

Call for Papers

Artistic hubs in and of the Arab Region

LAWHA International Conference

Beirut/Lebanon, 3-4 June 2024 (Part I)
Berlin/Germany, 25 June 2024 (Part II)

What makes a place an artistic hub? Besides a certain extent of freedom of expression that allows ideas to coexist, flourish and materialize – and some degree of public and/or private material support for cultural expression – it needs a sufficiently large number of artists, writers, and intellectuals who are open to exchange their ideas and engage in creative experimentation. Connected to this network of individuals is often an urgency or a vision, be it political or within the field of arts and literature itself. A cultural hub is a place that radiates and attracts others to become an integral part of it, as it carries the promise of fulfilment. In this conference, we would like to explore the notion of artistic hubs in and of the Arab region, looking at what makes cities draw artists and intellectuals from the region over a period of time – and what makes things shift or change.

The conference will be held in two parts.

In **Part One**, which will be held in **Beirut on 3 and 4 June 2024**, we look at how, why and when things have shifted within the region, and what role different cities have played over time. Beirut of the 1950s to mid-70s is often referred to as the Arab capital of culture, in its so-called “Golden Age” – a notion that is increasingly questioned. For whom was Beirut relevant during this time, and for whom not? Was Cairo “the place to be” before Beirut? What role did Baghdad play on a regional level? Has the Gulf succeeded in becoming a hub, and what are its pull factors? How can one conceive of a cultural capital under occupation, as in the case of Ramallah? Part One examines who different cultural hubs speak to, and which actors and initiatives are central in attracting artists and intellectuals. We will also look at the nexus of cultural hubs and cosmopolitanism, and to what extent the two are linked. By focusing on different players within the cultural field, such as art departments, galleries, biennials, festivals, public relations departments, and the role of the diaspora, this part aims to conceptualize the push and pull factors of cultural hubs in the Arab region.



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We are interested in contributions that think about artistic hubs in the region, including but not limited to the following questions:

- Case studies of cities within the region and to what extent, in what capacity and at which point in time they can be considered artistic hubs/capitals (Cairo, Beirut, Baghdad, Kuwait, Sharjah, Jeddah, etc.)
- What are the driving forces (people/institutions/funding bodies/formal and informal spaces/networks, etc.) that draw artists from the Arab region to these places?
- Can one dissociate an artistic hub from a larger cultural hub?
- Is there one Arab cultural or artistic capital at a time, or can these exist in parallel?
- What makes things shift?
- What role does branding play?
- What is a critical mass of artists and intellectuals that allows one to speak of a cultural capital or artistic hub? Who determines this, and how?

In **Part Two**, to be held in **Berlin on 25 June 2024**, we look at artistic hubs of the Arab region. At the centre, we approach the question of whether Berlin can be considered the new cultural and artistic capital of the Arab region. We will analyse whether the factors that crystallized during the first part on what makes a place a cultural hub *in* the region can be applied to a hub *of* the region, albeit outside of it, to understand the role of Berlin – and potentially other cities – within the art world of the Arab region today. We are interested in contributions that think about Berlin's place as an artistic hub of the region, including but not limited to the following questions:

- Can one speak of Berlin as the artistic capital of the Arab region?
- What are the driving forces (people/institutions/funding bodies/formal and informal spaces/networks, etc.) that draw artists from the Arab region (and the diaspora) to Berlin?
- In what temporality does it make sense to speak of Berlin as an artistic hub or an artistic capital of the Arab region?
- If we assume that Berlin is the new artistic capital of the Arab region, what consequences does this have?
- What is a critical mass of artists and intellectuals that allows one to speak of a cultural capital or artistic hub? Who determines this, and how?

The conferences in Beirut and Berlin are planned as two separate events with different participants. Please submit your abstract (300 words) and short bio (100 words) **for one of the two parts** by 16 July 2023 to Nadia von Maltzahn at lawha@orient-institut.org.

