

PRESS RELEASE

2023 GOETHE MEDALS GO TO GAGA CHKHEIDZE, YI-WEI KENG, AND THE OFF-BIENNALE

This year's Goethe Medal honours the film manager Gaga Chkheidze from Georgia, the curator and dramaturg Yi-Wei Keng from Taiwan, and the curatorial team of the OFF-Biennale from Hungary. The official decoration of the Federal Republic of Germany is awarded to public figures who render outstanding services to cultural exchange worldwide or the teaching of the German language. The Goethe-Instituts abroad nominate candidates by virtue of their significance for cultural policy and their exceptional artistic work; the selection of awardees is made by a jury of experts. The Goethe Medal will be conferred by the president of the Goethe-Institut Carola Lentz at a ceremony in Weimar on 28 August.

For the announcement of this year's awardees, **Carola Lentz**, president of the Goethe-Institut, noted, "Cultural practitioners and civil society actors worldwide are increasingly affected by censorship, repression, persecution and war. This year's award winners are inspiring enablers and mediators, creating places of encounter and diversity of perspective. They make a significant contribution to cultural understanding, global exchange, and freedom of expression and art. Gaga Chkheidze has contributed significantly to the development and internationalisation of the Georgian film scene and has worked hard to connect Georgia to European and international programmes. Yi-Wei Keng is one of the most important initiators of cultural exchange in Taiwan, especially of the networking with Germany's theatre scene. The OFF-Biennale is the largest independent event for contemporary art in Hungary and reflects current social, political, and ecological issues through artistic means. It unequivocally works without state funding. With the Goethe Medal, we hope to strengthen the work of these outstanding individuals and groups in their cultural context."

The **commission for awarding the Goethe Medal**, chaired by Thomas Oberender, justifies the selection of the award winners as follows:

Gaga Chkheidze is an internationally recognised film manager from Georgia. Under his leadership, the Tbilisi International Film Festival, which he founded, has become a central venue for the current Georgian and international film and cinema industries and an important meeting point for filmmakers, producers, and distributors in the South Caucasus. Gaga Chkheidze's engagement in the field of film is crucial for Georgia's connection to European and international institutions and programmes, film markets and festivals, and for opening Georgia to international co-productions. Gaga Chkheidze also maintains close working relations with Germany and creates important cultural bridges between the two countries. As director of the Georgian National Film Centre, he has worked for the digitization and restoration of the Georgian films produced during the Soviet era thus making a decisive contribution to the preservation of Georgian film heritage.

Yi-Wei Keng contributes as a curator, dramaturg, and translator to a lively cultural exchange in Taiwan, primarily in the performing arts. He has brought important stimuli to the Taiwanese theatre scene, including experimental theatre, children's theatre, and theatre for people with disabilities. Under his direction, the Taipei Arts Festival has become the most important festival for performative arts in Taiwan with guest performances and co-productions from Europe, the USA and Japan, among others. A special focus of his work is the promotion of German theatre productions. Yi-Wei Keng has brought productions by the Deutsches Theater Berlin, Rimini Protokoll and Raumlabor Berlin to Taiwan. He is also



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CONTACT

Annika Goretzki
Deputy press officer
Goethe-Institut
Capital city office
Tel.: +49 89 15921894
annika.goretzki@goethe.de

Leonard Pelz
Project consultant
Goethe-Institut
Capital city office
Tel.: +49 30 25906442
leonard.pelz@goethe.de



continuously committed to opening up new perspectives for theatre professionals and students of theatre studies in Taiwan through translations of fundamental foreign texts into traditional Chinese characters. At his suggestion and with his support, many contemporary plays and publications from Germany, such as "Postdramatisches Theater" by Hans-Thies Lehmann, have been translated in recent years.

The **OFF-Biennale** is the largest event for contemporary art in Hungary. The six-member curatorial team, which consists exclusively of women, brings contemporary art to civil society, and initiates a public discourse on current socio-political and ecological issues. The focus is on issues such as the participation of LGBTQ+ and Roma in Hungary. The curators not only invite central positions from Germany and other places into the Hungarian debate, but also make Hungarian and Eastern European perspectives accessible in Germany and beyond, as recently at documenta fifteen. OFF-Biennale deliberately keeps its distance from a national cultural policy and therefore works without state funding and without partnerships with state art institutions. This is considered by the OFF-Biennale both a strong political statement a practical basis to protect the freedom of artistic expression and the professional integrity of its programmes.

About the awardees

Gaga Chkheidze (Georgia)

Gaga Chkheidze was born in Georgia in 1957. After studying German at Tbilisi State University, Gaga Chkheidze graduated from the Faculty of Literature and Art at Friedrich Schiller University in Jena. In the 1980s, he worked as the director of the German school in Tbilisi and taught German literature at Ilia University. In 1988, he organised a Georgian film retrospective at the Arsenal cinema in Berlin for which he even smuggled films across the Soviet border in his car. In the 1990s he worked as a translator and programme coordinator for the Forum of Young Cinema (Berlin International Film Festival) and the Arsenal cinema (Berlin). In 2000, Gaga Chkheidze founded the Tbilisi International Film Festival in Georgia to introduce Georgian audiences to films made in Georgia and around the world and to promote the development of the Georgian film industry. The now internationally renowned festival celebrates its 23rd anniversary this year. From 2005 to 2022, Gaga Chkheidze was a board member of the Georgian Film Fund; from 2005 to 2008 and from 2019 to 2022, he was director of the Georgian National Film Centre. After Gaga Chkheidze expressed criticism of Russia in the wake of Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine and published a statement of solidarity with Ukraine, he was dismissed as director of the Georgia National Film Centre in March 2022. The decision of the Minister of Culture was challenged with a lawsuit.

Yi-Wei Keng (Taiwan)

Yi-Wei Keng, born in 1969 in Taiwan, went to Prague to study non-verbal theatre from 1997 to 1999 after studying philosophy. He returned to Taiwan in 1999 and began working in theatre alongside his work as a writer. In 2012, he became artistic director of the Taipei Arts Festival. His Axis Taipei & International Collaboration concept contributed to anchoring Taipei as a creative centre, introducing the latest trends in international theatre and presenting creative works from all over the world to the festival audience. The focus of his artistic work was and still is particularly on the promotion of German-Taiwanese cultural projects. Since 2018, Yi-Wei Keng has also been dramaturge at the National



Kaohsiung Center for the Arts in southern Taiwan, one of the three most important theatres in the country. For 2023, he has invited the Berlin Schaubühne with their production "Im Herzen der Gewalt". He is also co-curator of the Want to Dance festival in Taipei. From 2023, he will be responsible for the Tainan Arts Festival in southern Taiwan and thus provides access to German and international cultural content beyond the capital city. For his work to date, Keng received the Friendship Medal of the German Institute Taipei in 2017 and the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres of France in 2019.

OFF-Biennale, represented in Weimar by Hajnalka Somogyi and Nikolett Erőss (Hungary)

The **OFF-Biennale** started in 2014 as a "garage biennial" to create a platform for artists in exchange with civil society. Already in its first year, the art show attracted much international attention. With three editions to date (2015, 2017, and 2021), it has since become a highly regarded international event. The team behind the OFF-Biennale consists of six curators: Nikolett Erőss, Eszter Lázár, Hajnalka Somogyi, Eszter Szakács, Borbála Szalai and Katalin Székely.

Nikolett Erőss, leader and co-curator of the OFF-Biennale, works as a curator as well as editor and directs the municipal Budapest Gallery. Previously, she was co-curator of the C3 Gallery, coordinated media art projects at the C3 Cultural and Communication Centre Foundation, was director of the Trafó Gallery and curator at the Ludwig Museum in Budapest. **Hajnalka Somogyi** is the initiator, leader, and co-curator of the OFF-Biennale. She received her Master's degree at Bard College, New York in 2009, worked as a curator at Budapest's Ludwig Museum, founded the independent art initiatives Dinamo and Impex, and currently teaches as a professor at Metropolitan University Budapest. In 2020, she became the first Hungarian to be voted one of ArtReview's "Power 100: most influential people in art."

The artistic and discursive programme for the Goethe Medal in Weimar is developed in cooperation with Kunstfest Weimar.

Press photos of the 2023 awardees can be found at www.goethe.de/bilderservice

Information about the Goethe Medal and an overview of previous awardees can be found at www.goethe.de/goethe-medaille

About the Goethe Medal

Since 1955, the Goethe-Institut has awarded the Goethe Medal once a year as an official decoration of the Federal Republic of Germany. It is the most important award of Germany's foreign cultural policy. The candidates are nominated by the Goethe-Instituts around the world in consultation with Germany's diplomatic missions. From these nominations, the Goethe Medal Jury, consisting of persons from academia, art, and culture, draws up a selection that is confirmed by the president of the Goethe-Institut. The awarding of the Goethe Medal makes globally relevant cultural issues and actors known to the public in Germany and supports the internationalisation of the German cultural landscape. The award ceremony is held on 28 August, Goethe's birthday. Since it was first awarded in 1955, 375



persons from 70 countries have been honoured, including Dogan Akhanlı, Yuri Andrukhovych, Daniel Barenboim, David Cornwell aka John le Carré, Princess Marilyn Douala Manga Bell, Sofia Gubaidulina, Ágnes Heller, Wen Hui, Neil MacGregor, Petros Markaris, Ariane Mnouchkine, Tali Nates, Shirin Neshat, Sandbox Collective (Nimi Ravindran and Shiva Pathak), Irina Shcherbakova, Jorge Semprún, Yoko Tawada, Zukiswa Wanner, Robert Wilson and Helen Wolff.

The commission for awarding the Goethe Medal

Franziska Augstein (journalist), Meret Forster (editorial director, music, BR-Klassik), Olga Grjasnowa (writer), Matthias Lilienthal (dramaturg and theatre director), Moritz Müller-Wirth (journalist, Die Zeit), Cristina Nord (Berlinale Forum, head of Berlin section), Thomas Oberender (representative of the Presidium and chair of the jury, author and curator), Insa Wilke (literary critic); representing the Federal Foreign Office: Ralf Beste (Head of the department of culture and communication); representing the Goethe-Institut: Carola Lentz (President of the Goethe-Institut) and Johannes Ebert (Secretary-General of the Goethe-Institut)