

REPORT: Arts Festivals Summit 2023 Peralada / Girona

The Festival Academy invites: Take a stance

Tuesday, 25 April 2023 | 14.00-15.00, Hotel Carlemany - Plaça Miquel Santaló i Pavor, 1 - 17002 Girona

“This is the strength of this community. If I struggle, I don’t struggle individually, but we do it collectively. We are not living in individual worlds, and as we live in a collective world, we need to act collectively as we have collective responsibility.”

(Shahidul Alam, board members of The Festival Academy at EFA’s Arts Festivals Summit Peralada / Girona)

Introduction:

Global exchange and collaboration as well as the integration of voices beyond the European context have been important topics on the agenda of European festivals and in the European discourse in the last years. Many countries outside of Europe are contributing to the discussion about fair collaboration, mobility, and diversity. At the same time, festival makers from outside Europe still face visa difficulties, colonial stereotyping, exclusion from funding schemes and multiple challenges within in their practice.

The workshop of The Festival Academy had the aim to foster an exchange and cooperation between the different festival communities in Europe and beyond and discuss ways forward in tackling different challenges in an efficient way. It was also conceived as a platform to listen to each other’s needs and worries.

The workshop was organised by a group of 6 Alumni of The Festival Academy. Together with the support of EFA, 20 Alumni from 4 different continents had the chance to participate in the Arts Festivals Summit in Spain and enrich the European debates with their global perspectives.

In their workshop they aimed to share their different challenges and provoke thoughts and ideas for the future of festivals beyond the European context with The Festival Academy's mission in mind: To strengthen festivals to consider themselves as tools for change.

Welcome and short presentation of The Festival Academy's current activities:

In the first part of the workshop, [Inge Ceustermans](#), General Director of the Festival Academy, spoke about the recent activities of The Festival Academy, the Global [Atelier for Young Festival Makers Nicosia](#) and the tailor-made [Atelier for Arts and Production Managers Beirut](#) that had a focus on integrating artists from conflict regions, engaging cross-sector experts from peacebuilding organisations and worked around the topic of festivals as tools for social change. She also presented the upcoming activities of the organisation: the Global [Atelier for Young Festival Makers in Elefsina/ Greece](#) (June 2023) and in [New York](#) (January 2024).

She also invited festival representatives to follow the second Call for [Placements](#), a collaborative initiative of The Festival Academy together with EFA, in which European festivals can sign up to host Alumni of The Festival Academy to do a placement in their festivals.

The Alumni and facilitators of the workshop introduced themselves and briefly presented their Atelier experiences and the impact the activity had on their personal and professional life.

Facilitators:

Horacio Pérez (Chile) – Atelier Montreal 2022
Ignacio Priego (Spain/Egypt) – Online Atelier 2021
Iryna Bilan (Ukraine) – Atelier Nicosia 2022
Joon Suh Park (South Korea) – Atelier Montreal 2022
Sepehr Sharifzadeh (Iran) – Atelier Shanghai 2017
Thobile Maphanga (South Africa) – Atelier Montreal 2022

The game:

In the second part, the group of facilitators introduced the rules of the "Agree-Disagree"-game, which is an interactive and playful tool to tackle controversial topics and to enable a discussion and debate. The format is an inherent part of The Festival Academy's Ateliers. It is created around the needs of the participants and builds on the feedback of the Alumni. In the context of the EFA Arts Summit it served also as an insight into the essence of TFA's activities and their current fields of interest.

In the game, the workshop participants were confronted with 5 different provocations that had been prepared by the Alumni facilitating team. The provocations were built around the

topics of **decolonisation, mobility, inclusivity, diversity, and cultural/artistic boycott**. Participants were asked to position themselves in agreement or disagreement with the following controversial statements:

- The programme of a festival should have **gender parity**.
- To ensure diversity, an institution should have **representatives of different races/ethnicities in their team**.
- The programme of a festival should have a **guaranteed/established percentage of a marginalised community** (disabled artists, indigenous artists, etc).
- An **artist travel visa** could serve as a form of cultural reparations in the European context.
- **Cultural boycott** is a tool to show solidarity and support while counteracting a soft power on authoritarian governments.

To foster a more dynamic engagement in the workshop, the space had been set up into an inner circle for those agreeing, an outer circle to disagree and an elevated podium for those who wanted to express their indecisiveness. This setting offered participants to move around freely in the space, to reconsider the own standpoint and to change places any time as well as, if needed, to step out of the 'game zone' to be an observer.

After each statement, participants in the three different circles were interviewed by the Alumni who had presented the respective statement. They were asked to speak about their opinion, give arguments for their perspective and – take a stance!

About:

The exchange between European Summit participants and TFA Alumni initiated deeper conversation on the meaning of terms like **diversity, inclusivity, and sustainability**. The following is just an excerpt of the variety of topics discussed:

- The question about artist travel visas that could serve as a form of cultural reparation in the European context, led to the demand for diplomatic passports for artists in general and evolved further into a debate around cultural diplomacy and the role of artists as cultural ambassadors.
- With regards to the issue of gender diversity and mandated quotas, the debate quickly shifted to fundamental questions of power relations and the distribution of resources. The question of accountability of European festivals in the face of global inequalities, also revealed differences within countries of the European family. The debate also tackled notions of 'quality', 'excellence' and the structural power inequalities concerning the definition of such terms.

- The topic of climate change and festivals' responsibility of reducing their carbon footprints and contributing to sustainable business and curational models has been enormously enriched by the global perspectives of the TFA Alumni. The demand by European festivals for more suitability has led to numerous initiatives that aim to tackle this issue within their practice. In the context of the workshop, the idea of a zero-flight policy for festivals was controversially discussed, raising awareness to the effects of these kind of policies for the mobility of artists from the 'Global South'.

Outcome/Testimony:

*"As a non-European participant, the EFA Summit in Girona was my best experience yet in terms of connecting with the European festival scene. I've had a lot of experience collaborating with my European partner festivals/promoters before. But the summit provided a much deeper understanding of the scene by **letting me discover up-to-date discourses and agendas of the European art scene such as diversity, sustainability, and the general system and community behind all that.** It was interesting to find out how those ideas contain different meanings and contexts from the ones discussed in East Asia, where I'm based in.*

*While preparing and moderating the 'Take a Stance' session and participating in many other programmes, I believe I was able to offer perspectives of a non-European participant, especially by **questioning the term 'diversity' and initiating deeper conversations** about it with other European participants. While Europe has much more advantages to pursuing 'diversity' in terms of its economic/cultural capital, I wanted to remind ourselves how much **that notion of 'diversity' and the way of pursuing it has an impact on the 'peripheral' art scene-** of Africa, Latin America, Asia, etc. This doesn't only apply to the concept of diversity.*

*While building a discourse and collective narrative within the European community is already a highly demanding process, **I believe that the narrative would be much more on point if the context comes from the relationship with Europe and other parts of the world, not only from Europe itself.** (Joon Suh Park, Alumnus of The Festival Academy)*