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Arab arts in focus at London's Nour Festival

After the successful Shubbak Festival in London back in July, Arab artists are in the city's spotlight again

Farah Montasser from London, Monday 14 Nov 2011



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Nour Festival is an arts festival that features contemporary art, film, music, literature and fashion from around the Middle East and North Africa. The festival's organisers chose the word *nour* (Arabic for light or illumination) for its aptness to describe the showcase of arts currently going on at the Leighton House Museum in London after the Arab Spring.

In its second year, the festival has gained more exposure through the significance of events in the region it covers. "It is the revolutions across the Arab countries that currently attracts the world to the Arab culture," says Imorgan Ware, projects manager of the Arab British Centre in London and a co-organiser of the Nour Festival. A successful example is the Shubbak Festival back in July, where a number of renowned and young artists showcased their work.

"When funding the Shubbak festival back in July, the Mayor of London's office had expected attendance of the festival to be around 2,500 to 3,000 attendees; however, the number of visitors by the end of the festival had reached over 20,000," Ware says.

Despite its smaller size, Nour is international in scope, attracting leading names in contemporary Middle Eastern and North African art. Among its featured artists and programmes from the Middle East is the Egyptian movie *18 Days*, a collective project directed by Egyptian directors like Mariam Abou Ouf, Kamla Abu Zikri, Ahmed Alaa, Mohamed Ali, Ahmed Abdallah, Marwan Hamed, Yousry Nasrallah, Sherif Arafa among others. The film captures the Egyptian uprising that ousted Hosni Mubarak from power.

Egyptian contribution to the festival is also in the form of a short film entitled *Messages from Tahrir*, to be screened at the end of November. *Messages from Tahrir* is based on a conversation between writer and broadcaster Anthony Sattin and photographer Karima Khalil who presents some of the evocative images from her book bearing the same name. Khalil's book presents her photographs from Tahrir and the historical period that they capture.

Among other artists at Nour are Iraqi Suad Al Attar and Juliana Khalaf, the curator of a special private exhibition tour entitled "Subtitled: Narratives from Lebanon". The exhibition gathers over 30 artists from Lebanon who through photography and contemporary art canvases tell the story of their country's political struggle.

"The choice of Leighton House Museum is ideal to get more people to visit this small unknown museum in London," says Ware. "Furthermore, it is in a location in London next to a number of other small museums that the general public know little about."

Leighton House Museum was originally the home of Lord Leighton, a British traveller, art collector and artist who travelled to the Middle East during the nineteenth century. From his travels he created a traditional Arabic home in the heart of London. "It was only two years ago that Lord Leighton's house was renovated and transformed into a museum," confirms Ware.

A number of musical performances taking place at Nour Festival include a concert by Syrian pianist Riyad Nicolas who will perform a repertoire by contemporary Arab composers such as Jabri, Al Succari, Wadi and Al Hajjar. "This event is part of our participation at the festival," says Ware.

Nour Festival is taking place at the Leighton House Museum until 30 November 2011.

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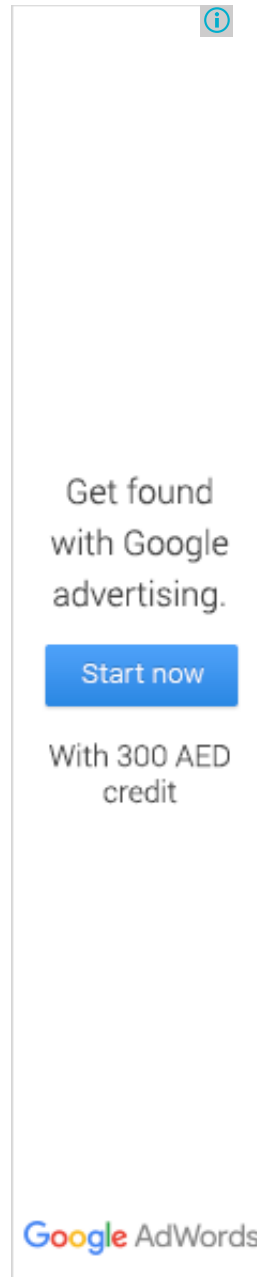
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