

AFAC EXPRESS

Program Brief

September 2012

A year of rapid-response granting for independent arts and cultural productions in times of crisis and ongoing change.



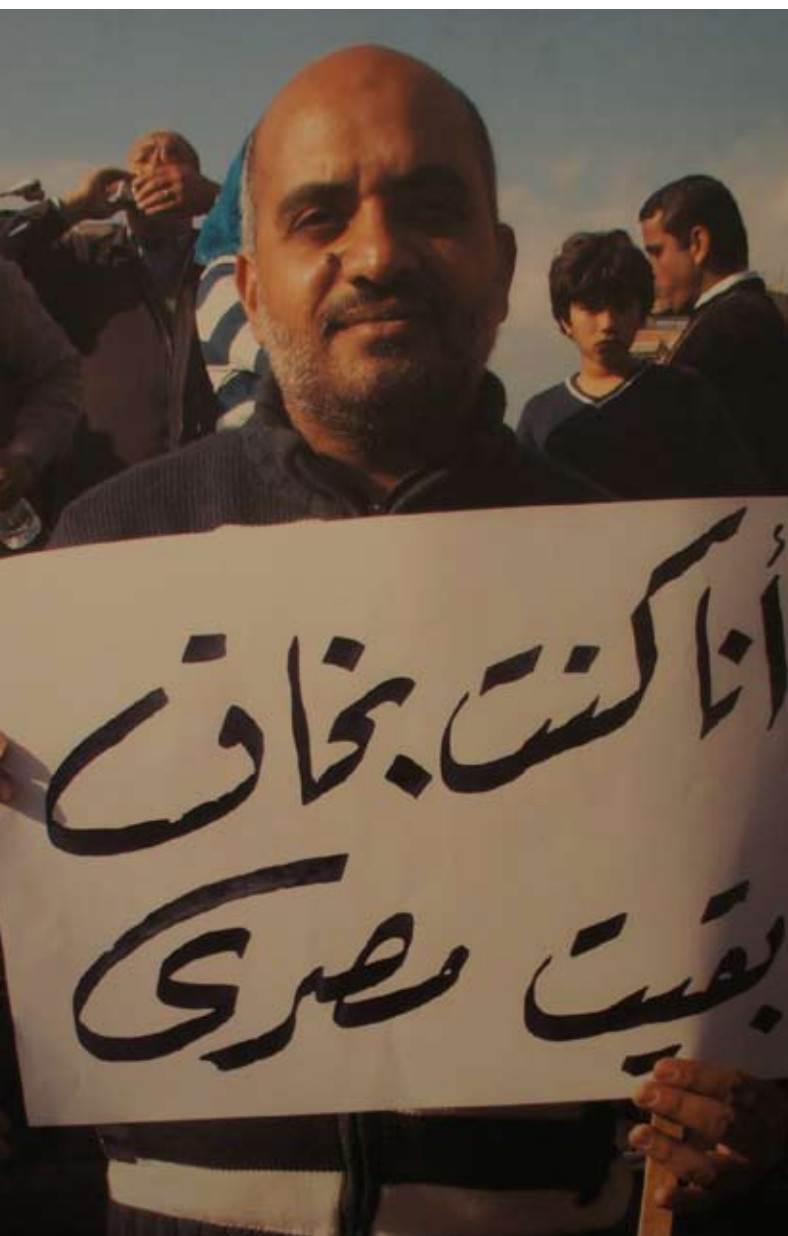
آفاق AFAC

The Arab Fund For Arts and Culture
الصندوق العربي للثقافة والفنون – آفاق

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Executive Summary



Recent changes sweeping the Arab region have created new circumstances in which individuals and institutions in the cultural field are openly addressing issues previously considered taboo—corruption, human rights, and freedom of artistic and political expression – with an unprecedented spirit of openness and engagement. AFAC recognized the need to support artists in this context and to offer a timelier granting program outside the annual cycle of the General Grant. For this reason, AFAC Express was launched in August 2011. Its experimental approach of modest means and limited scope, only a year-long, serves as an initial exploration and support of cultural production in times of crisis while respecting that change in the region is ongoing and increasingly complex. The program aims for expediency in grant making, upholding quality, originality, feasibility and relevance.

About 200 applications from across a wide variety of artistic productions – cinema, dance, documentary, music, performance, visual arts, research and workshops – have been received. Of these, 35 have been awarded funding with a total budget of \$400,000 USD and a maximum grant amount of \$15,000 USD. The grantees come from a wide geographic distribution:

Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, Lebanon, Libya, Yemen, Sudan, Palestine and Jordan.

AFAC Express' rolling call for applications has allowed for an expedient turn-around rate. Applications were processed in a matter of weeks and more than half of the awarded applicants' projects have already been completed. In a period of fast change, these projects are important snapshots of cultural realities in the face of difficulty. Far from making any generalizing statements, countries and individuals in the Arab region are struggling with change on many different levels, each in their unique circumstances, with artists and cultural practitioners seeking to play a positive role in a context that is still very much in flux.

Common themes emerging include enthusiasm for and recognition of changing mindsets, increasingly liberal expressions of social criticism, commemoration of heroism and sacrifice, and, most of all, a great anxiety towards the future and a desire to use art to channel the disorderly energies of the crises into a positive direction. Art for 'the greater good', as it were. Even projects that are documenting and interrogating the uprisings in their places of pain and irony are ultimately seeking to shatter illusions and misconceived notions about human beings living in a state of unrest and about citizenship in relation to governance. Many artistic and cultural projects are seeking somehow to prepare their communities in facing upcoming challenges. A dominant concern is the fear of social division; applicants from Egypt, Syria and Yemen are all deeply worried about the polarization of their people. Many theatre performances and music projects seek to raise awareness on economic disparity and injustice and also to promote social cohesion and political responsibility through new and interactive cultural productions. Most of all, the issue of human dignity arises as a primary mover of the people's uprisings, an issue for which the arts are far better suited to express than numbers and statistics.

Claims of any concrete final say on the Arab uprisings and their relations to arts and culture would be premature at this time but AFAC Express has offered an expedient source of support for urgent and worthy projects without abandoning criteria such as quality and innovation. While artists and cultural practitioners still face serious challenges in their lives, the question of the artists' role in times of crisis is increasingly made relevant.

Should art necessarily cater to a social/ political agenda? Can art be detached from its context? Isn't the call for detachment of art a political statement in itself, regarding the place and function of artistic expression? To quote Orwell, "In such circumstances detachment is not possible. You cannot take a purely aesthetic interest in a disease you are dying from... Every work of art has a meaning and a purpose — a political, social and religious purpose — Our aesthetic judgments are always coloured by our prejudices and beliefs."

AFAC Express emerged out of recognition that the urgency of the moment required thinking outside the conventional funding-process box. Outreach field trips to Yemen, Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia encouraged artists from those regions to proceed with projects that otherwise might have never seen the light. Of course the process was not without its challenges. Given the narrow time frame and the wide scope of productions supported, the jurors had to weed out repetitive projects of a clichéd nature in order to find more original, creative and immediately engaging works that are connected to their surroundings.

This report offers the results of this program, in mappings, thematic analyses, on-the-ground assessments and through the voices of the grantees themselves to understand better the impact of AFAC Express in supporting independent Arab arts and culture in trying times.

AFAC EXPRESS Context



Political and Economic Backdrop

The revolts that swept the Arab Middle East and North Africa in early 2011 have their roots in authoritarian rule as well as economic stagnation and inequality. After independence, many of the populous Arab countries witnessed the rise of one-party rule combined with a redistributive welfare state served by a large bureaucracy. The state owned the industries and other enterprises employing an urban work force. It also provided agricultural support to the peasantry and supplied extensive subsidies for basic consumer goods. This "social contract" consolidated power by trading in development for the political loyalty of key social forces such as workers, peasants, professionals and others in the educated middle class.

Accompanying this process, the ruling classes often invoked or appropriated popular regional, pan-Arab or pan-Islamic ideologies to legitimate their rule. Early on, at the economic level at least, these states achieved impressive accomplishments. However, economic performance by and large stagnated or declined in the mid-1970s and early 1980s. Opening up their markets to the international economy solved some of these countries problems while

creating many others. On the other hand politics and political power was always dominated by a small circle of people, and basic freedoms of speech, assembly, and organization were curbed and undermined. Artists, intellectuals and cultural practitioners were permitted self-expression so long as they fell within what the party line permitted. Individuals or movements that represented a threat to the party line or status quo were to be silenced, co-opted, or eliminated.

It seems like a distant memory today, but prior to the dramatic social upheavals, a main task of socio-political scholars and popular analysis was to explain why democratization had somehow skipped the Arab region. Why, for example, did Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and various parts of South and East Asia democratize, but not the Arab region? Invariably, and particularly among Western scholars, an Orientalist cultural paradigm is invoked as an explanatory variable. That is, there is something about Muslim Arab 'culture' that is inherently incompatible to universal human rights or democracy, that Arabs passively accepted their submissiveness towards authoritarian regimes. This point of view has permeated European and North American cultural and political representations of the Middle East as well as public discourse.

The reality is much more complex. The Arab revolts were not the first instance of mass revolts in the Arab region. Political defiance, social movements demanding democracy and human rights, food shortage revolts and other struggles were constant and ongoing throughout the postcolonial period. Uprisings based on economic and political grievances erupted across the region: Egypt in 1977, Morocco in 1981 and 1984, Tunisia in 1985, Algeria in 1988 and Jordan in 1989. The increase in global food prices since 2007 contributed to another wave of such "bread riots" in several countries, including Mauritania and Morocco, lasting up to the outbreak of the Tunisian revolution. In Egypt, some 1.7 million workers took part in over 1,900



strikes between 2004 and 2008, before the financial crisis, when the number of strikes and work stoppages reached into the thousands.

Needless to say, even before the Tunisian president's departure in January 14, 2011, the changes happening in the region were massive and unprecedented. Mass mobilizations across the Arab region, defying violence and repression, signaled that previously elusive political freedoms are suddenly within reach. Countries that did not directly witness large-scale uprisings are now forced to come to terms and adapt to this changing reality, while countries where the people's protests have overturned the regime are now dealing with the ramifications of multi-party participation and civil responsibility.

Arts and Culture Before and After

A close examination of cultural production throughout the Arab region reveals that artists and intellectuals have consistently found ways to defy and subvert both political repression as well as the homogenizing Western representations of the Middle East. Studio artists, playwrights, filmmakers, and poets across the Arab region became experts at navigating and pushing the limits of censorship and taking up the causes of the poor and marginalized in their societies. Given that political life was often stifled, the cultural field became the main avenue for dissent and free expression. Artists of the Arab region are masters at subverting official discourse, ideologies, repressive moral codes, imperial intervention and resisting what they viewed as illegitimate social hierarchies.

There are some important features shared across all the uprisings. One feature is the rise and increased relevance of public expression and street art like graffiti, street theatre and music performances in public squares. No longer confined to art galleries, theatres or movie screens, this "new wave of artists expression is spilling over into all areas of life, taking hold of public

spaces, virtual spaces, and making previous boundaries crumble," says visual artist and Egyptian feminist Sally Zohney (Daily News Egypt, January 18 2012).

The internet revolutionized artistic expression in the Arab region because it allowed uncensored creativity and spontaneous connection to a limitless audience. Virtual arts can include home-made performances, graphic designs, comic strips, photographs and documentary films all designated for online dissemination. When the 19th Annual Damascus Film Festival was cancelled in November 2011, organizers launched an online festival and a Facebook page for discussions of submitted films and voting for awards. Called the "First Free Syria Film Festival" and launched under the title "Cinema in Freedom Square" in December 17th 2011, Syrian filmmaker and AFAC Express's first grantee Ousama Mohammad described the festival in the Syria Today bimonthly magazine (Abu Assali, S. Syria Today, February 2012) as "an alternative cinema which seeks freedom through its own freedom," because pictures are now "the lungs of popular movements."

A third feature is the voice of music and young people expressing their frustrations and hopes. Street chants quickly became recognizable melodies that will mark the memory of the people for generations to come. Alternative music and poetry, particularly Arabic Hip Hop, is a genre long used as the voice of the oppressed and the emerging youth. Arabic Reggae musician Ahmed Al-Asery explains, "Of course freedom is about having bread to eat. The problems we are facing as a people are huge – things like poverty, corruption, unemployment, obstacles to simple human needs. These are long struggles that will take time. With music we can sing together and find a way to a better future. We sing for hope and patience and humanity."

We have seen how situations across the region have grown increasingly complex. As the initial euphoria of the revolts passes by and a new, convoluted, and in some locations violent reality sets in, artists are

challenged to think about the different ways they can shine a light of hope, guidance, evolution and often also emotional coping with anxiety, pain, fear and changes in responsibilities. Even people who successfully overthrew their leaders are now facing previously unseen challenges that threaten the very freedom, dignity and justice for which they rose up.

The Launch of AFAC Express

It is within this rapidly evolving context that AFAC Express was initiated to respond to the needs of cultural practitioners who were on the front lines of change. The time period, though full of promise, was not easy on cultural producers. They were suddenly emerging from a state of relative stability to one where the ground was shifting on a daily basis. Received dogmas and ideologies were being torn down, but there was confusion as to possible future directions.

Not only was the artist's relationship to the subject rapidly evolving, so too was her relationship to a new and evolving public. Old audiences were being fragmented while new and demanding ones were emerging. The drama and profoundness of actual events on the ground was paradoxically limiting some artists' ability to continue working on existing projects or even start new ones. AFAC grantee Samar Yazbeck refers to the dilemma of representing unfolding tragedies when she writes in her recently published memoirs *Woman Caught in the Crossfire*, "Reality is more monstrous than fiction. They say that writing a novel requires fiction but I say it requires reality, first and foremost. And what we write in our novels is less monstrous than reality." Moreover, while new spaces were indeed opening up, others were closing and old taboos and social constraints persisted. On the expectation of activism directed towards artists, Egyptian visual artist Doa Aly argues that "The freedom of artistic expression is the freedom to deal with absolutely any subject under the sun, to break away from formalist, conceptual and contextual ties. This kind of freedom is what might finally

signal a Revolution." (Garden City Blog, June 19, 2012).

Whether through the weight of accumulated cultural inertia or through the intense polarization of the debates in many of the countries witnessing uprisings, it is evident that this freedom was not and cannot be attained overnight. Therefore it is perhaps too soon to gauge the extent of the shift in cultural space. Certainly new spaces such as the independent Arab e-zine website Jadaliyya, Bidayat quarterly journal in Lebanon, Arete for Culture and the Arts in Libya, Ettijahat cultural institute in Syria, the National Theatre of the Oppressed in Egypt and the Tunisian Collective for Arts, Culture and Freedom herald the promise of new directions in cultural policy and production.

Conclusion

This one-year program is an experimental approach to addressing the challenges of supporting arts and culture in innovative and responsive ways during times of crisis. AFAC Express was introduced in August 2011 as a quick-response emergency fund for artists dealing with change in creative and relevant ways. As the landscape shifts, the work of artists and cultural producers is more crucial than ever. While many artists are rightfully paying tribute to what has been accomplished in the civil arena and struggle for human rights, the role of art is one of authenticity and presence. AFAC has been, and will continue to be, committed to supporting independent artists and cultural producers during this challenging time period as they explore new possibilities and test the limits of change in the search of a new equilibrium of wider horizons. (the conclusion is superfluous)

AFAC EXPRESS

Process and Results



Fact Sheet

Start date

August 17th 2011

Duration

One Year

Budget

\$400,000

Call for Proposals

Launched online on September 12th 2011 on rolling basis.

Number of Applicants

~ 200

Number of Grantees

35

Maximum grant amount

\$15,000 USD

Requirements for Applying to AFAC Express

- Arab nationality
- Creativity of project and relevance to the 'Arab Spring'
- Urgency of funding

Goal

AFAC Express aims to respond to the current climate of change and to support independent arts and culture projects in the Arab region in a more timely manner while upholding quality. It also aims to take a variety of snapshots of this historical period through cultural expressions from across the region that are engaging with the challenges and aspirations of change.

Methodology

The program was launched in September as a yearlong emergency fund with a total budget of \$400,000 USD and a maximum grant of \$15,000 USD. Applications are received on a rolling basis and submitted to a jury committee, which gives an evaluation within a 2-week period. AFAC Express also includes outreach initiatives, regional field trips and individual discussions with the applicants, all of which allow for a quicker application turn-around.

Challenges

AFAC Express came across a variety of challenges of a nuanced and qualitative nature as well as practical challenges dealing with logistics and physical concerns.

Riding the 'Arab Spring' Wave

Some applicants have approached this program with an eye on expedient funding, taking advantage of the 'Arab Spring' hype. It was necessary for jurors to filter out impulsive and underdeveloped projects that used pertinent buzzwords but in reality presented little depth, urgency or practical relevance to the current situation in the region.

Overzealous Patriotism

On the other hand, some applicants were overly political, proposing projects of an unoriginal and propagandistic quality with little analytical or creative depth. Upholding openness and critical awareness in parallel with artistic creativity and authentic expression were important in the jury selection process. Jurors did not favor projects that seemed like mere political sloganeering.

Inexperienced Grant Writing

A repeatedly emerging challenge is the lack of experience in grant writing. AFAC kept regular contact with applicants to assess if poorness in proposal quality is due to their inexperience in grant writing or to a particular state of urgency or simply to the fact that their ideas are ill-planned and difficult to support.

Low Representation from the Maghreb

The program was not long enough in duration, as our outreach and geographic variety of applicants increased over time. Also, despite our efforts to include more participation from relatively marginalized communities - including week-long trips to Yemen and Libya with regular follow up from AFAC staff – the number of applicants from either country have been relatively low. Reasons may be the lack of IT and Internet penetration in several Arab countries, especially those experiencing turmoil. Language is also a problem given the predominance of French in North Africa.

Security

Discretion is crucial and several applicants have requested anonymity for security purposes.

Applicants

Since launching in mid-September, about 200 applications have been submitted of which 80% are individual practitioners.

While the majority of applicants have come from Egypt, followed by Syria and Tunisia in terms of bulk, the application pool also includes projects from Lebanon, Palestine, Libya, Morocco, Yemen, Iraq, Sudan and Jordan.

Grantees

There are 35 total grantees coming from 9 Arab countries. The majority of the grantees, 26 of them, are individual artists while 9 are local institutions. The most popular kind of art project proposed among the grantees was in performing arts, followed by cinema and music. It is important, however, to take into account the co-launching of Crossroads program by AFAC, which catered particularly to new cinema projects.

Projects list by title, country of origin,
application date, genre, and type of grantee.

	Project Title	Country	Date	Genre	Type
1	Stars in Broad Daylight /Arteast	Syria/USA	Oct. 2011	<i>Cinema</i> Feature Movie	Institution
2	Words of Women from the Egyptian Revolution	Egypt	Nov. 2011	<i>Cinema</i> On-Line Documentary Series	Individual
3	Our Beloved Sudan	Sudan	Nov. 2011	<i>Visual Arts</i> Video Installation	Individual
4	Your Right to Know	Egypt	Nov. 2011	<i>RTR</i> Workshop	Institution
5	Political Poems	Syria	Dec. 2011	<i>Music</i>	Individual
6	One Hand	Syria	Dec. 2011	<i>Cinema</i> Animation Movie	Individual
7	"Ma Tikhsarnish" Campaign	Egypt	Jan. 2012	<i>Visual Arts</i> Visual Communication Project	Individual
8	Banned Artist	Palestine	Jan. 2012	<i>Performance</i> Stand-up comedy	Institution
9	Ibn al-3am Online	Syria	Jan. 2012	<i>Cinema</i> Documentary	Individual
10	Donkey's Farm	Egypt	Mar. 2012	<i>Performing Arts</i> Experimental Contemporary Dance	Individual
11	Khat Thaleth (Third Rail)	Syria/Lebanon	Mar. 2012	<i>Music</i> Compilation cd and performances	Individual
12	Much Music, Few Words	Syria	Mar. 2012	<i>Music</i> Album	Individual
13	432 Hours	Egypt	Mar. 2012	<i>Music</i> Album	Individual
14	Tales of Travel, Revolution and Paper	Egypt	Apr. 2012	<i>Performing arts</i>	Individual
15	The Other Side	Egypt	Apr. 2012	<i>Cinema</i> Short narrative Film	Individual
16	Democracy	Tunisia	Apr. 2012	<i>Visual arts</i>	Individual
17	3freet El-Net	Egypt	Apr.	<i>RTR - Research and Publication</i>	Individual
18	Far Away	Jordan	May	<i>Performing Arts</i>	Individual

19	The Scream	Yemen	May	<i>Cinema</i>	Individual
20	Under the Fence	Tunisia	May	<i>Visual Arts</i>	Individual
21	Presentation of 2 plays "Yahya Lives" and "Can you look to the Camera?"	Lebanon / Tunisia/ Syria	May 2012	<i>Performing Arts</i> 2 Plays	Institution
22	Ithbat 7aleh	Syria	May 2012	<i>Music</i> Album	Individual
23	Human	Yemen	May 2012	<i>Music</i> Album	Individual
24	Now/Here	Syria	May 2012	<i>Performing Arts</i>	Individual
25	Theater of Change	Egypt	May 2012	<i>Performing Arts</i> Experimental Theater	Institution
26	External Rotation	Egypt	May 2012	<i>Cinema</i> Short Experimental	Individual
27	The Free Arab	Lebanon	Jun. 2012	<i>Cinema</i> Interactive Documentary	Institution
28	The Inspector	Syria	Jun. 2012	<i>Performing Arts</i>	Individual
29	Political Publication	Egypt	Jun. 2012	<i>Performing Arts</i>	Individual
30	Light 2	Palestine	Jun. 2012	<i>Visual arts</i>	Individual
31	The First Day	Lebanon	Jun. 2012	<i>Performing Arts</i>	Individual
32	"Arete" Cultural Program 2012	Libya	Jun. 2012	<i>Various</i>	Institution
33	The Wall	Libya	Jun. 2012	<i>Performing Arts</i>	Individual
34	Tunisia's Theatre Laboratory	Tunisia	Aug. 2012	<i>Performing Arts</i>	Individual
35	Cinema On The Move	Tunisia	Aug. 2012	<i>Cinema</i>	Institution



Project Descriptions



Words of Women from the Egyptian Revolution

كلمات نساء من الثورة المصرية

video Herstory ... to remind History

01. **Grantee:** Oussama Mohamad/ ArteEast (Syria / New York)
Project Title: Stars in Broad Daylight (Nujum al-Nahar) ArteEast Participation
Description: The audio re-mastering and screening of his critical Syrian film "Stars in Broad Daylight" for the ArteEast Festival held at the Museum of Modern Arts in New York. The grantee was also able to participate as speaker at several institutions including the MOMA, Cooper Union and Bard universities.
02. **Grantee:** Imad Mortada (Egypt)
Project Title: Words of Women from the Egyptian Revolution
Description: Giving voice and visibility to a sector of society that is usually neglected by history, this project aims to present the Egyptian revolution through the stories of women. A period of research will be followed by interviews

with women from Egyptian cities and provinces from which an online documentary series will be created, presenting two interview episodes every week for a period of six months.

03. **Grantee:** Taghreed Sanhoury (Sudan)
Project Title: Our Beloved Sudan
Description: This is one of the first video projects to emerge on the separation of Sudan in July 2011. The director has spent 2 years filming the external transformations which led up to the recent division of the country. She documents the struggle of the Sudanese people, their burdens, sadness and hope. This project is presented as a video installation using two television screens, one for North Sudan and one for South, while a map of the once-united countries is projected on the ground between them.
04. **Grantee:** Support for Information Technology (Egypt)
Project Title: Your Right to Know
Description: As movements calling for fairness, transparency and non-corruption are sweeping the region, this project brings academics and activists together with young independent filmmakers to participate in workshops and in the production of five short movies that will introduce the concepts of "the right to know" and "the right to have access to information" as fundamental to human rights.
05. **Grantee:** Ribal al-Khodari and Bassel Rajjoub (Syria)
Project Title: Political Poems
Description: The poems of famous Iraqi poet and political activist Ahmad Matar are brought to new life through this contemporary music album featuring performances by two young Syrian musicians. The project speaks of a shared political fabric across the Arab region and critiques the relationship between governments and governed.

ما تِخْسَرْنِيش

06. Grantee: Wael Toubaji (Syria)

Project Title: One Hand

Description: This short three-minute film is an animation project about the triumph of peace and life over ignorance and war. A character of an anonymous soldier stomps with his over-sized boots any sign of life he sees, yet the grass continues to grow.

07. Grantee: Bassem Yousri (Egypt)

Project Title: "Ma Tikhsarnish" Spread a Word Campaign

Description: This campaign aims to raise awareness about the threats of violence, corruption and sectarianism through creative wordplay. This movement began on Facebook with dichromatic visual designs of a single word/ phrase in one color set against a background of a contrasting color. The words used are colloquial and warn against separation and division in society; the project has now gone into print in posters and badges.

08. Grantee: Hayat Association for Theatre (Palestine)

Project Title: Banned Artists

Description: This stand-up comedy act explores the huge transformations taking place in Arab societies today. When the 'fear barrier' breaks and the unthinkable becomes possible, long-standing patterns of authority and submission are boldly questioned and out-right defied.

09. Grantee: Ali Atassi (Syria)

Project Title: Ibn al-3am Online

Description: This film is a contemporary portrait of 83 year old Riyadh Al-Turk, a Syrian leftist opposition leader known as Syria's Mandela. The film director is based in Beirut and is unable to return to Syria where Riyadh lives in hiding between the two cities of Damascus and Homs. Information technology and social media become crucial communication tools in the Syrian revolution – particularly Skype. In addition to the two film crews working on this project, one in Beirut and one in Damascus, the Skype lens-and-screen is a third element essential to the visual construction of the film.



10. Grantee: Mohamed Shafik (Egypt)
Project Title: Donkey's farm
Description: Set in Cairo, this experimental contemporary dance project brings together dancers, actors, musicians, and cultural critics to explore themes of oppression and surrender, obedience and desire, using beasts of burden symbolically to carry the posture of the subjugated and the exploited. Participating performers explore their personal experiences of subjugation in any form: educational systems, social constructs, censorship, diplomatic appropriateness, taboos, etc..

Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Libya Tunisia and Iraq.

12. Grantee: Wael Alkak (Syria)
Project Title: Much Music, Few Words
Description: An album recording that brings original songs from Egypt and Syria inspired by the popular movements. It shows the deep relevance of popular musical expression in communicating social realities. Performances in public spaces in many Arab cities will include an audio-visual exhibition and a short film documenting the project's making.

11. Grantee: Ahmad Khouja (Syria /Lebanon)
Project Title: Khat Thaleth
Description: A collaborative project that brings together the urgent expressions of contemporary Arabic Hip Hop artists and rappers from around the world. They musically and poetically express their thoughts on the revolutionary changes that are sweeping the Arab region, making sure to allow more nuanced and diverse voices to be heard. Participating artists originate from

13. Grantee: Mohamed Ragab (Egypt)
Project Title: 432 Hours
Description: Putting to music the street chants and protest slogans from the early period of the Egyptian revolution - Jan 25 to Feb 11 - electronic instruments and oriental rhythms are used together in an innovative way to reflect the youthfulness, creativity and grass-roots popularity of the protests.

14. Grantee: Oussama Helmy (Egypt)
Project Title: Tales of Travel, Revolution and Paper
Description: A spoken performance that combines the art of paper-folding with that of story-telling and singing. Personal anecdotes of travel in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria are shared, like spotlight from before, during and after the revolutions. Audiences are engaged by the vivid testimony of the story-tellers. The project carries a sense of longing and even romanticism towards the intimacy and brotherhood of shared human struggle.

15. Grantee: Emadeddine Mabrouk (Egypt)
Project Title: The Other Side
Description: This short narrative film examines revolution from the perspective of 'the other side,' that of the counter-revolutionary sniper. Who is this character whose actions are knowingly and directly lethal? What does it mean when murderer and murdered were perhaps once neighbors or relatives or old family friends? The film seeks to shed light on this strange human capacity to uphold beliefs which can lead to committing the utmost crime against the closest of people.

16. Grantee: Houda Mhiri (Tunisia)
Project Title: Democracy
Description: A visual memorial for the revolution in Tunisia, this sculptural monument takes the word "democracy" in large "Kufic" script and three-dimensional form, allowing each letter of the word to hold images of Tunisian children, their eyes, their faces, and their hopefulness for a brighter future.

17. Grantee: Mariam Elias (Egypt)
Project Title: 3freet El-Net (The Genie of the Net)
Description: This book is a humorous and devious collection of the most memorable images, blogs, Facebook groups, statuses and tweets from Egypt. It seeks to capture this moment of activism and rebellion as creative online expression helped create the space to rise up against tyranny and reject the status quo.



18. Grantee: Wael Qadour (Jordan)
Project Title: Far Away
Description: Based on the renowned theatrical productions of contemporary British playwright Carol Churchill, this performance is implemented by a group of young Arabs from across the region who work in the different fields of performing arts and theatre production. The subject matter explores tyranny in three parts: brainwashing, societal violence and civil war. Participants are Syrian, Palestinian and Jordanian, together involved in directing, dramaturgy and acting of Churchill's plays in Arabized form within the context of current events.

19. Grantee: Khadija Al Salami (Yemen)
Project Title: The Scream
Description: This film explores the deep changes that have happened in Yemeni societies and families



throughout the revolution, during which women have taken to the streets to protest government tyranny and to demand democratic reform. While the film depicts women's roles in the revolution, it expresses concern that the marginalization of women may persist.

20. **Grantee:** Wassim Ghazlani (Tunisia)
Project Title: Under the Fence
Description: A multi-faceted project including an exhibition space for visual arts, an online platform, and a discussion series, Under the Fence aims to be an accessible resource for sharing the latest works conducted by young contemporary Tunisian artists and recognizing them as a pioneering generation of writers, intellectuals and cultural practitioners emerging from post-revolutionary Tunisia.

21. **Grantee:** Shams Theater (Lebanon)
Project Title: Two Plays: "Yahya Lives" & "Can You Look at the Camera?"
Description: Two performances, one from Syria and the other from Tunisia, echo the current transformations in the Arab region and give audiences in Lebanon the chance to experience new narratives. Both are courageous scripts that confront change head-on while also being self-critical and reflective.
22. **Grantee:** Ahmed Nazmi El-Assal (Syria)
Project Title: Ithbat 7aleh
Description: A collection of contemporary music composed in the current times to describe the challenging situation that the Arab region is going through. It takes on a very personal response to the revolutions as the artist experienced a new sense of belonging and pride in the Arab region and a desire to participate in refusing oppression. This project is collaborative, including musicians from different countries in the Arab region.
23. **Grantee:** Ahmed Saeed Asery (Yemen)
Project Title: Recording the album "Human"
Description: "Human" is the title of a new music album by the young Yemeni band "At a Distance of 3 Meters." It consists of 7 original songs that deal with political, intellectual and religious conflicts. The music is designed with a mix of styles - reggae, hip hop, and blues - all of which are relatively new to the Yemeni public.
24. **Grantee:** Omar Al Jbaai (Syria)
Project Title: Now / Here
Description: "Now / Here" is a theater production inspired by contemporary British playwright Edward Bond and his play "Bingo". Examining relationships to authority, the work sheds light on the role of the intellectual and the poet in bourgeois society with a focus on current events in Syria.
25. **Grantee:** Mobadron for culture and media consulting (Egypt)
Project Title: Theater of Change
Description: An experimental workshop



for training non-actors in acting, this project is organized by the "Theater of the Oppressed" to take place in four Egyptian governorates. The different theatre productions to emerge from these groups will be directed to the theatre Forum while the governorate of Port Said has been selected to supervise and give central unity to this project.

26. Grantee: Mohamed Abdul-Karim (Egypt)

Project Title: External Rotation

Description: This short experimental film is derived from the legend of "The People of the Cave," known in the Biblical tradition as "The Seven Sleepers." The symbolism of this archaic story is projected and integrated into the current events, particularly echoing the experience of the Arab youth and their sudden awakening.

27. Grantee: The Free Arab (Lebanon)

Project Title: The Free Arab

Description: An interactive documentary film project derived from the internet, cinema and television, it is a visual collection of different perspectives. The project aims to produce about 250 short documentary films from 7 Arab countries.

28. Grantee: Yamen Salman Mohamad (Syria)

Project Title: The Inspector

Description: Based on the theatrical production by British playwright Harold Pinter "Victoria Station", this performance seeks to create a space for all perspectives and political inclinations to be expressed in order to overcome the perceived dichotomy of the 'with or

against' mentality and to allow a more diverse and inclusive form of expression. The project was designed to encourage participation and balance as there are many members of society who hesitate to express themselves for fear of the polarizing tendencies that are causing great social damage.

29. Grantee: Adel Abdel Wahab (Egypt)

Project Title: Political Publication

Description: This multi-media interactive project brings actors and audiences together in a performance that is part scripted and part improvised. Everyone sits in a circle around a large central fabric used as a screening surface on which segments of recorded video, live video, and experimental video are projected. Performers and audiences alike observe and engage with what is presented on the screen, so that the circle symbolizes at once the public spaces of revolutionary action, the competing and often polarizing effect of media coverage, and lastly, the emergence of a new political arena.

30. Grantee: Mohamad Abusal (Palestine)

Project Title: Lighting 2

Description: In the darkness of electricity cuts in Gaza, we find thirty photographs and thirty interviews with families searching for alternative sources of lighting. In the spirit of sustainability, this experimental project builds on an earlier version, Lighting 1, conducted two years earlier and continues research for new lighting sources while also presenting a unique creative project.

- 31. Grantee:** Wissam Arbache (Lebanon)
Project Title: The First Day
Description: The revolution erupts on the day of the aging president's birthday, but Sharif is too depressed to want to celebrate. He turns to playing Ping-Pong while his wife insists on throwing him a party and inviting his friends. Meanwhile 20-year old Khaled, a champion ping pong player, is drawn into the revolutionary frenzy, much to the dismay of his coach and his mother. These two stories run in parallel, exploring the personal dilemma of avoidance and immersion in an original theatrical performance.
- 32. Grantee:** Arete for Culture and Arts (Libya)
Project Title: Cultural Program 2012
Description: Arete's program includes various artistic activities meant to invigorate the cultural scene in post-revolutionary Libya. For 2012, we are organizing film screenings and the launching of a cinema club, a music workshop, a video arts exhibition which will make a first-time appearance in Libya, a group exhibition of art installations, a workshop to improve the capacities of cultural practitioners in terms of professionalism in self-representation, and a series of "Arete" gatherings for discussions around arts and culture.
- 33. Grantee:** Walid Al-Abed (Libya)
Project Title: The Wall
Description: This theatre project is 50-minute performance exploring the impact of imagery and visual communication. It is also about the changed lives of Libyans after the revolution. Using projections onto a blank wall, forms appear and disappear, some pictures are moving, some are still; yet everything is constantly changing. Three actors discuss the ramifications of change on Libyan society with a focus on the impact of visual media.
- 34. Grantee:** Moez Mrabet (Tunisia)
Project Title: Tunisia's Theatre Laboratory
Description: It has been a year and a half since bringing down Ben Ali's dictatorial regime and Tunisia is in a political deadlock. Confusion and immaturity has marked the performance of our political parties and rulers. Dispersion and demise has been the fate of our opposition activists. The growing influence of the counter-revolution is increasing in the face of the intellectuals' failure to enforce it's views and to bridge the growing division between ideals and realities. The Tunisian Theatre Laboratory is a series of 'itinerant workshops' organized to take place in different parts of the country (north-west in Sijnan, center in Qafor, south east in Bani Khaddash) in order to facilitate interaction with the Tunisian people amidst their 'typical' environment and ordinary social milieus. Citizens will be invited to engage in performances and practical exercises in the manner of the 'Theatre of the Oppressed' school and techniques.
- 35. Grantee:** ATAC – Association Tunisienne d'Action pour le Cinéma
Project Title: Cinema on the Move
Description: Reviving the rural areas of Tunisia, especially those marginalized under the previous regime, is a must for contemporary cultural practitioners to spread their research. This project will establish cultural podiums and seeks to reconnect with citizens living outside the urban hubs by sharing with them a collection of cinema on the move. Avoiding any political content and highlighting instead the sense of curiosity, creativity and access to new worlds that cinema has to offer, a cinema caravan will be organized to tour and reach isolated areas of Tunisia, notably the countryside, as an opportunity for rural residents to witness the wonder of film screenings, sharing comic and acrobatic performances on film.

Evaluation Process



Given the multidisciplinary scope of AFAC Express, the jurors were selected for their diversified cultural management profile, social engagement and experience in the feasibility of project implementation. They were also selected to represent a broad geographic scope and a depth of experience in a variety of artistic genres.

"The idea of the Express fund is a brilliant one. Giving the possibility to artists to express themselves and to use their creativity to pass on messages or just to depict current situations is a must in periods like these," says Rola Kobeissi.

This is echoed in Nidhal Guiga's comment: "Of course the Arab context is exceptionally moving ... Of course the social changes and 'engulfing' Islamization is now shaking the balance of "petty bourgeois" countries in uprising ... These parameters emerge in the AFAC Express projects that I have read; they are the mirror of multifaceted Arab consciousness in all their diversity. It was important for me to discover these consciousnesses / sensitivities that brought together more than ever the concerns of the peoples of the south. The search for solutions was not absent but it was striking to see, in the projects, how the work of retrospection was crucial for artists."

From an administrative perspective, there was also a learning curve in implementing this program and the turn-around time gradually became more efficient by the latter months with applications being processed in a matter of a few weeks. Quality, feasibility, originality and budget were all taken into consideration with a heightened awareness on relevance to current events and on the direct impact of the projects with their surrounding communities.

Feedback from our jurors has also been critical as advice for future editions of this program. "AFAC Express should also provide opportunities for young people in countries experiencing political changes to work on joint projects. The proximity and accessibility to others will help develop perspectives on culture in our Arab region," said Faouzia Sahly from Tunisia.

Juror's Bios

The following five jurors have participated in the rolling call evaluation of AFAC Express applications, working in close connection with AFAC grants manager to maintain a flowing process.

Nidhal Guiga (Tunisia)

Nidhal Guiga is an actress, author and director. She is also a university professor. She worked with Mohamed Driss on "Haddith," in its first edition of 1997 - 1998, with Taoufik Jebali in the adapted works of Kahlil Gibran in 2000, and she authored and directed her own works including "An Hour and a Half after Me." She was a jury member of the American Festival of Independent Short Films (programmed by Digipro) and in the "first feature" competition of Carthage Film Festival with Marco Muller and Nour Sabbagh. She participated in coaching scenarios at the "Ten Shorts for a Cause" festival programmed by Ibrahim Letaïef.

Rola Kobeissi (Lebanon)

A graduate from the Lebanese American university with a BA in Communication Arts, Radio/TV/Film, she worked in Beirut Theatre as an executive producer. She completed a one-year program entitled "PROFFIL", specializing in Cinema production. 2 years later, she moved to the British Council as a Cultural Officer. In 2002, Rola Kobeissi went to Paris to get her master's degree in Strategic and Cultural Development. From 2003 until 2010, she worked at Zico House as a cultural manager, organizing a number of festivals, exhibitions, concerts, workshops, etc. As of 2011, she is a project coordinator at Beirut DC.

Zeina Maasri (Lebanon)

Associate Professor of Graphic Design at the American University of Beirut and a practicing independent graphic designer, Zeina Maasri has been conducting visual arts research since 2004 focusing on the political posters of Lebanon's civil war. She is the author of *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War*, (London:

I.B.Tauris, 2009). She curated an exhibition of political posters entitled "Signs of Conflict" in 2008 within the context of Beirut's 4th edition of Home Works by Ashkal Alwan and as part of the 11th edition of the International Istanbul Biennial in 2009.

Faouzia Sahly (Tunisia)

Former chief of staff to the Tunisian ministry of social affairs and the Tunisian ministry of women between 1993 and 1995, president of the National Commission for the purchase of works of art for the Tunisian Ministry of Culture from 1995 in 2004, Faouzia Sahly also worked as a consultant for various international exhibitions including Expo "Water for Sustainable Development SAROGOZA 2008" and various shows for arts and crafts. She participated in several jury committees in the field of plastic arts and craftsmanship in Tunisia. Since July 2010 she is founding member of the B'chira Art Center.

Marwa Seoudi (Egypt)

Marwa Seoudi is graphic design graduate from the American University in Cairo and founding member of the graduate support initiative "Nahdet el Mahroussa". She has been active in various civil society projects in Egypt including "Fathet Kheir". She lived in Jordan and worked with Nasseej - Resources for Community Youth Development where she was project coordinator for "SAFAR" Arab Youth Mobility Fund and the Arab Education form. She has been managing the theatre group "El Warsha" in Egypt. For the past two years and is currently coordinator of "Tamassi", a network of cultural institutions and theatre companies in the Arab region.



Thematic Analysis

Nowhere do we claim to be able to categorize conclusively the current cultural and artistic output of the Arab region. Time and distance will be necessary for a deeper understanding of current cultural output. Nevertheless, there are certain themes that emerge as shared trains of thoughts among the different productions supported by the few grantees of AFAC Express, and there is a large degree of overlap and multi-layers to the themes we have noted. We found it a useful process to present those themes here.



Freedom of Expression/ Call to Action/ Resistance to Oppression

The consequences of defying government corruption and authoritarian rule have been dire, with artists and cultural practitioners taking to heart the weight of oppression and the serious task of speaking up against injustice. How can art create change? Several AFAC Express grantees offer performances that explore a variety of engrained

and changing behaviors in the face of oppression. Through theatre, music, satire and contemporary dance an embodiment of resistance and an acknowledgement of diversity is acted out. The Arabic Hip Hop performances and album production by Khat Thalth (Syria) brings together critical thought and powerful lyrics from a diversity of Arab youth populations. The contemporary dance performance "Donkey's Farm" (Egypt) explores the dynamics of surrender and obedience found in daily scenarios that empower dictatorships and weaken individual autonomy. Art and performance is being used to tackle injustice with creative non-violent means.

establishes a yearning for continuity between the current uprisings and the history of dissent.



Interrogating the Uprisings

Given the rapid pace of events, artists were naturally drawn towards documenting and establishing a record of the often daily changes occurring across the Arab region. As the uprisings became more complex artists felt compelled to question emerging euphoric narratives and subject the fallout of the events with more scrutiny. Perhaps the most daring of these is a short narrative film by Egyptian Emadeddine Mabrouk, which examines the life of a counter-revolutionary sniper reaffirming artists' ability to explore and even humanize without absolving even the most reviled subjects. Walid Al-Abed in Libya is a performance that examines the transformation of people's lives as a result of the Libyan revolution.



Paying Tribute to Previous Struggle, Dissidents and Artists

Arab revolts are not without precedent. Political defiance and social movements have peppered the region over the various decades since the Arab countries' respective independence from imperialist rule. Political criticism of military regimes, royal governances, communist movements, Islamists and independent movements are not uncommon. Economic challenges have also been core in popular uprisings irrespective of the kind of government at hand, food and bread revolts were constant and ongoing throughout the postcolonial period. A music album by young Syrian musicians commemorating the political poetry of Iraqi activist Ahmad Matar, an online documentary reconnecting the protesting youth with an octogenarian leader of Syrian leftist opposition, a Tunisian artists' platform to recognize the pioneering generation of intellectuals and cultural practitioners, all this



Social Cohesion/Unity/Reconciliation

The increasing polarization of Arab societies features heavily as a concern among AFAC Express grantees. Artists express a sense of personal responsibility in offering works and projects that encourage unity, social cohesion and reconciliation in the face of division and violence. From Egypt, the Facebook-launched project "Ma Tikhsarnish" is an awareness campaign urging public participation in creating witty and poignant slogans for tolerance. "Political Publication" seats audiences and performers together in a circle of projected news footage that highlights the contested nature of received narratives and establishes an exercise in joint dialogue. A video

installation project "Our Beloved Sudan" documents the socio-economic backdrop leading to the country's division with a longing for unity. The Yemeni music album "Human" offers uplifting lyrics on dignity and equality while the Syrian animation "One Hand" is an animation of hope and serenity after military rule and bloodshed.



Raising Civil Rights Awareness

The cultural expression of a people is more than art productions and performances. It is also a matter of intellectual activity and citizenship, creating a sense of a collective society. At a time when old power structures are crumbling, many people are ill-equipped to be politically engaged after decades of dictatorial rule. Some AFAC Express grantees have undertaken projects that help prepare the people in playing a more informed role for their future. A Palestinian stand-up comedy act takes this crucial time when 'fear barriers' have broken as an unprecedented opportunity for people to rise up to the occasion of vocalized and engaged citizenship. "Your Right to Know" is an Egypt-based project that brings young filmmakers together with activists and academics in political science, communication, law and human rights with the aim of creating innovative and informed projects. The itinerant workshops organized by Tunisia's Theatre Laboratory emerge out of disappointment in the political weakness of post-revolutionary Tunisia and takes it upon itself to reach the marginalized regions of the country and offer them creative outlet as well as direct contact with new possibilities of thought and engagement.



New Media and Communication Capacities

The Arab Uprisings featured intensive and unprecedented usage of new media and social networks which has created a whole new arena for art. These new space of communication became heavily politicized from the beginning of the uprisings and fertile grounds for artistic expressions and previously unfeasible creative collaborations. Such possibilities are explored on multiple levels in the documentary "Ibn al-3am Online" where director Ali Atassi based in Lebanon, has a series of chats on Skype with longtime Syrian leftist dissident Riyadh al-Turk. Other projects are questioning the impact of visual communication, so ubiquitous and incessant these days, as seen in the Libyan performance project, "The Wall." Taking a bird's eye view, "3freet El-Net" is a collection of highlights from the Egyptian blogosphere – tweets, Facebook statuses, activists groups, discussion platforms and visual montages – that observes the progression of internet use and social media from pre-revolutionary years to the heightened intensity during the revolution, particularly noting artistic and creative productions, film, visual montages and satirical caricatures designated for online dissemination.



Introducing Contemporary Arts to Wider Publics

Many countries emerging from revolution have been in a cultural and artistic time-lapse in comparison with the rest of the world. Their art schools and art faculties have functioned with meager resources and equipment, teaching classic media like oil painting, sculpting and engraving. Many artists and art students in Libya, for example,

have had little or no access to the contemporary arts like video arts and audio-visual installations. There have been no functional cinemas in Libya since the 1980's. Similarly, in Yemen and the rural areas of Tunisia, creative expression has followed traditional modes. Projects like "Cinema on the Move" by Association Tunisienne d'Action pour le Cinéma (ATAC) brings cinema to the people, Ahmed Asery offers peace-loving Arabic reggae to a conservative and tribal society while Arete for Culture and the Arts is preparing Libya's first open-air video arts exhibition in the old city of Tripoli. Content in these projects tend to avoid political content and focus on bringing out the beauty and wonder of creativity.



The Revolution and The Individual

Speak to any denizen of the Arab countries during the revolts and they will tell you of the profound sense of personal change and transformation taking place. Suddenly people from all walks of life were questioning their role and relationship to society, their own expectations and responsibilities as citizens, their sense of allegiance. Psychological reactions are multilayered and the subtleties of coming to terms with the revolts on a person level were a feature of several projects. Lebanese playwright Wissam Arbache tracks the parallel lives of two characters who have different reaction to the revolutionary upheaval, that of the disheartened dictator and the over-zealous street rioter. Syrian artist Omar Al Jbaili's "Now/Here" explores the role of the poet and the intellectual in light of the upheavals. Art emerges again as a place for personal and subjective reflection, a striving for self-knowledge that may have been unexpectedly prompted by the current duress.



Women's Voices

The question of gender and women's liberation was one of the trickiest political subjects of the Arab Uprisings as debates flared whether the net result of the uprisings would be emancipatory or constraining on women. Khadija Al Salami from Yemen explores the possibilities and constraints unleashed by revolutionary transformation in her film "Roses Cry" while Imad Mortada from Egypt presents the story of the revolution itself through the words and perspectives of women in his online documentary series of interviews entitled "Words of Women from the Egyptian Revolution."



Realities on the Ground

Overview

In its effort to connect more directly with artists on the ground, AFAC conducted field visits throughout the year and maintained regular contact with its grantees and network of cultural practitioners in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen. Artists face complex issues and the role of culture as a repository of public thought, concerns, ideals and creativity is important for resolving tensions on a popular level and for offering new possibilities. Priorities, of course, differ in each country. Political activism, social criticism and innovation through arts and culture have long-standing histories in modern and contemporary Egypt, Syria and Tunisia, while countries like Yemen and Libya are relatively 'virgin' in terms of critical artistic production and are just starting to discover their own voices.

The political realities on the ground are also diverse and increasingly complex. In many countries, the initial solidarity among various social groups and classes has given way to a new and complicated reality. Intellectuals, artists, cultural activists, free thinkers, journalists, activists and independent voices are by their nature diverse and unsupported by the kind of substantial economic backing, institutional

presence or military might of governments and religions. Thus, false binaries seem to have emerged, with either a member of the old regime or a representative of an Islamic political party coming to the leadership fore, neither of which live up to the initial aspirations of many in the vanguard of the social transformations. This is most obvious in Tunisia and Egypt, where Islamists have won the post-revolutionary elections and in Yemen where a former regime insider now fills the previous president's shoes. Libya's elections have remarkably succeeded in electing a candidate free of either religious or despotic ties, though the threat of violence and a sense of defensiveness towards religion is prominent among the people, while in Syria the uprisings and clashes between revolutionaries and loyalists continues unabated.

Delivering on AFAC Express's promise of expedience and accessibility, outreach activities, field trips and networks have given AFAC a unique opportunity to assess the impact of the uprisings on artistic and cultural production in these different Arab regions and artists communities. It is a difficult time for cultural expression and the regional situation remains open-ended and unclear. Independent cultural practitioners are, in different ways, attempting to provide spaces and activities that channel the up-shaken energies of their people and their

communities towards creative outlets that allow them self-expression, while also inspiring them towards conscious citizenship and dignified humanity.

Tunisia

From the beginning, the sentiment was clear that the vast majority of Tunisian artists and cultural practitioners were taken by complete surprise and were in fact shocked by the sudden uprising of the people and the quick disposal of the president. Intellectuals, artists, curators and journalists have been almost unanimous in expressing their disbelief. This was coupled with a need for distance and analysis in order to understand the ramifications of what had happened. Many Tunisian artists refuse to accept congratulations on the abdication of the dictator, feeling such sentiments were unwarranted and too soon.

Indeed, since the fall of Ben Ali, Tunisian artists and intellectuals have suffered hostility and on occasion outright violence. The artist community and liberal thinkers are fighting back; for many, the Tunisian revolution has only just begun. When elections replaced Ben Ali's regime with the Ennahda, an Islamic revivalist party, the liberal-minded became watchful over infringements on freedom of thought, dress



and speech – the building-blocks of culture. On the eve of the country's first democratic poll in October 2011, Tunisia's Nessma TV aired the animation film "Persepolis" which tells the story of a young girl's ambivalent relationship with the Islamic Revolution in Iran. This caused an overly violent reaction among the conservative Muslims, or Salafists, of Tunisia who found the film sacrilegious. They held angry demonstrations outside the TV stations' office and then burned down the car and



the house of the station's director, Mr. Karoui. "I was expecting a reaction, but a political reaction, like statements in the press. I never expected that I will live this nightmare," he said (Beardsley, E. NPR, June 4th 2012).

Political maturity is a long way coming for the Tunisian people. To that effect, many contemporary curators and cultural managers are now targeting the rural populations of Tunisia, recognizing that they have been marginalized from the cultural engagements of the urban city-centers.

Artists and cultural practitioners are also calling on international support for their artistic freedom. The Tunisian Collective for Arts, Culture and Freedom issued a statement in June 2012 enumerating the repeated physical aggressions against Tunisian artists and intellectuals: "March

2012, a theatrical event was attacked by thousands of Salafists in downtown Tunis and artists were aggressed. Intellectuals were attacked during public conferences. May 2012, an attempt to murder with severe physical aggression took place on a theatre professor and artist and the members of an artistic association in Kef." The authors of the petition strongly reproach the Tunisian Ministry of Culture for failing to defend them from attacks and for issuing unsupportive statements like "It's enough for art to be beautiful, it shouldn't be revolutionary, it should be nice." (Nafas Art Magazine, June 2012). Thus in the wake of Tunisia's revolution, its artists and cultural practitioners are very much in protest, resisting the re-establishment of an authoritarian government, be it Islamic or otherwise, and calling for Tunisian government to "preserve freedom of conscience, creation, expression and the life of artists."

Egypt

Egypt's revolution started off with many artists and cultural practitioners in full swing alongside labor workers and activists, both in the streets of Egypt and on virtual platforms. Interviews targeting artists and celebrities began early in the uprisings, calling them to take a stand regarding the revolution. Cultural spaces were spontaneously transformed into open and accessible sanctuaries for revolutionaries as round-the-clock centers for discussion, mobilization and organization of civil disobedience and creative activism during the uprisings.

"People have been complaining about corruption and injustice for decades. The main change that happened with the revolution is that everything became more intense. More people were involved. People who typically posted just personal and biographical comments started posting political comments and realizing that they also have a political voice," says Egyptian cultural journalists and AFAC grantee Mariam Elias.

Enthusiasm and energy were still at a high during the early months of the revolution while tensions and polarizations have gradually increased leading to the current sense of disappointment and confusion at the political changes taking place. Nevertheless, we found a flurry of artistic and cultural production from Egypt and a massive volume of cultural activities. Even in AFAC Express's relative small scope, the number of Egyptian applicants and grantees supersede all other countries.

space for doubting what is going on. People can be arrested and taken to military court for criticizing the army. Women have to undertake virginity tests by Islamic law. It is really impossible to believe that this is where we are after our revolution. We started off with so much amazing energy and enthusiasm. But now, there is no more room for discussion and debate and middle ground," says grantee Mariam Elias.



Much of the content of these projects has been initially of an emotional patriotic nature. These quickly evolved to cultural projects with a utilitarian goal of seeking to educate people about their rights as citizens. "Ma Tikhsarnish" is a visual campaign against violence towards minorities, "Your Right To Know", is a workshop about the right to information and "Political Discussions" is an interactive multi-media performance that explores the meaning of public spaces, civil society and the impact of media.

However, as initial euphoria of success has transformed into the re-emergence of taboos, military rule, political Islamic governance and an increasingly polarized society, there is a sense of skepticism among artists and cultural practitioners in how the revolution has turned out. "It is confusing, I have to say. There is a lot of

The Egyptian revolution, like the rest of the Arab uprising, is a nightmare for political activists trying to figure out what happened and the emergence of political Islam in a leadership position is surely not the end of the revolution but merely a phase within the evolution of the popular movement. In the meantime, cultural practitioners want to push things forward, on the ground and among the people, without waiting for the political systems to get their act together. Cultural centers are continuing their outreach in the midst of upheaval. A successful story is that of theatre practitioner Nora Amin who has established Egypt's first nation-wide "Theatre for the Oppressed" program, using a method that ensures a home-based platform for addressing local injustices in a creative and accessible way. Many Egyptians believe the work of artists and cultural practitioners have only just begun.

Yemen

In Yemen, a new president has been nominated and the long drawn-out public protests have succeeded in turning a historic page, but change on the ground is still slow in coming. Yemeni journalist Malak Shahar told AFAC that "most projects that come our way in these difficult times for Yemen are related to aid, education, political reform and infrastructure development" and that many cultural practitioners in Yemen are disenchanted with the lack of cultural offerings their country currently has to offer, especially in terms of contemporary art as opposed to traditional forms. The scarcity of creative initiatives by public institutions points to the conservatism of Yemeni society. Visual arts are not as well-received or appreciated as poetry and folk music,

especially when they challenge the norms, as can be witnessed in a pre-revolution exhibition by female visual artist Amna Al-Nassiri called "Hisarat" or "Sieges". Turning away from classical arts like painting and sculpting, her exhibition presented a variety of photographs and audio-visual installations featuring unidentifiable veiled figures in different positions of confinement. As some visitors were angered by the show, complaining that it presented Yemen in a negative light, Al-Nassiri explained "They don't want changes in art in the same manner that they don't want changes in their lives and in their societies." (Albiso-Marino, A. Nafas Art Magazine, April 2011.)

Since the revolution, however, women have become more visible and outspoken. The election of female Yemeni journalist and political activist Tawakkul Karman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize of 2011 has been a powerful message of international recognition to the peaceful movement of the people as well as the empowerment of women. "Yemeni people want the world to respect them, they are not terrorists, not violent - and this award gives them the victory for the revolution," says Ms. Karman in an interview with the BBC. "I am very proud of the prize and feel all our efforts have made a difference. It is a prize for Yemen, Yemeni youth and women." (Sinjab, L. BBC News, October 10 2011). Ms. Karman's Nobel Peace Prize uplifts Yemen's identity and cultural strength in a way that is contemporary, democratic and Islamic.

Women are taking their place in public spaces, participating in street protests and in new cultural productions. "Because I was one of the first women to take to the streets, it was difficult for my family to accept. But gradually, as more and more women started to participate, the role of women was not only more acceptable but also a cause of its own," explains AFAC grantee (from our Crossroads program) filmmaker Sarah Ishaq. "I don't think I would have been able to succeed in making a film or anything if it weren't for the context of the revolution."



Libya

Many consider Libya a promising post-revolutionary Arab state, despite the massive destruction which took place in the overthrow of Gaddafi. Elections held in July 7th 2012 were the country's first general election since 1964 and the country has elected a liberal non-Islamic government leadership as the vote went to a coalition of secular political parties and civil society groups led by Mohamed El-Megarif, a former advisor to the overthrown president who had defected early on in the uprisings, giving him strong street credibility.

In spite of what seems to be a difficult situation and ongoing violence, many artists and cultural practitioners are optimistic about the future. "The new leadership in the ministry is excellent and will help us move through the bureaucratic middle management, slowly but surely. Just remember where we were a few months ago!" said Libyan poet Khaled Mattawa who, together with his wife Reem Gibriel are launching Arete, a new cultural initiative grantee of AFAC Express which will offer year-long projects and activities in contemporary arts. AFAC is establishing a network of local players that are looking forward to long-term development possibilities for arts and culture in Libya, together with the help of Libyan philanthropist Amr Ben Halim, colleagues and friends at Mawred and ADEF.

A lot of the most basic infrastructures are lacking in Libya. The founder of the Libyan Association for Photography explained that "in the 70's and 80's we had a dozen cinema theaters showing Italian, Indian and Egyptian movies. But Gaddafi was more interested in propaganda and forcibly neglected the industry." There have been no functioning cinemas in Libya for decades. In terms of contemporary arts and culture, the country is emerging from a vacuum. While creativity and talent is everywhere emerging, a shortage of equipment and infrastructure is the limiting factor. Intellectuals, cultural practitioners and artists inside Libya and many of those returning from Diaspora will play a crucial role in reviving the country's cultural sector.

Questions of identity are on everyone's mind, what will Libya of the future look like? Tribalism is prominent in Libyan society and learning to accommodate a diversity of voices and a whole new government system after 40 years of authoritarian rule is a delicate process. AFAC grantee Leila Tayeb speaks of "Art and Gender in the 2011 Libyan Revolution" during which she interviewed musicians and listeners of music, noting the important role of music in channeling popular energy and establishing a shared identity. "My vision for this footage is to be able to create a film that is tentatively titled- 'Men Antum?!' – ('Who are you?!') This phrase is absolutely central in the uprising. It spurred popular culture into revolution," she said. "The amount of music that came out playing on Gaddafi's statements is remarkable, not only in Libya but across the Arab world. 'Men antum?!' made the people of Libya rise up to show the tyrant exactly who they were and what they were made of."

Part of this process has been the emergence of new voices, some conservative and some liberal. There is also increased recognition of Amazigh culture, literature and music, long suppressed during Gaddafi's rule.

As in neighboring countries, the growing concern over conservative elements of society also exists. A famous Tunisian rap artist was forced to cancel an outdoor public concert in Tripoli after he reportedly received death threats for impious lyrics. Cultural practitioners are taking these realities into account and planning more strategically with an eye on gradual and long-term cultural growth. For example, Arete will avoid nudity scenes in upcoming cinema screenings. This kind of self-implemented censorship out of respect for conservative society is also strategic to avoid rousing a more compelling Islamic opposition that could deter artistic and cultural production at large.

The future remains to be seen and, in practical terms, the decades of dictatorship imply that a lot of infrastructural and social-psychological rebuilding is in order. It is the cultural sector's role to stay very closely connected to the many now-enabled voices that are helping to rethink Libyan identity.



Syria

AFAC's last visit to Syria was in March 2011 as a collaborator in Damascus' Dox Box film festival. The majority of the country had been watching the events in Tunisia and Egypt with full attention, yet the dominant sense at the time was one of promise, security and confidence that Syria would not be affected and that the government was intent on undertaking meaningful political liberalization. During this trip AFAC met with many potential applicants as well as potential donors eager to engage the arts and culture scene. Many contemporary cultural projects of a national stature were underway with regional and international partnerships working to develop new art galleries, museums, archives, theatres, films, orchestras and festivals. In March 2011, most people did not believe that Syria would witness similar upheavals to that which took place in Tunisia and Egypt.

Nevertheless, the use of indiscriminate violence, and the death and displacement of thousands of Syrians has led to a severe

destruction in the fabric of Syrian society. International measures to curtail the Syrian governments' resources have brought the country to an economic standstill and a state of armed polarization that today seems to be slipping into a tragic civil war.

In this context, many Syrian artists and cultural practitioners have relocated, largely to Lebanon and to Egypt, while maintaining contact to home and aspiring to return. There are also some cultural practitioners who have chosen to stay in Syria and continue their work in arts and culture despite the strains and facing serious threats. As a result of AFAC Express's expediency, several Syrian artists, playwrights, poets, filmmakers, actors, musicians and illustrators have been able to produce critical work in a short period of time. A lot of the projects are for virtual dissemination, such as the hopeful 3-minute animation, "One Hand," while some are regional in scope including collaborative theatre projects and music concerts. The cultural sector is playing a crucial – albeit limited - role in keeping the Syrian

community more sane by offering platforms for self-expression and filling the gap of economic paralysis and political upheaval with creative outlets and community activities.

Hip hop musician Ahmad Khouja's regional concerts have brought together poets and musicians engaging directly with politics and social change. Participants in his Khat Thaleth project reflect on the complications and diversities that the Arab Uprisings are bringing to light, on a Syrian level, an Arab regional level and an on international level. "It is challenging to listen to opinions that brushed against my own beliefs. But I didn't want to simply disregard people I disagreed with. So I faced personally this challenge of allowing different perspectives and I really appreciate the role of music in letting people from different perspectives come together. Hip-hop in particular is about self-expression and social criticism, not just melody and sound, and so you get a dialogue and debates and a multiplicity of perspectives through this art form."

In times of violence, expressions in arts and cultural are also often of an emotional nature: outrage, mourning, pain and defiance are common themes. From a more critical standpoint, however, there is a recognition among practitioners that understanding the long term impact of what is going on in terms of culture and identity will take a long time and that there will be much more meaningful works emerging once the crisis settles and all there is sufficient space and distance to understand all that has happened. This may take a long time yet. As Syrian playwright Mohammad Attar says, "the ongoing reality is full of images... painful accounts... dramatic stories par excellence," but it would take long years before such traumatic stories are assimilated by society. (Abu Assali, S. Syria Today, June 2012).

It is difficult to speak clearly of Syrian cultural production in the midst of tragedy that is ongoing and increasing. AFAC Express had far more Syrian applicants in its early months than its latter months as it has becoming increasingly difficult for

Syrians to do any obvious cultural or artistic activity. In addition to security threats, there is existential despair as artists experience the futility of their critical thinking, creative expression and cultural production in the face of indiscriminate violence and international stalemates. On the upside, alternative ways of expression on Facebook and YouTube have mushroomed and a whole virtual mode of existence is available for Syrian artists, performers, filmmakers and poets with followers and audiences around the globe. Yet, while virtual realities and platforms proliferate, reality on the ground is increasingly limited and dismal; the future remains unknown.

Conclusion

As the landscape shifts, the work of artists and cultural producers is more crucial than ever. While many artists are rightfully paying tribute to what has been accomplished in the civil arena and struggle for human rights, the role of art is one of authenticity, creative expression and presence. Independent sources of funding are indispensable. To that effect, AFAC Express has been like a time capsule - a one-year program taking on an experimental and expedient, albeit modest, approach to supporting contemporary cultural production and responding to urgent on-the-ground needs. AFAC has been, and continues to be, committed to supporting artists and cultural producers of the Arab region as they explore new possibilities and test the limits of change in the search of a new equilibrium with wider horizons.

Case Studies



Dignity in Music, On Stage and Off

Author: Ahmed Khouja

Activity: Khat Thaleth (Third Rail) Music
Compilation and Performances

Story collected by Zena Takieddine
August 1st, 2012

I grew up in Kuwait and the United States and spent my childhood summers in Damascus. I studied and specialized in architecture and for most of my life I've also had music as a passion and a sub-career. Four years ago I began a small label in San Francisco called Stronghold Sound together with friends of mine who are also involved in music production and journalism. One associate, Juan, is Argentinian and he has been in music journalism for a long time, the other one, Bongo Sidibe is a percussionist from Guinea.

We actually travelled to Guinea Conakry for 2 months last year, just before I came to Lebanon. I've been a long time student of West African music and I went to be part of a workshop that Bongo and his wife were organizing. We also ran a few different recording projects there and ended up with a Guinean compilation. It was a very

intense experience, being fully immersed in a culture facing so many challenges. There were a lot of safety concerns as the country had just held its first democratic election in its history. There were riots and a lot of fear, so many of the workshops that were meant to be held at that time were cancelled and we ended up being one of the only groups in town! What a unique experience! We really benefited by being the sole group who remained in the country for those two months, totally committed to the musical experience and with the democratic change a backdrop for the compilation itself.

Then I came to Beirut and the idea had been brewing in the back of my mind to create an Arabic hip-hop compilation for all the different voices of the Arab revolutions. My first months in Beirut, I was just getting my bearings, attending some concerts, meeting musicians, scoping out the talent, developing my personal contacts. At the beginning, everyone I spoke to was enthusiastic about the idea and had a positive attitude about the political changes taking place in the region. People were following the news on Tunisia and Egypt with amazement and a lot of enthusiasm. Things became a bit more controversial with Libya and what does it mean to have a revolution if you can't do it on your own and you are getting outside help? Bahrain and Yemen were also more depressing, what does it mean to have a revolution when it doesn't seem like it's likely to continue or to yield the wanted results? And then there is Syria, which is an ongoing agony.

As a Syrian, it has been a rollercoaster of skepticism and optimism for me, and finding steadfastness. People in the streets are facing bullets just to say they want a change. I can't be anything but proud and humbled. But then, arriving to Beirut, I was taken aback and really so disappointed by the sense of cynicism regarding Syria. "This isn't a real revolution," people would tell me, "It is a conspiracy." I can understand where that is coming from, and the role of larger regional and international powers, but I was really taken aback by the quick back paddling in opinions that people had with respect to the concept of change in

the Arab region. When the revolutions began in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, everyone was enthusiastic but when it came to Syria people suddenly had cold feet and viewed the Syrian revolution as less real, less authentic, an alien intrusion. I really couldn't believe it.

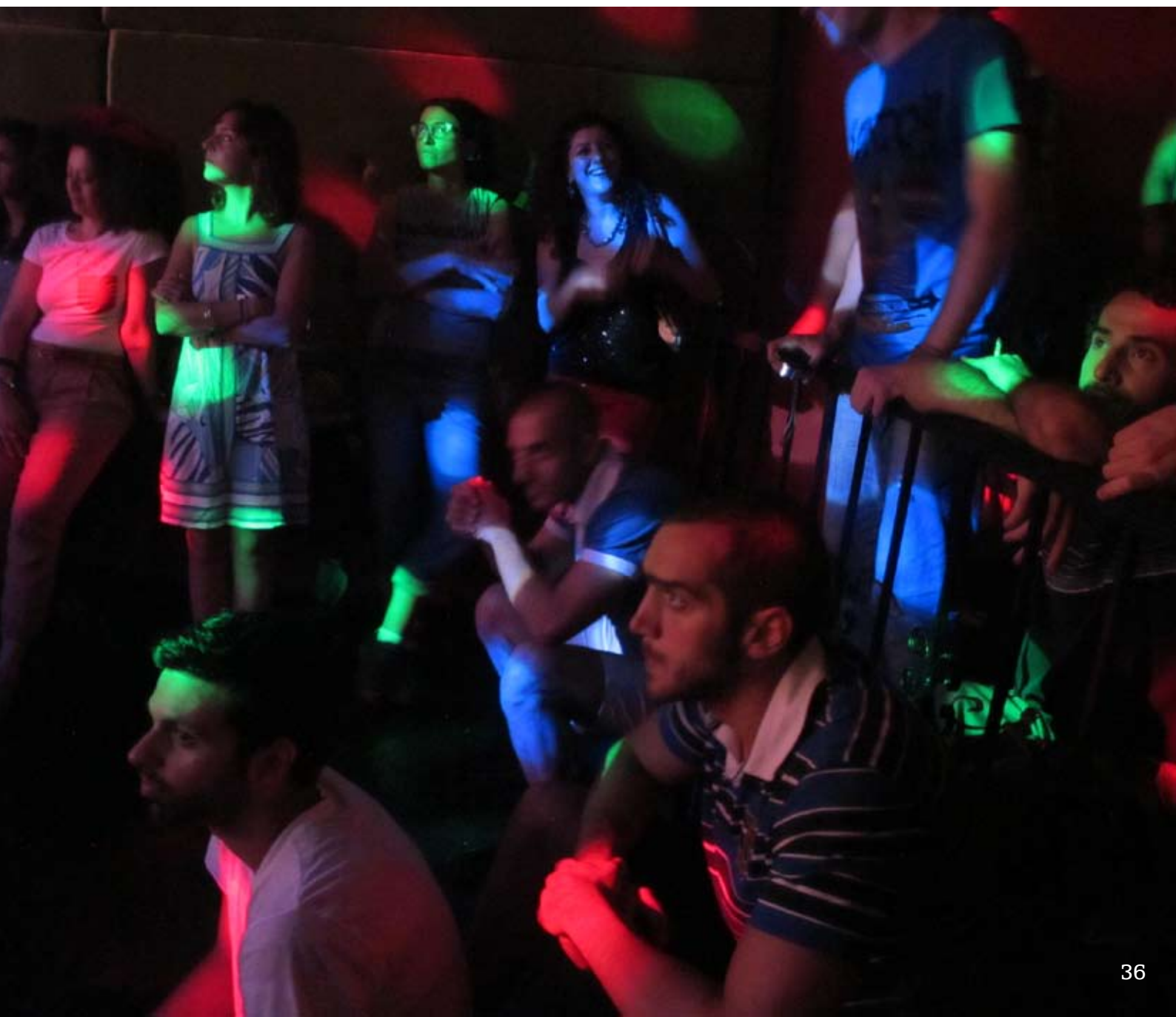
It is challenging to listen to opinions that brushed against my own beliefs. But I didn't want to simply disregard people I disagreed with. So I faced personally this challenge of allowing different perspectives and I really appreciate the role of music in letting people from different perspectives come together. Hip-hop in particular is about self-expression and social criticism, not just melody and sound, and so you get a dialogue and debates and a multiplicity of perspectives through this art form.

Getting the AFAC Express grant was an instant boost and gave me the starting point to get my project rolling and look for more funding and support. My project would include a series of performances in the Arab region and a hip-hop compilation of some 16 to 18 pieces by artists from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Jordanian, Iraq, Libya and Tunisia. The concept that we came up with, "Khat Thaleth," or "Third Rail" was coined by my colleague, Mazen El-Sayed - a.k.a Al-Rass with the sub-heading "Initiative for the Maturation of Popular Awareness". It came as a response to a climate which was becoming so polarized. You're either with the government or with the revolutionaries, with the conspiracy or with the neo-imperialists, with this sect or with that sect. Everything was dividing and breaking apart because of these extremes. "Khat Thaleth" means that, rather than supporting this polarizing environment, we were working on being ideologically independent and finding our own paths and our own opinions between them.

I am super happy with the results. We've had two events so far and a third one is underway in October. Artists are responding very positively to the project and are enjoying being a part of it. Audiences have been very receptive. And the music recording of our compilation is underway.

All of the musicians participating in "Khat Thaleth" are of a political nature and their performances are unique and specific. They're not about mass entertainment or mass consumerism. But they deserve attention. A pan-Arab performance circuit for Arabic hip-hop organized at a high quality level would be so valuable, both to the genre and to the people of the Arab region. My long term goal is to foster an ongoing relationship between all these different Arab musicians and to organize shows in the Middle East. Arabic hip-hop is so relevant. The artists need to be heard here. A lot of them make it big abroad, but this music now is by Arabs, for Arabs. That's what I really hope comes out in the long run.

The main challenges that came up were logistic issues like timing, travel and visas. Getting an artist visa in Lebanon has been particularly difficult as the Lebanese government places exorbitant fees for artist visas and it is ridiculous that artists are lumped together with pimps and prostitutes. Putting on a hip-hop event is not like putting on a rave concert. Our audiences are smaller groups who think of art as a place for social criticism and awareness. Supporting culture cannot happen at the same time as institutionalized disrespect at the official circles that deal with artists. I don't know if AFAC can play an advocacy role in raising awareness on this issue, but it is really a pity that Lebanon, which is so rich with culture and art and creativity, has this kind of undignified system.





Many Voices – Room for All?

Author: Mariam Elias

Activity: "3freet El-Net"

(The Genie of the Net) – a research project and publication

*Story collected by Zena Takieddine
July 26th, 2012*

My name is Mariam Elias, I'm Egyptian from Cairo. I studied in two universities at the same time, one for mass communication and journalism, the other for art direction and cinema. During my studies, I started writing reviews about art for different magazines and newspapers. Actually, that is mainly what I do: write reviews about contemporary Egyptian art and culture.

Recently, I released a book called Thawrat El-LOOOL – (The Revolution of LOOOL) –Chats with Young Egyptian Artists. It presents and analyzes the works and ideas of young Egyptian artists as they appear in chat rooms and online social media. I find there is something very similar in the trains of thoughts in people according to the generation they belong to. Thawrat El-LOOOL focuses on people who were born in the 1980's and grew up when internet use became common. For my book-launching,

I also included screenings of videos and independent film, all taken from the internet. There is an underground cinema culture online which is very real. Unknown filmmakers can become stars overnight! The internet has really made a huge change. No other medium can give you world-wide access. It almost makes traditional galleries and film-screening venues obsolete.

Last year, on February 28 2011 to be precise, I launched a Facebook group called "Nostalgia il-Fasad" (or Corruption's Nostalgia). This group quickly became very active and intense; we had a new post every second! At one point, we decided to hold elections on who would control the content and be the group 'administrator.' Then the first thing the elected administrator did was close down the page! With 'Nostalgia il-Fasad' closed, I felt that there was a lot of valuable content - in thought, creative expression and dialogue - that was just no longer accessible. Virtual reality is so transient! And yet, it is a cultural mirror that tells us a lot about our mindsets. I felt I needed to somehow collect all the interesting thoughts and statements that Egyptians had expressed and put out there, not only on this particular Facebook page, but across all the virtual groups in Egypt. So, that's how the idea came to me and I decided to make a resource book called "3freet El-Net " (The Genie of the Net) where I could collect and share in permanent form the 'best of' expressions of Egyptian blogosphere, Tweets, Facebook groups and YouTube posts. I turned to AFAC Express for funding, and when I got the grant, it made me take on my project all the more seriously and I really felt the weight of responsibility in being accurate and thorough in my research.

It is seriously amazing, the things that come up on YouTube and the Facebook groups that people make. A lot of them use satire and are really funny but they're also very effective in expressing common cause and moving people into action. For example, if you look at the Facebook group 'We Are All Khaled Saeed' which was started on April 6th 2011, it was able to create a sense of popular movement, of significant mass,

which was crucial to the Egyptian revolution.

I have six chapters in my "3freet El-Net" book and I have three goals: to collect, to share, and to analyze. It will be a new thing, outside the traditional periodization of art history. This is contemporary art, virtual space, a new field to document, archive and analyze the content of social media. I hope it becomes a reference for a very important period in Egyptian contemporary culture. The idea of making a tangible product out of something as intangible as social media is a bit strange, I know. But it comes to me because I have witnessed firsthand how important this blogosphere has been in galvanizing people.

I believe that virtual reality platforms have created new cultural spaces that have translated into real actions on the ground. There is something important about communication and information being posted independently online. Even prominent news agencies like CNN and BBC are quoting from these sources. In fact, it has been the source of choice during the Arab uprisings. People ask me, "How can you trust social media sources? People can lie. Everything is photoshopped." My response is that the same accusations hold true for mainstream media. Credibility is an issue to take into consideration for all news sources, online or otherwise.

There is a continuity of issues in a lot of the Egyptian blogosphere from before the revolution. Western commentators often think that information technology is what caused the people to rise up. But that's not true. People have been complaining about corruption and injustice for decades. The main change that happened with the revolution is that everything became more intense. More people were involved. People who typically posted just personal and biographical comments started posting political comments and realizing that they also have a political voice.

Since starting my project, however, there have been a lot of changes in Egypt. Although we are now in post-revolution, there is actually, in many ways, less

freedom and less unity. Bloggers and online commentators had much more freedom to criticize and to express their opinion before the revolution than they do now! It's making me question my own premises. How true it is that the 'revolution came from Facebook'? I have no doubt that it was an important tool in the uprisings against Mubarak and the success of the revolution. It wasn't just a self-expression tool but also an organizing tool. But now, I see we are not in a better place. The same tools that we used to rise up against a dictatorship are now being used to separate our society into extremes.

It is confusing, I have to say. There is a lot of space for doubting what is going on. People can be arrested and taken to military court for criticizing the army. Women have to undertake virginity tests by Islamic law. Is it really possible to believe that this is where we are after our revolution? We started off with such amazing energy and enthusiasm! But now, there is no more room for discussion and debate and middle ground. In this chaotic period, maybe it is more important than ever before to remember how things were in the beginning of the revolution.

It is ironic where we are today. Blogs and Facebook groups that were loyalist to the regime during the revolution, such as one group called "I am Sorry Sir", are now considered opposition groups. Staunch critics of the Mubarak's dictatorship are now supporting his former representative in the face of the Islamic alternative and the disorganized leftist groups. The most I can honestly say at the moment is that this is a transitional phase. There are new taboos in the name of patriotism and loyalty to the revolution.

Criticism is limited. There is definitely more censorship.

I know it is impossible to show all opinions and to be objective but I want "3freet El-Net" to be as close as possible to that. I want to show all points of view precisely because everything has gotten polarized more recently and the diversity and dialogue that existed before the revolution and at the beginning of the revolution are being squeezed out.





Free Souls Live What They Say

Author: Ahmed Saeed Asery

Activity: Music Album "Insan" by the "Three Meters Away" band

*Story collected by Zena Takieddine
August 16th, 2012*

AFAC's support in recording our first album, "Insan", has helped us in registering our band as official 'First Level' – meaning respectable - artists. In Yemen, most people listen to traditional folk music. The way we sing, with non-traditional instruments and making up our own lyrics, is not approved by many. Actually maybe it is also more the way we look. One of our band members, Shadi, was caught 2 months ago by a group of people who "promote proper behavior." They beat him up and shaved his head because they didn't like his long hair and considered it irreligious. Some fundamentalist consider music to be sacrilegious, point blank. And many people in general consider musicians to be low class, like an improper vocation. Can you imagine this kind of a society? We face many challenges of this kind. So getting an AFAC grant was a huge boost. It means a lot to get this kind of positive recognition and it gave us the chance to record the Album, "Insan"

which means "Human Being" where we sing about changing people's perspectives towards respect for everyone.

Our lyrics call for peace and human decency. We sing about the challenges and pains of our people. Things like extremism, territorialism and injustice. We sing for hope, education, brotherhood, charity. But we're also cool and laid back and just very welcoming to everyone, which I guess is something that runs against the grain of a conservative society like ours. We called our band "Three Meters Away" (3al Bo3d TlatAmtar) to indicate proximity, to help our listeners feel that we are close to them.

A lot of people call us aliens, like we just landed from outer space. It is because our music and our style is so weird to them. Peace-loving Arabic reggae? What is that? But the people who listen to our music really appreciate it. Our audiences, like our band, are young and old, boys and girls, Arabs and foreigners. Our songs are open for people of all ages, genders and beliefs. We've had a few local concerts and everyone is dancing and singing along. Our set designer is a young architect Alma Hashem, filmmaker is Monika Noda, photographer is Rahman Taha, the two drummers are Shady and Munther, harmonica player Omar Omar and bassist Hassan El-Malik.

AFAC funding has gone a long way with us. Not just in recording our album, but in helping us spread music appreciation in Yemen itself. We started a music gallery where we held an exhibition at the National Museum as part of World Music Day and we plan to make an annual event. We had an interview on an internet radio station where we talked about the connection between spirituality and music, how it unites people instead of separating them. It is really the opposite side of any sort of fundamentalism. Spiritual awareness is a simple love that doesn't get complicated by politics. Our aim is to embrace everyone and be embraced. Our lyrics speak to our humanity and everyone is included.

One of our songs is called "La Lel Asabiyah". It is not easy to translate what that means. "Asabiyah" is a kind of tribal allegiance that traditionally gives people a sense of identity and pride but can also keep people divided and fighting with each other. So our song says "No to Tribalism" and we bring up the issue of the "Ga3ashen." The "Ga3ashen" are refugees in Yemen, whose houses have been destroyed. Where do they go with themselves? They are considered outcasts, but we can't let them be homeless and just ignore them. By singing about them, we refuse to ignore them. It will take a long time to change these old customs, but as long as we keep remembering what matters, we will get there.

Yemeni society faces a lot of problems. Serious problems that are age-old and repetitive. History is like that, accumulated sufferings that can get really heavy. I actually studied to be a doctor. But I know that music is the path for me and that doctors of the past used music to heal people's pains and to lighten our heavy spirits. One of my favorite authors, his name is Abdallah Al-Bardouni, states in his book, "The Yemen Republic" that when the Yemeni people stop the killing they can finally start flourishing in arts and sciences.

Of course freedom is about having bread to eat. The problems we are facing as a people are huge – things like poverty, corruption, unemployment, obstacles to simple human needs. These are long struggles that will take time. With music you can sing together and find a way to a better future. We sing for hope and patience and humanity. We don't get involved in any particular political movement because we are committed completely to the dignity of the human being irrespective of where he or she stands.

I am really happy that we were able to bring people from outside of Yemen to join us in making our album, especially artists from Sudan. I don't know if people realize that there's a strong Sudani-Yemeni connection in our culture. It is remarkable. Dr. Nizar Ghanem is an artist who wrote a book called "Gosour Al-Wegdan Bain Al-Yemen wa Al-Sudan" (The Bridges of

Presence Between Yemen and Sudan) which basically talks about the 'Sudanese-Yemeni' or "Sumeni" identity. It has beautiful meanings and I find that "Sumeni" art is one of the most meaningful art combinations in the whole world.

It is a huge topic. And work on our album has left us without sleep for the past month as we've been doing so many workshops and consecutive recordings to get the sound right. AFAC's support has really moved many obstacles from our path and opened many doors. We were able to bring international participants into our group, we were able to record at the biggest studio in Yemen, and, since we began this project, the studio has offered us an official position to become the studio managers. Can you imagine? Our group includes sound engineers and so our little band is now fully employed at Yemen's number one studio! We are now accessible, we are now recognized, we are taken seriously and we can connect to other artists in Yemen and abroad. This means the world to us. It raises society's respect and appreciation for our

music immensely. We definitely could not have gotten here in the record-time that we did without AFAC Express. "Three Meters Away" is now both an official 'First Level' band and a professional studio-management team.

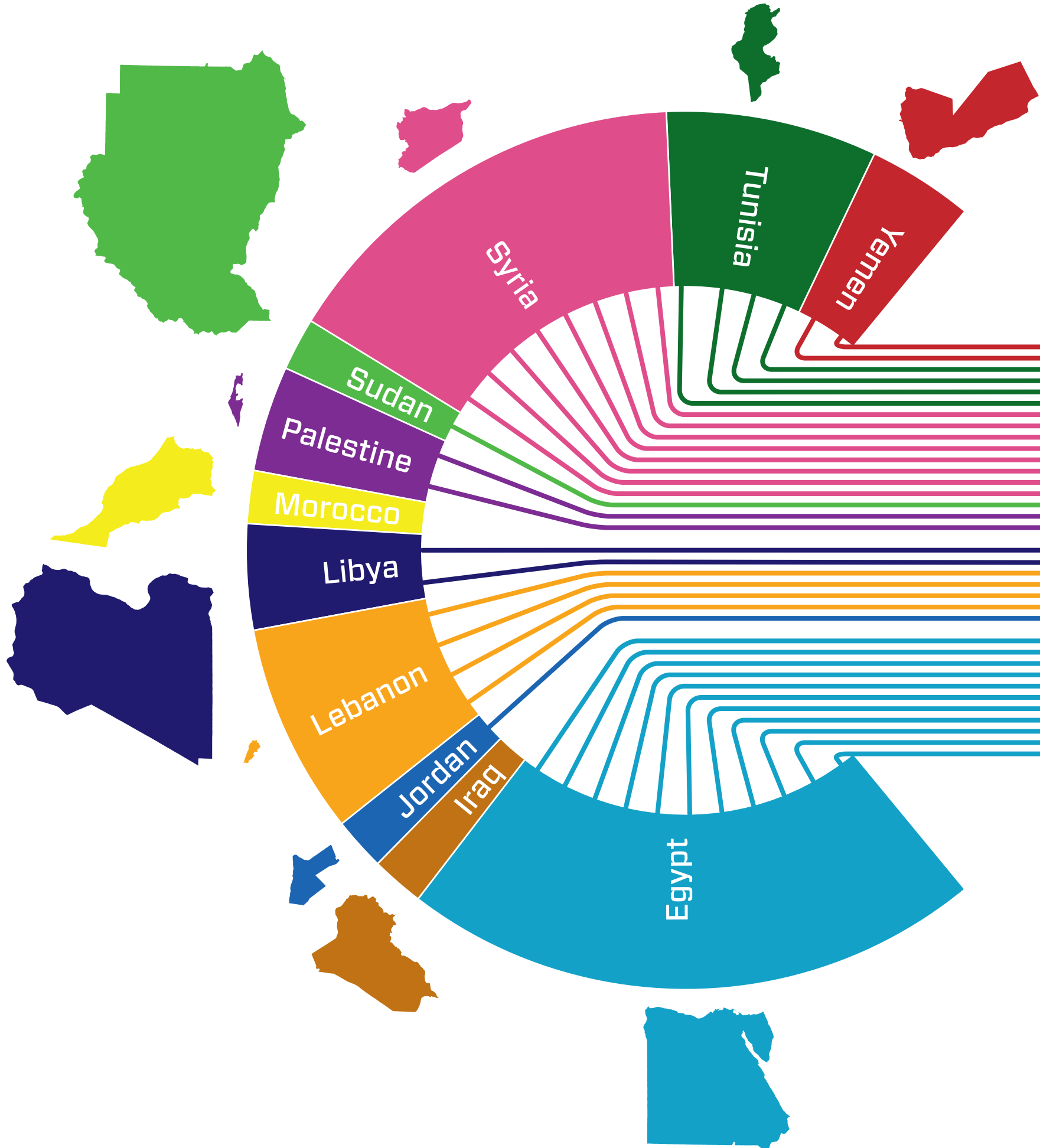
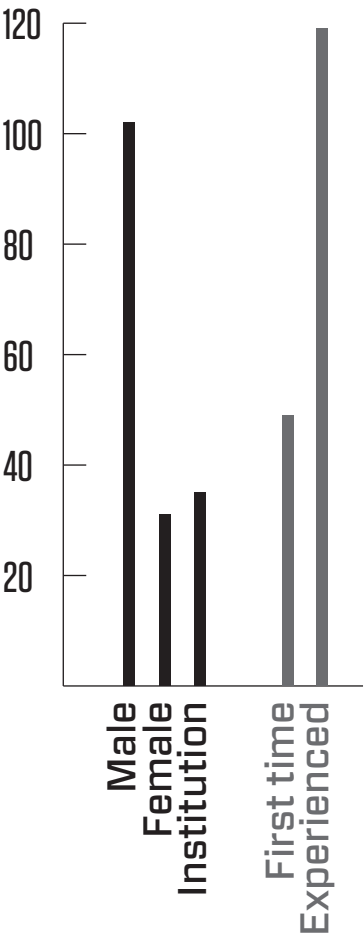
And there's more. I believe that free souls live what they say. So, in addition to our music album release, we are hosting a Peace One Day 2012 tour in Yemen that will include 8 days of workshops on citizenship, public behavior, humanitarian work, team sports like football and art activities like photography, music and theatre workshops, concluding the festival on September 20th with a "Three Meters Away" concert. Everything will be open to everyone, especially to people and youth who are used to carrying guns and have taken part in violent acts. We are raising awareness on making change for the better and we will engage in discussions with the area sheikhs to make agreements on a ceasefire. All this will take place in Dergag Village in Abyan and the smaller neighboring villages too. It matters now, more than any other time.



AFAC EXPRESS

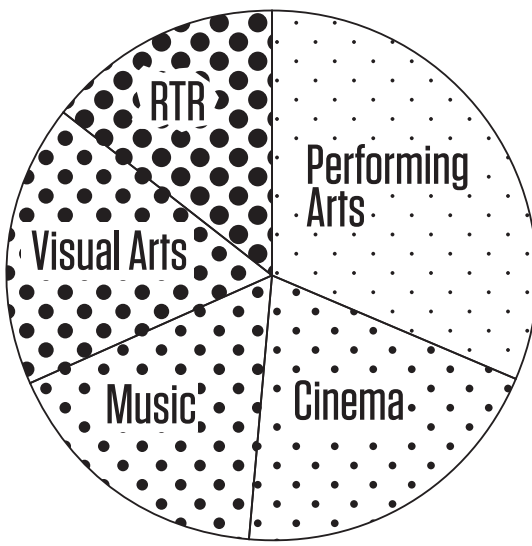
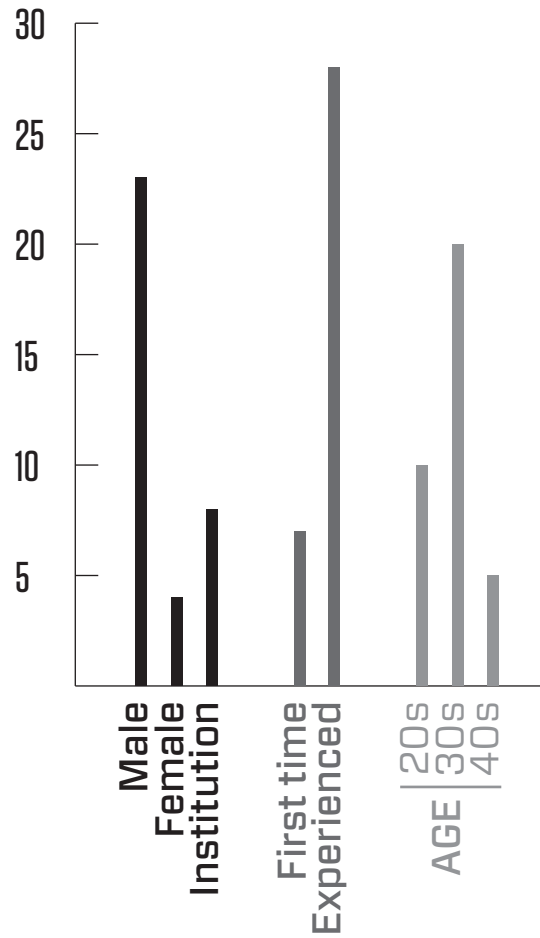
A year of rapid-response granting for independent arts and cultural productions in times of crisis and ongoing change.

168 Applicants



- Adel Abdel Wahab
- Ahmad Khouja
- Ahmed Nazmi El-Assal
- Ahmed Saeed Asery
- Ali Atassi
- Arete for Culture and Art
- ATAC
- Bassem Yousri
- Emadeddine Mabrouk
- The Free Arab
- Hayat Association for Theatre
- Houda Mhiri
- Imad Mortada
- Khadija Al Salami
- Mariam Elias
- Mobadroon for culture and media consulting
- Moez Mrabet
- Mohamed Abdul-Karim
- Mohamad Abusal
- Mohamed Ragab
- Mohamed Shafik
- Omar Al Jbaai
- Oussama Mohamad/ArteEast
- Oussama Helmy
- Ribal al-Khodari and Bassel Rajjoub
- Support for Information Technology
- Shams Theater
- Taghreed Sanhouri
- Wael Toubaji
- Wael Alkak
- Wael Qadour
- Wassim Ghozlani
- Wissam Arbache
- Walid Al-Abed
- Yamen Salman Mohamad

35 Grantees



9 Themes

- Freedom of Expression, Resistance to Oppression
- Paying Tribute to Previous Struggles, Dissidents and Artists
- Interrogating the Revolution
- Social Cohesion, Unity and Reconciliation
- Raising Civil Rights Awareness
- New Media and Communication Capacities
- Introducing Contemporary Arts to Wider Publics
- Women's Voices
- The Revolution and the Individual