

Press Release

23 October 2023

Awarding of the 2022 Konrad Wolf Prize to Achim Freyer

The Akademie der Künste's Konrad Wolf Prize for 2022 has been awarded to theatre-maker and painter, stage and costume designer and director Achim Freyer. The jury comprised Performing Arts Section members Reinhild Hoffmann, Christian Grashof and the late Jürgen Flimm, who died in February 2023. The off-schedule public award ceremony to present the prize, endowed with 5000 euros, will take place later this year on 8 December at the Akademie der Künste venue on Hanseatenweg.

The jury's selection underscores Achim Freyer's preeminence in the formation of director's theatre in Germany since the 1960s. "Even in his early collaborations with Ruth Berghaus, Benno Besson and Adolf Dresen, his stage designs thrust into consciousness, providing a novel space for the senses and thoughts demanded by the action. The mere fact that one art form was not subordinate to the other contained a genuinely system crashing power, Freyer then brought into West German theatre, too – very soon a director himself – and from which he continues to develop it today as a theatre-maker and painter. His is a creative source of innovation, inexhaustibly multiplied by visual inventiveness. In a lucid game of transgressing boundaries and symbiosis between visual art and theatre, he manages to sustainably set the two art forms into a new, equal relationship. ...” (statement of the jury).

Achim Freyer (b. 1934 in Berlin) studied painting and was later a *Meisterschüler* (master student) for stage design in Bertolt Brecht's classes at the Akademie der Künste from 1954 to 1956. Since then, he has worked as an independent painter, stage and costume designer, and, since the 1970s, as a theatre and music theatre director. Following works for Ruth Berghaus (since 1959), Freyer's stage design for her *Barbier von Sevilla* (*The Barber of Seville*) by Rossini, first performed in 1968 at the Staatsoper Berlin, set a timeless highpoint of visual stage language rarely seen before or after. In 1965, with Adolf Dresen, Sean O'Casey's *Der Mond scheint auf Kyleneamoe* was performed at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, and in 1970, with Benno Besson, Brecht's *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* at the Volksbühne. The controversy around Freyer's design to Dresen's production of Goethe's *Clavigo* at the Deutsches Theater Berlin in 1971 was followed in 1972 by Freyer's flight to the West during a guest performance in Italy.

In his subsequent collaborations with directors such as Hans Lietzau and Claus Peymann, Freyer managed to set artistic standards in West German theatre set design, which gave a new look of the times to the classics. These included Claus Peymann's productions at the Staatstheater Stuttgart of Schiller's *Die Räuber*

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(1975), Kleist's *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn* (1975) and Goethe's *Faust I und II* (1977). They were stamped with Freyer's own dramatic will to create, which soon led him to work as a director.

Since then, at leading theatres around the world, Achim Freyer has staged theatre and music theatre from all epochs, including pioneering performances of Mozart's *Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) in Hamburg (1982), Salzburg (1997) and Schwetzingen (2002), Richard Wagner's operas, as well as premieres of contemporary music theatre, including Philip Glass' *Echnaton* (Staatsoper Stuttgart, 1984), Helmut Lachenmann's *Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern* (Hamburgische Staatsoper, 1997) and Salvatore Sciarrino's *Macbeth* (Schwetzinger Festspiele, 2002). Freyer's close collaboration with Dieter Schnebel began in 1977 with *Maulwerke* at the Hochschule der Künste, Berlin (UdK). In 1988, he founded the Freyer-Ensemble for experimental theatre and musical theatre.

Freyer has received numerous prizes and awards for his stage creations, most recently the Deutscher Theaterpreis DER FAUST for his life's work (2022). He has participated twice in *documenta* as a visual artist and is represented in many national and international exhibitions. Achim Freyer was a full professor at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK) from 1976 to 2002. In 2012, the Kunsthaus of the ACHIM FREYER STIFTUNG opened in his villa in Berlin. Freyer has been a member of the Akademie der Künste since 1993.

Named after the film director and long-term president of the Akademie der Künste der DDR in East Berlin, the **Konrad Wolf Prize** is awarded annually for outstanding artistic achievements in the fields of the performing arts or film and media arts, awarded in alternating years by these two sections of the Akademie. Recipients of the prize in recent years were the Mauritanian-Malaysian filmmaker Abderrahmane Sissako, director and actor Alexander Lang, and documentary film director Heidi Specogna. *Yesterday* Sunday, 22 October 2023, the Konrad Wolf Prize for 2023 was awarded to Julian Assange.

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