

# Atelier for Young Festival Managers

## Gwangju, 31 August - 6 September 2015

### Speech by Inge Ceustermans

Managing Director of The Festival Academy

Closing Ceremony of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers GWANGJU 2015  
6 September 2015, Gwangju, South Korea

Anyoung haseyo!

Hello everybody,

Dear Ju No Lee, Dean of the Graduate School of Culture,

Dear Sunjung Kim, Artistic Director of ACC Archive & Research,

Dear Supawan Teerarat, Vice President Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau,

Dear Seonghee Kim, Artistic Director Asia Culture Center Theater,

Dear guests,

on behalf of the European Festivals Association (EFA), and Darko Brlek, President of EFA, and Kathrin Deventer, Secretary General of EFA, I would like to thank you, the Asia Culture Centre, Seonghee Kim, and the Chonnam National University, its Dean, and both organisations' wonderful teams for their collaboration in this Atelier.

This 9<sup>th</sup> Atelier, the second one in Asia, is for sure not the last. As you heard, Supawan Teerarat, Vice President TCEB, announced that they will be our host for an Atelier in Thailand. Apart from that The Festival Academy and EFA have been asked - within the framework of the EU-China Cultural agreement - to organise trainings in China for cultural managers from China and beyond. The intention is to start this cooperation with the EU and festivals in China in 2017 for a 3 year pilot phase.

It was a truly unique experience to have this Atelier taking place in the context of the opening of the ACC Theatre and its first festival, here on this historic site where the democratic uprising took place in 1980.

It must have been a real challenge, and I think it was very courageous of the ACC to organise this Atelier only a few days before the opening of the festival. In the days before the start, we witnessed how everyone of the team became paler and paler when asked about the festival...

I would like to thank all the artists, Ricardo Bartis, Araya Rasjdajmrearsnook, Tsai Ming-liang and Romeo Castelluci, for welcoming us at their shows, and for meeting with us.

I think we have spent marvelous 7 days with presentations, in-depth exchanges, visits of cultural places, working groups based on topics identified by the participants. But I'm curious to hear what you have to say about all this in a minute.

Nele Hertling, Monquie Veaute and Marie-Hélène Falcon shared their experiences in initiating festivals and venues which are today internationally renowned as Hebbel-Theater, Festival Transamériques Montréal and Romaeuropa, and the challenges and responsibilities they faced.

During the opening ceremony I talked about the responsibility of festival managers in the world today. And I think this issue has been raised a lot in the past 7 days. How can we answer to what is going on in the world, the refugee crisis, climate change etc. with art and culture? I said that the Atelier is a place to imagine a better world and to formulate those answers.

Chiaki Soma, former Director of the Tokyo Festival, talked about the situation in Japan after the 3/11 earthquake. She said, and I would like to quote: "When a colossal 'grand narrative' has overwhelmed our normality and reality surpassed even fiction, what can we say? When all cities and landscapes have disappeared, can we then set up and practice a new society model and form of community? What can the Arts mean after such a crisis? Art cannot save the community and its members from the crisis they face directly, but art can maybe help us understand what is misunderstood. We need to learn about those we do not understand through the eyes of the great artists of the past and present, to calmly and humbly consider the best way of coexistence with those we cannot understand."

Robyn Archer, mentor at six Ateliers so far, will talk in a minute. I would like to highlight one of the things she has brought up during the past day. She repeatedly mentioned the importance of "creating resilience for your festival" - the ability to cope with change, to overcome difficulties and trauma. I think the way Chiaki curated the Tokyo Festival after the Fukushima crisis by commissioning work strongly influenced by this context, is an extreme but very relevant example of this 'resilience' which brings a very strong message.

Through art we try to understand what is going on around us, we try to bring to the surface what is hidden, we try to build a culture of tolerance and to re-imagine our future. Or, to say it with the words of Marie-Hélène Falcon: "Festivals are a space for resistance, resistance against the forces of darkness, resistance to the fear of the other, resistance to fear itself, resistance to art being treated as trivial, as a commodity, resistance to entertainment, to the politically correct, to censorship. And festivals are of course a celebration of artistic endeavor and essentially a quest for beauty."

I hope this Atelier and this new network of 35 colleagues and friends after these 7 days will have strengthened, inspired and motivated you, dear participants, and will keep on doing this. You are now part of The Festival Academy's alumni network counting after this Atelier 335 fellow festival maniacs from 65 countries. Please make use of this network and the possibilities it offers.

But festivals are not only about responsibility. We have to admit we are also in it for the fun, for seeing work we love just because it's beautiful, and for spending time with people.

Robyn Archer said during the Atelier: "I'm a sinner." Well, I am a sinner too...

I really enjoyed my time in Gwangju and the encounters with all the people and discovering many different venues here. I would like to thank Choi Seunghyo for inviting us to his beautiful house, the Gwangju Traditional Culture Centre, and the Gwangju cultural foundation and for allowing us to enjoy the marvelous music brought to us by the performers. Thank you to the partners of the project.

I also enjoyed the Kimchi, Bulgogi, Bibimbap, and facial creams...

So, thank you once more to the marvelous teams with Hyojin Kun, Chamseul Kim, Sung Kyoung Hwang, the students of the university, the cameraman and filmmaker, the coffee bar Lucky 7, and all of you who made our stay unforgettable.

"kamsahamnida."

Please give them a big applause.

Thank you also to Hugo De Greef for coordinating and moderating the Gwangju Atelier, and thank you once again to the dear mentors, Nele Hertling, Robyn Archer, Marie-Hélène Falcon, Chiaki Soma, Monique Veaute, and of course Seonghee Kim, and to all guest speakers. And a very special thank you to you, dear participants, for being such a wonderful group!