



FIFF 2020 to showcase Rwandan cinema

The Fribourg International Film Festival unveils the first of its 2020 line-up. Between 20 and 28 March Rwanda will host the *New Territory* section. Compared to previous hosts like Nepal, Mongolia and the Caribbean, Rwanda is perhaps the country which best lives up to the 'new territory' appellation. A new generation of talented Rwandan film-makers are emerging and are propelling the growth of the country's nascent film industry. The *New Territory* section will screen a selection of short and feature-length films, which will give visitors to FIFF 2020 the chance to witness this dynamism for themselves and hear from some of the gifted creatives behind these works.

In the history of the film industry, it would not be entirely unfair to call Rwanda a new kid on the block. For example, the first foreign film to be shot in Rwanda only dates back to 1950. *King Solomon's Mines* is an exotic adventure story, starring Deborah Kerr and Stewart Granger and directed by US film-makers Compton Bennet and Andrew Marton. Foreign productions like this were few and far between until the release of the feature film *Cent Jours (100 Days)* by British director Nick Hughes in 2001. Most notably, however, *Cent Jours* was the first film to have a Rwandan producer at the helm, Eric Kabera. Within three years, Kabera had directed the first full-length film that was made entirely in Rwanda, the documentary *Gardiens de la mémoire (Keepers of Memory, 2004)*.

Almost a decade passed before Rwanda chalked up its first full-length feature film, *Matière grise (Grey Matter, 2011)*. It was made by Rwandan producer and director Kivu Ruhorahoza and very quickly picked up awards, notably at the Tribeca and Warsaw Film Festivals. *Matière grise* and shorts like *SAA-IPO* (Jean Luc Habyarimana, 2010) and *Lyiza* (Marie-Clémentine Dusabekambo, 2011) triggered a momentum that has continued to gather pace until now, and has been on full display at an array of major film festivals. In February 2018, *Imfura*, a short film by Samuel Ishimwe, won the Silver Bear at the Berlinale. A few months later, *I Got My Things and Left* by Philbert Aimé Mbabazi Sharangabo, was awarded a special mention at the Winterthur Short Film Festival and in spring 2019 took the Grand Prix at Oberhausen.

Feature-length films have also caught the eye of festival juries. *La Miséricorde de la jungle (The Mercy of the Jungle)* by Joël Karezezi made its festival debut at Toronto in 2018 and would go on to win the Gold Stallion and Best Actor award at FESPACO (Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou). In 2019 film-maker Kantarama Gahigiri was a guest of *La Fabrique Cinéma de l'Institut français*. This annual event, which is held in conjunction with the Cannes Film Festival, offers 10 emerging film-makers support and mentoring for their latest project. She is currently working on her next film, *Tanzanite*, a quirky, futuristic thriller.

As FIFF Artistic Director Thierry Jobin notes, “The audience will discover that in this explosion of talent ties to Switzerland run deep. In particular, Kantarama Gahigiri, Samuel Ishimwe and Philbert Aimé Mbabazi Sharangabo have very close links to Switzerland because they studied film here and/or were born here. What is admirable — and pretty remarkable — is their desire to plough all of their expertise, their practices and their energies into the Rwandan film industry. Rwandan cinema has so many stories to tell, and not only stories about the Rwanda genocide and exoticism which to date have been addressed primarily by Westerners. FIFF is extremely proud to be able to provide them with a platform to showcase their work and to encourage them to scale even higher heights.”

FIFF Press Office

Tel. +41 (0)26 347 42 00

presse@fiff.ch

The FIFF Management Board

Madeleine Descloux, Administrative Director *ad interim*

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