

INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY ARTS
FESTIVAL

ICAF

FESTIVAL
PROGRAMME
2026

ROTTERDAM

10TH
EDITION

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table of contents

3

introduction

5

residentialties

8

city programme

11

wednesday 25 march

13

thursday 26 march

23

friday 27 march

36

saturday 28 march

49

sunday 29 march

52

credits

introduction

The year 2026 is a special one for ICAF. It marks the 10th edition of our international community arts festival. This milestone feels both celebratory and significant. In the more than twenty years that ICAF has existed, the world has rarely felt as unstable as it does now. Geopolitical shifts, the effects of a rapidly changing climate, wars, genocides, and rising polarisation put pressure on our societies - and with it, on our physical and mental space.

Over a year ago, when we launched our open call and announced the theme of this edition, Space for Imagination, we were overwhelmed by proposals. The number of submissions from community arts groups around the world almost quadrupled compared to 2023. We were deeply moved. Each project was urgent, necessary, and powerful. They showed how threatened space is worldwide, but also how unevenly the privilege of having space is distributed. Many proposals reflected an attempt to fight for space for imagination in a society where empathy, creativity, and mutual understanding are increasingly under pressure.

This edition of ICAF is the most ambitious yet, taking up space quite literally. With *The Herds*, we present the largest project in ICAF's history. This large-scale, public art project, developed by The Walk Productions (creators of *Little Amal*) under the artistic direction of Amir Nizar Zuabi, has followed a long international route of 20,000 kilometers, from Central Africa to the far north, and now arrives in Rotterdam for its Dutch premiere. *The Herds* is a herd of around fifty life-sized animal puppets that take over the streets of Rotterdam, carried and operated by a local community of over one hundred and fifty Rotterdam residents.

With Town Anywhere, we retreat for a day into the only church in the city center that survived the bombing of Rotterdam in the Second World War. There, in the collective imagination of one hundred participants, a future city arises. That same evening, we will show the impressive film *There Is Another Way* in the main stage of Theater Zuidplein. This documentary follows the work of Combatants for Peace, a movement of former Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters who chose to lay down their weapons and use participatory arts projects to counter dehumanization. The film follows the group in the aftermath of the horrific Hamas attack on 7 October and its disastrous consequences: the genocide in Gaza and the continued occupation of Palestinian territories by Israeli forces.

These examples offer only a glimpse of what can be seen and experienced at ICAF. The full programme features many more impressive and inspiring projects. In addition to the largest projects and themes, this edition of the festival has intentionally created more open space for imagination and encounter. Every morning, there is the opportunity to take part in low-key community-building activities, to listen to and share stories on the yard of a Surinamese *oso* (house), or to sing together.

With pride and gratitude for all the projects and people who briefly anchor in the harbour of our city, we invite you to immerse yourself in this collective space for imagination - and then to return with courage and strength to your daily realities, continuing to build empathy, hope, and positive change.

Anamaria Cruz, Executive director ICAF
Jasmina Ibrahimovic, Creative director ICAF

residencies

PRE-FESTIVAL



ICAF is an international festival, yet it is deeply rooted in the city of Rotterdam. Long before international visitors arrive, an important part of our work already takes place - in neighbourhoods, together with residents and local social organisations. For these projects, we invite inspiring artists to collaborate over an extended period of time with local communities. The outcomes of these collaborations are presented within both the ICAF City Programme and the Professionals Programme.

The Herds: workshops

In the weeks leading up to the two major public events of The Herds, Rotterdam residents are actively involved in bringing the herd to life. In intensive workshops, one hundred and fifty participants learn the art of puppetry, explore the aesthetics of the project, and engage with the story of the animals' flight. Under the guidance of the team from The Walk Productions and the puppeteers of the South African Ukwanda Puppets and Designs Art Collective, participants learn the character of the herd and how it will respond when confronted with the bustle of the city. In Rotterdam, this striking encounter between humans and animals comes vividly to life. The workshops bring together residents, students, artists, and festival-goers, making them active co-creators of a large-scale art event.

In collaboration with Dik Danstheater, students from Codarts, and local communities, the Herds is brought to life on Friday 27 and Saturday 28 March, transforming the streets of Rotterdam into a breathtaking stage. On both days, all routes within the ICAF programme converge there by the end of the afternoon.

The Walk Productions & Ukwanda Puppets and Designs Art Collective

Voices of the Earth

A musical community project about our relationship with the Earth

Singer and community artist Maia Steinberg brings her project Voices of the Earth to Rotterdam South for ICAF. In this project, local residents explore together what the Earth means to them, and which personal memories, images and feelings are connected to it. Together with the local and international participants of ICAF, Maia works towards a collective Sunday afternoon concert in the main auditorium of Theater Zuidplein, during the closing of ICAF 2026.

Participants share their personal connection to the Earth and invite the audience to reflect on their own relationship with the world around them. During the concert, the entire neighbourhood is welcome to join in singing, young and old, from near and far. Voices of the Earth is an open and welcoming community concert in which encounter, connection and collective strength take centre stage.

Maia Steinberg

OsoToriOso

A Travelling Wooden House in Search of Its Story

OsoToriOso is a mobile heritage and storytelling project focused on the traditional wooden houses of Suriname, known as osos. These houses were built during and after slavery by African-descendant carpenters who had gained their freedom. Within a system of oppression and exploitation, they created places of pride, community, and hope. To this day, the osos carry stories of resistance, collective resilience, and transmitted knowledge, forming the foundation of OsoToriOso.

The project was developed in close collaboration with current and former residents, builders, and artists in Suriname and the Netherlands, as well as with schools and cultural organisations in Suriname. Research into the construction of these houses, including a small-scale replica, highlights the craftsmanship of the artisans who built them. In Paramaribo, Amsterdam, and now Rotterdam, people share personal memories of life in these houses through building, conversation, and exploration, creating a living archive where colonial history and contemporary questions of identity meet.

OsoToriOso invites visitors to reflect on the shared history of Suriname and the Netherlands, and on how this history continues to resonate today—in houses, memories, and people.

OsoToriOso

Team in Rotterdam

In no particular order: Robbert van der Horst / Monique van Hinte / Nellie Bakboord / Wilgo Holwijn



City— programme

16-29 MARCH



The ICAF City Programme invites the people of Rotterdam to experience the festival up close. This can be done by taking part in a participatory project or by attending a performance, film screening or concert for a modest ticket price. In this way, a broad local audience can engage with powerful national and international community arts projects. The City Programme builds a bridge between some of the most compelling international community arts practices and the local communities of Rotterdam.

The Red Thread of Belonging

In The Red Thread of Belonging, embroidery becomes a vibrant, collective artwork. Led by Haags Verhaal and developed in collaboration with Swiss artist Kathrin Stalder, this community arts project invites visitors to stitch their personal meaning of “home” with bright red thread onto small white cloths. Each stitch carries a memory, a longing, or a moment of connection. Together, these individual contributions form a growing installation that comes to life during the festival.

With every new piece, the artwork becomes a tangible, collective reflection on what home can mean - a truly Rotterdam story shaped by many voices and lived experiences.

Haags Verhaal

Discovering the echo from the shadows

Shadows United is a collective of Rotterdam-based artists, with and without a legal residency status, connected by a shared dream: a world in which everyone has access to fundamental human rights. Inspired by the ideas of Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal and Bertolt Brecht, they come together to create challenging and innovative work. Using shadow theatre, they tell stories and make invisible experiences about being ‘undocumented’ and therefore often unseen, visible. Through light, movement and recycled materials, they create an interactive space of imagination, solidarity and hope. Audiences are invited to explore, play and collectively imagine a more just and humane world.

Shadows United

Overbruggen (Bridging)

The profession of bridge operator has slowly disappeared from the streets of Rotterdam due to modernisation. With its disappearance, more than a thousand bridge operator’s houses across the Netherlands fell silent: once lookout posts on daily lives, passing by.

In Overbruggen (Bridging), an audio project by sound artist and journalist Bart Huijser (30), audience is invited to step into the operator's house on the Koninginnebrug and listen to stories from local residents. As the iconic Rotterdam panorama unfolds before you, headphones guide you through their everyday lives. At times, you follow their stories from a distance, and sometimes you bridge that distance and feel as if you are sitting in someone's living room.

You hear stories about favorite walking routes with the dog, kitchen-table conversations about music, or even about billionaire Jeff Bezos wanting to dismantle the beloved Hefbrug for his superyacht. Meanwhile, the city rumbles on, unbothered. Through the audio, which directs your gaze and attention, the bridge operator's house becomes once again a window onto the city and everyday life.

Bart Huijser

The inequality machine

The functioning of the criminal justice system deepens existing divides between rich and poor, Black and white. It is a demanding system within which these performers try to give voice to their desire for autonomy and to their own identities. Who decides for them, and who are they allowed to be? Who truly sees and hears them?

The Inequality Machine weaves together the stories of six young adults who have come into contact with different sides of the Kafkaesque bureaucracy that connects the criminal justice system with care services and debt restructuring. Through spoken word, dance, theatre, and rap, they take us deep into their personal stories—right to the core of their being.

This performance was created as part of the research programme of the same name on law, discrimination, and systemic change. It is the result of an intensive collaboration between Lleca Teatro, Young Perspectives, and the University of Amsterdam, made possible by the Knowledge Centre for Inequality.

Lleca Teatro, Young Perspectives & Knowledge Centre for Inequality



Wednesday 25 march

This evening marks the official opening of the festival. From this moment until Sunday 29 March, the three programme strands of ICAF — the residencies, the City Programme and the Professionals Programme — come together, and the festival unfolds in its full scope. The Professionals Programme brings together community arts groups, artists and organisations from around the world to exchange knowledge, experiences and practices. At the same time, participatory projects within the City Programme take place across different parts of the city, engaging local residents alongside an international audience. Each evening, all programme strands and visitors come together during the joint evening programme at Theater Zuidplein — the heart of the festival.

opening performance 20:15h

An Fara (It has begun)

An Fara is co-created by Mud Art and The Walk Productions and is inspired by THE HERDS - the monumental work of public art and climate action that swept through Africa and Europe in 2025.

An Fara is a haunting phrase from Kaduna, Northern Nigeria - historically spoken to signal fight or flight in moments of imminent danger. Once chanted, it triggers an instinctive ritual of survival, signifying the fragile threshold between life and death. This powerful performance juxtaposes Kaduna's history of sectarian violence with the accelerating global climate crisis, investigating moments of ecological and political collapse. By framing environmental destruction as an encroaching "An Fara" moment, the work awakens a visceral sense of urgency - an alarm bell that can no longer be ignored.

Through dance and theatre, the production tells the story of two systems collapsing as one: the ancestral spiritual practices and the natural world. Long intertwined, both now stand in a state of emergency, triggering the dreaded An Fara call - a final warning demanding collective action.

An Fara will receive its world premiere at ICAF Rotterdam.

late night stage

21:30h

The ICAF Late Night Stage is open every evening from 25 to 28 March and takes place in the foyer of Theater Zuidplein. It offers a vibrant finale to the festival days with a diverse evening programme. Visitors can enjoy live performances and DJ sets that reflect the festival's wide range of cultural influences. During these nights, all programme strands come together. It is a unique opportunity to dance, meet new people, and experience the energy of the festival in an informal setting. The programme is open to everyone who would like to end the evening with music and dance.



Thursday 26 march

The first full day of the ICAF professional programme, with morning sessions, afternoon workshops, and a rich evening programme of theatre performances and film screenings, ending once again with a late-night stage and a live concert.

morning sessions

Imagination in the Climate Crisis

As part of The Herds, we are organising an interdisciplinary seminar within the professional programme, bringing together researchers, students, artists, policymakers and residents of Rotterdam to engage in dialogue about the impacts of climate change. Not only from an ecological perspective, but also in its social and economic dimensions. The climate crisis is often described as a crisis of imagination. By coming together and exploring different perspectives, we can uncover shared values and imagine new ways of addressing this complex challenge. This is particularly relevant at a time when, in many countries, there is a growing gap between perspectives and lived experiences, regardless of how people are affected by climate change.

This conversation functions as a laboratory for new ideas, methods and forms of development across both the cultural and social domains.

ICAF in collaboration with Culture for Climate Scotland & Lectoraat Ecosocial Work

Moments of connection

Throughout the festival, visitors are invited to take part in a series of light-hearted, participatory moments that create space for meeting, reflection, and connection. Through playful questions, simple creative prompts, and small shared actions, these activities encourage festival participants to slow down, connect with one another, and rediscover the power of imagination as a way of being together. Expect informal encounters in which you might exchange memories, reflect on childhood imaginings, write or receive a kindness card, or take part in accessible icebreakers designed to open conversations.

The activities are facilitated by Mariah and Makayla Madill, graduate students in the MA Theatre programme at the University of Victoria, specialising in applied theatre. Their contribution offers a gentle but powerful invitation to connect, with others, with yourself, and with new ways of imagining how we relate to one another.

Mariah and Makayla Madill

Voices of the Earth

In these morning sessions within the ICAF Professionals Programme, you warm up your voice, body and mind. Guided by Uruguayan musician and community arts practitioner Maia Steinberg, you work with your voice to cultivate connection, presence and collective energy. Maia's approach creates a welcoming space in which everyone can contribute, be heard, and feel part of a shared community. Together, these sessions form the foundation for the closing concert on Sunday afternoon.

Maia Steinberg

OsoToriOso

OsoToriOso is a mobile heritage and storytelling project focused on the traditional wooden houses of Suriname, known as osos. These houses were built during and after slavery by African-descendant carpenters who had gained their freedom. Within a system of oppression and exploitation, they created places of pride, community, and hope. To this day, the osos carry stories of resistance, collective resilience, and transmitted knowledge, forming the foundation of OsoToriOso.

The project was developed in close collaboration with current and former residents, builders, and artists in Suriname and the Netherlands, as well as with schools and cultural organisations in Suriname. Research into the construction of these houses, including a small-scale replica, highlights the craftsmanship of the artisans who built them. In Paramaribo, Amsterdam, and now Rotterdam, people share personal memories of life in these houses through building, conversation, and exploration, creating a living archive where colonial history and contemporary questions of identity meet.

During ICAF, OsoToriOso will have a permanent presence in the foyer of Theater Zuidplein. Here, we create a communal courtyard and meeting place, where stories are shared and where a precise, scaled-down version of the Surinamese mother house (scale 1:5) is built live.

Stichting Under the Blue Surface

Town Anywhere: Rehearsing the Future

10:00-17:00h

What could the future be like if our cities were places of multi species kinship and collaboration? You are invited to time travel to 2035 to be part of designing building and rehearsing the future.

Town Anywhere is a large-scale community visioning process that brings together large groups of people to imagine and then spend the day creating a fictional city of the future shaped by your ideas, questions, and dreams. Participants translate visions for neighbourhoods, systems of care, education, governance, and open spaces into an interactive installation where imagination and dialogue come together.

In a time of major and sometimes paralysing societal challenges, Town Anywhere invites action through collaboration. By building, talking, and designing together, participants will co-create models of a possible future that faces into ongoing climate and ecological challenges with care and through multi species kinship and collaboration, coming away with inspiration for change in Rotterdam's neighborhoods and communities.

Town Anywhere is an exercise in collective imagination, Thrutopia, and reclaiming agency over the city we want to live in and our role within it. You are invited to Join in. Build together. Create together.

Ruth Ben-Tovim

Afternoon programme

13:30-17:00h

Facilitation in Practice: Learning from YATTA

In this interactive workshop, Dessa Quesada Palm, Artistic Director of Youth Advocates Through Theater Arts (YATTA) in Dumaguete City, Philippines, invites participants into the heart of the organisation's mission, vision, and working practice. Drawing on YATTA's long-standing commitment to youth empowerment, social justice, and community-based theatre, the session offers insight into how artistic processes can create space for agency, dialogue, and transformation. As a master facilitator, Dessa goes beyond sharing theory or case studies. Through hands-on exercises, reflective tasks, and collective activities, participants experience first-hand the power of facilitation as an artistic and relational practice. The workshop becomes a lived exploration of how imagination, trust, and connection can be actively cultivated within groups.

Warm, generous, and deeply reflective, this session offers both inspiration and practical tools, while creating space for participants to reconnect with facilitation as a practice of care, presence, and possibility.

Dessa Quesada Palm

The Artist as Leader in Community Arts

In this participatory workshop, Naomi Alexander (artistic director of Brighton Peoples Theatre) shares key insights from her UK Arts and Humanities Research Council funded research into leadership in community arts practice. Drawing on findings from her research and workshops with youth and community arts practitioners, she invites participants into a shared space of reflection, dialogue and embodied exploration.

Rather than positioning herself as an expert, Naomi works as a peer, creating an open process in which everyone's experience and perspective can be brought into the room. Through experiential exercises, participants explore what it means to lead and to be led in co-creative artistic processes. Role-play scenarios introduce ethical dilemmas commonly encountered in community arts, prompting reflection on responsibility, care, power and decision-making.

The workshop focuses on the role of the professional artist as a leader in community arts and responds to the lack of evidence-based research into how leadership functions within culturally democratic practices. This session both recognises the complex, often invisible skills artists already employ and opens up a conversation about how these forms of leadership can be better understood, supported and developed.

Naomi Alexander

Recovery street – ‘He Tangata!’

Recovery Street offers art-based therapy across New Zealand (Aotearoa) for people facing mental health challenges, addiction, homelessness, or involvement with the justice system. The project He Tangata! — inspired by the Māori proverb “He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!” (“What is the most important thing in the world? It is the people!”) — celebrates the value of every individual. Using visual arts, theatre, music, spoken word, film, graffiti, and traditional Māori arts like kapa haka, the project combines Western and Māori healing practices with trauma-informed therapies.

At ICAF 2026, founder and artistic director Chris Molloy will lead a workshop for arts and healthcare professionals, showcasing their methodology where art and therapy strengthen each other equally.

Chris Molloy

Whisper of Unity

In this powerful dance performance, young women from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, show how they fight against gender inequality and advocate for equal rights. Through dance, they claim their own space: their struggle becomes visible, tangible, and at the same time a tool for empowerment. Creating these stunning performances also allows them to earn their own income. In a society where traditional norms often limit access to education and financial independence, dance provides these young women with both a literal and figurative outlet, opening a path toward independence and self-determination.

Sisi Dance Theatre | Godchance Eden (Siger Maxter)

Where imagination takes flight

Dance as a creative form of (after)care

For young adults during and after cancer, movement is more than physical exercise: it is emotional processing, social connection, and a way to reclaim autonomy and self-confidence. R.A.A.F. danst (Roots, Authenticity, Agape, Freedom) introduces an innovative vision of care in which dance becomes an integral part of recovery.

At ICAF 2026, R.A.A.F. danst presents its approach through a workshop for healthcare professionals, dance teachers and therapists, focusing on methodologies for dance-based interventions in care contexts. Alongside this, the documentary *Bewogen Bewegen* (Moved by Movement) will be screened, commissioned by the F|Fort Foundation. The film follows 17 young women who, guided by former Scapino Ballet dancers, use dance to tell their stories, rediscover their strength and create a final performance. Together, the workshop and film show how dance as community art can contribute to personal growth, recovery and positive social impact.

Stichting R.A.A.F.

Evening programme

19:00-20:00h

YELKARAM

Weaving the Ancestral Body

Yelkaram brings the living heritage of Honduras' Lenca community to life in a powerful performance in which contemporary dance, video, and ritual converge. The performance places the body at the centre as a vessel of memory, resistance, and knowledge: how are the stories of our ancestors, and our connection to our roots, passed down from generation to generation?

The audience is taken on a physical and visual journey: dancers weave traditional movements with contemporary choreography, accompanied by projections of Lenca landscapes, symbols, and textile patterns. Ritual gestures, voice exploration, and rhythms reveal how care for the body is inseparable from care for the Earth.

The performance is the result of a close collaboration with the Lenca women's organisation MURILPAZ, who not only preserve their cultural heritage but also stand as water defenders protecting their territories and ecosystems.

This dialogue is urgent and timely: As indigenous cultures worldwide are under threat, Yelkaram brings their voices into sharp, embodied presence on stage.

Isadora Paz Taboada, Diana Lara, Gabriel Vallecillo (cocreators), Ronice Stratton and Kristen Rulifson. Special presentation and Lenca ritual lead: Donatila Girón and Felicita López

There is another way

There Is Another Way follows activists of Combatants for Peace, a bi-national movement founded by former Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters who, in 2006, chose to lay down their arms and co-resist the system of oppression they were living under through nonviolent means. These include education and art, partially inspired by Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, alongside grassroots actions such as joint olive harvests, protests and protective presence for Palestinian communities threatened by settler and military violence in the West Bank. Through personal stories, they create space for dialogue and empathy by drawing on their own journeys of personal transformation.

The film follows the group as they try to make sense of the devastating consequences of the October 7 massacre and the genocide in Gaza, while working on an alternative to the hawkish narratives from both sides. "In the midst of darkness we discover who we really are," the makers write on their website. The film shows that peace is not only an abstract ideal but a daily choice requiring courage in times of fear, loss, and division. It opens space for reflection, empathy, and dialogue, inviting us to look beyond the boundaries of conflict to rediscover our shared humanity. There Is Another Way courageously navigates grief and suffering to reveal what lies on the other side: hope.

Content warning: The film contains intense and violent documentary footage.

Post-screening discussion

After the screening, there will be a conversation with the founders of Combatants for Peace, reflecting together on the themes of peace, reconciliation, and solidarity, and exploring what it means to choose another way, both in conflict situations and in our daily lives.

A Reconsider Film, Stephen Apkon

late night stage

22:00h

The ICAF Late Night Stage is open every evening from 25 to 28 March and takes place in the foyer of Theater Zuidplein. It offers a vibrant finale to the festival days with a diverse evening programme. The programme is open to everyone who would like to end the evening with music and dance.

Ámàl Ensemble

This Amsterdam-based band consists of seven young musicians from Syria, Siberia, Mexico and France. Amal is Arabic for hope - and that is exactly what the band brings: music that fades borders and connects worlds. Listen to the soulful echoes of the buzuk, drift away on the cello's rich harmonies, and move along to the driving rhythms of Mexico.

Ámàl Ensemble is an initiative from Orchestre Partout.



Friday 27 march

The second full day of the ICAF professional programme, consisting of a series of morning sessions, afternoon workshops, The Herds event in Rotterdam South, and an extensive evening programme of theatre performances and film screenings, once again concluding with a late-night stage and a live concert.

Morning sessions

Voices of the Earth

In these morning sessions within the ICAF Professionals Programme, you warm up your voice, body and mind. Guided by Uruguayan musician and community arts practitioner Maia Steinberg, you work with your voice to cultivate connection, presence and collective energy. Maia's approach creates a welcoming space in which everyone can contribute, be heard, and feel part of a shared community. Together, these sessions form the foundation for the closing concert on Sunday afternoon.

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During the ICAF professionals programme, OsoToriOso will have a permanent spot in the foyer of Theater Zuidplein. Here, the facilitators will set up a heritage space: a meeting place where stories are shared and where a precise, scaled-down version of the Surinamese "mother house" (1:5 scale) will be built live.

Stichting Under the Blue Surface

Combatants for Peace

Founded in 2006 by former Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters, Combatants for Peace chose to lay down their arms and reject violence. Since then, they have worked together to end the occupation and build a just and sustainable peace through joint actions such as protests, agricultural work with Palestinian communities under threat, joint ceremonies and participatory art projects. Amid unprecedented suffering -from starvation and destruction in Gaza to rising settler violence and pressure from the occupation in the West Bank- these activists raise their voices in favor of a shared future.

At ICAF, members of the collective will lead a conversation in the ICAF professionals-programme, sharing their experiences and reflecting on the role of art, theatre, and encounter in times of extreme violence. As a rarely heard bi-national voice in a historic conflict zone, they provide a powerful example of nonviolent activism and sustaining human connection.

This session complements the screening of the film *There Is Another Way* (Thursday 26 March, main auditorium, Theater Zuidplein), which follows the group in the aftermath of the October 7 massacre and the subsequent genocide in Gaza.

Moments of connection

Throughout the festival, visitors are invited to take part in a series of light-hearted, participatory moments that create space for meeting, reflection, and connection. Through playful questions, simple creative prompts, and small shared actions, these activities encourage festival participants to slow down, connect with one another, and rediscover the power of imagination as a way of being together. Expect informal encounters in which you might exchange memories, reflect on childhood imaginings, write or receive a kindness card, or take part in accessible icebreakers designed to open conversations.

The activities are facilitated by Mariah and Makayla Madill, graduate students in the MA Theatre programme at the University of Victoria, specialising in applied theatre. Their contribution offers a gentle but powerful invitation to connect, with others, with yourself, and with new ways of imagining how we relate to one another.

Mariah and Makayla Madill

Aājoor | film

Aājoor is the first feature film ever made in the Bajjika language, spoken by over 20 million people in India and Nepal. Set in rural Bihar, one of India's largest states and a region marked by high levels of unskilled migration, the film follows Saloni, a young girl navigating her inner world and social constraints while holding onto her desire for education.

The film was created entirely within an underprivileged rural community, without the support of traditional production houses. Through both the film and the work of the organisation behind it, Aājoor became a collective process of learning and participation. More than 100 children from the rural communities were directly involved in the production, gaining exposure to storytelling, performance, observation, and various creative skills in an attempt to gently interrupt the cycle of migration and limited opportunity through cinema. Aājoor offers a rare platform to a language, a region, and lived experiences that are often overlooked, even within India itself.

Aaryan Chandra Prakash

Afternoon programme

13:30-14:45u

Playing with Reality: Theatre, War, and Gender Sensitivity

In this workshop, Natasha Borenko (director), Lidiia Golovanova (author/editor) and Beata Anna Schmutz (dramaturgy, lead of the Mannheimer Stadtensemble) share insights into the creative process behind *Krieg ist kein Spiel für Frauen* (War is not a game for women), a performance that foregrounds women's experiences of war while critically examining the idea of conflict as strategy or game.

The session focuses on how documentary material and personal testimonies are structured through explicit game-like elements such as rules, roles, turns, and choices. Participants explore how these theatrical "game mechanics" shape the audience's position: when to identify, when to distance, and when to take responsibility. The workshop reflects on the ethical and dramaturgical implications of using play to address violence, power, and memory, and invites dialogue on how game structures can be used consciously and critically within socially engaged and documentary theatre practices.

Nationaltheater Mannheim

Reconnecting Through Ritual and Theatre

This immersive workshop by Héctor Aristizábal offers an introduction to a practice rooted in community arts, collective healing, and social transformation. Through embodied exercises, storytelling, and contemporary ritual, participants are invited into a shared ceremonial space where lived experience can be witnessed and gently transformed. Grounded in deep ecology and collective presence, the workshop brings together theatre, ritual, and reflection as tools for connection and meaning-making.

Héctor has over forty years of experience working internationally at the intersection of art, healing, and social change. Trained in Theatre of the Oppressed, he founded ImaginAction in 2000 and has worked in more than fifty countries supporting processes of conflict transformation and collective trauma healing. Since returning to Colombia in 2017, he has been co-creating Re-Conectando, an immersive cultural laboratory responding to social and ecological fractures through theatre, ritual, and connection.

Re-Conectando | Hector Aristizábal

Making of Aājoor

The Art of Community Storytelling

This workshop accompanies the screening of Aājoor, the first feature film in the Bajjika language, and offers an in-depth look at its making. Participants will explore how the stories were developed, the writing process, and the collaborative work with the local community, including the involvement of over 100 children, as well as the personal and social impact of the project and how the aesthetics were shaped through co-creation.

The session will also focus on low-budget filmmaking, working within rural communities, and initiatives developed through our organisation, encouraging dialogue and reflection with the audience.

The film Aājoor will be screened on Friday, 27 March, from 10:00 to 12:00 at Theater Zuidplein.

Aaryan Chandra Prakash

Het Laagland: meaning of home

SSince 2020, the Dutch theatre company Het Laagland (The Lowland) has been based in the South part of the city Geleen, invited by the housing corporation ZOwonen. From a fixed location in the heart of the neighbourhood, Het Laagland explores what “home” means in a community undergoing constant change. Local residents, also called Wijkmakers (neighbourhood or community creators), collaborate on an equal footing with theatre-makers and artists, creating theatre, music, radio, photography, and visual art.

Any themes or forms that the Wijkmakers find interesting or important can become the starting point for a new project. Through this process, participants discover new perspectives and talents, gain self-confidence, and grow closer to themselves and to one another.

At ICAF, the makers of Het Laagland will lead a workshop within the Professionals Programme, sharing their thoughtful and sustainable methodology while taking participants into the stories and experiences of the neighbourhood.

Het Laagland

The red thread of belonging

In this workshop, participants explore the idea behind The Red Thread of Belonging: a community arts project that uses embroidery as a way to make personal stories visible and tangible. What does “home” really mean? Is it a place, a person, a memory, a language - or something that is constantly shifting?

Guided by Haags Verhaal (Story from The Hague) and developed in collaboration with the project’s initiator, Swiss artist Kathrin Stalder, participants are invited to reflect on their own sense of home and translate it into a simple yet meaningful action: stitching with bright red thread onto a small white cloth. Each stitch represents an experience, a longing, a loss, or a moment of connection.

The workshop makes tangible how an individual gesture can become part of something larger. Together, the embroidered pieces form a growing installation - a collective artwork in which many voices come together. The session invites reflection and exchange and shows how shared stories can evolve into a collective narrative: a tactile expression of what ‘home’ can be, in all its diversity and complexity.

Haags Verhaal

Holding On and Reaching Out: the art of re-building and deepening connections

Holding On and Reaching Out is a performed lecture and storytelling event. In this session, members of the Citz Participate team, including Neil Packham and Elly Goodman, reflect on their long-term work with communities. The presentation offers insight into a pivotal moment in the history of the Citizens Theatre: the large-scale transformation of its building and organisation.

Through stories from practice, lived experience and reflection, the team explores how this process of rebuilding became an opportunity to rethink what it means to be a civic theatre, and how to ensure that community voices, skills and imagination remain central during periods of change.

Holding On and Reaching Out is both a reflection and an invitation - to consider how cultural institutions can deepen connections, hold on to what matters, and continue to grow together with the communities they serve.

Citizens Theatre

BROTS: Art, Vulnerability and Activism

In this workshop, the Catalan theatre company BROTS introduces participants to the artistic and social context of their work. Made up of performers with lived experience of mental health challenges, BROTS has spent more than fourteen years developing a distinctive, collective practice in which art, vulnerability and activism are closely intertwined.

Participants are invited to explore how personal experience is transformed into theatrical language, and how performance can become a tool for mutual support, empowerment and social change. The workshop offers space to exchange perspectives on care, mental health and artistic responsibility, and to engage with BROTS' approach in an open and embodied way.

Brots de Utopia

Discovering the echo from the shadows

Shadows United is a collective of Rotterdam-based artists, with and without a legal residency status, connected by a shared dream: a world in which everyone has access to fundamental human rights. Inspired by the ideas of Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal and Bertolt Brecht, they come together to create challenging and innovative work. Using shadow theatre, they tell stories and make invisible experiences about being ‘undocumented’ and therefore often unseen, visible. Through light, movement and recycled materials, they create an interactive space of imagination, solidarity and hope. Audiences are invited to explore, play and collectively imagine a more just and humane world.

Shadows United

Cultural policy & Community Arts

The broad lines of international cultural policy were established after the Second World War. Principles of cultural democratisation—that the public duty was to spread the art and culture authorities implicitly deem good—were adopted by the new European welfare states. This began to be strongly contested in the 1960s by more radical ideas of cultural democracy: pluralism, participation, equity, and cocreation as human rights. Today, cultural policy – the basis on which public authorities support artists and cultural services – is not even understood, while culture is misused by both political extremes. This session will explain the basis of these problems and propose cultural policy principles rooted in human rights and democracy that can guide society through uncertain times. It will show why every community arts practitioner and policymaker should take care of cultural policy and support everyone in learning, debating, and cocreating it.

François Matarasso & Arlene Goldbard

OsoToriOso: building stories

OsoToriOso is a mobile heritage and storytelling project in Suriname and the Netherlands, focused on the Surinamese osos: wooden houses built during and after slavery by African-descendant carpenters who had gained their freedom. In OsoToriOso, each house carries stories from the Surinamese diaspora and, through encounters, workshops, and intergenerational exchange, grows into a living archive of memory and imagination.

In this workshop for community arts professionals, the project's initiators share the broader context and methodology behind OsoToriOso. They explore how stories are collected, translated into physical spaces and shared time, and how a socially engaged art project like this can contribute to redefining history. This workshop offers insight into working with tangible heritage, diaspora communities, and younger generations, providing inspiration for anyone working with personal stories and historical narratives.

Stichting Under the Blue Surface

15:30h

The Herds: a confrontation between humans and animals in the streets of Rotterdam

A herd of life-sized animal puppets travels the world. In 2025, the herd covered over 20,000 kilometres, passing through cities such as Kinshasa, Lagos, Dakar, Marrakesh, Casablanca, Madrid, Barcelona, Marseille, Arles, Paris, Venice, Manchester, London, Aarhus, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Trondheim, and the Arctic Circle. For the tenth edition of the ICAF festival, they storm into Rotterdam.

The herd is on the move, fleeing drought, flooding, or the loss of their habitat. As they take over the streets, a powerful confrontation unfolds between nature and the city, between humans and animals. Rotterdam artists, residents, and students were actively involved in a pre-festival residency, co-creating two large-scale art events. These events feature spectacular visual scenes that invite imagination while drawing attention to the devastating consequences of climate change worldwide. The first encounter takes place this afternoon on Beijerlandse laan, Rotterdam South.

The Herds was developed by The Walk Productions (creators of Little Amal), under the artistic direction of Amir Nizar Zuabi. The life-sized animal puppets were designed and built by Ukwanda Puppets and Designs Art Collective (South Africa) and international makers. In Rotterdam the Herds are brought to life in collaboration with Dik Danstheater and students from Codarts (Dance and Music), alongside local communities.

Evening programme

19:00-20:00h

Love me by the hour

LOVE ME BY THE HOUR is a musically driven physical theatre performance by the inclusive theatre company Speels Collectief, challenging persistent clichés around sex work. Based on the personal stories of sex workers and their clients, the performance explores the diverse forms of paid intimacy: from fleeting encounters and pure desire to long-term connections and intimate relationships. Beyond the stereotypical image of the red light, it focuses on the human dynamics behind sex work. Through music, movement and text, a layered portrait emerges of desire, reciprocity, vulnerability and agency. With blushing cheeks, but without shame... LOVE ME BY THE HOUR offers an honest and nuanced look at a world rarely seen in its full complexity.

Speels Collectief

Muses / A Bird Named Mansour

Jordy Dik is a celebrated Dutch choreographer and community artist, known for his inclusive dance practice in which all bodies are equally valued and everyone is invited to dance. For regular ICAF visitors, he is a familiar face: Jordy once began as a young maker within the festival and has since grown into a leading voice in contemporary dance in the Netherlands.

In this documentary, we follow Jordy and five dancers from Compagnie Tiuri, the inclusive dance theatre company of which he is co-founder and artistic director, on their journey to London. There, at the invitation of Hofesh Shechter, they collaborate with Shechter II. The film captures their first extended period away from home, the formation of new friendships, and the love, ambition, and vulnerability that define their work.

The documentary is followed by A Bird Named Mansour, the dance film that emerged from this collaboration. Inspired by the harsh reality of a world in crisis, and by birds as a symbol of freedom, the film expresses a longing for connection, humanity, and a more peaceful future.

Evening programme

20:30h

Apatridas (Stateless)

Apátridas (Stateless) by Companhia Nova de Teatro gives voice to displaced people, migrants and refugees by creating theatre with, rather than about, those directly affected. Inspired by classical mythological figures such as Cassandra, Hecuba, Prometheus and Hercules, the performance uses these universal stories as an entry point to explore urgent contemporary human crises.

The work is structured as four interconnected solos in which performers—including actors from Angola and Brazil—reflect on themes of identity and the loss of home. Through these personal and collective voices, the harsh realities of migration, displacement and the fragmentation of societies are brought into focus. Combining live performance with visual language and digital media, Apátridas explores how people relate to land, community and future in a world increasingly shaped by borders and exclusion.

By weaving intimate stories into wider social and political contexts, the performance invites audiences to reflect on what home means, and how identity and humanity are shaped amid crisis and constant movement.

Companhia Nova de Teatro

Late night stage

21:30h

The ICAF Late Night Stage is open every evening from 25 to 28 March and takes place in the foyer of Theater Zuidplein. It offers a vibrant finale to the festival days with a diverse evening programme. Visitors can enjoy live performances and DJ sets that reflect the festival's wide range of cultural influences. During these nights, all programme strands come together. It is a unique opportunity to dance, meet new people, and experience the energy of the festival in an informal setting. The programme is open to everyone who would like to end the evening with music and dance.



Saturday 28 march

The third and final full day of the ICAF professional programme, consisting of a series of morning sessions, afternoon workshops, the second major The Herds event in Rotterdam city centre, and an extensive evening programme of theatre performances and film screenings. The late-night concert marks the final ICAF festival evening and promises to be a celebration.

Morning sessions

Voices of the Earth

In these morning sessions within the ICAF Professionals Programme, you warm up your voice, body and mind. Guided by Uruguayan musician and community arts practitioner Maia Steinberg, you work with your voice to cultivate connection, presence and collective energy. Maia's approach creates a welcoming space in which everyone can contribute, be heard, and feel part of a shared community. Together, these sessions form the foundation for the closing concert on Sunday afternoon.

Maia Steinberg

OsoToriOso

A Travelling Wooden House in Search of Its Story

OsoToriOso is a mobile heritage and storytelling project focused on the traditional wooden houses of Suriname, known as osos. These houses were built during and after slavery by African-descendant carpenters who had gained their freedom. Within a system of oppression and exploitation, they created places of pride, community, and hope. To this day, the osos carry stories of resistance, collective resilience, and transmitted knowledge, forming the foundation of OsoToriOso.

The project was developed in close collaboration with current and former residents, builders, and artists in Suriname and the Netherlands, as well as with schools and cultural organisations in Suriname. Research into the construction of these houses, including a small-scale replica, highlights the craftsmanship of the artisans who built them. In Paramaribo, Amsterdam, and now Rotterdam, people share personal memories of life in these houses through building, conversation, and exploration, creating a living archive where colonial history and contemporary questions of identity meet.

During the ICAF professionals programme, OsoToriOso will have a permanent spot in the foyer of Theater Zuidplein. Here, the facilitators will set up a heritage space: a meeting place where stories are shared and where a precise, scaled-down version of the Surinamese "mother house" (1:5 scale) will be built live.

Stichting Under the Blue Surface

Moments of connection

Throughout the festival, visitors are invited to take part in a series of light-hearted, participatory moments that create space for meeting, reflection, and connection. Through playful questions, simple creative prompts, and small shared actions, these activities encourage festival participants to slow down, connect with one another, and rediscover the power of imagination as a way of being together. Expect informal encounters in which you might exchange memories, reflect on childhood imaginings, write or receive a kindness card, or take part in accessible icebreakers designed to open conversations.

The activities are facilitated by Mariah and Makayla Madill, graduate students in the MA Theatre programme at the University of Victoria, specialising in applied theatre. Their contribution offers a gentle but powerful invitation to connect, with others, with yourself, and with new ways of imagining how we relate to one another.

Mariah and Makayla Madill

The hardcore club

In recent years, the number of artists and organisations developing community arts or participatory projects in collaboration with specific communities has grown enormously. Decades ago, the landscape looked very different: worldwide there were only a handful of pioneers daring to develop community arts. They stumbled, got back up, learned, reinvented themselves, and refined their practice - a process from which our sector still has much to learn.

Now, many of these companies are undergoing a generational shift and celebrating their 30- or even 50+ year anniversaries. In this conversation, we invite the new generation of makers to celebrate the work of a few of the 'hardcore community arts organisations' and take stock: what lessons have they learned? And what new challenges and dilemmas arise in response to the contemporary realities within and beyond the cultural sector?

Drama Box (Singapore), Rotterdams Wijktheater (Netherlands), Stut Theater (Netherlands), Junction Arts (VK) en Citizens Theatre (Schotland)

Home of Hope

IMPACT is a global organisation advocating for arts and culture to transform conflict and build more creative, just and inclusive societies. It supports artists, cultural workers, peacebuilders and researchers who confront complex social challenges, offering spaces for exchange, learning and collective action across borders and disciplines.

At ICAF, IMPACT launches their Home of Hope, a community and space for collective sharing, learning and solidarity. This session invites ICAF participants to connect, explore opportunities, exchange practice and support each other. Through inspirational speakers and group discussions, participants will gain new insights, build meaningful connections, and receive an open invitation to join IMPACT's global 'Home of Hope' community, a network committed to creative and collaborative approaches to positive change.

IMPACT

Afternoon programme

13:30-14:45h

Rehearsing the future: Community imagining as Practice

In this talks and workshop participants explore community imagining as a shared practice: how temporary communities can be formed through collective imagination, collaboration, and shared responsibility, often within a very short timeframe. The session focuses on the conditions that enable people who do not know each other to work together, make decisions collectively, and build trust and a sense of belonging. Imagination is approached not as an individual act, but as a social skill that can be practiced, strengthened, and shared.

In this session, community artist and facilitator Ruth Ben-Tovim offers a deep dive into aspects of her creative methodology, reflecting on the principles, choices, and learnings over 25 years that shape her work, focusing on Town Anywhere; a large scale community visioning process that will be taking place at the festival the day before, on Thursday 27th of March.

Ruth Ben-Tovim

Inclusion as a foundation

In this workshop, theatre company Speels Collectief shares its inclusive working practice, in which reciprocity and equality are not add-ons but the foundation of both the organisation and its artistic process. The collective reflects on how collaboration is structured internally, how material is developed, and how choices, roles, and responsibilities are shared.

Drawing on examples from their own practice, the artists reflect on group dynamics, power relations, and trust, while also bringing in current questions they are navigating themselves. The workshop offers space for exchange and is intended for makers and professionals who want to deepen inclusion as both an artistic and ethical starting point.

Speels Collectief

This Ground We Share

Listening to Space, Mapping Place

Using Community Mapping as a methodology in their practice over the past 10 years, this workshop invites participants to pause and look closely at how space is shaped through everyday life, shared histories, and collective imagination as a way of listening, noticing, and sense making together. Through prompts, discussions, and a hands-on Community Mapping exercise, the workshop proposes Community Mapping as an ethical and creative starting point that focuses on collaboration, and imagination as foundations for sustained community-based art practice. With concrete examples practiced in Singapore, the workshop looks at process over product, emphasizing connection and curiosity constantly asking how artists might create with communities rather than for them, and how collective wisdom can open new possibilities for belonging, agency, and commons-making.

Koh, Hui-Ling and Han, Xuemei (Drama Box & ICAF Hub Singapore)

Weaving the Ancestral Body

Honduran choreographers Isadora Paz Taboada and Diana Lara will lead a workshop exploring the creative process behind the project *Yelkaram: Weaving the Ancestral Body*. The workshop highlights how the body carries memory, resistance, and knowledge, and how traditional movements, voice exploration, and rhythms are interwoven with contemporary choreography. Through this session, participants gain insight into the collaboration with the Lenca women of MURILPAZ, the cultural and ecological narratives at the heart of *Yelkaram*, and the methods through which art and ritual foster both personal and collective transformation.

Isadora Paz Taboada and Diana Lara

Theatre as Institutional Mirror

This workshop explores *Verloren Onschuld* and *Verloren Jeugd*, a theatre diptych created by Rotterdams Wijktheater (Rotterdam Neighbourhood Theatre) in close collaboration with victims of the Dutch childcare benefits scandal. In this scandal, tens of thousands of families were falsely accused of fraud due to institutional racism, partly driven by a discriminatory algorithm that targeted people with non-Dutch surnames or from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Families were forced to repay sums of up to €100,000: money they did not owe and did not have, causing deep and lasting harm.

Over three years, Rotterdams Wijktheater worked with affected residents of Rotterdam to transform lived experience into theatre, exposing systemic injustice through personal stories. The impact reached from neighbourhood centres to the Dutch Parliament. In this workshop, the makers reflect on how this impact was achieved and why they chose, after the theatre diptych, to create two short films, now used in the onboarding programme of the national recovery organisation to confront new staff with the human consequences of this scandal.

Rotterdams Wijktheater

Companhia Nova de Teatro: Turning Personal Stories into Universal Narratives

In this workshop, the makers of Companhia Nova de Teatro from Brazil will guide you through their working methods and the creative process behind their performance *Apátridas* (Stateless). At the heart of the workshop is how they make theatre about and with people who are often unheard, weaving personal stories with universal themes and mythological narratives to create a theatrical experience that resonates both locally and globally.

Participants will gain insight into the social and cultural context in which the performance was developed. Through exercises and examples, the makers will demonstrate how theatre, visual arts, and digital media are used to give both personal and collective voices a stage.

Het Laagland: the meaning of home

Since 2020, the Dutch theatre company Het Laagland (The Lowland) has been based in the South part of the city Geleen, invited by the housing corporation ZOwonen. From a fixed location in the heart of the neighbourhood, Het Laagland explores what “home” means in a community undergoing constant change.

Local residents, also called Wijkmakers (neighbourhood or community creators), collaborate on an equal footing with theatre-makers and artists, creating theatre, music, radio, photography, and visual art. Any themes or forms that the Wijkmakers find interesting or important can become the starting point for a new project. Through this process, participants discover new perspectives and talents, gain self-confidence, and grow closer to themselves and to one another.

At ICAF, the makers of Het Laagland will lead a workshop within the Professionals Programme, sharing their thoughtful and sustainable methodology while taking participants into the stories and experiences of the neighbourhood.

Het Laagland

Taking Care / Making Care: exploring the art of the process

In this workshop, James Thompson invites participants to explore the aesthetics of care within their own community arts practices. After a short introduction, the session becomes a working space in which participants actively reflect on concrete examples from their work. Together, they examine which elements of a process might carry an aesthetic value that often goes unrecognised, and where moments of tension arise when carefulness is challenged. The workshop focuses on practising the application of theory, with Thompson guiding the exchange as coach and facilitator.

James Thompson

Ethics and community arts

Co-creation involves the exercise and – if it is done well – the redistribution and sharing of power. As such it inevitably raises ethical challenges for those who practice it. For example, funders may attempt to censor public art or performances; artists may be charged with cultural appropriation; depictions of certain histories or cultural identities may be deemed offensive. Good intentions are not enough: indeed, they can be part of the problem. What matters is clear sight and good principles. Dealing with ethical problems is the daily practice of co-creation itself, central to the joy of the work. This session will open some of the complexities involved and equip participants with conceptual tools to approach ethics in their own work. We'll pick an ethical challenge to practice on, so if you've faced an ethical challenge in your own work, feel free to bring it to the session.

Arlene Goldbard & François Matarasso

Discovering the echo from the shadows

Shadows United is a collective of Rotterdam-based artists, with and without a legal residency status, connected by a shared dream: a world in which everyone has access to fundamental human rights. Inspired by the ideas of Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal and Bertolt Brecht, they come together to create challenging and innovative work. Using shadow theatre, they tell stories and make invisible experiences about being 'undocumented' and therefore often unseen, visible. Through light, movement and recycled materials, they create an interactive space of imagination, solidarity and hope. Audiences are invited to explore, play and collectively imagine a more just and humane world.

Shadows United

15:30h

The Herds: city centre

A herd of life-sized animal puppets travels the world. In 2025, the herd covered over 20,000 kilometres, passing through cities such as Kinshasa, Lagos, Dakar, Marrakesh, Casablanca, Madrid, Barcelona, Marseille, Arles, Paris, Venice, Manchester, London, Aarhus, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Trondheim, and the Arctic Circle. For the tenth edition of the ICAF festival, they storm into Rotterdam.

The herd is on the move, fleeing drought, flooding, or the loss of their habitat. As they take over the streets, a powerful confrontation unfolds between nature and the city, between humans and animals. Rotterdam artists, residents, and students were actively involved in a pre-festival residency, co-creating two large-scale art events. These events feature spectacular visual scenes that invite imagination while drawing attention to the devastating consequences of climate change worldwide. **After yesterday's event on Beijerlandse laan, this is the second and final encounter, taking place in the heart of the city, at Rotterdam City Hall.**

The Herds was developed by The Walk Productions (creators of Little Amal), under the artistic direction of Amir Nizar Zuabi. The life-sized animal puppets were designed and built by Ukwanda Puppets and Designs Art Collective (South Africa) and international makers. In Rotterdam the Herds are brought to life in collaboration with Dik Danstheater and students from Codarts (Dance and Music), alongside local communities.

Evening programme

19:00-20:00h

Luckiest Girl Alive

This powerful verbatim puppetry performance traces the life of activist Hoda Ali, from her childhood in Somalia to her flight to Europe as a survivor of female circumcision and female genital mutilation (FGM). With great care and sensitivity, the performance brings her story to the stage: from carefree childhood play to the traumatic circumcision ritual at the age of seven, and the profound medical and emotional consequences that followed. Presented in a respectful and informative way, the performance offers insight into the realities of FGM and contributes to efforts to end the practice. Through puppetry, projections and storytelling, Hoda shares her message: “If you save one girl, you save a generation.” A post-performance discussion will follow.

Nikki Charlesworth, Hoda Ali, Alison Denholm

Krieg ist kein spiel für Frauen

War is no play for women

War is too often portrayed as a male story — in the news, in novels, in our collective consciousness, and on stage. This performance turns that assumption upside down, giving female voices the role of storytellers. Playing as a way of understanding the world is the starting point of this performance. Play carries great potential: it not only reflects our world but also offers the possibility to imagine a peaceful future. War is also mirrored in play — for example, in boys’ games: shooting with sticks, fighting with swords or water guns. In first-person shooters and strategic computer games, wars are simulated. But where are the women in these games, and what roles do they play in real wars? To explore these questions, theatre maker Natasha Borenko went to Mannheim to collect stories from women who have experienced war. The result is an evening of theatre that, by exploring personal stories and transforming play, creates a new world.

The cast consists of 17 women from Ukraine, Kurdistan, Syria, Iran, Turkey, Nigeria, Kosovo, Bosnia, Croatia, and Germany. Siberian-born director Natasha Borenko develops political theatre, in which participation and play are instruments to deconstruct systems and practice social change. The texts were compiled by Lidiia Golovanova, who collected the personal stories of the women.

Stadtensemble NTM Mannheim

Evening programme

20:30h

Eucaristia

At ICAF 2026, the Catalan company BROTS presents its powerful performance Eucaristia. The company is made up of actors who have lived experience with mental health challenges. Through singing, shouting and acting, they perform their stories, holding up a mirror to the audience and confronting them directly.

Eucaristia explores how religious and conservative values continue to shape society, often unnoticed, and how they can lead to suffering. This project is an artistic plea for mental health care as a collective practice, rather than as individual therapy, supporting transformation and solidarity and a more humane approach to people who are psychologically vulnerable. Drawing on fourteen years of collective artistic practice, the makers share stories of liberation, mutual support and activism for mental health.

Brots de Utopia

Late night stage

21:30h

The ICAF Late Night Stage is open every evening from 25 to 28 March and takes place in the foyer of Theater Zuidplein. It offers a lively conclusion to the final festival days, with a varied evening programme. Visitors can enjoy live performances that reflect the festival's diverse cultural influences.

It is a unique opportunity to dance, meet new people and experience the energy of the festival in an informal setting. The programme is open to everyone who wants to end the evening with music and dance. On the final night, we close with warm salsa beats.



Sunday 29 march

The final festival day. Tired but fulfilled, we come together one last time for this 10th edition of ICAF at Theater Zuidplein. The day is dedicated to celebrating the many special moments we have shared and the people we have met over the past days. We conclude with a farewell lunch, a closing ritual, and a community concert in which everyone is welcome to take part.



Farewell lunch 12-30h

Before the closing ritual and musical finale of ICAF, all participants are invited to a shared farewell lunch. This informal gathering offers a moment to eat together, exchange experiences and say goodbye, before bringing the programme to a collective close.

Farewell ritual 13-30h

**Re-Conectando: a closing
ritual by
Héctor Aristizábal,
Colombia**

As a closing ritual for ICAF, Héctor Aristizábal invites participants to take part in a shared farewell. Through images, gestures and imagination, festival visitors are given the opportunity to give form to what they have felt and learned, and to return to their daily reality with greater attention, connection and care.

Héctor is a theatre maker, ritual practitioner and artistic facilitator, with more than forty years of experience in community arts, collective healing and social change. He was trained in the Theatre of the Oppressed methodology and founded ImaginAction in 2000. Since then, he has worked in more than fifty countries on transforming conflict and healing collective trauma. Since his return to Colombia in 2017, Héctor has been co-creating Re-Conectando, a cultural laboratory that works around the deep social and ecological damage left by decades of armed conflict. Re-Conectando organises experiential workshops in nature, where theatre, ecology and ritual come together. In these spaces, shared moments of storytelling, witnessing and the careful processing of lived experiences emerge.

This farewell ritual is an invitation to pause for a moment, to listen, and to remember that culture, at its core, is not only something we consume or produce, but something we experience together — especially in times when we grieve, let go and begin again.

Community performance 16:00h



**Voices of the Earth: a
musical community
performance facilitated
by Maia Steinberg**

Alongside local participants and international ICAF guests, Maia worked towards a collective Sunday afternoon concert in the main auditorium of Theater Zuidplein, presented as part of the closing programme of ICAF 2026.

In this very final performance of the festival, the audience is invited to take part; to collectively create space for imagination; to make themselves heard; to carry the stories of others through sound. For the performance, the entire neighbourhood is welcome to join; young and old, from near and far. Voices of the Earth is an open and welcoming community concert in which encounter, connection and collective strength take centre stage.

Credits

ORGANISATION

The International Community Arts Festival (ICAF) was founded in 2001 and grew, under the wings of Rotterdams Wijktheater, into the international festival it is today.

With more than thirty years of experience in community arts in Rotterdam, ICAF has developed into the largest international platform for community arts.

Since 2025, ICAF has also become an independent foundation. The tenth edition of the festival marks the beginning of this new phase.

TEAM

ICAF works with a small core team and a large, dedicated network of freelancers and volunteers. Together, they make the festival possible. During the festival, the team expands to include producers, technicians and more than fifty volunteers, ensuring the personal approach for which ICAF is known. With this flexible organisation, ICAF remains locally rooted and internationally connected.

ICAF CORE TEAM

Executive director: **Anamaria Cruz**

Creative director: **Jasmina Ibrahimovic**

Co-programmer: **Amy Gowen**

Financieel officer: **Albert Casan Milla**

FESTIVAL PROJECT TEAM

Creative Producer City Programme: **Joost Roskam**

Fundraising: **Kristin de Groot, Iris Korll**

Production: **Iris Korll**

Production leader: **Elise de Fooij**

Communication & Marketing: **Toke Voornhout and Famke Bloem**

Technical Production: **Edgar Davids**

ROTTERDAMS WIJKTHEATER TEAM

Creative producers: **Stefan van Hees, Nadja Polman**

Production: **Marion van Dragt**

Technical production: **Robert-Jan Schmidt**

LOCAL PROJECT TEAM FOR THE HERDS

Production: **Stichting de Loodsen**

Marketing: **Talitha Molen**

PARTNERS

The ICAF festival has, for many years, been able to rely on strong partners who help make the festival possible. **Theater Zuidplein and Podium Islemunda** are the two main festival venues and form the heart of the event. In addition, ICAF works with a broad network of programme partners and venue partners across the city, each contributing in their own way to the realisation of projects and events during the festival.

The festival is also grateful for the support of **Dutch Fund for Cultural Participation, Rotterdam Festivals**, the **Municipality of Rotterdam** and the **VSB Fund**, without whom the realisation of ICAF 2026 would not be possible.

ICAF 2026



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