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## SHUBBAK

### *A window on contemporary Arab culture*

### 1-16 July 2017

Shubbak, London's festival of contemporary Arab culture, has become a key event in the arts calendar of the UK and the Arab World, and 2017 will be the 4th edition of this biennial festival. It returns with a wide, diverse, exciting and thought-provoking programme, celebrating extraordinary artistic skills looking imaginatively to the future, whilst reflecting on the fragility, resilience and challenges of artists in times of crisis. Shubbak grew indirectly out of the 'Arab Spring' in 2011 and now engages with the turbulent legacy of that period to bring to audiences the hopes, ambitions and aspirations of artists and performers from across the entire region.

Eckhard Thiemann, artistic director of Shubbak says: *"At a time when the world feels more fragile and less secure, we have travelled far and wide and also looked in our own city to discover and commission Arab artists who reflect deeply on our times. There will be bold statements and brave works tackling urgent issues like migration and the desire for freedom, but we will also hear quiet, intimate and personal reflections which touch us with gentle emotions"*.

This year's festival showcases art, music, theatre, film, literature, debates, dance and spoken word and includes over 150 artists, originating from 14 Arab countries at over 80 events during 16 days. Venues and partners for 2017 include Barbican, Sadler's Wells, Southbank Centre, Tate Modern, Serpentine Galleries, the British Museum, British Library, Royal Opera House, The Mosaic Rooms, Young Vic, Arcola Theatre, Gasworks, Cine Lumiere, Rich Mix and many more.

### **Performance**

For 2017 Shubbak presents a number of theatre and dance UK premieres, which tell stories of personal lives affected by political events. Drawing on autobiography, historical research and even nostalgia, these works explore the human dimension of challenging times.

At the Young Vic *Taha* by Palestinian actor **Amer Hlehel**, charts the lyrical life story of one of Palestine's most eminent poets, Taha Muhammad Ali while at Sadler's Wells Syrian dancer and choreographer **Mithkal Alzghair** performs a poignant double bill entitled *Displacement*, drawing attention to the human being amidst the complexities of migration and war.

The UK premiere of *Corbeaux* by Moroccan choreographer **Bouchra Ouizguen**, a performance by 10 Moroccan women and up to 10 local dancers developed in workshops organised by Serpentine Galleries, will be presented at the Serpentine's Park Nights and at Tate Modern. In this work, originally devised for the opening of the Marrakech Biennale in 2014, choreographer **Bouchra Ouizguen** continues her exploration of society, the visual arts and folk traditions in her home country of Morocco. *Corbeaux* boldly takes possession of public spaces and is inspired by memories of trance nights and Persian literature of the 9th to the 11th centuries.

At the Arcola Theatre *And Here I Am* by award winning Iraqi writer **Hassan Abdelrazzak** (*Love, Bombs and Apples; Baghdad Wedding*) is based on the actor **Ahmed Tobasi's** personal coming of age story. An epic voyage of identity and self discovery combining fact and fantasy, tragedy and comedy, spanning both the first and second Palestinian intifadas.

**Cie Chatha** perform *Sacré Printemps!* at the British Library (co-presented with The Place) and Southbank Centre Square. Inspired by the hopes and challenges of building a new civil society, Tunis-born choreographers **Aïcha M'Barek** and **Hafiz Dhaou** create a visceral streetscape of today's Tunisia. Featuring life-sized silhouettes by seminal street artist Bilal Berreni, (aka Zoo-project), which appeared on Tunis' main avenue after the revolution. (remove the place from here)

Actress and singer **Norah Krief** explores the burst of nostalgia she felt, remembering her mother listening to the Egyptian diva Umm Kulthum on their record-player. It drove Krief to reinterpret 'Al Atlal' or 'The Ruins' by Egyptian poet and founder of the Cairo Society for Romantic Poetry, **Ibrahim Nagi**, accompanied by a trio of musicians. Norah Krief recently appeared at The Barbican in *Phèdre(s)* by Krzysztof Warlikowski as part of LIFT. At Cine Lumiere.

*Performance(s) Between Two Shores* is a series of three new works from Arab theatre artists now creating in Europe. Funded by the European Commission, these works include: at the Arcola Theatre *Three Rooms*, an original performance work by **Amal Omran** (Syria), **Hatem Hadawe** (Syria) and **Kathryn Hamilton** about absence through travel restrictions and *Mind the Gap*, an interactive lecture performance by **Hani Sami** (Egyptian), which investigates how we perceive and consume images of conflict. At the Hackney Showroom **Mithkal Alzghair** (Syria) will present *Transaction*, a meditation on the power of images from conflict situations, using aerial performance and live singing.

## Music

Shubbak's music programme kicks off at Barbican with a double-bill featuring Egyptian five-piece band **Cairokee**, mixing rock, rap and traditional Egyptian sounds, and Lebanese singer-songwriter and visual artist **Tania Saleh** in her UK debut. Saleh is one of the most respected independent artists in the Arab World.

*The Mayor of London's Eid Festival* on Trafalgar Square, at the end of Ramadan, is one of London's most important community celebrations, visited by 15,000 – 25,000 people. Shubbak will present three hours of music featuring Afro-Egyptian band **Hawidro**, Sudanese singer **Rasha**, the 'Nahda' tribute ensemble **Oxford Maqam** and virtuoso Syrian Kanun player, **Maya Youssef**. **Hawidro** will also be performing their genre-busting set at the Bush Hall, Shepherd's Bush.

King's Place sees the UK premiere of the **Tarek Yamani Trio, in partnership with Abu Dhabi Festival**. Born and raised in Beirut, **Tarek Yamani** is an American-Lebanese, New York based composer and pianist. The trio will be playing original music from his albums: 'Lisan Al

Tarab' in which he explores the relationships between African-American Jazz and Arabic rhythms/maqams and 'Peninsular', a pioneering new work, which blends the virtually unexplored rhythms of the Gulf with jazz.

Following the success of *Cities of Salt* in 2015 Shubbak and The Royal Opera, in partnership with the Abu Dhabi Festival, present an evening concert at LSO St Luke's. It features the premiere of excerpts from *Woman at Point Zero* by Lebanese composer **Bushra El-Turk**, with a libretto by British Egyptian writer **Sabrina Mahfouz**, and works by four composers in residence - **Nabil Benabdeljalil** (Morocco), **Bahaa El-Ansary** (Egypt), **Amir Elsaftar** (Iraq/America) and **Nadim Husni** (Syria). *Woman at Point Zero* is based on the seminal novel by Egyptian author, doctor and feminist **Nawal el Saadawi** - an allegorical tale of historical female oppression in Egypt that questions what true freedom and empowerment can mean for women today.

*Love & Revenge* at Rich Mix is a music and video performance by **Wael Koudaih** (aka Rayess Bek) and video artist **Randa Mirza** (aka La Mirza). It revisits the old popular songs and Egyptian movies from the golden era of Cairo's Studio Misr. Featuring stars such as: Samia Gamal, Tahi Carioca and singing idols Leila Mourad and Farid El Attrache.

Shubbak ends with a night of the finest electronic and underground sounds at Rich Mix. Featuring **Maurice Louca**, one of the pioneering musicians in Cairo's electronic music scene with influences from psychedelic to Egyptian shaabi; the Palestinian female DJ and electronic music producer **DJ Skywalker**; **Missy Ness** a DJ from Tunisia, with sounds drawn from Maghrebi urban cultures; Palestinian producer and beat maker **DJ Sotusura** playing the finest Arabic hip hop and electronic music and **Salvatore De Simone**, an Italian DJ, brings *Beirut World Beat*; a set including videos and projected images, which has proven hugely popular in many Arab countries.

## Visual arts

*Survival of the Artist*, presented in partnership with The Mosaic Rooms at the British Museum, is a one day event that reflects on how artists and art spaces continue to work in times of civil and political conflict and censorship, and on how they are responding to the threat to cultural heritage. Including artists **Khaled Barakeh** (Syria), **Larissa Sansour** and **Khaled Jarrar** (Palestine) and cultural influencers including the **Atassi Foundation for Art and Culture**, the **Ruya Foundation**, curating the Iraq Pavilion at this year's Venice Biennale, the **Al Mawred Al Thaqafi Foundation** and the director of Cairo's Townhouse Gallery, **William Wells**. *Survival of the Artist* also features performances: *For the Absent Ones*, is an audio-experience created in response to tightening borders by theatre artists **Abdullah Alkafri** (Beirut), **Moez Mrabet** (Tunis), **Jon Davies** and **Jonathan May** (UK).

**Shubbak at the British Museum** explores responses from artists and institutions to the fragility of and threat to cultural heritage and artistic expression. For one day only Saudi Arabian artist **Zahrah Al-Ghamdi** will produce an evocation of a Saudi village using sand, rubble and cloth in the Great Court in view of an audience. *Unearthed* sees Syrian artist **Issam Kourbaj** cover the floor of the Great Court with hundreds of old hardback book covers placed side-by-side to cover sixty square meters of floor.

Two highlights at The Mosaic Rooms are *Dar Al Sulh* (or Domain of Conciliation) - a supper club with a difference hosted by the Chicago based artist, **Michael Rakowitz**. This al-fresco three-course meal is based on the recipes of his Iraqi-Jewish grandmother and seeks to recall a time when 'Jews were once Arabs too'. The exhibition *Shift* is the UK debut of three young female artists from Saudi Arabia: **Zahrah Al-Ghamdi**, **Dana Awartani** and **Reem Al Nasser** present large scale installations

and video works which contemplate the place for memory and heritage amidst rapid cultural change.

*The Craft* at **Gasworks** is the first UK solo exhibition by Amsterdam-based Kuwaiti artist **Monira Al Qadiri**. Poking fun at collapsing postcolonial empires, these works explore how the rise of nationalism and political populism trivialise formerly common ways of being international in the world, in the era of diplomatic rituals, national grandeur and political grandstanding.

At Rich Mix Syrian artist **Sulafa Hijazi: *Animated Images*** is a response to our ever-closing relationship with new media. While trawling her 'Facebook feed' she became conscious of the plethora of images that bombard us, from a friend's wedding to updates from a warzone. In this era of 24-hour news, she asks whether we can shift our emotions as rapidly as we browse the flow of images, and what if anything we retain.

## Literature Programme

Shubbak at the British Library present a 2-day programme of readings, panels and debates, with themed sessions on the most current issues facing Arab literature.

Sessions include:

- **Against the Grain** - What do we mean by Arabic writing 'against the grain' in 2017? What are the inspirations, and the challenges, for the engaged Arab writer working today? Syrian British writer **Robin Yassin-Kassab** hosts a conversation with three writers from the region.
- **Rasha Abbas: The Seven of Cups** - Syrian writer **Rasha Abbas** digs deep into the archives at the British Library on the Arab Union.
- **Keepers of the Flame: contemporary Arabic poetry** - Celebrated poet and artist **Malika Booker** hosts four leading poets - **Golan Haji**, a Syrian Kurdish poet and translator; New York-based **Mona Kareem**; **Dunya Mikhail**, an Iraqi poet based in the United States and **Al-Saddiq Al-Raddi**, one of the leading African poets writing in Arabic today.
- **The waking nightmare: post-revolutionary Egyptian dystopias**- Six years after the revolution Egyptian writers have carved out a new literary genre; a mix of dystopian futurism, horror, sarcasm and black humour. With **Basma Abdel Aziz**, a journalist, novelist, psychiatrist; visual artist, **Ganzeer**, one of Egypt's most famous street artists and **Mohammad Rabie**, whose third novel 'Otared', was shortlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2016.
- **A New Confidence: Recent Queer Writing** - Kuwait born **Saleem Haddad**, author of the explosive debut novel 'Guapa' and Lebanese-Russian academic **Alexandra Chreiteh** join host **Alberto Fernández Carbajal** of the University of Leicester to explore the recent rise in novels and writing of strong gay and queer content.
- **Under the Radar: Women Writing from Outside the Arab Literary Mainstream** - Coming from countries removed from the major literary markets and rarely in the dominant media spotlight, how can female Libyan and Yemeni authors maintain their literary output? The discussion is hosted by acclaimed journalist and broadcaster, **Bidisha**.

## Film

Presented in a major partnership with the Arab Fund for Arts & Culture the film programme is titled 'Reframing Narratives' and explores artistic responses to crises. Drawn from recent releases

and including UK premieres, themed events explore how artists' imaginations chip away at conventional viewpoints and will largely take place at presenting partner Barbican Cinema.

UK premieres include '*Off Frame*' (AKA Revolution Until Victory) by **Mohanad Yaqubi**, which draws on discovered and archival footage to explore the tumultuous history of Palestine and Palestinian filmmaking; award-winning Syrian director **Soudade Kaadan's** '*Obscure*', the story of 6-year-old Ahmad living in a Lebanese refugee camp. Traumatized, overwhelmed and disengaged, Ahmad prefers to be silent. In Kaadan's words, "it explores the impossibility to verbally express what is happening in Syria now" and '*The Last of Us*' by Tunisian director **Ala Eddine Slim**. Lauded at the Venice Film Festival it tells the story of 'N', an anonymous sub-Saharan man on a journey to Europe.

The region's most exciting new voices are presented in an evening of award-winning short films and UK premieres. In **Mounia Akl's** *Submarine*, wild child Hala refuses to evacuate her derelict house when the garbage crisis in Lebanon causes her whole village to flee. **Larissa Sansour** offers a dystopian solution to the deadlock in the Middle East in '*Nation Estate*', whilst **Chadi Aoun's** '*Silence*' celebrates creative resistance in authoritarian darkness. Directors **Rana Kazkaz** and **Anas Khalaf**, capture the dilemmas lived by many on the Mediterranean shores and reflect on a Syrian parent's choices to save his daughter in '*Mare Nostrum*'.

'*Farouk, Besieged Like Me*' at Cine Lumiere is a deeply personal personal documentary by veteran Syrian documentarian **Hala Alabdalla**. She invites the audience to dinner with writer and editor **Farouk Mardam-Bey** for a thought-provoking reflection on Syria, culture and identity.

## Arab Festival Curation for local neighbourhoods

Shubbak has launched an ambitious new commissioning initiative, inviting two pioneering Arab festivals to devise new works for London, based on successful models of audience engagement in Beirut and Tunis. *Nehna Wel Amar Wel Jiran* (We, the Moon and the Neighbours) is an annual outdoors festival in Beirut, led by **Collectif Kahraba**. During the festival Nehna (for short) takes over a popular large urban staircase and animates it with artistic interventions. Shubbak has invited Nehna's artistic directors **Aurélien Zouki** and **Eric Deniaud** to commission a series of events for the Shepherd's Bush market, exploring a vibrant West London neighbourhood with a rich multi-cultural history.

*Dream City* in Tunis, is a multi-disciplinary biennale of contemporary art in the public space held in the medina. Shubbak has invited its creators Tunisian dancers and choreographers **Sofiane & Selma Ouissi** to commission a series of interventions for the Dalston area, exploring a neighbourhood facing rapid economic development alongside fragile existences and hidden histories.

The commissions include a new performance in an unused bunker by Egyptian theatre director **Leila Soliman** and **Ruud Gielens** (Brussels), which investigates the history of radical activism in East London and a new visual art installation by Tunisian artist **Malek Gnaoui**, who has been researching the legacy of boxing in London's East End. The commissions are supplemented by video installations and discussions.

The full programme of the neighbourhood festival will be released in mid-June.

For 2017 Shubbak will broaden its reach nationally by touring beyond London. **Hawidro** appears at Art in the Park outdoor festival in Milton Keynes on 1 July; **And Here I Am** travels to The Lowry in Salford and Unity Theatre in Liverpool as well as 5 other venues. **Cie Chatha** can be seen at Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival and **Taha** at The Lowry.

Website: [www.shubbak.co.uk](http://www.shubbak.co.uk)

Twitter symbol: @shubbakfestival

Facebook symbol: /shubbakfestival

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Notes for Editors:

Shubbak is led by Eckhard Thiemann, artistic director, and Dan Gorman, executive director. Principal partners for Shubbak 2017 are A. M. Qattan Foundation, Arab Fund for Arts and Culture – AFAC, British Council and supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

Shubbak invited a number of specialist curators and collaborators to develop particular strands in this year's programme. These include leading music promoter marsm (music), renowned translator Alice Guthrie (literature), BAFTA nominated film producer Elhum Shakerifar (film) as well as Nehna Wel Amar Wel Jiran artistic directors Aurélien Zouki and Eric Deniaud and choreographers Sofiane & Selma from Dream City.

The board of trustees comprises:

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Shubbak is a registered charity number 1150374.