle being fought by the artists and activists on the front lines and the need to support them, she said.

“These people are all fighting with everything they have for freedom and democratic values in their situations. Soldiers get uniforms and guns; these artists fight for freedoms with music, paint, text, and film. Both are apt to suffer physical harm, death, or prison,” DeVlieg said. “And I think that in my life, working in this field, I’ve never seen a year, a point, this year in fact, where institutions and policy makers are aware of this phenomenon. ... I think we should focus on this moment.”

DeVlieg was curator for Salzburg Global Seminar’s latest session, “On the Front Line: Artists at Risk, Artists Who Risk.” SGS convened more than 50 artists, activists, and allies from more than 40 countries at its home in Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg, Austria, from 25-30 March 2023.

Why 2023 Might Be the 'Moment'

There’s no doubt that many global institutions and organizations are already recognizing this year as a moment of reckoning for the freedom of artistic expression.

DeVlieg ticked off some of the indicators, including some in which she’s played a role. Take the Council

of Europe's launch of a Manifesto on the Freedom of Expression of Arts and Culture in the Digital Era, to mark the 70th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), as well as an accompanying digital exhibition titled "Free to Create — Create to be Free." In February 2023 the Council released a report examining artistic freedom in Europe. Then there is the upcoming 9th World Summit on Arts and Culture, set for Stockholm, Sweden, from 3-5 May, 2023. Its focus: "Safeguarding Artistic Freedom." And DeVlieg identified a rising number of arts organizations—including arts councils worldwide—focusing on this topic for prizes, festivals, and new funds, including Mimeta's Artists at Risk Funding Initiative.

This focus comes at a time when the right to free expression is under sustained assault, and artists and activists are bearing the brunt of the attack, as democracies and good governance face both interior and

exterior challenges.

"I think now we're in a position to really point out the fact that we are a community together with the human rights community, human rights defenders, anyone who is really trying to point out the value of human rights and democracy," DeVlieg said. "They are our allies, we are their allies."

The Toll, and the Challenge

In Salzburg, the convened group of artists, activists, and allies left the week without a finalized statement representing the gathering—although reportedly two are under development. But in the program's final hours, several working groups of those assembled did name some of the challenges they were facing, and proposed some steps forward.

One group examined the interplay of art and activism, and the blurred lines for creative work that seeks to envision a better world, a better future. Another

discussed the importance of artist involvement and risk of invisibility for many in the emerging field of AI. Others examined structural inequities and intersectoral equity. There was deep discussion surrounding the importance of care for art institutions or organizations at risk of getting "canceled" and some immediate steps to take to better incorporate public discussion, and adopt new perspectives and partnerships.

There was also significant attention paid to artist and activist safety. One working group put together a graphic "handbook" for artists at risk, identifying threats and protective mechanisms. Another group examined those protective mechanisms, looking at structural issues, funding constraints, cultural specificities and the need for deeper support for artist well-being and mental health.



Protecting Artists and Addressing Injustices

Mary Ann DeVlieg, independent consultant, and co-curator of Salzburg Global's recent Culture session, describes the magic that happens when Fellows come together

Christina DeNatale



Christina DeNatale, Salzburg Global Communications Intern:
Can you tell me a bit about who you are, what you do and how you got involved in the arts justice field?

Mary Ann DeVlieg, Independent Consultant and PhD Candidate:

Now, I'm an independent consultant. I worked all my life in the arts, mostly in management and also in policy. I founded several small organizations. Especially since 1993, I really specialized in working in Europe and the Middle East and North Africa. In 2009, I started to work with artists who are persecuted in their own countries and needed to be relocated. I did that work for about 12 years. I worked with 25 artists. So, I went from arts to human rights and in doing so, I met other people who were going from free speech and human rights and wanted to work more in the arts field with artists. I always call us an emergent

sector, and now that has really fulfilled itself. And there are many organizations now who are crossing over in those fields.

I was invited to a conference like this. We sat around talking and we said, "we should make us some sort of informal international network". And we called ourselves Arts Rights Justice. And that name has been used for many different things. We made a summer academy; we founded an EU level civil society working group. Once again, always bringing the different sides together.

Christina: What was your experience as a Fellow in 2017 and what made you want to come back as a co-curator?

Mary Ann: It was quite magical. I was asked to co-coordinate, co-facilitate a working group, which was

on arts and migration and inclusion, I think. It was quite a large working group. There were so many people who couldn't even fit in the room, so we had to split it in two. But, out of that we wrote, as our final output, we wrote a manifesto. And in that manifesto, we declared migrants' rights, artists' rights. But we also said that we had some goals that we wanted to achieve. Few, not many. And one of them was to come back here and create basically what we've just done. So, it was very powerful.

Christina: How does it feel to be here now and see the program you've been working on come to be?

Mary Ann: Well, of course I'm overwhelmed. It's just wonderful. I have this huge faith, when you bring together really interesting and dynamic people, magic happens. So, I'm just watching it happen

Christina: Why is it important to have these types of conversations and why is it important to hold a space where these discussions can happen?

Mary Ann: I opened [the program] with a few comments, and one was about this concept of shared collective responsibility for structural injustice. We all have a part to play, whether we're involved in it or not. I'm wearing a silk scarf from Vietnam, my sweater was purchased from an

English company, and I'm sure it was made in Asia. I'm wearing cheap jeans, which probably also were made in Asia. So, I'm supporting injustice very indirectly. I think that we can address those problems. Unless we meet internationally and that goes very well with the second concept that I mentioned, which was epistemic injustice, the fact that we don't for whatever reason, we don't give full credibility to the people who were listening to. So, the speaker, either because the speaker doesn't have

the words to tell and perhaps not a concept that has been developed or that we're judging the person to be inadequate because of our own prejudices or simply because we can't hear. We hear what we know. We instantly translate what they're saying to what we know. Unless we start meeting on these levels and really having the time, which is the beauty of Salzburg [Global], that we have the time to really listen, to really hear one another. If we do not do that, we will never get ahead.



Do What You Love, Love What You Do

Alicia Quiñones, Head of the Americas region at PEN International, reflects on her first program as a Salzburg Global Fellow and her passion for helping writers at risk.

Christina DeNatale



“This has been one of the best days of my life [of] understanding the work that I’m doing every single day,” said Alicia Quiñones on the last day of *On the Front Line: Artists at Risk, Artists Who Risk*.

“The second day, on Sunday, I was thinking that I have learned too many things that I couldn’t learn in many, many years in my work.”

Alicia is the head of the Americas Region at PEN International, an association dedicated to protecting writers at risk, promoting literature, and defending freedom of expression.

While Alicia is now developing PEN centers throughout North and South America, her journey at PEN began six years ago as a volunteer for the organization.

Alicia had been a journalist in Mexico for many years when the then PEN Mexico president, Jennifer Clement, contacted her to write about journalists at risk in Mexico.

“At that moment, we were facing a very difficult situation in terms of freedom of expression because a lot of journalists were killed,” said Alicia.

She continued to volunteer with the organization where she helped organize a protest in Mexico City in 2012, had meetings with the Mexican government related to the criminal investigations of the killings, and fell in love with the work of PEN International.

“Now I’m feeling like I’m a very lucky person. Now, [I’m doing] what I really wanted to do and I’m grateful for that,” said Alicia. “In the past when someone is asking ‘if this is really your passion, you should ask yourself if you could do your work without any payment,’ and now I can say ‘I did it.’”

Since joining PEN International, she has helped develop four new centers and recovered many other inactive centers throughout North and South America.

The latest culture program was Alicia’s first time attending a Salzburg Global session, which she found a fantastic opportunity, explaining that she feels lucky to learn from other Fellows, while also sharing her own knowledge on artists at risk.

“I was thinking this morning: ‘how can I give this information to the community where I’m coming from (journalists, writers, PEN International, other people interested in this topic)?” Alicia said.

Her answer: “[I am] a bridge between this information, this knowledge and the community I’m in contact with.”

Alicia also pondered what she can give from her communities to Salzburg Global. “I am promising myself, first of all, just to send something back to this program,” she said.

Using Art to Expose Racist Systems in the United States.

Salzburg Global Fellow Paul Rucker shares how he uses art to confront the United States' history of racism and white supremacy.

Christina DeNatale

Paul Rucker is a multimedia visual artist, composer and musician from the United States who uses art to show the direct correlation between enslavement and the modern socio-political climate in the U.S., including its connection to the present-day prison system.

His piece “Proliferation” illuminates the prison-industrial complex in the U.S. by showing the growth of the U.S. prison system from 1778 to 2005. The data visualization uses colors to signify different eras within U.S. history.

According to Paul, the prison-industrial complex began immediately after slavery ended so that the U.S. didn't lose the revenue made from free labor.

“There's this thing called the Convict Leasing Program that happened after enslavement. It basically made sure that certain people would be picked up during the season where crops needed to be picked and they'd be forced to work,” said Paul. “There is a direct correlation, and they were black folks.”

Paul used the example of marijuana possession in present day U.S., where Black Americans are nearly four times more likely to be charged with marijuana possession than white Americans, according to the American Civil Liberties Union.

“People want to think the justice system is about justice and that people are in prison because they should be in prison,” said Paul. “They don't understand the inequity in the process from selective enforcement of laws, who's going to get charged for this, who's not?”



Paul has been awarded numerous fellowships and in 2022, received support from the Mellon Foundation for his upcoming museum called Cary Forward, which is an interpretive arts center named after the enslaver Archibald Cary.

“I kind of wanted to appropriate his name and let people know what the name of the street was and who it was named for,” said Paul. Cary Street is a main road in Richmond, Virginia, where Paul is an assistant professor at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Paul has collected over 20,000 artifacts to be displayed in the museum, sometimes buying hundreds of pieces a week: “Everything from photos, books, tools, documentation, restraints (like shackles that were used for children and adults), parts of a bank, parts of the White House of the Confederacy, I have a wide range of pieces,” said Paul. “I buy every day. I bought 13 pieces last night,” said Paul. “I've been pretty much obsessed with this for the past decade plus.”

Cary Forward is expected to open in 2025 or 2026, with other shows before then, showcasing the artifacts.

Salzburg Snapshots

Photos from *On the Front Line: Artists at Risk, Artists Who Risk*



FOR ARTISTS AND ACTIVISTS, A CRUCIAL MOMENT IN AI AND VIDEO GAMES

Artists, civil society and policymakers must engage in what is becoming a decisive moment in technology, as AI and video games take on global significance for art, activism, and cultural diplomacy, writes DC's Jeremy Fugleberg from Salzburg, Austria.

Jeremy Fugleberg

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The video snapped to life, a blue spark flashed across the screen, underscored by epic words echoing underneath the rendered images. The spark alights on a stone pillar, then lifts off again before touching down and transforming into luminous humanoid figures, who arise and stride forward.

Forget Candy Crush. Behold, Biskaabiiyaang.

This was a video trailer for “Biskaabiiyaang: the Indigenous Metaverse,” a joint effort to promote and protect Indigenous languages through an Indigenous-led metaverse. Video games are massively popular, played by billions, and home to deep storytelling and artistic expression. As “Biskaabiiyaang” illustrates, they can

also be incredible vehicles for cultural preservation, promotion and shared understanding.

Yet for many artists, activist and policymakers, there remains a significant gap in their understanding of what is a crucial arena: technological platforms such as video games and artificial intelligence (AI), said Manouchehr Shamsrizi, a social entrepreneur, policy adviser, co-founder of gamelab.berlin in Humboldt University of Berlin’s Cluster of Excellence, and gaming and metaverse expert of Germany’s Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen.

These technologies hold significant peril and promise, and require immediate, in-depth and sustained engagement by artists, activists, and

policymakers alike. Only with such attention can these technologies reach their true potential as platforms for free expression.

“Gaming is the path to understand all those technologies,” Shamsrizi told Diplomatic Courier. “If we are able to close this gap, we would be able to make use of the potentials, and mitigate the risks, of many of these digital technologies.”

Shamsrizi is one of the participants in Salzburg Global Seminar’s latest session, “On the Front Line: Artists at Risk, Artists Who Risk.” SGS convened more than 50 artists, activists and allies from more than 40 countries at its home in Hotel Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg, Austria, from 25-30 March 2023. One

of the examined topics: technological solutions, with a strong focus on video games and AI.

Garbage In, Garbage Out?

Hardly a week goes by lately that doesn't feature news about AI. Significant advances in the field by multiple tech firms have resulted in the recent unveiling of generative AIs for public use, including OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Bard.

AI is a powerful tool, with most currently built atop what are known as large-language models. A generative AI is, fundamentally, a sophisticated prediction engine, using its capabilities and knowledge of a large body of existing work to predict the best next word in its responses to natural language queries, sometimes to such an uncanny degree that it marvels the mind.

The conversations at the "On the Front Line" event included discussion about the use of AI by artists and others. While the public increasingly has access to powerful AIs, we are still in the early stages of AI development and grappling with the flaws, failings, pitfalls and potentials of this technology. One such flaw: the large language models upon which such AIs are based. There was concern among participants that such models often include racist and misogynistic language and thinking, as well as historical biases.

Kira Xonorika, a participant who is an AI researcher, author and artist, described AI as requiring a "processing of de-biasing."

"To engage that process of de-biasing and to truly achieve an equitable world, we really need the collaboration of people of color, of Black people, Indigenous people, trans people, intersex people, and all those who have been affected by the macro-political effects of exclusion," Xonorika said. "And, for the stakeholders and the people who have power to change the infrastructure to truly prioritize these demographics so we can start balancing out things more."

There are even more basic concerns: AI presents significant hurdles for those without the necessary resources to use it. AI requires both technological literacy fueled by education access and technological access (equipment, internet, electricity) Both remain globally limited.

There has also been significant concern from many artists about AI models harvesting artists' work and using it as part of its creation process in service to others—plagiarism, essentially. But there remains a positive viewpoint to develop as well, amid the concerns. Xonorika described art created via AI as a collaboration with a collective consciousness, including a cooperative development process.

"That perspective of plagiarism is confined within the limits of 'AI will overpower us' that was imprinted in our consciousness due to Western science fiction between the '40s to the '60s," Xonorika said. "If you look at it that way, then you are closed to the possibility of understanding that AI is in the process of learning."

Industry, Policymakers Must Step Up

While much of the talk at the "On the Front Line" program about video games and AI was focused on what artists and activists could and should do, there remains a significant burden on others, specifically the gaming and AI industry itself, and policymakers who remain largely behind the technological curve, even if just to be aware of the latest developments. To correct this mismatch, Shamsrizi said, required significant sustained outreach to the arts community and its allies, which are well practiced in the use—and defense of—more-traditional art forms.

Shamsrizi listed a number of crucial steps for policy makers, as well: 1) monitor what is happening in games, 2) identify, listen to and develop in-house expertise in the field, 3) place video games on an equal footing with other arts—as a platform for culture and diplomacy—and seek to protect the artists who make them.

The gaming industry has its share of work to do as well, Shamsrizi said.

"The gaming industry has not grown up yet, that's what I believe. So it would highly benefit from exchange with cultural techniques or art forms and the communities connected to them, which has been dealing with these kinds of issues for decades, if not centuries," he said. "So, the gap is there. Because neither the traditional art forms nor the gaming communities have been too eager to collaborate. Of course, there are examples, right? But we are not where we should be."

Creativity Is the Key to Resistance

Salzburg Global Fellow Pamela López reflects on her first day of session

Pamela López



Yesterday upon arrival, I did as I was told, and I started to engage in different conversations with people.

I thought I was starting with easy questions: “What is your name?”, “where are you from?”, (a challenging question for many of us.) and “what do you do?”

Very rapidly, I heard the following answer: “I am an artist at risk.”

And just like that, in the middle of coffee and strudels, what seemed to be the provocative title of this gathering became immediately true and urgent.

I am an artist at risk means a lot.
I am an artist at risk is a call for action.

I must be honest; thinking about risk is not something I usually do, and as a matter of fact, it makes me feel a bit uncomfortable, a little uneasy. I am not a natural risk taker or at least I was not, until a few months

ago when I decided to quit my job, a powerful curatorial position in a large organization in my home country, Chile.

The formal answer to this “big quit”, was the pandemic, and maybe my personal systemic change. At some point, a millennial feeling inside me. At some point a gorgeous boyfriend inviting me to live with him in Buenos Aires.

There was also an informal answer for this transition. I was tired of being an insider, a gatekeeper.

Yesterday we heard a lot about this. About how institutions and institutionalism sometimes stand as an oxymoron as we feel protected and safeguarded, but at the same time oppressed by invisible barriers. Yesterday we named some of these barriers, we spoke about the relationship with authority. We spoke about content. We spoke about funding. At some point, here in the room, the group inherently decided

we liked the word “independent.” At that point I thought we had reached an agreement as a group. But of course, we had not.

Someone stated that “independent” can also be a dangerous word in some contexts. And then, someone raised a hand and asked: “Independent from what? Is there such a thing as artistic freedom? Is there such a freedom when we depend on systemic social mechanisms to work in the arts?”

We depend on political and religious freedom of course, but also in democratic states we seem to confront some other challenges and paradigms such as racism, populism, unfair working conditions, gender discrimination, money and even aesthetics.

We spoke about the importance of this “decolonial” moment, about how institutions are being triggered today by artists and audiences into ending different forms of supremacy. We, of course, made a distinction within

different forms of institutions because as someone also said: “in order to challenge institutions, you need to respect them.”

Being a part of these institutions means respect, but there was also in the group an open invitation to “hack them”, to understand them, to act as promoters of change.

Yesterday we had a good exchange, but some ideas might have been missing in the conversation. These ideas need to include some rearrangement in our positions as well: we need to include ourselves in the middle of the problem in order to be able to find new solutions.

Even though government authorities and institutionalized models will probably continue to be the main group of violators of artistic freedom, imposing censorship practices is something that has increasingly being taken on by other actors, including private individuals and the artistic communities themselves.

We need to reflect on social media as a tool of criticism and power, we need to address cancelation among peers, we need to think over market censorship imposing models of actions in the arts and also, we urgently need to question our colonized idea of “quality” as fixed agreement in the arts world and in our institutions.

We are invited today to continue all these conversations, and as I told you at the beginning, I always do as I am told. So, as I was asked for some provocations in the conversation, I immediately thought we should also feel invited to speak about these topics as insiders, as actors that are responsible for finding new solutions but also as professionals that are accountable for the models and paradigms that we have allowed in our own spaces and artistic practices.

We must acknowledge our privileges, the fact that we are in this room, in Austria. The fact that we have the personal economic means to stop for five days and be able to have these conversations. The fact that we have a certain type of standardized

“education” or knowledge that allows us to debate in these forms. The fact that we have a shared language to do that, because in some of our territories there are brilliant people that deserved to be heard but unfortunately the “epistemic injustice” of communication is preventing their voices to take part in these conversations.

As Gabriela Mistral, a famous Chilean poet once said: “Speech is our second possession, after the soul.”

To finish I must make a statement:

We are always outsiders, we are the rebels in the room, even when we think we are not. Culture has always been on the border, everywhere. The arts have always been and will always keep being a threat to our social systems.

As someone said yesterday: “Creativity is the key to resistance.”

Salzburg Snapshots

Photos from *On the Front Line: Artists at Risk, Artists Who Risk*



Is It Possible to Not Be on the Frontline as an Artist?

Salzburg Global Fellow Francesco Grech reflects on artists on the frontline and how their work shapes communities and challenges societal barriers

Francesco Grech



After my first Salzburg Global Seminar session, I would say no. Everyone has a frontline. Be it physical or metaphorical. Frontlines exist everywhere and artists are at the very front. From ongoing wars around the world to ongoing cultural tensions between countries and communities within the same country, artists are usually the voice of the voiceless that help communities grow into a better, more functional and just society.

Really and truly, it's all about growth. Both from the artists' perspective and the community's perspective. The artist feeds from the community and vice versa. Artists facilitate societal growth, because usually they tend to have a vision for it. What does this mean? It means artists are able to communicate

and shape society in a way no other politician or community leader can. Their art is powerful and it's no wonder that many artists still risk their very life to pursue their artistic practice.

Does this mean that there is a saviour complex hidden somewhere? Maybe. I have thought a lot about this. In a world where populism and the right are threatening to reshape our democracies, where countries are still ruled by tyrants and dictators, artists find themselves as guardians of good and justice. It is no wonder that artists feel a huge weight on their shoulders. The responsibility is overwhelming and the danger is real. Too real unfortunately. Artists around the world are still killed, imprisoned and exiled to this very day.

Artists feel the world around them in a very particular and unique way. It helps them transform their art into groundbreaking work which in turn shape the future of the community in which they work. This is seen as dangerous by individuals or pockets in our community who have no interest in the common good.

Art is a weapon. Artists break glass ceilings constantly. It is innate in the art itself to break barriers. To challenge. To question. To motivate. To encourage. To show. To protest. To teach. To lead. Will artists save the world? Probably not. But they sure have all the right tools to make it better for every living being.

And this, I believe, is the beauty of artists and their art. Bringing change.

The Salzburg Statement on Supporting Artists on the Front Line

On the Front Line: Artists at Risk, Artists Who Risk occurred between March 25 and 30, 2023. Salzburg Global Seminar convened a global group of 50 participants on the front lines of driving creative, courageous, and ethical change worldwide. Read more online: salzburgglobal.org/go/799-01

PRINCIPLES AND DEFINITIONS

Art functions socially in many ways—it challenges structures of power and repression, it uplifts democratic participation, heals the communities in which it operates, and facilitates independent critical thinking. Art that functions in this way—whether explicitly or implicitly, intentionally or unintentionally—plays a critical role in a healthy civil society.

A Definition of “Artists at Risk”: We call attention to risks faced by the makers of art or artists who are threatened by armed conflict, persecution, or oppression because of their artwork. Artists’ work may be sanctioned, censored, or banned; the makers may be defunded, denied a platform, restricted, surveilled, abused, silenced, forcibly exiled, imprisoned, tortured, killed, or their lives and work may become so constricted as to force them into self-exile. These risks, which can be imposed by state actors and non-state actors, private individuals, and the artistic communities themselves, can place artists in circumstances where they become “artists at risk.” While certainly, artists face all manner of risks, we use the term “artist at risk” in this Statement specifically to indicate those who face these enumerated risks.

An Assertion of the Importance of Artists at Risk: We assert the critical importance of artists at risk. Their work upholds recognized international human rights and freedoms for their communities and societies, stands on a front line between intolerance and tolerance, and between repression and freedom;

CONSIDERATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Policymakers need to address bias in cultural policy: Cultural policy can perpetuate systems and norms that contribute to the suppression of cultural rights and the right to artistic expression. To ensure that artists at risk have equitable access to support, policy and procedure must consider artists’ working and living conditions, especially but not limited to risks associated with racism, populism, unfair working conditions, gender discrimination, access to digital resources, and poverty. Such access must not discriminate by prioritizing standards of the most advantaged or historically dominant territories or populations. These goals can be addressed by establishing separate support programmes or by rewriting criteria for existing programmes to ensure substantive equality, and this needs to be done in full consultation with the target artists and arts organizations supporting them.

Evaluators and funders need to address bias in the appraisal of art made by artists at risk: In appraising the work of artists at risk, the interdisciplinarity and multi-sited nature of their work and lives must be considered during any appraisal of cultural worth. Assessments of art made by artists at risk must be informed by a comprehensive understanding of the intent, circumstances in which the artists create, and circumstances about which artists make their art.

Policymakers and the cultural sector need to integrate considerations of art made by artists at risk into cultural policy: The cultural sector shares a collective responsibility for the arts and artists to flourish and for the public to access, enjoy, engage with, and be stimulated by diverse artistic processes and products. The global cultural sector should be considered one body, the overall health of which is dependent on all of its parts. We call on all actors in the cultural sector to act in concrete solidarity with artists at risk, and those arts organizations working with them, whether digitally or in analogue. Creating a cultural sector that promotes freedom of artistic expression, cultural rights for all, and supports artists at risk should not happen through making a parallel cultural sector for artists at risk; rather, it requires a wholesale integration of new methods and resources into existing systems and institutions. Arts organizations and institutions that produce, present, and promote creative work in the culture sector need to examine their mission statements and programs and consider where and how they can support artists at risk, help amplify their voices, and help raise awareness of the public in the work of these artists.. In doing so, they also need to consider new types of art and corresponding artists who have previously been excluded, including video game artists or artistic activists expressing themselves in virtual realities or “metaverses”.

we also assert the critical importance of the interpreters of these arts, the creative and institutional workers, the administrative and legal structures, and organizations that support these artists.

An Invitation to Facilitate Artists at Risk: Supporting and upholding basic human rights, democratic participation, and social justice are necessary for cultural diversity, pluralism and creativity to flourish.

We invite those institutions that make social and cultural policy and those institutions that provide social and cultural resources to uphold an enabling and human rights-based environment that allows for the meaningful participation of artists, cultural and creative workers in social, community and political spaces, and to promulgate policies and procedures that concretely support artists at risk.

Wherever they are, artists at risk deserve support to continue their work, study, develop, create, produce, and distribute their work, and support for their work to be documented.

Human rights and free speech NGOs and GOs must fully integrate considerations art made by artists at risk into human rights policy: Organizations and institutions that support human and civil rights, including government, private, and non-governmental institutions, policymakers, and funders, should recognize the critical role artists at risk play in upholding the values of civil society. Human rights policy should consider artists at risk as vulnerable not only on the basis of the violation of their civil and political rights, but also on the basis of the violation of their cultural rights, and their creativity as artists. Human rights and free speech organizations need to take concrete steps to make their policies, systems, and resources more accessible to artists at risk. Measures should include but not be limited to improving applications for funding and other resources to better accommodate and reflect the work and conditions of artists at risk, opening of such programs for new types of artists in the digital world which were previously excluded, as well as specific training for workers by specialists from the field.

Major arts institutions must strengthen and support smaller organizations: Strong arts institutions whose missions include cultural rights, diversity and pluralism, democratic values and freedom of artistic expression have a duty to look to their communities to not only reach out and build audiences for artists at risk, but also to support, in turn, existing smaller organizations that may already promote this work to more diverse audiences.

CALL FOR CONCRETE ACTION

By the end of 2025, we ask policymakers, funders and international, national, and regional stakeholder organizations and networks to:

1. Facilitate a study of the factors and practices that inhibit, constrain, or ignore the creation, production, distribution, and documentation of the art of creative workers who have been or could be at risk due to their exercise of cultural rights and artistic freedom. This work must synthesize existing studies, analyze them and, most importantly, involve taking action with institutions with experience and a record of pioneering responsibilities in this regard.

2. Create a comprehensive report detailing good practices for identifying, evaluating, and addressing the needs of creative workers who have been or could be at risk due to exercising their artistic freedom, in both the analog and digital realms. This report must outline the applicable duty of care owed to art makers by the organizations that support them and the standards for evaluating the work of those organizations.

3. Introduce legal frameworks for Emergency Artistic Freedom visas that allow entry to identified receiving regions and nations, and provide work authorizations of sufficient duration for creative workers who have been or could be at risk due to exercising their cultural rights, including their artistic freedom.

4. Create and expand the allocation of financial and institutional resources to support and facilitate the relocation and ongoing professional development of creative workers who have been or could be at risk due to exercising their cultural rights and artistic freedom, including emergency residency facilities, especially in or close to the home regions of the artists. This allocation must recognize and include the creation and funding of financial and institutional resources to support and facilitate the short-term respite residencies and long-term creative development residencies for creative workers who have been or could be at risk due to exercising cultural rights and artistic freedom.

5. Integrate artistic rights and cultural rights into international policy work and improve the visibility of cultural rights in the priorities of states and human rights NGOs. Include artists in all policies relating to them.

6. Prioritize the collective expression and activities of artists as belonging in the human rights field, as important partners in finding solutions for sustainable development, democracy, and innovation.

SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR

Salzburg Global Seminar is an independent non-profit organization founded in 1947 with a mission to challenge current and future leaders to shape a better world.

Together with our world-spanning network of 40,000 Fellows, we have been at the forefront of global movements for change for 75 years, with significant impact on individuals, institutions, and systems.

Whether at our home of Schloss Leopoldskron, online, or in locations around the world, our programs inclusive, interdisciplinary, international and intergenerational, and are designed to provide a global lab for innovation and transformation.

We convene cohorts of passionate changemakers across diverse fields and backgrounds. We develop and curate networks that support collaboration, share innovations with new audiences, and expand our impact by working with partners around the globe.

We are supported by a combination of institutional partnerships, generous individual donations and revenue generated from our social enterprise, Hotel Schloss Leopoldskron.

CULTURE, ARTS AND SOCIETY

The Culture, Arts and Society series harnesses the transformative power of the arts to shape a better world. Through future-focused programs and projects, it raises the profile of culture and the arts in policy agendas, catalyzes exchange across disciplines and sectors, and sustains a unique creative community across continents.

For more info. please visit:
www.SalzburgGlobal.org