

Sabelo Mlangeni (South Africa)

wins third edition

James Barnor Prize

Special mention : George Mahashe



JAMES BARNOR
FOUNDATION

The 2026 edition of the James Barnor Prize was made possible
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SÉZANE

Sabelo Mlangeni, laureate

Working largely in black and white, Sabelo Mlangeni (1980, Driefontein, South Africa) has built his practice around intimate photographs that draw out the inherent beauty in the ordinary. Mlangeni is driven by his interest in the notions of community and communing where a central part of his process requires him to spend significant time —weeks, months, sometimes years—with those he chooses to photograph; sharing intimately in their thoughts, feelings, stories and everyday lives. His practice is a continuous survey of the most challenging, beautiful and confounding aspects of the human experience.

His work has been widely exhibited in South Africa and internationally, most recently at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C. (2026), the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York (2025), and the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (2024).



*Izimbali ne Nendandatho, Collie Magagula & Jomo Mhlanga,
Isivumelwano series, 2011*

George Mahashe, special mention

Dr. George Mahashe (1982, Bolobedu, South Africa) works in the field of photography, particularly at the intersection of artistic practice, archives, museums, and the afterlives of anthropology. His research takes Khelovedu[Khelobedu] as a central idea, drawing on its capacity to complicate ways of knowing and encouraging trans-disciplinarity. His current research project includes --*defunct contex* which engages the nexus of art, technology, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

Mahashe's publication --*defunct context: Ambivalence to Important Work*(2023) explores Photography through the format of an artist book and its assembly as a process of inscribing an archive of practice as a physical dreamscape. He recently presented the installation *Pavilion Prototype III: Camera Obscura #0 Mafadi* at 2026 Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale. Mahashe is an Associate Professor at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town.



Camera Obscura #6 Dream Me a Dream, 2017

2026 Edition #3

Southern Africa

The third edition of the prize is dedicated to Southern Africa: Angola, Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho, Eswatini.

In April 2026, the Foundation contacted a group of nominators, all recognised figures in the fields of photography and contemporary African art: Armelle Malvoisin, Paula Nascimento, Amy Sall, John Fleetwood, Beata America, Julie Bonzon, Dr. Portia Malatjie, Clive Kellner, Amandine Nana, Nadine Hounkpatin, Fiona Rogers, Annabelle Lacour, and Bianca Manu.

They were invited to nominate two to three candidates each.

Each nominated artist was then invited to submit an application dossier including a curriculum vitae and a portfolio presenting three bodies of work representative of their practice.

In June 2026, the jury, composed of Aby Gaye, Taous Dahmani, Adnan Bashir, Naoki Nakatani, Mário Macilau and chaired by James Barnor, met to review the applications and select the laureate. Sabelo Mlangeni was selected unanimously, while George Mahashe was awarded a special mention by the jury.

Their names were announced on July 8, 2026, at the Rencontres d'Arles by the James Barnor Foundation.

Edition #3 - 2026

Southern Africa

List of nominees



Lorraine Kalassa
South Africa

Untitled, Mom's Journal series, 1988-2020



Jo Ractliffe
South Africa

Floor slab, temporary military base, Riemvasmaak, The Borderlands series, 2012



Lindokuhle Sobekwa
South Africa

Untitled, Ezilalini (The Country) series, 2020



Zenaéca Singh
South Africa

Sisterhood I, Sisterhood series, 2025



Mikhailia Petersen
South Africa

Stronger Together, Reimagining Themba series, 2024



Lidudumalingani
South Africa

Unknown, Delta Park, Blairgowrie, Sites of Mourning series, 2019



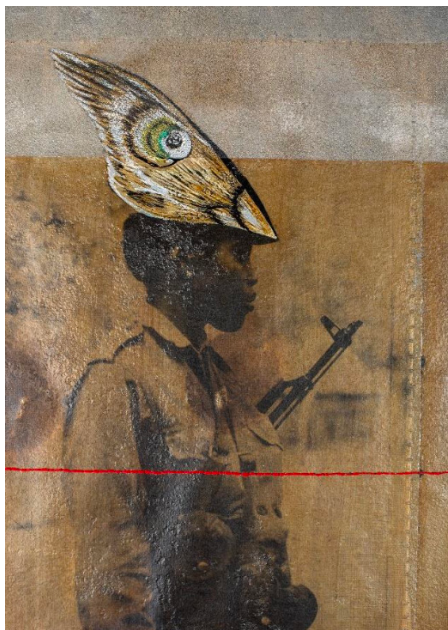
Sethembile Msezane
South Africa

Wather Bodies, Speaking Through Walls series, 2018



Thato Toebe
Lesotho

And the past is here to haunt you, Sehlahla se tukang empa se sa che series, 2025



Tuli Mekondjo
Namibia

Spiritual Embodiment of Meme Nekaya, The Borders of Memory series, 2020



Nonzuzo Gxekwa
South Africa

Untitled, Taxi Diaries series, 2018-ongoing



Thero Makepe
Botswana

Mama Mo Metsi, We didn't Choose to be Born Here series, 2019



Rui Magalhães
Angola

Untitled, Anita, a bright light series, 2022-2023



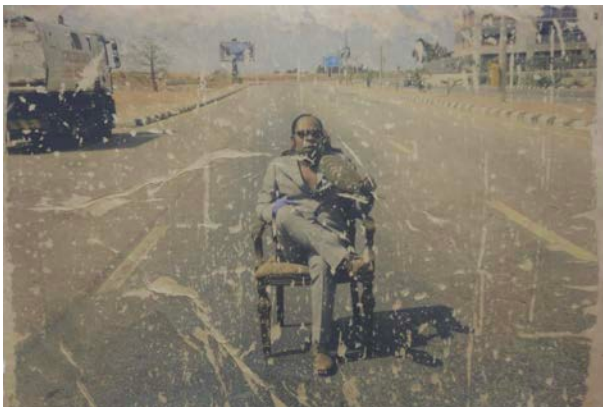
Nicola Brandt
South Africa

No monument for the fallen, Otjozondjupa Region, Embodied Memories series, 2012



Phumzile Khanyile
South Africa

Untitled, Plastic Crowns series, 2016



Luís Damião
Angola

Untitled, Mwata series, 2019



Lebohang Kganye
South Africa

Nights Unwavering Resolve, Le Sale ka Kgoso series, 2025



Andrew Tshabangu
South Africa

Women Praying at the Crucifix, Bridges series, 2001



Ruth Motau
South Africa

Untitled, Women's hostel Alexander series, 1992



Tshepiso Moropa
South Africa

The Showdown, Dineelwane (Fairytale) series, 2025



Edson Chagas
Angola

Untitled, Oikonomos series, 2012

The Foundation

The James Barnor Foundation is a UK-registered charity initiated by Ghanaian photographer James Barnor in 2020. Its aims include improving accessibility to creative education and training, advocating for the preservation of African cultures, and highlighting African cultural talents.

The Foundation's seminal project was the creation of the James Barnor Prize. Launched in 2022, this prize rewards mid-career African photographic talents, focusing on artists from a different region of the continent in each edition.



Rosemarie Thompson improvising a pose on a ladder in the cold on Gray's Inn Road, London, 1967

The Prize

A James Barnor initiative

‘I came across a magazine with an inscription that said,
“A civilization flourishes when men plant trees under which
they themselves never sit.” But it’s not only plants – putting
something in somebody’s life, a young person’s life,
is the same as planting a tree that you will not cut and sell.

That has helped me a lot in my work. Sometimes the more
you give, the more you get. That’s why I’m still going at 90!’
— James Barnor

A pioneer of Ghanaian photography, James Barnor has always claimed his desire to put his work at the service of new generations of African photographers. Today, at 96 years old, he still inspires many contemporary artists and has concretized this spirit of transmission through an annual prize dedicated to African photographers.

Organised on a six-year cycle, the prize is awarded each year to artists from different regions of Africa. In 2022, it focused on West Africa and was awarded to Sènamì Donoumassou (Benin), followed by Mário Macilau (Mozambique) for the East Africa edition.

This desire to focus on African photography circles back to the intentions set by the James Barnor Foundation, to which the Prize is attached: support for African culture and the education, training and promotion of new generations of African artists.

With an endowment of 10.000 €, the Prize awarded by the James Barnor Foundation is intended to reward the journey of established mid-career photographers who need support to achieve their deserved international recognition.

Prize organisation : John Akomfrah, Damarice Amao, Lizzie Carey-Thomas and Clémentine de la Féronnière (trustees of the James Barnor Foundation).



Filling up the Studio X23 car at the Agip petrol station for its 1974 calendar, Accra, 1973

2022 Edition #1

West Africa

First edition's winner:
Sènamì Donoumassou (Benin)



Humans of Africa series, 2023

Sènamì Donoumassou, recipient of the 2022's James Barnor Prize, is a visual and transdisciplinary artist. She explores the notions of identity, heritage and history through her work, experimenting with the technical and poetic possibilities of light.

With her series *Ako mla mla* (2022), she keeps the tradition of clanic pan-egyrics alive, combining photographs with a self-recorded audio piece. The portrayed individuals carry on their skin their own clan's eulogies, like a Fon tattoo.

Since winning the prize, Donoumassou has been invited by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung to the SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin, to take part in the 'Unraveling the (Under-) Development Complex' project in November 2022, and has presented a new solo exhibition, *Xogbè*, in Abomey-Calavy.

She was an artist-in-residence at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, as part of the 'TRAME' program in the spring of 2023.

In 2024, her work *Tàn xó* [Mémoire en prose] was showcased at the Parisian space of the Fondation H.

2023 Edition #2

East Africa

Second edition's winner:
Mário Macilau (Mozambique)



Circle of Memory series, 2020

Mário Macilau, recipient of the 2023's James Barnor Prize, is a multidisciplinary artist and activist, best known for his photographic work. His photographs highlight identity, political issues and environmental conditions.

Working at times with socially isolated groups Macilau not only brings awareness to many social injustices and inequalities in the world, but also to scenes of humanity, brotherhood, victory, love and hope, often making portraiture his starting point.

Macilau's work has been featured regularly in solo and group exhibitions in his home country and abroad, such as the Dakar Biennial in collaboration with the Fondation Dapper in 2022. His work is part of many private and public collections worldwide and has been internationally published in newspapers, magazines and books.

In 2024, Macilau's work was showcased at the Tate Modern's landmark exhibition *A World in Common: Contemporary African Photography*.

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Sabelo Mlangeni
*Faith and Sakhi Moruping, Thembisa Township, 2004, from the series *Isivumelwano**



Sabelo Mlangeni
*Izimbali ne Nendandatho, Collie Magagula & Jomo Mhlanga, 2011, from the series *Isivumelwano**



Sabelo Mlangeni
*Mr and Mrs Makhubu, Newcastle, Madadeni, Wakkerstroom, 2007, from the series *Isivumelwano**



Sabelo Mlangeni
Joyce inside her house, Kigoma, Lubumbashi, 2017, from the series "I have stopped time" A Family Portrait



Sabelo Mlangeni
Jenine, Kigoma, Lubumbashi, 2017, from the series "I have stopped time" A Family Portrait



Sabelo Mlangeni
*A morning after Umlindelo, 2016, from the series *Umlindelo wamaKholwa**



Sabelo Mlangeni
*Umkhuleko wabagulayo, Mama Khoza, Mfundisi Mathebula, KwaNyandeni, 2007, from the series *Umlindelo wamaKholwa**