

The Effects on Crisis and Upheavals on Artists

TAL FEDER AND ANKE SCHAD-SPINDLER IN CONVERSATION
WITH JULIE TRÉBAULT, PEN AMERICA'S /ARTISTS AT RISK
CONNECTION (ARC), AND JASMINA LAZOVIĆ, FREEMUSE*

Artists and cultural professionals are in many countries at the forefront of political protests, which makes them often the target of anti-liberal movements and authoritarian forces. Yet even without direct political activism, artists become the target of attacks because of their race, gender or sexual orientation. According to The State of Artistic Freedom 2021 Report, at least 17 artists were killed, 82 imprisoned, 133 detained and 107 prosecuted in 2020. Reasons for imprisonment were in 74% of the cases “criticising government policies and practices” and in 20% of the cases “women and artists creating women-themed artworks”. 26% of violations of artistic freedom took place in Europe, among those 72 cases in Turkey, 40 in France, 31 in Russia, 25 in the United Kingdom, 21 in Belarus and 12 in Poland (FREEMUSE 2021a: 10-14). This high share of Europe might be surprising, but it is pointing out that attacks happen everywhere, in democracies as well as in autocratic regimes. The numbers are also suggesting that most likely many cases of illegitimate restrictions of artistic freedom worldwide remain undocumented.

To explore these issues from the perspectives of organizations active in protecting and advocating for artists at risk and artistic freedom worldwide, we talked to Julie Trébault, director of PEN America's Artists at Risk Connection (ARC), and Jasmina Lazović, programme coordinator global monitoring at Freemuse.

Stating that “artists take risks for all of us” (ARC 2021a), ARC aims at safeguarding the right to artistic freedom of expression and ensuring that artists and cultural professionals can live and work without fear. Freemuse documents violations of artistic freedom and leverages evidence-based advocacy at international, regional, and national levels. The organization is known for its annual flagship report, The State of Artistic Freedom quoted above, widely referenced by governments, UN officials, academia, and key actors in the fields of culture and the arts (FREEMUSE 2021b).

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The following conversation is shortened and edited based on the original exchange.

First of all, could you please give us some information about yourselves and what brought you to your present position?

Julie Trébault: I am the director of PEN America's Artists At Risk Connection (ARC) Program. Before joining PEN America in 2017, I worked in the museum field, both in the US and abroad. Thanks to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's support, PEN America was looking for someone to create the ARC project and got the support of the Mellon Foundation to create a project that would help artists facing danger and persecution receive the support they need.

Jasmina Lazović: I was already a human rights activist when I joined Freemuse in 2017 as a program officer for South-Eastern Europe, where I was documenting violations of artistic freedom and advocating for their recognition. Starting from 2020, I am running our global research team.

What does your job entail in terms of tasks and responsibilities?

Trébault: ARC aims to safeguard the right to artistic freedom of expression and ensure that artists everywhere can live and work without fear. In order to address the needs of artists at risk and the organizations that serve them, we assist persecuted artists by connecting them to our growing global network of resources; facilitate cooperation among human rights and art organizations; and amplify the stories and work of at-risk artists as well as raise the visibility of the field of artistic freedom. When an artist contacts ARC for assistance, we assess their needs and identify the best resources for them from this constellation of services. Then we connect them to our partners and support them throughout the process of applying for, receiving, and following up on assistance. It is a lot of hand-holding. Most of the time, assistance for artists comes from the human rights world, and the art world has few resources dedicated to persecuted artists. I see a real disconnect there and my job is also to bridge these two worlds together. This could mean communicating with cultural organizations such as galleries, museums, or festivals. Much of our work also involves raising awareness about the challenges that artists face and our global network of partner organizations that are providing direct support to them.

Lazović: My main task in Freemuse is to document, together with our research team, cases of violations of artistic freedom on a regular basis and produce different reports like our annual *State of Artistic Freedom Report*, where we analyze the main trends that we see each year. We also produce thematic reports that tackle a specific issue. The last one was a report about LGBTQAI+ artists and artworks, and we are currently working on a report about the misuse of counterterrorism legislation to suppress artistic freedom (FREEMUSE 2020).

Could you tell us more about the origins of your organizations?

Trébault: The Artists at Risk Connection was created in 2017 as an extension of the PEN America's Writers at Risk program, which is dedicated to helping persecuted writers. PEN America has been fighting for freedom of expression and the right to create in peace for nearly one hundred years. Just as writers often become targets of violence, censorship, and other forms of persecution, so too do artists of other disciplines, often without the same networks of support as writers and journalists. Thus, the Artists at Risk Connection (ARC) project was created at PEN America to expand the organization's mission to include artists of all disciplines. Before ARC, when you wanted to help an artist, you literally had to open 100 websites to understand where the help was. The idea behind ARC's inception was to gather all the resources and facilitate the coordination of assistance with the partner organizations that had them. The ARC website features more than 670 resources which provide a wide array of services for artists facing risk, because artists need multiple types of support when they are persecuted. There is, unfortunately, no one solution that fits all -- it is really on a case-by-case basis.

Lazović: Freemuse was established in Denmark in 1998 as an international NGO with the goal of defending musicians that are being put in dangerous or challenging situations around the world, but around 2011 it also decided to extend its cover to a broader scope of arts. We don't define what art is. Whoever feels like an artist, this is legitimate. We work in two tracks: defending the freedom of expression in art and culture and advocating for access to art and cultural activities. We go from wall paintings on the streets to more traditional art forms and advocate for the recognition of artistic expression as a special niche within the freedom of expression. Most of the international focus on

freedom of expression has been put on journalists and the press, and artistic expressions were a bit ‘put in the corner.’

How do you operate structurally as independent international non-governmental organizations?

Trébault: Since the beginning of the project, to give you a sense of the breadth of what we have done, we have helped more than 300 artists coming from sixty different countries. We work by connecting them to a wide range of services. Most of the time they need emergency funds to cover basic living expenses. Financial assistance is extremely important but temporary relocation to safe countries, fellowship, legal assistance, and advocacy are also the most common forms of assistance requested by the artists that contact ARC. Very few organizations work solely on artistic freedom. It is a small field. One of our missions is to elevate the field both at the national level and the international level especially with the UN Special Rapporteurs, the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) and UNESCO and raise awareness about persecution against artists and the role of art and artists in society. Artists should not be forgotten by the international community.

Lazović: We have our regional researchers, some of them are hired as consultants for Freemuse and are not connected with any local organization. But when we can we prefer to partner with organizations that already exist in the region. For example, Samir Kassir Foundation in Lebanon, or CADAL organization in Argentina. We have our researchers based there since our primary goal is to have researchers who know the region, know where the key actors are, understand the political, social, and cultural dynamics, and of course, speak the local language. Once we learn about a case, we assess how it fits some of the trends that we recognize. For example, if it’s a legal prosecution, we try to reach out to the artist or their lawyers, or to a local human rights organization that monitors trials and deals with the freedom of expression. We always try to add these primary sources whenever possible since it is easy to contextualize the case incorrectly if you don’t have them.

You already mentioned some stakeholders and collaborators. Could you tell us more about your regional and local partners and how you work with them?

Trébault: It is easier to find the resources at the international level through global organizations such as Amnesty International or Article 19, but it is much more difficult to identify assistance at the local and regional level. Most of the artists that we have helped out since ARC's inception in 2017 don't want to leave their country where they have their family and audience. Some of them really need a local or regional option because they cannot stay, or otherwise, they would be arrested or tortured. When we get those requests, we want the artists to be able to remain in place and continue their work. By having the artist move out from their country, we deprive their community of their voice. While relocation programs are extremely important for the direst cases, the majority of the artists we work with need assistance locally and regionally. That is why we have been working to further develop our work in Asia, Africa, and Latin America through our regional representatives. The ARC regional representatives are located within their respective regions and are better equipped to find and reach out to local and regional organizations and provide context-specific guidance for ARC's work and for artists. They also oversee our regional core networks, including *Amani* (ARC 2021b) in Africa and *PAR – (Protección de Artistas en Riesgo) – América Latina y el Caribe* (ARC 2021c), two regional coalitions of organizations that work together to protect and defend artists. Additionally, ARC's regional representatives spearhead regional initiatives such as our podcasts *iEl Arte no Calla!* (ARC 2021d) and *Creating Artistic Resilience: Voices of Asia* (ARC 2021e), as well as our reports, *Arresting Art: Repression, Censorship, and Artistic Freedom in Asia* (ARC 2021f) and *Art under Pressure: Decree 349 Restricts Creative Freedom in Cuba* (ARC/CUBALEX 2019).

Lazović: We also take different actions – first, we have small capacities for direct financial assistance to artists in case of emergencies, like if they were attacked and need medical treatment or money for legal assistance. We are also connected with organizations that offer urgent relocation. But there are also other cases, for example, we had a case last year in Kano State in Northern Nigeria of a musician that was sentenced to death by hanging because of a song he shared on WhatsApp, which was deemed by the authorities as blasphemous and insulting of the prophet Muhammad. When we found out that he was sentenced without access to any legal defense, we were working with various partners in Nigeria and abroad, including representatives of different UN bodies to make sure that he is provided with legal counseling. In January this year,

the appeals court ruled that he did not receive proper legal treatment and decided on a retrial, but it is yet to be seen what the outcome of the second trial would be, having in mind very challenging local context.

It is definitely hard these days to keep track of all the crises world-wide, some of them do not even make it to the news anymore. From a geopolitical perspective, can you say something about what regions today are more problematic for artists? What is the specific focus of your work at the moment?

Lazović: Artistic expression does not exist in a vacuum. It is really highly impacted by the state of human rights, political freedoms, and the rule of law in one country. So you won't be at all surprised if I tell you that the countries where we documented the highest number of violations, regardless of our capacities (which in some areas are pretty limited) are Russia, China, India, Turkey, Egypt, Cuba, Nigeria, Uganda. The details about the problems with these particular countries would be the issues that we are already familiar with: For example, in Russia, you cannot oppose Putin, in Turkey, you cannot oppose president Erdogan, but also cannot express yourself in the Kurdish language. If you support the Kurdish cause, you are perceived as supporting terrorism. Artistic freedom is really a mirror of other issues that the country faces. Regarding the more recent development, Cuba is really 'burning' now, especially after the protests that started on July 11, 2021. We saw dozens of artists that were arrested there because of their participation in the protests. They have something that is called a 'summary trial' in which a person is arrested, prosecuted, and put in jail within one day or so, and we had a couple of artists who were charged this way. Belarus is also a current 'hotspot' in this regard. After the post-elections protests that started in August 2020, many artists that took part in the protests were arrested. Some of them are still facing legal prosecution for their participation in the protests last year. We are currently working on a campaign for eleven music band members that were arrested two weeks ago because they led and performed in one of the marches last year.

Trébault: ARC mainly operates with an international and regional focus. As mentioned earlier, we have three different regional representatives for Asia, Latin America, and Africa who maintain relationships with organizations and artists in those regions and we also have a US Network consisting of US-based partners who address censorship and other issues

facing artists on a domestic level. When crises arise in different parts of the world, whether in Myanmar, Afghanistan, Belarus, or elsewhere, we are able to leverage our network to try and address the needs of artists and cultural rights defenders in the midst of those challenges.

How do these simmering and open conflicts affect professionals in the arts sector?

Trébault: The situation in the Middle East is very difficult as we are dealing with many countries which are at war. The situation in Egypt and Turkey, where authoritarian governments are systematically attacking artists, is extremely bad, followed by China and other Asian countries, as Jasmina described. The main political crisis that has been occupying our minds and those of many others is the situation in Afghanistan. The Taliban's rule will, of course, primarily impact women from any kind of discipline, but especially journalists, artists, and writers who have spoken out against the regime in the past. The music and media sector has been particularly affected by the Taliban's ban on the public playing of music which has left multiple music schools under threat, particularly the *Afghanistan National Institute of Music* whose staff and students have been forced to close the school and now fear for their lives. This crisis is incredibly far reaching and we have received hundreds of requests for aid from artists and writers in the country, so one of our main focuses of late has been seeing how we can help place all of these individuals and their families. Another important one has been the recent political situation and anti-government protests in Cuba. Many artists, writers, and activists have been arrested for participating in these protests or for creating work critical of the government in its handling of the country's economy and COVID response. Although some artists like rapper El Radikal have been released (he was released August 20, 2021), many others still remain in jail and ARC has been focusing a lot of efforts there to demand the Cuban government's release of those prisoners. Since 2020, we have seen Belarus, Myanmar, Cuba, and the current Afghanistan crisis. It is very challenging for us to operate in this atmosphere of crisis. For example, in the past two weeks, we have worked on 160 cases of Afghan artists we tried to put on a plane because they wanted to leave. These major political upheavals have led to an urgent need for solidarity and safe spaces where artists can share their stories and advocate on behalf of the social justice movements in their communities and countries.

Lazović: Yes, one of the trends that we constantly see over the years is the backsliding of democracies. Some societies that achieved some level of democracy are now backsliding and turning into more autocratic societies as Julie said, it even intensified with the pandemic. We see governments use additional mechanisms to shrink the civil society space and limit access to fundamental freedoms. These governments that are returning to an authoritarian style of governing usually are those who also target LGBTQAI+ and other minority groups like we see in China with the Uigurs or like in Turkey with the Kurdish population.

Art making is one of the most fundamental and oldest human activities. When we think of it, it doesn't spring to mind as something that can easily put someone at risk of harm. What kind of groups of artists are particularly under pressure and why?

Trébault: As Jasmina said, LGBTQAI+ communities, women, and refugee immigrant artists are the main targets, as well as artists with a disability or artists from a linguistic minority. It also depends on where you are looking regionally, some countries of course have much more restrictive laws on free expression than others, but we see that artists who are both creating work that is political or controversial and hold marginalized identities (e.g., LGBTQAI+, religious, ethnic) are the most at risk. Artists who speak out against the authorities, especially in times of instability, such as the situation in Cuba, are also going to face increased risk. We also see this in the United States, where artists of color, especially Black artists, are more likely to be censored, have their work removed or destroyed, etc. But I also want to stress that there are many undocumented cases and while many artists defy these threats and continue their work, others engage in self-censorship or live in constant fear and trauma.

Lazović: How do artists become artists at risk? Primarily, if you challenge official elites in your country or the governments. This is one of the key problems. Just recently, a couple of artists were killed in Myanmar because of their participation in an anti-coup protest, and so many others were persecuted in other countries for challenging official narratives. But it even happens in countries where you wouldn't expect to see this censorship. Last year, we had an example from France where an Italian visual artist, Paolo Cirio was teaching in a small town and had an exhibition as part of his project of a one-year residency in France.

This project challenged the usage of facial recognition apps by the police. He planned an exhibition where he put photos of police officers that were taken during demonstrations, and he invited people to use facial recognition apps on them. He didn't know that the town where he worked was the birthplace of the current minister of interior of France, at the same time that his project is actually challenging his ministry. Eventually, the minister found out about that, and under his request, the exhibition was removed. I mean, even in France and other countries that are aware of all the standards related to freedom of expression, such things can happen. Other than challenging authority, challenging religious and moral norms are also risk factors for artistic freedom, and if there is intersectionality with your gender identity or sexual orientation, it makes you even more vulnerable.

Trébault: I feel that we have seen so many political crises in the past two years. Afghanistan is the latest one that I have in mind. The Taliban rule will, of course, primarily impact women in any kind of discipline, but also journalists, artists, and writers who have spoken out against the regime in the past. We know that the Taliban have a watch list. The music, media, and visual arts sector has been particularly affected by the Taliban ban on playing music, which we see also in Iran as a consequence for women.

Lazović: In countries like Iran, as Julie mentioned, women are not allowed to perform solo in front of a mixed-gender audience, and they're not even allowed to promote their art. But even more widely, we see that women's artworks that deal with themes of domestic violence, the right to abortion, reproductive rights, and other feminism-related issues are under enormous attacks and usually on the grounds of defending religious views and social norms.

We know that art can also be regarded as something of low importance, as some leisure activity that at best can be a form of entertainment. Also, in the last year and a half during the pandemic, there were voices saying that art has lost most of its relevance. If so, why, in your opinion, do illiberal regimes specifically target art? Is art powerful and influential for society after all?

Trébault: Most of the time, artists are not attacked because of a specific work of art. They are attacked because of who they are and what they

are representing in society. Sometimes it would be because they are touching on a contested issue, such as LGBTQAI+ rights. But some of them are reprimanded just because they are pushing boundaries. Attacks on artistic freedom are an indicator of the level of freedom in a society in general. As such, threats not only rob artists of the opportunity for creative expression but also impoverish democratic discourse by excluding challenging ideas and perspectives and depriving the public of creative contributions. The need for support for threatened artists has only increased in recent years – and even more rapidly in the wake of the pandemic.

Lazović: Yes, unless it has to do with nudity, fine art is never targeted by the authorities. Art for entertainment or ‘pure art’ – that’s not a problem. The problem is with the power of art to engage people in action, and we in Freemuse consider art as something that has the potential to move people and engage them to do things. I always like to say, have you ever been to any protest when there was no music, or no artists participating in some way? Or where the people didn’t express themselves aesthetically in the way they created the posters or the messages they were presenting? So, it is often this combination of art and activism that is shaping our lives or public opinion, and that is actually what is under attack out of the fear that art can engage people to do something challenging.

Some actions to restrict artists are more subtle, like the political instrumentalization of funding, others are more direct and brutal. From your observations, what are the policy measures that are taken to control or limit art by political actors?

Trébault: These really vary regionally and in particular depending on the given political context. In extreme cases, we do see a lot of intense censorship such as office raids, arrests, and physical injury. Unfortunately, this is what we are seeing currently in Afghanistan, with artists being killed or otherwise harmed or have gone into hiding. Some arts organizations have closed down (such as the *Afghan Institute of Music*) and others fear the same fate awaits them. Self-censorship has devastating effects on artistic creation in many countries. Most Chinese artists can’t create what they want because they will face immediate retaliation. In other cases, we do see more subtle impacts such as cutting funding or censoring certain projects, but the more extreme cases are the most concerning, of course. Cuba is probably also a good example,

given its history of increasing crackdowns on artistic freedom. There was an escalation in repression and censorship on the island following Decree 349, as well as retaliation against artists. Then there were the *27N Movement* protests, which started out with a call for conversation with the government and escalated when that was not granted. This led to the 11J Movement protests. Since then, the Cuban government have continued to harass, imprison artists, and press the prominent artist-activists to leave the country. Governmental censorship is not only used by the authoritarian regime and illiberal democracies. Quite the contrary, there is a lot of censorship in democracy, especially on social media. We have seen a number of artists whose Instagram account had been shut down (ARC 2021g). Young artists today, and even the older generations, are all on Instagram. If you shut down their page, you shut down their life and their way to make a living. The recent political crises, including those in Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, and Myanmar, have turned artists into political activists and protest leaders who are developing new forms of resistance, developing powerful new ways of resisting, mobilizing, and educating.

Lazović: Freedom of artistic expression has so many layers. At this stage and with our given capacities, we can focus on what we call direct violations of artistic freedom like censorship, prosecution, abduction, etc. We are also aware of other parallel issues that we monitor like the development of legislation, because that is a topic where we believe that there can be a considerable influence of NGOs on bodies such as the Council of Europe or the UN. Selective funding is another indirect form of control. For example, the *Serbian Film Center*, which is responsible for funding films, behaves as a very political body. Projects submitted by artists who are known as supporters of the political opposition to the government have a very slim chance of getting financial support. In Hungary, which is an EU member state, the government financially supports projects relevant for preserving national cultural heritage and artists who show support for the current regime. In Brazil there are very explicit criteria for getting financial support from the government, and last year it was decided that LGBTQAI+-related film projects will not be supported. In those cases, the government sees an opportunity for shaping public opinion through art with the use of finance. It is not direct censorship, but it is an even more powerful tool because you suppress potential topics and put artists in a position that they either choose to keep their job and have money or give up their artistic intentions. This

pushes them to rely more on international funding or crowdfunding. Still, we recently documented that the crowdsourcing platform *Fongogo* in Turkey rejected a documentary film project featuring Kurdish issues claiming that they cannot support this politically sensitive topic.

You already mentioned that legal regulations from other areas such as digital rights can strongly affect art production and dissemination. With the pandemic, we have seen that arts and communication in general has moved into the digital space. How has this affected the freedom of expression in art?

Trébault: The pandemic has accentuated the digital divide. A lot of artists and organizations in underserved regions lack good internet access and bandwidth. This has a direct impact on them and on their ability to do their work. We have also seen an increase in digital censorship, internet shutdowns, and repression online, like in Venezuela, Egypt, Myanmar, Cuba, and Hong Kong. As art continues to move and evolve, many artists will continue to depend on online platforms and spaces and navigate different government desires to increase control over a digital expression right now. Before the pandemic, most of the threats to artists were happening on the Web. There was already a real problem with online spaces and their use to attack and intimidate artists. Online harassment exploded over the past three years.

Certainly, the pandemic has had a strong impact on artists and audiences everywhere. In what way has it affected artists at risk in particular?

Trébault: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, artists have faced heightened risks as authoritarian regimes expand their emergency powers and crack down on dissident voices, often criminalizing artists under the guise of ‘spreading disinformation’. Artists who speak out about government failures in handling the spread of the virus have repeatedly found themselves under attack. Likewise, artists who have experienced risk already struggle with the impacts of trauma and PTSD, mental health realities which are compounded by uncertainties related to the pandemic. Additionally, cultural mobility and the sharing of artwork in public spaces is crucial to supporting artists at risk in gaining visibility and solidarity, but the restrictions resulting from the pandemic have radically impeded the working conditions of artists, allowing greater

room for crackdowns, censorship, and repression. Indeed, many artists now struggle to have access to regular equipment critical to their work, such as musicians unable to record, while also being forced more than ever to move their work online, posing difficulties related to internet access, online surveillance, and the inability to make a usual income from online platforms. Beyond adding pressures to artists who are already often suffering multiple pressures and threats related to their work, the COVID-19 pandemic also poses ever greater difficulties for protecting artists at risk and connecting them to support. Artists who have been detained or jailed in relation to their work are finding court dates delayed indefinitely and are struggling to gain access to counsel, as authorities limit interactions based on ‘emergency’ needs. Similarly, one of the most common forms of support requested is temporary relocation. Because of border closures, artists are finding themselves either unable to flee to safety, or stuck in limbo in third countries, unable to return home, and sometimes in situations where long-term resources are running out. One of the new challenges is the access to vaccination. A lot of artists who can now travel are still not permitted to because they are not vaccinated or they have been vaccinated with a vaccine not recognized by the host country.

Can we identify limitations of artistic freedom even in countries that are considered liberal democracies? There is, for example, the case of Pablo Hasél, a Spanish rapper who has been convicted and jailed for ‘exalting terrorism in his lyrics’ and ‘insulting the crown and police’ (LLORET/PURCELL 2021).

Lazović: People are always surprised when they hear that at least 14 rap musicians in Spain were prosecuted over the past few years for terrorism and insulting the crown. When Freemuse broke down the numbers of cases that we documented in Europe, Spain came first because of these cases. These rappers were not actually put in prison, but if they commit any further misconduct, they are at risk of being incarcerated. We got massive dissatisfaction with Freemuse’s work in Spain coming from supporters of the government in Madrid, saying it is impossible that Spain comes out in the report like it is worse than Iran or China, but very few asked why Spain arbitrarily uses national legislation to punish opposing musicians’ voices.

This brings up the question: How is your work received by both policy makers?

Lazović: As an international NGO, we need to work with governments and decision-makers if we want some change to happen. Despite positive examples of cooperation, sometimes there is not that much we can do, even when advocating for a particular artist. Like now, we are preparing a campaign for these eleven Belarussian artists who were arrested in mid-August. We plan to run a campaign to raise awareness about their arrest and engage people to share the news about it. We can invite people to write letters to the government and have letters coming from various sites to bring that issue on their radar. We can draft the letter to the authorities reminding them that they are supposed to uphold their international responsibilities that arise from signing some international conventions. We can reach out to UN bodies who can further work with national authorities aiming to release those artists from prisons. But there is no guarantee of success with these activities. We are aware that at the end of the day, the government makes the decisions, and it is hard to make some of them listen to anyone. It is a bit frustrating but as an NGO, raising awareness and creating solidarity is sometimes the most we can expect to achieve.

From everything you have told us, we get the impression that your work is certainly very challenging. At what kind of achievements can your organization and its partners look back?

Trébault: ARC has assisted more than 300 individual artists and cultural professionals from over 63 countries by connecting them to a wide range of services, most frequently including emergency funds, legal assistance, temporary relocation programs and fellowships. Thanks to our network of partner organizations, over 50% of them have already received direct support.

Equipping artists and organizations with the knowledge of how to prepare for and react to situations of risk, as well as the range of resources available to support threatened artists, is a core mission of ARC. That is why we released the *Safety Guide for Artists* (ARC 2021h) in January, a comprehensive, first-of-its-kind tool to help artists navigate, counter, and overcome threats and persecution. This Guide covers topics such as defining and understanding risk, preparing for threats, fortifying digital safety, documenting persecution, finding assistance, and

recovering from trauma. Tips and strategies were drawn from testimony of artists who have faced persecution, including Cuban performance artist Tania Bruguera, Lebanese singer Hamed Sinno, American visual artist Dread Scott, and Kenyan filmmaker Wanuri Kahiu, as well as the research and expertise of ARC's vast network of partners. We have also worked extensively to amplify the work and the stories of artists at risk and organizations working on the ground. The field of artistic freedom has gained greater visibility among the general public thanks to our continued engagement with international bodies such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UN Special Rapporteurs, as well human rights organizations working on free expression and in international protection. With our partner organizations, we have simultaneously worked to influence policy-making at the national level and help artists gain access to and become aware of existing resources.

Lazović: Of course, governments don't like to be criticized, especially not by international NGOs. But we saw some pioneering steps that were taken in recent years. In 2020, the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression published a specialized report on artistic freedom. Freemuse's work was mentioned dozens of times in this report. The UN rapporteur is the key body at the international level and the fact that it decided to dedicate its annual report to that topic was a huge step, and the first time that it was done at such a high level by someone who does not come from cultural circles. Last year, the EU parliament adopted a resolution about the cultural recovery of Europe post-COVID, which called on the EU commission and member states to support and promote freedom of artistic expression. Together with other organizations that submitted reports in this process, we believe that we inspired the European Parliament to publish such a resolution that explicitly mentioned artistic expression for the first time. Of course, there is still a long way to go in these issues. At the national level, as I said, governments are hesitant to work with us, but on a couple of occasions, some countries, even including Cuba, accepted some of the recommendations regarding freedom of artistic expression that appears in the annual UN's Universal Periodic Review for Human Rights that we contributed to.

What kind of future challenges do you fear for the freedom of the arts?

Trébault: Attacks against artists have increased alongside the rise of nationalist, authoritarian, and extremist regimes and conflicts around the world. This rise has led to a disturbing increase in violations of fundamental human rights. I am extremely worried that climate change will further affect artists who are already critically at risk. We have already seen artists being harassed and even arrested in countries like China or Bangladesh after the artists denounced the systemic pollution made by the government.

Lazović: Maybe because I come from Serbia and witnessed the backsliding of democracy quality since the 2000s, I see this challenge of preserving democracy as a central issue. There are quite few countries in Latin America that used to be considered democratic and now turning to semi-authoritarian or countries where the rule of law means nothing. Such governments not only target political opposition, but in order to get a bigger support, they always target those that are the most vulnerable, especially LGBTIQAI+ groups. I remember when we worked on the LGBTIQAI+ report, we found that in the past 10 years, 16 laws that suppress freedom of expression on LGBTIQAI+ issues were adopted in 16 different countries. At the same time that many countries are decriminalizing homosexuality and legalizing same-sex marriage, we see those countries adopting new laws that are often used for populist political purposes.

How should international diplomacy and political frameworks be designed to better protect artists under threat?

Trébault: In terms of international diplomacy, we work very closely with the UN and the special rapporteur. International diplomacy should move towards recognizing artistic freedom as a basic human right. We don't want to push a new framework but to work with the existing frameworks of defense of human rights. By doing so, we will be able to carry out this important work, and artists at risk will be able to be more protected. But seeing for example in Afghanistan, artists and cultural workers are often not featured as being a particularly at-risk group. Another major barrier is how difficult it is for threatened to get a visa for even a temporary relocation or a short-term visit. It would make a major difference if we could truly push the international bodies to create a humanitarian global visa.

Maybe our readers will also ask themselves by now: What can we as individuals and members of arts and cultural organizations do to support artists and arts organizations under threat in terms of more concrete acts of solidarity?

Trébault: "Most of the time, artists come to us because they are in very dangerous situations. We receive many requests for assistance and the many crises that occur in different countries reveal how much we are lacking emergency programs. There is just not enough support. Cultural organizations have the ability to support artists and arts organizations under threat; one way is to become host institutions for artists or scholars who are seeking relocation or residencies either in or outside of their home countries. Another step is to join the ARC network or donate to organizations that are supporting artists at risk. For individuals it is key for them to make it their business to stay informed about the different threats that artists and cultural rights defenders face around the world.

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