

D-CAF back to splash Cairo streets with culture




As Downtown Contemporary Arts Festival's 3rd edition is to bring music, theatre, film and more to Cairo 20 March-11 April, Ahram Online talks to D-CAF artistic director Ahmed El-Attar

Rowan El Shimi, Thursday 6 Mar 2014



100Hands Dutch dance troupe works with Egyptian dancers to present contemporary dance in public space (Photo: Courtesy of D-CAF)



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With the influx of independent and alternative arts that Cairo began to witness since the 2011 revolution, culture aficionados have come to anticipate specific seasons every year that promise abundant cultural saturation.

Spring is definitely such a time. For the past two years, the Downtown Contemporary Arts Festival (D-CAF) has in the spring engaged audiences in Cairo's theatres, exhibition spaces, abandoned apartments, and on the city's very streets and alleyways.

This year, D-CAF returns with theatre, dance, music, films, discussions, workshops and [public interventions](#) between 20 March and 11 April. Although shorter than last year's, the

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2014 edition of D-CAF will fill Cairo and Alexandria with exciting events through a multitude of mediums.

"This year we started [working on D-CAF] earlier, right after we finished last year's edition," D-CAF founder and artistic director Ahmed El-Attar told Ahram Online. "We have a better division of labour when it comes to staffing. We have a full team. We're giving ourselves the means to realise this vision."

With several premieres and cutting edge initiatives, D-CAF promises audiences yet another set of unique artistic events, undeterred by the ongoing political turmoil still gripping the country.

Programme Highlights

According to Attar, one of the most important aspects of this year's D-CAF is the Middle-East Focus from 3-6 April, which will offer mostly premiering performances by an array of Arab artists.

"We're inviting 30 of the world's top programmers and festival directors to attend, see the works, meet the artists," Attar asserts. "Not only is [the festival] a showcase for the general public, but also for the festival's organisers."

Through the focus week, Attar hopes to use D-CAF as a platform providing an opportunity for regional artists to reach a more international audience and possibly obtain invitations to festivals and events abroad.

Two of Attar's plays – *On the Importance of Being an Arab* and *The Last Supper* – are among the showcased events.

Other highlights from the programme's performing arts section include: *Violence Lointaine*, a joint dance production (Egypt, France, DR Congo) by Omar Ghayatt, DeLaVallet Bidiefono and Maxine Denuc; *It Happened Tomorrow* by Syrian director Oussama Ghanam and the Damascus Theatre Lab; Egyptian theatre troupe Teatro's adaptation of *No Exit*, performed last October at the Falaki Theatre; and, finally, two documentary theatre productions -- *Zawayya* and *The House of Curfew* -- presented by Hassan El-Gereitly's El-Warsha theatre troupe.

Lebanese musician Yasmine Hamdan, known for her previous collaboration with Zeid Hemdan on Soapkills -- a band widely believed to have shaped the alternative music scene in Lebanon during the late 90s -- will be performing in Qasr Al-Nil Theatre on 4 April. The same evening will also feature a performance by Egyptian artists Fayrouz Karawya and Ismael.

Shehrazade space will host D-CAF's Music Programme. Since last year, curator and founder of 100Copies Music Mahmoud Refaat converted the hitherto nightclub into a concert space. This year, its stage will be given to the Middle-East Focus late evening performances by Egypt's hip-hop and poetry band El Manzouma and the Syrian/Lebanese Hello Psychaleppo, joined by American One Be Lo.

The Middle-East Focus week will also present a survey exhibition of the relatively young Egyptian artist Hassan Khan, whose immersive body of work has been shown uniquely outside Egypt over the past decade.

"Doing a survey or a retrospective of Khan's work is unprecedented," Attar explains, as this practice is traditionally designed for deceased or elderly artists. "In D-CAF we feel this need to change, and we've put a lot of effort and resources into making this a class A exhibition."

Curated by Beth Stryker -- artist, curator and co-founder of Cairo Lab for Urban Studies, Training and Environmental Research (CLUSTER) -- the exhibition brings Khan's artworks from various corners of the world to downtown Cairo's abandoned Kodak store.

As the two entities tend to do with public spaces, [CLUSTER](#) has this year partnered with D-CAF to oversee the Kodak store renovation, ensuring it retains its character while suitably reinventing its space for such an exceptional exhibit.

What sets D-CAF apart from other Cairo festivals is not its international nature or curatorial value, but particularly its Urban Visions Programme presenting dance performances in [public spaces](#) -- invariably the festival's most organisationally challenging, and rewarding, aspect.

The performances will once more take place in front of the Egyptian Stock Exchange on Al-Alfy Street and will additionally utilise the less public, but still open, space of the American University in Cairo's Greek Campus, recently re-opened as a hub for Egyptian technologists.

In partnership with [Gudran for Arts and Development](#), some of Urban Visions' performances will also make their way to Downtown Alexandria.

D-CAF's Film Programme this year takes on two dimensions, one of which is curated by Hervé Le Phuez, the programming coordinator responsible for the shorts section at the International Francophone Film Festival of Namur (Belgium).

The film programme will in March present two evenings of Francophone short films at the Greek Campus, and will include several screenings of feature films at the newly refurbished Odeon Cinema. The cinema was renovated by Misr International Films-Youssef Chahine -- the same company behind the annually anticipated Panorama of the European Film -- to host their new initiative Zawya, an ongoing programme of Art House films in Cairo.

In addition to the curated film programme, D-CAF will also feature the Smart Film Festival, based on an open call for short films from the Arab world shot with mobile phones. Prior to D-CAF, several workshops on mobile filmmaking were held in Alexandria, Assiut, Minya and Cairo to produce some of the showcased films. A jury will select the winning films at the end of the festival.