

## 17<sup>th</sup> AfryKamera African Film Festival in Poland

The AfryKamera Film Festival ran from September 30 to October 9, 2022 in Warsaw and featured more than thirty films, including several competitive categories, such as feature films, musical documentary features, short films and animations. The programme is continuously available in numerous cities in Poland and on the biggest online platforms. As indicated in the festival's official Manifest, AfryKamera is changing, developing and referring to the future, hence this year's poster, which, like the entire event, was linked to Afrofuturism, a visual, literary, and philosophical concept and artistic genre of groundbreaking significance for Afro-American and African communities. The overall meaning of Afrofuturist influences in art and cinema remains a matter of debate, as this edition of AfryKamera demonstrated. The festival was focused on two main themes, which examined events from the past and the fate of African societies, and oscillated around topics related to the future, hope and a deep faith in agency.

Firstly, "The Roots of Music", served as the introduction to the world of the rich and prominent African music scene and its development through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The impressive set of contemporary productions proposed an inspiring and energetic journey through the past and present music life in Sub-Saharan Africa, including *The Rumba Kings* (2021; directed by Alan Brain; a musical documentary on how Congolese rumba was born in the 1950s), *Elder's Corner* (2021; directed by Siji Awoyinka; a documentary on Nigerian music from 1950s to the 1970s, highlife, jazz and afrobeat and their essential legends, for instance, Tony Allen or Fela Kuti), as well as *Rumba Rules, New Genealogies* (2020; directed by David Nadeau-Bernatchez, Kiripi Katembo, Sammy Baloji; the story on Brigade Sarbati Orchestra and the urban scene in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo); *Cesária Évora* (2022; directed by Sofia Fonseca; a documentary on the world-class singer known for performing *morna* – a style of singing and dancing characteristic of the Cape Verde Islands). "For what better way to map a country's history than through its music and the fascinating people who made it?" rightly asked Wilfred Okiche (from Olongo Africa), and the answers were to be found in a cross-sectional view of the musical strands that underpin many African identities.

The second key motif, yet perhaps more striking, was “Africa Mon Amour”, offering an equally romantic, and empathetic look at interpersonal relationships, the world of feelings and sense of community and identity. Several perfectly selected films fitted into this discourse: the internationally acclaimed best film of the year in Africa *The Gravedigger’s Wife* (directed by Khadar Ayderus Ahmed of Somali-Finnish origin), Zanzibar – a Tanzanian official film of the festival’s opening *Tug of War* (2021; directed by Amil Shivji) and *The Blue Caftan* (2022; directed by Moroccan artist Maryam Touzani). All resonated strongly and in a poetic dimension with the sublime slogan of love, suffering and sacrifice for homeland and family, searching for strength in the face of adversity, loss and political turbulence.

Importantly, the festival was honoured with a plebiscite with awards for the best productions in three categories. The viewers and the jury watched 33 films to select the best feature, the best documentary and the best short film. The jury of short films, which included Patrycja Kozieł and was chaired by Wiktor Bagiński, awarded the production *Irréprochable* (“Flawless”; 2021; directed by Anaïs Lonkeu). What resonated most strongly from this drama and fantasy fiction was the message: “*When you’re black, you have to work twice as hard as the others, otherwise you will disappear*”, the explanation given to Laura, a primary school pupil, by her mother. *Is it true that this might happen to black people as soon as they do not behave correctly? Lonkeu posed a question to its audience, expressing disagreement with ethnic stereotypes and social inequalities.*

While the Audience Award for Best Documentary was given to the already mentioned *Rumba Rules, New Genealogies*, the Audience Award for Best Full-Length Feature was won by the animated film *Nayola* (2022), proving that this difficult topic, which is a little discussed outside the Lusophone world, is needed and important. José Miguel Ribeiro’s dramatic debut animation that traced the legacy of the decades-long civil war in Angola (1975–2002) was written by Virgílio Almeida and based on the short story *Caixa Preta* (“Black Box”) by Mia Couto and José Eduardo Agualusa, two notable writers from Portuguese-speaking Africa. This outstanding feature animation film presented the life of three generations of women, such as Nayola, who went to the interior of Angola during the conflict, in search of her husband who was reported missing in the fight.

References to the Afrofuturism, the completely supernatural world, sci-fi, and the impact of space and extraterrestrials on human beings were, in turn, implemented through films such as *Underneath: Children of the Sun* (2022; directed by David Kirkman) and *The Gravity* (2022; directed by Cédric Ido), as well as a special set of short films under the common name “Afrofuturistic”,

including French-Moroccan feature by Sofia Alaoui *So What if the Goats Die*” (2020); Kenyan visual exploration made by Jim Chuchu *We Need Prayers: This One Went to the Market* (2017); Swiss-Rwandan production by Kantarama Gahigiri on astronauts, *Ethereality* (2020); C.J. “Fiery” Obasi’s adaptation of Nnedi Okorafor’s short story, *Hello Rain* (2018); and Congolese *Mulika* by Maisha Maene (2022).

The second element of short films screened in the “Africa Calling” collection featured several dramatic as well as comedic performances, exploring new paradigms of identities and migratory movements, and included the aforementioned award-winning *Flawless*, and also Nigerian *Precious Hair & Beauty* (2021) by John Ogunmuyiwa; Senegalese *Astel* (2021) by Ramata-Toulaye Sy or Angolan *A Lisbon Affair* (2021) by Hoji Fortuna, among others.

As every year, the festival was accompanied by events from the intersection of the arts – exhibitions, concerts, discussion sessions and a set of meetings with filmmakers, for instance, educational workshops for children led by Ogi Ugonoh, Naija Fusion dance classes with Precious Uwazuruonye Nwabueze, music workshops with Katarzyna Fifi Sylla and discussions led by the Scientific Club of Postcolonial Philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Warsaw. The concert of Noumassana Dembelé, whose leading instrument *iskora*, a kind of harp central for *mandingue* music and exhibition “Arewa Omobirin Eja” created by Polish-Nigerian artist Marta Baczewska-Ologele, were exceptional undertakings that absorbed the audience directly into the world of music and art, complementing the function and message of the festival itself, to present bottom-up African artistic activities taking into account a non-Eurocentric perspective.

Again, the 17<sup>th</sup> AfryKamera elicited an array of pivotal questions regarding the direction of the dynamic and fascinating growth of African cinema and its international and global recognition. This year’s festival should be considered one of the most important events concerning contemporary African cultures and societies, significant challenges and paradoxes, or current trends in the field of arts, which is still underestimated in Poland. Moreover, it once again confirmed that an ethical, visual narrative about Africa, presented by native artists, is the best method to enrich the multicultural dialogue and educate the audience in Poland.

