

L'ARABE DE SERVICE DO YOUR ARAB THING

COLLOQUIUM 14.10.2013 BRUSSELS



m●ussem.eu

L'Arabe de Service / Do Your Arab Thing

Colloquium

14.10.2013 Brussels



Publisher:

Pascal Nicolas
Moussem.eu
Driekoningenstraat 126
2600 Berchem
Belgium

ISBN: 9789081978514



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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Introduction

Looking for answers on questions as:

“Why does it appear so difficult for people to freely take on the confrontation and the discussion between new expressions of culture compared to the mainstream in their own environment, with the prevailing classical canon? Leaving the safe space of being right to negotiate what is beautiful and important in the journey of the new world, does not appear to be easy. The European canon is not a static set of acquired, well-defined values, but should rather be seen as a process, a challenge, a concept that must constantly be (re)interpreted.”

and

“Shaping European society is more than changing a façade. Indeed, the confrontation of ideas, attitudes and values require not only a negotiation on criteria and meanings. The responsibility for an assertive participation in the brewing of new European cultural identities lies with everyone who participates. A major challenge in Europe today therefore seems to lie in the field of supporting artists with an Arab background. Otherwise the discussion on participation and cultural exchange risks being held on unequal terms.”

moussem.eu organised in collaboration with its European partners and deBuren on Monday 14th of October 2013 in Brussels the colloquium *l'Arabe de service / Do your arab thing*.

We reflected on the classical Western canon from the perspective of artists with a link to the Arab World living and working in Europe. The field of the arts often gives these artists the floor only when they are reduced to certain stereotypes. Each artist reacts on this in his or her own way. The aim is to renegotiate a dynamic canon with the contribution of these artists making entirely part of our society.

This digital publication contains the keynote of *Zahia Rahmani*, responsible for the program *Art and globalisation* of the Paris INHA about the positive effect of the Arab servitude or the anthropological turn in contemporary art.

To inspire further reflection we added also the conclusions of the different multilingual workshops by *Wouter Hillaert*, *Sabine Frank*, *Taha Adnan* and *Gérard Mayen*.

All these thoughts motivate us to continue working in a large international network as *Mohamed Ikoubaân* concludes.

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Do your Arab thing: The Positive effect of the Arab Servitude or the Anthropological Turn in Contemporary Art

First of all I would like to thank the organisers of this conference. Moussem.eu, Mohamed Ikoubâan and Pascal Nicolas, deBuren and the others supports.

I accepted to speak in this 'Multilingue' meeting, in French. During this conference, you will be in the same situation that I find myself in when I am listening. I do not mean that I do not understand you. And I think that some of you understand what I say. But understanding a language does not mean that we really know it, in a way that we might interact with the controversies that pertain to its critical dynamism. As far as the English language is concerned, unless one is completely bilingual through birth and social life, we are, in France, distanced from its cultural and theoretical 'hearth'. Furthermore, we are ignorant of its contemporary life, and of the literary 'genealogies' and 'histories' that allow one to be in tune with the debates that animate it.

Contrary to the 'Francophone world', over the last two decades the English-speaking world has seen the clear and striking growth of its editorial system. This rise is historically unique. English-language publication has worked a real renewal of the community of these authors and intellectuals. It has globalised its community. What, is especially unheard of is that this system has found a public. It has inaugurated a scientific and intellectual space. In this sense, it has responded to an expectation. Through the variety of interests and the vivacity of the issues that these authors reveal and demonstrate in their writings, an immense body of work has been amassed. This body of work remains unrivalled both in its ambitions and its dimensions. It has been a question of rethinking western knowledge, and the entire writing of history, concerning all of the areas and subjects upon which it has touched – from the description of fauna, of flora and of men, to the subjective treatment of works of art – all whilst attempting to represent, in an always critical and living way, a common present, bearer of an ambition. All has not always been successful, but the advent of this body of work has been a saving grace for a great number of men and women across the world, and I am one of them. It responded to a necessity, and to an urgency. But also to an ethical requirement borne by 'minority' entities, responding on behalf of their groups. Here, I am specifically thinking of the of 'Queer' and 'Subalternist' writings. This corpus, still and always 'in progress', is the equivalent of a third party. A third party who comes to lead by the hand those whose sight has been taken.

A number of authors have contributed. I would like to use as an example : Ihab Habib Hassan. A thinker unknown in my country. He is a writer, theoretician and comparatist, and his bibliography is long. He left his country of origin, Egypt, in 1946, for the United States. His major work, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Ohio State University Press 1987), has never been translated in France. It exists in Chinese, but not in French. None of his books have in fact been translated into French, and yet, France, much more than the United States, appears as the

country with the best mastery of Arab culture and its intellectual community outside of the Arab world. Edward Saïd contributed largely to this in that he notably discredited the American Orientalists, especially Bernard Lewis. He underlined a sort of tradition of French knowledge of the Orient. This has been true, and remains so for certain intellectuals such as Gilles Keppel. But unlike the Anglo-Saxons we still do not have a contemporary Arab essayist translated into French. Not one. Nor translated from English, for that matter. There is no trend moving in this direction; a few texts here and there but nothing of importance. Yet Hassan published his first book in French in the 1960s. The title of the work was fairly prophetic, and tightly linked to the structuralist moment of that era. *Crisis of the American Contemporary Hero*. Like this *American Contemporary Hero* in crisis, Ihab Hassan did not find an audience in France.

Yes, when languages differ, systems of references differ, unless they have found a 'translation' in the language of reception of the text. This means that the understanding of statements of which the source is for example, the German language also differs.

The Positive effect of the Arab Servitude or the Anthropological Turn in Contemporary Art

What can we exceed when there is nothing left to exceed? In the era of advanced capitalism can we still think that objects of culture have not been affected by the consumerist and communicational logic of this capitalism? On the subject of the Global Art, Michel Deguy, a companion of Jean-François Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze, talks of 'by-products devoid of all authenticity'. He suggests by this that this 'authenticity' is over. That in the era of spectacle and marketing, authenticity can no longer exist. That its only possible outcome is the by-product. An object for tourists often made from cheap material. No more authenticity.

I have entitled my presentation *The Positive effect of the Arab Servitude or the Anthropological Turn in Contemporary Art*. What I wish to speak of here does not at first sight deal with works of art, but more with the commentary accompanying these works. This commentary must be understood here in a very simple sense. Just as we can understand it when we speak of a commentary in the media or in the press. Coming back on this notion, the commentary, I am not going to speak of post-modernism. I know that we can commentate a work and find ourselves in a case of a postmodern practice of the object that we commentate. But in this case the object must be in a 'postmodern' situation and in tune with a certain communicational and mercantile dynamic. Here I am once again using Jameson's definition. But nothing can confirm that the object upon which we are commenting is itself, at its origins, a 'postmodern object'. Contemporary objects of culture which have allowed for a political practise of being together, that have been produced over these last few months by the Tunisian and Egyptian youth, do not come under the 'postmodern' sphere as long as they perpetuate the political efficacy that was at the origins of its fabrication. I think notably of the different bandanna and coloured fabrics that have been used in the various public spaces by protesters. With just a red colour, or with three colours, red, black and white, mass performative gestures have been called upon; politically, the 'town squares' have worked. Others critics are obviously more competent than I am to speak of this. From my side, what interests me is the practice of commentary in art. Gestures have been very minimalist and precise.

These coloured fabrics without any inscriptions have been of a rare efficacy. The language produced by this can, and has been, decoded by all. Pacifist and universal. These fabrics have served as slogans, clothes and shelters (the 'performers' made tents with it). Worn as a bandanna or on their shoulders, these fabrics, in the context of the 'town square', had a strong weight of legibility. They

covered the body. Making these bodies bearers of political clues. And these common 'colours' also bear witness to a common attempt to construct a shared objective in terms of equality. And this equality is the 'shared fabric' that spoke of the will for it. We know the next episode in this story. But it is far from over.

I must, considering the title of my presentation, situate myself in the perspective inaugurated by Hal Foster in his text *Portrait of the Artist as an Ethnographer*, and in his reflection on the presupposed realists on the 'other'. You will perhaps remember that he begins on a commentary of Renée Green's work, *Seen* (1990). In this installation we see a photograph of the Venus Hottentote represented by an autopsied corpse, and another representing Josephine Baker naked. Foster wrote that with this type of 'ethnographic' work – that which involves "showing the European fantasy of the sexuality of the black woman", or "the terrifying spectrum of racial fantasies", such as *Vanilla Nightmares* (1986) by Adrien Piper – the artist makes of the 'other' a "being which is in the true". From there, Foster insists, this 'being' cannot pertain to any otherness or alterity, and even less to the here and now of that which he names the immanent contestation.

My wish is indeed to turn this question of immanent contestation around and to show how certain practices, ones that borrow 'by default' from codes of artistic creation, pertain, not without misunderstanding, to a subversive practice. And that for these reasons these practices cannot only concern the field of the aesthetic. The Arab and Turkish public spaces recently participated in this immanent contestation.

The serious work I have been carrying out at the *French National Institute of Art History* for the last 8 years on a database on art and globalisation has brought me an awareness of contemporary issues concerning artistic globalisation. This work has ingrained in me a certain critical genealogy, as well as knowledge on texts and their histories.

To support my arguments on *The Positive effect of the Arab Servitude or the Anthropological Turn in Contemporary Art* I will make use of three important texts.

One is a press article published by Salman Rushdie in 1982, *The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance*. Whilst this article gave way to many different readings and also the title of the book by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989), neither have been translated. I am in the habit of translating 'Empire Writes Back' by 'Empire Contre Ecrit'. Contre, in French, can mean 'beside', as in 'I am beside you, close to you...' or 'against you' as in 'opposed to you'. 'Writes back' could also signify written behind, or from behind, from behind one's back. From the back. Writing from behind. We can even, with 'Empire Writes Back' call upon sex and the Empire as the most unhealthy and shady of things. I don't know if Rushdie was thinking of the multiple meanings of his statement.

The second text is by Frederic Jameson, *The Literature of the Third World in the Era of Multinational Capitalism*, from 1986. This text was highly polemical, and raised a number of critical reactions. The French version dates from 2011.

The last article is by the Iranian artist Barbad Golshiri, *For They Know What They Do Know*. This article is really important. Published on the site e-flux, this text is the result of a discussion that was held at the Courtauld with Loyal Ftouni, upon Sarah Wilson's invitation to discuss the Orientalist canon in contemporary art. It deals with the exploitation of stereotypes in contemporary art and notably the veil. It comforted me concerning the aesthetic, ethical and moral reasons why I rejected works on the veil.

Salman Rushdie, with his concept of 'writing back', supported by figures such as Joyce, Beckett, Baldwin and Naipaul, has inaugurated a new type of English literary criticism. He wished for the consideration of its internationalisation. It was clear that numerous African and Indian English-speaking authors were carving real reputations for themselves on a worldwide scale, and it was becoming necessary and urgent to receive and understand these works with new historical and critical resources. As he would do so again in his text on the literature of the commonwealth the following year, Rushdie announced, with certain jubilation, the end of the domination of the 'centre'.

In his text on the literatures of the third world, Fredric Jameson leans on other authors, less exposed than Rushdie. He particularly calls upon the work of a great Chinese author, Lu Xun. What does Jameson say in this text? It is important to go back over this polemic as it seems to me that this text is useful for understanding what brings us all together today. He wrote that an intellectual like himself, a man whose background is the western modernist tradition, could not adhere, in the proper sense of the term, 'to a community sensitive' to this literature of the third world. With Jameson there is no will to re-establish any kind of hierarchy of artistic values, but a desire to take into account historical experiences as distinct aesthetic experiences. Education, the frequentation of certain works, says Jameson, participates from "an 'other' idea" of literature. In reality he is speaking of critical demand. And we cannot suspect him of wanting to reduce the peoples of the third world. An arena that, he says himself, is difficult to circumscribe. In this text we understand what he means by 'authors of the third world', these are authors who, for the most part, have participated in the forming of the national identity of their country. They are constitutive of these countries who will become independent. We re-discover these authors prior to these movements of emancipation, struggling against despotism for a happier horizon. These authors, these artists, through their work, accompany the will for change. And what does Jameson say to us? That these authors are necessarily on the side of the greater numbers, the community and the masses. And in fact their literature comes under the heading of national allegory. 'National Fable', Jameson even wrote. All in all, in this case there cannot be a modern experience of struggle, as the individual has no place. All artistic act is in this case, Jameson writes, 'metaphorical'. This stylistic device has been quite deeply held against him. Too univocal, according to Aijaz Ahmad. But it must be understood that Jameson says that in certain circumstances the 'author' produces a work which pertains to an analogy with a 'group'. The work, according to Jameson, substitutes the individual 'author' in favour of a collective entity. At this stage, the aesthetic and the political are put under tension, and separate. This means that the anthropological commentary does not fall into the modern tradition. But in order that an author acts as an author in this situation, in order that an individual "engraves his difference in the heart of the collectivity that he perpetuates", a system of knowledge specific to the notion of the 'author' must be operational.

The autoreflexivity specific to the formalist tradition cannot be useful in certain cases of artistic emergence. This autoreflexivity, this regime of distinction specific to the work of art cannot support the dynamic of extraction that is at work in the situations of artistic emergence that we have witnessed in what we have named the 'Arab revolutions'. And if we maintain Jameson's logic, we should say that he has been criticised for not having taken into account 'individual' paths. But what does an individual 'path' mean in territories where, indeed, there is no literary or artistic system. What does it mean when the majority of a population has no access to literature and does not know how to read – this is the case for millions of women in the world – when there are no books, when books are too expensive, when there are no critics or bookshops or anything else that makes up a

system of art? For example schools, collectors and dealers. Who takes over the systems in these cases? Who can make an artist out of an individual in these third world countries?

When the first photographs appeared of Iranian artists who dealt with the theme of the veil, I had real trouble appreciating their work. Having, myself, a fairly pronounced taste for words and concepts, it seemed to me that objects were being exposed devoid of any critical standards or demands. In fact, no one was speaking of photographs but about the subject of the photographs. The veil. Then the practice of themes related to that of the veil began to multiply. Women artists, European residents, English or French with relations or origins in Muslim territories, started to use the veil as the object and subject of their work. I did not particularly like these works. Only a rare few escaped the usual stereotypes. And this is still the case today. We have witnessed an inflation of propositions. A whole generation of women and men have arrived on the art scene and have started to work on the subject of the 'Arab' body and woman. And we said that they were artists. These artists do not practise criticism, do not write and are often incapable of justifying the form their work takes apart from through biographical accounts or social interest. Sometimes we witness attitudes that wish to come off as virtuous. I once heard an artist say, "my film is on illegal immigrants, on the homeless but I must show this work first in my gallery in Dubai."

In the beginning of the noughties, fate had it that my job, as a writer, took me to the Maghreb. There, I encountered artists who were struggling. Everyone condemned the work of these artists that people called Maghrebins to legitimate their work on the veil. Those condemning them could not understand why the social identity of their country was under attack, whilst they were living under 'despotic' and 'confiscatory' regimes. Who wore the veil in the Arab countries at this time? A large part of the poorer population. People who, in addition, were suffering from the disdain of their rulers. And here I arrive at my demonstration. We really can say that this indignation had positive effects.

If it were in good taste to be an 'Arab' artist, well let's become one. But this should not happen as a response to a European expectation. It became a question of going against the grain of what the Algerian artist Nouredine Feroucki, calls the 'New Westernism'. Or 'Un nouvel occidentalisme'. Let us take the example of the Moroccan artist Hassan Darsi. He trained in Belgium, and left Europe in 1989. He could have stayed. He told me that in 1989, the year of the Fatwa, of the 'Magicians of the Earth', the year the Wall fell, of Tienanmen, he found himself confronted with an ethical question. He did not want to be an exiled artist. He wanted to act in the heart of his society. This he did. Nothing that has happened in Morocco in the field of the visual arts these last few years is foreign to him. He opened different places. He manages a platform for residencies and productions, an annual festival and he receives numerous artists and intellectuals for exchanges. Very rapidly I built up strong ties with artists living in the Maghreb and I participated in numerous discussions regarding the expectations for the future projected by the west on the Arab countries. In another place, Lebanon, artists also work on an idea of the 'Arab world'. They were thinking about the way in which institutions devoted to the history of their peoples and their memories have not been founded or put together in Arab societies. "What is the Orient?" wrote Saïd. In this case, with this meeting also, we can substitute the word Orient with the word Arab. A construction. A western fiction. I am not going to discuss the pertinence of his proposition here. We know how efficacious it was. It is through working on the fiction of this memory that these artists have questioned colonial practice and its capacity to perpetuate or to produce the erasure of the 'other'.

We have witnessed, over the last two decades, a lowering of critical standards. Concerning this, we live in a moment of low intensity. We cannot deny that it is discouraging to witness the hopelessness

of the spectacle of the collusion of a number of actors of the art scene with the vacuousness of late capitalism (late because it has exhausted all of its sources). Pinault in Venice. It's vulgar.

How many times have I heard or read, "this artist's work is on such and such a subject. On slavery, the veiled woman, racism, borders, ethnography, museography..." we don't hear any other arguments concerning the medium. No longer a word on the autonomy of this medium. This arena of quite singular inscriptions which I experienced, like many others, as a space of emancipation, has gone into retreat. Formalism was a great school of thought. An almost crazy ambition, we will say. Today, everything has been reduced to messages that are easy to understand. Artists lack 'the word/verb'. Information is more easily diffused. Art has made itself accessible. And may be this is its finality, to become simplified to the point where it gives everyone the licence to work on... And with the means/media of intertextuality, montage, and metalanguage of art, we can; in some places in the world, produce subversion. "Stick, cut out, juxtapose. Now take the public space. And create a diversion. Reverse." I have seen this, dancers walking backwards in Marrakech. My friend Hassan Darsi spoke to me, during an interview dedicated to what we call 'the lead years' in Morocco, of the forty years of the reign of Hassan II. He told me "for all these years, our fathers, these Marxist fathers who struggled, you know they did not have the right tools". I thought about this phrase for a long time: our fathers did not have the right tools. And I know the great price these fathers paid for the legitimacy of their commitment. Death or imprisonment was their destiny. The enemy that opposed them knew how to justify terror against 'this Marxism', imported from elsewhere. The tools have changed. What can an armed soldier or policeman do today before a boy who, bare-armed and wearing high heels walks down the Ramallah Avenue in a red dress? What can the Moroccan state do to artists who paint passages lined with nails for the pedestrians of Casablanca, these poor who cannot possess a car in a city that cannot be frequented by any other means? Or, furthermore, what can be done when confronted with men who march in silence bearing a blank placard in the streets of Algiers?

These are the positive effects of the anthropological turn in contemporary art. The weakening of critical standards, as desired by merchant culture, has produced a devastating effect. An effect which is also linked to the 'quasi-barbaric' development of this merchant culture. In Morocco everything is being privatised. Even the coastal roads. The whole landscape of your childhood is wiped off the map in the space of a decade. And for such ugliness! This leaves you indignant. And the peoples are outraged. This has never been seen in Europe. That which has been subverted by a hopeless logic has turned on the sight of the desolation that a number of peoples were enduring in silence. I have finally accepted that in Europe criticism fails us. Perhaps European modernity has failed. Perhaps it was part of its ambition to transfer to the third world its own failure. But the third world has not accepted this. It is now from this place that we find hope, that in turn raises ambition. And these populations are struggling.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to me in French.

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Zahia Rahmani

Many do not find the way

In Flanders, the general view on artists with an Arab background is closely connected with a much wider debate about multiculturalism in the arts. That debate has in the meantime been raging for ten, fifteen years. What has been achieved? Theatre makers Chokri Ben Chikha and Dahlia Pessemiers have experienced little progress, quite the contrary.

Objectively speaking, much has happened. Former Minister of Culture Bert Anciaux initiated an Interculturalisation Action Plan, and his successor Joke Schauvliege managed to lure a large number of cultural organizations into entering into a declaration of commitment on diversity. The issue, at least on paper, is high on the ministerial agenda. Art Support Centres such as the VTi conduct research on talent development in young artists, especially those with a mixed background. The knowledge centre Demos keeps the topic front-of-mind as well, yet with a focus on sports and youths.

All this policy-related attention has not failed to affect the theatrical scene, even if the ‘opening up’ of a large number of theatre companies has perhaps more to do with social coloration as such than anything else. With GEN2020, 't Arsenaal in Mechelen initiated a promising initiative for master creators with different roots. Antwerp companies such as Laika, MartHa!tentatief or Luxemburg seem to exhibit a greater awareness of urban complexity, including on stage. With the emergence of Mokhallad Rasem and other Iraqi newcomers, together with artists such as Fikry El Azzouzi and the whole of the SIN Collective, new artistic voices have made themselves heard from the base as well. They are making themselves noticed with new approaches, different inspirations. Union Suspecte ceased to exist, but transformed into Action Zoo Humain. And both Moussem and Kunstenfestival 0090 could look forward to a strong catch-up in funding during the last round of structural funding in 2012. Even the young Mestizo Arts Festival is receiving increasing attention and appears to have become a breeding ground for young, mixed talent. Also, this year, as in the coming years, creators and actors with a different ethnic background will be graduating from drama schools like Rits and KASK. Does this not make for a pretty picture already? Why is multiculturalism still an issue at all?

Residual decolonization

At L'Arabe de service / Do your Arab thing, Ghent theater maker Chokri Ben Chikha intervened with a movie that summed up his vision in a single image: a young musician commits suicide in a farewell video that is as ironic as it is moving. Ben Chikha, who co-founded Union Suspecte ten years ago, bases this reflection on identity not only on the true story of a friend. For him, this radical act also symbolizes the general state of the diversity issue in the arts. “It is simply no longer a priority,” he says in his conversation with Dahlia Pessemiers. “The situation has worsened in ten years. Many creative young people are never given a chance, serve as a fig leaf, or close themselves off by adopting an unambiguous Islamic identity. Many have given up. The underlying belief prevalent in both society and the arts is still: just do hip-hop. It testifies of implicit and very persistent power relations. Young people have a hard time to figure this out. Everything is stuck. That can make me angry, but it also strengthens me in my search for new artistic strategies.”

Ben Chikha is currently working toward a doctorate in the arts, more specifically on the critical value of the use of stereotypes as theatrical signs, with a focus on the history of representation of other identities on the stage. He did intensive research into the tradition of ‘zoo humans’ or ‘Menschengarten’ (Human Zoos), historical phenomena which he himself plays with in his work as well. Today he can recognize them, non-ironically, not only explicitly in reality television programs like *Toast Kannibaal* (Toast Cannibal) or *Groeten uit de rimboe* (Greetings from the jungle), but also implicitly on many other levels. Opposite differences turn into the spectacle of difference. To Ben Chikha, the diversity issue and the perception of all things Arabic are not strictly Flemish matters but form part of a much broader issue. “What is at work here is the structural problem of identity in Europe. European thinking is still not fully decolonized. At all levels, the union is still struggling with the recognition of the multiple identities of its citizens.”

Identity as responsibility

Actress and theatre maker Dahlia Pessemiers Benamar, who graduated from Studio Herman Teirlinck fifteen years ago, is a little more optimistic about the situation in the Flemish performing arts sector. But she is also annoyed with the unaltered tendency of TV creators and producers to cast ‘ethnic actors’ in stereotypical roles of dubious, poorly Dutch-speaking, characters – roles she herself is still regularly offered. “How is it that we still cannot imagine a doctor in a soap opera or a movie with parents or grandparents born in Morocco? Because it doesn’t go well with the public?” Pessemiers Benamar finds that casting agencies have only a limited idea of the available existing talent, and has played with the idea to set up an alternative casting agency herself.

Although identity issues have not played a role in her own theatre career, Pessemiers Benamar has expressly addressed them in more recent years. With her company Dunia, she created the autobiographical monologue *Mozaïk*, and last season she directed the presentation *Baba* at the Antwerp youth theatre HETPALEIS, in which a girl sets out in search of her biological father. “The fact that I do address these themes now has arisen from a feeling that if I don’t, it doesn’t happen. And this while it addresses the story of a significant proportion of the urban population. It feels like a responsibility, and there is a lot of potential there. In HETPALEIS they were really surprised at how many visitors wearing a headscarf suddenly showed up at the family shows. You can still feel a certain naivety in this, but I don’t want to problematize this.”

When culture houses ask makers with a double background to create a presentation for them, it is often not just for artistic reasons, admits Pessemiers Benamar. “There surely are strategic or economic motives at play, but this I’m not losing any sleep over. It is a good thing that cultural institutions are increasingly being obliged to focus on a more diverse audience, which is logical since there are more and more children born into families who do not have Dutch as their native language and have a mixed background. If that allows me to let my artistic voice be heard on the stage of white culture houses more often, I see no harm in it, quite the contrary.”

Truth Commissions

The fact that the symbolic capital of ‘other stories’ and ‘other voices’ still remains low is a difficult issue to tackle. Flemish programmers often ignore festivals like MAF, and houses like ‘t Arsenaal or KVS that develop an intercultural trajectory are sometimes too easily accused of making artistic compromises. Underlying the surface debates on ‘participation’, ‘quota’ or ‘culturally diverse staff’

are ingrained quality norms and unexpressed artistic standards, which are being sold as universally applicable. 'The other' is very welcome in the theatre room and even in the visiting programme, but will find it difficult to 'contaminate' the heart of the artistic policy. Press, policy and artistic decision makers confirm each other's standards; a closed system that is in no overt way malevolent, but that nonetheless remains hard to undo. Everything that deviates from these subtle standards is considered as 'socially important', but similarly as artistically peripheral.

What can be done to remedy this? Dahlia Pessemiers Benamar thinks that more effort should be put toward giving guidance to young artists with a mixed background. "Many of them build a trajectory outside of any educational programmes, so they fail to build networks, and are not as versed in the jargon that is for example necessary to set up a project file. If you don't have a foot inside the theatre scene, setting up such a grant application is very difficult. Many do not find the way." According to Pessemiers Benamar, the evaluation committees that allocate funds to these applications also lack affinity with the specific situation of intercultural oriented projects. She herself was a member of the Theatre evaluation committee for some time. "There is great curiosity, but there is no time to go see work that is not being funded yet. That goes for everything that falls outside the standard parameters. It quickly becomes the specialization of one particular member, and there is no real discussion about it any more."

Chokri Ben Chikha believes that, today, only more radical social initiatives can make a difference. "If we want to give cultural polyphony the attention it deserves, we need a series of strongly anchored truth commissions with politicians, cultural agents, and civil society representatives. Where did it go wrong? Where are we now? How do people experience this? What strategies can we devise together? We cannot continue to let things take their course."

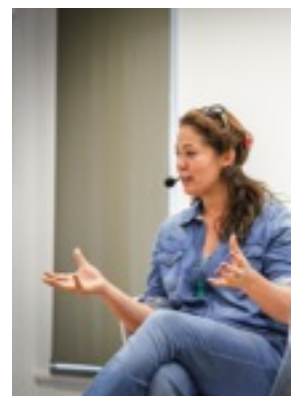
For Ben Chikha, the discussion has been too superficial, too one-sided and too nice for too long. "I do not mean to be cynical, but, at some level, confidence has been broken. All the figures show that Flanders is struggling with a serious backlog in employment, rental housing, education, you name it. To many, the headscarf debate felt like a breach of trust. That's why a strong signal is needed, comprising creative initiatives that can make the game in our intercultural society playable again. A truth commission is one possibility in this respect. We may not have had a civil war, but the polarized intercultural debate has cut deep wounds. That's what my movie is about: youths can't always figure it out. Therefore, we must absolutely avoid excluding an entire generation because it fails to find itself in what is being sold as 'culture in Flanders'."



Dahlia Pessemiers-Benamar, Wouter Hillaert & Chokri Ben Chikha



Chokri Ben Chikha



Dahlia Pessemiers-Benamar

Conforming versus Confounding Expectations

Workshop in English – summary

Europe is what helps us transcend national identities and national interests. Europe, in the form of the European Union, is what makes projects such as Mousseme.eu possible.

Yet in the field of culture, EU Member States have remained staunchly protective. Cultural policies remain national prerogatives. Culture was once put in the service of nation state building. Culture was drawn into political efforts to define what is Spanish, French or Swedish, etc. Cultural institutions were created to embody national identities, and public funding schemes were set up to cement forms of cultural production and of cultural reception, which underpin nation states.

After decades of immigration into Europe, the notion of homogenous national cultures has of course long ceased to be intact, but the bastions of cultural definition and of power have not yet all fallen.

Accordingly, the introductory text for the event contended that:

“The field of the arts often gives artists of Arab origins the floor only when they conform to certain stereotypes.”

On the panel to examine this situation were:

- **Cecilia Hörnel-Sunar**, co-director of the organization with the playful name *Re:Orient*, which was set up in 1993, has its own venue in Malmö, Sweden, since 2011, but also works nomadically in other Swedish cities.
- **Milan Vračar** from the association *Kulturanova*, founded in 2001 in Novi Sad, Serbia
- **Nuria Medina**, coordinator of the cultural programme of the *Casa Árabe*, set up in 2006 in both Madrid and Córdoba.

One commonality of the three speakers is that they work for structures, which were set up to do something that the existing cultural establishments could not or would not do.

The first question to the panelists therefore was:

Reckoning with power

What is ‘the field of the arts’ invoked in the introductory text? Who are the gatekeepers to ‘the field of the arts’? Who have you/do you come up against?

Cecilia explained that *Re:Orient* was set up some 20 years ago “to show Arab art for that art’s sake” – Arab artists until then had had to ‘hide’; *Re:Orient* gave them the chance to ‘take pride’ in their art. When *Re:Orient* started out with a festival, established cultural institutions occasionally invited artists of Arab origins to ‘do their thing’; in the meantime, many institutions have become interested in change. *Re:Orient* considers it has had an influence.

Milan highlighted the multicultural reality of Serbia – a country with six official languages. He said that the challenge was to work interculturally, to get the different linguistic communities out of their cultural niches. *Kulturanova* produced the first theatre show ever jointly with Serbians and Albanians.

Nuria recounted that *Casa Arabe* was set up in 2007 (after the terrorist attacks in New York and Madrid of 9th September 2001 and 11th March 2004 respectively) in a situation where universal stereotypes about Arabs prevailed in the West and of course, also in Spain. It set out to fill the gap of presenting 'Arab artists' with their potential and achievements as individuals.

Conforming With vs Confounding Expectations

The stereotypes or expectations that artists of Arab origins have to conform to are, for example:

- That they stay in the artistic traditions of their countries of origin, e.g. that they subscribe to a certain tradition of music and dance, 'do their Arab thing'.
- That their life experiences as migrants or refugees are the subject matter of their art, e.g. that they make plays or write books about being foreigners or newcomers to a society
- That they produce art for people from their 'own communities' in Europe
- That they aid European countries in relationship building with their countries of origin

Artists of Arab origins partly or up to a certain point in their careers fulfill such expectations voluntarily, but there comes the point where they want to go beyond or aside such expectations but come up against constraints, hit walls.

The second question to the panelists therefore was:

How does this hitting the wall of expectations happen? Examples?

What does not conforming to expectations mean? What is the alternative way of being an artist of Arab origins in Europe?

Cecilia pointed out that confounding expectations entails a demonstration of a sense of self-worth, which can translate, for example, in artists with roots elsewhere asking a fair price for their art. Moreover, in Sweden, artists of foreign origins might have to confound the expectation that they are integrated to the degree that they produce art like any other Swede, i.e. they might want to claim the right to include 'foreign' references in their art.

Nuria commented that Cecilia's example sprang from a country where migrants are in their 'second or third generation' (problematic as this expression might be) – this situation did not apply yet to Spain where Immigration from Arab and Muslim countries (mainly Morocco, Algeria, Bangladesh and Senegal) is a relatively recent phenomenon (from the late 80s / early 90s).

In her experience, many Arab artists do not feel very comfortable with the idea of taking part in art shows labelled as "Arab"; they rather insist on being shown for their artistic merits alone.

But at the same time, Nuria explained that art can contribute to cultural diplomacy, and to facilitating international relations. In fact there are also artists who are pleased to work with institutions in order to promote national or collective identities by means of art shows or cultural activities.

Milan gave the example that artists of Arab origins play on the stereotype of 'the terrorist'. Otherwise, defying expectations was a matter for cultural groups such as Hungarians or Roma in

Serbia to leave their cultural ghettos, to interact and to produce artistic quality to be seen beyond their communities, e.g. the Roma theatre *White Coat*.

Time ran out for further questions such as:

- How close are you in your respective countries to new ‘dynamic cultural canons’? How long might the journey still be?
- What benefit has European cooperation in the context of Moussem.eu brought?

A short discussion with the audience touched on issues such as:

- *Engines of change*: How can diversity be made the concern of a wider spectrum of cultural organisations? How can it be achieved that cultural spending is distributed along diversity criteria? Somebody mentioned that such political change has sometimes come about in the wake of riots, e.g. in the Brussels districts of Anderlecht and Molenbeek in 2011, where one response was to direct cultural spending more to the benefit of people with foreign origins. Somebody else pointed out that “Flanders is shameless in denying diversity”. Chokri Ben Chikha’s proposal of “truth commissions” (taking inspiration from South Africa’s post-apartheid truth & reconciliation commissions) in order to reveal Belgium’s ‘integration failures’ was discussed – he said that the objective, subjective and inter-subjective/ dialogical truths of the denial of diversity needed to be brought out into the open.
- *Obstacles to change*: These are not just the obvious ones such as rising xenophobic, populist forces, but also the inertia of well-meaning people or their inadvertent defense of structural elements of cultural discrimination, such as the defense of Bourgeois artistic heritage and of ‘quality’ standards. The discussion could have happily continued here, but time ran out ...



Milan Vracar & Sabine Frank



Top: Nuria Medina Garcia & Cecilia Hörnell-Sunar

The Arab at the service of stereotypes

Workshop in Arabic – summary

I don't know how it is in the Netherlands, but the Belgian suffers from a negative image made in France. In Belgium, we also have our own stereotypes: the lazy Walloon, the Flemish racist, the arrogant French, the Dutch cheapskate, etc...

In the Arab world, we can also take pride in a well-functioning stereotype machine. All our regional and cultural diversity has been converted into stereotypes. The image of the promiscuous Moroccan woman has pervaded even our literature. The Arab man from the Gulf also suffers from a negative image that often appears in film and television: the affluent Bedouin thirsty for sex.

Between these two 'worlds', stereotypes thrive. Especially when dragging a history of conflict that began long before the Crusades and continued after 11 September 2001. This conflictual heritage relies on stereotypical political and media treatments to be revived.

Within this duality, the stereotypes of the Arab continue to form. Prejudices, rooted in the collective mind of society, lead to a simplistic and negative vision. They are transposed onto the political level in order to consolidate the conditioned image.

Armed with a critical mind and a sense of autonomy, the Arab artist should first get rid of all these stereotypes and in so doing restore the universal dimension and unifying role of culture. However, can we really work towards reconciliation without colliding with a dominant culture that is peacefully based upon its own prejudices? Is it possible to embrace independent cultural and artistic action without failing a general horizon of expectation?

Historical, cultural and societal elements surely condition the reception of an artistic work. Yet how can creation resist these influences?

Patrons in Europe often make recommendations based on a predetermined vision. These specifications force cultural actors to yield to this vision in their hunt for subsidies. Cultural subsidy hunters. Application file engineers. Experts who anticipate the expectations of the authorising officers. Among them, there are many subservient Arabs. Arabs at the service of stereotypes.

In this way, integration becomes indistinguishable from assimilation, which tends to eliminate any cultural specificity. And art, which is supposed to question, to transgress, to surprise and to dialogue so as to create unity in diversity hides - out of opportunism - behind political banners. It is smuggled past the doubt, the uncertainty and the ambiguity that is paramount to any form of creation or deep understanding and introduced into a world where "everyone is beautiful, everyone is nice".

The subservient Arab is a cultural Judas; an apostle faithful to the dominant culture in order to better betray it. He claims to solve all its complex human equations by utilising comforting yet obsolete methods.

Free cultural and civic action today is the struggle of independent artists who, while keeping a critical sense toward themselves and their societies of origin, never yield, neither to facility nor to compromise.

This conference is a platform for resistance against the cultural bondage that distorts and prevents real dialogue. A dialogue based on respect and recognition of difference is urgently needed to overcome these preconceptions about the Arab and bring to the fore the most beautiful facets of a culture and a language, each with their own dynamic, both specific and universal, in the pluralist Europe of today.



Taha Adnan & Allal Bourqia



The Subservient Arab

Workshop in French – summary

The Arabs themselves are not the sole producers of the figure of the Subservient Arab. It originates at the intersection between their projects and the horizons of expectation that determine their reception.

Artists Nacera Belaza and Michel Khleifi addressed this issue in the framework of the francophone workshop at the conference *L'Arabe de service* (The subservient Arab) (Moussem.eu, 14 October 2013, Brussels). They are both well-established artists in their respective fields: Michel Khleifi, thirty years of filmography, pioneer of the contemporary Palestinian cinema, and Nacera Belaza, choreographer in the French contemporary dance field, regularly presented and programmed by leading international institutions.

Let us be aware of the exceptional power of the work of the image when it comes to ‘recognizing’ a Palestinian filmmaker as the inevitable fiery anti-Semitic agitator (virulent controversy surrounding the film *Route 181* by Eyal Sivan and Michel Khleifi, and the professional black-listing of the latter). Exceptional power of the choreographic production of bodies also, when we want to discern in any Arab woman dancing on a stage an act of forced testimony to her valiant attempt at emancipation, set against a background of wretched enslavement.

Michel Khleifi and Nacera Belaza could multiply the anecdotes that testify to similar confrontations, reductive receptions of the impact of an expression the latter had wanted to create, from her very first attempts, that touches upon “the most fundamental questions of man” in their generality, without there even being the slightest mention of her surname in Arabic writing on the seasonal programmes of cultural institutions.

A large arc reveals itself between the intransigence of the principle stated by Nacera Belaza – “in art, every word must be without any concession, and fully strive toward the deepening of a singularity” – and the contextualized formulation proposed by Michel Khleifi – “culture is in any case a form of service. We are go-betweens in the flow of values. We develop languages, and a language is a form of compromise (not a compromise of principles) which implies an intention, if not of a common language, then at least of an admissible language.”

The place of the Arab artist can only be derived from the one he has the strength to take – “I have built my freedom in the face of constraint. In dealing with a small space, my solution was to start digging on the spot, ultimately digging deeper into myself. To this day, I am still amazed at the general resonance that such a personal search generates.” She reiterates that “the space one takes is perceived as a threat.”

When she travels to Algeria, working with young artists, her pedagogy involves a “necessary distancing, the need to get away from the preformatted expectations of the social context; an attitude that is specific to an art project.”

With regard to this shift, Michel Khleifi cites Proust: “The most beautiful language is a language that is foreign to itself.” The articulation of the artistic gesture upon its social context will depend

upon an “ability to integrate into the system of this society, to reflect its issues from within.” This while pointing out that “art is living language, affected by historicity, rich in the plasticity of its concepts. For long, we could have conceived ourselves in function of the centrality of the European city, when in fact the Arabs have incessantly destroyed their own cities (Beirut, Algiers, Damascus), multiplying their failure to establish other centralities” at a time when globalized thinking is considering the decline of uni-centered models.

Since these Western centralities, Michel Khleifi assesses the ambit of Arab artists as a positive participation in “a democratic and cultural activation of the societies in which they operate, but also of their societies of origin.” By refusing the position of the Subservient Arab, at least they can remain aware of being used, and then take everything, making themselves truly useful, for example when it comes “to speaking about the Arabic world we know, instead of leaving it to supposed experts who understand nothing about it.”



Nacera Belaza, Gérard Mayen & Michel Khleifi



Top: Gérard Mayen & Michel Khleifi

Conclusion

“A few years ago, the Arab intellectual was required to take position on Marxism, today it is in relation to what foreigners refer to as Islamism that he must define himself. If he refuses, the refusal is interpreted as an admission. It is taken further, a neutral objective analysis is not accepted, a value judgment, an approval or a condemnation is required. And, more than often, the intellectual yields to the blackmail ... ”

Abdallah Laroui, Islamism, Modernism, Liberalism (1997)

After the publication of the book and the documentary «Traduit de l'arabe» (Translated from the Arabic), Moussem organized, in cooperation with its European partners and deBuren, the conference “l'Arabe de service / Do your arab thing” in Brussels on Monday, October 14, 2013. At this multilingual conference, various artists and managers of cultural institutions living and working in Europe were brought together to think about the Western canon, and examine the potential of a more open and dynamic cultural field.

The abovementioned quote from the Moroccan historian and writer Abdullah Laroui perfectly translates the weight on the shoulders of the Arab intellectual and by extension also the artist, forced as they are to meet certain outside expectations. The title of the symposium “l'Arabe de Service” (The Subservient Arab) was inspired by this insight and Moussem’s decade-long experience with Arab artists, both from the Arab world and Europe.

The statements, ‘l'arabe de service’ and ‘do your arab thing’ are underlying and rarely expressed sentiments, prevalent in the many initiatives in which artists with a connection to the Arab world are involved. The premise of the conference was that Arab writers, artists and actors generally only gain access to the stronghold of authoritative artistic productions when they play their Arab “trump card”. To put it in other words, when they conform to the image of how a Westerner sees a stereotypical Arab.

It struck me how many artists working or touring in Europe – from artists and writers to directors and choreographers – addressed major political and social themes in their work. Gender, political oppression, Islamism, sectarianism and civil wars, burqas and headscarves are recurring themes with many Arab artists. Many address these out of conviction, others out of pure opportunism, or what an artist friend calls “the implicit task or assignment of the Western cultural missions in the Arab world and cultural organizations in Europe.” What also struck me is that many of these artists rarely show their work in their own countries and almost never to an Arab audience. It seems that their art is solely intended for ‘export’. Many others have chosen to fight in their own countries and give their art a place in their own societies. They refuse to make any compromises that would affect their artistic freedom.

These expectations towards Arab artists were cited and confirmed by several speakers. Dalhia Pessemiers mentioned the example of the immigrant actor who is only given roles that confirm the stereotypes of his or her cultural community. In the workshop together with the organizers, a number of the most important obstacles that hamper the individual emancipation of the Arab artist were brought to the fore: migrant, bridge builder, manufacturer of ethnic art, caught in his traditions

Nacera Belaza and Michel Khleifi quoted examples in which specifically the perception of their art had become problematic. Khleifi is labelled as an anti-Semitic Palestinian agitator and Belaza's work is perceived as a statement for the emancipation of Arab and Muslim women.

Zahia Rahmani, 'Art & Globalization' programme officer of the National Institute for Art History in Paris (INHA, Paris) opened the conference (and this e-book) by positing that the effects of orientalism have not yet been overcome and still determine, to the present day, the way the other, the Arab, is perceived. She also indicated that there is a difference between the European countries. She underlined the lack of research and critical thinking in France, a country that is paradoxically considered closest to the Arab world. A situation that results from the refusal to debate on multiculturalism and supra-nationalism. In Anglo-Saxon countries, the different cultural identities are approached in a more positive manner.

She further deplored the lack of a thorough self-critical approach in both the receiver (westerner) and the maker (the Arab artist) which creates a problematic relationship between them. Still, she noted that today in the Maghreb for example, there are artists who do not fall into this trap and do "their thing" without taking into account what 'the European' expects of them.

She was followed by Chokri Ben Chikha, who addressed the critical value of stereotypes as theatre markers. In the workshops in which artists discussed the reality of the field, everyone responded in their own way, but there was a common feeling of constraint because of the sense of reduced identity. Some feel obliged. Others have no problem with it. Many do not find the way.

In the Arab workshop, emphasis was placed on the historical accumulation of prejudice, from the Crusades to 9/11. The independent Arab artist who pursues a universal artistic language while aiming to preserve his specific character has no easy task. But it is the only way to enter into a genuine and equal dialogue with the other.

All these thoughts motivate us to continue our work in a broad international network, in this way contributing to a more open, dynamic, global art field in which artists are judged on their merits and not on their origin or culture.

Let's do our European thing, together!

Mohamed Ikoubaân

director **Nomadisch Kunstencentrum Moussem**



Mohamed Ikoubaân

Programme

2012-2013

Colloquium **L'Arabe de Service / Do your Arab thing**

Monday 14th of Octobre 2013, 10.00-17.00 at deBuren, Leopoldstraat 6, B-1000 Brussels

PROGRAMME

10.00	Registration
10.30 – 10.45	Welcome by Pascal Nicolas
10.45 – 11.20	Keynote presentation by Zahia Rahmani (INHA) (in FR)
11.20 – 11.40	Possibility for questions and reflections (NL/FR/EN)
11.40 – 12.00	Intervention by Chokri Ben Chikha (NL)
13.30 – 15.30	workshops and discussions in Dutch &, English, in French and in Arabic <i>NL</i> by Chokri Ben Chikha & Dahlia Pessemiers-Benamar moderated by Wouter Hillaert <i>EN</i> by Cecilia Hörnell-Sunar, Nuria Medina, Milan Vracar moderated by Sabine Frank <i>AR</i> by Allal Bourqia & others moderated by Taha Adnan <i>FR</i> by Nacera Belaza & Michel Khleifi moderated by Gérard Mayen
15:40 – 16.20	Report of the workshops by moderators (NL/EN/AR/FR)
16.20 – 16.30	Conclusions by Mohamed Ikoubaân (NL)

The activities were translated simultaneously in English, Dutch and French

ORGANISATION

Moussem & deBuren (BE) in collaboration with

Re:Orient (SE), *Association Kulturanova* (RS), *Liverpool Arab Arts Festival* (GB), *Centre Choréographique National de Caen / Basse-Normandie* (FR), *Casa Arabe* (ES), *Compagnie Nacera Belaza* (FR)

With the support of:

the Culture Programme of the European Union & the Flemish Community



Contributors

Zahia Rahmani arrived in France in 1967. Writer and researcher she leads a program on contemporary artistic practices and globalization at the INHA in Paris.

Wouter Hillaert (BE) works as a freelance art critic (De Standaard, rekto:verso, ...)

Chokri Ben Chikha (BE) is theater director and researcher

Dahlia Pessemiers-Benamar (BE) is a Flemish actress.

Sabine Frank (DE) leads the activities of the Platform for Intercultural Europe, its membership relations and association management.

Nuria Medina Garcia (ES) is responsible for cooperation and programming as the coordinator of Culture and New Media at the Casa Arabe.

Cecilia Hörnell-Sunar (SE) is since ten years back Co-Director of the Swedish cultural organisation Re:Orient. She has a background in a range of different institutions working with multicultural and international programming.

Milan Vracar (RS) is an independent cultural producer and president of Association Kulturanova. Currently he is also working as a marketing manager in the Cultural Centre of Novi Sad in Serbia.

Taha Adnan (BE), poet and writer born in 1970 in Safi, grew up in Marrakech and since 1996 lives in Brussels.

Allal Bourqia (BE) writer and researcher for whom Brussels is his main inspiration.

Gérard Mayen (FR), journalist and dance critic in a.o. Danser, Mouvement, Mouvement.net, Quant à la danse, Repères Biennale du Val-de-Marne, ...

Nacera Belaza (FR), born in Médéa (Algeria), is choreographer.

Michel Khleifi (BE), born in Nazareth (Palestine) is film director from Noce en Galilée to Zindeeq.

Mohamed Ikoubâan is director of the Nomadic Arts Centre Moussem.

Pascal Nicolas co-ordinates the international projects of the Nomadic Arts Centre Moussem.

About **moussem.eu** and partners

Moussem.eu seeks to expand trans-national mobility of art(ists) and intercultural dialogue by developing a common identity without frontiers focusing on new and old migratory flows. The enlargement of the European Union, coupled with increasing mobility linked to the common market, new and old migratory flows, the new trade ties with the rest of the world, the education, leisure and globalisation in general, have led to increased contacts between cultures, religions, ethnic groups and languages. Within this framework, the development of intercultural skills and the expansion of intercultural dialogue are essential. Since Member States deal with migration and cultural diversity in various ways, the capabilities of the partners will differ.

In this case a European project is needed for **a critical reflection on the European canon from the perspective of the presence of European artists with an Arabic background.**

To this end Moussem.eu emphasises on sharing the good practices and experiences to enlarge the intercultural dialogue by

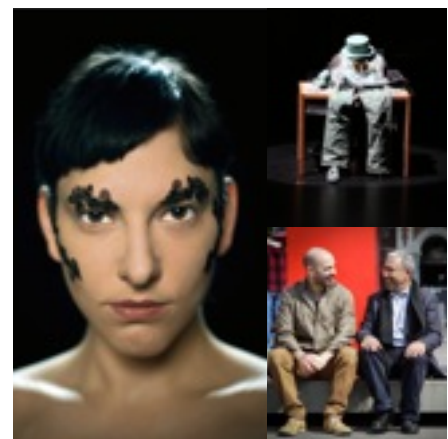
- the development of an artistic practice with European artists with Arabic background who reflect critically today's and yesterday's canons to jointly enlarge the contemporary canon.
- discussion and preliminary research to promote the introduction, selection and participation of artists with extra-European backgrounds to the regular European art institutions

and this all to empower the different partners and artists in their contemporary European intercultural ambitions.

The formula Moussem applies in Belgium to integrate not only artistic productions but also artists and audiences with a non-European (mostly North-African or Arabic) background, inspires to extend this intensive method in the European space. The formula of Moussem is to include its activities within regular art houses and cultural institutions. The character remains therefore deliberately nomadic.

Moussem.eu 2012-13 started with 4 artistic exchanging productions by artists with Arabic roots, working in the common European space. The productions were proposed by the different partners in different fields of the arts:

1. *Masculines* – an international dance production directed by H  la Fattoumi (FR) and Eric Lamoureux (FR), directors of the CCNC/BN, about Orientalism an international dance production
2. *Waiting* – a research project curated by Mokhallad Rasem (BE)
3. *Arabic-European Literary saloon* – a literary production of Re:Orient (SE) and Moussem (BE)
4. *I exist (in some way)* – a visual art production of LAAF and The Bluecoat Liverpool (GB) and Moussem (BE) in partnership with Look 13, Liverpool's international photography festival



Clockwise, from left: *Masculines*, *Waiting*, Arabic-European Literary saloon

All productions have to be seen also as a contemporary reflection on the European canon by artists with an extra-European (in this case North-African or Arabic) roots, living and/or working in the common European space. The target groups of moussem.eu are the cultural professionals, the general public and a new audience from communities with a extra-European background in Europe. These productions were disseminated in different European countries. Launching bridges between cultures, moussem.eu adds European art houses to establish a network for art(ists) with Arabic roots. Therefore we elaborate the platform for needs of European artists with Arabic background in their dialogue with the regular European art scene.

The reflection on the traditional Western canon moussem.eu makes, offer the professionals an opportunity to build a more contemporary European identity, also taking account of new and old migratory flows. Working on a broader independent network with the moussem.eu productions, the sharing platform and the discussions on the selection of artists with extra-European cultural backgrounds to regular art institutions, the participation of these artists should increase significantly. The project also offers the general audience the same opportunity. To attract a new audience the partners work with community organisations like the Federation of Moroccan Associations in BE and the Liverpool Arabic Centre in GB.

For the trans-national artists moussem.eu 2012-13 is working with, the European space is daily live reality, even if some don't have access to regular cultural institutions and art in general. Therefore moussem.eu will also establish a sharing platform for needs of European artists with Arabic background and for prospecting experiences in the Arabic world besides the research on introducing artists from all different cultural backgrounds to the regular European Arts scene will be the longer-term result of this project of cultural cooperation.

The concluding conference was also a first introduction for new members of a growing network that has as main objectives to widen and enforce trans-national mobility of art(ists) and intercultural dialogue creating identity and togetherness without frontiers in the European space, taking account of new and old migratory flows, by stimulating the participation of artists from different cultural background focussing on artists with Arabic roots in the arts. The reflection of these artists also contributes to build an common identity of all European citizens. The project builds a constructive dialogue with partner organisations on the globalisation, internationalisation and interculturalisation of our society. For this we will try to establish a broader network to introduce a new (multi-annual) project in 2014.

Traduit de l'arabe

In 2011 the Nomadic arts centre Moussem (BE) launched the project moussem.eu with De Nieuw Amsterdam (NL), Compagnie Nacera Belaza (FR) and the Liverpool Arab Arts Festival (GB) with the support of the European Commission. [Moussem.eu](http://moussem.eu) enables artists of Arabic origin to create with international perspective. As a result the book and the film *Traduit de l'arabe* were published. Several of the finest and internationally best reputed authors and opinion makers delivered a contribution for this book. The multilingual book contains articles, essays, poems of Ahdaf Soueif, Abdelkader Benali, Gérard Mayen, Professor Gema Martin-Muñoz, Taha Adnan and Ramsey Nasr with an introduction of Mohamed Ikoubaân and closing remarks by Pascal Nicolas.

The film (30') portrays Nacera Belaza, Sabri Saad El Hamus, the LAAF and Strange Fruit.

Watch the movie 'Traduit de l'arabe' here: <http://vimeo.com/53590220>.

The book 'Traduit de l'arabe' is also available online: <http://issuu.com/moussem/docs/traduitdelarabe>.

Partners

The Flemish nomadic arts centre Moussem (BE) is co-ordinator of this project

Since 2001 Moussem has been putting mainly art and culture from artists with a link or an open mind towards the Arab world on stage. Moussem (co-)produces and creates artistic productions and brings a wide and diverse (urban) audience into contact with well-known, lesser-known and novice artists from the Arab diaspora in Europe, Maghreb countries and the Middle East. As a nomadic arts centre Moussem links up with regular art houses and institutions. Through growing collaborations it occupies a crucial but still empty space in the intense European art landscape. Due to its diverse productions Moussem confronts and dialogues with the art scene as well as with mixed audiences. Moussem works inclusive mainly by collaborating consequently with established art and cultural institutions. It takes always care for the artist and his artistic freedom. Creating intercultural dialogue it generates also a new audience that seldom takes part in artistic events.

The Centre Choréographique National de Caen/Basse-Normandie / Compagnie Fattoumi-Lamoureux (FR)

The Centre Choréographique National de Caen/Basse-Normandie directed by Héra Fattoumi (FR) and Eric Lamoureux (FR) is a real resource centre for dance on its territory.

Its mission is to:

- create choreographies of Héra Fattoumi and Eric Lamoureux;
- distribute their productions;
- sensitise the public for choreography through workshops, presentations and an international dance Festival (danse d'ailleurs)
- host other companies by residencies and coproduction.

The spirit of CCN/BN is to link rather than divide.

The Liverpool Arab Arts Festival (UK)

LAAF was founded in 2002 by Liverpool Arabic Centre and the Bluecoat to provide Liverpool with a programme of Arab arts and culture. LAAF now works with Liverpool's major art institutions, such as the Picturehouse at FACT, the National Museums Liverpool and the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, but also with artists and community organizations. The festival takes place every year and is an event that raises awareness and promotes an understanding and appreciation of Arab culture. Every year the festival grows not only in size, but also in confidence, expectation and ambition and remains the only annual festival of its kind in the UK. In 2010 LAAF won the Arab British Centre's Culture & Society Award for its outstanding contribution to the public's knowledge and understanding of the life, society and culture of the Arab people. Since April 2011 it has been the only structurally subsidized Arab Arts Festival in Great Britain.

Re:Orient (SE)

Re:Orient was founded in 1993, with the ambition to present culture acts of high quality from the regions Middle East and North Africa. Today we arrange festivals, concerts, seminars, debates as well as nightclubs throughout the year. We are situated in Malmö, running a venue The Moorish Pavillion and in Stockholm and Vadstena working nomadically with most of the main stages as Sodra Teatern, Konserthuset and Kulturhuset.

The Association Kulturanova (RS)

Association Kulturanova is a non-governmental, non-profit organization founded for popularization and affirmation of art and cultural spirit. It was founded in May 2001 in Novi Sad (the capital of Vojvodina, region in Serbia). Organization was founded as "umbrella" association of various non-formal independent art groups and individuals, young artists from Novi Sad. Organization's focus is on development of urban youth culture and raising awareness on relevant social issues, with the vision of building creative platforms for youth in Novi Sad and in region.

The Bluecoat Liverpool (UK, associated partner)

Liverpool's creative hub, the Bluecoat showcases talent across visual art, music, dance, live art and literature. As the most historic building in Liverpool's city centre, the Bluecoat has four galleries. It houses a creative community of artists and businesses and runs a participation programme with local communities. In 1998 the Bluecoat with Liverpool Arabic Centre (a local community organisation), co-founded Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival (LAAF) providing Arabic arts and culture in Liverpool and beyond. The Bluecoat is an arts venue that has built a substantial reputation for the work it has done and the way it has always changed to be the role model for its time.

European Commission

Culture programme: a serious cultural investment

The EU's Culture programme (2007-2013) has a budget of €400 million for projects and initiatives to celebrate Europe's cultural diversity and enhance our shared cultural heritage through the development of cross-border co-operation between cultural operators and institutions.

The Culture programme aims to achieve three main objectives: to promote cross-border mobility of those working in the cultural sector; to encourage the transnational circulation of cultural and artistic output; and to foster intercultural dialogue.

For the achievement of these objectives, the programme supports three strands of activities: cultural actions; European-level cultural bodies; and analysis and dissemination activities.

For the organisation of the conference **l'Arabe de service / Do your Arab thing** we collaborated also with:

deBuren

The Flemish-Dutch House deBuren (“the neighbors”) presents beauty and wisdom of the Low Countries, and offers a platform for debate about culture, science, politics and the society in Flanders, The Netherlands and Europe. It is a place where artists, journalists, academics and politicians get the opportunity to voice their thoughts.

Casa Árabe

Casa Árabe and its International Institute of Arab and Muslim World Studies is a consortium formed on July 2006 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and the Spanish Agency for International Development, the autonomous communities of Madrid and Andalusia and the town councils of Madrid and Cordoba. The main goals of Casa Árabe, with headquarters in Madrid and Cordoba, are to strengthen bilateral and multilateral policies, to promote economical, cultural and educational relations, as well as supporting the development of training and knowledge on the Arab and Muslim world.

Compagnie Nacera Belaza

The Company Nacera Belaza is the dance company of Nacera Belaza. Each of her creation is based on the relation between the human being and his environment including spiritual tensions, between the human being and his reflecting, believing body. With an intensity of focus, Belaza and her sister Dalila, build up a trance-like, at times transcendent, experience through repetition and variation. The Company creates a space simultaneously brimming with tension and emptiness. A raw sensory landscape in which hollowness and volume co-exist with scientific precision. The sisters Belaza reveal nothing and everything in a captivating swoop.