

Dear people,

Amateo is the European network for amateur and participatory arts and has 50 members from across Europe and the UK. Being the Amateo president is quite an honor and quite a challenge in these challenging times for arts, culture and society.

We are facing rapid changes in the amateur arts sector in many European countries. I personally, find 'amateur arts' too limited a term for the vast territory covered by art lovers in their free time and art lovers making a living of working together on esthetic encounters and expressions.

More and more those esthetic expressions carry a multilayered load of enjoying and producing arts and culture and trying to benefit society. As a whole. The eternal question is: art for the arts or arts within a broader context and dialogue. In Amateo we see that both approaches exist side by side and differ in different surroundings and projects.

This year in the Amateo Awards – to be staged tonight - do come! – we see the impact of activism; activist projects using the power of the arts to make a statement; for example, visual poetry to speak out against mass tourism and illustrate the effect it has on the quality of life for people living, working and raising a family there.

This worthwhile work of "Poesie en Camino" from Gran Canaria – was entered side by side with other terrific projects. For example, "Satire against corruption" from Armenia uses a cartoon and comic book to address this complex item in their society. The sign of the times seems to develop towards activism in extending the participatory dimension of the arts towards both criticizing and benefiting our European society.

Similarly, important is the Ravensburg Light Festival in Germany; providing a focus for the community to come together; illuminating the evening streets of Ravensburg with their self-made lanterns and building friendships, bonds and belonging across society.

Who is to say what impact is more profound. NO ONE. That is what I love about Amateo that that all involved connect through their love for beauty, arts and culture in a way that befits them best.

Europe is struggling with many issues: migration, wars, some governments take a turn to right wing politics and try to limit artistic expression and basic human rights to express yourself the way you want.

These limitations coincide with budget cuts on arts, culture, community building and research. There is only one way to oppose these, by supporting each other, by supporting our mutual Amateo network.

We need each other to light our lanterns and shine through our work.

And the Amateo award does exactly this, shining a light on amateur arts projects making a difference to their communities. So, please, join us tonight, at 8 pm, at the Award ceremony and see some of great projects from across Europe.