



Mobility First! **Special open call for artists working in conflict**

Some reflections following the first round of selection

22 February 2019,
Phnom Penh & Singapore

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We live in a time of collective friction, wrote one of our applicants.

Indeed, we do.

But do we also live in a time of collective inertia and silence?

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In the last year, we - at the [Asia-Europe Foundation \(ASEF\)](#) and [Cambodian Living Arts \(CLA\)](#) - found ourselves connecting informally several times over the challenges of supporting artists and cultural professionals living and working in precarious social conditions. Those conversations that led us – peer funding organisations but, more importantly, old friends and collaborators – to imagine a concrete (albeit modest) action together. The result is our pilot travel grant in 2019 for artists living and working in particularly fragile and uncertain realities. This joint call complements our separate roles as international mobility funders: CLA offers regular travel grants through [Dam Dos](#) [Khmer: plant & grow] (since 2017) and ASEF through [Mobility First!](#) (since 2017). For our pilot year for our joint call, we planned two open calls: the first was launched in January 2019 and a second call will open in July this year.

We announce today that we have selected one organisation and one individual for support after the first call. In one case, the organisation applicant will work to strengthen conversations around issues at home - in what is a particularly sensitive time - with both local and international artists. In the other, the artist seeks to travel away from home to the safety of a more neutral space, but to explore very local issues of land with international peers. In this way, both grantees strongly foreground the notion of “Place”. Both selected applicants were also inspirational in that their projects are centred around bringing art to new local audiences: in remote rural communities and in urban peripheries. Travels will take place in both directions: from Asia to Europe and vice versa.



In reviewing the applications received for this special travel grant, we noticed some gaps, issues and challenges in the cultural sector which we thought might be of interest:

- Artists working in under-represented or under-funded artistic disciplines or areas are even more marginalised, in terms of access to travel funds. In some regions, 'under-represented' or 'under-funded' areas include practice-led (rather than academic) research, archiving and even photographic practice.
- There is strong interest in international collaboration in projects/conversations around the role of the artist in society, perhaps because such cross-border connections offer safer spaces for exploring the problematics of the issue?
- There is a high level of interest from artists working in the 'centre' to both physically travel to and work on topics related to the 'peripheries'; however, we also noticed that some projects of this nature would greatly benefit from a stronger curatorial axis.
- Artists in some countries are experiencing prejudice from international networks, and perceive they are sometimes being excluded from opportunities on the basis funders', arts organisations' and practitioners' stance on geopolitics relating to their 'home' country. This is beginning to put artists at risk and an important issue for peers to be aware of.
- The sustainability of non-profit arts organisations - even well-known and longstanding ones - is a critical issue in many countries. The time is, therefore, ripe for bold, new conversations on resilience; and, not only between funders and arts organisations, but among peer organisations as well.
- Sustainable regional connections need to be further reinforced among arts organisations/collectives/networks, particularly within Asia. Alliances built on trust and reciprocity among peer organisations in the global South are more urgent than ever.
- Many more travel grant schemes are needed to increase mobility within a region (such as southeast Asia or south Asia) and thus, enable face-to-face encounters that may turn into future alliances.
- There is a high level of interest from artists and practitioners to work on projects related to conflict or to take their practice into places that are experiencing conflict, although they themselves do not come from a context of conflict or are personally constrained by socio-political conditions. For our purposes, we wish to prioritise practitioners who are directly impacted by conflict – not necessarily those who wish to address issues of conflict.



This first call for applications has also made us aware of the urgent need to widen our dissemination channels to reach those well beyond the 'centre', where we often find ourselves working in (namely, capital cities, urban centres, English-speaking professionals, those with reasonably good digital access, those already well-connected internationally and to funding networks). As funders and facilitators of cultural mobility, this fact serves as a timely reminder for ourselves that so much more needs to be done, even when we are able to fund travel.

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For more info, please visit: www.asef.live/mobilityfirst-CLA
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