

PRESS RELEASE

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.



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 its understanding of African and African diaspora studies as a global enterprise. The Institute is conceived as a research-based think-tank, and a postgraduate studies institution, which aims to train a new generation of critical thinkers in African and African diaspora studies. Offering both master's and Ph.D. programs in the humanities and social sciences, The Africa Institute aims to be a model center of excellence that engages with, as well as shapes, new paradigms of thought in ways that will ensure Africa's place at the forefront of the academy for years to come. This is further pursued through its named senior and postdoctoral fellowships, its programs of international symposia and conferences, visual art exhibitions and artist commissions, film and performance series, and community classes and outreach events. The Institute has commissioned Adjaye Associate to design a new campus that is scheduled to complete in 2023, which will allow for significantly expanded programming. For further information visit <theafricainstitute.org>.

About 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).

About Salah M. Hassan

Salah M. Hassan is the Director of The Africa Institute, Sharjah, UAE, and Distinguished Professor of Arts and Sciences at Cornell University. Salah M. Hassan is an art historian, art critic and curator, and editor and co-founder of *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* (Duke University Press). He currently serves as a member of the editorial advisory board of *Atlantica, Journal of Curatorial Studies* and *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. He authored, edited and co-edited several books including



Ahmed Morsi: A Dialogic Imagination (2021); *Ibrahim El Salahi: A Visionary Modernist* (2012); *Darfur and the Crisis of Governance: A Critical Reader* (2009), and *Diaspora, Memory, Place* (2008); *Unpacking Europe* (2001); *Authentic/Ex-Centric* (2001); and *Art and Islamic Literacy among the Hausa of Northern Nigeria* (1992). He also edited and introduced, *Ibrahim El-Salahi: Prison Notebook* (New York and Sharjah, MoMA and SAF Publications, 2018, and guest-edited a special issue of *SAQ: South Atlantic Quarterly*, titled African Modernism (2010). Hassan has contributed essays to journals, anthologies and exhibition catalogues of contemporary art. He has curated several international exhibitions such as *Ibrahim El Salahi: A Visionary Modernist*, exhibited at The Tate Modern in London (July-October, 2013) after premiering at the Sharjah Art Museum (in March 2012) in Sharjah, UAE; *Authentic/Ex-Centric* (49th Venice Biennale, 2001), *Unpacking Europe* (Rotterdam, 2001-02), and *3x3: Three Artists/Three: David Hammons, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Pamela Z* (Dak'Art, 2004). He also curated several exhibitions for the Sharjah Art Foundation including *The Khartoum School: The Making of the Modern Art Movement in Sudan, 1945-2016* (2016-2017), and *When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938-1965)* (2016) in collaboration with Hoor Al Qasimi. He is the recipient of several grants and fellowships, such as the J. Paul Getty Postdoctoral Fellowship, Sharjah Art Foundation, Ford, Rockefeller, Andy Warhol and Prince Claus Fund foundations. Hassan has been honored as the 2021 Distinguished Professor by the College Art Association (CAA).

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