



PRESS RELEASE: Tuesday 1st Dec, 2020

First ever UK online directory of Middle Eastern and North African arts professionals is launched as new arts organisation celebrates MENA+ artists

A new arts organisation **MENA Arts UK** has been formed 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 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.

MENA Arts UK is led by a steering group of 11 UK professionals (6F, 5M) who are diverse in age, experience and work in many different art forms as directors, writers, actors, producers, designers and choreographers. Some are new graduates and others established cultural leaders. Between them, they speak over 10 languages and have worked all over the UK and globally.

The steering group includes **Ahmet Ahmet** as Website Producer. Ahmet is connected to Turkey and Cyprus. He is outreach director for The Stage, where he launched and oversees the Get Into Theatre initiative, supported by the Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation and UK Theatre/SOLT. He is also a lecturer at Trinity Laban and a PhD candidate at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama: *"I'm so excited that for the first time in history, Middle Eastern and North African professionals in the live and recorded arts can be found in one easily accessible online directory. Spotlighting all professionals in our community, we are here and now we can be found."*

Laura Hanna looks after the organisation's Communications and Lobbying work. She is a British-Egyptian multidisciplinary performer, creative and singer. She recently performed in *A History of Water in the Middle East* at The Royal Court and will be joining their Writer's Group in 2021: *"It's encouraging to see how conversations about ethnicity, race and representation in our*

industry are becoming more frequent and MENA Arts UK provides me and other MENA+ artists with a voice in those conversations. It's exciting to be part of complicating those discussions and to work towards some much-needed transparency by educating, connecting with and supporting one another."

British Cypriot, **Kerry Kyriacos Michael** is **Chair**. He was Artistic Director of **Theatre Royal Stratford East** for 13 years. Kerry now freelances and develops work through his production company: **Kyriacos and Company** and started developing this initiative last year. He says: "We have all come together to take control and ownership of our narrative and how the industry sees us. In the most simplest terms, we are still 'other' on forms and that has to stop. We are specific."

The directory is free to join and open to UK-based arts professionals with a connection to the Middle East, North Africa or surrounding area working professionally. It is funded by Arts Council England.

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NOTES TO EDITOR:

- 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
- Submissions are open to members of MENA Arts UK. Becoming a member is free and can be done via the MENA Arts UK website. Individual artists can apply as well as submissions from a team.
- Funded by Arts Council England, Grants for the Arts programme.

PART TWO (embargoed until Friday 4th Dec)

To celebrate the launch of the directory earlier this week, **MENA Arts UK** has announced a national competition to commission eight artists with a connection to the Middle East, North Africa and surrounding areas to capture their work on film. Each commission will receive £1000 to create a one minute work that is filmed, responding to the question: "**How should the MENA+ arts community celebrate what we have in common?**"

The competition encourages applications from all artists- not just filmmakers. **MENA Arts UK** are interested in hearing from poets, playwrights, performers, directors, musicians, sound designers, dancers, animators, multimedia artists, puppeteers- or any other content that can be captured on film.

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).

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Ramzi DeHani is a Palestinian/Libyan actor and artist and **Company Secretary**. He has previously worked with The National Theatre, the BBC, Creative Europe & the Kiln Theatre, as well as other arts organisations across stage and screen: *"The events we've curated alongside the launch of the directory have all come out of the experiences of our membership in the UK industry. From telling MENA stories to UK and global audiences, to celebrating up and coming MENA creatives in the UK scene. I'm excited that Middle Eastern and North African creatives are coming together to discuss their own stories, their own representation and their own place in the arts world."*

Sepy Baghaei is an Iranian theatre director who serves as **Co-Vice Chair** for **MENA Arts UK**. She has previously worked with The National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, and is currently Associate Director at The Space Theatre: *"In discussions with our membership, a key thing that has come up is this question of 'Who gets to tell MENA+ stories?' There's a strong feeling that MENA+ actors and creatives should be at the heart of work about our region. So, I'm thrilled to be overseeing our competition, and offering up an opportunity for eight artists or teams to create work connected to our rich and diverse cultures. No work about us without us!"*

Applications for the competition are now open until **29th December at 12pm**. The winning commissions will be released digitally in **March 2021**, alongside a Q&A with the artists behind each film.

Alongside the competition, there will be a series of wrap-around panel events. The first panel, 'Telling MENA+ stories' will take place on **Friday 11th December**. It will be attended by the four competition judges. They will discuss their experiences in telling MENA+ stories on the global stage, and look at what stories are currently being told about the MENA+ region and who is telling them.

Further wrap around panel discussions include: 'Making MENA+ stories happen: Commissioning, Funding and Producing your work on stage' (December 18); 'MENA+ crew and creatives on set' (January 22); 'But You Don't Look Middle Eastern?: A discussion on MENA+ identity' (February 12); and a Q&A with the competition winners on March 9.

To apply please see here: <https://www.menaarts.uk/>

- Any queries regarding the competition can be emailed to: info@menaarts.uk
- Images of Judges please click [here](#)

Follow the conversation on Twitter [@mena_arts_uk](#) [#WeAreMENA](#)

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITOR

- Competition entries open on December 4th and close on December 29th at 12pm.
- There will be wrap around panel events on: *Telling MENA+ Stories* (December 11th); *Commissioning, Funding and Producing Your Work On Stage* (December 18th); *MENA+ Crew and Creatives On Set* (January 22nd); *But You Don't Look Middle Eastern?: A Discussion on MENA+ Identity* (February 12th); and a *Q&A with Competition Winners* (March 9th).
- The competition and wrap around events are funded by Arts Council England (Grants for the Arts programme) and the Film+TV Charity (BAME Community Grants)