

PRESS RELEASE

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Celebrating the achievements of Arab Arts and Culture at The Arab British Centre's Award for Culture Ceremony

- **Winners announced as Syrian children's author and illustrator Nadine Kaadan and events production company MARS M**
- **Runners Up announced as textiles artist Omeima Mudawi-Rowlings and artist platform Sarha Collective**
- **Arab British Centre announces new programming strand, ARAB BRITAIN, exploring the history, achievements, and experiences of Arabs in Britain**

On Thursday 26 September The Arab British Centre hosted the award ceremony for The Arab British Centre Award for Culture at London's Living Room, City Hall.

The Arab British Centre Award for Culture is a biennial prize that celebrates those who have significantly contributed to the dissemination of Arab arts and culture and furthered dialogue and understanding of the Arab world in the United Kingdom. The prize was established in 2008 for the purpose of raising awareness of contemporary Arab culture in the UK and to give support to individuals and organisations at a crucial stage of their career. Winners of the Award for Culture receive a £2500 cash prize, and a British Council travel grant to visit a country in the Arab world. This year, the Arab British Centre also issued a British Council travel grant.

Speaking to 250 guests at the reception, Sir Derek Plumbly, Chairman of The Arab British Centre, opened the speeches by reflecting on the achievements of the Centre since the past Award two years ago, highlighting the SAFAR Film Festival and Making Marks, an exchange programme with Kuwait.

Continuing, Sir Derek said: "All this positive energy is against the backdrop of dark and very difficult times in much of the Arab world, and great uncertainty here. But that only goes to make the Centre's role of opening windows on the diversity and creativity to be found in the Arab world all the more important. The scope for prejudice and misunderstanding is great. Polls suggest high levels of ignorance, both of the Arab world and of the contribution Arabs and people of Arab heritage have made and are making to life in Britain.

With that last point in mind the Centre has been working in recent months on a new programme, ARAB BRITAIN, that will set out to explore the history, achievements and experiences of Arabs in Britain, to retrace the ways the Arab world has influenced and shaped British culture and society and to celebrate the contributions of Arabs in Britain, past and present."

Sir Derek highlighted the Centre's ambition to conduct an oral history project as part of ARAB BRITAIN, alongside the first event in the series LONDON'S THEATRE OF THE EAST (see notes for more info), opening 7 November at neighbouring museum, Dr Johnson's House.

The Kuwaiti Ambassador, H.E. Khaled Al Duwaisan, then took to the stage to speak of the importance of the Ambassadors' support for the Arab British Centre, and of their work supporting both the Arab community in the UK and across the region. He was followed by H.E. Ibrahim Mohieldeen, Ambassador to the League of Arab States in London, who congratulated the Arab British Centre on their work promoting Arab-British

understanding. He reflected on the worrying statistics of perceptions of Arabs in Britain, and explained how the League of Arab States are aiming to bridge boundaries and promote inclusion through a study of Arabs in Britain and by supporting other organisations working to achieve similar missions. He congratulated the shortlisted candidates on their creativity.

The Executive Director of the Arab British Centre, Nadia El-Sebai, then took to the stage to introduce the prize giving section of the ceremony, and talk about the history of the Award:

“We often talk about the way Britain has influenced the Arab world, yet we rarely speak about the fact that Britain’s encounters with the region has shaped our society too. As we’ve heard already, we are taking this opportunity today to extend our celebration to the announcement of our latest programme, ARAB BRITAIN.

Since 2008 the Arab British Centre award series has revealed just how much Arabs and content from the Arab world has contributed to British Society. Amongst our award alumni are publishers, writers, festivals and brands. Today, we add to this group 4 organisations and 5 individuals, whose work is not only outstanding in their respective fields, but ground breaking in the way they represent the diversity of the region and explore what it means to be Arab in Britain today.”

Judge Karl Sharro then announced that The Arab British Centre Award for Culture in the category of organisations was awarded to MARS M, a music events production company, for their outstanding work in bringing bands and musicians from across the region to thousands of people in the UK. Their diverse portfolio of artists range from classical to hip-hop, and established and emerging talent from the Middle East.

Federika Schliessler from MARS M said “Moments like these - especially surrounded by such amazing individuals and organisations - puts things into perspective and allows us to reflect on the work we’ve done in the past years and the impact it has...Reminding ourselves and hopefully yourselves as well, that our work does pay off, it inspires, it unites, it creates and shapes. More than anything, we are proud of creating a platform where artists (and ourselves!) do not compromise who they are and what they believe in, especially in order to find a place and voice in a city like London.”

Christina Hazboun from MARS M said “At a time of political fragmentation in the Arab world, our work at MARS M helps bring the Arab community together through the appreciation of culture. Music, as a form of organising space and time, brings the society together to appreciate the sounds of home and focuses on our similarities and the exchange of beautiful moments. This award will support our work in bringing the sounds of the alternative Middle East and North Africa to the UK and making the distance between humans shorter in an invitation to UK communities to come together.”

Judge Dr Venetia Porter then announced that The Arab British Centre Award for Culture in the category of individuals was awarded to Syrian children’s author and illustrator Nadine Kaadan, for her work building bridges between Anglophone families and the Arab world. Her moving stories, including 'The Jasmine Sneeze' and 'Tomorrow', bring Syria to life for young readers, and showcase the beautiful landscapes of Damascus alongside the often difficult reality of life there as a child.

Accepting the Award with tears in her eyes, Nadine Kaadan, said: “Honestly, when I was even nominated, I felt like such a winner because being among these wonderful women [in the shortlisted candidates of individuals] is just an incredible privilege, and to know about their work and be on the same level as them is so inspiring. This Award, this year, tells us something: this is Arab women, this is who we are. We are empowered, we are strong, and [we’ve had] enough of the media who keep misrepresenting who Arab women are, and who caricature us [sic]”.

Sudanese textile artist Omeima Mudawi-Rowlings was awarded runner-up the category for individuals, and artist platform Sarha Collective was awarded runner-up in the category for organisations.

The Arab British Centre would like to congratulate winners MARS M and Nadine Kaadan; runners-up Sarha Collective and Omeima Mudawi-Rowlings; and all the fantastic shortlisted candidates: Esther Manito, Juliana Yazbeck, and Samar Ziadat in the category for individuals, and The Barakat Trust, and Comma Press in the category for organisations.

The Arab British Centre's Award for Culture was made possible by the support of the British Council, The Council of Arab Ambassadors, and Zaytoun.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About The Arab British Centre Award for Culture

The Arab British Centre Award for Culture is a biennial prize that celebrates those who have significantly contributed to the dissemination of Arab arts and culture and furthered dialogue and understanding of the Arab world in the United Kingdom.

The award series was established in 2008 to raise awareness of contemporary Arab culture in the UK and to give financial support to individuals and organisations at a crucial stage in their career. The Award for Culture is a successor to the Arab British Culture & Society Award, which ran for four years between 2008 & 2011 and celebrated organisations that had made a considerable impact on the British public's understanding of the life, society and culture of the Arab world. Winners of that prize were Saqi Books, Zaytoun, Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival and Al Jazeera English. In 2013 the first Arab British Centre Award for Culture was presented to the London-based Iraqi playwright, Hassan Abdulrazzaq, whose plays address issues in the Arab world. In 2017, the Award grew to honour both an individual and an organisation, with playwright Hannah Khalil and arts and music events producer Arts Canteen taking the respective prizes.

A winner in two categories – individuals and organisations – receives a £2500 cash prize, and a British Council travel grant to a country in the Arab world to further develop their cultural networks in the region. A runner up in each category also receives a British Council travel grant.

The Judges

A distinguished panel of judges for The Arab British Centre Award for Culture 2019 included:

- Sir Derek Plumbly KCMG, Chairman of The Arab British Centre
- Venetia Porter, British Museum Curator of Islamic and Contemporary Art
- Lynn Gaspard, Publisher at Saqi Books
- Imogen Ware, cultural consultant and former Managing Director of Crossway Foundation
- Karl Sharro, architect, satirist and Middle East commentator
- Rebecca Gould, Head of Arts, British Council Wales

The Arab British Centre Award for Culture 2019 Winners

Nadine Kaadan:

Since the age of 8, Nadine Kaadan hasn't stopped writing and illustrating children's books - she simply knew that it was her calling in life. She started distributing her first children's magazine to her 5th grade classmates, and 20 years later she is an award winning children's book author and illustrator, whose mission it is to spread reading culture in the Arab world, in a way that is inspired by Syria's rich heritage. Her stories sometimes touch on delicate subjects like children with special needs, or like the current troubled situation in the Arab world, and other times they are just plain fun.

<http://www.nadinekaadan.com/site/>

MARSM:

Since its founding, Marsm has dedicated itself to producing and promoting events that promote the rich and diverse arts and culture of the Arab world across the UK. From hosting some of the biggest names in the Middle East to emboldening burgeoning underground music scenes, it strives to support the exceptional creativity and talent of artists across the region.

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<http://marsm.co.uk/>

The Arab British Centre

The Arab British Centre aims to further understanding of the Arab world by promoting its culture, sharing its knowledge and supporting a community of individuals and organisations that work to enhance friendship and collaboration between people of the UK and the Arab world.

www.arabbritishcentre.org.uk

Arab Britain

Arab Britain is a long-term programme by The Arab British Centre that sets out to explore and document the history, achievements and experiences of Arabs in Britain. The programme aims to overturn preconceptions and challenge prejudices, retrace the ways the Arab world has influenced and shaped British culture and society, and celebrate the contributions of Arabs in Britain, past and *present*.

About London's Theatre of The East

The Arab British Centre and Dr Johnson's House are inviting artists, researchers, and the general public to (re)examine the historical connections of the Middle East and North Africa to London, via the lens of Dr Johnson's 1749 play set in the fall of Constantinople, *Irene*.

Working with historians including Dr Jerry Brotton, author of *This Orient Isle*, four artists and writers have been commissioned to respond to the content and historical context of the play, examining the period and the influential encounters between London and the region from the 16th century onwards, when Elizabeth I first started trading with Muslim nations.

The artist responses will be showcased through an exhibit in Doctor Johnson's House, a series of public events including performances and workshops, and an accompanying publication; join us from 7 November 2019 to 14 February 2020 in exploring these largely hidden histories of trade and migration, their impact on society and culture, and their subsequent ripples into the present day.

London's Theatre of the East is supported by the City of London Corporation. Artists include fashion designer Nour Hage, playwright Hannah Khalil, photographer Lena Nassaanna, and author Saeida Rouass.

British Council

Established in 1934, the British Council is the world's leading cultural relations organisation, through our work we touch the lives of almost 600 million people every year. Equality, diversity and inclusion are at the heart of our cultural relations ambitions. They contribute to the mutual trust, respect and understanding we strive for on behalf of the UK. They are integral to the British Council brand, reputation, success and cultural relations impact.

Zaytoun

Zaytoun is a Community Interest Company, a social enterprise founded in 2004 to support Palestinian farmers through fair trade. 100% of our profits are reinvested into furthering this mission. Zaytoun's range of Palestinian fine foods are available in Whole Foods Market, Planet Organic, Traidcraft and a wide network of independent retailers nationwide.

www.zaytoun.org