

The European Museum Academy – Why are we meeting in Lesbos?

The European Museum Academy Annual Meeting and EMA Awards Ceremony will take place on the island of Lesbos from 19 to 21 May 2016. The event is being organised by the Bank of Piraeus Group Cultural Foundation which is an associate partner of EMA and which has been very active in creating new museums in several different Greek regions, including the Lesvos Museum of Industrial Olive Oil Production. The Meeting will include seminars, lectures and presentations connected with the 21st Micheletti Award as well as the DASA Award and the Heritage in Motion Award.

This initiative was planned time ago before the series of events which have made Lesbos a symbol of a tragedy which is now moving the public opinion of the entire world and also generating a strong political, social and moral debate, especially in European countries.

EMA is convinced that as the mission of any museum is to be a bridge across time, continents and people, and to stimulate dialogue in the spirit of mutual understanding and respect, it is important to have the annual conference of the European Museum Academy in these hard times on Lesbos. Organising a European event with a museum here is for us a way to strengthen relationships with an institution, with colleagues, with people of Europe – perhaps today the ‘most European’ part of Europe, where all the problems and difficulties of Europe about human rights, sense of citizenship and European unity come to a crucial point.

It is not a time for hesitations and vague messages of solidarity. On the contrary, it is the moment to take a stand and be decisive, respecting our programmes and trying to offer the best to our European audience as sign of hope and vitality from the museum sector which is an essential part of our cultural milieu.

The European Museum Academy also wants to send a message to the European Union and the Council of Europe, that Lesbos is where European history is being created at the moment and we follow with critical attention the values and respect for human dignity which are demonstrated by Europe now.

The Council of Europe created the convention of human rights two generations back and the European Union adopted these principles as the foundation for what are the commonalities of the union in the treaties.

Lesbos is the island of Sappho, defined by Plato. Plato qualifies her as being wise, and according to an epigram ascribed to him in the *Anthologia Palatina*, he called her the tenth Muse. This island is one of the cradles of European civilization and to be here with museums coming from the four corners of the continent will certainly be an occasion of inspiration and energy for their actions in favour of social development.

As guardians of the humanities we feel impelled to express our solidarity with people in Lesbos – refugees as well as inhabitants - and elsewhere in similar situations. It MUST be possible to meet the current refugee challenge in a better and more sustainable way with respect for human dignity. What the people of Lesbos are doing to face this situation in the context of the already difficult situation of the Greek economy and society shows great generosity.