

## Call for Proposals: “Every Artist Must Take Sides – Resonances of Eslanda and Paul Robeson”

### Open Call for Residencies for Artistic Research

Akademie der Künste, Berlin and Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape, Cape Town

April – May 2025, Berlin or Cape Town

Application Deadline: 14 January 2025

[www.adk.de](http://www.adk.de)

The Akademie der Künste, Berlin, and the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), Cape Town, are organizing a joint residency program for artistic research at the Paul Robeson Archives in Berlin and the UWC Research Collections, including the UWC Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archive in Cape Town. The program supports four artists in residence for their archival research and the production of new artistic works, which will be shown in the exhibition “**Every Artist Must Take Sides – Resonances of Eslanda and Paul Robeson**” at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin from November 2025 until January 2026. The developed works should deal with the transnational resonances of the respective archive holdings for the present and reflect the role of political stances and international solidarity in the arts with visual, audio or interdisciplinary formats.

This Call for Proposals is aimed at artists and artistic researchers who work in the field of sound/sonic art or visual art and whose practice has a connection to the subjects of the respective archive. Two artistic research residencies will take place at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin in April 2025, and two artistic research residencies will take place at the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape in April and May 2025, each for a period of one month.

### What to expect

#### One-month residency in Berlin, April 2025

- Return travel to Berlin (train or economy flight)
- Residency stipend 2700 € (incl. ground transport, insurance, daily allowance)
- Accommodation at Akademie der Künste, Hanseatenweg, as part of the JUNGE AKADEMIE's residency program
- Exchange with project participants in regular (online) meetings
- Archival and curatorial research support (availability of archival material in accordance with copyrights)
- An artistic work is to be realized for presentation at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, with an artist fee of 1500 € and a production budget of 2000 €. The Akademie der Künste will support the project with the technical setup, and coordinate the production schedule. Return economy

flight to Berlin, insurance and accommodation for the set-up of the work/opening of the exhibition are covered by the Akademie der Künste.

- Possibility to use the Studio for Electroacoustic Music at Akademie der Künste for the production of sound works

### **One-month residency in Cape Town, April or May 2025**

- Return travel to Cape Town (economy flight or car/public transportation)
- Residency stipend 2700 € (incl. accommodation, ground transport, insurance, daily allowance)
- Fellows will cover their accommodation through their stipend. A studio space will be provided at the CHR's Iyatsiba Lab for the duration of the residency.
- Exchange with project participants in regular (online) meetings
- Archival and curatorial research support (availability of archival material in accordance with copyrights)
- Regular meetings at the Centre for Humanities Research during the residency and the participation in their annual winter school between April and May
- An artistic work is to be realized for presentation at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, with an artist fee of 1500 € and a production budget of 2000 €. The Akademie der Künste will support the project with the technical setup, and coordinate the production schedule. Return economy flight to Berlin, insurance and accommodation for the set-up of the work and the opening of the exhibition are covered by the Akademie der Künste.

### **Applications should contain the following documents/files:**

- Completion of the **Personal Data Form** provided
- **CV**
- **Portfolio** of work (incl. audio or video files secured with permanent links, max. 10 pages, 4 MB)
- A **letter of motivation** or artist statement on why this call appeals to your practice. This should include a specification of the artist's established connection to and knowledge of the respective Archive's subject or to the work of Eslanda and/or Paul Robeson. (300 words)
- A sketch of the artistic **research project** you hope to realize during the residency at either the Paul Robeson Archives in Berlin or the UWC Research Collections, including UWC/RIM Mayibuye Archive in Cape Town, and of the artistic work you aim to create for the exhibition at Akademie der Künste, Berlin. A proposed timeline and production plan should be included, specifying key milestones. One pre-set milestone is the submission of a preliminary draft by the end of May, enabling its integration into the exhibition's overall spatial concept. The final production must be completed by mid-October. (300 words)

### **Application Process**

- Applications along with all required documents must be submitted online and emailed to [opencall@adk.de](mailto:opencall@adk.de) by no later than **14 January 2025**.
- Selections are made jointly by a steering committee comprising members from participating organizations. Successful applicants will be notified by the beginning of February 2025.

## About the Project

With “**Every Artist Must Take Sides – Resonances of Eslanda and Paul Robeson**”, the Akademie der Künste explores the legacy of two extraordinary figures of the 20th century. The political and artistic endeavors of Eslanda Cardozo Goode Robeson (1895–1965) and Paul Robeson (1898–1976) were an expression of a way of thinking that understood the world in relations and of an uncompromising resistance to all forms of oppression. An exhibition and a festival both present contributions by contemporary artists and musicians, as well as materials from the Paul Robeson Archives of the Akademie der Künste.

"Every artist, every scientist, every writer must decide now where he stands. He has no alternative. [...] The artist must take sides. He must elect to fight for freedom or for slavery." This urgent appeal was made by Paul Robeson on 24 June, 1937, during a solidarity concert at the sold-out Royal Albert Hall in London, in support of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. The African American singer, actor, trained lawyer, and activist reached a global audience through numerous films, theater and concert performances, political rallies, radio broadcasts, records, and newspapers. African American author, anthropologist, UN correspondent, artist manager, and activist Eslanda Robeson wrote about her travels to Southern, Eastern, and Central Africa and was actively involved in reconstituting the “world community” after World War II, focusing on internationalist women's organizations. Together, the couple linked the anti-racist struggle for civil and human rights in the United States with anti-fascist freedom movements in Europe, international labor movements, and anti-colonial liberation struggles in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean in the spirit of socialist internationalism. Paul Robeson's concerts and engagements, alongside Eslanda Robeson's research, took them on numerous journeys. Encounters with Sergei Eisenstein in Moscow, Welsh miners in England, students in East Berlin, and politicians in Accra constantly expanded their network of artists, political allies, and sympathizers. Paul Robeson's fame allowed both to engage with the Black diaspora worldwide, seeing themselves both as part of this diaspora and as global citizens. Eslanda Robeson regarded her writing, and Paul Robeson his voice and keen ear (which likely enabled him to sing in over 20 languages), as “weapons” they strategically deployed. Their stage performances, films, recordings, publications (such as the newspaper *Freedom*, founded with W.E.B. Du Bois in 1950), as well as postal services and telephone lines, became vital media for their transnational activism and tireless, creative resistance—even against the anti-communist repression, surveillance, and intimidation by the U.S. government during the 1940s and 1950s.

In 1965, in the midst of the Cold War, the Paul Robeson Archives was founded at the former Academy of Arts of the GDR as the first systematic collection of material on the life and work of a Black American artist and on the work of a Black activist and intellectual. Today, the Paul Robeson Archives represents a productive interface of current post-socialist and post-colonial discourses. On the occasion of the archive's 60th anniversary, the project “**Every Artist Must Take Sides**” opens up a resonance space to relate the legacy of the Robesons and their struggles to the pressing questions of our present.

The project draws not only on the Paul Robeson Archives in Berlin but also on the UWC Research Collections, including UWC/RIM Mayibuye Archive. The connection between these two archives highlights the significant role of anti-apartheid activism within the Council on African Affairs, co-founded by the Robesons in 1937, and the personal connections Eslanda Robeson forged when she

began her research travels in Cape Town in 1936. Together, the Paul Robeson Archives and the UWC/RIM Mayibuye Archives offer a necessarily fragmented picture of the 20th century from the perspective of anti-colonial, anti-racist, and internationalist struggles. What can we learn from these archives? What insights can contemporary artists provide by engaging with testimonies of freedom struggles such as those of the Robesons and the anti-apartheid movement? What resonances do artistic practices generate when they explore the historical North-South and East-West coordinates preserved in South African and (East) German archives? The exhibition and festival “**Every Artist Must Take Sides – Resonances of Eslanda and Paul Robeson**” take the political lives and artistic achievements of Eslanda and Paul Robeson as a starting point, examining them against the backdrop of archival collections in Berlin and Cape Town for transnational resonances relevant to the geopolitical present.

### **Participating institutions and involved archives**

**Akademie der Künste, Berlin:** Founded in 1696, the Akademie der Künste in Berlin is one of the oldest cultural institutes in Europe. It is an international community of artists and has a current total of 430 members in its six Sections (Visual Arts, Architecture, Music, Literature, Performing Arts, Film and Media Arts). The Akademie der Künste is an exhibition and event location, a meeting place for artists and people interested in the arts, where public debates on art and cultural policy take place. A key part of the Academy are its Archives. With over 1,200 estates by artists and an extensive art collection and library, the Academy Archives are one of the most important interdisciplinary archives of 20th century art. The event program of the Academy serves to present contemporary artistic positions to the public and is dedicated to safeguarding cultural heritage. In its two permanent locations in the heart of Berlin – Pariser Platz in the Berlin-Mitte district and Hanseatenweg in Tiergarten – the Academy shows exhibitions, organizes concerts, debates, readings, awards ceremonies, as well as film, theatre, and dance performances. The Academy has a residency program for young artists (JUNGE AKADEMIE) and a studio for electroacoustic music.

**Paul Robeson Archives:** The Paul Robeson Archives in Berlin was founded in 1965 at the Akademie der Künste (East) on the initiative of the Paul Robeson Committee, with the express consent of Eslanda and Paul Robeson. In the following years, the East Berlin Paul Robeson Committee initiated events and exhibitions about Paul Robeson based on the collected materials. With the dissolution of the Paul Robeson Committee in 1983, the phase of active engagement and remembrance of Paul Robeson within the Akademie der Künste (East) came to an end. From 1989/90, interest of wider society in Paul and Eslanda Robeson gradually faded in view of the changed political situation. Today, the archive consists of a partial estate from the Robesons' London apartment, documents about their visits to East Berlin and other evidence of their artistic and political work and their networks from the 1920s to the 1960s. It includes program booklets, photographs, correspondences (including with leading international intellectuals, artists and politicians), song lyrics, manuscripts of Eslanda Robeson's writings, manuscripts and tapes of Paul and Eslanda Robeson's speeches, records and films as well as other objects in the museal collection (such as a theater costume). With its collection, in particular the extensive documentation of institutional activities relating to Paul Robeson in the GDR, the Paul Robeson Archives at the Akademie der Künste is unique in its documentation of Black history and anticolonial struggles during the Post-War Era and during the Cold War at a German institution.

**Centre for Humanities Research:** In the years since its establishment in 2006, the Centre for Humanities Research has accomplished its goal of giving new impetus to the experiments in ideas for building a post-apartheid future that defined the University of the Western Cape in the 1980s. This has allowed it to reflect critically and affirmingly upon earlier debates about foundational concepts in the Humanities placing the arts at the heart of its inquiries. Rather than casting itself as neutral and devoid of perspective, the CHR insisted on beginning with an inquiry into the very conditions that brought the university into being under apartheid. In place of assuming the role of diagnostician, it offered a space of working through but also working out its relation to this untenable inheritance so as to offer a concept of freedom to the world. This conception has defined an ethos shaping the aesthetic and scholarly approaches of the CHR since its inception. A humanities inquiry informed by its location and history, the CHR lends itself to asking pertinent questions that have a significant impact on locating intellectual traditions in Africa in a global discourse on the contemporary human condition. The CHR's graduate fellowship and artist-in-residence programs have nurtured a humanities discourse that is responsive to shaping a discourse on postapartheid freedom exploring the relationship between the human, the arts and technology in our contemporary world, especially as these relate to rapidly transforming notions of society and politics. With partnerships across and between institutions, particularly universities, schools, public arts projects, museums, archives and art galleries, the CHR nurtures future generations of humanities graduates, educators and arts and cultural practitioners energized by transhemispheric collaborations that extend the reach of local and international humanities scholarship, as well as opportunities for arts education and cultural production beyond the institutional site of the university. The UWC Research Collections, currently engaged by the CHR's New Archival Visions project, hold a variety of materials relating to the liberation struggle in South Africa over the 20th century, including the collections of the UWC Robben Island Mayibuye Archive, which contains documentary records, letters, and artworks of numerous political organizations and prisoners, photo and film collections, as well as sound and oral history recordings. The UWC Research Collections also include works from the exhibition Art Against Apartheid, first opened in Paris in 1983, as well as the collections of the Community Arts Project, including various visual works, prints, photographs, and sculptures.

**“Every Artist Must Take Sides – Resonances of Eslanda and Paul Robeson”** is a project by Akademie der Künste, Berlin in collaboration with Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape, Cape Town and Haus für Poesie, Berlin.

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