

# Atelier for Young Festival Managers

## Gwangju, 31 August - 6 September 2015

### Speech by Inge Ceustermans

Managing Director of The Festival Academy

Opening Ceremony of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers GWANGJU 2015  
31 August 2015, Gwangju, South Korea

Dear Jee Byung-Moon, President of the Chonnam National University,  
Dear Jongman Choi, President of the Institute of Asian Culture Development,  
Dear SeeongHee Kim, Artistic Director of the Asia Culture Center Theatre,  
Dear honoured guests,  
Dear partners,  
Dear colleagues,

A special welcome to the mentors and to the participants at the Atelier Gwangju, the fourth Atelier to take place under the newly set-up organisation The Festival Academy, initiated by the European Festivals Association (EFA), and the 9th Atelier since its first edition in 2006! You find yourselves amongst 35 young festival managers from 20 countries and 4 continents – representing an enormous pool of wisdom.

I also welcome you in the name of Mr. Darko Brlek, President of The Festival Academy and the European Festivals Association and Director of the Ljubljana Festival, and Mrs. Kathrin Deventer, Secretary General of EFA, who deeply regret that they cannot be here, and who asked me to extend their words of welcome to you.

We are delighted that our partners in Gwangju, the Asia Culture Center and the Chonnam National University, are hosting this second Atelier in Asia after the 2011 edition in Singapore. Together, we have prepared an inspiring programme.

EFA looks back at many years of collaboration with Asian festivals and cultural organisations. In 2004, EFA contributed to the set-up of the Association of Asian Performing Arts Festivals (AAPAF). In 2010, a commitment of collaboration on intercultural dialogue, training formats, networking and more collaboration aspects was signed by both Associations; one of the outcomes was the Singapore Atelier.

Beyond these partnerships, EFA and its members have continuously initiated artistic collaborations across Asia and Europe. In this context networking is crucial as well as access to information on artists, artistic trends, cultural organisations, and networks of festivals in Asia and in Europe. A next edition of the Atelier in Asia is planned to take place in Chiang Mai, Thailand, 1-7 December 2016, continuing EU-Asia collaborations in the cultural field.

The main challenge for networks today, and I think this also applies to festivals, is to make clear why networks, both formal and informal, are important at a time when everything is measured in terms of direct revenue and numerical results. The Festival Academy is about human capital and development; it is about taking time off to develop one's own view, and to develop the Academy itself into the primary resource for festival training with real ambition even against the pressure of today's economic and political climate.

In Gwangju, we have 35 participants coming from 20 countries. Many of you have travelled a long distance; 16 of you are from Europe, 13 from Asia, 5 from Oceania, and 1 of you is from Africa.

Europe is a continent with a rich history in culture, architecture, performing arts, music etc etc, which could also flourish thanks to governments supporting and promoting the arts. A friend of mine from Israel, an Alumnus of the Atelier, asked me just recently if I knew of any opportunities in Europe as he wishes to move there to offer his family a more safe and sane place to live in, as the political climate and recent developments on the level of culture but also civil society are becoming very frightening. Life in Europe is indeed, I think, still considered good and safe. Although cracks are showing...

The EU seems to be in a constant state of chaos recently: the Greek crisis, Jihadis returning, war in Ukraine, one EU summit follows the next, millions of refugees either escaping war or the economic situation in their countries, drowning off the coasts of Europe, border controls in the heart of Europe – does this mean the end of Schengen, the end of free transport of goods and free movement of people between the EU member states?

Each day many people are trying to reach Europe to find a better life. The refugee crisis is on top of everyone's agenda these days. More than half of the Syrian population (12 million) is trying to escape and many are trying to reach the EU which led to shocking confrontations between the police and refugees in Macedonia, or in Austria just now where 71 refugees were found dead in a truck. A Swedish professor, Hans Rosling, put the refugee crisis into perspective: out of all Syrian refugees about 8 million are internally displaced in Syria, 4 million are currently registered in the neighbouring countries, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, as well as in Egypt and North Africa. And guess how many people have reached Europe? Only 250.000, a mere 2% of all Syrian refugees.

At the previous Atelier in Beirut in March, we witnessed ourselves what it means for a country as Lebanon: 100 times smaller than the EU and quite densely populated with its 4.5 million inhabitants providing shelter for 1.2 million Syrian refugees. 50 times more than the EU.

The core values of the European Union are being tested. The principles of solidarity, the Geneva Conventions, Schengen Agreement.... At the same time, everyone is looking at China and what is happening there on the financial markets. The recent confrontations between North and South Korea. And of course climate change. These are issues which concern all of us.

I sometimes wonder why we are not demonstrating every day against the lack of vision and ideas and the immobility of our politicians. It seems so obvious that we can only have a safer world if more people can have a better life, and wealth can be shared equally, so why is it so difficult to obtain this. And are we really ready to share what we have...

The Atelier is also first and foremost about sharing: sharing your ideas, knowledge, dreams, tastes, artists etc. It is a space to dream a better world and to reflect on the role art, culture and festivals can play in this context. You will learn a lot from the mentors, your colleague festival managers, the people from Gwangju. But: also think about what you can offer, what you have to give, what people can learn from you.

You are in a privileged position to be able to get a taste of the dynamic cultural scene active in Gwangju, to exchange with the people working here, and to experience this new ambitious cultural centre and its first international festival which will open on 4 September. Watch and learn!

All this provides the perfect setting for the 7 days of in-depth exchanges on festivals, on programming aspects but also on the essence of what you are all doing – working with art and artists. And here, I am of course Speech by Inge Ceustermans, Atelier GWANGJU 2015 referring to the quote coined by Bernard Faivre d'Arcier, which became the motto of the Atelier: "The true role of a festival is to help artists to dare, to engage in new projects."

The Atelier will not stop after the 7 days. You will become part of the Alumni network which, after the Atelier Gwangju, will count 335 alumni from more than 60 countries and all continents and some 40 mentors.

You are also in a privileged position because of the amazing group of people who will guide you through these 7 days with, first of all, Mr Hugo De Greef as the overall moderator: Hugo De Greef initiated the Atelier in 2006 when he was EFA's Secretary General. Together with Mrs Nele Hertling he selected this group out of a large pool of applicants; both have not missed any of the Ateliers so far and have been serving as true mentors. Also with us in Gwangju are: Robyn Archer (Artistic Director of The Light in Winter in Melbourne, Deputy Chair of the Australia Council for the Arts, Strategic Advisor Gold Coast Arts and Culture in Queensland, Member of the European House for Culture - Australia) who has accompanied us in four Ateliers; Marie-Hélène Falcon (former Director Festival TransAmériques Montréal – Canada) and Monique Veaute (President Fondazione Romaeuropa - Arte e Cultura-Italy); and two new presenters from Asia: Seonghee Kim (Artistic Director of the Asia Cultural Center Theater - South Korea) and Chiaki Soma (Art Producer, Representative Director of Arts Commons Tokyo, Former Artistic Director Tokyo Festival - Japan): all renowned festival leaders with a long experience in directing festivals.

Before giving the floor to Hugo De Greef, the General Coordinator of The Festival Academy, who will warm you up for the work to be done and set the tone for the next 7 days, I want to underline once more that I am very much looking forward to the coming days with you, and thank The Festival Academy team, Ysaline Lannoy and Marta Moliz, and the ACC Theater and Chonnam National University team, with Hyojun Kuh and Chamseul Kim and Sung Kyoung Hwang, who have been great partners in the preparation and production of the Atelier. Thanks also to the partners of the project and their support, with a special thanks to the EU's Creative Europe programme, the Arts Council Korea, Goethe Institut, Institut Français, Japan Foundation, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, the Flemish Community, Sociaal fonds podiumkunsten. The floor is all yours Hugo.