

INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORS SUMMIT ^{THE} DRAMA LEAGUE

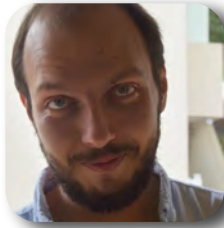
SESSION 3 THE ART OF DIRECTING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Monday December 12th, 2022

SPEAKERS



Maksima Boeva
she/her
& Bulgaria



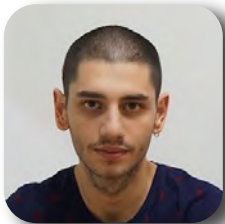
Stefan Prohorov
he/him
& Bulgaria



Natalie Ester
she/her
& Romania



Dima Levytsky
he/him +
& Ukraine



Avto Diasamidze
he/him +
& Georgia



Anna Smolar
she/her +
& Poland



Mei Ann Teo
she/her
& United States



Lisa Rothe
she/her
& United States



Gabriel Stelian-Shanks
he/him +
& United States



Gwynn MacDonald
she/her
& United States



Nilan
he/him +
& United States



Kalina Wagenstein
she/her
& Bulgaria



Andrew Coopman
they/he +
& United States

Maksima Boeva, Stefan Prohorov, Natalie Ester, Dima Levytsky,
Avto Diasamidze, Anna Smolar, Mei Ann Teo, Lisa Rothe
Gabriel Stelian-Shanks, Gwynn MacDonald, Nilan, Kalina Wagenstein and Andrew Coopman

INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORS SUMMIT THE DRAMA LEAGUE

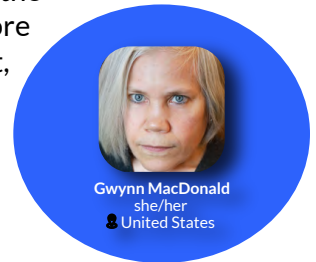
SESSION 3

THE ART OF DIRECTING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Monday December 12th, 2022

Gwynn MacDonald | she/her (United States)

Climate change¹ is a very simple but heavily argued concept. It's the rise in temperature as a result of human activity. Mostly dependence on fossil fuel². It threatens, as we know, the existence of our planet, as well as every species on it. Some of us have already experienced the results of rising temperatures. I think the last 10 years saw the highest temperatures on record in human history. Everything from incredibly destructive, uncontrollable fires, unhealthy air quality, severe drought, rising sea levels, water scarcity, melting of the polar ice caps, catastrophic storms, intense weather conditions, the loss of biodiversity, and more are all effects of climate change. Each effect creates ripple effects like population displacement, species extinction, and increased risk of future pandemics. The impact of the environmental change is disproportionately felt by the global majority of indigenous peoples and those from poorer countries. Which drives the divide further between the wealthy and poor. Let's begin our conversation around cultural specificity of effect. When thinking about the future of directing, what feelings come up from your own cultural ecosystems?



Natalie Ester | she/her (Romania)

From my point of view, we in Romania suffer from poor literature on the subject. It's quite a new subject for us. When it comes to life and everything about life has been so well reflected in literature and in drama, but this is quite a new subject, a new topic for the world. Searching for new literature/drama on the subject has been almost impossible.

Avto Diasamidze | he/him (Georgia)

I had that sort of experience too.

Stefan Prohorov | he/him (Bulgaria)

In the post-Soviet tradition, the role of the director is envisioned as one who exercises ideas in grandeur and scale. Climate consciousness comes into practice in the production values we approve. The association that I work for has produced a manual for greener approaches to work but for me, the interesting question is how do we adjust our aesthetic drive in all of its ambition and vanity to the climate conscious state? So where is this the border line between what is necessary for the art? And what is completely unsustainable for nature? Julie's Bicycle³ is a good resource for those of you looking for literature on the subject from an artist's perspective.

Kalina Wagenstein | she/her (Bulgaria)

Is it true that there is a materials shortage for theaters? It's hard to tell stories about the environment when environmental problems aren't the audience's first priority, at least in Bulgaria. We're facing the war. Maintaining electricity and heat throughout the winter. People are very anxious, very stressed, and they are not ready to just cope with another thing, which is somehow more distant and less urgent from their perspective. We had several workshops for kids that used sustainable materials that followed with conversation. We know this takes time, so we teach them early.



INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORS SUMMIT THE DRAMA LEAGUE

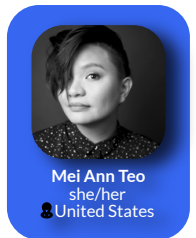
SESSION 3

THE ART OF DIRECTING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Monday December 12th, 2022

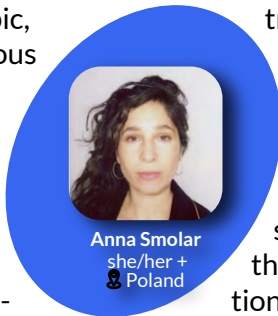
Mei Ann Teo | they/them (United States)

In American theatre, the training is very much text based. Artists practice how to create from this point first. How do we expand the imagination of that? Maybe the initial starting point is context not text. It's about the way in which we have to understand what is happening with us right now, and what that would shift within us. I remember going to a residency in Hubbard Hall, a very old theater in upstate New York, and they still had all of their rolls of scenery around. At first, I thought it was terrible, and then I realized how green of them. To begin with what is found already on earth with us. Makes me think of costume designers who work with found materials. How can we actually practice from the basis of the Earth as opposed to extraction of whatever there is for the sake of a text?



Anna Smolar | she/her (Poland)

I have mixed feelings, and, I think, only questions. First of all, I think that there is an intense process right now in Poland of implementing these practices. My biggest problem with the performances that try to deal with this topic is with the visibility you're talking about, Mei Ann. The question of seeing. What do we see? What do we hear? What words come up? What kind of manifesto comes up? In Poland, there are very good progressive theaters that try to face this topic, address people that are already very conscious that show how we can try to go from our mushroom, for example, of birds or trees propose to those who aren't sensitive to and you have this very shitty political stage ecology and all the decisions aren't catastrophe the environment are going absolutely in feeling that the people in theater and institutionally possible to implement, which means what topic we deal with on stage. I have friends that have created this collective Culture for the Climate⁵. It's a network of cultural institutions, not just theaters, who are trying to green the cultural sector. I think when we talk about climate catastrophe, we talk about the price of mental health, because young people are facing this from their very first years and it's heavy to bear. How do we even have a conversation about who is responsible? I'm not an artist who is placing the topic of climate change in the center of my productions, but in my practice. Zero waste and sustainability in relationships at work.



Dima Levitskiy | he/him (Ukraine)

What if we treat climate change the way we treat war? Consider climate change to be a man. We know how to fix man. I think we don't have the time to convince. It's time to act. We need to have this war or we need to have a big enough catastrophe from climate change. Then we will deal with it.

INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORS SUMMIT THE DRAMA LEAGUE

SESSION 3

THE ART OF DIRECTING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Monday December 12th, 2022

Gwynn MacDonald | she/her (United States)

It's the largest flaw in our common human nature. Just before we get to Gabriel, both what Mei Ann said and what you just said, Dima...I had the most satisfying tech of my artistic life in Cuba when the electricity went out. I had to do the entire thing outside and it was a musical. You did feel like you were connected to the earth and to the human bodies there, and to the actual art, in a very acute way.

Gabriel Stelian-Shanks | he/him+ (United States)

Thank you for those thoughts about having to take action, Anna and Mei Ann, and also what it will take for our art form and field to create this. I think, Dima, you're right, although I hope you're wrong. The U.S. is beginning to normalize climate change...the hurricanes, the droughts, the landslides, we're just accepting them as another violence in our lives. So the idea of action is blunted by this new normalcy. In America, I find very few people paying attention to the famine and drought in Sudan⁶, or where this is really, like the Maldives, where it's really starting to forever alter the landscape of human civilization. That idea of self-motivation into action, versus catastrophe forcing action...I wonder if there's a way that theater can lead to these motivations without loss of life. A theater we've been involved with at The Drama League throughout the pandemic built an outdoor stage, to reduce their carbon footprint, create better air flow and address other COVID concerns. But the road to hell is paved with good intentions. They didn't realize that they would end up canceling over 50% of their new outdoor performances due to extreme weather. There are new costs, to tend these spaces, to create space for these new ways of producing, and to Kalina's point, changing the way our work reacts to the earth. Now, this is one very specific theater, but I think if they were in this conference with us, they would say that the moment performances started to get canceled because of weather, and audiences were somehow inconvenienced in their ability to attend easily, people quit coming by and large. Is there a way that we can create productions that both recognize that climate change action is difficult AND a responsibility on both sides of the footlights? We can address climate artistically, producerial, or economically...but can we also not alienate audiences from what has been a very traditional architecture, at least in the Western tradition, for



Andrew Coopman | they/he (United States)

To Lisa's point about starting from the body and connecting to the earth: theatre companies with outdoor space give their audiences opportunities to feel the grass or gravel, to bring their dog along, to picnic, to embrace the nature around them

Gabriel Stelian-Shanks | he/him+ (United States)

Oh, at this theater I'm talking about? It was a lovely experience, and some audiences responded...just, frankly, not enough. That particular theater has been pushed to the brink of economic collapse, because their audiences have declined so precipitously. It lives inside that space that Avto and Dima seem to be talking about.

INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORS SUMMIT THE DRAMA LEAGUE

SESSION 3

THE ART OF DIRECTING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Monday December 12th, 2022

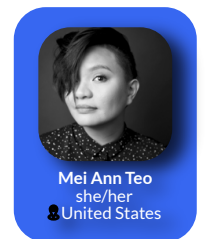
Natalie Ester | she/her (Romania)
The issue is just being brought up here. Theaters are not open yet. We don't have shows with this topic, but we do have artists who are trying to push the problem into society.

Stefan Prohorov | he/him (Bulgaria)
Thinking from an audience perspective, I personally have never been particularly interested in going to see an environmental show, because the idea is contained. I feel I already know how the weather works, for example. I wouldn't go see something I believe I have an accurate perception on. What is it that art can actually say about it? Beyond partisanship and forms of propaganda. This can't be what we convince people to attend the performance on. An example would be the film *Avatar*⁷. A box office hit. Bringing up much of what we discussed today around going green and sustainability but its creation created a major carbon footprint. We reference historically traveling troupes who only created shows with the bare minimum. Is that the way? It's a question of what makes us feel validated, not a question of real artistic exploration.

Anna Smolar | she/her (Poland)
I agree very much with Stefan. I am pretty convinced that it's really about the practice and tools then addressing the topic. There are performances here that are absolutely monumental. Intricate lighting designs with over 300 changes in under two hours. The growing electricity concerns would break this theatre. So, this becomes a question of vanity, right? The speed of change is key.

Gwynn MacDonald | she/her (United States)
Theatre is uniquely situated to expand those muscles for human beings. Why do books and environmental pieces and environmental themes only exist as morality tales?

Mei Ann Teo | they/them (United States)
I think about what I'm addicted to, or what we are addicted to, and what actually can change behavior. I'm addicted to hearing about the thing and then not really changing behavior about it. We celebrate Greta Thunberg⁸, we make her a Joan of Arc⁹, and then it's gone. We've done nothing. We must watch our ability to create a narrative around climate change that satisfies the impulse but nulls changing behavior. Does art change anything? I think about that alot. If we're actually going to try to change something, we have to understand addiction.



Gwynn MacDonald | she/her (United States)
In works like Athol Fugard's¹⁰ work. I mean, there's a lot of dramatic literature and performance that has fundamentally changed people because it reaches their emotions and it expands their abilities to empathize. So in that way, I think it does change human beings.

Mei Ann Teo | they/them (United States)
And...racism still exists. It's important for us as directors to not romanticize the impact of our work, and to continue to really address the work's conversation.

INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORS SUMMIT THE DRAMA LEAGUE

SESSION 3

THE ART OF DIRECTING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

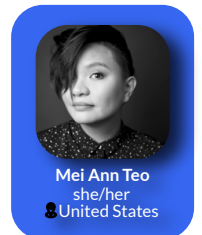
Monday December 12th, 2022

== Gabriel Stelian-Shanks | he/him+ (United States)

== Mei Ann, I don't want to put you on the spot, but I'm really curious when you talk about the addictions we have to theater being practiced in the same old way. What are directors, in your opinion, addicted to? I do think we over-romanticize the role of theater in general, and in our work in particular, but in this regard – the ways we construct live performance – does anything come to mind as an addiction?

== Mei Ann Teo | they/them (United States)

== I'll be honest, I keep thinking about how much I love design. I love an audience entering into a world that they've never encountered before and what that takes to make the space around them. I also work site-specifically. I'm addicted to doing things I've never done before. I know if I only work from one purview that might limit my love, my addition. The reality is that it's just another limitation theatre artists must face. I'm addicted to how I've been taught to work. I think that there is an addiction to comfort. I'm addicted to comfort. What does disturbing my comfort look like in my making? It is my desire to do that. We were working with Adrienne Marie Brown¹¹ who wrote the book Emergent Strategy and she requested that whatever we do resolve to be carbon neutral. What does that mean in production? Does that mean we buy carbon offsets? Ok, now who is making money off these carbon offsets? How do we still stay on budget? It's naive to think that it's actually about saving the Earth. It's really about the economy. For me I'm asking myself, how can I, in small ways, start to shift the addiction, start to shift the impulse, start to practice a different place of impulse?



== Nilan | he/him+ (United States)

== The Earth is the face of climate change and we live in spaces where we rarely see the Earth, at least in its natural state. There is no immediate act of shame when we practice non-sustainable actions. The ability to point the finger is a tool that I believe we need in this situation. There's no face of the enemy. When speaking of race one can point to the other. There is a whole market of Black versus White. When speaking about gender it's men versus women and vice versa. Or "fuck the binary". All of these things have viable markets and dedicated audiences. There is an established system for interpretation and consequence. Pointing at all is a weak choice because people, audiences, want to feel like they are on the right side. I wonder if we shoot too big and with climate change. I've always thought that you can't solve the world but you can solve your ecosystem. Maybe stop making audiences responsible for the world. Charge them with their backyards. What if we just cleaned up our own home? Multiple small microcosms creates a large effect.



== Lisa Rothe | she/her (United States)

== Yes, I believe this is why I'm shifting to smaller, one on one, heart to heart interactions, literal backyards, literal living rooms.

INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORS SUMMIT THE DRAMA LEAGUE

SESSION 3

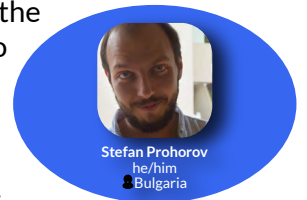
THE ART OF DIRECTING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Monday December 12th, 2022



Stefan Prohorov (Bulgaria)

I don't really disagree with Nilan. I think actually you can point, you can trace it to refer back to man. Of course it is the economy, because the economy is the way we function as a society. As much as I would love us to intervene as conscious human beings, unfortunately, we're not. Gabriel spoke in the case of the theater, losing their audience because of the rains and thunderstorms. That's the thing that actually drove audiences away as a result of climate change, but it didn't make them go more to the theater. So I think that actually we can be specific and precise and if we are to raise awareness. Jérôme Bel¹² changed their touring system to help the environment. It's a huge topic but I believe that it's more of a political topic, than an ethical one, and the ethical part I find incredibly boring. There are fingers to be pointed and there are people who have suffered from pointing those fingers. I have friends from Brazil¹³, who have been chased from the country or have been arrested for criticizing Bolsonaro¹⁴ in their work and one of the major things that Bolsonaro did to the planet, regardless of the many atrocities that he subdued the population of Brazil by legalizing the cutting of the Amazon rainforest¹⁵.



Gwynn MacDonald | she/her (United States)

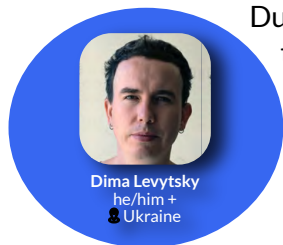
The question of whether art is situated to do that, is a good one. Are there other mediums? Media that might better convey what theater cant?. I am gonna insert my own opinion here. I really do believe, and I don't think it's romanticization, that the power of empathy which theater fosters, that can really change a human being and their actions much more deeply than a political message, or an ethical one.



Dima Levitskiy | he/him (Ukraine)

Personally, I also don't know what to romanticize or how to create environmental shows. Gwynn. I too, really believe in the power of empathy. Today, I read an article about dolphins dying in the Black sea.

Due to the war, since March, there have been lots of cases of dying dolphins. Scientists are trying to fully access the ecocide due to the war and mines. "The situation highlights the difficulty, and the necessity, of conducting wartime science." Something about those scientists made me want to tell their story. I wouldn't call this an environmental show, right? Or is it a story of war and climate change?



Gabriel Stelian-Shanks | he/him+ (United States)

Dima, I wonder if there's something in our addictions, just going back to Mei Ann's thoughts. I think a lot about how theater is not a very good response mechanism to the world, because of the time it takes for us to create a show and rehearse a show, revise the show, fund the show, and more. I ask this to everyone: is there a response mechanism to these rapidly-evolving climate issues that could be more immediate when something like that happens? Is there a way for us to make theater that perhaps doesn't lean into design or multi-year development, the way we've all been taught, that could respond efficiently and effectively to moments like that?

INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORS SUMMIT THE DRAMA LEAGUE

SESSION 3

THE ART OF DIRECTING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Monday December 12th, 2022



Gwynn MacDonald | she/her (United States)

A great question, Gabriel...and one we can pick up next time, as we have run out of time. How about we end there? Thank you all for this healthy and robust discussion.



Gabriel Stelian-Shanks | he/him+ (United States)

We're about to go into the holiday season for those of you who are people of faith, so I hope you have a great time away.



Gwynn MacDonald | she/her (United States)

Happy festive season. Thank you. See you in the new year.

¹ Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. These shifts may be natural, such as through variations in the solar cycle. But since the 1800s, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas.

² A fossil fuel is a hydrocarbon-containing material formed naturally in the Earth's crust from the remains of dead plants and animals that is extracted and burned as a fuel. The main fossil fuels are coal, oil, and natural gas.

³ Julie's Bicycle is a pioneering not-for-profit, mobilizing the arts and culture to take action on the climate and ecological crisis

⁴ Going green means implementing certain lifestyle changes designed to help you live in a more eco-friendly way. It means becoming more environmentally aware and changing your behavior and lifestyle to reduce the amount of pollution and waste you generate.

⁵ Culture for Climate is a grassroots initiative aimed at greening the cultural sector. The group consists of employees of cultural institutions, NGOs, local authorities, and independent artists and curators

⁶ Sudan, officially the Republic of the Sudan, is a country in Northeast Africa.

⁷ Avatar is a 2009 film written and directed by James Cameron about humans colonizing a foreign planet to extract its natural resources and the ethics around such actions.

⁸ Greta Thunberg is a Swedish environmental activist who is known for challenging world leaders to take immediate action for climate change mitigation. Thunberg's activism began when she persuaded her parents to adopt lifestyle choices that reduced their own carbon footprint.

⁹ St. Joan of Arc is a national heroine of France. She was a peasant girl who, believing that she was acting under divine guidance, led the French army in a momentous victory at Orléans in 1429 that repulsed an English attempt to conquer France during the Hundred Years' War.



SESSION 3 THE ART OF DIRECTING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Monday December 12th, 2022

¹⁰ Athol Fugard is a South African playwright, novelist, actor, and director widely regarded as South Africa's greatest playwright. He is best known for his political and penetrating plays opposing the system of apartheid.

¹¹ Adrienne Maree Brown, is a writer, activist and facilitator.

¹² Jérôme Bel is a French dancer and choreographer. In 2019, the company chose to no longer use airplanes when touring.

¹³ Brazil, officially the Federative Republic of Brazil, is the largest country in South America and in Latin America. At 8.5 million square kilometers and with over 217 million people, Brazil is the world's fifth-largest country by area and the seventh most populous.

¹⁴ Jair Messias Bolsonaro is a Brazilian politician and retired military officer who served as the 38th president of Brazil from 2019 until 2022

⁶ Sudan, officially the Republic of the Sudan, is a country in Northeast Africa.

¹⁵ The Amazon rainforest, covering much of northwestern Brazil and extending into Colombia, Peru and other South American countries, is the world's largest tropical rainforest, famed for its biodiversity.