



01/10/2021

For Immediate Release

ART 27 SCOTLAND'S SOUTHSIDE COLLECTIVE LAUNCHES ITS FIRST EXHIBITION WITH TWO NIGHTS OF THEATRE, MUSIC AND POLITICAL DISCUSSION

October 8th & 9th: Art27 Scotland will celebrate the launch of its new project The Southside Collective with an exhibition, music and performances exploring the lives, stories and work of two Yemeni artists Shatha Altowai and Saber Bamatraf.

On the 8th and 9th of October, the newly-launched Southside Collective, a project of cultural rights organisation Art27 Scotland, will celebrate the work of two Yemeni artists-in-exile through a two-night event *Saber Came To Tea*. Saber Bamatraf and Shatha Altowai have shared an art practise since their marriage in 2014, and have discussed their experiences as a married couple living in a very conservative society in a number of initiatives, including their TED Talk at TEDxLIUSana'a, 'Synaesthesia', and the documentary film *Voice of the Rainbow*. The couple have both been awarded an IIE-Artist Protection Fund (APF) Fellowship 2020-21 and are in residence at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities within the University of Edinburgh.

The evenings will include a performance of *Turning Point* by [Saber Bamatraf](#), which is a musical collaboration with Edinburgh-based uilleann piper Phil Westwell and cellist Katherine Campbell. Saber is a self-taught pianist and composer, whose new music focuses on the courage and hope he has felt since being welcomed to Edinburgh after six traumatic years of uncertainty in a war-torn country.

Saber Bamatraf, Yemeni Artist-In-Exile: *"No-one mentions when artists are getting abuse. Nobody cares, not even the human rights organizations. When you see their reports for each year, there's nothing about the regulations against artists."*

There will also be a rehearsed reading of *Saber Came to Tea*, a theatrical performance in Arabic with English captions directed by [Robert Rae](#), Co-Director of Art27 Scotland and an Embedded Artist of the Southside Collective project, one of Scotland's leading directors and writers of socially-engaged theatre

and film. *Saber Came to Tea* tells a fictionalised dramatisation of the true story of newly married Saber making his first visit to his new bride's home in a remote village in the province of Hadhramout, after months of separation due to the war in Yemen. Taken by surprise by the gender separation traditions of his new family, Saber attempts to ease the unexpected tensions by resorting to magic. In an affectionate and intimate portrayal of the cultural & religious narratives that shape family relationships, *Saber Comes to Tea* looks at the critical implications for those that choose to break the rules.

Each evening will close with a panel discussion, in order to ground the work within its political contexts. The first evening, October 8th, will feature an exploration of the topic 'Women Artists in Exile' chaired by [Shaista Aziz](#), a journalist, women's rights and anti-racism campaigner, founder of the Labour Homelessness Campaign and Labour councillor for Oxford City Council. The evening of October 9th will close with a discussion of 'The War in Yemen' chaired by Emma Cockburn, the Scotland Co-Ordinator for [Campaign Against Arms Trade](#) (CAAT).



Saber Bamatraf & Shatha Altowai, Yemeni Artists-in-Exile who have shared an art practise since their marriage in 2014.

The evenings of performance and discussion will act as a launch event for *Scratched Identities*, a new photography and multimedia exhibition by [Shatha Altowai](#), recipient of the 2021 John Byrne Award. The exhibition, which will remain up in the Southside Community Center until November 11th, explores the women who are forced to hide their own identities due to the community constraints that are imposed on them. The pieces are inspired by the artists' experience of gender-based discrimination in her home country, and will include contributions from Yemeni women, Scottish women and local women in positions of leadership, in which their photographs are defaced and their faces are scratched off to

comment on the way in which women over a certain age in Yemen cannot have their photographs displayed.

Shatha Altowai, Yemeni Artist-In-Exile: “There are a lot of issues that I could highlight through my paintings while I was in Yemen. However, there are certain topics I wished to discuss but whenever I wanted to paint it, I hesitated, because it is considered as a sensitive matter and the people's reaction is un-guaranteed. So I am here in Edinburgh, with freedom of expression, I have more courage and confidence to release what's in my head. The idea of the *Scratched Identities* exhibition is to give support, solidarity and to show that there is a problem here - If we identify the problem, then the solution will be found.”

The Southside Collective is a project of Art 27 Scotland, a community interest company named after Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which dictates that “*Everyone has the Right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, and to enjoy the arts [...]*”. Art27 Scotland believe that cultural rights are indivisible from human rights, and aim to explore what cultural rights mean in practice through artist-led, community-driven projects.

Robert Rae, Co-Director * Embedded Artist of Art27 Scotland: “*We aim to highlight the cultural exclusion and racism faced by our neighbours in the Southside, and to facilitate these artists to share their practice by creating a safe, relevant and collective space at Southside Community Centre. It's notable that Southside has a rich cluster of cultural organisations, yet there appears little relationship with the diverse communities who live here*”.

More information on Art27 Scotland can be found on their [website](#), and details of their upcoming events can be found on [Eventbrite](#). The Southside Community Center is located at 177 Nicolson Street, Edinburgh, Eh8 9ER. *Saber Came to Tea* will take place on the evenings of October 8th and 9th, and the *Scratched Identities* exhibition will remain up in Southside Community Center until 11th of November.

Notes to editors:

Additional quotes and images, as well as interviews with both the organisers of the Art27 project and upcoming artists and collaborators involved in the Southside Collective, are available upon request.

For further press and media enquiries, contact: paula@art27scotland.org

For general enquiries, contact: info@art27scotland.org

1. [Art27 Scotland](#): Art27 at Southside Community Centre has been funded by Creative Scotland and Scottish Government as part of the [national Culture Collective](#).
2. ***Improving human rights protections for artists***: Shatha and Saber, two artists who have been awarded an APF Fellowship and are currently in residence at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, say that part of the problem is the lack of value placed on artists, compared to journalists, politicians, humanitarian workers, or even conflict actors. Concerns over freedom of expression tend to focus more on the news media, rather than on arts and artists – threats to artistic freedom are rarely mentioned in international discourse about Yemen. “No-one mentions when artists are getting abuse,” they told us, “nobody cares, not even the human rights organizations. When you see their reports for each year, there’s nothing about the regulations against artists.” It took them over two years and multiple applications to find protection after they started receiving a concerted campaign against them in Yemen, while at the same time some of the key instigators of the campaign of harassment against them were being presented with gifts at the Stockholm negotiations. “That time was really, really hard on us psychologically,” says Shatha, “but [once we heard from APF] we felt like someone cared, that someone had listened, and that kept us strong.”

In addition to making more international protection funds, safe havens, residencies and visas available to artists, Saber and Shatha say that it is equally important to start properly recording the abuses and violations against artists and freedom of expression within Yemen.

(from: REPORT The Role of Arts in Peacebuilding in Yemen: Broken People Can’t Heal a Nation by Yazeed al-Jeddawy, Maged al-Kholidy and Kate Nevens)

3. [IASH](#): The *Scratched Identities* exhibition and launch event *Saber Came To Tea* is supported by the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (University of Edinburgh) and the Artist Protection Fund. An initiative of the Institute of International Education, the Artist Protection Fund (IIE-APF) fills a critical unmet need by protecting threatened artists and placing them at welcoming host institutions in safe countries where they can continue their work and plan for their futures. IIE-APF places these artists in safe havens for a full year and provides fellowship funding, mentoring, and inclusion in a comprehensive network of artistic and social support.
4. [Shatha Altowai](#) is a Yemeni artist, winner of the 2021 John Byrne Award, and IIE-Artist Protection Fund (APF) Fellow in residence at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH) at the University of Edinburgh. Creating art in a war-torn country, in which most of the population is dependent upon aid for basic survival, is not an easy thing. Even harder is the

struggle to live safely and securely. Shatha has previously avoided touching on sensitive political and social topics through her art. Despite this, she has experienced hardships in her artistic journey, including serious damage to her house in 2015, and the threats she and her musician husband received in 2018 as a result of a cyberbullying campaign launched against them after the release of their short documentary film, Voice of the Rainbow. Nevertheless, Shatha has continued to pursue her passion in art and encouraging social change through her engagement in the artistic and youth community in Yemen. Much of Shatha's work reflects aspects of life in her society, and the suffering caused by the ongoing civil war in Yemen. Through her figurative, cubist, and abstract paintings, Shatha seeks to shed light on issues such as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), women, coexistence, and families in Yemen. Her work can be found [here](#).

5. [Saber Bamatraf](#) is a Yemeni pianist and music composer, who was also awarded an IIE-Artist Protection Fund (APF) Fellowship 2020-21 and is in residence at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities within the University of Edinburgh. Saber has participated in both solo and group musical performances and projects as a self-taught pianist who does not read music, but has played music by ear since childhood. Saber began focusing more on composition in 2014, with the release of his debut album Turning Point. He also began working to renew Yemeni folk poetic music through 'Yamaniat', a playlist he recently launched. Saber works to reconceptualise the Yemeni work spread throughout Arabia by focusing solely on instrumentals. This way, he attempts to represent the Yemeni musical legacy and heritage in a style that can be enjoyed worldwide. Saber's latest album release, Embrace from Edinburgh, is available now on all digital platforms. It contains seven New Age tracks that Saber has composed since arriving in Edinburgh. In this album, he expresses the inspiration he has drawn from living in a peaceful environment, and the senses of courage and hope he has felt while immersed in the natural and historic Edinburgh landscape, after six traumatic years of uncertainty in a war torn country. The album can be heard [here](#), and more of Saber's work can be found [here](#).
6. [Robert Rae](#) is the Co-Director and Embedded Artist of Art27 Scotland. Robert Rae is one of Scotland's leading theatre and film directors and writers. He chooses to develop his work through socially engaged practice that aligns with his own political and activist commitments. His expertise has taken him all over the world sharing and developing his methodology. His career spans over 30 years during which time he was Producer for 7:84 England, and Artistic Director/CEO of Theatre Workshop Scotland for 18yrs which changed the landscape in Scotland for disabled artists in particular, Most recently he was International Artist in Residence for The Playhouse, Derry devising a Theatre of Witness piece based on survivors of the Conflict in the

border towns in Northern Ireland. He is also Director of his own theatre company Our Land Productions.

An Embedded Artist is a process oriented role which brings together the knowledge, skills and competencies of the artist, and non-Arts stakeholders to use creative methodologies towards a shared goal. As the embedded artist Robert is not creating his own work but utilising his skills as a socially engaged theatre practitioner, film director and writer to devise an exploratory route to unpick and rethink what cultural rights mean in Scotland. More information on Robert and his work can be found [here](#).

7. The Scottish Government National Taskforce Report on Human Rights Leadership can be found [here](#)