

# EMERGING VOICES

Art, Fiction and Film



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# Emerging Voices 2016

# CELEBRATE THE VOICES OF TOMORROW.

**ART**, GARETH NYANDORO  
Africa and the Middle East

**FICTION**, EKA KURNIAWAN  
Asia-Pacific

**FILM**, CLARISSA CAMPOLINA  
Latin America

Their work speaks of stigma and struggle. Of identity and belonging. Of obstacles and optimism. Their work challenges us to listen with new ears. And look at the world with new eyes.

Join OppenheimerFunds and the Financial Times in celebrating the 2016 Emerging Voices winners. Let's honor all the writers, filmmakers and artists in emerging markets who give voice to their truth.

For more information about the Emerging Voices Awards, visit [emergingvoicesawards.com](http://emergingvoicesawards.com) and join the conversation.



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# 'THESE AWARDS HAVE SURVIVED THEIR INFANCY. WE LOOK FORWARD TO WATCHING THEM GROW'

The judging panel for our second FT/OppenheimerFunds Emerging Voices awards agreed on two things. First, while this year's winners and runners-up were, as 2015's, outstanding, the overall standard of entries was higher. Second, it was easier for the judges to agree on the best entries this year. In their second year, the awards are better known and even more talented artists entered them. Also the judges, several of whom also served last year, had a better idea of what they were looking for.

As the Emerging Voices awards become better established, it is worth reiterating their purpose for those new to them. Justin Leverenz, director of emerging market equities at OppenheimerFunds, approached the Financial Times with the idea for a set of awards for art from emerging markets in 2014. To the FT, the proposal was immediately attractive. We have spent years reporting on and writing about the world's rising economies, looking at their businesses, financial systems and governments.

These awards offered a way to probe more deeply — to learn more about these countries through their art, film and literature. We saw the awards as not only a way of recognising talented artists, film-makers and novelists, but also as a means of bringing their work to the attention of our readers. This year we asked for art entries from Africa and the Middle East, films from Latin America and novels from the Asia-Pacific region. We received 797 entries.

A question often asked about the Emerging Voices awards is: which is emerging, the artist or the country? The answer is the country. Those eligible to enter the awards are citizens of nations named by the World Bank as having a gross national income per capita of \$12,746 or less. The judges' instructions were straightforward: choose the best works submitted in each category. Some of our winners and runners-up are exciting up-and-



coming talents, but others are already well known in their own countries and regions.

The judges for the film category this year — who included Yuhang Ho, the Malaysian director who won last year's film award — were impressed with Tania Cattebeke from Paraguay and her film *Olia*, the story of a boy looked after by a mute neighbour while his mother is at work. They described it as “haunting, layered, very effective”. They were captivated by Camilo Restrepo's *Impressions of a War*, which they called a “painterly, personal” view of Colombia's 50-year armed conflict. But their winner was Clarissa Campolina of Brazil with *Solon*, an enigmatic film that imagines an alternative

PHOTOS: ANNA GORDON



beginning of the world, that the judges commended as “enchanting”, “poetic” and displaying “great muscularity”.

Of the art entries, the judges were impressed by Noor Abuarafteh’s deeply researched mixed-media exploration of Palestinian history. They were enthusiastic about Kenyan-German artist Syowia Kyambi’s personal installation-performance entry. But their winner was Gareth Nyandoro of Zimbabwe, with his strikingly coloured paper-mounted-on-canvas works.

The fiction entries demonstrated the virtues of range across a vast region, with the 10 longlisted works coming from Bangladesh, Indonesia, China, India and Turkey. Four of the 10 had originally been written in English; the remainder had been published over the past year in English translations.

The judges chose two Chinese books as runners-up: *The Seventh Day* by Yu Hua and *The Four Books* by Yan Lianke. They are both remarkable works, highly recommended to anyone who wants an insight into contemporary China and its modern history. The narrator of *The Seventh Day* is a young man who has died and who, being too poor to afford a burial plot, wanders the country with similarly afflicted souls. *The Four Books*, set in a labour and re-education camp at the time of China’s Great Leap Forward, is a lacerating account of the lies, cruelties and absurdities of life in captivity.

The winning novel was the distinguished Indonesian author Eka Kurniawan’s *Man Tiger*. The story of a young man who has a supernatural female white tiger within himself was called “Marquez-like” by the judges, who had particular praise for the translator, Labodalih Sembiring.

After their first two years, the awards have survived their infancy in good health. We look forward to watching them grow.

*Michael Skapinker*  
FT chair of judges

#### WINNERS

12

**Art** Africa and the Middle East  
**Winner** Gareth Nyandoro, Zimbabwe  
**Runners-up** Noor Abuarafteh, Jordan, Syowia Kyambi, Kenya

26

**Fiction** Asia-Pacific  
**Winner** *Man Tiger* by Eka Kurniawan, Indonesia  
**Runners-up** *The Seventh Day* by Yu Hua, China, *The Four Books* by Yan Lianke, China

42

**Film** Latin America and the Caribbean  
**Winner** *Solon* by Clarissa Campolina, Brazil  
**Runners-up** *Olia* by Tania Cattebeke, Paraguay, *Impressions of a War* by Camilo Restrepo, Colombia

## Contents

### 6 Introduction

Art in an age of conflict. By Kamila Shamsie

#### ART

### 16 Dubai

An unlikely haven for Middle Eastern artists

### 18 Egypt

Arab spring graffitists are finding new outlets

### 20 South Africa

Memories of a post-apartheid murder

### 23 Opinion

Jan Dalley on nationality and cultural expression

### 24 Kenya

Nairobi’s vibrant market points to a boom

#### FICTION

### 30 Indonesia

A brutal history is brought to global attention

### 32 India

Regional languages break English dominance

### 35 Pakistan

Faiza S Khan on new commercial fiction writers

### 36 Turkey

Nilufer Kuyas navigates turbulent times

### 38 China

The silencing of influential liberal voices

#### FILM

### 46 Cuba

Thrills and pitfalls from Hollywood cash

### 50 Colombia

Footprints of a five decade-long civil war

### 52 Mexico

Directors are setting focus on the US border

### 54 Brazil

Daniel Ribeiro’s explorations of love

### 56 The judges

INTRODUCTION



**Taking flight**  
People reach the Tunisia border after fleeing Libya during fighting in 2011



PHOTO: PAOLO PELLEGRINI/MAGNUM PHOTOS

# ART IN AN AGE OF CONFLICT

In history's ugly moments — war, censorship, oppression, political turmoil — artists are compelled to bear witness and break the silence. *By Kamila Shamsie*

**H**istory, both past and ongoing, has always exerted a particular pull on the artist in search of a subject. “What happened here? What is happening here?” the artist asks when entering a room, a nation, a political current. If the question hasn't already been answered, or if no one seems to want to answer it — particularly if someone seems determined not to have it asked, let alone answered — the artist's antenna rises. There is a story here. And down the rabbit-hole they go, encountering realities that engender demands and provoke more questions.

In the ugly moments of history — times of conflict, war, oppression or censorship — two questions are provoked, over and over: what is good art in such times? And what good is art in response to such times?

Artistic form is a starting point to answering the first question. Photographers are, by almost universal agreement, the most powerful artists of the ongoing. They make the world “see” what is happening in other nations, other neighbourhoods, and they implicitly ask the question: now that you have seen, what are you going to do about it?

Graffiti artists play a less heralded, but nonetheless significant, role — marking streets as belonging to art rather than tanks, to the people rather than their oppressors. And poets, particularly in parts of the world that retain traditions of turning poetry into song, can give a people their anthems of resistance and their ballads of sorrow. Of course, no art form is in service of one kind of politics only; militaristic songs, hate-filled graffiti and triumphalist images are also produced during conflict.

I will never forget sitting in London with the writer Hisham Matar in the early days of the Libyan revolution, watching footage on his laptop of thousands of people in Benghazi, standing together singing a poem, which Matar and his mother sang along with them, ►

IF SOMEONE SEEMS DETERMINED NOT TO HAVE A QUESTION ASKED, THE ARTIST'S ANTENNA RISES

## INTRODUCTION

thousands of miles away. I assumed it was an old song, a Libyan equivalent to Pakistan's "Hum Dakhain Gay" (We Will See), which was first written by the poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz in 1979 during the military dictatorship of Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq and was later adopted as the anthem to the successful protests against the military government of Pervez Musharraf in 2007. But no, Matar told me, the poem had been written just days earlier and everyone already knew it by heart.

Other forms such as novels or films simply need a different time span to be produced. Ahdaf Soueif, the Egyptian novelist and columnist, spoke in 2014 of the fine poems that had been written during the Egyptian revolution of 2011. In contrast, she said that works of fiction about that conflict had "not ripened" yet.

Soueif added that, as the times and truths were becoming murkier and more layered, she was finding it harder to whittle her analyses down to a newspaper column, and that perhaps the best way to engage was "in a more imaginative way", via a novel. She spoke of this prospect as "that horrible plunge, that horrible risk" — the horribleness and riskiness being embodied not by the response a novel might receive from those on the other side of history but from a failure to achieve the high artistic demands necessary to conveying such complex truths.

Weighty subject matter does not lighten the demands of craft; it increases them. If you doubt this, go and look at Picasso's painting "Guernica" for a while, even at a screen-sized reproduction. Perhaps the answer to the question "What is good art in such times?" proves itself unchanged by the removal of the last three words.

The thornier question, then, is "What good is art in response to such times?" Can art stop massacres, overthrow dictators, remove hatred from the world? Patently not. "Guernica" was painted in 1937 but did nothing to temper, let alone prevent, the aerial bombardments of the second world war.

Some art can be produced in the eye of the storm, but it does not affect the raging of the storm in any decisive way. The agents in control of the narrative during any time of strife are never the artists. When a threat to a nation or tribe or ideology is identified it brings with it the widespread belief that "decisive action" and "unity of purpose" is called for, rather than the representations of nuance and complexity with which artists are often more comfortable.

But just because art cannot stop a storm from raging doesn't mean it is powerless to alter the experience of being trapped by the storm. Recently, in Bosnia, I heard the retired army general Jovan Divjak talk about the role culture played during the siege of Sarajevo in the early 1990s. Concerts and plays were performed by candlelight, art exhibitions honoured those who had died; art reminded people of humanity, he said, and kept their spirits strong.

In the end, history outlives its actors and their acts, and this may be where the most important role of the artist comes in. In an essay that considered the artist's role in bearing witness, Nadine Gordimer, the South African writer and political activist, wrote: "Writers cannot indulge the hubris of believing they can plant the flag of truth on ineluctable territory. But we can exclude nothing in our solitary travail towards meaning." That "solitary travail" is not the work of those who want to control a narrative but of those who are determined to follow one,

### Faces of a revolution

Laura El-Tantawy is an Egyptian photographer brought up in the UK, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the US. Her first book of photography, *In the Shadow of the Pyramids*, a first-person account exploring memory and identity against the backdrop of Egypt's political turmoil from 2005 to 2014, was nominated for the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize 2016

no matter if it leads them down the darkest of paths.

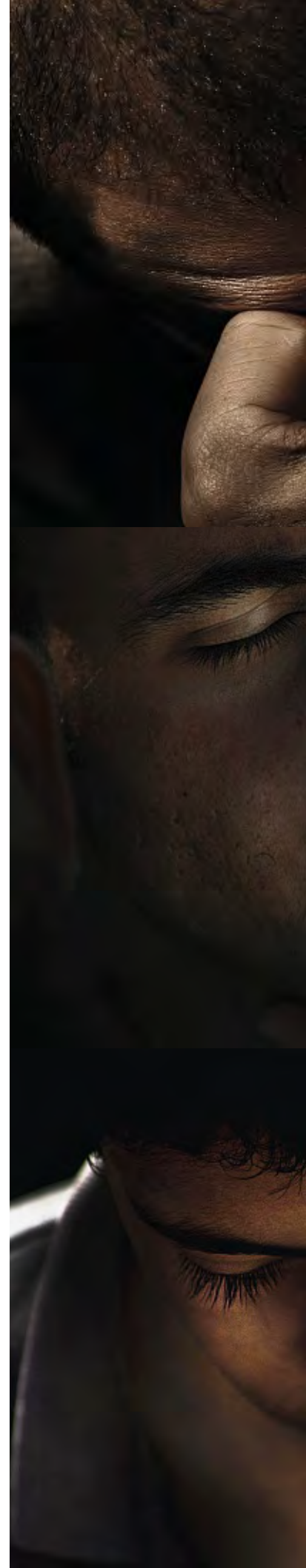
But why bear witness? Why walk those paths and take others along with you? The easiest answer is: to deny those responsible the glorious places in posterity that they crave. But it isn't, it shouldn't be, about them. The most oft-repeated answer is Spanish philosopher George Santayana's aphorism: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." But surely we are past believing that it is only forgetfulness that can make us repeat our worst actions? If 71 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the new prime minister of the UK can assure the nation of her willingness to use nuclear bombs, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives, what business do we have pretending there is any threshold of horror that humanity is not willing to cross more than once?

Here is another way of looking at the question. What is the cost of continued silence? How do you measure the crime of failing to acknowledge those who resisted, those who were lost, those who still live with the wounds? You write or paint or sing their stories in order to give those people voices again, to give them back a place in a history that wants them erased. That is where you start — and in doing that you might discover something easily forgotten in the midst of history's terrible repetitions and the gathering clamour of hate-filled voices: grace.

Because, there are always those who resist, those who remember, those who believe the world could be better and whose bravery shames us for giving in to the apathy of pessimism. When we bear witness to horror we also bear witness to resistance. We give the lie to those who claim no one can be held responsible for certain attitudes or actions because they are universal. Sometimes, shattering the myth that "everyone" is complicit is the start of a conversation about the ways of complicity, the cost of resistance, the path to justice and the nature of humanity itself.

The Italian novelist Italo Calvino said it best: "The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognise who and what, in the midst of inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space." ●

*Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction*







# GREAT ARTISTS SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY.

So do great investors.

Artists and investors share a common language of ideas. They find inspiration in places one wouldn't immediately think to look. Both delight in provocation. And ultimately, the artists and investors of the developing nations are optimists. They see a future made brighter by the power of creativity.

## **A developing world of opportunities.**

OppenheimerFunds seeks out companies with leadership strategies that use ingenuity to solve existing and new problems. These companies aim to improve what already exists, to bridge and connect people. "We focus on something extraordinary, which is uniquely gifted companies and entrepreneurs," says Justin Leverenz, founder of the Emerging Voices Awards and Director of Emerging Markets Equities at OppenheimerFunds. "I think great artists and great investors are both in the business of ideas and both need to be unconventional."

The Emerging Markets Equity Team is looking for innovators who are doing things differently. "Whether it's in the consumer space, in the healthcare space, in technology, sometimes you meet companies and the bell goes off, and you know it's a huge opportunity," says Heidi Heikenfeld, Portfolio Manager on the OppenheimerFunds Emerging Markets Equity Team. "There are so many promising new companies in the developing world and if you don't invest directly in these emerging markets, you could miss the opportunity to capitalize on the innovation that's happening there."

## **Ingenuity is a thing of beauty.**

Ingenuous individuals, like exceptional companies, are rare and demand investment. The mission of the Emerging Voices Awards is to show the world just how much these filmmakers, novelists, and visual artists have to teach us all. This year the awards received 797 outstanding entries from artists in over 60 emerging market nations.

Please join OppenheimerFunds in celebrating the emerging markets' most gifted creative minds.



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# 'I TRY TO RECREATE SITUATIONS THAT PEOPLE DON'T SEE AS IMPORTANT'

**Gareth Nyandoro**, winner,  
Emerging Voices Art Award

By Rose Carr

**W**hile Gareth Nyandoro's vivid, abstract depictions of commercial life in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital, have earned him international recognition, the response of his local audience remains paramount to the artist. His canvases depict the ephemera of everyday life — a pair of shoes, a bicycle, a rail of clothes — objects so familiar that they have become virtually invisible. "I try to recreate situations that people don't see as important," he says. "I want to show them what they are missing."

Beneath the swirling chaos of Harare's markets, his work evokes humdrum human interactions. Discernible figures dance in and out of view amid the frenetic compositions. "He is a keen observer of human behaviour," says Maria Varnava, co-director of Tiwani Contemporary, a London gallery that represents international emerging and established artists.

"The arrangement of objects I find on the street [in Harare] is an artwork in itself," Nyandoro says. "[The traders] are very conscious of how they



PHOTO: EMEKA KUPESKI OKEREKE







PHOTO: HEMIS/ALAMY

arrange their stalls and the objects on them. It's very artistic for me."

Born in 1982, Nyandoro graduated with a diploma in fine art from Harare Polytechnic in 2003 and completed his studies in creative art and design at Chinhoyi University of Technology, Zimbabwe, in 2008. With a residency at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam and a sold-out solo show at Tiwani Contemporary already under his belt, his name is becoming well known. He recently represented his country in the 56th Venice Biennale and is busy preparing a solo show at Cape Town's SMAC gallery.

"He is part of a generation of exciting young artists, like Virginia Chihota and Portia Zvavahera, who are bringing Zimbabwe to the forefront," says Varnava. Nyandoro agrees: "There is a lot of stuff happening here because of the economic hardship — people are making really important work. Zimbabwe is booming with creativity."

The country's chequered economic past includes severe bouts of hyperinflation, recession and, following President Robert Mugabe's unsuccessful land reforms in 2001, a full-blown economic collapse. But despite ongoing deprivation — or perhaps because of it — a nascent art scene has emerged. "There's not much support for the arts from the government, so people are creating work out of their own pockets," Nyandoro says.

Zimbabwe looms large in Nyandoro's work, though the country is rarely explicitly referenced. "It is very difficult for me to paint other things," he says. While in Amsterdam, he kept being drawn back home. "I was looking for things from Zimbabwe even though I was far away," he says. "I was kind of in between the spaces." Keeping in touch through Facebook and YouTube, he trawled the internet for inspiration,

sometimes working from stills taken from online videos. "Facebook is a place to interact. It becomes like a small kind village for me," he says.

But what distinguishes Nyandoro from his contemporaries is his process. Behind the blocks of bold primary colour and expressive monochrome figures is an intricate, laboured form of craftsmanship. A printmaker by education, Nyandoro developed his distinctive style in part as a result of a scarcity of materials. "When I majored we didn't have conventional materials for etching, linocut or silk-screen printing, so we were just improvising, sometimes cutting into paper to make prints," he says. "But when I was experimenting, I realised the plate I was using to print was actually a finished piece of work itself."

This makeshift approach led to the development of an expressive style of printmaking, incorporating elements of drawing, etching, painting, weaving and collage. Dubbing his technique "Kuchekacheka" — *cheka* means to cut in Shona, a native Bantu language — Nyandoro slices paper cutouts with blades, painstakingly scratching out an image and stripping away layers of paper, the scraps of which are later incorporated back into the painting. He then fills the incisions with ink that bleeds across the canvas. The process allows the artist to create images that look like etchings but can be made on a larger scale. "I try to connect my work to its surroundings. It becomes part of the environment," he says.

The work Nyandoro is preparing for his Cape Town show takes inspiration from the makeshift billboards in Zimbabwe. "Signposts are a kind of artwork that the locals read," he says. "I recreate that because it is popular and familiar to the local people, so when they come into the space it relates to them easily. It's all about people trying to make employment for themselves." ●

#### Market forces

Gareth Nyandoro's work evokes humdrum human interactions amid the frenetic nature of Harare's street life

## Noor Abuarafeh, runner-up

Palestinian artist Noor Abuarafeh turned to art after the upheavals of the Second Intifada — the period of intensified Israeli-Palestinian violence between 2000 and 2005 — forced her to drop out of law school. Growing up in the region (“where history has many layers to it”) stimulated an interest in the mutable and contested nature of history. “My interest came from a growing consciousness that historical narratives are not given, but rather produced in part by an ongoing engagement with institutions like archives,” she says.

Using a mixture of public and private archival material and by repurposing oral stories, blogs, photographs and books, Abuarafeh’s work explores fragmented interactions between memory, history and identity. “I am interested in history as a concept, and the possibility of rewriting it,” she says.

Her work adopts the novelist’s skill of weaving together fact and fiction, unearthing lost historical accounts and reworking narratives to offer new accounts of history. In one piece, “Observational Desire on a Memory that Remains”, she searches for a man in a photograph and, in a bid to build a picture of his life, juxtaposes real and imagined narratives, as well as laying bare her own process of investigation, which becomes a central element in the piece. “I developed my method of looking into the past by digging into history, searching for forgotten events, or taking testimonies from people who experienced a particular event,” she says. “This process makes me combine the idea of a storyteller and a historian.”

Rose Carr



## Syowia Kyambi, runner-up

Multimedia artist Syowia Kyambi graduated in 2002 from the Art Institute of Chicago and, after five years in the US city, returned to Kenya in 2003. She is of mixed Kenyan and German descent, and her work focuses on identity and the components that construct it. “I explore personal relationships and cultural identities, linking them to issues of loss, longing, race and more recently, questioning women’s roles in society,” she says.

Her work often evokes a profound sense of dislocation that is partly rooted in her dual heritage and, by extension, the process of decolonisation in Kenya. “The connection between the collective self and the individual self and the psychology of post-colonialism represented in our daily lives interests me,” she says.

For her multimedia production “Between Us”, which incorporates performance, installation, photography, sculpture and video, she joins forces with choreographer James Mweu and dancers from Kunja Dance Theatre to examine social norms and perceptions about the body and gender. The production is part of a travelling installation that was first performed in Nairobi in 2014, then in London and Dresden this year.

“There are repetitive elements used within the performance installations. However, each production has its own specific narrative situated within the context of the city in which the work is being presented,” Kyambi says.

Rose Carr

**1.**  
Noor Abuarafeh is interested in history as a concept and the possibility of rewriting it

**2.**  
Syowia Kyambi’s work often evokes dislocation, partly rooted in her dual heritage

# A HAVEN IN TURMOIL

Dubai has become an unlikely refuge for many artists from the tumult of the Middle East.

By *Simeon Kerr*

**D**ubai's transformation over the past 100 years from sleepy village to bustling trading entrepot to global metropolis was achieved in part by creating a tax-free environment to attract Persian traders across the Gulf. The city has since drawn in vibrant Arab and Asian expatriate communities, lured by its connectivity, political stability and economic freedom.

At the start of this century, an equally dramatic transformation began in Dubai's art scene. Artists from all over the Middle East, fleeing war, violence and persecution, have arrived in the emirate. "Dubai has become a safe haven for the intellectuals and creatives of the region," says Manal Al Dowayan, a Saudi artist whose installations often have a feminist bent. "As an artist living here, I have access to a growing and exciting art scene that is supported and protected by the community."

The cultural influences on this community are diverse: in the 1970s Palestinian-born painter Youssef Dweik came to Dubai; the late Iraqi artist Ismail Fattah worked in the United Arab Emirates following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003; the brothers Rokni and Ramin Haerizadeh, known for their arresting paintings and installations, entered self-imposed exile from their native Iran in 2009; and Tunisian "calligraffiti" star eL Seed has set up a studio in the city.

More recently, the tumult of the Arab spring has driven people, businesses and money from troubled states such as Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria to Dubai,



inflating property prices and filling the city's hotels. Meanwhile, second-generation expatriates born or raised in the UAE to non-Emirati parents, such as Dubai-raised Chinese multimedia practitioner Lantian Xie, have been making a name for themselves.

"An unfortunate reality is that as political, economic and social issues affect the wider region, more people flock to the UAE as a place of refuge, to raise a family and find employment," says Myrna Ayad, director of Art Dubai, an annual fair that has run since 2006. "For an artist, Dubai provides a diverse network of patrons, collectors and gallerists. It's a scene that offers them a solid international stage from which to successfully launch their careers." The scene, she adds, has created programmes and spaces, such as Tashkeel, an artists' studios complex, that are attractive for regional artists. Elsewhere in the UAE, institutions such as the Sheikhha Salama Foundation of Abu Dhabi offer education and residencies, while the Sharjah Art Foundation supports artists through its biennial.

Renowned Syrian artists have also moved to Dubai, including painters Safwan Dahoul and Tammam Azzam. Azzam, 36, came to Dubai from Damascus in 2011

ARTISTS HAVE TO CAREFULLY  
NEGOTIATE THE RED LINES OF  
ACCEPTED EXPRESSION IN DUBAI





**On the frontline**  
Tammmam Azzam's  
'Wallpaper' (2015),  
a photomontage  
depicting the  
destruction caused  
by the war in Syria

along with his gallery, Ayyam, which transferred its operations to the Gulf as the civil war intensified back home. "I spent four years in Dubai from 2011. I went there because it is a safe place," says Azzam, who works as a graphic designer as well as a fine artist. The nature of his work, which describes the destruction of the war and supports the populist revolt, means he cannot return to Syria, he says. "Some of my work is political — I have been supporting the revolution since the first moments."

But while Dubai offers political safety, it is an unlikely haven in other respects. Freedom of expression there has been curtailed since the Arab spring raised tensions over political freedom and sectarianism in the Middle East. Artists work in a sometimes strained atmosphere, carefully negotiating the red lines of accepted expression in the city's burgeoning gallery scene and at Art Dubai.

In the absence of work visas, artists obtain residence visas at the invitation of a gallery or Emirati national. Artists from countries afflicted by Arab spring violence say it is increasingly difficult to secure such papers. The authorities are concerned about importing revolutionary zeal that might undermine the Gulf's stability.

Azzam left Dubai for Germany to take up a fellowship on an academic arts programme, in part because the country offered longer-term stability for a foreigner. His UAE visa only allowed for visits from his parents, not his siblings, and there was no chance of naturalisation in Dubai. He says if he had lost his contract with the gallery, he would have had to leave the country within a month. ●

## Back in Baghdad: the pull of home

Not all artists who come from troubled parts of the Middle East have chosen to leave their homeland. Qassim Sabti, 63, owner of Hewar Art Gallery in Baghdad, has stayed throughout Iraq's crippling international sanctions, the US occupation and, since then, the sectarian violence he describes as "the most dangerous thing a country can go through". He says he has received death threats three times since 2005.

Despite that, the Iraqi artist has enjoyed considerable success at home and abroad, most notably for a series employing the tattered remnants of books that were burned or destroyed in the looting after Baghdad's fall to US forces in 2003. "At Hewar we've done 280 exhibitions, not just of visual art but of poetry as well. My success would not have happened without Baghdad. I'm a son of Baghdad — this is where all my memories are," he says.

Sabti says he also feels a moral duty to stay, despite receiving reports about relatives killed in Anbar and Diyala provinces, where Iraqi forces have been fighting to push back Isis. "I tell artists here that instead of raising our weapons, our job is to raise our culture," he says. "They create death, but we create life. We are in a dramatic and essential struggle."

Still, Sabti admits that the pull to leave can be strong. Even his 24-year-old son, a graphic artist, dreams of moving abroad. Sabti has held several exhibitions in New York, Paris and Tokyo. He has organised exhibitions for Iraqi artists in Beirut and Paris, and is planning another series of shows around the region. Dubai, he says, is becoming an increasingly important regional hub. "We can call it one of the capitals of creativity in the Arab world and it deserves to be a cultural capital," he says. "I extend my hand to this city."

For most artists who have stayed in Iraq, however, living off their art is nearly impossible. Most have second jobs — from working as civil servants to driving taxis — says Iraqi-German artist Furat Jamil, who is also director of the Ruya Foundation for Contemporary Culture in Iraq. Jamil, who focuses on film-making, moved to Iraq as a teenager and says she chooses to remain in Baghdad despite the violence. "It's very hard to make a living. It would be easier in Berlin — but I'd miss the inspiration."

One of Jamil's forthcoming pieces was inspired by the remains of a Koran she found at the site of a truck bomb explosion this July that ripped through Baghdad's bustling Karrada district, killing nearly 300 people. She believes the Iraqi artists who stay also play a critical role in preventing a rich, ancient heritage from being ravaged by violence and western cultural hegemony. She recently made a 3D animated film that revises the story of Sulawa, a beautiful demon creature that harks back to ancient Sumerian culture and that Jamil believes inspired Europe's vampire tales.

She estimates that half of Iraq's younger generation of artists do leave but that many of them end up returning. "After the novelty has faded, many of them find that something is missing."

**Erika Solomon**

# AFTER THE REVOLUTION

The graffiti art of the Arab spring may have gone, but Egypt's street artists are finding new outlets around the world for creative dissent. By *Heba Saleh*

No art form has expressed the exuberance of feelings unleashed by Egypt's 2011 revolution as vividly as graffiti. As central Cairo became the scene of protests and clashes between police and demonstrators during the turbulent first two years after the uprising, street art splashed on the city's drab walls offered a powerful commentary on the unfolding events.

The art took diverse forms, from large, colourful murals to small, monochrome stencils and scribbled slogans that boldly celebrated "martyrs" felled by police bullets. The artists all mocked the country's interim military rulers and exposed hypocrisy and deceit in the media and politics. The blood, hope, anger and pain of those days took shape on the walls in an explosion of creativity that captured both local and international attention.

That moment has long passed, the walls have been painted over and drawing messages of defiance on the streets has become too risky for the young artists who made their names during the revolution. Space for public dissent has shrunk since the widely supported coup in 2013 that ousted an elected Islamist president. But while that era of Egyptian graffiti art appears to have ended, its impact lives on. It has helped establish the reputations of some artists at least and opened the door to international recognition.

Soraya al-Morayef, who has chronicled the rise of Egyptian graffiti in her art blog *Suzeeinthecity*, says the result for individual artists has been both positive and negative. "Everyone has felt it, whether in terms of career, fame or even a change in direction. There have been different levels of success and also trauma, and even depression," she says.

The satirical artist Ganzeer was among the first street artists to gain public recognition after the revolution. Since 2014 he has lived in Los Angeles after a presenter on an Egyptian television programme claimed he was a member of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, causing Ganzeer to fear for his safety. His mural in Cairo of a face-off between a tank and a bread delivery man on a bicycle in May 2011 was an eloquent visual comment on the tensions that had quickly emerged between the then





‘I DID NOT GO DOWN TO THE STREETS TO PAINT TO PROVE THAT I AM AN ARTIST. I HAD A SKILL AND I USED IT TO DOCUMENT SOMETHING I BELIEVED IN’

the same kind of work he made in Egypt, which was tied to the revolution. “I don’t see the point of placing this work in a New York gallery for rich people to buy,” he says. “The work I did was in Egypt for Egyptians.”

Ammar Abo Bakr, another prolific street artist, painted huge, expressive, richly detailed murals often depicting “martyrs” with angel wings. His work packs a strong emotional punch with its vibrant colours, overlaying of motifs and use of irony. For him, a former art lecturer at South Valley University in Luxor, the revolution might have suffered a setback, but it is not over and, he says, graffiti will have a role once again.

“I used to draw the martyrs to point at their killers,” says Abo Bakr, speaking in his flat in the centre of Cairo where the walls are covered with multi-layered painting, objects, symbols, insignia and calligraphy celebrating the revolution and its icons. “I did not go down to the streets to paint to prove that I am an artist. I had a skill and I used it to document something I believed in.”

These days Abo Bakr is often invited to Europe to paint in street art events but stays away from revolutionary themes there. While abroad, though, independently he has painted murals of Sanaa Seif, a young activist who was jailed for suggesting that Egypt’s judiciary was not independent. “She is an icon of the revolution,” Abo Bakr says.

Other graffiti artists in demand internationally include Alaa Awad, another art lecturer from Luxor whose celebrated murals, inspired by Pharaonic Egypt, shared wall space in downtown Cairo with Abo Bakr’s paintings. Awad, who does not view himself as an opponent of the regime, says he was moved by the violence and polarisation to produce work that reminded Egyptians of their roots in an ancient civilization. Elegant, enigmatic and moving, his murals reference ancient temple paintings while appearing to comment on the modern conflicts that unfolded on Cairo’s streets.

Similarly, Aya Tarek works in the port city of Alexandria and took up graffiti in 2007 long before the revolution. She makes a point of underlining that her work is not political and that she is not a “revolutionary artist”. Having received numerous commissions in Europe and the US, including for a music production house in Los Angeles and the USF Contemporary Art Museum in Tampa, Florida, she says the spotlight that revolution art focused on Egypt has raised her profile.

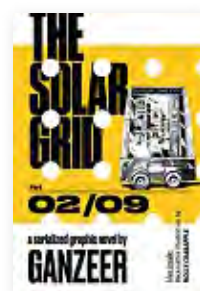
“I don’t use art as a propaganda tool,” she says. “I no longer do graffiti. I paint murals. Graffiti is quick and has to be witty and instant. But it is a different approach for me now. Things have to move on.” ●

ruling military council and the young activists at the forefront of the uprising.

Ganzeer is now working on *The Solar Grid*, a serialised sci-fi graphic novel. He says he is seeking to create an effect beyond the immediate hit delivered by street art: “For me it was important to take a step back from work that is immediately urgent and to put effort into something that might have a slow impact over a longer period.”

His novel presents a dystopian world set in a distant future in the wake of an environmental catastrophe that has depleted the world’s clean water supplies. The planet depends on a grid of solar panels that bask it in sunlight round the clock and have abolished night. “This is good for production because factories can work 24 hours a day, but it has horrible effects on the environment,” says Ganzeer. “The story revolves around two children who destroy the solar grid and save the planet. But on the other hand there are the people who benefit from the solar grid who you may see as the villains. I wanted to make the point that there are no bad guys, only people with different ideas of what is good and what is bad.”

Ganzeer says he produces art “from time to time for a cause or an exhibition” but turns down offers to produce



1. Ganzeer

2. Ganzeer’s Cairo mural of a face-off between a tank and a bread delivery man

3. Ammar Abo Bakr at work near Cairo’s Tahrir Square in 2013

4. Ganzeer’s dystopian vision of environmental disaster



**Mohau Modisakeng**  
"Ga Etscho 5"  
(2015), courtesy  
of Tyburn Gallery

# MEMORIES OF A MURDER

Mohau Modisakeng's brother was killed in the violence of early post-apartheid South Africa. Now the photographer and sculptor uses his body to describe his loss and the collective black trauma.

*By Tom Seymour*

In 1991 Mohau Modisakeng was five years old, playing near his home in Soweto under the care of his older brother, Sthembiso. Their mother worked as a nurse in the city, their father at a local school. It was a Zulu settlement but was rife with unrest between various tribes affiliated to rival black parties, the African National Congress and Inkatha Freedom Party.

Suddenly the stutter of AK-47 fire cut through the air. Modisakeng remembers his brother gathering him in his arms and running hard. "He ran from home to home until he found a tap and I remember him holding my face under the water, washing something from it," says Modisakeng, now 29. "I couldn't tell you what was being washed from my face. I can't remember." Later, he would learn that the police had been firing tear gas.

It is the most vivid of a handful of memories Modisakeng has of Sthembiso, who was murdered in another such outburst soon after. One day, Modisakeng found his mother holding the white sweater Sthembiso had been wearing on the day he died and noticed it had a hole and a dark brown stain. Sthembiso's death was not talked about again.

Today, Modisakeng still lives in Soweto, a poverty-stricken township in Johannesburg, and has risen to become one of the leading African artists of his

generation. His birth as an artist, he says, was directly linked to Sthembiso's death. "This [happened] in the early years after apartheid, between Mandela's release in 1990 and the elections in 1994, when South Africa was transitioning into a democracy," he says.

In these unstable early years of the 1990s, the Bang Bang Club, a group of photojournalists who followed the transition of South Africa from apartheid to a government based on universal suffrage, were documenting the violence of the liberation struggle. "They produced images that have come to define apartheid in the place I called home," Modisakeng says. "The conflict they describe in their work was the kind of violence I encountered as a child on a very regular basis.

"I remember seeing people who had just been killed, their bodies still in the street. Death was part of my every day. So when I reflect on violence today, it's based on those experiences, filtered through my own memories and emotions."

In 2004, Modisakeng travelled to London on a school exchange programme. He remembers seeing the turbine hall at Tate Modern. "There was room upon room of artwork in the gallery. I had never been exposed to anything like that," he says. "I didn't know what it meant to be an artist. I didn't know any other artists. But I made the decision."

At 18, Modisakeng went to study at the University of Cape Town's Michaelis School of Fine Art. For his final project, he returned to Soweto and tried to force his family to talk about his brother's death. "I had never asked questions about my brother," he says. "A detail that stuck with me was the knife that was used to kill him. I suddenly knew exactly what it looked like, where one

'I REMEMBER SEEING PEOPLE WHO HAD JUST BEEN KILLED, THEIR BODIES STILL IN THE STREET. DEATH WAS PART OF MY EVERY DAY'

**Mohau Modisakeng**  
 "Endabeni 6"  
 (2015)

could get hold of one. I replicated the knife that killed him until it became a large-scale sculpture." This sculpture, "Untitled (Okapi)", created in 2009, is an outsized replica of a knife designed to be used by tradesmen, with a carved wooden handle and a long blade.

"Right from the start, my art was drawing from my experiences of loss and trauma," Modisakeng says. "I started to work with photography and to put my own body into the images, layering narratives over the top of it. I saw my body as a way of describing my own struggle with loss, but also reflecting on the collective black experience in South Africa and the trauma and loss that is such a part of our history."

Modisakeng creates his artwork using costume, props and gestures. In a recent series "Ditaola" (2016), a white dove perches on the barrel of a rifle, splayed across his shoulders. In the images, the dove is seen still, then launching into flight and, finally, flying



'STHEMBISO IS A PART OF ME.  
 THAT'S WHY OUR BODIES  
 CAN HOLD SUCH POWER,  
 IF WE WANT THEM TO'

away. Modisakeng stares past the dove into emptiness, wearing animal furs and a traditional tribal dress, signifying a country moving towards freedom but still freighted by its violent past, still in the process of reclaiming its ancestral history.

Then there are the series "Endabeni" and "Ga Etsho", from 2015, on show recently at London's Tyburn Gallery. In both, Modisakeng wears a trilby, a symbol of migrant labour in Johannesburg. "Men would arrive from the countryside to work in the mines but would fashion themselves to reflect the image of a gentleman. It became a marker for a certain type of masculine worker during apartheid," he says.

He wears a leather apron and horse blinkers made to fit a human head. "If you wear blinkers, you can't look behind you, only forward. They symbolise the idea of being blind to history," he says.

Modisakeng's work engages with tribal customs and traditional beliefs, a recognition of the influence of his mother. "I learnt a lot about my country from my mother's experiences. She would go to work as a nurse in the morning and come back late at night. On the trains she took to the city, they would hold makeshift church services. These churches took on a political tone, and became spaces for people to exchange ideas — mostly through song. She would come home still singing these struggle songs."

Modisakeng's rise as an artist has been steady. After graduation, he won an artist-in-residency grant at the Gyeonggi Creation Center in South Korea. In 2011, he won the Sasol New Signatures award for emerging artists and has since exhibited his work at the Volta art fair in New York, London's Saatchi Gallery, the 2012 Dakar Biennale, Focus 11 in Basel and the Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town. He has also been invited to study for a masters in fine arts at Columbia University in New York but has had to defer this year, he says, because he cannot afford the travel costs.

So, for now, Modisakeng remains in Soweto, still mining the collective experiences of apartheid in a country that is still defined, he insists, by white supremacy. And still meditating on his brother's death. "Sthembiso is a memory I must live with, so the only way to try and resolve his death is to reflect on it. He is a part of me, and that's why our bodies can hold such power, if we want them to." ●

# 'THE MORE WE STUDY THE LINKS BETWEEN NATIONALITY AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION, THE MORE TENUOUS THEY APPEAR'

In today's world, art has little to do with borders, says *Jan Dalley*



**H**as something happened to the idea of nationality? As millions of refugees stream across borders and countries are torn apart from within by their own citizens, through civil wars and terror attacks in the streets or even by the preposterous French burkini ban this summer, it seems traditional notions of national identity are in shreds. Once upon a time nationality implied shared ways of thinking and being: is it no longer represented by anything more than a passport?

As a cultural clash, the burkini row was surprisingly eloquent, with implications far beyond the battleground of the beach. Since the burkini wearers were almost all French nationals — declared outlandish by their compatriots — it was a vivid display of just how much contemporary cultural values are vested in religious, ethnic or political sensibilities, rather than in ideas of nationhood.

As with women's clothes, so with art: both express what we value, individually and collectively. The more we study the links between nationality and cultural expression in today's world, the more tenuous they appear. Meanwhile, the influence of wider aesthetic and political beliefs on art and culture grows stronger.

Modernism, that great internationalist movement, was devoted to the dissolution of national identity — to ideas of universal sensibility, beyond depictions of reality. Originally a western aesthetic, it also took hold across the then-free world, especially through architecture.

Pre-modernist artists took a quite different view of national art. Through the 19th century painting was often used to bolster national identity, especially at times of change: think of the artists of the Hudson River School, who helped to create the romance and mythology of the American West, or Eugène Delacroix in France after 1830, or, more infamously, art in Russia after 1917.

This sort of thing could hardly be further from the minds of today's artists. The last century saw the growing dominance of abstraction, surely the greatest anti-national genre. Although every artist's eyes are attuned by what they have seen around them — the indelible imprint of "home" — just about all are powerfully influenced by the modernist aesthetic and the ways in which it has dissolved and transcended national borders, even as it has changed its face in each cultural landscape.

Many artists today play with precisely that dynamic: the Ghanaian El Anatsui, for instance, creates giant, fluid hangings that evoke the weaving traditions of his homeland but are composed of the modern world's detritus: tin cans, scrap and bottle caps. Those eloquent little objects, born in the 1890s at the same moment as modern art itself, embody the modernist ubiquity that makes one culture speak to another.

While most leading artists I've spoken to like to think of their work as supranational, many now marry the aesthetic of abstraction with "national" elements, just as El Anatsui does. Contemporary artists from Iran — Charles Hossein Zenderoudi, Parviz Tanavoli — often base their abstract work on the calligraphic tradition, while a host of younger Chinese practitioners are reinvestigating the long history of ink painting.

But I'd argue that this kind of involvement with past traditions, though essential to the deep life of the mind, has little to do with national boundaries. Quite apart from the enforced exile suffered by many artists, nationhood is often elective. Willem de Kooning was one of the great figures of American abstract expressionism, but that was because he left his native Holland at 23 for New York. Pablo Picasso, born in Spain, decided to spend his adult life in France; Anish Kapoor embraced Britain.

Many artists now divide their time between their homeland and another place that proves more aesthetically or politically conducive to their work. Does this prove that nationality may be a pointless concept when it comes to the creative mind — wherever its inspirations come from? Not always. Artists choose causes as well as locations. Ai Weiwei, probably the best known name in contemporary art in China, spent some years in New York, but elected to return home and his work deals powerfully and passionately with the politics of his country. Yet his art is in no sense "Chinese": it takes its stylistic language from international conceptual and installation art. In the fine tradition of dissident artists, his nationality is definitive yet his sensibility and means of expression rise above national considerations into the universal realm to which all art aspires.

So here is another way of defining an artist's allegiance — perhaps the only one we can point to with any certainty. To art itself, and its power. That's why artists very often have a deeper connection with each other, and with those who love and value art, than with their countrymen — whatever the colour of their passport. ●

*Jan Dalley is the FT's arts editor*

# NAIROBI'S NEW WAVE

Growing appreciation for east African art abroad and a vibrant domestic market spark hopes that Kenya is on the cusp of an art boom.

By *Catrina Stewart*

**A**s Paul Onditi prepared to move his family back to Kenya after a decade as a struggling artist in Germany, his former art school professor tried to dissuade him. “How can you leave your life here and go back?” the teacher asked. “How will you survive?”

But Onditi says he was barely surviving in Europe. “I had nine years of [financial] drought. It’s winter, it’s minus 20, you can’t heat your house, the water is cut off, there is not enough money to buy food.”

Six years later, Onditi, who was born in Nairobi in 1980, has made an international name for himself. But he is not the only artist finding success at home. Some of Kenya’s younger artists are now selling works for thousands of dollars — prices that would have been unthinkable a few years ago. And, as appreciation grows for contemporary Kenyan art, both at home and abroad, many hope Kenya is on the cusp of an art boom.

In a dilapidated plot off a potholed road in Nairobi, Onditi now works out of a shipping container turned studio alongside a security company and South Sudanese refugees taking adult education classes. His dusty laptop is surrounded by paints, brushes and ideas for future projects jotted on notepaper. “When I landed [back] here, it was a big struggle,” he says. “Everyone said: ‘When are you going back to Europe?’”

One day, a friend of his took six of his paintings to Kuona Trust, an influential Nairobi art collective, where an Indian visitor spotted them and bought them all. Shortly afterwards, Onditi had a show at the Alliance Française, the French cultural institution, and almost sold out. “I was like, ‘Am I in Kenya?’ Why was the country I left 10 years ago on such a high, buying art? It was all taking me by surprise,” he says.

The country’s first major auction of east African art, held at Circle Art Agency in Nairobi in 2013, was a pivotal moment. “We were telling people that artists [here] were doing well, and the art was an investment,” says Danda Jaroljmek, the agency’s director. “But how could we say that if there was nowhere to sell art?”

That first auction — it is now an annual event — drew a mix of international buyers and affluent Kenyans.



Forty-seven works from east Africa went under the hammer, two selling for more than Ks1m (\$10,000). At last November’s sale, four works beat that price; the most expensive piece, by Ugandan painter Geoffrey Mukasa, who died in 2009, fetched Ks1.7m. “We couldn’t believe it,” says Jaroljmek. “It was extraordinary.”

It wasn’t just that east African art was relatively cheap, although it certainly is compared with more buoyant markets such as those for Chinese or western and southern African art. Artists in Kenya “are enormously inventive”, says Giles Peppiatt, an expert in African art at Bonhams auction house in London. “Just because they are not fetching £100,000 a picture does not mean they are lesser. The trouble is, everyone expects everything to follow the trajectory of Chinese contemporary art. The market has cooled distinctly since those days.”

Since the largely self-taught first generation emerged — the “moderns”, as they are known, working between the 1960s and 1980s — the Kenyan art scene has changed dramatically. An increasingly liberal political atmosphere under president Mwai Kibaki in the 2000s led the next generation to tackle more controversial subjects, painting less to please than to provoke.

Since then, Kenyan art has become more challenging, more abstract. Among the new faces are Beatrice





## 'I KNOW ARTISTS WHO RUN AWAY DON'T WANT TO BE BRANDED AS POLITICAL. BUT WHAT IS NOT POLITICAL?'

Wanjiku, born near Nairobi in 1978, who studied at the Kenyan capital's Buruburu Institute of Fine Arts and paints haunting, distorted portraits. Richard Kimathi, born in 1971 in Nyeri, graduated from the Nairobi Creative Art Centre and is regarded as one of the country's most promising talents. A woodcut print by Nairobi-born Peterson Kamwathi has been bought by the British Museum, while the self-taught sculptor Cyrus Kabiru, who fashions eyeglasses from waste material, is a regular fixture at international fairs.

Increasingly, artists such as Kimathi, Kamwathi and Michael Soi (who describes his art as "social commentary") are inspired by turmoil in their own country: corruption, the 2007-08 post-election violence or China's investment in the continent. "You can't separate art from politics," says Onditi. "I know artists who run away don't want to be branded as political. But what is not political?"

Carol Lees, who runs Nairobi contemporary art gallery One Off, believes political art sells best. "The stuff that's really making its mark is political," she says. "The big collectors, that's what they are looking for."

One such, Samit Gehlot, a Nairobi businessman whose family interests include construction and safari lodges, has collected Kenyan art for about 15 years. "When I started collecting, [global art] was not very affordable," he says. "In Kenya, when I asked the price [of an artwork], nobody really had any idea what to charge. Kenyan art allowed me an entrée into the art market."

But Kenya still has some catching-up to do with Nigeria and South Africa, where wealthy local buyers prop up art sales. In Kenya, where the middle class remains small, so too is the appetite for pricier art. Some 85 per cent of the works Lees sells go abroad, she says.


Onditi, who has exhibited in New York and London as well as west Africa — with his most important works priced at around \$14,000 — says the importance of local buyers cannot be overstated if "future generations are to bank on art as a profession". He warns that Kenya's time in the limelight could be short-lived if locals do not come to understand the value of art. "Once the [momentum] has gone, for those who have not gained an international reputation, it will be a sad story." ●

### Fresh perspective

Paul Onditi, in his Nairobi studio, has seen demand and prices for his work soar since he returned to Kenya

**FICTION** ASIA-PACIFIC





# 'WRITERS HAVE TO CHALLENGE EVERY KIND OF MORALITY OR VIRTUE'

**Eka Kurniawan**, winner,  
Emerging Voices Fiction Award

By Ben Bland

Photograph by Muhammad Fadli

**E**ka Kurniawan's writing can be brutally funny and is definitely not for the faint of heart. It has been described by another leading Indonesian author as "rape heavy".

Kurniawan's first book, *Beauty is a Wound* (published in Indonesia in 2002), opens with its chief protagonist, a dead prostitute, rising from the grave and contracting herself to a local gangster.

The book was described by the *New Yorker* as a "B-movie sex romp — but shot through with a strangely touching, light-hearted compassion". It has won Kurniawan international praise and award nominations, the writer himself is unassuming. Even a decade after he had written *Man Tiger* (2004), his second book, few in Indonesia or elsewhere seemed very interested in his literature and he survived by working as a television and film script writer.

It was only in 2015 that the books were finally published in the US, after Benedict Anderson, a political scientist of Southeast Asia, promoted Kurniawan's work. It was only this intervention that enabled the author to find a translator and an all-important literary ➤



PHOTOS: ALEXANDER HEIMANN; AFP/GETTY IMAGES

agent. Now, the 40-year-old jokes, he is annoyed that many people only want to read his books “because they were published in the US”.

Over tea at the office of his publisher in a typically crowded part of south Jakarta, Kurniawan explains what motivated him to start writing and it was not the prospect of commercial success. Having graduated with a philosophy degree in 1999, just a year after the fall of Suharto, the long-ruling dictator. He was emboldened by a new atmosphere of freedom.

Dressed in jeans, a T-shirt and trainers, carrying a backpack made by surf brand Billabong, Kurniawan could still pass for a student. “As a young writer I felt I could write anything I wanted, almost without risk,” he says. “If no publisher wanted it, I didn’t care. I thought maybe I could just print a few copies for my friends.”

While studying at Gadjah Mada university in the central Java city of Yogyakarta, he was influenced by the writing of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Indonesia’s pre-eminent modern author, as well as classic works by the likes of Cervantes and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and niche local writers of martial arts and horror stories.

But it was the seminal 1890 book *Hunger* by Norway’s Knut Hamsun and its tale of a struggling young author that inspired Kurniawan to start writing. “After I finished that novel I wanted to be a writer too,” he says.

Kurniawan’s fascination with dark themes is clear across his work from *Beauty is a Wound* to *Man Tiger*, which tells of a murder committed by a man possessed by the spirit of a tiger. His third book, *Love and Vengeance*, which is due to be published internationally next year, is about “a man who can’t get a hard-on” as Kurniawan puts it. “Writers have to challenge every kind of morality or virtue,” he says.

Despite his recent burst of success, Kurniawan wants to take a break while *Love and Vengeance*



is being translated, a process in which he likes to participate, to ensure the English rendering faithfully conveys his original text.

“I have more time now — I don’t have to work every week as a TV scriptwriter,” he says. “At the same time, I don’t want to force myself to, for example, write a novel every two years. It’s time to relax for a while and maybe travel here or there.”

The international attention, Kurniawan says, has been unexpected and he is still struggling to understand it. Bemused, he asks: “Do outsiders really need to read anything about Indonesia?” ●

**Stars of the show**

Indonesian titles at the 2015 Frankfurt Book Fair, where the ‘guest of honour’ — a special literary programme — was Indonesia



## Yan Lianke, runner-up *The Four Books*

Set in a prison camp run by The Child, a tyrannical infant and low-level Communist party official, Yan Lianke's *The Four Books* tells the story of a group of dissenters as they undergo a draconian process of re-education during the time of Chairman Mao's Great Leap Forward.

In the wall-less compound the intellectuals — known only by their former professions, The Musician, The Scholar, The Author, The Theologian and The Technician — must carry out tasks for The Child before they can be set free.

But when the weather turns, the regime abandons the prisoners and they struggle to survive in the harsh conditions. By touching on the Great Chinese Famine of 1959-61, which led to the deaths of 15m people, an event that is still heavily censored in China — *The Four Books* is in part a dedication to these forgotten dead.

In dealing with such controversial subjects, however, Lianke has not always managed to stay under the censor's radar. Both his previous novels, *Serve the People!* (2008) and *Dream of Ding Village* (2011), were banned by the state.

The party and the army have long been targets for Lianke's satirical opprobrium. He joined the People's Liberation Army in 1978 and graduated from the army's Art Academy in 1991. In *Serve the People!* after an exhausting three-day love affair a general's wife and a young soldier are reduced to smashing figurines of Mao to arouse each other.

*The Four Books* is his most unbridled critique yet. Its publication in China has been banned outright. "The (not entirely) uninhibited experiment that was *The Four Books* was made possible because I was not writing for publication," Lianke wrote in *The Nation*. In 2016, *The Four Books* was shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize.

Rose Carr

## Yua Hua, runner-up *The Seventh Day*

Yang Fei, *The Seventh Day's* hapless protagonist, arrives late to his own funeral only to find he cannot afford a burial plot. Cast from his ancestral home, he is condemned to wander through purgatory. A spectral no man's land where the dead and the destitute roam, "the land of the unburied" is the surreal backdrop for Yua Hua's sardonic and often absurdist critique of modern-day China.

Taking place over the course of a week, the story follows Yang Fei — born in a train toilet and killed at 41 in a restaurant fire — as he travels through the afterlife, encountering a cast of equally ill-fated relatives and acquaintances. The tales of the characters satirise the explosive effect of market capitalism on China, replete with greed, corruption and repression. It is dark but funny too.

Yua Hua was born in Hangzhou in 1960. Now one of China's most politically profane writers, he rose to prominence in the 1980s, turning his hand to fiction after a five-year stint as a dentist. "The inside of the mouth is the place with the ugliest scenes in the world," he told the *New York Times*. He has since become known for his brutal realism and dark, comedic tone.

His novel *Brothers* (2005) is considered one of the most controversial in modern China. *To Live* (1992) was adapted for the screen by Zhang Yimou and won the Grand Prix at the 1994 Cannes film festival. He is one of the few Chinese novelists who writes regularly for the western press. As a columnist for the *New York Times*, he has written on topics from the Chinese stock market to air pollution and even censorship.

Rose Carr

1.  
Yua Hua, known for brutal realism and a dark, comedic tone

2.  
Yan Lianke, who has long satirised the party and the army



# ALTERNATIVE HISTORIES

Writers, film-makers and publishers have brought the country's brutal past to global attention. *By Ben Bland*

In 1999, as Indonesians were still celebrating the end of 31 years of dictatorial rule by Suharto, their second president, an unemployed philosophy graduate started writing a sprawling novel that blended his fascination for martial arts and horror stories with an acerbic take on his country's twisted history.

Eka Kurniawan finished *Beauty is a Wound* three years later, in 2002. Weaving together graphic violence and rape with vicious takedowns of officials, religious figures and even the idea of Indonesia itself, it may have seemed designed to flop. This was, after all, a country with a limited literary culture and many lingering political sensitivities.

Sure enough, after being picked up by a tiny local publisher and reprinted briefly by a bigger rival, the book disappeared. Undeterred, Kurniawan wrote another, *Man Tiger*, two years later. His second novel was barely more successful. "Those two novels gave me almost no money, so I started to work as a scriptwriter and editor for a television production house," says Kurniawan.

Yet somehow, over a decade later, he has found himself at the forefront of a revival of international interest in Indonesian writing that has resulted in global publishing deals, glowing reviews and *Man Tiger's* longlist nomination for the 2016 Man Booker International Prize.

Besides Kurniawan and other Indonesian authors, such as Leila Chudori and Laksmi Pamuntjak, who have emerged on the world literary stage, a strange cast of characters has helped to bring about this awakening. They include a US documentary-maker dedicated to exposing the truth about Indonesia's 1965 mass killings, a grizzled expatriate translator in Jakarta and executives of the Frankfurt Book Fair, the world's largest literary trade show.

It is a suitably unlikely story for a country dubbed the "improbable nation" by US journalist and scientist Elizabeth Pisani in *Indonesia Etc.*, published last year, which asks why a country so large and diverse still attracts so little attention from the rest of the world.

Not since Pramoedya Ananta Toer, the former political prisoner who wrote in the second half of the 20th century about Indonesia's struggle for independence from Dutch colonial rule, have writers from Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous nation, attracted such interest.



1. Leila Chudori

2. Students demand the resignation of president Suharto in 1998

3. Eka Kurniawan



The development of a literary scene in Indonesia has been hobbled by an exploitative colonial history that left many illiterate, a long period of censorship under Suharto and a weakened education system that does not teach literature, even in today's more open and democratic society. The new buzz around Indonesian authors has caught the few people slaving away in the nation's small publishing industry unawares.

"I can't believe it's taken this long, after working in this field for 40 years and publishing close to 200 titles," says John McGlynn, a US translator who runs the Lontar Foundation, a Jakarta-based organisation that promotes Indonesian literature — the only one in the country that is trying to do so to a global audience. "There's a basic ignorance and lack of knowledge about Indonesia abroad, which you can blame on the Indonesian government as well as the international media. Then there's the global publishing industry, which is usually unwilling to take a chance on introducing foreign-sounding authors."

As he chain-smokes Indonesian clove cigarettes in his office in a small villa, McGlynn, who translated Chudori's 2012 novel *Home* into English, explains that the Frankfurt Book Fair's decision to name Indonesia as guest of honour in 2015 was the "key turning point".

With tens of thousands of international publishers, agents and journalists in attendance, the fair is one of the few opportunities for talented non-English writers to make the connections they need in order to succeed.



## 'WRITERS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO CHANGE THE PERCEPTION OF INDONESIA AS A COUNTRY THAT DOESN'T KNOW WHAT IT'S DOING'

Following in the footsteps of writers from previous guests of honour such as Turkey and South Korea, Indonesia's authors suddenly found the book world was listening to what they had to say. "They've been able to change the perception of Indonesia as a country that doesn't know what it's doing," says Claudia Kaiser, the Jakarta-based vice-president for South and Southeast Asia at the Frankfurt Book Fair.

Kurniawan, Chudori and Pamuntjak all have very different backgrounds, personalities and writing styles. What stirred international interest in these authors was that they had all written about the 1965 massacres of more than 500,000 Communists, leftist sympathisers and their families and friends, which Suharto had used to take control of the nation. "It's all about 1965," says Kaiser.

Indonesians are still taught the Suharto-era propaganda that the mass killings were a necessary and limited pre-emptive move against an imminent Communist takeover. But since the fall of Suharto in 1998, a handful of Indonesian journalists and writers have tried to broadcast an alternative version.

Joshua Oppenheimer, an American film-maker with a

love for Indonesia, thrust the painful truth in front of a global audience with his horrific, Oscar-nominated 2012 documentary *The Act of Killing*.

In Germany, which is still struggling with its own genocidal history, readers seemed to connect with Indonesian writers' battles to make sense of a past that refuses to retreat into history. "I couldn't breathe at some of the events because there were so many people trying to interview me," says Chudori, who is a senior editor at Tempo, Indonesia's most respected weekly news magazine.

Pamuntjak, who co-founded Aksara, one of Jakarta's best-loved bookshops, says that readers are drawn to writing framed around what conflicts do to ordinary people. "Were friendships possible between the oppressor and the oppressed, was forgiveness possible?" she asks. "These questions, which inevitably open up so many grey zones of the human psyche — doubts, ambiguities, inconsistencies, good versus evil, man versus woman, friend versus foe — are wonderful material for the novel."

Yet despite the global attention, the debate about 1965 in Indonesia is still a limited one and the domestic publishing industry remains weak. One of the great ironies of the resurgence of Indonesian writing is that it has been facilitated by a lack of domestic interest, which has allowed authors to tackle taboos about sex, Islam and politics without censorship or a concerted backlash from hardline political or religious groups. ●

# REBIRTH OF THE VERNACULAR

Regional Indian language authors are finding wider audiences as publishers look beyond once dominant urban, anglophone names. By Amy Kazmin

In January 2015, India's English-speaking, urban middle class awoke to unusual news. In a small southern town, Perumal Murugan, a college lecturer and novelist little known beyond his home state of Tamil Nadu, had taken to Facebook to announce his own "death" as a writer.

"Author Perumal Murugan has died," he posted. "Perumal Murugan, the writer, is dead. As he is no God, he is not going to resurrect himself. He has no faith in rebirth. As an ordinary teacher, he will live as P Murugan. Leave him alone."

He asked his publishers to stop selling his books, and promised to compensate them — and any reader who felt it was "a waste" to buy his books — for their losses.

Murugan's renunciation was prompted by the eruption of a controversy over his 2010 Tamil-language novel, *Madhorubhagan*, which tells the story of the anguish of a peasant couple, childless after 12 years of marriage. Under intense family pressure, the wife attends a religious festival where it is permissible to have sex with any man to conceive a child, who is considered a gift from God.

In December 2014, agitators complained that the novel defamed local women, depicting them as "sexually permissive". After rabble-rousing protests, which drove the author and his family from their home, the authorities tried to restore order with a "peace meeting". Murugan was put under pressure to "unconditionally apologise" and agree to withdraw the offending portions of the novel.

His metaphorical suicide note followed swiftly. "He was in torment," Kannan Sundaram, his Tamil publisher, says. "He felt he can't be a writer any more if he is afraid and has to take account of so many things he can't write freely about — temple, caste or women."

*One Part Woman* — the novel's English translation published more than a year before the furor — had been critically acclaimed, but sales had been limited. After Murugan made national headlines, however, the English version of his book began to fly off the shelves, the latest novel written in one of India's indigenous languages to find national fame.

Until recently, writing in regional languages struggled for attention in India, overshadowed by English. But of late, India's growing publishing industry, hungry for more original literary fiction, has cast its net beyond the urban, anglophone writers who have dominated the literary spotlight. Critically or commercially successful novels written in indigenous Indian languages are increasingly published in translation, helping them transcend their linguistic boundaries to reach wider audiences.

"The most experimental and most ambitious novels I've read tend to be translations," says R Sivapriya, fiction editor at Juggernaut Books, a digitally oriented Indian publishing house. "If you claim you are publishing the best and most interesting Indian fiction, a large part of it has to come from the Indian languages."

Growing interest in indigenous language writing stems partly from a sense of "sameness" of many Indian-English novels, given their authors' similar socioeconomic backgrounds. "Writing in English tends to be from, and about, a certain kind of English-educated middle class," Sivapriya says. "In the Indian languages, it tends to be people from all corners of society."

Nilanjana Roy, an author and critic, says the literary "snobbery" that previously favoured English-language fiction is eroding. "There is a sense that Indian languages are no longer the stepchildren languages," she says. "They may not get the global attention they deserve, but there is a lot of confidence in the Indian languages — a feeling that they can hold their own."

Twenty years ago, Salman Rushdie, the Indian-born British writer, provoked anger when he derided writing in India's indigenous languages as being akin to Soviet "tractor art" — socialist realism known for its earnest depictions of grim village life. Indian writing in English, he claimed, was a "stronger and more important body of work" than vernacular writing. Yet today, contemporary Indian language authors are tackling themes that resonate beyond parochial audiences.

*Hangwoman*, a novel by KR Meera, written in Malayalam (mostly spoken in the southern state of Kerala) and published in English in 2015, wrestles



# word



# शब्द

**English versus Hindi**  
India's publishing industry has been casting its net beyond anglophone writers



## 'IT IS NOT JUST ENGLISH WRITERS THAT RESPOND TO THE MODERN WORLD'

with issues of crime, punishment, class and gender in contemporary India, albeit through the story of the last in a long line of hereditary executioners in Calcutta. *Goat Days*, by the Malayalam-language writer Benyamin, looks at the dark side of globalisation as it relates the story of an Indian migrant worker who goes to the Persian Gulf hoping for a better life but ends up in a slave-like existence as a goat-herder in the Saudi desert.

*Ghachar Ghochar*, by Vivek Shanbhag, who writes in Kannada, a language predominantly spoken in the state of Karnataka, explores the impact of sudden wealth on a tight-knit middle-class family, mirroring the changes that have transformed India over 25 years of economic liberalisation. An English translation was published in India in last year, and will appear in the US in 2017. "It is not just English writers that respond to the modern world," says Shanbhag, a former executive at Unilever, who says he had "no choice" but to write in the vernacular language of his childhood.

India's literary community has long been torn by debates over language. Between the 1960s and 1980s, writers such as UR Ananthamurthy, OV Vijayan, and Mahasweta Devi, consciously spurned English, despite their fluency in the language, to write fiction in the vernacular tongues of the communities they were depicting — respectively Kannada, Malayalam and Bengali (spoken in West Bengal). It was also in regional languages where they felt their most important readership lay.

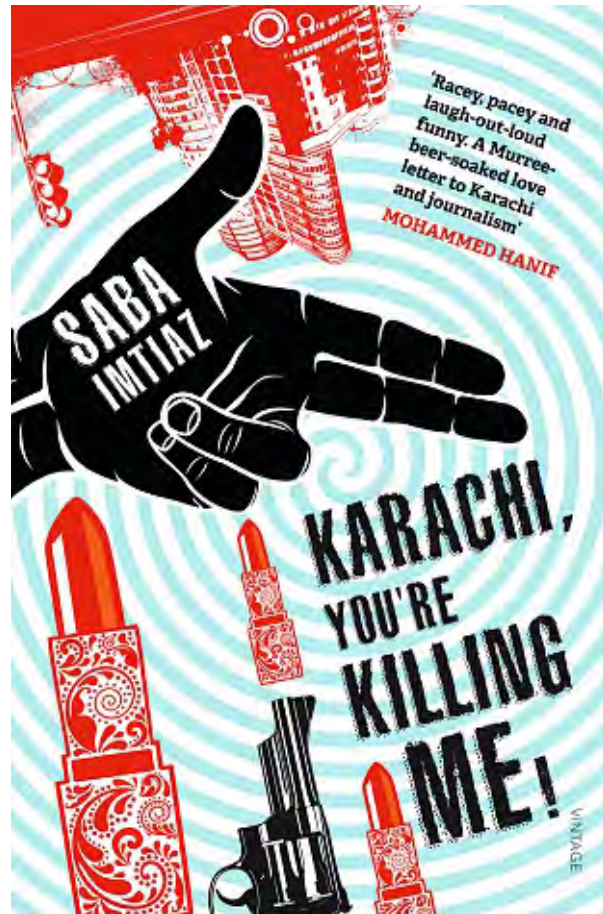
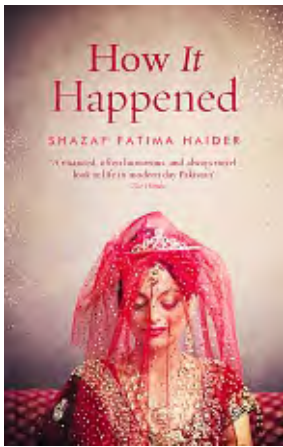


Many of today's young regional language writers, who come from more diverse social, economic and educational backgrounds than their predecessors, have no option but to write in the vernacular as they lack sufficient command of English. "The literature of Indian languages is getting more and more democratised," says Sundaram. "All sections of society — people from rural areas, oppressed castes, minority religions, women, gays and transgenders — are all coming into Tamil literature in a big way, telling new stories, unknown stories."

Muguran, who speaks little English, epitomises this trend. He is expected to return to writing soon. In an important victory for free speech in India, the Madras High Court in July upheld his right to write freely, criticised the officials who put pressure on him to apologise and ruled that his promise to withdraw *One Part Woman* had no legal force. In their conclusion, the judges urged Murugan to be "resurrected to do what he is best at: write". In response, the writer, who had ruled out his resurrection as an author, promised his readers: "I will get up [and write again]." ●

1.  
Perumal Murugan  
(right) at a book  
signing

2.  
A classroom in  
Tamil Nadu



# BOOM OF THE GENRE BUSTERS

Commercial fiction has opened the door to new writers. *By Faiza S Khan*

**A** hush appears to have fallen in the west in the past few years over Pakistani literary fiction in English. It may be true that every now and again a novel by a Pakistani author is published to respectable reviews, but the picture is nothing like 2008-09, when a handful of works by Pakistani writers appeared almost simultaneously — and to great acclaim.

Daniyal Mueenuddin's short story collection *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (for which he became a Pulitzer Prize finalist) was followed by the Booker-longlisted *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* by Mohammed Hanif. Kamila Shamsie's fifth novel, *Burnt Shadows*, was heralded as her finest work to date.

Dubbed the “Pakistani literary boom” — with reference to the magnificent South American literary boom of the 1960s and 1970s — this eruption of Pakistani talent seemed to reflect, in part, the literary west's desire to “understand” culturally a country largely associated with terrorism, religious extremism and other assorted wretchedness. At the same time, there was some

AUTHORS  
ARE FREE OF  
THE NEED TO  
EXPLAIN  
CULTURAL  
CONTEXT

adolescent theorising about how “suffering” produced great literature, which didn't explain why the people producing it were generally the most comfortably off, or why there is still more literary fiction being written in the suburbs of Toronto than in corpse-strewn Karachi.

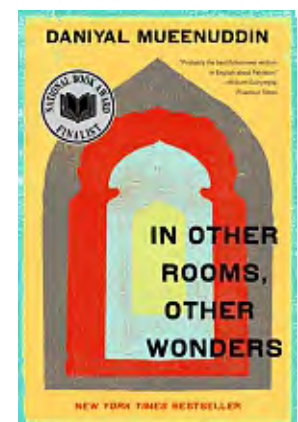
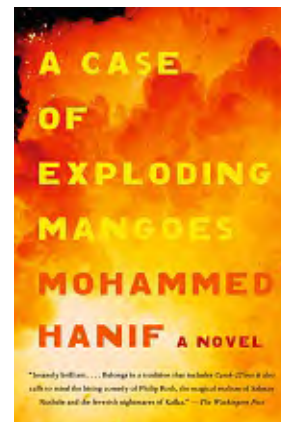
The most important, and commonly overlooked, factor was the growth of publishing in India, where editors keep a constant eye out for Pakistani talent — India's love-hate relationship with its neighbour engenders, among other things, an immense curiosity. Indian publishing houses also distribute books in Pakistan, filling the gaps left by an underdeveloped English-language publishing industry's sketchy and inconsistent efforts there. Western publishing houses have still only published a handful of Pakistani authors — and mostly they want literary fiction and non-fiction.

Second, Indian publishing houses have, in recent years, made another huge leap forward by embracing the lucrative possibilities of commercial fiction. Previously, successful Pakistani authors tended to be privileged graduates of elite universities, writing about the upper echelons of society. Through commercial fiction, Pakistanis writing in English are now in a position to tell stories across a variety of genres and styles, throwing open the doors to a broader cross-section of writers from diverse backgrounds.

In the past few years, we have seen thrillers set in Karachi — perhaps the perfect genre to reflect life in this fast-paced, crime-ridden, gritty but still seductive metropolis — including Omar Shahid Hamid's *The Prisoner* (2013) and *The Spinner's Tale* (2015). Shazaf Fatima Haider's *How It Happened* (2012) took a witty, satirical look at the marriage market, laying into the double standards for men and women and the hypocrisy that goes with them. Saba Imtiaz's 2014 novel *Karachi, You're Killing Me!* — think Bridget Jones with bomb scares — is being adapted as a Bollywood movie. And, published this summer, SS Mausooof's *The Warehouse* is a pulpy neo-noir complete with insurance agents duped by femme fatales.

Commercial fiction is judged, as it should be, on its sales. The Pakistani authors writing it find a great deal more freedom and are able to shed, for example, the burden of representation and the need to explain cultural context to a more global readership. For this, they tend to forgo international critical attention. I think that's a bargain. ●

*Faiza S Khan is the editorial director of Bloomsbury India*







## 'TURKISH FICTION HAS REACHED A PEAK. I DOUBT TRANSLATION COULD DO MUCH OF IT JUSTICE'

about absurdity with a tongue-in-cheek seriousness.

Gursoy Sokmen agrees there has been a literary explosion, pushing writers into clusters of solidarity: publishing journals, forming schools or even gangs. One such is the self-styled “Swaggering Hipsters”, a bunch of mostly male enfants terribles. Well-educated children of middle-class families, they represent a literary pop culture: loud, street-wise, confident with slang. Their sales are robust. One of their stars, Emrah Serbes, shot to fame with Ankara-based crime novels and recently wrote *The King of Taksim Square*, set during the Gezi park protests of 2013.

According to domestic statistics backed by the International Publishers Association, Turkey ranks 12th in the world in terms of ISBN titles and number of books published per capita. Even if these figures are overblown, this is impressive.

Media-savvy authors sell in their hundreds of thousands. The days when distributors used to say that Turkish writers don't sell are long gone.

The downside to this upbeat trend is that the playing field is too level; there is a catch-all of styles, with no clear process of critical selection. “Only the market decides,” says Gursoy Sokmen, and many commentators



complain that the market is dominated by bookstore chains and big publicity budgets.

Despite market pressure, publishers are not shy about seeking new talent. The independent online book review K24, for which I write, ran a feature in July on writers aged 35 and under. Among the dozen authors interviewed, there was not a single story of rejection. All had their first book published within a year, sometimes just months after submitting their manuscripts, even though literary agents are almost unheard of in Turkey.

On the other hand, each writer complained about a dearth of literary criticism. Where are the arbiters of taste? “Critics haven't disappeared — they are less visible, they write on social media and blogs,” Gursoy Sokmen says. But clearly they don't wield the influence they once did. The field is too large. Mainstream cultural journalism is divided and weakened, and social media cannot fill the void entirely.

Although Islamic conservatives have been in power for 14 years and have sought to create their own literary stars — so far without success — cultural hegemony is still in the balance. My writer friend Emre Ayvaz points out there are no grants, no institutions of support for authors in Turkey, public or private. He thinks the race for visibility pushes writers to try to cover everything, to say too much, to be too clever.

An editor at K24, Murat Sevki Coban, agrees. He thinks many writers who are overwhelmed by reality escape into allegory. There is a tendency to encapsulate experience in philosophical platitudes. Sevki Coban and I jokingly called this “aphoristic realism”.

But I want to finish in the positive mood I started with. The east-west divide seems no longer to be the burning existential issue it once was. That postmodern cultural identity crisis, which Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk used to such great effect in his novels, appears to have subsided. “Turkish writers no longer want to see themselves or the country through another's eyes,” Kafaoglu Buke says. “We are tired of identity politics.” Turkish fiction, as it struggles with the endless strangeness of fact, has broken its mould and shed many of its stereotypes. We both wondered if the west can shed some of its own as well. Who knows? The secret might soon be out. ●

*Nilufer Kuyas is a novelist based in Istanbul*

# STRETCHING THE TRUTH

The silencing of influential liberal voices signals that a new cycle of censorship has begun under President Xi Jinping. By *Lucy Hornby*

The truth can seem so strange as to be unbelievable in China these days. Consider some surreal events that have made the headlines in the past year: escalators swallowing people up, sickening miasmas rising up from school running tracks, a sports stadium flooded with water like a giant swimming pool. And dissenters mysteriously vanishing, only to reappear and denounce themselves on state television.

So what is a fiction writer to do in a country where even the daily news reads like magic realism?

“Impossible things happen in China every day,” says Yan Lianke, who was born in an impoverished village in Henan province in 1958. He grew up during Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution, which sought to replace traditional Chinese culture with Maoist ideology.

Yan joined the army as a teenager in order, he says, to get three square meals a day. Now 58, he has become one of China’s bestselling (and most often-banned) authors. “What we see is usually the external truth; the inner truth is usually hard to find — but this inner truth is precisely what literature should grasp,” he says.

Sixty-seven years of Communist rule have provided both foil and fodder for Chinese novelists. Their work is tolerated by the state as long as subjects are tackled obliquely — and routinely banned when they dare to be more direct.

The American sinologist Perry Link coined the metaphor of “the anaconda in the chandelier” to illustrate the dilemma of self-censorship that grips China’s editors, writers and journalists. Conscious always of the beast coiled above them, most internalise the rules of what cannot be written, thus sparing the censor his job, he argued.

The incentives to self-censor are obvious. A writer whose creativity finds expression within (or just outside) the bounds of what is permissible can live very comfortably. Yan believes that Chinese literature pays a price for self-censorship, however, in terms of diminished international influence.

“The reason Chinese literature is paid attention to is because people pay attention to Chinese political

restrictions. That doesn’t mean the literature is good,” he says.

Chinese authors view Link’s anaconda in a different light. They focus on what they can say, rather than on what they cannot. Many writers remember a time when they could be severely punished even for what was in their notebooks. Nowadays, they say, the question is not so much what they are allowed to write but what they may publish.

In response, some aim for what the feminist novelist Xu Xiaobin describes as “a coherent story and a deeper layer for wiser readers”. Her female characters experience history that is very different from the version taught in state-approved textbooks.

Xu, Yan and fellow novelist Yu Hua have each chronicled some of modern China’s most turbulent times in their fiction. All three were teenagers during the tumultuous Cultural Revolution and came of age as writers in the 1980s, when foreign ideas of every stripe began to flood back into China. Their generation was defined by the protests in Tiananmen square in 1989 and the bloody crackdown and years of repression that followed.

They have tested — and sometimes crossed — the boundaries of what censors will allow for most of their writing lives. Over the past three decades, those boundaries have retreated as Chinese society has liberalised at a dizzying speed.

Now a new cycle of tightening has begun. Influential liberal voices in civil society have been silenced or jailed as President Xi Jinping roots out factional opponents in the party and the military. Daring publishers have been prosecuted for corruption. The Chinese internet once hosted a cacophony of voices absent from the staid official media, including witty social critique. Now it is awash with “red posts” by nationalistic leftists who denounce the intellectuals as “rightists”.

The watershed for intellectuals came in October 2014, when artists were ordered to study a speech on literature and art delivered by Xi that consciously harked back to Mao Zedong’s 1942 “Forum on Literature and Art”, which foreshadowed the Communist party’s subsequent war on intellectuals.

ILLUSTRATION: BORIS SEMENIAKO



'CHINESE SOCIETY IS ALWAYS LIKE THIS. YOU LOOSEN, THINGS GET CHAOTIC. YOU TIGHTEN, SOCIETY STARTS TO DIE'

The text of Xi's speech was not made publicly available until late 2015. But when it was, his take on contemporary literature caused many to shiver. The president denounced works that "ridicule the sublime, warp the classics, subvert history or defile the masses and heroic characters" and those wherein "good and evil cannot be distinguished, ugliness replaces beauty and the dark side of society is overemphasised". Instead, he decreed, writers should produce works with "positive energy".

Getting work published under these conditions is a game in which literary daring sometimes wins, thanks to shifts in the political winds or commercial publishers' need for a bestseller. The existence of literate and wealthy Chinese societies just out of reach of the Communist state — Hong Kong is no longer the safe haven it once was, but there is still self-ruled Taiwan — means books banned in China can still find their way to a Chinese audience.

Authors and publishers must now reassess what can and cannot be published in China. Some, like Xu, whose writing relies on dreams and symbolism, are experimenting with genre. She has responded by trying her hand at fantasy. "Right now I am escaping a little," she says. "I have a lot of thoughts I can't write out."

Yu Hua, best known in the west for his 1990s epic *To Live*, believes his recent novella *The Seventh Day* could not be published today (it came out in 2013, just before Xi's tightening began). It is a satirical tale of the sort of social injustice that appears frequently in the daily papers, narrated by a corpse awaiting its own burial.

But Yu is taking the long view. "Chinese society is always like this," he says. "You loosen, things get chaotic. You tighten, society starts to die." The idea that this phase could last even as long as a decade he views as "a little pessimistic".

He recalls that, in 1987, his short stories had just begun to find an audience when all his commissions were cancelled following the fall of the reformist leader Hu Yaobang. In despair, the young writer walked all day across Beijing and back. "I knew if I stayed in the dormitory I could not bear it. I had to keep walking all the time. I felt that I was so close to getting famous and then all of a sudden it was all over."

The lasting impact of the current crackdown will not be on Yu's generation but on a younger crowd coming to grips with its own inner truth in a modern society where politics is often more unpredictable than fiction. Propaganda might be misleading but has a basis in reality, Yan says. "So many things we see on TV seem fake, but that doesn't mean that they don't exist." ●

Additional reporting by Luna Lin and Wan Li



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In 2015 OppenheimerFunds and the Financial Times launched the annual Emerging Voices Awards to provide a global showcase for the most gifted artists of the developing world. The bold talents of last year's three inaugural winners are a source of inspiration for us all.

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Learn more at [emergingvoicesawards.com](http://emergingvoicesawards.com).



## Yuhang Ho

The Emerging Voices Awards inaugural winner in the Film category, Malaysia's Yuhang Ho, has since embarked on an omnibus film in collaboration with four other award-winning Southeast Asian Filmmakers and the Singapore National Gallery. Mr. Ho is serving as a judge for the Film category of the 2016 Emerging Voices Awards.

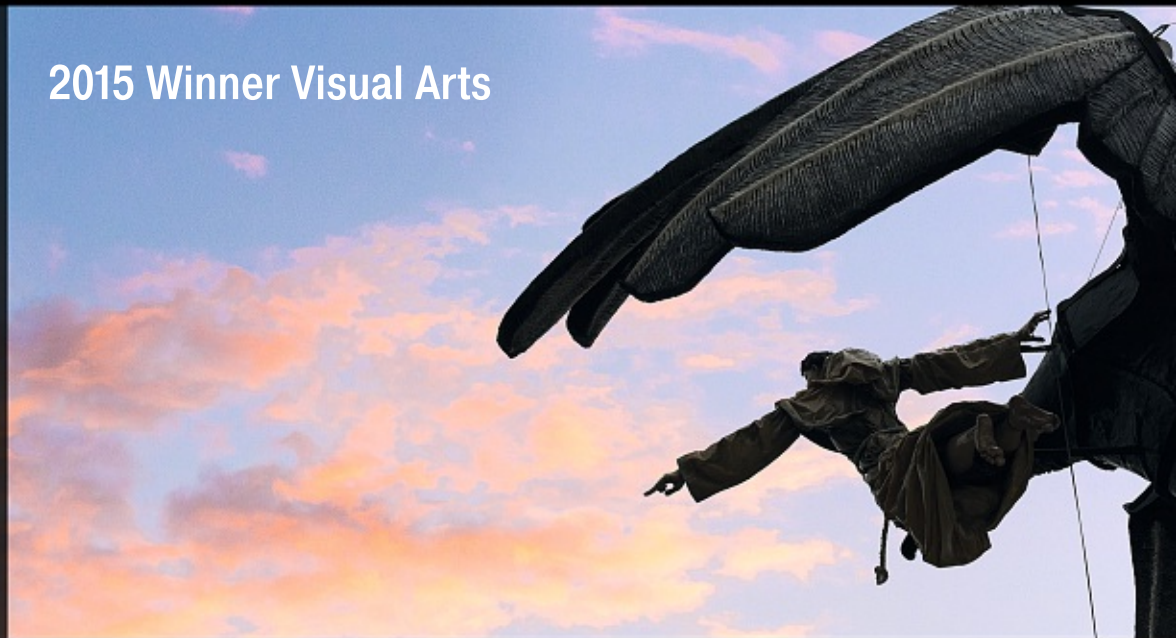
## 2015 Winner Film



## Cristina Planas

Peruvian Cristina Planas' exploration of Christian themes has brought her official censure but also helped her win the very first Emerging Voices Award for Visual Arts. Since winning, she has received an enormous amount of visibility in Peru. Ms. Planas has recently completed two new pieces in her award-winning Vulture series.

## 2015 Winner Visual Arts



## Chigozie Obioma

Since winning the 2015 Emerging Voices Award for Fiction, Chigozie Obioma of Nigeria has seen his first novel, *The Fishermen*, published in 29 countries, translated into 25 languages and named a finalist for the Man Booker Prize.

## 2015 Winner Fiction



FILM LATIN AMERICA / CARIBBEAN





# 'I WANTED TO TELL A FABLE WHERE GOD IS FEMININE'

**Clarissa Campolina**, winner,  
Emerging Voices Film Award

By Joe Leahy  
Photograph by André Vieira

In the city of Belo Horizonte, where Brazilian experimental film director Clarissa Campolina grew up, nothing is permanent. The capital of the state of Minas Gerais (“general mines” in English) climbs a hill that has been hollowed out on one side for its rich deposits of iron ore.

Another once commanding hill, on the road to a friend’s house, one day simply disappeared and last year a mining disaster led to a mud tsunami that polluted one of Brazil’s largest river systems. “This landscape in a certain way gave me the sensation that the world had already ended, that we are already dealing with the end of time,” Campolina says.

The general sense of devastation in Minas Gerais presented Campolina with the idea for her latest short film, *Solon*, a work that has solidified her reputation as one of the country’s most creative directors, particularly among those outside the creative hubs of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Rather than using the destruction of Minas Gerais to create a tale of cataclysm, she turns it into the background for a creation myth. In a kind of moving ►



PHOTO: DEAGOSTINI/GETTY IMAGES

installation that combines fine art and film, a creature emerges from a burning, arid landscape, spouts water and eventually turns into a woman.

We meet to discuss her latest work at Rio de Janeiro’s Museum of Art, a landmark in the city’s beautified Centro district. “I never want to stay in my comfort zone — I always want to experiment with something new,” Campolina says. “I think that with *Solon* I wanted to tell a fable of the reconstruction of the world, where God is feminine, not masculine, with a body that forms part of the landscape and vice versa.”

Born in 1979, Campolina got her start in cinema in 1997 as an assistant director after studying communications. She worked with Rafael Conde, a director and professor of fine arts at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, before becoming a partner in Teia, a collective production outfit, between 2002 and 2014. She has since founded her own company, Anavilhana.

Campolina has made five short films and one feature, *Swirl*, which she co-directed with Helvécio Marins. It had its premiere at the 2011 Venice film festival, where it won the Interfilm Award.

Several of Campolina’s works have experimented with a documentary style, using ordinary people and

their stories to build a narrative that blends fiction with dreamy reality.

In *Swirl*, Bastú, an 81-year-old widow starts a new life after the loss of her husband. She is played by Maria Sebastian Martins Álvaro, a resident of the Minas Gerais *sertão* (back country) along the São Francisco river. “Time doesn’t stop — it’s us who stop,” Bastú remarks in the film, one of many of her characteristically blunt observations.

Working with non-actors is rewarding, Campolina says. But it can take time — *Swirl* took six years to film.

She uses a similar tactic in *Stretch*, another partnership with Marins, in which the two directors follow a central character, Libério, as he retraces a 2,300-km journey along Brazil’s highways that he had made eight years previously. “The journey is a reconstruction of a journey — it could be fiction. We filmed the points along the way that he remembered,” Campolina says.

Working in partnerships has been a big part of Campolina’s work, she says. Having a second opinion helps to “divert a bit some of my obsessions and keep me in check.”

“I like the sense of exchange very much,” she adds. “Having someone else’s opinion helps me to hone my own perspective.” ●

**Mining**

Campolina took inspiration from the landscape of her home state of Minas Gerais



**1.**  
Camilo Restrepo discovered a new Colombia after years away from the country

**2.**  
Tania Cattebeke explored death through the eyes of a child

## Tania Cattebeke, runner-up *Olia*

Tania Cattebeke may be the only film-maker who has arranged for a cast member to play himself without him knowing it. *Olia* is inspired by her family's struggle to explain to her nephew the death of his nanny — "My sister told him that it was a long trip" — and the resulting film is a personal exploration of death, seen through the eyes of a child.

Using only black and white stills and strong audio production techniques, *Olia* tells the story of the aftermath of the nanny's death. "One day I returned from university and found my mother at home crying because my nephew had told her the night before that his nanny had been calling him with a bell."

The sound of the bell both spooked Cattebeke and sparked her imagination. "That event was the inspiration for *Olia*," she says. With no budget, Cattebeke cast her family in the production; her mother and nephew took leading roles. This presented its own problems, especially when it came to her nephew. "It was very difficult because when we were shooting I didn't want him to understand that the film was about him," she says. "He still hasn't seen [it] because I think it would scare him if he knew."

With little in the way of a film industry in her native Paraguay, Cattebeke, a former psychology student, started making short films on her own before embarking on a full-time career as a cinematographer in 2013. She has since been recognised for her work at international festivals and says she hopes this might help her win a scholarship to go to film school.

"Paraguay is starting to tell stories with film, but this is new for my country," she says. "We don't have a cinematography industry here yet, but we have so many stories to tell."

**Rose Carr**

## Camilo Restrepo, runner-up *Impressions of a War*

"I belong to a generation of Colombians who were strongly affected by the most violent years of the conflict and who bear the stigmata of the war," says Camilo Restrepo. Born in 1975 in Medellín, Colombia, Restrepo explores the pervasive effects of a 50-year-long internecine war on a society that has been ravaged by guerrilla groups, drug traffickers, military and paramilitary forces, and mafia-style gangs. "The country has turned into a battlefield, leading to a climate of generalised violence gradually settling across the whole of society," he says.

The visible traces of the conflict have been etched into the landscape, in the cityscapes and on the battlefields, and these physical wounds form the visual backdrop of Restrepo's *Impressions of a War*. "My goal was to capture visible traces of the violence in the daily lives of the people who live in that country," he says.

Restrepo has lived and worked in Paris since 1999. Since then, "memories, encounters, telephone conversations and the media have been my substitutes for living [in Colombia] day to day", he says. "Over time, a different country from the one I used to know has taken shape for me." His foray into film-making started in response to revisiting Colombia, and contrasting "the recomposed Colombia in my mind with the country's reality".

Restrepo is a member of the film-makers' collective L'Abominable, an experimental film lab. *Impressions of a War* was shot on 16mm film, a decision that imposed certain restrictions on the process. "I create the image mentally as I am manipulating it physically, and my films evolve constantly in response to technical decisions," says Restrepo.

**Rose Carr**







# HAVANA IN ON THE ACTION

Hollywood producers are rushing to shoot in a newly open Cuba but local film-makers fear the money brought in will not be reinvested in the island's own industry. *By John Paul Rathbone*

When Hollywood's Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences asked Jorge Perugorría to become a member this January, the 50-year-old Cuban film star was delighted but perplexed. "I had to ask around if I was allowed to join. I didn't think it would be possible," he says. "Then I had to ask the Academy if they could send me physical DVDs — Cuban internet connections are too slow for downloads."

Perugorría, the "Johnny Depp of Havana" or "Pichi", as he is nicknamed, is best known internationally for his lead role in the 1993 Oscar-nominated *Strawberry & Chocolate*, the story of a friendship between an orthodox Communist and a homosexual artist. His bemusement at the Academy's membership invitation reflects the ideologically ambiguous, legally uncertain and woefully underfunded state of Cuban film. Two years into the restoration of diplomatic ties between Havana and Washington, the industry is opening up, albeit haltingly. "*No es fácil* — it's not easy," he says.

Claudia Claviño, 33, the producer of the 2012 surprise hit *Juan of the Dead*, a darkly comic Havana-based zombie flick, is bolder in her assessment of the state of Cuban film-making. "It's bad," she says.

For decades, Cuban film was at the forefront of official revolutionary culture. One of Fidel Castro's first acts after his revolutionary government took power in 1959 was to create the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (the ICAIC), whose express purpose was to develop a powerful mass communication medium, albeit at the expense of independent voices, which were suppressed under the Communist dictatorship.

Nearly 60 years later, the situation has changed somewhat. US production companies have arrived. Local independent producers and directors, who sprang up in the 1990s as digital technology made film-making more accessible and state funding ran out, are becoming more established. Ideological red lines have blurred.

"It's curious: in the same breath a Cuban might say, 'Viva Fidel!' and then 'This is a very f\*\*ked-up

## Rolling into town

On the Havana set of *Fast 8*, the latest in the US action series *The Fast and the Furious*

PHOTO: MAMBO PHOTO/GETTY IMAGES

'YOU CAN OWN A RESTAURANT, YOU CAN OWN A GUEST HOUSE, BUT YOU CAN'T HAVE A LEGALLY REGISTERED LOCAL FILM COMPANY'

country,” observes Marcel Beltrán, 31, an independent film-maker based in Havana.

Beltrán's short film *The Cloud* premiered at this year's Miami Film Festival, in another softening of traditional enmities between the US and Cuba, while his feature-length documentary on Chinolope, a one-armed Cuban photographer who worked for Life and Time magazines, explores such tensions further. Chinolope was born in poverty and went on to be awarded revolutionary hero status, photographing Castro and the rebels in the Sierra Maestra. He was later pushed aside by the government after he sided with homosexual writers and other artists.

Like The Rolling Stones, who played a gig in Havana in March, and French fashion house Chanel, which two months later turned the Paseo del Prado boulevard into a catwalk, Hollywood has long been seduced by the island's forbidden exoticism. That interest has become manifest since new US Treasury regulations, published in January, allowed American production companies to shoot scripted shows on the island — something previously illegal under the economic embargo.

The Showtime comedy series *House of Lies* was shot in Cuba this year, as was action-fantasy *Transformers: The Last Knight*. Actor and director Ethan Hawke has stated his intention to scout for locations in Cuba for an adaptation of *Camino Real*, a Tennessee Williams play set in a dead-end desert town. Most dramatic of all, the action series *The Fast and the Furious* shot its eighth instalment, *Fast 8*, in Havana in May. This was a massive logistical exercise. In co-operation with the Cuban army, the shoot involved at least two firsts: a US company hiring a helicopter to fly over the city and obtaining permission to use pyrotechnics during the filming.



2.

Whether this influx will be a boon or a bane for local film-making, though, is open to question. “I am all for US film-makers coming here if it helps cinema and Cuba's economy generally,” says Claviño. “But it would be good if the ICAIC reinvested some of those *Fast and Furious* dollars into local film. There's no sign of that.”

With little private or public money available locally, Cuban films are invariably co-productions funded by foreign sources — to date, largely from Europe or Latin America. *Viva*, a touching drama released this year about a drag queen son and his boxer father (played by Perugorria) was written, directed and funded by Irish movie-makers. US-based independents, meanwhile, can turn to crowdfunding, as they did with *The Oldies*, a bittersweet documentary about ageing that was filmed in Santa Clara province.

For Cuban film-makers, though, there is little sign the country's tentative opening-up has had many benefits, although it has generated income for independents with a sideline in production services for foreign commercials and music video producers. “We are in a cultural recession,” says Carlos Lechuga, 33, director of the prize-winning 2012 film *Melaza*, about a destitute former sugar-producing town. “There was hope that when the US came, cultural life would get better. It hasn't happened.”

Lechuga says his European co-producer called *Melaza's* budget “embarrassingly small”, while Beltrán shot his film “with a zero budget”. Budgets aside, they also still have to turn to the ICAIC for script approval, shooting permits and cinema distribution.

It is an unusual, sometimes uneasy relationship. Some worry that while the government opens its arms to Hollywood, it will shut out independent film-makers who address more sensitive themes. Complicating matters for the film industry is its lack of formal legal status. “You can own a restaurant, you can own a guest house, but you can't have a legally registered local film company,” bemoans Claviño, who is lobbying for legal change.

Further challenges range from the lack of credit cards — the financing mainstay of so many first films — to

1. Marcel Beltrán
2. Claudia Claviño
3. Carlos Lechuga
4. Jorge Perugorria on set in Havana



1.





‘WE ARE IN A CULTURAL RECESSION. THERE WAS HOPE THAT WHEN THE US CAME, CULTURAL LIFE WOULD GET BETTER. IT HASN’T HAPPENED’

rundown cinemas that limit audiences, poor internet speeds and, most recently, sharply rising costs.

“It’s a universal worry,” says Paul Federbush of the Sundance Institute, a US organisation that supports emerging film-makers and is running a series of film workshops in Cuba for Cubans. “The US influx has pushed up Cuban production costs.”

Like the country as a whole, the Cuban film industry is in transition. The ICAIC, in common with other state institutions, is struggling to redefine its role, and the novelty and allure of Cuba as a backdrop will eventually fade. Film-makers will therefore need to develop storylines with more universal themes if they are to flourish. Meanwhile, local film-makers face many of the same problems as independents everywhere — but with some added difficulties. “You can always find actors under 17 or over 50,” says Lechuga. “Between those years, though, it’s hard: almost everyone has emigrated — or wants to leave.” ●



## The sleuth who shines a light on Cuban foibles

Mario Conde is slovenly, often drunk and always hard-up. He is a womaniser, prone to doubt and self-examination, a police detective who would rather be a writer and an anti-hero who feels solidarity with “writers, crazy people and drunkards”.

He is also the island’s best-loved fictional character and the creation of Leonardo Padura, Cuba’s most famous living novelist. “I think of myself as being a bit like Conde,” says Cuban actor Jorge Perugorria, to shrieks of laughter from his family.

Conde is unique in Cuba in that, through him, Padura is able to describe Havana’s multiple and obvious failings (the crumbling houses, the lifts that don’t work, the Scotch whisky that only the well-connected can afford, the dirty streets) in a politically acceptable way.

Four Conde novels — the so-called Havana Quartet — have been adapted for the screen, in a European/Cuban co-production directed by Spain’s Félix Viscarret due to premiere this year. Hollywood actor and producer Antonio Banderas has optioned the rights for a mooted English-language television series.

An even hotter ticket, though, promises to be the eventual adaptation of Padura’s masterpiece, *The Man Who Loved Dogs*, his prize-winning novel that tells the story of exiled Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky’s assassin, who ended his days in Havana. “That book is a very sought-after project,” says Lia Rodríguez, the Cuban co-producer of the Conde films. **JPR**

# FOOTPRINTS OF WAR

As half a century of violence comes to an end, the country's film-makers are shifting their focus to what will be left behind. By *Andres Schipani*

After five decades of internecine bloodletting the civil war has finally ended. Now, more than ever, Colombian film-makers feel it is their duty to examine the lacerations, to reflect on half a century of conflict that led to 225,000 deaths and displaced almost 7m people from their homes and land.

"It is important to talk about the war, of what happened, what it has left us, its protagonists. Because if we don't talk about all of that, we cannot look at the mistakes we made and we won't be able to heal the wounds," explains Jhonny Hendrix, a Colombian film-maker and double award winner at the Cartagena film festival.

After almost four years of peace talks, the Colombian government and negotiators from the left-wing Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc) recently signed a deal to end the fratricidal war, which over the years has involved these two opposing sides, as well as right-wing paramilitary groups and drugs gangs.

"This is a moment of healing, in which one has to fill one's heart with hope, look back at what happened in order not to repeat it," Hendrix says. "Cinema is the place that allows all of us to saturate ourselves with what we don't want to see any more, in order not to do it again."

Hendrix recently finished the script of *The Troop* about a sergeant in the Colombian army who is kidnapped by Farc guerrillas, escapes after an air strike and returns to his old life, only to find that his family has abandoned him. He realises he hates war more than anything else. "It is a metaphor that shows that war only produces losses," says Hendrix.

This war has been an overarching theme of Colombian cinema since 1965, roughly a year after the beginning of the civil strife, when Julio Luzardo's *The River of the Tombs* was released. Notwithstanding, argues Pedro Adrián Zuluaga, a Colombian film critic, "it has evolved; now it is about the footprints left behind by the war".

That is patent in Felipe Guerrero's *Dark Beast*, acclaimed at this year's Guadalajara film festival, about three silenced women fleeing their war-torn lives. Filmed in Colombia's lush Magdalena Medio region, these women — one whose village has been ravaged, one who has been raped by what could either be a guerrilla or a paramilitary fighter and one who was a combatant who buried corpses and provides sexual distractions

to her commander — escape this "dark beast" that is the war. "The focus is the suffering of these women so as to put the voiceless victims at the centre," says Guerrero. "The radars of Colombian film-makers are now set on the impact of violence."

The preoccupation is understandable given that this generation of Colombian film-makers have all been affected in some way by their country's violent recent history. They range from Ciro Guerra, director of the Oscar-nominated *Embrace of the Serpent*, who is now exploring the origins of drug-fuelled violence in the upcoming *Birds of Passage*, to the lesser known Sebastián Mejía who, with co-director Alice Tabard, has released *They Return*, a heart-wrenching account of forced displacement.

As the peace deal, which was reached in Cuba in August, faces stiff opposition from Colombia's conservative sectors, Mejía believes it is "crucial for these movies to reach those who do not trust this peace". He adds: "I have hopes based on what's happening in Havana, but movies should be a mirror of what still needs to be solved in Colombia."

To do that, directors should keep bringing human stories to the forefront, says Claudia Triana, director of Colombia's film development fund, Proimágenes. "Film-makers have the challenge of trying to humanise this peace, and by humanising stories from all sides of the armed conflict they can promote a dialogue," she says.

Even animated films are making war and reconciliation their focus. *Unbreakable Boy* by Anamaría Castiblanco tells the story, due on screen in 2018, of a child who loses his father and one of his legs after stepping on a landmine, but who nevertheless becomes a cycling champion and forgives his estranged uncle-turned-trainer, who placed the mine.

Landmines were a central feature of Colombia's war. The country was second only to Afghanistan for the number of casualties by landmines in 2014, as recorded by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Last year, the warring sides agreed to clean up the battlefields.

Castiblanco started writing the story when the Colombian peace talks started. "Now, we are in a moment which inspires us to make these kinds of films," she says, adding: "This is the moment of turning a new leaf and telling stories in which the central theme is forgiveness. We already have many movies about the conflict, so here we are looking at the post conflict." ●

A young child with dark skin and curly hair is lying in a hammock. The child is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved shirt and white shorts. The hammock has a dark brown base with a colorful striped border in shades of orange, red, and blue. The background is a wall made of horizontal wooden planks. The lighting is soft and natural, creating a calm and intimate atmosphere.

'THIS IS THE MOMENT OF  
TURNING A NEW LEAF AND  
TELLING STORIES IN WHICH  
THE CENTRAL THEME IS  
FORGIVENESS'

**Suffering in silence**

*Dark Beast* focuses on the voiceless victims of Colombia's violence, according to director Felipe Guerrero

# BORDER STORIES

As the thriller *Desierto* takes aim at Donald Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric, directors from all over the world are training their lenses on 'the most absurd border on earth'.

By Stephen Woodman



1.  
Jonás Cuarón  
2.  
*Desierto* featuring  
Gael García Bernal

**A**londra Hidalgo sees her first lead role in a feature film as a political project as much as a personal one. The Mexican actress stars alongside Gael García Bernal, one of Mexico's most recognisable faces, in *Desierto*, a thriller about a group of migrants stalked by a racist American sniper as they attempt to steal across the US-Mexico border.

*Desierto* is due for release in the US on October 14, just three weeks before the presidential election. Promoting it, the cast and crew have brought the film's political subtext to the surface. At times, *Desierto*'s publicity campaign has seemed like an attack on Republican party nominee Donald Trump, whose diatribes against illegal Mexican immigrants have been denounced at home and abroad. "It's important to speak out against him because his stance is contagious," says Hidalgo.

*Desierto*'s Mexican director, Jonás Cuarón, whose previous credits include co-writer on his father Alfonso's Hollywood blockbuster *Gravity*, has made the link with Trump explicitly. The movie's international trailer begins with a voiceover of parts of Trump's June 2015 speech about Mexican immigrants. "They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime, they're rapists... and it's gotta stop," Trump intones, as we watch the vigilante gunman shoot at the men and women running and hiding in the desert.

At a press conference, Cuarón encouraged Mexicans to upload ironic photos of themselves and their families to Facebook and Instagram holding placards bearing Trump's epithets "Rapist", "Criminal" or "I'm bringing drugs". He promised to print them and send them to television networks.

Mexico has a long tradition of cinema about immigration — one that has grown in popularity over the past decade. But foreign directors have also made powerful films about Mexican migrants. Iranian-born Rafi Pitts' *Soy Nero*, for example, was nominated for the Golden Bear award at the 2016 Berlin film festival but does not yet have a UK or US release date. The film tells the story of Nero Maldonado, a young Mexican who enlists in the US army as a "green card soldier" in an attempt to secure citizenship. Although he is sent to



fight in the Middle East, the film implies he will become one of the many foreign-born veterans to be deported, despite having served in the US military.

Pitts says he believes the US and Mexico share "the most absurd border" on earth. A wall, he says, is an unbecoming monument in a nation founded by immigrants. "People don't want to help immigrants any more," he says. "Walls are being built all over the place."

Similarly, British director Marc Silver has looked to the US-Mexico border. His 2013 documentary *Who is Dayani Cristal?* also featured García Bernal, who plays himself hitching a ride on the trans-Mexico freight train migrants call "La Bestia" (The Beast). His aim is to trace the movements of an unknown man whose body was found 20 minutes by car from the city of Tucson, Arizona.

Silver's film focuses on the dangerous desert corridor that migrants increasingly traverse in an effort to avoid tightened security along the traditional routes. Before 2000, typically 12 bodies were found in the Arizona desert every year. Between 2001 and 2014, the annual average rose to 165, many of which are never identified. "I thought about the universal story of the re-humanisation of a skeleton," Silver says. "It just happened to take place at the US-Mexico border."

The greatest threats to migrants crossing to the US can come from fellow Latinos. In August 2010, the Zetas



## 'IT'S IMPORTANT TO GIVE A FACE TO MIGRANTS AND SHOW WE ARE NOT ALL RAPISTS OR DRUG TRAFFICKERS'

drug cartel murdered 72 migrants pulled from intercity buses in San Fernando, a small city in north-east Mexico. The discovery of mass graves containing 193 bodies in the same region the following year emphasised the vulnerability of migrants in Mexico. The victims were mostly Central Americans on their way to Texas.

Then there is the threat of sexual violence: Amnesty International estimated in 2010 that as many as six in 10 migrant women and girls are raped. In 2014, Fusion, a news organisation, raised that estimate to eight in 10.

Spanish-born Mexican Diego Quemada-Díez, who directed *The Golden Dream* (2013), travelled on La Bestia as part of his research, experiencing many of the events depicted in the film, including having a gun held to his head by a gangster. The film tells the story of two Guatemalan teenagers trying to reach the US, accompanied by a Tzotzil Mayan boy who speaks no Spanish.

Yet while his film is politically engaged, Quemada-Díez — who received the “A Certain Talent” award at Cannes for the film — says he was primarily drawn to the topic for artistic reasons. He interviewed more than 600

migrants in Mexico and came to see their potential as protagonists. “They were risking their lives to help their families. It was a heroic journey,” he says.

Alejandro Solalinde, a Catholic priest who runs a migrant shelter in southern Mexico and appears as himself in both *Who is Dayani Cristal?* and *The Golden Dream*, shares this view. He says US society is “tired out by individualism”. Migrants, on the other hand, “bring a sense of inclusion materialist, consumerist societies lack”.

Evil and misfortune are not the focus of every immigration film — family comedies have also engaged with the challenges of journeying north to start a new life. In *Instructions Not Included* (2013), Mexican actor Eugenio Derbez plays a carefree womaniser who crosses the border to return a baby to her mother in Los Angeles.

Audiences took to the film’s lighthearted tone — it is the highest grossing Mexican movie in the US ever, having netted \$44m at the box office. “For many years we wanted to portray darkness,” says Derbez, who also directed and co-wrote the film. “Watching a Mexican movie meant watching pain and poverty.”

Now, though, with Trump’s views gaining support in the US, Derbez believes it is time to present positive immigration stories. “It’s important to give a face to migrants and show that we are not all rapists or drug traffickers,” he says. ●



## BEYOND THE FAVELAS

A leading light in Brazil's new wave of directors, Daniel Ribeiro has won international recognition by exploring universal themes from angst to sexuality. By *Joe Leahy*  
 Photograph by *Luiz Maximiano*

The nucleus of São Paulo's avant garde cinema scene is in the city's historic Centro district, a few blocks from where the sprawling metropolis was founded by Jesuit missionaries in the 16th century. A rickety pre-war lift takes you to the modest office of Daniel Ribeiro, one of Brazil's new wave of directors, known for giving universal themes a 21st-century twist. Indeed, the whole building is a hub for people working in film, with four floors occupied by directors and producers, Ribeiro says.

"Most of the people here are friends; we all know each other," says Ribeiro, friendly and relaxed. At 34, he is one of a generation of mostly millennial directors spawned by a system of state-administered funding for cinema that is changing the face of Brazilian film.

Exploring subjects that range from sexuality to middle-class angst, they represent a departure from their predecessors, who gave viewers Brazil's favela thrillers, including *City of God* (2002) and *Elite Squad* (2007), and more traditional representations of inequality and rural poverty, such as *Central Station* (1998).

The new generation is also winning recognition on the international stage. Other rising Brazilian film-makers include João Paulo Miranda Maria (34), Eryk Rocha (38) and Kleber Mendonça Filho (47), all of whom were honoured at this year's Cannes film festival.



## 'I INTEND TO TELL STORIES ANYONE WATCHING WILL THINK, "YEAH, I CAN IDENTIFY WITH THAT"'

forced to care for one of the men's 10-year-old brother, creating a complicated situation in which the three must cohabitate. The film won the best short film prize for the Generation 14plus jury at the 2008 Berlin film festival.

"Before, the type of cinema that was successful, especially internationally, had this eye towards inequality," Ribeiro says. "Today, that's no longer necessarily the case."

The cause of this change, he says, lies in the rise of Brazil's left-wing president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who ruled for eight years between 2003 and 2011. Through a special cinema fund, the Fundo Setorial do Audiovisual, created by the Lula da Silva government, the industry has become somewhat self-sufficient. The government collects taxes from the industry, which go into the fund. The fund then lends money back to makers of films and television series, who repay the loans if their productions make a profit.

"They invest in various lines of film-making — those with commercial potential, which end up sustaining the fund, and those that will win prestige overseas," says Ribeiro. The increase in funding has led to a steady rise in the number of films, which now come from a greater range of states in Brazil, from Rio Grande do Sul in the south to Amazonas in the north. This breadth of field has in turn fostered a diversity of themes.

"When you had 40 films being made per year, or 30 films, you had less incentive for the producers who finance those films to take risks. When that number rises to 100 or more, you are opening up the game," Ribeiro says.

The risk is that more conservative future governments could cut this funding, Brazil's economic crisis adding pressure. "In principle, it would not appear sensible to destroy, especially during a moment of economic crisis, an area that generates jobs and revenue," he says.

Coming from a developing country is not a serious obstacle to winning recognition overseas for Brazilian films. While Hollywood remains dominant internationally, Brazilian films get showings at film festivals and social media help to spread their popularity. More important is the overall profile of the country abroad. When Brazil's economy was growing rapidly a few years ago, curiosity about the country increased, stimulating interest in its cinema. "Being a developing country is not a fundamental problem," Ribeiro says.

Ribeiro wrote his university thesis on how the portrayal of gay characters in Brazilian film has evolved from stereotypical representations to explorations of themes of human interest through characters who happen to be gay. "This is what I did with *The Way He Looks*," he says. "While the story shows a boy who is in love with another boy, the theme is really first love."

Next, he is working on a film about a male and female transgender couple who began dating when they were adolescents but grow apart after she enters university and develops other interests. "I could be doing a story about transsexuals," Ribeiro says, "but I instead intend to tell a story that any person watching it will think: 'Yeah, I can identify with that — you leave school and the world opens up and everything changes.'" ●

### Out from the crowd

Daniel Ribeiro, pictured in São Paulo, tells stories of ordinary people in neutral settings

But few represent the new wave better than Ribeiro, whose films tell the stories of ordinary people in neutral settings that could almost be anywhere in the world. The plot is revealed through engaging dialogue, rather than the shock and awe of violence or poverty. Take the dialogue from an early scene from his first feature film, *The Way He Looks* (2014).

The female lead, an adolescent schoolgirl called Giovanna, is talking by the pool with her friend Léo.

"And what about you, don't you worry about that?" she asks.

"About what?" responds Léo.

"About passing your entire life without kissing someone?"

"Who's going to want to kiss me?" retorts Léo.

It could be a scene from any teenage coming-of-age drama. But Léo is blind and his first kiss eventually comes from a male classmate, Gabriel.

The film won multiple awards, including two at the 2014 Berlin film festival — the Teddy Award for the best feature film on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender topics and the Fipresci jury Panorama prize.

The feature builds on Ribeiro's earlier short films, *I Don't Want to Go Back Alone* (2010), about the same characters, and *You, Me and Him* (2007), in which two gay young men are contemplating moving in together when the parents of one of them die. They are then

# JUDGING PANEL, EMERGING VOICES AWARDS 2016

## Justin Leverenz

In addition to being director of emerging market equities at OppenheimerFunds, Justin Leverenz is portfolio manager of the Oppenheimer Developing Markets Fund and Oppenheimer Emerging Markets Innovators Fund. Leverenz lived and worked in China for more than a decade, and his interest in emerging markets extends well beyond investing. That interest led him to establish the Emerging Voices awards to recognise exceptional talent in literature, film and visual in emerging market countries.

## Michael Skapinker

Michael Skapinker is an associate editor at the Financial Times and writes a weekly column on business and society. He joined the FT in 1986 and has held many positions, including Weekend editor, management editor and Special Reports editor. He was born in South Africa and educated at Witwatersrand and Cambridge universities. He was awarded the Work Foundation Members' Award for his contribution to the understanding of working life in 2003, was named WorkWorld Media Awards columnist of the year in 2008, Editorial Intelligence Awards top business commentator in 2012 and top business ethics commentator in 2015.



- 1. Justin Leverenz
- 2. Michael Skapinker 3. El Anatsui
- 4. Iwona Blazwick 5. Antonia Carver
- 6. Jan Dalley 7. Koyo Kouoh 8. Xiaolu Guo
- 9. Sunil Khilnani 10. Lorien Kite
- 11. YiYun Li



## ART

## El Anatsui

Throughout El Anatsui's 40-year career as a sculptor and teacher — he was professor of sculpture and departmental head at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka — he has addressed numerous social, political and historical concerns, using a diverse range of media and processes. His sculptures have been collected by the British Museum, London, the Centre Pompidou, Paris, the de Young Museum, San Francisco, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and many others. In 2014, he was made an honorary Royal Academician and elected into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

## Iwona Blazwick

Iwona Blazwick has been director of the Whitechapel Gallery in London since 2001, leading its expansion in 2009. Previously she worked at London's Tate Modern gallery, co-curating the inaugural collection displays and Turbine Hall projects. Blazwick has served on juries for numerous art awards, including the Turner Prize in the UK and Venice Biennale Golden Lion event. She has worked as an independent curator in Europe and Japan and has written on contemporary artists from around the world. She is chair of the Mayor of London's cultural strategy group and was awarded an OBE for services to art in 2007.

## Antonia Carver

Antonia Carver was director of Art Dubai from 2010 to 2016. This August she became the first director of Art Jameel, an arts foundation that supports artists and arts infrastructure throughout the wider Middle East, south Asia and beyond. Based in the United Arab Emirates since 2001, Carver has written on Middle Eastern art and film, and edited books and journals. In 2004, she joined travel magazine Bidoun as an editor and later became the director of the Middle Eastern arts organisation's projects division.



6.



7.



## Jan Dalley

Jan Dalley has been arts editor of the Financial Times since 2004. She joined the FT in 1999 as literary editor. Previously, she was literary editor of the Independent on Sunday for eight years, and before becoming a journalist she worked in publishing. She has judged literary prizes including the Booker Prize, the Whitbread Book awards, the Hawthornden Prize and the Encore Prize. She wrote the book *Black Hole: Money, Myth and Empire*, a study of the Black Hole of Calcutta, published by Penguin in 2006.

## Koyo Kouoh

Koyo Kouoh is the founding artistic director of RAW Material Company, a centre for the arts in Dakar, Senegal, and the curator of the 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair in London and New York. Besides maintaining a theoretical, exhibition and residency programme at RAW Material Company, she works as a curator, adviser and judge internationally. In collaboration with curator and writer Rasha Salti, Kouoh is currently working on "Saving Bruce Lee: African and Arab Cinema in the Era of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy", a research, exhibition and publication project. She lives and works in Dakar and occasionally in Basel, Switzerland.

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### FICTION

## Xiaolu Guo

Novelist and film-maker Xiaolu Guo's career spans both China and Britain. Her novels have been translated into more than 26 languages, including *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary For Lovers* (shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction) and *I Am China* (longlisted for the Bailey's Women's Prize for Fiction). In 2013, she was named as one of Granta's Best of Young British Novelists. She has also directed several award-winning films, including *She, a Chinese*, *UFO in Her Eyes* and *Once Upon a Time Proletarian*. Guo is an honorary professor at the University of Nottingham in the UK. She lives in London and Berlin.

## Sunil Khilnani

Sunil Khilnani is director of the India Institute at King's College London. He was Starr Foundation Professor at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advance International Studies in Washington DC, and director of south Asia studies. He was also professor of politics at Seikei University, Tokyo, and a fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge. His publications include *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Postwar France* (1993),

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*The Idea of India* (7th edn, 2016) and *Incarnations: India in 50 Lives* (2016), which accompanied his series on BBC Radio 4.

## Lorien Kite

Lorien Kite has been books editor of the Financial Times since 2011, overseeing the FT Weekend Review section, reporting on developments in the literary world and interviewing writers. He served on the jury panel for the 2014 Samuel Johnson prize for non-fiction. Kite joined the FT in 2000 after a period working in publishing. He has also worked on the FT's comment and analysis pages.

## Yiyun Li

Yiyun Li grew up in Beijing and moved to the US in 1996. Her debut collection, *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*, won several awards, including the PEN/Hemingway Award and the Guardian First Book Award. Her books have been translated into more than 20 languages, and two stories from her debut collection were made into feature films. She is a contributing editor to the Brooklyn-based literary magazine *A Public Space* and has served on literary jury panels, including the Man Booker International Prize and the National Book Award. She lives in Oakland, California. ➤

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## JUDGES

### Elif Shafak

Elif Shafak writes in both English and Turkish and has published 14 books, nine of which are novels, including *The Bastard of Istanbul*, *The Forty Rules of Love* and her genre-crossing memoir *Black Milk*. Her books have been translated into more than 40 languages. Shafak blends western and eastern traditions of storytelling, bringing out the voices of women, minorities, subcultures and immigrants. Her works draw on different cultures and cities, and reflect a strong interest in history, philosophy, culture, mysticism, intercultural dialogue and gender equality. Shafak is a political scientist and a commentator. She lives in London with her two children.



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1. Elif Shafak
2. Nigel Andrews
3. Yuhang Ho
4. Claudia Llosa
5. Mira Nair
6. Pablo Trapero



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## FILM

### Nigel Andrews

Nigel Andrews has been the Financial Times' film critic since 1973. He has been a regular broadcaster for BBC radio and is author of the books *True Myths: The Life and Times of Arnold Schwarzenegger* and *Jaws*. Andrews has twice been named Critic of the Year in British Press awards. He is a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

### Yuhang Ho

Yuhang Ho won an FT/OppenheimerFunds Emerging Voices Award in 2015 for his short film *Trespassed*. He was born in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. He studied engineering at Iowa State University in the US and worked in television production on his return to Malaysia. His debut feature *Min* in 2003 won the Special Jury Prize at the Festival des 3 Continents in Nantes. His latest film is *Mrs K*.

### Claudia Llosa

Peruvian director, producer and screenwriter Claudia Llosa studied communications sciences at the University of Lima, Peru, and scriptwriting at the TAI in Madrid, before working in advertising



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and television. Her first feature film *Madeinusa* was released in 2006. Three years later *The Milk of Sorrow* won the Berlin film festival Golden Bear and was nominated for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar. At Berlin in 2012, her short film *Loxoro* won a Teddy Award.

### Mira Nair

Mira Nair's debut feature *Salaam Bombay!* received more than 25 international awards including an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language Film in 1988 and the Caméra d'Or Award at the Cannes film festival. Most recently, she directed Disney's *Queen of Katwe*. In 2008, she used the profits from *Salaam Bombay!* to create the Salaam Baalak Trust, which works with street children in India.

### Pablo Trapero

Director Pablo Trapero was born in Argentina in 1971. His first feature, *Mundo Grúa* (1999), won the Critics Prize at the Venice film festival. In 2008, *Leonera* was nominated for the Palme d'Or at Cannes and returned to Cannes with *Carancho* (2010) and *White Elephant* (2012). Trapero has sat on juries at Venice, San Sebastián and Locarno, among others. His latest film, *The Clan* (2015), won the Silver Lion for best director at Venice.



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