



### **Shubbak Opening Reception Speech: Omar Al Qattan, Shubbak Festival Chair**

Thank you everyone for coming tonight to celebrate the launch of the 2013 Shubbak Festival.

The event here at the Victoria & Albert Museum has been made possible by the generous support and sponsorship of Barclays. I would like to thank Shubbak's board of trustees, patrons and many cultural partners, including more than 38 large and small organisations, for coming together to make the festival possible. Special thanks also to our financial supporters: the AM Qattan Foundation, the Mayor of London's Office, Arts Council England, the Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco in London, the British Council, Institut Français, Qatar UK 2013, The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and Hammersmith London BID. I would also like to extend special thanks to the wonderful team that has put the festival together, particularly our tireless director Sue Davies and our artistic director Eckhard Thiemann.

Over the last few years, London has turned into a veritable international hub for contemporary Arab culture. The Mayor's idea to launch Shubbak back in 2011 was extremely timely and welcome. After the success of its first edition, a group of

institutions and individuals passionate about Arab culture formed a new trust to ensure that the festival continue on a biennial basis. I am delighted that we have succeeded in bringing you the second edition of Shubbak with a programme as rich, exciting and varied as in the one in 2011.

The festival kicked off on Saturday with 'Hafla' - or party - on the Square – two days of free family activities at Lyric Square in Hammersmith. And in the evening, Algeria's Rachid Taha and Souad Massi performed to 2,000 people at our opening concert at the Barbican Centre.

We believe strongly that through Shubbak we have a unique opportunity to celebrate the rich and diverse culture of the Arab world, and also to give support to the region's writers, artists, musicians and curators.

This is even more important now during these extremely challenging and turbulent times in the region.

Shubbak is also a chance to see how we in London and the rest of the UK continue to be connected to the Arab World, and how these connections can become more enriching, equitable and peaceful.

We thus hope that over the next two weeks, Shubbak will provide opportunities for discovery, exchange and debate across the cultural community, with its programme in the visual arts, music, theatre, cinema and dance.

Thank you.

**Omar Al Qattan, Shubbak Festival Chair**