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For Immediate Release

SHUBBAK 11-26 July 2015

'A Window on Contemporary Arab Culture'

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Shubbak (meaning 'window' in Arabic) is London's largest biennial festival of contemporary Arab culture. For its third festival, which runs from the 11-26 July, Shubbak presents its most ambitious programme yet, with UK premieres and new commissions from artists across the Arab world. **This year's festival will present a truly varied programme designed to appeal to London's population in all its diversity.**

Festival highlights include:

- Key strand of the **visual arts** offering is In-Situ, including sound-art installations, sculpture and street art, and the first ever UK mural by 'calligraphiti' artist **eL Seed**
- **Music** highlights include the festival's opening concert at Barbican Centre featuring a host of celebrated Arab musicians, including **Karima Skalli** and the **Asil Ensemble**, and world premiere of scenes from *Cities of Salt*, the forthcoming opera by Syrian composer **Zaid Jabri** at the Royal Opera House, based on the classic titular novel
- A weekend of **literature and storytelling** at the British Library courtesy of some of the Arab world's most acclaimed writers
- Arab **theatre** in London showcased by works at four of the city's most innovative venues: the **Arcola, Bush, Young Vic** and **Cockpit** Theatres
- **Badke**, a collaboration between Belgian choreographers and Palestinian dancers, inspired by Dabke, the popular Palestinian folk **dance**
- **Film** programme curated by noted Palestinian director **Michel Khleifi**
- Free **outdoor events** including Eid on Trafalgar Square, with food, live music and activities for all the family

Omar Al-Qattan, Festival chair says: *Shubbak may today be the world's premier festival of Arab culture, with the widest scope, freedom and variety. Incredible artists from across the Arab world are participating, helping us understand their world with greater lucidity and deeper empathy.*

Eckhard Thiemann, artistic director of Shubbak says:

We are immensely proud to have brought together an ambitious programme that invites artists to speak in a multitude of voices about what matters deeply to them. London is intrinsically connected to the Arab world. Shubbak amplifies these links through connecting Arab artists with audiences in London.

The 2015 Shubbak programme includes:

ART

As a major new initiative this year, Shubbak and its partners present 'In-Situ'; an invitation to Arab artists to respond to London's outdoor, unusual and historic locations. The strand includes sculpture installations, street art, performative interventions and sound art.

In-Situ includes:

For his first UK commission, celebrated French Tunisian 'calligraffiti' artist **eL Seed** paints a large-scale mural in the heart of London's urban art quarter. Blending Arab calligraphy with graffiti techniques, eL Seed has developed a distinctive and striking style, fusing poetry and language with dramatic design to create large-scale work. His creations adorn the 47m high minaret in the Southern Tunisian city Gabes, a wall on the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, motorway underpasses in Qatar as well as walls in New York, Melbourne and Jeddah. Commissioned by Shubbak. Supported by British Council

The Stage for Any Revolution is an installation created by Kuwaiti-Puerto Rican artist **Alia Farid** for Edgware Road's Nutford Place. This stage or piece of 'urban furniture' is for public use, from sitting to sharing discussions, or for making declarations or speeches. Over the course of the festival the 'stage' will come to life with a series of performances and it will see the launch of a new publication *Continuous City: Mapping Arab London*. A collaboration between Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art and the Edgware Road Project at the Serpentine Galleries, *Continuous City: Mapping Arab London* maps London through its historical and contemporary Arab communities. The Stage for Any Revolution is commissioned by Serpentine Galleries, British Council and Shubbak.

To celebrate the launch of *Continuous City: Mapping Arab London* Qatari-American artist and writer **Sophia Al Maria** has produced a sound piece based on her father's first visit to the Edgware Road in the 1970s and loosely inspired by Tayeb Salih's 1966 post-colonial novel *Season of Migration to the North*. Commissioned by Serpentine Galleries, British Council and Shubbak.

Based on improvised carts used by street merchants in Morocco, **Younes Baba-Ali** re-imagines the *Carroussa Sonore* as a vehicle to present sound art. Offering a personal selection of sound works from Arab and international artists, the artist will display the *Carroussa Sonore*, in the foyer of Chelsea Theatre throughout the festival. It will also travel to Victoria & Albert Museum, Portobello Road Market and the World End Estate. Shown in Marseille, Rabat and Brussels, this is its first UK visit.

Another Day Lost is an installation across five sites inspired by, and based on, the Syrian refugee crisis by Syrian-born, UK-based artist, **Issam Kourbaj**. These installations are scattered around London, mapping out and reflecting the geographic pattern of refugee presence outside the borders of Syria. The 'camps' are constructed out of waste materials, such as medicine packaging and discarded books, and encircled with a 'fence' of approximately 1,500 used matches: each match represents a day lost since the beginning of the Syrian uprising.

Street Art is a fast growing movement in the Gulf. Engaging with the public realm and frequently using humour, irony and references from popular culture, the works range from subtle interventions to large-scale murals. Shubbak and the British Council have invited some of the most exciting emerging artists to make their mark in London's urban spaces. Artists include **Fathima Mohiuddin** and the Riyadh-based **Shaweesh** and **Tala Al Zeid**.

The Nomad by leading Dubai-based **Khalid Shafar** is a contemporary architectural reinterpretation of the Arish - a traditional Gulf house placed in the iconic surroundings of the Rootstein Hopkins Parade Ground at Chelsea College throughout Shubbak, The Nomad now invites you to sit, meet, converse, study and relax.

Supported by: Dubai Design District (d3) & Abu Dhabi Festival

The Great Court at the British Museum becomes the stage for two artists working between drawing and performance. Moroccan choreographer and dancer **Radouan Mriziga** performs his solo '55'. Exploring the body's relationship to space through simple gestures and with quiet intensity, Mriziga gradually measures the space and creates an intricate floor pattern. Alexandrian born **Nazir Tanbouli** creates large-scale drawings, starting from simple marks and gradually covering the ground. In the process of drawing it becomes a performance. For Shubbak Tanbouli will create new 12m long works inspired by the British Museum and a recent research trip to Egypt.

In 2012, leading Lebanese artist **Ziad Antar** went on a photographic journey, capturing many of the large-scale works by world-renowned artists on Jeddah's famed corniche including works by **Joan Miró**, **Henry Moore**, **César Baldaccini** and **Aref Al Rayes**. Some of these sculptures were covered and protected from the construction work around them. Ziad Antar photographed these mysterious and hidden monuments and translated them into a new series of seven sculptures – *Derivable Sculptures*- which will be sited at the Riverside Walk Gardens by 60 Millbank. Produced by Selma Feriani Gallery.

Lebanese artist **Raed Yassin** will show his work in the unique surroundings of Leighton House. The exhibition *Kissing Amnesia*, includes *Yassin Dynasty*, a series of beautiful porcelain vases made in the Chinese porcelain capital Jingdezhen, depicting battles from the Lebanese civil war. The colourful, intimate and ornamental embroideries of the series *Dancing, Smoking, Kissing* stitch together memories and recollections from the artist's childhood in the absence of photographic records. Artist, turntablist and all-round musician **Raed Yassin** also creates a special electronic and turntabling set for the unique surroundings of Leighton House and his exhibition.

Exhibitions include:

At the Hayward Gallery a group exhibition - *Echoes & Reverberations* - explores performative approaches to aural culture and oral history from **Jumana Emil Abboud's** weaving of Palestinian folktales into contemporary life to **Joe Namy's** interest in collectively performed sound and music.

A Prologue to the Past and the Present State of Things at **Delfina Foundation**, is a constellation of performances, videos, objects and archival material charting key moments in the Arab region and throughout the world. This group exhibition launches Staging History an initiative by Delfina Foundation to support research and new commissions on performance art from the Arab region and beyond.

The Road Bloc Collective is a group of artists and activists from across the Arab world, who explore how power inscribes itself in urban space through architecture and images. Featuring photography, sound works and installation, *Road Block* at Rich Mix enacts the ongoing battle for space and claims for 'the right to the city'.

Curated by **Sam Bardaouil** and **Till Fellrath** of Art Reoriented, *I Spy with My Little Eye...* at The Mosaic Rooms explores a shift in individual concerns within a new generation of artists connected to Beirut. This exhibition showcases the rise of a young movement including **Caline Aoun, George Awde, Mirna Bamieh, Nour Bishouty, Pascal Hachem, Cherbil-Joseph H. Boutros, Aya Haidar, Georgette Power, Joe Namy, Stephanie Saade, Siska, Lara Tabet & Tala Worrell.**

What Is Home?, is it the building, town or country we live in, the people we live with or even the objects we surround ourselves with. Visitors to the quasi-domestic exhibition at the **Pump House Gallery** are invited to assume the role of the resident or collector as they view works by artists including: **Manal Al Dowayan, Faten Eldisoky, Walid Elsawi, Amina Menia** and **Moataz Nasr.**

Visual artist **Monira Al Qadiri** curates a thought-provoking evening of short satirical films from the Gulf - *Jaykar: The Cheeky Video Scene of the Gulf* - at the Crossway Foundation. In the past few years, sharp political and social critique has found a home in satire. In Saudi Arabia in particular, the production of online YouTube series has exploded; comedians, filmmakers and artists fiercely compete to stay relevant on social media. The programme will feature a collection of short films from this burgeoning scene, in an attempt to paint a portrait of this cheeky *Jaykar* (a Gulfi transliteration of the word Joker) character that both eludes and disrupts the status quo.

MUSIC

Shubbak's music programme combines masters of classical Arab music, scenes from the opera 'Cities of Salt', with the latest talent from the alternative and club music scene.

Shubbak's opening concert, co-presented with the Abu Dhabi Festival, brings together some of the greatest musicians from across the Arab World. Moroccan singer **Karima Skalli** joins the **Asil Ensemble** to perform three *Burdas*-song cycles combining poetry and music, inspired by the greatest Arab composers and poets across the centuries. A well known classical Burda with words from the 12th century poems of **Al Busari** and the famous *Nahj El Burda* of **Umm Kulthoum**, with words by **Ahmed Shawqi**, join a new composition by oud virtuoso **Mustafa Said**, to words by contemporary Palestinian poet **Tamim Barghouti**.

The concert is preceded by a free concert honouring the 'Arab Paganni' **Sami Al Shawa**. Presented by the Foundation for Arab Music Archiving & Research (AMAR) in association with Abu Dhabi Festival.

Originally from Aleppo, **Hello Psychaleppo**, aka **Samer Saem Eldahr**, is the founder of Electro-Tarab and rapidly gaining recognition as Syria's preeminent electronic artist. For Shubbak, **Hello Psychaleppo** creates a new video *Shahba* (another name for Aleppo) by mixing original video footage from his hometown, sampling the music of Aleppian singer **Nehad Najjar**, and blending it with his own illustrations to pay homage to the city that formed him. Co-commissioned by Shubbak, British Council and The Space.

Artist, turntablist and all-round musician **Raed Yassin** will create a special electronic and turntabling set for the unique surroundings of Leighton House and his exhibition. Remixing classic popular Arab music with playful nostalgia and cheeky irreverence, his music will inject a mesmeric and haunting soundscape to London's most orientalist building. Raed Yassin is an essential figure on the Lebanese experimental music scene. He is a founding member of the Irtijal Festival and Annihaya records in Beirut and has performed widely across the Middle East, as well as the US, Japan and Europe.

Supported by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the British Council

At Royal Opera House, Prize-winning Syrian composer **Zaid Jabri** presents a world premiere concert performance of four scenes from his new opera *Cities of Salt*. Writers **Yvette Christiansë** and **Rosalind Morris** provide the libretto, adapted from **Peter Theroux's** translation of the seminal novel of the same title by **Abdelrahman Munif**. The opera is written for full orchestra with seven soloists and chorus; this concert will feature scenes from each of the opera's three acts.

Jabri's music for *Cities of Salt* skilfully draws on Arab and European musical traditions, infusing the Western symphonic tradition with a sense of the Middle East through the use of microtones and vernacular traditions. His intelligent score brings this modern and timely tale to life in all its poignancy and violence. Performed by **Southbank Sinfonia**, conducted by **Michal Klauza**.

Kuwait-based multimedia artist **Zahed Sultan** performs a live set, especially created for the Barbican Art Gallery as part of **Doug Aitken's Station to Station: A 30 Day Happening** (27 June – 26 July). Using existing and new material created in a short residency on-site, the

immersive audiovisual performance uses song arrangements, including his signature tracks *Hakatha* and *I want her but I don't want her*, to atmospherically weave live acoustic and electronic sounds to create intense and mesmerising audio-visual landscapes. Commissioned by Shubbak and British Council. Produced by the Barbican.

The *Eid Festival* on Trafalgar Square is the Mayor of London's community event to celebrate the end of Ramadan. It includes a food festival, live music and fun activities for children and families. Between 2-5pm on Saturday 25 July, Shubbak presents three hours of rousing open-air festival music on the main stage. Straight from Alexandria comes **Massar Egbari** -Egypt's most popular alternative band, mixing rock, jazz and blues with oriental music. **47 Soul** -the border defying collective of Palestinian musicians- arrives from Womad, bringing with them the energetic beats of Dabke, Shaabi and Electro-Arabic. **Karama**, led by oud player **Soufian Saihi** performs a set inspired by 'Gnawa', ancient African Islamic spiritual religious songs and rhythms, Arabic classical music and the diverse sounds of London.

The Mix-Shubbak Music Finale at Rich Mix unites international Arab music talent in a rousing festival music finale. Straight from playing Trafalgar Square **Massar Egbari** share the main stage with **47 Soul** and **Hello Psychaleppo**, while in Studio 1 sound-artist **Karim Sultan** joins folktronica singer-songwriter **Reham** and **Karama**, led by **Soufian Saihi**, playing music inspired by Gnawa and classical Arabic music.

THEATRE

At Rich Mix award-winning Tunisian actor and director **Meher Awachri** performs the UK premiere of *D-Sisyphé*, a night in the life of Khmais, a Tunisian construction worker in the midst of an existential crisis. Based on story of Sisyphus this monologue (in Arabic with English subtitles) with contemporary dance and physical theatre, confronts topics of religion, revolution and individual will.

London has a rich sector of Arab theatre makers creating new work. Shubbak highlights four examples of Arab theatre making in London:

At the Cockpit Theatre London-based **El-Alfy Theatre Company** presents *The Tree Climber* by Tawfik Al Hakeem, Egypt's most renowned playwright of the 20th century.

Bahadir Effendi, a retired train inspector, finds himself in a whirlpool of problems when his wife, Behana disappears. The subsequent plot includes a detective, a lizard, a time-travelling dervish, and a magic tree, who all contribute to turn the quiet life of a married couple upside down. *The Tree Climber* is a fast-paced farce and a major work of absurdist theatre in Egypt. Adapted by **Perdita Stott** and directed by **Ahmed El-Alfy**.

Sevan K. Greene's Nahda (Awakening) is a collection of four short plays at the Bush Theatre telling stories of the confusion of second generation children of refugees, the conflicted fate of Arab Muslim soldiers, the West's fascination with consumerism, and five generations of women using Facebook for political agency. Sevan K. Greene asks how personal freedom and identity can be conquered under the pressure of conflicting forces.

Love, Bombs & Apples at the Arcola Theatre is four comic tales of four men from different parts of the globe experiencing a moment of revelation. Written by **Hassan Abdulrazzak** (*Baghdad Wedding*), performed by **Asif Khan**, directed by **Rosamunde Hutt**, designed by **Mila Sanders** with music by **James Hesford**. "Exhilarating...The dialogue is quick, sardonic, full of character" - *The Observer on Baghdad Wedding*". Presented by AIK productions.

Razor Sharp brings together at Rich Mix three of London's foremost Arab women writing for the stage today: **Hannah Khalil**, **Yamina Bakiri** and **Malu Halasa**. Collaborating with the same cast, and responding to current affairs, *Razor Sharp* will present a series of three rehearsed readings tackling a wide variety of topics. A showcase of satire and gentle mocking from Arab women who are not afraid to put pen to paper and tell it like it is. Presented by Sandpit Arts.

Now Is The Time To Say Nothing at the Young Vic explores the ongoing conflict in Syria through the eyes of young Londoners collaborating with young Syrian filmmaker **Reem Karssli**. Featuring moving video and a stunning soundscape, this powerful and immersive Young Vic Taking Part production will run for a limited period.

FAMILY

Hafla on the Square (Hafla means party) at 7 World's End Place celebrates the first day of the festival with a free family-friendly afternoon of live music, art and drop-in workshops. London-based Egyptian artist **Nazir Tanbouli** will create a giant floor painting while **Variant Space** construct an installation and **Farouk Al Safi** holds one of his popular tabla drumming circles. The music stage will present some of London's best Arab musicians, including the **Yaz Fentazi Trio**, described by Time Out as 'a wicked fusion of chaabi, gnawa and jazz'.

TALKS

In the post-colonial age, Arab urban life has often borne witness to destruction, through civil wars, foreign invasion and religious conflict. Old customs and architectures have been erased; in their place, a new landscape of globalization has emerged. *Disappearing Cities of the Arab World* at the **British Museum** explores issues of architecture, post-colonialism, globalisation and psycho-geography. It brings together writers, artists, historians, architects and urbanists to explore the complex space that is the contemporary Arab city. Speakers include **Ziauddin Sardar** on Mecca, **Eyal Weizman** on architecture of occupation, as well as writers and artists offering dispatches from cities across the Arab region. Presented by Mosaic Rooms.

FILM

An homage to Michel Khleifi

The celebrated Palestinian director Michel Khleifi is 65 this year and Shubbak has invited him to mark this occasion by curating the festival's main film programme: a themed, personal selection from his own films in dialogue with works of Arab and European cinema. Spread across three venues, the season explores representations of Palestine and the Arab in European cinema, as well as the struggle for the emancipation of women.

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS, LONDON

Visions of Palestine is a triple bill of seminal documentaries: *Location Hunting in Palestine* is a record of Pier Paolo Pasolini's visit to the Holy Land in 1964 scouting for locations for *The Gospel According to St Matthew*; *Description of a Struggle* by French auteur **Chris Marker** about Israeli identity and the treatment of Arab minorities was Winner of the 1961 Golden Bear for Best Feature-Length Documentary at the Berlin International Film Festival and *Ma'loul Celebrates its Destruction* by Michel Khleifi is about the destruction by the Israeli armed forces of Ma'loul, a Palestinian village in Galilee in 1948. The former inhabitants are only allowed to visit once a year, on the anniversary of Israel's independence, and have developed a new tradition: they have a picnic on the very site of the destroyed village.

CINE LUMIERE, INSTITUT FRANCAIS

The Struggle for Female Emancipation includes *Fertile Memory* by Michel Khleifi the first full length film to be shot in Palestine, combining documentary with narrative to craft portraits of two very different women: Farah Hatoum, a 50-year old widow living in northern Israel and Sahar Khalifeh, a divorcee living with her daughter in the Israeli occupied West Bank. *The Season of Men* by **Moufida Tlatli**, the first female feature film director in Arab cinema –tells the story of 18-year old Aicha in Djerba, who is married to Said who works 11-months of the year in Tunis. Aicha wants to follow Said to Tunis. Said agrees but imposes one condition: first, she must bear him a son.

Representations of the Arab in European Cinema includes *Out of Life* by **Maroun Baghdadi** set amidst the turbulence of Beirut's 15-year long civil war and inspired by the kidnapping of the French journalist, Roger Auque; the critically acclaimed family drama *Couscous (aka The Secret of the Grain)* from the multi-award winning Tunisian director Abdellatif Kechiche (*Blue is the Warmest Colour* (2013) following 60-year old shipyard worker Slimane Beiji as he attempts to realise his dream of converting a dilapidated boat into a family restaurant specialising in fish couscous; *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* is one of the most powerful films by the great German auteur Fassbinder. An unlikely whirlwind romance blossoms between Emmi, a 60-year old German widow and Ali, a Moroccan migrant worker in his 30s; *Wedding in Galilee* by **Michel Khleifi** was the first Palestinian film to appear at the Cannes Film Festival, where it won the International Critics' Prize in 1987. It tells the story of Abu Adil, the mayor of a Galilean village, who is determined to celebrate his son's wedding with all the traditional Palestinian fanfare. The village is under an Israeli military imposed curfew, which means that Abu Adil also must invite the military governor...

THE MOSAIC ROOMS

Canticle of the Stones is Khleifi's second feature film. It tells the story of star-crossed lovers, Bushra and Makram. Parted in the 1960s when Bushra emigrates to the US, heartbroken after Makram's imprisonment for resisting the Israeli occupation, the pair meet again years later when she returns to Jerusalem at the height of the first Intifada; *Forbidden Marriages in the Holy Land*, also by Michel Khleifi, is a documentary on mixed marriages between inter-faith and inter-racial couples from Israeli and Palestinian societies; *Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel* - in the Summer of 2002 Israeli and Palestinian filmmakers, Michel Khleifi and Eyal Sivan travelled the length of their country of birth. Tracing their trajectory on a map, they called it 'Route 181' after United Nations Resolution 181 – the 1947 partition plan of Palestine into two independent states. This 3-part documentary follows the filmmakers as they meet people along the route. A rare chance to see all three parts of the seminal travelogue across two days.

At the Barbican Cinema *Queens of Syria*, a documentary directed by Yasmin Fedda, tells the story of sixty women from Syria. Forced into exile and now based in Jordan, they came together in 2013 to create and perform their own version of *The Trojan Women*, Euripides' timeless Ancient Greek tragedy about women in war. Fedda was awarded the Black Pearl for 'Best Documentary Director in the Arab World' at the Abu Dhabi Film Festival for the film in 2014. This screening will be the London premiere.

Masasit Mati is one of the most influential activist artist collectives from Syria. In 2011, as the Syrian uprising began, they created the seminal *Top Goon* – an online series of sarcastic and irreverent puppet theatre films. *Top Goon* reached more than 180,000 YouTube hits and nearly 1,000,000 Facebook followers, becoming a defining internet sensation. Now dispersed across several countries, the creators unite for the first time again to create *Top Goon Reloaded: Intimate Diaries of Evil*. The films will include live actors as well as newly created puppets.

"We use satire, parody and biting humour to touch people, their dreams, their feelings, and the contradictions we live with." – Masasit Mati. **Online: shubbak.co.uk and thespace.org**

DANCE

Inspired by *Dabke*, the wildly popular and infectious Palestinian folk dance, *Badke* is a collaboration between Belgian choreographers **Koen Augustijnen, Rosalba Torres Guerrero (les ballets C de la B), Hildegard De Vuyst (KVS)** and ten Palestinian performers from different dance backgrounds, including traditional *dabke*, modern dance, hip-hop, capoeira and circus. The 10 dancers of *Badke* turn it into thrilling, anarchic theatre: an eruption of joy and an affirmation of belonging. The dancers push themselves to new extremes, driven by **Nasser Al-Faris'** infectious soundscore. "A hurricane of energy, smiles and leaping bodies. *Badke* offers an hour of amazing moments of collective dance performed by ten Palestinian performers" *Le Soir*. Produced by Southbank Centre.

The 60s and 70s were the heyday of popular Arab cinema. Singing, dancing and smoking divas filled the screens and enchanted audiences of all ages. With *When The Arabs Used to Dance* at **The Place**, Tunisian choreographer **Radhouane El Meddeb** harks back in a

bittersweet production to this glory age, now performed by four men, and pared down to existential intensity.

Into the Night: Three Works by critically acclaimed Algerian choreographer **Nacera Belaza** at the Sadler's Wells Lilian Baylis Studio offers a chance to witness her physical ideas unfold over a longer encounter of three distinctive works: *Les Oiseaux*, *La Nuit* and *La Traversée*. Central to Belaza's last 20 years of investigation is the search for freedom conveyed by a distinctive form of meditative minimalism, creating a thousand images without ever singling one out. Produced by Sadler's Wells.
'An abstract and minimal dance, but sensual and extremely captivating' – Le Figaro

LITERATURE/SPOKEN WORD

Literature Festival | British Library Conference Centre | 25 & 26 July

Shubbak will present a weekend of literature and storytelling with some of the finest writers from across the Arab World. From poetry to novels, from new literary forms to graphic novels, the Shubbak Literature Festival explores the depth and diversity of current Arab writing in the UK, Europe and across the Arab world.

Highlights include:

Elias Khoury in conversation with **Marina Warner** – One of the true greats of Arab literature, Lebanese author Elias Khoury is the author of a number of award-winning novels, including the effervescent *Gate of the Sun*, which the New York Times called 'a genuine masterpiece'. He will be discussing his work, writing in the current climate and his inspirations, in conversation with award-winning author, academic and critic **Marina Warner**.

Panel discussion on The 'New Generation' of Writers: experimental forms, renegade subjects. Author, activist and cultural commentator **Bidisha** will discuss new forms of writing and taboo busting with Syrian writer **Shahla Ujayli**, Omani author **Jokha al-Harhi**, and controversial Yemeni writer **Ali Al Muqri**, author of sexually and religiously daring novels such as *The Handsome Jew* and *Hurma*.

Panel discussion on writing in times of conflict and crisis. Featuring the great Palestinian poet and author **Mourid Barghouti**, whose *I Saw Ramallah* (Bloomsbury 2004) won the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature and was described as "one of the finest existential accounts of Palestinian displacement we now have" by Edward Said, Kurdish poet **Choman Hardi**, based in Iraqi Kurdistan, whose work has focused on the Anfal genocide and forced migration, and has featured on the UK GCSE curriculum, and young Syrian short story writer and journalist **Rasha Abbas**, a contributor to *Syria Speaks* (Saqi Books, 2014) in discussion with **Daljit Nagra**.

Mourid Barghouti will also take part in 'The Astonishing Form': an evening of poetry from across the Arab World **with a variety of radical, powerful and unexpected voices**. Featuring performances and readings in English and Arabic (with translation) by one of Palestine's greatest living poets, **Mourid Barghouti**, British Egyptian performance poet

Sabrina Mahfouz, Iraqi poet **Ghareeb Iskander** and Palestinian performance poet **Rafeef Ziadeh**.

Discussion on the new wave of Science Fiction in the Arab World – From utopian dreams to dystopian nightmares, could a new wave of Arab science fiction spur us to reimagine alternative futures in the Middle East and beyond? Sindbad Sci-Fi's producer **Yasmin Khan** joins forces with Shubbak to beam up a stellar panel of visionary writers, including Egyptian **Ahmed Khaled Towfik**, author of *Utopia* (BQFP, 2012), Iraqi **Ahmed Saawadi**, the author of the IPAF-winning *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (Al-Jamal, 2013) and Iraqi playwright **Hassan Abdulrazzak**, author of a short story about an alien invasion of Baghdad

Across the Arab world comics and graphic novels are blooming and blossoming, with the genre fast becoming a key fixture of the literary landscape. **Paul Gravett**, co-curator of 'Comics Unmasked' at the British Library, chairs an illustrated discussion with pioneers of the form **Lena Merhej**, co-founder of the Samandal collective in Lebanon, **Andeel**, co-founder of Egypt's Tok-Tok and Libyan-British manga-influenced comic writer and artist, **Asia Alfasi**.

There will also be discussions on the rise of Arabic literature in English, Arab writing in European languages, discussions with pioneers of the comic form, children's events, film screenings a book stall run by Saqi Books and readings from prominent authors including International Man Booker Prize finalist **Hoda Barakat**.

Other literature events include *Speaking Truth to Power* at the Free Word Centre, with three leading writers from the Middle East debating the limits of freedom of expression in the region and beyond. Sinan Antoon is an Iraqi author currently living in New York, whose novels include *The Corpse Washer* and *Ya Mariam*. Choman Hardi is a Kurdish poet whose family were forced to flee Iraq several times. Samar Yazbek is a Syrian writer and journalist now living in exile and recipient of 2012 PEN/Pinter Writer of Courage award.

In *Poets on the Frontline* at the Southbank Centre as part of Poetry International, celebrated poets **Choman Hardi** (Iraqi Kurdistan) and **Ghareeb Iskander** (Iraq) are reunited with **Kei Miller** (UK/Jamaica), who visited Erbil for last year's literary festival, to offer poetic dispatches from the frontline and discuss the challenges of capturing conflict in the crosshairs of verse.

For booking visit venue websites.

Website: www.shubbak.co.uk

Twitter: @shubbakfestival

Facebook: /shubbakfestival

For further information contact Anna Arthur/ Lana Lay at Arthur Leone PR

0207 836 7660 or ana@arthurleone.com

Notes for Editors:

The festival is chaired by Omar Al-Qattan, Secretary of the Board of Trustees, A.M.Qattan Foundation; Eckhard Thiemann, Artistic Director and Daniel Gorman, Festival Director.

Shubbak Core Funders:

A. M. Qattan Foundation
Al-Qattan Charitable Trust
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Event & Exhibition Funders & Partners:

British Council
Open Society Foundations
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Goethe-Institut London
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