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# Repression, Censorship, and Artistic Freedom in Asia



A new report has been published in June 2021 by Artists at Risk Connection - 'Arresting Art: Repression, Censorship and Artistic Freedom in Asia'. The report draws on findings from a workshop held in December 2020 exploring with practitioners how censorship, free expression and state action impact artistic freedom in Asia. The study makes recommendations and calls for solidarity and a safer, more equitable environment for artists both in Asia and around the globe, free of censorship and harassment.

The climate for artists across South, Southeast and East Asia is increasingly hostile, with the global COVID-19 pandemic continuing to pose a serious threat to artistic freedom and the specter of censorship jeopardizing artists' ability to work and speak out. In a new publication called *Arresting Art: Repression, Censorship, and Artistic Freedom in Asia* from PEN America's Artists at Risk Connection (ARC)—produced in partnership with the [Mekong Cultural Hub \(MCH\)](#) and the [Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development \(FORUM-ASIA\)](#)—artists across the Asian continent expressed serious fears, especially around digital security laws and nationalistic tendencies that threaten to impose a culture of conformity across one of the most vibrant, diverse regions for the arts in the world. *Arresting Art* presents the discussion and findings from a closed virtual workshop convened in December 2020.

ARC, MCH, and FORUM-ASIA hosted a workshop in December 2020 to better understand the growing threats to artistic freedom in the region. With 30 participants and five facilitators from 17 countries across South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia, the workshop explored

three key issues central to curbing artistic freedom: censorship, free expression, and state action. The workshop aimed to bridge the arts and human rights sectors and to understand the connections and disconnects between the two.

Key findings from the workshop include:

- Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many artists find themselves without work (whether in the arts or other sectors) and are thus unable to continue creating art.
- The pandemic has also resulted in both an alarming shrinkage of civic spaces for artists whose work engages in human rights issues and an increase in threats to their safety and well-being.
- Digital security laws and regulations are normalizing internet-based censorship and unlawful detention under the guise of protecting national security and sovereignty.
- Community-based censorship and ostracism, often motivated by communal and traditional interests, are fast becoming commonplace, both online and offline, leaving artists vulnerable and trapped in a so-called “culture of conformity.” Most threatened artists are from minority religious, ethnic, and/or gender groups.

In addition, the publication offers the following key recommendations based on discussions among workshop participants:

- Build sustainable and secure networks to connect artists at risk, cultural institutions, and human rights organizations and to facilitate the exchange of important information and resources.
- Refine the assessment methods employed by civil society organizations to make their resources and services more accessible to artists at risk.
- Retool funding methods and channels so that they facilitate, rather than hinder, artists’ work, especially on difficult subjects.
- Build capacity and bolster training in areas such as digital rights, data security, financial security, and physical and mental well-being to make artists more aware of their rights and available resources.
- Step up legal aid and emergency measures to provide artists with immediate and actionable steps that can be implemented swiftly during a time of crisis.

In addition to sharing important insights into the state of artistic freedom in Asia, *Arresting Art* aims to provide a glimpse into the lived experiences of artists and cultural practitioners in the region. ARC, MCH, and FORUM-ASIA are also developing a limited podcast series capturing stories on artistic freedom in Asia that will expand on the key findings highlighted in *Arresting Art* with firsthand accounts from artists describing the stakes, the threats they face, and the communities they have built to protect themselves and their right to create.

Download publication: [Arresting Art](#)

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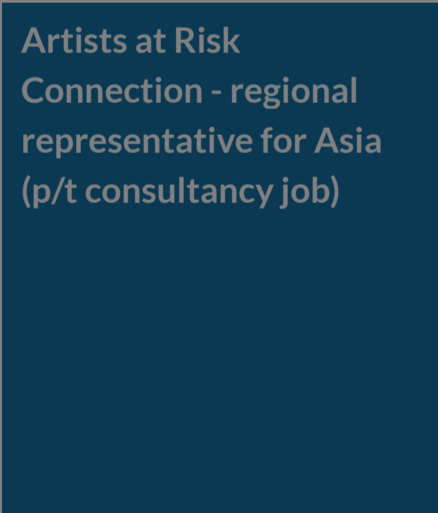
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Arts Rights Justice Academy 2018 - apply now

A poster for the Arts Rights Justice Academy 2018. It features a collage of small portraits of people and the text 'Arts Rights Justice Academy 2018' and 'applications'.

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Artists at Risk Connection - regional representative for Asia (p/t consultancy job)

A solid blue poster with white text that reads 'Artists at Risk Connection - regional representative for Asia (p/t consultancy job)'.

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A poster for the Arts Rights Justice Academy. It features a night photograph of a large, historic building with a green sign that says 'Arts Rights Justice Academy' and the text 'August - 1st September' and 'save the date'.

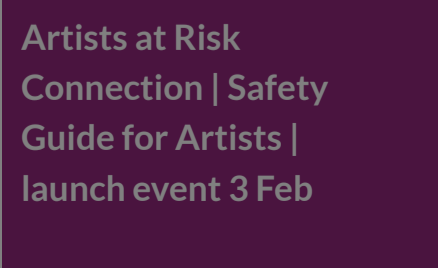
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Harstad, Norway becomes first Safe Music Haven

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Artists at Risk Connection | Safety Guide for Artists | launch event 3 Feb

A solid purple poster with white text that reads 'Artists at Risk Connection | Safety Guide for Artists | launch event 3 Feb'.

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