

Mike van Graan

Founding President African Cultural Policy Network – South Africa



Mike van Graan graduated from the University of Cape Town with a BA Honours Degree in Drama in the mid-eighties. He has served in leadership positions in a variety of anti-apartheid cultural organisations, including 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.

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.

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. 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 and he 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.

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.

He is currently a fellow of the Stellenbosch Instituted for Advanced Study (STIAS), working on his first novel.