

ROBBY MÜLLER AWARD 2021

There is a great responsibility inherent in the issuance of any award, and that responsibility weighs heavier when the award is in honor of an exceptional personality. As a cinematographer, Robby Müller created more than iconic images of cinema history, but also photography, painting, and art in general. Müller's singular eye infused his images with a deeply personal touch that allows them to unfold for the audience in a constant process of becoming. They smoothly oscillate between artistry and effortlessness, as if they have always been there: natural, living artefacts of the world itself.

In an effort to honor such qualities in other, contemporary creators of the moving image, members of the Robby Müller Award jury have been captivated, again and again, by the oeuvre of Kelly Reichardt as an example of a pure film language that is at once classical and entirely new.

Known for their precise, detailed portrayal of everyday yet underrepresented America, Kelly Reichardt's films are made of gestures and glances—pauses and words-in-between-the-lines—all of which serve as almost documentary evidence of a quiet yet epic life. The near transcendental calmness of her works comes from her ability to see different beings and objects as equal and related parts of the same universe. Roads, landscapes, humans, animals, trains, streets, trees and even a small lizard share almost the same fragility there. Frequently shot with natural light en plein air or through the lenses of urban landscapes (doors and windows) the images in her films have a crystal-clear transparency. They illuminate a space in which the narrative has a chance to evolve by itself, and where a viewer's gaze can wander freely.

The sensitive, caring eye of Reichardt *animates*, in the ancient (Greek) sense of the word, things that we tend to perceive as mundane and peripheral, if not marginal. Sometimes, perhaps involuntarily, echoing the paintings of Edward Hopper—an artist very dear to Robby Müller—she reinterprets quotidian experiences as moments of fleeting magic, poetry, and tenderness. Even if those moments are full of loneliness, melancholy, despair or harrowing placelessness.

The authentic aim of cinematography, as understood in the early days of cinema, is to revive things, to focus on what exists out of sight or remains invisible. To make this happen today—in the digital age of overproduction and banalization of images through oversaturation—is perhaps even more challenging than ever before. The palpable lightness of Reichardt's images reestablishes the profoundness of cinema and gives it a modern touch that is hyper-sensitive to the representation of humans and nature, femininity and masculinity, friendship and love.

Reichardt's work shows a remarkable sensibility and a diligence of visual language, on a par with the poetic sensitivity that Robby Müller displayed throughout his career.

Rotterdam, 4 February 2021

The jury members:

Evgeny Gussyatinskiy, IFFR
Andrea Müller-Schirmer
Jay Rabinowitz, ACE
Gerwin Tamsma, IFFR
Josje van Erkel, NSC
Richard van Oosterhout, NSC