

## 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



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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.

### **About Africa Hall and the future campus of The Africa Institute**

Initially inaugurated in Sharjah in 1976, Africa Hall is an auditorium and performance venue that is now part of The Africa Institute. Its first cultural and political event was the Arab-African Symposium—after which it was named—held from 14 to 18 December 1976. The new Africa Hall, which has been rebuilt on the same site as the original building, will serve as the meeting place for conferences, symposia, lectures, film screenings, stage plays, and other performances and events related to the activities of The Africa Institute. An additional building, to be designed by the renowned Ghanaian–British architect Sir David Adjaye, OBE RA, will be constructed adjacent to Africa Hall to permanently house the research facilities, classrooms and library of The Africa Institute. The Africa Institute is an interdisciplinary academic research institute dedicated to the study, research and documentation of Africa; its people and its cultures; its complex past, present and future; and its manifold connections with the wider world. It is a globally oriented research-based think tank with a focus on the humanities and social sciences that will have a postgraduate studies program offering both masters and Ph.D. degrees with the aim of training a new generation of critical thinkers in the African and African diaspora. One particular area of interest is the historical and contemporary linkages between Africa and the Arabian Gulf region. The idea for The Africa Institute as a center for African and African Diaspora studies dates as far back as 1976, when Sharjah organized and presented the first Symposium on African and Arab Relations under the patronage of His Highness Dr Sultan bin Mohammed Al-Qasimi, Member of the Federal Supreme Council of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Sharjah.



## **Hoor Al Qasimi**

Hoor Al Qasimi is the President of The Africa Institute. She also serves as President and Director of Sharjah Art Foundation. Al Qasimi is a curator and practicing artist who received her BFA from the Slade School of Fine Art, London (2002), a Diploma in Painting from the Royal Academy of Arts, London (2005) and an MA in Curating Contemporary Art from the Royal College of Art, London (2008). In 2003, she was appointed curator of Sharjah Biennial 6, and has since continued to serve as the Biennial Director. Al Qasimi is on the Board of Directors for MoMA PS1, New York; KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin; Ashkal Alwan, Beirut, and Darat Al Funun, Amman.

She is President of the International Biennial Association; Chair of the Advisory Board for the College of Art and Design, University of Sharjah; and a member of the Advisory Board for the Khoj International Artists' Association (New Delhi). Since 2016, she has served on the Prince Claus Award Committee (2016–current) and was also on the jury for the Bonnefanten Award for Contemporary Art (2018).

## **Salah M. Hassan**

Salah M. Hassan is the Director of The Africa Institute, Sharjah, UAE. Hassan is the Distinguished Professor of Arts and Sciences in African Studies, and Director of the Institute for Comparative Modernities, and Professor of Art History and Visual Culture in the Africana Studies and Research Center, and the Department of History of Art and Visual Studies, Cornell University, Ithaca, US. Hassan is an art critic, curator, and founding editor of *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*.

He authored, edited, and co-edited several books including *Ibrahim El Salahi: A Visionary Modernist* (Museum for African Art and Tate Modern, 2012, 2013), *Darfur and the Crisis of Governance: A Critical Reader* (Cornell University Press, 2009), *Diaspora, Memory, Place* (Prestel Publishing, 2008), *Unpacking Europe* (NAi Publishers, 2001) and *Authentic/ Ex-Centric* (Forum for African Arts, 2001). Hassan has curated several exhibitions including major ones at the Venice and Dakar Biennales, and most recently *The Khartoum School: The Making of the Modern Art Movement in Sudan (1945–Present)*, and *The Egyptian Surrealists: When Art Becomes Liberty (1938–1965)* sponsored by the Sharjah Art Foundation and which opened in Sharjah and Cairo (2016). Hassan was the Madeleine Haas Russell Visiting Professor in African and Afro-American Studies, Brandeis University, Boston, US (2016–2017). He is the recipient of several grants and awards including the J. Paul Getty Postdoctoral Fellowship in Art History and the Humanities, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Andy Warhol Foundation, and Sharjah Art Foundation.

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