

The Gramsci International Prize for Theatre in Prison 2020 is awarded to Zishan Ugurlu



I Teatri Delle Diversità (The Theatres of Diversities)

On Saturday, 31 October, during the 21st edition of the International Conference of the European Review “Catarsi-Teatri delle Diversità”, held in Urbania/Italy, from 29 to 31 October 2020, the European Review “Catarsi-Teatri delle Diversità” in collaboration with Casa Natale Gramsci di Ales Association, Italian Association of Theatre Critics, International Network Theatre in Prison has decided to honour **Zishan Ugurlu with the Gramsci International Prize for Theatre in Prison**

Zishan Ugurlu has worked extensively both in New York and abroad as a theatre artist since 1995. She is a resident actress and director at La MaMa Theatre and a member of the Great Jones Repertory Company. She has performed with her group in numerous international theatre productions including *Panorama*, directed by the Italian company Motus. She performed as Carmen in Robert Wooduff's award-winning *Godard-Distant and Right*. She performed in *Draupadi*, *Oedipus Rex* and *Yunus* under the direction of Ellen Stewart. Other solo performances include Dario Fo's *la Bibbia dei contadini (Peasants' Bible)* and Jose Watanabe's *Antigone*.

She also participated in some films, including *The Letter*, presented at the Cannes Film Festival and in *Dog Race*, short film presented at the International Film Festival.

She recently directed *Fragments, Lists and Lacunae* written by Alexandra Chasin featuring philosopher Judith Butler. As a director she also worked on several monologues presented at the United Solo Festival in New York.

She is the artistic director and founder of "Actors Without Borders-ITONY", a theatre company committed to presenting to the American public well known and appreciated national and international playwrights, that are rarely produced. She graduated at Columbia University and holds a PhD. She currently teaches at Eugene Lang College at the New School for Liberal Arts as an associate professor.

Since 2008 she has developed several theatre training experiences in penitentiaries in the USA, involving her students on a regular basis and living a close and intimate experience with the phenomenon of mass incarceration in America.

From Arthur Kill Correctional Facility in Staten Island, to the maximum-security prison of Sing Sing in Ossing (New York), she introduced workshops at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan as well. She specialized in research programs such as "Creating a Solo Performance" or "Intro Direction" with unprecedented experiments in the teaching of directing; the latter gave many people the opportunity to tell their stories in an intimate environment through the acceptance of vulnerability, with detailed analyses of human behavior and the nature of the choice process.

Her recent performance from Tennessee Williams' *Not About Nightingales* was highly significant; it involved former inmates and students at Lang College and aimed at raising awareness and critical thinking on the problem of mass incarceration and its relationship with racial justice.

Here is what Zishan Ugurlu said, after receiving the Gramsci Prize 2020.

"This accolade comes as the highest of honors. I am humbled to have had this award dedicated to my experience as a theater-maker and educator. Since I can remember, my own convictions about justice have been infused into my work — to have even been in consideration for this is a timely reminder of our shared passion, and the urgency with which we must carry it forward. Gramsci's prosecutor said "for twenty years we must stop this brain from functioning". The potency of this quotation lies in its revelation of the profound fear held by those who would wish to burn the seeds of human progress. It is a recurring theme of history, and as artists we exist and create within a lineage of hope so that our visions of a better present and future might be realized. For this very same reason, I believe in the intersection of theater, pedagogy, and prison. As one of the most corrupt, antiquated, and oppressive institutions in the modern world, there is almost no better emblem of the fear for people's liberation than the prison. I find it vital that our worlds converge — not simply for the sake of teaching, but for the sake of teaching and being taught. Only then can we mold a better and more just world that will free us from shackles both literal and figurative."

More information about the Gramsci Prize, its earlier editions can be found on the website of the International Network for Theatre in Prison

INTiP: <https://www.theatreinprison.org/>

<https://www.teatridellediversita.it>

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