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MENA Arts UK announces eight exciting new film commissions following national competition.

MENA Arts UK have commissioned eight artists with a connection to the Middle East, North Africa and surrounding areas to capture their work on film.

The national competition which put a call out for MENA artists at the end of last year encouraged applications from all artists- not just filmmakers. The results have seen eight selected artists, hailing from a range of backgrounds, from a puppeteer to a DJ, from a deaf Iranian artist to a Yemeni-Scouse performance artist.

Each artist will now receive £1000 to create a one minute work that will be filmed, responding to the question: **“How should the MENA+ arts community celebrate what we have in common?”**

MENA Arts UK was launched in Dec 2020 to celebrate artists working in the UK live and recorded arts with a connection to the Middle East, North Africa and the surrounding area. MENA Arts UK’s objectives include lobbying for appropriate representation, advocating for change, and seeking to increase UK work opportunities. The organisation has also launched the UK’s first ever online directory of all MENA+ artists including creatives, technicians and academics and is encouraging artists as well as up and coming MENA creatives in the UK scene to sign up for a free listing.

Sepy Baghaei, an Iranian theatre director who serves as **Co-Vice Chair** for **MENA Arts UK** said:

“We received 53 applications for the competition, and were blown away by the high standard, creativity and ambition of all the ideas submitted. Our winning eight ideas are an eclectic mix, and feature animation, set design, poetry and music. Their

makers are from all around the UK- including Liverpool and the West Midlands - and are connected to MENA regions including Iran, Palestine, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon. I am so excited to see these films come to life, and to share their celebrations of MENA+ identity with a wider audience.”

The eight artists include:

Peyvand Sadeghian is an Actor, Puppeteer and Theatre Maker born, bred and based in London to Iranian and Chinese parents. Recent credits include: DUAL دوگانه (Vault Festival Show of the Week 2020), Rich Kids: A History of Shopping Malls in Tehran (Fringe First 2019). Although she has experience in front of the screen, this will be her first time making a short film.

Nooriyah Qais is a DJ, presenter and filmmaker. As a DJ, she is known for playing upbeat popular records infused with Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) sounds, paying homage to her heritage. She is currently a MENA specialist resident at *Foundation FM* and *Plus 1 Radio*. As a filmmaker, she explores the themes of home, culture and gender with films showcased at the V&A Museum, Liverpool Arab Arts festival and more.

May Ziade is French-Lebanese and works on other people's films and her own. She has written stories and poems that were adapted into comics and short films, and worked as a producer's assistant on high-budget productions. She is currently working on her first short-film, 'Neo-Nahda'.

Maral Mamaghanizadeh is a Deaf Iranian artist. Her work explores the barriers she encounters in everyday life, being Deaf, female and a refugee. Maral communicates through her artworks, combining feminism and cultural politics. In 2017, Maral became a political refugee as her work, 'The Politics of Voice; The Tale of Tresses' directly challenged the patriarchal society in Iran. Her work continues to challenge stereotypes, break boundaries and open people's hearts and minds.

Majid Adin studied fine art and animation in Iran, where he was arrested because of the political nature of his work. He fled his country and arrived in the UK in 2016. He now lives in London and works as an artist. He won a prestigious competition to create the official music video for Sir Elton John's 'Rocket Man'. He is currently working on his first graphic novel, 'Hamid and Shakespeare' which will be published in April 2021.

Jida Akil is a Syrian/Lebanese early-career theatre designer currently based between London & Cyprus. She designs set & costume for both theatre and dance with a design-led devising approach. The themes of her work often revolve around political and socio-economic issues which also explore dramaturgy inspired by lived

experience. Jida is currently completing her bachelor's degree in Performance Design at Central Saint Martins.

Bint Mbareh is a first-time filmmaker with experience in television production, songwriting and an interest in sound. Her most recent research was an exploration of how rain-summoning song and ritual in Palestine acted and may continue to act as a ritual of time-bending. Several installations and performances down the line, the singer was offered the MENA Arts UK grant to explore death with the Palestinian sonic and musical tradition in mind.

Amina Atiq is a Yemeni–Scouse poet, performance artist and activist. Award winning for her active & community engagement work, *Curious Minds* Young Associate for and BBC Words First Finalist 19. She is currently writing her first one-woman show, *Broken Biscuits* to explore her gran-mothers 1970s Yemeni- Scouse household to untangle what it means to be British. She is currently a remote writer in residence with *Queensland Poetry Festival* and *Metal Southend*.

Supported by the **Film and TV Charity** and **Arts Council England**, **MENA Arts UK** have secured an exciting panel of industry professionals to their judging panel comprising of **Sabrina Mahfouz** (playwright/poet), **Hannah Khalil** (playwright), **Saeed Taji Farouky** (film director), and **Sepy Baghaei** (theatre director and Co-Vice Chair of MENA Arts UK).

Alongside the competition, there will be a series of wrap-around panel events including 'But You Don't Look Middle Eastern?: A discussion on MENA+ identity' on February 12 and a Q&A with the competition winners on March 9.

Keep up to date here: <https://www.menaarts.uk>

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NOTES TO EDITOR:

- Photo Credit: MENA Arts UK competition winners
From Left to Right, top to bottom
Amina Atiq Photo credit: Robin Clewle
Bint Mbareh
Jida Akil
Majid Adin
Maral Mamaghanizadeh
May Ziadé
Nooriyah Qais
Peyvand Sadeghian Photo credit: Ray Roberts

- MENA Arts UK are a UK-based not-for-profit Arts organisation for professionals who work in Live & Recorded Arts and are connected to the Middle East, North Africa or the surrounding area: www.menaarts.uk
- Becoming a member to the Directory is free and can be done via the MENA Arts UK website.
- Funded by Arts Council England, Grants for the Arts programme.

