

Film Africa 2025: The Cinema of Souleymane Cissé

Thursday 20th November – 5pm, Julian Study Centre - University of East Anglia -

Organised by Film Africa in partnership with the University of East Anglia, School of Media, Language and Communication - *World Cinema Spotlights Series*

Yeelen by Souleymane Cissé - in its newly restored version by Les Films Cissé - will be screened at the University of East Anglia on Thursday 20th November, as part of [Film Africa 2025](#). Established in 2011, Film Africa is the UK leading festival celebrating African and African diaspora cinema. Film Africa 2025 will be the 12th edition, championing contemporary and classic cinema from across Africa and its diaspora. Film Africa is a festival supported by the Royal African Society.

This special screening will pay tribute to Souleymane Cissé, the legendary filmmaker who passed away in February 2025. His groundbreaking work redefined African cinema and brought it global recognition. Cissé's work has long been recognised as foundational to the cinematic imagination of Africa. As Antoine de Baecque observes, *Yeelen* can be seen as "the birth of African cinema itself," a film that, through its metaphoric play of "light after the cataclysm," brings forth a new visual and spiritual world (de Baecque, 2015). The film's title—meaning "brightness" in Bambara—encapsulates both its aesthetic and philosophical vision: light as revelation and resistance.

Upon its release, *Yeelen* won the Jury Prize at Cannes and was hailed in *Sight & Sound* as a work of "overwhelming visual poetry," whose luminous landscapes and mythic structure offered an alternative to the dominant frameworks of European film art (BFI, 1988). Yet its brilliance lies not merely in its formal beauty but in its moral and political depth. As Suzanne MacRae argues, *Yeelen* is at once a mythic parable and a pointed critique of power in postcolonial Mali (MacRae, 1995).

This screening of *Yeelen* offers contemporary audiences a chance to reconnect with Cissé's visionary filmmaking and to explore its continuing resonance in shaping the aesthetic and ethical horizons of African cinema. It honours a filmmaker whose work transformed both African and world cinema, while renewing engagement with a film that continues to speak powerfully to global audiences and to those interested in cinema as a shared, evolving story.

Yeelen screening will be the first event of the *World Cinema Spotlights* - a series of events organised within the framework of Global Cinema teaching and research at the University of East Anglia that seeks to showcase visionary filmmakers whose works have reshaped the global cinematic language. Its objective is to foster cross-cultural dialogue, celebrate diverse film traditions, and reintroduce restored or rediscovered masterpieces to new audiences through curated screenings and critical discussion.

References

BFI (1988) Souleymane Cissé's *Yeelen* reviewed. *Sight & Sound*, British Film Institute.

de Baecque, A. (2015) On Souleymane Cissé's *Yeelen*. *Toronto Film Review*. Available at: <https://torontofilmreview.blogspot.com/2015/03/antoine-de-baecque-on-souleymane-cisses.html>

MacRae, S.H. (1995) "Yeelen": A Political Fable of the "Komo" Blacksmith/Sorcerers', *Research in African Literatures*, 26(3), pp. 57–66.