

## **LOLA ARIAS' SPEECH DURING THE INTERNATIONAL IBSEN AWARD CEREMONY**

*I am very happy to be in Oslo receiving this award. Thank you to the jury for shining a light on a woman from Argentina at a time when Javier Milei's far-right government is bent on destroying education, public health, national industry, art, cinema and cultural institutions, and pushing thousands of people to live below the poverty line.*

*I must say that this award came to me just as I was working on the most difficult project of my career, and it gave me strength and hope. It made me reflect on why I've spent my life in such an unusual profession.*

*I grew up in downtown Buenos Aires, in an office building. In that neighborhood, there were no children or trees to climb. On the fifth floor of San Martin Street, my younger sister and I would perform plays for an exclusive audience of two: mother and father. When I was sixteen, a friend, with whom I had a band, asked me if I wanted to go study theater. I went along just by chance, following her. She quit right away. I never stopped.*

*The first play I wrote and directed was called La escuálida familia ("The Squalid Family") and it premiered at the University of Buenos Aires theater. Since the ceilings leaked, it began to rain on the stage and in the audience. The first review of my work said: "Something extraordinary happened at the Centro Cultural Rojas, it rained onstage." That first review taught me that theater is what happens here and now, and because of that, it cannot be impermeable to the outside world, to reality. Since then, my fictional theater has been infiltrated by reality.*

*After several fiction plays, in 2009 I wrote and directed Mi vida después ("My Life After"), my first non-fiction work, with people of my generation reconstructing the Argentine military dictatorship of 1976 through their personal archives. Since then, I've written and directed many others, featuring war veterans, people raised in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), young refugees, elderly people and their caregivers, people fighting to have or not have children, sex workers, people who had been in prison. And in each of those projects, I discovered that theater, for me, was a way to enter other people's lives, to reconstruct the past and reimagine the future, to find different ways of thinking about questions I didn't have answers to.*

*The theater became an invented space where former war enemies, people who supported or fought against the GDR, children of perpetrators or victims of the Argentine dictatorship, could confront their stories and coexist in disagreement. Perhaps theater is that echo chamber where what is difficult to hear in the real world can be heard. I remember that in Atlas of Communism, Salomea, who had spied for the Stasi, and Jana, who had been imprisoned for composing punk songs, confronted each other until both took off their hearing devices: one had lost her hearing from listening to other people's conversations, the other from listening to too much punk.*

*After years of working with the lives of others, I think the greatest challenge is learning to listen, taking the time to receive the words I want to hear and those I don't, letting in images I would never have been able to imagine from my desk. And letting all those voices speak through me, being the channel, the medium. Belarusian writer Svetlana Alexievich says she is an "ear" writer. I feel very close to that.*

*Directing is about watching and listening. It sounds simple, but it takes a lot of work. Truly watching and allowing the people on stage to be seen, to open up before your eyes like a book you read slowly. There's no method except spending time together, because time is the currency of trust. Sometimes, in the rehearsal room, I feel like I'm disappearing into other people, because from*

*watching and listening to them so much, I become them. All the memories they shared with me, even the ones that didn't make it into the final script, are inside me. People say I have a bad memory and forget things. Maybe it's because I carry too many other people's memories.*

*As I moved from fiction to non-fiction, many times people told me that what I was doing wasn't theater because I wasn't working with professional actors, or that I wasn't a playwright because I simply edited other people's testimonies. Perhaps I myself was the one who created the illusion that these works aren't literature but pieces of life. But I'm sorry to break the spell: every word has been written and rewritten for hours; every silence and gesture of the protagonists has been rehearsed endlessly.*

*It is said that theater is a living art, but I would also say that it is an art that dies. Of each of these works, some documents will remain, but nothing of what truly happened on stage. Perhaps that's why I create works about living people, and the plays are rewritten over the years. I like to think that my works don't live for posterity, but they mature, age, and die, just like their protagonists.*

*Sometimes I think my plays are full of ghosts because in them live all those fallen in war, people who died in prison, those who drowned crossing the Mediterranean, murdered trans women, missing mothers and fathers... And those ghosts hold our hands in the darkness and allow us to summon them. I remember Marcelo Vallejo, one of the protagonists of Campo Minado ("Minefield"), wore every show under his costume a t-shirt with the picture of his friend Sergio, who died beside him during the war. Marcelo dedicated each performance to him. Perhaps theater is also a ritual to reconnect with our dead.*

*Many times I'm asked: what happens to the protagonists of your works when the play ends? Life is no longer the same: they've rewritten their life stories and shared them with the world. They've created a distance that has allowed them to see themselves from the outside. But life goes on. What comes next? All my plays reconstruct the past, but they're really asking about the future. Being able to imagine the future is a privilege for those who don't have the challenge of surviving every day. Perhaps these plays are an attempt to imagine possible futures.*

*I would love for the 108 protagonists of all my plays to be here with me tonight because they have taught me to think from new perspectives. But fortunately, I am accompanied by the six protagonists of Los días afuera ("The Days Outside").*

*I want to end by especially thanking the seven women producers, dramaturgs, and researchers who have supported my work for many years and who do the hardest and most invisible work: Sofia Medici, Luz Algranti, Lucila Piffer, Laura Nicolas, Bibiana Mendes, Mara Martínez, Gema Juarez Allen. They help me think, create, and make things possible. And of course, all the artists who have accompanied my work: set designers, musicians, lighting designers, and others who collaborate with me on each piece. I want to invite them, the performers, and my team to come up on stage. And I'd like to invite my partner Alan, who has supported me with his love for many years and gives me feedback on everything I do (including this very speech I'm reading), and our son Remo, who taught me how to be a mother without ceasing to be an artist. And my sister Lucía, who has been my accomplice from the start of this adventure called life.*

*Now you can see that behind my name there are many people. Because, in the end, theater is a somewhat convoluted way of expanding the family and spending time with people imagining things in a room without windows.*

Lola Arias  
Oslo, October 13th, 2024