



UNION OF VISUAL ARTISTS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

To the participants in the 18th General Assembly of IAA / AIAP and the 11th General Assembly of IAA Europe

Dear Friends,

I would like to welcome you in Pilsen; some of you for the first time, and others after fifteen years. In 2000, on the occasion of the 2nd Biennial of Drawing, there was a meeting of our Central European umbrella organizations, attended by the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and Switzerland. At that time, the Czech Union was still in good condition and could therefore take an active part in the establishment of the present IAA Europe in Bratislava a year later, in 2001; it also participated in the meeting of IAA European National Committees in Heidelberg (2002) and namely in the first regular IAA Europe conference, held in Vilnius in 2003. It was there that we introduced to our colleagues the developing Biennial of Drawing in Pilsen as an important event that might take place under the auspices of IAA Europe, and we were pleased to have our proposal approved.

At the same time, though, our financial situation began to deteriorate seriously. It was due to the fact that we were the only umbrella organisation in the former communist area without any registered property of our own. Since the Russian occupation in 1968, everything remained in the property of the Culture Fund. After 1993, however, its resources dried up. Once it had been transformed into a private foundation, its properties were gradually consumed. We were left with a few cabinets, tables and chairs in rented-out rooms and income from membership fees.

In the period 1990–2015 the Union gradually registered 71 professional associations with 5,806 visual artists. But neither these associations could benefit of any substantial financial resources besides their own membership fees. Some of them disappeared. Others gradually left the Union, either because they were not able to pay membership contributions for shared costs, or they were no more interested in being represented on a national level. By the year 2000 there remained 47 associations from the original number, while by 2005 it further decreased to 34, and continued to go down to the present 12 associations represented.

Also the number of represented artists decreased to the present state of 1,437 – of which, however, only 212 currently pay membership fees. That is the reason why the Union is in permanent debt towards the IAA.

The age of our members constitutes an even bigger problem. In 2005 the average age was of 60 years, while at present it is over 70 years. It does not mean that there are no fresh graduates or artists in their thirties among our members. But these are only a few individuals. Demographically speaking, the Union is dying. Almost none of our associations have managed to naturally integrate new members; most of them became centered around one generation, and are therefore slowly passing away. University teachers do not encourage young graduates to join renowned artistic associations, and they even resist or despise their own membership. The demographic category sometimes titled as Generation “X” (born in the 1960s – 1980s, today in their forties and fifties) have not built up any professional structures. The following Generation “Y” (the millennial one, born at the turn of the centuries and entering their artistic careers at the beginning of the 3rd millennium) are flexible, they do not like any fixed structures and they can do with coffeehouse clusters that arise as quickly as they vanish.

In this emergency situation we are still able to keep our website (www.art-visual.cz), to send out occasional e-information targeted to some 2,000 e-mail addresses, and to maintain and update the CZ National Register of Professional Visual Artists and Designers as a free database available to the general public. We offer help to member associations and individuals that need to solve organisational and administrative problems, and we take part in several activities such as the exhibition projects Body Action, Space and Time, The Right Toy, etc. Some of our information is sent out also to IAA National Committees and to artists living abroad, e.g. to participants in the Pilsen Biennial.

Dear Colleagues, let me wish you that your situation never even approaches the one we now experience in the Czech Republic. I wish you a pleasant stay in Pilsen – European Capital of Culture 2015, a town heartily hosting and supporting the Drawing Biennial. I also wish you a successful meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Václav Kubát,
Acting President of the UVU ČR Council

11 October 2015

The Union of Visual Artists of the Czech Republic (Unie výtvarných umělců České republiky, UVU ČR) is a civic society covering professional bodies of visual artists (associations, unions, clubs, etc.), each of them being legally and economically independent. They are connected with UVU ČR either as member organizations, as contractual partner organizations or as recognized organizations. UVU ČR pleads for and provides support to professional interests of visual artists, acts as an information centre, coordinates the activities of its members, and keeps the CZ National Register of Professional Visual Artists and Designers.

The legislative body is UVU ČR Council, made of one representative of each member. The President of the UVU ČR Council acts as its official representative.

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