

## **Konfrontacje Teatralne 2013-2017. An overview**

The concept of the Konfrontacje festival that we proposed was based on the idea of the festival as a public art institution, which has very precise responsibilities, obligations and roles to play – both in relation to artists and to the public, at local and international level. One of our aims was to provide artists with the conditions to work and develop their practice and to stimulate the free flow of people, thoughts, experiences and ideas, as well as developing a critical discourse which would enable the artists and the audience to talk.

The Lublin audience's enthusiastic and attentive feedback to our propositions, and the interest shown for the offer of performances, led in 2015 to the increased doubling of presentations—up until the year 2017, when almost all guest performances were presented at least twice. Most of the events, prepared by local artist and those by guests from other countries, attracted more spectators than the festival venues could seat.

In our view festival is responsible for creating frames that would enable a public debate as well as for becoming open to ever larger and more diverse groups of participants. At the same time, we believed that the festival programme shall always leave additional space for unexpected encounters, coincidences — and clashes. This way of thinking on the notion of the festival was deeply rooted in the history of Konfrontacje Teatralne: this festival has been created as part of the independent, alternative, political theatre movement; it has from its outset sought solutions and ideas distinct from those which prevail in mainstream theatre, in this way proving that the dramatic theatre model is not the only conceivable one.

### **During the recent five years, our invitation to Lublin had been accepted by number of artists:**

Szymon Adamczak, Mateusz Atman, Bryndjar Bandlien, Zosia Bernad, Wojtek Blecharz, Ana Brzezińska, Bogna Burska, Gianina Cărbunariu, Elisabetta Consonni, Madalina Dan, Paweł Demirski, Ivo Dimchev, Valentijn Dhaeners, Marcin Dymiter, Magdalena & Ludomir Franczak, Marta Górnicka, Holly Hughes, Agnieszka Jakimiak, Aleksandra Jakubczak, Jolanta Janiczak, Eisa Jocson, Pavel Jurov, Heiner Goebbels, Krzysztof Kaliski, Anna Karasińska, Szymon Kasproicz, Paweł Korbus, Robert Kuśmirowski, Romuald Krężel, Maria Kwiecień, Jan Lauwers, Xavier Le Roy, Joanna Lewicka, Krystian Lupa, Paweł Łysak, Daniel Malone, Agata Maszkiewicz, Christophe Meierhans, Mikołaj Mikołajczyk, Magda Mosiewicz, Toshiki Okada, Dan Perjovschi, Miłosz Pękała, Brice Pichard, Jaśmina Polak, Natalia Przybysz, Dito van Reigersberg, Raphael Rogiński, Paweł Romańczuk, Wiktor Rubin, Agata Siniarska, Anna Smolar, Justyna Sobczyk, Mårten Spånberg, Vava Ștefănescu, Monika Strzępka, Krzysztof Szekalski, Weronika Szczawińska, Magda Szpecht,

Carmina Šilec, Vincent Tirmarche, Tea Tupajić, Janek Turkowski, Benjamin Verdonck, Barbara Wysocka, Michał Zadara, Petra Zanki, Hubert Zemler, Paul Zirkus, Wojtek Ziemilski, Marek Żerański as well as Penny Arcade & Steve Zehantner, Holly Hughes, Citizen Reno, Peggy Shaw & Lois Weaver in frames of „Decency Clause”, prepared in collaboration with Joanna Krakowska.

**and collectives and theatre groups:**

Agrupación Señor Serrano, Andcompany&Co., Berlin Group, Betontanc, Carmina Slovenica, chelfitch, Centrala, Czytelnia Dramatu, Dance On Ensemble, dramAcum, Forced Entertainment, Gob Squad, GroundFloor, Kana Theatre, Komuna//Warszawa, National Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, neTTheatre, Needcompany, The Pig Iron, Provisorium, Scena Plastyczna KUL, Stereo Akt, She She Pop, Teatr 21, Teatr im. W. Bogusławskiego - Kalisz, Teatr im. J. Osterwy - Lublin, Teatr im. S. Żeromskiego - Kielce, Teatr Dramatyczny im. J. Szaniawskiego - Wałbrzych, Teatr Nowy Warszawa, Teatr Ósmego Dnia, Teatr Polski - Poznań, Teatr Polski im. H. Konieczki - Bydgoszcz, Teatr Realistyczny, Teatr Stary - Lublin, Teatr Żydowski im. E. R. i I. Kamińskich - Warsaw, TR Warszawa, Umka.lv

The festival programme in the years 2013-2017 also included projects led by Ende Neu, Sonic Phenomena, Yael Vishnizki Levi, and Szymon Kasprówicz. The presentations of local artists shown during the City of Lublin's 700th anniversary in 2017 were prepared under the artistic guidance of Janusz Opryński. From the very beginning, the film section of the programme was curated by Barbara Sawicka.

The festival, in our understanding, was something far more than a presentation of ready performances. With its every edition, we continually developed the aspects of festival activities which were aimed at supporting performing arts makers and thinkers, as well as developing the space for public debate. These were, among others:

**Artistic residencies in Lublin:**

residencies for playwrights — Pavlo Arie, Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk and Özen Yula. The residencies, prepared in cooperation with the Galata Perform theatre in Istanbul, resulted not only in the creation of new stage texts (which were presented during the festival's 19th edition, as part of the Play City project, and prepared together with the Soho Theatre), but also in a realisation concept for “The Mayor” by Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk, directed by Maria Kwiecien and featuring Lublin-based actors.

### **Coproductions:**

„Birdie” Agrupación Señor Serrano, „War and Peace” Gob Squad, „Oratorio. A collective mediation on a well-kept secret” She She Pop, „Usland. Śladami Leonarda Z.” by Agnieszka Jakimiak (in coproduction with Goethe Institut and Kultur Forum Weimar), „Mothers of Steel” by Madalina Dan and Agata Siniarskia (in coproduction with Art Stations Foundation in Poznań, Alfred ve Dvore in Prague and Fabrika Potsdam), „Po co psuć i tak już złą atmosferę” by Aleksandra Jakubczak (in cooperation with Sopot NonFiction Festival and Boto Theatre) and „Metamorphosis” by Mime Wave.

**Year-long programme of artistic residencies** was to be continued through the next two seasons, in cooperation with Quarantine from Manchester, Comédie de Béthune - Centre Dramatique National, Grand Theatre Groningen and La 18 from Marrakesh—as part of a EU-financed project. Due to changes, the project was transferred to Galeria Labirynt.

### **Festival Campus:**

A series of seminars held during last focus festival editions. Few days long meeting of students of theatre studies departments of Polish universities, the Festival Campus became a space of intellectual and experiential exchange, a site of discussions about attended plays and shows, a place of meetings with artists as well as a platform for debates that reach far beyond the scope of the Festival itself. Conducted by researchers from the universities of Kraków, Lublin, Poznań and Warszawa, the seminars tackled both the issues related to the festival and its wider context. In addition, Campus participants were also be given a chance to participate in specially tailored meetings with artists participating in the Festival. The teachers and mentors were, among others: dr Anna R. Burzyńska (UJ, Kraków), dr Jarosław Cymerman, (UMCS, Lublin), prof. Ewa Guderian-Czaplińska (UAM, Poznań), dr Grzegorz Kondrasiuk (UMCS, Lublin), dr Tomasz Kowalski (UAM), prof. Bojana Kunst (ATW, Giessen), dr Monika Kwaśniewska (UJ, Kraków), dr Piotr Morawski (UW, Warsaw), Rabih Mroué (Beirut/Berlin), Zofia Smolarska (AT, Warsaw)

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'Konfrontacje Teatralne' is an utopian festival for the future of the arts and a precious offer for 'theatre as an experience'. I would be happy if Europe had more festivals so carefully curated like this."

**Prof. Heiner Goebbels, Institute for Applied Theater Studies, Justus Liebig University, Giessen**

One of the most progressive theatre events in Poland.

**Witold Mrozek, *Dwutygodnik (Biweekly)*, issue no. 220, 9/2017**

Advanced positions in the international world of theatre, dance, performance are not easy to find. The genre of devised, not drama-based live arts pushes now for several years the aesthetic discourse and is widely considered to be a driving force in live arts - but it at the same time remains a small scene. So if one knot in the international network that enables, produces, commissions, supports artistic work in this field is cut, it can be felt far beyond the borders of the city even the state where this cut happens. The Confrontations Festival in Lublin has become in the last years such an indispensable knot: Due to the thoughtful, innovative, provokative but at the same time very serious and sensitive work of Marta Keil and Grzegorz Reske the festival has given great impulses to the scene - but more important to the local as well as the international audience.

**Florian Malzacher, curator, dramaturg, Berlin**

For me, the festival was like an open space to everyone to participate; from artists, actors and directors, to spectators, students and visitors, all were there, going from one show to another. What was really amazing and important is how the two curators organized an international festival that is essentially taking into consideration the local productions; how to bring polish artists belonging to different generations and put them side by side with renowned international artists, all together without hierarchies; how to build a platform where the urgent matters that we are all facing today are debated and be articulated; questioning the existing “modes of production and the subsequent consequences for workers”, the necessity of protecting the autonomy of art, and to rethink democracy and its relation to the big dominant institutions and other matters... Marta Keil and Grzegorz Reske, thank you for your motivating and fabulous work and efforts, hoping this festival will continue for it is not only important for the artists and spectators in Poland but also for the us as well, we who come as individuals bringing our questions, concerns and thoughts to share them with yours and also to share with you the same fear: the fear of losing our last open spaces that accommodate people of different point of views, different experiences and different identities.

**Rabih Mroué, artist, Beirut/Berlin**

It is a festival that completely realizes Rancière’s principal of the emancipation of the spectator: the audience crosses the line between the opposing sides of looking and acting, opens to discussion and creative work. It is facilitated to a large extent by the festival publications (which fill the gap in access to important, contemporary texts on culture and which are edited like academic publications) and the programme of the campus, which is a unique initiative in Poland.

**dr Anna R. Burzyńska, Jagiellonian University lecturer, editor of the „Didaskalia” magazine**

We observe the Konfrontacje festival in Lublin with some envy, as for several years it has hosted the newest and most popular names in theatre and performance and has presented the most

interesting cultural propositions in Europe. It is unfortunate that the capital city does not have an event like this.

During the Festival we confront with the new, often previously unknown, look on the art of theatre —which is exceptionally invigorating and refreshing. And increasingly rare in our country. We meet fantastic people, and the contacts we forge during the festival remain a long-lasting source of interesting projects and exchanges. Due to Konfrontacje, Lublin is a true European capital of culture—and that is what we love about the city.

### **Komuna/Warszawa**

I very much admire the way how program is curated and how the content of the festival is always put together with great care. The festival is formulated as a vivid platform of exchange between artists, writers, thinkers and the audience, and is with its many different platforms (performances, talks, publications) opening some crucial questions about the aesthetic approaches in contemporary theater. Konfrontacje Festival is for sure one of the most important performance events I visited in the last years, very well connected to the audience and local community. It is open, communicative, daring and very attentive to the variety of theater and performance practice. At the same time it is always reflective, critical also towards itself, always searching for new possibilities how to enable and give voice to contemporary theater and performance practice.

**Prof. Dr. Bojana Kunst, Institute for Applied Theater Studies, Justus Liebig University, Giessen**

The programme declaration of the Konfrontacje Teatralne festival in Lublin announced “undermining and demolishing the boundaries of theatre,” “searching for solutions and ideas other than those applied in mainstream theatre,” asking questions about “the role, meaning and the fundamental objectives of theatre.” And although the Konfrontacje festival curated by Marta Keil and Grzegorz Reske have gained in the last few years the position of one of the most interesting theatre festivals in Poland, I was sceptical about these declarations. But I was wrong. And now I can write this review with a feeling that I have experienced something truly important.

**Marcin Kościelniak, Mówiąc wprost, e-teatr.pl, 7 November 2015**

The festival follows the newest trends in the development of theatre language and pays special attention to the phenomena occurring between genres, transcending the distinctions between theatre, performance, visual art and music. The unique advantage of the programme propositions prepared by the curators—Marta Keil and Grzegorz Reske—is the ability to juxtapose corresponding Polish, European and world scenes. Ones that are seeking new forms and maintaining a dialogue with each other.

[...] At the same time, Konfrontacje remain a living and diverse event, which is both open to audiences and firmly rooted in its locality. The festival is a celebration of theatre, both on a local and international scale, for spectators, the wide artistic community and experts—which is an extraordinary feat!

**dr Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, editor, researcher, dramaturg and lecturer, Warsaw**

This year, Konfrontacje stands out among Polish festivals due to the cohesion of its programme, its high artistic level and the courage to notice the phenomena that only emerge from the fringes of the theatrical world.

**Katarzyna Waligóra, Theatre of performers #1: "Autonomy/Institution/Democracy" (Teatr performerów #1: „Autonomia/Instytucja/Demokracja”) – account of the XXI Konfrontacje Teatralne, *taniecPOLSKA.pl*, 10 November 2016**

I find the programme of this year's edition of Konfrontacje Teatralne in Lublin extremely interesting, fresh and coherent when it comes to curatorial premises, and at the same time diverse when it comes to the artistic shape of the featured productions. The curators' decision to invite performances by Agrupación Señor Serrano, Gob Squad or Penny Arcade gave us an opportunity to encounter the works of artists who are rarely presented in Poland, and who determine the newest directions of theatrical exploration right now. It is my strong belief that such initiatives must be supported—and the ones who benefit from them most are the spectators.

**Anka Herbut, dramaturg, Wrocław**

The Konfrontacje Teatralne festival in Lublin, as shaped by its curators, Marta Keil and Grzegorz Reske, is, in my view, one of the most interesting events in the Polish theatre landscape. Its programme juxtaposes, in an extremely interesting manner, the most fascinating achievements of Polish experimental theatre (both from institutional and "off" circles), important dance productions and various performative experiments (such as, for example, stand-up comedy). What is more, the festival programme is international, and allows for a comparison between important Polish works and the achievements of prominent creators from abroad (such as Xavier LeRoy or Gob Squad). It is also worth to emphasize the civic attitude of the curators, who create the programme in such a way that it can be treated as a worldview statement—and in the current period of political crisis it is, to my mind, an approach worth of our respect and protection.

**dr Tomasz Plata, The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw**

The choice of the curatorial formula of the Konfrontacje festival, as well as the choice of Marta Keil and Grzegorz Reske as its main curators and producers, were exceptionally fortunate. Their grasp of the theatre world—including their knowledge of trends, interesting artists and groups that are

worth presenting, as well as their vast contacts—constitute one of many undeniable advantages of the duo. However, the specific character and uniqueness of their Konfrontacje is determined by one more thing: their intellectual courage and diagnostic intuition which allows them to compose the festival propositions into a coherent whole, which forever remains one step ahead of the changes happening around us. It is due to this fact that Konfrontacje are a true international festival which does not limit itself to increasingly futile and boring (and at the same time awkward) local conflicts and themes. It is an event which does not focus on what we know and think about now, but instead points to what we will probably (and unfortunately) think about tomorrow.

**Prof. dr hab. Dariusz Kosiński, Jagiellonian University lecturer, Kraków**

The experience gained by students during their week at the festival is priceless—it is a fact which they state themselves, but which is also proven by the endless conversations and discussions (which we still hold) about the events we took part in. Workshops with artists such as Rabih Mroué or discussions with researchers as renowned as Bojana Kunst open for the students completely new and exciting spheres of participation in culture and novel ways of thinking about theatre. [...] All this would be impossible without the festival's curatorial concept, which not only includes a strong and distinctive artistic component, but also creates a space for discussion, inspiration and meetings—its titular confrontations. And for this opportunity—to confront with students from other institutions, to confront with exquisite art, to confront with our own theatrical sensitivity, and, finally, to meet brilliant researchers and artist—we would like to express our enormous gratitude.

**Prof. Ewa Guderian-Czaplińska and the students of Theatre Studies at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań**

The 20th, anniversary edition of the Konfrontacje Teatralne festival has officially ended. And it has to be stated that it has left a lasting impression. Karta Keil and Grzegorz Reske, the curators responsible for the programme of the festival, have managed to evoke tremendous emotions and to prove that theatre evolves, demolishes boundaries and becomes an important voice in public discourse.

**Aleksandra Puculek, Kacper Sulowski, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20 October 2015**

The extraordinary value of the last year and current edition of the festival was the cohesion between the artistic and theory-centred elements of the programme. The performances problematized and focused on the themes taken up in discussions, and at the same time presented, to a large extent, a very high artistic level. The spectacles expanded the field of reflection and encouraged creative polemics. All that made the week spent at the festival an extremely stimulating and inspiring experience, which is a rare feature shared only by a few theatre festivals in Poland.

[...] The Konfrontacje Teatralne festival develops its formula with every edition and strengthens its position in the theatrical map of Poland, while simultaneously striving to introduce good institutional practices. My hope is that with time they will have a significant influence on the standards of work in Polish theatres.

**dr Monika Kwaśniewska-Mikuła, Jagiellonian University lecturer, editor of the „Didaskalia” magazine**

The programme of this year’s edition of Konfrontacje was extremely interesting and diverse, and at the same time conceptually coherent. I am talking about the spectacles that were presented and the organised debates and film screenings. I feel that the festival created a pretext and an occasion for many important conversations, and the discussed themes, such as the institutional dimension of art or autothematic theatre, corresponded to the artistic practices of the featured artists, as well as to the experience of participating in cultural life shared by the guests and spectators of the festival.

**Zuzanna Berendt, Jagiellonian University student**

The Konfrontacje Teatralne festival in Lublin is definitely one of the best festivals in Poland. It is also one of the most important, as it is a festival which opens Polish audiences and artist to current trends and discourses in theatre and performing arts—both independent and institutional, Polish and international. Never have I seen, on any theatre festival in Poland, a programme which would truly present the wide horizons of particular discourses and problems (which are often shunned and tabooed in Poland) in such a comprehensive manner.

I was greatly impressed by the curatorial level of Konfrontacje: its accurate and coherent programme line. Most of all, I was impressed by one of the best initiatives to open a festival to the youngest generations of theatre theorists and researchers—the Campus organized for students of theatre studies. It is a one-of-a-kind initiative joining three universities that are centres for theatre studies in Poland. It was during Konfrontacje that for the first time I have been able to exchange ideas with my peers from all around Poland, and to consciously discuss the festival spectacles and events, as well as the issues mirrored by the programme (as it does present important issues), which makes Konfrontacje one of very few festivals which have a true theoretic and educational programme line and do not solely focus on presenting a sequence of famous titles and names.

**Klaudia Kasperska, Jagiellonian University student**

No other theatre festival has given me the opportunity to take part in such a rich programme, which included spectacles, concert and performance presentations, as well as workshops, lectures, seminars and meetings with artists (organized for the students participating in the Festival Campus or open for all interested persons). [...] I believe that Konfrontacje Teatralne is a festival which has



been thoroughly well-thought-out when it comes to its programme, which strives to touch upon current issues and trends in contemporary theatre and performing arts in general. The invited artists have different artistic temperaments, methods of work, and styles of functioning in the world of theatre and institutions (and sometimes beyond it). The festival broadens the perspectives of its viewers and provides them with tool that are helpful in thinking about theatre and art in general.

**Dominika Bremer, Jagiellonian University student**

Even before the anniversary edition, the organizers of the festival declared that it will be an occasion to return to its sources: to the tradition of alternative theatre, which is the origin of Konfrontacje. And they managed to fully realize this premise. It was a far-reaching return. Not only to its first editions, which still featured some traditional, repertoire theatres, but even further—to Student Theatre Spring festivals and the Confrontations of Young Theatre, which hosted only alternative theatres. All performances presented during this year's edition stemmed out of this field. And the presentations displayed the variety of formal and thematic experiments taken up by contemporary artists.

**Andrzej Z. Kowalczyk, *Kurier Lubelski*, 19 October 2015**