



Profile

Christophe Slagmuylder

Born in Brussels in 1967, Christophe Slagmuylder studied contemporary art at Universite Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and subsequently became an instructor at Brussels's La Cambre (l'Ecole Nationale Supérieure) (ENSAV). From 1994 he became involved in production work with the companies of choreographers Michèle Noiret, Pierre Droulers and born Thomas Hauert. and also with the PARTS school founded by choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, leader of the Rosas company. Then, after working as assistant artistic director for a theater in Brussels joined the Kunsten Festival des Arts (KFDA) staff in 2002 and worked on the festival programming with the artistic director, Frie Leysen. Since the retirement of Leysen from KFDA in 2006, he took over as the festival's artistic director.

Kunsten Festival des Arts

This festival is held every May in Brussels, Belgium. It is a contemporary arts festival focusing primarily on the performing arts. Known for its avant-garde program, it is recognized as one of the "antenna" festivals of the international contemporary arts scene introducing talented new artists. In contrast to France's Avignon Festival with its program of mainstream European theater, KFDA strives to present a program with more experimental works and a variety of artists reflecting the wider diversity of arts from around the world. With its own initiatives, the festival seeks to discover and support the production of works by young artists not only from Belgium but throughout Europe and also artists from developing countries that lack arts support systems. In addition to these many productions of young artists' works, KFDA works to encourage the careers of these artists from a long-term standpoint by involving them in multi-year collaborative production efforts. At the same time, the festival produces new works with established artist from Belgium and the rest

Presenter Interview

プレゼンターインタビュー
The Kunsten Festival des Arts, making Brussels a center
generating new trends in contemporary art

2008.2.29

現代アートの潮流を生み出す震源地
ブリュッセルのクンステン・フェスティバル・デザール

Held every May in Brussels, Belgium, the Kunsten Festival des Arts is a contemporary arts festival known for its cutting-edge program and for introducing many talented new artists. All this plus the active pursuit of international collaborative works that bring to the festival a large number of world premieres—roughly half its program—has made KFDA as one of the "antenna" festivals of the international contemporary arts scene that attracts festival directors from around the world. In this interview the festival's new artistic director, Christophe Slagmuylder, talks about the history and the future of this festival that has served as the springboard to international success for many artists like Japan's Toshiki Okada.

(Interviewer: Chiaki Soma)

I would like to begin by asking about how the Kunsten Festival des Arts (KFDA) came to be established. KFDA was first held in 1994, the year after the establishment of the European Union with its headquarters in Brussels and Belgium adopted a federal government system, both of which made it a time of great change in Brussels. Was there any relationship between this social change and the founding of the Kunsten Festival des Arts?

KFDA was established by Frie Leysen in 1994. She believed that it was very important for Brussels to have a cutting-edge international arts festival. And, although Brussels was seeking to establish its position as the political "capital" of Europe, it trailed the other capitals of Europe as a cultural center. Also, Belgium is a country divided between two populations, the French-speaking Walloon region and the Flemish-speaking Flanders region, and Brussels is unique in that the only city in the country where both languages are used as official languages. In the past cultural activities in Belgium were always affiliated with one or the other of these two communities. Each community has had its own bureau of cultural affairs and the arts funding systems and theaters were also affiliated with one community or the other. By being established in Brussels, the only city in Belgium where the two communities co-existed, KFDA sought to be a festival that could help break down this traditional division in Belgian society by being open to the people of both communities and to be one that worked with international artists, artists living and working in Brussels as well as the artists of both communities. Also, financially KFDA received funding from both communities from the beginning and strongly maintained its position as a festival for both communities and as an international festival for Brussels and of Brussels. Of course this was not an easy thing to accomplish and almost every year there were conflicts with the authorities in power. It was quite difficult politically because KFDA could not exercise the political advantages of saying that we were a French-speaking community festival or a Flemish-speaking community festival. In that sense, by not being affiliated with either community left us outside the existing system and unable to let political priorities affect our decisions. Now that KFDA has become a famous international festival the government can no longer take us lightly.

Presenter Interview

The Kunsten Festival des Arts, making Brussels a center generating new trends in contemporary art

現代アートの潮流を生み出す震源地
ブリュッセルのクンステン・フェスティバル・デザール

of Europe and provides the venues for their world premieres. As one of the epicenters creating new trends in the world's performing arts, KFDA enjoys a strong brand equity. More than 50% of the KFDA program consists of works produced by KFDA or created through KFDA-led collaborative efforts, an half of these will be world premieres in any given year. The fonder of KFDA, Frie Leysen, retired as artistic director after the 2006 festival, after which the post was taken over by her assistant artistic director, Christophe Slagmuylder. Attention in the arts scene is now focused on the changes Slagmuylder will bring to KFDA.



http://www.kfda.be/temp_08/splash/video08.html

In other words, Frie Leysen intended to establish the festival's identity within the context of Brussels as the political capital of Europe?

That can be said to be true in some ways, but also untrue in some ways. Frie Leysen always saw Brussels as a city lacking in ambition in the arts and culture and in the intellectual pursuits. The launch of the European Union was above all an economic measure. What Frie Leysen wanted was to see Brussels not become only the political capital of Europe but also an intellectual and cultural capital. It is true that Brussels has gained much from being centrally located in Europe and easily accessible from the other major cities, even though it may be smaller in size (pop. approx. 1 million). It is also a fact that Brussels is a city where we are constantly confronting the questions of the identity of Belgium as a country where two different communities live in a tense relationship. Belgium is a young country founded in 1830, and it is also a country with a long history of domination by foreign powers both before and after its independence. It doesn't have the strong traditions and cultural identity of the larger surrounding nations of Germany, France and Britain. There is no sense of a clear definition when we speak about Belgian culture. On the contrary, that is also what makes Belgium interesting and opens up a lot of possibilities. For the very fact that it has no heavy weight of cultural heritage, Belgium, and particularly present-day Brussels, are not bound to past traditions and can thus provide an atmosphere and spirit that is open and looking to the future. This is very evident on the Belgian arts scene. Despite the size of the country there has consistently been a very rich arts scene in all the genre over the last 30 years. So, I believe that it is no coincidence that a new festival would be born in Brussels in such a context. In other words, the open-minded environment and the facts that it there is no strong national identity and a lack of strong cultural branding have, conversely, made it easier to promote avant-garde projects, I believe. The term avant-garde may not be the most fitting, I believe that this kind of context is essential for the pursuing new types of artistic forms and language.

Since the 1980s, Belgium has had numerous artists of the Flemish community such as Jan Fabre, Wim Vandekeybus and Jan Lauwers who have been active on the international scene. Was the community of these artists centered in Antwerp?

Not only Antwerp. They were also active in Brussels. Jan Lauwers' Needcompany and Rosas were based in Brussels from that time.

The KFDA founder, Frie Leysen, served as artistic director of arts campus De Singel in Antwerp until 1992.

That's true. The way De Singel was founded is quite different from how she founded KFDA. And it is very interesting. In fact, De Singel was originally planned as an arts school (conservatoire) with a large high-spec hall designed for the students' use. Leysen was hired as the concierge (superintendent) of that hall! (Laughs) She felt that this wonderful hall could become a potent tool for artists such as no other in Belgium. So she talked to the government and politicians and convinced them to make the hall a venue where invited works by international artists could be performed. At the time, there was no other hall in Belgium as large and outfitted with such high-spec stage equipment, and she believed that it could be the place to stage large-scale theatrical works like those of Pina Bausch. With her ongoing efforts, she struggled to make this hall that was originally planned as an educational facility into an international arts center. Even today, De Singel maintains its dual functions as an educational facility and an arts center, and this is purely the result of Frie Leysen's vision and ideas. Until the early 1980s there were

Presenter Interview

The Kunsten Festival des Arts, making
Brussels a center generating new trends
in contemporary art

現代アートの潮流を生み出す震源地
ブリュッセルのクンステン・フェスティバル・
デザール

almost no internationally acclaimed artists in Belgium, and De Singel would play a significant role in contributing to the birth of the world-class that emerged in the country after that. For example, Jan Fabre is one of the artists who benefited from the presence of De Singel. There was a period when he was able to mount works on the same De Singel single stage that was being used by the world's top artists and make it the site of his creative work. In this way, De Singel stood like the "lighthouse" of the Belgian arts scene during the 1980s and '90s.

Why did Ms. Leysen leave De Singel to start a festival in Brussels?

She is the kind of person who always seeks progressive change. She doesn't like to stay in the same position and see things stagnate. During her 10 years at De Singel, she tried many new things and helped it develop, then she decided to leave it to the next generation and move on to her next challenge. Shortly after quitting De Singel, she decided that what she really wanted to do most of all was to start a cutting-edge festival in Brussels, a city that was clearly lacking in international perspective. After coming up with this idea, she took two years to plan and mount the first festival. She quit De Singel in 1992 and the first KFDA was held in 1994.

What work were you involved in at the time the KFDA was getting started in the early 1990s? And how did you come to begin working with Frie Leysen in 2002?

Originally, I was studying contemporary art history at university and after graduation I got a teaching position and taught a course at Brussels's Ecole Superieure. At the same time, I was involved in production and administrative work with numerous dance companies on the performing arts scene. I was working at Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's school, PARTS. I helped in the planning of special student performances and as a career counselor after they graduated. It was in the course of that work that I became acquainted with KFDA's Frie Leysen, and in 2002 she asked me if I wanted to work on the program with her. Ever since the festival's start in 1994, Leysen had put together the programs by herself. Around the time she met me she was looking to reform the program and wanted someone to exchange ideas with about new directions. I think any festival reaches a point where they review their policies and look for problems, and in Frie Leysen's case it was eight years since the launch of KFDA and she was at a point where the situation in Brussels had changed a lot and she needed someone to help her examine whether or not the festival should be continued, and if so, in what way. That is how I began working as Frie Leysen's partner from 2002, and we collaborated to develop and continue the festival until she decided to move on. She left after the 2006 festival, and even though there is no time limit on the director's tenure, it was still unusual perhaps for her to quit the festival that she started herself. KFDA is a festival that is independent of any public authority, having been founded as a personal initiative of Frie Leysen alone. Of course the festival receives public funding, the government didn't ask her to start the festival. So, she could have stayed on if she had wanted, but she decided to leave it to the next generation to bring the KFDA project to its next level of development.

Was Frie Leysen working alone when she established KFDA? Or was she working with anyone as an administrator?

There was a co-director, Guy-do Minne, who was an important person on the Belgian cultural scene in the 90s. From the first festival in 1994 until 2000, when he left for the Brussels cultural capital, he served as the festival's General Director in charge of the budgeting and management. He also supported Frie Leysen on the artistic front as well.

Presenter Interview

The Kunsten Festival des Arts, making
Brussels a center generating new trends
in contemporary art

現代アートの潮流を生み出す震源地
ブリュッセルのクンステン・フェスティバル・
デザール

Before you joined the KFDA team, how did you view the festival from the outside?

Did you feel any new movements going on?

I saw the first festival in 1994 as nothing less than a great event in the art life of Brussels. From that first festival the program consisted of international artists and artists of Brussels, and there were also artists from outside of Europe. For example, there were contemporary artists from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan on the program. At the time there might have been performances of the traditional arts of countries like these, but it was very rare for their contemporary artists to perform in Belgium. It encouraged local artists to create works with new forms of expression and gave them the opportunity to perform their works in an international context. It was important as a festival where works reflecting the viewpoints of the artists of Brussels and Belgium and works reflecting the broader visions of international artists to be performed on the same stages and also as an opportunity for local artists to have their works seen by foreign presenters.

Furthermore, seen in terms of the relationship between the French-speaking and Flemish-speaking communities, since KFDA has no theater facilities of its own, we had to work in cooperation with the theater or performance space that we used as the venues for our productions. And, at the time it was very rare for a presenter to be using theaters and arts centers affiliated with both the French-speaking and Flemish-speaking communities. Traditionally, the French-speaking and Flemish-speaking community theaters and arts centers have belonged to two completely different circuits that didn't know each other and had no reason to get to know each other. In short, there were no merits in getting to know each other. The two circuits each had their own separate support organizations and their own audiences, and their programs were also written only in their own languages. The media that covered the French-language and Flemish-language arts were also completely separate—and it is only now that this situation is beginning to change. In the 1990s they were still completely separate. The French-language television broadcasts and Flemish-language broadcasts are separate and they don't necessarily need to cover the same subjects in terms of cultural information.

But in the educational system the two communities learn each other's languages, don't they?

It is true that the other language becomes one of our required subjects in school from a young age. However, with the exception of Brussels, where both languages are the official languages, in the rest of Belgium there is almost never a need to speak the other community's language.

It is certainly a strange situation to have two sets of separate public institutions in the same country, but to answer your earlier question about KFDA as viewed in this context, the very fact that the directors affiliated with the theaters of these two separate communities could sit down in discussion at the same table was an event in itself with considerable impact. But today, the situation has changed considerably and more theaters are now mounting productions in what was formerly the other community's language, for which they may use translated subtitles during the performances and print bilingual programs. All this was unthinkable in the 90s. So, it can be said that KFDA has helped make Brussels a city where people can come and go more freely and look at things from different perspectives.

Presenter Interview

The Kunsten Festival des Arts, making Brussels a center generating new trends in contemporary art

現代アートの潮流を生み出す震源地
ブリュッセルのクンステン・フェスティバル・
デザール

Despite all the contributions KFDA has made in helping the two communities coexist, the country's political situation isn't getting better ... (laughs). The division between the two communities has become even clearer and there was the recent crisis where the new government couldn't get started for several months. What are your thoughts on this contradiction?

The most serious issue is that today's government can only be created by politicians who are chosen by democratic elections. The internal situation is that the northern (Flanders) region of the country is economically affluent compared to the southern (French-speaking) region. So there are an increasing number of people supporting the division of the two regions into separate countries. This movement is based mainly on economic motives. It is a very complex matter. As I mentioned earlier, the public institutions are completely separated by community in the realm of culture, but there are other areas like social security where there is only one bureau. But even in these areas there are increasing divisions as the two communities seek to establish their political influence. This lies in direct contradiction to the approach we have taken in our festival. And it is a situation that is a serious issue in Brussels. But Brussels is a city that is neither in the French-language and Flemish-language community, and since it is considered a metropolitan area that is governed separately from the Walloon and Flanders regions, if the two communities were to be separated, Brussels would not belong to either region.

Nonetheless, the movement to separate the Health, Tax and Social Security bureaus only grows stronger. The reason is that the people of the affluent region are tired of paying taxes to be used by people in the poorer region that don't even speak the same language as them. They say they are fed up with the situation (laughs). It's a very serious situation.

Right beside the concept of opening up our borders as a European metropolis is this division that keeps people in this small country of Belgium from reaching agreement, and instead they are trying to close the borders and redefine them in a way that makes their world smaller. It is really frightening. These people just want to feel safe within their own unified cultural realm and comfortable in their economic affluence and they are willing to let intolerance for others grow as a result. It is truly something to be concerned about.

And Brussels also has another community, the immigrant community.

That's correct. The 2007 festival is the first one since I took over as artistic director. While naturally continuing the approach until now and the festival's fundamental philosophy, I also wanted to gradually add my own personal flavor to it. And to do this, it was important that I redefine the festival's concepts and mission and introduce new vocabulary. We emphasized the words urban and cosmopolitan in the 2007 festival. For me, aside from the French-community and Flemish-community issues, this is a very cosmopolitan city with a truly large number of communities. But a community cannot simply be defined by a common language. There are many ways that communities are diversifying today, I believe, due to such factors as people living in the same proximity and having the same hobbies, or that the central elements of their interests are the same or that people are now connected via the Internet. So it is not just language. There are many interconnected communities in large metropolises like Brussels and Tokyo. What we want to support is exactly this kind of cosmopolitan condition. And, we can say that the important thing is for these different communities to coexist and not be

Presenter Interview

The Kunsten Festival des Arts, making Brussels a center generating new trends in contemporary art

現代アートの潮流を生み出す震源地
ブリュッセルのクンステン・フェスティバル・デザール

confined within their separate restrictive boundaries. Rather, they should get to know each other better. For example, Chinatown and other communities exist as isolated “ghettos” inside the city, and while it may be with the intention of maintaining a family-like atmosphere, what interest me is rather the culture shocks that occur when these communities come face to face with each other with a recognition of their differences.

Next I would like to focus on what the festival will be like now that you are at the helm. First of all would like to ask you about some basic facts. Concerning the managing system, your festival takes the form of nonprofit association, doesn't it? Who are the association's directors?

The directors are people from the arts and the intellectual communities, and all of them are Belgian. Naturally, we are careful to make sure that the makeup of the board of directors is well balanced in terms of members from both the French-speaking and Flemish –speaking communities. We even have two presidents. All of the directors are completely independent of any political affiliations or responsibilities. For that reason, we may not be able to use them as political contacts or information sources, but on the other hand they are completely free from any political pressure. I think that is very important. We have about four meetings of the board a year and the directors serve as a form of control organization. They never interfere in the festival programming or try to pressure me in any way, but they are very important people for us and I consult with them for opinions before I announce the festival program. And, each year after the festival is over in June we review it together and have them present for the evaluation. So, for me the board serves as a control organization as well as being an important reference source. Some of the directors are people that Frie Leysen gathered at the start of the festival in 1994, and some are new members who have joined since then.

Next I would like to ask you about your office team. You have a co-director who helps with the administrative side, don't you?

Yes. I have a co-director named Roger CHRISTMANN who is in charge of the financial and administrative aspects of the festival. This co-directorship is very important because, by concentrating on the fund-raising and the organizational aspects of each project, he allows me to concentrate on the artistic side and the festival programming. Roger joined the KFDA team before me, back in 2001, and I began working with him as co-director from June of 2006.

Besides you two directors, how many people are on your full-time staff?

That is a difficult to answer. There are a number of people that we have working for us nine or ten months out of the year, and although they are not 100% full-time staff, they work for us on contract for a given period of time. There are only six of us, including Roger and me, who are full-time, as opposed to working on short-termed contracts. Four more work nine or ten months out of the year. These ten people constitute the core of the festival staff. In addition, we have a lot of people working short term from January or February until the festival in May.

KFDA always publishes thick programmes with all texts fully translated in French, Flemish and English, and you always issue press releases before performances with texts that are very complete in both quality and volume. What's more you always have full French and Flemish subtitles for all foreign performances. How do you handle such a large volume of text production?

Presenter Interview

The Kunsten Festival des Arts, making Brussels a center generating new trends in contemporary art

現代アートの潮流を生み出す震源地
ブリュッセルのクンステン・フェスティバル・デザール



First of all, one of our central team members is in charge of the programme publication and editing our website. She collects all the information and contacts all the artists. We outsource the writing of the programme to freelance writers, and I write some of the texts myself, and we form an editorial team of her, myself and the freelance writers. And here again we run into the language problem (laughs). We produce all our publications in the three languages, so we hire freelancers for the French and Flemish and we hire a separate translator to do the English.

With the performance subtitles, we have one translator we have been working with for quite some time. He is a translator who specializes in theater subtitles, and he does the subtitles for other festivals as well. Since this is an international festival we have to deal with a number of languages. These include a wide variety of languages, such as Japanese, Portuguese and Croatian to name a few. When we need subtitles for a production in one of these languages, we first go to consult our translator and then he goes out to find a translator for the language in question that he can work with. Also, for all the works we deal with, we try to translate directly from the original language it was written in. So, it becomes quite a volume of work. Furthermore, when we use subtitle we always discuss things thoroughly with the artists to decide where the subtitles will be projected and the relationship with the set components. At times, we asked to have several rehearsals with the subtitles before a production's opening. For example, in the case of Tosiki Okada, it was the first time that his production had been performed overseas and it took a long time to get the volume and timing of the subtitles right. This great volume of work is one of the choices you make with an international festival. It is important that an international festival make use of a wide range of means to deepen its audience's understanding of works in a foreign language.

Next I would like to ask about KFDA's budget. Compared to other major festivals in Europe, it seems to be a rather "modest" budget (laughs).

Yes, it is modest (laughs). The festival's total budget is 2,700,000 euro. And we work to dedicate more than half of the budget to the artistic aspects like production of works. And we try to devote a large part of this budget for the artistic aspects to support collaborative works. This is because one of the big prerequisites we have set for ourselves is that ours be a creation type festival. Of course, we do invite existing works, but more than half of the works on our programme are ones that we have participated in supporting the creation of. So, our outlays for the artistic side of the festival takes up a large part of our budget.

I would like to ask you more about the collaborative works you do later on, but before that I want to ask you if you have any kind of specific strategy behind KFDA's operation on the administrative and financial sides. Could you tell us about your basic approach and methods for keeping the festival going and developing?

First of all, as I said earlier, we work to get funding from both the French-speaking and Flemish-speaking communities. This is an ongoing and universal priority for KFDA, and if support from one of the two communities would ever be cut off, we would have to close down our festival. That is how essential this issue is to our festival's existence and our reason for being. We have multi-year contracts with the cultural affairs bureaus of both communities. We have a five-year contract with the bureau of the French-speaking community and a four-year contract with the bureau of the Flemish-speaking community, and both are renewable. These contracts guarantee us the same amount of funding each year of their four- or five-year durations. In the final year of each contract a review is made of the results of the

Presenter Interview

The Kunsten Festival des Arts, making Brussels a center generating new trends in contemporary art

現代アートの潮流を生み出す震源地
ブリュッセルのクンステン・フェスティバル・デザール

contract period and we make proposals for the programs we want to engage in the coming contract period and then negotiate concerning the amount of funding the ensuing contract will entail. The funding we receive through these two contracts constitutes our festival's basic operating budget, and other than these we don't have any other grants guaranteeing multi-year support. The support we get from the two bureaus accounts for close to 60% of our total revenue.

Do these two cultural bureaus have any say in the contents the festival programming?

They are not involved in choosing the programme contents. However, since our relationship with the bureaus is based on contracts, we have to define missions and goals for the respective four- and five-year contract periods and initiate plans to accomplish them. We also have to file evaluation reports every year. In addition to a financial evaluation we also have to cover the contents of the, including things like critical reviews. And we have to submit longer-term reports on the four- or five-year results and documents defining directions for activities over the coming contract periods. This is not only true for KFDA but for all the larger companies and artists receiving government agency funding in Belgium.

Do companies also have four- or five-year contracts? And do arts organizations also receive multi-year support?

Yes. It is a good system, isn't it? Particularly in the Flemish community, all the companies come up for contract renewal during the same period, so it provides a good opportunity for the government to consider where we want to be four years down the road in terms of the arts in Belgium and make decisions based on long-term visions. That means the funding can be applied based on long-term visions of the larger picture, rather than just doling out funds project by project on a one-up basis.

That is good. I would definitely like to propose to the Japanese government that it base its support for the arts on such a multi-year funding system (laughs). Besides government funding, what other sources of revenue do you have?

The non-government funding we get is basically on a year-by-year basis. The sources are the region Brussels is in and the city of Brussels. There are also grants that are applied for on a yearly basis, but there is no guarantee that we will receive these, and we often don't hear whether our applications have been accepted until just before the festival, or sometimes even after it is over.

From 2008, we have received our first 5-year contract for support from the EU. This is support for collaborative projects by six festivals including KFDA. Our partners are the Rotterdam, Lisbon, Estonia, Gothenburg, and Bordeaux. We will be working together on collaborative projects over the next five years. KFDA is the leader among the five other festivals in this project and we are serving as the intermediary with the EU.

But, within this system of public funding, I have the feeling that we are near the ceiling and there aren't many prospects for increasing the amount of funding we can get. So, we are now studying ways to gradually get more funding from private sector foundations. That said, the private sector foundations in Belgium are not functioning on a sufficient level and I think we have to be careful in looking to them as a source of funding. This may be partially because I believe that, more than anyone, it is the governments and public sector that should be supporting the arts.

Also, I think that perhaps we need to question whether or not we should be trying

Presenter Interview

The Kunsten Festival des Arts, making Brussels a center generating new trends in contemporary art

現代アートの潮流を生み出す震源地
ブリュッセルのクンステン・フェスティバル・デザール

to make the festival any larger than it is now. In the last few years our festival attendance at KFDA (ticket sales) has grown from around 20,000 to 25,000. In particular, the last four festivals have been very successful, with an attendance rate of over 90% capacity for all of the programme performances. We need to discuss whether we should be trying to grow our audience or whether we should be trying to put on larger-scale productions. Of course we don't want to get any smaller. That point is clear. As I mentioned earlier, I want to see us get plenty of funding to produce new original works, but I have doubts about whether we should be grow the scale of the festival in general. I feel that our current scale of 30 works over three weeks is just about right, and since the population of Brussels is only one million, I wonder if there is really much more audience size potential that we can develop, even if we are able to bring in many people from other countries. For example, I have doubts whether or not it would be good to double the number of works on our programme to 60 and try to draw a total audience of 50,000. I believe it is important to get a good picture of what the most suitable scale is for the size of our festival.

Next I would like to ask you about the collaborative works you undertake for KFDA. Why does KFDA focus on collaborative works like it does? Could you tell us something about the meaning of such collaborations and what the philosophy behind this festival's focus on collaboration is?

First of all, I believe that there are basically two ways to do a festival. The first is to get a shopping bag and go around the world looking for interesting works to choose, and then introduce them to your audience within the framework of your festival. That is a wonderful thing in itself, and in fact we select a certain part of our programme at KFDA in that way. On the other hand, I believe that the role of a festival should also be to support artists in the creation of new works and provide them with a venue for presenting those works to the public. That is why KFDA has a strong dedication to giving that kind of support and means to artists who don't normally have sufficient opportunities to create and present new works. For example, Forsythe and Rosas are outstanding artists who have presented works numerous times at KFDA with great interest to us. However, these are the artists who are at a level where they don't necessarily need our festival's support in creating works. On the other hand, using collaboration as an indirect form of support to help younger artists who are not yet at that level of fame to undertake the challenge of create works can give our festival great meaning and justify its existence.

There are two aspects to collaborative work. The first is the purely financial aspect. In other words, the festival makes a financial outlay (investment). The second aspect involves contents; the festival supports the project or the work by providing some kinds of contents. When we do a collaborative, the first prerequisite is that it be an artist we have met with several times, whose works we have seen and whom we have built a relationship of trust with. It must be an artist in whom we believe and whose creative work we really want to support. Within this relationship of trust, much communication is born between us and the artists. The artists may consult us about their present state or their futures, and we may be invited to their rehearsals sometimes and be asked for our opinions. It may also lead to a situation where they ask us for our advice concerning possible collaborations with other artists. Therefore, collaboration is not simply financial support but can also include content support in terms of artistic and intellectual aspects.

Since participating in a collaborative work often means that we will be presenting

Presenter Interview

The Kunsten Festival des Arts, making
Brussels a center generating new trends
in contemporary art

現代アートの潮流を生み出す震源地
ブリュッセルのクンステン・フェスティバル・
デザール

to our audience a new work that we have not seen before, it requires a considerable amount of courage and acceptance of the unpredictable aspect, and it also requires accountability on our part with regard to our audience. There is risk involved too, and we need to share that risk with our audience. The audience should understand that risk and a collaborative should spark a sense of curiosity, and I believe that they can discover the enjoyment of expectation involved in an unknown work. And I feel that, since the artists doing our collaborative works are ones whose works have appeared several times in past KFDA festivals, there is also an added sense of curiosity for the audience to see these works in the context of the continuity with their past works.

Doing collaborative works first of all requires tie-ups with the other festivals or theaters you will be collaborating with, and I also believe that there are a number of ways that the actual work process can proceed. For example, who approaches the artist about a possible collaboration and at what point in the project.

Of course we need other partners. There is a limit to how much KFDA alone can offer in terms of financial support for a collaborative work, and it isn't enough to finance the entire work. In the case of artists who already have an organized network such as companies or production companies that they are working with internationally on an ongoing basis, they are able to find their own collaboration partners. But, with artists who are still young and don't have a strong organizational base or network, our festival can help them find international partners. In the case of **Toshiki Okada**, his next work after the one he did for KFDA was one with a collaboration partner that I introduced him to. There are also cases where the artist has no production functions at all and the festival provides all of the production capability and resources. In other words, the festival directly makes contracts with all the necessary actors and technical staff for the production and also takes charge of the production management. In this case the festival becomes the producer and may seek out other collaborative partners later. This usually happens in the case of works commissioned by the festival. For example, in the last festival we commissioned The Wooster Group to do the production for an opera and since the festival was the original producer, we sought out other European partners to help finance the production. The Christoph Marthaler work we presented in the 2006 festival was also produced in this way.

Even within the KFDA, however, we are divided over the question of whether or not the festival should function as producers. Doing production work requires a suitable infrastructure, but KFDA has nothing but its own office space. We have no theater or rehearsal studio. If you start doing production work, you need a place for the artists and the team to meet and work. It requires different know-how from that of simply running a festival. For example, when KFDA did the production of Christoph Marthaler's new work for the 2006 festival, we also planned a tour for it afterward and we ended up doing the contracts with the theaters and festivals that the production toured to. In that sense, production work is a big load for a small festival organization like ours that has, as I mentioned earlier, a permanent staff of only six.

I fully appreciate that feeling. Fortunately, in the Tokyo International Festival (TIF) I work on, we have affiliated studio, theater and other facilities, but even so it is we find it very difficult to manage these facilities and do production work in addition to running our festival.

With such a supportive philosophy as you have talked about thus far, what does it

Presenter Interview

The Kunsten Festival des Arts, making Brussels a center generating new trends in contemporary art

現代アートの潮流を生み出す震源地
ブリュッセルのクンステン・フェスティバル・
デザール

mean for young artists to be presented at KFDA? I heard, for example, that after his debut at KFDA Toshiki Okada got lots of proposals from around the world.

It is a very sensitive thing (laughs). It is true that KFDA has won a reputation as a festival that discovers talented young artists. One of our roles is to introduce artists that have not won a reputation yet and artists who have not performed in Europe before. But, the most important thing for me is always our audience. For example, I chose Okada's work for our programme because I thought it was wonderful work, but even before that there is the desire to share his work with our audience. It is also true that many foreign professionals come to KFDA and today it has become a reference source for today's contemporary art world. For example, for professional who can't spend as much time as me traveling all over the world to see local artists' works, coming to KFDA gives them a chance to see a selection of good work from all over the world at one time.

But, this role that KFDA has come to serve today also brings with it a big responsibility. In other words, there is always the risk that our influence can produce negative results. There are cases where works that we present at our festival in front of professionals from all over the world are not received as well as we had hoped. So, we have to avoid being impetuous or reckless in our choices.

Speaking honestly, I never expected Okada to receive such an exceptional number of offers after he appeared in KFDA. Of course, receiving a number of proposals is a wonderful thing for him, but at the same time I think it is a frightening situation as well. That's because there is the important question of how Okada's works will be received in countries outside of Japan. His work is about the lives of young people in Japan and it is written in their contemporary slang, so even if it is considered only from the problem of translation, it is by no means a simple task to present his work well. In fact, I was scared when we introduced his work for the first time outside of Japan, and I knew that if the works he presented after that didn't live up to the success of the first one, there would be people who would quickly turn their backs on him. Of course, I believe that Okada's work has the strength substance to endure in the long run and that it is continuing to mature. And, for that very reason, I want to take the time necessary to see that his works are introduced we and not rush things. In Okada's case I decided to invite him to our festival after seeing just one work, but that is actually an exception. In many cases we will see four or five works by an artist and finally decide to invite them after seeing the sixth. This is where we have to be very careful. If the work we present is a success, that is fine, but if it fails it can be a brutal blow for the artist. A lot of attention gets focused on the festival, so a work that fails is immediately labeled as no good worldwide. That doesn't mean that we are going to introduce only artists who have already won a good reputation, but it is the reason why we must avoid bringing in artists who are still too young and fragile. We have to be very careful in our evaluation and decide which has already reached a level today where he or she will be able to stand up to international critique and criticism.

Ever since Okada's success at KFDA, Japanese artists look at me as if I am the savior of his career (laughs), but it is an illusion to think that if you are successfully introduced at KFDA you will be an international success. There may have been one artist for whom that happened, but it may not be true for others. That's why it is very difficult and we must be very careful.

Presenter Interview

The Kunsten Festival des Arts, making Brussels a center generating new trends in contemporary art

現代アートの潮流を生み出す震源地
ブリュッセルのクンステン・フェスティバル・
デザール



There is cooperation between the various international festivals today, but there is also rivalry. What are the types of festivals that KFDA wants to network with for the future?

First of all KFDA is a multi-genre festival that works with a wide variety of artists, and for that reason we work with a variety of organizations. So, there is the possibility to work with a wide variety of partners. Also, our festival is held in May, so we tie up with other European festivals that are held at the same time of year so that the same works can tour. In Europe there are tie-ups like this not only between festivals but also between theaters. Outside of Europe, we will be introducing artists from Singapore at our 2008 festival so we are collaborating on the production with the Singapore Arts Festival. These kinds of partnerships are formed work-by-work or project-by-project and are thus different in nature from long-term partnerships. With the network of six European festivals I mentioned earlier that we are receiving EU funding from, we work together from the planning stage. That doesn't mean that all six festivals must participate in our joint projects. The requirement is that three of the six have to participate in order to receive funding. I think this is a very good system that allows the festivals in the network to maintain their independence and individuality.

You could say that there is a danger that this network for collaborative works could lead to all the festivals using the same artists on their programmes. It is good for the festivals to network and cooperate but there is also a need for the festivals to maintain their individuality.

When you are able to present the world premiere or the European premiere of a work at KFDA, what significance does that have for you as a festival? One would think that there is a considerable amount of prestige involved in being able to present a world premiere.

There are two answers to this question, a sincere one and an insincere one (laughs).

First the insincere one. For the audience, the fact that a performance is a world premiere doesn't matter at all. And, since it doesn't matter to the audience if the work has been performed before in another city, for that reason it is not important to me as the festival director whether a work premieres at my festival or not.

Now the sincere answer. Even though it doesn't matter to the audience, there is still an element of prestige in presenting a world premiere and I believe that one can't ignore the significance of the fact that many foreign professionals and journalists will be coming to be there at the world premiere of a new creation. And, the prestige of being able to present a world premiere that attracts a large foreign audience is something that politicians and public-sector authorities can look at when evaluating the impact of the festival, and it is therefore an important asset that can be used to convince the public-sector authorities that our festival is worth continuing.

It also has significance in terms of creating a relationship of trust with an artist by being the presenter of a world premiere of their work, doesn't it?

That is certainly a factor, but there are also cases in which the work is still somewhat incomplete or unrefined when it premieres at KFDA and then it appears at another festival half a year later in a much better, more mature performance (laughs). Deciding how to deal with these contradicting factors of a world premiere is difficult. It takes time for a work to mature. And for the audience to come to a performance with big expectations and curiosity because it is a world premiere and

Presenter Interview

The Kunsten Festival des Arts, making Brussels a center generating new trends in contemporary art

現代アートの潮流を生み出す震源地
ブリュッセルのクンステン・フェスティバル・
デザール

end up seeing what is still an immature work can be very disappointing. So there are good and bad aspects to a world premiere and you have to consider the risks involved.

Can you tell us about the directions and projects you want to pursue as KFDA's second director?

First of all I want to do my best to continue the proud tradition that has been established at KFDA, but at the same time I want to think of KFDA itself as a kind of project. KFDA is not some clearly defined a priori entity but a project that arose in the midst of a given time and its contexts. Therefore, I believe that my role is to carry on with a strong sense of the philosophical basis of the festival while continuing to question how to share artistic creativity in today's society, how to encourage the development of individual intellect and critical faculties and how to gain from our encounters with others. Because, I believe that these are the fundamentals of our festival's philosophy. And, my challenge is finding ways to apply these ideals practically to our programme. I belong to a different generation from Frie Leysen, and I believe that I can bring something of my own vision, my own color and my own path to the programme.

If it were a project that I had no previous involvement in, it might be interesting to start over from point zero and make my own start, but in my case I have been involved in KFDA since 2002, working with Frie Leysen on the programme and inheriting a lot from her gradually. And in fact, she left a considerable part of the artistic choices up to me in the past, so for me there is no cut-off point between her directorship and mine. Rather, it has been a quite natural transition with a good amount of continuity. So, I don't have the feeling that I have to make any drastic decisions to change things. From the beginning, KFDA has been a festival that has always been changing and developing, and I think it is important for me to carry on this tradition of evolving with the times.

In terms of specific differences, I would say that Frie Leysen was the type person who found interest in programming that deliberately juxtaposed artists from different regions with contrasting artistic vocabularies, while I am one who wants to bring some kind of clear line or direction to a programme.

Finally, could you give us some specific names of artists from the history of the KFDA whom you think have been especially important in defining and projecting to the world the value and unique character of your festival?

As artists who have participated at KFDA from the early years, and who were relatively unknown at the time but are now recognized as some of the world's leading international artists, I would cite Tim Etchells (Forced Entertainment) and Romeo Castellucci (Societas Raffaello Sanzio). Also, Christoph Marthaler is one who participated from the first KFDA festival, and for the first time outside the German-speaking arts scene, and today he is one of Europe's leading artists. Our festival also has a long tradition of working with artists from Argentina. In particular, El Perifelico des Objectos has created works for KFDA and performed for us numerous times. William Kentridge of South Africa is another frequent participant in KFDA. This relationship began when we asked him to compose a piece of music, and now he has reached the point where he is writing operas as well. We also have relationships with artists from the Middle East, There is Rabih Mroue of Lebanon who has presented works at KFDA three times, I believe, and now he has become a well-known artist on the international scene. It is the same with the young Iranian director Amir Reza Koohestani. He was a virtually unknown young

Presenter Interview

The Kunsten Festival des Arts, making
Brussels a center generating new trends
in contemporary art

現代アートの潮流を生み出す震源地
ブリュッセルのクンステン・フェスティバル・
デザール

artist when he presented his work *Dance on The Glass* at KFDA in 2004, but after our 2007 festival he was also presenting his works at such famous international festivals as the Holland Festival and Festival D'Autoume. The same is true for Toshiki Okada. For artists like these, KFDA became the starting point for their international careers, and from the standpoint of our audience, they were artists who provided exciting new art. And for me, Toshiki Okada is one of these representative artists. And I truly hope that he will continue to be an artist who participates in the history of the KFDA.