



Arts and Culture
Annual Report 2025 – 2026

ABOUT THE BRITISH COUNCIL

The British Council is the UK's international culture and education organisation. We support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide

Creating these vital connections between the people of all four nations of the UK and other countries benefits everyone. It encourages people and organisations from around the world to visit, study and partner with the UK, strengthening the UK's global reputation and influence and driving economic growth.

By connecting the UK's expertise in arts and culture, education and the English language to our global presence and unparalleled networks we unlock potential and transform lives. We help artists to share their distinctive voices. We provide educators with the tools to shape generations. We give young people the confidence to shine.

We work with governments and our partners in the education, English language and cultural sectors to make a bigger difference, creating benefit for millions of people all over the world. At the heart of these relationships is trust which is built over time and nurtured through shared experiences.

We work with people in over 200 countries and territories. In 2024–25 we reached almost 600 million people. Founded in 1934, we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body, operating at arm's length from government.

Most of our income comes from partnership agreements, contracts, teaching and exams, and philanthropy. We also receive grant-in-aid funding from the UK government.

For almost a century, it's been our mission to build a world where people connect across borders, and where trust is the foundation for lasting change. A world where opportunities are limitless.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Arts and Culture Annual Report 2025 – 2026 was led by Marc Mouarkech and coordinated by Zeinab Allaw, and is based on contributions from partners and cultural practitioners across Lebanon and the UK.

The report was prepared by Rabih Koussa.

Mayssa Dawi Hachem

Director | British Council Lebanon

FOREWORD

Against a backdrop of continuing economic hardship, regional instability, and the long aftermath of conflict, I have watched Lebanon's artists, cultural institutions, and creative communities do something remarkable: they kept going. Not quietly or reluctantly - but with purpose, with imagination, and with a clear-eyed belief that culture is not a luxury to be set aside in difficult times. It is, in fact, one of the few things that holds communities together when everything else feels uncertain.

That guiding principle sits at the heart of everything the British Council does in Lebanon. As the UK's international organisation for cultural relations, our role is to stand alongside Lebanon's cultural sector, to listen carefully, to connect meaningfully, and to draw upon the UK's expertise, networks, and resources in ways that genuinely serve the people and institutions shaping cultural life on the ground.

This report reflects how this commitment has been translated into practice over the past year. Through flagship initiatives such as *Intersections: the UK Film Festival in Lebanon*, we celebrated the richness and diversity of British cinema while connecting Lebanese filmmakers and audiences with leading UK industry professionals across film, sound, and creative technology. We also enabled artists and cultural leaders from Lebanon and the wider region to engage directly with the UK's renowned festivals, institutions, and creative industries through international exchange platforms such as *Momentum* and *Arab Arts Focus x In Between*.

At the same time, our work through the *Cultural Protection Fund* has taken on renewed urgency. From the restoration of Sursock Palace and emergency response initiatives such as *SAWN* in Lebanon, to the preservation of endangered oral traditions through *DOUROUB* in Syria, we have worked with local and international partners to protect cultural heritage at risk and empower communities to preserve their identities for future generations.

The UK and Lebanon share a long-standing partnership, and this report stands as a great testament to the depth and value of the UK-Lebanon collaboration, as well as to the creativity, resilience, and talent of Lebanon's cultural sector. I extend my sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed to this work. Together, we continue to build trust, create opportunity, and ensure that arts and culture remain central to recovery, social cohesion, and shared prosperity. This is the essence of cultural diplomacy: sustained relationships grounded in mutual exchange, built over time, rooted in respect, and delivering impact through enduring human connection.

As we look ahead, Lebanon's journey remains difficult and the region continues to shift in ways that are hard to predict. But I am genuinely hopeful, and the British Council's commitment to this country and to the people who make culture here remains firm.

Marc Mouarkech

Head of Arts | British Council Lebanon & Syria

FOREWORD

This report closes a year marked by a fragile continuity, shaped by a war that, while officially halted, never fully receded. What persisted in the south throughout 2024 returned more visibly in March 2026, disrupting a landscape that had only begun to stabilise.

Over the past five years, we have worked to build connections, support practitioners, and position the cultural sector within a broader international landscape. This year was meant to extend that work, to consolidate what had been set in motion and move towards longer term structures and partnerships.

Instead, the context imposed another shift, moving the work away from growth and towards holding, protecting, and sustaining. Within this, important work continued. *Intersections: the UK Film Festival in Lebanon*, created space for exchange between local and UK film professionals. *MAHARAT* focused on capacity building, while *Marsah Art Week* prioritised platforming emerging artists and decentralisation. Initiatives like the *Biodiversity and Cinema tour* and the publication *I Will Always Be Looking For You* extended Lebanese voices into international platforms. The *Port Cities* exhibition brought regional perspectives into focus, while residencies and delegations sustained international professional exchange.

As the situation escalated, responses became more immediate. The *Safeguarding Arts and Archives* initiative, developed with BeMA, focused on protecting collections and building local capacity for emergency response. Other programmes continued to provide support, connection, and working space under constrained conditions.

Across these projects, a consistent direction remains: a focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion, an investment in people, skills, and institutions, and an understanding of exchange as a way to remain connected despite fragmentation.

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OUR WORK IN LEBANON

Haven for Artists

In partnership with **Edinburgh Arts Festival** and **Lighthouse Edinburgh's Radical Bookstore**

“I WILL ALWAYS BE LOOKING FOR YOU” BOOK LAUNCH

The launch of *I Will Always Be Looking For You* represented the culmination of years of intensive curatorial and editorial labour, bringing together 31 artists and 24 writers to produce a bilingual anthology of queer Arab art. In a regional context where artists face significant isolation due to mobility restrictions and a lack of international platforms, the publication serves as a vital act of visibility, addressing the absence of a formal canon for queer Arab expression. By documenting these stories, the anthology refuses the erasure of scattered fragments of work, instead offering a permanent record of a living, breathing multiplicity of identities that exists beyond a singular narrative.

The launch took place during the *Edinburgh Festival* in August 2025, providing an important international platform for the publication and its contributors. This moment not only

reflected the extensive work undertaken by the Haven for Artists team but also built on relationships developed over the years with the UK arts sector. These connections have been further strengthened through the *Momentum International Delegate Programme*, which has supported ongoing engagement and exchange between regional artists and UK-based cultural networks, helping to create the conditions for this collaboration and launch in Edinburgh.

The Haven for Artists project team – including Dayna Ash (project lead), Yasmine El Rifaii and Nadim Choufi (co-editors), and Rayan Abdelkhalek (translator) – engaged directly with the UK arts sector across a series of high-profile events in Scotland. These included an intimate panel discussion at Lighthouse, an additional panel and presentation at Custom Lane, and a large-scale community celebration at Leith Arches, all developed in partnership with the *Edinburgh Arts Festival*. These platforms enabled the organisers and contributors to discuss their work on their own terms, challenging reductive or tokenising narratives and establishing professional connections with UK curators, publishers, and institutions.

The extraordinary enthusiasm met in Edinburgh has sparked a momentum that translates immediate audience connection into long-term institutional resonance. While the intimate sessions fostered deep dialogue with over 70 attendees and the sale of 50 books, the vibrant celebration drew 120 members of the UK-based Arab diaspora, affirming the urgency of this work for communities often in exile. This reception, supported by meaningful online engagement, has already paved the way for an expansive international tour across cities like Milan, Belfast, and London, alongside planned 2026 artist residencies in the UK.



A stack of the bilingual anthology *I Will Always Be Looking For You*, representing years of curatorial and artistic labour by the Haven for Artists team to preserve queer Arab artistic expression.

Project lead Dayna Ash alongside co-editors Yasmine El Rifaii and Nadim Choufi during the panel discussion at Custom Lane in Edinburgh.



“Libraries and cultural organizations began reaching out to acquire and circulate the book, affirming its urgency and resonance.”
 — Dayna Ash | Director, Haven for Artists

Beirut Art Center and
Liverpool Arab Arts Festival

PORT CITIES: FRAGMENTS OF MARITIME ROUTES

The port is rarely just a site of infrastructure; it is a repository of memory, a gateway for migration, and, in the context of Beirut, a living wound. *Port Cities: Fragments of Maritime Routes* was conceived as a travelling international exhibition to explore these complex legacies of trade, colonial history, and personal narrative. The project originated with a research residency in Liverpool in February 2024, where four artists from the Arab world engaged with the city's maritime past before returning to their own shorelines in Alexandria, Tunis, Marrakech, and Beirut to ask what it means

to live with these legacies today. Following successful presentations at the Liverpool Arab Arts Festival in the UK (2024) and at Dada and Le 18 in Marrakech, Morocco (2024), the exhibition arrived in Lebanon.

The Beirut edition, held from 9 October to 6 December 2025 at Beirut Art Center, adapted the global project to a local reality defined by fractured geographies. The exhibition featured commissioned works that navigated the port through archive and myth. Mohamed Abdelkarim's sound installation, *Nobody Remembered the Ark, Said the Sea*, utilised printed fabric and two audio channels to present a fragmented narrative of maritime migration. Laila Hida's *Le Grand Voyage* explored the transit of goods and people through photography, while Nadia Kaabi-Linke's *Salt and Sand* meditated on the fragility and resilience of North African societies. The film *Still Waters Run Deep* by Siska combined 16mm footage with a performance-based installation featuring hanging paper rolls and custom stamps to explore water as a symbol of both hope and displacement.

The project invited witnesses to engage with the layered complexity of maritime history by complementing the exhibition with a context-specific public programme, including a panel discussion featuring Siska who explored the responsibility of narrating port cities. This conversation revisited the port as a site of speculative storytelling, connecting the current exhibition to *Port Fiction*, a previous collaborative project that examined spaces of constructed narratives. By engaging with over 300 artists and 500 community members, the project moved beyond the depiction of crisis to strengthen international artistic networks, ensuring that art remains a vital tool for imagining a shared future.



Centered on Liverpool's 19th-century Palm House, Laila Hida's *Reversed Landscape* (2024) exposes the colonial frameworks of appropriation and commodification underlying its beauty through an installation of photographs, posters, and sculptural elements.

Left: Nadia Kaabi-Linke's *Heartbeat Wavelines* (2024) and *ONS* (2023). Right: Siska's installation *Still Waters Run Deep*. Below: Attendees watching Siska's film, and In the background, Mohamed Abdelkarim's *Nobody Remembered the Ark, Said the Sea* shimmers in blue.



But art insists that even in the shadow of destruction, imagination remains possible. Not naïve imagination, but the kind that refuses to let catastrophe define the totality of a place.



— Ibrahim Nehme | Director, Beirut Art Center

Rural Encounters on Environment and Film (REEF)

BIODIVERSITY AND CINEMA UK TOUR

The *Biodiversity and Cinema initiative* addresses the urgent need for climate justice narratives in Lebanon by documenting rural knowledge and ecological memory. In a context of accelerating environmental degradation, the project serves as a platform for “rooted resistance,” utilising documentary film to preserve intangible heritage related to Lebanon’s land and biodiversity. This programme ensures that local ecological challenges – from the vulnerability of high-mountain groundwater

to the loss of rural expertise – are situated within international conversations on conservation and climate advocacy.

The British Council enabled the project’s international expansion through a UK Touring Programme, which showcased Lebanese environmental narratives at major British festivals. The tour premiered at the *Safar Film Festival* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in June 2025, featuring four films: *Memory Within a Tree* (Wassim Tanios), *The Earth Weavers* (Rima Kaddissi), *The Tree of Hell* (Raed Zeno), and *Shift* (Sherine Raffoul and Moussa Shabandar). The tour continued to the *Braziers International Film Festival*, where filmmaker Rebecca Tawk led a workshop on Lebanon’s ecosystems, and the *Big Syn International Film Festival*, aligning Lebanese storytelling with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. These platforms facilitated direct exchange between Lebanese filmmakers and UK audiences, establishing cinema as a critical tool for biodiversity awareness.

In Lebanon, the project’s second phase culminated in an intensive *Biodiversity and Cinema Residency* in February 2026. This interdisciplinary programme brought together 22 participants, including filmmakers, conservation scientists, and activists, to explore the intersection of scientific expertise and creative practice. The residency featured a masterclass by UK filmmaker Saeed Taji Farouki (Radical Film School) and impact production sessions with Doc Society’s Climate Unit. Field visits to Douma and Tannourine allowed participants to engage directly with ecological heritage, resulting in the development of new documentary concepts focused on environmental justice. These films are intended for a future national impact campaign, empowering local practitioners to lead civic engagement through cinema.



16 The residency included a hike in Tannourine and its surrounding landscapes, where participants explored local ecosystems and engaged with environmental practitioners working on biodiversity protection and rural ecological heritage.

17 Filmmakers Moussa Shabandar and Rima Kaddissi engaging in a Q&A session at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) during the London premiere of the Biodiversity & Cinema tour.



“The residency created a collaborative space between filmmakers and environmental practitioners [...] enabling participants to begin developing documentary ideas addressing environmental challenges in Lebanon.”

— Eliane Raheb | Documentary Filmmaker & Co-founder, REEF

MOMENTUM FOLLOW-UP GRANT

19

The Momentum international delegate programme offers an unrivalled platform for curators, creative entrepreneurs, funders, media professionals, officials, producers and programmers from all over the world to immerse themselves in the showcase of global cultural excellence that defines the city of Edinburgh every August. The Momentum Follow-up Grant provides the support for transforming brief festival encounters into deep-rooted, long-term institutional collaborations. By providing dedicated funding following the delegation, the grant ensures that the sparks of inspiration ignited in Edinburgh evolve into tangible co-productions, residencies, and knowledge-sharing initiatives. This strategic support shifts the focus from one-off networking toward a model of sustained partnership, allowing practitioners to return to their local contexts with the resources needed to co-design project components that reflect shared UK and international aspirations.

Temporary Art Platform
In partnership with Hospitalfield

RADICAL CARE AND HOSPITALITY RESIDENCY

Building on the Momentum delegation's engagement, this residency at Hospitalfield facilitated a critical exchange between the Lebanese and Scottish arts sectors by supporting practitioners Nour Osseiran and Alaa Itani. Managed by Temporary Art Platform (TAP), the programme repurposed the residency as a mechanism for collective relief and mutual aid in response to the instability in Lebanon. By

launching an open call to extend the privilege of respite, TAP transformed the invitation into a safe space for care and reciprocal hospitality.

In a professional landscape defined by high-pressure demands and regional precarity, the residency provided a necessary "pause" from the Beirut cultural scene. By inhabiting the role of participants rather than facilitators, Osseiran and Itani moved away from transactional production toward slower, relation-building models. This environment enabled Nour Osseiran to advance her research project, *Immediacy and Hindsight: Curating in Crisis*, which examines curatorial practices in volatile socio-political contexts. Similarly, artist Alaa Itani utilised the relief residency to experiment with pattern making and literature, stepping away from his usual conceptual foundations to explore the restorative atmosphere of the Arts and Crafts setting in Arbroath. Through dialogues with UK-based artists and thinkers, the focus of the international exchange shifted toward mutual learning and non-extractive collaboration.

The outcomes extend beyond the immediate time frame, resulting in expanded professional networks and ongoing relationships between Lebanon and Scotland. For Itani, the experience was punctuated by the "stunning" coastal landscape and the creative energy of the coinciding *Edinburgh* and *Fringe Festivals*, providing two weeks of essential respite and artistic discovery. By mapping social practice artists and establishing contacts with various UK institutions, the project has laid a foundation for future cross-border initiatives. Ultimately, this partnership demonstrated that care-centred infrastructure can effectively bridge disparate geographies, empowering practitioners to advocate for restorative and sustainable models of engagement within the wider arts ecosystem.



Resident Alaa Itani utilized the relief residency to step away from his usual conceptual foundations and experiment with literature and pattern making within the restorative Arts and Crafts setting.

Nour Osseiran engaged in several collaborative and networking activities with UK-based artists and thinkers, shifting away from transactional production toward slower, relation-building models.



The residency offered a rare and necessary pause... I leave with relationships that feel ongoing rather than concluded.

— Nour Osseiran | Resident / Curator

[...] I allowed myself to experiment and shift away from what I usually do in my practice, leaving with renewed energy to continue my work.

— Alaa Itani | Resident / Visual Artist



Ettijahat –
Independent Culture

MAHARAT: CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR SYRIAN PERFORMING ARTS MANAGERS

This initiative was delivered during a period of profound regional transformation, set against the backdrop of the 2024 ceasefire in Lebanon and the significant political transitions in Syria. These concurrent developments highlighted an urgent need to redefine the structural and strategic roles of cultural festivals and performing arts organisations in contexts of post-conflict recovery. By addressing how cultural

frameworks can function as engines for regional solidarity, the project provided a vital space for reflection on the emerging cultural landscapes of Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon, ensuring that independent institutions remain resilient during times of transition.

The programme was implemented through a dedicated institutional development strand of MAHARAT, (a transliteration for ‘Skills’), Ettijahat’s flagship capacity-building programme. While MAHARAT typically provides technical tracks in lighting and sound design, this *Momentum*-supported cycle has focused specifically on organisational sustainability and strategic planning. Collaborating with Independent Arts Projects (UK), the initiative delivered intensive training in financial literacy, business planning, and audience development. This practice-based approach allowed 10 participating organisations – including Marsah Warche 13 and Rumman in Lebanon, Damascus Theatre Lab in Syria, and Nablus Circus Association in Palestine – to develop bespoke management frameworks tailored to their specific, resource-constrained environments.

The project strengthened the leadership of 20 cultural practitioners and managers, equipping them with evaluation frameworks and outreach plans to improve their long-term sustainability. Beyond this immediate cohort, the initiative achieved a significant indirect reach of over 4,000 beneficiaries, including youth in training programmes and communities engaged in psychosocial support initiatives. By enhancing the financial and strategic literacy of core institutions, the project has ensured that the independent ecosystem in the Arab region can continue to serve as a robust platform for artistic expression and community engagement despite ongoing regional fragility.



TootArd’s performance during the Rumman Music Festival 2025 in Tripoli, Lebanon. Photograph credits: Hamza Hariri.



“ The timing of the grant prompted deeper inquiry into the structural and strategic role of festivals and cultural spaces across the region, especially in contexts of transition. ”

— Abdullah Alkafri | Executive Director, Ettijahat – Independent Culture

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.

**British Council Lebanon and
Metropolis Cinema Association**
In partnership with the **British Embassy in Beirut**

INTERSECTIONS: THE UK FILM FESTIVAL IN LEBANON

Intersections, the premier UK Film Festival in Lebanon, was launched as a landmark cultural intervention designed to celebrate the diversity, global impact, and creative depth of British cinema while fostering deep-rooted connections with Lebanon's vibrant film community. Against a backdrop of regional instability, the festival served as a critical space for "Cinema to Connect," moving beyond simple screenings to establish a platform for cultural relations and professional growth. By bringing together a curated selection of 11 UK films – ranging from restored classics to contemporary independent works – the festival addressed the cultural necessity of maintaining

international exchange and creative visibility in Beirut. The project's central theme of "Intersections" highlighted the meeting points between different cinematic traditions, soundscapes, and social narratives, providing Lebanese audiences with a unique window into the UK's multifaceted cultural identity. The British Council, in collaboration with the British Embassy and supported by the UK Government's *GREAT Britain and Northern Ireland Campaign*, played a catalytic role in delivering a programme that balanced public celebration with professional development. The festival opened at Metropolis Cinema with the Lebanese premiere of *Grand Theft Hamlet* (Pinny Grylls and Sam Crane, 2024), an innovative documentary filmed entirely within the world of *Grand Theft Auto*. This was followed by a diverse lineup that included Waad Al-Kateab's *We Dare to Dream* (2023), which follows refugee athletes; Rebecca Lenkiewicz's *Hot Milk* (2025); and the 4K restoration of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's 1948 masterpiece, *The Red Shoes*. The programme also featured *Made in England: The Films of Powell and Pressburger* (David Hinton, 2024), *The Salt Path* (Marianne Elliott, 2024), and William Wyler's 1965 classic *The Collector*.

A defining feature of the British Council's involvement was the integration of technical expertise through the Professional Programme, which connected Lebanese filmmakers with leading UK industry figures. This included masterclasses and conversations with internationally acclaimed professionals such as sound designer Paul Davies, sound theorist Larry Sider, and composer Rob Walker, focusing on areas of UK competitive advantage like sound design and post-production. These sessions, such



26 His Majesty's Ambassador to the Lebanese Republic HE Hamish Cowell CMG with the directors of the opening film Penny Grylls and Sam Crane.

An enthusiastic audience attends the Opening Night of *Intersections*, the UK Film Festival in Lebanon preceding the opening film, *Grand Theft Hamlet*.



as "Finding a Language for Sound" with Rob Walker and Rana Eid, provided practitioners with a rare opportunity to discuss the role of sound in cinematic storytelling. Additionally, an Airquake session featuring Steve Goodman and Mohamed Choucair further explored the physical and emotional impact of sound. The narrative of the festival was further enriched by a specialised Video Gaming and Film Workshop at the Beirut Digital District, which

explored the emerging intersections between gaming technology and cinematic storytelling. This forward-thinking session attracted a new generation of creative professionals, highlighting the UK's leadership in creative services and digital innovation. The festival's closing event featured a unique "Ciné-Concert" by Lebanese musicians Julia Sabra and Fadi Tabbal, who performed a live, reimagined score for Alfred Hitchcock's 1928 silent film

FESTIVALS

Easy Virtue. This collaborative performance served as a powerful metaphor for the festival’s objective: taking iconic UK cultural assets and reinterpreting them through a local Lebanese lens to create something entirely new and resonant.

Intersections achieved a significant impact, drawing over 1,050 face-to-face attendees across its screenings and workshops, with the specialised talks and the Ciné-Concert attracting a dedicated core of industry leaders and artists. The project’s digital reach was equally substantial, with over 22,000 digital impressions and a major media presence. This visibility ensured that the partnership was recognised as a symbol of cultural resilience, reaching a broader public that extends beyond the immediate festival grounds. The legacy of *Intersections* is marked by the establishment of

concrete pathways for long-term institutional cooperation. The professional programme successfully generated follow-up demand for UK expertise, with Lebanese institutions actively seeking further training and advisory engagements in creative services. In addition, the British Council has initiated a structured follow-up with the Lebanese Ministry of Culture to disseminate a “Practical Opportunities” document for local filmmakers, highlighting UK funding pathways, training opportunities, and co-production advantages. By positioning UK cinema as a bridge for skills exchange rather than just a product for consumption, the festival has empowered a new cohort of Lebanese practitioners to engage more robustly with the global creative economy, ensuring that the spirit of the intersections continues to evolve in subsequent seasons.



28 Atmospheric photograph of an enthusiastic audience at opening night of *Intersections: the UK Film Festival in Lebanon*.

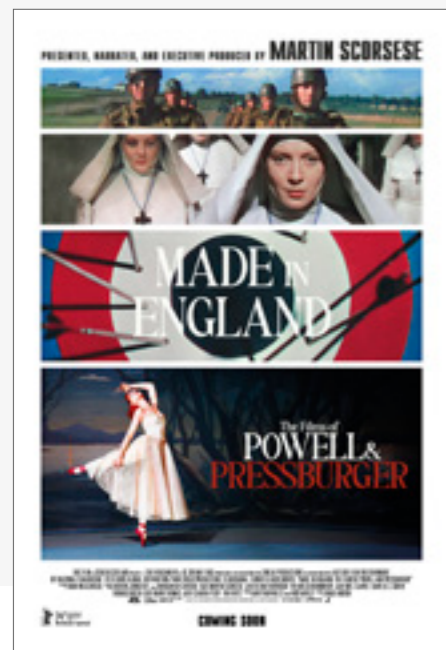
Above: The panel discussion *Building Futures: Film, Innovation, and Cross-Border Collaboration* explored how collaboration fuels innovation, technological progress, and sustainable industry growth. Below: Steve Goodman, Mohamad Choucair, and Nadim Mishlawi presenting the UAI virtual instrument.



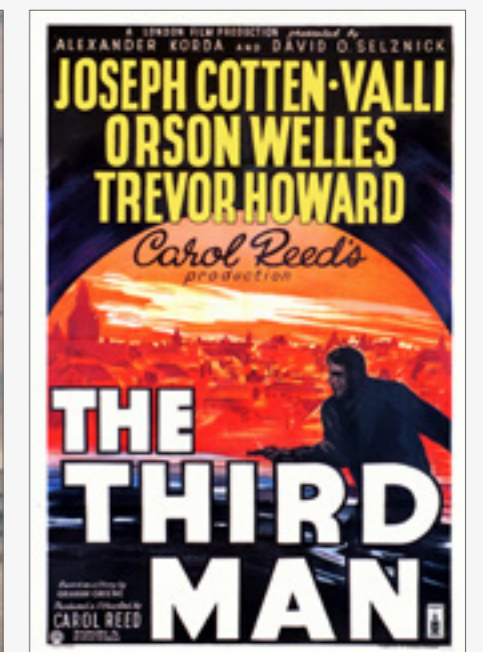
“ This first film festival is a strong example of how the longstanding partnership [between the UK and Lebanon] continues to grow and evolve. I’m hopeful that *Intersections* marks the beginning of a platform committed to innovation, sector growth, and sustainable cultural impact. ”

— HE Hamish Cowell CMG | His Majesty’s Ambassador to the Lebanese Republic

FESTIVALS



The films presented included: *The Red Shoes* (1948), *The Collector* (1965), *The Old Oak* (2023), *The Outrun* (2024), and *The Third Man* (1949).



The films presented included: *Grand Theft Hamlet* (2024), *Hot Milk* (2025), *We Dare to Dream* (2023), *Made in England: The Films of Powell and Pressburger* (2024), *The Salt Path* (2024), and *Is There Anybody Out There?* (2023).

Orient Productions /
Downtown Contemporary Art Festival

ARAB ARTS FOCUS x IN BETWEEN

The Arab Arts Focus (AAF) x IN BETWEEN showcase serves as a premier international platform for contemporary Arab performing arts, providing a global audience with deep insights into the creative landscape of the region. By convening in Cairo, an Arab cultural capital, the showcase ensures that critical professional dialogues occur within the geographical context of the work. This year's edition addressed the cultural necessity of regional visibility, offering a curated programme that challenged barriers to international exposure and fostered a sense of belonging

for Arab practitioners presenting their work on home soil.

Originally launched in 2022 in Beirut as a festival, IN BETWEEN has since evolved into a wider platform dedicated to rethinking festival-making practices across the Arab region. Through its continued development, including the IN BETWEEN x Momentum gathering in Scotland in 2024, the initiative has created spaces for exchange, reflection and collaboration among festival practitioners and cultural professionals.

Building on this trajectory, the collaboration with the IN BETWEEN platform enabled the AAF to extend its showcase to an intensive six-day format, hosting 17 performances and five visual arts exhibitions. This expansion facilitated knowledge exchange, where professional expertise was transferred from Arab artists and delegates to the global sector. The artistic programme featured a diverse range of disciplines, from the Documentary Dance of Laila Soliman's *Story of...* to the immersive sound installation *Solh* by Nancy Mounir. Notable highlights included *The Long Shadow of Alois Brunner* by Collective Ma'louba, a powerful theatrical exploration of Syrian history, and the new media arts installation *Pathogen of War* by Yasmin Fedda, which offered a critical look at the intersections of conflict and health. Lebanese contributions were central to the programme, featuring the play *Stop Calling Beirut* by Zoukak Collective and Charlie Khalil Prince's *The Body Symphonic*, a multidisciplinary work blending contemporary dance and music. These works, alongside British Council-supported premieres like *The Light Within* by Shaymaa Shoukry and *Ta Bron Orm* by Michael McEvoy, allowed artists to engage directly with over 140 international delegates, creating a vital window into contemporary Arab culture.



32 A powerful scene from *The Long Shadow of Alois Brunner* by Collective Ma'louba, a theatrical exploration of Syrian history that served as a major highlight of the curated performing arts programme.

Above: *Stop Calling Beirut* by Zoukak Collective is a navigates contemporary Lebanese realities and ecological memory. Below: Yasmina Fedda's *Pathogen of War* offered a critical look at the intersections of conflict and health.



FESTIVALS

The resonance of these performances was immediate, with surveyed programmers identifying new works for potential future collaboration and indicating a high likelihood of programming the shows in their own festivals. Beyond the stage, the showcase functioned as a vibrant space for resistance and solidarity, particularly for Palestinian and Syrian artists navigating exile. By hosting influential UK institutions – including Factory International, *Shubbak Festival*, and the *Edinburgh International Festival* – the project established concrete pathways for Arab artists to enter the global touring circuit. This impact was mirrored in the festival’s internal capacities, generating significant economic activity for a team of over 80 individuals who delivered the

event. The project further prioritised inclusion through the “Arts for All” initiative, providing free tickets to NGOs and student discounts to ensure Cairo’s local communities could engage with contemporary performance.

As a biennial reference point, the AAF x *IN BETWEEN* has laid a strong foundation for the 2027 season, strengthening the bonds of trust and creation between the UK and the Arab world. To further illustrate this ongoing journey, the *IN BETWEEN x Momentum video* captures key reflections and shifts in regional festival-making discussed in Scotland, while the *IN BETWEEN x AAF Showcase video* provides a visual record of the vibrant performances and artistic collaborations that defined the convening in Cairo.



34 The premiere of *The Light Within* by Shaymaa Shoukry, a British Council-supported collaboration between Egyptian, Palestinian, and UK artists that exemplifies the project’s focus on cross-border creative partnerships.



Above: Marc Mouarkech presenting the programme’s objectives to attending international delegates in Cairo’s Beit El Sinnara. Below: Triple Dance Bill: Just One Title combines the movement vocabulary of Mahraganat (Festivals) with contemporary dance.



“D-CAF was more than just an artistic event; it was a vibrant human space, a sincere platform that amplified the voices of artists saying: “We are here, we remain, we create, dream, and resist.”

— Khaled Elayyan | Executive Director, Sareyyet Ramallah

Warche 13

MARSAH ART WEEK

Tripoli has historically lacked a structured landscape for contemporary artistic production, leaving emerging local talent with few opportunities for professional growth or international exposure. Marsah, a multidisciplinary cultural platform, addresses this by transforming its centre and theatre into a space for residencies, performances, and collective research. This initiative reclaims the city's right to culture, fostering a resilient ecosystem where local narratives can be

articulated through contemporary art. The British Council facilitated the inaugural *Marsah Art Week* as the culmination of a comprehensive nine-month residency programme. The intervention provided critical resources, including production grants and tailored mentorship, allowing artists to move from conceptual exploration to public presentation. A key component was enabling international exchange through the participation of UK-based artist Lara Kobeissy. Her presentation of *NAZAR* and subsequent public talks provided local practitioners with direct exposure to UK methodologies in experimental storytelling and interdisciplinary research, bridging the gap between Tripoli's arts scene and the international cultural landscape.

The extent of the activities spanned intensive capacity-building and multidisciplinary production. The programme supported 8 resident artists, 6 of whom were women, and delivered technical workshops in comics, photography, and documentary filmmaking in collaboration with partners such as Samandal, YURA, and the Between Women Film Caravan. These sessions provided hands-on skills to the wider community, enabling participants to develop personal narratives. The festival showcased diverse outputs, including a VR installation by Ahmad Nabulsi exploring the Abu Ali River, a theatrical script by Mirna Eit, and a collective visual installation by Youssef Tekriti, Reem Rafie, and Moussa Hijazi focused on memory and space. A central feature was the projection mapping installation *Preserving the Coast* by ICONEM, supported by the British Council's *Cultural Protection Fund*. This intervention utilised photogrammetry and laser scanning to create detailed 3D models of historic sites in Tripoli's Old City, raising awareness for the safeguarding of Lebanon's



36 The publication installation for *Maajouka* features the work of resident artists Amal Mallah, Mariam Kotob, Youssef Tekriti, and Rim Yakan. It showcases visual storytelling and graphic narratives developed during their residency.

Above: *Cosmic Escape* by Moussa Hijazi is an exhibition that presents the artist's comic works. Below: A theatrical reading of the work-in-progress script, whose title translates to 'One Ear of Mud, One Ear of Dough' by resident artist Mirna Eit.



FESTIVALS

tangible heritage. The programme engaged a diverse cohort of emerging artists and seven established mentors, culminating in the launch of *Maajouka*, Marsah's first publication. Developed in collaboration with the *Rusted Radishes* editorial team, this art zine featured seven artists who contributed visual and written works reflecting on local cultural practices and visual storytelling, while documenting an emerging collective from Tripoli.

Ultimately, *Marsah Art Week* has established a new offering for Tripoli's creative sector. By integrating an entrepreneurial approach, such as the development of a merchandise kiosk with resident artist Mariam Kotob, the project links artistic production with income-generating opportunities. This ensures that the intervention is not a one-off event but a long-term contribution to the financial resilience and sustainability of Northern District artists.



38 As it Fades Away is an immersive video and sound installation by Youssef Tekriti which uses multiple screens to weave archival images, maps, and personal footage from Tripoli in 2006.



39 "Khalf al Bahr Chou Fi?" (a transliteration of 'What's Behind the Sea?') is a concert by the Lebanese Soprano, Mona Hallab accompanied by Ghina Fallah on piano presents a diverse repertoire from Asmahan to Opera.

“ Marsah Art Week created meaningful opportunities for emerging artists in Tripoli. The residency gave them the opportunity to grow their practices, work with mentors and develop first-time productions in a city that lacks a landscape for contemporary offerings. ”

— Nadine Ali Dib | Executive Director, Warche 13

The Cultural Protection Fund is the UK's main response to international cultural heritage protection. Its role is to safeguard cultural heritage at risk due to conflict and/or climate change and to contribute to sustainable social stability and economic prosperity. Putting people at the heart of cultural heritage protection, the fund supports organisations to safeguard cultural heritage whilst seeking to strengthen individual, community and societal identity. By restoring and safeguarding heritage which might otherwise have been lost, the fund's projects help communities to reconnect with one another and create new forms of cultural expression inspired by their own lives and identities. Through training, education and professional opportunities, Cultural Protection Fund projects empower people with the skills and knowledge to learn from the past and shape a better future for themselves and their families. With this work, the fund contributes to advancements in cultural heritage protection practice worldwide, helps to counteract illicit trade of artefacts and creates a range of positive outcomes in its target countries.

Beirut Museum of Art (BeMA)
 In partnership with **Biladi** and
Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts

SAFEGUARDING ARTS & ARCHIVES WEAVING NETWORK

In the volatile aftermath of the 2024 war on Lebanon, the nation's cultural fabric faced an existential threat that exposed deep-seated vulnerabilities in the legal and physical protection of modern fine art. The *Safeguarding Arts & Archives Weaving Network* initiative – whose name in Arabic, *Sawn*, means safeguarding – was launched in October 2024 as a strategic emergency response to these risks, operating within a landscape of ongoing socio-political crises. While Lebanon's ancient heritage often receives international attention, this initiative addresses the critical gaps in the regulatory frameworks and preservation

practices specifically surrounding modern art and its associated archives, ensuring their preservation for future generations.

The initiative's first phase implemented a participatory, field-based methodology designed to bridge institutional and independent practices under a shared framework of trust and care. Central to this phase was the *Mapping Modern Heritage* component, which established a workflow for stakeholder identification and engagement. To date, the project has successfully identified and mapped 180 stakeholders across Lebanon, governed by an ethical framework for data protection, and bound by Memoranda of Understanding to define mutual accountability among caretakers and professionals.

Central to the initiative's long-term sustainability was its commitment to weaving a network of care through professional development and cross-sectoral collaboration, delivering 192 hours of specialised training. This included a 10-day Collection Material Assessment workshop led by international expert Caroline Marchal and the 100-hour *JOUHOUZIA* training in collaboration with Biladi. These programmes empowered a cohort of 19 cultural responders – including BeMA staff, volunteers, and representatives from the Ministry of Culture – in forensic documentation, risk analysis, and emergency response. In line with the objectives of the training, the field team conducted on-site material evaluations for a pilot group of 15 collections, ranging from intimate estates to large-scale storage. This collaborative effort extended beyond technical outputs, aiming to create a resilient community of practice capable of responding to future emergencies.

Looking ahead, the second phase will focus on the operationalisation of the Emergency Vault.



42 During the Collection Material Assessment workshop, cultural responders were trained to assess the buildings which house the collection, and create basic documentation including inventory and photos to be used in case of emergency.

43 Participants in the Jouhouzia component of SAWN engage in a practical training session focused on the emergency documentation and specialised packing of cultural artifacts.



Following a landmark ten-year agreement with the Lebanese Ministry of Culture, BeMA has assumed management of the UNESCO Storage vault. This space, strategically selected for its proximity to secure zones, provides a reliable sanctuary for at-risk collections. Efforts will prioritise urgent structural upgrades to safeguard the collection from environmental degradation and conflict-related damage. This will include comprehensive waterproofing, the unblocking of drainage systems to prevent water accumulation, and the installation of a

sustainable solar power network to ensure climate-control for sensitive works. In parallel, the project will continue its digitisation and archiving efforts to create a permanent record of modern fine art artefacts. SAWN has established a sustainable heritage protection model that balances emergency relief with the long-term preservation of a shared cultural identity. As these efforts expand in 2026, the initiative moves beyond the mitigation of loss to anchoring a resilient infrastructure in the expertise of a new generation of custodians.



44 The Jouhouzia Risk Preparedness Planning session organised at the Cultural Property Protection and Emergency Response Training Centre, offered an equipped simulation facility for protocol training.

45 Photograph of programme participants during the Collection Material Assessment workshop at the museum of Dorothy Salhab Khazemy.



“ Through SAWN, scattered histories become connected narratives, strengthening our cultural heritage through emergency response training and collaborative preservation. ”

— Juliana Khalaf Salhab | Director, Beirut Museum of Art

Beirut Heritage Initiative

EMERGENCY RESPONSE: SURSOCK PALACE

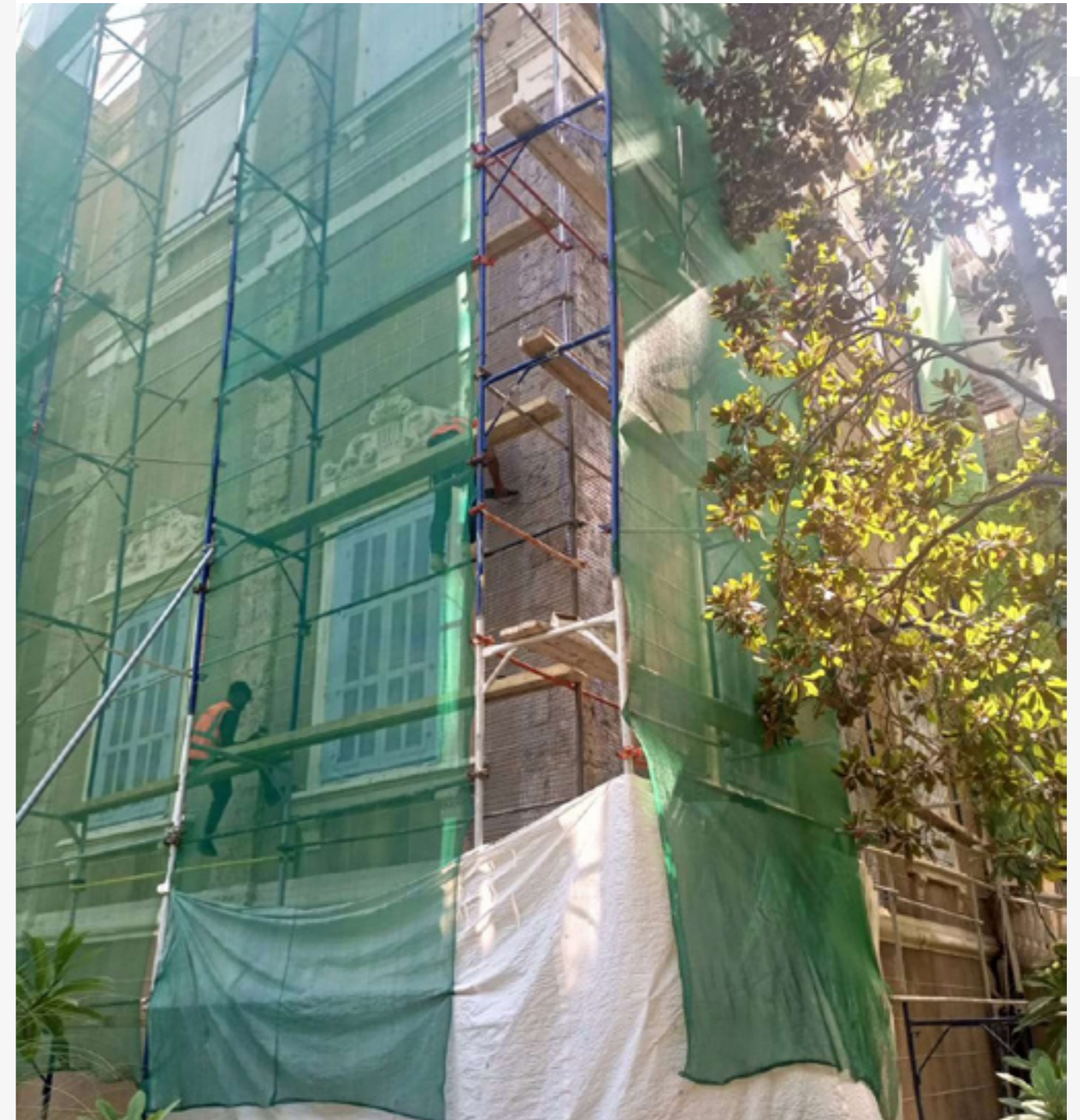
Following the restoration works of Sursock Palace after the August 2020 Beirut port explosion, a [short film](#) has been produced to capture the technical process and its impact. This visual record documents the specialised interventions funded by the Cultural Protection Fund to safeguard this landmark. The film highlights critical structural and artisanal work, including the reinforcement of connections and the restoration of the South Elevation. The footage tracks the masonry restoration, featuring the disassembly and reconstruction of stone elements and the reproduction of decorative limestone pediments. It also documents the

rehabilitation of the pitched roofs, where wooden components were replaced and a vapour barrier was installed beneath the traditional red clay tiles. Interior finishes are also showcased, specifically the application of traditional lime plaster and the restoration of the central hall's intricate Baghdadi ceilings. By capturing these technical milestones alongside workshops on damage assessment and sandstone masonry, the film ensures that the lessons learned in restoring this iconic site contribute to the wider safeguarding of Beirut's architectural legacy.



46 Photograph of Sursock Palace's South elevation, taken after finishing the lime plastering, painting the elevation, reproducing the extruded joints, grinding the marble slabs and cleaning the corbels.

47 Photograph of the mesh installation on the South elevation prior to the plastering activity on site, using wood forms and reference points.



The restoration [...] has made a meaningful impact on the critical exterior and interior materials and finishes [...] partially bringing the building back to a living cultural and architectural landmark.



— Mary Cochrane | Owner, Sursock Palace

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION GRANTS

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The International Collaboration Grants support UK and overseas organisations to make connections and create new work around the world. They are designed 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.

48

Fondation Liban Cinema
In partnership with **Film London**

AI IN FILM: A NEW CREATIVE DIALOGUE

The integration of artificial intelligence into the cinematic landscape presents both a transformative opportunity and a complex cultural challenge for the global filmmaking community. In a production environment like Lebanon, where financial constraints often limit the scope of storytelling, the *AI in Film* project emerged as a meaningful intervention to explore how technology can open new creative pathways. By positioning collaboration rather than technology alone as

the driver of innovation, the project sought to strengthen Lebanon's creative ecosystem while fostering international dialogue on the evolving definitions of authorship and production.

Supported by the British Council's International Collaboration Grant, the initiative facilitated a deep knowledge exchange between emerging filmmakers from Lebanon and the United Kingdom. The project enabled this cross-cultural connection by providing the framework for online workshops led by UK-based filmmaker Ben Aston and producer Eline Van Der Velden, alongside Lebanese filmmaker Yves Chlela. Across three days of intensive online sessions, participants explored AI-assisted tools for visual development, script experimentation, and post-production. These workshops provided a collaborative space for critical reflection, allowing practitioners to question the ethical implications and biases inherent in AI systems, such as the frequent failure of AI to accurately represent Lebanese identities.

The outcomes of this dialogue were manifested in the production of two short films, *A Stage of Flesh* directed by Guibert Najarian, and *Doula* directed by Chady Younes, which served as practical case studies for AI integration. These films premiered at the *London Short Film Festival* in January 2026, following public discussions in June 2025 that introduced the initiative to industry professionals. By utilizing AI to create ambitious visual worlds for psychological thrillers and science fiction, genres which are often financially unfeasible in Lebanon, the project demonstrated how technology can bypass traditional production barriers. Ultimately, the initiative reinforced the importance of UK-Lebanon partnerships in supporting the exchange of talent and resources to shape the future of cinema.



The project was presented through public discussions and panels to showcase the resulting films' trailers and creative processes.

Screen captures from *Doula* by Chady Younes (above), and *A Stage of Flesh* by Guibert Najarian (below), in which AI-generated visuals and effects were combined with live-action footage.



The project demonstrated how international collaboration can open new creative pathways, particularly for emerging filmmakers working within constrained production environments.



— Karim Nasr | Project Manager, Fondation Liban Cinema

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.

Jointly organised by **Festivals Edinburgh,**
British Council Scotland, and **Creative Scotland**

MOMENTUM INTERNATIONAL DELEGATE PROGRAMME

The *Momentum international delegate programme* serves as a vital gateway for cultural leaders to engage with the world-renowned festivals of Edinburgh. Designed to foster long-term international partnerships and encourage investment in Scotland's arts

sector, the programme brings together arts professionals each August, including producers, festival programmers, and government representatives, to facilitate the exchange of professional and creative practices across geographic boundaries.

Since 2022, British Council Lebanon has consistently leveraged this platform to support the development of Lebanon's creative sector infrastructure. In August 2025, the delegation featured Lebanese writer and cultural practitioner Ibrahim Nehme, whose participation highlighted a shift from formal networking toward profound artistic recognition. Moving through the Edinburgh festival landscape, Nehme engaged with major institutions; at *The Fruitmarket*, he noted a devotion to poetry, an art form that resonates deeply in Beirut as a site of refuge and archive. His engagement at the *Talbot Rice Gallery* with the work of Wael Shawky further extended into professional contribution, as he was invited to write for the exhibition's official publication.

The 2025 exchange moved beyond the prestige of international gatherings to focus on the power of shared vulnerability and honest dialogue. For Nehme, the experience dissolved the perceived distance between cities, revealing that the challenges facing cultural workers in Beirut are mirrored globally, appearing merely in different guises. These interactions served to admit the difficult conditions under which art is produced today, transforming shared doubt into a collective form of courage. By connecting Lebanese practitioners with a global community, *Momentum* ensures that even in periods of fragmentation, the knowledge that others are asking similar "impossible questions" remains a powerful form of solidarity and creative endurance.



54 Photograph of the Momentum delegation's visit to Collective Gallery in Edinburgh.



Above: Visit to Stills Gallery in Edinburgh, where the delegates engaged in conversations about contemporary photographic practices and exhibition-making. Below: Conversation with the Director of Fruitmarket Gallery, exploring institutional approaches to poetry, publishing, and public engagement.



“Momentum altered my sense of distance. The conversations did not introduce new questions, they revealed that the same ones were already being asked elsewhere.”

— Ibrahim Nehme | Delegate / Director, Beirut Art Center

OUR WORK IN SYRIA

British Council
In partnership with **Jouri for Research and Consulting**

REPORT LAUNCH: SYRIA CULTURAL LANDSCAPE MAPPING

The Syrian cultural sector stands at a pivotal and fragile crossroads, emerging from over a decade of conflict and fragmentation while navigating a significant political transition following the collapse of the previous regime in late 2024. This comprehensive mapping study, conducted between March and July 2025 by Jouri for Research and Consulting, establishes a vital evidence base to document the lived realities of cultural actors and identify pathways for recovery. In a landscape where traditional infrastructure has been severely weakened and cultural expression remains constrained by

economic hardship and ambiguous red lines of censorship, the report serves as both a record of remarkable resilience and a strategic roadmap for future engagement. It highlights a sector that is cautiously reawakening, characterised by a surge of creative energy in public spaces and a profound appetite for inclusive transformation.

The British Council's role in commissioning this study represents its first in-depth engagement with Syria's internal cultural dynamics in 14 years, leveraging its position as a long-trusted, neutral actor to facilitate Syrian-led solutions. The research employed a qualitative and participatory methodology, incorporating 29 Key Informant Interviews and 3 Focus Group Discussions with artists, institutional leaders, and practitioners across Damascus, Aleppo, Raqqa, Idlib, and the diaspora. By documenting these diverse voices, the British Council has enabled a platform for stakeholders to co-design programming that reflects local aspirations. Key takeaways emphasise the need to decentralise arts education beyond Damascus, address the chronic underfunding of performing arts (which receives only 10% of sectoral funding compared to 65% for heritage), and create safe, negotiated spaces for artistic freedom.

Ultimately, the report proposes a shift from transactional support to genuine partnership, focusing on long-term sustainability and the organisational capacity of grassroots collectives. It outlines four operating principles – Presence, Co-creation, Pluralism, and Honesty – to guide the British Council and international partners in supporting culture as a central force for peace, prosperity, and civic renewal. By bridging the gap between local actors and global initiatives, this mapping provides the building blocks for a shared cultural future that honours Syria's diversity and aspirations.



58 The report advocates for long-term sustainability and the decentralisation of arts education to support grassroots collectives through principles of Presence, Co-creation, Pluralism, and Honesty.

Representatives from international organisations and the British Council convene for a presentation of the findings of the Syria Cultural Landscape Mapping report, facilitating a discussion on the sector's transition and recovery.



“ [These shifting realities] also remind us of the resilience of artists, institutions, and communities who persist against immense odds, safeguarding memory, sustaining creativity, and keeping alive the hope of a more inclusive and peaceful future. ”

— **Amany Abouzeid** | British Council Regional Arts Director - MENA

The Cultural Protection Fund is the UK's main response to international cultural heritage protection. Its role is to safeguard cultural heritage at risk due to conflict and/or climate change and to contribute to sustainable social stability and economic prosperity. Putting people at the heart of cultural heritage protection, the fund supports organisations to safeguard cultural heritage whilst seeking to strengthen individual, community and societal identity. By restoring and safeguarding heritage which might otherwise have been lost, the fund's projects help communities to reconnect with one another and create new forms of cultural expression inspired by their own lives and identities. Through training, education and professional opportunities, Cultural Protection Fund projects empower people with the skills and knowledge to learn from the past and shape a better future for themselves and their families. With this work, the fund contributes to advancements in cultural heritage protection practice worldwide, helps to counteract illicit trade of artefacts and creates a range of positive outcomes in its target countries.

Ettijahat - Independent Culture

DOUROUB: SAFEGUARDING ENDANGERED ORAL TRADITIONS AND MINORITY HERITAGES IN SYRIA

The preservation of Syria's intangible cultural heritage remains a critical challenge as protracted conflict and the subsequent displacement of communities threaten to erase centuries of oral traditions, languages, and traditional knowledge. The *DOUROUB* programme was launched during one of the most sensitive and transformative periods in Syria's modern history to address these risks. The project ensures that the diverse cultural expressions of Syria's ethnic and religious minorities are not only documented but actively revitalised within the contemporary cultural ecosystem.

Building on the foundations laid by previous components enabled by the *Cultural Protection Fund*, this phase follows a trajectory of sustained support for Syrian cultural identity. Earlier editions established a robust framework

by mapping over 200 elements of the Syrian intangible cultural map. Key achievements included the creation of the *Memory and Storytelling in Syria* series, the *Douroub* web series, and the production of 13 musical pieces in collaboration with the Ornina Syrian Orchestra. Previous work also reached the younger generation through the distribution of 80 copies of the *Once Upon a Time* card game and the publication of the storytelling book *Shall We Sleep or Shall We Play?*. These foundational activities were critical in shifting the programme's focus from documentation toward the active transmission and revitalisation of minority folklore.

A central outcome of this cycle was the promotion of 40 stories from various ethnicities – including Arab, Kurdish, Yazidi, Assyrian, and Armenian – through the *Douroub Nights* series of live and recorded concerts. This included a landmark recording in August with Noma Omran and the Gardenia Choir featuring Arabic, Syriac, and Aramaic musical heritage, followed by three concert evenings in Homs and Tartus. Furthermore, the grant facilitated the *Syrian Rhythms* event at the *Shubbak Festival* in London, bridging the gap between local heritage and global audiences to raise awareness through the arts.

The programme delivered substantial impact through the design of *Douroub Forums* in Aleppo, Damascus, Homs, and Hama. These four community dialogue sessions featured over 20 expert speakers, including academics and heritage practitioners, who addressed locally relevant themes to raise awareness of heritage protection. On a technical level, the project completed a systematic assessment of cultural and creative industries in Aleppo and its surrounding villages, which directly



Sandouk Al Hakaya is one of five key organizations collaborating within a mentorship framework designed to strengthen the local heritage sector's capacity to safeguard and transmit intangible practices.

The *Syrian Rhythms* event was part of the *Shubbak Festival* in London, highlighting Syria's diverse cultural expressions to raise global awareness through the arts and promote non-extractive cultural exchange.



informed an intensive training programme for 16 young people. This curriculum focused on the importance of traditional crafts alongside strategic small business planning and entrepreneurship. To deepen sector knowledge, the programme published the research study *The Nexus of Heritage, Earthquake, and Conflict*, providing an enhanced analysis of governance and cultural trauma across Harem, Afrin, and Old Aleppo.

By designing a mentorship framework with five key organisations – Sandouk Al Hakaya, Wellfy Handcrafts, Sama Handmade, Threads of Hope, and Rafekatuna Organisation – the project

has strengthened the capacity of the local heritage sector to design advanced training for safeguarding intangible practices. Despite the security situation, the achievements of the *DOUROUB* programme provide compelling evidence that heritage-led approaches can simultaneously address cultural preservation, social cohesion, and economic resilience.

By empowering local organisations and youth to become the new stewards of their collective memory, the initiative ensures that Syria's rich cultural diversity remains a living pillar for future civic participation.

LOOKING AHEAD

Building on the recommendations of the Syria Cultural Landscape Mapping, two initiatives supported by the Cultural Protection Fund are set for implementation in 2026. These projects address structural gaps in entrepreneurship and institutional funding to lay the groundwork for long-term recovery in Syria.

Action for Hope

Syrian Cultural Entrepreneurs Needs Assessment

The first of these initiatives is led by Action for Hope. This needs assessment examines the realities, challenges, and opportunities facing Syrian cultural entrepreneurs working with intangible cultural heritage inside Syria and across the diaspora. The research focuses on practitioners attempting to sustain, transmit, and generate livelihoods from heritage-based knowledge and practices, including music, crafts, oral traditions, culinary heritage, performing arts, and cultural education.

Through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and case studies, the assessment identifies structural barriers affecting these practitioners, such as access to funding, markets, and sustainable business models. Rather than focusing solely on preservation, the study explores how cultural knowledge supports livelihoods, community resilience, and cultural recovery.

The outcome will provide a clear evidence base and practical recommendations to inform future programmes, donor strategies, and policy conversations. These findings will help shape responsive support mechanisms for practitioners working at the intersection of heritage, creativity, and economic sustainability.

Ettijahat — Independent Culture

Fundraising Capacity Building for Syrian Heritage Organisations

Complementing the research, Ettijahat will launch a comprehensive three-month capacity-building programme in the first half of 2026 to ensure the long-term institutional survival of Syrian heritage entities. Small and medium-sized civil society organisations are the frontline of heritage protection in Syria, yet they frequently lack the technical expertise to navigate complex international fundraising processes. This initiative addresses that disparity by training 16 practitioners and providing direct support to six organisations, enabling them to develop concrete project concepts, budgets, and strategic applications through a participant-centred, applied learning methodology.

A key outcome of this project is the professional Arabic translation and adaptation of the CER-SCRI fundraising manual, which will be released as a free digital resource to support the broader Arab heritage community. Led by distinguished specialists, the programme positions heritage not as a peripheral concern, but as fundamental recovery infrastructure capable of supporting social cohesion and identity reconstruction during Syria's transition.

Above: Participants observe a hands-on demonstration during a folk music instrument-making workshop by Action for Hope. Below: As a grantee of Douroub programme, Makani Makani provides economic empowerment to refugee and asylum-seeking women, focusing on the preservation of traditional crafts.



This economic boost can help rebuild war-torn regions and provide a source of income for musicians and artisans, preserving their traditional crafts and skills.

— From *On the Tracks of Music* publication | Action for Hope

[...] the applications approached heritage from different perspectives, reflecting a growing interest in working on intangible cultural heritage as an entry point for community development and the strengthening of social ties.

— Basma El Hussein & Waseem Al-Bahri | Ettijahat — Independent Culture



