

AICA presidency program 2024-2026

“After the first general UNESCO Conference, [I] had the idea of bringing together major art critics from all over the world in a conference in order to lay out for them the details of these different projects, to ask them for advice and recommendations, and to group them, when needed, in an international association which would not only be responsible for defending the professional interests of critics and artists, thus becoming a kind of International Syndicate of Art Critics (and perhaps of artists as well), but one which would above all collaborate with UNESCO, as an organization of specialists.” – Mojmír Vaněk

Mojmír Vaněk was a Czechoslovakian art historian, who was responsible for the Fine Arts section of UNESCO's Preparatory Commission, founded in November 1945, as recalled in her article by Antje Kramer-Mallordy.¹ He could not, however, realize his idea, as he was incarcerated for 11 years by the Czechoslovakian regime. It is a fact, however, that the concept of uniting under a common flag came from a person from Eastern Europe, and that's why AICA in our region has always been an important organization.

Since the inauguration of AICA, there has been no “easy moment” for art or art critics in the world. Periods of relative prosperity in some parts of the world coincided with the darkest times in the history of others. In my part of the Planet, we are continually challenged and forced to redefine our positions as art professionals and as human beings. The *raison de être* of our Association is to focus on those areas where we might encounter difficulties and at the same time – to facilitate the exchange of ideas despite them.

AICA has a lot of power in the local sections, but it needs to be reorganized in the spirit of today's changes in the art discourse and practice. Decolonization, decentralization, focus on diversity and inclusivity, sustainability and respect towards local circumstances. These changes have already been started and must be continued. New sections need to be opened or those which stopped being active – revived.

I am also a fervent advocate for the right to freedom of artistic expression, and the transparency of decision-making processes, as well as the inclusivity and professionalism in the administrative bodies, and I aspire to make this topic a top priority.

¹ Antje Kramer-Mallordy, “The Archives of the International Association of Art Critics, a forward-looking history of globalization?”, *Critique d'Art* 45 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.4000/critiquedart.19188>

As a President, I would focus on the values associated with AICA and its main objectives, which are defined in the statute. According to the document, AICA's main aims are:

a) to promote art criticism as a discipline and contribute to its methodology

AICA accomplishes this mission by directing its activities both inward – to its members (Open Call for Projects) – and outward – to the public (webinars, symposia, the Young Critics Award, the e-magazine, the African UNESCO project, the Archive in Rennes, the publications), as well as through expansion: attracting new members and the establishment of new sections. These activities should be strongly promoted.

In 2019, I co-created a program of studies dedicated to Contemporary Art, which focuses on both curatorial practice and art criticism. It was the first MA program of this type in Poland. The implementation of the study program gave me an opportunity to see the contemporary problems, concerns, and needs of the younger generation of critics. The result of this insight is that the youngest generation is disenchanted with the shrinking space for autonomous art



fig. 1: mumok, Vienna; Adam Pendleton, *Blackness, White, and Light*.

criticism. That's why we need to continue projects which can potentially expand that field, such as the AICA Academy, the Young Critics Award, and the e-magazine. They also point out at the dangers associated with the conflicts of interests and conformism. Our role is then to promote good practices (e.g., in the rules of the YCA competition, the Open Call for Projects etc.).

A debate has started among the vice-presidents about the criteria according to which new members should be evaluated. I believe that we should trust the local sections and acknowledge their decision about who they accept, as the situation of art criticism in every country is different. However, as discussed at the meeting, we should encourage new members to define what art

criticism means to them and how they practice it. This will help us keep our own identity while being open to changes in the world.

b) to promote the ethical and professional interests of its members and co-operate in defending their rights

My experience as the vice-president of AICA Poland (since 2020) showed me that to gain visibility and become an opinion-making body, we need to actively seek contacts with public servants and activists, as well as mainstream media. I see the role of the President in strengthening the links with UNESCO not only on the level of potential funding of the projects but also on the diplomatic level.

We should also co-operate with various actors which have the same interests – especially associations of professionals – just like ICOM, CIMAM and IKT, with whom we share many members, including members of board. This is especially important in lobbying e.g., for funding, protecting the rights of our members, or cases of censorship.

c) to maintain an active international network for its members, with the aid of available technologies and encouragement of face-to-face encounters

The most important event during the whole year is the Congress, and its organization is crucial to maintain the identification of members with the Association. Unfortunately, it is always connected with financial endeavor of participants as well as organizers. As a co-organizer of this year's Congress in Kraków, I see the hardships that national sections go through. Ideally, the Congresses should be organized in those places which need moral support and visibility, places where art criticism encounters political oppression. In these places, however, it is very complicated to get the funds, so it creates a vicious circle. What is expected from the organizers often exceeds the possibilities of a small NGO, especially in less numerous sections. I would advocate more active role in fundraising is done on the side of AICA International and the Congress Committee. Congresses are large events that need to be planned far in advance. For example, ICOM is now planning its Congress for 2028. We cannot expect the national sections to effectively apply for funding if the decision about the organization of the Congress is left until the last moment, like in a case of Poland or next year's Romania. I propose to invite to the Congress Committee the colleagues who were engaged in the organization of Congress within the last 10 years, as their experience (also in fundraising) can be very beneficial and would contribute to making the expectations towards the hosting section more realistic and adjusted to the local reality.

The webinars / debates which are open to the public are a part of our everyday life now and their organization is out of question. I participated in organizing 3 of them together with AICA Hungary and AICA Slovakia, and I am still going to organize another – dedicated to the freedom of expression. Those meetings are always very well received and contribute to the production of knowledge.



fig. 2: Pinacoteca de São Paulo; Marta Minujín, Comunicando con Tierra.

The regular Board meetings and General Assemblies are now organized online. It is, however, difficult to balance the acceptable length of the meeting with the necessary space for discussion. I would hand it over the mission to the Digital Strategies Committee to organize a way (e.g., internet forum, discussion list or others) which would facilitate the exchange of points of view in between the meetings to boost up the effectiveness of the online gatherings. I would also suggest founding smaller working groups devoted to certain tasks – as it has been done

lately, to speed up the work during our major meetings. The statute needs to be adjusted to the reality of online meetings, as it cannot be something that keeps us from efficient work.

In my opinion, the Committees need the re-evaluation of their missions and *modus operandi*. This should be discussed with current chairs and members. Changes have been already introduced regarding the terms of the chairs, but further adjustments are needed.

d) to contribute to mutual understanding of visual arts and aesthetics in all cultures

As a curator, critic or academic, I travelled around 44 countries in the world. Most recently I travelled through Turkey, Bulgaria and South America: Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil. I visited big museums as well as small independent venues to have a wide image of the local contexts and the artistic activity, also in countries usually neglected by the Western art world.

Just after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, I conducted a diplomatic mission between the colleagues in Ukraine and the rest of AICA, as well as I tried to get to know the position of AICA Russia towards the war. I translated more than 20 pages of letters of protest and other documents published in Russian, which showed its unanimous condemnation by AICA Russia. It became clear, however, that the geopolitical situation of this region, as well as its history and culture is quite unknown outside Eastern Europe, which only proves we still have a lot to do in this respect.

I think that the division into national sections should be more flexible and the membership to a certain section, or setting up a new section, should be more a question of self-identification and emotional attachment than the place of residence or nationality. I would encourage members to establish new sections – also those which do not have their state – just like it slowly has started at the Venice Biennale. It is necessary to encourage the establishment of new sections in Africa, Asia and Latin America. I recently spoke with critics who are interested in setting up the section in Ecuador, an initiative started by Ernesto Muñoz. I also spoke with critics interested in reestablishing AICA Uruguay.

e) to stimulate professional relationships across political, geographical, ethnic, economic and religious boundaries

As part of my vice-presidency program, I organized a regional secretariat of the Central and Eastern Europe. Then Latin America also joined this trend and has its own Secretariat, which publishes newsletters and organizes webinars. Together with AICA Czech Republic, AICA Slovakia and AICA Hungary, we applied for and received a grant from the Visegrád Fund for the publication of the *Anthology of Critical Texts Published After 1989*, which we hope to be ready for the Congress. These two examples proved that acting on the regional level is very beneficial.

One of the very controversial topics is the membership fees. Today it is 20 or 30 EUR depending on the country's World Bank classification, although it is not always up to date because it changes every year. I understand that the system must be clear and easy to apply (e.g., ICOM and CIMAM have 4 groups according to Gross Domestic Product per capita by Purchasing Power Parity). In the actual classification used by AICA countries like Switzerland and Poland are in one group. According to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, an average salary in art and culture is around 6500 CHF (roughly 6500 EUR) while in Poland, it is around

1 000 EUR (according to the Polish Main Statistical Office). These gaps between countries need to be acknowledged, and the fees need to be re-thought, so that the contribution of each section is fair.

In the great Cartography project report, conducted by the Secretary General Marc Partouche, out of 62 sections, only 28 responded. The question remains open, why the rest of them do not engage in the life of AICA? Why don't they have a connection with AICA International? I would try to connect with all sections that have lost interest in the life of AICA and search for the reasons. It is important to improve the flow of information between the national sections and the Paris office about the local activities.

The visual identification of AICA needs to be boosted and a more consistent policy on social media should be in place, which could be used to connect and identify better with the local sections.

f) to defend and promote freedom of expression and thought

As a vice-president of AICA Poland, together with Dorota Jarecka, a current member of Board of Polish AICA, we co-created a report with cases of censorship in visual arts between 2017 and 2021, which included cases of legal prosecution, confiscates of artworks and taking the artworks down by museum / gallery directors. Last year I participated in workshops devoted to censorship organized by the Council of Europe in Ljubljana, co-run by our colleague Kata Krasznohorkai from AICA Hungary. I will participate in this workshop again in October. Last November I participated in a panel discussion organized at the Columbia University in New York by the Artistic Freedom Initiative – an NGO with offices in New York and Geneva, which publishes reports on censorship all around the world, and which has recently published reports on Poland and Hungary², and now is working on the situation in Iran. In September, I am planning to meet with the project manager from AFI who would be genuinely interested in cooperating with AICA and is ready to raise funds for this purpose.



fig. 3: Interview on Polish television on the appointment of the Director of the National Gallery in Warsaw.

Censorship is a complicated and multi-layered issue which must be understood in the local context. In countries which lack freedom of expression, it also shows as self-censorship and economic censorship. A clear methodology and systematic work are required to judge those cases. It has been worked out by organizations that are fully devoted to the issue, and if we want to stand actively and effectively against it, we need to act together with them and fully use the experience of all members who have advocated the freedom of speech. AICA needs to engage in the project that are already running – while occasionally, it can write the letters of

² <https://artisticfreedominitiative.org/about-us/media/reports-resources/>

support, its activity cannot be limited to this. AICA must use its all power to pressure the European grant bodies to introduce anti-censorship clauses, and to advocate the transparency of decision-making processes and the inclusivity and professionalism in the administrative bodies. We need to use political pressure through mainstream media, as well as the bodies such as European Council, members of European Parliament or United Nations. We can also bring specific cases of censorship in front of the United Nations, e.g. through an organization called Freemuse.

I think of AICA as of a living, complex organism that requires constant communication between its constitutive sections. My experience in managing institutions includes responsibility for the budget similar to the one of AICA. I have experience in fundraising, including for AICA, and a strong network of international contacts with a focus on the 'peripheries'. I am persistent, open, and aware of current social and cultural issues on a global scale. I have been an active intermediary between multiple sections of AICA, and I am not afraid to speak out on issues important to the community. I believe these are strong assets to run for the presidency.