



Annual Report

Arts and Culture Programmes 2023/24 - 2024/25



About us

The British Council builds connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language.

We work in two ways – directly with individuals to transform their lives, and with governments and partners to make a bigger difference for the longer term, creating benefit for millions of people all over the world.

We help young people to gain the skills, confidence and connections they are looking for to realise their potential and to participate in strong and inclusive communities. We support them to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications. Our work in arts and culture stimulates creative expression and exchange and nurtures creative enterprise.

We connect the best of the UK with the world and the best of the world with the UK. These connections lead to an understanding of each other's strengths and of the challenges and values that we share. This builds trust between people in the UK and other nations which endures even when official relations may be strained.

We work on the ground in more than 100 countries. Last year we reached over 75 million people directly and 758 million people overall including online, broadcasts and publications.

Our purpose

The British Council's work in arts and culture in Lebanon supports a vibrant ecosystem of artists, institutions, and cultural practitioners committed to creativity, dialogue, and social impact. Through flagship programmes such as CATAPULT, ARTIVATOR, and IN BETWEEN, we nurture emerging talent, strengthen cultural infrastructure, and build lasting connections between Lebanon, the UK, and the wider region. Our collaborations span festivals, residencies, and policy dialogues that promote inclusion, sustainability, and innovation. From safeguarding heritage through the Cultural Protection Fund to fostering exchange via delegate and festival partnerships, our work champions culture as a force for resilience, understanding, and collective renewal in challenging times.

Acknowledgement

The Annual Report – Arts and Culture Programmes 2023/24–2024/25 is led by Marc Mouarkech and Zeinab Allaw, with contributions from partners and cultural practitioners across Lebanon and the UK. The report was prepared by Rabih Koussa.

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INTRODUCTION

This Annual Report captures the impact of the British Council's arts and culture work in Lebanon during a period defined by uncertainty, adaptation, and renewal. It reflects not only our programmes and outcomes but also a moment of collective pause and reflection. When the war broke out, we needed to breathe, reassess, and find ways to continue meaningfully. More than ever, it was essential to listen to our partners, to their realities, and to the shifting ground beneath us all.

Amid these challenges, our partners showed remarkable resilience. They continued to create, engage, and nurture communities whenever possible, driven by a shared belief that culture should not be the first to suffer in times of crisis. Their perseverance became a reminder of what sustains this sector: conviction, care, and a deep sense of purpose.

Throughout 2023 and 2024, the British Council's partnerships reinforced the foundations of Lebanon's cultural ecosystem, supporting artists, institutions, and practitioners to adapt and thrive. CATAPULT consolidated its role as a national incubator for creative sectors, advancing new forms of artistic production and research in dance, visual arts, and music. The Artivator Fellowships deepened the sector's professional infrastructure by training future leaders in curation, festival management, and art handling, while festival collaborations demonstrated the power of artistic production to create solidarity and dialogue across borders. Delegate programmes expanded these exchanges into sustained professional relationships, linking Lebanese creatives with peers in the UK and the wider SWANA region.

Equally central was the continuation of the Cultural Protection Fund, whose projects addressed the urgent need to safeguard both tangible and intangible heritage while empowering communities with new skills and confidence. These initiatives revealed culture's capacity to respond to crisis not only through preservation but through regeneration, turning protection into participation and vulnerability into shared learning.

Together, these programmes affirm the British Council Lebanon's commitment to building a cultural landscape that is connected, inclusive, and resilient. This report is both a record of what we achieved and a testament to the unwavering spirit of those who made it possible, a reminder that culture remains one of the most powerful tools for rebuilding trust, strengthening communities, and imagining a shared future.



CATAPULT

CATAPULT is a pilot initiative launched by British Council Lebanon's Arts and Culture department. It is thought of as a talent and professional development programme in collaboration with pre-existing hubs in four different creative sectors: Dance and Performing Arts, Music, Games, and Visual Arts.

The programme is about recognizing the potential in each of the sectors and developing with local partners, programmes that respond to the needs and ambitions of artists, and creative and cultural practitioners. British Council's involvement in each sector takes different forms but has one primary objective: to support creative talents from Lebanon while building strong connections with the UK, whilst focusing on creative expression, exchange, and enterprise. CATAPULT is about upskilling, growth and thriving.

CATAPULT.BODY: DANCE RESEARCH

In partnership with Yaraqa



Participants, including artists, cultural and press representatives, and cross-sectoral professionals, gathering at the Charles Corm Foundation for the 'Activating the Ecosystem' event. The exhibition showcases the research process and outcomes of the 3-year partnership between Yaraqa and British Council under the CATAPULT.body programme © Alex Meouchy

The first two years of the CATAPULT.body programme profoundly influenced Lebanon's Dance and Movement (D&M) sector, uncovering critical challenges and immense potential. These insights highlighted an urgent need to consolidate findings and expand research to address systemic issues within the ecosystem. In its third year, the programme introduced several transformative initiatives, with the Ecosystem Mapping Platform at their centre, aimed at fostering collaboration, promoting sustainable practices, and bridging gaps across the sector.

The Ecosystem Mapping Platform, supported by the Drosos Foundation, serves as a groundbreaking digital tool that visualizes the complex web of relationships within the D&M ecosystem. It maps stakeholder perspectives, identifies connections, and highlights opportunities for action. Built upon extensive research—including surveys, interviews, and workshops—the platform synthesizes insights into an accessible, actionable resource designed to guide the sector toward sustainable growth. The platform's unveiling took place during the Activating the Ecosystem event on May 13, 2024, at the Charles Corm Foundation in Beirut, with a simultaneous online component. This pre-launch event gathered 55 participants from various professional fields, creating a vibrant space for dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaboration. Attendees engaged with the platform's features and discussed its findings, underscoring its role as a tool to unify stakeholders and catalyse new partnerships. The event reinforced the importance of shared action to address the sector's pressing challenges, inspiring fresh perspectives and collective strategies.

The research underpinning the platform's development was comprehensive, identifying 20 critical areas, 123 key topics, and 412 connections within the D&M ecosystem. It illuminated essential dynamics, such as financial sustainability, regional disparities, and professional work patterns, while highlighting opportunities to strengthen the sector. These findings have become the foundation for informed decision-making, empowering stakeholders to design effective interventions while fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration. To further disseminate these findings, the Activating the Ecosystem event featured an installation pre-launch that transformed the research into a tangible, visual experience. Detailed installations presented the ecosystem's critical areas and interconnections in an accessible format,



As part of the exhibition, an installation featuring 20 models of the ecosystem map, each embodying a focus area and its mapped connections, allows participants to interact with the research findings © Alex Meouchy

encouraging deeper engagement with the findings. By sparking conversations and inviting stakeholders to interact with the data, these creative displays demonstrated the value of innovative methods for translating research into action.

Collectively, these initiatives have had a far-reaching impact on Lebanon's D&M sector. They have addressed fragmentation, promoted collaboration, and created opportunities for shared growth and innovation. The Ecosystem Mapping Platform stands as a testament to the sector's resilience and potential, equipping professionals with the tools to navigate its complexities and unlock new possibilities. These efforts have demonstrated commitment to cultivating sustainable practices to ensure that Lebanon's D&M sector thrives as a vital component of the arts and culture landscape. This work not only responds to immediate needs but also lays the groundwork for a future of increased impact in the sector.

CATAPULT.VISUAL'ARTS 2.0

In partnership with the Beirut Museum of Art (BeMA)

The CATAPULT.visual'arts 2.0 programme celebrated its second iteration with an ambitious agenda to foster artistic talent and cultural exchange in Lebanon. Through a series of interconnected activities, the programme provided emerging visual artists and students with invaluable mentorship, practical experience, and a platform to showcase their creative expressions.

A key highlight of the programme was the introduction of a Buddy System, designed to pair four emerging artists from the CATAPULT programme with four students from the Lebanese University – Fine Arts division. Over a six-month

period, these partnerships created an intimate and supportive framework for learning and exchange. Through personalised sessions, workshops, and collaborative projects, the Buddy System bridged the gap between academic learning and professional practice, allowing participants to develop their creative practices and explore career opportunities within Lebanon's arts ecosystem.

The programme also featured Unfolding Practices, a dynamic series of five workshops curated by BeMA Labs. These sessions tackled vital themes at the intersection of art and contemporary challenges, including technology, identity,



Yara Mahdi and Elias Nafaa pitch their project Conversations with the Strata



The 'Unveiling the Power of Heritage and Creativity' workshop delved into the role of museums in cultural preservation

activism, sustainability, and entrepreneurship. Participants engaged in inspiring discussions with experts, delving into topics such as heritage preservation, digital artistry, exhibition design, and sustainable creative practices. These workshops not only broadened the participants' knowledge but also equipped them with tools and insights for navigating the complex landscape of the arts and culture sector.

The culmination of CATAPULT.visual'arts 2.0 was the Unfolding Landscapes exhibition, held at the Beiteddine Palace as part of the Beiteddine Festival. This itinerant exhibition showcased modern works from the Lebanese Ministry of Culture's collection alongside newly commissioned ones by CATAPULT participants. Centred around the theme of Landscape, the exhibition invited audiences to

reflect on the interconnectedness of art, heritage, and environment.

Through its carefully curated activities, CATAPULT.visual'arts 2.0 successfully empowered emerging artists and students, nurtured innovation, and fostered dialogue across disciplines and cultures. The programme reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Lebanon's vibrant arts and culture ecosystem while creating meaningful opportunities for collaboration and growth.



Celebrating three years of CATAPULT

To mark three years of CATAPULT and the conclusion of the programme, a series of reflective sit-ins brought together partner organisations, artists, and creative practitioners who had shaped its journey. These conversations revisited the programme's milestones, celebrated its achievements, and traced its impact across Lebanon's creative ecosystem — from the professional growth it enabled to the lasting collaborations it inspired across disciplines. The resulting **video series** captures these voices and moments of reflection, inviting viewers to look back on CATAPULT's three-year journey and the creative community it helped nurture.



Cold Pop artist Tamara Qaddoumi's much-awaited homecoming show as part of CATAPULT.sonic at STATION celebrated the release of her latest EP "Sorry Signal"



FESTIVALS

The British Council's Festival programmes aim to establish prominent cultural platforms, focusing on collaboration with various actors. Their impact is multifaceted, including expanding professional networks and access to international markets for creative professionals, facilitating intercultural exchanges with the UK across various domains, sharing knowledge to support the development of creative sectors, and fostering long-term bilateral relationships and cultural connections through collaborative efforts and showcasing.

In 2023/24 and 2024/25, British Council Lebanon supported a total of eight festivals:

- 01** Lakes International Comic Art Festival
- 02** Al-Bustan International Festival
- 03** Liverpool Arab Arts Festival
- 04** Beirut International Platform of Dance
- 05** Rumman Music Festival
- 06** Rural Encounters on the Environment and Film
- 07** Warshe 13
- 08** Tripoli Film Festival

01 LAKES INTERNATIONAL COMIC ART FESTIVAL (LICAF) - FROM INK TO ACTION

From Ink to Action is a unique cross-cultural project that foregrounds Arab comic artists and positions comic art as a powerful tool for environmental storytelling and international dialogue. Jointly delivered by the British Council MENA and the Lakes International Comic Art Festival (LICAF), the project commissioned twelve creators from Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Syria and Algeria to produce new works on environmental themes. These stories are featured in a bilingual [anthology](#) and form the core of a travelling exhibition.

The first public showing took place in September 2023 at LICAF in Bowness-on-Windermere. Working with Skēnē Works, the festival turned nine shopfronts into temporary gallery spaces. Recycled-plastic display structures, designed for flat-pack shipping and reuse, carried the pages of each comic like placards in a street-side demonstration. Six of the twelve artists attended the opening weekend, taking part in talks, live-drawing sessions and networking events. Moroccan illustrator Mehdi Annassi painted a large outdoor mural, and Egyptian artist Mohamed Salah supplied the festival's signature artwork, raising public visibility for both the project and the wider Arab comics scene.

Professional development sits alongside public programming. Through the [Artivator Fellowship](#), two emerging producers—from Lebanon and Egypt—joined LICAF's core team for a four-week residency. Guided by festival staff, they gained practical experience in event operations, marketing and partnership management, and reported greater confidence and an expanded professional network on completion.

In December 2023 the exhibition travelled to Dubai as part of COP28's cultural schedule and was hosted by Alserkal Avenue from 8 to 22 December. Opening night combined the launch of the printed anthology with an introduction to a digital animated rendition by Alex Abdallah and Sama Baydoun. A youth workshop, *Painting the Future Together*, led by Mehdi Annassi, invited local participants to create their own climate-focused comics. Egyptian academics Dr Mustafa Riad and Dr Iman Ezzeldin presented *Translating Sustainability*, a performative lecture linking science and visual



In its second iteration, the exhibition was part of COP 28's parallel programming at Alserkal Avenue. When the individual displays converge in one space, they are read as a collective call for climate action.



Lebanese artist Lena Merhej and Moroccan illustrator Mehdi Annassi share how comics can turn climate facts into human stories during the “Comics in Conversation” panel moderated by LICAF’s Julie Tait .

storytelling. Comics in Conversation, moderated by LICAF’s Julie Tait and featuring artists Lena Merhej (Lebanon) and Annassi, explored how comic art documents everyday realities and motivates social action. Collectively, these activities underscore the project’s aim to position comics as an accessible medium for environmental dialogue.

The journey continued in June 2024, when the exhibition appeared at Manchester’s Festival of Libraries alongside public workshops and readings. Educational resources based on the anthology are

in use in schools and cultural centres in the UK, Qatar and the Philippines, with expanding interest worldwide.

From Ink to Action demonstrates how comics connect communities, share knowledge and encourage climate-positive action. By combining artistic production, public engagement and skills development, the project creates a flexible platform that travels, adapts and grows, ensuring that the conversation it started in the Lake District resonates far beyond the festival’s borders.

02 AL-BUSTAN INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL FOR MUSIC AND PERFORMING ARTS

Under the theme of ‘Thirty Years: Against All Odds,’ the Al Bustan International Festival 2024 marked three decades of resilience, cultural enrichment, and world-class performances. Held from 21 February to 17 March 2024, the festival featured 15 live performances across diverse genres, embodying the festival’s enduring commitment to artistic excellence despite challenging circumstances. Among the highlights of this milestone edition was a heartwarming jazz concert supported by the British Council. On Friday, 8 March 2024, the stage of the Emile Bustani Auditorium at Al Bustan Hotel was enlivened with the exceptional

talent of renowned British artists Julian Joseph on piano and James Joseph on drums, accompanied by Lebanese bassist Khatchatur Savzyan. The trio performed a selection of standards, including works by George Gershwin, Duke Ellington, and Cole Porter, alongside original compositions by Julian Joseph. Their synergy delivered a masterful performance, seamlessly blending dynamic improvisations with emotional depth.

The full-house audience of 480 attendees was enthralled, their applause echoing the powerful connection forged between artists and listeners. The event not only introduced the Lebanese community to the brilliance of British jazz but also provided a platform for cross-border collaboration. For bassist Khatchatur Savzyan, the chance to share the stage with internationally acclaimed artists was transformative, leading to invitations for further performances both locally and abroad. Reflecting the festival’s broader commitment to inclusion and accessibility, particular attention was given to ensuring a diverse audience could experience the concert. Ten blind individuals were invited to attend, offering them an inspiring and enriching encounter with live music. This initiative aligned with the festival’s celebration of three decades of resilience, underscoring its mission to break barriers—both artistic and social—and create spaces where everyone, regardless of circumstance, can partake in the unifying and transformative power of the arts.

The Al Bustan International Festival continues to be a symbol of hope, creativity, and cross-cultural collaboration. The 30th anniversary not only marked a significant milestone but also set the stage for an exciting future.



Julian Joseph on the piano during Jazz Night at Al-Bustan



Jazz Night at Al-Bustan featuring Julian Joseph on the piano, James Joseph on drums, Khachatur Savzyan on bass

03 LIVERPOOL ARAB ARTS FESTIVAL (LAAF)



VIP Launch – Liverpool Arab Arts Festival, July 2024

The Port Cities project, launched in partnership with the Liverpool Arab Arts Festival (LAAF), is an ambitious initiative exploring the shared histories, contemporary realities, and imagined futures of port cities across the world. At the heart of the project is a critical dialogue that connects Liverpool – a city with a deeply intertwined history of trade, migration, and cultural exchange – with major Arab port cities, including Beirut, Casablanca, Tunis, and Cairo. This initiative reflects on the socio-economic, cultural, and environmental dynamics of these urban hubs through the lens of multidisciplinary art.

The project began with a residency programme in Liverpool, where four Arab artists – Mohamed Abdelkarim, Laila Hida, Nadia Kaabi-Linke, and Siska – engaged deeply with the city’s maritime legacy. Liverpool, a historic global port city, has long been shaped by its role in the transatlantic slave trade, the industrial revolution, and, more recently, its ambitious redevelopment plans, including the creation of a Freeport. These themes served as a foundation for the artists, who explored parallels between Liverpool and their respective home cities in the Arab world. Supported by LAAF, the residency facilitated research visits, professional networking, and collaboration with local cultural institutions, laying the groundwork for the creation of newly commissioned artworks.

Titled [Port Cities](#), the resulting group exhibition premiered at the Liverpool Arab Arts Festival in July 2024, held at Space Liverpool. Open to the public, the exhibition offered an evocative exploration of port cities’ histories and their evolving identities. Mohamed Abdelkarim’s sound installation, *Nobody Remembered the Ark, Said the Sea*, gave voice



In the foreground, Siska's 'Still Waters Run Deep' tackles the subjects of migration and bureaucracy © Rob Battersby

to the sea and mythical creatures, critiquing humanity's exploitation of marine ecosystems for trade, war, and the commodification of human lives. Laila Hida's *Reversed Landscape*, an extension of her ongoing project *Le Voyage du Pheonix*, used Liverpool's iconic locations, such as Sefton Park's Palm House, to reflect on the displacement of commodities and the legacy of imperial exploration. Nadia Kaabi-Linke's *Heartbeat Wavelines* created a poignant link between Liverpool and Tunis through a site-specific installation. The piece combined a full-scale drawing of a derelict wall from Liverpool's North docks with windows from the Megara Hotel in Tunis, symbolizing shared histories of war, deprivation, and perpetual change. Siska, meanwhile, employed a mix of film and archival materials to examine the intersections of personal and collective memory, inviting audiences to consider how port cities like Beirut and Liverpool are shaped by migration and identity.

The exhibition is accompanied by a dynamic programme of public events, including a symposium held during LAAF 2024, where artists and curators delved into the project's conceptual underpinnings. The discussion illuminated the shared narratives

of port cities as sites of exchange, tension, and transformation. Following its debut in Liverpool, the exhibition will embark on an international tour to Beirut, Tunis, Casablanca, and Cairo, where site-specific activities, including talks and workshops will be held.

A significant aspect of the project is its commitment to environmental sustainability. Artists were encouraged to create works that are adaptable and responsive to different sites, minimizing the ecological impact of material use and transportation. This aligns with the broader goals of fostering sustainable artistic practices and addressing pressing global challenges.

The Liverpool Arab Arts Festival, now in its 26th year, has become a vital part of the city's cultural fabric. Through initiatives like *Port Cities*, it continues to provide a platform for intercultural dialogue, fostering connections between Liverpool and the Arab world. As it continues to tour, *Port Cities* exemplifies the transformative power of art to connect people and places, creating a global dialogue that transcends geographic boundaries while remaining grounded in the unique narratives of each city it touches.

04 BEIRUT INTERNATIONAL PLATFORM OF DANCE (BIPOD)

The British Council supported the 20th edition of Beirut International Platform of Dance (BIPOD), organized by Maqamat Beit El Raqs, marking a significant milestone in the festival's evolution. The 2024 program, entitled *To Do, To Share*, was designed to engage both artists and audiences in immersive experiences that challenged traditional artistic formats and showcased creativity as an integral part of daily life. The theme *Spaces of Hope* explored the evolving relationship between creativity and societal values, with a focus on how art can shape personal and collective narratives. BIPOD's innovative approach included a blend of performances, workshops, and discussions, inviting audiences to actively participate in the

cultural dialogue and reflecting on how gatherings and artistic exchanges can foster transformation.

The festival began with *Moultqa Leymoun*, a five-day segment running from April 16 to 19, which brought together local and international artists to experiment, collaborate, and engage in creative research. This initiative, which involved dancers, musicians, visual artists, filmmakers, and writers, explored the intersections of digital and urban spaces within Beirut. Through these exchanges, BIPOD continued its mission of developing a pan-Arab contemporary dance network, enhancing the visibility of Arab artists on the global stage. The festival then culminated in a dynamic three-day celebration from April 19 to 21, hosted across iconic venues such as Station Beirut, Beirut Art Centre, and the Sursock Museum. Featuring live-streaming through *Citerne.live*, the festival offered an inclusive environment where audiences could directly engage with performances, workshops, and discussions, encouraging participation beyond passive observation.

Accessibility and sustainability were central to the 2024 edition, with efforts made to integrate both local cultural landmarks and digital platforms to bridge physical and virtual spaces. The festival supported emerging artists while fostering international collaboration, pushing the boundaries of dance through the inclusion of various art forms like music, visual arts, and literature. The participatory format of the festival allowed the audience to immerse themselves in the performances, with opportunities to engage in improvisations, collaborative activities, and cultural encounters that highlighted the strength of community in shaping the experience.



BIPOD Festival 2024 – Opening Ceremony



Laurence Yadi, from Compagnie Cie, performing TODAY at Abroyan Factory

BIPOD 2024 served as a platform for socio-economic empowerment. By offering free access to all performances and events, the festival ensured that individuals from diverse backgrounds could participate. It particularly benefited young and emerging dancers from underrepresented areas outside Beirut, providing them with the opportunity to volunteer, attend workshops, and be exposed to the broader dance community. The festival also contributed to the local economy, generating employment for technicians, coordinators, and support staff, and stimulating local businesses. Furthermore, BIPOD supported the creative industries by nurturing entrepreneurial ventures

in the performing arts sector, encouraging cross-cultural collaborations and knowledge exchanges.

Through strategic partnerships, BIPOD has secured long-term support for its future editions. The collaborative network established in 2024 will ensure the festival's sustainability, fostering artistic exchange and continuing to engage the community in meaningful ways. This year's edition not only celebrated two decades of artistic excellence but also laid the foundation for future growth, embracing innovation, diversity, and inclusivity to strengthen Beirut's position as a vibrant cultural hub.

05 RUMMAN MUSIC FESTIVAL

The third edition of Rumman Music Festival (RMF) took place in Tripoli, North Lebanon, marking a significant milestone for the city's only independent music festival. Over three days, RMF gathered musicians, audiences, and cultural practitioners from Lebanon and the SWANA region, fostering a space for artistic expression and collaboration despite Lebanon's ongoing challenges. This year's festival not only provided a platform for emerging and established artists but also strengthened its ties to the local economy, community, and cultural heritage.

Shaped by a sense of defiance and hope, RMF unfolded against the backdrop of Lebanon's economic and political turmoil. With Tripoli named the Arab Capital of Culture for 2024, the festival

stood as an act of resilience, demonstrating music's power to unite in times of uncertainty. More than 738 attendees participated, many traveling from Beirut, reflecting RMF's growing influence beyond Tripoli.

The festival featured 33 artists, blending contemporary and traditional sounds to create a diverse musical experience. A key highlight was the RMF residency program, culminating in a tribute to the legendary Bendaly Family. Lebanese and Syrian artists collaborated to reinterpret the group's songs, reintroducing their work to new generations while celebrating Tripoli's artistic history. The festival also established Stereo Kawalis as its permanent venue, transforming the historic Art Deco space into an immersive setting



Bendaly Family Music Tribute (05_09_Ali Dallou)



Etyen x Salwa Jaradat (Lebanon/Palestine) (07_09_Ali Dallou)

for live performances. This shift reinforced RMF's connection to the city and encouraged visitors to explore beyond the festival, engaging with Tripoli's businesses and cultural sites. The programme was a carefully curated mix of performances, workshops, and discussions. The opening night set the tone with an electrifying fusion of electronic and folk influences, featuring Lebanese producer Liliane Chlela and Syrian artist Assa'aleek. The second night brought a mix of indie, rock, and hip-hop, with standout performances by Beirut-based band Sandmoon and Palestinian-Jordanian rapper The Synaptik, whose raw lyricism deeply resonated with audiences. The final night was dedicated to the Bendaly Family tribute, a nostalgic yet contemporary reimagining of their classic songs. Longtime fans and new listeners alike joined in, turning the performance into a powerful moment of collective joy and remembrance.

Beyond performances, RMF sparked vital discussions on the independent music scene in Lebanon. Panel talks addressed challenges like funding, artistic sustainability, and the impact of regional crises on creative production. A workshop on live sound production and electronic music composition provided young musicians with hands-on experience, reinforcing the festival's role as a space for learning and mentorship.

In a city often overlooked in Lebanon's cultural landscape, RMF proved that music can be a force for change. By reclaiming spaces, fostering collaboration, and amplifying independent voices, the festival reaffirmed its mission: to build a thriving cultural scene in Tripoli, driven by resilience, creativity, and the unyielding power of sound.

06 RURAL ENCOUNTERS ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND FILM (REEF)

The 2024 REEF Ambassadors Programme, developed by the Rural Encounters on Environment and Film (REEF) Festival and supported by the British Council, demonstrates how art-centred learning can translate environmental awareness into tangible community action. Over five days, sixteen young participants (aged 13–18) engaged in field walks, film dialogues and maker-labs that moved them from curious observers to articulate advocates for Akkar's fragile ecosystems.

The evidence of this shift was clear. Baseline surveys showed most ambassadors could initially name only two local species; by the week's end, they identified at least ten and explained threats such as unchecked logging and spring-water contamination. Their new knowledge was formalised in a press communiqué—researched and presented on the festival stage—that urged municipal leaders to cut plastic use, monitor forest health and protect Mar Assia spring. Three neighbouring municipalities have adopted the



Youth Ambassadors record plant sightings and soil conditions during a guided biodiversity hike on Kobayat's Cedar Trail – an exercise that boosts their species-identification skills and feeds data to REEF's citizen-science log.



Zeinab Allaw of the British Council Lebanon introduces From Ink to Action—a digital exhibition, anthology, and new comic commission—showing how Arab artists use graphic storytelling to spotlight climate challenges.

document as a youth advisory charter, giving the ambassadors an official voice in local policy.

Creative outputs reinforced the programme's learning objectives. Acting as the jury for REEF's Short Film Competition, the group publicly debated thematic and technical merits before selecting a Syrian animation on river restoration as the winner, modelling transparent cultural decision-making. Parallel workshops produced thirty glass-jar terrariums—miniature ecosystems now on permanent display in Kobayat's public library—and a crowd-sourced biodiversity photo wall that attracted more than 700 visitors and anchored an interactive species-identification quiz.

A highlight of the 2024 festival was a rendition of *From Ink to Action*, a digital exhibition of Arab climate-themed comics devised by the Lakes International Comic Art Festival. Installed in Kobayat's historic Silk Factory, the show drew 1,050 visitors over three days and introduced diverse audiences to comics as a tool for environmental narrative. Sales of the accompanying anthology directly financed the town's volunteer fire-watch initiative, linking cultural participation with practical conservation.

Capacity-building extended beyond the exhibition hall. At the local level, ambassadors shadowed eco-guides on trails and subsequently led a 60-person community hike. Follow-up surveys conducted three months later reported that 80 percent of participants had launched recycling drives or biodiversity clubs in their schools. Evening "village suppers" paired farmers, scientists and families with the ambassadors, fostering inter-generational dialogue and rooting new ideas in community tradition.

Collectively, these outcomes illustrate the REEF model's potential. Kobayat gains a new cultural attraction, Akkar gains sixteen informed environmental stewards and Lebanon acquires a scalable blueprint for year-round, youth-led climate engagement.

07 WARSHE 13 ARTIST RESIDENCY AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME

The Warshe 13 Artist Residency and Mentorship Programme, presented by Marsah with the support of the British Council offers a transformative space for creative exploration and professional growth in Tripoli. Marsah aims to foster an independent grassroots arts movement, revitalizing the city's cultural scene and affirming its role as a dynamic hub for creativity and innovation.

Running from September 2024 through May 2025, the residency welcomed a diverse cohort of emerging artists working across multiple disciplines, including contemporary art, performing arts, visual storytelling, illustration, creative writing, photography, comics, and installation art. Participants benefited from structured mentorship tailored to their specific artistic visions and needs. The programme successfully delivered four

intensive foundational courses: Introduction to Image and Film, Art and Philosophy, Art and Body Movement, and Production and Collaborations. Subsequently, a rigorous mentorship programme commenced in January 2025, pairing each emerging artist with established mentors such as Aurelian Zouki (Kollectif Kahraba), Hussein Nkahal (Beit Waraq), Nur Turkmani (Rusted Radishes), Hashem Adnan (Bah), Maya Fidawi, Olivier Garo, and Lena Merhej (Samandal). Each mentor-mentee pairing engaged deeply across disciplines, fostering substantial growth and skill development.

The mentorship programme comprised ten focused sessions over three months, providing significant one-on-one interaction. This personalized approach allowed each artist to create detailed action plans, culminating in two major deliverables, namely contributions to a bilingual Art Journal in collaboration with Rusted Radishes, and conceptual proposals for performance or installation works. The journal will be launched in October 2025 during the inaugural edition of Art Week, alongside selected performances and installations funded by production grants ranging from \$2,500 to \$3,000. These grants, complemented by technical support from Marsah, will enable artists to bring their ambitious projects to life.

To further increase visibility and outreach, Marsah initiated a dynamic communications strategy involving social media announcements and artist-mentor interviews. Through these initiatives, Warshe 13 not only supports individual artistic journeys but also strengthens Tripoli's wider artistic community, creating lasting cultural impact and positioning the city as a resilient center for innovative arts practice.



Artist-in-Residence Program – Body as a Creative Tool in Live Arts session led by Maya Zbib



Artist-in-Residence Program – Art & Philosophy session led by Junaid Sariedeen

08 TRIPOLI FILM FESTIVAL

Now in its eleventh year, the Tripoli Film Festival continues to demonstrate cinema's unique power to unite communities and spark fresh ideas—even amid challenging times. Held from 19 to 25 September 2024, this edition transformed Beit El-Fan's historic vaulted hall into a vibrant space where audiences could explore stories that spanned cultures, tackled urgent themes, and prompted meaningful reflection.

The festival's programme was marked by a spirit of experimentation and engagement. Seventeen carefully selected features and five short-film programmes offered diverse perspectives on themes including displacement, labour, identity, and gender. A special animation showcase drew enthusiastic school groups, filling the hall with eager young voices experiencing cinema for free—

many attending screenings for the very first time. The opening night set the tone with Lina Soualem's powerful documentary *Bye Bye Tiberias*, followed by an insightful discussion on documentary ethics. Another highlight was the Arab shorts segment, premiering five inventive micro-budget films that captivated viewers with their storytelling daring and cinematic vision. Even when regional travel disruptions prevented two filmmakers from attending, their Q&As continued via video link, creating intimate virtual exchanges. Long after screenings ended, lively conversations spilled into Beit El-Fan's courtyard, deepening dialogues around women's voices and authorship in Arab cinema.

Complementing the film screenings, the festival's industry platform TFF Forum created invaluable opportunities for emerging filmmakers and industry



Guests from Beirut around Emile Chahine (Lifetime Achievement Award 2025) and Lebanese actress Marilyne Naamane.



Lebanese actress Nada Abou Farhat, feature film jury member and Elias Khlaf Festival director around Emile Chahine (Lifetime Achievement Award 2025).

professionals. Two masterclasses, one exploring Moufida Tlatli's pioneering editing techniques and another dissecting Nadine Labaki's acclaimed actor-director approach, drew packed rooms of young film professionals eager to deepen their craft. Panels addressing independent distribution and regional co-production fostered concrete initiatives, including a planned Tunis-Tripoli script exchange in 2025 and a dedicated pitching fund in Cairo for Levantine shorts. The Arab Shorts Pitching Platform proved especially successful, awarding mentorship to five promising young directors. Jury chair Annemarie Jacir described the pitching session as "the most concentrated burst of new voices I've heard this year."

Beyond screenings and industry panels, the festival invested directly in local capacity building. At Stereo Kawalis, ten Tripolitan teenagers participated in an acting laboratory, resulting in a vibrant public performance showcasing their newly acquired scene-study skills. Meanwhile, nine novice filmmakers engaged in an intensive cinematography boot camp, learning practical skills in lighting and camera work for low-

resource filmmaking. They immediately put their training to use, capturing daily festival diaries and creating engaging social media content.

The festival also took a bold stand on artistic freedom when censorship affected three competition titles. Organisers ensured the films remained part of jury deliberations, and in place of the scheduled screenings, projected a black screen bearing Nietzsche's provocative quote: "Sometimes people don't want to hear the truth because they don't want their illusions destroyed." This powerful gesture resonated widely, sparking conversations on artistic censorship from Beirut to Berlin.

Despite heightened security concerns leading to a modified closing event, festival winners were announced through a press release warmly received online, reaffirming the community's continued support. Ultimately, the 2024 Tripoli Film Festival highlighted the resilience and creativity of Tripoli's filmmakers, cinephiles, and youth, proving once again that storytelling and cultural exchange can thrive and inspire—even against the odds.



DELEGATIONS

The British Council is dedicated to fostering artistic and professional exchanges between Lebanon and the UK through various delegate programmes. We recognise the immense value of cross-cultural collaboration and the transformative power it holds for artists, cultural practitioners, and the wider arts community. Our initiatives aim not only to facilitate the exchange of creative ideas and artistic practices but also to cultivate meaningful connections between the two countries.

In 2023/24 and 2024/25, the British Council enabled five Lebanese delegations to the UK:

- 01** Spotlight on Culture - Spotlight on Northern Ireland @GFA25
- 02** Momentum International Delegate Programme 2023
- 03** Momentum International Delegate Programme 2024
- 04** EUNIC Climate Culture(s) Creative Lab
- 05** International Producers Development Network

01 SPOTLIGHT ON CULTURE - SPOTLIGHT ON NORTHERN IRELAND @GFA25

As part of Spotlight on Culture: Northern Ireland Arts – Peace and Beyond 2023, a British Council programme marking the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, we invited three leading figures from the Syrian and Lebanese cultural sectors to participate in a week of exchange in Belfast. The programme, grounded in Northern Ireland's ongoing journey from conflict to peace, highlights the role of socially engaged arts in addressing unresolved tensions, navigating polarised identities, and imagining inclusive futures. Designed to foster international partnerships, the initiative brought together global delegates working in challenging and post-conflict contexts, with a shared belief in the transformative power of culture. Our delegation included Khaled Barakeh, artist and founder of the Syrian Biennale,

who built on previous collaborations in Belfast to deepen his work connecting Syrian artists in exile with global networks. Cynthia Zaven, a celebrated Lebanese musician and sound artist, was invited to explore two new commissions linking music and filmmaking, drawing inspiration from Belfast's own sonic and cinematic explorations of memory and place. Basma Baydoun, project manager at Ettijahat – Independent Culture, engaged with local models of cultural regeneration and community-led creative practice, identifying intersections with regional approaches in the Arab world. Their participation not only sparked new collaborations but also reflected on the universal resonance of cultural practice in times of fracture, memory, and repair.



The delegation to Belfast included Khaled Barakeh, Basma Baydoun, Cynthia Zaven and Marc Mourkech.



Delegates immerse themselves in a virtual reality performance presented by Big Telly Theatre Company

02 MOMENTUM INTERNATIONAL DELEGATE PROGRAMME 2023

The Momentum International Delegate Programme 2023—a partnership between the British Council Scotland, Edinburgh Festivals, and Creative Scotland—was a landmark initiative fostering cultural exchange between the United Kingdom and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Held in Edinburgh during the city’s peak festival season, the programme brought together cultural leaders from Lebanon to build lasting bridges between Scotland’s world-renowned festivals and the vibrant arts scene of our region.

Momentum provides a curated platform for international exchange, investment, and cultural diplomacy, enabling high-level delegates to engage directly with Scotland’s creative ecosystem and develop long-term collaborations.

The 2023 Lebanese delegation included Romy Assouad, co-founder of Yaraqa, who initiated a partnership with Scottish Dance Theatre exploring the intersection of movement and technology; Marielise Aad, director of Hammama Artist House, who forged new festival connections and shared rural residency practices; and Helena Nassif, Executive Director of Al Mawred Al Thaqafy, who began discussions with the University of Edinburgh to establish a capacity-building exchange for her wider team.

These engagements highlight Momentum’s role as both a gateway to Edinburgh’s dynamic festival network and a catalyst for sustained collaboration, professional growth, and the reimagining of international partnerships across a changing global arts landscape.





03 IN BETWEEN x MOMENTUM 2024

The 2024 edition of the Momentum International Delegate Programme brought together directors, programmers, and cultural policymakers from across the Arab region and the UK as part of the broader IN BETWEEN collaboration under the British Council MENA's Fadaa'aat framework. Over three intensive days in Edinburgh, participants explored the evolving role of festivals within a world shaped by political volatility, economic shifts, and rapid technological change – seeking pathways toward sustainability, inclusion, and shared cultural growth.

IN BETWEEN x Momentum served as a dynamic platform for dialogue between regional and international festival leaders, fostering peer exchange around the social, financial, and ethical dimensions of festival-making. Discussions

examined how festivals can sustain cultural vitality in times of crisis while remaining spaces of joy, dialogue, and resistance.

The convening featured contributions from over twenty international festivals – including Shubbak (UK), Visa for Music (Morocco), Baghdad Tarkib (Iraq), Dougga Festival (Tunisia), Edinburgh Art Festival, and the Liverpool Arab Arts Festival – each presenting case studies that illustrated innovation and resilience in their respective contexts. Together, these exchanges underscored that festivals are not merely celebratory events but critical infrastructures for social connection, identity formation, and creative economies.



Festival directors, arts professionals, and British Council Arts staff in a speed dating session

Throughout the convening, several cross-cutting themes emerged. Participants reaffirmed the role of festivals as catalysts for dialogue, wellbeing, and cultural preservation, while examining diverse funding and business models to address financial sustainability. Learning from Edinburgh's major festivals, delegates identified adaptable strategies for the MENA context, emphasising shared ownership and community relevance.

Conversations on audience development highlighted a shift from passive spectatorship to active co-creation – calling for accessibility, affordability, and inclusive, community-based programming. Technology was explored as both a creative medium and an operational tool, with examples from Tunisia's INTERFERENCE and Scotland's Sonica festivals demonstrating how digital innovation can expand engagement while prompting ethical reflection on equity and access.

Collaboration emerged as a central theme, recognised as essential to sustaining the global festival ecosystem. Exchanges between the Edinburgh Art Festival, Marsah (Lebanon), and Tarkib (Iraq) showcased the benefits of shared resources and collective learning, while also revealing challenges related to power dynamics

and institutional disparities. Participants emphasised the importance of transparent, value-driven partnerships grounded in mutual respect.

Despite persistent regional challenges – from funding cuts and censorship to mobility restrictions and climate change – discussions remained focused on opportunities to cultivate solidarity, diversify income streams, and embed care, mental health, and environmental responsibility into future programming.

The gathering culminated in a collective vision for the future of festival-making – one rooted in collaboration, ethical practice, and cultural relevance. As such, IN BETWEEN x Momentum 2024 reaffirmed Edinburgh's role as a global meeting point for cultural innovation and solidarity, while amplifying Arab voices in shaping a new, interconnected, and caring festival ecosystem.



04 EUNIC CLIMATE CULTURE(S) CREATIVE LAB

In June 2023, Marc Mouarkech, Head of Arts and Culture at the British Council in Lebanon and Syria, took part in the EUNIC Climate Culture(s) Creative Lab (CCCLab) in Berlin—an intensive, week-long programme that brought together 43 cultural practitioners from 19 EUNIC member organisations around the world. Organised under the Goethe-Institut's EUNIC presidency and facilitated by Julie's Bicycle and Social Impact, the Lab addressed

the intersection of climate, culture, and justice through collaborative learning, peer-led sessions, and immersive visits to Berlin-based sustainable initiatives. The programme foregrounded not only the urgency of environmental action, but also the role of arts and culture in catalysing systemic change, with a particular focus on equity, intersectionality, and creative diplomacy.



Marc's contribution to the Lab laid the foundation for his continued engagement, culminating in his invitation to serve on the Steering Committee that commissioned the EUNIC Sustainability Toolkit: A Practical Guide for Cultural Relations Institutes. Developed collaboratively and launched in 2024, the Toolkit provides accessible resources and frameworks for cultural institutions at all stages of their sustainability journey. It includes key performance indicators, inclusive communication strategies, and practical tools for embedding climate action across cultural programming. The

Toolkit embodies the spirit of the Lab—fostering community-driven solutions and championing collective responsibility. Marc's participation not only reinforced the British Council's leadership on cultural sustainability but also amplified the voices of practitioners working in complex, often under-resourced contexts, where environmental urgency intersects with social justice.



05 INTERNATIONAL PRODUCERS DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

As part of the British Council's efforts to cultivate emerging cultural leaders from the MENA region, the Future Global Leaders cultural exchange brought together a dynamic cohort of artists, designers, and cultural practitioners for a week-long intensive programme in Manchester, UK in May 2024. Among them was Anas Naamani, architect, designer, and art director at Rumman, whose participation underscored the

programme's mission to foster deep, cross-cultural understanding and professional development.

The programme itinerary offered a panoramic view of the UK's creative sector—from internationally acclaimed institutions to grassroots initiatives—allowing participants to build meaningful personal and professional connections across disciplines. Through site visits, discussions, performances,



and studio tours, participants explored the UK's cultural infrastructure and its approaches to artistic production, civic engagement, and social change.

For Anas Naamani, the experience was particularly impactful in two key moments. The first was an in-depth encounter with Factory International, Manchester's flagship contemporary arts venue, where he had a private technical tour led by Technical Director Jack Thomson. The exchange offered rare insight into the behind-the-scenes workings of large-scale performance spaces, including stage configuration logistics and the design challenges of multi-format venues. This technical access, coupled with candid conversations on human-centered problem solving in artistic production, aligned closely with Anas's role at Rumman and expanded his understanding of spatial and experiential design.

The second major highlight was the visit to Bradford, recently named UK City of Culture 2025. In dialogue with the Bradford team, Anas found compelling parallels between Bradford and his hometown Tripoli, both post-industrial cities with complex cultural legacies and underutilized public space. Discussions around Bradford's mobile prototype project, The Beacon, opened a rich architectural and programmatic conversation on adaptable cultural infrastructure—a theme central to Rumman's own work.

Through this exchange, Anas and his peers engaged deeply with models of creative leadership, institutional collaboration, and community-based cultural development. The programme offered not only knowledge, but lasting relationships and a renewed sense of purpose within the global arts ecosystem.





CULTURAL PROTECTION FUND

The Cultural Protection Fund is a fund that supports efforts to protect cultural heritage at risk. It aims to help to create sustainable opportunities for economic and social development through building capacity to foster, safeguard and promote cultural heritage.

In 2023/24 and 2024/25, ten projects from Lebanon and Syria received grants:

- 01** Protection and Documentation of Medieval Coastal Heritage in Lebanon
- 02** Jouhouzia
- 03** Emergency Response - Sursock Palace
- 04** EAMENA: Mitigating Conflict and Climate Change Risks Through Digital Heritage, Capacity Building, and Consolidation
- 05** Syrian Cassette Archives: Three New Collections
- 06** Emergency Intervention and Damage Assessment in Manbij, Syria
- 07** Protection of a Bronze Age Archaeological Site and Rehabilitation of an On-site Complex in Northern Syria
- 08** Rediscovering and Reviving Folk Music Heritage: On the Tracks of Music
- 09** Safeguarding Endangered Oral Traditions and Minority Heritages in Syria
- 10** Ahliyeh and Life: Cultural Solidarity After the Earthquake

01 PROTECTION AND DOCUMENTATION OF MEDIEVAL COASTAL HERITAGE IN LEBANON

Grant recipient: Iconem Fund | Partner: Lebanese Ministry of Culture - General Directorate of Antiquities (DGA), Lebanon | Grant Amount: £ 92,000 | Target Country: Lebanon



Point cloud representation of Khan El Saboun in Tripoli © ICONEM

The Protection and Documentation of Medieval Coastal Heritage in Lebanon project marks a significant effort in safeguarding Lebanon's vulnerable medieval coastal heritage. Supported by the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund, the initiative combined advanced documentation techniques, specialized training, and collaborative site assessments to address critical preservation challenges. These efforts not only protected invaluable historical structures but also strengthened local expertise in heritage management and restoration, ensuring a lasting impact on Lebanon's architectural legacy.

To support the project's sustainability, a high-performance laptop was provided to the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) for processing collected data. In August 2023, an initial coordination meeting laid the groundwork for implementation, with local archaeologists and

restoration specialists offering key insights into the historical and structural significance of the selected sites. Training played a central role in the project's success. On July 16, 2024, at Khan El Saboun in Tripoli, the first training session, organized by the Order of Engineers and Architects in collaboration with the DGA, brought together architects, engineers, and restoration experts. Over five days, participants received theoretical and hands-on instruction in photogrammetry and heritage documentation, led by experts from Iconem. The training combined classroom learning with fieldwork, equipping attendees with essential documentation skills and producing initial heritage summary sheets—now part of a growing database capturing the condition and preservation needs of key buildings. Following the training, the project focused on documenting and assessing three historically significant sites: Enfeh, Batroun, and Tripoli. Enfeh was fully scanned and processed,



Paratactical Photogrammetry Training – Khan El Saboun \ July 2024 – Trainees and trainers gathered on-site for hands-on learning

creating a comprehensive digital record. In Batroun, 80% of the Old City was documented. Meanwhile, Tripoli's Old City, including Khan El Saboun, underwent extensive scanning. The collected data was transformed into orthophotographs and architectural documentation, providing a valuable resource for future restoration efforts. In addition, a structural assessment of eight zones in Tripoli was conducted from August 23 to September 23, 2024. Teams of volunteers, team leaders, and coordinators systematically surveyed historical buildings, prioritizing those at risk. Inaccessible structures were analysed externally, supplemented by resident interviews.

Overall, the project established a solid foundation for future preservation work, including emergency restoration plans developed in collaboration with the DGA. A seminar in April 2025 presented findings and highlighted the importance of documentation and training. By merging cutting-edge technology with local expertise, this initiative sets a precedent for cultural heritage preservation in Lebanon, ensuring the protection of these historic coastal sites for generations to come.

02 JOUHOUZIA

Grant recipient: Biladi



Visit of the Saida Sea Castle

Jouhouzia, a training program dedicated to protecting cultural heritage in times of crisis, has received support from the Cultural Protection Fund to strengthen the capacity of heritage and emergency professionals in Lebanon. In a country where cultural heritage remains at risk due to conflict and natural disasters, this initiative unites archaeologists, museologists, archivists, fire brigades, police officers, and army personnel, fostering collaboration between these diverse actors to enhance emergency preparedness and response.

The program follows a structured, incremental approach to building expertise. At the introductory level, participants explore the definition of heritage, its significance, and the legal frameworks governing its protection. With CPF's support, 100 participants completed Level 1 training, which focuses on raising awareness of the importance of cultural heritage and the consequences of its loss. Additionally, 30 participants advanced to Level 2, a more intensive phase that provides hands-on skills and practical strategies for safeguarding heritage during emergencies. As they progress, trainees engage in technical modules covering emergency response, conservation strategies, and the role of law enforcement in heritage protection. Trainings were conducted across multiple regions, including Baalbek, Tyre, Tripoli, and Byblos, ensuring broad accessibility and engagement across Lebanese society. Participants included university students, civil defense members, disaster management professionals, and municipal employees, embedding heritage protection knowledge across various sectors. The most advanced phase of training takes place at the Cultural Property Protection and Emergency Response



Field exercise for the multidisciplinary team in Baalbeck

headquarters in Jamhour, a facility equipped with a lecture hall and a dedicated simulation room designed to replicate a museum environment. This space enables trainees to practice real-world emergency response techniques, including object evacuation, triage, and first-aid conservation for cultural artifacts.

The program benefits from the expertise of both national and international trainers. Lebanese professionals—either independent experts with over a decade of experience or university professors specializing in heritage preservation—

lead the sessions. They are joined by international trainers affiliated with Blue Shield International, the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative, and Cultural Emergency Response, integrating global best practices into the Lebanese context. By equipping emergency responders and heritage professionals with essential knowledge and skills, Jouhouzia plays a crucial role in safeguarding Lebanon's rich cultural heritage. It ensures that, in times of crisis, heritage is not an afterthought but a priority, protected by a trained and coordinated network of professionals committed to its preservation.

03 EMERGENCY RESPONSE - SURSOCK PALACE

Grant recipient(s): Beirut Heritage Initiative

Following the previous emergency funding, the Cultural Protection Fund awarded a grant to the Beirut Heritage Initiative to support the restoration of cultural heritage damaged by the August 2020 explosion in Beirut, Lebanon. The project focused on the consolidation and repair of a significant heritage building: Sursock Palace. In addition to structural interventions, the team conducted workshops on damage assessment and reconstruction techniques, including sandstone masonry restoration and the repair of Baghdadi ceilings.

Sursock Palace, a landmark of Lebanese cultural heritage, suffered severe damage in the Beirut port explosion, particularly to its South Elevation and pitched roofs. The emergency stabilization of this section was carried out by ACE s.a.r.l. under the supervision of architect and restorer Lara Maalouf, with the goal of consolidating and restoring key structural components while preserving the site's historical integrity.

The project encompassed a series of critical restoration measures. Structural reinforcement involved consolidating wall-to-wall and wall-



Photograph of Sursock Palace taken after finishing the lime plastering, painting the elevation, reproducing the extruded joints, grinding the marble slabs and cleaning the corbels © Beirut Heritage initiative



Lime plaster applied on the roof parapet, in order to prepare for the gutters installation © Beirut Heritage initiative

to-slab connections using stainless steel rods and plates to improve resilience against future stressors. Masonry restoration required the careful disassembly, documentation, and reconstruction of damaged stone elements, with special attention given to the reinstallation of decorative limestone pediments. The roof rehabilitation included replacing deteriorated wooden components and installing stainless steel gutters, copper chimney extensions, and a breathable vapor barrier beneath the red clay tiles. The restoration process also extended to interior plaster finishes, where structural fiber mesh reinforcement was applied before traditional lime plaster layers,

which were completed with Tyrolean plaster and sponge-finished lime coatings. An essential part of the intervention was the preservation of the palace's intricate ornamentation, particularly the restoration of the central hall ceiling's plasterwork and the reproduction of missing pediment sections to match the existing architectural details.

Significant progress was made in stabilizing the South Elevation and completing essential roofing and plastering work. The intervention not only restored an iconic heritage site but also contributed to the wider effort of safeguarding Beirut's architectural and cultural legacy.

04 EAMENA: MITIGATING CONFLICT AND CLIMATE CHANGE RISKS THROUGH DIGITAL HERITAGE, CAPACITY BUILDING, AND CONSOLIDATION

Lead organisation: Oxford University, the University of Leicester and Durham University | Partner organisations: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Palestine; Department of Antiquities, Libya; University of Tipasa, Algeria; ICOMOS Jordan; Ministry of Culture – Directorate General of Antiquities, Lebanon; Heritage for Peace, Spain; St Catherines Monastery and St Catherines Foundation, Egypt | Grant Amount: £999,769 | Target Countries: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Syria

The EAMENA (Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa) project addresses the escalating threats faced by historic and archaeological sites across the MENA region—threats that are intensifying due to climate change, conflict, looting, and neglect. Monuments, historic buildings, and landscapes in seven countries have already suffered damage from extreme weather events and

instability, prompting urgent calls for intervention.

This initiative focuses on enhancing local capacity and equipping heritage professionals with the digital tools needed to safeguard these irreplaceable assets. Central to the effort is the EAMENA database, an open-access platform that consolidates data from satellite imagery and published reports to provide a comprehensive view



Students in Jordan learning how to document archaeological sites on the EAMENA database



EAMENA Database v4: Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa. Sidon, Lebanon © Crystal Safadi

of at-risk sites. By tracking changes over time, the database enables timely monitoring and supports informed decision-making for site protection.

Building on transformative work previously supported by the Cultural Protection Fund, the project works closely with national NGOs and government bodies to embed critical preservation skills across the region. Professionals collaborate to assess the extent of existing damage and develop sustainable strategies for the safeguarding of vulnerable sites. These partnerships have bolstered national capacities while contributing to a regional network committed to long-term heritage resilience.

In Syria, the project developed a secure, stand-alone version of the EAMENA database and trained 20 professionals in its use. Additional support was extended to Syrian civil society groups to advance

independent archaeological projects, broadening local ownership of heritage protection efforts.

The initiative culminated in a regional conference where government officials and heritage experts convened to discuss policy changes aimed at reinforcing heritage protection at the national level. These conversations have laid the groundwork for new legislation and improved cross-border collaboration on cultural heritage.

By combining technological innovation with on-the-ground training and regional policy engagement, the EAMENA project not only strengthens the preservation infrastructure of individual countries but also contributes to the wider protection of globally significant heritage across the Middle East and North Africa.

05 SYRIAN CASSETTE ARCHIVES: THREE NEW COLLECTIONS

Grant recipient(s): Syrian Cassette Archives Initiative

The Syrian Cassette Archives is an initiative dedicated to safeguarding and sharing Syria's rich musical heritage from the cassette era (1960s–2010s). Enabled by the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund, the project addresses the urgent risks posed by years of conflict, displacement, and media degradation, which have imperiled this vital part of Syrian cultural identity.

By documenting, digitizing, and safeguarding a diverse range of recordings—including folk music, wedding concerts, classical works, and children's songs—the project protects a unique artistic legacy reflecting Syria's vibrant communities, such as Syrian Arabs, Assyrians, Kurds, Armenians, and displaced Iraqi populations. These recordings serve as a snapshot of everyday life and cultural practices, showcasing the diverse voices that make up the country's rich musical tapestry.

The fund also supports training in digitization and collection documentation, fostering local expertise to sustain this preservation effort. Crucially, the Syrian Cassette Archives captures the stories behind the music through interviews with musicians, producers, and collectors, creating a living archive that connects past and present. These interviews offer invaluable insight into Syria's cultural history and the importance of music within the country's communities. By making these materials accessible online, the initiative not only preserves endangered heritage but also fosters cross-cultural understanding, ensuring Syria's artistic resilience and its contributions to global culture endure for future generations. This ongoing project creates a platform for the revival of forgotten voices, supporting the preservation of intangible heritage and contributing to the long-term recovery and cultural rebuilding of Syria.



Syrian Cassette Archives landing page © SCA Initiative



Cassette shop in Hama, Syria © Mark Gergis

06 EMERGENCY INTERVENTION AND DAMAGE ASSESSMENT IN MANBIJ, SYRIA

Grant recipient(s): Heritage for Peace | Partner(s): RehabiMed, Spain | Grant Amount: £ 80,000 | Target Countries: Syria

Completed in June 2024, this project aimed to establish a capacity-building program to train local professionals in heritage preservation skills while expanding the learning context to include other locations. The project focused on stabilizing three at-risk monuments in Manbij, Syria, through emergency interventions to prevent further damage and protect them for future generations. Additionally, it aimed to share findings, disseminate documentation, and raise awareness through a broad campaign engaging professionals, interested parties, and the local community.

Success factors included comprehensive training workshops covering all aspects of heritage documentation, which involved 15 local trainees, 35 workers, and 17 artisans. Training in heritage management and consolidation resulted in emergency interventions which effectively stabilized and safeguarded key monuments, while community outreach efforts organized heritage lectures and events, promoting cultural understanding. The project also identified and developed heritage-based economic opportunities through exploring the potential for future tourism.



On-site renovation work © Heritage for Peace

07 PROTECTION OF A BRONZE AGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE AND REHABILITATION OF AN ON-SITE COMPLEX IN NORTHERN SYRIA

Grant recipient(s): Asociacion RehabiMed | Partner: Heritage for Peace, Lebanon | Grant Amount: £ 97,500 | Target Country: Syria



On-site consolidation work © Mohammad Helal

Several structures at the remains of an ancient city in one of the oldest archaeological sites in northern Syria have been severely impacted by the effects of conflict. Damage assessment and consolidation has been carried out on these structures. Highly significant artefacts and archaeological materials at risk of being looted have also been documented and stored. Local architects and archaeologists have been trained in assessment, monitoring and preservation techniques. Since 2018 the site has housed more than 1600 displaced people. A number of people living on site have been trained in traditional building skills before assisting in the

renovation of an on-site complex. It is hoped this will now provide an invaluable community and civil society resource. Now complete, the project has seen the documentation and consolidation of 2 built heritage sites, as well as the conservation of 19 small artefacts and 60 pieces of pottery from the sites. More than 70 paid workers received training in 4 areas of traditional building skills, including the use of mud brick, traditional roof insulation, gypsum plastering and traditional carpentry. 600 individuals engaged in heritage awareness raising presentations and more than 1,600 have engaged online.

08 REDISCOVERING AND REVIVING FOLK MUSIC HERITAGE: ON THE TRACKS OF MUSIC

Grant recipient(s): Action for Hope | Partner(s): Action for Hope School of Music, Action for Hope Music Ensembles, CLUSTER (Cairo Lab for Urban Studies, Training and Environmental Research), TaleBox | Grant Amount: £ 100,000 | Target Countries: Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon



On the Tracks of Music – Irbid Concert: Artist Layth Seddik on violin, performing alongside a singer participating in the programme



On the Tracks of Music – Exhibition on traditional musical instruments from the Levant and Mesopotamia, held in Amman

In the midst of conflict and displacement across Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan, the rich musical heritage of the Levant and Mesopotamia faces grave threats. *On the Tracks of Music*, led by Action for Hope in collaboration with cultural organisations from across the region, aims to preserve and revive these endangered traditions while reconnecting communities through music.

Over eighteen months, researchers and musicologists travelled across the region to document the living musical traditions of 11 communities. Their work identified 14 traditional instruments and archived 158 unique folk songs—each embodying centuries of cultural memory and local identity. This was not just preservation for the archives: it was cultural revitalization. More than 130 young people participated in music and instrument-making workshops, re-learning the sounds and crafts of their ancestors, many for the first time.

One of the project's standout achievements is an immersive exhibition designed by the Cairo Lab for Urban Studies, Training, and Environmental Research (CLUSTER). Inspired by the early 20th-century Pianola—a mobile musical device carried

across neighbourhoods by Greek immigrants—the exhibition travelled across towns and camps in Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. Visitors could listen to traditional melodies, watch videos of instruments being played, and even try their hand at the instruments themselves, forging a tactile connection to a shared cultural past.

The project culminated in a series of celebratory performances across six cities—Basra, Baghdad, Amman, Irbid, Hermel, and Beirut—drawing over 1,500 attendees and reigniting local pride in folk traditions. A digital platform, set to launch in January, will expand access to the documentation, recordings, and stories gathered throughout the project.

On the Tracks of Music is ultimately about more than heritage—it is about healing, belonging, and continuity. It affirms the power of music as a cultural anchor and a bridge between generations, especially in times of displacement and uncertainty. Through this project, communities are not only preserving their past—they are composing their cultural futures.

09 SAFEGUARDING ENDANGERED ORAL TRADITIONS AND MINORITY HERITAGES IN SYRIA

Grant recipient(s): Ettijahat | Partner(s): RE Cultural Platform, Institut Francais du Proche-Orient, Malva for Arts, Sandouk Alhakaya | Grant Amount: £ 391,501.59 | Target Country: Syria





Amid the ongoing conflict in Syria, minority communities face the growing threat of losing their intangible cultural heritage—oral storytelling, proverbs, folktales, and traditional crafts passed down through generations. With displacement disrupting cultural transmission and social bonds, this project steps in to document, protect, and reactivate traditions at risk of vanishing.

Led by Ettijahat, the initiative captures the voices of 80 elders across northern Syria, whose stories are now archived through over 20 podcast episodes and a mythologically themed web series. These formats, widely shared online and accessible to younger audiences, ensure that endangered oral traditions are not only preserved but given renewed visibility within contemporary cultural life.

Beyond preservation, the project invests in transmission. Twenty young Syrians have been trained in the art of traditional woodblock printing through a series of intensive workshops. The resulting creations—displayed at open-day exhibitions—reflect both a technical mastery and a growing sense of ownership among the participants. These skills are more than artistic: they offer new pathways for livelihood and cultural entrepreneurship in communities with few such opportunities.

Equally important is the support extended to Syria's heritage ecosystem. Seven civil society organisations participated in capacity-building sessions focused on heritage safeguarding, research, and community mobilisation. The outcome: ten original research papers that explore minority heritage from diverse perspectives—archival, anthropological, and artistic—offering critical insights for future scholarship and advocacy.

The impact is multifaceted. The project reactivates cultural memory, nurtures emerging talent, and strengthens institutional capacity, creating a scaffold for cultural resilience amid instability. Intergenerational exchange is central to this effort: elders become transmitters of knowledge, youth become stewards of tradition, and local organisations evolve into guardians of collective memory.

This work also contributes to a wider model of community-led heritage preservation, one that foregrounds agency, dignity, and creative expression in the face of adversity. In a region where cultural erasure is a very real risk, the project's success affirms the power of targeted investment, digital innovation, and long-term partnerships in sustaining cultural continuity. Through these efforts, what was once fragile and fragmented is becoming legible, valued, and resilient.

10 AHLIYEH: AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT SYRIANS FOLLOWING THE FEBRUARY 2023 EARTHQUAKE

Grant recipient(s): Ettijahat – Independent Culture | Partner(s): Action for Hope | Grant Amount: £ 110,000 | Target Country: Syria



Children participate in Sandouq el Dunya (Wonder Box) activities where they listen to stories narrated by the box keeper and create their own wonder boxes—decorating them with drawings of their dreams and placing their illustrated tales inside.



Participant engaging in the Metamorphosis Oral History workshop

In response to the devastating earthquake that struck northern Syria and southern Turkey in February 2023, Ettijahat – Independent Culture launched the Ahliyah initiative in partnership with Action for Hope. Named after the Syrian tradition of civic solidarity, Ahliyah mobilised a rapid emergency framework that delivered vital support to communities and cultural actors affected by the disaster.

Ahliyah offered both material and psychosocial relief through five local organisations working across Gaziantep, Jindires, Afrin, Idlib, and Azaz. These efforts included distributing health supplies, books, household goods, and direct financial assistance, as well as organising art activities and psychological support sessions for children, women, and families. Collaborative site visits among partner organisations encouraged the exchange of best practices and led to joint initiatives such as establishing music choirs, educational centres for orphans, and the renovation of damaged homes.

Alongside emergency aid, Ahliyah embedded long-term resilience by integrating arts-based trauma support. Twenty cultural practitioners participated in extensive training—online and in person—on how to use arts in crisis contexts, particularly when working with marginalised communities. These sessions laid the foundation

for continued collaboration, knowledge sharing, and community-based cultural healing.

Building on this momentum, Ettijahat launched a special edition of its Life programme to further empower cultural entities in affected areas. Through Life, 12 institutions—including the Citizens Artists Foundation, Mraya Theatre Project, Metamorphosis Foundation, School of Dramatic Arts, and Nefes Foundation—developed artistic interventions tailored to post-earthquake recovery. These ranged from interactive theatre and storytelling workshops to music education and oral history initiatives, often with integrated mental health support.

Together, Ahliyah and Life reached over 7,500 people directly, strengthened local cultural infrastructure, and fostered a sense of collective agency amid crisis. Beyond immediate relief, the initiatives helped redefine the role of culture in disaster response – bridging humanitarian need with artistic expression and community care. For Ettijahat, this work is not only about preserving culture but also about reaffirming dignity, resilience, and hope.



INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION FUND

The International Collaboration Fund is designed to support artists to make and develop creative artwork with their international peers, and to encourage new international partnerships and innovative ways of collaborating. Selected projects demonstrate genuine international collaboration and an explicit benefit to individual artists and international partners, and address significant contemporary themes, from climate change to global challenges.

In 2023/24 and 2024/25, one project from Lebanon was enabled by the fund:

01 Create Syria

01 CREATE SYRIA: A SPACE TO EXPLORE ARTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Collaborators: Counterpoints Arts (UK), Ettijahat - Independent Culture (Lebanon), Plymouth College of Art (UK) and Mozilla Festival (UK) | Grant Amount: £ 69,000

Create Syria strengthens the capacity of artists interested in arts and social change, fostering more cohesive communities through impactful community arts initiatives. The programme has supported over 47 artists in developing more than 20 socially engaged creative interventions across Lebanon, Syria, France, Poland, and Germany. It has also hosted forums and webinars, bringing together over 300 creative practitioners to explore the role of art in times of crisis. In 2023, the programme focused on supporting commissioned projects, providing artists with small artistic grants, mentorship, and collaborative spaces. Artists worked closely with mentors from

Ettijahat and Counterpoints Arts, engaging in one-on-one sessions to refine their artistic goals. Seven online sessions were also held with resident artists at Grow Plymouth, an independent creative space, allowing artists to showcase work-in-progress to local audiences.

Among the commissioned projects, *Kitsch in Traditional Crafts* by Ward Al Khalaf explored contemporary approaches to handcrafts. Initially collaborating with a weaver in Hama, Syria, Ward faced challenges and later expanded the project to Lebanon, working with craftswomen in Maghdoucheh to focus on embroidery and crochet. *I Am the Conscience of the Speaker* by



Prova: Scene from Memory by Maya Rihawi and Salwa Arslan



Return to Tenderness by Juan Delgado

Fawaz Hassoun worked with street children known as “Torch Children,” engaging them in interactive theatre workshops. The project provided a rare safe space where they could experience childhood and express their stories through role-playing, impacting their self-perception and sense of possibility beyond cycles of violence and poverty. In *My Grandmother’s Quilt*, Noura Alsouma introduced ten participants from Brazil, Poland, Belarus, and China to the Arabic language through embroidery and storytelling. Each participant stitched Arabic letters onto fabric, connecting language to personal childhood memories. *Prova: Scene from Memory* by Maya Rihawi and Salwa Arslan brought together artists from various disciplines to explore anger, violence, and oppression. Inspired by Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*, the workshop prioritized bodily expression over spoken

language, fostering artistic experimentation and collective reflection. *Return to Tenderness* by Juan Delgado created a digital archive documenting the musical heritage of Raqqa and the Furat River. Interviews with local musicians explored the link between music and oral traditions, with findings presented at the First International Conference on Protection of Tangible and Intangible Heritage at Al-Sharq University in Raqqa. Despite initial delays, *Art Tent* by Samer Ibrahim launched in April 2023, offering theatre, visual arts, and environmental awareness workshops in a public space.

Through these projects, Create Syria continues to reaffirm the role of art in fostering social change, strengthening communities, and offering new possibilities for creative expression in times of crisis.



ARTIVATOR

ARTIVATOR is a new Art Management Incubator initiated by the British Council – MENA, aimed at building the capacities of cultural practitioners from the region. The initiative offers training, mentorship, and networking opportunities in collaboration with regional and UK partners. Through its work, the incubator promotes the development of a vibrant and sustainable sector and equips a new generation of leaders with the skills and knowledge to navigate the industry's challenges and drive its growth and innovation.

In 2023/24 and 2024/25, the incubator presented four fellowship opportunities:

01 Fellowship in Event and Festival Development and Management

02 Fellowship in Curation

03 Fellowship in Art Handling and Exhibition Installation

01 FELLOWSHIP IN EVENT AND FESTIVAL DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

In partnership with the Lakes International Comic Art Festival (LICAF)

As part of the 2022–2023 ARTIVATOR cycle, this fellowship offered a transformative learning opportunity for emerging cultural practitioners from the MENA region. Developed under the From Ink to Action project, it aimed to strengthen the professional capabilities of early-career arts managers through immersive exposure to the real-world dynamics of festival and event development.

The programme welcomed fellows Youhana Nassif (Egypt) and Sasha Mattar (Lebanon), who spent a month embedded with the LICAF team in the Lake District, UK. Although initially expecting a more

conventional office-based structure, the fellows experienced a dynamic and unconventional learning environment, with meetings held in informal, inspiring settings – from cafés to outdoor walks—encouraging reflective dialogue and peer learning.

Throughout their residency, the fellows were actively involved in programming, logistics, artist and audience engagement, communications, and funding strategies. Rather than observing from the sidelines, they took on integral roles within the festival production cycle, contributing to real-time coordination and decision-making. They also leveraged their time to engage in remote collaboration with colleagues back home, applying new perspectives to their own initiatives in Lebanon and Egypt.

One of the most significant shifts in perception came from understanding LICAF’s scale and international reach. Initially seen as a small, local festival, it quickly revealed itself to be a complex,



Photograph of fellow Youhana Nassif

“I came expecting a small local event, but discovered an international festival powered by a tight-knit, passionate team—an experience that completely reshaped how I understand cultural production.”

– Youhana Nassif

globally connected operation—hosting over 100 international guests and drawing a wide-ranging audience. The fellows gained firsthand experience in managing guest logistics, supporting artists and speakers, and navigating the pressures of live event execution, all of which sharpened their adaptability and leadership skills.

The experience also offered valuable exposure to the UK's cultural infrastructure, including its arts funding ecosystem. Through active participation in outreach initiatives and sponsor engagement, the fellows deepened their understanding of partnership development, grant structures, and the importance of financial sustainability. While they contributed primarily to on-the-ground operations, both expressed a strong interest in further exploring the strategic dimensions of festival planning—such as budgeting, long-term reporting cycles, and curatorial decision-making.



Photograph of fellow Sasha Matar

"Being immersed in such a warm and dynamic festival environment helped me overcome my professional anxieties, sharpen my thinking, and return home with a renewed sense of purpose and direction."

– Sasha Mattar

Team dynamics and community engagement emerged as central themes. LICAF's close-knit and intergenerational working culture—where families, volunteers, and professionals all contributed to the festival's delivery—left a lasting impression. The fellows developed a deeper appreciation for the interpersonal, leadership, and soft skills required to build and maintain creative teams, foster collaboration, and cultivate a strong sense of belonging among audiences and stakeholders alike.

The natural and cultural richness of the Lake District also shaped the fellows' experience. They found the region's landscape both grounding and inspiring, creating space for creative thinking and

meaningful exchange. The informality of the setting helped ease initial anxieties about professional networking, enabling them to confidently engage with practitioners from across the arts, gaming, and publishing sectors.

Reflecting on the fellowship, both participants emphasized how the supportive and generous LICAF team created an environment conducive to growth, learning, and personal development. The opportunity to participate in an international festival of this calibre—alongside mentorship, informal learning, and collaborative engagement—enabled them to leave with sharpened professional tools, a clearer strategic outlook, and an expanded network of peers and mentors across the cultural sector.

By offering direct industry exposure, cross-cultural collaboration, and hands-on learning, the ARTIVATOR Fellowship equipped these emerging arts managers with the skills and confidence to navigate the complexities of cultural project development and leadership. It has positioned them as capable, connected, and resourceful contributors to the evolving cultural landscape of the MENA region.

02 FELLOWSHIP IN CURATION

In partnership with the Liverpool Arab Arts Festival (LAAF)

The second cycle of the 2023 ARTIVATOR Fellowship created a distinctive opportunity for emerging curators from the MENA region through a partnership with the Liverpool Arab Arts Festival (LAAF). Lin Dabbous, a Lebanese cultural practitioner, was selected as the fellow, contributing to one of the UK's most dynamic platforms for Arab arts while advancing her own curatorial practice.



Photograph of fellow Lin Dabbous

Lin was embedded within the LAAF team as they developed the 2024 festival exhibition, supporting the curation of a group show featuring four Arab visual artists from Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia. She played a key role in coordinating communications with the artists, managing exhibition logistics and schedules, and contributing to conversations around the exhibition's conceptual framing. One of her central tasks was overseeing the physical installation of the show—a hands-on process that sharpened her ability to translate artistic narratives into spatial, public-facing displays.

Titled *Port Cities*, the exhibition examined the layered histories, geopolitical complexities, and cultural exchanges embedded in global port cities, including Liverpool and counterparts across the Arab region. Lin's involvement in shaping the exhibition narrative gave her deeper insight into how curators can address issues such as colonial legacy, mobility, and cultural identity through artistic production.

In addition to her curatorial contributions, Lin engaged in one-to-one mentorship sessions and peer briefings that expanded her knowledge of festival-making, artist support systems, and international collaboration. She also contributed to a symposium accompanying the exhibition, where she explored urgent questions around censorship, restricted movement, and the role of cultural production in confronting shared global challenges.

Reflecting on the experience, Lin emphasized the value of the fellowship's practical exposure and generous mentorship. It not only strengthened her curatorial skills but also deepened her commitment

to championing artistic freedom and cross-cultural exchange.

The ARTIVATOR Fellowship continues to empower the next generation of cultural leaders in the MENA region. Lin's contribution to LAAF exemplifies the programme's mission: building capacity, strengthening networks, and creating meaningful connections between the UK and MENA arts ecosystems.

"The fellowship reinforced my commitment to promoting Arab artists internationally, especially in the face of challenges like restricted mobility and censorship."

– Lin Dabbous



03 FELLOWSHIP IN ART HANDLING AND EXHIBITION INSTALLATION

In partnership with the Beirut Museum of Art (BeMA)

The Fellowship was a pioneering professional development initiative designed to strengthen Lebanon's cultural infrastructure by equipping emerging art handlers and exhibition technicians with museum-standard expertise. The programme combined theoretical instruction with hands-on experience, covering every stage of the exhibition process—from planning and installation to

preventive conservation and dismantling. Through its structured phases, Artivator bridged academic knowledge with real-world practice, preparing a new generation of cultural practitioners to meet international standards while adapting to Lebanon's evolving institutional landscape.

Phase 1 focused on technical and conceptual grounding. Fellows learned exhibition design, condition reporting, artwork handling, and climate control through mentorship by curators, conservators, and technical specialists. The programme then transitioned into the live installation of *Portals & Pathways* at the Nuhad Es-Said Pavilion, where participants implemented what they learned – mounting artworks, setting up multimedia, managing lighting systems, and ensuring conservation compliance. This real exhibition context provided an invaluable bridge between training and professional reality.

Feedback from fellows reflected the depth of impact. Karl Kassouf described the training as transformative in understanding collaboration between curators, conservators, and technicians. A highlight for him was resolving a humidity-induced challenge with delicate paper works by designing structural supports that stabilised the pieces – an exercise that underscored how installation requires both technical skill and creative problem-solving. Mohammad Shaito, drew on his lighting background to refine the exhibition's visual atmosphere, recognising how minor adjustments in illumination could dramatically shape viewer perception. He emphasized the importance of environmental control and the ethics of safety and care in handling art, noting that every detail—from humidity to fixture angle—contributes to an artwork's longevity.



*Installation of the exhibition *Portals and Pathways: A Journey through Reality and Imagination* at Nuhad es-Said Pavilion's Inauguration*

Across testimonies, Artivator emerged as a model for sector renewal. By merging technical mastery, collective responsibility, and reflective learning, it demonstrated how empowering cultural workers at the operational level can profoundly elevate exhibition quality nationwide. The fellows’

experiences reaffirmed that professional care, collaboration, and contextual sensitivity are the cornerstones of sustainable cultural practice in Lebanon.





PARTNER PROGRAMMES

AFLAMUNA

Organised by Aflamuna

The AFLAMUNA project, implemented over 10 months, sought to bridge the gap between independent filmmakers and civil society actors through a series of immersive Impact Labs. These labs aimed to train filmmakers and local organizations on how to use film as a tool for social change, empowering them to create impactful campaigns around pressing social issues. The programme included three local labs held in Syria, Egypt, and Iraq, as well as a Training of Trainers (ToT) programme to sustain the initiative long-term.

The objectives of AFLAMUNA were to train filmmakers and civil society actors in Impact Production, equip local institutions with the

necessary skills to support these efforts, and enable the creation of impactful campaigns tied to films addressing urgent social issues. Participants were guided through the process of designing and implementing Impact Campaigns, which have already resulted in seven campaigns being seeded. Furthermore, the initiative led to the creation of a new curriculum for future labs, ensuring the continuity of the program. The project successfully trained 57 participants and established 5 local institutions as future hubs for Impact Production. The ToT programme also ensured that trainers were equipped to lead future labs, creating a sustainable cycle of knowledge sharing.



A dynamic Q&A session with impact trainer Racha Najdi and guest speaker Andreas Rocksen, producer of the film "Arica" at the AFLAMUNA Impact Lab Syria 2023. The lab was held in partnership with Ettijahat Independent Culture © AFLAMUNA



Participants of the AFLAMUNA Impact Lab Egypt 2023 gather for a group photo. This gathering brought together film professionals and activists from across Egypt, to train on the model of using storytelling for positive social and environmental impact. The lab was held in partnership with the Egyptian Film Producers' Club and Seen Films © AFLAMUNA

A key strength of the project was its commitment to inclusivity. The program not only included diverse participant profiles, but it also created safe spaces for discussions on sensitive topics such as gender equality and queer rights. Many of the films produced through the labs have become powerful tools for advocacy, shedding light on issues like forced circumcision, child labour, and transgender rights. One of the major impacts of the AFLAMUNA project was its ability to open new professional avenues for participants, particularly the creation of the role of Impact Producers. These professionals bridge the gap between filmmaking and civil society, ensuring that films not only reach their intended audiences but also create meaningful, lasting change. In Egypt, Seen Films

has emerged as a local hub for Impact Production, and several successful Impact Campaigns have been launched, such as “Lift Like a Girl,” which continues to challenge stereotypes around girls in sports.

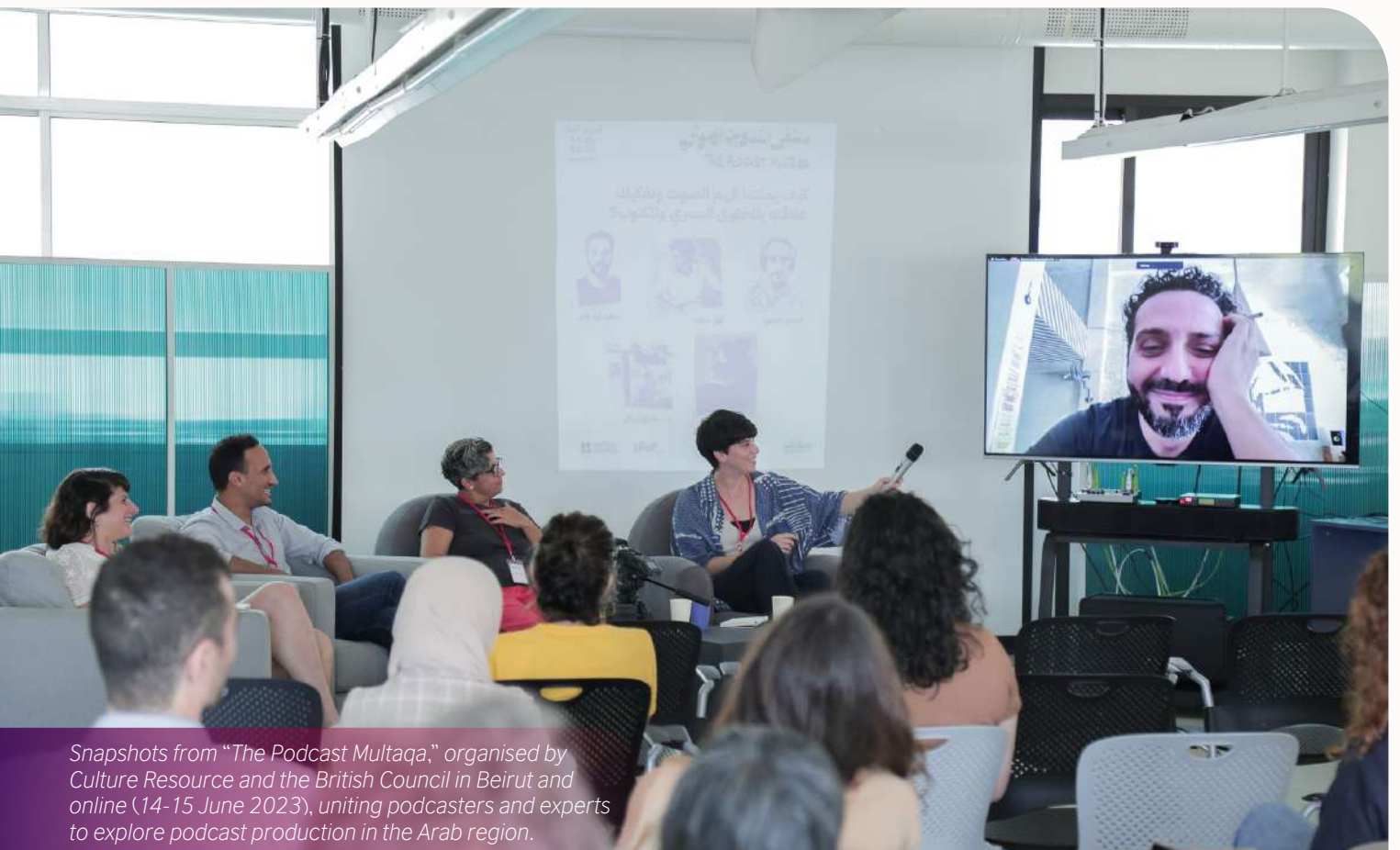
Through its partnerships with local organizations and global entities, AFLAMUNA has established a framework for future collaboration and growth. The success of the Impact Labs has empowered participants to create campaigns and films that resonate with their communities and the broader region. The AFLAMUNA project has proven to be a catalyst for social change, demonstrating the transformative power of film in addressing some of the Arab region’s most pressing challenges.

MULTAQA PODCAST

Organised by Culture Resource / Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy

The Multaqa Podcast Forum marked the culmination of the Mudawanat project, held in Beirut and online on 14 and 15 June 2023. Organized by Culture Resource (Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy) in partnership with the British Council, the forum convened podcast creators, cultural producers, artists, and audio specialists from across the Arab region and its diaspora to collectively reflect on the evolving landscape of Arabic-language podcasts focused on arts and culture.

Structured around five main sessions, the forum addressed both creative and structural dimensions of podcasting in the region. The opening session, “Podcast as a Medium for Artistic Expression,” explored the potential of podcasts as a form of sonic art, examining how abstract and experimental audio narratives can engage audiences. In a special session, designer Naji El Mir shared the creative process behind the visual identity of the Mudawanat podcast, shedding light on branding and design in the audio space.



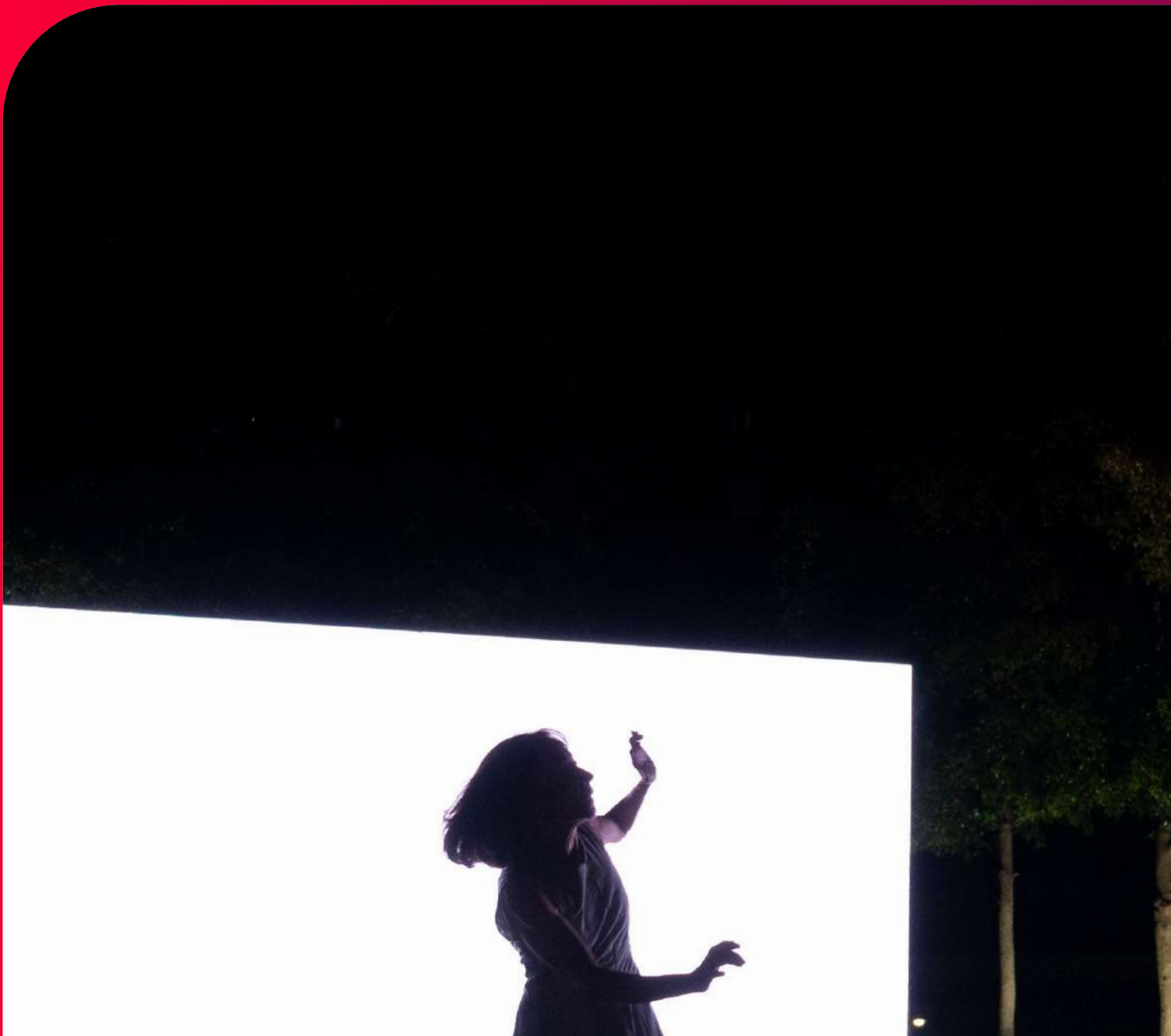
Snapshots from “The Podcast Multaqa,” organised by Culture Resource and the British Council in Beirut and online (14-15 June 2023), uniting podcasters and experts to explore podcast production in the Arab region.



Subsequent sessions tackled urgent themes shaping podcast production today. “Podcasting as a Communication Tool Between Exile and Homeland” focused on diaspora experiences and the role of audio in maintaining cultural connection. The fourth session, “Independent Production and Audience Engagement,” examined the technical, financial, and editorial challenges facing independent producers, highlighting the need for better access to resources, funding, and audience analytics. The final session, “The Future of Podcasting,” gathered insights on sustainability, accessibility, and podcasting’s growing influence as a cultural medium.

The forum was designed as a hybrid platform for learning and exchange, integrating public presentations with informal dialogue among participants. It drew on the broader context of the Mudawanat project, which, since 2020, has supported over 60 podcast episodes through training, mentorship, and thematic curation.

By assembling a regional network of practitioners and experts, the Multaqa Podcast Forum initiated an ongoing conversation about the future of Arabic-language podcasting. It underscored podcasting’s potential not only as a storytelling medium but as a site of artistic freedom, cultural preservation, and regional collaboration in the arts and culture sector.



PATHWAYS: British Council's Work in Lebanon

Celebrating a New Chapter at Beirut Digital District

On June 14, 2023, British Council Lebanon officially inaugurated its new offices at Beirut Digital District (BDD) with a landmark event titled Pathways: British Council's Work in Lebanon. This gathering brought together key stakeholders, partners, and members of the community to celebrate the organisation's continued commitment to education, non-formal education, arts and culture, and services in Lebanon.



Together We Walk immersed the audience in a dynamic fusion of dance and digital monoliths, confronting Lebanon's evolving identity

The evening commenced with a welcome note from Marc Mouarkech, Head of Arts for Lebanon and Syria, setting the stage for an engaging showcase of the British Council's diverse initiatives. Attendees were given insights into the organisation's work in non-formal education through the Beirut Creators project, which empowers youth with skills in content creation, gender awareness, and countering misinformation, discrimination and hate speech narratives. The event further highlighted the transformative power of international school partnerships. A video presentation, coupled with a spoken word performance from a student of Mohamad Shamel Public School, illustrated the impact of the British Council's education initiatives in fostering cross-cultural understanding and collaboration.

A key segment of the evening featured speeches by British Council Lebanon Country Director Mayssa Dawi, British Council Deputy Chief Executive Officer Kate Ewart-Biggs, and British Embassy Deputy Head of Mission Camilla Nickless. Their remarks underscored the importance of the British Council's long-standing presence in Lebanon, and its 79-year journey.

The arts and culture segment of the programme brought to life the vibrancy and resilience of Lebanon's creative sector. Performances included

Beirut Crosswords / Still Surviving by Action for Hope, an interdisciplinary musical act showcasing the talents of immigrant communities in Beirut, and The Fake Plastic Tree by Ahla Fawda and Julien Boutros, a storytelling montage addressing climate change and environmental awareness. The evening also featured Together We Walk by Yaraqa, an immersive digital and dance performance reflecting on Lebanon's socio-political and environmental landscape. Closing the artistic programme was RUST, a contemporary electronic music duo part of the Shuruq Music Platform by Station Beirut, blending traditional Arabic poetry and music with modern electronic soundscapes. The event concluded with a networking reception, allowing attendees to connect and discuss future collaborations.

The inauguration of the British Council's new offices at BDD marks a significant milestone, reinforcing its commitment to fostering connections and innovation in Lebanon. With a dynamic and forward-thinking approach, the British Council continues to serve as a bridge between the UK and Lebanon, supporting learning, creativity, and cross-cultural dialogue.



Petra Hawi and Hani Manja weaved hypnotic electro tarab with reimagined classics



The Fake Plastic Tree brought climate stories to life through a powerful theatrical montage

