

PRESS RELEASE

The Africa Institute, Sharjah, launches new literature and cultural studies fellowship in tribute to Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison

Sharjah, UAE, September 28, 2022 — The Africa Institute, Sharjah, is pleased to launch its second senior fellowship titled “The Toni Morrison Senior Fellowship in African Diaspora Literature and Cultural Studies,” in honor of the late Toni Morrison, prolific writer, and first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.



“We are honored that this fellowship has been linked with the memory and remarkable work of Toni Morrison, one of the torchbearers of powerfully depicting Black America with its rich history, culture, identity, and experiences that expand beyond her novels. Her masterful, multilayered, purposeful, lyrical, and revelatory prose is like an ever-burning flame that continues to inspire upcoming and future writers and readers around the world,” said Hoor Al-Qasimi, President, The Africa Institute, Sharjah.

Being “a writer’s writer,” Morrison authored eleven novels, children’s books, and essay collections. Among them were celebrated works like *Song of Solomon*, which received the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977, and *Beloved*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988.

The one-year residency program based in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (UAE), is a milestone addition to the institute’s Research Fellowships Program dedicated to studying Africa and its diaspora in the humanities and social sciences.

“We aim for our Research Fellowships Program to facilitate an impactful opportunity for junior and senior scholars of African and African diaspora literature and culture to contribute, enrich, and



participate in this scholarly and intellectual pursuit during their term at the institute,” said Salah M. Hassan, Director, The Africa Institute, Sharjah.

Launched in 2021, the first inaugural senior fellowship was named in honor of the esteemed professor of African studies Ali A. Mazrui followed by two postdoctoral fellowships named after scholar and art critic Okwui Enwezor and for world-renowned Moroccan scholar Fatema Mernissi. The Africa Institute welcomes interested scholars to apply by for fellowships commencing in September 2023. For more visit, theafricainstitute.org.

With the state-of-the-art campus scheduled to be completed in 2023, The Africa Institute, Sharjah, is conceived as a research-based think tank and postgraduate studies institution that will offer masters and PhD programs dedicated to training a new generation of critical thinkers in African and African diaspora studies and evolving a new model for academic research, teaching, and documentation in the field.

Biography: Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison (1931–2019) was a prolific woman of letters whose contributions to world literature, the humanities, and the understanding of the African American experience expands beyond her novels and into incisive texts in cultural studies and critical theory. By all measures, Toni Morrison is one of the most important thinkers of our time.

Being the first African American woman to win the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature, Morrison made her debut as a novelist in 1970 and soon after gained the attention of both critics and readers for her rich, powerful depictions of black life, the supernatural, folklore, identity, friendship, and themes of womanhood. Read by millions, her unique voice encouraged individuals and entire nations to contextually imagine the black experience through powerful lyrical prose that continues to inspire old and new artists alike.

With an instructive mastery of the written word, she authored eleven novels, including *Song of Solomon*, which received the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977, and *Beloved*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. Among her other works are *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Tar Baby*, *Jazz* and *Paradise*, as well as children’s books, plays, and the essay collections *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (2007) and *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (2019).

Morrison attended Howard University, graduating with a BA in English in 1953, and Cornell University, where she earned an MA in 1955. After graduation she began a career that ranged from serving as a senior editor at Random House for nearly two decades, to an academic career that included Texas Southern University, Howard, Yale University, and Princeton University, where



she held the Robert F. Goheen Chair in the Humanities from 1989 until 2006, when she became professor emeritus. She held numerous lectureships and academic chairs at universities across the United States (US) and Europe and was honored with many honorary doctorates. Among the many prestigious accolades, Morrison was awarded Officer of the French Legion of Honour (2010), the US Presidential Medal of Freedom (2012), the American Academy of Arts and Letters' highest honor for excellence in the arts (2019), the Gold Medal for Fiction (2019), among many others. Moreover, in the fall of 2019 the US Senate passed a resolution honoring Morrison's life, work, and legacy and the state of Ohio officially designated her birthday, February 18, as "Toni Morrison Day" to be celebrated annually.

As a tribute to her life and career, her son Ford Morrison produced the film *The Foreigner's Home* (2018), which explores Morrison's artistic and intellectual vision through "The Foreigner's Home," her 2006 curated exhibition at the Louvre. Using exclusive footage of Morrison in dialogue with artists, along with extensive archival footage, music, and animation, the film presents a series of incisive exchanges about race, identity, foreignness, and art's redemptive power. The film is based on writings by Toni Morrison and conversations with Edwidge Danticat.

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 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 completed, will allow for significantly expanded programming. The institute is led by Hoor Al-Qasimi and Salah M. Hassan. Our website: <https://theafricainstitute.org/>

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 The Africa Institute Director 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 cocurated 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.

About 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 SAF, Salah M. Hassan has 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).

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