

African creatives score spots in Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative

South African visual artist Bronwyn Katz and Ghanaian author Ayesha Harruna Attah have been selected as mentees in the 2023-2024 cycle of the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative.



Visual artist Bronwyn Katz and Senegal-based Ghanaian author Ayesha Harruna Attah. Source: Supplied

The mentorship programme sees five of the world's most admired artists – El Anatsui (visual arts), Bernardine Evaristo (literature), Jia Zhang-Ke (film), Anne Lacaton (architecture) and Dianne Reeves (music) – each mentor an outstanding emerging artist. The mentors and their protégés, who come from across the globe, will spend the next two years in creative collaboration.

The Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative was established by Rolex in 2002 to aid in the transmission of artistic knowledge and craft from one generation to the next.

The programme has since paired 63 of the world's greatest artists with 63 highly talented younger professionals from around the globe. Rolex announced the new mentors and their protégés at a ceremony at New York's Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) this past weekend, as part of a two-day Rolex Arts Weekend celebrating the culmination of the current cycle of the programme.



Design Indaba Emerging Creatives programme calls for entries

8 Sep 2022



Rolex announced that Ghanaian sculptor El Anatsui selected Bronwyn Katz as his protégée; British author Bernardine Evaristo selected Ghanaian writer Ayesha Harruna Attah; Chinese filmmaker Jia Zhang-Ke selected Filipino filmmaker Rafael Manuel; French architect Anne Lacaton selected Lebanese-Armenian architect Arine Aprahamian; and American jazz singer Dianne Reeves selected South Korean singer and composer Song Yi Jeon.

The 2023–2024 mentors and protégés are:

Visual arts

Mentor: El Anatsui

Ghanaian artist El Anatsui has helped redefine the global art world with Africa's presence, raising its profile through his monumental sculptures and installations that move across painting, textiles, sculpture and design to encompass the use of water, wind, wood, clay, stone, metal, printing plates, aluminium bottle tops and other found materials.

He is emeritus professor in Sculpture of the University of Nigeria, an Honorary Royal Academician of the Royal Society of Arts and elected into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Among his awards are the Venice Biennale's Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement and Japan's Praemium Imperiale.

Protégé: Bronwyn Katz

Singled out for her many accomplishments, South African visual artist Bronwyn Katz has established herself internationally. The Cape Town-based artist has incorporated sculpture, installation, video and performance in her acclaimed, nuanced body of work that uses found natural materials such as iron ore, or salvaged manufactured objects including foam mattresses and bed springs.

A solo exhibition of her work at London's White Cube gallery in 2021 was followed by an exhibition at the International Art Exhibition of the 2022 Venice Biennale. Katz won Africa's prestigious First National Bank Art Prize in 2019. She is a founding member of iQhiya, a network of 11 Black women artists.



El Anatsui and Bronwyn Katz. Source: Supplied

Literature

Mentor: Bernardine Evaristo

Bernardine Evaristo was the first Black woman and the first Black British person to win the prestigious 2019 Booker Prize for her novel, *Girl, Woman, Other*. She is the author of 10 books that explore the African diaspora and numerous other works of short fiction, poetry, drama, essays and journalism.

The Emperor's Babe (2001) was named one of '100 Best Books of the Decade' by *The Times of London* in 2010. Most recently, she published *Manifesto: On Never Giving Up* (2021), her first book of non-fiction. Evaristo is president of the Royal Society of Literature, the first writer of colour to hold the position in 200 years.

Protégé: Ayesha Harruna Attah

Part of a new generation of African writers who are making their name in literary circles, Senegal-based Ghanaian author Ayesha Harruna Attah has published five novels: *Harmattan Rain* (2009), *Saturday's Shadows* (2015), *The Hundred Wells of Salaga* (2018), *The Deep Blue Between* (2020) and *Zainab Takes New York* (2022).

In all of these works, she strives to create historical fiction that challenges existing preconceptions of African mores through her vibrant storytelling. Among her many accolades, Attah was a finalist in the William Saroyan International Prize for Writing, long-listed for the Prix Les Afriques and shortlisted for the Wilbur Smith Adventure Writing Prize.



Bernardine Evaristo and Ayesha Harruna Attah. Source: Supplied

Architecture

Mentor: Anne Lacaton

Named a Laureate of the 2021 Pritzker Architecture Prize along with her partner Jean-Philippe Vassal, Lacaton is recognised internationally for designs that maximise the discipline's human and environmental potential and make sustainable use of what already exists.

Established in Paris in 1987, Lacaton & Vassal has since designed dozens of private and social housing projects, cultural and academic institutions, as well as public spaces, mostly throughout Europe. Lacaton has served as an associate professor of Architecture and Design at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology ETH Zurich and has been a visiting professor at other leading universities.

Protégé: Arine Aprahamian

Lebanese-Armenian architect, designer and researcher Arine Aprahamian champions an innovative, affordable and sustainable vision of the future through architecture. She founded architecture and design studio Müller Aprahamian with partner Adrian Müller in 2018.

With activities in Beirut, London and Yerevan, Armenia, the studio has since worked on cutting-edge buildings and proposals, as well as on forward-thinking projects with notable designers, artists and institutions. They recently launched Terraforma, an in-house R&D project working with local industry to explore the traditional, ancient building material of clay and produce innovative, domestic alternatives for architectural materials.



Anne Lacaton and Arine Aprahamian. Source: Supplied

Film

Mentor: Jia Zhang-Ke

Considered one of the most daring Chinese filmmakers working today, Jia Zhang-Ke has become a leading figure in the post-1990 'sixth generation' of Chinese directors. His early films, known as the Shanxi trilogy, including his first feature *Xiao Wu* (Pickpocket, 1997), caught moments of transition in Chinese society.

In 2006, Zhang-Ke's critically acclaimed *Still Life* won the Golden Lion at the 2006 Venice Film Festival and earned him the title of Best Director at the Asian Film Awards. His three latest award-winning feature films are *A Touch of Sin* (2013), *Mountains May Depart* (2015) and *Ash is Purest White* (2018). In 2017, Zhang-Ke founded the Pingyao International Film Festival.

Protégé: Rafael Manuel

Filipino filmmaker Rafael Manuel, currently based between Amsterdam, London and Manila, has grounded his creations in the study of philosophy and visual communications. Among his numerous awards, Manuel won the Silver Bear Jury Prize at the 2020 Berlin International Film Festival for his short film *Filipiñana*.

In 2021, he received the Prince Claus Seed Award for Development and Culture, the Script and Development Award from the Hubert Bals Fund and the Ani ng Dangal Award from the Philippine National Commission for Culture and the Arts. Manuel is currently working on his first two feature films: *Filipiñana* (based on his short) and *Patrimonio*. He is a cofounder of the international artist collective and film production company Idle Eye Productions.



Jia Zhang-Ke and Rafael Manuel. Source: Supplied

Music

Mentor: Dianne Reeves

Recognised for her breathtaking virtuosity, improvisational prowess and unique jazz and R&B stylings, five-time Grammy winner Dianne Reeves is considered the pre-eminent jazz vocalist in the world. Her most recent album, *Beautiful Life*, received the Grammy for Best Jazz Vocal Performance and she won the same award previously for three consecutive recordings.

She was the first creative chair for jazz for the Los Angeles Philharmonic and has performed at the White House on multiple occasions. In 2018, the National Endowment for the Arts designated Reeves a 'jazz master' – the highest honour the US bestows on jazz artists.

Protégé: Song Yi Jeon

South Korean modern jazz singer and composer Song Yi Jeon is known for her hypnotic voice which is likened to a malleable wordless instrument, as well as for her incomparable improvisations. She studied classical composition at the University of Music and Fine Art in Graz, Austria, and jazz vocals at the Academy of Music in Basel, Switzerland, and Boston's Berklee College of Music in the US where she developed her unique sound.

At Berklee, she was the inaugural Quincy Jones CJ&E fellow and was also awarded the Billboard Endowed Award. Among the many clubs and festivals where the Song Yi Jeon Quintet has performed is New York's famous Blue Note. In 2015, the quintet released the mini-album *Straight*, while in 2018 Jeon released her first album, *Movement of Lives*.



Dianne Reeves and Song Yi Jeon. Source: Supplied

Rebecca Irvin, head of the mentorship programme, said, “Rolex is deeply grateful to the mentors for their commitment to advancing the artistry of the next generation through the irreplaceable tradition of individual exchange and inspiration. We also extend our congratulations to the protégés, who now join the global and multigenerational artistic community that has grown over the past two decades.

“It will be exciting to see how the creative collaborations in this new cycle will once again take place across barriers of geography and culture, as well as age, and to look forward to celebrating all the mentors and protégés from the past 20 years next year at an exceptional Rolex Arts gathering.”

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