

## **Awardees: Heidi and Rolf Abderhalden (Mapa Teatro) Theatre-makers, Colombia**



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**The Colombian theatrical collective Mapa Teatro around the Swiss-Colombian siblings Heidi and Rolf Abderhalden has been unique in its form since its founding in 1984. The “experimental laboratory” includes visual as well as performing music and video artists, who can be seen in its innovative plays at theatre festivals worldwide. In its social documentary projects, Mapa Teatro devotes itself to regional as well as global issues and, using radical and multimedia means, investigates the interweaving of politics, society, festive culture, violence and revolution in Colombian society. Thus, the collective makes an important contribution not only to contemporary Colombian theatre, but also to the country’s reconciliation processes.**

The siblings Heidi, Rolf and Elizabeth Abderhalden, children of a Swiss father and a Colombian mother, founded the theatre collective Mapa Teatro after their training in Paris in 1984, and two years later, Heidi and Rolf decided to make a permanent move to Colombia. Heidi Abderhalden (born 1962 in Bogotá), educated in acting, directing and stage design in Lausanne and Paris, is a director and dramaturge. She is particularly interested in topics such as the body, voice and their appearance in art. For example, the online platform 1000voces.com, founded by her, compiles radio sound works based on testimonies from the “La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres project”. Rolf Abderhalden (born 1965 in Manizales, Colombia) is trained in art therapy, theatre directing and acting in Lausanne, Rome and Paris. In addition to his work at Mapa Teatro, he works as a lecturer at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. All the hallmarks and individual interests of both siblings are visible in each of the plays by Mapa Teatro, which is why they are always considered as “one mind” behind Mapa Teatro. The third founding member of Mapa Teatro, Elizabeth Abderhalden, did not move to Colombia, but remained close to the collective, for example by designing the extraordinary costumes for the productions.

After moving from Paris to Bogotá in 1986, Heidi and Rolf Abderhalden inaugurated the Laboratory for Artistic and Transdisciplinary Creation. Since then, the Laboratorio de artistas de Mapa Teatro has played an important role in artistic dynamics in Colombia in the field of creation and art education. Mapa Teatro draws its own cartography in the “living arts” – they open up a space in which the crossing of geographical, linguistic and artistic boundaries is explicitly demanded. The same applies to the staging of local and global issues to which the collective devotes itself with various artistic means such as theatre, opera, cabaret, radio, visual and sound installations, urban measures or performative conferences. With their work, the collective thus makes an important contribution to contemporary Colombian theatre.

Processing regional political issues has a long tradition at Mapa Teatro and their plays have always reflected the situation of Colombia and the continent. From the point of view of the collective, over 50 years of armed conflict in the country, violence, displacement and unresolved questions of guilt require constant exploration. In *Testigo de las Ruinas* (Witness to the Ruins, 2005) they deal with the evacuation and dissolution of a neighbourhood. In *Los Incontados*

(*The Unaccounted*, 2014), they reflect on the role of feasts and celebrations in the context of Colombian violence. Even their venues – above all the republican building that houses the collective and which was saved from certain decay by their moving into it in the 1980s – testify to this. Contemporary drama also flows into their plays: their first theatre project (*El silencio*, 1988 to 1990), for example, was a research project on Samuel Beckett and approved by him. Other works explore, for example, Heiner Müller (*Palabras y música*, 1991-1995), Gabriel García Márquez and traditional Indian theatre (*El otro Mapa*, 1996-2000) and the “political works” of Shakespeare (since 2000) and their own “Ethno-fiction” productions, remembering Jean Rouch's work (*Cundúa Project*, *Anatomy of violence in Colombia*)

Mapa Teatro collaborates in numerous productions, for instance with Hebbel am Ufer (HAU) in Berlin, the Schaubuehne and the Vienna Festwochen and the Zurich Theater Spektakel. In return, the Abderhaldens bring theatre-makers from other countries to Bogotá as part of the Experimenta/Sur art festival organised by them with the support of the Siemens Stiftung. This platform is, as it were, the quintessence of Mapa Teatro, as it combines socio-political engagement, international networking and highly contemporary theatre. Since 2017 Mapa Teatro has participated in a curatorial capacity in the regional two-year project The Future of Remembrance, which is organised by the Goethe-Institut South America. In performances, panel discussions and other experimental formats, it addresses future-oriented questions of remembrance and forgetting. It is a motto that could not be better suited to the theme of the 2018 Goethe Medal, “Life after Catastrophe.”

The collective gathers inspiration not least through its international networking. Guest appearances in numerous cities around the world enable it to raise awareness of Colombian topics outside the country and the continent. For example, Mapa Teatro appeared as a guest in Berlin three times at the theatre festival F.I.N.D. with its work (*Anatomías de la violencia*, 2010-2017) and its latest production *La Despedida*. The trilogy explores the facets of Colombia's political violence – paramilitarism, drug trafficking and guerrilla warfare – using two distinctive motifs: the “fiesta de los vivos” (Feast of the Living) and the “celebración de los muertos” (Celebration of the Dead). Each part presents a single party to this lengthy war and reveals the fine line between celebration and outbreaks of violence. Together, the three parts combine to form a substantial vision, made up of cult and surrealistic elements, of Latin American democracies since the end of the Second World War.

### **Quotes by Mapa Teatro**

“Since the birth of Tragedy, theater has been the scene of the relationship between death and celebration. For us, theater continues to be the poetic-political device that allows us to transpose the fear of death and the violence that we have lived in Colombia since we were born, but also our permanent desire to celebrate life.”

To the abominable rituals of death that this country has witnessed, we Colombians have opposed an obstinate resistance force that we recognize in our

ability to survive and celebrate. From our side, we have tried to conjure indignation and fear in the enjoyment and freedom that theater offers us.”

“We have waited 52 years to celebrate peace and now that it is front of us, we seem not to know how to live without the enemy. That same sensation has gone through the creation process of *La Despedida*, our very last production: saying goodbye to war seems to be more difficult than welcoming peace.”



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### **Quotes about Mapa Teatro**

“One more reason to go to the theatre. During the Experimenta Sur, *Los Incontados* is performed, the last part of a trilogy, staged by Rolf and Heidi Abderhalden, who have operated the Mapa for thirty years. Themes: Colombian violence, narcs, rebels, paramilitary, corrupt politicians. The surreal image sequence in the privately financed house – a play that is much larger than the means with which it comes about, is striking.” (Boris Pofalla, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*)

“The troupe can hardly be classified to a specific style. ‘At first we were heavily influenced by European theatre, Beckett and Heiner Müller, the young British dramas of the 1990s. In the meantime, however, we have developed our own forms,’ says Abderhalden. They are based heavily on musical elements, the construction of objects and environments and the impressive presence of the performers. According to the manifesto of the Brazilian Osvaldo de Andrade, Abderhalden calls the form of appropriation of the most varied styles and methods ‘anthropophagous,’ that is, feeding on human flesh. ‘It’s not really about eating the flesh. Rather, the early cultures wanted to incorporate the spirit of their enemies, their courage, their valour.’” (Tom Muströph, *Der Tagesspiegel*)

“The Mapa Teatro is one of the absolute theatrical spearheads of Colombia – and in a radical way and using experimental performative means, investigates the interweaving of politics, society, festive culture, violence and revolution. The directors Heidi and Rolf Abderhalden confront actors, magicians, children and musicians with the present and past of Colombia and dissect the relationship of people to the state as a fascinating and disturbing social picture puzzle.” (Jürgen Berger and Ilona Goyeneche, curators, ¡Adelante!, Ibero-American Theatre Festival at the Theater Heidelberg)