

JOHANNESBURG 2018

« 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 23 - 29 March 2018

Speech by

Inge Ceustermans

Managing Director The Festival Academy

Closing Ceremony of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers Johannesburg 2018

29 March, Johannesburg, 2018

Dear colleagues,

We have arrived at the end of the 7 days, from the opening at Wits and now ending at The Market Theatre. My head is exploding with information. I have to say I have never had an Atelier where so many ideas and so much information came to the foreground. Exceptional.

I'm really impressed with the work you've all done with your sustainable festival toolkits proposals, you displayed an enormous 'collective power'. In identifying characteristics of a leader, a good festival, a good festival manager, by presenting your dream festivals, by responding to a proposed protocol for a more equal collaboration between Global South and Global North, the panels you participated in on Festivals, diversity and cultural chauvinism, on Festivals as agents of change and so much more.

You have engaged yourself, mentored yourself, made a real effort to articulate answers to challenging questions and issues.

There are so many lines resonating in my head. It's just harvest time. It's not a job it's a passion. I don't want to give up on hope when it comes to cultural diplomacy. The closer the money comes to me, the cleaner it gets. Funding follows good projects. In Ghana artists were perceived as losers. If you don't keep your audience you won't be able to transform it. That we need to be able to fund our core vision ourselves as you do not want your core business ruled by others. And that festivals are about who you are going to fuck around with, what you are going to achieve by fucking around with them and at what cost. To name only a few.

We were immersed in the local and cultural scene of Johannesburg through a panel with South African festivals and visits to the Windybrow Centre and to Soweto. We dugged really deep during the 7 days ending up in the caves at the cradle of humankind and visiting that place where artists cannot read that well or was that called 'The Centre for the less good idea'? And even King T'Chaka joining us for a moment at this WAKANDA Atelier.

The Apartheid museum. A moment of reflection, struggle, frustration, anger and pain for many. I think it is an important and humble lesson that a vision of someone (as the architects of apartheid) can also have destructive and long lasting effects on a country.

It was intense. I heard from you this afternoon that the Atelier impacted in several ways: Faith in people again and in arts, not to feel alone, networking, new ideas and perspectives, public speaking practice, feeling stronger after the 7 days, inspiration etc. And the concrete outcomes: the toolkits you made which can be shared with a broader global festival community, potential collaborations to be explored between you and the ideas that have been generated: to copy a festival of homes in other places, to organise a film festival for shooting films instead of showing films, to open a travel agency if you are a destination festival etc. And the ongoing conversation about the importance of your vision, an idea, and the implementation of it.

I want to look back for a moment. 2 years ago, when the Atelier celebrated its 10th birthday, we did a retreat, an evaluation moment with mentors and alumni coming from the different Ateliers to evaluate the past 10 years and Ateliers. Out of this evaluation we distilled 10 action points and I want to highlight them for a moment.

- **Mentors:** diversify geographically (GN/GS), social background, age, scale festival and to involve alumni as speakers.
- **Participants:** diversity with focus on people with less access in terms of financing: research scholarships, foundations for participants' support
- **Rework the dramaturgy and facilitation of the Atelier** - involve certain techniques, to encourage decision making, to have everyone speak equally
- **Papers** - Rework the paper concept. One on one feedback on the proposals.
- **Develop the alumni network** - funding as a catalyzer for global collaborations.
- **Develop the knowledge centre**
- **Improve the communication** to mentors/ participants/ the outside world - Branding/ own image/ to reflect global image of the organization
- **Fundraising** - Fundraise for The Festival Academy to allow it to be financially independent (EU, cultural institutes, foundations, embassies, including alternative fundraising). Research on certain foundations/ scholarships for participants (with a focus on regions with less access to the programme)
- **Quality in all:** Make sure the high standards which were set at the start of the programme are being obtained in each edition on all levels (mentors, participants, dramaturgy, location, organisation, accommodation, venue etc. etc.)
- **Management and long-term development of the organisation**
Diversify the board and the GA of The Festival Academy (balance gender, race, age, geographical representation ...)

Professionalise the general working (communication, team, finances, long term activity plan etc.)

A start has been made with implementing this vision and action points and will be continued in the next years, and we still need to find out if it's sustainable. As many of you mentioned, the Atelier is like a festival, the toolkit will be useful to me as well. I will definitely use the protocol next time I start a collaboration with the Global South. It's been great to see many of these action points become reality in this Johannesburg Atelier. Carole said, it's just harvest time. It took time indeed, and we had to be patient at moments, taking each obstacle as a challenge to grow and expand through. And it goes on. It is only a beginning and so many new ideas have generated from this Atelier alone as the Festival WIKI, we will work on that together with Wits!

As well as on the toolkit for sustainable festival managers which we will continue in the next Atelier in Goteborg, Sweden from 23-29 August 2018, it will be interesting to bring this perspective into a Global North context.

This first Atelier for Young Festival Managers run by The Festival Academy (initiative of the European Festivals Association) has been exceptional on many levels. First of all in the diversity of the group of 25 emerging festival managers coming from 13 countries, a wonderful group of people, you were all strong activist voices, with a majority of you coming from Africa which has influenced the dialogues greatly and the perspective of what sustainable festivals can be, related to the conditions of a country, a nation and within the global context of today where nations' or continents' challenges are globally interrelated. Tough questions have been put on the table and issues have been addressed directly and I'm sure you will go back home transformed which will affect your festivals and the work you're doing in your communities.

Finally the way the programme was designed really put the issues and visions of today's festival managers forward with the international mentors guiding them towards re-imagining, or transforming their projects to a next level. Special thanks to Mike van Graan for designing this, what one of you called this afternoon 'an expertly designed and executed programme'. And for Brett Pyper and the Market Theatre's input in this. Thank you especially for the clear and open, generous, ethical and gentle facilitation during the 7 days. As someone said 'thank you for not leaving any stone unturned' for 'uncovering things which we took for granted for too long and in such a way you can apply it to your own context' or simply 'you could not escape from Mike' as it was also unescapable to tackle difficult issues and questions. I think you have an extraordinary talent in guiding people to become aware of the sometimes less obvious choice or perspective and of the complexity and ambiguity of many issues festivals are dealing with in realizing their vision and programming as ethics, audience and community involvement, branding, funding etc.

Mentors also thank you for your engagement, involvement and participation. Your essential support in guiding the dream festivals. For those who are here still tonight Carole, for your encouragement and inspiration, you arrived and jumped in immediately, Mantse with your 'priceless infectious aura', Brett who someone described as 'Mike provoked us and you made us understand the principle behind many of the issues'. Thanks to those who left, Carmen Romero, Cristina Fuentes, Ismail Mahomed. Special thanks to The Market theatre and Wits School of arts for partnering with us and for their respective teams with Yusrah, the Market Theatre technicians with Mtutu, Simphiwe, Hailey, the photographers, the ushers, the drivers. And from the Wits School of Arts, Kingdom, all the students, the film crew, I would like to thank very much The Festival Academy team with Laure and Séphora; Well done! Give all of them a big applause!

Thank you also to the founders of the project. We would not be sitting here today if they did not have the courage to realise their vision at the time. I'm honoured to be able to run and continue developing the Atelier for which they had the courage and belief to start it up in 2006 and The Festival Academy which resulted from that. Special thanks to Kathrin Deventer, Secretary General of EFA, the EFA board with Jan Briers and the Academy board with Darko Brlek, thank you for joining us here, for your trust and support.

Thank you also to all the cultural venues that invited us to their space, all the guest speakers and to Palesa for organising the Soweto dinners. And thank you to all our partners and sponsors: Arts Council Korea, Belgian Embassy of South Africa, DOEN Foundation – The Netherlands, French Institute South Africa – IFAS, Goethe Institute South Africa, National Arts Council of South Africa, Swiss Arts Council - Pro Helvetia Johannesburg, Spanish Embassy of South Africa. And finally thank you the Creative Europe programme of the European Union for their support.

But especially thanks to you, the participants, you have really made it into a worthwhile experience for yourself. It is as many of you mentioned a privileged position so please share your experience with your community when you go home, keep in contact, make use of the Alumni network counting more than 500 festival managers, invite each other to your festivals, use your resources and means to make this continue! And let's have fun together! Time to start dancing and allow ourselves to be silly, which I still think should be added to the characteristics of a good leader!