

# The LUCAS Festival: “We’re obsessed by trying out new stuff”

The LUCAS International Festival for Young Film Lovers in Frankfurt (Germany) is different from most festivals you might know. In the way they organise things differently (like mixing children and adults in one jury), set different goals (in compiling their programme) and invest in participation. *“Towards participation our approach is radical. It is not implemented in specific parts of the festival, it is implemented throughout the entire festival structure, spreading out like a mushroom field,”* says festival co-worker Wilke Bitter. On the occasion of the 44th edition, early October, I tried to find out with him and festival director Julia Fleißig what the LUCAS profile exactly is about.

Julia Fleißig: We’re curating several small film programmes, both thematically and aesthetically, competitive or not, offering young people an overview of what is going on in the world. Around that we have constructed a framework of discussing and intensively working with films. There, already in an early stage, we get children, youth and young adults involved, meeting them at eye level.

This encounter is not based on theories or strategies, it is based on a tradition that we further develop. In the end, it is always the young people who are deciding, encouraged by our team and often by their teachers.

**When asking you about the LUCAS profile, unavoidably you end up with participation.**

Wilke Bitter: Because you can’t think about LUCAS without it. Together with the team we work towards a contemporary and representative programme that gets its shape through a creative process with young people. Fleißig: Programming and participation are always entangled. As a festival team, we partly give up our decisive powers. Of course the first selection – we’re talking about watching hundreds of films – is in the hands of an adult selection committee. But the kids are involved on all levels where it is possible and responsible – we wouldn’t ask them to fill out funding application forms!

**LUCAS is not the kind of festival chasing the big premieres.**

Fleißig: We do have some – in the



Stadtteil Jury

short film competition all titles are German premieres – but it is not the cornerstone of our work. When establishing the festival profile, we focus on quality, we want our programme to stand out. We don’t have a hundred titles in our catalogue; our catalogue is small and considerably compiled and stimulates thinking out-of-the-box. A film like this year’s SWEET THING (by Alexandre Rockwell) you wouldn’t find easily in many young audience festivals.

**It is even in the name of the festival... “for film lovers”.**

Bitter: Visiting LUCAS is a way to get to know more about film. You don’t just watch a movie, you watch it in an active way, which motivates you to become a cinema lover. That is what being a cinephile is all about.

Fleißig: This name marked a new start for the festival. The German name “junge Filmfans” carries the risk of exclusion – as if we’re only there for the fans – whereas the true goal of the festival is to include people. That



Q&amp;A

is why I prefer the English name “for young film lovers”.

### **You granted young people control over the festival.**

Fleißig: It is not about giving up responsibilities, it is about inviting young people. We've given up on the decision making, and there never was an anxiety to do so.

Bitter: Giving up sounds scary. It is part of a process; we take them there, we guide them. With our Young Euro-

pean Cinephiles projects, we give the control into the hands of the youngsters, but it is not about 'power', it is about empowerment. We offer them security, while it is our mission to handle the insecurity at our side. And by framing it with education, we make it even less scary.

### **How would you describe this educational frame?**

Bitter: It depends upon the age group, and the outcome each project is sup-

posed to have. We're not a film education organisation, we're a festival that happens to have a strong educational drive. With young kids we start at a basic level, not with an information overload, but with the pure experience of watching, and expressing what they feel, in whatever way that may be. On the other end of the spectrum are the teenage Young European Cinephiles. We offer them a stage to present their choices, which comes with certain responsibilities. You have to stand for what you choose. Often they work in close collaboration with their teachers, as this project takes place during school hours. That is why we always make sure to combine the programme with a few elements from the school curriculum.

### **Here's another cliché: If the kids do all the work, that means less work for you.**

Fleißig: Sure, let them do it while we take a rest! Seriously, I guess it would be easier and more practical if we did it the traditional way, but we decided to do it differently.

### **It seems kind of hard for you to accept the credits as 'true pioneers'.**

Bitter: Maybe we will accept your compliment in another 20 years, once we've really explored every single



Young European Cinephiles

option in the participation spectrum. Actually it's all about trying out new stuff. We're a small team, we're too few to always do the same jobs. Of course we have our standards to maintain, but basically we're totally addicted to trying out new things.

### **Like the “Stadtteil Jury”?**

Bitter: The right translation would be something like “the City Boroughs Jury”, reaching out to youth centres and youth clubs, to see what relation-

ship they can develop with the festival programme. We go where they are, and find them. We already had this target group curating our open air screenings, and they were radical! Now we address them with a new jury project, and it is great fun!

### **This could influence the profile of your future audience?**

Bitter: It is a matter of mobility. Frankfurt has many different communities and we want them all to know that they're welcome. The festival doesn't have a standard they have to live up to. There is this festival, and the only barrier is that you might not know about it... yet.

### **Is there a strategy on how to do this? Many festivals are searching for a way to lower that threshold.**

Bitter: It is not a strategy. We try to detect the dynamics in the city, scanning different areas, considering how to address them. More than a strategy, it is a gut feeling that was never boiled down to a theory; it is about going through the city, noticing what is going on.

Fleißig: It is always about the exchange, about bringing different audiences together and launching a dialogue. This policy is not only included in the festival, but also in The House.



It's a general attempt to make this an open and inclusive film institute or film museum.

### **You call it "The House"?**

Fleißig: The DFF – Deutsches Film Institute and Film Museum – is the mothership, where more than 200 people are working for the archive, the cinema, the internet projects, the Go East Festival, the Fassbinder Centre etc. The LUCAS festival is one department, one project of the DFF.

### **Is the educational profile more with**

### **the festival or with the DFF?**

Fleißig: With both, I guess, as we're so closely connected. We present cinema, keeping the medium alive, which is a mission rooted in my heart. I used to have a cinema in a small region where all the time I realised: our audience is getting old, the young people don't find their way into the cinema. Which is one of the reasons why in Frankfurt we started the school cinema weeks, which have now grown big, attracting thousands of kids. The DFF has been doing film literacy forever. In the earlier days we didn't dare to

name it as such, but now we do. Years ago, we had panels about diversity in children's films. We had a panel about film marketing when people still thought it was about selling our souls. We don't have a secret recipe – we discuss it, and then we do it. My approach in general is: let's not talk about it again, we've discussed it all before, now let's try to get the money and do it.

**The most fantastic experience for me this year in LUCAS was sitting together with these amazing young jury members. What a fantastic constellation! You're the only ones that I know off, bringing youngsters and adults together in one jury.**

Fleißig: Those young people apply for this post, we invite them, discuss with them, and carefully select them. Every year our jury members tell us what a great experience it was – I can't understand why other festivals aren't doing the same. It might be less difficult than one might think to profoundly share perspectives with the youngest kids, and with teenagers it always works. Meeting people from different walks of life is interesting for everyone involved.

–  
Gert Hermans