

HERstory 9 and 10 July 2018

Generously hosted by Kirsten Langkilde, Rector of the FNHW, Academy of Art and Design in Basel

INTROCUCTION by Carla Delfos

Why are we here?

During my time as ELIA's Executive Director (27 years) I often tried to put the theme 'women in leading positions in the cultural sector in Europe' on the agenda, and although there was interest and sympathy, there were always more pressing issues to focus on.

It was important but it never seemed important enough.

So I thought, it is about time! I approached Chrissie Tiller and Mercedes Giovinazzo and they enthusiastically embraced the idea. Kirsten Langkilde immediately offered to host the first event. That's why we are here.

As introduction to our discussions I would like to address three questions:

1. Where do we come from?
2. Where are we now?
3. Where do we want to go from here?

Where do we come from?

We do owe the generations of women before us

Olympe de Gouges was an activist and writer in Paris in the period of the French Revolution. She published in 1791 'The Declaration of the Rights of Women' and she was beheaded two year later, in 1793.

150 years later the key statements of her declaration were internationally endorsed by the United Nations in the 'Declaration of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women' which, in turn, went on to be legally recognised in nearly every country in the world.

The Suffragettes started their actions around 1913, Millicent Fawcette, the founder, Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel, Annie Kenney, they fought the toughest struggle, not to be compared to our situation right now.

That is where we come from.

Where are we now?

To name a few of the many recent actions:

- since the start of the Cannes film festival 82 women film directors walked the red carpet and 1.688 male;
- Irish women were protesting for abortion in May 2018, this turned out to be successful, now they fight to take the law stating that women 'contribute to society by staying at home' out, there will be a referendum in Ireland November 2018;
- grandmothers 'Oma's' went on the street in Austria, against the right wing developments.

From incapacitated in the 50'ties (my mother was, by law, not allowed to work when she married) to #metoo in 2018.

After a long and tedious fight, voting rights for women were a fact approximately 100 years ago, since then a revolution took place with radical changes, but we are not there yet:

- For the 2nd year in a row the Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum shows equality of man and women is getting backwards;
- Local elections in Holland for the City Council resulted in 30% women in the City Councils;
- The sad score on gender equality in the European Commission...only 9 out of 28 EU Commissioners and 37% of members of the current European Parliament are women;
- Women in the UK effectively work for more than two months a year for free because of the country's gender pay gap, according to the Trades Union Congress in a report published this year coinciding with International Women's Day.

The glass ceiling, though it has risen over the past decades, has not yet shattered. The gender-pay gap and continued male dominance in decision-making positions show that efforts made haven't been enough.

In the current speed, gender equality will not be reached in 83 years, as was predicted a few years ago, but in 100 years. We are going backwards.

As inspiration we asked you to read 'Women and Power, a Manifesto' written by Mary Beard. Recently Mary Beard has accused a US broadcaster of editing her BBC documentary Civilisations. They cut out most of the scenes she was visible and introduced a voice over. The American edits of the show had erased her central arguments and reduced her on-screen contributions.

Erasing of a women's faces is not new.

Pharaoh Hatshepsut lived around 1500 BC and reigned Egypt for 22 years.

She was killed by her nephew who then became the Pharaoh. He was so afraid of her and her reputation that he ordered for all images of her face to be chiselled away from the reliefs, she was made invisible.

Or 'using' the works from women, like:

- The sculpture 'fountain' or better known as 'urinoir' that was made by the German Dada-poet Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, after she died Marcel Duchamp took the credit;
- Paintings from Judith Leyster were accredited as works by Frans Hals;
- Works of Camil Claudelle were accredited by Rodin as his own;
- Works of Eileen Grey were accredited as his by Le Corbusier and many many more.

Talented and successful women, erased or used.

But there is of course also a lot of progress.

We also asked you to read Chimamanda Adichie, author of 'we all should be feminists'. She is very successful in having her voice heard and she even recently addressed the Chatham House. In all our countries there are wonderful and constructive initiatives to bridge the gap.

Frans Timmermans, EU Commissioner, said in a speech 8 March, I quote:

'So I think the battle for women's rights is right in the heart of the battle for the future of our society and what kind of society that will be.

The battle for women's rights is also the most accessible battle in terms of how people mobilise, if you look at the United States but also parts of Europe, if you look at parts of Asia. There is a lot of pushback but also incredible amounts of mobilisation of women of all generations who stand up for women's rights and who deserve a bigger alliance of men joining their fight'.

End quote

This is where we are now.

A lot has been achieved the past 100 years, how about the coming 100 years?

There is obviously still a lot to do.

What is our responsibility.

Where do we want to go from here?

I propose that we are not going to point fingers and blame man or ourselves for what has not yet been achieved, let's not complain or moan, but let's take the situation as it is now as our starting point.

Let's take responsibility and develop ideas how we can contribute to the 100 years to come.

Three points I would like to emphasise before we start our discussions:

visibility, solidarity and empowerment.

I would like to give very personal examples:

When I started ELIA (ELIA was my idea), it was planned as a one off conference, but when not 60 but 400 people registered everybody realised it was going to be something more than that and we worked day and night to make it happen. Originally I had planned to give the openings speech, but there was so much to do that when one of my - male - colleagues offered to take over the opening speech, I gratefully accepted. One thing less to worry about. It did feel slightly awkward, but I took no time to think it through.

Until I told a friend, she was director of the Amsterdam City Theatre, and she said: 'I will be there when your conference opens, and if you are not the first person I see, I never talk to you again'.

Only then I realised what I had done.

Then I realised how important it is to be visible, to show yourself, take responsibility and take credit. I was embarrassed and ever so grateful she pointed this out to me.

But I needed a women friend to make me aware.

Point 1: visibility!

In my almost 30 years leading ELIA, with an average of 2/3 male board members, I have seen that for man there is, by default, the old boys network. It goes without saying, a net woven during many many years, strong, impossible to break down, for man only. They are not even aware themselves, it is just there, constructed during thousands of years. Good for them. Women don't have that, not yet, it will take years to develop....but we are on our way. You can see it at many levels all over the world, women are coming together on their own terms, just look at us here today.

Point 2: solidarity!

As we are here in this room we can say we are all – more or less - successful and established. It has not been easy, we each have our own stories about struggles, the bumpy road we took, but we did it.

Now I feel the duty to share my experience with the younger generation, we can perhaps make it easier for them by providing them with our experience, with useful tools, trainings and mentoring. At the same time we, as established generation, can also learn a lot from the younger generation.

Point 3. Empowerment!

Visibility – Solidarity – Empowerment

The coming 2 days we will get to know each other, we will share, compare, discuss and develop ideas. We will celebrate and make plans for the future.

Yesterday evening we, the 4 organisers, were making the final preparations and we had a heated discussion about the definition of power, the role of women through the ages, about role models and recognition.

We didn't find answers or solutions, but we did have a discussion we normally do not have. I trust this will continue today.

The coming 2 days we will have discussions we normally do not have.

We will travel from the personal, via professional to the political.....

We are going on a journey