

GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY

February 2024 - February 2025

a **COMMON STORIES** project

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CommonLAB 2025 - Massandje Sanogo © Rafael de Oliveira

INTRODUCTION

by Virginie Dupray

Halfway through the *Common Stories* project, which will come to an end on December 31st, 2025, the *Good Practices Factory 2024* reviews and reflects on our production, touring, artist support, and audience development practices in our six partner cities.

From Lisbon to Brussels, from Bobigny to Cologne, from Stockholm to Warsaw, this second publication shares the specific contexts and challenges faced by each partner, as well as the responses provided in this long-term search for greater diversity on and around the stage.

From the development of a common Code of Conduct for cultural venues in Cologne to greater accessibility of the theatre for audiences and artists with disabilities in Warsaw, from a reflection on racism within the theatre in Bobigny and Lisbon in partnership with UNA (União Negra das Artes) to perceptions of notions of diversity within teams in Brussels and Stockholm, our journeys towards more honorable practices have taken different paths.

Shared at the annual *Good Practices Factory Day* in Brussels on November 8th, 2024, the various approaches, diagnoses and experiences, recipes and knowledge, attempts, doubts, and progress have inspired our teams, creating links and echoes that are sometimes unexpected, often comforting, in these processes of resistance developed in the four corners of a Europe in the throes of growing nationalism.

Through texts and interviews, this publication shares the experiences that drive us and carry us forward on a daily basis, so that our stages can fully bear witness to the cultural diversity of today's European narratives, celebrating their complexities and richness...



CommonLAB 2024 - A workshop by Sanja Pleterski - Virginie Dupray

THE GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN BOBIGNY

Training Together to Dare to Name

Since 2023, the MC93 has been running a project to raise awareness of racism-related issues within its team. What are the root causes of racism in everyday life? How can we identify the problematic behaviours and statements that stem from it? What concrete tools can we use to recognize and fight against discriminations? And how can we promote open and constructive dialogues on these sensitive issues?

With this in mind, a steering committee was set up and met several times between February and December 2024 to define the main thrusts of this project and implement a series of meetings and discussions between MC93 teams and invited personalities.

ACTIVITIES IN 2024

Both a space for reflection and discussion to define and identify the issues, and a source of inspiration to implement concrete actions, these meetings were led by guest speakers (academics, authors, artists, activists...) specialising in the fields of anti-racism and social sciences. It was documented by Ainhoa Jean-Calmettes.

Preparatory discussions were organised to explain to the guest speakers the professional context in which these encounters would take place, and then they adapted their approach to the subject and identified specific areas for reflection.

The first meeting was held on October 14, 2024, with the artist **Pankaj Tiwari**. Around twenty members of the MC93 team attended. The *CommonLAB 2024* artist, Tiwari, spoke about the power dynamics at work between the West and the “Global South”, reflections that are at the heart of his artistic practice.

Creation of a Dedicated Library

In March 2024, a bibliography was compiled to create a dedicated resource centre, now accessible to the whole team.

A Meeting with the Projects with Audiences team

On October 8, 2024, a discussion on racism/feedback was held with the MC93 Projects with Audiences team. A summary of this meeting was drawn up and shared at the *Common Stories* annual meeting in Brussels.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Encounters between guest personalities and the MC93 team continue in 2025:

Meeting with **Léonora Miano** on January 15, 2025, to discuss her book *L'opposé de la blancheur* (The Opposite of Whiteness), an essay in which she deconstructs the notion of “being white”.

Meeting on March 13, 2025, with **Prisca Ratovonasy**, an author, podcaster and consultant working on issues of diasporic identity and the representation of minority bodies in the performing arts. Prisca was also Soa Ratsifandrihana’s outside eye on these issues in the show *Fampitaha, fampita, fampitana* presented at the MC93 in September 2024.

Meeting on June 4, 2025, to discuss the book *Entrer en pédagogie antiraciste* (Entering Anti-Racist Education), published in 2023 by Shed Publishing. **Lydia Amarouche**, founder of Shed Publishing, will be in conversation with **Houyem Rebai**, schoolteacher and co-author of the book.

This three-year journey will result in the development of a tailor-made training programme for in-house teams. Its implementation is part of the MC93’s commitment to create an exemplary professional environment, where every individual feels respected and valued. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the individual fulfilment of the employees, and to reinforce the Scène Nationale’s position as a socially responsible organisation, both in terms of its missions and its work ethics.

Created in dialogue with Lydia Amarouche and the Coprisme association, which will implement it in September 2025, the training course *Understanding and Acting on Racial Discrimination in Everyday Life* will aim to raise awareness of the mechanisms of racial discrimination, from cognitive biases to stereotypes, via micro-aggressions. Through a socio-historical contextualization, theoretical tools, practical exercises and keys will be offered to identify and act on racial discriminations in everyday life, whether in the context of collective projects or interpersonal and professional relationships involving hierarchical links.



Paper Planes by Pankaj Tiwari and De Singel © Santanu Kumar Choudhury

Who?

The Good Practices Factory 2024 in Bobigny was led by:

Hortense Archambault, General and Artistic Director, MC93 | **Margault Chavaroché**, Director of Audiences, MC93 | **Elsa Mahi**, Production Manager, MC93 |

As well as the MC93 teams | Documentation: **Aïnhua Jean-Calmettes**

REPAIRING IMAGINATIONS

by Ainhoa Jean-Calmettes

From October 2024 to June 2025, the MC93 teams has invited intellectuals, creators, and specialists to join them in thinking about the racist prejudices and unconscious biases that shape French society and, more specifically, the performing arts. Discussions, open to all on a voluntary basis, were organised with multidisciplinary artist Pankaj Tiwari, one of the artists of *CommonLAB 2024*; author Léonora Miano; and Prisca Ratovonasy, producer of the podcast *Les enfants du bruit et de l'odeur* (Children of the Noise and the Smell) and consultant and mentor for artistic projects related to issues of diasporic identity. A final meeting will take place in June 2025 with Lydia Amarouche, founder of Shed Publishing, which published the book *Entrer en pédagogie antiraciste* (Entering Anti-Racist Education). Whereas the first shared his analysis of North/South economic and ecological logic in artistic circles, the second revisited the long political and philosophical history of racialization to shed light on how we have inherited it. Lastly, the third unravelled the logic of everyday racism in culture. This text sets out to illustrate some of the main points of what was said.

Giving Ourselves the Means to Repair Our Imaginations

If, according to Prisca Ratovonasy, culture should “be one of the ramparts against racism”, its circles are not immune to discrimination and domination, stereotypes and prejudices, or violence. In recent years, many performing arts institutions have focused on the issue of representation, striving to make their stages more accurate mirrors of contemporary European societies by diversifying the narratives performed on them. This challenge is “crucial,” according to Léonora Miano, “because it is here that we can work to repair our imaginations.” The author develops the French case, stating, “All the major ethnic groups of humanity are represented here. Yet when France tells its story to the world and to itself, they never appear. We could have told the stories of all the small Frances that exist in the seas of the world, but we chose not to. We must seek out these stories. In them, we find what we need to change our perspective, enrich our imaginations, and ultimately overcome the problem of racism.”

Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go. For Prisca Ratovonasy, change is slow: “In programming, we often find the same themes, embodied by artists of colour, exhausted by the weight and stigma of these creations that leave no one unscathed. However, there are many of them trying to tackle subjects that one would not expect them to broach, and they too rarely obtain the necessary funding.”

Upon his arrival in Amsterdam, Pankaj Tiwari also quickly met these financial obstacles. His student grant did not allow him to find an accommodation, so he decided to shower in the school kitchen as a sign of protest. He states, “Institutions cannot live up to their rhetoric of openness and inclusion if they don't give themselves the means to do so.” Some time later, in Zurich, he realised that the grants he was receiving were ten times less than those received by his Swiss counterparts of the same age and with the same experience.

Overcoming "the White Gaze"

Being invited to a cultural venue is not enough. Realising that a host institution was more interested in what he stood for symbolically as a young Indian artist than in his ideas and work, Pankaj Tiwari put an end to their collaboration. “The European art market loves to pigeonhole artists, especially when they come from India.” Pankaj Tiwari describes the con game that plays out between institutions, driven by more or less conscious expectations about the stories that artists from the Global South should tell, and the artists themselves, who conform to these expectations to gain international exposure. “When travelling, programmers rarely make the effort to look beyond what is immediately apparent. As a result, they always select the same artists, who not only usually come from the most affluent social classes in their country of origin, but also contribute, through their work, to the dissemination of prejudices and clichés, often of a miserabilist nature.”

Is it possible to dodge instrumentalization and appropriation? Feeling trapped in this impasse, the multidisciplinary artist decided to stop working with narrative and to reorient his practice towards more conceptual forms in 2020.

For her part, Prisca Ratovonasy is regularly called upon by creators to try to counter these mechanisms. “My goal is not to tell them what they should or shouldn't do, but to push them to become aware of how they may, despite themselves, internalise the white gaze in their bodies and minds. No one is immune to passing on unthought stereotypes.”

An Insidious System

Prisca Ratovonasy also supports artists of colour in their dealings with institutions and helps them to prepare psychologically for the demands and expectations they will face. She reminds us that programming choices are just one of many mechanisms of discrimination in a much larger, persistent, and extremely pernicious system. “What allows racism to take root and rot everything away is the accumulation of seemingly harmless behaviours and passive-aggressive situations that flirt with the limits. Above all else, discrimination is hidden in the details.” The unspoken plays out at the technical level, in “lighting that makes a Black body invisible”; in communication, those words and images we choose, “which veer toward fetishization”; and even in the way we welcome and interact with others. She insists on one point: “We too often approach racism in a moral way, taking it as a judgment or a personal attack against an individual. It is not about telling someone, ‘You're a bad person. You're the problem.’ Rather, we need to talk collectively, not only about individual behaviours, but also about group dynamics, the weight of institutions, and the fact that we have all, to a greater or lesser degree, internalised the constructs of racialisation and activate them under certain conditions as reflexes.”



La Petite Troupe © Jérémy Piot

The Racial Burden

While racism concerns everybody, the responsibility for change still lies largely with racialised people, who are already on the front lines of violence. Theorised in France by Maboula Soumahoro, the concept of racial burden describes the daily pressure felt by those who, exposed to stigmatisation on a day-to-day basis, not only live in a state of constant vigilance, but must also take on the exhausting task of explaining and making intelligible the discriminatory situations they face.

Pankaj Tiwari devoted his final project to inventing a model for financing the everyday lives of colleagues caught up in the contradictions he himself had experienced. “If I can do it, how is it possible to understand why institutions can’t?” Prisca Ratovonasy shares this question: “Many artists of colour are really doing the job. They work and fight, while being subjected to a suffocating demand for perfection. In fact, we practically expect them to fix this society. Institutions, for their part, are often very far removed from the complexity of these realities. There is a huge gap between the urgency of the former, who may be living through situations that damage their mental health, and the inaction of the latter, who too often relax in the comfort of discourse.”

Here there is once more an unacknowledged issue at play, which is undoubtedly at the root of all the others, and which Léonora Miano describes as follows: “Until now, this history of racialisation, colonisation, and slavery has been seen as the history of what happened to the colonised, the enslaved, and their descendants. Those who created themselves as white have placed themselves in a dimension that protects them from thinking of themselves as racialised. White is neutral, universal, the reference point. In this way, they refuse to see that they are also locked up in the racial prison. That is more comfortable. Thinking of oneself as racialised immediately means losing power.”

The author of *L’opposé de la blancheur* (The Opposite of Whiteness) continues, “People who are favourably racialised must engage in self-analysis and reflection. Those who have been created as white by history are probably those whose actions and words, in this field, have not been enough to bring about progress.”

How much longer will they continue to not be wanting?

Aïnhua Jean-Calmettes is a freelance journalist specialising in culture and ideas. Editor-in-chief of *Mouvement* magazine from 2014 to 2023, she continues to coordinate the *Sortir du XX^e siècle* and *Après la nature* columns. She reflects on the intersections between contemporary creation and the human sciences by writing critical texts, analytical articles and surveys on the artistic field. She collaborates with several cultural institutions, including the MC93, and regularly moderates meetings.



Aïnhua Jean-Calmettes © Aurore Osselame



CommonLAB 2024 - Talking about Your Art Work © Virginie Dupray

How do you explain this tension around systemic racism?

AGA: Its logic is not yet entirely recognised in France. We were not constructed by telling ourselves that we were living in a racist and exclusionary society, but rather by thinking that we were exemplary when it came to human rights, thanks to our history. Recognising that we are all shot through with racist prejudices is very difficult to accept, perhaps even more so in the cultural sector, which likes to see itself as a model of inclusivity and generosity.

Do you think that the responsibility for change still falls too heavily on people of colour?

AGA: Yes, that's true. I think everyone should play their part in this change to really transform the system. I also believe it is essential to recognise the value of knowledge gained from minority experiences, whatever they may be. I strongly believe that approaching these issues through the prism of competence, and in relation to the objectives of a project, is a meaningful starting point. I realised this once again during my work with the *CommonLAB* artists. There was such a wealth of knowledge around the table that could and should be transferred! Saphir Belkheir, for example, is currently writing a guide for organising more inclusive art workshops. Collectively, we have a lot to learn from people with minority experiences, and we need to find ways to recognise this expertise, remunerate its transmission suitably, and empower these people with more agency and responsibility. This would also ensure that these issues are not addressed based on societal goodwill, but rather on the foundation of working practices. Our collective learning about these issues requires experimentation and errors. We must recognise the efforts that are being made, acknowledge their limitations, and draw from them to move forward.

What obstacles still exist?

AGA: Truly considering the unique circumstances of each guest artist (geopolitical, economic, administrative...) requires tailor-made work that cultural organisations do not always have the means to provide today. The economic pressure to rationalise is so strong that openness tends to become standardised, offering a single framework into which everyone must fit. The same applies to welcoming professionals from other backgrounds into a team. Many people realise that there is a need for more dialogue and adaptation to better welcome and include others, but this would require choosing priorities, which is not always done, and this puts professionals under pressure.

Interview by **Ainhoa Jean-Calmettes**, April 2025

Albane Guinet-Ahrens currently co-leads *La Belle Ouvrage*, a support organisation for professionals in the cultural field, which she founded together with Clara Rousseau and Laure Guazzoni in 2006. As a consultant and as a trainer, she supports teams and individual artists, producers, directors, presenters, and others. Her background includes extensive experience in theatres and venues (such as Le Volcan, Scène Nationale du Havre, and Parc de la Villette in Paris), as well as collaborations with dance and performance artists within a production office. She holds degrees in economics and management and psycho-sociology, and she uses tools coming from production and administration fields, as well as facilitation and animation schemes.



Albane Guinet-Ahrens © Régis Blondeau



Tufting workshop - Maak9/Transmettre © Nouria Tirou

THE GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN BRUXELLES

Looking for the Values of Diversity in an Institution

Aiming at creating a new environment in the theatre that would be creative, stimulating and supportive, the Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles (Théâtre National) chose to see their teams as a starting point to think about the values of diversity.

ACTIVITIES IN 2024

The Théâtre National pursued its collaboration with Safia Kessas, a journalist, filmmaker and member of the *Common Stories* Advisory Committee, and Laurie Hanquinet, a Doctor in Political and Social Sciences at the Université Libre de Bruxelles whose research focuses on performing arts and diversity.

Led by them, a series of five workshops / discussions was proposed to the different team members from August 2023 to June 2024 to examine internally the different takes on diversity.

Three themes were particularly addressed:

- How to define “diversity” and what it implies?
- What are the main challenges met in trying to achieve diversity?
- What are/should be the goals and/or aspirations regarding diversity within the institution.

Documented and analysed, the team sessions nurtured a diagnosis and a series of recommendations made by Kessas and Hanquinet in October 2024.

The sessions were an eye-opener about diversity issues, but also more generally about the working environment, the relationship to leadership, and internal potential misunderstandings or misleading interpretations... They revealed that the Théâtre National team is mostly unaware of the measures already taken

to promote in-house diversity and that more communication is needed to publicize the different actions.

According to Pierre Thys, the Théâtre National artistic director, this self-diagnosis is crucial “to grasp how far we still have to go to make this venue as democratic and open as possible, in tune with the realities of today’s society, but also to better accompany the journeys of guest artists from diverse backgrounds.”

It also appears that audience-development programmes, as well as the new artistic directions on stage have impacted teams and audiences. Workshops such Joëlle Samb’s *Decolonizing our Imaginary* (May 2022) or the one on unconscious biases by Annalisa Casini, a professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the University of Louvain (April 2024), as well as the multiple collaborations with associate artists Clément Papachristou and his brother Guillaume, an artist with a disability, have shifted perceptions and practices within the Théâtre National.

Last but not least, an in-house resources centre dedicated to diversity issues was opened in 2024.



As part of the *Common Stories* annual meeting, the Théâtre National hosted the *Good Practices Factory Day* on 8 November, 2024.

The GPF representatives of each city, Théâtre National staff members and *CommonLAB 2024* artists were in attendance. After a presentation by each group focusing on the actions implemented during the year, the participants were invited to learn about tufting with the collective Maak & Transmettre. Based in Brussels, the collective offers educational work focusing on literacy for migrant women through art and design and has collaborated with the Théâtre National on the 2024-2025 season's visual identity.

In the afternoon, three workshops were proposed:

- *Embodiment and Inclusivity through Mindfulness Practice* by Aurélie de Schoutheete. An osteopath and meditation instructor, she proposed an introduction to Shamata, a meditation practice to help calm the nervous system and reappropriate the body through breathing.
- *Self-Defense in a Specific Context* by Safia Kessas and Dr. Alena Sander, a researcher in the field of feminist development studies. They explored different practices to react when faced with discrimination.
- Moderated by the dramaturge Youness Anzane, *Common Stories, What's Next?* invited participants to a collective reflection on the future of the *Common Stories* programme.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Following delivered recommendations, several actions will be implemented in 2025:

- A Diversity Committee will be set up, at the initiative of the Human Resources Department, with an agenda and a programme;
- Different processes & tools will be tried out to improve internal communication.

In this context, the Théâtre National has called on an external organisation to carry out in-depth work on the issue of relationships within teams. Using a constructive, forward-looking approach, the aim is to promote a better understanding of the artistic project, a deeper knowledge of each team member's position and responsibilities within a new work dynamic, and the development and implementation of mechanisms to address diversity issues, both within the teams and on stage. Several consultation and information sessions were organised during the first quarter of 2025 to identify and clarify needs and expectations.

Who?

The Good Practices Factory 2024 in Brussels was led by:

Safia Kessas, journalist, filmmaker, member of the *Common Stories* Advisory Committee | **Laurie Hanquinet**, Professor of Sociology at the Université Libre de Bruxelles | **Isabelle Collard**, Head of Public Relation and Cultural Mediation, Théâtre National | As well as the Théâtre National Human Resources team

A CONVERSATION WITH...
Pierre Thys and Isabelle Collard

A Theatre of Relationships, Rather than Representation...

A conversation with Pierre Thys, Director of the Théâtre National, and Isabelle Collard, Head of the public relations.

When you arrived at the Théâtre National four years ago, you redefined the role of the public relations department. In what way?

Pierre Thys (PT): The department of public relations no longer serves the programming department by “filling seats.” Both departments work to develop artistic projects with artists and audiences, so they are considered to be on the same level. While many people talk about inclusion when defining audience development goals, we like to say that we want to step outside ourselves to go out and meet the public. It is not about bringing audiences to us, but also, and above all else, about leaving the theatre and meeting them where they are. So, we do not open our seasons on the big stage of the Théâtre National, but in public spaces in rural or peri-urban areas, sometimes over 150 kilometres from Brussels.

So, are the ideas you are exploring in *Common Stories* a continuation of the work you have been doing for a long time?

Isabelle Collard (IC): Absolutely. A long-term commitment is essential to creating relationships with these audiences. The projects we are creating within the department of the public relations are always designed with the artists: through our programming, we open ourselves up to new audiences. The projects then take different forms, ranging from support in discovering a work to long-term workshops that can lead to artistic proposals – podcasts, exhibitions, or performances – presented at the *À la scène comme à la ville* festival. The latter is really designed on the same level as the Théâtre National’s other “highlights”. I think it is important to emphasise that. We would also rather talk about “audiences who would not spontaneously walk through the doors of a theatre” rather than “disadvantaged audiences” or “remote audiences” – terms that contain a whole series of prejudices, when the reasons for not coming to the theatre are extremely diverse and not just cultural or socioeconomic. The example of school audiences is an interesting one: all the work has to be done again when they reach higher education. Because “going to the theatre” is still not part of their cultural practices. Attending once does not mean you will come back. Becoming a regular and seasoned audience member is, once again, a long process.

PT: What matters to us is reaching communities of people and building new types of relationships with them around a work. Breaking out of our comfort zone and established relationships. To make this happen, I also must think outside the box as a programmer. Simply inviting artists who don’t fit the institution’s profile allows us to meet audiences we don’t often see. *Maison Gertrude*, the project we are working on with Mohamed El Khatib to create an arts centre in a nursing home, is a good example. On top of shifting the narrative from the stage to a care facility, we are changing our relationships with audiences, the relationships between audiences and artists, and the relationships between theatre crews and artists. This type of project also creates links between sectors and institutions that are not used to working together.



Pierre Thys © Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles



Isabelle Collard © Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles

How have these changes been perceived in your teams?

IC: There may have been a few obstacles. That’s why we organised meetings within the different teams as part of the *Good Practices Factory* so that everyone could talk about their perceptions of diversity. What words should we use to talk about it? What difficulties are we encountering? Organising meetings, department by department, seemed more appropriate to us to promote open dialogue between people who are experiencing the same reality and to avoid certain questions whose answers are obvious to some groups being overlooked by others. Providing a space to express our doubts and find solutions was a very important step.

PT: Confronted with such changes in direction, teams want and need constant clarification. But the most surprising thing is that, at the same time, some things change very naturally, and no one even notices it!

In 2021, Clément and Guillaume Papachristou called on the public relations department to work with audiences who have the same disability as Guillaume. The first time Guillaume walked through the theatre doors, the teams did not always know how to behave around him. Today, he feels at home. When he arrives, everyone rushes over to say hello. Sometimes, it is simply through “doing” that attitudes change. You also have to know when to stop explaining and reasoning and just try things out.

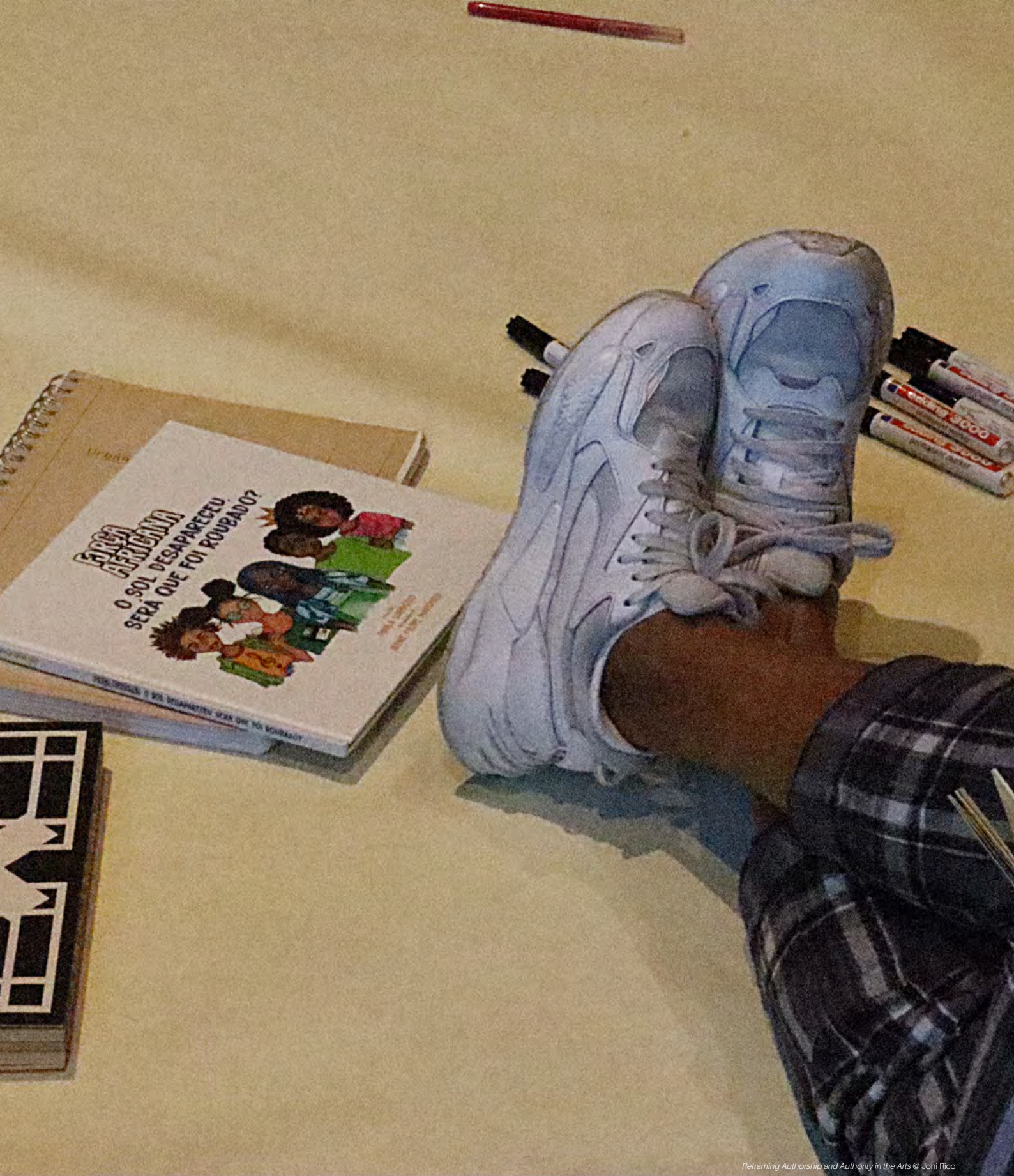
IC: The most disturbing thing is that, even today, some theatre staff members tell us, “We don’t do anything about diversity issues.” That’s why we need to continue using the right words. Because they have become part of everyday life, certain things have become invisible.

After these meetings, a report and recommendations were sent to you. What have you taken away from them?

IC: That our most important work is to improve the quality of relations between the theatre teams. It may not seem like much, but the way we relate to each other is at the heart of our daily lives. So, we have set up team coaching with an external consultant, which helps us “deconstruct” a lot of things. For example, putting an end to how we can downplay “the participatory work carried out by the public relations team” helps improve relations with the technical teams. They do everything they can to find the right solutions, while working in a much calmer way. Mindsets have changed.

PT: Some observers tell us that at the Théâtre National we are more about practicing a theatre of relationship than a theatre of representation. How can we rebuild “community” in an increasingly polarized society? This is where theatre can be political – in rebuilding damaged relationships. Today, we are faced with a new problem, which is still utopian. How can we be sure that the communities that now visit our spaces on an occasional basis, when they never used to come, can also mix in a completely natural way?

Interview by **Aïnhua Jean-Calmettes**, April 2025



Reframing Authorship and Authority in the Arts © Joni Rico

THE GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN LISBON

Creating an Anti-Racist Manual

Founded in April 2021, União Negra das Artes (UNA) defends the specific interests of Blackness in the cultural sector, considering the historical continuities of colonial racism that maintain deep asymmetries and hinder the creation, fructification, access, production, programming, and, consequently, Black representation in the artistic sector in Portugal. The main objectives are the promotion, increase, and strengthening of Black representation in the Portuguese artistic field, as well as the recognition and appreciation of the intangible heritage of the Black population in Portugal.

For more information:
uniaonegradasartes.pt

Culturgest continues its shared journey with UNA (União Negra das Artes) to reflect and build on an Anti-Racist Manual, a publication in process that will gather experiences, proposals and practices for the Portuguese art scene.

Dori Nigro, an artist and art educator and a member of UNA, shares about the process (see p.16)

ACTIVITIES IN 2024

On November 12 2024, CG hosted the workshop *Caminhanti é Caminho/Caminho di caminhanti: Routes of Care in the Practice of the Performing Arts in Portugal*, a day of reflection and exchange dedicated to transforming institutional practices in the performing arts. The event brought together artists, educators, activists, and professionals from the sector to explore paths of care, inclusion, and anti-racism.

Inspired by the work of Lygia Clark, the workshop included relational and sensorial practices that enabled deep reflection on the challenges and possibilities of truly transformative cultural action. A central focus was the collective construction of an Anti-Racist Manual for the Arts, a project promoted by UNA supported by CG through the *Good Practices Factory*. With contributions from Maria Gil, Máira Zenun, a *CommonLAB 2023* artist, and Francisca Carneiro Fernandes, the workshop created a space for intersectional dialogue, the strengthening of care-based networks, and the sharing of inclusive practices already underway. This initiative reaffirms the urgency of rethinking power structures in the arts, paving the way for a fairer, more diverse, and collaborative cultural landscape.

WHAT'S NEXT?

In 2025, UNA and CG will conclude the work initiated in 2023 as part of the *Good Practices Factory* with the creation of an Anti-Racist Manual for the performing arts. On September 20, 2025, a public event will bring together previous participants and guests from the sector.

Who?

The Good Practices Factory 2024 in Lisbon was led by:

Dori Nigro and **Melissa Rodrigues**, artists and educators, UNA members, programmed by **Mark Deputter**, General and Artistic Director, CG |

Raquel Lima, UNA member, member of the *Common Stories* Advisory Committee | **Liliana Coutinho**, Head of Conferences & Debates Programming, CG |

Carolina Mano Marques, Executive Assistant and Head of European Projects, CG

“This is Just the Beginning”: Building an Anti-Racist Manual for the Arts in Portugal

A CONVERSATION WITH...

Dori Nigro, Mark Deputter and Liliana Coutinho

The relationship between people of colour and cultural institutions in Portugal has been shaped by multiple layers of structural racism and what performer and educator Dori Nigro describes as “an ongoing process of guilt and denial.” This dynamic, he says, has hindered the necessary dialogue and transformation. Nigro, a member of UNA – União Negra das Artes, an organisation that seeks to promote Black representation in Portugal’s artistic sector, stresses the need for “a broad, human-centred education aimed at recognising and confronting racism” – both in society and within the arts.

Mark Deputter, president of the board at Culturgest, acknowledges that many institutions have addressed the issue of racism in recent years – through discussions about colonization, the independence wars, and the returnees, for example – but only sporadically. “I think we’re still very much in a phase of recognition, of coming together, he says. Some smaller, more flexible organisations are already a step ahead. But in larger institutions there is still a lot of work to be done. There are structural issues that don’t change overnight. I’m thinking of things as basic as hiring people of colour into leadership roles. There is awareness, but we’re still far from achieving what could be called fair representation and participation.”

This underrepresentation also extends to programming. Just over a decade ago, the representation of Black narratives was virtually non-existent, recalls Dori Nigro. Then came what he refers to as “Benetton-style representation” – merely an effort to fulfil quotas or meet international regulations, and, in some ways, “riding the wave of the moment,” but “without any ethical responsibility.” It was superficial anti-racism. And only recently has there been a shift toward greater accountability within artistic institutions.

“It’s a process that is underway,” confirms Deputter, pointing to artists like Victor de Oliveira, Marlene Freitas, and Teatro Griot, who have performed on Culturgest’s stages. In this shift, UNA has become “a visible cultural partner with whom dialogue is possible” and, moreover, “a proactive, idea-driven partner” that has consistently engaged with institutions.

How can we do better? How can we contribute to the transformation? Culturgest began working with UNA to help answer these questions. “An institution like Culturgest can create collaborative spaces where those who have long reflected on these issues through their lived experiences – often with limited resources – can do so more effectively,” explains Liliana Coutinho, talks and lectures curator at Culturgest. “It’s not about giving them a voice – they already have one – but about combining means and opportunities to enhance their work,” she says. “Amplifying” is the term chosen by Dori, “in the sense that these are voices that already exist but are not yet in positions of power.”

As part of the *Good Practices Factory*, this collaboration has taken shape as a three-year initiative that includes both ongoing work and annual meetings, with the first two taking place in 2023 and 2024, and the third scheduled for September 2025. The main goal is to develop an Anti-Racist Manual for the arts – a goal pursued as Liliana Coutinho emphasises, “collectively, in consultation with the community.” Participants in both seminars included people who work in the performing arts, such as artists and programmers, as well as educators and activists, invited guests, and others who applied – all contributing their diverse perspectives.

The first workshop, *Reframing Authorship and Authority in the Arts: Weaving Lines of Repair*, aimed to “bring together all these threads” and “reflect on both formal and informal educational experiences within the performing arts and beyond”, Dori Nigro explains, highlighting the importance of thinking about education as a continuous process. He refuses the idea of a ready-made rulebook, envisioning the manual instead as a hands-on tool – one that invites “erasing, rewriting, and even leaving blank pages to be filled in later.” The second meeting, *Caminhanti é Caminho: Routes of Care in the Practice of the Performing Arts in Portugal*, built on that foundation, focusing on care as an artistic practice.

“This is still just the beginning,” says Liliana Coutinho. The work so far has allowed us “to understand how deeply embedded these prejudices are in our very being,” but the journey is far from over. She compares the process to acupuncture, and Dori Nigro agrees: “It’s almost as if these two meetings functioned like needles touching specific points. We know the impact will resonate beyond them, but we don’t yet know exactly how.”



Dori Nigro © José Sergio

A performer and art educator, Dori Nigro studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Porto, and at the College of Arts, Coimbra, he has a PhD and a master’s degree in the field of contemporary art, artistic practices and art/education, a degree in pedagogy and a bachelor’s degree in media-photography. Since 2007, he has been mainly working on multidisciplinary creation, navigating between Portugal and Brazil. He is also organising cultural activities with local artists and communities. Together with Paulo Pinto, he runs LARóyé - a house/atelier for sharing affective, creative and ancestral experiences, in Porto. The *Baronessas do Frago* project, currently under construction, aims at hosting cultural activities and artistic re-creation residencies in Olinda, Brazil. Dori Nigro is a member of the União Negra das Artes.

Mark Deputter believes that the relationship between Culturgest and UNA must be structural (not occasional), ongoing (a process), and must also involve distribution – i.e. “the importance of sharing this process with other institutions, inviting other theatres and organisations to join the dialogue.” “I believe we are making progress on each of these fronts” he concludes.

Still, Deputter acknowledges that three years will likely not be enough to achieve a lasting impact on Portugal’s artistic landscape. “We will certainly need more time and must extend the work to other partners in Lisbon, and across the country,” he says. This conversation has to continue. Dori Nigro speaks of a seed that has been planted – one that must continue to be watered.

Maria João Caetano, April 2025

Maria João Caetano is a Portuguese journalist since 1996, who has been working with media platforms such as CNN, Diário de Notícias and TVI. Graduated in Sciences of Communication from NOVA University, she holds a post-graduation in Theatre Studies (University of Lisbon).



CommonLAB 2023 at Stockholm ©Joacim Gustafson - Riksteatern

THE GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN STOCKHOLM

Identifying and Growing Conscious Competence for Today and Tomorrow

To implement the *Good Practices Factory*, Riksteatern (RT) relied among others on an existing group created in Spring 2022 to identify and evaluate inhouse knowledge and experience, the *Meeting Place for Learning - Equality and Diversity* group.

Based on their recommendations and infused by the RT strategies for equality and diversity, two specific programmes have been developed in 2024, by the RT Human Resources department. Head of the RT Dance Department, Mia Larsson followed one of these programmes, and here she talks about it p.20.

ACTIVITIES IN 2024

The *Conscious Competence Provision* targets RT directors and managers, e.g. a total of 35 people.

Led by the RT Human Resources, this ongoing process aims to increase the knowledge and understanding in how to transfer knowledge into practice by focussing on in-house skills.

It ensures that RT can secure and maintain the necessary competence in the long term to operate in today's society and create relevant performing arts for the future. The programme aims at increasing knowledge and understanding through already existing experience and knowledge, case studies, and research and statistics, while defining the individual roles and responsibilities of the RT managers.

In 2024, the group met twice, over a total of three days. Led by a licensed psychologist, the first two days focussed on organisation and working life, using systems theories to understand how human systems develop and transform and

Who?

The Good Practices Factory 2024 in Stockholm was led by:

Anusha Tyson, Meeting Place coordinator, RT | **Kajsa Asheim**, Director of Human Resources, RT | All the managers and the CEO of RT Theatre Department, Dance Department, Workshops and Design Studios, Sales and Communication, Finance and Operational Support and Human Resources Department

what eventually hinders their development. The group also learned more about how to create psychological safety at work. Concrete presentations by the Cullberg director, the RT Network for Youth project officer, the head of the Theatre Department, the HR director and the CEO of a Swedish recruitment agency brought new perspectives in prioritising potentials and competence and how that led to diversity. Four months later, the group met again for another day of project presentation of learning examples to increase diversity.

The second implemented programme deals with children's perspectives at RT. In 2020, the Convention on the Rights of the Child became a law in Sweden. Led by a children's rights expert, the training involves around thirty RT employees, helping them become children's rights strategists. Again, it is about increasing our team members' vision and ensure that the child perspective is fully part of RT.

WHAT'S NEXT?

In the coming months, the *Conscious Competence Provision* programme will continue, with more concrete applications, linked to activity plans. All managers will provide individual inputs on perspectives and needs to continue the work. The next meeting will take place in June 2025.

Following the Children Right and Perspective training, concrete recommendations will be made to all team members, with, for example, a checklist system.

A CONVERSATION WITH...

Mia Larsson

Head of the Dance Department at Riksteatern (RT), Mia Larsson is currently following a leadership programme, *Conscious Competence Provision*, as part of the work to increase equality and diversity at RT, here are some of her thoughts about the work and the programme.

Could you briefly introduce your role within the RT?

Mia Larsson (ML): RT's vision is "Performing arts that move minds and emotions – for everyone, everywhere." The Dance Department I'm leading produces and tours high quality dance art in Sweden and internationally while creating relationships between audiences, artists, and organisers. It stands on two legs: Cullberg, an international dance company with an ensemble and a mission to tour both in Sweden and internationally; and the Riksteatern Dance Repertoire, a curated programme for touring in Sweden that includes commissioning and co-produced works.

You are currently following a leadership programme within the RT, could you tell us more?

ML: RT has had a leadership programme since 2015, in which all managers participate. Since 2024, it focuses on *Conscious Competence Provision* and one of our goals is diversity on, behind, and in front of the stage. If we achieve diversity on and behind the scene, we believe we will be more relevant to more people and will reach a larger audience. To do so, we need to increase our competencies and to understand the ones missing when recruiting but also to retain valuable skills. It's also important to take inventory of the competencies we already have at the RT and make that knowledge visible, while identifying artists, organisations and venues that have knowledge and qualities we could learn from. In the long term, the purpose of our *Conscious Competence Provision* programme is to ensure that RT reaches and secures the competencies needed to run its missions in its time and create relevant performing arts for the future.

As leaders and directors of RT departments, how do you see your role in promoting diversity and equity within the institution?

ML: Art institutions have a powerful role in shaping culture, narratives, and representation. To truly reflect the diversity of society and ensure equal access and opportunity, we must be willing to examine our structures and actively work towards change. And we need to commit to long term change, beyond one-time initiatives.

In this process, I think leaders and managers play a key role in shaping the culture and values of an organisation. When we actively take responsibility for promoting equality, it sends a strong message that fairness, inclusion, and respect are priorities, not just ideals. If leaders demonstrate a commitment to equality, it encourages other team members to do the same and helps build a more inclusive workplace culture. Then, it's also the responsibility of leaders to ensure that everyone feels respected, valued, and safe at work. This includes recognising and addressing bias, discrimination, or unequal treatment. A precious tool in this process is our Code of Conduct. A simple guide on how we should take care of our common work environment.

At this stage, what has been the impact of the different sessions on your professional vision / practices?

ML: It has become clear that it is important to find a way forward where each individual feels part of the process but also understands how to carry out the work. To educate ourselves together, with all management colleagues, strengthens our joint work and creates space to support each other and share good examples, as well as obstacles and more difficult and challenging situations. Change creates conflict. In conflict, there is power and opportunity for the exchange of information and perspectives. But it can be scary, and here you may need support. As managers, it can be hard to talk about situations where you failed or made mistakes, without feeling unsuccessful. I hope the programme will individually strengthen us as leaders, but also collectively, making us feel safer with each other.

Mia Larsson has been part of the management team and head of the Dance Department at RT since 2015. A 1992 graduate of the Stockholm University of the Arts, she has worked as a producer for institutions, independent companies, and through her own production company, before becoming the Artistic Director of the RT's Dance Repertoire for eight years. Her focus has been on performing arts for children and youth, as well as dance and choreography. Mia Larsson is also a board member of Dansens Hus in Stockholm.



Mia Larsson © Sören Vilks

Are there too any impacts at a more personal level?

ML: Indeed, the insights gained from working with equality and inclusion don't just stay at the workplace. They shape how you see and interact with the world in your everyday life. You become more aware of injustice and exclusion in everyday situations, and you are more likely to speak up or question unfair treatment when you see it, whether it's among friends, in public spaces, or in community groups. To be privileged and to have a conversation with other privileged people; to realize that what I take for granted is not a given for everyone.

Throughout the programme, how have you disseminated learned knowledge and practices within your department and team?

ML: I like to think that I carry that knowledge and practice in my everyday work, in meetings and conversations. To talk to people and not about them. To give feedback and to ask for feedback. To listen and to be able to change. To listen and be able to stand up for oneself. I hope that I will be braver and demand more accountability. Diversity is a part of the RT artistic direction, and diversity in expressions, formats, and practices is what we strive for. The next step is to give ourselves goals and to use our activity-plan as a tool to formulate which activities are needed.

Interview by **Anusha Tyson**, April 2025



Que importa el abismo by Aida Colmenero Díaz / She poems © Idartes

THE GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN COLOGNE

Collectively Reflecting on Strategies for Diversity in Cologne

Since 2023, as part of the *Good Practices Factory*, africologne (AFC) has been implementing a self-reflection process on its activities and positioning, as well as on its methodologies, in dialogue with other cultural institutions in the city and region, including the Orangerie Theatre. A concrete result is the writing of a Code of Conduct for teams, artists, and audiences that will be implemented for the 8th edition of the festival that will take place from the 11th to the 22nd of June, 2025 in Cologne.

ACTIVITIES IN 2024

A one-day workshop on the theme of *Good Practices Factory* was organised on May 14th, 2024, bringing together several cultural structures and institutions, as well as theatre-makers of Cologne.

During the workshop, participants explored and debated the various possibilities for good practices in relation to diversity. The discussion was moderated by Sarah Youssef who talks about this experience p.23.

Key concepts and concrete steps for greater diversity awareness were discussed, aiming to adopt common good practice guidelines, as well as a Code of Conduct in 2025.

The festival board has also decided to change the name of the festival from Festival der afrikanischen Künste (Festival of African Arts) to Festival für afrikanische und afrodiasporische Künste und Positionen (Festival for African and Afro-diasporic Arts and Positions), with a new logo.

Moving away from the universality of the previous title (which the festival could not represent), this repositioning acknowledges the more partial character of what can be presented as part of the festival, while opening it to artists from the diasporas.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The next workshop to be held at the beginning of June 2025 aims to finalise the code of conduct that will be operational during the festival.

The working groups will reflect on the possible variations of a Code of Conduct that should adapt to the different contexts and structures it will be applied to.

Finally, starting with the 2025 edition, a new format, africologneLOCAL, curated by Yaël Koutouan, will offer visibility during the festival to artists from Cologne's diasporas.

Who?

The Good Practices Factory 2024 in Cologne was led by:

Gerhard Haag, Managing Director, AFC | **Kerstin Ortmeier**, Artistic Director, AFC | with: **Dr. Sarah Youssef**, Artistic Director, Orangerie Theatre | **Andrea Bleikamp**, WEHR51 | **Simon Eifeler**, Bridgeworks | **Janna Hüttebräucker**, Bridgeworks | **Ines Langel**, Orangerie Theatre | **Lisa Lehnen**, Overhead Project | **Laurenz Leky**, Theatre im Bauturm | **Bernd Schlenkrich**, Theatre im Bauturm | **Andrea Tedone**, Comedia Theatre

A CONVERSATION WITH...

Sarah Youssef

Dr. Sarah Youssef, Artistic Director of the Orangerie Theatre in Cologne, a long-time collaborator of *africologne* (AFC) since its inception, and a member of the *Good Practices Factory* group, has been deeply involved in drafting a Code of Conduct for art institutions in Cologne. She shares with us the reasons behind this initiative – and how it came to life.

Could you tell us a bit more about your professional background which is quite international and your role as the artistic director of the Orangerie Theatre?

Sarah Youssef (SY): The Orangerie Theatre is a small-scale theatre in Cologne. It was originally a private house that was later repurposed into a theatre. We perform music and theatre, co-produce projects with local and international groups, and collaborate with local festivals such as *africologne*, for example. Since I took on the position in October 2022, we have transformed the theatre into a fully accessible venue – accessible to artists, the public, and staff alike. We are also working towards making it a green theatre.

Almost everyone on the staff has an international background. The diversity that is so important to the city of Cologne – with its inhabitants originating from more than 180 nations – is also reflected in our team.

I myself am a native of Cologne, born and raised here by Egyptian parents. I later studied theatre at the American University in Cairo and then moved to London to study theatre and community arts. In London, and later in the U.S., I worked with young people in high- and medium-security prisons and wrote a PhD about this experience, which I completed at the University of Cologne. I also have work experience in Arab countries, including Gaza, working with refugees and with Sudanese and Somali communities.

Over the past decade, my focus has been on political theatre, as well as on nurturing and developing international connections between venues and artists.

According to you, does the art scene in Cologne reflect the cosmopolitanism of the city?

SY: Structural racism still exists within all Western institutions, including those in the theatre world, and Cologne is no exception. The communities are present, but they do not have equal access to funding, resources, opportunities, or platforms for artistic expression. Nevertheless, I believe the Cologne arts scene is actively working towards more accurately representing the city's diversity.

And writing a Code of Conduct seems to be a good lever to implement dynamics?

SY: I wouldn't talk about dynamics, you know. I always pass as a "good" foreigner – when you look at me, you wouldn't guess I'm from Egypt. In the U.S., people think I'm Puerto Rican; here, they assume I'm Spanish. And being a "good" foreigner comes with certain privileges. When you're in this privileged position, it's easy to assume that your individual experience is somehow universal.

But the reality is that discrimination, racism, and the challenges some people face in daily life are very real. On one side, there's resistance to talking about these issues; on the other, there's exhaustion from having to explain them over and over again. That's why having a shared vocabulary is so important – it helps everyone start from the same baseline.

These ground rules might seem obvious, but naming the obvious is never harmful, especially when it's not part of everyone's lived experience.

We need to create a space where not every question coming from a position of privilege is immediately labelled as "white fragility" or ignorance, and where people who face daily discrimination and racism aren't constantly forced to justify or prove their experiences.

If you're a person of colour, have an Arab name, or practice a certain faith, you're likely to face discrimination. That's a fact. A Code of Conduct helps raise awareness of these realities while also creating a safe environment for asking questions. In collaborative work, it acts as a kind of security blanket – a respectful framework for how we treat one another, a non-violent way of setting boundaries and expressing needs. Most importantly, it's something we can refer back to when misunderstandings occur.

This Code of Conduct has to be organic. If it's based on shared morals and ethics, it must also allow room for change and adaptation. It should constantly affirm our collective desire to live in this shared social space and to meet each person with respect.

When AFC invites artists to share their craft and work here, we have to create safe spaces. And we can't assume that everyone we work with already knows the rules. So let's give them a fair chance – a fair fighting chance – not to make mistakes.

When working with the *Good Practices Factory* in preparing this Code of Conduct, you insist a lot on terminologies? Why are words so important?

SY: It's easy to throw out words – like when theatres say, "We live diversity." But then you look at the staff, the programming, the audience – and it's not diverse at all. Or take "white fragility," a term I've heard so often in recent years – but what does it really mean?

What, for example, is the difference between racism and discrimination? I've heard professors – highly educated people, even those working in postcolonial studies – ask, "Isn't it the same for someone of Jewish faith or someone in a wheelchair?" That kind of comparison – as if my suffering is equal to or worse than yours – requires explanation. It reduces the complexity of individual experiences into a hierarchy of misery. What does "antisemitism" mean in today's political climate? What does it mean when people say antisemitism originates in Arab countries – effectively erasing a significant part of European history? Once again, we have to return to the words we use. Why is the German word *Rasse* so problematic? And why does simply removing it from official texts not solve the problem?

I believe we need to go back to the most powerful tool we have:



Sarah Youssef © Bettina Malik

language. Language can wound or heal; it manipulates, it creates rituals, it shapes perceptions.

We have to start from the very beginning and ask: What do we actually mean? In our workshops, we explored the dominant language currently in use. And it worked – participants began to naturally engage with the topic. They read, educated themselves, and learned to ask genuine, thoughtful questions. Simple changes matter – like saying “people with disabilities” instead of “disabled people,” or “people of colour” instead of generalising with “Black,” and being attentive to gender inclusivity. Across all levels and in every context, people started to reflect on their language. And that’s a powerful shift. We must stay aware of how the linguistic habits we’re so accustomed to affect others.

In a few weeks, we’ll host the next AFC Festival. Of course, there will be challenges – that one person, that one situation. So the goal isn’t to eradicate every form of discrimination and racism entirely. It’s about whether we choose to look away – or not.

Could you also tell me more about the exhaustion you mentioned before?

SY: Yes, conversations are important – but it’s not my duty to educate you just because I’m Muslim, or because I’m Black or Brown. If you want to understand racism, there’s a Wikipedia entry for that. Otherwise, it turns into a sermon, and we’re constantly put in the position of having to explain ourselves. When people ask me about Islam, I usually have a list of reliable sources I share. If they still have questions after reading, they’re welcome to come and ask.

I’m not a fan of telling people what to think or do. But I am a big believer in the slow-burn process – you bring up a topic, someone starts reading, thinking, and stays open to growth. Long-term change doesn’t come from being told what’s right or wrong. Rules alone – the dos and don’ts – don’t create real societal transformation. That’s why it’s more important than ever to create spaces for reflection and conversation.

In a time when most people are living a fast-paced, five-slide social media life, slowing down is radical.

And when you work in the arts, the responsibility is even greater. As artists and institutions, we are meant to reflect and embody the essence of humanity. We carry a responsibility to go back to the drawing board – to look inward, to question where we stand, and to examine what we’re really saying.

At the Orangerie Theatre, you have launched several programmes intended for young curators or emerging artists?

SY: Indeed, when you want to diversify and open your perspective – even if you trust your own judgment – you have to bring in different viewpoints. I should not carry the sole responsibility, or the sole power, to decide what is relevant and how a story should be told. When I program, I shape the gaze; I shape the themes. That’s why co-curation is so important. In terms of emerging artists, we are currently focusing on the MENA¹ region. While there are many talented artists there, funding and opportunities are extremely limited.

In Europe, we love telling stories about others – including in theatre – so the real question is: How do we give artists the chance to tell their own stories, in their own ways? It’s not just about showcasing their work – it’s about nurturing the entire creative process. That means supporting artists in maintaining their artistic integrity, without pressuring them to conform to European dramaturgical norms, for instance.

It’s also about creating safe spaces for failure. As I often tell my students, not giving up after failing is often the real path to success. Failure – and this is deeply cultural – is still seen here as something to avoid. But it should be understood as part of the learning process, a step along the way toward growth.

So how do we create those safe spaces to fail – places where artists are free to try, to explore, to go off the expected path? That’s why, once again, we need Codes of Conduct: to help build those safe environments. A shared language, shared ethics, and a shared approach are essential for allowing all participants to flourish and explore their creativity – without holding back.

Interview by **Virginie Dupray**, April 2025



EP © Adrian Lach, TR Warszawa

THE GOOD PRACTICES FACTORY IN WARSAW

Towards Greater Accessibility
for Audiences and Artists with Disabilities

Recognised for several years for its policy on accessibility, the TR Warszawa (TRW) is pursuing actions and reflections aimed not only at audiences, but also at artists with disabilities.

ACTIVITIES IN 2024

In 2024, TRW focused on *EP*, a co-creation between deaf poet and performer Adam Stoyanov, directors Agnieszka Jakimiak and Kuba Krzewiński and actress Monika Frajczyk.

The latter bears witness p.27 to a process that has opened path for reflection on the participation of disabled and deaf artists in the performing arts in Poland.

In concrete terms, several initiatives for a more accessible theatre have been implemented in 2024:

- 37 shows, events or workshops have been made accessible thanks to audio-description, subtitling for the deaf and translations into Polish sign language.
- Three induction loops² have been installed in TRW spaces.
- A pre-guide in ETR³ was prepared for the performances.

The TRW also took part in the 12th National Festival of Culture Without Barriers and was a partner in the Bogna Olszewska scholarship organised by Warsaw's Museum of Modern Art. Focusing on professionals in the cultural and educational sectors, the scholarship is designed to increase skills in the arts towards inclusion and accessibility for people with special needs.

Finally, in cooperation with the Project Elderly Foundation and Nowy Teatr, the *Theatre at First Sight* project was implemented at TRW. The participants – half aged between 18 and 40, and the other half over 60, working collectively or in intergenerational pairs – took part in a series of sessions: screenings of plays from the TRW and Nowy Teatr repertoires, workshops on contemporary art, and convivial moments over good meals. This new programme strives to diversify the audience of cultural institutions, by reaching out to age groups that are not often present and familiarising the elderly with contemporary art, while promoting intergenerational dynamics

WHAT'S NEXT?

In 2025, the TRW opens up to people with or having gone through mental health problems. Tours of the theatre and a series of workshops will be organised for psychiatric patients who are relearning how to live in society. In autumn 2025, *Theatre at First Sight* will be working with mixed groups of healthy people and those diagnosed with mental health problems on the issue of stigmatisation. How can we prevent the self-stigmatisation of patients and the stigmatisation of patients by others? How can we prevent mental disorder from becoming the prism through which those diagnosed define themselves or are defined?

Who?

The Good Practices Factory 2024 in Warsaw was led by:

Agata Kołacz, Head of International Projects, TRW | **Helena Świegocka**, Project Manager, TRW | **Katarzyna Batarowska**, Supporting Specialist, Theatre Pedagogy and Accessibility Department, TRW | And other members of the Accessibility, Technical and Production teams at TRW

² Magnetic induction loops provide hearing assistance to hearing-impaired people using hearing aids via a hearing loop. (source: Wikipedia)

³ A pre-guide is a guide that people on the autism spectrum can read before visiting an institution. ETR is an easy-to-read-and-understand text format used for people with intellectual disabilities.

A CONVERSATION WITH... **Monika Frajczyk**

An actress of the TRW ensemble, Monika Frajczyk tells us about the creation process of *EP*, a theatre play she performed in and co-created in 2024 with deaf poet and performer Adam Stoyanov and directors Agnieszka Jakimiak and Kuba Krzewiński.

From June to September 2024, you joined the creation process of *EP*. What were the different steps to create the conditions for exchange and mutual understanding?

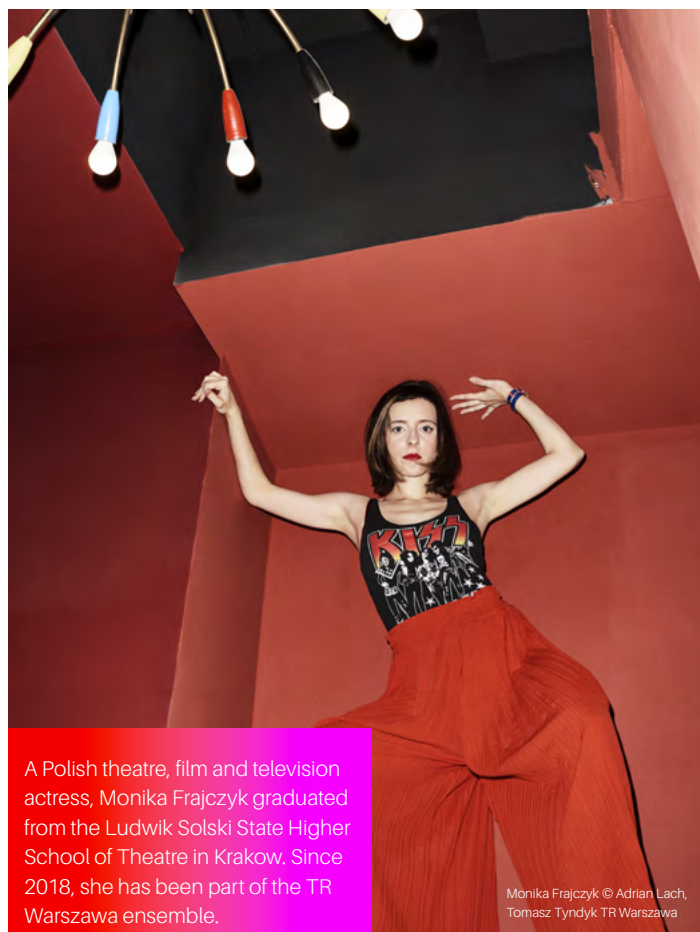
Monika Frajczyk (MF): At first, it was about learning how to communicate with each other, like basic phrases in sign language. As part of this process, Adam [Stoyanov] showed us different types of languages spoken by the deaf community, including the language of the deaf-blind (tactile language). We also spent a lot of time experiencing sound – how we can feel sound, how sound can become audible to Adam, as he feels its frequencies through the floor. How we can actually “see” the sound or the vibration of the speaker, opening up to a completely different perception of the sound, the sound and the appearance of the sound at the same time.

How did this process challenge what we take for granted, and question what should be a common ground, a common language?

MF: *EP* is indeed a real experience that challenges our normative patterns of communication, and more particularly how we receive and perform a play. The audience included both hearing people, the hearing-impaired, and deaf people. This resulted in a multi-level experience. Because the audience, just like the performers, speaks different languages. The audience was slightly lit to allow deaf people to communicate freely during the performance. Which they did! The hearing audience, at first, was not sure about what was happening, and it was only after a while that they began to understand that the deaf audience could communicate during the performance because their language is “mute”. It means that a part of the audience actually talked during the performance while the other could not! This communication experience challenges our common denominator, as well as the conditions of being together – us on stage, and the audience in front of the stage.

Was this the first time you have worked with artist with disabilities and more specifically with deaf artists?

MF: No, I have already had the opportunity to work with people with physical disabilities before – visually-impaired, deaf, with intellectual disabilities (people with cerebral palsy) or suffering from mental illness. I met deaf people at the beginning of my professional career; I was preparing a play in which I had to learn sign language and I went to a centre for the deaf where a sign interpreter taught me the language. These different works and experiences with people with disabilities helped me a lot in overcoming barriers, even sometimes the shame around identifying which behaviours and questions are ok for a person with a disability and which are not. Not to be afraid to look for new ways to communicate and to be attentive to the different codes and languages used to communicate by your interlocutor.



A Polish theatre, film and television actress, Monika Frajczyk graduated from the Ludwik Solski State Higher School of Theatre in Krakow. Since 2018, she has been part of the TR Warszawa ensemble.

Monika Frajczyk © Adrian Lach, Tomasz Tyndyk TR Warszawa

According to you, what is the situation for artists with disabilities in Poland and how do the art structures respond to this?

MF: Artists and actors and actresses with disabilities are practically invisible in Poland. Despite admirable initiatives such as the Centre for Inclusive Arts – Theatre 21, with which TRW also cooperates, it’s unfortunately still unthinkable for Polish repertory institutions to propose permanent positions in acting ensembles for artists with disabilities, to invite them to be part of lasting artistic process, and, to give them a real visibility on the art scene.

Even though they make up a significant part of Polish society, their representation is still not guaranteed. Recently, the *Wspolglosy* project that combined a jazz trio and a choir of singers with intellectual disabilities, under the musical direction of Marcel Balinski, received the historic *Fryderyk* prize (the most important Polish phonographic award) in the jazz category. Little by little, the situation is changing, but we still have far to go, and it’s still too slow.

How did this whole experience impact you on a professional and personal levels?

MF: The experience of working on *EP* has strengthened my conviction about the importance of working with groups that are “excluded” from the normative space of theatre. Such a process broadens your perspective, and shifts your point of view. Each experience of working with people with disabilities is another step towards new skills of communication. It improves your empathy and helps you grow as an artist, but also, above all else, as a human being.

Interview by **Katarzyna Batarowska**, April 2025

(RE)SOURCES

Each GPF group sent references of books, articles, films, podcasts that have been nurturing their reflections over the past few months...

This is not an exhaustive list, but rather a bedside, heartfelt bibliography: words, thoughts, images from which to build, expand, face doubts too, but always move forward...

PICK OF THE MC93

To Read

La charge raciale, Vertige d'un silence écrasant, Douce Dibondo, Éditions Fayard, 2024

Brutalism (Brutalisme), Achille Mbembe, Duke University Press, 2024

Colonisations, notre histoire, under direction of Pierre Singaravelou, Éditions du Seuil, 2023

La puissance des mères, Fatima Ouassak Éditions La Découverte, 2020 – Éditions Points, 2023

Et maintenant le pouvoir : Un horizon politique afro-féministe, Fania Noël, Éditions Cambourakis, 2022

Survivre au taf. Stratégies d'autodéfense pour personnes minorisées, Marie Dasyuva, Éditions Daronnes, 2022

Les mondes de l'esclavage, une histoire comparée, under direction of Paulin Ismard, Éditions du Seuil, 2021

Blanche, Catherine Blondeau, Éditions Mémoire d'Encrier, 2021

A Decolonial Feminism (Un féminisme décolonial), Françoise Vergès, Pluto Press, 2021

La pensée blanche, Lilian Thuram, Éditions Philippe Rey, 2020

Un monde en nègre et blanc, Aurelia Michel, Éditions du Seuil, 2020

Le Triangle et l'Hexagone. Réflexions sur une identité noire, Maboula Somahoro, Éditions La Découverte, 2020

Des particularités françaises de la négrophobie, Mame-Fatou Niang, Éditions La Découverte, 2020

Migrant Brothers (Frères migrants), Patrick Chamoiseau, Yale University Press, 2018

Edward Said, Le roman de sa pensée, Dominique Eddé, Éditions La Fabrique, 2017

Entrer en pédagogie antiraciste. D'une lutte syndicale à des outils pour l'émancipation, SUD Éducation 93, Shed Publishing, 2017-2022

To Watch

Noirs en France, Aurélia Perreau and Alain Mabanckou, France télévision / Bangumi, 2022
Watch [here](#)

Le bleu blanc rouge de mes cheveux, Josza Anjambé, Yukunkun Productions, 2016

PICK OF THE THÉÂTRE NATIONAL WALLONIE-BRUXELLES

To Read

Afropea: A Post-Western and Post-Racist Utopia (Utopie post-occidentale et post-raciste), Léonora Miano, Seagull Books, 2024

Clouer le bec au patriarcat, Julie Arcoulin, Éditions Courrier du Livre, 2023

La mixité en entreprise – Tout savoir pour agir, Catherine Bonneville Morawski, Éditions Ellipses, 2022

Biais Inconscients, Annie Burdick, Éditions Summersdale, 2021

To Listen

Les Grenades, Safia Kessas, RTBF, 2024
Listen [here](#)

Amicalement Gouine, Sacha Kridelka, 2022-2024
Listen [here](#)

To Watch

Casser les codes, Safia Kessas and Minery Marion, RTBF, 2021

Electrons libres, ces femmes de science qui changent nos vies, RTBF Auvio, 2024
Watch [here](#)

PICK OF CULTURGEST

To Read

Inter-munthu: em busca do sujeito da reconciliação, José P. Castiano, Fundza Publishers, 2023

Manual para um recrutamento Inclusivo, Performart Publishers, 2023

Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments – Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals, Saidiya Hartman, Serpent's Tail Publishers, 2019

As mulheres ciganas estão a fazer a sua pequena revolução, Ana Cristina Ferreira, Público, 2018

Read [here](#)

Podemos descolonizar os museus?, António Pinto Ribeiro, dans *Geometrias da Memória: configurações pós-coloniais*, Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, António Sousa Ribeiro, Afrontamento Publishers, 2016

PICK OF THE RIKSTEATERN

To Read

Cultural Habits of Young People, The Swedish Agency of Cultural Policy Analysis, Mari Nilsson, 2025

Read [here](#)

Straff, Ann-Helén Laestadius, Romanus & Selling Publishers, 2023

Punished, Ann-Helén Laestadius, Scribner Publishers, 2023

Stolen, Ann-Helén Laestadius, Scribner Publishers, 2021

Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF, 2017

Read [here](#)

Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism – Theory for a Global Age Series, Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonson, Bloomsbury Academic, 2014

A Brief History of the Masses: Three Revolutions in Philosophy, Social Criticism, and the Arts, Stefan Jonson, University Press, 2008

PICK OF THE TR WARSZAWA

To Read

I Don't Have the Strength to Live in Self-destruction in Culture, Halszka Witkowska, Scientific Editor Piotr Nowak, 2024

Body Remember, The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment, Babette Rothschild, WW Norton & Co, 2000

Realistic ways to connect to others, Thomas Joiner in *Lonely at the Top, The High Cost of Men's Success*, Thomas Joiner, Éditions Solutions, 2011

To Watch

WSPÓŁGŁOSY BAND, project by Marcel Baliński, 2024

Read [here](#)

Czasem czuję mocniej. Rozmowy o wychodzeniu z kryzysu psychicznego, Agnieszka Jucewicz, 2022

Watch [here](#)

Dwubiegunowi, Joanna Trojanowska, 2019

Watch [here](#)

Nawet nie wiesz, jak bardzo Cię Kocham, Paweł Łoziński, 2016

Watch [here](#)

PICK OF THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

To Read

Racines, Lou Lubie, Éditions Delcourt, 2024

Un désir démesuré d'amitié, Hélène Giannecchini, Éditions Le Seuil, 2024

Consolée, Beata Umubyeyi Mairesse, Éditions Autrement, 2022

Undrowned, Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, AK Press, 2020

To Watch

Towards Tenderness (Vers la tendresse), Alice Diop, 2016

Watch [here](#)

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