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Russian Director at Cannes Denounces Moscow Theater Trial

By AFP

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Russian director Kirill Serebrennikov poses with a picture of director Yevgeniya Berkovich and writer Svetlana Petriychuk detained in Russia. **Sameer Al-Doumy / AFP**

Russian director Kirill Serebrennikov, competing for the Palme d'Or at Cannes, brandished a picture of two theater artists who went on trial in Moscow on Monday.

"They did absolutely nothing wrong, they just put on a show and they have already been in prison for a year," Serebrennikov told reporters at the film festival.

The arrest of director Yevgeniya Berkovich and writer Svetlana Petriychuk in May last year shook Russia's artistic community, already facing an increasingly repressive environment since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

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The women have been accused of justifying terrorism in their 2021 play about Russian women lured to marry Islamic State militants in Syria and tried for terrorism on their return. It was awarded two prestigious Golden Mask awards.

Serebrennikov, who has competed multiple times at the Cannes Film Festival, left Russia after the invasion.

His new movie, "Limonov: The Ballad," is an English-language portrayal of a radical Soviet poet starring British actor Ben Whishaw.

Serebrennikov told reporters in Cannes that Berkovich is one of his former students "and she is in prison for completely invented accusations."

"This is the real consequence of the law on foreign agentism," he added, referring to recent laws aimed at identifying Russian civil society groups that are financed from abroad.

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