

# TIRO ASSOCIATION FOR ARTS (TAA)

NON-GOVERNMENTAL  
ORGANIZATION



Executive Director  
**KASSEM ISTANBOULI**

THIS PUBLICATION IS FOCUSED ON ADDRESSING OUR EXPERIENCE DURING OUR INITIATIVE; THE LESSONS WE LEARNED; THE GOALS WE ACHIEVED; THE PHASES OF OUR SUCCESS; THE EVENTS; AND THE STRATEGY WE USED; SO THAT OTHERS CAN LEARN FROM OUR EXPERIENCE AND ESTABLISH SOMETHING SIMILAR IF THEY WISH. THEY CAN ALSO CREATE A COMPARABLE STRATEGY ON THEIR OWN.





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# 03

## PREFACE



## 04 PREFACE

In 2008, Kassem Istanbouli, together with his friends, artists and graduates from the Institute of Fine Arts at the Lebanese University in Beirut, founded the Istanbouli Theater group, aiming to bring together young students and theater enthusiasts to perform in the streets and public spaces. It all started with mobile interactive theater, music, dance performances, and carnivals. Later on, it progressed to local and international tours and festivals.





## 05 PREFACE

In 2014, the Tiro Association for Arts (TAA) was founded as a non-governmental organization<sup>1</sup> and is currently located in Tyre and Tripoli, South and North Lebanon. It is a youth-led and volunteer-based organization aiming to create free and independent cultural platforms in Lebanon through the rehabilitation of cultural spaces and the organization of festivals and activities. Its main goal is to decentralize culture and the arts, making it accessible to several areas of Lebanon, especially the marginalized and abandoned ones, by promoting cultural development.



## 06 PREFACE

TAA went through a series of changes and challenges before becoming an association with recognizable achievements. The association has evolved from learning experiences and shortcomings faced during the development of the initiative. This booklet outlines TAA's strategy and approach to creating and sustaining free cultural platforms, aiming to inspire others to start their own initiatives.

<sup>1</sup> TIRO ASSOCIATION FOR ARTS (TAA) IS REGISTERED AS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION UNDER LICENSE NO. 2633/2015.



## 08 HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Istanbuli brought together artists and friends who had a strong desire to perform artistic shows in the streets. In 2008, the first theater group known as the Istanbuli Theater emerged. The group began participating in local and international festivals between 2009 and 2013.

Although the learning process enriched the experience, the main focus was to create a project in Tyre, a place to belong, “our own place.”

The first “home” was a small space that could fit only sixty chairs. We called it the Istanbuli Theater, and there we hosted weekly theater, music, poetry, and drawing events. We would also invite local artists to present their work using the space for free.



# 07

## HOW IT ALL BEGAN



## 09 HOW IT ALL BEGAN

During the events, we would place a donation box in front of the door. To encourage others, we were the first donors. One of the first difficulties was when the box was stolen. Nonetheless, we continued with our theater activities for another six months. That was when we started noticing children lining up in front of the theater every day, waiting for us to open the doors. The



## 10 HOW IT ALL BEGAN



key to our continuous success over the years was our ability to attract individuals, and this is what distinguished us from others. We gave individuals a place to belong in society. Seeing the children coming back and queuing every day was the first success in creating a safe and joyful place for them. This motivated us to move to a bigger space and to renovate Al Hamra Cinema in Tyre.



# 11

## TYRE CITY MOVIE THEATERS



In 1939, the first cinema, “Roxy,” opened in Tyre. During the following years, a number of other cinemas opened their doors, such as Rivoli Cinema in 1959 and Al Hamra Cinema in 1966. Rivoli Cinema was built during the golden era of Lebanon, when movies were brought to Tyre by sea from Palestine and Greece. This cinema was screening movies from around the world, showing theatrical works by renowned theater makers in the Middle East, and hosting concerts for Lebanon’s most beloved performers.





13 TYRE CITY MOVIE THEATERS

Despite the war atrocities in 1982, Rivoli Cinema continued its shows. During the civil war, the cinema became a stronghold for the leftist parties, organizing meetings with famous composers and artists, such as the music composer, Marcel Khalife, and the Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish. Rivoli Cinema has a rich history. However, for over thirty years, all cinemas and theaters in Tyre were closed. Thus, reopening cinemas in Tyre had a deep and meaningful significance for the city; it was a bridge between the old and new generations. For the Tyre population, it represented a symbolic memorization of their childhood pleasures. At Al Hamra Cinema, for example, we dedicated a week of movies to Omar Al Sharif, a well-known Egyptian and internationally



14 TYRE CITY MOVIE THEATERS

recognized actor. During the screening of one of his movies, an old man came to watch it again with his grandson, remembering watching the same movie forty years ago.

2 EXAMPLES INCLUDE IBRAHIM MARAACHLI, AHMED AL ZEIN, SALAH TIZANI (ALSO KNOWN AS ABOU SALIM), THE ABU ABDULLAH AL DALHEEN GROUP, WADIH AL-SAFI, SAMIRA TEWFIK, AND OTHERS.



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**WE ARE  
WITNESSING THE  
ESTABLISHMENT  
OF THE FIRST  
FILM FESTIVAL  
IN THE HISTORY  
OF THE SOUTH,  
BUT THERE WILL  
COME A TIME  
WHEN FUTURE  
GENERATIONS  
WILL GET TO  
KNOW ABOUT  
THIS HISTORIC  
MOMENT; THIS  
WILL BECOME A  
GLOBAL  
FESTIVAL.**”

**EGYPTIAN  
ACTOR,  
MAHMOUD KABIL  
(2014)**





# 15

## RENOVATING CINEMAS

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*I'M DELIGHTED TO BE HERE IN THIS HISTORIC LOCATION, WHICH BRINGS BACK MEMORIES OF MY YOUTH YEARS. YOU ARE SIMILAR TO FARMERS WHO STRIVE TO REVIVE THE EARTH BY WATERING IT. THROUGH THE FESTIVALS, YOU PROMOTE LOVE FOR CINEMA AND THE ARTS. I HOPE YOU ACHIEVE AND EXPAND THIS INITIATIVE SO THAT IT CAN REACH ALL OF LEBANON.*

LEBANESE DIRECTOR,  
GEORGE NASR (2015)

”







We started implementing activities and events six months after opening the Istanbouli Theater, while rehabilitating Al Hamra Cinema in Tyre at the same time. We decided to rebuild the cinema because we needed a free open cinema, and Al Hamra was in a historic location with a special history, memory, and artistic value to Tyre city and its citizens. The goal was to create a free cultural platform where everyone is welcome. A diverse group of volunteers arrived to assist, including Palestinians, Lebanese, and Syrians of various ages and backgrounds. Volunteers are, and have always been, the cornerstones of all projects and initiatives. At Al Hamra

“  
**THE LEBANESE NATIONAL THEATER IS LEBANON'S FIRST FREE THEATER AND CINEMA. ITS SIGNIFICANCE STEMS FROM ITS CONTRIBUTION TO CULTURAL DECENTRALIZATION, DESPITE THE HARDSHIPS. WE WILL SUPPORT TIRO ASSOCIATION FOR ARTS BECAUSE WE VALUE ITS WORK IN FOSTERING TRUE CULTURE.**  
 ”

**LEBANESE MINISTER OF CULTURE, MOHAMMED DAOUD (2018)**





## 19 RENOVATING CINEMAS - AL HAMRA CINEMA

Cinema, we started implementing activities and events six months after opening the Istanbuli Theater, while rehabilitating Al Hamra Cinema in Tyre at the same time. We decided to rebuild the cinema because we needed a free open cinema, and Al Hamra was in a historic location with a special history, memory, and artistic value to Tyre city and its citizens. The goal was to create a free cultural platform where everyone is welcome. A diverse group of volunteers arrived to assist, including Palestinians, Lebanese, and Syrians of various ages and backgrounds. Volunteers are, and have always been, the cornerstones of all projects and initiatives. At Al Hamra Cinema, they worked with their hands; they did the cleaning, painting, repairing, and renovating.



## 20 RENOVATING CINEMAS - AL HAMRA CINEMA





## 21 RENOVATING CINEMAS - AL HAMRA CINEMA

After six months of hard work, the cinema opened and hosted the first theater festival in South Lebanon's history. It was a great success, and representatives from twelve countries were present. Tyre was missing artistic events because Beirut had it all. One of the primary reasons for the mission was to promote the south of Lebanon as a viable, cultural, and artistic destination.

We began to see an increase in the number of volunteers and attendees, much like the children who queued every day at the Istambouli Theater. We connected with people from various backgrounds, individually. Thus, a human bond was built.



## 22 RENOVATING CINEMAS - AL HAMRA CINEMA



After two years of establishing Al Hamra Cinema, we were forced to shut down activities and relocate. We tried repeatedly to renew the cinema leasing contract. The owner stated that he intended to reopen the cinema with a new concept. Unfortunately, Al Hamra Cinema is still closed today.

While still working at Al Hamra Cinema, TAA was created in 2014 and became the first cultural organization in Southern Lebanon to offer free artistic training workshops and activities in December 2015.

# 23

## STARS CINEMA



We needed to expand our experience; therefore, we went further. We began working in a more organized and professional manner, recognizing the importance of connecting with the local communities, so we engaged with local institutions, associations, organizations, and the Nabatieh Municipality, avoiding schisms within the local community (artists, government, institutions, and civil society). We tried to involve others in the renovation process by asking everyone to join. Also, we wanted to preserve the cinema's cultural history while avoiding any changes to its original form during the rehabilitation process, thus preserving its original architecture. Tourists and localities visited Stars Cinema more for its architectural design than to watch a movie. Our team worked hard, thus tightening our bonds.





## 25 RENOVATING CINEMAS - STARS CINEMA

Within six months, we rehabilitated the cinema, and it officially opened during the Lebanese International Theater Festival. It took place in three cities at the same time: Tripoli, Tyre, and Nabatieh. Our main goal was to promote cultural decentralization. Following the festival, we began implementing artistic training workshops, as well as weekly movie screenings and theater performances in the



## 26 RENOVATING CINEMAS - STARS CINEMA

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**THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS PROJECT IS THAT IT IS BASED ON VOLUNTEERISM IN ORDER TO BUILD A CULTURE IN THE SOUTH, BRINGING TOGETHER DIFFERENT CULTURES FROM AROUND THE WORLD THROUGH FESTIVALS, TRAINING, WORKSHOPS, AND ESTABLISHING A CULTURAL FUTURE FOR THE CITY OF NABATIEH AND THE SOUTH. THIS GROUND-BREAKING EXPERIENCE AND THIS BEAUTIFUL PLACE REMIND ME OF THE ITALIAN MOVIE “CINEMA PARADISO.” YOU ARE MAKING A LEBANESE “PARADISO CINEMA” WITH YOUR BODIES AND YOUR FAITH IN CULTURE WITHOUT ANY FUNDING FOR THE PROJECT.**

**THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR TO LEBANON, EMMANUEL BOONE (2016)**

”





## 27 RENOVATING CINEMAS - STARS CINEMA

cinema. People started coming, and we could see that we were truly making a difference in the community. This is why it was such a difficult time when the owner refused to renew the rental contract. We were devastated. We raised funds for the cinema through an online campaign entitled “Save Stars in Nabatieh,” but the attempt was unsuccessful. Suddenly, the owners decided to sell it to a buyer and requested that we evacuate the building. We lived through a true tragedy!



## 28 RENOVATING CINEMAS - STARS CINEMA

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**I'M EXCITED TO BE VISITING NABATIEH FOR THE FIRST TIME. WE ARE PROUD OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE RENOVATING AND RE-OPENING CULTURAL PLATFORMS AND HISTORICAL CINEMAS LIKE STARS IN NABATIEH. WE WILL WORK TO SUPPORT THESE PIONEERING INITIATIVES IN CULTURE AND ART. WE WILL ALSO PARTICIPATE IN THESE FESTIVALS WITH UKRAINIAN ACTIVITIES, THEREBY PROMOTING CULTURAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.**

”  
**THE UKRAINIAN AMBASSADOR TO LEBANON, IGOR OSTASH (2016)**





### 30 RENOVATING CINEMAS - RIVOLI CINEMA

In 2018, we returned to Tyre and rehabilitated a third movie theater: Rivoli. We signed a long-term lease for the cinema rather than a short-term one, taking into consideration how much trouble this had caused us in the past. We were previously pressured by political parties to cease our activities, especially with a short-term contract, so we were always left with only one option: evict the place and leave.

**“ TYRE IS OPEN TO THE WORLD. THANKS TO THE EXISTENCE OF THESE CULTURAL SPACES, WHICH WERE ESTABLISHED BY THE TIRO ASSOCIATION FOR ARTS TO BRING DIFFERENCES FROM VARIOUS CULTURES AROUND THE WORLD. THESE YOUNG PEOPLE WORK WITH THEIR HEARTS AND SOULS. THEY ARE DEEPLY COMMITTED TO THE CAUSE, TO WHICH NO OFFICIAL INSTITUTIONS ARE CONTRIBUTING. ”**

**LEBANESE  
ACTOR, NICOLAS  
DANIEL (2018)**



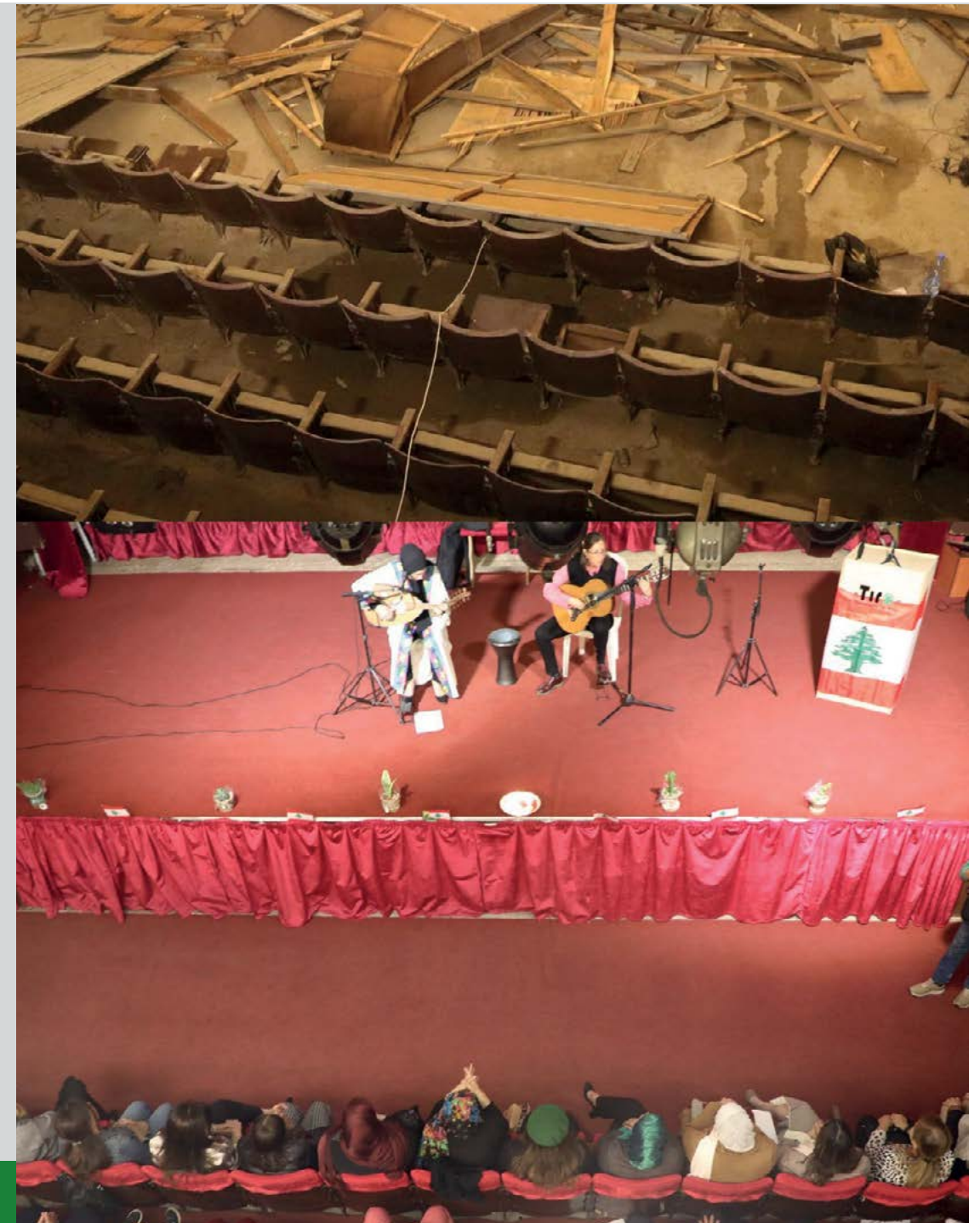


### 31 RENOVATING CINEMAS - RIVOLI CINEMA



We rehabilitated and renovated “Rivoli Cinema” with our team from both Tyre and Nabatieh. It became the “Lebanese National Theater,” a free platform that consists of a theater, a cinema, a library, and a cafeteria. We officially reopened the cinema concurrently with the “Tiro International Arts Festival” in October 2018.

### 32 RENOVATING CINEMAS - RIVOLI CINEMA





### 33 RENOVATING CINEMAS - RIVOLI CINEMA

In 2019, we expanded our festivals and began looking for donors to help us develop our project. We formed a capable team and provided part-time jobs to our volunteers and members. We had a management team as well as an artistic one. The management team was in charge of the organization, while the artistic team comprised trainers, organizers, theater, and cinema professionals. We now have a financial officer, a public relations officer, a proposal writer, a project evaluator, and a project manager. The presence of an experienced team helped us move from a theater group to a solid organization.



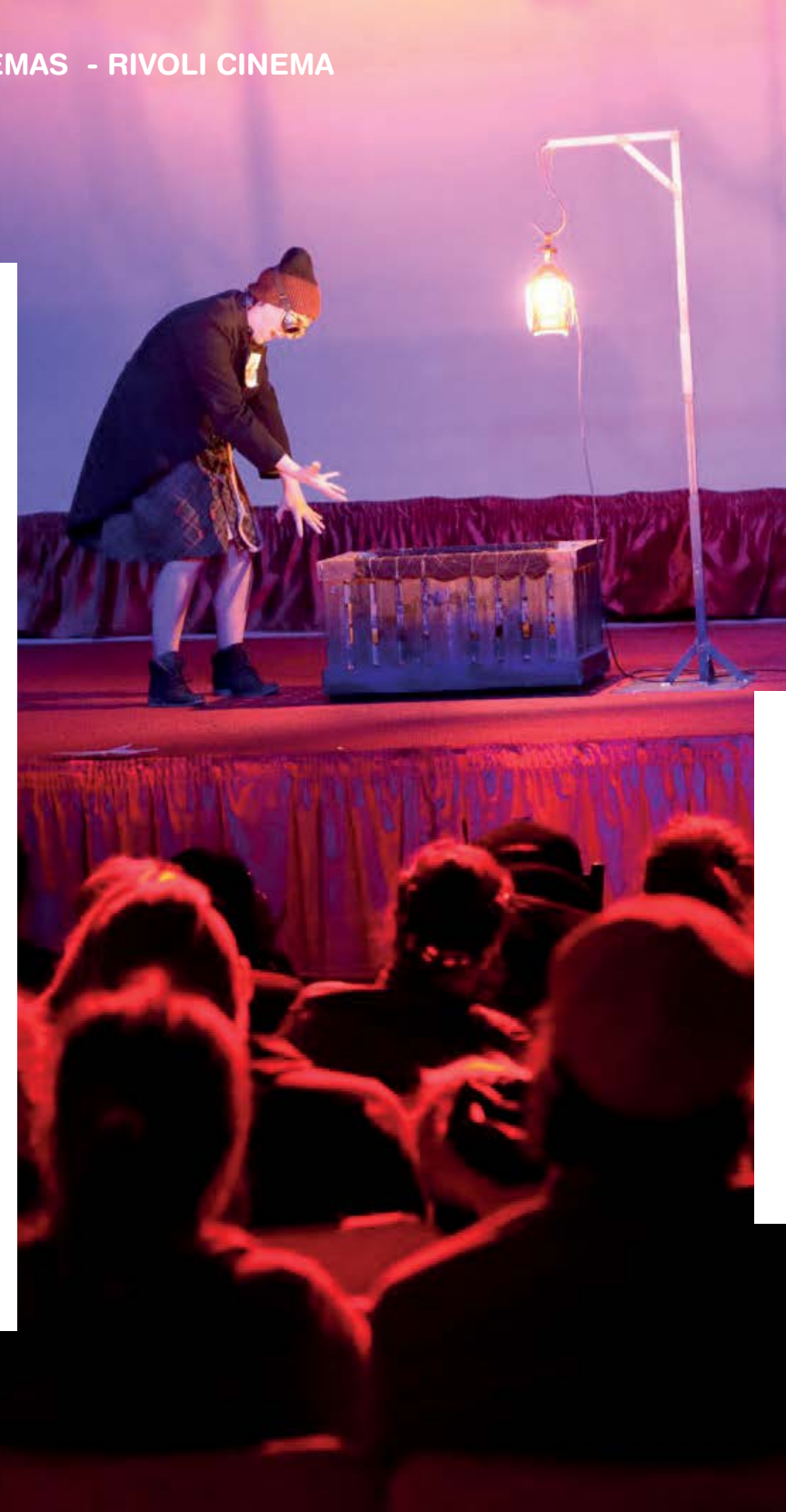
### 34 RENOVATING CINEMAS - RIVOLI CINEMA

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***THE CINEMA IN TYRE SURVIVES; THANKS TO THE EFFORTS OF YOUNG VOLUNTEERS WHO HAVE ACCOMPLISHED THE SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE IN REHABILITATING THE CINEMA AFTER THE WAR DEVASTATED EVERYTHING. DUE TO THE EFFORT AND PASSION OF THE YOUTH FOR FILM AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE, WE ARE SEEING THE RETURN OF ART TO THIS VITAL CITY TODAY.***

”

**LEBANESE  
JOURNALIST  
AND DIRECTOR,  
JOCELYNE SAAB  
(2014)**





## 35 RENOVATING CINEMAS - RIVOLI CINEMA

Due to the fact that Lebanon lacks a free national theater, we renamed Rivoli Cinema as the “Lebanese National Theater.” As a result, the Lebanese National Theater became Lebanon’s first free, independent, and open-to-the-public theater. We transformed a popular area into a cultural and artistic platform where people from all cultural backgrounds could meet and interact, forming a dynamic human link between various social classes.



## 36 RENOVATING CINEMAS - RIVOLI CINEMA

In 2019, we launched new festivals celebrating contemporary dance, Palestinian culture, storytelling, and women-led theater in order to attract new artists. During the same year, we focused heavily on community capacity building, inviting people to training workshops. Many of our trainees who previously received training in our cinemas have now become trainers. We also established an international volunteer base, where foreigners come to visit and train with the association. In 2020, during the corona period in Lebanon, we immediately took action and adjusted to the situation. We started online training workshops and activities to avoid a full closure. Not to mention that TAA today counts over 300 members.





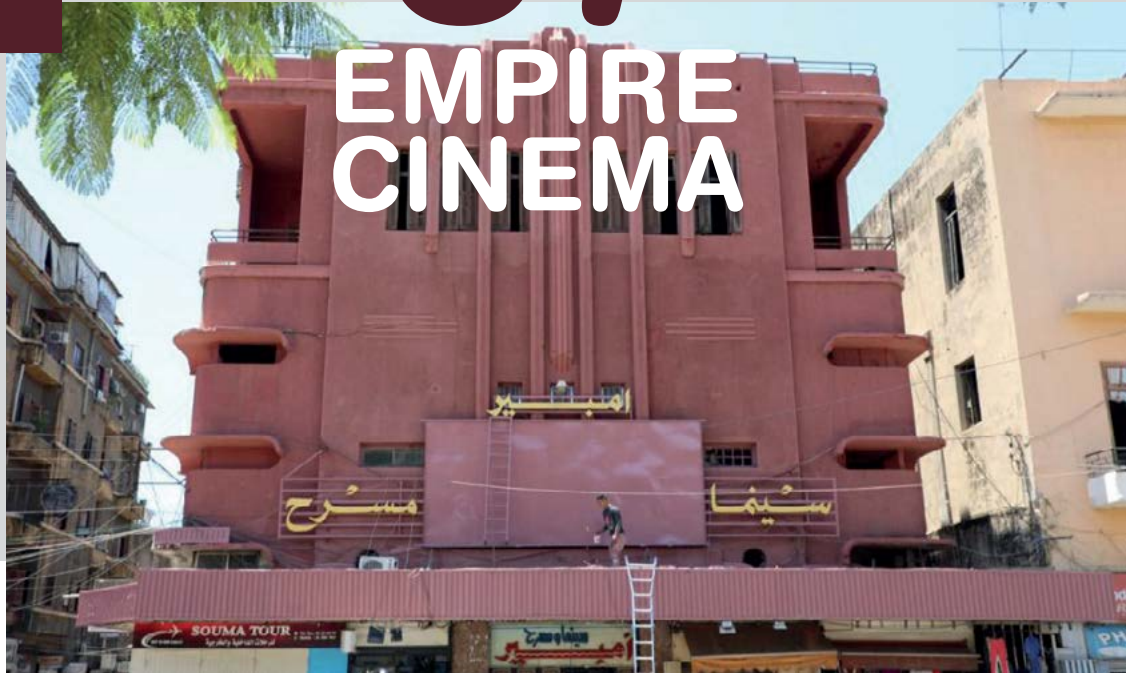
## 38 RENOVATING CINEMAS - EMPIRE CINEMA

The first cinema in Lebanon was built in Tripoli. This city had the largest number of cinemas, which is 35. Since the 90s, almost all of these cinemas have been closed or abandoned, leaving only a diminutive number of cinemas' spells alive.

One of the rare cinemas still standing in Tripoli is Empire Cinema. Located in Al Tal, Tripoli's center, this cinema has a theater, a balcony, a small cafeteria, and approximately 780 seats. Reconstructing and rehabilitating Empire Cinema will keep the remaining artistic and cultural heritage of cinematic history alive, which will form the historical memory of the city and help it avoid the probability of demising like the other cinemas. Beyond

# 37

## EMPIRE CINEMA





### 39 RENOVATING CINEMAS - EMPIRE CINEMA

that, restoring the cinema will have a positive cultural, social, and economic impact, particularly on the city and on the country in general. TAA is replicating its proven methods to revitalize Empire Cinema in Tripoli and bring back its vitality and potential to be the Lebanese National Theater in Tripoli, thus decentralizing culture and the arts.

Revitalizing Tripoli entails bolstering the city's artistic movement and generating new job opportunities for youth, all while capitalizing on the existence of a historical, independent, and cultural platform that



### 40 RENOVATING CINEMAS - EMPIRE CINEMA



serves as a free space for all to benefit. A forum for discussion, meetings, and free expression that includes a theater, a cinema, a library, and a cafeteria. Moreover, publicizing social cohesion and diversity by bringing together people and youth from numerous socioeconomic, gender, and religious backgrounds, along with building and strengthening interconnections between Tyre and Tripoli, South and North, to crumble the virtual wall separating them.



Furthermore, TAA is looking to decentralize cultural and artistic influence, making these two major and fundamental tools traceable all over the country and by everyone, and this could happen by establishing a free and independent cultural and artistic forum. TAA aims to transfer the experiences carried out in Tyre to Tripoli and connect the two regions, thus creating a reciprocal relationship based on successful and enjoyable activities. Therefore, and by following the aforementioned vision, Tripoli will ascend again and reach the vertex, to be, by 2023, the capital of the Arabian arts and known as “the city of cinemas”.





# 43

## THE PEACE ART BUS



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**TIRO ASSOCIATION  
FOR ARTS IS THE  
TORCH THAT LIGHTS  
UP LEBANON'S  
THEATER JOURNEY.  
THE OPENING OF  
A FREE LEBANESE  
NATIONAL THEATER  
IN THE HOPE  
OF CULTURAL  
DECENTRALIZATION,  
THE AVAILABILITY  
OF THEATERS IN ALL  
AREAS OF LEBANON,  
AND THE EXCHANGE  
OF CULTURAL  
HERITAGE ALWAYS  
SURPRISES  
US.**

”

**LEBANESE ACTRESS,  
JULIA KASSAR (2019)**





## 45 THE PEACE ART BUS

With the \$10,000 raised through an online campaign entitled “Save Stars in Nabatieh,” we purchased a former school bus. It was renovated into a mobile cinema and theater. We used it as a means of transportation to travel to marginalized areas throughout Lebanon, and that was to ensure the decentralization of culture and the arts, as well as to provide access to abandoned areas in South Lebanon. TAA began with mobile art performances and tours in villages and towns. The bus tour included discussions,



## 46 THE PEACE ART BUS



movie screenings, concerts, storytelling, and food sharing. It was also used for drawing and photography training workshops, as well as night movie screenings, fostering long-lasting bonds between divided communities. We also met talented people who later became members of our organization. The bus is currently parked in Tyre, where it has also become a local tourist attraction, with many tourists and individuals flocking to take photographs in front of it.



## 47

TAA'S  
APPROACH

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**AT THE ISTANBOULI  
THEATER'S OPENING,  
WE ECHO THE EARTH  
AND THE PEOPLE'S  
SONG. HERE WE  
WRITE AND FORGE  
THE CULTURE  
OF DEFIANCE.  
WE PLAY, DRAW,  
CAPTURE DANCE,  
AND PRACTICE  
OUR HUMANITY,  
AS WE SHOULD,  
BY FLYING IN OUR  
SPACE, SINGING, AND  
BEARING A MESSAGE  
OF LOVE, PEACE,  
AND DIGNITY.**

”

**PALESTINIAN  
WRITER AND  
NOVELIST, SALMAN  
NATOUR (2014)**

The limitations we face are actually our strengths. We never changed our objectives or goals to accommodate anyone. We choose our collaborators, making sure that we do have the same vision and are working towards the same goal. We never let money change our beliefs. We have worked for many years without the assistance of donor institutions or formal funding. We will continue to be an independent organization that makes its own decisions. Our priority relies upon developing the skills of our volunteers, students, and members. We welcome everyone, and not just those with artistic abilities. We are always looking for new members to help us grow and expand the association. People are a part of TAA, and it is a part of them.

TAA is a “common meeting ground” for the arts, culture, and social interaction. We maintain close contact with our members and volunteers. We are totally concerned with our members and we believe that our strength remains in the growth of human bonds, especially with our members.





## INDEPENDENCE FROM POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INTERESTS

From the start, our main policy was to avoid getting involved in politics. Therefore, we did not accept financial support from any political party or host individuals involved in the promotion of political propaganda. Furthermore, none of the artists we hosted were sponsored politically, nor did they advertise any political views. Being free and independent is something we have maintained since the beginning of our initiative. That was the reason why we took a loan from the bank rather than depend on donors, whether from governments or public institutions. Accordingly, we began to work on establishing an independent cultural center in Tyre, where people could meet, express their thoughts and ideas freely, participate, receive training, and get involved in the artistic activities. Cultural and artistic ties often raise awareness among various classes of society.



We focused on turning our weaknesses into strengths and powers. We also continued to be an independent organization, contributing to the promotion of cultural development and the decentralization of culture and the arts in Beirut.

## POSITIVE PRO-ACTIVE ATTITUDE

Despite our repeated setbacks, we always maintained a positive attitude. We do our best to motivate the team and to keep them away from feeling helpless and frustrated. We continued our activities as much as possible in open public spaces. We used dialogue to find solutions to complex situations, and we ensured transparency among our members, which was the main reason for our success. We will always remember our modest beginnings: a very small budget but intense energy, mutual collaboration, and positive intent. We have relied on each other to complete the work since the beginning of our initiative. Herein lies our strength.





TRANSPARENCY

Clarity, honesty, and solidarity were our basic traits, which attracted the public. We did not deny our origins, nor did we pretend to be people we were not. We are honest and straightforward with the people we associate with, such as artists and professionals, and we present to others our potential and even limitations. We provide them with meals, accommodation, and transportation. We are also upfront with our logistical, financial, and technical capabilities. People who associate with us, especially artists, are already aware of our conditions from the beginning. We also try to find individuals that share our interests, accept our conditions, and enjoy organizing festivals with us.



“  
**THE TIRO  
ASSOCIATION  
FOR ARTS AND  
LEBANESE  
CINEMA'S  
TRIBUTE TO “JEAN  
CHAMON” AT  
THE LEBANESE  
NATIONAL  
THEATER IS A  
SIGN OF LOVE  
AND HONOR.  
DESPITE DIFFICULT  
CIRCUMSTANCES,  
THE  
ESTABLISHMENT  
OF A LEBANESE  
FREE NATIONAL  
THEATER IN THE  
SOUTH IS AN  
ACHIEVEMENT  
FOR FUTURE  
GENERATIONS AND  
FOR THE CINEMA.**

**FILMMAKER,  
DIRECTOR,  
AND PRODUCER,  
MAI MASRI (2019)**  
”



## 53 TAA'S APPROACH

### VOLUNTEERS ACQUIRE SKILLS

TAA is a volunteer-run organization. We relied on self-funding and investments such as donations, the members' annual subscriptions, a donation box in front of the association, and money raised from the sale of t-shirts, posters, coffee, popcorn, soap, embroideries, and other items produced during the training workshops. Later on, collaborations and partnerships helped in funding projects.

When the association was established, it consisted of volunteers. However, the specialized training and capacity-building opportunities led us to have specialized individuals in finance, public relations, proposal writing, monitoring and evaluation, project management, and organizing. Every individual has his or her own role and tasks, which are shared according to their skills. Today we have seven committees.



## 54 TAA'S APPROACH





## COMMITTEES AND TEAMWORK

TAA has a general assembly that consists of over 300 members; an administrative board; a board of trustees; and seven committees: the finance, procurement, and equipment committee; the media and public relations committee; the events and festivals organization committee; the proposal writing committee; the monitoring and evaluation committee; the volunteer management committee; and the photography and filmmaking committee. The administrative board comprises six members elected by the general assembly. Members of TAA are divided into two groups: volunteers and working individuals, i.e., staff. Every committee was created to perform certain tasks, led by a president and vice president.



**The finance, procurement, and equipment committee** handles the purchasing measures, financial reports, accounting, and invoices.

**The media and public relations committee** handles everything from the media to the connections of the association.

**The events and festivals organization committee** establishes the weekly screening of movies, organizes events and festivals, as well as other activities.

**The proposal writing committee** prepares project proposals and handles the budget funds needed to implement it by the association.





## 57 TAA'S APPROACH

**The monitoring and evaluating committee** oversees and coordinates the implementation of its monitoring and evaluation strategy as well as the action plan of the association.

**The volunteer management committee** recruits and handles the new volunteers' tasks.

**The photography and filmmaking committee** films and edits all internal and external activities, events, and festivals to document them and participates in the filming and editing of releases produced by TAA and existing artistic training workshops.

Volunteers share and contribute to the association's initiatives and have an important role in its development. Committees help with teamwork and the

## 58 TAA'S APPROACH





## 59 TAA'S APPROACH

distribution of tasks with professionalism. TAA has evolved into becoming an association heavily reliant on volunteerism and teamwork.

### COMMUNICATION

Initially, we relied heavily on emails and WhatsApp. During our festivals and street events, large crowds congregated on the streets, in shops, and in arenas. Later, we would send them a “WhatsApp broadcast message” informing them of our activities and events. We also made cards and posters to hang on the street and put our logo on cars, as well as inviting people on the street to the cinema, all while promoting on a tight budget.



## 60 TAA'S APPROACH



Due to our project's distinctiveness and uniqueness, we attracted the attention of local and foreign media, who took pictures and filmed videos of our activities and displayed them on television.

At the beginning of our initiative, we lacked a media committee. We would take pictures of our activities and write articles, then send them to newspapers and magazines. Later on, we established a media team that handled the advertisements and promotions.



## 61 TAA'S APPROACH

We progressed from local recognition to regional and international recognition. International websites and agencies were writing articles about us. As a result, we began writing festival open calls in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish in order to reach a larger audience of artists. For example, when a foreign artist participated in one of our festivals or won a competition, their home country would write about us; it helped us promote our association.



## 62 TAA'S APPROACH



We are definitely a self-taught association; learning is our process. We started from scratch, building the capacities of young volunteers and members of the association who developed their skills. We became an association capable of responding to difficulties as well as promoting socio-economic, cultural, and artistic abilities. We mobilized the substantial, financial, and human resources needed to implement the programs of the association, carrying out its mission in various areas with a maximum of synergy and efficiency.





63

## ARAB CULTURE AND ARTS NETWORK (ACAN)

An independent, non-profit organization established in 2020 during the Corona pandemic crisis on the initiative of cultural activists with the aim of networking individuals and cultural and artistic institutions for cultural solidarity and opening a link and channels for the exchange of events, festivals, and experiences in art and culture in the Arab region and opening cultural bridges in the Middle East.

### ACAN'S VISION

The world witnessed a catastrophic transformation due to the accelerating spread of COVID-19, and thus a significant decline in the cultural and civilizational fields appeared at the global level as a whole and at the Arab level in particular. To fill this gap, ACAN was established by TAA to bring together Arab institutions, associations, and artists in late 2020. As this project develops, it addresses cultural, political, economic, and social issues, including programs for children and youth, artistic programs





## 65 ARAB CULTURE AND ARTS NETWORK (ACAN)

related to theater, in addition to programs for exchanging experiences between institutions. Thus, it serves as a motivational tool that promotes artistic and social culture to this day.



ACAN's programs involve providing grants to platforms as well as individuals. It also organizes training workshops to organize festivals and events for volunteers and institutions; webinars; weekly online conferences; exchange of experiences; meetings; and annual seminars. ACAN issues a monthly electronic newspaper that highlights the



## 66 ARAB CULTURE AND ARTS NETWORK (ACAN)

cultural scenes of 22 Arabian countries and 44 European ones.

The network started with nine founders. Today, it has over 700 organizational and individual members, besides having volunteers, radio programs, training workshops that involve beneficiaries, and annual online meetings.





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## TAA'S PROGRAMS

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND RECOVERY FOR YOUNG GIRLS AND WOMEN

An artistic and cultural program that is dedicated to women and ensures their full empowerment, including equal participation in all aspects of public life, economically and politically, in an atmosphere of peace and non-violent interactions. Through this project, TAA aims to promote women's socio-economic empowerment by elaborating a handcrafts workshop that includes the accessories industry, mosaic, cookery, amigurumi, as well as drawing and coloring on wood, pottery, glass, fabrics, old glow-lights, and using the home oven. The main objective of our project is the social-economic empowerment and recovery of young girls and women, aiming to train and build the capacity of young girls and women, advocate for women's human rights, hone their skills and capacities, and promote social and economic recovery.





## 69 TAA PROGRAMS

### SPECIAL NEEDS

We were able to implement a program dedicated to people with disabilities, in which a drawing and theatrical training workshop were initiated at the Lebanese National Theater (LNT) in Tyre, and targeted trainees of both genders equally. This program is included in TAA's strategy and among the action plan. The aim of it is to enhance their capabilities and artistic and life skills in order to contribute to their inclusion in society and give them the opportunity to express themselves.



## 70 TAA PROGRAMS



### CAMP'S DREAMS THEATER

The idea of this project stems from the belief that there are suppressed energies and talents that need a space to express, without any sort of restrictions, their skills and enhance them. That's why, through "Camp's Dreams Theater," we are working to develop the skills of children and youth in the camps by using the language of art to change the stereotyped image that the community draws of the refugee camps. In addition to opening a window from the camps to the world to bring communities closer, that is, by training children and youth and empowering women to express themselves and empowering people with special needs through theater, besides establishing free independent spaces within the camps.





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## AWARDS AND NOMINATIONS

“ THIS CULTURAL PROJECT IN SOUTHERN LEBANON EMPHASIZES THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN CHANGE, HOW THIS ARTISTIC WORK CONTRIBUTES TO SOCIETY-BUILDING, AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS EXPERIENCE IN REOPENING THEATERS THAT WERE CLOSED AS A RESULT OF THE WAR IN ORDER TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER. THIS IS A VERY OUTSTANDING WORK. ”

UNITED NATIONS  
SECRETARY-  
GENERAL, ANTONIO  
GUTERRES (2021)



## 73 AWARDS AND NOMINATIONS

1. kassem istanbouli won the unesco-sharjah prize for arab culture's 19th edition in 2023 in recognition of all your efforts in the field of culture and intercultural dialogue.
2. kassem istanbouli won the jury's special award in the name of the egyptian actor, el deif ahmed, for performing "koum yaba" in the mansoura theater festival's second edition in 2023.
3. kassem istanbouli won the bachir gemayel award, which was given for the first time in lebanon in 2022. the committee's decision on granting this award was made after examining the projects that have contributed to the country's crisis lately.

## 74 AWARDS AND NOMINATIONS





## 75 AWARDS AND NOMINATIONS

“  
**IT'S CRITICAL THAT  
THE FESTIVAL  
BE HELD IN  
TYRE, WHICH  
CONTRIBUTES TO  
THE PROMOTION  
OF FILM CULTURE  
OUTSIDE OF BEIRUT,  
AND THAT THE  
PUBLIC IN THE  
SOUTH RECOGNIZES  
EUROPEAN  
CULTURE.**  
”

**THE AUSTRIAN  
AMBASSADOR TO  
LEBANON, URSULA  
FAHRENKER (2016)**

## 76 AWARDS AND NOMINATIONS

4. taa's project, acan, won the world summit on the information society prizes (wsis) in 2021 among the five best projects in the world in the categories of cultural diversity, identity, linguistic diversity, and local content.
5. the acan project won the intercultural achievement award (iaa) in the category “recent events” in vienna in 2021, granted by austria's federal ministry for european and international affairs.
6. kassem istanbouli won the best theatrical character award for 2019 at the sharm el-sheikh international theater festival in egypt.





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## FINAL WORDS



A city without a theater is a lifeless city. We believe that art has the power to change people's lives and communities. When we watch a movie or a play together, we share emotions and are united by our humanity, with no boundaries or differences.

Art is not art unless it is free. When art is absent, there is no chance for change. Our dream is to provide open spaces. We are working on building a platform of new ideas while preserving memories for future generations.





## 79 FINAL WORDS

We have done street performances since the beginning of our journey; we wanted to ensure that our dream was not only for artists, but for the entire community. We embrace young trainees, assisting them in realizing a dream they never imagined they would be able to realize.

“

**GREETINGS TO THE YOUNG VOLUNTEERS AND THEIR IMPORTANT ROLE IN BRINGING THEATRICAL AND CULTURAL LIFE BACK TO THE SOUTH AFTER A LONG ABSENCE, AS WELL AS THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS FREE AND INDEPENDENT SPACE IN THE CITY, GATHERING PEOPLE TOGETHER IN THEIR VARIOUS AFFILIATIONS TO ART, BEAUTY, AND CULTURE.**

”

**LEBANESE PLAYWRIGHT, ACTOR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF DAWAR AL-SHAMS (THE SUNFLOWER CULTURAL CENTER), ROGER ASSAF (2014)**



## 80 FINAL WORDS



Nothing can be accomplished in an instant; it takes time, patience, and effort to establish an initiative. We believe that passion, love, and affiliation are the most important aspects of project implementation. We learn through experience and work, and “we are always governed by hope and hold onto love to preserve culture, art, and the convergence of people.” The theater is for the people, and our goal is to make art accessible to everyone, rich and poor alike. We are close to the general public because we started out as street performers. We kept performing on the streets and worked hard to attract the public’s attention by encouraging them to participate in our carnivals, events, and activities. Our goal is to address social issues through our events, raise cultural awareness, and direct public support towards our initiatives’ goals and objectives.



**ANA CENDRERO ÁLVAREZ**

Ana was a crucial individual in the establishment of the Istanbouli Theater group and the association. She started a weekly screening of Middle Eastern movies in her home city, Madrid. She is still a TAA member and has been friends with the association for over ten years.

**JANA EL-HASSAN**

She has been a choreographer, dramaturge, and professor of drama and dance, and an activist for several years. Jana has contributed to Istanbouli's approach to theater. She is the cultural advisor and honorary president of TAA.

**IBRAHIM IBRAHIM**

A volunteer, an actor, and a member of TAA's events and festivals organization committee. Ibrahim was elected the administrative board's president upon the first elections in 2019, three years after TAA was founded.

**HOUSSAM KHATTAB**

Khattab is a Syrian refugee who lives in Lebanon. He joined the association as a volunteer and received theater training. Today, Houssam is an actor who participates in theater performances. He also works at TAA as a filmmaker and editor, and he is the photography and filmmaking committee's president.

“

*I AM PLEASED WITH THE TYRE INTERNATIONAL THEATER FESTIVAL'S HISTORIC ACHIEVEMENT IN REVIVING THEATER IN LEBANON AND THE ARAB WORLD. TIRO'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE ARTS IS A ONE-OF-A-KIND CASE. EVERYONE IN LEBANON SHOULD BACK IT UP AND SUPPORT IT.*

”

**LEBANESE ACTRESS AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF AL MADINA THEATER, NIDAL AL ACKHAR (2015)**

81

**INCLUSIVITY &  
DIVERSITY**



**BAHIA ZAYAT**

Bahia Zayat is a Lebanese artist. She started making crafts for the festivals' prizes and performers in 2014 and used to gather donations for the theater. In 2019, she started doing artistic training workshops for trainees in the field of fine arts. She was elected the administrative board's president in 2021.

**MARYAM MAHFOUTH**

A Lebanese young female born in Tyre city. She joined the association in 2018 with the intention of learning theater. Later, she sharpened her writing skills and moved behind the scenes. Maryam completed her book "The Naked Truth" in 2021, which is a collection of people's stories linked in a touching and artistic manner. On a professional level, she is now a member of TAA's monitoring and evaluation, photography and filmmaking, as well as the proposal writing committee. "TAA is a place where I challenged myself, believed in myself, and grew. It will hold a special place in my heart and mind for the rest of my life," claims Maryam.

**ISRAA ALAYAN**

Israa, a 20-year-old Lebanese female, began volunteering as a data analyst and joined the public relations committee at TAA in 2019. Later on, she gradually became immersed in her work, eventually heading to being the aforementioned committee's president. In 2021,



## 85 INCLUSIVITY & DIVERSITY

she traveled with the organization and took part in various activities. Israa gratifies TAA for letting her gain knowledge, experience, and personal growth as she improved her public speaking and social interaction skills.

### MAHA AMINE

Maha, a 60-year-old mother, once stepped into Rivoli Cinema with her grandchildren with the aim of enrolling them in the theater training workshop. She wanted to become an actress, but was unable to do so due to family circumstances. A few years later, she led a series of “Women’s Stories from Tyre”



## 86 INCLUSIVITY & DIVERSITY



under the supervision of TAA’s cultural advisor, director Jana El-Hassan.

### BASHAR SABRA

Bachar joined the association while still in high school. At the university, he directed his first movie, which was screened at the Tyre International Film Festival. Now, Bachar wishes to bring his friends from the University of Russia to the association.



**FOUAD ISSA**

Fouad Issa, a 39-year-old Palestinian from Al-Bass camp, has been a member of TAA. Fouad is passionate about art and storytelling. He works on lights and equipment.

**MOHAMMED AKKAWI**

Akkawi is a 24-year-old Palestinian from Al-Bass camp. The association allowed him to step outside of his discouraging zone and broaden his horizons. He became an actor, a photographer, a sound and light technician, the association's and ACAN's website developer, and the events and festivals organization committee's president.

**BASIL AL SHEIKH**

Basil is a 19-year-old Syrian refugee in Lebanon. Following the closure of Stars Cinema, Basil moved to Tyre and began volunteering at Rivoli Cinema. He is now an actor who performs in theater performances and assists with cleaning and painting at TAA.



“  
**TRIPOLI, BEIRUT,  
AND TYRE; THE  
STRETCH OF  
THEATER THAT  
BLOOMS IN  
TYRE CITY AND  
THE NATIONAL  
THEATER ARE A  
NATIONAL ACT  
FOR ALL. THANKS  
TO EVERYONE'S  
EFFORTS.  
TIRO'S ARTISTS,  
AUDIENCES, AND  
VOLUNTEERS  
ARE THE DRIVING  
FORCES BEHIND  
THIS PROCESS.**

**LEBANESE  
ACTOR,  
KAMIL SALEMEH  
(2019)**”







# 89

## COLLECTED TESTIMONIES

“Theater, dance, and body language are being revived in the South. It enables every community to attend free theater, cinema, and music performances. A genuine artistic revolution and a well-educated generation.”

**THE INDIAN AMBASSADOR TO LEBANON, ANITA NAYAR (2015)**

“This theater and cultural space will have a significant impact on the future. Many people around the world will learn from it because the young people who volunteer in Tiro inspire others to be energetic in creating art.”

**LEBANESE ACTOR, ZIAD ABU AABSI (2015)**

“Greetings to Lebanon, Nabatieh, and Istanbouli Theater for creating a cultural venue for all at a time when several theaters around the world are closing. Congratulations to this cultural union that defies classification, and I hope to join you one day.”

**SPANISH PLAYWRIGHT, SCREENWRITER, FILM DIRECTOR, NOVELIST, AND POET, FERNANDO ARRABAL (2016)**





“The European Union’s goal is to build a movie audience in Lebanon by screening movies in schools around the country. This is precisely what Tiro Association for Arts is doing to stimulate the cultural movement in the South, hence promoting artistic abilities and skills while also establishing an educated generation.”

**REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ITALIAN EUROPEAN UNION,  
MARCELLO MORI (2016)**

“We appreciate the fact that you organized Egyptian movies and honored Egyptian actors and directors in your theater. This promotes the exchange of cultural relations between Lebanon and Egypt through the medium of cinema.”

**CAPTAIN OF ACTORS IN EGYPT, ASHRAF ZAKY (2018)**

“Melhem Barakat will be honored in this beautiful theater built with the sweat and effort of young people who bring people together for music and the fine arts. They deserve our gratitude because they are a state-sized institution that works with passion, love, and volunteerism for others.”

**LEBANESE POET AND LYRICIST, NIZAR FRANCIS (2019)**

“The team that brought this cinema back to life has love and passion for cinema, and this scene has taken me back to happier times because





## 93 COLLECTED TESTIMONIES

there are still people honoring artists and organizing film festivals in Tyre, which cultural institutions in Beirut have failed to do.”

**LEBANESE ACTOR, CHAWKI MATTA (2019)**

“This festival is an important opportunity for young people to show their movies. This cultural project and its pilot experience in how to build culture and art in marginalized areas have proven that nothing is impossible as long as there is a will and a belief in art and change.”

**LEBANESE ACTOR, MOUNIR KESSERWANY (2019)**



## 94 COLLECTED TESTIMONIES



“I am thrilled to be able to support my colleague and friend Kassem Istambouli in his artistic and enthusiastic efforts. Nizar Mikati was introduced to me by the artist Omar Mikati. I am grateful to the people of Tyre for this accomplishment, and I am honored to be standing on this great stage, to which I will soon return.”

**LEBANESE ACTOR, GEORGES KHABBAZ (2019)**

“At a time where theaters and the spaces of culture are closing, Tiro Association for Arts is promoting culture and the arts during a very difficult time.”

**LEBANESE SINGER, SONGWRITER, MUSIC COMPOSER, AND ACTOR, AHMAD KAABOUR (2019)**



## 95 COLLECTED TESTIMONIES

“You have contributed to the creation and remembrance of the Lebanese National Theater. We must assist you in re-introducing theaters and its audiences to Lebanon.”

**LEBANESE ACTOR, AHMAD AL ZEIN (2019)**

“You are the flame of light in the city of Tyre and for the world in a dark time.”

**LEBANESE ACTOR, REFAAT TARABIYEH (2019)**

“Remembering and honoring Nizar Mikati and Shushu by Tiro Association for Arts is a qualitative transformation of theater and culture in Lebanon, from the bourgeois theater to the people’s theater.”

**LEBANESE ACTOR AND WRITER, OMAR MIKATI (2020)**



## 96 COLLECTED TESTIMONIES

“I am pleased with this tribute, particularly at the free Lebanese National Theater, which is an extension of our generation and Lebanon’s Golden Age. What Tiro Association for Arts has accomplished, the Lebanese government has not. This theater is a source of pride for us and all of Lebanon’s playwrights.”

**LEBANESE ACTRESS, AMAL AAFEESH (2020)**

“Kassem Istanbouli is an artist who won the Arab Theater Artist Award as Best Theater Character in 2019 at the Festival of Youth in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. It is well deserved; given the number of theater activities he is currently involved in here in Tyre. He outperforms the Ministry of Culture with his individual potential.”

**LEBANESE PUBLICIST AND JOURNALIST, JAMAL FAYYAD (2020)**





## 97 COLLECTED TESTIMONIES

“It is a moment of great emotion. Sitting here in the cinema after being absent for 18 months is an unusual act of freedom. This project is a project of hope for life and success, and those who have undertaken it have created a precious space for people with their diversity and differences to interact, to dialogue, to laugh, to cry, and to listen to each other. Through culture and the arts, the future is being constructed. I am so happy to visit this amazing



## 98 COLLECTED TESTIMONIES

place. I will do everything in my power to get France to support this project. It is of great importance that it happens here in Tyre and perhaps later in Tripoli, if this is on Tiro's agenda. I invite the Lebanese people to be present where culture exists, being the scene for hope and freedom. France and Lebanon are bound through culture, representing the diversified and multiplural identity of Lebanon. This is Lebanon's strength in the region and around the world. Congratulations to Tiro and its members and to everyone who contributed to the success of this fabulous project. Come join and be part of this exceptional space! A space of hope and freedom!”

**THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR TO LEBANON, ANNE GRILLO**  
(2021)





## 99 COLLECTED TESTIMONIES

“Joy, happiness, learning, and sharing are what Istambouli Theater represents. It is a space for everyone who believes in freedom and democracy. This is where I belong.”

**DIRECTOR AND CHOREOGRAPHER, JANA EL HASSAN**  
(2021)

“I had the pleasure of meeting you in this magical place: Rivoli Cinema, which existed before YouTube, Netflix, and movies. The Tiro Association for Arts is establishing an independent cultural space where people of all ages, creeds, and nationalities can gather and share their culture, religion, and food. Rivoli managed to leave a trace in the cinema that transports us back many years to the times of Martin Luther King and



## 100 COLLECTED TESTIMONIES



Om Kalthoum, when the future seemed promising and it appeared that this phase in the community here would only get better. I was so impressed to see these young people working so hard and developing themselves to make the most of this opportunity in a country that is suffering.”

**THE AUSTRIAN AMBASSADOR TO LEBANON, DR. RENÉ PAUL AMRY** (2021)





“

*WE ARE GOVERNED BY HOPE AND HOLD ONTO LOVE TO GRANT  
PEOPLE HAPPINESS. WHEREVER THE SUN LIES, THERE IS  
THEATER. WHEREVER THERE IS DARKNESS AND A DIM LIGHT,  
THERE IS THE CINEMA.*

”

KASSEM ISTANBOULI





[www.tiroart.org](http://www.tiroart.org)

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