

Activities – Humanistic Entities

Action Committee for Artist Rights ACAR

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Members

As from the 35th ITI World Congress, Segovia (Spain), July 2017: Ann Mari Engel (Sweden), Spokesperson; Thomas Irmer, Thomas Engel (Germany), Coordinators. Contact persons at ITI Centres in: Bangladesh, Finland, Israel, Slovenia, South Korea, Sweden, Uganda, USA. Contact person at the Network of Emerging Arts Professionals of the ITI: Taiwo Afolabi, Canada

Activities 2017

In October, ACAR joined the Artists at Risk Connection, a pilot program of PEN America, an online platform of over 500 international resources - organisations, networks, artist residencies, funds, and programs - that can be mobilised on behalf of artists at risk.

In 2017, in addition to general information about censorship cases and state abuses, ACAR reported in 34 news stories on violations of the rights of the following artists in particular: Chen Yunfei (Chengdu, China), Kirill Serebrennikov (director, Russia), Osman Kavala (cultural mediator, Turkey). Thomas Irmer represented ACAR at the Save Havens Conference in Malmö in December, and in July, Thomas Engel co-presented with Ann Mari Engel at the 35th World Congress in Segovia, Spain, in a seminar entitled „Partners and Strategies for Artists Rights.“ ACAR brought two unanimously adopted resolutions to the General Assembly of the 35th ITI World Congress. The first supported calls for UNESCO to improve UN mechanisms for registering human rights violations and to develop protection mechanisms for politically persecuted artists. The second resolution condemned

the exclusion of Einat Weizmann's „Prisoners of the Occupation“ from the 2017 AKKO Festival by the local municipality. The ITI declared its solidarity with the festival management, which resigned because of this, and with the Israeli theatre artists protesting against it nationwide.

Activities 2018

In January, the conference of the Dramaturgische Gesellschaft on „Dramaturgies of Resistance“ took place at the Theatre Vorpommern in Greifswald, in the framework of which the ITI Germany / ACAR organised a panel on „Fundamentals of Artistic Freedom“. Srirak Pliapat from Freemuse spoke about aspects of the international juridification of artistic freedom, Gemma Pörzgen (Reporters without Borders) presented the international initiatives to protect journalists from censorship and political repression, and Urban Beckmann (Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, Germany) spoke about the new „Martin Roth Initiative“ of the German Foreign Office to protect threatened artists. Thomas Irmer covered the event at the German monthly theatre journal Theatre der Zeit (3/2018).

In October in Maribor (Slovenia), within the Slovenian theatre festival Borstnikovo, a panel on „Artistic Freedom and its Limits“ organised by ITI Slovenia with ACAR took place. Darko Lukić, Zagreb, referred in his keynote speech to the connection between the spirit of the Nazi exhibition „Degenerate Art“ and the partly state-directed attacks on artists* in Eastern European

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countries in recent years. Srirak Plipat (Denmark) presented the monitoring work of Freemuse and the tendencies observed, Tomasz Kireńczuk reported in a video contribution on the political pressure on the festival Dialog in Wrocław, which he directs, and Thomas Irmer presented the current case of the BDS movement during the Ruhrtriennale and how politics deal with this new phenomenon in the context of international theatre in Germany.

In November, a public discussion on the topic of „Problems of Contemporary Russian Theatre“ took place at the end of the festival „Current Russian Theatre“ at the Deutsches Theatre Berlin. Besides Russian theatre artists and the host artistic director Ulrich Khuon, Thomas Irmer spoke as a representative of the ITI/ACAR, among others, on the perception of the Kirill Serebrennikov case in Germany and how it influences the German reception of contemporary theatre in Russia or touches on the question of artistic freedom in the different perceptions in both countries. ACAR compiled three newsletters in 2018 with the messages of the last months and sent them to all ITI Centres and ACAR members. 27 notifications were documented, including 4 personal cases: Kirill Serebrennikov (Russia), Mohammad Abu Sakha (Israel/Palestine), Osman Kavala (Turkey), Baris Atay (Turkey). On average, the ACAR page recorded 120 views per day.

Activities 2019

ACAR sent out 3 newsletters to all ITI Centres and ACAR members. In parallel, there was an increasing switch to the automatic email dispatch of current notifications upon publication, which can be subscribed to individually. 26 notifications were documented in 2019, including 4 personal cases: Kirill Serebrennikov and Yulia Tsvetkova (Russia), Ezz Darwish (Egypt), and Mahmut Canbay (D).

In May, ACAR organised a discussion event at the Swedish Biennale for the Performing Arts on „Silencing the Others,“ which focused on censorship and self-

ensorship in Europe. Examples were used to discuss the growing tendencies of cancelling performances due to feared audience reactions and the need for censorship seemingly coming from the democratic middle of the audience. Guests were Thomas Engel, ITI Germany, Hungarian theatre critic and lecturer Tamás Jászay, and Srirak Plipat, Freemuse/Denmark. ACAR supported and initiated petitions and open letters on the demolition of the Albanian National Theatre, against the Hungarian government’s action against free theatres, against cuts in the cultural budget in Belgium, among others.

Activities 2020

ACAR posted 31 news items online, including 6 new or updated personal cases: Kirill Serebrennikov and Yulia Tsvetkova (Russia), 5 artists: Inside the Civic Lab Network (Sudan) Duaa Tarig Mohamed Ahmed, Abdel Rahman Mohamed Hamdan, Ayman Khalaf Allah Mohamed Ahmed, Ahmed Elsadig Ahmed Hammad, Hajooj Mohamed Haj Omar (aka Hajooj Kuka), Hella Mewis (Germany), Kirvan Fortuin (South Africa), Osman Kavala (Turkey), and visa denial to Austria for a group from the Algerian ITI Centre (Okbaoui Cheikh, Bezia Cheddad, Smaani Arazki, Fellag Malek, Kerdous Jedjiga, Boutchiche Hamadache, Kessir Sofiane, Slimani Samia, Belayel Rayel, Sahnoune Kamel).

In December, ACAR presented its work at the ITI General Conference, which was streamed worldwide. Members of ACAR called in personal video messages to all members of the ITI to stand up for the rights of their colleagues, to be aware of violations of artistic freedom and attacks against artists, especially under the condition of the pandemic, and to strengthen the ACAR network with tips and initiatives. The presentation is stored in the “about” section on the ACAR website.

Activities 2021

In light of the rapidly growing repression in Myanmar, an online meeting with theatre makers from Myanmar

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and neighbouring Thailand was held in early April, facilitated by Raksak Konseng of US-ITI, to report on the situation of artists and government restrictions on the performing arts. In May, ACAR issued a statement in solidarity with Israeli artists who opposed the outbreaks of racist violence in various Israeli cities. Following the Taliban takeover of power in Afghanistan, one of the first prominent Taliban victims was comedian Nazar Mohammad (Kasha Zwan), who was kidnapped and murdered in Kandahar in July. In August, ACAR provided an initial overview of the few existing support initiatives and called for immediate action to protect theatre artists under threat in Afghanistan, particularly women and members of ethnic or religious minorities.

ACAR posted 18 messages online and went public with statements and letters on behalf of the ITI. These included the protest against the closure of the theatre department of the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, the support of ASSITEJ South Africa in demand for clarification of non-transparent use of national COVID-19 support funds, the declaration of solidarity with the Embros Theatre in Athens in the face of increasing displacement of independent theatre initiatives from the public space.

Activities 2022 (until May)

On Feb. 26, a few days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, ACAR released a statement from 19 European centres declaring solidarity with their Ukrainian colleagues and condemning the invasion of Russian troops. The statement was also supported by the informal network TDA (The Day After), with intellectuals from 11 countries worldwide.

ACAR published 24 posts, many of them connected to the war in Ukraine and new support schemes for Ukrainian theatre artists. ACAR also reported about the growing political pressure against theatre artists in Russia, amongst them Kiryll Serebrennikow, Alexandra (Shasha) Skochilenko, and Yulia Tsvetkova. 2 other personal cases of political pressure have been

reported from Poland (Krzysztof Głuchowski, artistic director of Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Kraków,) and Ukraine (Oleksandr Knyha who was detained by Russian authorities in Kherson).

Website
artistsrights.iti-germany.de

Report Submitted by Thomas Engel, Coordinator of ACAR.