

Intro

This is a special edition of the ARJ newsfeed, the final edition of the year 2016/2017. It gives a perspective on how much the landscape of support for artists' rights and artists-at-risk has changed since the initial 'ARJ' initiatives started. This is also an opportunity for Current ARJ members to learn the history (and why the ARJ acronym is a generic description really). It's also an invitation to take part in the evolution of an arts-right-justice archive and library that is slowly taking form (see below). Finally, I hope it gives a slightly complementary picture to what the ARJ EU Working Group is doing — and how important it is that its members continue to do good work, especially by filling in the gap of knowledge of cases in Europe (and beyond).

A Brief History

ICARJ - International Coalition for Arts, Human Rights and Social Justice — was formed in the summer of 2010 at a seminar in Canada organised by freeDimensional. (The abbreviation, 'ARJ' is a title that Todd Lester has been using for various initiatives and websites since he founded freeDimensional in 2005.) The 16 international culture/free expression/human rights NGOs that gathered that summer wrote the ICARJ manifesto stating,

"Influencing public policy can be an important tool to make progress on issues and conditions concerning arts work linked to human rights and social justice issues. Relevant policy areas are much broader than "culture policy", and appropriate political levels range from the local to the international. Much value can be gained by experienced organisations sharing their knowledge and information and working together to identify key events, produce common texts, and create effective lobby campaigns.

*Our focus encompasses arts, creative resistance, social justice and human rights.
Our tools are:*

Sharing resources with others

Being resources for others

Strategising on effective action

Responding to requests for help

Highlighting opportunities for raising awareness and influencing policies."

ICARJ proceeded informally, but in 2011 an opportunity arose that held additional possibilities — following the successful termination of work by the Creativity and Creation Working Group in the Access to Culture Civil Society Dialogue Platform, there was a call for new working group concepts. (The civil society dialogue platforms were initiated by the European Commission's DG for Culture in 2008, and the Access to Culture Platform was coordinated by the European Festivals Association/European House of Cultures from 2008 until 2013. The **ARJ** working group was proposed and adopted by Platform members in 2011. Various activities were envisaged including,

"Mapping exercises for identifying gaps (support for artists mobility/free expression/human rights/ legal support/ decent working conditions, cases of abuse, what to do when threatened with censorship, violence, imprisonment...)

Deepening skills and knowledge base via sharing of best practices, training, publications

Liaising with UNESCO, Council of Europe and others regarding the correct implementation of existing conventions, treaties, legal and social status of artists as well as addressing gaps in the law or its use."

In 2012 an application was made to the European Cultural Foundation to merge the two groups, but it was unsuccessful. As the ARJ then had a specific purpose linked to direct advocacy with the European Commission's culture and other pertinent programmes, it became the main focus and subsequently integrated several of the original ICARJ members such as freeDimensional (hosting an ARJ website), Arterial, Article 19, ICORN, IETM, TransEurope-Halles, Triangle Arts, Latin American Network for Social Transformation and others.

Not many organisations at that time aimed to support, protect and defend artists' rights and artists-at-risk. ICORN (International Cities of Refuge Network) hosted writers and had not yet opened to artist of all disciplines. Freemuse focused on musicians (although interested in other disciplines too). In 2011 Freemuse proposed to resuscitate the Artsfex initiative, a concept and international partnership dating back some ten years prior, to build 'the first international civil society network actively concerned with the right of artists to freedom of expression as well as with issues relating to human rights and freedoms generally. Artsfex was loosely based on IFEX — the global Freedom of Expression exchange network, largely catering for the media and journalism. Artsfex was (re)launched formally in 2012 and included UK's Index on Censorship (a staunch defender of free speech for writers), PEN International, Article 19, the National Coalition Against Censorship, and many others.

A Changed Landscape

So much has changed in the last four years — in 2013 ARJ members successfully organised a presentation of the then-UN Special Rapporteur on Culture Rights, Farida Shaheed's report, 'The Right to Freedom of Artistic Expression and Creativity' to the European Parliament, members of various DG's and interested foundations. 'Artists' were included in the EU's 2014 Human Rights Guidelines of Freedom of Expression as a category of defenders to be protected. On behalf of ARJ and freeDimensional, Mary Ann DeVlieg gave a series of presentations on the abuse of artists' human rights at several annual EU DEVCO-organised NGO and human rights defenders' conferences and became a member of the EU Temporary Shelter Platform. Awareness was certainly raised in the EU + 'third countries' contexts, to a large degree thanks to the EIDHR (European Instrument on Democracy and Human Rights) under the auspices of DEVCO.

In 2014, the ARJ EU Working Group has become an independent group hosted by Culture Action Europe, and after 3 years of internal learning it moved to become a stronger outward oriented initiative dedicated to support the arts and culture sectors' empowerment to understand and protect artists rights.

Interest and support for this work has dropped from some foundations but others have picked it up or carried it on, notably Norway's Fritt Ord and Mimeta foundations who support, among others, ArtWatchAfrica and Freemuse, as well as the Mellon Foundation in the USA and Musagetes Foundation in Canada who are now funding three new initiatives mentioned below — APF, ARC and ArtistsSafety.net @ArtsEverywhere. The Ford Foundation is currently researching and reflecting on a potential programme they might offer.

There is raised awareness in the NGO field of the needs of artists who are in danger due to their work, as well as more socially and politically engaged art. This means that more arts organisations are at least sympathetic to the needs of artists-at-risk but also that more artists risk becoming targets of repression. Freemuse has recently published its annual statistics on violations of artistic freedom showing the sharp year-on-year rise in such crimes with,

“...a total number of 1,028 cases of censorship and attacks on artistic freedom across 78 countries. This number more than doubled the number of cases registered in 2015, rising from 469. Freemuse documented 188 total serious violations – killings, attacks, abductions, imprisonments and threats – and a staggering 840 acts of censorship. ...”

Recent political changes in Europe, Turkey, the USA, Africa — well, in quite a lot of the world — have seen a rise in hate crimes and intolerance, perhaps reaching a media boiling point in the Trump administration's immigration ban in January 2017. Many see the positive sides of these repressive political and social movements in the strong, re-engaged and collaborative resistance of more humanist and democratic groups. An example is the joint statement on the impact to artistic freedom of the US immigration ban issued in February 2017 by a number of key actors such as the NCAC, PEN, ICORN, Freemuse, Arterial, IETM, The Roberto Cimetta Fund and many others.

Some Positive Examples (in alphabetical order)

APF The Artist Protection Fund (APF) is a three-year pilot program at the Institute of International Education (IIE), sponsored by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The APF makes fellowship grants to threatened artists from any field of artistic endeavor, and places them at host institutions, universities and arts centers in countries where they can safely continue their work and plan for their future. As of today, the APF has received over 150 applications and queries from over 45 countries, has held three selection committee meetings, identified over 50 host-institutions and awarded 14 APF Fellowships. Applications and submissions are accepted at any time throughout the year, on a rolling basis.

ARC Launched in 2017, the Artists at Risk Coalition (ARC) is a 33 month pilot program based at PEN America and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Working across the fields of arts and culture, arts freedom, and human rights, ARC is a collaborative network of likeminded organisations who champion the rights of artists facing persecution and censorship. By curating available resources in an online portal, facilitating assistance to threatened artists and the organisations that support them, ARC enshrines the human right to artistic freedom of expression, and ensures individual artists can work and thrive in safety around the world.

ARJ Academy and Conference. The ARJ Academy is an initiative that has been slowly constructed by Todd Lester (freeDimensional and ArtistSafety founder), Daniel Gad, Manager of the University of Hildesheim's UNESCO Chair in Cultural Policy for the Arts in Development, and Mary Ann DeVlieg since 2015, in collaboration with ICORN, EU ProtectDefenders and a host of others. It will see the light of day at the first ARJ Academy and international conference, at the Hildesheim Marienburg campus in August-Sept 2017. The Academy aims to bring together professionals working across the arts, free expression and human rights sectors to exchange experience and knowledge, increase cross-sector networking and support new initiatives to support, protect and defend artists' human rights and free artistic expression. The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed its support in February 2017, thus more information will soon start to appear. Contact artsindevelopment@gmail.com or artsrighsjustice@gmail.com.

ArtistSafety.net Following the successful winding up of the ten-year freeDimensional project, Sidd Joag and Todd Lester have launched a number of follow-up initiatives. Artist-Safety.net is a 'consultancy and volunteer network that provides case management for artists and culture workers at risk due to their work, as well as information services to projects and organisations in the arts, free expression, journalism, and human rights fields'. Sidd and Todd are both editors at [ArtsEverywhere](#), a news and thought-platform of Canada's Musagetes Foundation and together have developed a strand focusing on 'critical roles artists play in society in relation to their mobility, free expression, safety and labor conditions, including articles, discussions, and examples of fieldwork at the intersection of arts, journalism, and human rights derived from ArtistSafety.net, as well as other forms of practice in the FoE, human rights and related fields.

An online, learning cohort on Safe Haven Operating Procedures (or S.H.O.P. Talk) is the first joint offering from ArtistSafety.net and ArtsEverywhere. S.H.O.P. Talk is a free, online training for artists residencies (and other sites with safe haven interests/potential) interested in further developing or starting to host artists at risk. The six monthly videocalls and related study materials will form the basis for a more final version of the course available following the pilot. There are 60 participants from six continents involved in this first pilot, and the resulting co-authored 'curriculum' will be shared on ArtsEverywhere after its completion later this year. More information at info@artistsafety.net.

El Mawred Culture Resource, '[Be with Art](#)' is a programme launched in 2016, following a period of research and reflection as well as a conference, 'Artists Against All Odds' in Beirut in May 2016. Working in collaboration with a range of arts and free speech organisations in the Arab and international levels, it offers a package of services to artists and arts workers, and aims to protect their freedoms, rights and safety.

EU ProtectDefenders is the new address for the former EU Temporary Shelter Platform. Led by 12 Human rights NGOs, like [Freedom House](#) in the USA, they offer emergency grants to human rights defenders (including artists) in danger due to their defence of human rights, free expression and social justice. They also have a newsfeed and regular newsletters.

fD Archive and fD Library, Observatory, Research. In conjunction with the ARJ Academy, Mary Ann DeVlieg, commissioned by the University, is currently helping to build a library of resources thanks to the donation of freeDimensional's ten year archives, as well as active research for pertinent publications, articles, reports and other materials. The University foresees the eventual evolution of an ARJ Observatory as well as post-graduate research opportunities.

Safe Havens conferences in Malmö. Since 2013, the City of Malmö, an ICORN city, has been hosting a conference each year on safe havens for artists. Initially a one-off Swedish Arts Council initiative, it has developed into a 3-year commitment from [2015 to 2017](#). [The conferences](#) bring together artists with direct experience of repression, ICORN cities, artists residencies that host artists-at-risk, arts activists, and artists rights initiatives. It is a closed gathering, due to the sensitive nature of some of the artists who may still be facing danger, but to date it has served the community extremely well, encouraging networking, the development and exchange of knowledge and skills, and generally acting as an annual stock-taking of what is evolving in this field of work. http://artseverywhere.ca/artseverywhere/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Safe-Havens-program_20161105.pdf

Safemuse is an initiative working in close collaboration with Freemuse, to assist musicians-at-risk who have had to flee repression due to their work. They also work hand in hand with ICORN, who may offer ICORN city residencies. You can read a report of one of their guest artists, the Egyptian singer/songwriter, Ramy Essam. Safemuse is an excellent example of a broker or host that takes very seriously the artist's need to continue working, build a professional career and of course earn money!