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**Press Release 1-2/12/2024**

**6th International Festival “Reflection of Disability in Art” of University of Macedonia**

The 2nd day of the 6th International Festival "The Reflection of Disability in Art" started with extreme weather conditions and strong winds that caused serious problems and difficulty in transportation in Thessaloniki. The Festival's Organizing Committee prioritizing the safety of both the audience and the artists decided to hold the festival online on Sunday 1/12.

On Sunday morning, the films "Dream It Big", "Way out west", "All Quiet On The Westlake", "Crip/Mad Archive Dances", "I am here" and "Black rain in my eyes" were shown on the theme of social support and social networks. In the afternoon of the same day, films about family relationships were shown. The first screening included the films "SOL", "Wild flower" and "Raised on Rhythms", while the second included the films "I invented the electric scooter", "Ania from Piekielnik", "Waiting for the sound", "The Duchenne Race” and “Parenting special needs children: cerebral palsy”. The audience responded to the adaptation of the program and participated with interest in the online screenings. Due to the adverse weather conditions, the voluntary-artistic activities planned for that day were postponed.

On Monday 2/12, the scheduled screening of the films "Seer Claws", "Invisible life" "Lise's life" and "The KODA Chrome (W)rapper" took place at the theme "Dimensions of life-Sensory disabilities". Due to the bad weather, the artistic activities were cancelled, as by decision of the Municipalities the schools remained closed and therefore the students could not move at the University.

In the afternoon of the same day, the films "A World in Colors - The Artistry of Richard Hunt", "Olga's World", "Traveling Light", "Davide and the monster", "Danse de la Lune" and "WAY OUT" were screened with topic "Disability and Art: Obstacles, practices, perspectives".

A round table discussion followed with disabled and non-disabled artists, on the topic of the right of disabled people to equal participation in culture, both as spectators and visitors and as producers of cultural products. Sofia Georgiadi designs comics with disabled heroes, highlighting diversity, while in her comics she includes Greek Sign Language, which is difficult to record. Irini Kourouvani - Disabled dancer suffers from a rare motor disability and moves in a wheelchair. Dance has been in her life since a very young age and for her is a way of expression and art, while she is also involved in sports, as all sports incorporate dance and an approach to movement. Anna Vekiari - Choreographer and dancer is a founding member of dance groups in which disabled and non-disabled people participate and creates choreographies that are presented in public spaces. Nikos Argyros - Actor with visual impairment is the founder of the sports club Hephaestus, where people with visual impairment can choose any sport they want with the appropriate support. At the same time, he participates in the theater group of SAEK Pylaias-Chortiatis and his goal is to create a mixed group of actors with sighted people and people with visual impairment so that there is harmony on stage.

The discussion began with the obstacles and difficulties experienced by disabled people in their efforts to study arts or participate in artistic groups. Ms. Kourouvani referred to the prohibitive condition of the State School of Dance Art that requires students to be able-bodied. She added that it is imperative to abolish this condition, giving everyone the opportunity to study dance. She even mentioned that she herself managed to get involved in dance because some people - amateur dancers - included her in their group, so that she too could enjoy her right to dance.

Correspondingly, Mr. Argyros spoke about the State Theater and the fact that despite their positive mood, there were no suitable conditions for his participation, emphasizing that the purpose of the theater group he wants to create is the possibility of participation of disabled people and not for everyone to become actors. He pointed out that disability is not capable of highlighting an artist without talent. All speakers spoke about the need to give more opportunities for promotion to artists with disabilities through universally accessible actions and festivals. Reference was made to the impossibility of people with disabilities to find a job as artists and earn a living through art as artists with disabilities should have, something that is considered self-evident abroad, but also to the need to familiarize the public with the participation of disabled artists in artistic actions.

It is characteristic that in films that deal with disability, non-disabled actors are preferred and often convey the wrong messages, while disabled actors could play and convey the correct image of disability. An interesting point that was highlighted is that in comics, while in the past the superpower of a disabled person covered his disability, now the disabled person remains disabled even after the superpower, he or she has, is revealed. All speakers agreed on the power of art to convey messages in a much more effective and understandable way than conferences and seminars, to reveal invisible aspects and aspects of disability and to contribute significantly to the claim of the rights of the disabled. The discussion closed with the observation that disabled people are not superheroes but need the appropriate help and support, pointing out that anyone can find themselves in this position and that art is present in every moment of our lives, as long as we can see it.

The evening closed with the screening of the films “Tremor”, “Silent dance”, “The Book of Mario”, “Suhail” and “Aram” on the theme “Dimensions of the lives of the disabled”.