

Press release

27 August 2021

Konrad Wolf Prize 2021 goes to Abderrahmane Sissako

Award ceremony on 5 October 2021, Akademie der Künste, Hanseatenweg

The Akademie der Künste is awarding this year's Konrad Wolf Prize to the Mauritanian director Abderrahmane Sissako. The award ceremony is taking place on 5 October 2021. The jury brings together Erika Gregor, honorary member of the Akademie der Künste, Ulrich Gregor, Akademie member, and the curator and filmmaker Dorothee Wenner.

In choosing Sissako, the jury is paying tribute to one of the most important filmmakers from sub-Saharan Africa. Their citation reads: "Despite all their differences, Abderrahmane Sissako's films are notable for their refusal to accept existing limitations, but rather transcend them, fly over them, question them and expand them artistically. For the filmmaker born in Mauritania and raised in Mali, there was no preordained path to the directing profession. With his choice of material, his mastery of cinematic means and his keen eye for reality, he has remained a pioneer who has succeeded in reinventing himself as a director for each film. The jury is commending Sissako because his films – like those of Konrad Wolf – regard the cinema screen as a powerful source of humanitarian and enlightening inspiration. Today, with the renegotiation of the global coexistence of cultures and continents, Sissako deserves our recognition, attention and gratitude."

Born in Kiffa, Mauritania, in 1961, **Abderrahmane Sissako** grew up in Mali. From 1983 to 1989 he studied directing at the Moscow Gerasimov Institute for Cinematography (WGIK), where Konrad Wolf, the award's namesake, also studied from 1949 to 1954. Sissako has been living in Paris since the early 1990s. In his films, he expands cinematically depicted reality by using different narrative levels and inventing new dramaturgical formats. His first feature-length film, the documentary *Rostov-Luanda* (1997), was shown at Documenta X. His documentary feature *Bamako* (2006) established him as a director capable of interweaving the political with the poetic. In a fictional court case, the future of the African continent is negotiated: On trial are the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which seek to subject the public good to the dictates of foreign investors. Concurrently with the courtroom scenes, Sissako portrays everyday scenes in which he translates the political conditions into partly absurd and partly tragic tales. The film *Timbuktu* (2014) about the occupation of parts of Mali by radical jihadists gains a frightening topicality in view of the current situation in Afghanistan. It shows in many facets how the occupation of the city affects people's everyday lives: dress codes, forced marriages, stonings and the ban on

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music are forcibly imposed. In *La vie sur terre (Life on Earth)* (1999) and in *En attendant le bonheur (Waiting for Happiness)* (2001), he also addresses economic and cultural aspects of the African continent and illuminates the legacy of colonialism.

Sissako's films have been repeatedly invited to major film festivals. In 2003 he was a member of the international jury at the Berlinale and in 2007 a member of the jury at the Cannes Film Festival.

Named after the film director and longstanding president of the East German Akademie der Künste, the **Konrad Wolf Prize** worth EUR 5,000 is awarded each year for outstanding artistic achievements in the fields of the performing arts or film and media art. It was most recently awarded to the director and actor Alexander Lang, documentary film director Heidi Specogna (2019) and the cultural magazine *Lettre International* (2018).

Event details

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Award ceremony

Tuesday, 5 October 2021, 7 pm

Akademie der Künste, Hanseatenweg 10, 10557 Berlin, admission free

Laudatory speech: Ulrich Gregor. Feature film *Bamako* directed by Abderrahmane Sissako, Mali, 2006, 117 min, original version with German and French subtitles.

Dorothee Wenner in conversation with Abderrahmane Sissako

The event is taking place in French with German interpreting.

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