

Chiang Mai 2016

« Car le vrai rôle d'un festival est d'aider les
artistes à oser, à entreprendre des projets... »
Bernard Faivre d'Arcier

Atelier for Young Festival Managers

1 - 7 December 2016

Welcome Speech by

Inge Ceustermans

Managing Director of The Festival Academy

Opening Ceremony of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers Chiang Mai 2016
01 December 2016, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Dear Ms. Supawan Teerarat, Vice President of the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau,
Dear Honorary guests,
Dear Partners,
Dear Colleagues,

A very special welcome to the mentors and to the participants taking part in the Atelier Chiang Mai. We are here today with 35 young festival managers from 20 countries and 4 continents and 7 mentors coming from all over the world. I also welcome you in the name of Mr. Darko Brlek, President of the European Festivals Association and The Festival Academy and Director of the Ljubljana Festival and Ms. Kathrin Deventer, Secretary General of EFA, who deeply regret that they cannot be here and who have asked me to extend their words of welcome to you.

We are delighted that our partner in Chiang Mai, the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau is hosting this Atelier. Two years ago we were together in Ostrava in the Czech Republic for the EFA General Assembly with the Ambassador of Thailand to the Czech Republic and the Ambassador of Thailand to Belgium where we signed the agreement and today we are here. Together, we have prepared an inspiring programme.

We are celebrating this year 10 years of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers. Where do we stand today? 10 editions and 400 festival managers from 66 countries and all continents and more than 40 renowned festival directors participated and global alliances have been created. The Festival Academy, a young organisation set up by EFA in 2012 to run this training programme. An upcoming publication which gathers material from presentations and texts by both presenters and alumni of the past ten years and two new train programmes 'Festival Production Management Training' and 'Festival Readings' that have been launched in 2016 and 2014 and a lot of exciting plans for the future.

Chiang Mai is the 11th edition after the Atelier started in 2006 and the fifth Atelier to take place under the The Festival Academy and the third in Asia after Singapore 2011 and Gwangju/ South Korea 2015.

With the Atelier for Young Festival Managers we are always connected to the world, as we gather people from far ends in one place to discuss and reflect on the role of festivals today. You have an enormous pool of wisdom here at your disposal to tackle the issues you are concerned with today.

The world is in a strange place today, the past months I've woken up more than once to a world view I don't seem to share with many people. Brexit, Donald Trump actually getting president of the US, referenda in several European countries about the refugee crisis, the ongoing war in Syria, the situation in Turkey today. It is not about the actual fact of Trump becoming president, but it is about the fact so many people voted for him. So many people share his populist world views which don't offer a real solution to the very urgent challenges the world is facing today as the refugee crisis, climate change and the continuing inequality of division of resources in the world today.

The fact that so many people follow these populist and polarising world leaders and world views blindly, on the basis of feeling, without critical thinking, out of fear makes it very possible that we will enter another war which we have not seen yet in history. And that is the real danger of this. For us, for our children, for the next generations.

And we can look hopefully to the future, which we should. But I feel time is up, and that we need to ACT now. I don't think art should be instrumentalised and used for political purposes, we have seen very bad examples of this as well in the past where art and culture actually is used to reflect totalitarian or polarizing regimes. But I do believe we all need to use the power and possibilities we have, and you all have a platform to act and react from and to defend basic rights as the freedom of speech, the freedom of mobility and against the xenophobia that seems to rule the world today. You reach out to many people who come to your performances, visit your festivals come to the bars etc.

The European Festivals Association has been set up after the Second World War by 15 festivals in Europe who believed that through creating alliances such an atrocity could never happen again. If people today wonder what the relevance of networks is. Well, exactly still that. Denis de Rougemont, founder of the European Festivals Association (EFA), which was born in 1952, said:

"Culture is all the dreams and labour tending towards forging humanity. Culture requests a paradoxical pact: diversity must be the principle of unity, taking stock of differences is necessary not to divide, but to enrich culture even more."

This is EFA's guiding principle and the spirit of its activities for 65 years now.

In a time that sees the world moving towards separation and building walls, an active attention and commitment to connect and create communities is ever more pressing. EFA's role is to inspire and enrich the festival landscape worldwide. It does this by fostering interaction between festival makers in Europe, in Asia, in the Arab countries etc. sharing know-how and encouraging cooperation in the villages, cities & regions where festivals are located.

We don't all need to think alike for this, EFA is exactly about bringing together confronting world views and to open up to different perspectives. This oldest cultural network of European festivals was established to bridge the distance between organisations; and to create connections. At the same time an ever growing young community is created through the training programmes preparing for many years now the next generation of festival makers worldwide.

It is of course important to look at the underlying problems why Brexit, Trump, the situation in countries as Hungary, Turkey etc. can happen and why voices go up for a Nexit with Wilders in the Netherlands and a Frexit with Le Pen in France. We should ask ourselves what went wrong or is going wrong in society that people don't see the use of these connections anymore.

We were recently at the Istanbul Music Festival. During their festival the terrorist attack happened at Ataturk airport. The festival Director Yesim Gurer told us she thought people would not come to the performances out of fear, but on the contrary they never had such large audiences for their events. People needed to come out to talk, to be together, to connect.

The question is what can we learn from this? Apart from being courageous as the quote from Bernard Faivre D’Arcier and motto of The Festival Academy implies “The true role of a festival is to help artists to dare, to engage in new projects’ , I think we need to stay curious; curious for the other, curious to find solutions, curious to find other ways of leaving. We need to ask questions again and open ourselves up to what we don’t know.

And one more thing which might be essential today is that we look how we can help other people? We are living in times which are very self-centered, the focus is always on finding yourself, improving yourself, being resilient and expectations are very high. But what would society look like if we would look more to the needs of the other? Would a Brexit happen if people would think, what does Europe need? What does Greece need? Instead of what do we need? What do I need? Maybe the essence of the crisis of today is not the economic crisis but are we living a crisis of social imagination?

I would suggest to all of you in the coming days, when people present their projects, challenges, that you listen, but also that you think ‘how can I help this person advance their project?’. What do I have to offer that could give the other new ideas, inspiration etc.? We can all be catalysts to advance other people’s initiatives, lives etc.

And I think if we all focus on that in the next days, each and every one of you will be greatly helped through their thinking. You will not be stuck on ‘but I have written this paper and I want answers to my questions’, because 35 participants and 7 mentors will be focusing not on what they need but on what you need.

We have here with us in the next seven days, Robyn Archer from Australia, Mark Ball from the UK, Nele Hertling from Germany, Bernard Faivre D’Arcier from France, Seong Hee Kim from South Korea and Kee Hong Low from Hong Kong. On top you will be immersed in the local cultural scene of Chiang Mai and Thailand and you will meet many artists and cultural players from here. And this all under the coordination of Hugo De Greef who I would like to thank especially for his 10-year investment in guiding these Ateliers.

You are privileged to be here. Make use of this. You can in the next days open up your perspectives, challenge your views and learn from each other. The Festival Academy is a small step towards the breaking out of known patterns, the us knows us. You are given a platform to meet and to make connections with a diversity of creative minds.

Be self-critical, be open and ready to share, mould these 7 days into what you want to discuss... What are your topics? What are your questions? Doubts? What are your daily struggles? Be honest. Be modest, don't only share your successes but let others learn from your failures. This is your Atelier, the mentors are here for you. They will guide you but they will also respect you and your freedom. You also have a responsibility in this and you will need to engage yourself to direct this atelier in the way you want.

As participant once said, it is truly unique that the atelier is a space where so much experience and knowledge comes together. You can learn skills, people management, making budgets in other programmes. That's not why you are here. You are here to reflect on the role of festivals today, in a society in transition. You are here to reflect on the ways how to deal with this transition. You are here to identify the right questions. You might find answers, but you might also go home with many more questions. You are here to get inspired and to make alliances beyond these 7 days and to put some stones for the future. This is only the beginning as you the Atelier does not stop after the 7 days, you will become part of the alumni network. You can make use of these connections.

And hopefully you will be going home after these 7 days, feeling stronger and feeling connected knowing that there are people in the world that are struggling every day for the same things you believe in.

As a conclusion I would like to thank once more our host, the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau with Supawan Teerarat, Harisuda Boonyawat, Kaewkan and the team and also Laure and Debora from The Festival Academy. Our partners Korea Arts Council, Social Fonds Podiumkunsten and the National Institute of Dramatic Art and the many cultural venues in Chiang Mai that will open their doors for us in the coming days. And finally I would like to thank Creative Europe for its generous support in making this Atelier possible.