



Europe's fine craft professions are currently enjoying a renaissance

Ateliers d'Art de France, the founder and organizer of the R v lations Biennial, wanted to strengthen its European approach to the sector of fine craft and creation professions at the upcoming event by welcoming a distinguished guest, WCC Europe - World Crafts Council Europe.

Mrs. Louise Allen, its president, who is also vice-president of WCC International, talks about the event and the importance of WCC's presence at R v lations.

INTERVIEW BY VIRGINIE CHUIMER-LAYEN

Mrs. Louise Allen, can you remind us of the mission of World Crafts Council Europe?

WCC Europe is a prolongation of the World Crafts Council (WCC), which focuses on Europe. This organisation was formed forty years ago and represents 26 fine craft organisations in 17 countries, with the aim of promoting this sector and underlining its importance throughout Europe. Our purpose is to promote crafts as a vital part of cultural, social and economic life through our global network of members and affiliates.

How do you see your participation in this 4th edition of the R v lations biennial?

We are delighted to be part of such a prominent event, held in the prestigious setting of the Grand Palais in Paris. R v lations is an extraordinary economic and cultural platform and a unique opportunity for networking and discussion between creators, designers, collectors and clients of international importance.

The public will discover your selection of craft works in the Agora. What message do you want to get across?

We want to bring a modern vision of Europe's craft professions through works from central Europe, such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as from the Nordic countries, and Ireland of course. We felt that it would be interesting to show the public, as soon as they enter the exhibition, how today's craftspeople work their materials with a combination of creativity and traditional expertise.

On that subject, what do you think of the exhibition *Le Banquet*?

The international exhibition *Le Banquet* is a wonderful exhibition made up of exceptional works from 11 countries. It is a real "visual festival of excellence" for collectors, clients, institutions, and enthusiasts. This spotlight at the heart of the biennial also helps visitors to understand the context of the creations. The works presented evoke common themes, and show the similarities in the creative processes but, at the same time, the unique style of each culture, territory and creator. That is its major strength.

One of the aims of the Symposium, in which WCC Europe will be participating, is to create and stimulate European recognition of creative trades. What is your view on this subject?

For us this Symposium, like other conferences, is a unique opportunity to highlight the vitality and real potential of the sector at the European level,

while taking into account the different cultural, social and economic contexts. It is essential to initiate a dialogue with influencers and political decision-makers within the European Commission and in the different countries, so that they realise the importance and contribution of craft professions to the community, from a human viewpoint as well as the economic and social aspects. Even if it is difficult to give a common definition of craft professions in the whole of Europe, I think that the ethical stance, values, expertise and realities promoted by our sector can be approved by all the decision-makers and representative organisations in Europe.

Luxembourg is the country of honour this year. What strong symbol does this represent in your opinion?

It shows that there is growing recognition of European and international craft professions. Europe's fine craft professions are currently enjoying a renaissance and choosing Luxembourg as the country of honour demonstrates this perfectly.

What do you think of the new visual identity of the biennial, *Nuances in Blue and Black*, by the Norwegian textile artist Hanne Friis?

Norway was the first country of honour at the 2013 biennial, and this work offers a refreshing vision of craft professions. It raises current questions about the environment, materials and shapes. It is also symbolic, at an international level, of the new challenges facing the sector.

How will WCC Europe be celebrating its fortieth anniversary at R v lations?

This fortieth anniversary is one of the reasons why we were invited! The program is still not definitive, but we are going to organize events linked to the forward-looking vision of our sector. The preservation and transmission of skills, the commitment of the new, young generation of craftspeople, and the integration of new technologies in light of traditional know-how are challenges and also great opportunities. We are seeing a real boom in the sector of creative trades and it is vital that we make the most of the boost provided by events such as R v lations, Tresor, Collect, Homo Faber and the Loewe Craft Prize, and strive, together, to create a roadmap for the future.