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Media Release Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation

Cao Fei wins the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize 2021

Cao Fei has won the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize 2021 for her solo exhibition *Blueprints* (2020). She was announced as the 2021 winner of the prestigious £30,000 prize at a special ceremony at The Photographers' Gallery in London on Thursday 9 September 2021.

The 2021 award, which also marks the 25th anniversary of this long-standing and prestigious annual prize, recognises artists and projects deemed to have made the most innovative and significant contribution to photography over the previous 12 months.

Cao Fei (b. 1978, Guangzhou), was awarded the prize for her first large-scale UK solo exhibition, *Blueprints* (2020), at the Serpentine Gallery, London (4 March – 17 May 2020 and 4 August – 13 September 2020). This immersive, site-specific presentation brought together new and existing works, including *Whose Utopia?* (2006), *Asia One* (2018) and *La Town* (2014) exploring the impact of technology, virtual realities, urbanisation and the alienating effects of mechanised labour on individuals and communities. Shown in an environment that blurred the boundaries of virtual, physical and cinematic spaces, *Blueprints* offered visitors multiple frames of experience through precisely crafted, visually lush narratives and propositions informed by a rich resource of references.

Cao Fei is one of the most innovative and exciting young Chinese artists to have emerged on the international scene. Working across film, photography, digital media, sculpture and installation, Cao Fei's longstanding interest in virtual possibilities is underpinned by her own experience of, and extensive research into, China's historical, political and social structures.

From early in her practice, Cao Fei harnessed the digital world as both a utopian and dystopian space, with little distinction between virtual and analogue experience. While her work reflects social-cultural dynamics in China, and plays with nostalgic yearning for a previous age, her focus is on the potential of what might be, of virtual possibilities. She addresses these far-reaching topics through deadpan humour and the creation of surreal encounters and fantastical scenarios. Although each of Cao Fei's worlds appear to teeter on the edge of apocalyptic uncertainty, her characters navigate these complex and chaotic realities with vigour and agency, harnessing the unique possibilities of technology in order to shape a collective future.

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The Jury

The 2021 Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize jury comprised: **Cristina de Middel**, artist; **Simon Njami**, independent curator, writer, lecturer and art critic; **Anna Tellgren**, curator of photography at Moderna Museet, Stockholm; **Anne-Marie Beckmann**, Director of the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation, Frankfurt; and **Brett Rogers**, Director of The Photographers' Gallery as the non-voting chair.

Brett Rogers OBE, Director, The Photographers' Gallery and Chair of Jury said:

"Huge congratulations to Cao Fei whose prescient, multi-layered work speaks so pertinently about the moment we are living in – especially post pandemic. Although she speaks from a position rooted in Chinese history, she addresses universally resonant themes in her immaculately crafted narratives: The importance and fragility of human connection, the power of love, the ethics of technology, and existential malaise. To a large degree, all her work explores technology as a source of alienation but also as the thing that binds us – it's neither a totally bleak nor overly optimistic vision, but it is ultimately humane.

*On behalf of the jury, I also want to acknowledge and pay tribute to fellow 2021 shortlisted artists, **Poulomi Basu, Alejandro Cartagena and Zineb Sedira**. Separately and collectively they showed the myriad ways images can connect, reflect, inform, protest, educate and re-imagine the world around us and evoked a rich and illuminating discussion about the role of photography today."*

Anne-Marie Beckmann, Director, Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation, said:

"It is with great pleasure that we announce Cao Fei as this year's winner. Drawing upon extensive research and a wealth of cultural and visual references, her work offers a uniquely poetic dystopia that echoes the human condition today. She captures the particular isolation and alienation experienced in our increasingly digital age through a distinctive and seductive visual language that speaks both through and about images and their place in the world today.

*I also want to extend my congratulations and heartfelt thanks to the other nominees, **Poulomi Basu, Alejandro Cartagena and Zineb Sedira** all of whose projects reflect the power and generosity of the photographic medium to encompass a multitude of perspectives and intentions."*

The work of all the 2021 shortlisted artists, **Poulomi Basu, Alejandro Cartagena, Cao Fei and Zineb Sedira**, remains on display at The Photographers' Gallery, curated by Anna Dannemann, until 26 September 2021. The exhibition is also part of the international photography triennial RAY Fotografieprojekte Frankfurt/RheinMain and is on display at Deutsche Börse's headquarters in Eschborn/Frankfurt until 19 September 2021.

Over the last 25 years, this leading Photography Prize has honoured ground-breaking artists from across the world, drawing attention to the diverse manifestations and innovative developments of contemporary photography. In showcasing four finalist and one winner each year, the prize has enabled remarkable artist work to be recognised and rewarded within the field, and by the wider public, while capturing, reflecting upon and questioning the changing context of the medium and its wider perception.

Anniversary talks

To mark the legacy of the prize, two Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize anniversary talks with previous winners and finalists will take place this September. Audiences can join artists **Laura El-Tantawy** (2016 Prize finalist) and **Awoiska van der Molen** (2017 Prize finalist) on 14 September in conversation with TPG Director **Brett Rogers**, and on 16 September hear artists **Oliver Chanarin** (2013 Winner), **Mishka Henner** (2013 finalist), and **Dana Lixenberg** (2017 Winner) at the Gallery with Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Director **Anne-Marie Beckmann**, as they examine the ongoing importance of the medium, the mechanisms of the prize and its role in shaping photographic practice today.

For detailed information, please visit tpg.org.uk

Notes for Editors:

We are happy to provide high-res press images.

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About Cao Fei

Cao Fei (b. 1978, Guangzhou) is one of the most innovative Chinese artists to have emerged on the international scene. Currently living in Beijing, she mixes social commentary, popular aesthetics, references to Surrealism, and documentary conventions in her films and installations. Her works reflect on the rapid and chaotic changes that are occurring in Chinese society today.

Cao Fei's works have been exhibited at a number of international biennales and triennales, including the Shanghai Biennale, the Moscow Biennale, the Taipei Biennale, the 15th & 17th Biennale of Sydney, the Istanbul Biennial, the Yokohama Triennale, and the 50th, 52nd & 56th Venice Biennale. Exhibitions and screenings of her work have taken place at Tate Modern, the Serpentine Galleries and the Whitechapel Gallery in London; the New Museum, the Guggenheim Museum, and MoMA in New York; the Centre Pompidou, the Palais de Tokyo and the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris. In 2016, Cao Fei held her first solo exhibition at MoMA PS1, New York.

Cao Fei's recent projects include a solo show at Tai Kwun Contemporary in Hong Kong (2018) and a retrospective at K21 Düsseldorf (2018), a solo exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, Paris (2019), an Augmented Reality Art Project by APPLE and the New Museum New York (2019), a solo exhibition at the Serpentine Galleries, London (2020). Her future projects will be a solo exhibition at the MAXXI, the National Museum of 21st Century Arts in Rome (2021) and a solo exhibition at the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing (2021).

She was a nominee for the Future Generation Art Prize (2010) and the finalist of Hugo Boss Prize (2010). She received the Chinese Contemporary Art Award (CCAA) Best Young Artist Award (2006) and Best Artist Award (2016). She was also the recipient of Piedra de Sal Award at Cuenca Biennale (2016).

Cao Fei was on the Jury of The Selection Committee for the Curatorship of the 8th Berlin Biennale (2014), the jury of The Bonnefanten Award for Contemporary (2016), and the jury of Hugo Boss Asia Art Prize (2019). She was the nominator of the Rolls-Royce Art Programme Muse (2019).

The Photographers' Gallery

The Photographers' Gallery opened in 1971 in Great Newport Street, London, as the UK's first independent gallery devoted to photography. It was the first public gallery in the UK to exhibit many key names in international photography, including Juergen Teller, Robert Capa, Sebastiano Salgado and Andreas Gursky. The Gallery has also been instrumental in establishing contemporary British photographers, including Martin Parr and Corinne Day. In 2009, the Gallery moved to 16 – 18 Ramillies Street in Soho, the first stage in its plan to create a 21st century home for photography. Following an eighteen months long redevelopment project, the Gallery reopened to the public in 2012. The success of The Photographers' Gallery over the past four decades has helped to establish photography as a recognised art form, introducing new audiences to photography and championing its place at the heart of visual culture. www.thephotographersgallery.org.uk

Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation

The Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation is a Frankfurt-based non-profit organisation. The foundation activities focus on collecting, exhibiting and promoting contemporary photography. Deutsche Börse began to build up its collection of contemporary photography in 1999. The Art Collection Deutsche Börse now comprises more than 2,000 works by over 130 artists from 27 nations. Expanding the Art Collection Deutsche Börse is one of the key aims of the foundation. The collection and a changing exhibition programme are open to the public. Together with The Photographers' Gallery in London, the foundation awards the renowned Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize each year. The promotion of young artists is a special concern of the foundation. It supports them in the form of awards, scholarships, exhibitions and cooperations with other institutions, such as the Foam Talents Programme of the Foam Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam. Other focal points include supporting exhibition projects of international museums and institutions, and the expansion of platforms for academic discussion about the medium. www.deutscheboersephotographyfoundation.org

The Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize History

Founded in 1996 by The Photographers' Gallery, and now in its twenty-fifth year, the Prize has become one of the most prestigious international arts awards and has launched and established the careers of many photographers over the years. Previously known as the Citigroup Photography Prize, the Gallery has been collaborating with Deutsche Börse Group as title sponsors since 2005. In 2016 the Prize was retitled as the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize following the establishment of the foundation as a non-profit organisation dedicated to the collection, exhibition and promotion of contemporary photography.

Winner of the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize 2020 was Mohamed Bourouissa for his exhibition *Free Trade*. Past winners include Susan Meiselas, Dana Lixenberg, Trevor Paglen, Paul

Graham, Juergen Teller, Rineke Dijkstra, Richard Billingham, John Stezaker and Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.