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Sarah Alberti receives the ADKV-ART COLOGNE Prize for Art Criticism 2026

The ADKV-ART COLOGNE Prize for Art Criticism, endowed with 5,000 Euro, this year goes to the Leipzig art critic, host and author Sarah Alberti.

A five-member jury decided in favour of this distinction, which especially emphasises Alberti's art criticism writing with regard to her perspective on the cultural history of the GDR and her current references to art in Eastern Germany.

The jury for the Prize for Art Criticism 2026:

Juliane Bischoff (Frankfurt), Gürsoy Dogtas (Munich), Annekathrin Kohout (Leipzig), Noemi Y. Molitor (Berlin), Vanessa Joan Müller (Vienna)

Reasoning of the jury

With Sarah Alberti, the jury honours an author whose significance for involvement with the visual arts and their discourses is measured by the consistency of a body of work established over a decade and a half. Alberti, with a doctorate in art history and active as a freelance journalist, processes the ruptures and vacancies of German art history in the weekly and daily press as well as in art magazines, interview series, exhibition and art education projects. At the heart of this practice is a field that is to the present day only selectively dealt with by the German art business: the art and culture of the GDR and its continued existence in collections, institutions and commemorative debates of the present. Just as consistently, Alberti dedicates her writing to current art matters in Eastern Germany and their supraregional relevance.

Her submitted texts, including a contention with the Unity and Freedom Monument in Leipzig and a review of the German Pavilion of this year's Venice Biennale, combine precise historical knowledge with a judgment that does not persist merely in the descriptive. The knowledgeability of her writing speaks from the subtext without pushing itself to the fore. Thus, a practice is being honoured rather than an accomplishment bound to individual texts.

Alberti was born in 1989 in Leipzig, eight months before the fall of the Berlin Wall. She writes from Leipzig and has twice elaborated the same historical watershed; academically in her doctoral thesis on the exhibition project "Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit Berlin 1990" (The finitude of freedom Berlin 1990) and journalistically in her ongoing reporting. For her, Eastern Germany does not appear as a special theme requiring a great deal of catching-up, but rather as a touchstone for those narratives that the pan-German art system has concocted about itself. From dealings with monuments in public space to the question of which biographies and which works



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find their place in the canon, she pursues this perspective with a knowledge of the field that presently only seldom finds space in German-language art journalism. They are texts on themes that presumably only appear because this author exists.

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The jury therefore also understands the distinction as a position determination. Art criticism in Germany is very much centred around the capital and for the most part follows the major events, while entire regions, discourses and institutions benefit from little to no visibility in the media whatsoever. Authors are called for who break out of this dynamic with insistence and with a recognisable posture. Sarah Alberti has been doing this for years. The prize acknowledges her tenacity and at the same time lends a name to what is necessary in the present landscape of art criticism and art journalism: voices that repeatedly reveal decisive gaps of representation.

About the ADKV - ART COLOGNE Prize for Art Criticism

The prize has been awarded since 1999 by the ADKV, in cooperation with ART COLOGNE since 2006, and is endowed with 5,000 Euro. The award honours the engagement of freelance art critics who deal with contemporary art and its social context in the trade and daily press or in other media. The ADKV-ART COLOGNE Prize for Art Criticism has developed into an award respected throughout the entire German-speaking region.

With the trend of the press landscape toward the cost-effective merging of editorial offices, a clear reduction in reporting has been evident in past decades, especially in the realm of art criticism. As a result, many freelance critics have lost the possibility to publish and their economic foundation. Travel costs were also drastically cut. Supraregional reporting concentrates increasingly on exhibition institutions in the metropolitan regions and on names already established in the art business - but one also hardly finds differentiated exhibition discussions of local exhibitions in regional daily newspapers any longer.

Especially the art associations, with their focus on the production of contemporary art, are dependent upon a culture journalism that develops and describes independent quality criteria and innovative text forms. In the interest of artists and art associations, the ADKV-ART COLOGNE Prize for Art Criticism contributes to strengthening high-quality culture journalism.

Prize winners of past years

Noemi Y. Molitor (2025), Martin Conrads (2024), Oliver Körner von Gustorf (2023), Magdalena Kröner (2022), Noemi Smolik (2020), Antje Stahl (2019), Radek Krolczyk (2018), Kito Nedo (2017), Jörg Scheller (2016), Stefan Kobel (2015), Barbara Buchmaier und Christine Woditschka (2014), Astrid Mania (2013), Kolja Reichert (2012), Jens Kastner (2011), Jennifer Allen (2009), Rudolf Schmitz (2008), Ludwig Seyfarth (2007), Catrin Lorch (2006), Dominic Eichler (2005), Gregory Williams (2004), Raimar Stange (2003), Renate Puvogel (2002), Jan Verwoert (2001), Stefan Römer (2000), Hans-Christian Dany (1999)

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