

Mike van Graan

Founding President African Cultural Policy Network – South Africa

*Hiroshima Foundation for Peace
and Culture Award 2018*

African Cultural Policy Network

Arterial Network

One City, Many Cultures Festival

UNESCO

African Arts Institute



Mike van Graan graduated from the University of Cape Town with a BA Honours Degree in Drama in the mid-eighties, and was appointed as an Associate Professor in UCT's Drama Department from 2015-2019. He has served in leadership positions in a variety of anti-apartheid cultural organisations including Director of the Community Arts Project, Projects Officer for the Congress of South African Writers and General Secretary of the National Arts Coalition. After the country's first democratic elections in 1994, he was appointed as a Special Adviser to the first minister responsible for arts and culture where he played an influential role in shaping post-apartheid cultural policies. In 2011, he was appointed by UNESCO as a Technical Adviser to develop cultural policies and strategies aligned to the 2005 Convention in the Global South.

Until early 2016, he served as the Executive Director of the African Arts Institute (AFAI) in Cape Town to help develop leadership for the African creative sector. He also served as the founding Secretary General of Arterial Network, a Pan African network of artists, cultural activists and creative enterprises contributing to human rights, democracy and development in Africa. In 2017, he was elected as the founding President of the newly-formed African Cultural Policy Network.

Creatively, van Graan works as a playwright. To date, he has written thirty plays. He was appointed as Artscape's Associate Playwright from 2011-2014 and is considered as one of South Africa's leading contemporary playwrights. From 1 September 2016 to the end of May 2017, he was a Richard von Weizsaecker Fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin.

Until early 2017, he served as a Board member for five years of one of South Africa's largest multi-disciplinary festivals, the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival. In the late 1990s, he was appointed by the City of Cape Town to coordinate the inaugural One City, Many Cultures Festival as an intercultural response to the increasing polarization between the primary religious faiths (Islam, Judaism and Christianity) as a result of a series of bomb blasts in the city.

Van Graan has also acquired experience in curating international conferences such as the World Summit on Arts and Culture (Johannesburg, 2009), the International Network for Cultural Diversity conference (Cape Town, 2001) and the African Creative Economy Conference (Cape Town, 2013).

He is the 2018 recipient of the Hiroshima Foundation for Peace and Culture Award in recognition of his contribution to the fight against apartheid, to building a post-apartheid society and to the study of the interface between peace and culture both in his home country and across the African continent.