



TIME TO INNOVATE, REINVENT & RETHINK

By Mike Downey



This summer, we thought we were turning a corner. Autumn has brought us little hope. Winter will bring even less. People don't want to risk their lives to watch a movie, when they can (to a lesser or greater extent) engage culturally and commercially with a version of cinema at home. The virus is not allowing us to create cinema in the same way that we have done before, and not in the same quantities. This is the stark status quo that the European film industry and the European Film Academy itself must face up to for the next six months ... at least.

The time has come to innovate, reinvent, rethink and be increasingly flexible, in order to plan well for a time when there can be some sense of restoration and rebirth. Things will certainly not be the same at every level of our multi-layered industry.

What we have now is a period in which we can reflect, analyse and lay the groundwork for a future Academy that will be resistant, durable and able to survive the cultural, epidemiological and financial vagaries in an increasingly insecure global environment.

The Academy has been fortunate enough in these treacherous times to have been supported by its loyal funders, patrons, and last but not least, by you, its faithful members. The support of our public funders and patrons has become even more valuable than ever this year as we had to deal with a shortfall for the first time in our history, due to unpaid membership fees. We are aware of the difficult situation of many of our members and have engaged to find solutions for those cases of need. It is you, our members of the Academy, who are the centre of all our activities, and who, going forward, will be at the epicentre of our thinking as we reflect, consider and build for the coming years.

Which brings us back to the future. And not just the survival of the Academy, but the desire and vision to maintain its strong roots at the heart of European cultural life, consolidating the already high standards and quality of its membership, but also at the same to grow the membership to make it even more reflective of the European industry.

We need to reach out further into our existing chapters, and bring into the fold professionals who have not yet made an acquaintance with our guild, and to curate an entry of younger members to bolster our ranks.

As a group of professionals, we need to focus on our interests and those of our immediate industry. Equally, in the current environment, we would do well to find ways to connect in increased, symbiotic, and more collaborative ways to reach out to audiences.

The Academy has already embarked on a programme which will revise, renovate and renew not only its websites and internet presence but also will re-assess and re-analyse our overall web and social media presence. We plan to reach out to the *cinophile* audience all over the continent, who are thirsty for European film, with particular focus on younger audiences.

Which is why we need to maintain and reinforce our active presence in the educational sector. Priorities include the expansion of the EFA Young Audience Award and the further promotion of the European Universities Film Award. The EFA Young Audience Award (which moved online this year) had been planned for a new record of 70 cities in 41 countries, involving 2,000 jurors from ages 12 to 14. This unique film education programme makes a huge contribution to our future possibilities and it has more global potential.

We are committed to sustainability and the establishment of a sustainability award; we have already planted the EFA forest in Iceland in anticipation of the Awards hosted there in 2022, going some way to offset our carbon footprint.

Also, we need to maintain our commitments to gender balance across the board and are planning to introduce an EFA gender balance Seal of Approval in 2021. Equality and human rights remain at the heart of our commitments and engagement, as defined by our foundation of and participation in the International Coalition for Filmmakers at Risk.

Equally, the need for inclusion and belonging can benefit from the current political awareness of unconscious bias and institutional racism, also in the European cultural environment, to that end, EFA will take an active role in ARTEF (Anti-Racism Taskforce for European Film).

These are just some of the highlights that the board, incoming EFA Director Matthijs Wouter Knol and outgoing Director Marion Döring, EFA Productions chief Jürgen Biesinger and the whole EFA team have been discussing, developing and curating over the pandemic period and beyond.

We are facing a great, historic upheaval, and we will only be able to master it if we are looking beyond our own personal needs, beyond the needs of our own individual professional departments, and, last but not least, beyond pure national interests.

Rebuilding the future of our industry and our societies will require new thinking. There are massive challenges and hurdles to overcome. But I believe that both EFA and the industry is resilient, strong and stubborn, and is willing to fight for its survival. With the help of national governments, regional funds and the European Union, the brick walls will for sure crumble. And we will come home safely through to the other side. It's just a matter of time

Mike Downey is a producer at Film & Music Entertainment and chairman of EFA.

EFA CLOSE-UP

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