

Press Release
Warsaw, March 11 2024

Yang Lian

Laureate of The Zbigniew Herbert International Literary Award 2024

The Zbigniew Herbert Foundation announced the name of this year's Laureate of the annual Zbigniew Herbert International Literary Award. The honour went to Yang Lian, one of China's most eminent living poets, and an unwavering freedom of speech campaigner.

Yang Lian (楊煉 Yáng Liàn), a Chinese poet, was born in 1955, and now lives in Berlin. He is one of the most important representatives of the so-called Misty Poets (朦朧詩人; pinyin: *Ménglóng Shīrén*) authors, who, writing in the modernist poetic style since the 1970s, managed to inculcate their work with what was officially banned in the aftermath of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. His poetry is close to Herbert's understanding of art, through creative references to tradition and an unceasing dialogue with poetry from the past. As Ai Weiwei commented, his poetry: "is rigorously and precisely thought through: it links history and reality with metaphysical speculation, as layer by layer it goes deeper and deeper down, until he has transcended tradition".

Brought up in Beijing, he understood the power of oppression of the totalitarian system at an early age, when as a young man he was forced to interrupt his education to undergo 're-education through labour' in the provinces. He decided to emigrate, following the bloody suppression of the 1989 Tian'anmen Square protest. He nonetheless remains a staunchly Chinese language poet, as well as a critic of oppressive governments, and a freedom of speech campaigner.

Winner of numerous awards, Yang Lian recently received the English PEN Award for his latest volume, *A Tower Built Downwards*. Joanna Krenz and Grzegorz Murzewicz have translated his poetry into Polish.

The Zbigniew Herbert International Literary Award is a distinction on the literary world stage – primarily in the field of poetry. Conferred since 2013, in recognition of outstanding artistic and intellectual achievements, it remains inspired by the values and ideals which Zbigniew Herbert's work exemplifies. Existing Laureates include W.S. Merwin, Charles Simic, Ryszard

Krynicky, Lars Gustafsson, Breyten Breytenbach, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Agi Miszol, Durs Grünbein, Yusef Komunyakaa, Marianna Kijanowska and Tomas Venclova.

This year's Laureate was chosen by a jury, composed of poets, essayists, translators and publishers: Krystyna Dąbrowska (Poland), Edward Hirsch (USA), Michael Krüger (Germany), Mercedes Monmany (Spain), and Aleš Šteger (Slovenia).

The Award Presentation Ceremony will be held at the *Teatr Polski* in Warsaw, on May 23rd 2024. The ceremony will be transmitted live, via the Zbigniew Herbert Foundation social media account.

Zbigniew Herbert Foundations Partners include:

- **The Arnold Szyfman Polish Theatre** – (*Teatr Polski im Arnolda Szyfmana*), Warsaw;
- **The National Library** – (*Biblioteka Narodowa*);
- **Polish Radio** – (*Polskie Radio*) – Media Partner.

More information about the Zbigniew Herbert International Literary Award at:

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