

IFACCA 4th World Summit on Arts and Culture

Meeting of Cultures: Creating Meaning through the Arts

Johannesburg (South Africa), 22-25 September 2009

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PLENARY: Panel 2

Intercultural Dialogue Through the Arts: Models of Good Practice

Chair: Andreas Wiesand, Executive Director, ERICarts Institute (Germany)

Good morning dear participants in this important gathering, good morning colleagues! Let me add already now: good morning friends!

Actually, I need a lot of good friends here, since it was quite courageous of the organisers to offer the chair of this session to someone whose native language is not English! Only good friends will forgive the errors I'm bound to make...

Most of you probably came to this session to see my pre-announced colleague Danielle Cliche, with whom I just undertook the worldwide survey on *Intercultural Dialogue In and Through the Arts* – some of you may have already found it among the Conference material or on the IFACCA website¹. However, as much as I tried to look a bit like her, even considering consulting a beauty surgeon, I simply could not make it in time! It will be a consolation for those of you who are engaged in the field of promoting or safeguarding cultural diversity, that Danielle will continue to work for exactly this goal and chances are, that some of you may meet her doing that in the years to come.

First, let me introduce the members of our Panel. They will shortly tell us what they are normally up to and what has brought them here today. In the order of appearance:

- Frank Panucci, Australia Council, Community Partnerships, Sydney (Australia);
- Yvette Vaughan Jones, Visiting Arts, London (UK);
- Joy Mboya, Godown Arts Centre, Nairobi (Kenya); and
- T. Sasitharan, Theatre Training and Research Programme, Singapore.

A word to my own background: I direct the *European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research* (or in short: the ERICarts Institute). It is guided by an international Board of Governors and currently based in Germany. This is a non-commercial, independent provider of empirical information and analysis to policymakers and other cultural actors in Europe, in international bodies as well as in national governments and NGOs. Our topics include the status of artists, cultural financing, intercultural cooperation or cultural dimensions of diverse policy sectors such as employment; media; education. In our comparative research, we rely on a network of experienced institutes, researchers and other specialists in nearly 50 countries, both in- and outside of Europe. We try to guard our scientific independence and our commitment to principles such as diversity, transparency or equality.

I live in Cologne, one of the largest and culturally most diverse cities in Germany and the metropolis of the State of NorthRhine-Westphalia. While the richness of this city in

¹ <http://media.ifacca.org/files/ICDpaperAug09.pdf>

e.g. ethnic, linguistic or religious terms also results in diversified interests and audiences, some of Cologne's arts institutions do not yet recognise this potential, as is the case in many other European cities: their "cultural canon" can still be characterised as being traditionally West-European.

This in mind, Cologne-based artists and intellectuals from Germany and many different corners of the world recently proposed the creation of a new type of institution: an "Academy of World Arts" where the majority of members should come from outside of Europe. It is to become the bridgehead for an open-minded understanding of artistic quality and also for a new concept of cultural policy making in that city and beyond. The aim of the new Academy, which has found the support of the city government, is to complement cultural life in Cologne and, particularly, enrich the programmes of existing arts facilities by confronting them with current artistic concepts and innovations from other parts of the world. To this effect, the new Academy of World Arts also plans a scholarship programme for artists from outside of Europe and from outside of the mainstream, who will be given the chance to present in or cooperate with different Cologne arts institutions.

While the new Academy is still in a planning stage – so there may actually be a chance for some of you to contribute to its development – a few of the Cologne public arts facilities did already start to reconsider their artistic programming and added more intercultural flavour to it. As an example, I can mention the Cologne Philharmonic Hall, whose current programme includes such highlights as YoYo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble; Mohammad Reza Shajarian and the Shahnaz Ensemble from Iran; combining works of Georgian composers Kancheli and Zinzadse with those of Mozart and Haydn; works of Iraqui composer Kayhan Kalhor or a Chinese New Year's Concert for the start of the "Year of the Tiger".

I started with the Cologne examples, because they can possibly animate our debate on the (potential) relationship between the arts and intercultural dialogue...

On the other hand, our debate should not exclude discussing questions or critical stances, such as those taken by World Summit Programme Director Mike van Graan in his pre-conference blog on 16 September 2009. I quote:

More frequently than now-and-then, along come new buzz phrases in international cultural discourse that require not a little unpacking. Just recently, there's been "cultural diversity" and "culture as vectors of development". Now, there's "intercultural dialogue"...

Now, it's hardly likely that migrant and marginalised communities wake up in the morning and decide that "today, I'm going to have a multicultural experience, and seek to have a relationship with someone from the dominant culture". It is almost always those from within hegemonic cultural paradigms that initiate cultural exchange, cultural diversity programmes, intercultural dialogue. Which begs the further question: whose interests do these serve? Who provides the resources for such programmes and what are the power relations within such intercultural dialogue?...

In the 'developing world', while we are trying to make sense of these buzz phrases (beyond their strategic value as conduits to the resources of the 'developed world') and what they mean for us (cultural diversity was the swear word of the divide-and-rule colonialists, and now we are asked to embrace it), the next buzz phrase is upon us, demanding our support and engagement.

I take such critical remarks serious and even admit that I first had, and partly still have, my doubts about this and many other common buzz words myself. Currently, my most loathed catch phrase is "creative industries", despite – or rather: because – of

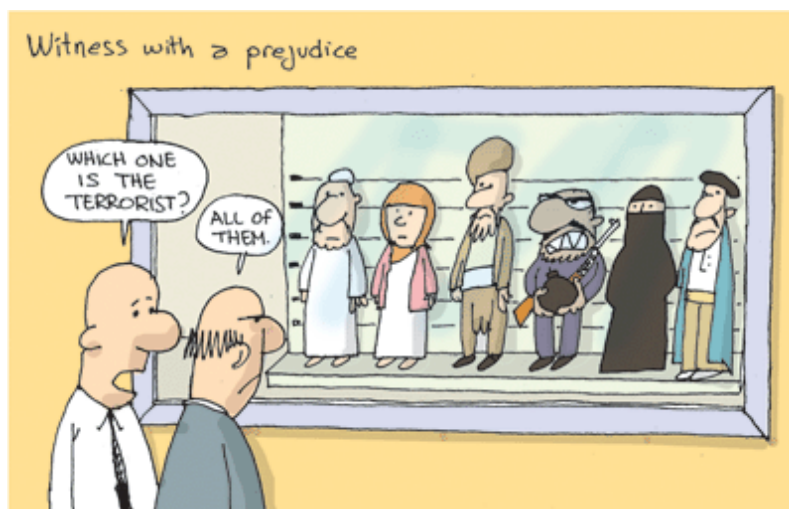
the fact that I was responsible for a number of "Cultural Industries Reports" in my country. On the other hand, I do hope that we will have a "creative" debate today...

In our report to IFACCA, as in the previous study "Sharing Diversity" for the European Union², we did not spare out the fact that some critics see the concept of intercultural dialogue as being "in itself contentious" and one that may "place artificial boundaries around cultures and their 'representatives'".

However, such criticism is valid only if we suppose that individuals should indeed act as "ambassadors" for a whole culture. What may be tolerable in a diplomatic context, does it really make sense when we consider a myriad of day to day transnational relations between individuals, groups or institutions? In a preparatory debate for the new intercultural academy in Cologne, I recently met with Raj Isar, formerly at UNESCO. He pointed out that individuals may "assume different identities at different times" and sometimes we even have to host within us "contradictory identities, pulling in different directions", as he put it.

What may be an ambiguous situation for the average citizen could turn into an asset for those we are focusing on in this conference: the artists. I don't think I'm exaggerating if I say that in today's world their emotional, intellectual and synthetic capacities, commonly labeled "creativity", highly depend on the outcome of dialogues taking place within their minds. No doubt, these are often based on old or fresh encounters with other persons and ideas. This *Yin and Yang*, thesis and anti-thesis reflections, the give and take relations and their artistic results, will bear cultural traces, reflecting one's own cultural background as well as many other influences and world views. Most artists I know would deny that this has anything to do with being the "representative" of a specific culture – if that can still be a valid idea today.

In my view, intercultural dialogue could mean to, first of all, better understand the "diversity of cultural expressions", to create awareness about existing ambiguities or imbalances, and then to take the right steps to overcome them. No small task, I can assure you, since we still live in a world where the looks count more than the brains:

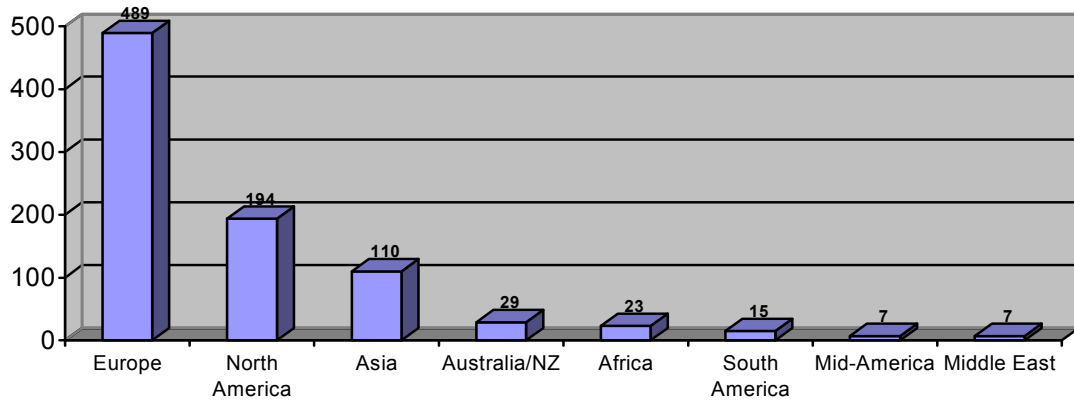


Cartoon by Saleh Memecan - from an exhibition at the Conference "Muslim Integration in the West", ASMA Society & Cordoba Initiative, Copenhagen 2006

² See <http://www.interculturaldialogue.eu>

From a cultural policy viewpoint, the strong "Western bias" shown in the following graph on the distribution of artists' residencies³ – is just one example for areas where action can and should be taken.

Global provision of artists' residencies



This afternoon, in the Roundtable No. 8, the results and possible consequences of our survey for IFACCA will be discussed in greater detail. And let me remind you: the present 'green paper' is just a draft. We really appreciate your critical review and possible fresh ideas; whatever comes to our attention, during the next two or three weeks, will be incorporated into the final version of the IFACCA D'Art report on *Intercultural Dialogue In and Through the Arts*.

On behalf of the whole community of practice of the ERICarts Institute, I want to thank you for your eventual feedback – and for your attention today!

³ Source: Analysis of the Database of the *Trans Artists' Network*, taken from a new study of the ERICarts Institute for the EU Commission: "Mobility Matters", 2008