

CASE STUDY THREE:
SCOTLAND AND

BRAZIL

Over two years of engagement with Momentum, Natalia Mallo, an independent artist, creative entrepreneur and curator of the Museum of Image and Sound in São Paulo, has worked at multiple levels with Edinburgh's festivals and the wider cultural sector in Scotland. Her Momentum experiences, and the subsequent delivery of her Scottish/Brazilian collaborations, have had significant effects on her practice, perspectives on cultural policy, and ability to operate on an international level.

Natalia's projects have created opportunities for artists in Scotland, Brazil and Argentina to collaborate and present their work. As a result, she has not only pushed the boundaries of creative practice, but helped change attitudes toward the trans community in Brazil.

TRANSFORMING
AND EMPOWERING



ORIGINS

Natalia's initial engagement with Momentum came at a time when she was feeling professionally isolated and in need of new inspiration. Her itinerary was carefully curated by the Momentum delivery team, working closely with the British Council's Arts Manager for Brazil, and focused on meeting artists whose practice would resonate with her own creative and political agenda.

Her first night in Edinburgh was revelatory. She saw *The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen of Heaven*, written and performed by playwright Jo Clifford, and understood the potential of the play to resonate in her home country.

'A friend sensed that I would identify with the work. It was the last night of *The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen of Heaven* and I had tickets for another show. My friend insisted that I should go, so I did. I decided immediately that I wanted to take Jo to Brazil and produce the show there in Portuguese. I stayed up all night translating it.'

Natalia Mallo

After attending Momentum seminars provided by Festivals Edinburgh on business models and destination tourism, Natalia began to see her own practice and business in a new light.

'I started thinking about the arts globally. Before, I was engaged as an artist in festivals, but at Momentum I started to understand what cultural diplomacy really is.'

Natalia Mallo

FOLLOW-UP AND DELIVERY

Natalia's second Momentum visit focused on developing relationships made during her previous trip. She followed up an idea with the choreographer Marc Brew and continued her conversations with Jo Clifford, alongside managers from SESC, Brazil's largest arts presenter. The presence of the latter would prove crucial in bringing the play to audiences in South America.

Natalia's task was far from easy. Wearing the hats of both artist and producer, she struggled to find a balance that would enable the right things to happen at the right time.

'It's all about networks. With Momentum I found a lot of support for the follow-up of projects in Scotland, especially for research and development, which they don't have in Brazil.'

Natalia Mallo

Despite the difficulties, the results have been extensive:

'The Brazilian production of *The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen of Heaven* has brought impacts at many levels – from the personal to the collective, and from the artistic to the political – bringing changes to how people perceive a historically stigmatised group which has faced some of the worst levels of exclusion in Brazil.'

Natalia Mallo

The transformative effects of Natalia's work is perhaps most evident in the story of Renata Carvalho, the actress who plays the Brazilian Jesus. After 20 years of being systematically rejected as professional performer – to the point of seeing herself with no choice but to work in prostitution – she is now invited to act in theatre and film, give talks and teach.

Partly through the visibility generated by the Brazilian production of *The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen of Heaven*, Carvalho founded the T Collective, an organisation that campaigns for better opportunities for trans artists. As a result, established institutions have demonstrated a positive change in attitude, such as that seen in Itaú Cultural's *All Genders*

Festival in 2017, and an increase in television directors and film and theatre producers revising their policies on hiring trans artists.

The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen of Heaven toured throughout São Paulo free of charge, with an accompanying education and debate programme. The production reached places with limited access to culture, such as artist- and activist-led sites of resistance, prisons, care homes and shelters for trans people and other vulnerable communities.

The tour was aided through a grant from the São Paulo Secretary of Culture, the first trans-related production to receive such funding. Leading arts institutions and festivals not only programmed the work but refused to give in to demands to censor performances, focusing instead on encouraging audiences to engage with the issues raised in the play.

'When the show opened in Londrina there was a massive outcry. It had to be moved to a different venue because of objections about using a church. The amazing thing was that there was a torch-lit procession of festival people that walked from the original church to the new venue and a group of pregnant women created a protective circle around the new space. In Curitiba, the show was denounced by three archbishops but the minister of the Episcopal Cathedral wrote a pastoral letter and got her boss the bishop to sign it. Renata then performed the show in the Episcopal Cathedral in Curitiba.'

Jo Clifford

Natalia believes the play has had a profound impact on both artists and audiences:

'The Brazilian production has created a debate involving all sectors in society, generated by an artistic work that, due to its excellence in dealing with sensitive issues, opens paths and establishes spaces of dialogue. This was supported by a very-well-thought-out, non-violent communication strategy, drawn from the nature of the work and the insights it provides. These spaces of dialogue, once created, have no turning back, so they represent a real triumph.'

Natalia Mallo

LEGACIES

Ideas and opportunities are still evolving from Natalia's Momentum experiences.

'Natalia is Argentinian and has had a dream to take the show to her home country. She has found a trans actress from Uruguay and will now tour Uruguay and Argentina. She has invited me to a festival in Argentina where the three Jesuses would perform together. Who would have dreamt this in 2009 when I began the show? I couldn't conceive of that happening. It's a vindication because I was hurt so badly when it opened in Glasgow. If I'd dared to dream, it would have been to see it tour so widely and make a difference wherever it went.'

Jo Clifford

Natalia has also been selected as a Global Cultural Fellow as part of the University of Edinburgh Institute for International Cultural Relations programme, also taking place during Edinburgh's peak August festival period.

'Momentum and the projects and opportunities which have followed have genuinely built my capacity to work internationally – now it doesn't scare me, it fascinates me.'

Natalia Mallo

LINKS

Natalia Mallo
<https://www.nataliamallo.com>

Jo Clifford
www.teatrodomundo.com

