
AL JAZEERA ENGLISH ANNOUNCED WINNER OF THE ARAB BRITISH CULTURE & SOCIETY AWARD 2011



Front row, left-right: Baroness Helena Kennedy (QC); Tessa Bryson; Samah El-Shahat. Back row, left-right: Diarmuid Jeffreys; Peter Wallace; Marwan Bishara. Photo©Kevin Poolman 2011

The annual award, including prize-money of £5000, is given to an individual or organisation which, in the opinion of the judges, has made an outstanding contribution to the British public's knowledge and understanding of the life, society and culture of the Arab people.

The judges chose Al Jazeera English out of a shortlist of five nominees for its extensive reach and impact on the general British public's understanding of events in the Arab world. The judges felt that Al Jazeera English had risen to the occasion at a key moment in the history of the Arab world, with its journalists undertaking personal risks to provide an alternative perspective to the mainstream British media. The panel noted the 24-hour news station's wide availability with the free to view UK channel reaching over 31.5 million UK households. The winner was announced at a ceremony held at Leighton House Museum on 14 April.

Receiving the prize on behalf of Al Jazeera English, Marwan Bishara said, “Al Jazeera English has succeeded for several reasons: it is financially supported so it can avoid commercial dependence or motive; it has the freedom to decide on its stories; and it has a backyard fertile with hot news.” Al Jazeera English will be donating the £5000 prize money (recipient to be announced).

The judges highly commended the Delfina Foundation for its vital work creating artistic dialogue between the Arab world and the UK. The foundation was credited for its programme of residencies, artistic exchanges and related public art events.

Chair of the judging panel and Master of Ceremonies Baroness Helena Kennedy spoke about each of the five shortlisted candidates as “extraordinary artistic endeavours and social encounters” reflecting on the work of each in turn. She also spoke of the difficulty the panel had had in choosing a winner, describing the experience as akin to “*12 Angry Men*; the debate was so fierce that in the end we had to introduce a system of Alternative Vote!”. Acknowledging that the choice of Al Jazeera English might be perceived as controversial, Baroness Kennedy explained what had tipped the balance in its favour; that it had “shown the British public voices of ordinary Arab people, people who challenge the stereotypes”.

Also in attendance at the Award Ceremony were previous Award Winners Zaytoun CIC and Saqi Publishing who were invited to display and sell their products.

2010 Award Winner Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival’s Ngozi Ikoku said that winning last year’s Award had “lead to a real partnership and friendship with the Arab British Centre”. One of the forthcoming Festival’s acts, ‘ūd player Khyam Allami, wowed the audience with a premiere performance of *An Alif/An Apex* from his forthcoming album *Resonance/Dissonance*.

At the ceremony, the Mayor of London’s Advisor on Arts and Culture Munira Mirza spoke in support of the Arab cultural community, saying “the Award highlights the important work of the Arab British Centre and today we are celebrating all those organisations creating dialogue through culture”.

The judging panel for the 2011 Arab British Culture and Society Award comprised: Baroness Helena Kennedy QC (Chair); Oliver Butterworth; Heather Masoud; James Neil; Dr Venetia Porter; Samuel Shimon; and Dr Shelagh Weir. The shortlist comprised: Al Jazeera English; Delfina Foundation; Dash Arts; Palestine Film Foundation; and the London Middle East Institute.

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Additional images are available on request.

Note to Editors:

The Arab British Culture & Society Award is an initiative of the Arab British Centre which was launched in 2008.

The Arab British Centre is a UK-registered charity which works to improve the British public’s understanding of the Arab world. We organise and promote cultural and artistic events relating to the Arab world, and host a regular programme of activities including Arabic calligraphy classes and Arabic language classes. We also house permanent and temporary collections of contemporary art, have a specialised library open to the public and hold talks on a variety of topics.

Since the Centre was founded in 1977, we have housed and subsidised other like-minded organisations involved in Arab-British relations in our premises in Gough Square. The Arab British Centre currently supports the Council for Arab-British Understanding (Caabu), Offscreen Education Programme, Edge of Arabia, Banipal, and Friends of Birzeit University (fobzu).