

Arab Creativity and Entrepreneurship Fund

2014

Olfat al-Mutlaq Juffali, Nabil Qaddumi, Amr Ben Halim, Sawsan Jafar, Hani Kalouti, HRH Princess Adila bint Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Fahd al-Rajaan, Luma and Zade Zalatimo, Gregory Evans, Khalil and Aeran Amiouni, Sara Salem Mohammad Binladen, Sawsan and Ayman Asfari, Walid Ramadan, Abla Lahhoud, Amin el-Maghraby, Anne-Dominique Janecek, Dina and Amine Jabali, Suad al-Houssaini, Nafez Jundi, Najat Rizk, Omar and Nayla Karkour, Omar Qattan, Rana Sadik, Waleed Ghafari, Isaac Souede, Waleed al-Banawi, Ali Hassan al-Husseini, Anthony and Sandra Tamer, Anthony Baladi, Fayez Takieddine, Fouad al-Khadra, Habib and Lara Kairouz, Hamza al-Kholi, Imane Farès, Jamil el-Khazen, Marwan al-Sayeh, Nayla Saba Karkour, Patrick Knowles, Roberto Boghossian, Suheil Sabbagh, Tafeeda and Ali Jarbawi, Tayseer Barakat, William J. Tyne, Zina Jardaneh, Chatila Fustok, Sherine Jafar, Dina and Mohamad Zameli, Huda Kitmitto, Kathryn Sutherland, Malek and Gail Antabi, Rashad Khourshid, Salah Fustok, Omar Kodmani, Dania Sakka, Donald Zilkha, Rania and Omar Ashur, Talal and Nada Idriss, Yousef Asad, Akram Zaatari, Carol N. Marshi, Danya Alhamrani and Dania Nassief, Elizabeth Kassab, Gidon Kremer, Hanan Sayed and Steve Worrell, Jawdat Shawwa, Joslyn Barnes, Mariam Farag and Augusto Costa, Maya Abdulamajeed and Tarek Sakka, Maya al-Khalil, Nada Saab, Paula Mueller and Philippe Salomon, Riad and Rafa Mourtada, Rula el-Alami, Taymour Grahne, Wafa Saab, Pierre Olivier Sarkozy



آفاق AFAC

**Arab Creativity
and Entrepreneurship
Fund**

2014

Last year, AFAC launched a special fund that aims to invest in projects that have high social impact. During these difficult times that the Arab region is going through, we felt the need to support cultural initiatives that are contributing to positive change. We insisted on creating a long-term program that can help revive the region’s confidence in itself by providing the financial backbone that is needed for creativity to flourish.

The Arab Creativity and Entrepreneurship Fund, ACEF, was born out of an urge to empower local, independent cultural practitioners. ACEF’s mission is a socially conscious extension to what AFAC stands for in the world of Arab arts and culture. It is a further declaration that the support of self-expression and freedom in creative production are essential in the development of powerful and vibrant Arab communities.

ACEF actively engages stakeholders from different backgrounds and encourages them to pool in their skills and resources for positive social responsibility. Building on our inherent goal to ‘Make Art Possible’, we presented ACEF in March 2014 as a shareholding venture through which investors can support Arab artists and creative entrepreneurs in developing their projects. These projects are helping educate, inspire and build different communities across the Arab region. Thus, the return on investment of this Fund is one of positive social impact, rather than financial gain.

Given AFAC’s nature as an institution that is developing infrastructure for philanthropy in the region, we have managed to invest in talented young people who are determined to propel this region forward. Creativity and entrepreneurship are much needed tools in the mission to reform our Arab communities and promote more authentic representations of who we are to the world. As we grapple with narratives of intolerance, extremism and backwardness, these independent voices are the ones that are best positioned to portray the region’s complex realities and usher in a new era for democracy.

In this book, we share with you an overview of the harvest of the first year of ACEF, a one of a kind model that you helped make possible. We invested in projects that are challenging stereotypes, raising awareness, building capacities, empowering their respective communities, and offering spaces for young people to imagine a better future.

Investing in this Fund is a direct investment in these voices of the future of the Arab region. ACEF’s first year was a promising stepping-stone and we are very happy with the outstanding results that we couldn’t have reached without your generous support. I, as well as the members of the board of trustees of AFAC, would like to thank you for your trust in this vision. Thank you for making tomorrow a time to look forward to together, and we hope to have you on board for years to come.

Ghassan Salamé, *Chairman, AFAC*

Board Members

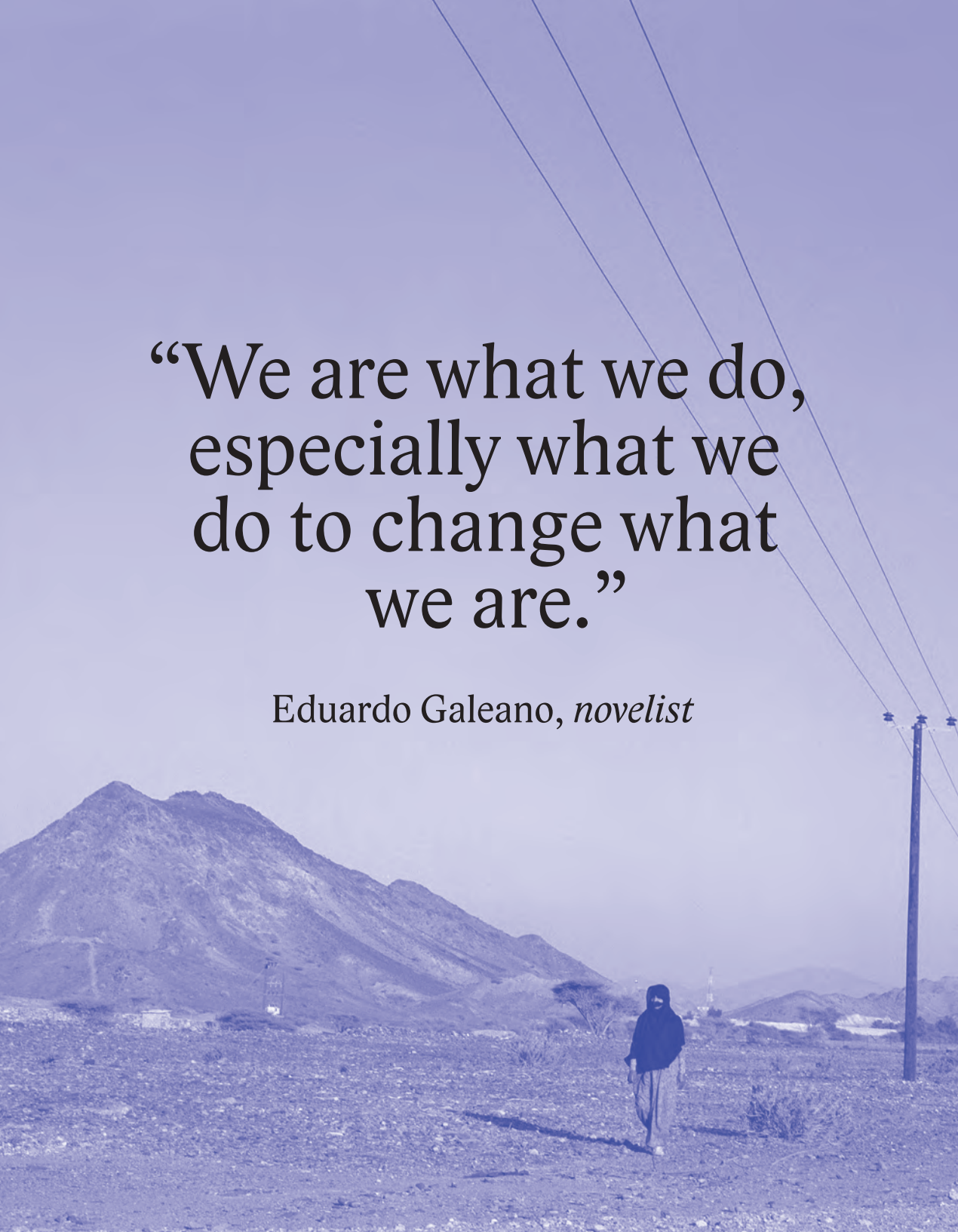
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Oussama Rifahi
Executive Director

A person wearing a dark headscarf and light-colored clothing is walking away from the camera on a dirt path in a desert. In the background, there are large, arid mountains under a clear sky. A utility pole with wires is visible on the right side of the path.

“We are what we do,
especially what we
do to change what
we are.”

Eduardo Galeano, *novelist*

This book features 50 projects, each contributing to positive change in the Arab region. *These projects were made possible thanks to your generous support.*

AFAC would like to thank its donors and investors who supported the first edition of the Arab Creativity and Entrepreneurship Fund in 2014. Together, we raised \$725,000, which were invested in 50 cultural projects with high social impact. These projects are changing the Arab region to the better, each in its own way. This book showcases the work that has been done and the impact that has been created in 2014. It is the fruit of our collaboration. Thank you for investing in ACEF.



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الممولون

ACEF 2014 INVESTORS

2014 was a very promising start for ACEF. In its first year, the Fund collected a total of \$726,500 from a total of 83 donors from the Arab region and beyond.

- Reglular

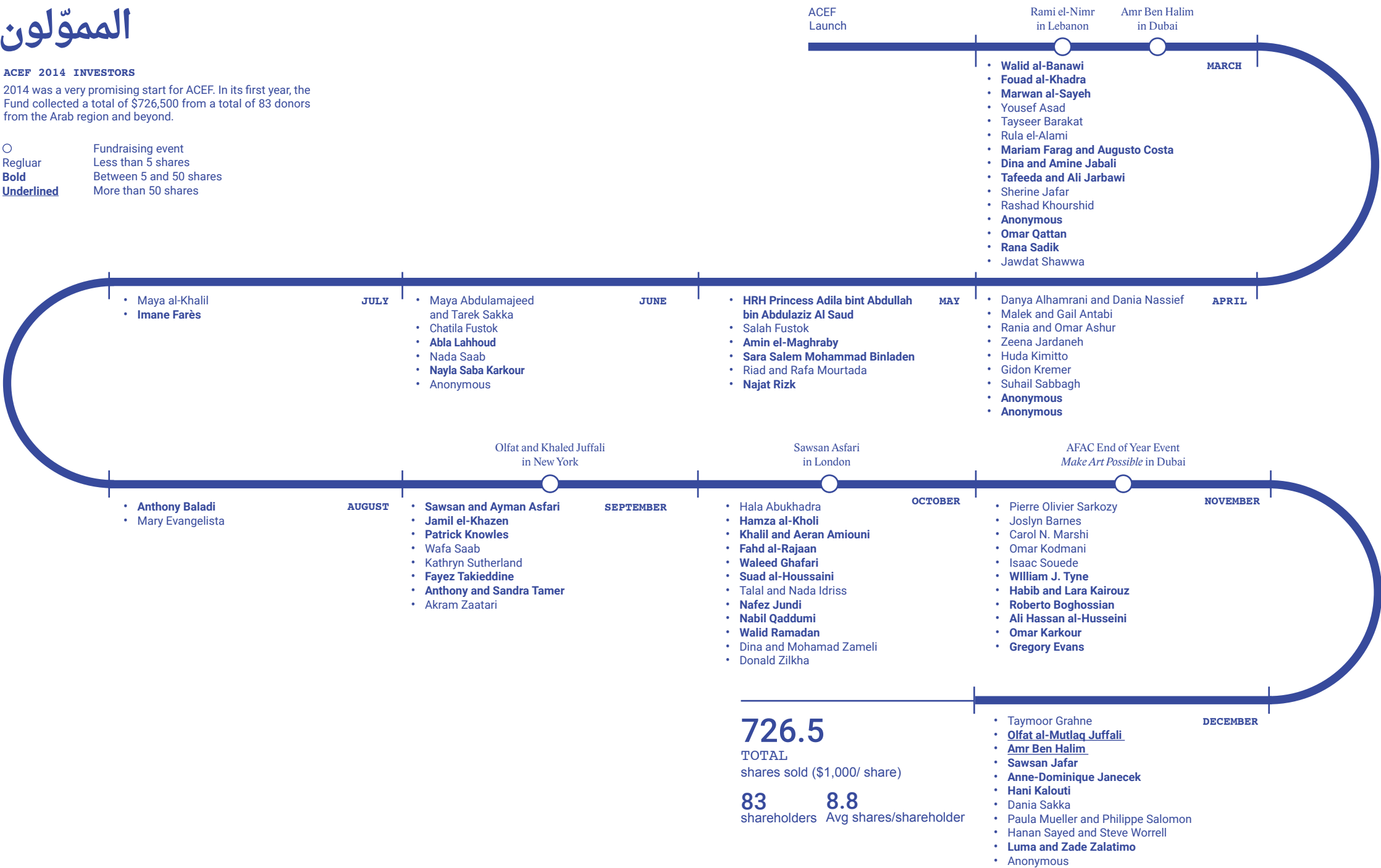
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Underlined
- Fundraising event

Less than 5 shares

Between 5 and 50 shares

More than 50 shares



Rami el-Nimer

“You need a lot of initiatives to accumulate in order to create a cultural renaissance”

Rami el-Nimer is the General Manager of the First National Bank in Lebanon. He is an experienced art collector and a firm believer in the role of arts and culture in moving societies forward. He hosted one of the five fundraisers that were held last year to support and promote the first edition of the Arab Creativity and Entrepreneurship Fund.

How do you evaluate the culture scene in the Arab region today?

Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire, there has been a total oppression of the arts and culture in the region. Of course there was the *nahda* in Egypt and Iraq and other countries but it was short lived. After the occupation of Palestine and the takeover of dictators in many countries across the region, Arab culture witnessed a total decline and decay. Culture became a propaganda tool used by governments to serve their political agendas, like in Eastern European countries where culture was directed, rather than organic or built on solid intellectual movements. Culture had to serve the state's political agenda, and when it didn't, it was crushed. Another reason is the economy, which was a priority in the past decades. People were busy finding jobs and making money, and the Gulf countries were busy extracting oil, so no one had time for the arts. There were some cultural initiatives that sprouted here and there, but they didn't really pick up. You need a lot of initiatives to accumulate in order to create a cultural renaissance.

Do you feel that the situation is changing?

Definitely. We are now seeing this accumulation happening. The change started around a decade ago and it was even pushed further by the Arab Spring, which was an opportunity to revive the cultural scene in the region. We are seeing initiatives in photography, film, literature, visual arts, etc. You can feel that the younger generation is interested in arts and culture, and this is a new thing, especially if you compare it to the generation that preceded it, which, as I said, was financially driven and focused on getting into the job market and making money. The younger generation has been oppressed for so long and today they are heading towards arts and culture as a reaction to decades of oppression. They are finally taking the lead and creating important cultural projects that tackle pressing issues in our society. It's only the beginning and we are yet to see how this will evolve or what will come out of it.

What do you think of AFAC's role in this context?

I am a big supporter of AFAC because I see it as an organization that is helping in spreading culture in

the region by providing the means for young artists to produce, promote and disseminate their work. It is an initiative by a group of cultured and progressive individuals with the goal of encouraging young people to develop their artistic and cultural projects. This is an important mission, especially today with all the violence that's going on around us in the region.

What do you think of the cultural output of the region today?

There's a really interesting wave of artists who are producing work that is dedicated to important causes. I am interested in art that has a cause and can lead to social impact. It can be political, environmental or social, but I believe that art should tackle a certain issue. I was very inspired by Raeda Taha's latest play, which I thought was really great. It is based on her personal experience as a daughter of a Palestinian martyr, and she uses her personal story to delve into issues like martyrdom, the PLO, Abou Ammar, the political situation in Palestine, amongst other things. But she did that in a subtle and sarcastic way that touched everyone in the audience.

Do you think art and culture can change a society?

Without a doubt, art and culture can do a lot to a society. Great art can impact society in positive ways, especially if it's directed towards certain causes. Art can move you. It can raise awareness about different causes, help you understand, and offer new perspectives. A society without arts and culture is worth nothing. Culture is the accumulation of people's emotions, histories, experiences, and interactions. If you have a society that has never seen proper cinema or watched proper theater, then its people are doomed. So now we're trying to push culture in the region, which is why we need to support institutions like AFAC that are helping these cultural projects that are contributing to social impact in the Arab region.

Nayla Karkour

“Art is a creative outlet for artists to express their anger, fears and frustrations.”

Nayla Karkour is a Syrian architect and art enthusiast who lives between Beirut and Dubai. In 2009, she co-founded an art gallery in Damascus with the aim of creating a space for cultural exchange and dialogue. She has been a proud supporter of ACEF since its inception last year. We sat with her to talk about arts and culture in the Arab region and their role as catalysts for social change.

You’re a keen supporter of the arts in the region. Can you tell us more about your experience in the art world?

I was always interested in fine arts, and it was something I wanted to study, but for different reasons I ended up in architecture school. After that, I worked as a freelance architect in Syria, up until 2009 when my friend Rafia asked me if I’d be interested in co-founding an art gallery with her in Damascus. We are both art lovers and I felt that it would be an opportunity to rekindle my relationship with the art world. The objective was to introduce Middle Eastern artists, as well as Syrian artists living abroad, to Syria. There was a cultural revival happening at the time in Syria and the gallery became like a cultural center. We held events and hosted talks and discussions, which were free and open to the public, but then in 2011 the events happened and we had to close it down. However, I am still very much an advocate of arts and culture, especially at this point in time that the Arab region is going through, and it’s one of the reasons I was interested in supporting ACEF.

What were your initial impressions on ACEF?

I was first approached by Racha Salah [Grants Manager at AFAC], and she told me about this new program called ACEF [Arab Creativity and Entrepreneurship Fund]. I was really inspired by her energy and passion for this new initiative. I then attended a gathering that AFAC was hosting to present ACEF. I remember being so impressed by the quality of the works that were shown. Not only that, it was also interesting to see how the different supported projects are helping impact different communities in the Arab region in different ways. So I was prompted to take part and support the initiative.

How do you see the art and culture scene in the Arab region today?

In the 1960s and 1970s there was an important cultural renaissance going on, but then it stopped due to different economic, cultural, and political reasons. In the past years, access to arts and culture has increased and widened, but I think that after the Arab Spring, people became more worried about

their lives especially in the Levant, and the art scene has shifted more towards the Gulf states. However, during these times of conflict, there’s a need by artists to use art as a tool for expression – whether by painting, singing, dancing, acting, writing, etc. It’s a creative outlet for them to express their anger, fears and frustrations. And there is important work being done now.

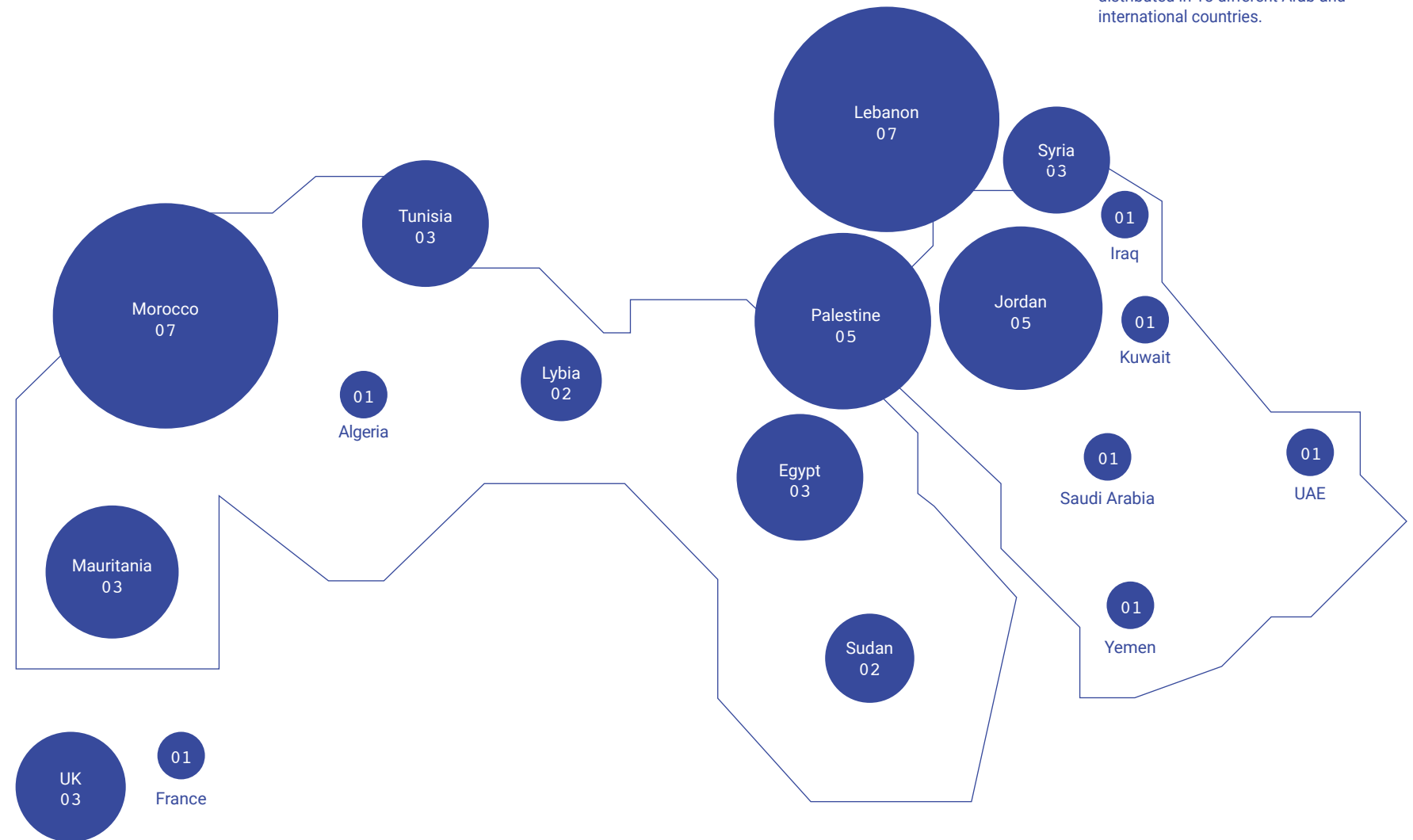
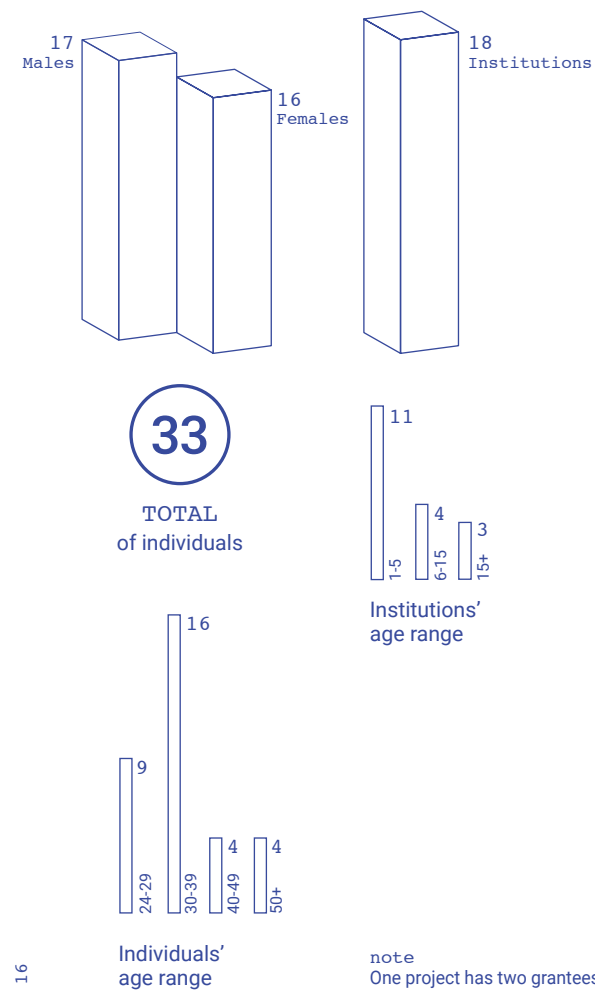
How do you think artistic projects can impact individuals or communities in conflict areas?

The change that artists can help create is in the minds of the people, whether by creating awareness or engaging the senses and opening up the minds. They say that you remember things better when you experience them using your senses. So projects like YANTE in Palestine, where they go to villages and teach young people dance techniques, and the films that are coming out of the Syrian revolution, help people open their minds, shift their perspectives, and see a different version of reality. Sometimes the media has a narrow-minded perspective, and doesn’t let you see the whole picture. The good thing about the ACEF projects is that they try to present a more holistic picture despite the bleak situation going on in Syria, Palestine and elsewhere. They help instill hope and show people, especially the younger generation, that there is a future despite all this destruction. Which is why it’s paramount to back initiatives like ACEF because they help these artists launch projects that are having a positive impact.

المشاريع

THE PROJECTS

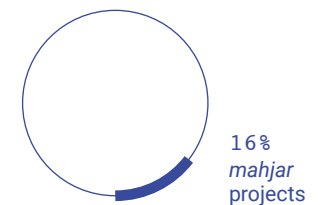
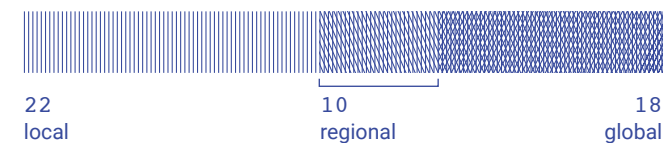
In 2014, we invested in 50 projects in the categories of literature, visual arts, performing arts, film, music, photography, research, training and regional events. The 33 individual grantees are almost equally distributed between men and women of all ages. The 18 institutional grants focused on relatively new institutions, with 10 of those grants given to institutions between 1 and 5 years old.



The 50 supported ACEF projects are distributed in 18 different Arab and international countries.

OUTREACH

Each of the 50 projects differ in their scope and reach. Some of them cater to their local communities while others reach out to the Arab region, or sometimes to a global audience.



إضاءات

The projects in the first section of this book are selected from AFAC's Documentary Program (ADP) and the Arab Documentary Photography Program (ADPP). These projects aim to uncover social issues, shedding light on them and creating awareness about different aspects of the Arab region today. These projects in photography and documentary film uncover and document possi-

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نظرة أخرى

Imagination is a very powerful tool. It helps us discover new perspectives, it inspires creation, and it provides a space for a group of people to imagine a better world. By doing so, it offers us a glimpse of, or at least a hope for, a more inspiring future. This section sheds light on ACEF projects that propose alternative solutions to existing problems and allow for different points of view to come together and im-

page 109 — page 192

إستعادة المسؤولية

The projects in this section invite the audience into their realms. They are participatory initiatives that bring people together in order to tackle existing problems and investigate their potential solutions. They offer platforms that encourage various stakeholders to take part in engaging activities and lead them to take action. Arab societies can only completely recover through inspiring projects that reach out to

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bilities, while also identifying obstacles standing in the way of progress in the Arab region, and in some cases providing tools to overcome them. This section showcases and pinpoints the social impact of ACEF-funded projects and discusses topics such as Syrian refugees in Lebanon, checkpoint births in Palestine, the social landscape in Kuwait, and strong independent women in Yemen and Morocco.

agine a better future. It features projects in theater, photography, music, dance, contemporary art and literature, offering new perspectives on topics such as women's sexuality in Egypt, political corruption in Libya, public spaces in Dubai, community ties in Palestine, as well as the production and digital archiving of audiovisual material in the Arab region as a whole.

the different communities and bring people together, allowing them to think freely, speak out, create new projects, and make the world a better place. This section showcases projects that range from engaging the Lebanese community with its public spaces, preserving traditional music in Mauritania, supporting craftsmen in Morocco, to launching various art and music festivals and promoting Arab culture.

un — cover

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re — cover



HSBC x AFAC

A Partnership to Boost Creativity and Entrepreneurship

Whilst creativity has long been at the heart of the arts and culture scene, it is only in more recent times that the fostering of a healthy arts and culture ecosystem has been linked to the development of creative economies. We have also seen over a similar timeframe the evolution of philanthropy to embrace new forms such as social investment and impact investment, using a broader range of financing techniques focused on delivering social impact rather than financial return.

Our decision to partner with AFAC on this important initiative is reflective of the organization's important role in the development of the cultural landscape in MENA, but we also intend to provide support to AFAC as they develop new models for the financing of creativity and entrepreneurship in the field of arts and culture.

We believe that supporting the Arab Creativity and Entrepreneurship Fund (ACEF) will further encourage sustainability of the communities in which it works. ACEF has adopted a financial model and refocused it in a way that contributes to the region's social development. By doing so, this initiative manages to combine the progressiveness of regional philanthropy, with financial efficiency in order to maximize its social impact.

We are pleased to partner with AFAC and support this initiative.

Sobhi Tabbara, *Member of General Management, HSBC Private Bank*
Russell Prior, *Head of Philanthropy, EMEA, HSBC Private Bank*



HSBC Private Bank

un — cover

“Art holds a mirror up to society. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is such a long tradition of artists concerned with social justice. In fact, the artist who at some time has not wrestled with the theme of justice in society is an exception. It is not a question of whether art and social justice are connected, but, rather, the form and intensity of that connection.”

Dudley Cocke



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Khalid Shamis

Male
LIBYA

39 Y.O

كلاب العقيد الضالة

THE COLONEL'S STRAY DOGS

In 1981 seven exiled Libyan revolutionaries gathered to form the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL). Their main objective was to use armed warfare against the regime and, for a while, it looked like they would succeed. Gadhafi set out to hunt them down and for the next 30 years they became his most dangerous oppositional force—the stray dogs, he called them.

After Gadhafi's death, the members of the Front rushed back to Tripoli and Benghazi to help start the new country. They took prominent positions within the transitional government but they soon discovered that the dream of a free Libya quickly turned into a nightmare as the country descended into chaos. In a way, these men became caretakers of the mess Gadhafi left.

Khalid Shamis's father is one of these men. For the longest time he wanted to work on a film that explores exile and homecoming through a movement that dedicated itself to a homeland that for decades was out of reach.

The Colonel's Stray Dogs is a feature documentary that embarks on an exploration of lives lived in exile, revolution and rebellion. Lives that from the outset manifested courage, determination and a dream. Memories are interwoven with archival images acquired from a variety of formal and informal sources. The product is a biographical narrative, telling the story of a country, a movement and a dictator through that of men who lived on the edge and are now at the center of a new country with a revolution still in process.

What issues are you raising in your film?

Opposition movements to dictators often have a starkly differing, and at times truer, account of history than the ones we think we know. I am interested in exploring the compromises that one has to make in order to fight the good fight. Where does family exist in this space when the fight for the freedom of the homeland carries foremost priority? How long does one hold out the candle of hope for the freedom of their land? What happens when the land you fought for and regained very quickly turns and rejects you? Does the expectation ever live up to the dream?

Can answers to these questions help inform the situation in Libya today?

An understanding of exile from the viewpoint that I am proposing is extremely important for a country to understand in order to move on and take positive steps towards a peaceful and fruitful future. The aim is not to make a propaganda film about the NFSL but to draw on the Front to access an understanding of the Libyan opposition to Gadhafi. Films that explore people and places in the Middle East are integral to understanding this immensely varied and troubled region of the world. Through the making of this film, and collecting the accounts of the men who started the NFSL, I seek to uncover a hidden history that will inform global opinion on Libya, while at the same time giving me insight into

my father's double life in relation to my years as a youth. As a result, the film becomes a dual heritage document. This is not solely a personal journey of myself, rather it is an accounting of history, which will inform us of the present and future states of a country in flux; and because of the access that I have to these characters, and the circumstances that Libya – and myself now – find ourselves in, it is an obligation.

Was it easy to convince them to take part in the project?

There were around 15 founding members and I am focusing on six or seven of them. In principal most of them were receptive to the idea. Some of them weren't easy to get hold of because of the delicate situation they're in due to the current politics. Others agreed on the condition that they would discuss history and their point of view from that history, because it's tough for them to sit and talk about Libya now, which affects their political situation. My father was the doorway into this world and he facilitated the connection with all of these men. Some of them I already knew because I grew up with in exile. With some others it was more of a challenge because of the relationship they have (or don't have anymore) with my dad. But I'm trying to show them that I'm not biased towards my dad's ideas and that I really want to understand what was it like to be in exile, what was it like to compromise their family and safety? One of my big questions is: was it worth it?

You're also using a lot of archival material. What role will it have in the film?

A big part of the film explores the 1980s and 1990s when Gadhafi used the media as a mouthpiece for his own regime. I am very interested in reclaiming a lot of this old propaganda and turning it on its head to kind of show a different point of view. I'm now trying to source it but it's hard to find. The politics in Libya are so fragmented and you can see this reflected in the media. You don't know who is controlling what. Some people are also unwilling to cooperate because they have a problem with the Front; they think that they are the cause for many of the country's problems post-Gadhafi.

You're also insisting on working with a local crew...

It has always been my intention to help nurture the Libyan filmmaking industry which is quite fragmented. There are a handful of filmmakers and almost none of them lived under Gadhafi. I grew up in London and now live in Cape Town and I definitely don't want to come with a foreign crew and leave. I want to work with local people on the ground and help contribute to the development of the industry. Having said that, I will also be working with people from outside the country since some characters do not live there.

"Films that explore people and places in the the Middle East are integral to understanding this immensely varied and troubled region of the world."

Finally, what do you hope your film would achieve?

I'm hoping the film would give an insight into lives lived in exile but also we're not going to escape talking about Libya today. If we understand the history of Libya through these guys we could arrive at a point where we could understand why it's so fragmented today. Libya today is not just a mess because of extremist Islamist groups, but also because of very complex political decisions and alliances, and I'm trying to arrive at how generations under dictators and outside the country understand the country. If we understand our past we can have some kind of a glimpse of where we are today. It's a classic thing in documentary: you use the past to understand something about the present.

Expected completion: Spring 2016

"If we understand our past we can have some kind of a glimpse of where we are today."



Amira al-Sharif

Female
YEMEN

32 Y.O

سيدات يمنيات بروح مناضلة

WOMEN WITH FIGHTING SPIRITS



Sadiya holding her morning catch

As part of her project entitled *Yemeni Women with Fighting Spirits* photojournalist Amira al-Sharif has been looking for Yemeni women who, despite facing conservative traditions and the limitations of a male-dominated society, have made it on their own. Yemeni women have suffered a great deal due to historical, cultural and religious marginalization as well as to a weak judicial system, which is further perpetuated by patriarchal social structures led by religious leaders, tribal leaders and law enforcement authorities.

Given these limitations, it is often tough to showcase a Yemeni woman's life. In fact, photographing a woman's face is particularly difficult as it is considered shameful for a woman to allow anyone other than her family members to see her face.

Al-Sharif's research led her to the Yemeni island of Socotra where she met a woman called Sadiya, who owns a piece of land near one of the island's finest beaches. Sadiya was born and raised there and now lives on the island with her husband, seven children and many goats. For the past 14 years a tribe has been harassing Sadiya to give up her land due to the increasing demand for eco-tourism in the area. They even imprisoned her for 50 days in a male prison to pressure her, but she hasn't budged on her decision to keep her land. Al-Sharif was attracted to Sadiya's courage and resilience and believed that putting her story out was important to inspire other women to be courageous and step up to men's subjugation.

Despite an initial objection from Sadiya's husband and elderly sons towards the proposed documentary, al-Sharif managed to gain access to her and document her life in the end. She admits that the most difficult aspect of the project has been to get the men's approvals, and subsequently to mask the identities of the women so that the photographs wouldn't have any repercussions for them. Often she found herself photographing the men in order to build connections and subsequently be able to

get access to the women. She spoke to sheikhs, religious and tribal leaders, local authorities, tourist guides and community members to learn about inspiring and pioneering women on the island.

Al-Sharif has so far spent more than 10 months on Socotra, living with Sadiya, discovering the island, and even learning the Socotran language. The photographs show Sadiya in settings that tell the story of her life without relying on her facial expressions. The photos show her strength and powerful commitment to save her land, attributes that are generally reserved for men.

"This documentary illustrates the role women play in Yemeni society while capturing their powerful and beautiful femininity. My images explore inherent dreams and achievements reached in spite of all the obstacles that the society places in the face of these women," al-Sharif explains.

The objective was to showcase these photos on International Women's Day in March as the photographer believes that the event provides a cultural bridge between women in conservative places, like the ones she has photographed in Yemen, and more empowered women around the world. "It is important to uncover and tell the stories of Yemeni women in order to stimulate a discourse on the need for greater openness and equality, shared responsibility, and appreciation for the essential contributions women make," she asserts.

Ideally, al-Sharif would like to inspire through the project other Yemeni women to follow in the footsteps of Sadiya as well as other women featured in her documentary. In the end, as al-Sharif puts it: "Women like Sadiya are leading a social change. They are courageous and do not readily accept their fate and are fighting against discrimination and mistreatment."



Sadiya in the coral reef holding a black sea creature, which she says that the Chinese use for medicinal purposes



Sadiya seen fishing and preparing lunch





Zara Samiry

Female
MOROCCO

32 Y.O

قصص من الأمازون المغربي

TALES OF THE MOROCCAN AMAZON



Oumaima, 18, is a member of the female troupe Farisat al-Hawzia, which is one of few female troupes that practice the Fantasia in Morocco

While cavalier traditions are disappearing in contemporary Morocco, the country still maintains a horse-riding culture, mainly through the *Fantasia* (or *Tbourida*). “La Fantasia” is the modern version of a secular heritage: it defines traditional equestrian performances that simulate mock-attacks by warriors and celebrate the remains of Arab-Berber equestrian military art. Due to its dangerous and very physical nature it has long been the domain of men. Women would be in the audience to welcome and cheer the horsemen on with “*youyous*” (ululations).

For a few years now, young Moroccan women have been turning traditions upside down: these horsewomen, modern-day Amazons, attempt to establish themselves in a once patriarchal warrior tradition.

Fantasia is part of Moroccan culture and often features on television at news hour in small segments on the male competitions and the festivals honouring the saints. Photojournalist Zara Samiry remembers visiting family members while the TV was running in the background, like in virtually all Moroccan households, when she heard yet another reportage about the *Fantasia*, to which she didn’t pay much attention until a female voice could be heard talking about her troupe and her love for this equestrian art. Samiry was hooked, and she soon found herself fascinated by this feminine aspect of the *Tbourida*.

She began her research and later found out about Kahina, a seventh century Berber warrior queen, and discovered the Orientalist paintings of Eugene Delacroix depicting the *Fantasia* (accomplished in 1832 during the French diplomatic mission to Sultan Abd al-Rahman). After that she decided to turn her research to a project that explores the evolution of this ancestral heritage since the arrival of female troupes in the *Tbourida*, which is an aspect audiences know little about.

Although *Fantasia* is hugely vivacious and known in Morocco, work that highlights the participation of female troupes is rare. The first troupe

of mixed cavaliers dates back to 2002 before an exclusively female troupe emerged in Mohammedia in Morocco. The female *Fantasia*, however, is still unrecognized and little unknown by local audiences and even more so on an international level.

In the beginning, Samiry couldn’t find much information on the female *Fantasia*, which has its own jargon that one has to master in order to be able to look where necessary. Also, given that this is a seasonal activity that only takes place during summer, the time allotted for her research was largely reduced. She then managed to convince a troupe called Farisat al-Hawziya to work with her. She documented their everyday lives and took portraits of young women in the troupe.

“The horsewomen were receptive to my project, which they saw as a very good means to get the feminine aspect of the *Fantasia* known at international level and to get it recognized at the local level. It was easy to connect. I remember spending the night at the head of the troupe’s farm. I had complete freedom to take photographs and of course I showed them the images I had taken during the course of the project in order to establish mutual trust,” she says.

Samiry believes that the importance of this project lies in showcasing the evolution of women’s position at the heart of Moroccan society and to allow for a different image of the sometimes-victimized Arab woman as portrayed by the media to emerge.

She wants to make this tradition’s feminine aspect of this tradition known by means of exhibitions and publications, and hopes that in the long run she will be able to compile a book on the female *Fantasia* in Morocco.

“I wish to share with the audience this passion I felt when I first discovered the feminine *Tbourida*, the beauty of this secular tradition, those magnificent colors that Morocco is renowned for and most of all to showcase the singularity of the Moroccan woman through her cultural heritage: that of being an amazon.”



During the show, the riders and their Arab-Barb horses gallop across the field, in perfect alignment facing an imaginary enemy, and fire a salvo of shots. A few meters in front of them is a male-dominated public sitting in caïdales tents (Moroccan tents). Throughout the performance, the riders must stay perfectly synchronized and end with a perfect shot in a single detonation

“This reportage showcases the evolution of women’s position at the heart of Moroccan society and allows for a different image of the sometimes-victimized Arab woman as portrayed by the media to emerge.”





Bouchra is the chief of the Farisat al-Hawziya troupe. She is an experienced rider, who was taught the Fantasia by her grandfather



Members of the Farisat al-Hawzia troupe in the farm that belongs to the chief of the troupe (wearing red), a few kilometers away from Rabat

Omar Imam

Male
SYRIA

35 Y.O

عيش حب لاجيء

LIVE LOVE REFUGEE

Since he moved to Lebanon two years ago, Omar Imam has seen the number of Syrian refugees in the country quadruple as the conflict in Syria has worsened. Along with this came a new narrative that attempted to portray these refugees as desperate people in need of food, money and UN aid. Imam, who is a photographer and Syrian himself, became really tired of these stereotypes and decided to dig deeper into the emotional situations of these refugees. He believes that when it comes to the Syrian refugees, especially the ones in Lebanon, there are many more angles to explore relating to their new lives in the country.

His research has led him to various refugee camps across Lebanon, mostly in the Bekaa Valley, as well as to Syrian refugees living in apartments in Beirut. At first he found it really hard to establish a connection because they were resistant to cooperate with him. They suspected him to be another one of

those photographers coming to them to recycle the clichéd narratives. But soon they realized that he was actually different. He didn't ask them to put aside their dignity when they stood in front of his camera. He didn't ask them to lie, to say that they're happy when they're clearly not. He also didn't ask them to present themselves as desperate and begging. What he did however was start a conversation with them and by doing so he succeeded in gaining their trust.

There is one story Imam likes to recount about an old man who lives in one of the refugee camps in the Bekaa. The man tried committing suicide several times and has now confided to the privacy of his own tent refusing to speak to anyone. His son died in a car accident in Syria and he couldn't quite recover from the shock. The man then heard about Imam's visits to the camp and was interested to meet with him on the condition that the meeting only take place between the two of them alone. So they met and the man opened up to Imam, dwelling on the intimate details of his life in a way that moved the photographer.

Interestingly, Imam thinks that while the research was intended to help him uncover insights for his project, it has also helped the refugees themselves in the process. He believes that it created an avenue for them to open up, speak out and voice their stories, and by doing so they started remembering what they've gone through and perhaps this has allowed them to form a better understanding of themselves and their situations.

"There needs to be a new image that helps us to connect with the psychological state of the refugees, to help us understand their hallucinations, fears, and dreams," Imam explains. Also, given the intensity of most of the cases as well as the over abundance of stereotyping narratives on Syrian refugees, the photographer felt there was a need to develop a new visual representation. In his project he is employing imaginative techniques in order to express reality in a visually accessible manner, without however undermining the truth.

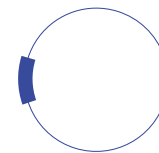
Ideally he would like the audiences to engage with these refugees, know their names, learn about their stories, and, importantly, connect with them on a human level.







SYRIAN REFUGEES
Akkar



9.2%
of total number of
refugees in Lebanon

108 381

TOTAL
number of Syrian refugees

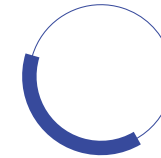
26 986

TOTAL
number of households

UNHCR Figures as of April 2015



SYRIAN REFUGEES
Bekaa Valley



33.2%
of total number of
refugees in Lebanon

416 127

TOTAL
number of Syrian refugees

94 232

TOTAL
number of households

UNHCR Figures as of April 2015

Samar Hazboun

Female
PALESTINE

29 Y.O

ما بعد حواجز التفتيش

BEYOND CHECKPOINTS

According to the World Health Organization, at least 69 women have given birth at Israeli checkpoints between 2000 and 2006. These incidents still happen today, mostly in Area A, which is the area that falls under Palestinian Authority (Area B is shared between Palestine and Israel but Israeli law applies; Area C falls strictly under Israeli authority and Palestinians are not allowed to enter the area).

When Samar Hazboun, a Palestinian photojournalist, heard about these stories she couldn't believe them. "Israelis claim to be the only democracy in the Middle East, how can they allow a woman in labor to give birth in front of them while they just

watch on?" she exclaims. Women in labor are left bleeding heavily and not allowed to cross to the other side of the checkpoint to reach the nearest hospital.

Hazboun decided to research and explore this issue, hoping that documenting these injustices would raise awareness about the issue and in the long run put international pressure on Israel to stop these criminalities.

The photos includes portraits of the women, the surviving babies, and objects the mothers have kept for their babies like clothes or toys, and in some cases, the baby's death certificate. Out of all the cases Hazboun has researched, only two babies have survived. The causes of death vary: some suffocate due to the extreme tension the women are put in, a drop in the baby's body temperature due

to cold, a delay in reaching the other side of the checkpoint, unhygienic situations, among others.

When Hazboun started researching the project in January 2014, she couldn't find a lot of material on the subject mainly because it has received scant coverage. For obvious reasons, she couldn't get a permit to shoot at a checkpoint and many times she had to traverse the long distance between her house in Bethlehem and the checkpoints before she could obtain a perfect a shot. She also photographed the families inside their homes. Some were surprised when she first knocked on their doors because a lot of time had passed since their babies had died. Other families were scared of vocalizing their story and only agreed to speak with her without having their photos taken. Out of the many families she interviewed, nine are present in the final documentation.

Hazboun confesses that she is scared of putting the project out there. When she published her previous project, which documented the horrific experiences of detained Palestinian children in Israeli prisons, she received threats and hate mail. Also, the time she spent researching the project hasn't been easy on her. "There was one time when I was interviewing a family and the husband started crying. It's so tough to see a man cry. At the end of the day, we live in a patriarchal society and men are supposed to be strong. When a man starts crying in front of you, it just makes you feel helpless, it breaks something inside of you," she says.

On the flip side, she says that speaking to these families was important to them. A lot of the times it felt like talking about it was a relief for them — they needed to speak out. None of the families has received any kind of medical or psychological help, let alone legal rights. No soldier was prosecuted or found guilty.

In her opinion, since the Palestinians are considered a demographic threat to the Israelis, actions like preventing them from giving birth seem to be part of a systematic strategy to erase Palestinians. "There are indeed so many cases that it's hard to believe it's a mere coincidence," she notes.

Which is why more projects like her project are needed. "It doesn't bother me that everybody is a photographer today because a massive photographic archive in Palestine has been destroyed

and stolen. We have to make sure that we have a proper archive for the future. Researchers and photographers need to work together. I hope my project will put an initiative out there for more people to work together and understand the importance of photography as a proof of things that happened. I hope to inspire other people to take such initiatives because these things are very important."

"I hope my project will put an initiative out there for more people to work together and understand the importance of photography as a proof of things that happened."

Hazboun is now in the final stages of the project. She hopes that once she publishes the work, it will help raise awareness on the issue. "I want people to know, I want a change in policy, I want an end to checkpoints, I want an end to all these restrictions, be it on women, children or Palestinians in general, and I want to encourage more people to talk about these things, because the more we talk and the more people know, the more pressure we can exert on Israel to stop its injustices."

69

TOTAL

number of women who have given birth
at Israeli checkpoints between
2000 and 2006

“It doesn’t bother me that everybody is a photographer today because a massive photographic archive in Palestine has been destroyed and stolen. We have to make sure that we have a proper archive for the future.”





02 TOTAL
number of babies that have survived
out of the many cases Hazboun
has researched

Samar Hazboun's project explores a series of births that took place at checkpoints. The photographer pairs portraits of her subjects with relevant belongings, like premature death certificates or baby clothes that were never worn. These elements are inanimate witnesses to an otherwise undocumented event. They aim to introduce personal narratives by taking the viewer into images beyond what is usually seen, inviting them to explore stories through their secondary characters. The project is an intersection of memory, loss, grief, and the sad truth that all that remains from these tragedies are mere objects that bear witness to a slowly fading history.





Tamara Stepanyan

Female
FRANCE

32 Y.O

البرزخ

LIMBO

Three years ago, as Tamara Stepanyan was leaving the train station at Lyon-Perrache, she heard familiar sounds. She started following them until she encountered an astounding sight. Hundreds of Armenians were crammed into an enclosed garden and living in tents. They were asylum seekers who have fled Armenia and were now awaiting the French government's decision on their legal status.

"People were floating around in an undetermined space waiting for something to happen," Stepanyan remembers. Her heart broke at the sight. After all, an Armenian exile herself, she shared their pain, the pain of the displaced. The filmmaker left Armenia at age 12 for Lebanon, before immigrating to Denmark and then to France where she now resides with her French husband and daughter. She was very familiar with this sense of transition, going from one place to another in search of home.

The Armenian diaspora exists due to various reasons: the first genocide of the 20th century, abuse of Stalinist rule, the collapse of the Soviet regime and the anarchy that soon followed. But today people escape to run away from the adverse political and economic conditions plaguing the

country. A lot of them have landed in France by chance, at the whims of smugglers (some of them board on ships without even knowing to where they're heading). All of them are lured by the prospects and dreams of a better life away from Armenia.

As soon as they arrive in France, or elsewhere in Europe, they surrender themselves to the state. Then begins a long process of waiting. Some asylum seekers live in this state of transition for several months, sometimes years, before the court makes its decision. According to Stepanyan, 90% of the cases she encountered were denied legal status since Armenia is listed as a 'safe country', which means that France has no right to give them papers. In fact, of all the families the filmmaker spoke to, only one was granted entry. Those rejected can try one more time, and if they're rejected again they automatically become illegal.

Stepanyan was interested in this phase of the asylum seekers' struggle. In fact her entire film, which is aptly named *Limbo*, is about waiting.

In ancient literature, 'Limbo' is a space where people wait before they are sent to either heaven or hell. In the asylum seekers' case, since the state only gives them the right to be on the land before the court makes its verdict, Limbo becomes this unidentified, brutal place of waiting, before their new life can begin.

Limbo is a documentary dedicated to the exploration of a state of being. It is an intimate in-between journey where the characters wander. It is shot at the homes of the subjects, precarious locations like hotel rooms, slums, squatter settlements, and the streets, where asylum seekers have piled up all that remains of their former lives.

"I will observe them at home as they go about their daily activities. I also want to capture how the body is waiting patiently, how these bodies roam, how these bodies are struggling. Strangely many of them suffer from illness (cancer, disability, etc.), as if they have endured exile in their flesh, as if the waiting has revealed the sickness which previously was dormant," the director explains. She is also interested in the group dynamics that emerge, especially since most of them have traveled as families. "Waiting creates both solidarity and dissension," she points out.



While Lyon provided the initial point of departure—and inspiration—for Stepanyan’s documentary, Marseille will be the location where the film takes place. Marseille’s very geography and topography evoke the idea of transit. Marseille has been a crossroad for a long time and has a long history of immigration. The city, nestled between the Mediterranean and the hills, embodies an in-between space open over the horizon. Fittingly, it is also a place that is closely linked to Armenian history. According to the director, many exiles that had fled the 1915 genocide arrived in Marseille. “This is a city that speaks to our imagination because we all read *The Count of Monte Cristo* in school. All Armenian asylum seekers I met here told me about their emotions when they discovered the Château d’If, that it was just a few minutes by boat from the Old Harbor. Marseille is a half-real, half-imaginary city, a city made up of all the communities it welcomes: the perfect place to talk about time, sometimes precise and open to waiting, the perfect place to film *Limbo*.”

“When we make films we want to touch people, to make them feel what we feel, to let them hear our cries, worries, sadness, and happiness. As far as this documentary is concerned, I want to share with people how these asylum seekers are living and what they’re enduring,” she explains. Stepanyan hopes that by doing so she could help bring some kind of change to these people.

“I will observe them at home as they go about their daily activities. The camera will have an invisible presence, as if I am not there. I also want to shoot, while looking at the bodies, what the words sometimes fail to express.”

“Some asylum seekers think I am a psychologist because I care to listen to them without any political or administrative reasons. It’s very important to care humanly about somebody who needs it, especially these people who are stuck, they can’t go out in the city because they don’t have legal status and they don’t even know the language. I have a feeling that I’ve become someone they can talk to

and share their stories with.” Some have even asked her to translate their paperwork.

Documentaries force you to care about a human being. They’re full of moments of giving and taking, of sharing love and feelings and caring for each other. Later comes the film. However, she concedes that documentaries are tough business. “Every time I make a documentary, I say that it’s the last time, because I give it too much of myself.”

To express the state of her characters, Stepanyan plans on using texts that evoke limbo. These texts, mostly drawn from classic tales like Homer, Aristophanes, Virgil, and Dante will be established by a voiceover and accompanied by shots of the sea.

Like the souls of the dead in Homer and Virgil, her characters are on a shore waiting to embark, to find their home. Here, she will leave them to adapt to this space, letting herself be guided by their movements, their gestures, their looks. The sea will become a visual and narrative pattern that will come back regularly in the film. It will be like breathing, punctuation, rhythm. After all, they all have arrived here seeking a better world, and to most of them, regardless of what the court decides, the sea is the point of no return.

Expected completion: early 2016

436 000

TOTAL

number asylum applications from stateless
people received by Europe in 2014

“When we make films
we want to touch
people, to make
them feel what we feel,
to let them hear our
cries, worries, sadness,
and happiness.”

Hamada Elrasam

Male 28 Y.O
EGYPT

بقايا نزاع

TRACES OF CONFLICT

Nearly three years after the Egyptian Revolution, the yearning for freedom still lives deep in the hearts and minds of young Egyptians, but the divide between the different political and religious groups is widening and the conflict is worsening.

Hamada Elrasam's photographic project focuses on the youth who are affected by the conflict. He was interested to work on this topic after he witnessed how much blood was shed in the past three years in his country. The project explores the emotional and mental effects of post-conflict trauma on kids. "The objective is to put out a message that says that blood shedding will only lead to more blood, and it will also breed a generation that is violent and revengeful," he explains.

For the first series of this photographic endeavor, which he has received the ADPP grant for, Elrasam is focusing on the children whose fathers had died in violent protests and other street clashes. He is looking at how these incidents affect the kids both emotionally and mentally. He says that it is extremely important to know how to deal with kids in these situations, instead of feeding in them violent emotions like revenge, which is what a lot of families do.

Elrasam has so far photographed nine families but he is still looking for more because he hasn't reached the visual result he is looking for. He has taken portraits of his subjects and photos of the families inside their houses and as they went about their daily lives. He is also juxtaposing these images with street photography because he wants to show how the conflict is playing out on the street as well, as seen through graffiti and other forms of street expression.

He is also aware that he needs to understand the psychological dimension associated with these stories in order to be able to deliver powerful and effective visual narratives. To do so, he is working with psychologist Eman Gaber, who has previously led a campaign to help kids in post-traumatic situations. One of the things he learned from her is that a kids' reaction to trauma is very different from an adult's, and therefore the parents need to be aware of that in order to know how to treat their children.

In Egypt, and more generally in the Arab region, there's no awareness about this issue. In fact, there's a general fear of and misconception about psychologists. "Some people think psychologists will treat them with chemicals or even with electric shots!" he exclaims. On the contrary, he says that the kids in these situations of trauma need to spend their time doing activities like sports, drawing, singing, etc., but none of the families he spoke to were aware of that, or let alone willing to send their children to see a psychologist. Some families make the situation worse by feeding in them the will to revenge. This is also reinforced when the kids play violent video games and so forth. However, by meeting his subjects, spending time, and discussing this issue with them, he is slowly starting to sense an impact on them, especially in how they view this issue.

When he launches the project, Elrasam is hoping to show audiences the extent of the problem and raise awareness about it, especially amongst the affected parents so that they can know how to treat their kids. Finally, he hopes to reach a stage when the parents of the affected kids understand that it's a big problem instead of dismissing it, and work with their children on fixing it.









Yahya al-Abdallah

Male
JORDAN

36 Y.O

المجلس
THE COUNCIL

Yahya al-Abdallah's documentary *The Council* tells the story of two young students running for student council in a Palestinian primary UNRWA school in Jordan.

First of all, why did you choose to focus on a refugee camp?

I taught at private and public schools in Jordan for seven years and witnessed the discrepancies in the educational levels between the two systems. Then I decided to leave teaching and try to do something about these issues. I tried for three years to get a permission to film at public schools but they didn't grant me access. Up until the UNRWA accepted that I film at a primary school in a Palestinian refugee camp. It's the same problem really; the only difference is that the kids there don't have national ID's like the kids in Jordanian public schools. I followed the student's from the beginning of the academic year until the end of the year.

What are the issues you raise in the film?

In the film I raise three main issues, which apply to any public school in Jordan.

The first is the safety issue. I ask if our kids are really safe at school. The second issue is about the type of skills the students are receiving at this critical age. The third is about the separation between the boys and the girls, which I think is a really important issue that also affects the first two—the safety and the skills—as well as the relationship between a man and a woman. I think that most of the problems come from this separation.

I chose a school that has morning shifts for boys and an afternoon shift for the girls, so I could monitor the problem from the start. Boys climb up the wall of the school and eat popcorn while watching the girls during the school recess as if they were watching a movie, and the principal and the headmistress are in constant disagreement as a result of that separation between the sexes and the way each sex looks at the other.

You also seem to touch upon issues like corruption...
When I lived in that school for one year I became part of the community and started discovering a lot of important things that I thought needed to be in the movie. We also see the level of violence that is prevalent in that community and how the students' elections are linked to the society and their families.

"Documentaries help us in presenting pertinent issues in order to raise questions and point the general public's attention towards them."

Were there other problems you noticed?

When I first arrived at the school, there were two students at the principal's office. One of them had assaulted the other one and the principal wanted to indirectly show me that the school is not responsible for that violence, but the social class to which the students belong. So he asked the assaulting student about the nature of his father's job and when the student said that his father is a herdsman, the principal looked at me in a such way as though to tell me that the reason behind the student's violence has just been justified. Only then I knew that there are also issues of classism even when they all live in the same camp. Classism is an inevitable result of the societies in which there is no peaceful exchange of authority.

How can a film like *The Council* help in changing the difficult reality it sheds light on?

Documentaries help us in presenting pertinent issues in order to raise questions and point the general public's attention towards them. The film indirectly raises the problem of the political system in Jordan, especially the laws by which the Jordanian Parliament is formed. The Kingdom's adoption of the "One Voice" law breaks up the structure of society and enables every family or clan to produce one candidate who often lacks the necessary skills for the civil representation in parliament. This leads to corruption because the candidate becomes pre-occupied with serving the interests of his family at the expense of the community. That is what we will see in the film, from all 40 candidates at school we only find two doing their duties toward those who

have elected them; they are the only ones who chose the public over the personal interest.

How was the response among the students?

I spent one month with the students before filming so it helped me become part of their community in a natural way and they treated me like I was one of their teachers. Also, given how small the camera was, and that it was installed on my chest, the students didn't pay much attention to it. Also I was filming by myself; I didn't have a crew to interrupt the flow.

As I mentioned the film was shot at a school that has two shifts, a morning shift for boys and an afternoon shift for girls. The girls' response after screening the film at the school was positive and they were happy to see themselves on screen. The headmistress objected on some of the scenes that she said could have a negative image on the school, like the scene when the students tried drinking water from a locked container.

I couldn't show the film to the boys because the headmistress had locked the library where the film was supposed to show and hid the key, because the principal of the boys' school didn't agree to share with her the cost of the film projector. But I plan on showing it there in the near future.



DUBAI INTL
FILM FESTIVAL
Special mention



VENICE
FILM FESTIVAL
Final Cut Award



Natalie Naccache

Female
LEBANON

25 Y.O

التيه

OUR LIMBO

As a photojournalist working for the *New York Times* and *Independent*, Natalie Naccache gets a lot of assignments to cover Syrian refugees in Lebanon. She soon realized though that all of these assignments focus on refugees from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and exclude those belonging to mid and upper social classes.

In her project, *Our Limbo*, she aims to show how well-off Syrian refugees are growing up in Beirut at a time when the political map of the Middle East is changing drastically and as these refugees continue to live with an unwelcome stigma in Lebanon. She would like audiences to relate to how it is like be a refugee whilst being financially stable. Ultimately she wants to question if money can buy a home. “It is a different way of looking at the displaced. It’s not politicized; it’s a human story,” she says.

She began working on the project after she got connected to a Syrian girl in Beirut through a common friend. The girl then introduced Naccache to her group of five friends. The Syrian girls were all born and raised in Damascus and then came together to Beirut to complete their graduate studies. They had plans of going back to Syria to their families after their graduations, but then the Syrian war happened and their plans were halted.

Now they are scattered in six different countries around the world. Naccache’s documentary tells the story of these displaced girls and zones in on the psychological effects of not being able to go home and the yearnings for Syria and for the memories there, while trying to adapt to a new life in a new country.

Naccache felt that there are so many emotions that are hard to visualize in this project because what these girls are going through is so difficult. “How do you visualize the yearning for the past, for example?” she asks. This has led her to branch out from the traditional photographic medium and experiment with new media like video, audio, and even a journal. “A journal makes you feel more connected to the subjects because it peaks into their private lives,” she explains. The final outcome of the project will be a multi-media piece, including home videos from Syria, an Instagram feed, a journal, and portraits.

The photos communicate the girls’ feelings, their resilience against being forced out of their homeland, and seek to convey with dignity their desires and values.

Naccache hopes that people who will see the photos will empathize with these refugees who can’t go back home, because, as she puts it: “Empathy leads to understanding, understanding leads to tolerance, tolerance leads to peace, and peace leads to a kinder society.”

“Empathy leads to understanding, understanding leads to tolerance, tolerance leads to peace, and peace leads to a kinder society.”



Memo my birthday
Memo

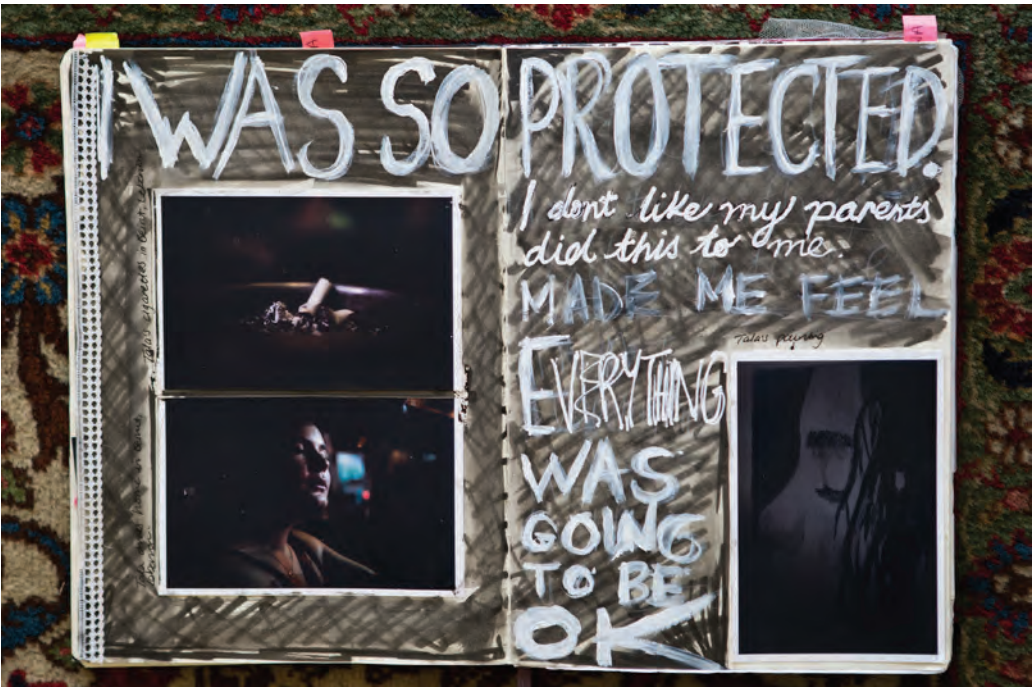


Memo My birthday
Memo

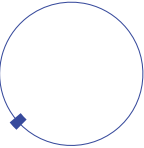




Tala, 23, holds one of her paintings that she made in response to Syria's war. Although she went to university in Beirut, her plan was to go back to her hometown Damascus and find work. "In this war, I have lost a part of who I am. I'm not used to being so dead inside. I close my eyes and wish that this isn't reality."



SYRIAN REFUGEES
Beirut



2.8%
of total number of
refugees in Lebanon

32 535

TOTAL
number of Syrian refugees

9 578

TOTAL
number of households

UNHCR Figures as of April 2015

BOTTOM LEFT
Nadia, 23, from Damascus in her apartment in Dubai.
"I'm not really here, I go to work, come back, eat, go to sleep
so I don't feel it as much."

Faisal al-Fouzan

Male
KUWAIT

31 Y.O

زوّارة الجمعة

FRIDAY GATHERING



Raja, 30, from Rajasthan, India, sleeping before his 12-hours shift at a car repair shop



More than two-thirds of Kuwait's population are expats, with the majority being low income manual labor and service workers

Friday Gathering is a documentary photography project by Kuwaiti photographer Faisal al-Fouzan, who aims to uncover the social landscapes of low-income migrant workers in Kuwait. The issue of blue-collar workers in Kuwait, and more generally in the Gulf, has been talked about a lot before but al-Fouzan thinks that no one has really dug deep into it.

"We tend to overlook this issue although it speaks to all of us; we deal with these people on a daily basis – they're the tea boys, construction workers, restaurant waiters, mechanics... They are at the core of construction and developmental projects, they are the workers who build our city and keep it running, they turn our dreams into reality," he notes. Although this issue has been around for a long time, the Kuwaiti government has been hesitant in taking effective action and parliament has failed in coming up with a decent solution. Feeble suggestions have been made on building a worker's city and though this need is prevalent in almost all Gulf countries as well, these cities are yet to see the light.

To achieve his objectives, al-Fouzan wanted to enter the worker's world, the communal living spaces they inhabit. His photos aim to show the miserable situations these workers live in. The living spaces are shabby, poorly constructed, highly dense, ramshackle accommodations, where the living conditions are inhuman.

In the beginning, al-Fouzan says that the subjects were generally afraid to open up or act normally in front of his camera, even more so because he himself is a citizen of the country that has let them down, and he seemed like an intruder to them. Also there are large numbers of workers that reside illegally, who are constantly afraid of deportation at any moment. The photographer had to gain their trust and it took a while before they opened up their houses—and themselves—to him. He visited them many times to explain what he was doing and what he was hoping to achieve with the project, and then he took

some pictures of them, printed them out and came back and showed them the prints so that they could visualize what he was talking about.

He has so far far visited workers' residences in three governorate – Kuwait City, Hawalli and Farwaniya – which house most of the low-income expats in Kuwait. There he took photos of the architecture, the living environment, their routines, rooms, bathrooms, meals, zoomed in details of their belongings, signs of their diverse faiths and practices, and the interaction between the inhabitants. He has spent more than 200 hours shooting at the workers' accommodations and spoke to 150 workers.

The project will be presented in a photographic exhibition, which will include a comprehensive set of photos as well as a separate audio and furniture installation from the visited accommodations to complement the findings.

Al-Fouzan does not believe that his project will lead to a change in policy, at least not in the short term. What he hopes to achieve, however, is to open the eyes of the younger generation to the realities of these workers in order to hopefully trigger more compassion and kindness towards them. "This generation is open-minded, they go to galleries, are active on instagram, and are the ones that will most likely create impact. These are baby steps, they're small changes, but step by step we can make changes that are really meaningful in the long run."



A view of Kuwait's financial center from the workers' houses



Due to the lack of space, Husain, who comes from Bangladesh and works as an office clerk, hangs his whole wardrobe above his bed



TOP LEFT

Photos of Ismail's children on the wall behind his bed. Ismail works in a shop and sees his kids once every two years

BOTTOM LEFT

An old house in Kuwait City accommodating more than 300 low-income migrant laborers from different countries. Its big yard and corridors are transformed into makeshift shared bedrooms, kitchens and communal bathrooms





Philip Rizk & Jasmina Metwaly

Male & Female 33 & 32 Y.O
EGYPT

برّه في الشارع

OUT ON THE STREET

Egyptian filmmakers Philip Rizk and Jasmina Metwaly have been working together on short videos since 2011, filming on the streets, in factories, joining marches and sit-ins in cities across Egypt in an attempt to document a wide variety of struggles. In February 2011, three weeks after Moubarak was toppled, they went down to a protest that was organized by a group of low-income workers. The filmmakers thought that the voices of these workers are part of the revolution and needed to be heard.

“We went to listen, to film, and to try to understand the different dimensions of their protests. We wanted to know the unseen battles, hierarchies and social manipulations, work-caused illness and injuries and, in severe cases, death,” explains Metwaly. The event soon became the spark that led to their film, *Out on the Street*, which is about a group of workers from Helwan, a working class neighborhood in Egypt.

The film raises the issue of the privatization of companies and factories in Egypt and the impact that this has had on the workers. Privatization was a scheme devised by the Egyptian government more than 15 years ago, in collaboration with other influential businessmen in the country, during which a lot of the public companies were sold to private

“We don’t want to make a film that turns that harsh reality into a spectacle, a source of entertainment, but a re-evaluation of the past and an imagining of what the future could hold.”

buyers—sometimes for less than a quarter of the actual price—and the employees fired.

In the film, eight working-class men participate in an acting workshop, and through the rehearsals, stories emerge of factory injustice, police brutality, courts that fabricate criminal charges, and countless tales of corruption and exploitation by their capitalist employers. In the filmmakers view, “It is always about exploitation and systematic corruption, the effects of capitalism creeping deeper into people’s lives, the closing down of a public sector, privatizing public land and industry for the sake of growth, investment, and the ‘economy’ rather than people. These workers risk being demoted, losing their jobs, or being beaten by the police or hired thugs, arrested or tried.”

On a rooftop studio overlooking the heart of Cairo – presented as a space between fact and fiction – the workers move in and out of character as they shape the performance that engages their daily realities. *Out on the Street* interweaves scenes from the workshop, fictional performances, and mobile phone footage shot by a worker intended as evidence for the courts to stop the destruction of his workplace. This hybrid approach aims to engage a collective imaginary, situating the participants and spectators within a broader social struggle.

Rizk explains that the film is intentionally low budget. They didn’t want to work with a big production team because of the fragility of the situation with the actors. “The workers became our friends, and the image wasn’t really the most important thing we were looking for. It was more about the stories, the process, and the relationships that came out of it,” he says. “We don’t want to make a film that turns that harsh reality into a spectacle, a source of entertainment, but a re-evaluation of the past and an imagining of what the future could hold.”

The filmmakers believe that the film was also a chance for the actors to step out of the struggles of their daily lives and play. As Rizk notes, “People who live the hard life don’t have the time to imagine. They’re always worried about their work and struggle.”

The final outcome is a film that blurs the lines between feature and documentary and presents a

story of injustice and abuse. It’s an invitation for the viewers to think about what has happened and ask questions. As Metwaly points out in the end, “We are not trying to provide solutions in the film. Our objective is to make the reader feel uncomfortable, but we don’t promise any solutions. There is no end to the film anyway.”



BERLINALE 2015
Forum Expanded
selection



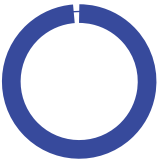
VENICE
BIENNALE
2015 Selection



Eman Helal

Female
EGYPT

29 Y.O



99.3%
of the surveyed Egyptian
women were sexually harassed
according to a UN 2013 study

قف

JUST STOP

In March 2011 Eman Helal went down to Tahrir Square in Cairo to join a protest that was held on the occasion of International Women's Day. As she was taking pictures of the event, she noticed that a lot of women were being harassed and some were even being attacked. Helal was shocked. For a country that has just emerged from an inspiring revolution, with the momentum of change and freedom still at a peak, the Egyptian photographer just couldn't believe what she was seeing.

Few months later she came across the story of Isra' Ahmed, a young girl that was harassed at a metro station in Cairo. As the story goes, when Ahmed was verbally harassed by a man in the middle of the crowded station, she started shouting at him, but no one came to her rescue. She then went to the station's security office to file a complaint, but the officer there dismissed her and told her to

go home. Her family was outraged after hearing about what happened to her, and her sister, a human rights lawyer, decided to take the matter to social media. Helal remembers seeing the Facebook post and immediately getting in touch with her. Three days later Helal was taking pictures of Ahmed, and since the incident was still fresh, one portrait shows the girl with a visible scar on her face, revealing a scary level of violence (the harasser pushed Ahmed away when she started shouting at him, so she fell on the ground and injured her head). Ahmed was so terrorized by the incident that when Helal visited, she was afraid that someone would touch her. Ahmed's parents were hesitant to speak with Helal and to vocalize their daughter's story but their lawyer daughter insisted that it was paramount to do so. From then on, Helal visited the family home numerous times, documenting Ahmed's life after the harassment.

Helal says that the situation is very grave. A UN 2013 study revealed that 99.3 percent of the surveyed Egyptian women were sexually harassed. A lot of the women are afraid of speaking up because the society tends to shame them rather than protect

them. A harassed woman that speaks out about being harassed is considered to be with loose morals.

On Ahmed's first day of school, her teacher asked the students to write a journal entry, so Ahmed wrote about her harassment incident. After the teacher read the story, he took Ahmed to the principal's office. The principal was furious and started shouting at the young girl, warning her from talking about this again or she'd risk expulsion from school. In fact, Helal herself had to work around the system to be able to take pictures of Ahmed in school because she says that it was impossible to bring up the 'harassment' topic. Newspapers in Egypt usually report on the first day of the academic year, so Helal used this as an alibi to get a permit from the Ministry of Education to access the school. Once she was inside, she followed Ahmed secretly and took photos of her from a distance.

So far, Helal has documented 10 cases. A lot of women have refused to speak up because they were convinced that the society would look at them as though they were the ones responsible for their own harassment. Some of the married women were even afraid to tell their husbands that they were harassed and Helal took photos of them without showing their faces. "Verbal and physical harassment is a spiraling phenomenon in the country, and it can happen to every women anywhere, and in most of the cases the women don't know what to do after they're harassed," Helal explains.

There was an incident where a girl was walking with her sister on a street in Cairo when a bus driver stopped his vehicle and started harassing her. The tension quickly escalated and the girl's sister told the driver that she will call the police and stood in front of the bus to prevent him from escaping. He drove over her and fled. The girl died and the story created an uproar in Egyptian media with people demanding justice for the sisters, but the driver is still nowhere to be found.

Even Helal herself was harassed once while she was at a protest in Tahrir Square. When she first started working on the project, she was afraid that the men would see her taking pictures of them and attack her, so she recently bought a smaller camera, which is making her feel more secure when

taking photos of harassment incidents.

The project includes portraits of women who have been harassed, accidents of harassment, and places where harassments occur (mostly on the metro, where most of the incidents happen, as well as in crowded areas like Kobri Kasr al-Nil, which is the road that leads to Tahrir Square). "When taking pictures of the girls on public transport, my idea is not to show incidents of harassment as much as the petrified looks on the girls' faces," she says.

Helal says that she doesn't really know if the situation is getting any better, although she senses some improvements as more people are talking openly about it. But in her opinion, if the phenomenon has shrunk, it's because the army is preventing big gatherings in public spaces, which are usually the pretext for such harassments.

After working on the project for four years now, she admits to feeling both tired and hopeless, but insists on keeping the project alive. "I'm depressed and tired. I've been hearing about all these harassment stories. Then comes a point where it starts affecting you emotionally and psychologically, especially if you're following the political situation after the revolution." She is thinking of taking a break and then resuming work on the project. "It's my duty as a photographer to try to solve this problem, even though I have lost hope that the situation will end any time soon."

The *New York Times* recently picked up on Helal's project and wrote that the photographer intends to spur societal change with her project. Currently, Helal is raising money for an anti-harassment billboard campaign featuring portraits and interviews with Egyptian women.

What Helal hopes to achieve is put the word out there, and by doing so to help bring some justice to these women. This is actually the reason why the family of the girl who was killed by the bus driver decided to open up to her. "If the government cannot provide citizens with justice, then the public might," she concedes.

"I don't want to just make a story and stop," she tells the *New York Times* reporter. "It's my dream to make the streets safe for women to walk on."



DON JUAN

نيسما
NESSMA FASHION

Accessories for
NEXT Women

أسعار نهاية الموسم

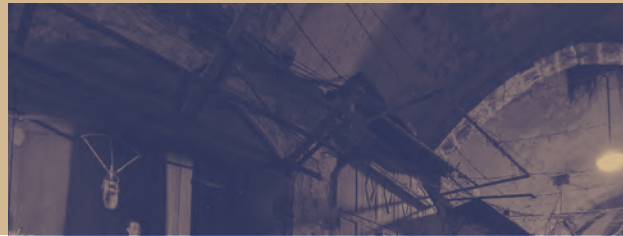




dis — cover

“Cultural activities can help rebuild shattered identities and create a sense of hope. They are important assets for community development and a necessary condition to create a free and democratic society in the long run.”

Freedom Theater, *Palestine*



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Yasir el-Tigani

Male 49 Y.O.
SUDAN

وهذه أيضاً ليست مسرحية

THIS IS NOT A PLAY!

At its core, theater is a living record of a country, told through the stories and experiences of its people. In Sudan, a country that is currently witnessing extreme political tension and strife, theater has become a space that encapsulates opposing political and ideological energies and promotes dialogue. This is what Yasir el-Tigani is trying to do.

The idea behind your project is really interesting. To work on three plays simultaneously, with each play trying to achieve a different objective. What was the thinking behind it?

After 20 years of self-imposed exile in Damascus, I decided to come back to my home country Sudan. Upon my return I was shocked at the prevailing political situation and the miserable state of the arts. So I decided to do something about it. I started having conversations with groups of friends and artists and tried to think of new creative and intellectual ways to respond to the grave situation. There is no freedom of speech in Sudan and the only artists that are actually supported are the ones rehashing the government's taking points. The main strategic objective was to establish an experimental theater that works on independent theatrical productions in the country, which is extremely important especially now given the transformations happening in the region.

What can you tell us about the three plays?

The three plays are *Death and the Maiden* by Ariel Dorfman, *A Day of Our Time* by celebrated Syrian playwright Saadallah Wannous, and the third is a local production we worked on called *This is not a play!* It is a project in improvisation and experimentation that attempts to explore the current situation in Sudan, a country that is being divided drastically, like what happened with the separation of the South, which I consider to be the most tragic historical event in Sudan's modern history. The three plays ran consecutively over a period of 10 days.

Why were these plays selected?

Dorfman's text is extremely provocative and it has been produced almost everywhere in the world. It is set in a country that has only recently returned to democracy and it talks about democratic movements, the fall of regimes, and transitional justice. Wannous' play was written in the 1990s during a time when corruption had infiltrated all aspects of the country. The play takes place in a school and uses the school as a microcosm of the country. Through the stories of the teachers and the students, it raises pertinent questions about corruption and opens the audience's eyes to what is going on around them. Thirdly, our experiment came from the coming together of different actors and artists who wanted to create theater that reflects the reality we're living in.

10
TOTAL
number of days

25
TOTAL
number of performers

“It’s been more than 30 years of cultural and political oppression and the audiences were happy to see the theater scene in Sudan being reignited.”

1 500
TOTAL
number of attendees

The censorship board in Sudan is clearly very stern. You even mentioned earlier that cultural funds are only given to artists who speak the government’s language. Your latest project was explosively provocative. How did you manage to get away with it?

Indeed we did face some hurdles; the government was sending us direct and indirect messages when we were working on the production. We tried to find smart artistic solutions and we had to be careful in how we direct these plays, because in the end it targets the crisis. We tried to be as safe as possible but you can never know what’s running in their minds or if they decide to interpret or re-interpret something their own way. These works are fighting works. They seek freedom, dialogue, and civic involvement, and we tried to run away from the controversies in order to hopefully achieve our objectives.

“These works are fighting works. They seek freedom, dialogue, and civic involvement.”

Any other challenges you faced?

We had a big financial challenge, and this is a challenge that’s generally faced by all theater makers in Sudan because the money only goes to those speaking the language of the government. AFAC was instrumental in helping us produce the play, which gathered around 25 people, notably actors, dramaturges, and other experts over a period of 3 months.

How was the response?

We were surprised by the response of both professionals and the general public. It was received with a lot of passion and love. There was a general feeling that the texts were very daring, especially in these critical times of complicated social, political, and cultural tension. We felt as though the audience was really thirsty for good cultural productions. It’s been more than 30 years of cultural and political oppression and the audiences were happy to see the theater scene in Sudan being reignited.

I personally thought it was a turning point, a positive contribution to the theater scene in the country, given all the challenges and problems it faces. It tried to productively pose and trigger critical questions, which engaged both the actors and the audiences in an interesting way.

What are your future plans?

Since the beginning, we were keen on communicating that we are a theater that aims to start a dialogue with the other, regardless of how different or opposing that other is from us.

We do not carry weapons; culture and theater is our weapon that we hope to use in order to achieve peaceful change. Our biggest threat is the astounding level of illiteracy and ignorance in Sudan and more generally across the Arab region. Our role as theater makers and cultural practitioners is to help fill in these educational and knowledge gaps. If you look at the media production around us, or even on a very smaller scale if you look at the signs of the shops on the corner of your street, you can witness a total collapse in our educational and cultural systems. So our theater is an alternative method to help achieve change in peaceful manners and through dialogue. The political deadlock after the Arab Spring happened because there was no dialogue, and it’s important to keep on creating spaces that allow for dialogue.



- o • Revive independent theater production in Sudan and create opportunities for theater makers
- B
- J
- E • Open a space for creation, imagination and dialogue in a country where these things are jeopardized
- C
- T
- I • Trigger critical questions that engage both the actors and the audiences
- V
- E
- S



Randa Mirza

Female 36 Y.O
LEBANON

الزَّهْرَة لَمْ تُولَدْ فِي يَوْمٍ وَاحِدٍ

AL-ZOHRA WASN'T BORN IN A DAY



The myth of the Year of the Elephant
Mixed Media Installation, 2014

The Near East has always been a land of gods and myths. From the first primitive fertility cults until the advent of Islam, the various Babylonian, Sumerian, Phoenician, Akkadian, Hebrew, Egyptian, Persian, Arab, Greek and Roman civilizations have all left numerous mythological tales in their literature and archaeological artefacts. Some of those myths are well known, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh. However, a vast array of tales remains overlooked and little known. The conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity in 380, the subsequent persecution of lingering paganism by the Byzantine Empire, and the censors of a nascent Islam have wiped out the Near East polytheists and their myths, which contained the last traces of memory of the earliest civilizations.

In her project, *Al-Zohra Wasn't Born in a Day*, Lebanese artist Randa Mirza is bringing to light a part of this overlooked history. "These polytheistic myths were hidden from us so that we forget them. What did they contain that was so dangerous in the eyes of monotheistic religions? What secrets do they hide?" she asks.

According to her, before the hegemony of the Greek myths that underpinned imperialist societies, Europeans pretended to ignore that people in the East had produced significant works prior to the Hellenics. Those were remarkable works, strange even to the natives themselves, and Mirza believes that they merit a real rereading and an in-depth study. "If the people of the Near East take their historiography – which has long been sketched out by the colonizer – into their own hands, would they be able to redefine how they are seen? Would it allow us to understand the identity and community crises we're facing today?"

Al-Zohra Wasn't Born in a Day delves into the stories of the old Muslim chroniclers, Koranic and

biblical texts, the collection of *hadith*, classical Arabic literature and the vast realm of pre-Islamic poetry to put origin myths under the spotlight.

The research will lead to the creation of art installations that include performances that recount mythic narratives, dioramas, maquette tableaux, and miniature-theater.

"I firmly believe in not only the artistic but also the intellectual, philosophical and historical significance of this project. The exhumation of these myths is key for generations to come, not solely in Middle East, but for all future generations. The integration of these myths into the collective memory could contribute to the eradication of colonial images. They are in fact tools of criticism of symbols of a cultural identity that forms part of a shared wealth," she says.

With the help of the AFAC grant, an exploratory stage was made possible, and allowed Mirza to work on three myths (Issaf and Naila", "Al-Zohra and the fallen angels" and "The year of the elephant"). Two models were completed and one piece was finalized in November 2014. It takes so much time to dig into these histories, understand and analyze them, uncover insights, and then conceptualize the pieces artistically and produce them. She admits that it is a long and arduous process, but aspires to work on 15 pieces in the long run.

Through these myths, history is also constructed in many strata, a palimpsest where fiction, philosophy and poetry become mixed up with the reality of historical fact. "My personal approach places itself in a postcolonial, anti-establishment perspective where I seek to dissect hegemonic speech so as to reveal the different strata that make up historical fact."

Mirza's determination lies in her desire to defend a historiography to which she belongs. This rereading and thorough appropriation of the past has allowed her to not only question imperialist colonial thought, but to also uncover religious censorship. The intention is to open up new perspectives on a part of mythical thought of the peoples of the Near East that has up until now been disregarded.

“If the people of the Near East take their historiography – which has long been sketched out by the colonizer – into their own hands, would they be able to redefine how they are seen?”

The myth of the Year of the Elephant

Chroniclers date the Year of the Elephant to around 570AD. In that year, the Ethiopian Christian general and vice-King of Yemen, Abraha, is said to have in vain attacked Mecca with an elephant, with the idea of demolishing the Kaaba, a sanctuary holy to the Arab pagans. On arriving at the sanctuary, the elephant refused to advance and the attack was repelled by the brilliant repost of birds throwing burning stones. In Muslim tradition, the Year of the Elephant marks the birth date of the prophet.

Mirza's diorama transfers the myth of the Year of the Elephant into a no-man's-land. The scene's protagonists are the elephant, the Kaaba, and the hoard of birds attacking from the sky. All human presence is intentionally eliminated.

The myth of Issaf and Naila

Among the gods venerated in Mecca during the pre-Islamic era were Issaf and Naila, two lovers who arranged to meet at Mecca during the period of the annual pilgrimage, known as the Hajj. Finding refuge in the sanctuary of the Kaaba, they made love in the enclosure of the holy place and were transformed into stone statues. Discovering the statuettes intertwined, the inhabitants of Mecca separated them and left the statue of Issaf on the hill of Safa and that of Naila on the hill of Marwah. The two petrified lovers became the keystone of a cult of circumambulation and offerings between the two hills. Today, Issaf and Naila have largely disappeared from the Arab collective imagination, although Muslims continue to practice the rite of *Sa'iy* between the two hills of Safa and Marwah (*Sa'iy* involves tracing the journey between the hills of Safa and Marwah seven times, and is part of one of the essential rituals of Muslim pilgrimage).

Mirza's tableau recreates the myth of Issaf and Naila. The image is inspired by modern-day funeral processions in the Middle East. The statues of Issaf and Naila are a voluminous interpretation of a Sumerian low-relief, showing a couple engaging in coitus. This image will take the form of a paper theater, a modern miniature theater, where photography, sculpture and light are the principle materials.

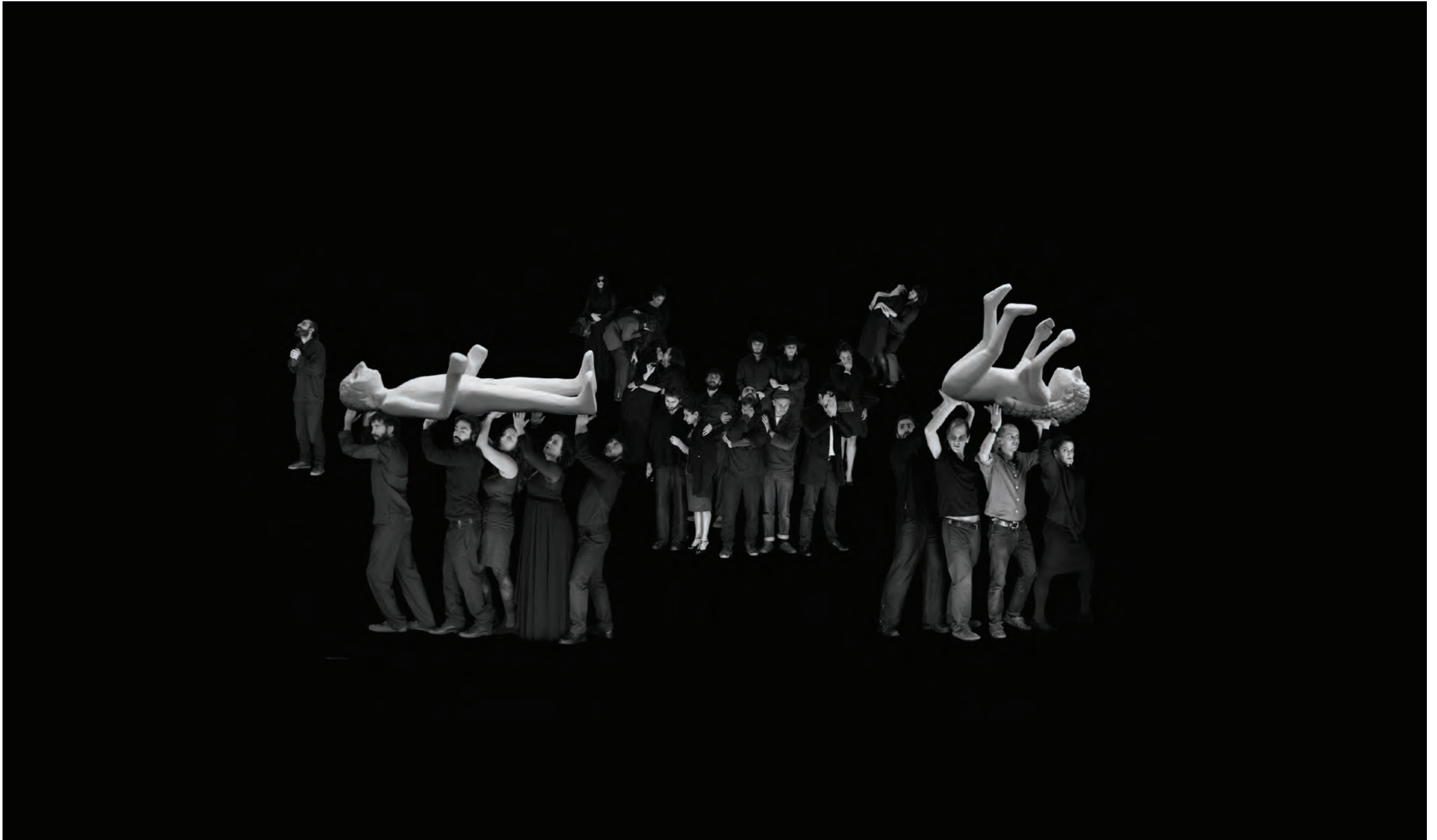
The myth of Al-Zohra and the Fallen Angels

The angels were astonished and perplexed by the behavior and disobedience of man. God said to the angels that had they been in man's place, they would have acted in the same way, and therefore they would have sinned. To find out the truth, the angels elected from among them Harut and Marut to be given human instincts by God. God instructed them to avoid wine, idol worship, fornication, murder, etc., and sent them to Earth. On Earth, they met Zohra and fell in love with her charms. Zohra agreed to give herself to them sexually on the condition that they'd teach her the secret words that would take her up to heaven. On pronouncing the magic words, Zohra is lifted towards the sky, but when she wished to go back down to Earth, she forgot the words and was transformed into a planet. Thus the Arabs recount the story of the planet Venus (Zohra means Venus in Arabic). The work emphasizes the verticality of the ascension of Zohra towards the sky and her transformation into Venus. Harut and Marut are the two dogs placed at her feet – in Muslim tradition, dogs are fallen angels. The composition of the image is inspired by a portrayal of Ishtar, an Assyrian and Babylonian goddess whose descendants are Aphrodite for the Greeks and Venus for the Romans.



- Revive forgotten rich stories from ancient Arabia
- Shed light on an obscure pan-Arab culture and heritage
- Question Orientalists' views and legacy

O
B
J
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T
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V
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S



Rula Halawani

Female 51 Y.O
PALESTINE

القدس تنادي

JERUSALEM CALLING

Tell us more about your project.

Jerusalem Calling is an artistic intervention using photography and sound in space. I projected archival images from the PBS (Palestinian Broadcasting Service) during the Mandatory Period, specifically during the years of 1936-1948 in which the PBS was operating onto the current physical architectural spaces of the Old City of Jerusalem during night, and photographed the imposed, temporal juxtapositions. The complete installation consists of eight panoramic photographs – large-scale at approximately 1m in height and 1.5m in width. The photographs will be hung on a wall, and installed with Holosonics Audio Spotlight technology. Each photograph will have its own dedicated directional speaker, mounted under each hung photograph, essentially concentrating the sound waves out into a focused physical space. This allows for the audience standing in front of each photograph only to hear the sound of that specific audio associated with its paired photograph. The sound, therefore, will not overlap with other audio

streams in the physical space of installation.

During the years of 1936-1948, the PBS disseminated prominent cultural leaders and musical artists over radio waves, from the urban city of Jerusalem into the distant realms of rural Palestine. This audio, broadcasted in both public and private spaces, strengthened community ties as a result of Palestinians gathering around radio receivers to listen to the their voices and music. Uniting people from the city to the countryside was the spoken cadence of the radio station's call sign: "This is Jerusalem calling on 443 and 522 meters."

The photographic-auditory installation I produced, *Jerusalem Calling*, situates a compression of time and place, narrating a historical story of a Jerusalem that once served as a cultural capital. It acts as a hope and a promise for a fluid inter-communal vibrancy that is now in 'exile' in present-day Jerusalem, due to systematic suppression of Palestinian cultural expression in public. The audio consists of a remix produced from the original broadcasts of the archival PBS programming, which includes performances and recitations, such as Koran readings, instrumental Oud, a child singing, among other auditory source material. The photographs, as I mentioned, are the projections of the historical images onto the various architectural spaces in the Old City and neighborhoods of Jerusalem.

By leaving no physical residue or indication of the symbolic, temporal gesture of projecting the photographic archive of PBS onto the Old City (and photographing it), I had hoped to avoid questioning by the authorities, but that proved impossible. My safety was not the only practical concern but it was the conceptual framework and the process of work, which were equally daunting.

The Old City walls and physical spaces caught the falling light from the projection, acting like a mother who cradles her beloved child. The city momentarily amplified ghostly figures of culture-makers from a past era, on her walls. The result is the photograph—the documentation of what is seen during the precise span of time that my camera's shutter opens and shuts. It communed, in public, my purpose of celebrating Palestinian culture and history as an understated form of withstanding the present cultural eradication.

What inspired the idea and drove you to work on it?

In 2009, I completed a photographic project titled *Presence and Impressions*. This project dealt with the subject of the Palestinian villages and cities that were depopulated or destroyed by Israel in 1948. While searching for historical images of the villages before they were depopulated, I discovered images of the 'radio artists' from the PBS period. These photographs caught my attention; over the past several years, I continued my research, unearthing the visual and audio material that contributed to a vision for *Jerusalem Calling*, which came into fruition over the past six months after being awarded the needed financial support of AFAC in 2014. Coincidentally, *Presence and Impressions* was also supported by an AFAC grant that I was awarded in 2008.

"The act of making the work in itself, without even the resulting outcome of the installation, was an operation of preserving my own Palestinian identity, my own psychological self-preservation in a system that targets my innate human and civil rights of expression."

Your project has a public space component. Given the political and legal limitations in Jerusalem, what are the challenges you are facing to make it happen?

There were some challenges with the Israeli army and police while I was working on the project. For example, I was caught on the surveillance cameras that Israel populates the streets of the old city of Jerusalem with. Three Israeli soldiers came up to me while I had my projector and cameras set up late one night. They started to question me in Hebrew. I replied in English that I could not speak their language, and if we could correspond in either English or Arabic. The ongoing discussion, in their broken English, was fraught with tension – me, denying breaking any laws or working in a political matter, and them, dismissing my truthful, albeit, simple answers. They spoke to me with foul

language, threatened me with consequences if I returned. I did return, over and over, each time growing weary of hiding from the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), police and their surveillance cameras. Other incidents included contentious conversations with Israeli citizens and American tourists who discovered me working. It is well known and even documented that ordinary Israeli citizens will call the police or IDF if they perceive any threatening actions by Palestinians – actions, in my case, as simple as being present with a camera and projector. It was as if I was spray painting and defacing a wall. I had to continually negotiate and wrestle with my own desire to speak to my right to work within my own city, which was in emotional and intellectual conflict with the need to complete my project and avoid incarceration. It was one of the most difficult projects to produce in my own personal experience. I have photographed clashes, the wall and checkpoints over many years, putting my own body in the middle of violent exchange. However, the current state of East Jerusalem, and in particular, the old city, is one of complete control of Palestinian experiences, and even the very mundane practices in public spaces can be the excuse needed to arrest and eject Palestinians from their home. But for that reason alone, I knew my project was necessary to produce. The act of making the work in itself, without even the resulting outcome of the installation, was an operation of preserving my own Palestinian identity, my own psychological self-preservation in a system that targets my innate human and civil rights of expression.

What would you like the audiences to feel or think after seeing the work?

I want them to remember the beautiful days of the past, when people from all over Palestine could reach the streets of the old city freely. The Jerusalem of my childhood was filled with life. Today, when I walk the streets, these memories haunt me. At night, the emptiness of the softly lit streets exposes the vulnerability of the old city and heightens its drama. By conceptually inviting the 'broadcast artists', symbols of our culture who created the original programming for PBS, 'back' to Jerusalem today in a symbolic visual and audio 'broadcast',

I am attempting to repopulate the streets with familiar faces and our Palestinian cultural legacy. I want the audience to confront the questions I attempted to address with my work, the most important of which is: what would be the PBS's workers' reflection on the present day city?

I hope audiences of *Jerusalem Calling* will contemplate new associations with the already heavily layered analogies and narratives connected to historical sites, such as Via Dolorosa, which is a historical neighborhood in the old city of Jerusalem that all three major monolithic religions lay claim to. I hope to draw attention to the more demure and inconspicuous residential neighborhoods of my city, in which now the traces of the historical Palestinian presence can only be found by the architecture itself. Buildings, homes and neighborhoods that were previously owned by Palestinians, were loved, and cared for, and passed down over hundreds of years by our growing families, are now forcibly occupied by Israelis who hang their flags from the windows and throughout the streets.

"The intervention brings visibility to the Palestinian's once thriving presence, their ongoing struggle to retain what remains, and desire to reclaim what was unjustifiably lost."

Why do you think it is important to recreate moments in history?

I wouldn't necessarily say I am recreating moments in history, but rather, intervening with the ongoing threat of complete eradication of the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem by artistic actions that bring forward historical moments and situate them within our contemporary peril. I seek to conceptually liberate the Palestinian cultural anthropology and its presence, the vivacity, the DNA of Jerusalem itself, now being held hostage under occupation. I want to remind my audience of the ongoing threat to the complete erasure of the Palestinian identity and presence in such historical physical spaces of Jerusalem — spaces that are either significant to the world due to its religious or historical context, or simply cherished and now mourned by its original homeowners, the

Palestinian families. Simply put, this intervention bring visibility to our once thriving presence, our ongoing struggle to retain what remains, and desire to reclaim what was unjustifiably lost.

You mention that the PBS was instrumental in reaffirming a shared Palestinian identity. With the demise of PBS and the deepening of the conflict that followed, and the impact this has had on Palestinian identity and psyche today, what do you think is needed in order to capture the imagination of Palestinians again? Can projects like *Jerusalem Calling* help in achieving that?

Jerusalem Calling contributes to many projects and actions, both past and present, by Palestinian artists, scholars and cultural producers that hope to support the general Palestinian public resolve of resistance. My project serves as a reminder of other historic strategies (such as the PBS), which formed community alliance, solidarity, and positive self-reflection of the Palestinian identity. It is important to me that we Palestinians remain proud and hopeful, in spite of living life under duress. We must continue to remind ourselves of the extraordinary talent we have bred, as well as the creative ingenuity we have historically exercised in community building and connectivity to one another throughout a brutal and exhausting Israeli campaign of fragmentation and eradication. Our presence in Jerusalem, the heart and capital of our Palestinian identity throughout all of historical Palestine, is hopefully threaded together in my project, while also giving the world notice of the pressing question of our future survival. It isn't simply a reenactment, or a documentation of the painful imposition Israel has enacted upon our community and physical spaces. It brings these two actualities together in space and time, and by doing so, allows us to imagine the possibility of what comes next. Of what once was our reality, and what it is now — and by collapsing together, hopefully triggers thoughtful contemplation in my project, of what *should be*.



The photographic-auditory installation, Jerusalem Calling, situates a compression of time and place, narrating a historical story of a Jerusalem that once served as a cultural capital. It acts as a hope and a promise for a fluid inter-communal vibrancy that is now in 'exile' in present-day Jerusalem.



By conceptually inviting the 'broadcast artists', symbols of Palestinian culture who created the original programming for PBS, 'back' to Jerusalem today in a symbolic visual and audio 'broadcast', Halawani is attempting to repopulate the streets with familiar faces and Palestinian cultural legacy.

“We must continue to remind ourselves of the extraordinary talent we have bred, as well as the creative ingenuity we have historically exercised in community building and connectivity to one another, throughout a brutal and exhausting Israeli campaign of fragmentation and eradication.”

InVisible

a public art project, Dubai

Curatorial introduction by Amanda Abi Khalil

The “Dubai-phenomenon” is a scale, an economy, a style; an adjective for an excessive metropolis, a context where almost nothing overreaches. Infrastructural projects are monumental and urban sprawl has no limits. This scenario is known, it was studied, replicated and also criticized.

For this public commission artists Vartan Avakian, Doa Aly, Vikram Divecha, Monira al-Qadiri and Shaikha al-Mazrou responded to the notion of “InVisible”. A theme that inspired contemporary national monuments, narrative and formal sculptural gestures concealing the visible and revealing the invisible within the cultural, historical and architectural context of Dubai. They looked at material and immaterial manifestations, dug out hidden foundations and brought to light forgotten narratives. Informed by specific sites, stories, textures, forms and national representa-

tions, the works call to question the place of culture in public space, its tangible and intangible nature and its impact on the collective and the individual. The works resulting from this commission are to be read and metamorphosed, thus appropriated by the community and the viewers to become the custodians of silent poetic readings and symbolic associations within the context of Dubai beyond its gigantism. A public commission is also a procedure, a complex yet invisible chain of cultural actors, technicians, contractors, engineers, policy makers’ efforts, labor and achievements. It is this form of cultural production that AFAC encourages particularly in Dubai for its capacity to operate from outside the art world. It offers the artists new terrains for their practices and the ability to address Dubai’s context and its communities.

Monira al-Qadiri

تكنولوجيا غريبة

ALIEN TECHNOLOGY

A gigantic iridescent form alluding to both an underwater world that fed the Gulf’s economy for so many years and simultaneously, the tool that is central to the current economy of oil. The pearl industry is invisible to most, a forgotten history after the economic transformation that came with the discovery of oil in the region. And while the presence of oil is known and all-pervasive, the nature of its extraction is rarely seen. This drill is the basis of the wealth of the region, a central cog in the workings of the economy, finally made visible in al-Qadiri’s shimmering monument.

Doa Aly

غزال أمام المصاييح

DEER IN THE HEADLIGHTS

In May 2014, an Arabian Mountain gazelle was spotted running down the road at the Palm Jumeirah. The creature was seen “on the divider on the trunk of the island,” like a mirage; an eruption of nature within an urban environment. Bindu Rai reported the incident on Emirates 24/7 and it became the basis for Doa Aly’s elusive monument.

Vartan Avakian

غيوم متساقطة من غاز وغبار

COLLAPSING CLOUDS OF GAS AND DUST

Monumentality resides in scale. It resides in the scale of residue the monument generates. The power evoked by a monumental structure emanates from this residue, from this dust. Dust is soil. Dust is pollen. Dust is fibers. Dust is also skin cells, hair, tears and sweat. This dust generated by the monument’s “life” holds its aura.

Vikram Divecha

أرض صخرية

BOULDER PLOT

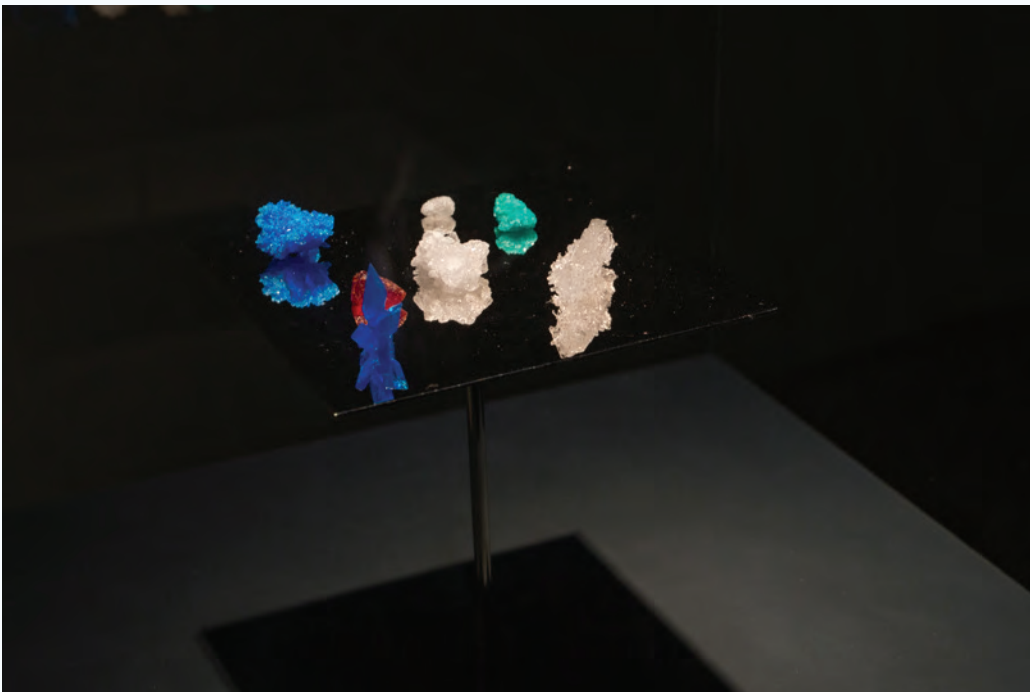
Site-specific sculptural installation composed of gouged boulders that were carefully handpicked from Fujairah, where quarries regularly conduct blasts in the mountainous Emirate, producing a range of aggregates and rocks used for asphalt, concrete, marine and infrastructure construction works. Each of these boulders has a cylindrical hole that runs through it.

Shaikha al-Mazrou

قف هنا

STAND HERE

Sculptural installation, made from scaffolding polls in primary colors. Seen from different angles, the sculpture appears to change form, becoming a variety of geometric shapes. Merely by circling the work, the audience is forced to engage with the sculpture, as it changes and evolves before their eyes. It encourages an active viewing experience, playing with visual assumptions and evoking a physical and immediate reaction.



TOP LEFT
Shaikha al-Mazrou, *Stand Here*
BOTTOM LEFT
Vartan Avakian, *Collapsing Clouds of Gas and Dust*
ABOVE
Monira al-Qadiri, *Alien Technology*

Vikram Divecha

Male
UAE 37 Y.O

أرض صخرية

BOULDER PLOT

Intervention

I've been living in Dubai for nine years and I've seen this city surface from almost nothing. So my work has been involved a lot in construction processes trying to understand the heavy construction activity happening here. I try to work with these processes, intervene with them and through that create a dialogue with the city.

It came to my attention that there's a lot of quarrying happening in the Emirate of Fujairah, and it so happened that I befriended a blasting engineer who took me there and showed me how the process works. I even witnessed some blasting sessions and that's what mainly triggered the idea of this project.

These mountains are leveled down and then aggregates are used to make concrete blocks, which are then raised here in Dubai and we inhabit them in a different form. I was interested in how those mountains are subjected to man's power and then brought over to Dubai and translated into something completely different.

In the process I realized that the blasting engineers drill holes in the mountains, fill them with explosives and blast them. Sometimes there are weak points in the explosion and the rocks come out with holes in them. It's a machine-made hole

and it's so perfect that it offsets the organic shape of the mountain block. I felt that this little gesture represents man's incisions into nature. I always felt I'm this urban kind of person with no relationship with nature, but then I realized that I actually do have a relationship with nature but in the oddest way possible.

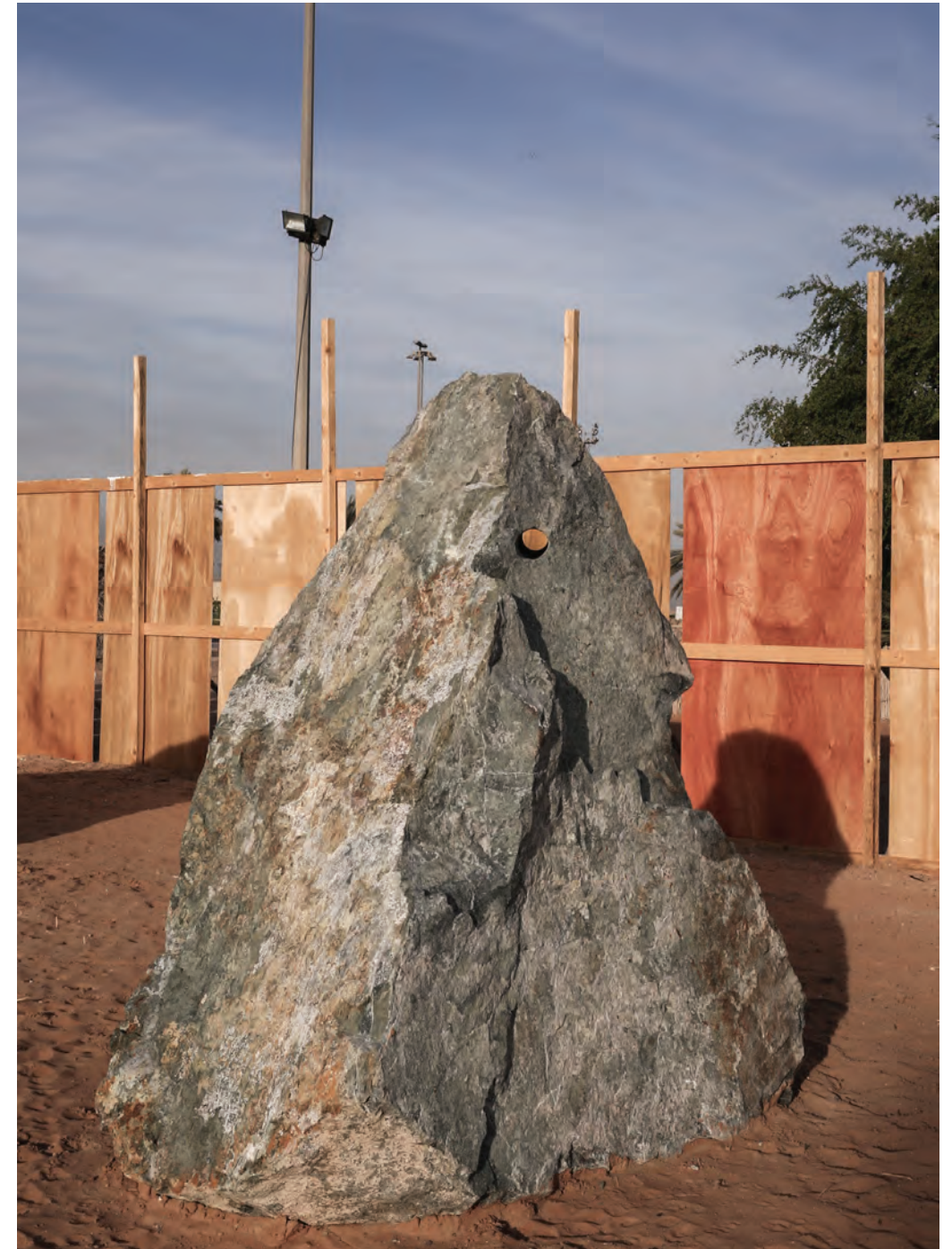
The fencing is part of the artwork. Construction work is a very particular visual language of Dubai but you're never allowed to peak inside a construction site, and that's what the project tries to do. The plot size used for the artwork is almost the size of a plot of an actual building. I tried to arrange the blocks in a spacial sense of how I inhabit the building.

After the project ends, the boulders will be sent back to Fujairah to be crushed and used for commercial purposes.

Response

Firstly, there is the artwork as a social or public space. People are hanging around the site and there's this interesting relationship happening with the space, the work and the viewer/visitor. People come to the place in the morning, have a walk, exercise, and the space is being inhabited by this regular activity. So I'm interested in how this artwork is becoming part of a really social or public space. It almost overlaps between being an artwork that has things to say and providing an area for contemplating and just being there, and it is something important because Dubai lacks public spaces. The work is very material, you can walk around it, touch it, etc. On one side it's a spectacle, but there is also a spatial relation that is important (I borrow my ratios from architecture and cities). It's important for public art to create a place for discussion besides providing a subject for discussion.

On the other hand there have been interesting responses from people interested in the arts, however small this community is. My work stems from the relation I have with this land and me being in Dubai, and in a certain sense Dubai is a place, of transience. Art comes and goes from this place so I was interested in creating art that stays here, art that can open a dialogue with people about how they see themselves over here.



Doa Aly

Female 38 Y.O
EGYPT

غزال أمام المصابيح

DEER IN THE HEADLIGHTS

Intervention

I had never been to Dubai before, so my first reaction was to try to understand the city. It's hard to find material on Dubai that is neither fiercely critical of or completely spellbound by its version of modernity: dream world architecture, gigantism, extravagant projects, etc. I knew I didn't want to propose any "critique" of Dubai as such, it's not interesting for a public art piece, and anyway I knew too little about it. But reading about Dubai put me in a specific mindset, I was disposed to create some link between nature and technology, or nature and urbanism. Then I stumbled upon a news story posted by Bindu Rai on *Emirates 24/7*, in May 2014, where the writer reported seeing an Arabian mountain gazelle running down the road at the Palm Jumeirah, and calling it a "deer in the headlights moment". I was very inspired by the astonishment of the reporter.

I thought of recreating this awe, the unsettling encounter with an object or a creature where it doesn't belong. I first thought of an oversized sculpture of an actual gazelle, but this seemed too modernist and lacked any edge. There was some-

thing sublime and eerie about the experience as related by Bindu, and I wanted to capture that. Then I thought that gazelles do exist in Emirati everyday life, they are very much part of the culture, but not as full-bodied living creatures running down the roads (the mountain gazelle is in fact an endangered species). I started looking at gazelle hunting trophies, and decided the sculpture will be that of a huge gazelle skull mounted on a stand. The oversized skull is an organic yet artificial object, familiar but slightly troubling. I thought it would reverse man's dominance over animals, thereby becoming a sublime event.

It was important that the piece is installed in a vast open space, so that one could see it from a far distance. It would look like a mirage, slowly becoming what it is without the aid of logic.

Response

I was worried it would be too creepy but the response so far has been very positive, surprisingly. Of course when you have an idea it's always very different from the final product. When it finally came together in the studio, there was a "what have I done!" moment. The skull, its size, with its cavities and without its trademark horns, looked stunning but scary, a sure case of sublime beauty, so I was a bit worried. But AFAC, Amanda [Abi Khalil, the curator], and the public fell in love with it, which was a relief.

With unexpected warmth and familiarity, people related to it immediately. They started taking pictures with the skull, putting their arms around it, sitting underneath it. This level of interaction was also a surprise to me, because I had never done a public art piece before. I'm used to exhibiting works in a gallery or museum context where the public isn't allowed to touch it. In a public space, the artist relinquishes control completely, I had never thought of my work in those terms. The experience has taught me to let go. It also raised questions of accessibility and relevance, which have been on my mind a lot lately, as I am witnessing a growing gap between contemporary art and the general public. I'm not sure I'll venture into public art again, but there's definitely something to be learned from the enthusiasm and joy of participation involved in it.



Maysoon Pachachi

Female 67 Y.O
IRAQ

كلشي ماكو

NOTHING DOING IN BAGHDAD

How do people – and ultimately societies – repair and renew themselves in a situation of catastrophic violence and disintegration, like Iraq? How do they find inside themselves the will to resist the damage and to trust in a fragile hope for the future? What helps them to survive and keep a sense of who they are? Probably they will never forget much of what they have seen and experienced – not just since the invasion of 2003, but through the long years of dictatorship and wars. How do they carry this burden of the past into the future? How do they live with it? What do they pass on to their children?

Also, how do people reconcile their sense of themselves as Iraqis with the fact that the country is rapidly splintering into separate sectarian identities? And if people don't follow the sectarian path, sticking with 'their own' and blaming the 'others', then how do they deal with the barbaric violence inflicted on Iraqis by other Iraqis? Everyday people ask themselves and each other: 'Who are we... What have we become?' In this circumstance, can they retain a sense of community and a belief in

humanity – and how?

Those are some of the underlying questions that London-based Iraqi filmmaker Maysoon Pachachi is exploring in her new film *Kulshi Makoo* (*Nothing Doing in Baghdad*). We sat down with her and with the film's producer Talal al-Muhanna to learn more about this feature.

Why did you decide to make this film?

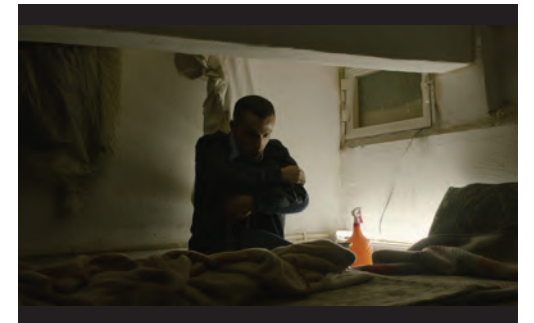
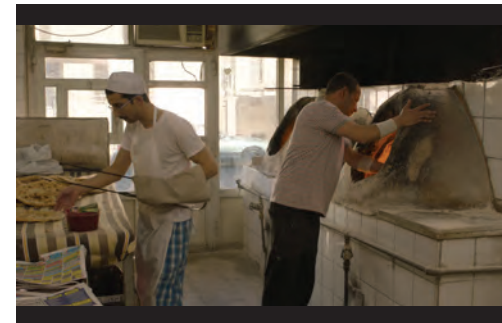
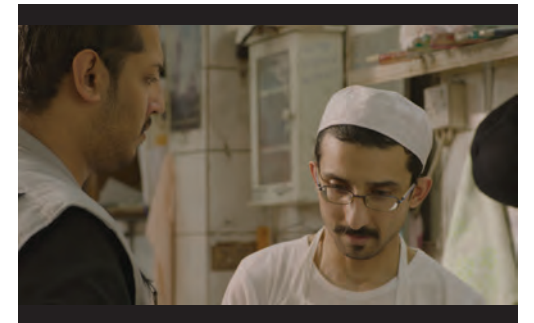
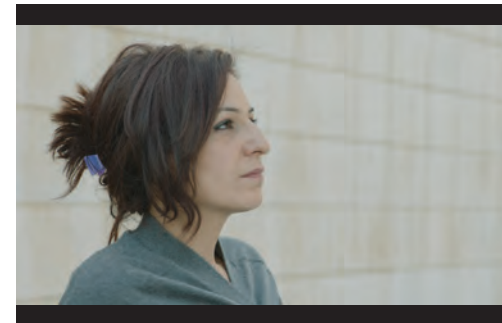
Maysoon Pachachi We're surrounded by images of explosions and shocked, weeping people. Who are these people? In our minds they're just 'victims'. Is it easier to wage wars and ignore destructive practices, when you don't see these 'victims' as individual people with dreams, fears and dilemmas – just like you? As an Iraqi filmmaker, I urgently need to tell the story of how people – as individuals we can empathize with – are living through extraordinary and violent times.

How did you start working on the film?

In the midst of what was going on in Iraq in 2006 my co-writer Irada al-Jabouri, who is a novelist and short story writer, stopped being able to write fiction because it seemed like we were living in a one big lie. She found that every time she went out in Iraq or took her child to school, there were those scenes of ordinary lives living the most extraordinary situations. At the same time I had co-founded with an Iraqi filmmaker a free-of-charge film-training center in Baghdad and we had both been collecting stories and having conversations about what was going on. Irada and I got off really well and from all this documentary material we started extrapolating situations and characters and fictionalizing them completely.

Why did you decide to make a feature and not a documentary?

I don't think it could have worked as a documentary because it deals with the interiorities of people and their feelings of past and present, and this is very difficult to show properly in documentary. We very much wanted this dialectic between the interior and the exterior, and fiction seemed the only way to do that. For me personally I find that in documentaries it's easy to have a narrative but it's really hard to have a story, whereas in fiction



you can create trajectories as to what happens to the people in the film.

What is the film about?

It happens over one week at the end of 2006 when Iraq is witnessing extreme sectarian violence and nightly curfews. It takes place in a typically mixed Baghdadi neighborhood at a time when the city is being divided along sectarian lines. It shows the life of different characters, each living on their own, and builds up to the last day when all the stories of the characters unfold and intersect. So it's not a single story of a hero or a heroin; we felt that a hero format was inappropriate given the situation we're dealing with. The essential thing in the story is the ways in which people may find internal personal resistance to the destruction and fragmentation that's going around them. It's about people who are just trying to live ordinary, everyday lives in spite of the difficult and sometimes deadly circumstances. And despite overwhelming odds, like a miracle, life still blossoms.

So is it a hopeful story?

Yes, it ultimately is a hopeful story. It definitely does not run away from pain. It shows what the damage is like, the damage of living in this sort of situation where you really feel that the world you inhabit is falling into pieces and that the society you're part of has been through years of trauma and has not had the time to heal. So it doesn't run away from that, but it does have a sense of hope in the sense that it shows a strong possibility inside people for finding a way to make something at a time when everything is being unmade. It is a fragile kind of hope for sure. It is the kind of hope that has to be renewed in one way or another everyday. This is universal in a way, but it's stronger in the case of Iraq.

What would you like the viewer to think or feel, or maybe even do, after watching the movie?

I would say to find that sense of hope in themselves, to find that sense of courage to hope. Many people who will see the film only hear about explosions on TVs but they haven't really gone through such experiences, so I'd like them to see what it really means. For the others who have actually been through and

faced such dire circumstances, I hope that the film will allow them to take a step back and think about how to resist this stuff.

Do you think a film could change the world?

I think that on the regular scale of things a film cannot do very much. What it can do however is start a dialogue. You can go in and come out feeling that you have more agency and strength than you thought you did. It can also make you think about things.

You've written seven drafts. First of all, why so many? Secondly, what was the process like and how did the story evolve from the first draft till the last?

And the seventh draft is probably not the final one! I'm sure there will be rewriting scenes while shooting. Irada and I talked for a long time and then took all the material we each had gathered, went through it, started extrapolating interesting characters and then combining them with fictional characters. Irada is not a film writer and didn't know much about writing for film, so we decided that I write a structure, a scene outline, first. After that we sat and wrote the scenes together in Arabic. Then I took it away and pulled it apart, adding parts and deleting some others. I went back to her with my comments and then she rewrote it based on that. At a certain point when we were applying for funds we had to write an English version so I took over the writing. When we first started writing, half of the film took place in Basra and had different characters. After draft two, we changed the location. Some of the characters were transposed to Baghdad but completely modified.

The revisions that were made on draft seven include enhancing of the main character's drama line and the removal of three characters whose inclusion did not sufficiently benefit the dramatic purposes of draft six's screenplay. We are also improving upon the character arcs of two secondary characters and all this work is intended to integrate the overlapping stories better with one another and to make the ensemble nature of the narrative more accessible for audiences; in short, to have stronger main characters with sharper and more evident dilemmas and overall more enhanced storylines.

What was the main challenge?

The challenge was to find a fictional form in which to explore these wider existential questions we are raising, while at the same time, telling a good, engaging story – personal, dramatic and psychologically acute. That's why we chose to do an ensemble film because of its unfolding and intersecting narratives of ordinary, everyday lives. It was important to keep the tension between the chaos on the streets and the details of these daily lives – the small joys and triumphs, jokes and songs, the yearnings for love, the angers and grieves and fears. It was crucial not to let ourselves be enticed by sensationalism, but to hold a steady and calm focus on the individual dramas being lived.

Was there any turning point during the writing or production process?

There wasn't just one point. When I first started working with Talal he offered a fresh perspective and changed certain things, and as we talked further he asked questions that I couldn't answer. Then the Arab Spring happened and it impacted quite a lot on one of the characters. Also more recently with what's happening in Iraq with ISIS and the extreme fragmentation, which has been going on for quite sometime but it's happening so intensely now. It actually made me look at the script in a new context and realize that 2006 was a harbinger or a foretelling of this extreme disintegration we're going through now. Back then, people were thinking where is this taking us and the answer is actually where we are now.

"What a film can do is start a dialogue. You can go in and come out feeling that you have more agency and strength than you thought you did. It can also make you think about things."

What's the status of production right now?

Talal al-Muhanna We are currently in preproduction for a test shoot in Kuwait and one of the reasons we're doing that is because we wanted to take an opportunity outside the stress of full on production to mix some of our European crew from France in particular with some of the local and regional

crews from Kuwait and the Middle East. As a producer I'm always trying to get the most bang for the buck, so I'm hoping that a couple of those scenes would end up in the film! If all goes according to plan and we raise sufficient funds for production and post-production, then we can begin filming as early November/December 2015, which means wrapping the shoot by end of January 2016.

What drew you to produce this film?

I actually came to know about the film through a relative of mine who is an Iraqi actress living in London and who has been collaborating with Maysoon on one of the characters in the film. About two and a half years ago, I was visiting London and she mentioned that she was working with Maysoon on a fiction film. So when she started telling me about her character work on the story and the story itself we called Maysoon and met up at a little diner and started talking. Then I took the script and had a read-through and we agreed to work together. In a way it went kind of quickly. By the end of that summer I decided to submit the project to the IEWC Script Award at the Dubai Film Festival. We won and the prize was \$100,000, which helped us kick off the film.

Osama Halal

Male 35 Y.O
SYRIA

فوق الصّفر

ABOVE ZERO

In the final scene of the Syrian dance production, *Above Zero*, seven dancers hurl themselves from atop a high bed. Only one dancer does not. “This is what we are living in Syria,” says director, Ousama Helal. “We are living a state of suicide, whether direct or indirect, whether conscious or unconscious. When I walk down a street knowing that at any moment, a mortar can explode right there, I am living on the edge of suicide, on the edge of death. That’s where the name *Above Zero* comes from. It’s not quite zero, but it’s close. The last standing dancer is that tiny breathing space, that small ray of hope.”

In many ways, *Above Zero* has been that vital ray of light for the performers themselves, offering them a chance to dialogue in ways they never permitted themselves before. The rehearsals began with improvisation exercises based on the question “What scares you?” It turned out that even answering that question was scary for many of the performers. “I asked the dancers to answer from their own experiences and that was something radical and new for them,” says Helal. “When people do improvisation exercises in Syria, they typically answer using hypothetical or imagined experiences, not what is real for them. We are not used to expressing our fears or being given the space to express them, so this was difficult; they struggled.”

For the creators of the performance, breaking the ‘fear barrier’ forms the core of this work. It is a political act, both on the personal level and in the grandest sense. The creators quote the chants of



Syria’s early peaceful protesters: “Break the fear to reach freedom, break the fear barrier to reach hope!” In the eyes of Helal, this ‘fear barrier’ is what dictatorships use to drive people to despair itself and to despair of their demands for freedom.

Above Zero is a performance about war, about fear, about immigration and longing. Inspiration came from Berthold Brecht’s poetry, when the poet himself was in exile during the horrific events of War War II. “The earth no longer produces, it devours. The sky hurls down no rain, only iron.”

The production is a collaboration between the Syrian theater ensemble, Koon, dramaturge Modhar al-Hagi, as well as four musicians who are also part of the action on stage. Two of the musicians, al-Rass and Sayyed Darwich, are rappers and that choice was especially important for Helal. “Many artists separate their art from their views. Rap is not like that; it’s very close to the street,” he says. For him, the revolution has been a call to bring his craft closer to what is happening on the Syrian street, which is a new approach for him as a Syrian artist. “Before the revolution, I worked on theater projects without really understanding why I was doing them. So much Syrian art, even now, is flowery or totally removed from what is really going on. After the revolution began, I realized I needed to use my artistic tools to express what was happening. A revolution makes you rethink your tools, it makes you honest. When the war in Syria forces a blacksmith to make a door bereft of his tools, or electricity, or when a doctor must perform an operation without anesthesia, it makes me re-examine my role as an artist. Why should I be creating flowery, beautiful art or staging love stories, as if nothing is happening? I need to develop my tools to express what’s real.”

“We are not used to expressing our fears or being given the space to express them.”

Another breakthrough for the production has been the collaboration between Syrian and Lebanese performers, whether dancers or musicians. “We realize that some Lebanese people resent the presence of Syrians here in Lebanon,” says Reem

Khattab, member of the Koon Ensemble. “This was a chance not only for us to work together on stage, but also to present our perspective to a Lebanese audience, in the hope that they might be more understanding somehow.” For her, the opportunity for dialogue often came more abruptly than she expected. “I was approached after the show by different generations of Lebanese people, some more understanding than others, wanting to know more.”

1800
TOTAL
number of attendees

18
TOTAL
number of artists



- Open a space for dialogue and collaboration between Syrian and Lebanese artists and theater professionals
- Produce theatrical works that tackle the current political situation and its repercussions on Syrian people
- Send out a message of peace and light at a time of complete destruction in Syria
- Create job opportunities for Syrian artists in Beirut



Younes Baba-Ali

Male 28 Y.O
MOROCCO

موروكو

MOROCCO

MOROCCO is a project by visual artist and everyday activist Younes Baba-Ali questioning the right to copy in Morocco. Through the project, Baba-Ali will reflect on the legal concept of copyright, which grants the creators of original work exclusive rights to its use and distribution, and invent new gestures, sounds and images that inhabit the so-called pirated logos.

Tell us more about your project.

The work is an intervention that explores the concept of copyrights in contemporary Morocco. While the idea is relevant to many other developing countries, I chose to focus on Morocco because

I am a Moroccan artist. There is a lot of plagiarism going on whereby local brands copy culture, food, clothes, and concepts from international brands. Through the project I question the possibility of copying, the right to copy, the dysfunctional rules and regulations, the legal aspects, and the economy of copying. When copied products end up being accepted, what does this tell us about our culture? As an artist I find it both complicated and interesting to examine how copyright laws – if there are any – are implemented within such a context.

How does this issue affect you personally?

It doesn't affect me directly but I've seen this a lot. We have a place in Morocco called Sandway and everything about it—from the logo and visual identity, to the food presentation and concept—is a copy of [the international food chain] Subway. You also see fake Nikes and you have access to culture by way of pirated videos and music. We grew up with this mentality, and then when I got into the art world I started to see how people steal ideas directly or indirectly and then it becomes sort of normal. Modern art in Morocco copies modern art in the West, and it's really visible. A lot of people are stealing or copying.

"Your position as an artist allows you to create shortcuts in order to tackle a particular situation and present a different point of view."

Are there any legal implications on someone who copies in Morocco?

There are rules and regulations but they're not enforced so it gives people an opportunity to continue copying. What's interesting now is that the country is growing culturally and also economically, participating in international business and also trying to build an image of itself that compares to Europe, or the West more generally. So how can the country go in this capitalistic direction trying to be on the same level as the West but still allow for these things to happen? It feels to me like it's a very superficial attitude of wanting to be like Europe but deep inside the system is still very dysfunctional and chaotic.

How do you intend to address the problem in your work?

Your position as an artist allows you to create shortcuts in order to tackle a particular situation and present a different point of view. So I will myself be copying the copies. As artists we have a lot of possibilities socially, it's interesting for me to practice this kind of copying. It's less about culture and art and more about the economic impact. The idea is to copy some of the fake brands in Morocco that have completely plagiarized international brands and reproduce them in the country. My work has a lot to do with process so it's also about how I can do this. How can I actually copy the copies? I will have to reach out to the copiers and ask them to reproduce this and that. I don't know how the project will develop once I begin with the process but I hope that it will trigger questions about things that are dysfunctional and to get people to think about the possibilities of copying. I will be researching good trades that I can copy. I will try to find the local production sources where they are produced and see if it's possible to reproduce the same ones.

"To undermine a system, it is first necessary to penetrate it." How are you penetrating the system with this work?

First of all you have to understand the context and the situation and it's always about how I situate myself in that context—to whom I speak, what material I choose, how I develop the idea, how I can be as close as possible to the public to propose my work, what kind of public space I choose, etc. The context is very important, so I try to think of all the specificities in order to be as relevant to the context as possible.

What will the final outcome be?

An exhibition that will premiere in Brussels on 16 April 2015.



- Approaching an urgent issue and exploring its effects on growing economies like Morocco
- Reflecting on contemporary society and global economy
- Producing installations that question the right to copy

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“The idea is to copy some of the fake brands in Morocco that have completely plagiarized international brands and reproduce them in the country.”

Hadia Gana

Female 42 Y.O
LIBYA

قصّات ورق

SCRAP PAPER

Libyan artist Hadia Gana received an AFAC grant to participate in Ashkal Alwan's *Home Works* 2014 program in Beirut. In the following interview, she tells more about the experience and what came out of it.

With your AFAC grant, you were able to work on a video as part of Ashkal Alwan's *Home Works* program. What was the video about?

The video was a continuation to my ceramic installation titled *Gannas*, which consisted of an empty golden paper-bin surrounded by printed ceramic scrapped paper. The aim was to mimic how some official letters, when thrown towards the bin, end up on the floor. The work was more of a question than an answer, a question about political decisions and priorities. *Scrap Paper* is a short video taking my previous project further by highlighting wrong decisions taken by the successive Libyan governments.

It's a work where I try to understand and express the violence that I, as well as a large of number of fellow Libyan citizens, are subjected to. Also, like in most of my other work, I try to exercise a certain level of violence.

Could you tell us more about the process of making the video?

Video making was a completely new territory for me, but I wanted to experiment with a different medium in my work. Ashkal Alwan and its guest tutors offered the right resources that helped me kick start the project. The philosophical discussions that followed the talks and video screenings—part of the Home Works program—where eye-opening and thought-provoking. I also took creative writing workshops, also a new experience for me, and these workshops were useful in helping me focus and develop a clear storyline. The rhythm of the program allowed me enough time to process the events of both the revolution and post-revolution

in Libya. Also, I wanted the video to resemble clay modelling and had no knowledge of video editing, but Ashkal Alwan offered the facilities and I was supported by technicians as well other participants in the program.

What do you hope that audiences would think or feel after they watch it?

I see my video as an enabler for discussions and a trigger for questions. It tries to put the finger on the wound and maybe shed light on one reason for the violence my country at this point in time.

Where will it be screened?

The video hasn't been screened yet, but it will be part of the ceramic installation *Dry Bread*, which I am working on now and should be exhibited in London later this year. Until recently, the realm of 'international art market' wasn't my focus. I saw my work as a form of dialogue or discussion with my fellow citizens on subjects that were a bit taboo in Libya such as corruption, disdain and thoughtlessness. It is still the case—my focus remains in major part inspired by the Libyan society; however, the international exposure and input is bringing another dimension to and enriching the work.

How do you think art and culture can help a society evolve?

I strongly believe that art and culture are key players in a society's evolution, and even more in countries that have been traumatized, like Libya for instance. Apart from being an educational and therapeutic tool, art enables knowledge sharing and access to other cultures. By exchanging experiences we understand our own problems and make better choices. Arts and culture are perfect tools to introduce dialogue in a soft way in countries accustomed to violence and this allows for different points of view to emerge. Art may also be effective in delivering certain messages in a nuanced and indirect way, especially when the aim is to create change in an organic manner, just like plants invade the concrete.

The Libyan art scene is underdeveloped yes, but it has an insular potential that could bring interesting insights and breadth to the country's future art scene.

You are creating an art museum in Libya. Tell us more about this, especially in relation to what you said about Libya's art scene being underdeveloped.

Indeed I am creating the Ali Gana Museum in one of Tripoli's suburbs. It will be the first art museum in the country, as until now we mostly have archaeological and anthropologic institutions from the Italian colonial era. The Ali Gana Museum will work more as a cultural center and educational platform based on the work of one artist, Ali Gana, who is known to be as one of the "first generation artists" in Libya. This sculptor and painter was so passionate about art education and spent all his life teaching, 40 years of which were at the Architecture Faculty in Tripoli. He also studied local crafts and architecture in the country. His work and research will constitute the core material for the museum's thematic programming and cultural discussions. The project itself is planned to be a work-in-progress since it has to account for the developments in the country and evolve in tandem with them. The museum aims to involve future visitors from the start by using social media to share thoughts, difficulties, and ideas as part of the educational exchange.

“Arts and culture
are perfect tools to
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Ma3azef

Institution 04 Y.O
JORDAN

Fast forward to 2011 when an inspiring wave of uprisings swept the Arab region and shook the core of its establishment, opening loopholes in these tightly controlled mechanisms that have been entrenched for so long. The Arab uprisings brought a collective energy that came out of a sudden and out of nowhere. *Ma3azef* was an idea that emerged in those times. It was born from the womb of the Arab Spring as an online magazine that aims to look at cultural and music production in the Arab region with a critical eye.

400 000

TOTAL
listeners on soundcloud

While the idea of the magazine had been incubating for some time before that, the founders Ma'an Abu Taleb, Ahmad al-Zaatary, and Tamer Abu Ghazaleh "got a kick" in 2011 when they saw the opportunities that the revolutions created and the surge of cultural output that followed. Abu Taleb concedes that traditional media in the region proved incapable of dealing with the new ideas, issues, and forms that accompanied the Arab Spring because journalists did not have the capacity and knowledge to criticize them.

"Ma3azef reminds us that criticism is healthy, as a fundamental requisite of a functioning democracy and a condition for a vibrant art scene."

— Ali Sharayer, *Kalimat magazine*

Ma3azef was launched because, as Abu Taleb puts it quite simply, "There was no writing on music." He explains that music writing in the Arab region falls into two categories: it's either written by Arab journalists who do not make an effort to examine the music critically or by Western journalists that tend to stereotype the works produced.

According to Abu Taleb, this unsatisfactory media criticism has also affected the music scene itself because it encouraged average productions. "We do not have a tradition in the region that sit-

uates original kind of work. Music production is classified as either good or bad, but those doing something really original do not fit within the established system."

This is where *Ma3azef* comes in. The online platform is filling these gaps by offering serious criticism and discussion on Arabic music. The magazine publishes on average three articles a week and one report every four months, with each article getting a good share of readers (2000-3000 unique page views per article). There are more than 40,000 followers on Facebook and their Soundcloud page reaches more than 400,000 listeners. Abu Taleb says that the response has been a lot more than what they had expected when they first started. "The articles are starting debates, and some readers even go into online wars over an article, especially in Egypt, where *Ma3azef* has become a household name. We have also been very encouraged by people we respect and admire like Faysal Daraga, Amjad Nasir, and Camilia Joubran, and from other musicians who have been very supportive and cooperative," he notes.

50

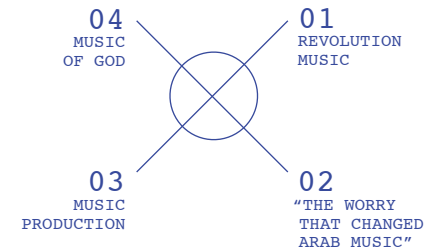
TOTAL
writers and translators
across the Arab region

Abu Taleb's long-term objective is to become a platform where a serious and engaging discussion takes place about Arab music with Arab listeners — and in Arabic. ("Why should we talk about Arabic music in English and why should it be dumbed down or sound like a press release if we were to write it in Arabic?" he asks.) To get there though, the founders need to overcome a major editorial hurdle. Given that *Ma3azef* is introducing a new form of journalism to the region, it is hard to find journalists who excel at this type of writing. Abu Taleb admits that there is no content of the sort they want to have, which has led them to begin a series of workshops with the Qattan Foundation. The workshops focus on training people in several Arab cities on music appreciation, writing about

music, structuring articles, etc., with the hope of discovering and retaining new writing talent. In parallel he's working on building a core team of staff writers and contributors from across the Arab region.

"We want to be a magazine that everybody reads, not just the intelligentsia," he says. "My idea is that everybody listens to music in the Arab region, in taxis, in cafes — everywhere, and there's no reason people shouldn't be reading about music as well, especially when you give them compelling content."

Maz3azef tackles Arabic music
from 4 angles



- Foster critical thinking and promote narrative journalism among Arab journalists
- Offer a platform for open and critical discussion about Arabic music
- Organize events to promote local musicians

معارف

MA3AZE.F.COM

Egyptian journalist and critic Mohamad Kalfat says that a day will come when people in the Arab region will speak of the time "before *Ma3azef*" and the time "after *Ma3azef*." To understand Kalfat's statement, one has to go back 50 years in time, when a wave of dictators took over the Arab region and orchestrated a tight control mechanism that quelled freedom of speech and suppressed all forms of criticism. Over time, this control mechanism had direct implications on the state of the media by fostering a culture of compliance and complacency. Journalists are fed content and the content finds its way onto their pages and TV screens without being challenged, analyzed or criticized.

Arab Image Foundation

Institution
LEBANON

17 Y.O

منصة إلكترونية تعاونية لأرشيف الصور

A COLLABORATIVE ONLINE PLATFORM FOR PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES



Tamouz celebrations, Rifaat Chadirji, Baghdad, Iraq, 1978,
Courtesy Arab Image Foundation

The Arab Image Foundation intends to launch an online platform that is being conceived as an innovative and interactive tool, which would allow access to its own collection as well as regional photograph archives, and would encourage critical reflection in the field of photography and visual culture by engaging Arab and global audiences and specialists from various disciplines. In the following interview, AIF's Director Rima Mokaiesh tells us more about the project.

What is your favorite AIF collection?

There are about 300 AIF collections, each coming from a different source, which can be a family, a professional or an amateur photographer, a collector of photography... Each collection has gems, some collections only have a handful of photographs, some contain rare processes, others have very intimate and touching images. I cannot pick one!

If you were to attribute the success of AIF to one thing, what would it be?

The AIF probably owes its success to its unique governance model: it is neither a museum nor an archive. It is a membership-based organization and its collection was built according to the research interests and collecting practices of its members, who are artists, curators, writers, filmmakers, historians, and other practitioners.

How do you see AIF's role today, given the dynamics of today's visual culture, the state of photo archiving and preservation in the region, as well as the regional cultural and political dynamics?

Over the years, the AIF has become a regional expert in photograph preservation, and we have built networks across the region and beyond, which have allowed for opportunities in trainings, research, and a number of regional initiatives. But the AIF also remains a platform for critical thinking about photography, as well as different modes of collecting, preserving, and displaying photographs. Members of the AIF have engaged in research and

artistic projects that range from re-definitions of preservation away from the traditional museum understanding (Akram Zaatari's *Time Capsule*, Kassel, 2012), to exploring the possibilities and challenges of archiving across digital media in the context of recent political uprisings (Lara Baladi's *Vox Populi* project, ongoing).

How will the new digital platform that you are currently developing with the support of AFAC help in further establishing AIF's role and achieving its objectives?

The new platform will allow users to access more images and create linkages between photographs and between collections. It will hold more information about the collections. We also want it to be a platform for research on other collections and archives, which we will invite. Finally, through its interactive features and its blog, it will be a platform for critical thinking and exchange on photography.

Where do you like to see AIF in five years?

I would like the AIF to be an incubator for critical engagement with and preservation of photography and the evolution of the medium, with a public programming giving us strong local visibility, as well as a rich digital programming. I would also like us to have reached a little more of a comfort zone in terms of sustainability.



*Studio Portrait, Fouad Bendali Ghorab/ Studio Fouad,
Lebanon, Beirut, Courtesy Arab Image Foundation*

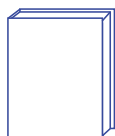


*Maha Sha'sha'a ,Photographed by Daed Sha'sha'a, Amman,
Jordan, 1968, Courtesy Arab Image Foundation*



Family Album, Egypt, Courtesy Arab Image Foundation

The AIF has produced



08
publications



15
exhibitions

40 000

TOTAL
images in the AIF database,
many of which are online

The AIF has a public space and
research center open to the public



OPENING HOURS
Mon - Fri
13:00 - 17:00



- Upgrade the AIF's online presence, thereby allowing it to better fulfill and communicate its mission for the preservation, study and circulation of photography from the Middle East and North Africa, and the Arab diaspora
- Act as a locus and trigger for artistic and scholarly collaborations between individuals and institutions in the region and beyond
- Encourage the preservation, digitizing, online publishing and diffusion of archives across the region



UNESCO-SHARJAH
Prize for Arab culture
2014

Selim Ben Safia

Male
TUNISIA

27 Y.O

زنقة

IMPASSE

Impasse is a choreographic creation by Tunisian contemporary dancer and choreographer Selim Ben Safia. It is based on three scenes of life, three different persons looking for themselves, each in their own world, all in one closed theatrical setup, free to express themselves, ask questions and look for answers.

Your project *Impasse* aims to make people think about their dreams, of what makes them happy and the social and cultural barriers that limit their progress. Tell us more about it.

Through *Impasse*, I wanted to bring three very different characters, with one thing in common, together on stage: the pursuit of happiness. These three characters, in my opinion, reflect Tunisia's reality but also that of a large majority of the Arab region: tugged between opening towards the West and cultural and religious barriers.

We don't always succeed at making a choice between deep desire and social reality because most of us have a difficulty admitting to this duality. *Impasse's* genesis lies in this context, I think: to make the spectators think and to make them face their contradictions.

"Impasse's genesis lies in this context, I think: to make the spectators think and to make them face their contradictions."

Do you think that dance, or a dance performance in this case, can help achieve these objectives?

I believe that dance or art in general exists to make people think. Personally, I don't have the pretension to change things but to make people think as much as possible. I hope that the audience will, when leaving my performances, be saying: "Well, he's got a point..."

What has been the response on your show?

At the end of the performance, we received an incredible standing ovation from the audience. The response has been very good, some told us "we want more," others were very moved... the gamble paid off.

Various professionals and major actors in Tunisia's contemporary dance scene also came to see the performance. This very positive feedback we received also allowed us to plan a Tunisian tour and we are also in the course of working on an international tour.

For some, the performance was a "revolution" in contemporary dance in Tunisia since we approached gesture in a different way. We wish to take this performance to other Arab countries in order to exchange different points of views.

How was the process of creation like and what did you learn from it?

Since creating *À Jour* in 2013, I have wanted to create differently and not to start from a "written" danced phrase but a feeling. This research process gained momentum with *Impasse*. I asked my dancers to forget for a certain time all contemporary dance classes they had had and to make way to

their emotions. Each of my dancers first started to work on their characters (the civil servant; the young brilliant woman; the young, lost student), they claimed their fears, their desires but also their will to overcome this situation... this "Impasse". The emergence of the "danced" gesture came later in the process of creation. I tried for gestures and natural reactions to be danced. Today, I believe that this process of creation made my work sincere. On stage, each of my dancers each really felt their movements, they really were possessed by a genuine rage.

How do you see the state of contemporary dance in the Arab region today? Do you think it reflects the sociopolitical tensions going on?

I believe that dance in the Arab region is changing more and more and choreographers are daring to explore new approaches. I also think that within the Arab region, we do have a real artistic identity – our history, our culture, our religion, our revolution, are numerous sources of inspiration, which make us special in the world.

In Tunis, young choreographers today seek the recognition from the state; we are still not recognized as professionals but it is imminent, I'm certain of it, thanks to choreographers, dancers but also Tunisian and foreign partners that we have. To be supported by an organization like AFAC allows for the creation of works of quality that will make our country and us proud.

"To touch audiences and to incite them to ask themselves these kinds of questions is to me a first step towards change."

Do you think that dance can change societies?

I believe dance can greatly contribute to changing a society. After the *Impasse* performances we facilitated roundtable discussions with the audiences. The questions often focused on the "pursuit of happiness," "the tensions between what we want and what we dare." To touch audiences and to incite them to ask themselves these kinds of questions is to me a first step towards change. It is what will incite them to change their attitudes. Art in general

and dance in particular is about opening up to the other, it is about acknowledging the difference of the other. In *Impasse* I put three characters, seemingly different at first gaze on stage, but in reality the three characters have the same expectations and the same fears. Dance won't change the world from one day to the next, of course, but it will contribute to making change happen, and I am proud to be contributing to this.



- o • Make people think about the limitations of their culture
- B • Incite people to ask questions which can lead to changing attitudes and behaviors
- J • Foster tolerance and promote differences
- E • Make a statement after Tunisian revolution that the body needs to break free from sociocultural limitations
- T • Show that body language is as important as oral language
- I • Democratize contemporary dance in Tunisia, and in the Arab region more generally
- V
- E
- S

“Art in general and
dance in particular
is about opening
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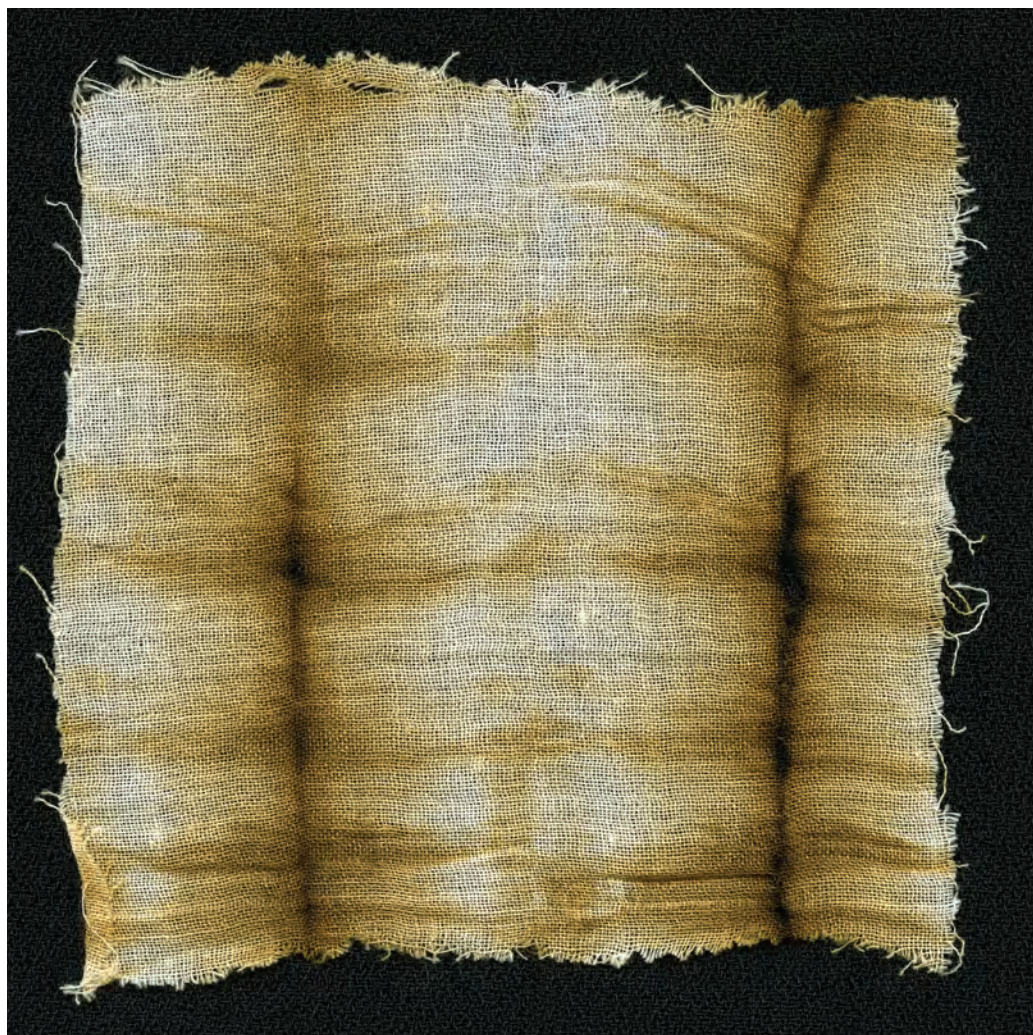
Amanda Kerdahi

Female
EGYPT

32 Y.O

أحاديث مقطرة على طاولة مستديرة

FILTERED CONVERSATIONS AT ROUND TABLE



Amanda Kerdahi's *100 Conversations* crosses boundaries and goes beyond taboos in order to create a non-judgmental, non-stigmatized space where intimacies between women are shared. She invited 100 women living in Cairo to smoke with her and start a conversation about their sexualities and experiences. The conversations explored the taboos associated with the unrestrained female body, the idea of female sexuality and, seemingly more trivial, the act of smoking in public in Egypt, which is in fact generally associated with 'easy virtue' and loose morals.

The cigarettes were hand-rolled by Kerdahi with a piece of fabric replacing the typical filter. Each filter (square of fabric) visualized spoken and unspoken thoughts of the smoker and her sexuality. The filters became visual transcriptions of two actions usually reserved for private exchange: smoking and talking about sexuality. Kerdahi collected the filters and used them as vestigial recordings of the conversations, then juxtaposed them with soundless video conversations, inviting the viewer to experience fragments of complex female sexualities.

Her new project *Filtered Conversations at Round Table* picks up from where *100 Conversations* left. The aim is to continue to have a dialogue with women of various ages, sexual orientations, religions, and professions, in order to counter taboos in Egyptian society connected to the female body.

How is the second project different from the first one?

In the first project I was so focused on the installation rather than the conversation. Halfway through the project I realized that the conversations were actually the crux of the work. In the beginning I couldn't see the impact these conversations could have both on myself and on the participants. Intimacy and trust between speakers offers mutual learning, perception shifts, or affirmations. From the conversations I've had in the past months, the feedback has been extremely positive. Women have

met each other and there was a bond that was created by sharing an intimate dialogue. This is why the second project focuses on the conversations by inviting the women to congregate at a round table. The joining of women in addition to dialogue is the focal point of the event. There is no head of the table implying that there is also no hierarchy between those who attend – each participant has equal status. I will also invite women who don't smoke. In addition to the fabric filters, I will collect the glass cups which will be used in the final installation with soundless video – a round, top angle view of the table during the dialogues.

"I think that change needs to start on a very small scale. If one person feels different about her body, then maybe it will have a sort of ripple effect and then it will spread in a way that a top down approach wouldn't."

What are the typical themes that are explored in these conversations?

The topics and tangents of each conversation have been varied, insightful, and informative. Sexual harassment was a big topic, which wasn't surprising. There was also a lot of talk about the way women identify with their own bodies and how the environment plays a large role in the perception they have of themselves. There was also a certain queer element and a lot of talk about how we're going from a very heterosexual normative culture to rediscovering other dimensions of sexuality and homosexual experiences. Conversations explored how this has reshaped the paradigm in which we're living, and also the dangers around it because there's a lot of targeting from the government right now on homosexual or queer bodies or anybody that looks different, anyone working outside the binary gender norms, as well as the experiences, fears, and stories that have come out of that. I let them steer the conversation. I participate and share my own experiences but I don't change the topic.

What has been the feedback like?

I can't speak for a lot of them, but those who have talked to me about it afterwards told me that there

40+

TOTAL
number of recorded conversations

“Being able to say
‘vagina’ without anyone
giggling or feeling
awkward is quite
something even though
in the grander scheme
of things it might not
really be that big
of a deal.”

100

TOTAL
number of women

400

TOTAL
number of filters collected

was a sense of catharsis, that they felt lighter after leaving. If anything it’s just because they’re speaking and somebody is listening, and for me this was the most important thing to be doing, to really be listening to them and responding genuinely.

How do you think a project like your project can contribute to change?

I think that change needs to start on a very small scale. If one person feels different about her body, then maybe it will have a sort of ripple effect and then it will spread in a way that a top down approach wouldn’t. So my goal or expected outcome isn’t something super measurable because when I think about my own sexuality and about how long and slow it’s taken for the changes to take place, I realize that it is so hard to measure. It’s just something really personal. However, this kind of slow small change is a lot more realistic. Also, this idea of normalizing talk about sexuality is important because there’s a lot of hush-hush around it. So being able to just normalize that and being able to say ‘vagina’ without anyone giggling or feeling awkward is quite something even though in the grander scheme of things it might not really be that big of a deal.



- Provide a safe space for dialogue among Egyptian or Arab women of various ages, sexual orientations, religions, and professions
- Actualize an installation that counters stigmas and taboos in Egyptian society in connection to the female body
- Create more visibility around complexities of sexuality

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Arab Media Lab

Institution 04 Y.O
MOROCCO

مراكش الرقمية

DIGITAL MARRAKECH

Digital Marrakech is an international media arts and digital festival, which aims to present diverse trends and practices in the fields of digital film and video, multimedia performances, video installations, digital mapping, net art, workshops and other interdisciplinary forms. The festival program consists of performances, film screenings, workshops, lectures, and an exhibition. Artists from all over the world present latest practices, research and technology, and showcase important achievements in the development of media arts. The festival takes place in a number of locations in Marrakech city, with the main events held in the old medina.

Through Digital Marrakech, you aim to capture the evolving artistic zeitgeist in the Arab region through the lens of digital technology. What sparked the idea?

Abdelaziz Taleb, Director, Arab Media Lab We have been working on various projects that explore and reflect on current Arab happenings as well as show the richness and complexity of Arabic culture through video, digital film, and moving images since 2012. First with *Videokaravaan* project (2002-2010), and then came the Arab Media Lab, which initiated the *Digital Marrakech Festival*.

Video production in the Arab region has been witnessing constant growth. Young filmmakers, video and media artists have been exploring different paths of subjective expression with a fragile and anxious freedom, and most importantly, they have been taking control of their own images. Their images represent them, they represent the political and social conditions of different communities, and the deeply rooted traditions. Overall, their images encompass a wide-range of ideas, reflections and experimentations.

With Digital Marrakech we wanted to share our experience with the public, and show the importance of the moving picture. We wanted to stimulate an open and critical debate and create an alternative space for a new generation of media artists and filmmakers.

Tell us more about the 2014 festival program.

For the 2014 edition we decided to dedicate part of our program to contemporary representations in the Arab region, ranging from independent cinema to media arts. We wanted to take a close look at how media arts and digital communications are evolving in the Arab region and explore how technology in the region is understood and practiced. We also had special tributes to Terrence Malick, Wes Anderson, Quentin Tarantino, and Ghassan Salhab and a special program focused on the Arab region.

How was the response?

This fourth edition was a great success. The festival has matured and secured a reputed spot in the Moroccan art scene. It has also succeeded in



reaching out to the rest of the Arab region and created several international interdisciplinary collaborations. We had more than 150 artworks showcased, as well as one main workshop on 3D Digital Mapping, and welcomed more than 2,000 visitors.

How do you think your festival is adding value to the attendees?

Digital Marrakech is a platform for local artists to present their work to a much larger public. The festival plays a major role in expanding the opportunities for local talents in film, video and interactive media. The most successful participants are offered the opportunity to produce new works during the master classes, which stretch over two to four weeks and are held under the supervision of professionals.

It also contributes to interdisciplinary collaborations between South and North, and creates an atmosphere of international exchange between Moroccan artists and international ones. It brings together emerging artists sharing common ideas and energies, and introduces them to the newest trends in media arts.

The idea is to make the festival a very significant cultural event on the Moroccan and Arab map and unite various social spheres, like culture, arts and education. Our ambition is to turn the festival into a center of the young people's life in Marrakech.

“Encouraging artistic activities in our region will open the door to a lot of experimentation, which leads to a rich artistic atmosphere, and this in turn will contribute to transformations on an individual and social level.”

What has been the Festival's biggest achievement so far?

With a very limited budget, we have managed to create a special showcase and put Digital Marrakech on the map as the only festival in Africa and the Arab region that opens its program to various representations of new cinema (independent and experimental films, creative documentaries, digital

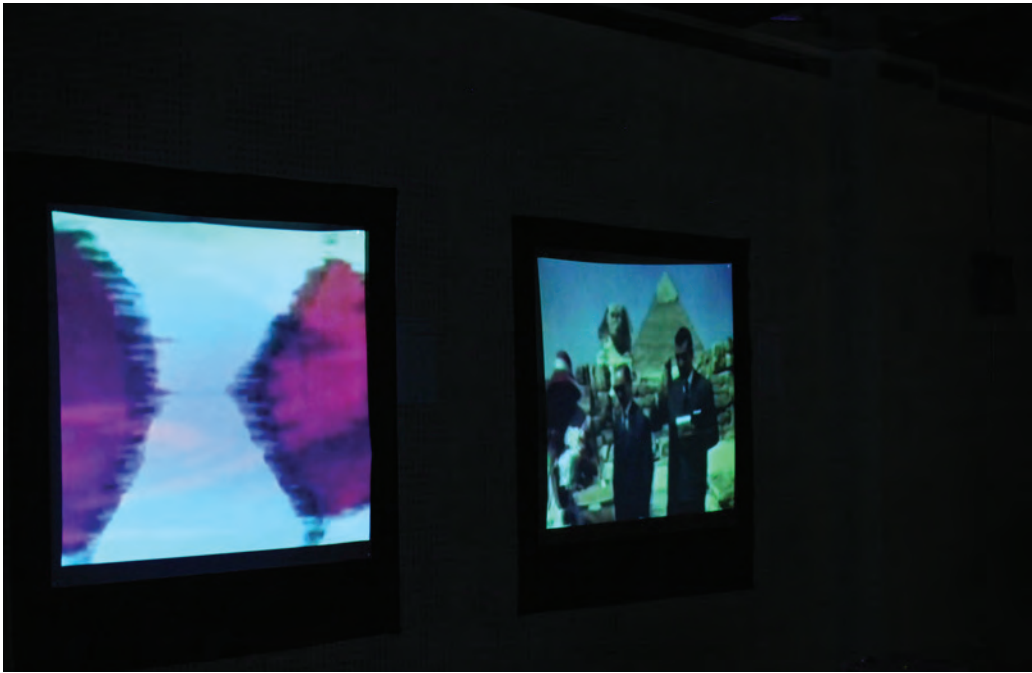
and video art, video installations, 3D mapping). It is also a platform for learning since it includes a lot of workshops and masters classes.

How and in what ways do you think an initiative like Digital Marrakech can help in creating change in the Arab region?

We believe that encouraging artistic activities in our region will open the door to a lot of experimentation, which leads to a rich artistic atmosphere, and this in turn will contribute to transformations on an individual and social level. The majority of the population in the Arab region is young and they are using art to reclaim their right to express themselves in different ways.



- Strengthen media art creation in Morocco, North Africa and the Arab region
- Contribute to individual and social development through video, digital film-making and mixed media art
- Provide a program to young mixed media artists from various fields and initiate international and regional networks among the participants
- Challenge the Western perspective on art from the Arab region and show the richness and complexity of Arabic culture



Sawsan Darwaza

Female 52 Y.O
JORDAN

ونحن نسامح؟

AS WE FORGIVE?

As We Forgive? is the most recent work by award-winning theater director Sawsan Darwaza. The play raises many issues facing the Arab region today, such as extremism, discrimination, and hate, and explores how these issues are threatening our morals and ethics. She hopes to get people to start thinking about pertinent concepts like revenge and forgiveness in this context of extreme violence.

How did the idea of this play come about?

As part of her graduation project my daughter worked on a text by Australian writer Tom Holloway. I was really drawn to the text because it intersects with what's happening now in the Arab region, especially its discussions of social divisions and its exploration of extremism and revenge, which are two very relevant ideas to what's going on in the region. As Arabs we're surrounded by and sub-

jected to a lot of violence and I felt that Holloway's text provides a launch pad to discuss these issues. I wanted to adapt it and experiment with it. So I spoke to Holloway and shared my vision with him, and he was happy about it. I then translated it with one of the actors, Alhakim Masoud, and after that I further developed the script and the themes with Najib Nuseir, who is a professional writer in Jordan. The final theater text was a collaboration between the actors and myself.

What's the story about?

The story is about a 50-years-old man who has a knee injury and lives off the government. He sits at home feeling secure, and he doesn't really have to do or worry about anything. Then someone breaks into his house, but the thief discovers that the man doesn't really have money, so he beats him and leaves him frightened. From that moment on, the man starts talking to the audience about his plan for revenge. There are two layers to the story. The first is psychological related to how someone can

become so violent and full of rage. These are scary emotions that arise when a person is subjected to violence, racism, or discrimination, and eventually this could lead to a society that is extremely violent. The second layer has to do with experimental theater, or what Artaud refers to as the 'theater of cruelty', and what I call the 'theater of death' or the 'theater of violence'—I have even tried finding more violent adjectives for it because it's a type of theater that brims with an extreme violent energy. The audience is also subjected to this violence. The idea is to put the audience in a state of extreme pressure and let them feel that this violence can touch them any second.

Why did you decide to take this direction?

Despite living in a place of extreme violence, most of us feel protected. We talk about violence in numbers, and most of the time in huge numbers: number of explosions, number of air strikes, number of dead people, etc. But it remains a virtual type of violence that we're exposed to through narratives in the media; in other words, we're disconnected from it, it's like fiction. It was important for me to establish through this play a direct connection or association with violence.

"The play was provoking, like the title itself *As We Forgive?* The fact that it admits forgiveness makes you want to dig deeper to better understand the process of regret, pain, hatred, fear, vengeance, and forgiveness... It invites you to an open thinking session, a journey of cries, blood, violence, and *ambiance noire*."

— Omar Tarawneh, *spectator*

Why do you think establishing this connection to violence is important?

If you're talking about the Syrian catastrophe or any revolution that has happened in our region, you are dealing with whole new sets of problems and controversies, whole new paradigms. We've crossed all the red lines. Our reference points, and our entire moral and ethical systems have been

altered dramatically. Everyone is hugely confused and afraid. It's a very difficult and unprecedented period. The play ends with a blood bath. It's a horrific metaphor because you don't have to be inside the explosion to bleed and die.

What do you hope to achieve with it?

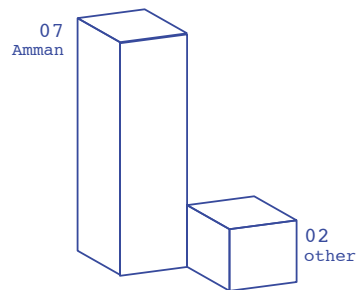
I still haven't finished the project so we can't really talk about full objectives. We've done nine shows so far, but I still want to work on it and refine it now that I have more time to analyze the feedback and discussions and explore how to move forward with it. In theater, if you don't travel with your play you can't really speak of substantial achievements or impact. My thesis at university explored whether or not political theater can change society. And I realized that it can't. However what political theater can do is ask questions and change perspectives. It can impact the audience's point of view.



- Get people to think about two important issues—forgiveness and revenge—at a time of extreme violence
- Promote tolerance and peace
- Propose a new narrative to counter narratives of violence and terror

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TOTAL
number of spectatorsFuture Shows

- Australia
- Beirut
- Fujairah
- Tunis
- Zurich

“Political theater can ask questions and change perspectives. It can impact the audience’s point of view.”



Arthur Gabriel Yak

Male
SUDAN

42 Y.O

إنتحار عزرائيل

AZRAEL'S SUICIDE

The Day Azrael Committed Suicide is a novel by Sudanese writer Arthur Gabriel Yak. Yak is the General Director of the Nile Cultural Center in Juba and a contributing writer to *al-Mauqif*, an Arabic newspaper in South Sudan.

Why did Azrael commit suicide?

Azrael has nothing to do with the story. In other words, it's not Azrael himself that would commit suicide. Azrael is used here symbolically; we are dealing with a protagonist who acts like the Angel of Death (Azrael). In many religions, Azrael is a high-ranking commander of God's Angels who takes the souls of dead people and returns them to God upon their death. Our fictional Azrael is a high-ranking officer in the Sudanese army and is being used by his commanders to kill members of another ethnic group in order to retain political power. But he then discovers that he doesn't actually belong to his tribe but to the other tribe that he thought were the enemy. After his discovery, his commander orders him to go liberate a city from the occupation of rebels who belong to his newly discovered tribe. Being caught up in this tribal-po-

litico-military imbroglio he decides that he can't go, but he also won't be able to resign from the military. So this is where suicide becomes a solution to an intricate situation.

"In a tribal society like ours, fiction can help change people's perceptions of each other."

What is the big idea or the main story you are trying to tell in your novel?

There are two messages I would like to send to the world. The first is that there were ethnic massacres perpetrated in South Sudan. The second is that no matter what you will do in order to protect your political or ethnic group, it will affect you either directly or indirectly. No one has chosen to be a member of a certain ethnic group; we have all found ourselves belonging to a certain group or the other without putting a lot of effort into it.

What inspired you to write this novel?

On 15 December 2013 a fight erupted within the presidential guards between the Dinka tribe, which is the tribe of the president, and the Nuer tribe, which is the tribe of the former vice-president. The

second day the government announced that there's a failed coup by the former vice-president, and then things turned violent and tribal. This is where my inspiration came from.

"Whoever is not ready to compromise his life to reveal the truth to the world is not worthy of being a writer."

Besides being a political novel, you also touch upon a lot of societal complexities, which sometimes pinpoint some kind of perversion in the society, especially in your discussion of the characters' sexual lives. Why did you decide to take this route and what are you trying to achieve with it? Sexual lives are not just about having sex. Sex is a source of happiness and unhappiness. Frustration, stress, and depression might be a result of a life devoid of intimate sex. And that depression or stress or frustration will reflect in our behavior and hence affect our societal relations. One of the characters in the novel would not relieve himself sexually without torturing his spouse; otherwise he wouldn't reach the zenith of orgasm. He's like a dictator who would not satisfy himself except through torture and bloodshed of his victims. What I'm trying to achieve is to tell my reader that beyond what we see as just physical contact between two intimate souls, lays a monumental power that could either destroy a man or make him very happy.

Are you afraid of censorship?

I'm not afraid of censorship because that is the least one would expect. Things might have reached harassments if not worse. To unmask the hideous face of the killers who are still alive. But whoever is not ready to compromise his life to reveal the truth to the world is not worthy of being a writer.

Do you think fiction can help change societies?

I don't write to entertain people, but rather to let them see the world from my own angle, hoping that it would make some change in the way they see the world. In a tribal society like ours, fiction can help change people's perceptions of each other. The stereotypes being held by certain tribes against

each other could be challenged, if not eradicated, through fiction. I think that the very nature of fiction, in how the characters and plots interweave in a way to tell a story, can attract readers and immerse them emotionally. When a fictional work is able to move you emotionally, sometimes to the point of tears, our behavior or our way of looking at things could change. I hope that this fiction will make a tremendous change in our tribal psyche.

"I want to write about them so that they would not escape from our collective memory, even if they have somehow managed to escape justice."

What kind of tremendous change would you like to see once the novel is published?

I would like my fellow citizens to recognize that there were tribal-based genocides that happened in Juba, Bor, Bentiu, and Malakal, and that these genocides have been executed by both tribes against each other. For the readers who happen to be the executors—because I believe that most of them are still alive—I would tell them that I write about the genocides that you have been part of. I want to torment their consciousness by reminding them of what they have done. I want to write about them so that they would not escape from our collective memory, even if they have somehow managed to escape justice.

Expected completion: May 2015

Anthony Chidiac

Male 26 Y.O
LEBANON

غرفة لرجل

ROOM FOR A MAN

Room for a Man is an 80-minutes documentary about a young Lebanese man struggling with his identity. Carole Abboud, the film's producer, and Anthony Chidiac, the director, tell us more.

How did the film come about?

Carole Abboud, Producer I worked with Anthony on a 52-minute fictional film in which he tackled real issues but through fictional characters. We were working closely and developed a personal friendship and at one point he was telling me about what was happening to him in his own private home. It was a long conversation that trickled down to arrive at Anthony's room. The entire film basically takes place in his room. It's an introspective film. The director is the main character who is trying to understand his environment and surroundings and how have these influenced his growth.

What were the difficulties you faced?

I started producing films six years ago and it so happened that I was working with films that can be considered as 'difficult', in the sense that people are not used to them in the Lebanese or regional context. So they were a hard sell. It was difficult to get them across the censorship board or on TVs, and you couldn't get funding from the Gulf for a film with two men kissing each other. It's also tough to sell them abroad because the West are

looking for a certain exotic format which I am not willing to adhere to. I do not want to sell for the sake of selling. So when the Gulf is saying we're too progressive and the West is saying that we're not exotic enough, you have institutions like AFAC who believe in us and the stories we are trying to tell, and for this I thank them.

It's a sensitive topic to cover. Did you face any resistance?

The film basically observes the things around us, around the director's universe, and breaks them down in order to understand what they're made of, what they are, and what we can do with that information. So his mom, sister and the house are like the main obstacles and it's as though we're tearing down the house and reconstructing Anthony's room, which here metaphorically resembles Anthony himself.

What kind of questions does the film raise?

Beyond the question that the director is asking himself, which is what is it like to be a man in Lebanon in particular, the film more generally asks how is it like for someone to be able to live freely while at the same time be so chained by the social and cultural environment he or she lives in.

Can films like this lead to change?

The director is allowed to express him or her self in a way that can eventually impact society, shift its perspectives, correct a misconception, or offer a space for imagination. With the talented filmmakers I'm working with, we're trying to create some kind of impact, because no matter how small the impact is, in the end it will create some kind of change. They're small earthquakes that will contribute to our quest for freedom and emancipation. Small changes are needed in order to lead to big changes.

We've read the synopsis of the film, but in your own words as the director, how do you describe your film?

Anthony Chidiac, Director This documentary film is written like a personal reflection. It's an introspection, which is known as 'Cinema d'auteur.'

I believe there is a thin line between myself as a person and as a filmmaker and that's why I find this experience both challenging and motivating. I tried to combine opposite elements in one bowl like the omnipresence of a mother and the absence of a Father, fear of strangers and desire for strangers, home and insecurity, past and future, childhood and manhood, etc. Many layers are simultaneously exposed and triggered through one main event, which is my bedroom's renovation. The film stars one main character which is the mother (hysterical, funny, strong) and few other working men, in addition to personal belongings that reflect my position in the film.

"A film can eventually impact society, shift its perspectives, correct a misconception, or offer a space for imagination."

The film is pretty much about your story, which is at the same time a very private and sensitive story. Why did you choose to tell it publicly?

Stories remain personal until they are shared publicly. It's a hard process indeed, but once you obtain enough distance during the editing process, it becomes smoother to treat yourself as a character. "Honesty" is probably the right answer for that.

What do you hope audiences would feel, think or do after watching the film?

To be honest, we never started working on that film for a certain target audience and that's not 'correct' if you want to hit the market. But I hope the film would trigger something in every single viewer and get them to re-question some basic values we all have been raised on – like manhood, mothers, success, work, responsibility, family, loneliness, etc.

I have the feeling that people enjoy being voyeurs of other people's lives, especially when humor and drama are involved.

Expected completion: November 2015

Kaouther Ben Hania

Female
TUNISIA

40 Y.O

زينب تكره الثلج

ZAINEB HATES THE SNOW

Kaouther Ben Hania's new film, *Zineb Hates the Snow*, which she has been working on it for the past six years, blurs the boundaries between documentary and feature. In this interview, the filmmaker tells us more about the project and why it has taken so long.

You've been filming for six years and are finally starting to approach the final stages of production. What is the film about and why has it taken so long?

The project started as an adventure. I knew Zineb since she was a kid because her mother, Wided, is my cousin. Zineb's father died in a car accident when she was nine-years-old. After the incident her mother started telling me about a love story she had before she married Zineb's father with a man called Maher. Maher then left to Canada and

married another woman. Wided ended up accepting an arranged marriage to a man who wasn't particularly to her liking – Zineb's father. When Maher learned that Wided has lost her husband, he called her to present his condolences and the love story was rekindled. He then proposed to her to move with her daughter to Canada to live with him and his daughter from his ex-wife. It was all so new and confusing for Wided. How would she tell Zineb about this man? Going to Canada, emigrating – it was a radical change for her. For his part, Maher had to also convince his own daughter, Wijdene, that this was a good thing. So the film is the story of a young Tunisian girl's life and her changing family life. It is a process documentary told through the eyes of Zineb as she matures physically and emotionally and discovers whether or not she truly hates the snow, or in other words the land of snow that is Canada.

What attracted you to this story?

I am fond of small stories, those concerning ordinary people. Touching stories with a hint of poetry, which, through the special fate of a person, can teach us about our own familial relationships and ourselves. Zineb's story is about introduction to life and to the world of adults, but it's also the story of an ordinary yet special relationship between a mother and daughter. Zineb will learn much about the life of adults and the complexity of their feelings. It is the initiatory process, which is of interest to me in this story. *Zineb Hates the Snow* is a universal story despite its specificities; we've all gone through this phase when growing up.

Was it hard to convince them to be part of the film?

[Zineb's mother] Wided is my paternal cousin, we grew up together and I'm her lone confidante. [Zineb's stepfather] Maher is my maternal uncle. I found myself involved in their long-distance love story, between Canada and Tunisia. We have talked a lot about this film and Wided and Maher have revealed to me that, just like in romantic comedies, they would like their story to have a happy ending. They will try their best to achieve their goal and are comfortable letting me document the difficulties they are facing along the way.

Did you know it would take such a long time?

I had a feeling it would take a long time because that's the rhythm of life. In 2009, I filmed the meeting between the two girls and how they started to live with each other. The most important thing for me was the initiation phase, how you learn and grow. When you're filming over a long period of time you get to really witness the growth of the characters in the film – physically, psychologically, emotionally...

Which production stage have you reached now?

Since the first footage shot back in 2009 following the death of Zineb's father in Tunis, we followed Zineb's family at the moment of their final departure to Canada this past summer [2014]. The plan is to continue to follow Zineb over this year until she leaves her adoptive country Canada and returns to her homeland Tunis, a place filled with the ghost of her dead father and a past life more remote and dreamlike with each passing day. By the end of production we would have captured five transformational years in a young girl's life as she grows and matures. In parallel, since most of the filming has been completed, we are starting the editing process.

What were the main difficulties that you faced?

Obviously there was an ethical issue involved; when you shoot the personal lives of people, they open their doors, their memories, you need to be sensitive as to how and what you shoot and be wary of the extent you can go in diving into details, details that they may not want to reveal or showcase. Wided and Maher gave me their trust because they knew me but it was still very difficult. When the camera starts rolling, you're filming constantly in their house and you have to shoot responsibly.

What did you learn from this experience?

In this film I was forced to film myself because the situation is private and I couldn't bring in a technical team into the house. In a way I was the sole team doing the picture, sound, everything, so I learned how to divide the tasks by myself like solo orchestra, if you will. It was a great experience to work technically and creatively on finding solutions. It was very tiring but rewarding at the same time.

Your film is documentary but also feels like a fiction. What drew you to this format?

Reality is a big mess. It is chaotic and so much is going on. So when you're filming reality, the challenge is to find a way to reorganize it in a way that's poetic or narratively interesting. So making a documentary is like learning to write in reality, and you end up creating meaning by the choices and decisions you make in the film. Documentary allows a filmmaker to look at the world from the lens of the camera. So in way it has prepared me for feature films in the sense that it taught me how to write scenes that can be rich in reality but at the same time allow you to have a storyline that evolves.

What kind of artistic choices and decisions have you made in the film?

The film will be mostly composed of images shot on the spot, which I was able to do thanks to my closeness to the characters. I have chosen to tell the story through Zineb's eyes for various reasons. Firstly, because a child's sensitivity and outlook can teach us something about the world of adults in an original and sometimes surprising manner. In my first fiction short film, I treated a similar theme – adult sexuality seen through a child's eye. In that film, a child tries to sabotage his sister's wedding so that his sister does not commit that “thing” on her wedding night with this stranger (the husband). In my second film *Imams Go to School*, a 75-minute documentary about Imam education on secularism in France through a catholic institute, I was facing reality, with all its complexities, and could observe and choose from it things that interested me. This allowed me to learn “direct cinema” and to find out that I have a special attraction to the documentary genre. With *Zineb Hates The Snow*, I wish to address a less intellectual theme, a theme that relates more to emotions, to love, to family; thus venturing beyond and digging deeper.

Expected completion: End of 2015



Hassan Darsi

Male
MOROCCO

42 Y.O

السّاحة السّفليّة

LE SQUARE D'EN BAS

Quel genre de questions essayez-vous de poser à travers votre nouveau projet, *le Sqaure d'en Bas*?

Le Square d'en Bas prolonge une recherche entamée il y a plus de 10 ans par un autre projet similaire « Le projet de la maquette, cas du parc de l'Hermitage en 2002 »¹. Les deux projets sont en résonnance avec deux territoires de la ville de Casablanca. Les deux projets consistent en la fabrication d'une maquette qui inventorie l'existant en vue d'en faire un modèle, formel, social et politique.

Le Square d'en Bas est une œuvre en chantier de construction qui emprunte les mêmes outils (repérages, relevés, inventaires, mesures, plans, archivages, ...), et en contre-pied à la politique d'urbanisation d'une ville elle-même en chantier, introduit et amplifie une réflexion sur la ville et ses réalités.

La question essentielle dans ce projet est le travail à l'échelle, et c'est la question posée dans

tout le programme social et politique de la ville.

Le Square d'en Bas est un processus de construction du réel, mettant en vis-à-vis : démarche citoyenne, ouverte, participative et projet de société. A quelle échelle pensons nous la ville ? A quelle échelle estimons-nous nos moyens d'action ? Quel modèle de société voulons-nous ?

Comment prévoyez-vous poser ces questions ?

D'abord par la nature même du projet : Une maquette d'une ruine en centre-ville. Pour cela, *Le Square d'en Bas* intègre un processus participatif. La construction de la maquette se fait à plusieurs mains, des habitants dans toutes leurs diversités viennent ponctuellement participer à cette construction. Si faire une maquette, c'est faire de l'architecture, à plus grande échelle, comment la construction de la ville peut-elle devenir une question populaire ?

Par ailleurs, autour de la construction de la maquette, deux autres projets se sont greffés pour programmer des actions pluridisciplinaires en danse, performances, poésie, ateliers de dessins, enquêtes sociales, et implication des architectes dans une convergence de point de vues vers le même territoire questionner le devenir du lieu « Legal Frères et Cie », sujet de la maquette.

Quel est le principal problème auquel font face les villes arabes aujourd'hui , Casablanca en particulier?

Les villes dans notre région sont à certains endroits inhumaines. Une ville ne se construit pas seulement par l'argent et par les intérêts économiques. Elle se construit par le rêve, par la poésie et par le désir. Le travail à l'échelle qui structure la construction de la maquette dit inversement ce manque de réflexion et de travail à l'échelle humaine. *Le Square d'en Bas* tente de faire écho à cette réflexion.

Pensez-vous que l'art peut contribuer à résoudre ces problèmes? de quelle façon?

Le cas du « Projet de la maquette » autour du parc de l'Hermitage (Jadis abandonné et aujourd'hui réhabilité) que j'ai conduit de 2002 à 2007 avec La Source du lion, renseigne sur les capacités d'une œuvre à décaler le regard pour mieux percevoir, aussi bien la réalité que les actions les plus justes à mener. L'art devrait reprendre sa place dans la construction d'une société, comme Casablanca pourrait redevenir le laboratoire d'architecture qui a été à l'origine de sa vraie modernité.

Qu'aimerez-vous les gens ressentent après avoir vu *Le Square d'en Bas*?

Voir la maquette et l'apprécier, voir la ville et vouloir se l'approprier.

Quelle a été la réaction du public jusqu'à présent?

La maquette est en construction, le processus participatif se met en œuvre progressivement et quelques dizaines de personnes sont déjà venues construire des éléments de la maquette dans le chantier ouvert toute la semaine dans l'atelier de La Source du lion. Une rencontre sur la ville avec l'écrivain algérien Kamel Daoud a eu lieu dans le

même atelier, une autre avec l'historienne de l'art marocaine Nadia Sabri autour de Max Ernest et des surréalistes ; d'autres moments de rencontres publiques viendront tout au long de la fabrication de la maquette jalonner le chantier et créer le désir d'y participer.

Quelles sont les prochaines étapes pour compléter le projet?

La dimension communication par tous les médias, presse écrite, télé, radio et web feront écho au projet en temps venu.

La maquette sera inaugurée lors des Journées Nationales du Patrimoine en avril. Je prévois en 2016 que la maquette puisse circuler dans d'autres villes au Maroc et ailleurs, pour de nouveaux moments de rencontres et d'échanges en perspective.

¹ La Maquette du Parc de l'Hermitage, *aujourd'hui inscrite dans la collection de Beaubourg, a été un vaste chantier concernant ce territoire de 17 hectares. Durant 7 ans, ce parc jadis abandonné est devenu un cas d'école pour la ville de Casablanca. Ce projet a activé les désirs autour de ce parc et de tous les parcs abandonnés dans Casablanca. Le projet de la maquette fait partie de l'exposition actuelle (une histoire, l'histoire de l'art, de l'architecture et du design des années 80 à aujourd'hui) de la collection permanente de Beaubourg. Commissaire Christine Macel. Juillet 2014-Janvier 2016*

«L'art devrait
reprendre sa place
dans la construction
d'une société, comme
Casablanca pourrait
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d'architecture qui a
été à l'origine de sa
vraie modernité.»



Rana Jarbou

Female 33 Y.O
SAUDI ARABIA

هجولة

Hajwalah

Hajwalah is a documentary film that explores the city of Riyadh, as seen through the lens of Rakan, a young male joyrider, and the lens of a woman, the filmmaker Rana Jarbou.

Let's begin with the name of the film, *Hajwalah*. What does it mean?

Hajwalah is the term used to refer to a youth male subculture in Saudi Arabia, engaging in activities ranging from drifting to joyriding to simply attending the joyriding processions taking place in the outer part of the city. *Hajwalah* also means driving in circles without direction.

So the film is about this subculture?

The truth is, I had initially planned on making a documentary about graffiti in the Saudi kingdom titled, *Jidranuna (Our Walls)*, which was to explore three specific graffiti practices that reveal the different worlds lived by the respective graffiti artists. During my research of one of these practices, which

I had initially titled, “the vandal,” in reference to the *hajwalah* subculture, I stumbled across an ethnography titled, *Joyriding in Riyadh: oil, urbanism, and road revolt*, by Pascal Menoret, that led me to focus on the *hajwalah*.

Why did you shift the focus of the film?

I shifted the focus because I thought that joyriding in the kingdom is a more urgent story to tell, especially since it had been around for decades, and yet only had a single narrative about it in mainstream media. Driven by curiosity, I also wanted to see if I can possibly tell a story about a joyrider, to whom my accessibility is very limited.

In a sense, the film is still about “our walls” in Saudi Arabia. The structural violence and regulation of our social relations in the Saudi kingdom is gradually revealed. I intentionally reinforce this message when Rakan, a joyrider and the main character, is asked about the city, its public spaces and our separation from one another. He answers by referring to the internet and social media, which is telling of our virtual worlds and relationships.

What will the film explore?

The film explores the joyriding practice through Rakan’s passion for what he considers a “motor-sport” that should be legalized. Rakan defies the stereotypes. Fearful of losing his job, he stopped joyriding for almost a year and turned to gaming in order to reimagine and virtually relive the *hajwalah* world.

In parallel to Rakan’s story, the film explores the city from a woman’s lens, through a filmic essay that drives in no direction. It captures my attempt to claim a sense of place in the rapidly growing city. I am a passenger, being driven in no direction.

Is there a main message you are trying to deliver?

A central theme in my work has been the juxtaposition between the power of expression and the expression of power. I want this film to be a powerful expression of something we see and hear everyday and yet we don’t fully understand.

I am not trying to build tension in the film, but to encourage introspection. What is the city? Who is Rakan? What is public space? The film attempts to have a real conversation about joyriding that wasn’t had in mainstream media, and another one about the city and public space. This process has so far proven to me that there is always someone willing to tell their story. Rakan defied all my assumptions and he even changed my perspective on joyriders. I learned a lot about the *hajwalah* world of Saudi male youth, and many of my own stereotypes were challenged. I also learned more about the city itself, Riyadh, which has become a central character in this film.

What attracted you to Rakan’s and the other joyriders’ stories?

As a native of Riyadh hoping to drive in my city one day, nothing seems more important than connecting my plight with my visible and yet marginalized male counterparts who drive in the outer city. The structural and economic violence in the city is captured from the car window, and regulation of social interactions and relations is reflected in the film-making process. I became attracted to the joyriding subculture and wanted to understand it. From far away I saw that joyriders conquer public spaces

with a quest for individual identity and fame. They are “joyriders,” a collective group identity thus creates a public spectacle of performance, admiration and competition. I wanted to make this film in order to take a closer look. In doing so, my gendered lens became an inevitable part of the narrative.

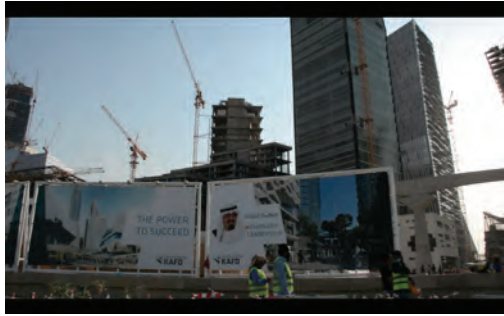
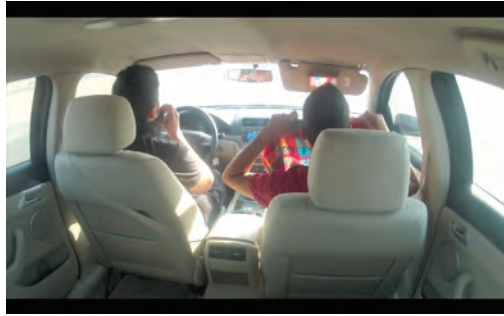
How is the story relevant to what’s going on in the Kingdom today?

Oil discovery in the country quickly turned a once nomadic and tribal society into an urban one, particularly in the 1970’s, which was an important period in the Saudi kingdom’s economy due to the oil boom. In this scenario, car transportation became the only way to make sense of space and to be mobile in the vast spaces of the expanding city of Riyadh, creating a car-based culture. During the same period joyriding emerged.

What are you hoping to achieve with the film?

I felt the urgency of connecting our plights, and highlighting the structural violence and repression that we are both faced with day-in day-out. I am hoping to subvert the typical narratives that tend to put people and subcultures in a box to be addressed with separately. Regulation of our social relations and interactions has become integral in our impulsive polarized politicization and sidelining of our own fellow citizens. I want this film to dismantle gendered, classist and politicized discourses that tend to obscure a bigger picture about spatial repression.

Expected completion: March 2016



re — cover

“Arts and culture offer platforms for social interaction; they help build civic experience by advancing collective work and problem solving, experimentation in co-existence and respect for diversity and dialogue, all crucial moments of transition and reform.”

Moukhtar Kocache



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Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art

Institution 16 Y.O
PALESTINE

عرض القدس السابع

THE JERUSALEM SHOW

The *Jerusalem Show* is an art and culture festival that aims to open up Palestine to the international art scene and promote Palestinian contemporary life and art through a two-week program in Jerusalem and the West Bank attended by artists, researchers, academics and architects from Palestine and the rest of the world. Jack Persekian, Director of Al-Ma'mal, the foundation that organizes the Show, tells us more about the project.

You've been organizing the *Jerusalem Show* for seven years now. From your experience, in what ways can artistic and cultural projects like the one you organize impact situations of severe conflict like in Palestine?

I believe that situations of severe conflict, such as in Palestine, are fertile breeding grounds for radical thought and extremism. But over the many years I've been living in Jerusalem, I have also seen that with motivation and guidance – with the provision of alternative options – new ways of thinking and inspirational new work can emerge. These things become beacons that attract and inspire other people, and sometimes entire communities.



So our duty as art and cultural institutions is to provide these options, this motivation and inspiration for people, and particularly young people, to create spaces that allow them to think beyond the limitations of doctrine and to question what is forced upon them. It is not very difficult for me to imagine what the situation is like in places where there aren't any artistic and cultural projects, and it frightens me. But thankfully it is impossible for me to picture Jerusalem without the untiring persistence of Palestinian artistic and cultural projects in the face of a determined campaign to eliminate Palestinian presence in the city.

How did the *Jerusalem Show* develop in the past seven years? What has been your biggest achievement?

The idea for the *Jerusalem Show* stemmed largely from conversations about our concern over the dire situation in the city, and what our role in it might be. Throughout the many years that we've been working at Al-Ma'mal (since 1997), we've asked ourselves time and again how we can act as advocates for contemporary art in Palestine, and how we can find ways to break the state of isolation imposed on Jerusalem by the Israelis. We developed several programs to help tackle these two issues, and the *Jerusalem Show* is one of these. The Show not only brings people from all over to Jerusalem, but more importantly it puts them in direct contact with the people in the city through partnerships and meetings at schools and community centers. I think this model, which we have devised and tested over the past seven years, and which in 2012 constituted the basis for creating and structuring the Qalandiya International Biennale, is one of our greatest achievements.

What are the main challenges you face in putting together the Show annually and how do you overcome them?

Somewhat differently from other exhibitions in Palestine, the *Jerusalem Show* requires that the work the artists present in the Show is inspired and/or is in response to the situation in the city: its past, its present, the life of its inhabitants... This means

that participating artists need to spend time in the city, and very often they return on several trips to conceive, develop and realize their projects. This is of the utmost importance – it is at the core of what makes this Show special. But the challenge for Al-Ma'mal here is to raise enough resources to cover the costs this process entails. And in recent times these resources have become scarce – the whole *Jerusalem Show* undertaking is becoming far more challenging than it was a few years ago. To overcome this, Al-Ma'mal (like several other institutions working in the arts in Jerusalem) is working on diversifying its fundraising base, reaching out to wider networks of collaboration and partnerships beyond the city. We believe that a strong network of partnerships amongst the various arts institutions working in Jerusalem would create a critical mass that is hard for the donor community to ignore. This network or consortium would also ensure an efficient and judicious way of utilizing the limited resources at hand.

"Artists, art practitioners, researchers and art/cultural institutions from abroad participated, exchanged and learned about life, culture, history and politics in Jerusalem, and familiarized themselves with the complex and rich reality that Palestinians live in."

What has the response been like to the 2014 Show?

I think the response was very positive, particularly from local artists. You see, most of the local artists who participated in the Show are from the West Bank and Gaza. So almost all of them have never been to Jerusalem, because as you know Israel does not allow Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza to enter the city. And it was a real challenge for the artists to produce work that responds to the city and the situation without being able to access it. This challenge I think actually ended by affecting a sort of reconnection with the city, which is gradually being forgotten and lost as Israel tries – and succeeds – to isolate and remove Jerusalem from the Palestinian psyche.

“Our duty as art and cultural institutions is to provide motivation and inspiration for people, and particularly young people, to create spaces that allow them to think beyond the limitations of doctrine and to question what is forced upon them.”

What was the theme you worked on?

Our theme was ‘Archives, lived and shared’. This originated from the fact that there are several institutions in Palestine working on preserving archives, but access to these archives has so far been limited to researchers and historians, while the general public is totally unaware of why they’re preserved, how they’re utilized, and in many cases of their very existence. Of course, several of these specialized institutions are investing in digitizing them in an attempt to make them accessible to a wider audience. Yet none of them are talking to one another about this. They could be crosschecking their findings and even collaborating in working out which systems to install, what equipment to procure and what protocols need to be implemented. But instead each institution is actually developing its own infrastructure independently, and in isolation from the others. To complicate the matter further, none of these institutions is working with the others on concerns like classification criteria and indexing – and this is clearly essential if these online archives are to be cross-referenced, searchable and sharable, as a major body of information pertaining to the history of a nation and country. All these issues, coupled with a greater interest by individuals and institutions in collecting and stockpiling archives, have provided ample material and urgency to raise awareness of the phenomenon to a national level. And so the theme ‘Archives, lived and shared’ proved very pertinent, and was incorporated by most of the partner institutions in *Qalandiya International 2014* as their guiding theme as well as being adopted as the title theme for the Biennale.

You speak a lot about the role of imagination. How can imagination contribute to social, cultural and/or political change?

I believe it was Albert Einstein who once said: “Perhaps imagination is the basis for all knowledge due to the fact that any kind of invention or theory is either created or purposed as a result of an idea formatted from imagination. Thus proving that knowledge is just as infinite and important as imagination.” And to me this says it all – for any given social, cultural and/or political context.

Imagination is the bedrock for change: no change can happen before it’s imagined, believed in and acted upon. Our role is to enrich, to broaden and simply to spark the imagination of every person, and particularly every young person, in Palestine.

“Imagination is the bedrock for change: no change can happen before it’s imagined, believed in and acted upon. Our role is to enrich, to broaden and simply to spark the imagination of every person, and particularly every young person, in Palestine.”

What do you think is the single most important value that the *Jerusalem Show* is bringing to Palestine?

The *Jerusalem Show* is a key international art event, organized by us Palestinians in Jerusalem, which asserts our presence and steadfastness in the city. It presents a fresh, contemporary image of Palestine to the world and tells our story in ways that are engaging, inspiring, and thoughtful.



- o • Connect the fragmented parts of Palestine, particularly Jerusalem with the West Bank, Gaza
- B
- J
- E • Encourage Palestinian art and cultural life and promote discourse on Palestine and the region
- C
- T
- I • Build cultural bridges through cooperation among local participants and visiting participants and provide a positive environment for debate on social and political issues
- V
- E
- S
- Provide a positive and creative environment for the youth whose self-confidence is challenged by the closed off political horizon and dire economic conditions
- Promote research on Palestinian history, places, culture and social lifestyles and build an archive library

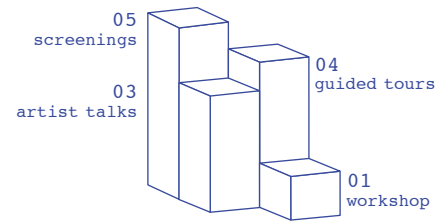


- Artists from
- 📍 Palestine
 - 📍 Iraq
 - 📍 Turkey
 - 📍 Cyprus
 - 📍 India
 - 📍 UK
 - 📍 Ireland
 - 📍 Germany
 - 📍 France
 - 📍 Switzerland
 - 📍 Denmark
 - 📍 Finland
 - 📍 The Netherlands
 - 📍 Japan
 - 📍 USA
 - 📍 Australia



21
TOTAL
number of projects

23
TOTAL
number of artists



Espace Culturel

Institution 08 Y.O
MAURITANIA

مهرجان الحكم الشعبية

THE FESTIVAL OF POPULAR SAYINGS

Elhaj Aldine is on a mission to preserve Mauritania's traditional tales from being lost. In the following interview, he tells us more about his ambitious undertaking.

How did the idea for the project come about?

Given the influence of television and the internet and the dominance of these new, different modes of communication, both stories and reading are beginning to lose their place in society. And given how important it is for every people to both defend and advocate for their culture, and our own awareness of this bitter truth, we felt an imperative to participate by preserving Mauritania's traditional tales from being lost.

The project aims to gather together a large number of the fables and morality tales from Mauritanian and Arab culture, making them accessible to a wide audience, especially schoolchildren, the latter through a yearly festival organized by the local government in the city of Nouakchott, which comprises many activities, including: storytelling sessions in local schools, presentations of proverbs and legends, workshops on how to teach stories to schoolchildren and others geared toward teachers especially.

We look forward in this regard to adopting a curriculum aimed at opening up to Arab and African cultures, with the goal of providing a tangible contribution to the strengthening of national social harmony and the preservation of the non-material culture of Mauritania and the Arab region, as well as promoting openness and opening up intercultural dialogue.

REACH

5 000 students
+ 1 500 members of the public

What are the challenges you find yourself facing in preparing for the festival?

There are a lot of challenges actually, but they remain challenges that can be dealt with through a number of measures, and we will be working with the Ministry of National Education so that they may help and contribute to our project by gradually introducing the concept of the story within the educational curriculum, just as we will be opening up meetings for dialogue and discussion with teachers and educators about the function of the story and its educational role.

“Since the dawn of history, folktales have helped people along their life’s path, as a source of entertainment, a source of knowledge, and a way to think about the different aspects of what it means to be alive.”

In an effort to meet the challenges and overcome the difficulties that may be encountered during the implementation phase of the project, we anticipate some challenges, mainly around: collecting a significant number of oral stories and popular folktales or legends gathered from reference figures in the community, and categorizing those stories and proverbs under a variety of subjects; figuring out methods for disseminating and teaching those stories; and coordinating and managing the commitment of our partners and targeting the right sort of audience with the right variety of stories at a predetermined quantity in order to ensure finishing up the project in the time allotted.

“There is ample evidence to indicate that art and culture can effectively contribute to sustainable social development, due to the ways in which they help promote citizenship and democracy.”

15

TOTAL

number of workshops on the art of reciting and memorizing stories, some aimed at teachers, others at students

How can your festival help revive a storytelling culture that is generally on the decline in Mauritania and in the Arab region?

Folktales fulfill an essential social role as an educational and pedagogical tool; since the dawn of history, tales have helped people along their life's path, as a source of entertainment, a source of knowledge, and a way to think about the different aspects of what it means to be alive.

How many people got used to enjoying traditional stories during long evening gatherings with the family, under the moonlight, and how many children and young people benefitted from the human experience they received through these nightly storytelling sessions (whether at their grandmother's knee or under

the dome of a tent or with the elders of the tribe or around relatives and friends). No one can deny the educational value of stories, fables, legends and morality tales.

The marked decline of this time-honored storytelling tradition, which is almost a general decline, partially explains the social deterioration we notice in our communities today, particularly among the youth, in urban and semi-urban settings, where violence and intolerance are rampant, academic failure and delinquency is noticeable, and there is a lack of dialogue and role models accompanied by a lack of ideals and clear conviction.

Despite all that, there is ample evidence to indicate that art and culture can effectively contribute to sustainable social development, due to the ways in which they help promote citizenship and democracy, those values considered essential to helping create shifts in mentality and strengthening our fragile social fabric, helping create more solid future generations.

In fact, we hope that through our project we might be able to re-establish the story as both an educational tool and social pastime and as a channel to help promote values and ideals, supporting the sound education of children and youth. The story will help spread a sense of folklore and community values through both educational and cultural channels, through theatrical or performative works, and workshops on gathering materials and training and disseminating the storytelling arts within schools and cultural institutions, in an effort to raise the profile of this humanist, traditional art form as something of inherent value, worth preserving and highlighting. We hope also that disseminating this project in the Arab region, evolving it and having it replicated through other cultural endeavors in the region, might also lead to providing more solid foundations for the upcoming generations, allowing them ownership over their cultural heritage so that they may be able to modernize it to help create the desired Arab cultural renaissance. Keeping pace with current trends of globalization without losing the authenticity of ancient Arab culture.

In your opinion, how can the story help bring about a (cultural) renaissance?

There is no doubt that the different forms of cultural and artistic expression tangibly contribute to sustainable social development, due to their

clear and visible impact on consolidating the values of citizenship and democracy, which are vital to creating a shift in mentality and strengthening our fragile social fabric, helping create more solid future generations.

The story can lead to a renaissance in both Arab and African cultures if it is used as an educational strategy and social practice, helping raise children and youth with an openness toward the other in terms of both culture and society, raising them on the ideals and values of tolerance, respect, the acceptance of diversity and pride of belonging and identity: all those moral values necessary for raising future generations.

The workshops around gathering, memorizing, reciting and theatrically performing stories, are all ways in which we seek to revive and spread this ancient practice, within schools and cultural institutions and even in the interior towns and villages where habits and customs are fading, and where the centers and spaces for cultural exchange have disappeared.

What are your larger aims for this festival?

The project our organization is undertaking aims to promote the story within an educational and pedagogical context, through the *Festival for Popular Folklore*, which provides an opportunity for the meeting and interaction of the social and the cultural. The idea for organizing a regular story and oral storytelling festival in Mauritania is to revive moral values and popular proverbs.

60

TOTAL

number of gathered popular stories and fables that have roots in the Arab and African culture



- O • Contribute to the protection of the story and oral cultural traditions and the non-material heritage of Mauritania
- B
- J
- E • Contribute to the education of children and youth, who don't have recourse to reference figures in the community, motivating them to academic success
- C
- T
- I
- V • Facilitate dialogue between the generations (fathers and sons)
- E
- S • Advance the values of citizenship, intercultural dialogue and human rights through stories and proverbs
- Advance the storyteller's profession, and revive the cultural and artistic scene in Mauritania
- Promote awareness around the dangers threatening non-material heritage

Information Assembly for Culture, Heritage and the Arts

Institution 04 Y.O
MAURITANIA



الطرب الشعبي الحساني

POPULAR HASSANI TARAB

Malouma bint al-Midah (Khater) is working hard to make sure that Mauritania's traditional Hassani music does not find its way to extinction. Given the country's cultural realities, this is a tall order.

What's the problem you are trying to tackle with your project?

Mauritania has a very rich musical history, especially when it comes to traditional Hassani music, which is a really original blend of African beats combined with Arabic songwriting. It also uses unique instruments, which are different from the ones that are common in the Arab region. But the production of this music was limited to few big

families that were very protective of their music. The families started disappearing, so did the music. It's a very closed culture – neither do they record their music nor do they pass on this rich musical knowledge to people outside of their families. So I felt that, especially since this tradition isn't being transmitted to the younger generation, if we don't save it now, it will be lost forever.

What was the biggest challenge you faced?

The musicians that are still doing this, which are basically the children of the older generation that was taught by the masters, are a handful. We had to look for them and this took a lot of time and effort. The good thing is that they knew and liked me; otherwise it would have been impossible to convince them to take part in the project.



09
TOTAL
number of recording days

06
TOTAL
number of participating artists

“The Hassani music is very representative of Mauritania. It speaks of our history and it is a very important musical tradition that distinguishes this country.”

19
TOTAL
number of recorded songs

You must have faced a lot of resistance since you say the musicians are protective of their music...

I belong to a generation that received this musical knowledge, so they consider me as ‘part of them’, so to speak. When I first reached out to them, I explained the importance of this project and of having them involved in it. I said that this music is going to become extinct if we do not do something about it now. I said that they couldn’t stay behind closed doors, trying to fight technology or progress, because we have to allow other people to discover the uniqueness of this music.

The Hassani music is very representative of this country. The people who have contributed to the development of Mauritania made it. It speaks of our history and it is a very important musical tradition that distinguishes this country. So we need to maintain and save this rich heritage for the future by recording it and archiving the knowledge and save what’s left of it.

What’s the status of the project now?

In the past 10 days we have been recording the music. We are working with six artists. Each artist comes to the studio with his team and spends two days there working with experts on recording the music. Our initial plan was to have nine artists but we couldn’t contact three of them, so we are now working with six.

What will happen after the recording is complete?

There will be the mastering and finalization. We will produce an album containing 19 songs. Then we will invite the musicians, the press, the Ministry of Culture and other people interested in the musical scene to an event at our Association in Nouakchott where we will launch the album. It will be a gathering to listen to the music, get feedback, and promote the work we’ve been doing.

How has the reception been so far?

Very good! First of all we are very grateful for AFAC for supporting the project because otherwise we couldn’t have done it. Also the Minister of Culture has been very encouraging and supportive. Generally the response has been very good and we have received a lot of very good press.

What do you hope to achieve in the future?

We created this Association in order to archive a musical tradition that we believe is extremely important. We are starting to have a group of people interested in preserving this music and they will act as the nucleus that will help in documenting, recording, and archiving this music in order to preserve it for the future and teach the future generation about it. Music accompanies history and the traditional Hassani music tells the story of the Mauritanian people and the story of Mauritania.



- Revive an important musical heritage and save it from the threat of extinction
- Connect young people to their history and heritage through music
- Build musicians’ capacities so that they can transmit ancient knowledge to the younger generations

Sara Ouhaddou

Female 28 Y.O
MOROCCO

بين إثنين

ENTRE 2

Artistic trends tend to evolve in a globalized world as they are exposed to a broad spectrum of influences. At the same time, they are also subject to cultural, historical and geographical conditions and end up being reshaped to produce complex expressions related to specific local contexts. But how are global influences and constraints accommodated to local needs? How are these processes of adaptation linked to questions of cultural identity? And above all how can artisanal practices evolve within these circumstances while continuing to define and reaffirm cultural identity?

These are some of the questions that Sara Ouhaddou is interested in exploring in her project *Entre 2*. Her work focuses on the relationship between the Moroccan tradition of crafts on one hand and contemporary artwork on the other, as part of a wider debate on the role of art in Arabic culture today. Through her project she aims to explore the way tradition can be used as a basis for artistic innovation in Morocco. She wants to examine expressions of historical identity and their place within the current cultural environment.

By involving craftsmen in different trades to explore new ways of artistic creation, she hopes to work with them to upgrade the knowledge in various fields of Moroccan crafts, and stimulate the development of new artistic techniques. The project tests the limits of materials and techniques used by local craftsmen and examines how traditional art can be drawn out of its traditional forms in order to develop a new aesthetic and cultural language.



How did this project start?

I've been researching traditional artisanal crafts in Morocco for quite some time now and I was interested in how the evolving cultural context can become a source of inspiration and innovation in order to advance the state of these crafts. While finishing my Masters program in Paris I became more interested in the particularities of context, of how details like geography, politics, society, and others can shape an identity and end up influencing the art itself. So I knew that if I were to contribute to the development of the artisanal scene in my country I had to immerse myself in the different contexts in order to understand all the details related to a particular craft, learn about the people making this craft, their techniques, their way of life, and from there try to improve them.

It makes sense to think that a project with the scope and ambition of *Entre 2* will face a lot of resistance, especially from the very craftsmen it attempts to involve. How was your experience like?

After two and a half years of working on this project and dealing with different artisans, I realized that there are different types of resistance. It also depends on which part of the country you're in. When I was working with the embroiders in the North, which is a very conservative and closed community, it was really hard at first to establish a relationship with them because they looked at me as a foreign intruder, a free woman coming to their area to ruin their daughters [laughs].

So I spoke to the director of an art space there, in Tetouan, and we decided to work with the students at a local school. Once we had access to the kids and gained their trust, they then became our link to the parents. I also understood that I had to connect with someone from there and was lucky enough to meet a man who was born in the Medina and was very well known there. He showed me around and introduced me to people. I also made an effort to respect the context I'm in, so for example when I first went to the school I wore a *gelaba*.

Other than that, on a more general note, the main resistance I faced was involving the craftsmen in the beginning, because they are used to one way of work which they've been doing for a really long

time. This is a very noble thing of course, but it can end up becoming routine work and makes them averse to trying new stuff. So I always have to find a way to trigger their curiosity and excite them to be involved in a new project and experiment with a new technique.

"I would like to be able to work towards reinventing very old and traditional crafts and preserve the techniques used in making them."

Are there any specific regions you're focusing on?

The long-term goal is to be able to focus on all parts of Morocco because I would like to create a connection between the different regions that are somehow disconnected. I find that people don't connect anymore with each other as they used to. The embroiders of Tetouan are only known in their region whereas in the past their craft used to be recognized nationwide. So far I've worked in four different regions (embroidery in Tetouan, ceramics in the Ourika Valley, rubber recycling in Targa, and weaving in the Atlas Mountains). While doing this I realized that if I actually take the time to face the resistance and try to work with the locals on their traditional crafts, and after that start introducing the world to these crafts, their history, where they come from, etc., then this would be the first achievement.

How many craftspeople are involved in the project?

On each project I try to connect and work with 15-20 craftsmen from the community.

What's your dream for *Entre 2*?

The issues raised in this project are about the transformation of local crafts in Morocco. The project aims to rethink the relationship between local and cultural identity within a globalized context. The objective is to help reinterpret crafts in contemporary structures and enhance their chances of survival in modern society. So I would like to be able to work towards reinventing very old and traditional crafts and preserve the techniques used in making them. It's a really long process though. In

parallel I'm trying to find different ways to exhibit these works and expose the world to them.

What has been the response of the craftsmen and women?

There have been a lot of very positive responses. In the last project in the Atlas Mountains where each of the weavers is working on their own, I wanted to gather them and get them to work together. So I spoke to the Director of a women's association in a town that has many weavers and we managed to gather a lot of women to work on a project. In this region they produce a big traditional carpet called *Bou Charouit* and we decided to work on one in collaboration with all the women, using a special technique of weaving which is very famous to the extent that it has become so trivial. I decided to use this technique in a new way so that the craftswomen could look at it differently. Added to that, the *Bou Charouit* is usually a really colorful piece but I asked them to work on one in pure white. I felt that this idea could help them imagine something else and shift their perspective as to what could be done. I also insisted that they work gently with the fabric, like a jeweler, and not roughly like they're used to. After a lot of resistance we got started on the project. Finally, the day came to uncover the carpet and everyone gathered to look at what they'd done. And it so happened that it was snowing on that day. So the big white piece was unfolded as the snow was falling and the sight was just magical, almost sacred. The women were very surprised and at first started apologizing to me because they thought that they had done something wrong because the piece was not what they're usually used to. And I told them that we did something new, and we have to give it a new name. So they gave it a new name, and a few days later I came back and saw them working on a new one in green. It was just an incredible experience.

And all the projects are like that. You always start with a lot of resistance but then you somehow end up reaching your goal. And throughout the process, their mind changes, the way they look at their craft and at their technique changes, everything changes.



- O • Reinterpret crafts in contemporary structures and enhance their chances of survival in modern society
- B
- J
- E • Transform the process of production and design of local crafts through innovation
- C
- T • Enhance the potential of innovation and improvement (technically and artistically) of Moroccan craftsmen
- I
- V
- E • Focus on the future generation of craftsmen by reconceiving the traditional arts and find forms that will revive interest in them in the contemporary circumstances
- S
- Build bridges between the generation of master craftsmen and the new generation influenced by modern lifestyles



WEAVERS
Atlas Mountain

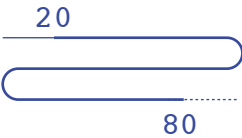
Some of the female weavers working on a new carpet called Bou Oumlil. Oumlil means white in Arabic



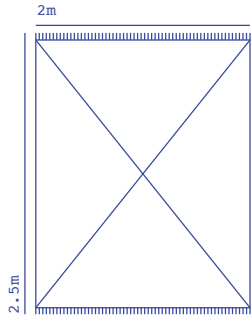
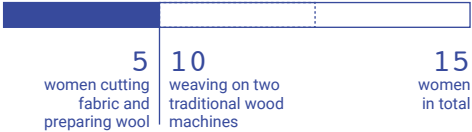
120m
of white
recycled fabric

28
working
days

The age range



Division of tasks



The outcome was
2 large carpets

“All the projects are like that. You always start with a lot of resistance but then you somehow end up reaching your goal. And throughout the process their mind changes, the way they look at their craft and at their technique changes, everything changes.”

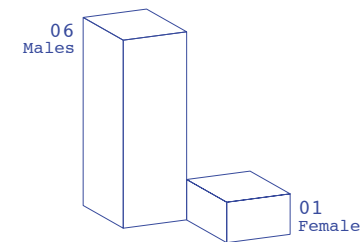


CERAMICS
Ourika Village

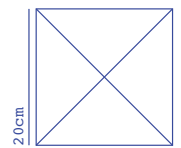
Craftmen working on ceramic patterns in Ourika

02
years

200
of natural
clay



The outcome was a set of tiles



05 NEW TECHNIQUES
were introduced to the craftsmen
in Ourika Valley and Atlas Mountain

Maison des Cinéastes

Institution 12 Y.O
MAURITANIA

سينما المقاطعات

CINEMA CROSSROADS

Interview with Abderrahmane Lahy, Director at Maison des Cineastes in Mauritania, who is spearheading a program that helps young Mauritanian filmmakers in various provinces create their first films.

How did the idea for the project come about?

From the beginning of the 1960s until the beginning of the 1980s, Mauritania went through a cinematic boom that was quite significant in comparison to the country's relative age since independence (gained in 1960). That boom saw a period of substantial local film production, with lots of people going to train abroad, and the opening of movie theaters in most of the country's provinces. At one point there were more than 10 different movie theaters in the capital, Nouakchott, which at the time had a population of about 400,000.

It reached a point where cinema was so popular that entire families and politicians, including the head of state, would go to attend movies at the commercial theaters.

One day, this all came to a sudden halt however, without prior warning. The movie theaters began disappearing one after the other, and the movie-makers all emigrated abroad, and the Ministry of Information disrupted the administration of cinema in the country. Art also effectively disappeared from the school curriculums.

This period of inactivity went on for about 20 years. When the Association of Filmmakers was founded in April 2002, their reading of the situation pushed them to work along two urgent tracks: reviving the collective movie-going experience by showing films that directly address Mauritani-ans, and where they might see reflections that they might be able to identify with immediately, and advanc-

ing the largest possible number of young people through courses on the ABC's of cinema to allow them to get a first leg up in the industry.

This is how the idea of the program, entitled *Do You Speak the Language of Images?* came about. It's a three-five day training course for young people in the provinces on the basics of the cinematic arts, covering everything from the basic idea, to script-writing, cutting, direction and editing.

During its first years, the program continued to operate under the same name, without any association to the programming of the *Nouakchott International Festival for Short Films*. In the end, the name was changed to *Cinema of the Provinces*, and its graduates began producing short films for competitive entry in the festival.

How were the films chosen? What are the subjects with which they deal?

There are two processes by which we choose the nine films. First is an administrative one whereby we choose the competitors by coordinating with the municipal districts, as well as with regional delegates for culture and youth and local networks and associations for youth. The second is artistic, and it takes place over two phases: the first by soliciting a number of topic suggestions from the participants, related to their own local or even national concerns, and then we narrow it down to one topic. The script is then written during the training workshop. The participants then split up into creative teams in order to produce the film under the financial and creative support of the Filmmaker's Association and its partners.

After the production of all the films, they are then presented to the Festival team, who decides whether or not each film will be entered into competition. The designated films are then entered into a general competition entitled "Workshop Films," alongside the other films produced through workshops organized by the Filmmaker's Association or any other party.

What are the noticeable changes that you have witnessed since the launching of the project?

The most important changes that have taken place include:

- The creation of a substantial new generation of young filmmakers who are able to produce their films completely independently of the Filmmaker's Association and who are able to either participate in its activities or to submit their films to the *Nouakchott Festival*, or to other regional or international festivals.
- The graduation of a significant number of young people who have gone on to continue their cinematic training with the Filmmaker's Association and who today have come to make up a major part of the creative and technical staff in the local television stations that have cropped up during the last years.
- The strong and bold change in the issues that are raised by the films being made, a significant departure from the uncontroversial or self-indulgent topics dominant in the media. The films are questioning many complex issues and tackling thorny questions that remain taboo.
- Some of the young people who benefitted from the project courses and its support returned to their towns in the interior and established their own small film festivals there (for example, the *Kaédi Film Festival*, or the *Boghé River Image Festival*), screening local films and organizing training courses for the village youth who don't have access to the capital and therefore can't take part in any of the creative services available there.

"The films are questioning many complex issues and tackling thorny questions that remain taboo."

In your opinion, how might films play a role in positively contributing to social, cultural and political change?

Any artistic or cultural output contributes to positive change, first, on the artists themselves, and this is indeed what happened with many of the participants in the project. And when the number of films being produced increases, it creates a local culture around the creation and reading of the image, and gives a measure of freedom to the viewer to be able to discuss issues that were previously invisible or absent. The use of modern creative forms and techniques also raises

the level of public awareness and audience etiquette among the Mauritanian nomad communities.

And when these films begin raising discussion about issues that were previously silent or hidden under the table, this can be considered direct evidence of social and political change. Some of these young filmmaker’s films raised issues such as the painful 1989 events in Mauritania, bisexuality, extremism, etc.

As a sequel to the previous question, do you feel that the films you support fulfill this role in Mauritania and how?

Among the current generation, the Filmmaker’s Association’s selection and its production of films is distinguished through its philosophy, founded on building up the Mauritanian person and shedding light on all the terrible, hidden things in the social fabric, while at the same time working on building bridges between peoples and cultures, especially in a country with so many cultures itself, which has both its benefits and its pitfalls.

That’s why our support for this generation goes beyond the temporary relationship forged during the training workshops, building into other meetings and programs that help strengthen the desire for positive change and for taking matters into one’s own hands. In fact we see evidence of that every time we see the output produced by one of our workshop or program participants of this generation.

What are the challenges you face? Do you face any opposition from the censorship board, or do you have a certain measure of freedom of expression?

There is no censorship board for films in the institutional sense in Mauritania; the issue really comes down to the whims of those who make up the private sector that’s responsible for culture. We faced seizure or confiscation only twice: first in conjunction with the documentary *Drowned in Oblivion* by the Belgian filmmaker Pierre-Yves Vanderweerd, a film that talks about the inhuman treatment of black Mauritanian prisoners in the city of Oualata. The Ministry excused itself from showing the film under the pretext that the country

was going through political transition, which is of course an empty excuse, and promised to allow it to be screened at a later time. They didn’t fulfill their promise, which drove us to show it without their permission. The second time was with the film, *1989*, produced by the Filmmaker’s Association and directed by one of our training workshop participants. The film talks about the bloody clashes of 1989, but we won the battle that time by going over their heads and appealing directly to the presidency of the republic.



- Provide young Mauritians with tools for self expression
- Establish cinema clubs in various Mauritanian provinces
- Use film as a tool for social change

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09

TOTAL
number of films per year

“And when these films begin raising discussion about issues that were previously silent or hidden under the table, this can be considered direct evidence of social and political change.”



06:00 mins
TOTAL
length of each film

Cinéma et Mémoire

Institution
ALGERIA

06 Y.O

رحلات إلى مدن إفريقية

PASSAGES IN AFRICAN CITIES

Cinéma et Mémoire is an association of cinema professionals that has been providing training and audiovisual resources to film professionals in Algeria for over a decade. In October 2014, the association launched a competition of short films for young filmmakers in eight African countries, in partnership with L’Institut de la Ville en Mouvement and Kaïna Cinema. The selected participants will take part in a creative workshop that guides them through the making of their films. Habiba Djahnine, Cinéma et Mémoire’s Director, gives us more details.

What inspired the idea to create such a program?

The idea is to share practical experiences in cinematography with youngsters that have never made films. L’Institut de la Ville en Mouvement (IVM) asked me to be part of their steering committee and work with them on the setting up of a multi-disciplinary project around the notion of “Urban Passages” as a space in transition within the urban environment. Since they had never worked on the African continent before, they asked me to come up with a program of short films around the theme of “filming the passage in African cities”. So I suggested a short film competition followed by a creative workshop to be held in each partner country. There are eight countries involved in this program.

What is the value of this project in your opinion?

The most important thing is to get the participants to work collectively in a creative workshop and establish a dynamic relationship between the different partners, to share experiences and practices, and to give young people residing in Africa opportunities to make themselves known. Through this kind of program, we’re able to discover new talents and provide them with the opportunity to get known. Cinema programs cannot only take place in schools; experiences like these are needed for young filmmakers to discover themselves, work on themselves, and create. Through the competition, they will have the means to make their films possible.

Why did you choose the theme Urban Passages?

As I said, we adhered to the IVM’s program. I find that the theme of “Passage” is a promising and creative subject. It will allow us to generate a portrait of the lifestyle and the mutations that are at play in our cities, which are too urbanized, badly organized and overpopulated, but with an incredible creative potential and zest for life. To me, this kind of theme can reveal interesting things about our African societies to us. The appropriation of the urban space, if well analyzed, allows for the emergence of solutions on how to live better.

What has the response of the participants about the program been?

The partners, cinema associations, cinema schools, and production companies immediately adhered to this project. It is rather unifying and also universal. Given that we have just launched the competition we have not yet received many proposals so I can’t say a lot about the participants’ responses.

Who is the competition aimed at and what are your goals?

The competition is aimed at students in cinema or young self-taught filmmakers who have made at least one first film before applying, live in the African continent and are under 35 years old. The project seeks to promote the work of young artists in festivals, TV shows and exhibitions. The final goal is to create a high-quality short film collection pack based on a collective experience.



- Provide training and support to the next generation of filmmakers in Africa
- Develop methodologies of partnership among African countries
- Create films that explore various dimensions of different African cities

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Dar al-Mussawir

Institution 02 Y.O
LEBANON

عشر قصص للاجئين سوريين في لبنان

TEN STORIES FROM SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

The turmoil and violence in Syria have forced millions of citizens to flee and seek shelter in neighboring countries. In Lebanon, the incoming number of Syrian refugees has been estimated to be more than 2,000,000, the majority of which are living under very dire and severe conditions.

Aid organizations and the media tend to focus their efforts and coverage on the refugees in the tented settlements scattered throughout the country, mostly in the Bekaa Valley and Akkar, due to the harsh living conditions endured (extreme weather, lack of sanitation, access to water, medical services, education, etc.). Little has been done however to address the needs of the Syrian youths

living in Beirut, who are searching for means to support themselves and develop their capacities and skills after they were forced out of their schools and country.

Among the Syrians in Beirut is a significant demographic that constitutes college students, artists, filmmakers, photographers and other creative talents. Many of them have finished their studies in Syria but are yet to find working opportunities in Lebanon. They are constantly looking for sources of income in this new environment.

Dar al-Mussawir, a photographic and cultural center in Beirut that aims to promote image culture in the region and support marginalized communities through self-advocacy and awareness, have launched a program that aims to provide 20 Syrian refugees, aged between 18 and 25 years and living

in Beirut, with video and editing training through a series of workshops. Working in pairs, the program will allow them to develop short films ranging between five and seven minutes, covering various aspects of the Syrian refugees' life in Lebanon.

"The stories are expected to span from tented settlements dispersed throughout the Lebanese provinces, to stories of the middle and upper classes. The participants will be supported with the contacts, access and technical support in order to make their videos," shares Ramzi Haidar, Founder of Dar al-Mussawir.

In the first edition, which has just begun, 20 participants were enrolled. Haidar says that they received a large number of applications, which shows that this type of program is highly needed.

The videos will provide the participants with a creative outlet to express their stories, memories, worries, fears, and dreams. In addition, it's a chance to interact with Syrians from other communities and to share an insight into their lives through film. The videos will be screened in various locations throughout the country and later broadcasted on social media platforms as well as on international media like TV5, ARTE, CNN and Al Jazeera. The broadcasting of the videos will act as a powerful tool for advocacy and raising awareness about the lives of Syrians in Lebanon.

Importantly, Haidar believes that the training will provide these unemployed and mostly marginalized participants with professional means to help kick-start their careers as filmmakers. "The long-term objective is to create job opportunities for them by offering them training and developing their skillsets," he explains.

Dar al-Mussawir has done similar projects before with other Syrian and Palestinian refugees, in collaboration with Zakira, a non-profit that also focuses on promoting image culture. Haidar says that the impact of the previous projects has been very positive. As part of the *Lahza* project, they distributed 500 cameras to 500 Syrian children, in a similar fashion to *Lahza 1*, which was done with 500 Palestinian refugees. *Lahza* provided troubled children with the opportunity to record, document and talk about their lives through images. It was an artistic and recreational way to help them express

their feelings, step out of their difficult reality and help them recuperate from their trauma. The images were later published in a book and displayed to the public in an exhibition.

Haidar believes that these projects are opening up a whole new world of opportunities for the participants, some of which have found jobs abroad. As far as this program is concerned, he says that the short videos are only the beginning. "We are providing them with the equipment and technical knowhow, but after that they're free to develop their short films into full-fledged documentaries and share their stories with the world."



- O • Train Syrian youths on film and video editing
- B • Produce 10 films exploring various aspects of Syrian refugees' lives
- J
- E • Create advocacy and raise awareness through film
- C
- T • Provide work opportunities for marginalized refugees
- I
- V
- E
- S



1 184 813
TOTAL
number of registered Syrian refugees

1 196 296
TOTAL
number of concerned Syrian refugees

11 483
TOTAL
number of refugees awaiting registration

UNHCR Figures as of April 2015

ASSABIL

Institution 15 Y.O
LEBANON

مهرجان حرش بيروت

HORSH BEIRUT FESTIVAL



ASSABIL has been organizing the *Horsh Beirut Festival*, a multi-layered and free festival in the biggest green space in Beirut since 2011. The Municipality of Beirut opens this green space to the public only for this one event, which has attracted between 6,000 and 8,000 visitors in the past years, mostly coming from the densely inhabited and deprived neighborhoods surrounding the park.

Can you give us some background about the festival?

Ali Sabbagh, Activities Coordinator The creation and opening of public spaces and making them available to the public has been a major challenge and a top priority for ASSABIL, since we opened the first public library in the Bachoura neighborhood of Beirut in 2000. With the launch of the *Horsh Beirut Festival* in 2011, we have worked to ensure access to public spaces and culture beyond the walls of public libraries. By organizing high-quality cultural activities during this annual festival, we can reach new audiences and conquer the public spaces in the city.

How is this Festival related to your organization's mission of promoting public libraries and reading?

ASSABIL works on promoting public libraries as public spaces and as spaces for dynamic cultural activities that are accessible to everyone. The Festival created an opportunity to open Horsh Beirut to the public and offer a cultural program related to books and reading, and also provide visibility for the libraries.

We are presenting a high-level cultural program for free, and offering people a chance to visit Horsh Beirut, which is otherwise a closed (public) park. Also, it's a chance for us to show the municipality of Beirut that a lot of people are coming to the park and they're respecting the space, contrary to what the municipality presumes. So hopefully in the long run, this will convince the municipality to open up the park to the public.

Do you see any progress on this front?

The Festival has been going on since 2011 and in the last conference organized by the municipality, they said that they would open it in one or two years.

"In the current fragile and volatile environment, we think it is particularly important to promote public spaces as shared spaces of culture, imagination, enjoyment, and peaceful coexistence."

What was the main highlight of the fourth annual festival held in 2014?

For the last edition we aimed to develop the festival artistically in a way that supports its longstanding goal to open inaccessible and closed public spaces to the public. So we worked with Lebanese and French artists and performers with expertise in street art to develop and create performances directly inspired by Horsh Beirut and other prominent public spaces in the city. Our goal was to use ASSABIL's mobile library to go beyond the *Horsh Beirut Festival* to other public spaces in Beirut such as the Seafront Corniche and the city's public gardens.

By working with street art companies and artists, something we have not done in the past, we have added a new dimension to the festival. After this first exchange, we will further develop these ideas at future festivals as we build stronger ties with local and international artists and experts.

What in your opinion is the most important value that the festival is creating?

We strongly believe that public spaces and cultural activities are critical in developing societies, especially in times of tension, conflict, and upheaval. Through the proposed program, we seek to introduce audiences to a creative world, a world that deals differently and imaginatively with societal problems and tensions that are so pervasive in too many of these spaces. In the current fragile and volatile environment, we think it is particularly important to promote public spaces as shared spaces of culture, imagination, enjoyment, and peaceful coexistence. Our libraries, and the other public spaces where

12

TOTAL
number of artists

“Public spaces
and cultural activities
are critical in
developing societies,
especially in times
of tension, conflict,
and upheaval.”

7000

TOTAL
number of visitors

we work, have become platforms for communication and collaboration among artists, writers, and performers. This project will enable us to further strengthen this role, paving the way for future collaborations.

How has the response been so far?

In the beginning we were worried about opening up a really big space. We thought that people would come in and break things and ruin the park, but then we saw that they're extremely disciplined and they started waiting for the festival. This shows that people are hungry for these spaces.

Tell us more about your programs to promote reading. Besides managing the libraries, do you also distribute books?

We don't distribute books since libraries are for free. They are open to the public and lend books for free, as well as having free internet. You can borrow seven books for three days. We also organize a lot of different cultural activities like cine clubs, music nights, etc. So on a cultural level, they play a very important role because they're providing information to people and increasing the educational level through the various resources they provide. On a social level, they are spaces for democracy because people from all ages and religious backgrounds are coming together to meet. We also work with the kids of public schools who come for special visits because they don't have libraries at their schools. We focus on creating cultural programs and training librarians to encourage people to read. Teenagers are very hard to attract so we try to do workshops in photography, puppetry, writing, and we are also working with students of secondary schools on debating clubs.

That's really interesting, especially in a country where it's really hard for people to engage in civilized debate. How has the impact been on the students?

It's been very good and you can even notice the changes on the students themselves, because they get a lot of practice and training preparing for the live debates. You can notice a change in their arguments, in how they find the right argu-

ment, in how they speak publicly, etc. We are also bringing schools from different neighborhood, like from Ashrafieh and Dahieh for example, to debate against each other.



- Develop public spaces as places for arts and culture
- Promote artistic exchanges among artists from different backgrounds
- Offer audiences, especially from deprived neighborhoods, with a high-quality, free-of-charge cultural program
- Lobby the Municipality of Beirut to permanently open the Horsh Beirut Park
- Promote reading and encourage civilized debate

Ma3mal 612

Institution 05 Y.O
JORDAN

مهرجان كرامة

KARAMA FESTIVAL

From Amman to Gaza with Hope is a project by the Arab Network for Human Rights Films, which is a division of the Karama Human Rights Film Festival (HRFF) in Jordan. It was initiated in 2013 with the objective of creating a cultural platform to shed light on human rights' issues through film. The project involves filmmakers, artists, activists and other stakeholders, mainly based in Gaza and Amman.

The organizers believe that the project can create a bridge that connects Amman and Gaza; it's an indirect solidarity campaign. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, they believe that the festival can make people more hopeful. "We aim to implant hope as a seed that could later create impact and change," says Ehab al-Khatib, who spearheads *From Amman to Gaza with Hope*.

The 2015 edition of the festival was supposed to be held in February, but due to the blockade in Gaza, it was postponed till May 2015. Within this context, it's also fitting to mention that one of the festival's objectives is to challenge the Gaza blockade by seeking to communicate and engage with the Palestinian audiences through cinema.

This year's films, some of which were produced by filmmakers from Gaza, were selected by a viewing committee composed of film experts from Am-

man and members from the Lama Film Group in Gaza, which is a partner on this project. The chosen films tackle various human rights violations, with some situations relevant to the Arab region and others more universal. The films will be followed by interactive discussion sessions, with the goal of creating dialogue and debates, which al-Khatib thinks are essential tools for change.

Al-Khatib's two favorite films from this year's program are *Sarah* and *The Beach*, which discuss the situation in Gaza. Al-Khatib's own film, *Taa Marbouta*, is also showing. The film is about identity complications and discusses the right of Jordanian women who marry non-Jordanians to pass on their nationality to their children (in many cases the children are from Palestinian fathers). There are also films by amateurs from Gaza. "The project in all its elements aims to explore the situation of cinema in Gaza, so it was important to include films produced in Gaza, despite the lack of opportunities and tools. These films bring to light Gaza's issues and present an honest portrait of the city," al-Khatib explains.

The films will be mainly screened at al-Nasr Cinema, an old cinema house that has been destroyed by the occupation. The organizers hope that by organizing the festival there, they would inject life back into this once-prominent cultural center. The idea was inspired by Khalil Muzayen's film entitled *Gaza 35mm*, which exposes the situation of cinemas in Gaza and the lack of spaces where films can be screened to the public. "The scenes in the film made us remember these places that are supposed to spread life and vivacity but have now been destroyed. They forced us to claim responsibility of this issue and take action," he says. Screening on the ruins of al-Nasr will be a symbol of life; it will inject colors into a black space and allow people to hope for a better world. Selecting destroyed cinema houses and open spaces in Gaza for film screenings and activities proves that possibilities can be created, despite the lack of resources and tough conditions."

Needless to say, the project hasn't been easy to implement given the blockade and the political realities in Gaza but the organizers are proud that despite all these difficulties they are succeeding at creating a space that allows people to hope.

“Selecting destroyed cinema houses and open spaces in Gaza for film screenings and activities proves that possibilities can be created, despite the lack of resources and tough conditions.”



Mohammed Hawajri, Red Carpet, Gaza



380
TOTAL
number of spectators

08 TOTAL
number of screened
themed films

Four Palestinian cities

- 📍 Ramallah
- 📍 Jerusalem
- 📍 Nablus
- 📍 Gaza

YANTE

Institution
PALESTINE

04 Y.O

يمكنني أن أتحرك

I CAN MOVE

The organizers of the *I Can Move* project in Palestine believe that dance can be a tool for addressing specific social development obstacles, like inequality, exclusion, fragmentation and post-traumatic stress disorder. The program includes weekly community classes with disabled participants, women, the elderly, and children in villages, as well as thematic performances to raise awareness and engage participants physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually. Nadia Arouri, the Artistic Director of the program tells us more about her vision.

Tell us more about the program and how it all started.

The program has two different aspects. The first is the training program, which has been going on for four years now and the objective behind it is to

teach students dance technique. The second aspect is the outreach program that we do, and it mainly consists of community building through dance. We launched a pilot in 2011, evaluated it, made some changes to it, and then started a 12-months, four-years training program in 2012. We are now in the fourth and last year of this program.

What does the training program consist of?

We are training dance therapists, not just dancers, so throughout the different modules, we teach them various educational skills. Participants are trained in dance therapy, psychology, nonviolent communication, possibility management, and project management, among other things. The objective is to give them the tools that would allow them to become dance therapists and activists.

How is the selection process like?

When we first launched the program we sent out a call for applications through our networks in Palestine. It was important for us to get out of the elitist intellectual and cultural circle and reach everyone.

We didn't want to be exclusive. What we consider important in the selection is that the students show interest and commitment. They come in the beginning and try out for a month and if they feel that it is something they could pursue, they sign a contract with us and become part of the program. We don't have audition exams because I don't believe that within two hours you can prove to someone who hasn't seen you or doesn't know you that you're good enough.

What made you believe in the possibilities of such a program?

I studied dance and saw the impact of both the psychological and physical process on my body and on my growth. And since I'm a Palestinian, it became obvious to me that dance is an important tool in societies that are extremely traumatized.

"Dance as a communal therapeutic activity enhances peace by advancing the social development of individuals and communities through addressing elements of social divide (gender equality, stereotyping, exclusion, marginalization and fragmentation)."

Do you think that dance could really heal?

Dance as a communal therapeutic activity enhances peace by advancing the social development of individuals and communities through addressing elements of social divide (gender-equality, stereotyping, exclusion, marginalization and fragmentation). If you look at post-traumatic growth theory, they say that in order to achieve growth instead of stress (PTSD) in situations of post-trauma, you have to enhance in each individual four resiliencies—emotional resilience, physical resilience, social resilience, and mental resilience. Dance provides an experience that enhances all of these four pillars. It is an absolutely emotional experience, even when you're not necessarily dealing with an emotional topic. There is an important element of human touch involved, and when any person is in touch with another person for six seconds, their body

starts producing oxytocin, which is the happy hormone. The physical is rather evident. The social is because dance is usually done in social groups; you have to watch out for the space and be an active part of that space. As for the mental, which is usually split into cognitive and intellectual resiliencies: you have to count, mark the counts, coordinate the movement of your body, listen to music, etc., and also in community dance participants tackle intellectual issues related to the society. So dance is one of the strongest tools in terms of achieving growth after trauma.

What has the impact been so far?

I could go on forever! There is one really important story from our pilot phase, which we did in a conservative, Christian village called Zababde, which borders a Muslim village called Tammoun. The villages have a long history of infighting, so when we asked the students from Tammoun to come to Zababde and participate in the program, the principal of the Christian school didn't let them in. So we went in and were really harsh on him until he finally approved to let the students in. At the end of the training, we organized a show in the playground of the school, and it was astonishing to see other students from Tammoun come watch the performances. Even the municipality chiefs of the two villages came and shook hands and it was kind of like making peace.

When we worked with the street children, you could see the change on a social level. Our policy is to bring together groups from different backgrounds, so in this case we had street children working with children from private schools. This technique helps in building bridges in the society. Some of the children became friends after the program. Even some of the girls reported being harassed less after they became friends with the street kids.

We also have cases of physical triumph whereby disabled participants were able to expand the possibilities of their bodies. There are really so many examples. You can sense change on all levels, from challenging gender and disability stigmas to social and economic marginalization.



175

TOTAL

number of participants including street children, handicapped, elderly, culturally differentiated youth and mixed groups

What about the impact on the participants themselves?

This is a very tough question. They've grown a lot, although I am always criticizing them! One has to acknowledge that they come from completely different backgrounds.

In the beginning when we gave out exercises, the men were more playful and creative than the women; they'd jump and go on their hands, while the women were more scared and conservative. I can say this of all the women in the program; when they begin with us they are much weaker than the men and they don't dare to play around with their body. And it's really interesting to see the incredible growth they experience throughout the program. They open up; you could see shackles torn away.

In the past four years, you've worked with street kids, the disabled, the elderly and women. What will you be working on this year?

This year the participants have their graduation project, so we've let them set the themes. They're doing it all by themselves. In the first performance four years ago, we had to organize everything ourselves. The next year they learned the choreography and kind of taught it to the students under the mentorship of professional teachers, and in the third year they did the choreography themselves, and also worked on the press and marketing. This year they have to do everything by themselves.

What will happen after this fourth year?

It's a big question, which we've been thinking a lot about. We have just managed to convince the Palestinian Commercial Bank and Pedico Holding to hire two of our students as full timers with the task of teaching dance in community centers and schools in Palestine. I consider this as a huge success because we have not only managed to include the private sector, but also to get them to take charge and step up in building society. In Palestine there's a misconception that marketing and CSR are one thing, but they're not. Marketing is short term selling. CSR on the other hand is a really long-term commitment where you work on projects that could indirectly lead to profits for your company because the entire society is better educated.



- o • Contribute to the social development of Palestinian individuals and communities by addressing elements of social divide such as stereotyping, inequality, exclusion, marginalization and fragmentation
- B
- J
- E
- C
- T • Raise levels of self and communal empathy within the Palestinian society
- I
- V • Break stereotypes by addressing issues of gender equality, power of the disabled, and the creativity of the socially marginalized
- E
- S
- Work with stigmatized individuals like violated women, young females and children in schools from varying socio-economic backgrounds
- Enhance gender equality and fight stigmatization and social fragmentation
- Promote empathy amongst individuals and empower them to become productive, active citizens
- Promote intercultural cooperation

Zakharef in Motion

Institution 02 Y.O
JORDAN

مخيّم الرّاقصين الرّحل

NOMAD DANCE CAMP

Founded in 2007 in Jordan, ‘Zakharef in Motion’ is a local, non-profit organization aimed at promoting dance and free body expression in Jordan and the region. Its eponymous dance festival is an annual encounter of international, regional and local dance performances and workshops. Their interestingly peculiar name holds key to the context in which this dance movement was born and the much-needed goals its team is eager to achieve.

“Zakharef in Motion wasn’t our original name,” says Dina Abu Hamdan, the organization’s founder and artistic director, “When we started the festival in 2007, it was called Amman International Dance Festival, AIDF. After its success, the Islamic Brotherhood wrote a statement against the government’s support of a dance festival because it’s *haram*. The year after, we faced difficulties in securing funds for the festival due to the repercussions of that announcement, so we changed the name,” she continues. “Our new name, ‘Zakharef in Motion,’ pays tribute to traditional arabesque and architectural lines that are formed by dancing bodies. ‘Zakharef’ is a symbolic name for the body in motion, and the festival survived!”

Amidst the rapid socio-political changes and economic challenges facing the Arab region today,

its young dancers are increasingly threatened by a lack of resources crippling their production, mobility, and professional development. Dance amongst other forms of art is seen as a blasphemous act, unnecessary luxury or illegitimate means of self-expression. The work done by ‘Zakharef in Motion’ is crucial in shaking off old stigmas and setting more fertile grounds for culturally engaged future generations. Its different platforms are directly reflected into the artistic, cultural, and social lives in Jordan, motivating, encouraging and developing the arts, and especially dance, in a positive and progressive way, boosting local identity and presence in the global performing arts scene.

“Cultural and artistic organizations have the power to reach out to the masses, touch their hearts, change their thoughts, open their minds, create a better understanding of our values and roots, and build communities based on dialogue.”

Through ACEF, ‘Zakharef in Motion’ was able to set up a very unique workshop, the ‘NOMAD Dance Camp,’ a regional project that joined the experience of North African and Middle Eastern dancers, empowering the culture of sharing, inviting them to reflect on the similarities and differences amongst them through performance. This is a very rare type of collaboration, mainly because of lack of funds and logistical obstacles as basic as

obtaining travel visas, preventing the artists from meeting and working together.

During the three-week residency program, the ‘NOMAD Dance Camp’ encouraged its participants to think about contributing to the political changes on the ground, and not just be affected by them. Seven regional and three Jordanian participants met with international choreographers, writers and directors in a natural reserve in the Jordanian desert. The spectacular setting was a major factor enriching the participants’ solitude and self-reflection regarding their individual and group works.

Throughout this unique experiment, dancers from North Africa and the Middle East shared their visions and projects, forming a dynamic coalition shaking off the rather dormant, isolated and individual state of art production in this part of the world. In collaborating to write a contextual, local performance, each of the young participants channeled their own thoughts, their own language of expression, their own stories to address local communities, and not only the occidental market which they are tempted to address most of the time. Through finding the points of connection between all those writings, and empowering the youth to create and to be heard by their communities, the camp is a strategic preparation for a future network of a young generation of Arab talents. The dance camp’s aim is to create sustainable solidarity among the regional performing artists to face the unstable political and socioeconomic challenges they live in.

While being set in the middle of the desert, the ‘NOMAD Dance Camp’ has an international agenda. It is a firm advocate of the fact that instead of merely accommodating for its own sustainability under tremulous events, cultural activity can actually influence the world very tangibly. “Cultural and artistic organizations have the power to reach out to the masses, touch their hearts, change their thoughts, open their minds, create a better understanding of our values and roots, and build communities based on dialogue and respect,” says Abu Hamdan, “Many examples of how Japan, France and Great Britain used the soft power of culture to build bridges with the world. Through dance or any form of artistic and creative expression, we can

export our thoughts, and break the mainstream. We can defend our integrity and values.”

Abu Hamdan is very clear that the ‘NOMAD Dance Camp’ is not interested in pausing at individual accomplishments, but intends to grow this initiative into a regional movement with an agenda to promote independent thought and freedom of expression. The challenge of balancing between the individual and the collective is crucial in the Arab region where the youths remain untrained to collaborate. Enriching the mainstream without losing artistic integrity is a long-term investment enforced through accepting the other, building trust, and investing a lot of time and effort in the creative sectors.

The ‘NOMAD Dance Camp’ created an opportunity for a learning experience for many practitioners on how to approach the community, yet keep this balance. The community and the artists experienced authentic forms of dialogue where different parties were listening to each other, yet preserving and respecting the personal spaces of one another. The response from the public was as encouraging as that of the participants. Anxieties, doubts and some hidden fears diluted in signs of joyful relief and respect that everyone involved managed to communicate and break the isolation. What’s more relieving is that ‘Zakharef in Motion’ is here to stay, especially after the success of the dance camp. The team is as dedicated as ever to breaking the walls stopping local communities from reaching their full potential, using the tool least expected in the region: dance.



- Create solidarity amongst the regional performing artists in order to face the unstable political and socioeconomic challenges
- Promote freedom of thought and create spaces for expression
- Create Nomad residencies to host artists from countries of conflict
- Build local capacities of artists and dancers
- Launch a roadmap for Pan-Arab mobility between Arab dance practitioners



Danseurs Citoyens

Institution 01 Y.O
TUNISA

صنع في الشارع

MADE BY STREET

Made By Street is a project by Tunisian dance company Danseurs Citoyens with the objective of helping kids living in unfavorable communities in Tunisia to become professional dancers. The participants are offered vocational training and work with professional dancers on developing their technical as well as intellectual capacities.

Danseurs Citoyens started in 2012 as a dance collective that aims to use street art and dance as a way to engage citizens and help them come to terms with their bodies. It is the brainchild of seasoned Tunisian dancer Mohamed Bahri, who believes that the state of professional dance is in his country is completely underdeveloped. “Dance is a type of art that the government neglects; there are no rules or regulations governing this professional practice,

and no national schools or institutions for dance that could help young people kick off their dancing careers and become professionals,” he explains.

Bahri admits that these are issues he has grappled with throughout his 25-year career as a dancer. But the Tunisian Revolution opened up new windows of possibility. It created an opportunity for Bahri to intervene in an attempt to help improve the state of things. Empowered by the energies of change, he, along with some of his fellow dancers, decided to take to the street. “We wanted to work on a project that raises issues related to human rights, democracy and freedom. We personally have our political positions and we wanted to use dance to get them across. When the country is going through terrorism and Islamists are taking over public spaces, our aim is to go to the same places and use our bodies to liberate them.”

October 2014

Bahri and his colleagues succeeded in convincing the Ministry of Culture to establish the National Dance Committee in Tunisia

Bahri’s objective is to establish the foundations of professional dance in Tunisia. “We started by educating young people in underprivileged neighborhoods. They’re not aware of the capacities of their bodies, so we opened a school and started an eight-months educational program during which we taught kids aged between 16 and 25 the techniques needed to create movement with their bodies, to teach them how to think with their bodies, and the relationship between their bodies and the realities around them.” The eight-months program, entitled *Made by Street*, was followed by a two-months creative and experimental workshop during which the students worked on a street performance that was shown in various parts of Tunis.

In its first edition in 2014, *Made by Street* gathered 15 young Tunisians who suffered from enormous social and cultural problems and provided them with a space to express themselves through their bodies. “I think that we need to start creating more healthy relationships with our bodies and the reason I think this still hasn’t happened – and is

not being allowed to happen – is because of the Islamist culture, which has a clear role for the body,” he notes. “There are various social, religious and cultural stigmas that lead people to say that dance is a form of art they don’t understand.”

Bahri believes that the country has a long way to go before it becomes at ease with dancing bodies – and more generally, with talking openly about the body. He says that the impact on the participants has been noticeable and that the program has even opened some doors for them – some landed positions or casting opportunities with foreign dance troupes and others are currently working on their own shows.



FOCUS ON
street dance, clowning, circus, graffiti, break
dance, other alternative types

In 2015, Bahri is launching a second edition with new students. The focus is on the types of art that have no institutions or are not supported in the country, whether legally or culturally, like street dance, clowning, circus, graffiti, break dance, and other alternative types of Art. Bahri feels that there’s a classical take on how things should be done, and that new ideas are often rejected. He reveals that they are planning on creating a big organization that encompasses various smaller organizations, each focusing on one specific form of alternative art.

15

TOTAL
number of participants

Danseurs Citoyen’s efforts to normalize and democratize access to dance and street art are already bearing fruit. They have managed to convince the Ministry of Culture to establish the Nation-

al Dance Committee in October 2014 (they had submitted their proposal in March of the same year). As for the impact on the audiences, he feels that there is a thirst for this type of work. “People need culture, they need happiness,” he says. Their street performances are also helping in challenging the misconceptions and stigmas associated with dancing. “After the shows we hold a discussion and people start asking about what we’re doing and why we’re doing it. I think that these discussions are having a lot of positive impact.”

It might still be early to judge how far this movement will go, but Bahri can already sense a lot of improvements. He cites the hundreds of *Harlem Shake* videos that spread like wildfire around the country, encouraging people to dance publicly. Also, there was the Pharrell Williams’ *Happy* video, which saw the Minister of Education stop the three students who did it. This caused an uproar and a ripple effect in the country, whereby kids in schools started filming their own versions of the *Happy* song and putting it on the internet. After all, as he puts it himself, “You cannot prevent people from dancing.”



- Establish a choreographic center to empower local dancers
- Promote art and dance in underprivileged neighborhoods
- Use dance as a tool to further democracy and freedom of speech
- Democratize and develop dance in Tunisia

Brunel Institute

Institution 12 Y.O
UK

أوبرا مدن الملح

CITIES OF SALT



The world premiere of a new opera by Zaid Jabri, an outstanding young composer from Syria, with a libretto by Rosalind Morris and Yvette Christianse, based on the famous novel *Cities of Salt* by Abdel Rahman Munif.

What's the story behind this Opera? How did the idea come about and how did it all happen?

Oliver Butterworth, Co-director of the Brunel Institute for Contemporary Middle-Eastern Music The distinguished writers, Rosalind Morris and Yvette Christianse, both Professors at Columbia University in New York, approached Professor Peter Wiegold and myself at the Brunel University Institute for Contemporary Middle-Eastern Music (BICMEM), for advice in their search for a composer for their planned opera based on the great first novel of Abdelrahman Munif's trilogy *Cities of Salt*, for which, with permission from the Munif estate, and support from American Opera Projects, they had already written a substantial libretto which now awaited a score. We recommended a selection of composers, amongst whom, and perhaps at the top of the list, was the Syrian Zaid Jabri, whose music and extraordinary gifts we knew well; we had already promoted performances of Zaid's music in London at Cadogan Hall, at LSO St. Luke's, in Dubai and at Oxford University. Through the BICMEM website, Rosalind and Yvette could listen to musical extracts from works by all the suggested composers and also read their biographies and gain contact details. In September 2012 Rosalind wrote to us saying: "I did make contact with Zaid, and more! The exchange has been a thrilling one and have now begun working together on the opera *Cities of Salt*. Yvette Christianse and I will travel to Krakow sometime in the Spring to meet, but in the meantime, we are enjoying an extraordinary correspondence with Zaid, whose conceptualization of the music is exactly what we had hoped for."

This is the first opera by an Arab composer to be taken on by a world class opera house. Why now and why has it taken so long?

There have been other Arab operas – Patrick Lama,

the wonderful pianist from Palestine, wrote an opera *CANAAN* and the very talented Egyptian composer Amr Okba in 2005 wrote *The Book of Going Forth by Day*, which has had a partial concert performance in Stuttgart, and still awaits a proper production. Art music is relatively a new development in many Arab countries and although there are numerous symphony orchestras across the region, most have only come into existence in the last 50 years or so. Of course, Egypt has a long tradition of opera performances but most usually given by visiting Italian companies, as at the premiere of *Aida*. It was Solhi al-Wadi who, as recently as 1995, presented the first ever opera in Syria with Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. Opera in the Middle East is just a little behind the development of the orchestras, and with the many new opera houses, such as the splendid one in Muscat, hopefully it will not be long before opera can be enjoyed across the region.

What were the challenges you faced in making/producing this Opera?

Funding is always the greatest challenge but we are very fortunate in having support from AFAC, and also the London *Shubbak Festival*, who are in turn supported by the Qattan Foundation and the Polish Cultural Institute. But before one gets to the production, funding has also to be found for the librettists and composer and here we have been fortunate to have assistance from the 'Alwan for the Arts' and American Opera Projects, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Bellagio Residence and CEC Artslink and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. But perhaps most importantly it is the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, above all, who by their generous support and enthusiasm are key to making this happen, key to bringing the first Arab opera to the international stage.

Another challenge is finding the ideal singers for the individual and particular roles and we are delighted that the one female role will be taken by the brilliant young Syrian soprano Talar Dekrmanjian. Originally from Damascus, Zaid Jabri studied with Krzysztof Penderecki and is now a Professor of composition at the Krakow Music Academy in Poland and we are delighted that the performance

27
TOTAL
number of musicians

07
TOTAL
number of solo voices

“We cannot understand our world without understanding the place of oil. But the stories of those who were most immediately affected by the discovery of oil have not often been told.”

1st

Opera by an Arab composer to be taken
on by a world class opera house

will be conducted by the Polish conductor Michel Klauza who has often performed Zaid’s music in Poland; Michel Klauza was for some time working in the UK at Welsh National Opera and is now Music Director of Podlasie Opera and Philharmony at the European Centre for Arts in Białystok.

My hope is that this special Royal Opera House event will demonstrate the wonderful artistic and musical talents that are to be found in the Middle East, and help to bring both Talar and Zaid the international recognition they deserve, as much as also reviving interest in Abdel Rahman Munif’s exceptional book.

Although the BICMEM has brought over many musicians and composers to the UK from Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Syria, this is the first time that the BICMEM’s website itself (www.brunel.ac.uk/BICMEM) has produced such an international collaboration. I do hope that, with the generous and continuing support of the Institute by Brunel University London, we will see many more of these exceptional collaborations; it only needs a promoter in for instance Japan to look up ‘symphony’ from say Lebanon, and they will find many symphonic works in a variety of styles from a wide range of Lebanese composers – they can listen to excerpts – they can contact the composers directly and, most importantly, they can then program them in their concert series.

The choice of *Cities of Salt* as the text to be adapted is really interesting. Could you please tell us more about this decision?

Rosalind Morris and Yvette Christiansë, the librettists The world we live in today is, in almost all respects, dependent on oil. It has made new kinds of mobility possible, and demanded the construction of new networks. It has founded cities and threatened environments. It has made some people enormously wealthy and others desperately poor. We cannot understand our world without understanding the place of oil. But the stories of those who were most immediately affected by the discovery of oil have not often been told. Munif’s sequence of novels, which in the English translation is called ‘*Cities of Salt*,’ provides a magnificent exception. We love his writing in these books both for its beau-

ty and because it opens up that history and makes it possible for the reader to grasp the enormity of the transformations that occurred. We believe that Munif tells a story that everyone should hear. And we feel that opera – with its combination of text and music, theater and immersive experience – can make this story available to new audiences, and indeed enliven it further.

The novel which was written in the 1930s depicts a time when Arabs were victims of their rulers and the foreigners. This hasn’t really changed so much today. What is the relationship between the time of the novel and the current time in the Arab region? What can these pre-histories tell us about our contemporary conflict and what can we possibly learn from them?

History is a process of continuity and change. We want audiences to think about what has indeed changed and what has remained the same. Our hope is that in posing this question, people will consider the role of the oil economy in the contemporary situation. We can draw many parallels with the history that Munif invokes, but in the end it is up to audiences to determine how and in what ways it has shaped the conflicts of our time.

Abdel Rahman Munif believed that the mission of literature is to increase awareness and receptiveness in an attempt to create cases for renaissance and revival. Do you think this Opera can help achieve or at least contribute to that?

Our hope is that this Opera, and Opera in general, inspires people to both think and feel differently. It uses story and music to move people, and while it cannot provide answers, it can certainly provoke questions and critical reflection on the world. But it ought not induce despair. In watching and listening to Opera, there should be some excitement about the very process of creation and in this way, Opera can be a source of inspiration for engagement in the world.

Shubbak, a Window on Contemporary Arab Culture

Institution 04 Y.O
UK

النسخة الثالثة من مهرجان شبّاك

SHUBBAK - THE THIRD EDITION

Shubbak Festival has been described as the Arab region's extravaganza in London. The festival brings together a diverse group of Arab artists, writers, filmmakers and musicians to present, perform and exhibit, with the objective of celebrating and promoting contemporary Arab culture and the growing influence of London's Arab population.

It all started in 2011 when London Mayor's Office had the idea of creating a festival that showcases the wealth and breadth of contemporary Arab art to audiences in London. It was a great success but it was just a one-off project that had been initiated by the Mayor. So the steering group, with the support of the A. M. Qattan Foundation and the Al-Qattan Charitable Trust, decided to transition into a fully-fledged independent cultural organization, with the responsibility of organizing the festival once every two years. The second install-



ment took place in 2013. It attracted 55,000 visitors from London and the Arab region, showcased 52 events and hosted artists from 16 Arab countries. “Shubbak is developing into an international festival defined by its content, new artists and programming innovation,” says Daniel Gorman, the Festival’s Director. Gorman is hoping to anchor the festival as a key event in London and the UK’s artistic calendar, as well as within the Arab region.

“It is a confluence of and a platform for different voices and approaches that aim to inspire audiences and create an atmosphere in which Arab artists can communicate and exchange their work in a spirit of openness, collaboration, tolerance and curiosity,” says Eckhard Thiemann, Shubbak’s Artistic Director. Thiemann is responsible for curating the festival’s program, which includes theater, dance, music, visual arts, film, literature, talks and guided tours. For the 2015 edition, which is happening between 11 and 26 July, Thiemann is employing a number of curatorial approaches to achieve his vision. This will consist of a core program of new commissions, premieres and public realm installations, and a wider partner program of events. Program highlights include a 2-day Literary Summit at the British Library, Art in the Public Realm strand of installations in public spaces, artistic interventions into existing London collections, free family events at World’s End Place and the British Museum, a world premiere at the Royal Opera House, and UK premieres of theater and dance performances including Radhouane el-Meddeb, Badke, Nacera Belaza, Meher Awachri, Radouan Mriziga.

“Many of the festival’s artists reflect deeply on their position in time and place, many excavate forgotten and hidden histories, showing a future imbued by the past, and provoking audiences to think about what world we want to live in.”

One of the key themes this year will be an exploration of cities and time. London is a dynamic and fast changing city, where historic culture rubs against the ambitions of new ideas and concepts, where nostalgia and interest in the past is con-

fronted with futuristic ideas and bold imaginings of things to come. Many of the festival’s artists reflect deeply on their position in time and place, many excavate forgotten and hidden histories, showing a future imbued by the past, and provoking audiences to think about what world we want to live in. In particular, many of the artists chart the deep recent changes in Arab societies, the booming optimism of fast growing cities side by side with tragic destructions from war and conflict.

“I think the Arab region is constantly in our daily news and people are looking for other ways of understanding and expressing our relationship to the Arab region. Culture can provide a very different, a more personal and faceted way of understanding something and dealing directly with people, which is very different from what we see in the media,” Thiemann explains.

At a time when the Arab region grapples with political instability and strife, Shubbak is presenting itself as a window for artists to deal with these challenges artistically and to imagine a more inspiring future. After all, artists are at the center of Shubbak. And as the organizers point out: “The artists’ imaginations open up new ways for us to understand our world. Shubbak is the window to these imaginations.”



Hand Painted Porcelain Vase by Raed Yassin
(Kalfayan Galleries)



52

TOTAL
number of events
in 2013

132

TOTAL
editorial pieces in UK
and international media

“The festival speaks
of restless societies
that are questioning
themselves.”

55.000
visitors in 2013

65.000
expected in 2015

Peter Aspden, *Financial Times*

Anya

Institution
MOROCCO

01 Y.O

موسيقى بدون تأشيرة

VISA FOR MUSIC

Visa For Music is a new platform that was inaugurated in Rabat, Morocco in November 2014 with the aim of promoting and developing the music sector in African and Middle Eastern countries. We speak with the founder of this acclaimed initiative, Brahim el-Mazned.

Tell us more about your project.

Visa For Music is a meeting place for artists and everyone interested in music production. It is a platform that aims to create links between the East and the West. It also aims to bridge the gap between the Maghreb (North Africa) and the Machrek (Eastern Mediterranean countries) regions. Despite the proximity of these two regions, there is a disconnection especially on the cultural level. *Visa for Music* will thus allow artists from different parts of the

Arab region and Africa to come together, connect, and collaborate. Through this platform for Middle Eastern and African music, we hope to contribute to the development of the cultural and music sector.

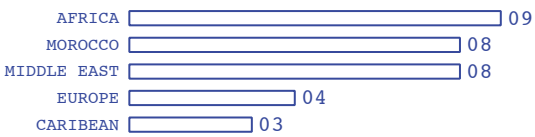
Why was it created?

The project came as a response to the fact that there is an absence – or even a lack – of Middle Eastern and African artists at an international level and from a need to face the profound changes that the music industry is witnessing. It is also an attempt to challenge the unfavorable conditions for artists from the countries of the South. The region offers an artistic and cultural potential that is rich and diverse, but it is widely underexploited. It remains a part of the world that has no international platform for cultural music. Thus, *Visa For Music* is an opportunity to create a movement and foster collaborations between artists and professionals of these regions.

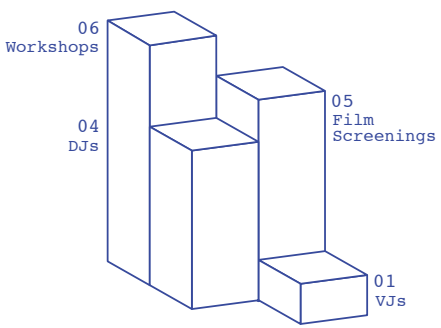


32

TOTAL
number of concerts



“Through music and art we can promote a more hopeful image and appeal to the desires and dreams of young Arabs.”



In November 2014 you organized the first edition of the festival. How was it received?

It was a great success. We received 650 applications from 51 countries and over 1,000 musicians from all over the world attended, most notably from Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Turkey, African countries, and also from Europe and America. It also created opportunities for many musicians. For example, *Mashrou3 Leila* and *N3rdistan* played at the *Montpellier Festival* in France because they were discovered at *Visa For Music*... Also, in the past couple of days I was traveling around in different European countries, and I was so surprised at how many people were aware of it and wanted to be part of the next edition.

“It is an event that is vital to showcase Moroccan musical output, a structure that creates linkages, which was missing... *Visa For Music* takes part in the valorization of artistic production and Morocco’s musical heritage, it’s cultural diplomacy...”

— Mohamed Amine Sbihi,
Moroccan Minister of Culture

What were the main difficulties you faced in making it happen?

In the beginning it wasn’t very clear to people what we were doing because most people are used to certain formats, like either an exhibition for professionals or a music festival. *Visa For Music* is both. It is a meeting point for music professionals during the day and a music festival open to the public at night. The idea is to create a platform where music professionals from around the world can meet, connect and have the opportunity to work together and push for more innovation. We spent a year trying to convince sponsors to come on board but it was really hard to get them to grasp the concept, let alone pick their interest, especially given the challenges and problems the Arab region is facing today economically and culturally. But despite all the difficulties we have gone through in terms of creating interest and making it happen, the success

that we achieved from the first edition shows that this kind of platform is highly needed.

How do you think a festival like this can positively impact the Arab region?

Today there is a dark cloud over the Arab region. Through music and art we can promote a more hopeful image and appeal to the desires and dreams of young Arabs, especially through alternative music, which in itself is the biggest reflection of reality. If we were to support music production in the region and give local alternative acts a chance to emerge and create a new dynamic, and to re-inforce the production of such music, we need to invest in similar platforms. *Visa For Music* is also an international platform and by opening up to the rest of the world it is helping in promoting a positive image of the Arab region. *Visa For Music* is like a window to the Arab region.



- Encourage artistic mobility between African countries and the Middle East
- Participate in the development of the local cultural sector in these areas
- Promote the regional music scene at an international level
- Contribute to the improvement of the status of artists from southern countries
- Strengthen the North-South relationship in the cultural sector



1 000 +

TOTAL
number of attendees

220

TOTAL
number of artists

60

TOTAL
number of exhibitors

Beirut & Beyond

Institution 02 Y.O
BEIRUT

النسخة الثانية من مهرجان "بيروت أند بيوند"

SECOND EDITION



The Beirut & Beyond International Music Festival invites musicians from various backgrounds and influences to perform to a wide-ranging audience in Beirut. It was launched two years ago as a platform for showcasing local and foreign talents, providing the opportunity for exposure, exchange, and dialogue. Festival Director Amani Semaan and Artistic Director Khaled Yassine tell us more about the project.

In just two years you have managed to build an international music festival with a strong line up. Why do you think the audience believed in you?

Khaled Yassine It has been our objective to showcase emerging independent music acts from the Arab region and beyond. A lot of these acts are not really known locally, so when the audiences started discovering them at the festival, it added an element of surprise to the experience. People are buying tickets to concerts for bands they don't really know. This shows that they have come to trust our artistic direction and are eager to discover new talent. The feedback so far has been very positive. We're really happy with the result. It happened really quickly because I think audiences are curious and hungry for new voices.

"There's curiosity and hunger for new voices."

It seems that you are also reaching out to new audiences, not just the elite crowd in Beirut...

Amani Semaan Indeed we are trying to get outside Beirut. In the last edition we had a concert in Tripoli featuring a band called Alif. It was a completely different audience and it was very well received. Next year we are planning to work in different areas because we think that it's very important to decentralize culture in Lebanon.

We hope to build a solid base of festivalgoers that has a knack for independent music and is interested in listening to new styles. One idea we're thinking about is a tour around universities in order

to create curiosity among students early on. The students after all are the next generation of festivalgoers and it is important to trigger their curiosity from now. Also, we make it a point to keep our tickets affordable so that the festival is accessible to everyone.

How do you summarize the goal of B&B?

Khaled Yassine The festival has two main objectives. The first is to help musicians from the Arab region get exposed to the international music scene. Every year we invite festival managers, bookers, agents, labels and other professionals to come see the acts. In the last edition we had 25 international professionals attend the festival. We also organize a Scandinavian tour every year on which we take three or four regional bands that perform to a European audience.

The second objective is to introduce audiences in Lebanon and more generally in the Arab region to new acts and styles and allow them to discover new cultures through music.

"When we organize a high quality music festival, it creates a different image [of the Arab region] and sends a message of hope."

You seem to be putting a lot of effort into the workshops.

Amani Semaan The festival also helps the artists professionally. The workshops are held during the four days of the festival and aim at educating the artists on how to develop their projects legally, economically, artistically, etc. Basically what the artists need to know for their project to be fit for international festivals or labels. I also feel that the importance of these workshops comes from the discussions that are created during the meetings.

In the first edition the workshops weren't very concrete. We had a small presentation by the *Oslo World Music Festival* during which they explained their interest in the Middle East and how they choose the artists from here.

With the support we got from the Danish Embassy, the workshops were more specific in 2014. We did a legal workshop on copyrighting,

which explained everything the musicians need to know about that. The goal is to have a series of legal workshops that touch upon different topics like publishing, licensing, distribution, and other issues. The workshops are free of charge and targeted towards musicians and professionals (agents, managers, venues).

Do you sense a change in the music scene in the Arab region?

Khaled Yassine Locally I think the way we listen to music has changed in the past five years – before and after the revolutions. You now see new independent acts, sometimes controversial, starting to surface in mainstream media. You hear the media also talk about ‘bands’; the concept of a band was unheard of before - you had a lead singer and the rest of the band members were extras. This mainstream impact is still not big enough because TV is still an integral force, but judging from the underground compass, the audience is definitely increasing.

How can the festival in your opinion contribute to the energies of change going on in the region?

Khaled Yassine The artists we work with are not in the mainstream yet and the reason mainstream media doesn’t cover them is because what they say is different from what the mainstream disseminates. Their reach is definitely growing and they’re being heard more, which means that a greater variety of styles are being exposed, and this automatically opens up new channels and opportunities. Also, the surfacing of these bands from the ‘underground’ has a role in challenging the stereotypes about the Arab region, which are specifically entrenched in Western media. The fact that we’re exposing these musicians abroad is helping challenge these stereotypes. And when we organize a high quality music festival, it creates a different image and sends a message of hope. It’s also a confirmation to the artists that whatever they’re saying is valid; they don’t have to adapt to a certain format to fit the mainstream.



- Support local and regional independent musicians by showcasing and promoting their work through an annual four-days festival
- Offer a platform for freedom of expression and positive intercultural exchange in a fragile and conflicted region
- Enable access and participation to culture for all, regardless of age, status, religion, and background
- Offer a free platform for professional development through a series of workshops, lectures and training, primarily aimed at engaging emerging artists and young music practitioners
- Create and foster networks of exchange and collaboration within the music industry both locally and internationally
- Become an agent of change towards a transparent, equal, and professional music scene in the Middle East, by exhibiting good practices and offering new work models
- Expose audiences to a wide range of musical genres celebrating the universality of music
- Play a role in presenting a diversified image of the Arab region and contemporary Arab culture

“We think that it’s very important to decentralize culture in Lebanon.”



3 700
TOTAL
number of attendees

09
TOTAL
number of venues



85

TOTAL
number of performers

“The mission of art is to increase awareness and receptiveness in an attempt to create cases for renaissance and revival.”

Abdul Rahman Munif, *Novelist*

ACEF 2015

Invest in Talent and the Future of the Arab region



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**This book was conceived and developed in
collaboration with *The Outpost* magazine, Beirut.**

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