

In partnership with

**Maria
Lassnig
Foundation**

Press Release

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MARIA LASSNIG PRIZE 2021 AWARDED TO ATTA KWAMI

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Atta Kwami, 2019, photo credit Modern Painters, New Decorators

The Maria Lassnig Foundation and the Serpentine Galleries are delighted to announce that the 2021 Maria Lassnig Prize is awarded to UK-based Ghanaian artist **Atta Kwami**.

The artist will receive a major grant of 50,000 euros and a project with Serpentine Galleries, the institutional partner for the 2021 Maria Lassnig Prize. The Serpentine Galleries presented a solo exhibition of Lassnig's work in 2008. Kwami was selected by a jury comprising the Serpentine Galleries, the Maria Lassnig Foundation, the former partnering institution Lenbachhaus and the artist Albert Oehlen.



Atta Kwami's project with Serpentine – a comprehensive monograph publication and a public art commission – will be launched in 2022.

The Maria Lassnig Prize is awarded biennially to a mid-career artist in association with an international institutional partner. Atta Kwami is the third artist to be granted the Maria Lassnig Prize, following **Cathy Wilkes**, in partnership with MoMA PS1, New York (2017), and **Sheela Gowda**, in partnership with Lenbachhaus, Munich (2019).

Atta Kwami (b. Accra, 1956) is a painter, printmaker, art historian and independent curator based in Loughborough, UK. Kwami is known for paintings, murals and kiosk-sculptures that are conceived as expanded three-dimensional paintings, incorporating his signature use of colour and abstract painting style. His works play with the colour and form improvisations that are distinctive of Ghanaian architecture and African strip-woven textiles, especially kente, made famous by his culture the Ewe and Asante of Ghana.

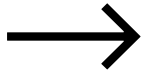
Kwami is part of the forthcoming Folkestone Triennial 2020 (postponed to 2021) and is designing a triptych of large stained-glass windows for the new Ghana National Cathedral in Accra designed by Sir David Adjaye OBE.

Atta Kwami: 'I am proud to be associated with Maria Lassnig's legacy. Her late recognition requires us to look again at so many artists whose life work has been overlooked or undervalued. Her formidable and wide-ranging body of work shows that she was an individual who pushed herself to her limits, without the critical recognition to guide her on.'

The Maria Lassnig Prize 2021 is completely unexpected. I am very happy it has come at this stage of my life. I shall always be humbly grateful for all the people who have supported me; my mother, my wife, my galleries and my friends both inside and outside Ghana. I am glad for myself and for Ghana.'

Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director, Serpentine Galleries: *'We are so pleased to collaborate with the Lassnig Foundation who have chosen the Serpentine as the partner institution for the Maria Lassnig Prize 2021. The ethos of the Prize resonates strongly with the Serpentine's core programming in working with late career artists who deserve wider recognition. This is also a welcome opportunity to celebrate the close friendship we had with Maria Lassnig, and to remember her landmark exhibition at the Serpentine Galleries in 2008, her first in the UK.'*

We warmly congratulate Atta Kwami as the recipient of the next Maria Lassnig Prize who, like Lassnig, is an artist with decades of pioneering work. Kwami's painting traverses many different forms from canvases to sculptures and structures, and he is an influential art historian and advocate of Ghanaian art. It will be a privilege to work closely with him over the next 18 months on his first major monograph and to develop a public art project. The role of art in public spaces has become increasingly important for the Serpentine as a



way to connect differently with audiences during socially distanced times and further our belief in art accessible for all.'

Peter Pakesch, Chairman of the Board of the Maria Lassnig Foundation: *'The aim of the Maria Lassnig Prize is to honour an important artistic position that should be seen in a broader context. It is always exciting to meet the jury and take an amazing tour d'horizon through oeuvres that have not yet been celebrated in major museums and the mainstream artworld. After many presentations and discussions the big question for the jury arises: which artist should have the opportunity to share their work with new audiences and would benefit from the challenge of a new commission at this stage of their career? On this occasion, painting, a medium close to Maria Lassnig, took centre stage. Atta Kwami is a highly prolific artist, whose core practice lies in expanded notions of painting. In a unique way his work is both based in the visual world of his native Ghana and in reflections on modernism and its universality.'*

The jury for the Maria Lassnig Prize 2020/21:

Melissa Blanchflower, Curator Exhibitions and Public Art, Serpentine Galleries

Rebecca Lewin, Curator, Exhibitions and Design, Serpentine Galleries

Matthias Mühling, Director of Lenbachhaus, Munich and Member of the Board of the Maria Lassnig Foundation

Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director of the Serpentine Galleries, London and Member of the Advisory Board of the Maria Lassnig Foundation

Albert Oehlen, Artist

Peter Pakesch, Chairman of the Board of the Maria Lassnig Foundation

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Notes to Editors

Atta Kwami is a painter, printmaker, independent art historian and curator. He trained and taught at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana and the UK. He was a Visiting Fellow at the Cambridge/Africa Collaborative Research Programme, Art and Museums in Africa (2012/2013). Kwami is part of the forthcoming Folkestone Triennial 2020 (postponed to 2021) and is designing a triptych of large stained-glass windows for the new Ghana National Cathedral in Accra designed by Sir David Adjaye OBE.

He has work in major collections including the National Museums of Ghana and Kenya; the V&A Museum, London; the National Museum of African Art, Washington, DC; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York; The Newark Museum, USA; The Chazen Museum, University of Wisconsin-Madison; University of Michigan Museum of Art and The British Museum.



He has received awards including Ghana Denmark Cultural Fund, Thami Mnyele Foundation, Amsterdam, Howard Kestenbaum/Vijay Paramsothy International Fellowship, Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Maine, USA; Janet L. Stanley Travel Award: Fifteenth Triennial Symposium on African Art, University of California, Los Angeles; Artist in Residence, University of Michigan, Graduate School of Art & Design; Philip L. Ravenhill Fellowship, (UCLA); Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of African Art, Washington, DC; 1st Thoyer Distinguished Visiting Scholar, New York University, New York.

Maria Lassnig (1919-2014)

Born in Carinthia in Southern Austria in 1919, Maria Lassnig studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna in the midst of the Second World War, graduating in 1945. In postwar Europe, she quickly moved away from the state-approved academic realism in which she had been trained. Inspired by artists such as Cézanne, Van Gogh, Kokoschka, Munch, and Picasso, she was investigating her own colour vision and working in expressionist, cubist, and surrealist styles. In the 1950s, Lassnig pioneered *art informel* in Austria and continued to develop her painting practice, moving between Vienna and Paris, where she lived from 1960 to 1968. The key notion which came to characterise Lassnig's work was above all the concept of body awareness: by introspectively discovering the true nature of her own condition, she expressed physical sensations through the use of artistic media. In 1968, Lassnig moved to New York, where she created pioneering work in film, producing a series of inventive animations. In 1978, she received a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and went for a year to Berlin.

In 1980, at the age of 60, Lassnig was awarded a professorship at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. From 1980 to 1989, she held the master class for "Gestaltungslehre – experimentelles Gestalten." Apart from painting, she also taught animated film. In 1980, Lassnig co-represented Austria in the 39th Venice Biennale, and went on to participate in documenta 7 (1982) and documenta X (1997). Lassnig's art has been the subject of many other well-attended international solo exhibitions, including surveys at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands (1994); Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France (1995); the Serpentine Gallery, London, UK (2008); and MoMA PS1, Long Island City, NY, USA (2014). In 2013, Lassnig was awarded the Venice Biennale's Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement. Her work resides in the permanent collections of institutions internationally.

The Maria Lassnig Prize

The Maria Lassnig Prize was originally envisioned by pioneering Austrian artist Maria Lassnig before her death in 2014 at the age of 94, at height of her artistic career. Having achieved recognition only later in life, she hoped to encourage the efforts of artists not yet familiar to the public. Each prize granted in her name carries an award of 50,000 euros and a project organised by a designated institution that has collaborated with the Foundation and a selection committee to choose a winner. In 2017, the inaugural year Cathy Wilkes was awarded the Prize accompanied by an exhibition at the institutional partner MoMA PS1, New York, in 2019 Sheela Gowda was awarded the Prize and exhibition at Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau München.



The Maria Lassnig Foundation

Launched in 2015, the Maria Lassnig Foundation is dedicated to advancing the legacy of one of the most original and important artists in modern times. The Foundation's central mission is to share Lassnig's work and vision with the broadest and most diverse audiences possible, and to increase international awareness of the artist's contributions by supporting exhibitions, publications, and original scholarly research. The foundation is planning a comprehensive Lassnig *catalogue raisonné* and, in 2016, established the Maria Lassnig Prize to honour the achievements of midcareer artists.

The Maria Lassnig Foundation is located in the former studio of the artist in Vienna. Chairman of the Board of the Foundation is Peter Pakesch. Further Members of the Board are Georg Geyer, Matthias Mühling, Friedrich Petzel, Hans Werner Poschauko, Gabriele Wimmer, and Iwan Wirth. Members of the Advisory Board are Sebastian Egenhofer, Anita Haldemann, Antonia Hoerschelmann, Kasper König, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Ralph Ubl.