



CITIZENSHIP
AWARD
CEREMONY
OF THE P&V
FOUNDATION
2023



FOUNDATION P&V

*emancipation participation
citizenship solidarity*



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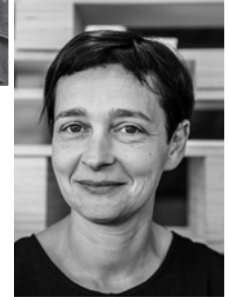
THE CITIZENSHIP AWARD

2023



Jessy Siongers ▶

◀ Olivier Servais



Olivier Servais and Jessy Siongers , co-presidents of the P&V Foundation

Olivier Servais is a professor of anthropology and dean of the Faculty of Economic, Political, Social and Communication Sciences at the University of Louvain (UCLouvain) in Louvain-la-Neuve and Brussels. He heads the international journal *Social Compass*, SAGE, London. He also teaches at L'Institut des Arts de Diffusion in Louvain-la-Neuve. He's co-founder of the Carta Academica Network which defends the commitment of academics in the public debate.

In addition to his academic career, he is also active in civil society. He has served as chairman of the Scouts Pluralistes and Guides and is administrator of various social and cultural institutions.

Jessy Siongers is sociologist and affiliated to the Free University of Brussels (VUB) and Ghent University. She coordinates the interuniversity Knowledge Centre for Cultural Research and is one of the supervisors of the Youth Research Platform. She also teaches Statistics and Cultural Management

at the VUB. She contributed to different national and international studies on children and youth such as the Flemish Youth Monitor and Children's Worlds, an international survey of children's well-being, and is co-editor of different books on young people.

She is also an editorial member of the *Tijdschrift voor Jeugd en Kinderrechten* and national correspondent for the Youth Wiki (EU), an online database on national structures, policies and actions in support of young people in Europe.



The Citizenship Prize rewards people who put into practice the Foundation's objectives and ideals in an exemplary way by promoting a society of active, committed citizens who stand up for the welfare and happiness of others and who contribute to a more just, tolerant and respectful society for all.

The Foundation has asked a panel of 35 persons with different backgrounds (media, politics, economics, culture, social work, science) to nominate candidates for the Citizenship Award. This resulted in a list of 18 candidates. The names of the candidates who were most often chosen by this panel in a preliminary round were gathered in a shortlist with 10 candidates. The panel convened in June to select the laureate for 2023 out of this shortlist (jury).

The jury chose to reward a Belgian film director and screenwriter of Moroccan descent with a social commitment to young people: **Adil El Arbi**.

Adil El Arbi was born on 30 June 1988 in Edegem, Belgium. Together with his directing partner Bilal Fallah, he has made an impressive contribution to the Flemish and international film industry.

Adil and Bilal graduated from the LUCA School of Arts in Brussels. Their graduation film, *Broeders*, won the Audience Award at the Ghent Film Festival in 2011. They made a national name for themselves with their film *Image* in 2014. Their breakthrough came with the film *Black* in 2015, which received rave reviews and won several awards, including the Ensor for Best Director. This success opened the doors to Hollywood, where they made *Bad Boys for Life* in 2020, the third instalment in the *Bad Boys* franchise. They directed the first and last episodes of *Ms. Marvel*, which features a series about a young female Muslim superhero. Adil and Bilal see *Rebel* (2022), about the Islamic State and young Molenbeek residents ending up in Syrian hell, as their most personal film. They are considered to be among the most promising directors of their generation and have won international acclaim for their work.

In addition to his film work, Adil is also committed to social causes. He campaigns for diversity and inclusion in the film industry and encourages the representation of minorities. His work often reflects the experiences and challenges of people from diverse backgrounds. Without adopting a moralistic approach, he puts his finger on

society's wounds. This makes him a very inspiring, connecting, successful role model for young people.

He reaches out to young people through various organisations and events working for greater youth inclusion, such as TADA (Toekomst Atelier Del Avenir) and WAJOW (a platform for young emerging talent in front of and behind the camera). Adil El Arbi was given the opportunity to support a project that is in line with the mission and values of our foundation. He chose the latter: **WAJOW** focuses on more diversity within the artistic scene and connects different cultures, backgrounds and ages through a joint passion for film and online content. It is as much about tapping into the talents of (socially vulnerable) young people as it is about empowering them and broadening their vision of the future. WAJOW Talent Factory is a program for 30 young filmmakers and directors (of photography), who develop their skills for film making and online content during 9 months, with as ultimate goal the production of their very own vertical short film!

Adil can create support and connection, and cuts

across themes that affect different communities such as equal rights for women and men. The jury sees him as a bridge builder between different cultures, between different generations, and between different groups of young people.

Béatrice Delvaux, chief editorialist at *Le Soir*; will pronounce the laureate's laudation.

Besides the financial support of WAJOW, the laureate will receive a woodcut on paper from the artist Philip Aguirre y Otegui.



THE P&V FOUNDATION

The P&V Insurance Group, which originated from the cooperative movement, established the P&V Foundation in 2000 and is its main sponsor. The Foundation operates in total independence and its mission is to fight the social exclusion of young people and promote active citizenship. Based on the most important values of the social economy, the Foundation emphasises active participation, independence and social responsibility among young people. The P&V Foundation was recognised as a foundation for public utility in 2005.



FOUNDATION P&V

*emancipation participation
citizenship solidarity*



Youth Forum on 19.04.2023 © alohafred

A FOUNDATION AT YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE!

The cornerstone of the P&V Foundation is the fight against the exclusion of young people. The Foundation wants to guide young people regarding different aspects of social life. By giving them the necessary opportunities and by actively involving them, it helps them take their lives into their own hands.

The objective of the P&V Foundation is therefore to provide young people with a range of resources that appeal to their talents and convictions. It wants to encourage young people to show solidarity, to develop their sense of citizenship by helping them to express their ideas, to cooperate, to respect each other and to increase their sense of responsibility. Because young people are the adults of tomorrow, the P&V Foundation aims to increase their opportunities for development by means of projects young people select themselves and in which they participate.



Podcast with Made by Brussels - 19.04.2023 © alohatred

25TH ANNIVERSARY

Although created in 2000, the current operation of the P&V Foundation began 25 years ago with the creation of the first Belgian Youth Parliament by the P&V Fund within the King Baudouin Foundation. This Youth Parliament was already fighting against the exclusion of young people.

On 19 April 2023, we celebrated this 25th anniversary. It became a festive event where we brought together different people, youngsters, experts, organisations, partners, etc. Not only to reflect on the past years but also to reflect on the future.

25 years of the P&V Foundation summarised in a few figures? That generates the following infographic. Together with many experts and independent juries, over the past 25 years we have honoured more than 200 laureates as a result of project calls, scientific prizes, Citizenship



Awards,...More than 36,000 young people were involved in these projects, as final beneficiaries but also as active participants. More than 400 young people were indeed given a voice and an active role within our own projects or in projects we supported. In doing so, they themselves built the projects that combat youth exclusion and promote active citizenship.



The P&V Foundation stands out from other actors in the landscape of foundations and philanthropic institutions. In the future, we want to build on those distinctive pillars and anchor them even more strongly in our actions and operation. Evidence-based working was part of the Foundation's DNA from the very beginning.

In the future, we want to build the scientific basis even more systematically into our entire approach. It is our ambition to stay more up-to-date on scientific advances and important future topics. We also want to give the voice of young people an even more structural place in our operations. The success of our youth forum strengthens our conviction that we need to build on this youth input.

Finally, in addition to a 'replicator/accelerator' function, we also want to build into our project calls an 'incubator/laboratory' function. This means that we not only support projects that have proven their worth, but also help develop promising projects. In doing so, we accept some risk, but it is a reasoned risk. Indeed, thanks to

our many partnerships and collaborations, we can fall back on structures that can partially absorb these risks. The fact that we can rely on both internal and external partnerships is fairly unique and we want to maintain those in the future. Always, of course, in function of our mission and in line with our values. A mission and values that are more important today than ever.

More information? Scan this QR code and have a look at our film or dive into our brochure published for the occasion!





CONNECTING YOU(TH)

With its «ConnectingYou(th)» project, the P&V Foundation aimed to overcome social divisions among young people. The project consisted of two parts: a call for projects and a youth forum. This project was an opportunity for twenty young people aged between 16 and 23, from different backgrounds and from all over Belgium, to gain experience in active citizenship.

Following the call for projects, the Youth Forum selected 14 non-profit organisations that facilitate mutual encounters between young people with different backgrounds and overcome social divisions, through projects supported by the P&V Foundation. Each organisation worked at its own level to overcome these divisions through 4 themes: inclusion, education, promoting entrepreneurship and citizenship, culture and the media, and sport.

The final event on 19 April 2023, co-organised and co-hosted by the Youth Forum, brought together young people, researchers, youth experts and non-profit organisations to share their experiences through interactive

workshops, podcasts, debates and slam poetries.... Participants of the Youth Forum also had the opportunity to discuss their concerns with the Ministers of Youth, Benjamin Dalle and Valérie Glatigny.

The recommendations of all actors will be gathered in a forthcoming publication. Furthermore, the P&V Foundation took the opportunity to engage 3 Youth Forum members to the Youth Coalition of Brussels 2030. The Youth Coalition is part of the Co-creation workstream of Brussels2030, Brussels' bid to become European Capital of Culture in 2030, and more specifically of the Speak Up Brussels! project, which aims to collect the demands of young Brussels' residents for debate in the Brussels Parliament.



Performance by Jemy BSG and youngsters of A frohouse Belgium - 19.04.2023 © alohaFred



The Youth Forum in conversation with Ministers of Youth - 19.04.2023 © alohaFred

Discover the film of the Youth Forum by scanning this QR-code.



Project supported by the National Lottery.



KEEP

In 2021-2023, the P&V Foundation took part in the Erasmus+ KEEP project with 6 partners from 4 countries in order to pool the good practices put in place by secondary school teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain contact with young people and combat the risk of dropping out of school.

In 2023 the last phase was implemented by the finalization of all Work Packages and the organisation of events to disseminate the results of the KEEP project. The 20 portraits, created to highlight the educational practices, challenges and opportunities encountered in the four participating countries, were presented at conferences in each of the partner countries with the participation of teachers, experts, representatives of research institutes, youngsters, policy makers etc.

The Belgian national conference was held in Brussels on 15 February 2023 under the title: «The impact of Covid 19 on young people in and out of school. Factors and obstacles to maintaining the link with young people», where

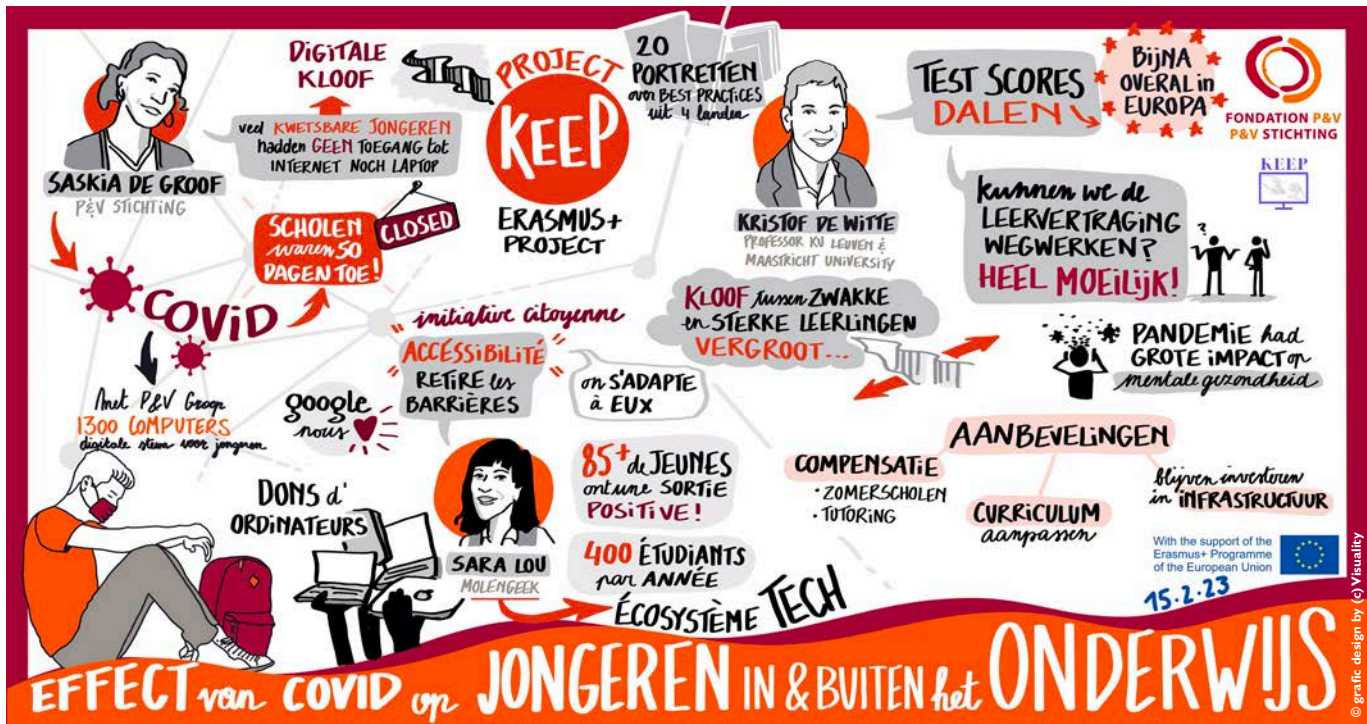
we presented both the results of the KEEP project and those of our national Linking Youth Up project.

The study concluded with a European conference in Paris and a good practices' and recommendations' report on innovative

methodologies used by secondary teachers to keep in touch with learners from a distance, and the obstacles and enablers of remote education in the fight against early school leaving.

Scan this QR-code for more information:





A CITIZENSHIP AWARD WITH AN EYE FOR VALUES

In order to emphasise and add resonance to its ideal of citizenship, the P&V Foundation organises its annual Citizenship Award, which is awarded to Belgian or foreign persons, initiatives or organisations that have contributed to an open, democratic and tolerant society in an exemplary way.

2005

Fadéla Amara (Ni Putes Ni Soumises) and Job Cohen (Mayor of Amsterdam) were the first to receive the Citizenship Award in 2005.



2005

2006

In 2006 the prize was awarded to singer, writer and sculptor Wannes Van de Velde and director duo Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne.



2006

2007

Senegalese human rights activist Khady Koita, president of the European Network for the Prevention of Female Genital Mutilation and author of *Mutilée*, received the award in 2007.



2007

2008

In 2008 the prize was awarded to two ladies: Jeanne Devos, human rights activist and founder of the National Domestic Workers' Movement (NDWM), and Simone Süsskind, president of Actions dans la Méditerranée.



2008

2009

In 2009 two Belgian organisations were rewarded for their efforts to promote intercultural dialogue and awareness of citizenship: Kif Kif and Les Territoires de la Mémoire.



2009

2010

In 2010 the panel selected a duo that was awarded for its endeavours to promote the reintegration of prisoners. Jacqueline Rousseau founded Adeppi (Atelier d'Education Permanente pour Personnes Incarcérées) in 1981 and Guido Verschueren has provided humane leadership at the prison in Leuven for 30 years.



2010

2011

In 2011 the Citizenship Prize was awarded to Stéphane Hessel, diplomat, human rights activist and author of *Indignez-vous!* (Time for Outrage!), which was sold over four million copies worldwide.



2011

2012

In 2012, the P&V Foundation awarded its 8th prize to Dr Izzeldin Abuelaish, author of the book "I Shall Not Hate"



2012

2013

Jan Goossens, the artistic director of the KVS (the Brussels Royal Flemish Theatre), received the award in 2013. He has led the KVS to an urban and contemporary theatre, focusing on diversity in his own country and on cultural wealth elsewhere in the world.



2013

2014

In 2014, the Citizenship Award was given out to two people who give, on a daily basis, opportunities to socially vulnerable people to participate in society: Reinhilde Decler, actress and instigator of the Theater Company «Tutti Fratelli» and Ho Chul Chantraine, Founder of Agricover, a cooperative company with social and ecological objectives.



2014

2015

The Citizenship Award 2015 has been accorded to Eric Domb, founder of Pairi Daiza, and Frans De Clerck, co-founder of Triodos bank Belgium.



2015

2016

In 2016, Michel Claise, investigating magistrate specialised in financial crime, and Jan Nolf, honorary justice of the peace and critical observer, were the designated laureates for the 12th citizenship award.



2016

2017

In 2017, the Citizenship Prize was awarded to Paul Collier, professor of economics at the University of Oxford and influential thinker on migration and development economics.



2017

2018

Michel Pradolini received the Citizenship Award in 2018. He is the driving force behind and chairman of the widely supported social football club City Pirates.



2018

2019

In 2019, the Citizenship Prize was awarded to journalists Virginie Nguyen and Geert Mak. Two laureates who bring out a broader story and vision of society in an accessible way, by means of testimonials and portraits of ordinary people.



2019

2020

In 2020, the Citizenship Award went to a female journalist for her active and militant citizenship: Waad al-Kateab.



2020

2021

In 2021, the Citizenship Prize was awarded to Jean Drèze, a Belgian-born Indian development economist and social activist.



2021

2022

In 2022, the Citizenship Award was given to Dorottya Rédei, a Hungarian academic and LGBTQI+- and human rights activist.



2022

THE LAUREATE

ADIL EL ARBI

Dreaming of Steven Spielberg as an eight-year-old boy in Antwerp South, and before you're even thirty, a major US magazine names you 'the Spielberg of Molenbeek' and a Next Generation Leader. It sounds like a feel-good movie, the kind of family film that sweeps everyone up in someone else's dream world from under a warm blanket. But it is reality. And indeed, the promise that the young director was going to make it big has since come true. Both Hollywood and the international festival circuit went berserk. *Bad Boys #4* is in the final stage of completion, the pile of future scripts growing. But it is not the success at the box office or with the critics that made P&V Foundation to award Adil El Arbi the Citizenship Award 2023. It is his attitude to life, his commitment to metropolitan youth, his contribution to social cohesion, his belief in the possibility of embracing diversity and making dreams come true – for everyone. So much for the trailer:

The actual story begins on the border between Wilrijk and Edegem, where Adil El Arbi was born in 1988. Because his mother had to deliver via caesarean section, the birth certificate says Edegem, otherwise it would have been Wilrijk. But actually he is really from Antwerp: the first years he lived between Vlaamse Kaai and Waalse Kaai - how symbolic do you want it to be? Later the family moved more towards Berchem. But he always went to school in the centre of Antwerp.

El Arbi's parents were market vendors. On weekends, they worked at the Vogelenmarkt with their textile stall, which changed along with the rhythm of fashions and rages. When, because of Michael Jordan, basketball and the NBA became wildly popular, they sold the one and only NBA shirts. During World Cup or European Championships, there were piles of football shirts. Another time everything was Kabouter Plop or K3, then it was Pokémon again

with the whole range: clothes, toys, cards, shoes, ... Sometimes young Adil went with them to the market, often he stayed at home. In the sofa, in front of TV, because 'I was not a very social child, so sports clubs or youth movements didn't appeal.'

Adil El Arbi: 'I watched everything: films, series, documentaries, reports, the news... That definitely sparked a love for cinema and fiction in general.' If out of that multitude of visual stimuli, one influence stood out, it was Steven Spielberg. 'Not just the movies appealed to me, but the whole phenomenon. Dinosaurs were made popular by *Jurassic Park*, Spielberg was on the news, and then it turned out he was also the man behind *ET*, *Indiana Jones*, *Jaws*, even the cartoon series *Tiny Toon Adventures* started with 'Steven Spielberg Presents'... The man was a phenomenon and it was because of him that I started to realise that films are made by a director, and that I started to think I wanted to

become one too. The first time I got a glimpse behind the scenes of film was by watching *The making of Jurassic Park*. Adil was eight at the time.

Interview by Gie Goris



“IF WE OPEN DOORS FOR
THE NEXT GENERATION,
THEY CAN MAKE THEIR
DREAMS COME TRUE”

ADIL EL ARBI



WHEN THE DREAM IS STRONGER THAN CALCULATION

During the week, he had to go to school, of course. Kindergarten and primary at St Lutgardis, secondary at St Jan Berchmans College afterwards. It was not always easy for Adil El Arbi to balance between home, where he spoke French with his parents who spoke Arabic among themselves, and school. 'Sometimes I did miss an explanation or an assignment or an appointment in the first years in kindergarten,' he laughs, 'but the older I got, the more Dutch became the natural language.' Quite a few Flemish politicians and opinion leaders are convinced that multiple languages create an obstacle for the chances children with recent migration histories have at school and in society. Does he understand the strict ban on a language other than Dutch on the playground, in the refectory or anywhere else in school? 'Obviously it took me years to master that Dutch completely, but apparently I did. Besides, I have great doubts about whether you can oblige or ban a language in free time, even within the walls of the school. Such a measure mainly fuels rebellion among teenagers, I would think.'

Adil El Arbi was a bright and ambitious child from a migrant background. That kind of profile usually leads straight to law or medicine studies, but certainly not to art school. Could his parents live with the choice to go to St Lukas Art School? El Arbi: 'Indeed, it seemed much more natural to choose a conventional career as a lawyer, civil engineer or doctor after my Latin-Math Studies. But by that time I had been convinced for so long that I wanted to be a filmmaker; that it felt evident that I would try that first. For me, life was obvious: «I'm going to Hollywood!» My mother believed in my dream, my father was a bit more apprehensive, because he saw how difficult it was even for pure white Belgians to make movies, let alone for someone of Moroccan origin and born in Belgium...At the time, there wasn't a single example to which I could point and say: you see, it can be done. Not in Belgium, and certainly not a Belgian with a migrant background. The only international directors who spoke Dutch were from the Netherlands.'



When he arrived at art school, he was immediately confronted with reality. 'At Sint Jan Berchmans, I was the only one who dreamt of a future as a filmmaker; while at Sint Lukas I immediately came face to face with 75 other young people with exactly that same dream – that makes you realise how little chance there is that they will all succeed. Moreover, I arrived with a Hollywood dream, while the other students knew much more about artistic films and their makers, the central focus of the curriculum.'

To top it all, the school was very white and, worse, the artistic discipline he had chosen had remained, in Belgium at least, very white, both in front of and behind the camera. So how does an 18-year-old dreamer keep his nerve when faced with these challenges? El Arbi: 'What certainly helped, was that Bilal Fallah was at the same school, so we could fight that battle

together: We immediately became the duo we still are. Thanks to Bilal, we soon found out that we needed to tell stories from our own backgrounds. That didn't immediately fit into my Big Dream, and so in that first year we still made too much wannabe Hollywood, and in any case not enough personal work.'





IN A UNIVERSAL STORY, EACH RECOGNISES THEIR HUMANITY

Personal filming does not mean that the director focuses the camera on his own innermost thoughts. It means he discovers what he has to say that matters to society and audiences. 'This is a fundamental insight that was taught to us in school,' says Adil. 'The essence is that you create a story with characters for whom the reader, the listener or the viewer can feel empathy. The story has to be universal.' Adil El Arbi is convinced that people are not only interested in stories that reflect their own lives or backgrounds. 'People long for stories from distant lands, from times long gone, about people who are completely different. Provided they are about recognisable – universal – feelings or dilemmas. It should revolve around being happy or unhappy, falling in love or being abandoned, about good and evil, about guilt and penance. About the fundamentals we can all recognise and identify with.'

That is why, he says, stories about Japanese samurais continue to appeal, even though they come from very far away and from a different era. That is why Greek tragedies are retold generation after generation. It is why we are enthralled by the non-existent world of science fiction. 'Because they are built around recognisable feelings, values and choices. That's also why a film like *Oppenheimer* scores so well, not because everyone is a nuclear scientist, but because he had a dream, found a breakthrough, but also got doubts because his invention might end up dramatically bad...'

Adil & Bilal locate their universal stories right at the heart of the daily reality of today's metropolis, showing the world from the perspective they grew up with and experienced. That world is super diverse, anything but easy and sometimes violent, but one hundred per cent human.

THE COLOURED CITY AND THE WHITE SCREEN

To film those stories, they needed a much more diverse cast than what can be found at drama schools in this country. For *Image*, the first real Adil & Bilal feature film, they even set up their own casting agency. Adil El Arbi: 'The agency still exists and is now called *Oi Mundo*. Ten years ago, there was really hardly anyone of colour in drama schools, so we had to do street casting. Today that situation has improved a bit, I think, but we are definitely not yet where we need to be.' El Arbi is pleased to note that, thanks to their films and series, he has helped open doors to a new and more diverse generation of talent. 'Many of the actors from migrant backgrounds who are now getting roles and are professionals, often got their first opportunity with us. That is nice to see, especially because that, in turn, is inspiring again more young people to pursue their artistic dreams.'

During a conversation we had in 2015 about the lack of diversity on screen, Adil El Arbi said that a good screenplay does not start from a political choice to write this or that background into the story, but rather from credible, strong

characters. 'The story and roles should be written «colour-blind» in the first place. The question is simply; what is a cool story? Only when you have that, with clearly defined characters who can drive in the story, can you assign roles based on the diverse composition of the cast.' This is less of a guide for his own work, he now says. He considers it rather good advice for white writers who struggle more with these issues, because they fear making mistakes and being judged for them. 'By first composing an authentic character; they can free themselves from that predicament. It is precisely the frenetic handling of the diverse reality that causes characters to lose their authenticity, and that is a mortal sin. I myself am freer in that, I think.'

Flemish directors automatically assuming that all characters are blonde and have blue eyes, and are called Peter or Sarah, are not necessarily racist, he said eight years ago, 'they are rather automaticist. Because everything that has worked so far has been white television, and a series with a majority of roles for immigrants has



never been shown before, they automatically focus every new series on the same familiar faces.' Meanwhile, Adil & Bilal made *Grand (Soil)*, a series about young undertakers who want to serve their Moroccan clients in Molenbeek by enabling burial in consecrated ground near Brussels. That sounds exactly what he was asking for: a series with Belgian diversity at its heart, mostly with actors with migration backgrounds, and broadcasted on Netflix. Adil El Arbi indeed sees a positive evolution. 'New series are more diverse, news programmes are more diverse. Far from what we need, but not as white as when we started turning *Image* ten years ago, when you didn't find people of Moroccan, African or other origin anywhere in Belgian fiction. Today, one can already put together a decent football team, or maybe even two, with actors or media people with migrant backgrounds.'

RELEVANT STORIES FOR A WIDE AUDIENCE

Can he briefly summarise what he actually wants to bring about with the films he makes, I ask. The answer shows that El Arbi has a remarkably good idea of what he is doing and has already thought about the wording of his answer many times: 'That varies from film to film. *Bad Boys for Life* is something completely different than *Rebel* or *Black*. But certainly with our Belgian films and series, we try to tell something about society today. These films have the ambition to express our point of view and become a testimony of the times we live in. We try to immerse broad audiences into stories they might not otherwise

know. With *Image* and *Black* we focused on chunks of life and problems in Brussels, with *Patser* (or *Gangsta*, as the film was called in international release) we told the story of drugs and cocaine violence in Antwerp - which was hardly known at the time. Those films are also entertainment, but they are also educative, because they create opportunities to talk about current challenges. That is also why they are often shown in schools. That in itself is a merit, I think, to give young people the opportunity to think and talk about issues that affect them.'

Adil El Arbi is also acutely aware of the unequal position in which girls and women find themselves in all too often. That too is a theme he consciously addresses or incorporates in his films: 'In both *Image* and *Black*, the lead is a strong woman - which is exceptional for movies set «in the neighbourhoods». *Ms Marvel* revolved around a female superhero. So did *Batgirl*, although that one is kept in Warner Bros' cellar and can't play her role for now. I make a conscious effort to create strong female characters and make them central to our films. That is my way of conveying feminism: fair and equal opportunities for women, rather than macho masculinity.'



Rebel, the duo's latest feature film, which is now also running in US arthouse cinema, tells the story of Islamist militants from Molenbeek who went to Syria and became part of the civil war there. The traumas of that period, both in Syria and in Brussels and Paris, are still so fresh, that it is quite daring to tell that story at this point with the empathy any authentic character deserves. 'We wondered more than once whether we

should do this,' says Adil El Arbi. 'There was the very real possibility to pursue commercial projects in Hollywood, but we felt the story was too important. We couldn't leave it untold. *Rebel* shows a decade that marked us all. The movie is what we have to say about that period, what we felt about it, how we processed it. By turning these experiences and discussions into a movie, we create the space to approach those involved as fully human. Compare it to what *WIL* does for the period of World War II: that story resists the temptation to simply dismiss all collaborators as inhumans, and instead explores their motives, their dilemmas, their choices. I wanted to do the same with Syria, the war, the excesses there. The reality is not that monsters left Belgium for Syria, but that otherwise ordinary guys ended up committing monstrous acts. What we show is how someone, having made mistakes, gets dragged into the logic or actions of a mafia - in this case, a religious mafia. They are the real bad guys, but most of those involved are basically cowards, or so scared they will do whatever needed to survive.'



© Jo Voets

How does he deal with the ambiguity of what he makes or does, I want to know. Because, for instance, *Image* denounces the deep gap between the lives of young people in Molenbeek and the images the media create about them and their city, while on the other hand, films like *Black* and *Rebel* focus on street violence and religious fanaticism in Molenbeek. Did he ever ask himself whether, through those movies, he was actually contributing to the negative perception that was the target of *Image*?

That is certainly an important question to ask, says El Arbi, but it should not prevent a director from telling relevant stories. '*Black* is about the gangs that were active in Brussels, and then you have to show violence or certainly not cover it up. In *Rebel*, we made sure that all the scenes from Molenbeek - globally regarded as the most dangerous neighbourhood in the world - were as mundane as life itself. Nothing significant happens on the streets. The war takes place in Syria, not in Molenbeek. The series *Grand* was also shot in Molenbeek, showing the streets and neighbourhoods as chill places

where people live. Image talks about the riots in Molenbeek and about the paradoxical spiral in which media portray young people in that part of Brussels as violent, and therefore they report on it, and because only then they report on it, young people start to behave that way, and so the media start reporting on it again...'



THERE IS NO MODEL, BUT INSPIRATION WORKS

TIME magazine called Adil El Arbi the Spielberg of Molenbeek and a next-generation leader back in 2017. Variety named him and Bilal Fallah as rising stars in the film firmament. And now P&V Foundation is praising Adil El Arbi as a role model for young people in the super-diverse country that is Belgium. How does that make him feel? El Arbi: 'My contention has always been that whoever wants to be a role model, certainly isn't. So I don't seek that role, but I do realise that in the meantime I have become an inspiration for many, and that comes with some responsibility. The fact that I became successful by dreaming big and working hard, the fact that as a Moroccan Belgian I have the unique opportunity to make films with legendary stars in Hollywood, that lays the question at my doorstep: what do you do with that? My answer is: I want to be an ambassador of my country, my origins, my religion. Being allowed to film Ms Marvel, the first Muslim comic book character to become a superhero, was an opportunity and an honour. If I can show the kind of talent Muslims or people with a migrant background

bring to society, that makes me happy and maybe it will make the world a little happier for some young people.'

Adil El Arbi does not limit his responsibility to some celebrity charisma, he also rolls up his sleeves. Brussels-based initiatives like Toekomst Atelier Del Avenir (TADA) and WAJOW can count on his commitment, and young people gripped by film get his roadmap to move ahead. These engagements give him the chance to show young people that their dreams can be achievable goals. 'When I started, Hollywood was unattainable. But the Oscar nomination for Michaël Roskam (for *Rundskop*) changed that for me, because I knew him well and then saw him among all those stars and at that big event. The same with Matthias Schoenaerts. That had the effect that a whole generation started thinking: if they can hit all the way up there, so can we. That's what I want to do for the new generation. Showing that I am at home in the world of Hollywood, but also in the Brussels neighbourhoods. If I can do it, so can you.'



That's inspiring, but is it really true? Young and aspiring people from vulnerable backgrounds need more than a dream and an example, they also need a trainer and continued guidance, no? Adil El Arbi: 'I am particularly opposed to the mentality that will say «it will never work anyway, because...». Why give up without trying, or after failing once? Who would have ever thought that two boys from Moroccan origin from Belgium would direct *Bad Boys*? Yet they succeeded. You have to believe in it and work for it. You have to develop technical skills, have something to say and be willing to persevere.'

BLINGBLING DOES NOT DRIVE ME

Film in general and Hollywood in particular is also a world of Big Ego's, Big Money and Blingbling. That does not fit with the image we have of Adil El Arbi as an approachable young director who keeps glitz and ostentatious living at more than an arm's length. 'That has to do with one's past and upbringing,' El Arbi responds, 'and how you process that. I really lived in deep poverty at one point and I can't get that out of my head. The feeling that everything could be over tomorrow is always present, and so I feel the need to save and be careful of what I do. With that background, you always are conscious that it is not evident to eat what you want, instead of depending on food banks and other charity. Appearances and blingbling don't drive me. What makes me thick, is everything that helps me make my dream come through in an honest and authentic way.'

Is that also what he wants to pass on to young people: go for your dream, not for the glitz? El Arbi: 'The main message is that glitter and wealth should not be your goal. Do you like going out with expensive clothes and wear shiny gold? I

don't care. As characters, by the way, those blingblingers are interesting because of their extravagance. But if that becomes your only motivation, you have a problem. Ultimately, you have to follow your passion, be it medicine, art or plumbing. Everything else is less important.'

As the soundtrack behind this conversation begins to swell a bit and the camera shows a moving shadow softly silhouetted on the white wall behind Adil El Arbi, I expect the credits to start running any moment. But I had two final questions.

After all that insane success, the star buddies and the transcontinental life, does Adil still suffer from what he used to call 'fear for failure'? He does not hesitate: 'That fear remains present and is necessary. It really becomes dangerous once you start working blind, with no fear for failure, because then you are not prepared for setbacks. And yes, I have had my fair share of that too.'



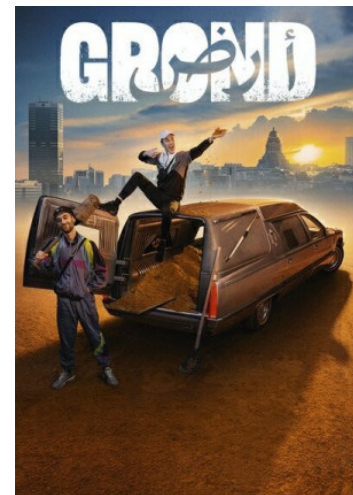
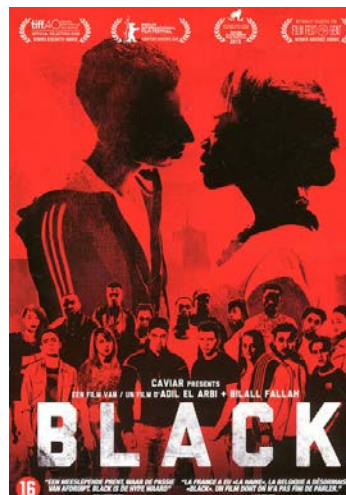
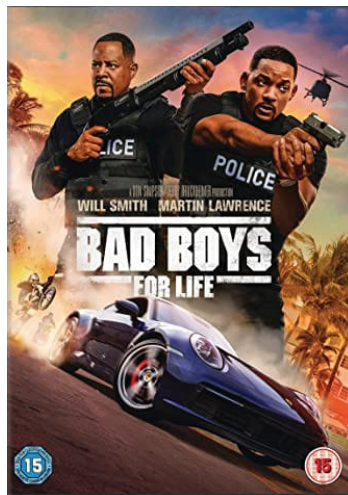


Adil with youngsters of TADA © Antonio Ponte

My last question was a game, but as that shadow comes more and more emphatically into view, I fear it is too late. I ask it anyway: 'Adil & Bilal or Adil & Loubna?' The shadow laughs with surprising pleasure and Adil rushes to answer: 'Adil & Loubna, without a doubt.'

Later that evening, I see a picture on journalist Loubna Khalkhali's social media of a living room, with two plates filled with delicious food, for two happy people who were at home and together again. Maybe that is what success looks like?

(End credits start running now: produced by P&V Foundation, directed by Gie Goris, starring: Adil El Arbi, support acts: Bilal Fallah, Loubna Khalkhali, Steven Spielberg, and all the young talents of Belgium with whatever background they have).



Biography

1988: Born in Edegem near Antwerp

2011: Graduated as a film maker at LUCA School of Arts in Brussels

2014: Founder of Hakuna casting, with Bilal Fallah and Matthias Schoenaerts

2015: Sponsor of the non-profit youth organisation TADA (ToekomstAtelierDelAvenir)

2017: Considered Next generation leader by Time

2020: Partner with Bilal Fallah of the WAJOW project : platform that encourage youth film and online content creation





Red Carpet Cannes 2022 © Management Ken Lambrichts

Filmography Adil & Bilal

2023: Bad Boys 4 (preproduction)

2022: Batgirl (Film) – Directors (unfinished)

2022: Ms. Marvel (TV Series) – Directors & Executive Producers

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films 2022 – Winner of Saturn Award: Best Performance by a Younger Actor in a Streaming Series

2022: Rebel (Film) - Directors & Writers

Cannes Film Festival 2022 - Official Selection

2021: Soil (TV Series) - Directors

*Film Fest Gent 2021 – Official Selection
Film Festival Ostend Ensors 2022 – Winner of Best TV Series, Best Script & Best Acting Performance in a Leading Role*

2020: Bad Boys for Life (Film) – Directors

Critics Choice Super Awards 2020
NAACP Image Awards 2020 – Winner of Outstanding Motion Picture
BET Awards 2020
People's Choice Awards 2020 – Winner of Favorite Motion Picture, Favorite Male Movie Star

2018: Gangsta (Film) - Directors, Editors, Writers

Palm Springs International Film Festival 2018 – Variety's Directors to Watch
Film Festival Ostend Ensors 2018 – Winner of Telenet Audience Award

2017: Scalped (TV Movie) - Directors

2017: Snowfall (TV Series) - Directors

2017: Hashtag (Short) - Directors, Editors, Writers

2015: Black (Film) - Directors & Writers

Toronto International Film Festival 2015 – Winner of Discovery Award
Film Fest Gent 2015 – Winner of Port of Ghent Public Choice Award
Tallin Film Festival 2015 – Official Selection – Winner of Best Actress
Gijon Film Festival 2015 – Official Selection
Festival International du Film Francophone 2015 – Official Selection
Film Festival Ostend Ensors 2016 – Winner of Best Direction, Best Actress, Best Editor, Telenet Audience Award
Ramdam Festival 2016 - Winner of Best Film & Most Impressive Film of the Year
SXSW 2016 – Narrative Spotlight Selection
Edinburgh International Film Festival 2016 – Official Selection
Hamburg Film Festival 2016 – Official Selection
Netia Off Camera International Festival of Independent Cinema 2016 – Winner of Making Way Award
Black Film Festival Montreal 2016 – Winner of Best Narrative Feature

2014: Image (Film) - Directors & Writers

Film Festival Ostend Ensors 2015 – Telenet Audience Award
Netherlands Film Festival 2015 – Official Selection

2012: Bergica (TV Series) - Directors & Writers

2011: Broeders (Short) - Directors & Writers

Film Fest Gent 2011 – Winner of Best Student Short
Leuven international Film Festival 2011 – Winner of Audience Award
Flanders Audiovisual Fund 2011 – Winner of Wildcard

LAUDATION

BÉATRICE DELVAUX

1960: Born in Namur

1983: Master's degree in economics and social sciences from Facultés universitaires Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix in Namur

1983: Traineeship at the International Monetary Fund in Washington

1984: Joined *Le Soir* newspaper

1989: *Head of the economics department*

2001: *Editor-in-chief of Le Soir*

Since 2011: *Chief editorialist of Le Soir*

Columnist at *De Standaard*

Author of the book 'Le bal des empires' with Stefaan Michiels from *De Standaard* (Editions Racines), about the upheavals of Belgian capitalism.

Bruggenbouwer; constructeur de ponts, bridgebuilder: there's no more beautiful and difficult job in the world. And there is no better person to embody it than Adil El Arbi. When you mention his name, however, it's not certain that this qualifier and this profession come to mind. They'll say actor; world star; friend of Will Smith, filmmaker. They'll say Bilal Fallah, Molenbeek, Hollywood, Morocco, Antwerp, Brussels. They'll say Rebel, Black,

Bad Boys For Life, Gangsta. We'll say Flemish, Brussels, Belgian, Moroccan, Dutch, French. We'll agree on «Slimste mens ter wereld», the most intelligent man in the world.

Obviously, if you're a French-speaking Walloon over the age of 50, you might not say anything, because it's in this demographic that his fame hasn't (yet) percolated. So yes, this young man still has a few territories to conquer; but nothing compared to what he has already stored up, swallowed and devoured, but above all to all the people he has already seduced.

Bridge builder? If we were worthy of the task he has accomplished, we would have to say that he has built real crossroads, bringing together - in both directions - cultures, regions, languages, universes, sexes, nationalities, cultural genres, enemies and religions.



Adil El Arbi,

it's the story of a little boy who spoke French and Arabic at home and Dutch at school, which made him the smartest man in Flanders and like a fish in water in Brussels.

it's the story of a son of fabric merchants on the Antwerp market, who became a filmmaker in Hollywood.

it's the story of a North African who made a remarkable entrance into the very white world of a Brussels' art school.

it's the story of a man who opened the eyes on Antwerp, Brussels and Molenbeek to all those who knew them, thought they knew them, didn't want to know them or didn't know them.

it's the story of a man who forced a meeting on screen between Molenbeekers who had left to become terrorists in Syria and all those who cursed them, refused to see them, to listen to them or to look at them, didn't want to know or had decided to stop thinking about them.

it's the story of a man who doesn't just show people to each other, but who creates or supports places where people can break out of their own walls and cross bridges, where fears can be unleashed and people can in turn build crossroads while being deeply and intensely themselves.

it's the story of a man who made women his partners, and feminism a fight for all.

it's the story of a man who proclaims that young people are not threatening or depressing, but powerful, breathtaking, brilliant.

it's the story of a man who makes dreams available to everyone, whatever their origin, sex, gender or skin colour.

In these dark times, a man who is all these things has achieved much more than being the Spielberg of Molenbeek. He is a model, an inspiration, the embodiment of possibilities, of richness, of necessity and above all, of the orgasmic pleasure that comes from diversity, multiculturalism, fusion and intersections.

Adil El Arbi is the story of a man who has made his dreams come true and is telling us «If I can do it, so can you».

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THE ARTIST

PHILIP AGUIRRE Y OTEGUI

Internationally renowned sculptor Philip Aguirre y Otegui (1961) lives and works in Antwerp. He studied at the Antwerp Academy of Fine Arts. He has been strongly influenced by many trips and stays, first in Rome, Florence and Spain, and later on in Latin America and Africa. A number of his pieces are part of important collections, and many are on display in public spaces. He regularly participates in individual or group exhibitions both in Belgium and abroad. On 17 March 2017, he received the International Award for Public Art for this work in Hong Kong. From October 2022 until the end of January 2023, his work was shown in the Plantin-Moretusmuseum in Antwerp: “L’invitation au voyage”. A selection of his drawings and graphic works is presented in a book published on the occasion of this exposition.

<http://www.philipaguirre.be/>

Philip Aguirre has stood out from the artistic and conceptual flows of his time since the early 1980s. He is interested in classical art, cubists and modernists, as well as other cultures - African art, in particular. In his own words, his work contains: ‘References to cubism, Greek art or a baroque sculpture - these can all be seen in my work, but I try to absorb them into a personal style. To my mind, beauty is neither good nor lovely. True beauty also depicts the cruelty of life. This is why I strive for a kind of poetry - one that isn’t abstract, but rather tries to make elements of our world readable.’

Versatile artist Aguirre has built up a rich body of work in various art disciplines over the past 40 years. He is best known for his sculptures, installations and monumental works in public spaces. His extensive oeuvre of drawings and graphic works is much less known. The focus on drawing forms the start of his thought process but techniques such as etchings and





water shortages, migration, social injustice, and poverty. He is guided by images of the world today, people in situations of violence, people fleeing, and protests, among other things, as well as by concrete issues such as the Israeli-Palestine conflict, or young migrants risking the journey to Europe in a rickety boat, seeking a better life.

While Philip Aguirre's art is consistent and personal, it is also evolving on an ongoing basis and is always particularly engaged and humanistic in nature.

woodcuts also often feature in his work. Human figures and landscapes are his main source of inspiration. 'My images abstract personal traits, and link social issues to the universal concept of humanity.'

His focus is on the world, and his works radiate with a certain kind of thoughtfulness: they are powerful and poetic at the same time. He is sensitive to societal issues such as



Exile

Adil El Arbi will receive a woodcut, printed on Japanese paper, created in 2017, called "Exile". It is an excerpt from a stream of refugees based on newspaper photographs of the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. Miles of people streaming through the jungle, packed with mattresses, pots and pans, clothing... I rendered these as silhouettes. The work is featured in his book "L'invitation au voyage" (Mercatorfonds, 2022)

*This text is based on Philip Aguirre y Otegui (2008)
– "Sculptures, 1985–2007", Mercatorfonds, as
well as texts by the artist himself.*



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