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At Sundance Institute’s Playwrights Residency in Germany, New Work by Syrian Theatre-Makers

Berlin and Neuklostersee, Germany — Six Europe-based Syrian playwrights will create new work in Arabic as part of Sundance Institute’s Playwrights Residency in Berlin and Neuklostersee, continuing the Theatre Program’s mission-driven tradition of nurturing and amplifying emerging and established playwrights at the cutting edge of their craft, and furthers their support of work from the Middle East and North Africa.

Table reads for the selected projects will take place May 3–4 at Berlin’s HAU Studio; casts will be drawn from the Exil Ensemble, a troupe of performers-in-residence at the Gorki Theater who are themselves newcomers to Europe, as well as other Syrian actors from the Berlin theatre community. Operations then move to Neuklostersee for six days of workshops and development-focused conversations with an international cohort of mentors and professionals. Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Annie Baker and Janice Paran will act as Creative Advisors; Chrystèle Khodr, Amir Nizar Zuabi and Rania Mleihi, as dramaturgs. The residency is led by Sundance Institute Theatre Program’s Artistic Director Philip Himberg, Producing Director Christopher Hibma, and Middle East / North Africa Manager Jumana Al-Yasiri, with support from Ignacia Delgado, Literary Manager and Roberta Levitow, Senior Program Associate. Two evenings of performance, “Sundance Syria 1” and “Sundance Syria 2,” will showcase the works-in-progress at the Gorki’s Studio Я on May 12 and 13.

“Many of the works address a very specific set of circumstances and places associated with the artistic diaspora,” said Himberg, “but the stories are deeply personal, rather than overtly political, as is the case in the best theatrical writing. Time and space to create are essential to global culture, especially in times of conflicts and major transformations; preserving and cultivating independent voices and storytelling enriches societies. We’re excited to convene these artists in Berlin, with its dynamic and thriving metropolitan community which includes many Middle Eastern & North African artists.”

Sundance Institute’s Theatre Program has a long history of supporting the development of U.S. and international new work for the stage, including projects such as Appropriate, Fun Home, A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder, Taha, Circle Mirror Transformation, An Iliad, The Lily’s Revenge, Happy New Fear, The Good Negro, The Light in the Piazza, Passing Stranger, Spring Awakening, Boredom, The Laramie Project and I Am My Own Wife and artists such as Amar Al Bojrad, Amer Heheel, Anna Akkash, Hamza Boulaiz, Kamal Khalladi, Raeda Taha,
Rima Najdi, and Zoukak. Their International activity supports mentorship and cross-cultural exchange, focused on artists from the Middle East and North Africa, and has included Labs, workshops and retreats in Morocco, East Africa, France and the U.S.

The playwrights and projects selected for the Residency are:

**Terror**  
**By Liwaa Yazji**  
A man enters his hotel room, angry. He calls his wife to tell her that he will be late because his flight had to stop in Amman shortly after taking off from Beirut because of the terrorist attacks in Paris. While on the phone, someone knocks on his door. It’s his ex-girlfriend, who was on the same flight to Paris. The game starts the moment he opens the door. She is here and she won’t leave until she gets answers to old questions, and perhaps this is her only chance for closure…

Filmmaker, poet, playwright, screenwriter & translator, Liwaa Yazji, is a graduate in both English Literature and Theater Studies (Damascus Higher Institute for Dramatic Arts). Her first play *Here in the Park* was published in 2012, followed by a collection of poems titled, *In peace, we leave home*, and her Arabic translation of Edward Bond’s *Saved*, both in 2014. Liwaa’s play *Q&Q* was produced by The Birth Festival at The Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester in 2015, and her play *Goats* will open at The Royal Court in London in March 2017. Her first documentary *Haunted* was released in 2014, and she's now co-writing *HEIM*, a TV series to be produced in Germany. In 2015, Liwaa was a poet-in-residence at the New York’s Poets House. She’s also a Board Member of Ettijahat-Independent Culture.

**Wind The Wind**  
**By Mudar Al Haggi**  
*Wind The Wind* chronicles the story of Mudar Al Haggi, a Syrian playwright, and his move to Germany as a refugee. Mudar’s arrival to Germany in the second half of 2015 coincides with the height of the refugee crisis in Europe. Shortly after arriving to Germany, Mudar applies for asylum, embarking on a long and complicated journey of bureaucracy and life in several refugee camps. Through this journey Mudar encounters different people, stories, details, and incidents. Al Haggi tells these stories from his own perception, reflecting on topics like identity, borders, the other, and revolution. These concepts become the source of a story of alienation and displacement emblematic of our times.

Dramaturg and playwright, Mudar graduated from Damascus Higher Institute for Dramatic Arts in 2004. For several years, he designed interactive activities for children, and trained trainers in interactive theatre methods. He participated in several writing workshops and residency programs in Europe and the Arab region. In 2013, Mudar launched So On And So Forth, a series of writing and documentation workshops for Syrian refugees. Mudar’s work include: *Just an Enemy of the People* - an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen’s *Enemy of the People* (2008), *The Don Juan* (2008), *Six Days No Less* (2009), *Bronze* (2010), and *Your Love is Fire*, to be brought to the stage in Berlin by Raafat Al Zakout in 2017.

**Chronicles of A City We Never Knew**  
**By Wael Qadour**  
*Chronicles of A City We Never Knew* addresses the dualism of love and violence in Damascus, before and during the beginning of the Syrian uprising in March 2011, the rise of the Free Syrian Army a few months later, and the transformations of the Syrian society in light of this dualism. The depicted pre-revolution Syrian society is marked by the latent violence dominating everyone’s life (both in open and closed spaces) as a direct result of the political, religious, and social oppressive patterns practiced in Syria for decades. The play describes and analyzes
the deep divisions that shook the Syrian society during the first months of the Syrian uprising (even before its militarization) leading to the emergence of new and even more brutal forms of violent behaviors and social conflicts.

Playwright and theater director, Wael Qadour, graduated from Damascus Higher Institute for Dramatic Arts in 2005. In 2007, Wael was a playwright-in-residence in the 19th International Playwrights Residency organized by the Royal Court Theatre in London. He served as a writer and a dramaturg for several plays, and directed Ohio Impromptu by Samuel Beckett (Damascus, 2011), Far Away by Caryl Churchill (Amman, 2012), Little Rooms (Amman, 2013), and When Farah Weeps by Mudar Al Haggi (Amman, 2014). Wael is a published playwright and play translator, and his works include: Virus (2008), Out of Control (2009), Little Rooms (2013), Dahal (2013), and The Confession (2015). Wael is also the Editor of the Arab Cultural Policies website, and the Head of Communications at Ettijahat-Independent Culture.

Love Stories in Marly's Hotel
By Amre Sawah
In Love Stories in Marly’s Hotel, five love stories are taking place in a fictional hotel in Beirut right after the Cedars Revolution, an epic political moment in the contemporary history of Lebanon. Some of these stories were witnessed first-hand by the playwright, while others were read in the press or heard in bars and cafés in Beirut. In this play, reality and fiction meet, without any reference to actual individuals or events. For 90 minutes, these stories will unfold with time and place intersecting. What unites these five stories is a bullet that will take the life of one of these lovers.

Writer, dramaturg, journalist, theatre and film director, Amre Sawah, graduated from Damascus Higher Institute for Dramatic Arts in 2002. Amre took part in several regional and international playwrights residencies and his play Family Secret (2006) was first directed in Damascus by French director Catherine Boskowitz, and published in both Arabic and French later the same year. In 2016, the play was directed in Bordeaux, where Amre sought asylum in 2015. Last year, Amre also made his stage directing debut in French with the play Under the Bridge written by Abdel Rahmane Khallouf and presented at Festival International des Arts de Bordeaux. Since 2012, he has been the producer of two shows for Radio Souriali, Days of Pearls and Misevaluation. Amre’s first collection of short stories titled A Room of Roses, was published in 2006.

Amad
By Wael Salem
Amad tells three stories taking place in Syria in 2013. The first story is about a novelist who, haunted by conflicts from his past, has not written much in while. The second story is about a mother who keeps having miscarriages, leaving her childless and desperate. The third story is about what looks like a perfect marriage between Dalia and Amjad, which is far from the truth. Living a lie, Dalia keeps denying her husband’s homosexuality. "Amad" refers to a specific type of time in Arabic: a time that has a beginning and an end. In this play where the action takes place in one day and in several places, the playwright reflects on the current catastrophe shaking the lives and destinies of Syrian individuals.

Graduate of Damascus Higher Institute for Dramatic Arts in 2015, Wael Salem attended several workshops at Damascus Theatre Lab. Wael made his debut as a playwright with a short play titled Living Room Tragedy. Soon after, he translated Joe Orton’s Entertaining Mr. Sloane, which was the first work by Orton to be translated into Arabic. In 2015, Wael was forced to leave Syria and has been living in Berlin since late March 2016. In fall of 2017, Wael will begin his candidacy as a PhD graduate in Theatre Studies, researching post-World War II German theatre, in addition to continuing his work as a dramaturg and translator.

Family Statement
By Ayham Abu Shaqra
Since the beginning of the Syrian uprising, Nora has been trying to escape from the tragic reality of her country, wondering if she should stay or leave for good. One day, she goes to obtain a family statement (required for traveling outside the country since the beginning of the war) and ends up discovering that she has a stepmother and a half-sister she has never heard of. The image of the homogenous and happy family she has cultivated all her life, shatters suddenly in front of her eyes. Nora is faced with two options: either keep what she discovered to herself or reveal the truth and risk destroying her family. Soon after, Nora seeks asylum in Germany and ends up living in a refugee camp and faces new personal struggles. The stage is divided into two spaces: on one side we see the past events which took place in Damascus in 2011, and on the other, we see Nora describing her current life in Germany and commenting on the past as she looks at it now from distance. Family Statement is about questioning all corrupt institutions of our past, including the institution of family.

A graduate of Damascus Higher Institute for Dramatic Studies and from the Communications Department at Damascus University in 2008, Ayham Abu Shaqra wrote his first play, Rami and Juliette, during a playwriting workshop organized in Beirut by Citizen Artists in 2013. He worked as a dramaturg on Find Me an Anchor Point by Zoukak Theater Group in Beirut in 2014. Ayham also joined the Contemporary Playwriting Program, organized by the British Council and The Royal Court Theatre in Beirut in 2014-2015. In 2014, Ayham joined Tandem, an exchange program between arts managers from the Arab region and Europe. As a cultural researcher, he has received two research grants from the Syria Trust for Development (2011) and Ettijahat-Independent Culture (2013), where he currently works as a Programs Manager. Ayham is currently in the Master's program in Arts Management at the Sorbonne in Paris.

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Sundance Institute
Founded in 1981 by Robert Redford, Sundance Institute is a nonprofit organization that provides and preserves the space for artists in film, theatre, and new media to create and thrive. The Institute's signature Labs, granting, and mentorship programs, dedicated to developing new work, take place throughout the year in the U.S. and internationally. The Sundance Film Festival and other public programs connect audiences to artists in igniting new ideas, discovering original voices, and building a community dedicated to independent storytelling. Sundance Institute has supported such projects as Boyhood, Swiss Army Man, Manchester By the Sea, Brooklyn, Little Miss Sunshine, Life, Animated, Sonita, 20 Feet From Stardom, Beasts of the Southern Wild, Fruitvale Station, Sin Nombre, Spring Awakening, A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder and Fun Home. Join Sundance Institute on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.

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