

Press release

Kassel, 4. Mai 2023/

Award Ceremony of Arnold-Bode Prize of the City of Kassel: Artists' Collective Wajukuu Art Project from Kenya is distinguished

On Tuesday, 2 May 2023, the Kenyan artists' collective Wajukuu Art Project received the Arnold-Bode Award at the Brüderkirche in Kassel. The award is endowed with € 10,000 and was bestowed by the Magistrate of the City of Kassel, as the Board of Directors of the Arnold-Bode-Foundation, at the suggestion of the Board of Trustees. Five members of the art collective, Ngugi Waweru Wanjiku, Josephat Kimathi Kaaria, Joseph Ndung'u Kimani, Grace Wambui Ngombo and Shabu Mwangi, had travelled to Kassel to represent the entire collective in receiving the award.

Wajukuu Art Project is a community-based initiative by Kenyan artists from Mukuru, one of the slum areas of Kenya's capital city of Nairobi. In an environment dominated by inadequate living conditions and crime, Wajukuu Art Project empowers children and adolescents to discover and to develop their creative potential, by offering a space for becoming involved in artistic activities. During documenta fifteen, the images and sculptures on display in the exhibition space represented topical amalgamates of materials readily available in Mukuru's slum and contemporary form language, such as a striking ready-made sculpture made of battered knives.

In her welcoming address, Dr. Susanne Völker, Head of the Department of Culture, pointed out: "Since 1980, the Arnold-Bode-Award has been given to artists in order to distinguish their outstanding achievements in the field of contemporary art. This is the 29th awarding ceremony, and the list of awardees features leading exponents of contemporary art. I am glad that today the City of Kassel honours the Kenyan artists' collective Wajukuu Art Project with this prestigious award." She then emphasised: "Wajukuu Art Project impressively confirm the potential of collective art practice guided by the common good. These projects actively contribute to improving the living conditions of children and youths in the Mukuru-slum, while at the same time meeting high artistic standards. With their works of art shown at documenta fifteen Wajukuu Art Project brought a striking selection of their work in Nairobi to the documenta Halle in Kassel."

The laudatory speech in honour of Wajukuu Art Project was held by Ann Mbuti, journalist and author of, among other publications, "Black Artists Now. Von El Anatsui

bis Kara Walker“ (C. H. Beck, 2022). In this book she outlines fifteen exemplary positions of black artists working in the field of contemporary art.

The prize money has been provided in equal parts by Kasseler Sparkasse and by Sparkassen-Kulturstiftung Hessen-Thüringen.

A selection of the collective's artworks, curated by Andrea Linnenkohl, accompanies the award ceremony, and will remain open to the public on Wednesday, 3 May, and Thursday, 4 May, 11 am – 6 pm. Entrance is free of charge. All works on display may be acquired from the lumbung gallery.

Background:

The Arnold-Bode-Award was set up 10 1980, and is given to artists who for exceptional achievements in the field of contemporary art. The award has been named to commemorate Arnold Bode, the founder of documenta. From 1980 – 1988, the prize was awarded; from then on, it has turned into a predominantly biannual event, even though the award is mandatory in documenta years. Laureates are not necessarily documenta artists, even if their work needs to meet documenta standards.

Compliant with foundation's charter, the board of trustees includes one member of the Bode-family, one financial expert as well as three art experts. The period of office for each board member is five years. The current members of the board of trustees are Ingo Buchholz, Prof. Heiner Georgsdorf (Chairman), E.R. Nele, ruangrupa and Prof. Dr. Julia Voss. The board of trustees meets with Dr. Susanne Völker, Director of Kassel's Department of Culture, as a representative of the foundation's board.