**Press Release**

29 March 2016, Beirut

**Ashkal Alwan Organizes the First Symposium on the Arabic Novel in Beirut**

The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, Ashkal Alwan, is organizing the first Symposium on Arabic Novel in Beirut from April 29th through May 2nd, 2016.

This four-day literary symposium is part of of Ashkal Alwan’s systematic efforts to approach contemporary shifts within the Arabic language by looking at its literature, narrative, idiomatic as well as communicative instruments.

We are witnessing an unprecedented boom, quantitative and qualitative, in the production of Arabic novels. In addition, the number of Arab novelists has grown considerably as a result of a thriving publishing industry for the novel across all Arab countries. Today, novels have become the face of Arab culture and its authors enjoy a prominent position. Bidding to attract novelists and discover new talent, the printing, publishing, and distribution of novels are now publishing houses’ primary occupation. It is arguable that the flourishing art of novel writing is coupled with an equally flourishing readership, a notably expanding market for the Arabic book, an increased number of editions, an advancement in printing technology, and an aestheticized interest in paper quality.

In recent years, the role of the numerous awards dedicated to Arabic novels has become ever more evident, namely in the making of “star” novelists, influencing production and marketing trends, and even affecting the reader's taste and preference. In fact, this strong interest in novels has driven poets and short-story writers towards novel writing, as the later weaves its way to becoming the most demanded and read literary genre; eventually taking over poetry’s historic prominence within Arabic literature.

These shifts are mirrored in yet another significant development: a vast and rapid movement of translating Arabic novels into foreign languages.

Over the span of four days, the symposium at Ashkal Alwan will attempt to address a number of questions divided into five themes:

**Theme I**

1. What are the reasons behind the growing quantity, quality, and readership of the Arabic novel?
2. Has the Arabic novel, as opposed to poetry, become the most prominent cultural expression of social, cultural and political shifts; thus driving the development of our written language?

**Theme II**

1. Is it possible to identify generic features, specific to the Arabic novel? Does every region or country demonstrate its own unique features and ‘line’ of novels?
2. What is the most prominent development in narrative techniques within Arabic novel writing?
3. To what extent did revolutions, wars, and political unrest play a role in reviving documentary and realist trends in the Arabic novel? Has political discourse been restored to novels?
4. Is the Syrian and Iraqi novel distinctive in its use of personal testimonies, autobiographical techniques, and historical documentation?
5. Is the Arabic novel, first and foremost, autobiographical and confessional?
6. Has the Arabic novel transcended the debate around the three traditional taboos of sex, religion, and politics?

**Theme III**

1. What effects does translation from (and to) Arabic have on novel production? Whom does a novelist address? Who is the imagined reader?
2. What views do foreign readers have on the Arabic novel? Why is it read?
3. Why are translated Arabic novels in such high demand?

**Theme IV**

1. Has the Arabic novel become the pillar of a cultural industry by creating institutions, markets, and jobs?
2. To what extent has the Arabic novel been the reason for the recent boom in printing, publishing, and distribution?
3. What are the implications of awards acting as a principal drive behind the rapid growth of novel publishing (testimonies and statements)?

**Theme V**

The Arabic novel appears to be primarily based on societal critique and on rebelling against family, tradition, and authority.

1. Is the novel definitely a counter-ethical discourse?
2. Is it the triumph of the individual’s choice, and her/ his freedom?
3. Is it exclusively the product of the city and a middle-class consciousness? What has changed since the Mahfouz model?

The Symposium on Arabic Novel features thirty novelists, publishers, and translators from Lebanon and the Arab world including: Elias Farkouh, Ali Bader, Mohamed El-Shahat, Elias Khoury, Ahmed Mohsen, Inaam Kachachi, Ahmed al-Saadawi, Mahmoud Wardani, Hassan Dawood, Ahmed Naji, Chokri Makhbout, Maha Hassan, Muhammad Abi Samra, Waddah Charara, Elisabetta Bartoli, Samuel Shimon, Mona Prince, Jabbour Douaihy, Jamal Gubran, Khalid al-Maaly, Fatma Elboudy, Taleb al-Refai, [Maya Abul Hayyat](http://www.banipal.co.uk/contributors/902/maya-abul-hayyat/), Hilal Chouman, Wajdi al-Ahdal, Sahar Mandour, Lina Badr, Miral al-Tahawy, Rashid Al-Daif, Bashir Mefti, Kamel Riahi, Najwa Barakat, and Iman Humaydan.

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