

IN GOOD TIMES ... AND IN BAD TIMES ...

By Marion Döring

2020 has been an exceptionally tough year for everyone. Since March, we have all been struggling hard to find our ways through a new landscape of sudden insecurity, and while the end of this weird year is coming into sight, we still don't know what is awaiting us behind the horizon, in 2021 and beyond. At the same time, 2020 has been a year of accelerated learning and adapting ourselves to a future which requests our readiness to new approaches as it may be deprived of long established and reliable coordinates.

The industry is resilient, strong and stubborn, says EFA Chairman Mike Downey. Exactly. These are three good characteristics to take up the challenge of this crisis. It was encouraging to see that the fundamental upheaval caused by the pandemic has released new energy instead of standstill and depression. We have seen innovation embraced – and an ever-present desire for communication and cooperation. Our industry can rely on a solid ground of functioning networks that have grown over the past three decades.

The European Commission's Creative Europe programme and its preceding programmes have not only supported the European audiovisual industry with grants in a wide and growing range of schemes (with an increased budget for the next seven years to still be passed by the European Parliament and Council) – it has fostered its beneficiaries to connect in networks, to form alliances and to cooperate across national borders and professional departments. Creative Europe brought us together in festivals and markets and in promotional, training and educational programmes. Creative Europe has all rights to claim its invaluable impact on shaping an industry of true European dimension and spirit without which we would feel desperately alone and disconnected in this demanding situation. In these turbulent times we should therefore pause for a moment and send a big Thank You to Brussels.

Sharing more gratitude, the European Film Academy has particular respect and appreciation for the faithfulness of its EFA Patrons who stood with us in a moment when they themselves were facing big challenges in their own countries. We salute the flexibility with which our public funding institutions such as the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, FFA German Federal Film Board, German State Lottery Berlin, and Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg and the already mentioned Creative Europe responded to the crisis, allowing us to re-allocate our budgets to the needs of an exceptional year, when the activities of the European Film Academy were fundamentally affected by COVID-19.

Already during spring, during the first lockdown, we were forced to quickly transform our Young Audience Award from physical events across the whole continent to an online adventure – a surprisingly satisfying adventure, although it couldn't replace the physical cinema experience of the young jurors.

We had hoped that the European Film Awards Ceremony in December would be preserved from the same fate, but we had to react to the growing number of infections, and together with our Icelandic partners we finally had to take the painful decision of cancelling the ceremony in Reykjavik, which we all had been dreaming to become an emotional moment of post-pandemic reunion of the European film industry. And here, again, we can't praise enough the flexibility of public institutions: Within only a few weeks, the Icelandic Minister of Culture and the Mayor of Reykjavik managed to pave the way to finally host the European Film Awards in the Icelandic capital in December 2022.



As a consequence of force majeure, the European Film Awards will be presented this week in a completely new format – a series of virtual events from Tuesday, 8 December to the Grand Finale on Saturday, 12 December. Will these events be able to replace the social gathering of nominees and winners, of EFA members and EFA Patrons, EU representatives, the industry and the media? Certainly not, like nothing can replace us being physically together. On the other hand: Haven't we all experienced the strong bonds that keep us connected in times of social distancing, maybe, even more than ever, because we suddenly became aware of this great quality of our industry which we took for granted before, without even thinking about it?

Let's remember this when we will meet virtually during the next days. Only together will we be able to make the virtual 33rd European Film Awards a memorable event of an industry that stands together in promoting and celebrating European cinema in a very memorable year.

Marion Döring is Director of the European Film Academy.