

## **Awardee: Akinbode Akinbiyi**

### **Photographer and curator, Nigeria/Germany**

**Berlin-based Akinbode Akinbiyi is one of the most prominent African photographers worldwide. With his photographs of everyday life in African cities, he brings viewers closer to urban life in Africa and conveys an impression of the rapid changes they are undergoing. Akinbode Akinbiyi is also an intercultural mediator in his curating work. He has curated a number of exhibitions for the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, including *Spot on ... DAK'ART* (2009). A pan-African project he co-initiated has also made him an important mentor of young photographers from Africa.**

Akinbode Akinbiyi was born in Oxford in 1946, grew up in Lagos and in England and studied Literature and English in Nigeria, England and Germany. In the mid-1970s he began to photograph as an autodidact and, after stays in Heidelberg and Munich, finally moved to West Berlin where he has lived ever since. He is among the most well known African photographers and is internationally active as a curator and writer. Akinbode Akinbiyi's pictures have been shown at exhibitions and biennials in Tokyo, Paris, Philadelphia, Johannesburg and Havana, and have been published in various magazines. His focuses are reportage, architectural and cultural photography. The main focus of his work is on rapidly growing and changing African megacities. One crucial biographical moment was receiving the 1987 reportage scholarship from *Stern* magazine; the ensuing picture series of the West African cities of Dakar, Kano and Lagos brought him renown. In 1993 he and close friends founded the UMZANSI cultural centre in Durban, South Africa. Akinbode Akinbiyi has curated a number of exhibitions for the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa), including *STADTanSICHTEN - LAGOS* (2004) and *Spot on ... DAK'ART - Die 8. Biennale zeitgenössischer afrikanischer Kunst* (2009) presented at the ifa galleries in Berlin and Stuttgart. In 2003 he curated the German contribution to the *Rencontres de Bamako - Biennale de la Photographie Africaine* in Bamako, Mali. A tireless intercultural mediator who prefers to explore the urban centres of Africa and Europe on foot and illuminate them with his mechanical, analogue medium-format camera, he ranks among the most important representatives of Germany in the present African photography scene. A few years ago, in cooperation with the Goethe-Institut Nigeria, he initiated a master class for young Nigerian photographers, from which the pan-African project "Centers of learning for photography in Africa" developed to network photography schools in sub-Saharan Africa. In numerous workshops, training sessions and master classes across the continent, notably in Sudan, but also in Ethiopia, South Africa and Congo, the mentor Akin Akinbiyi has been able to pass on his experience to young photographers. In 2008 he was on the jury of the World Press Photo Award. His main exhibitions include *Tales from a Globalizing World* (2003-2007 in Brussels, Dhaka, Geneva, Cairo and other locations), *Africa Remix* (2004-2007 in Düsseldorf, London, Paris, Tokyo, Stockholm and Johannesburg), *Sea never dry* (2005 at the Staatliche Museum für Völkerkunde in Dresden), *Adama in Wonderland* (2013-14 at the Goethe-Institut Johannesburg) and *Three Photographers/Six Cities* (2016 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art). In addition to his artistic and curatorial activities, he is also active as a writer. Among other things, he writes the notes for his own exhibitions and co-authored *Just Ask!*, a publication about and for the contemporary African and international photography scene in 2014. In 2016

an article by him was published in the catalogue of the Kenyan photographer Mimi Cheron Ng'ok, *Always, in Spite of Everything*. Akin Akinbiyi will participate with new works in documenta 14 in 2017, which will be held in Athens and Kassel.

### **Quotes by Akinbode Akinbiyi**

“I move very slowly and gently, I try not to invade other people’s spaces, while at the same time trying to take images. It is a sort of dance, a negotiation, meandering – a very sensitive way of moving through all kinds of spaces.” (Akinbode Akinbiyi in an interview, Goethe-Institut Johannesburg, 2013)

“My work is an attempt to understand cities and urban life today. Over the past years I’ve realised that I am looking for my childhood, that kind of innocence and childlikeness that I had growing up in London and Lagos, and which I feel is no longer there. Whenever I find such moments – fragments of this lost innocence – I take photographs.” (Akinbode Akinbiyi in an interview, Goethe-Institut Johannesburg, 2013)

“I consider myself a wanderer, somebody who wanders and at the same time wonders ... It is my way of coming to grips with the world around me, which for my current work is urban space.” (Akinbode Akinbiyi in an interview, Goethe-Institut Johannesburg, 2013)

### **Quotes about Akinbode Akinbiyi**

“Unobtrusiveness is one of his most important tools for when Akinbode Akinbiyi wanders through the streets of Brazilian or African cities, hardly anyone takes note, let alone are they offended by him. Time and again he stands still – even in areas where tourist guides would advise against it – and pulls his medium-format camera from his bag to take pictures.” (Eva Apraku, “Du bist Berlin: Akinbode Akinbiyi – Der Beobachter,” *tip Berlin-Magazin* of 14.4.2009)

“Akinbiyi’s pictures show the confusing world as it collapses onto passers-by in the international cities: Passengers trying to fight one another in the departing buses, hawkers passing through weaving human throngs carefully balancing their goods on their heads. And people who could no longer keep pace with this bustle and are left motionless on the roadside. In Akinbiyi’s images nothing remains of the supposed glamour of big cities. All the more, the almost immeasurable power of human vitality shines, still wresting life from even the saddest environment.” (Eva Apraku, “Du bist Berlin: Akinbode Akinbiyi – Der Beobachter,” *tip Berlin-Magazin* of 14.4.2009)

### **Exhibitions (selection)**

1993 Durhammer Galerie, Frankfurt

1995 LiteraturWerkstatt, Berlin

1996 *MALOKA*, documenta Halle, Kassel

2003 - 2007 *Tales from a globalizing World*, Brussels, Dhaka, Geneva, Havana, Cairo, Krakow, New York

2004 - 2007 *Africa Remix*, Düsseldorf, Johannesburg, London, Paris, Stockholm, Tokyo

2005 *Sea never dry*, Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden

2008 *Common Place*, Alte Pathologie P40, Hamburg

2013 *Adama in Wonderland*, Goethe-Institut, Johannesburg

2016 *Three Photographers/Six Cities*, Philadelphia Museum of Art

### **Publications (selection)**

2001 Black and white reportage and curatorial article about contemporary Nigerian photography in the catalogue for the fourth Bamako photo biennial

2003 Colour reportage and article in the catalogue *Tales from a globalizing World*, London

2008 Curatorial article on the exhibition *Spot on - Bamako 2007* at the IfA Galerie, Berlin and Stuttgart

2014 Co-author of *Just Ask!*, Kerber Publishers, Germany

2015 Co-author of the special edition of *dienacht* photography magazine, Leipzig, Germany