

## THE AFRICA INSTITUTE SHARJAH LAUNCHES GHANAIAN PLAYWRIGHT MOHAMMED IBN-ABDALLAH'S PLAY, 'SONG OF THE PHARAOH' IN ACCRA

***As part of the 'Writing Africa' publication series, 'Song of the Pharaoh' is a timeless story of the love, political, and religious transformation of Egyptian society and African nation-states.***

Accra, July 16, 2022 — The Africa Institute, Sharjah launches renowned Ghanaian avant-garde artist Mohammed Ibn-Abdallah's play, *Song of the Pharaoh* at Base Lounge in Accra, Ghana on July 16, 2022.

Coming from a long line of pan-African activists and Islamic thinkers, Abdallah is the major Ghanaian playwright of his generation, and *Song of the Pharaoh* is his most ambitious play. It explores the life of the eighteenth dynasty Pharaoh Akhnaten and is a timeless story of love, politics, and religious intrigue set in ancient Egypt. The play brings together decades of formal theatrical experiments with a lustrous and spectacular Pan-African aesthetic combining Ghanaian traditional music and dance forms with an eclectic, creative blend of styles from Egypt and across Africa.

The book was ceremonially unveiled by the author Mohammed Ibn-Abdallah in line with The Africa Institute's second edition of the country-focused season with the focus on 'Global Ghana,' an annual initiative exploring one African country or African diaspora community through a range of scholarly and public programs.

To further engage and stimulate audiences, the event hosted a panel discussion, music performance and showcased an ensemble that included some original and new cast members who performed excerpts from *Song of the Pharaoh* serving as a tribute and celebrating the launch of the publication of the play in English and Arabic.

"This book, *Song of the Pharaoh* is the first bilingual publication as part of The Africa Institute series, *Writing Africa*, making it accessible to Arabic readers across the globe. This represents our commitment of The Africa Institute to translation in order to familiarize readers with the diversity and complexities of African creative expressions and as an important form of bringing different cultures into a fruitful dialogue of ideas, interpretation, and presentation of African cultural forms and norms," said Salah Hassan, Director, The Africa Institute.

Introducing the book, ethnographer and artist Jesse Weaver Shipley, spoke of Abdullah's seamless technique of incorporating music, dance, and reflexive reflections on the performance itself into the dramatic narrative, forcefully and playfully pulling audiences into the story itself.

"It is important to say that Abdallah's work in theatre and the arts have opened critical dialogues among artists and audiences in our evolving cosmopolitan world. As a writer, director, and politician working on culture, his work tries to rebalance the power dynamics that lie just below



the surface and to tell stories that reshape how people remember and forget,” said Shipley.

This publication was made possible by the generous support and leadership of Hoor Al Qasimi, President, The Africa Institute; Awo Asiedu, Acting Dean of the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, Legon for her guidance and to the entire faculty, staff, and students at the School of Performing Arts and lastly all the highly skilled translators.

Song of the Pharaoh first premiered at Ghana’s National Theatre in September 2013 with a cast that included the National Theatre Company, the National Dance Ensemble, and the National Symphony Orchestra. Musicians blended the akpaloo and kora genres into a modern original musical score. The dance choreography blended various movement styles from around the continent, incorporating staccato aggressive war dances, celebratory sweeping wedding movements, and somber funerary marches rendered in slow-motion.

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### **About The Africa Institute**

Established in 2018, The Africa Institute in Sharjah, UAE, is an interdisciplinary academic research institute dedicated to the study, research, and documentation of Africa and the African diaspora. As the only institution of its kind located in the Gulf—the historical nexus of African-Arab cultural exchange—The Africa Institute is uniquely positioned to expand understanding of African and African diaspora studies as a global enterprise. The Africa Institute’s curriculum of postgraduate studies is designed to train the next generation of critical thinkers in African and African diaspora studies, through its program of international symposia and conferences, visual art exhibitions and artist commissions, film and performance series, and community classes and outreach events. The Institute is expanding public understanding of Arab and African exchange within not only the scholarly community but also the local Sharjah community, the region, and around the globe. The Institute has commissioned Adjaye Associates to design a new campus that, when complete in 2023, will allow for significantly expanded programming. The Institute is led by Dr. Salah M. Hassan and Hoor Al-Qasimi. *Learn more at <https://theafricainstitute.org/>.*

### **About Dr. Salah M. Hassan**

Long active in Sharjah, the larger Gulf region, and Africa through his research, conferences, and curatorial work, including many projects developed in collaboration with Sharjah Art Foundation, Dr. Salah M. Hassan played a foundational role in the development of The Africa Institute. He currently serves as the Institute’s founding Director, where he continues to spearhead its academic, research, artistic, and public programs in collaboration with The Africa Institute President Hoor Al Qasimi.

Hassan concurrently holds positions at Cornell University as the Goldwin Smith Professor of African and African Diaspora Art History and Visual Culture in the Department of Africana Studies and Research Center; in the Department of History of Art and Visual Studies; and as Director of the Institute for Comparative Modernities. Hassan also served as Professor of History of Art in African and African American Studies and Fine Art at Brandeis University, where he was previously awarded the Madeleine Haas Russell Professorship in the Departments of African and Afro-American Studies and Fine Arts (2016-2017).



### ***About Hoor Al-Qasimi***

Hoor Al Qasimi has been spearheading the establishment of The Africa Institute into a major international institution, building upon the rich legacy of Afro-Arab cultural and scholarly interchange in Sharjah, including the landmark 1976 "Symposium on African and Arab Relations" that envisioned a future nexus for learning and collaboration between the two regions. Working in partnership with Africa Institute Director Dr. Salah M. Hassan, she continues to shape its programming and future endeavors.

A practicing artist and curator, Al Qasimi is also President and founding Director of Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF), which was established in 2009 as a catalyst and advocate for the role of art in Sharjah, the UAE, regionally, and internationally. With a passion for supporting experimentation and innovation in the arts, Al Qasimi has continuously expanded the scope of the Foundation over its ten-year history to include major exhibitions that have toured internationally; artist and curator residencies in visual art, film, and music; commissions and production grants for emerging artists; and a wide range of educational programming for children and adults in Sharjah. In 2003, Al Qasimi co-curated Sharjah Biennial 6, and has since continued as Biennial Director. Under Al Qasimi's leadership, the Sharjah Biennial has continued to grow as an internationally recognized platform for contemporary artists, curators, and cultural producers. Her leadership in the field led to her election as president of the International Biennial Association (IBA) in 2017.

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