

Rebecca Matthews's speech at the launch of Life-boats in Aalborg on the 18/6-2016

Mange tak for invitationen til at tale her i dag.

On a winters day three years ago, shortly after I had been appointed as the CEO of Aarhus 2017 European Capital of Culture, I was standing - not very long from here, - looking out over the snow. Deep snow-covered fields of this wonderful Danish scenery, with the fire burning in the stove, eating Norwegian myseost – brun ost – det var rigtig hyggeligt! You can probably guess where I was –I was in Mygdal visiting Marit Benthe Norheim. She was in fact one of the first people, artists who invited me to come to see work of art in progress here in Denmark, and what a project it was. I have to admit that in my wildest dream I could not have imagined a project as daring, as confident and as moving as hers. Three sculptured Life-boats shaped to be sailing women, each with one very distinctive story to tell. -And of course, such a remarkable and surprising art project just had to be part of the European Capital of Culture - a year where we are into dragging people together right across Denmark throwing unique cultural experiences just like this one.

2017 will be a very special year, all the better for it, because of Life-boats. There will be more than 350 cultural project, events, festivals and so much more. 2017 is our opportunity to shine and share. To reveal the best of who we are creatively and socially, to share that we are fellow Europeans and to provide ourselves to learn from them. The theme for Aarhus 2017 is Lets Rethink. -And if there is something, you can definitely say about Life-boats, that is; that it is without doubt a rethinking project in many ways. Of course, the origins of the boats are based in old traditions, but their shapes and these three females' bodies' symbolism rethink life in different stages. As you heard; Life yet to be, a pregnancy -all the joy it expresses! A life well lived; in My life is loaded with Memories. The fascinating stories of mature older women from 18 different nationalities. -And of course and not least, there is the ship of youth; My ship is loaded with Longing, life yet to be fully explored.

Today I had the great honor of naming this boat with the words; *I am christening you "Longing". May good luck, peace and happiness attend all those who are sailing you along the coasts, the fjords and among waterways for the benefit of art and in honor of art.* -(I take very personal pride in the fact that I was chosen to name the youth boat, - that does not happen very often anymore, thank you very much for that one!)

Longing can of course be many things. Longing to sail away, to escape, longing to explore and longing for encounters, to meet and connect with other people, and of course that is exactly what Life-boats are about to do. They are going to cast anchor, connect with people and sail out to the public eye. -And today along with Aarhus 2017, Life-boats set out on their Maiden Voyage over the course of 4 months, to twelve different Municipalities in Limfjorden and along the east coast of Jutland with amazing journeys ahead.

I would truly want to thank the city of Aalborg for having the vision and allowing the launching to take place here. -And after today this maiden voyage includes visits to many seaports; celebrating St. Hans in Gjørl, and listening to music in Struer, eating seafood in Lemvig, attending the Nordic Cultural festival in Thisted and the Cultural Summit in Mors. Going to Randers, Bønnerup, Fanø and Ebeltoft, before the sail into Aarhus on the 12 of October of this year for the full program launch of the Capital of Culture of Aarhus to the world. -And I say ours because it is everyone's; we are sharing with everyone, Danes and Europeans alike, that is very important for us.

Just the other day at the Aarhus secretary, we received an email and it said this: *Hey, my name is Peter. I am 16 year old, I have a sailing certificate, I've done a lot of sailing, and I would like to sail on the trip from Ebeltoft to Aarhus. Regards Peter* – that was it. That makes us very happy, because it is about involvement and inclusion, **det er bevægelser Aarhus 2017!** -And we want everyone to participate in the project and in our year of culture, to participate in Life-boats like Peter and our extraordinary volunteers that are here today. When the boats sail out they will be exclusively staffed, alongside with of course professional captains, by volunteers, so it's extremely important for us to extend our warmest thanks to all of the volunteers, men, women, young, old, east, west, north and south, who have come forward to make this voyage possible.

I will finish now with one last thought; these extraordinary Life-boats that Benthe has made, are made with great care and consideration, and they perfectly embody our European Capital of Culture values. They are deeply reflective and participate in the principles of sustainability, democracy and diversity - Danish values that we can be proud of, and that we could share with Europe. These boats have been build - and will be sailed - as sustainable as possible. They have been created throughout democratic processes, with technical, artistic, operational organization skills moved together and the project represent a diversity that will be incredibly hard to find anywhere else. A huge numbers of nationalities of volunteers have worked in the project.

Life-boats means something very special to Benthe, to North Jutland and to Aarhus 2017. -And that is why it gives me such a great pleasure to be here today, at their launching, and to be able to send Life-boats out on their journey, a wonderful - now complete - work of art, as the first and greatest project of the European Capital of Culture year so far, to draw attention to our year and our shows.

Have a wonderful and safe journey, and here from me in very bad Danish (I apologize) is a little Gruk to help you on the way; *Jeg linder kun min dør på klem, jeg ser kun 20 meter frem, men Gud hvor jeg misunder dem som rejser rundt og længes hjem.* Tak