Azerbaijan hosts the Festival of Contemporary Art "MAIDEN TOWER. To Be a Woman" organized by the European Union Delegation

The European Union Delegation to the Republic of Azerbaijan is organizing the International Festival of Contemporary Art "MAIDEN TOWER. To Be a Woman", which will be held on 17-27 September in Baku and in the regions of Azerbaijan.

The Festival topic is linked with the 100th anniversary of the liberation of Azerbaijani women and emphasizes the role of women in the Azerbaijani society and around the world. The festival's program includes several exhibitions, public art events, visual poetry evening, discussion panel, thematic film shows and workshops in the context of contemporary art. At the beginning of 20th century in the context of important historical and political events, the first women liberation movement was launched in Azerbaijan and with the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, it became the first Muslim country to grant election rights to women, as early as in 1918.
“MAIDEN TOWER. To be a Woman”, The International Contemporary Art Forum has been initiated by Sabina Shikhlinskaya in 2009 in Baku. It was the first collective reflection to the subject of the gender equality through the contemporary art in Azerbaijan. A year later, in 2010, the same topic - “To be a Woman” - was presented through the exhibition project “Openly” in the framework of Istanbul - European Capital of Culture 2010. After 10 years S.Shikhlinskaya is curating “MAIDEN TOWER. To be a Woman” 2019 concentrating on still actual questions of gender equality.

The title of the Festival is inspired from the main attraction and symbol of Baku city - Maiden Tower, shrouded in many legends and mysteries. Most of them are associated with the meaning of the word "Maiden" meaning the tower of the virgin in the context of woman - “Virgo”. Contents vary depending on different stories, but the fatal outcome of woman's life due to the moral or physical violence of a man is the key and dominant theme. This image of a woman in the East - weak and not protected in her rights and fighting for her freedom with only possible solution - death - is a kind of ideological stereotype, and it creates false priorities on the gender equality topic in the region. Historians and researchers believe the name of the main tower of the city "Gyz Galasy" means the Virgin Tower in the meaning of its inaccessibility, because the tower due to its very favorable location was never captured by any enemy. “Maiden Tower” was surrounded by Caspian Sea on one side and on the other side – by a town fortress, which made it almost unconquerable.

The project attempts to work with artists, curators, cultural activists and local communities in Azerbaijan-Baku and regions through the prism of gender equality, feminism and immaterial cultural heritage in this context. In the framework of the project, exchanges will try to define methodologies and better understanding in the local and global context. This project should provide answers to the system, its problems, gender and social inequalities. Art exhibitions, debates, panel discussion, urban and contemporary art and happenings are the way to create a temporary community between the international participants and the local residents building long-term relationships.

The festival is organized and implemented in partnership with a number of diplomatic missions in Baku and government leading institutions and organizations of arts and culture as the Union of Azerbaijani Artists, MoMA Baku, YARAT Contemporary Art Center, Baku city Cultural Department, Baku International Centre of Multiculturalism, M.Ibrahimbayov Creativity Center, Ganja municipality etc.

The guests- participants of Festival are film directors, museum specialists, curators and art critics, artists and cultural activists, from EU member states such as Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Hungary, Latvia from Eastern Partnership countries such as Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and from third countries such Turkey, Israel, Iran, Switzerland.

All cultural events in frame of Festival will be open for the public.

This Festival is the third large Festival sponsored by the European Union Delegation, following "IMAGINE-Euro Tolerance Festival" and "FANTAZIA-Cultural heritage festival", promoting European values and principles. The season’s next big EU-sponsored Festival,
FANTAIZA, is scheduled for 1-15 November.

Programme of the Festival -

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