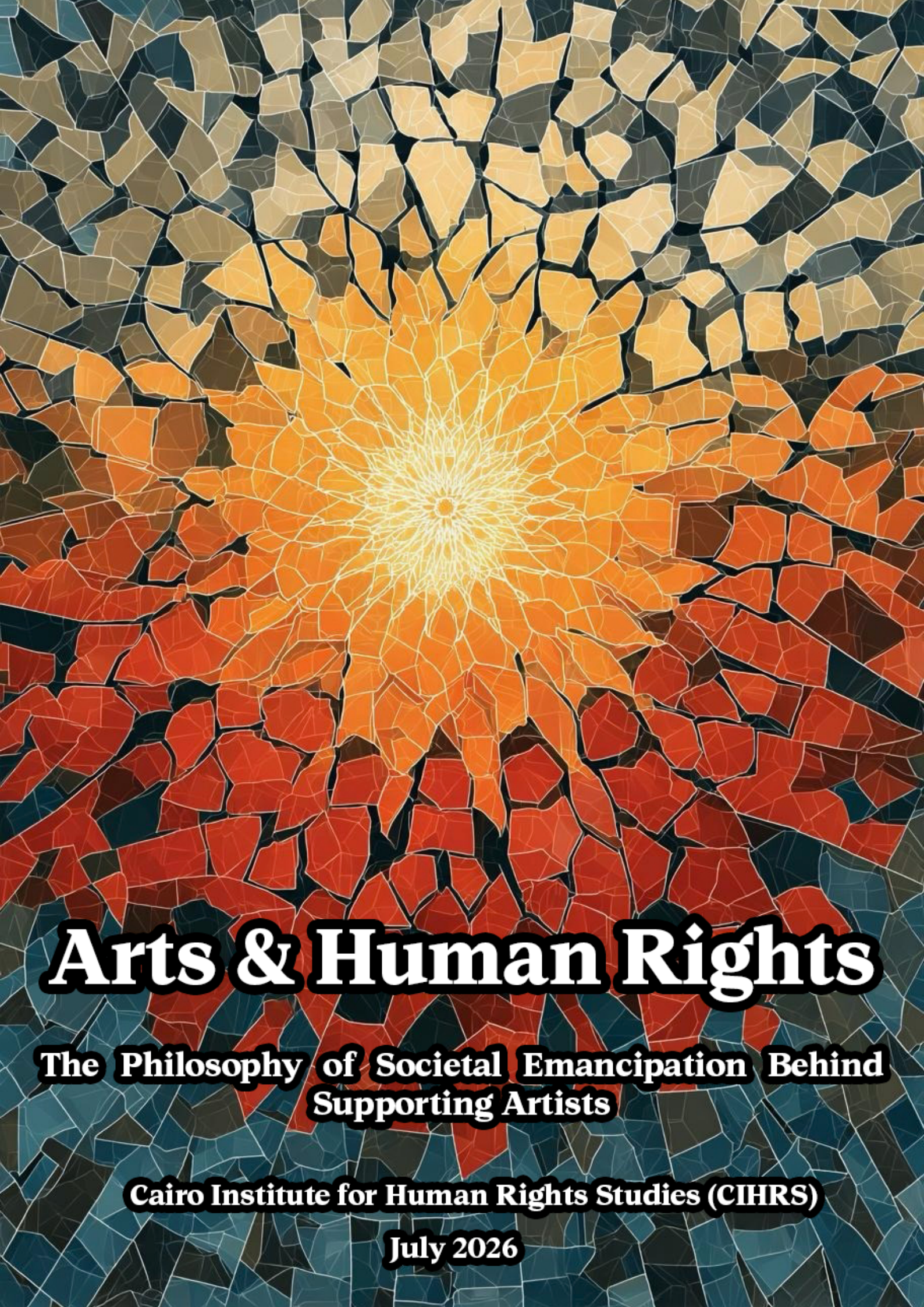




Arts & Human Rights

**The Philosophy of Societal Emancipation Behind
Supporting Artists**

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

July 2026

«Arts & Human Rights»

The Philosophy of Societal Emancipation Behind Supporting Artists

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

July 2026

This report

Prepared by: Dr. Fayrouz Karawiya

Foreword by: Ziad Abdeltawab and Youssef Ahmed

Translation: Ragab Saad

Cover by: Tarek ALGhorani

About the Author: Fayrouz Karawya is an Egyptian independent singer, songwriter, writer, and researcher whose multidisciplinary work bridges music, cultural anthropology, and critical studies. Since her artistic debut in 2006, she has released six albums and over 120 singles, collaborating across music, theater, and film. Karawya holds a master's degree in Cultural Anthropology from the American University in Cairo (2009), where her research examined Egyptian cinema's socio-political undercurrents. As a cultural researcher, she has led projects on gender, musicology, and Arab popular culture, authoring two books: *Constructions of Chaos* (2010), and *Kol Da Kan Leih* (2022)—the latter tracing Egyptian mainstream music's cultural history from the late 19th century to the present. In 2024, she earned her PhD in Cultural Studies from Sorbonne University (Paris 4), analyzing the evolution of Egypt's digital memosphere after 2013 within the country's post-revolutionary socio-political landscape.

The Tae'thir Project



Implemented in partnership with:



Cairo Institute
for Human Rights Studies
Institut du Caire pour les études des droits de l'homme
مركز القاهرة لدراسات حقوق الإنسان



Supported by:



AFD
AGENCE FRANÇAISE
DE DÉVELOPPEMENT



Funded by
the European Union

Civil Society Facility for the Mediterranean
مرفق المجتمع المدني لمنطقة المتوسط

Contents

Art, Human Rights, and the Cultural Dilemma in the Arab Region . . .	5
Introductory Essay by the Editors	5
1. Introduction	14
2. Theoretical Framework	20
3. Context and Constraints on Artistic Activity in the MENA Region Post-2011	26
4. The Tae'thir Project as a Case Study	35
1. Training Sessions and the Relevance of Abstraction	37
2. The Local and the Transnational Contexts	39
3. Networks of Production, Circulation, and Distribution Changing the Limits of the Possible . .	41
4. Community Building and Collective Artistry	42
5. Findings and Conclusion	44
1. Affective Mobilization	44
2. Cognitive Liberation	46
3. Art as Commons / Public Space	49
4. Art as Dialogue and Community	49
Conclusion	50
6. Annexes	52
1. Note on Tae'thir Project	52
2. Selected Excerpts from CIHRS Publications on Art, Culture, and Human Rights	55

Art, Human Rights, and the Cultural Dilemma in the Arab Region

Introductory Essay by the Editors

In the research report, *Arts and Human Rights: The Philosophy of Societal Emancipation Behind Supporting Artists*, Dr. Fayrouz Karawya explores a less-traveled path for the work of human rights organizations; the path opened by art, imagination, memory, emotion, and creative expression.

This path does not treat art as an adornment of advocacy, nor does it ask artists to translate human rights concepts into simplified messages. Rather, it begins from a different premise: Genuine, autonomous intellectual expression, through art, can reach people in ways that formal human rights discourse often cannot. Through stories, images, performances, sounds, shared emotions, irony, beauty, discomfort, and ambiguity, art can- in many ways - influence the cultural and emotional worlds that shape a person's conceptualization of freedom, dignity, injustice, fear, and hope.

Art, however, is not intrinsically emancipatory, as the report illustrates. Like all forms of reflection and expression, Art can be captured by systems of power, economics, and belief. Its transformative potential is subject to the conditions under which it is created, circulated, received, and debated. Most importantly, art's potency is contingent upon how artists position themselves.

This report is therefore part of a broader reflection within the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) on the relationship between human rights and culture in the Arab region. For decades, CIHRS has explored potential paths for human rights values to move beyond legal, diplomatic, and activist circles and become socially meaningful to our specific region.¹ Traditional human rights methods are often reactive by nature, while the forces we confront operate not only through laws and institutions, but also through fear, memory, identity and emotions. How can we communicate with wider publics, including intellectuals, artists, writers, educators, and cultural actors who may not necessarily use the language of human rights, but who contribute to synthesizing the symbolic and moral imagination of society?

This exploration has been fundamental to the vision of CIHRS since its first years.² Mohamed Sayed Said, one of the CIHRS's co-founders, repeatedly asked how culture could be renewed through education, civil society, public debate, and struggles for rights, so that democratic citizenship could become a manifested reality in the Arab region. CIHRS was founded, in part, to contribute to the long and arduous journey towards a dignified existence for all peoples in the region.

Like all forms of reflection and expression, Art can be captured by systems of power, economics, and belief. Its transformative potential is subject to the conditions under which it is created, circulated, received, and debated

¹ Bahey eldin Hassan, "Views: From National Liberation to National Colonialism" Rowaq Arabi 29, no. 2 (2024): 22-39,

<https://cihrs-rowaq.org/views-from-national-liberation-to-national-colonialism/?lang=en>

² See Annex 2 of this report, "Selected Excerpts from CIHRS Publications on Art, Culture, and Human Rights."

Authoritarianism is not the inevitable destiny of Arab societies. Said rejected cultural determinism³ premised upon the so-called immutability of political culture in the region and instead uplifted its transformative potential. Political culture in the Arab region, he asserted, had at times undergone partial, uneven, and reversible transformations toward greater acceptance of democracy and international human rights norms, including within opposition discourses, whether Islamist, nationalist, leftist, or liberal.⁴ Yet he also warned that authoritarian tendencies remained powerful within dominant political and cultural formations and can easily undermine this cultural transformation.

The relevance of Mohamed Sayed Said's vision became evident in the struggles for democratic transformation and human dignity that intensified after his death, cresting during the waves of Arab uprisings between 2011 and 2019. It also became visible in the decline that followed. Bahey eldin Hassan, who co-founded CIHRS with Said, observed in 2024 the extended political and social stagnancy in which the Arab region remains trapped, lagging behind other regions for particular historical, political, and institutional reasons.⁵

Mohamed Sayed Said had long insisted on a delicate but essential point: Culture is not an essence that predetermines failure in the Arab region, but neither is it secondary. It is a field for contention. It is where authoritarianism, religious zealotry, nationalism, patriarchy, rights, democracy, citizenship, pluralism, and enlightenment confront one another. Culture

³ Mohamed El-Sayed Said, "Ishkaliyat Ta'aththur al-Dimuqratiya fi al-'Alam al-'Arabi [The Question of the Democratic Impasse in the Arab World]," in Azmi Bishara and Mohamed El-Sayed Said (eds.) *Ishkaliyat Ta'aththur al-Tahawwul al-Dimuqrati fi al-Watan al-'Arabi [Questions on the Impasse of Democratisation in the Arab World]* (Birzeit, Muwatin Institute for Democracy and Human Rights:1996)

⁴ Mohamed El-Sayd Said, "Transformations of Arab Culture from a Human Rights Perspective," *Rowaq Arabi* 14, no.1 (2009): 71–96.

⁵ Bahey eldin Hassan, "Democratisation and Human Rights in the Arab World, Enduring or Temporary Impasse?"

Rowaq Arabi 28, no. 3 (2024): 23-35,

<https://cihrs-rowaq.org/views-enduring-or-temporary-impasse-democratisation-and-human-rights-in-the-arab-world/?lang=en>

can be a field of obedience and fear, but it can also become a field of emancipation and renewal. That is why Said prioritized this topic in his work.

Cultural renewal emerges historically from the interaction of social forces, material conditions, inherited symbols, everyday practices, and creative reinterpretation.

A pathway for cultural renewal must therefore be encouraged. Yet this renewal cannot simply be tasked to human rights organizations, nor can it be invented at will by intellectuals, political elites, or state institutions. Burhan Ghalioun, a Syrian intellectual, sees culture as neither a passive mirror of society nor an autonomous realm floating above it. It is formed through dialectics: between the individual and the group, consciousness and reality, past and future, geography and space, tradition and change.⁶ For him, culture becomes productive when it gives society ways to manage these tensions creatively; it becomes pathological when it congeals them into rigid identities or suppresses differences. Building on Ghalioun's insight we may understand that cultural renewal emerges historically from the interaction of social forces, material conditions, inherited symbols, everyday practices, and creative reinterpretation. It cannot be meaningfully renewed without civil liberties, political participation, freedom of expression, and institutional pluralism. Attempts to impose cultural change from above have often failed, producing alienation rather than renewal. Culture, in other words, is not merely heritage or identity. It is the product of living interactions within society.

Artists and intellectuals, like all other individuals and groups, are shaped by the societies in which they live, the education they receive, the dogmas they encounter, and the political, ideological, religious, or secular commitments they carry. They are not required to be

⁶ Burhan Ghalioun, *Ightiyāl al-‘Aql: al-Thaqāfa al-‘Arabiyya bayna al-Salafiyya wa-l-Tab‘iyya* [The Assassination of Reason: Arab Culture between Salafism and Dependency] (6th edition, Arab Cultural Center, 2012).

neutral, but some may prevent these commitments from impeding the independence of knowledge, critique, and imagination. Mohamed Sayed Said had long argued that when the intellectual becomes merely a technician of ideas, a propagandist, a servant of authority, or a direct manager of power, they lose the critical position that makes intellectual work meaningful. The contribution of intellectuals, including artists, to renewal may therefore be amplified by their ability to examine inherited systems, question the rules that have governed past and present realities, and imagine alternatives that can improve existing conditions. In that regard, their role is not necessarily to defend or attack systems of belief, nor is it to produce ideology. Rather, it is to aid society in understanding its own symbolic and normative systems, and through this deepened understanding, they can contribute to transforming culture from a “prison of identity” to a field of renewal.

For a human rights organization like ours, working with intellectuals, artists, and cultural actors requires sensitivity. Our aim is not, and should not be, to produce the “engaged intellectual,” but to help provide spaces where intellectuals and artists can engage freely and consciously with their social, political, cultural, and economic realities.

We further recognize the imperative to engage more deeply with the social and cultural environment in which human rights values either resonate or fail to resonate. In authoritarian contexts, this environment includes state propaganda, censorship, media systems, religious discourse, nationalism, cultural industries, social norms, and everyday fears. This imperative becomes even more daunting at a time when human rights values are globally contested and waning. Nevertheless, artists and cultural actors are uniquely positioned to become protagonists capable of counteracting and challenging authoritarianism, whether through direct confrontation or indirect maneuvering. Ambiguity, symbolism, irony, beauty, memory, discomfort, tenderness, and imagination can all be deployed by the artist in some contexts.

It cannot be meaningfully renewed without civil liberties, political participation, freedom of expression, and institutional pluralism

Artists are part of the broader community of intellectual and cultural actors who shape the minds and imaginations of generations. In his book *Modernity Is the Sister of Tolerance: Contemporary Arabic Poetry and Human Rights*, published by CIHRS in 2001, poet and writer Helmy Salem examined the manifestations of human rights in modern Arabic poetry. Through thematic and artistic readings of Arab poets, Salem traced how Arab creators engaged with questions of freedom, repression, justice, dignity, and security. For Salem, many Arab poets understood modernity as the artist's right, and even duty, to rely on reason rather than inherited tradition, and to produce art that expresses individuality rather than reproducing collective dogma.⁷ Modernity was thus not confined to a historical period or imported concept. It was an exercise in discovery, experimentation, and creative risk, especially when confronting taboos surrounding religion, politics, and sexuality.

It is impossible to think today that the “chapter of arts” has ended, and perhaps it never will. Regardless of technological transformations, digital media, and the rise of virtual realities, art remains uniquely distinguished among human productions because it creates a form of presence through the encounter between the artwork and its audience. The path of art is therefore intertwined with the path of humanity and civilization and confronted with the same challenges of modernity and tradition.

The tension between modernity and tradition has been a constant feature of intellectual and artistic life in the Arab region. Political conflicts in the Arab region have often been accompanied by conflicts over culture, ideology, religion, law, knowledge, social organiza-

⁷ Helmy Salem, *Al-Ḥadātha Ukht al-Tasāmuḥ: al-Shi'r al-ʿArabī al-Muʿāṣir wa-Ḥuqūq al-Insān* [Modernity Is the Sister of Tolerance: Contemporary Arabic Poetry and Human Rights] (Cairo, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, 2000).

tion, and human rights. Helmy Salem described this tension as the artist's struggle against "the guardians of taboos and the opponents of freedom of expression."

Supporting artists should encompass more than protecting free expression or producing advocacy-oriented content, it should further aim to foster deeper cognitive and affective transformations in society

CIHRS's long-standing commitment to cultural renewal and debates on identity provides the background for the Tae'thir project managed by a unique consortium of four organizations.⁸ It is unique because it is rare to find such a harmonious collaboration between an organization specializing in human rights research and advocacy, one focused on networking civil society actors, another working in popular education, and a fourth dedicated to video art. It takes vision to create such a partnership and sustaining it over the years requires vision and commitment.

Through training, mentorship, artistic production, mobility, and networking, Tae'thir supports participants working on themes such as patriarchy, censorship, criticism and authoritarianism. Rather than reducing art to advocacy messaging, the project seeks to protect creative autonomy, deepen critical reflection, and foster transnational solidarities.

⁸ **Tae'thir** is a three-year Mediterranean initiative that brings together artists, digital creators, and cultural actors from the MENA and Mediterranean regions to explore the links between art, human rights, and social transformation. It is a project Co-implemented with Réseau Euromed France, Instants Vidéo numériques et poétiques, Ligue de l'enseignement 13 and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies. This is not the first time our four organizations have worked together. Our collaboration goes back almost nine years. Our first joint initiative took place in July 2017, when we organized a training program for human rights defenders from Libya on artistic expression. The project brought together eight young Libyans to portray their realities and challenges through innovative artistic forms, including documentary, fiction, animation, and experimental film.

Tae'thir reflects the tensions surrounding the role of intellectuals and artists in society. Its objective is not to ask artists to “illustrate” human rights concepts or transform them into simplified educators. Instead, it seeks to offer spaces where artists, content creators, and human rights actors can learn from one another, question dominant narratives, and collectively explore how artistic practice can challenge authoritarianism, extremism, patriarchy, exclusion, and fear.

At a time when authoritarian and anti-rights narratives are becoming more sophisticated, human rights movements must become more imaginative as well.

Supporting artists should encompass more than protecting free expression or producing advocacy-oriented content, it should further aim to foster deeper cognitive and affective transformations in society, the research report contends. In its examination of the relationship between art, human rights, and societal emancipation in the MENA region, the report focuses on Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia. It also uses a practical case study of a conceptual art program operating at the intersection of artistic practice and human rights dissemination. Cognitive liberation, affective mobilization, art as commons or public space, and art as dialogue and community are identified as key dimensions through which artistic practice can contribute to broader social change.

The choice of Fayrouz Karawya as author of this study is itself significant. As an artist, singer, songwriter, physician, academic, and cultural researcher, Karawya occupies precisely the intersection this report seeks to examine: the meeting point between artistic practice, critical inquiry, and social imagination. Her work thus offers a vital contribution; it enables the report to transcend an external human rights reading of art and approach artists as producers of knowledge, critique, affect, and possibility.

When conducting this research, we asked the researcher not to focus primarily on the precarious situation of artists. As an organization, we fully acknowledge the security, social, economic, ideological, political, and war-related constraints to which the artistic scene in the Arab region is subjected. We also recognize that several competent human rights and cultural organizations are already working hard to document these constraints. In this research, the aim was to go beyond documenting these restrictions and to help open a much-needed discussion in our region on the role of art in culture and society. The brief overview of the numerous violations faced by the artistic community in this report is intended as a stark reminder that art - like thought, freedom, rights, and other vital aspects of life- remains under the guillotine of authoritarian regimes. Artists, as citizens of our societies, are exposed to the same risks faced by others who dare to exercise their basic human rights or to exist in the public — and sometimes even the private — sphere as an “other.” We acknowledge the heavy price paid by countless artists and their families across the region. Together with artists throughout the region, our aim is to explore new spaces for cultural renewal.

At a time when authoritarian and anti-rights narratives are becoming more sophisticated, human rights movements must become more imaginative as well. This means recognizing that law alone cannot transform societies unless people can also imagine themselves and others differently. Art is an avenue to create that possibility. It can open spaces where fear is named, silence is interrupted, inherited assumptions are questioned, and new forms of solidarity become conceivable.

This report is an invitation to take that possibility seriously.

Youssef AHMED

Head of the Human Rights Dissemination Program

Ziad ABDELTAWAB

CIHRS Director

1. Introduction

Over the past century, human rights frameworks, often advanced by civil society organizations (CSOs), have played a significant role in supporting cultural rights through their engagement with art as a medium capable of shaping and advancing social change. This engagement has emphasized advocacy and the protection of artistic freedom as a fundamental right. However, it has also generated recurring tensions, particularly around the instrumentalization of art as a tool subject to human rights concepts, bound to deliver them in semi-pedagogical forms. Such approaches risk producing message-driven artistic output guided by standardized visions, thereby undermining artistic autonomy.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, especially in the post-2011 context, the relationship between art and human rights has become increasingly complex. The rigid dichotomy between art as an autonomous sphere and art as an instrument for social change no longer adequately captures the realities on the ground. Instead, the profound transformations that have affected political systems, social structures, and cultural production call for rethinking the foundations through which human rights actors engage with art creators. This raises critical questions about the current needs of post-2011 societies, the cultural trends shaping artistic production, and the evolving concerns and constraints faced by artists across the region.

This research project examines how conceptual art programs can contribute to developing a foundational method that combines the efforts of human rights movements and cultural producers in the MENA region. Focusing on Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia as case studies, it seeks to formulate a conceptual framework that moves beyond the dominant models of engagement over the past two decades. The choice of the three countries is based on their respective influence on the history of cultural industries in the region over the past two centuries, which positions them as suitable cases for investigating cultural and artistic practices situated within established and relatively long-standing legal, institutional, and

pedagogical structures. Second, despite the chaotic and precarious political crises affecting many other countries in the region, often disrupting the continuity and sustainability of artistic activity, these three countries still maintain relatively coherent artistic practices that follow an ongoing and regular trajectory. This is the case even if such practices are not evenly distributed across their territories, due to factors such as war in Lebanon or limited cultural development in Upper Egypt and rural Tunisia, for example.

Methodologically, the study draws on library research and critical discourse analysis, complemented by qualitative ethnographic research and in-depth interviews with independent artists and cultural actors, particularly beneficiaries and coordinators of the Tae'thir Project (2023-2026), led by a consortium including REF – Réseau Euromed France (REF), the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), Instants vidéo numériques et poétiques, and Ligue de l'enseignement 13.

The targeted sample is expected to participate in direct interviews and qualitative ethnographic research, contributing grassroots experiences, data, and visions regarding the actual advantages and deficiencies related to conceptual art programs. These contributions aim to support the development of programs that take into consideration diversified thought processes, foster socially conscious artistic practices, and conceive a rights-based perspective that can be effectively integrated into artistic projects.

This research project examines how conceptual art programs can contribute to developing a foundational method that combines the efforts of human rights movements and cultural producers in the MENA region.

The post-2011 phase has produced divergent yet converging trajectories across the region. While some countries descended into civil wars and prolonged instability, others experienced varying forms of authoritarian restoration, particularly since 2014. In these contexts,

ruling authorities have sought to reassert control over increasingly fragmented and dynamic media and cultural landscapes. In Egypt, for example, the post-2014 period witnessed the construction of a state-aligned media monolith through the systematic acquisition of private media outlets by state-backed entities and pro-regime businessmen.⁹

This phase, often referred to as “the return of the state”¹⁰ was accompanied by the expansion of censorship mechanisms, including the strengthening of institutions such as the Supreme Council for Media Regulation, the blocking of hundreds of websites, and the repression of journalists, bloggers, and cultural producers under broadly defined counterterrorism frameworks, including the 2018 Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law.¹¹

Since 2014, curbing the dynamic activity within political, social, and cultural spheres has led to the institutionalization of repression and state violence. Digital activism and the role of social media platforms began to be regarded pejoratively. Counterattacks on digital media targeted cyber-militants and access to almost six hundred websites,¹² most of them belonging to media organizations, have been blocked.¹³

⁹ Fatima El Issawi, *Egyptian Media under Transition: In the Name of the Regime... In the Name of the People?*

(POLIS, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2014)

https://researchonline.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/59868/1/El-Issawi_Egyptian-Media-Under-Transition_2014_pub.pdf

¹⁰ Carole Sigman, “The ‘Return of the State’ and New Forms of Domination in Russia: The Case of Higher Education,” *Revue française de science politique* 66 (2016): 915–936.

¹¹ Reporters Without Borders (RSF), “Egypt’s New Cybercrime Law Legalizes Internet Censorship,” IFEX (24 August 2018),

<https://ifex.org/egypts-new-cybercrime-law-legalizes-internet-censorship/>

¹² Masaar, “Blocked Websites in Egypt,” (23 September 2020, last updated 27 April 2021),

<https://masaar.net/en/blocked-websites-in-egypt/>

¹³ Elissa Miller, “Egypt Leads the Pack in Internet Censorship across the Middle East,” Atlantic Council (2018).

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/egypt-leads-the-pack-in-internet-censorship-across-the-middle-east/>

Similarly, Tunisia has experienced an accelerated process of authoritarian restructuring since the election of President Kais Saied in 2019. The suspension of parliament in 2021 and subsequent decree-laws—notably Decree-Law 2022-14—have introduced sweeping restrictions on freedom of expression through vaguely defined provisions that criminalize the dissemination of information deemed harmful to economic or public order.¹⁴ Other decree-laws and developments within the Tunisian political ecosystem have raised serious concerns regarding the freedom of association, freedom of expression, fair trial guarantees, and the broader environment for civil society and cultural production.¹⁵

Cultural actors and CSOs operating within the field of cultural rights face overlapping challenges. These include shrinking civic space, intensified censorship regimes, restrictive legal frameworks, and the marginalization of cultural rights within broader human rights agendas

In Lebanon, the constraints take a different but equally severe form. Since 2011, the country has faced the compounded effects of political paralysis, sectarian tensions exacerbated by the Syrian conflict, and a deepening economic collapse.¹⁶ The 2019 protest movement, while significant, failed to produce structural reform and was followed by rapid

¹⁴ Amnesty International, “Tunisia: A Year of Human Rights Regression since President’s Power-Grab,” 2022
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/MDE3058762022ENGLISH.pdf>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Karam Karam, “The Fragile Balance in Lebanon: Domestic Tension and Foreign Pressure,” European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), (2023),
<https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-fragile-balance-in-lebanon-domestic-tension-and-foreign-pressure/>

impoverishment, institutional breakdown, and the collapse of cultural funding structures.

¹⁷ The Beirut port explosion further accelerated state disintegration and public distrust, while the Israeli wars on Lebanon after October 7th, 2023, have pushed the country toward heightened instability, threatening complete political failure. For artists and cultural producers, these conditions have resulted in increased precarity and reliance on international funding, and significant waves of migration and brain drain.

Across these three contexts, cultural actors and CSOs operating within the field of cultural rights face overlapping challenges. These include shrinking civic space, intensified censorship regimes, restrictive legal frameworks, and the marginalization of cultural rights within broader human rights agendas. Communication between state institutions and youthful cultural practitioners is often absent or adversarial, while the institutional infrastructure supporting independent artistic production remains weak.

Against this backdrop, this research argues that strategic interventions aimed at producing substantive societal change must engage with culture as a form of “social glue.” Supporting artists should move beyond the protection of freedom of expression or the production of advocacy-oriented content, toward fostering deeper cognitive and affective transformations. Enabling artists to “reimagine the possible” requires addressing internalized constraints shaped by hegemonic cultural narratives—whether state-imposed or socially embedded—and creating conditions for what can be described as “cognitive liberation.”

For that purpose, the research aims to explore the untapped potential within collaborative and interactive programs that bring together the efforts and imaginations of artists and human rights organizations, focusing on fostering artistic human rights defense and support artists’ “cognitive liberation” by moving from theory to collaborative creation.

¹⁷ Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, “The Lebanese Uprising: Causes and Repercussions,” Unit for Political Studies, (23 October 2019),

<https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/Pages/The-Lebanese-Uprising.aspx>

Ultimately, this research seeks to transcend instrumental approaches to art within human rights advocacy circles by proposing a holistic model that recognizes artists as agents of intellectual and social transformation. Investing in artistic imagination, legal protection, and mental support constitutes the foundation of a comprehensive strategy aimed at generating affective and cognitive shifts in public discourse in the region. Such shifts are understood as a necessary step toward broader processes of societal emancipation, the development of public thought, and the pursuit of social freedoms and democratic transformation and reconfiguration.

2. Theoretical Framework

This research is situated at the intersection of cultural policy studies, political sociology, and critical theory. It draws on the works of George Yúdice, Jacques Rancière, Eleonora Belfiore, Gintarė Rukšėnaitė, and Kim West to develop a nuanced framework for understanding the relationship between art, human rights, and societal emancipation. At the core of this framework lies a fundamental tension: the coexistence of art as a resource mobilized within systems of governance, power relations and institutions from one side, and art as a site of critical engagement and emancipatory transformation for society, on the other side.

Professor and culture studies scholar George Yúdice's concept of the "expediency of culture" provides a critical entry point to understand the contemporary conditions of art production.¹⁸ Yúdice argues that art and culture have increasingly been mobilized as a resource within broader systems of governance, where they become enmeshed within larger policies, and are expected to contribute to social cohesion, economic development, and political stabilization. Artistic practices are thus embedded within institutional networks shaped by funding structures, policy frameworks, and development agendas.

This logic of instrumentalization, as Yúdice refers, is not limited to state actors but extends to CSOs, including human rights institutions, which often engage art as a medium for advocacy and social change. As a result, artistic production is frequently shaped by objectives that are "external" to the creative process, leading to standardized, message-driven outputs aligned with donor priorities.¹⁹ Professor of cultural policy studies Eleonora Belfiore suggests that the emphasis on the "social impact" of the arts is not only concep-

¹⁸ George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Duke University Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture*.

tually unstable but also conditioned by historical context.²⁰

Claims about the transformative power of art have oscillated across time, ranging from moral rectification and pedagogy to political control and social engineering. Contemporary policy frameworks, as Belfiore highlights, often reduce the complexity of artistic endeavor to measurable outcomes, exerting pressure to justify art in terms of predefined social parameters such as inclusion, economic growth, or community development.²¹

Belfiore's critique reveals that the demand for measurable impact risks flattening the multifaceted nature of artistic experience and reproducing an impoverished understanding of art as a "societal mission." This insight is crucial for interrogating human rights approaches that rely on art as an advocacy tool without fully engaging with its epistemological and affective dimensions.

The tension between artistic autonomy and instrumentalization is further elaborated in cultural policy studies. Public and International Relations Specialist Gintarė Rukšėnaitė conceptualizes cultural policy not merely as a set of administrative tools but as an ideological field that actively shapes the meaning, value, and function of art in society.²² Within this field, the "arm's length principle" is often referred to as a mechanism to protect artistic freedom by maintaining distance between political authority, cultural actors, and art producers.

Yet, as Rukšėnaitė's analysis shows, this principle is frequently compromised in practice by competing policy objectives. Cultural policy frameworks simultaneously promote artistic

²⁰ Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, "RETHINKING THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF THE ARTS," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 13, no. 2 (2007): 135–151,

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630701342741>

²¹ Belfiore and Bennet, "RETHINKING THE SOCIAL".

²² Gintarė Rukšėnaitė, "The Role of Cultural Policy in Maintaining Artistic Freedom," Aaltodoc Repository, (Master's thesis, Aalto University, 2023),

<https://aaltodoc.aalto.fi/server/api/core/bitstreams/5707909b-1e2e-41dc-9e11-1ca2b3b1e70d/content>

freedom and assign art a role in achieving broader socio-economic goals, such as sustainable development and social inclusion. This dual function creates an inherent imbalance, where instrumental rationales can subtly shape funding criteria, evaluation processes, and artistic outputs.

In the MENA region, stressing the role of arts in moral reform and social development has always been a point of convergence between authoritarian forces like extreme nationalists and Islamist enthusiasts.²³ Ḥasan al-Bannā, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, opined that art was an important cultural field that could be useful to Islam. He emphasized the label of *al-fann al-hādif* (useful/purposeful art) as a tool in fashioning society and spreading moral or ethical messages. Under Gamal Abd al-Nasser’s reign, the same label was deployed to encourage the realist productions of the time to “raise the people’s consciousness and reforming society.”²⁴

The stress on purposeful art for “social” reform, as nationalists claim, could be tweaked to purposeful art for “moral” reform under Islamist slogans. Historically, the alternance of the mission of art between social and moral reform became a “diaphasic” variation, or lexical codification in the spoken language, that signified political inclination, be it nationalist or Islamist. The logic of art instrumentalization in this sense is heavily deployed in official cultural policies to put more restrictions on art producers, under the slogans of social or moral reform, as demonstrated in the censorship laws in different countries in the region.

The goal is not to resolve the tension between autonomy and instrumentalization, but to work within it productively, creating conditions under which artistic practices

²³ Karin van Nieuwkerk, “Part Three: The New Millennium: Performing Piety,” in *Performing Piety: Singers and Actors in Egypt’s Islamic Revival* (University of Texas Press, 2013): 192.

²⁴ van Nieuwkerk, “The New Millenium,” 192-193.

can contribute through their artistic experiences and agency to broader processes of societal emancipation.

This institutional mediation is further problematized by cultural researcher and critic Kim West, who challenges the assumption that artistic freedom can be understood as a space entirely separate from political or institutional influence.²⁵ Instead, West argues that the autonomy of art should be conceived as an ongoing and contested project, integrated within an emancipatory cultural policy and broader democratic processes. The notion of autonomy, in this sense, is not a given condition but an aspired achievement that must be continuously negotiated.²⁶

These theoretical perspectives complicate the binary opposition between autonomy and instrumentalization. They suggest that artistic practices are always situated within institutional frameworks that both enhance and constrain their possibilities. For this research, this implies that the question is not whether art can remain autonomous, but how forms of engagement can be designed to navigate the constraints and continuously reimagine the collective work in art, through creative art programs and contributions of CSOs.

While Yúdice and cultural policy scholars foreground the structural conditions of artistic production, cultural theorist Jacques Rancière provides a conceptualization of art and aesthetic acts as “configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity.”²⁷ His notion of the “distribution of the

²⁵ Kim West, “A Free Art Calls for a Free Society: On the Freedom of Art and Autonomy as Project,” *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, no. 65 (2023): 8–48.

²⁶ West, “A Free Art”.

²⁷ Jacques Rancière, “The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible,” trans. and ed. Gabriel Rockhill (Continuum, 2004)

<https://selforganizedseminar.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/rancic3a8re-jacques-politics-aesthetics-distribution-sensible-new-scan.pdf>

sensible” positions art as a field that organizes what can be perceived, thought, and articulated within a given social order. For Rancière, the political dimension of art lies in its capacity to produce “dissensus”—a disruption of dominant perceptual frameworks that makes visible alternative realities and subjectivities.²⁸

This process does not depend on explicit political messaging or instrumental goals; rather, it operates through shifts in form, affect, and meaning that challenge established hierarchies of visibility and intelligibility. With this emphasis on the diversity of artistic tools and forms, Rancière does not limit the emancipatory capacity of art within the political and message-driven dimensions, he further conceives the artistic experience as a liberating practice in itself and suggests that its “social impact” lies in its expansion and dissemination to various social sectors.

If art’s political force lies in its ability to reconfigure perception rather than transmit messages, then its value cannot be reduced to measurable outcomes or predefined advocacy goals. Instead, its transformative potential resides in its capacity to unsettle, rethink, and expand the horizons of the possible.

Bringing these perspectives into dialogue highlights a central contradiction: art is simultaneously embedded in systems of governance and capable of surpassing them. This research addresses this contradiction by proposing the concept of “cognitive liberation” as a bridging framework. Cognitive liberation refers to the process through which individuals and collectives critically reassess dominant narratives, hegemonic taboos, and perceived limits of social imagination. It aligns with Rancière’s notion of dissensus in its emphasis on perceptual transformation within the artistic experience, while remaining attentive—following Yúdice and cultural policy scholars—to the institutional conditions that shape artistic practice.

²⁸ Rancière, “The Politics of Aesthetics”.

In parallel, the other concept that this paper proposes is capitalizing on “affective mobilization,” that captures the capacity of art to generate emotional resonance, empathy, and identification, thereby influencing public consciousness. Unlike instrumental approaches that seek to produce direct moral and pedagogical changes, affective mobilization operates through indirect and often unpredictable processes, engaging audiences at the level of experience of art production and reception, rather than instruction.

This theoretical framework has direct implications for the design of conceptual art programs within human rights contexts. Such programs can be reimagined as spaces of collective creation, artistic experimentation, and critical reflection on different aspects of Arab sociality.

In this sense, the goal is not to resolve the tension between autonomy and instrumentalization, but to work within it productively, creating conditions under which artistic practices can contribute through their artistic experiences and agency to broader processes of societal emancipation.

3. Context and Constraints on Artistic Activity in the MENA Region Post-2011

In 1967, the Egyptian and Tunisian states signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Lebanese state signed the Covenant in 1968. Tunisia, Lebanon, and Egypt ratified it respectively in 1969, 1972, and 1982. Each State Party to this Covenant commits ²⁹ to taking steps, individually and through international cooperation, to fully realize the rights recognized herein, using all appropriate means, including legislative measures. States also pledge to ensure these rights are exercised without discrimination based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political opinion, origin, property, birth, or other status.

Article 15 of the Covenant requires States Parties to recognize everyone's right to: (a) Participate in cultural life, (b) Enjoy the benefits of scientific progress, and (c) Protect their moral and material interests in their scientific, literary, or artistic works. States must take steps to conserve, develop, and disseminate science and culture, respect the freedom essential for research and creativity, and promote international cooperation in scientific and cultural life.

Cultural rights, however, could be better distinguished through implicit and explicit references in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments

²⁹ United Nations General Assembly, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 3 January 1976, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

and human rights mechanisms like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Declaration on Education for All (1990), Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, 1989 (No. 169) of the International Labor Organization. ³⁰

The concept of cultural rights (as enshrined in the forementioned references) is framed around several key principles: the rights to free expression, scientific research, and creative activity (encompassing both material and intangible forms of art); access to information and communication; the right to benefit from scientific progress and its applications; and education and training. It also emphasizes the right to preserve identity and belonging to diverse, evolving communities with shared cultural values, participation in cultural life and practices, and the development of specific worldviews and ways of life. Additionally, cultural rights include access to and enjoyment of heritage in all its forms—tangible, intangible, natural, and hybrid—as well as the protection of moral and material interests tied to an individual’s scientific, literary, or artistic creations (in relation to intellectual property regimes). Finally, it highlights the importance of access to public spaces as a fundamental aspect of the right to contribute to and participate in cultural life, as well as to engage in cultural practices.

Among the various types of Egyptian CSOs and human rights movements, the subfield of cultural rights remains notably underrepresented. Despite the complexity and breadth of issues related to cultural rights, there are few specialized CSOs dedicated to monitoring, advocating for, and legally defending these rights. Instead, cultural rights are often marginalized within broader agendas that prioritize political and social rights. This lack

³⁰ “International Standards: Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights,” United Nations.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-cultural-rights/international-standards>

of dedicated structures leaves the nuanced dynamics of the evolving cultural landscape largely unaddressed. To support cultural creators and emerging artists, there is a pressing need for the establishment of more comprehensive and updated organizations focused specifically on cultural rights.

Throughout their post-independence modern history, states in the MENA region have centralized the role of censorship authorities in the fields of arts and culture. Despite variations in censorship parameters between the three countries (Egypt, Tunisia, and Lebanon), which left Lebanon as a different model of broader social and cultural freedoms, the country has recently witnessed numerous cases of repression of artistic freedoms and freedom of expression.³¹ For example, four theatre plays were banned in Beirut in 2025 “for addressing taboo topics such as religion, homosexuality, and Lebanon’s civil war.”³² In 2024, legal action was taken against comedian Shaden Fakhri by Lebanon’s highest Sunni and Shiite religious authorities “for alleged blasphemy and inciting sectarian strife.”

According to my interviewees from Lebanon, approaching religious and sexual taboos remains one of the most dominant reasons for censoring an artistic work. Filmmakers and theatre directors struggle to obtain permits for productions critically tackling these topics, and some artists prefer to shoot their films without permits and seek venues outside the country for screening later.

The unification of censorship policies under the broad umbrella of state-backed production, distribution, and funding networks across the region has created a new reality

³¹ Mimeta, “Censorship and Harassment in Lebanon’s Arts Scene,” (1 April 1 2025),

<https://www.mimeta.org/mimeta-news-on-censorship-in-art/2025/4/1/censorship-and-harassment-in-lebanons-arts-scene>

³² Mimeta, “Censorship”.

in which cultural rights are increasingly tied to the opportunities available through these networks.

In Egypt, the Central Authority for the Censorship of Works of Art (CACWA) has been notorious for its strict and convoluted legislative frameworks, coupled with opaque and bureaucratic security strategies designed to enforce prior censorship on artistic works and activities. Rooted in nationalist and religious conservative ideologies, this framework has created a labyrinth of red lines surrounding the depiction of politics, religion, and sexuality in art. For successive political regimes, restricting artistic freedom has consistently been framed as a matter of “national security,” particularly in the case of widely accessible and popular art forms such as cinema, music, theater, and large-scale public performances.

In Tunisia, many reports indicate the serious shift from post-2011 openness to authoritarian constriction in recent years, as the country has experienced serious setbacks in freedom of expression since 2022.³³ Media and public discourse are increasingly shaped by political power, while artists face the growing censorship interventions, arrest and intimidation, and more pressures to self-censor.³⁴ Early in 2026, Tunisian comedian and actor Lotfi Abdelli had been sentenced in absentia to eighteen months in prison over a play he performed years ago. The ruling was described by Abdelli as politically motivated and aimed at stifling critical voices. Abdelli, according to reports, has in recent months “stepped up his

³³ Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2026: Tunisia,” World Report 2026, accessed 25 April 2026, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/tunisia>.

³⁴ Larbi Chouikha, “Journalism in Tunisia: Between Political Legacy and Historical Contingencies,” Nawaat, (27 January 2026), accessed 25 April 2026.

satirical criticism of President Kais Saied over his handling of the situation in Tunisia.”³⁵

From 2024 to 2026, following a trajectory similar to that of the Egyptian government, foreign funding was increasingly used as a pretext for repression in Tunisia.³⁶ Authorities have used accusations of “suspicious foreign funding” to justify arrests, asset freezes, banking restrictions, and the suspension of NGOs. As my interviewees from Tunisia reported, these restrictions on foreign funding flows spill over into the fields of art and culture, especially sectors relying on international networks, as they increase state control over associations, threaten NGO independence, and render already limited cultural circles in Tunisia even smaller, with fewer opportunities, internalized censorship, and institutionalized repression.

The rise of new media platforms, fueled by web-based technologies and an increasingly integrated media ecosystem³⁷ (online and offline media convergence) has since the early twenty-first century provided artists in the region with alternative avenues for expression. This proliferation of platforms has arguably diluted the influence of traditional censorship tools and diminished the impact of official restrictions on artistic content.

However, censorship of digital expressions has been taking more aggressive forms in the last decade. In August 2018, the Egyptian president ratified the Anti-Cyber and Information

³⁵ Tarek Amara, “Tunisian Comedian Abdelli Sentenced in Absentia, Says Ruling Targets Free Speech,” Reuters, (17 April 2026)

<https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/tunisian-comedian-abdelli-sentenced-absentia-says-ruling-targets-free-speech-2026-04-17/>

³⁶ Amnesty International, “Tunisia: Escalating Crackdown on Human Rights Organizations Reaches Critical Levels,” (14 November 2025)

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/11/tunisia-escalating-crackdown-on-human-rights-organizations-reaches-critical-levels/>

³⁷ Tourya Guaaybess, “Media Policy in the MENA: The Political Impact of Media Confluence,” *The Handbook of Media and Culture in the Middle East*, ed. by J.F. Khalil, G. Khiabany, T. Guaaybess and B. Yesil (Wiley Blackwell, 2023): 93-106.

Technology Crimes Law under the pretext of fighting terrorism.³⁸ The law allows authorities to block websites that are considered “a threat to national security” or to the “national economy.” Individuals who visit these websites can face steep fines and penalties.³⁹ The law also requires internet service providers to “save and release personal information to security services upon their request.”⁴⁰ The number of Egyptian citizens targeted by the State due to digital expression has been steadily rising.⁴¹ In addition, Egypt’s parliament passed a law that would treat social media accounts and blogs with more than 5,000 followers as media outlets, which would make them vulnerable to prosecution for publishing fake news or any “incitement to break the law.”⁴²

Cultural production has become a key site of what can be described as ongoing “cultural wars,” reflecting broader struggles over memory, belonging, and the future of social and political order in the region.

Another contextual factor should be taken in consideration when evaluating the relation between artists and censorship networks, which is the newly adopted cultural strategies in

³⁸ Elissa Miller, “Egypt Leads the Pack in Internet Censorship across the Middle East,” Atlantic Council, (2018), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/egypt-leads-the-pack-in-internet-censorship-across-the-middle-east/>

³⁹ Reporters Without Borders, “Egypt’s new cybercrime law legalizes Internet censorship,” (24 August 2018), IFEX, <https://ifex.org/egypts-new-cybercrime-law-legalizes-internet-censorship/>

⁴⁰ Miller, “Egypt Leads”.

⁴¹ Open Technology Fund, “The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism in Egypt: Digital Expression Arrests From 2011-2019,” Columbia Global Freedom of Expression, (2019), <https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/publications/the-rise-of-digital-authoritarianism-in-egypt-digital-expression-arrests-from-2011-2019/>

⁴² Reuters Staff, “Egypt Targets Social Media with New Law,” Reuters, (17 July 2018) <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-politics/egypt-targets-social-media-with-new-law-idUSKBN1K722C>

Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia ⁴³ and the United Arab Emirates. These transforming strategies marked a significant shift that directly challenged ⁴⁴ traditional censorship policies. Backed by strong political and economic support, the emerging artistic landscape in Gulf nations began attracting artists and industry professionals from all over the region, signaling the rise of a major soft power contender in the Arab world. This shift forced Egyptian authorities, for example, to adjust their approach, at times easing restrictions on artistic freedoms and renegotiating the “red lines” imposed on local artists.

However, the shift in cultural influence and market dynamics led to an implicit, unwritten understanding between emerging players in the art and entertainment industry, such as the Gulf states, and established hubs like Egypt. This tacit agreement aimed to align censorship policies in a way that respected the “red lines” specific to each country.

The unification of censorship policies under the broad umbrella of state-backed production, distribution, and funding networks across the region has created a new reality in which cultural rights are increasingly tied to the opportunities available through these networks.

These dynamics pose significant challenges to key pillars of cultural rights, such as freedom of expression, access to public venues and permits, and contribution and participation in cultural life. CSOs and internationally backed funding structures in particular face growing obstacles as they contend with structural constraints imposed by state authorities, further limiting their ability to advocate for and uphold these rights.

⁴³ Michelle Cioffoletti, “The Restructuring of Saudi Arts and Entertainment,” Arab Gulf States Institute, (8 August 2019),

<https://agsi.org/analysis/the-restructuring-of-saudi-arts-and-entertainment>

⁴⁴ Mada Masr, “The Arab Saudi Entertainment Kingdom: Art Under Turki Al Sheikh’s Patronage,” (7 March 2019),

<https://www.madamasr.com/2019/03/07/feature/%D8%AB%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A9/%D9%85%D9%85%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%86-%D8%A8/>

After 2011, youth-driven digital communities across the MENA region became central arenas for renegotiating middle-class values and social norms, shaped by ongoing identity conflicts between authoritarian state formations, Islamist movements, and emerging liberal and critical currents. Social media platforms amplified generational debates, enabled new forms of cultural dissidence, and made visible deepening societal polarization. While in Egypt the post-2013 political shift subjected Islamic revivalist discourses to intensified scrutiny in parallel to the rise of nationalist and populist rhetoric under Sisi's rule, similar dynamics unfolded differently in Tunisia and Lebanon.

In Tunisia, the post-revolutionary openness gradually gave way to renewed authoritarian consolidation, particularly after 2021, producing tensions between democratic aspirations and state-led restrictions on expression. In Lebanon, longstanding sectarian divisions, compounded by economic collapse, the aftermath of the 2019 uprising, and the Beirut port explosion, generated a fragmented public sphere marked by competing narratives and intensified polarization.

Across these contexts, a prior period of precarity and chaos (driven by failed governance models, economic decline, social fragmentation, and regional conflicts) has contributed to widespread skepticism toward formal political processes. This has shifted political dissidence and contestation increasingly into the cultural sphere, where competing forces (like state authorities, religious actors, and independent cultural producers) struggle over meaning, identity, and representation. As a result, cultural production has become a key site of what can be described as ongoing “cultural wars,” reflecting broader struggles over memory, belonging, and the future of social and political order in the region.

These transformations have brought to the forefront the challenge of contesting the monopolization of cultural narratives by both authoritarian regimes and dominant ideological forces. In response, various actors, including artists, cultural practitioners, and segments of civil society, have increasingly recognized the need for independent forms of cultural mobilization. Such mobilization seeks not only to raise awareness and foster cultural production,

but also to reclaim a pluralistic sense of historical and social identity, capable of resisting both state-imposed narratives and rigid extreme ideological frameworks.

However, these efforts continue to face structural constraints. In Egypt, cultural production remains heavily centralized in Cairo, where access to resources and funding is concentrated. In Tunisia, increasing restrictions on civil society and foreign funding have begun to limit the operational space for independent cultural initiatives. In Lebanon, the collapse of economic and institutional infrastructures has severely diminished cultural production, forcing artists to rely on precarious funding networks and transnational support. Across the three contexts, these conditions underscore the fragility of independent cultural fields and highlight the urgent need for innovative frameworks that can sustain artistic practice and enable meaningful engagement with broader processes of social transformation.

4. The Tae'thir Project as a Case Study

The Tae'thir project constitutes a relevant empirical case for envisioning a conceptual art program at the intersection between artistic practice and human rights promotion in the contemporary Mediterranean context.⁴⁵ Led by the Réseau Euromed France (REF) in partnership with the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), Instants Vidéo numériques et poétiques, and Ligue de l'enseignement des Bouches-du-Rhône (Ligue 13) the project aims to promote a culture of human rights and support artistic creativity through youth-led art and content creation practices.

In this respect, the organizations managing the Tae'thir project often clarify that the intersection between two distinct domains such as art and human rights is not intended to instrumentalize the arts for simple advocacy purposes or to push artists to “feed into a dogma.”⁴⁶ In their perspective, the criteria for the selection of artistic projects within Tae'thir encompass complexities that preserve the thematic relevance of the projects and their alignment with human rights values, while also considering artistic and technical dimensions such as innovation, thought provocation, feasibility, and social impact.

The project consortium refers to the selection of projects as a selection of the person and the project, on an individual basis. By this, the project partners assert that accompanying artists during Tae'thir cycles is grounded in the understanding of their ownership of their projects, their freedom to modify their plans or take different aesthetic decisions throughout the journey of an artistic work—from conception to realization, with all the

⁴⁵ For further details, see Annex 1 (Note on Tae'thir Project), prepared by the researcher as part of the case study, based on the project's core documents.

⁴⁶ Direct interview with Hend Hassassi, coordinator of Tae'thir project (September 2023-January 2026), and Juliette Valle (the current coordinator of Tae'thir project) (1 April 2026).

transformations and difficulties it entails: “It is us adjusting to their artistic framework, not the opposite.”

The multi-layered structure—combining selection, mentorship, funding, and advisory mechanisms—positions Tae’tbir as both an institutional framework and a relational space, enabling the emergence of collaborative practices and the formation of a community of artists engaged in human rights issues (or “transnational solidarity networks”). The communal aspect, political advocacy, and social impact were emphasized by the project partners, particularly in their description of the “internship week in Marseille” as a mobility initiative that connects participants with mentors, exposes them to local organizations in Marseille, and promotes the circulation of artists, projects, and ideas. For them, creating a community that extends beyond the three-year co-creation program is a key added value of Tae’tbir.

Methodologically, this research mobilizes Tae’tbir as a case study to examine how its objectives, strategies, and the tensions it generates—particularly between artistic autonomy and instrumentalization—unfold in practice. By combining qualitative interviews, discourse analysis, and the study of institutional reports and outputs, it seeks to identify the conditions under which artistic practices move beyond instrumentalization and contribute to processes of cognitive liberation, understood as the reconfiguration of perception, meaning, and possibility.

In this sense, Tae’tbir can be conceptualized as a hybrid structure (a heterotopic space in Foucauldian terms) where alternative forms of sociality, creativity, and political imagination are temporarily enacted.

Six in-depth interviews with Tae’tbir participants from Lebanon, Egypt, and Tunisia yielded diverse and sometimes contrasting perspectives. The interviews focused on participants’ motivations for joining the program, their views on the relevance of theoretical lectures and discussions, the balance between different program components (training sessions,

mentoring sessions, and the one-week internship), the influence of mentorship on their projects' development, their takes on the funding mechanism within the program, the obstacles they face in their local cultural contexts, and their assessment of Tae'thir's potential to transcend its temporary framework and contribute to longer-term networks and new forms of engagement among Mediterranean youth.

In the following sections, I will focus on the most relevant points in my interviewees' feedback, in relation to this research's questions:

1. Training Sessions and the Relevance of Abstraction

The majority of interviewees agreed that artists should engage with broader sociocultural contexts and critically reflect on theoretical notions such as patriarchy, censorship, and human rights in order to develop their artistic approaches and enrich their capacities. However, many of them also reported that the number of sessions and discussions dedicated to these theoretical themes generated a sense of cognitive fatigue, especially as their one-week internship, according to several participants, also included a considerable amount of time devoted to related discussions. During the interviews, I sensed a clear preference for prioritizing work on their own projects, supported by mentors. Some participants emphasized that they learn more effectively through practical rather than abstract tools and expressed a desire for a rebalanced structure in which mentoring sessions would take precedence over theoretical training.

These observations reveal a tension that lies at the core of this research: the gap between the ambition to foster critical awareness through conceptual engagement and the participants' inclination toward practice-oriented programming. From the perspective of Yúdice's framework, the interviewees criticized the structuring of artistic practice, within art programs and institutional cadres, often through predefined thematic and pedagogical frame-

works. At the same time, the participants' resistance to extended theoretical engagement resonates with Belfiore's critique of instrumental approaches that risk reducing complex artistic processes to measured institutional objectives. Rather than rejecting theoretical reflection altogether, these responses point to the need for alternative modes of integrating critical thinking into artistic practice modes that align more closely with experimentation, co-creation, and process-based learning.

Moreover, this tension can be interpreted through Rancière's notion of dissensus. The participants' preference for practice over theory reflects not simply a pedagogical choice, but a different view of how knowledge, creativity, and critical reflection could be distributed and experienced. The challenge, therefore, is not merely to reduce the amount of theoretical content, but to rethink its form and mode of delivery, so that it becomes embedded within artistic processes rather than external to them. This raises a broader question for the design of conceptual art programs; how to cultivate cognitive liberation and critical awareness without reproducing the very forms of intellectual authority and abstraction that may alienate participants.

The need for alternative modes of integrating critical thinking into artistic practice modes that align more closely with experimentation, co-creation, and process-based learning.

Such preferences may also reflect the cultural ethos of the present moment, in which knowledge is increasingly mediated through visual, performative, and networked forms, rather than through sustained reading and collective deliberation, thereby calling for pedagogical models that bridge conceptual depth with practice-based engagement.

2. The Local and the Transnational Contexts

Among the six interviewees, only two were living outside their countries of origin at the time of the interviews. While some participants were able to circulate between their countries in the MENA region and European countries, where they also resided, the majority remained acutely aware of the discrepancy between the conditions governing artistic production in their home environments and those encountered abroad. Despite shared characteristics across Egypt, Tunisia, and Lebanon—namely the presence of restrictive censorship apparatuses, precarious living conditions, and limited opportunities for independent artists—specific constraints varied: Security and policing pressures in Egypt and Tunisia, compared to war, destruction, and institutional collapse in Lebanon, all emerged as major impediments to free artistic expression. Within this context, several interviewees emphasized that one of their primary motivations for applying to the Tae'thir project was precisely the nature of their artistic work and the themes they address; issues that would be difficult, if not impossible, to produce, exhibit, or distribute locally.

The Tae'thir project thus offers what can be described as a relatively safe and enabling environment, providing financial, technical, and institutional support within a transnational framework. Such environment could reflect the mobilization of culture within global circuits of governance, where artistic production is facilitated through international funding structures and institutional mediation. However, this transnational flexibility also introduces a critical tension: the emergence of a split between artistic practices grounded in local realities and those articulated within transnational conditions of production and reception. Rather than confronting the constraints of the local context, and conditions that have historically compelled artists under authoritarian regimes to develop inventive strategies of resistance, participants may find themselves operating in a space where such pressures are

partially suspended. As a result, artistic works that address deeply local struggles risk being produced for, and circulated within, audiences largely situated outside those contexts.

This dynamic complicates the emancipatory potential of such programs. While Tae'thir enables processes of artistic creation and what may be understood as "individual-level cognitive liberation," it also raises questions about the collective and situated impact of these artistic practices. Drawing on Rancière's notion of dissensus, one may ask whether the innovative perceptions and meanings produced through these works can effectively intervene in the "distribution of the sensible" within the artists' societies in the MENA region, if their circulation remains largely external.

The challenge, therefore, lies in designing frameworks that sustain meaningful connections to local contexts, ensuring that artistic production can contribute to both individual emancipation and broader collective transformation

At the same time, the relative freedom afforded by transnational contexts may reduce the necessity for authentic artistic tools and layered/coded/semiotic languages (such as symbolism, irony, and complex visual and auditory signs), that artists often develop under conditions of censorship. These practices, while born of constraint, constitute important modes of resistance within local artistic fields.

Avoiding a simplistic opposition between the local and the global, this tension ultimately points to a deeper question concerning the aims and design of conceptual art programs. While supporting artists through transnational networks may enhance their individual capacities and provide temporary relief from restrictive conditions, it risks producing forms of artistic engagement that are not concerned to develop their tools of "affective mobilization" and influence on local audiences. The challenge, therefore, lies in designing frameworks

that sustain meaningful connections to local contexts, ensuring that artistic production can contribute to both individual emancipation and broader collective transformation.

3. Networks of Production, Circulation, and Distribution: Changing the Limits of the Possible

While Tae'thir's programming rightly provides financial support and mentorship to underpin the production and development of artistic projects, several interviewees pointed to the limited opportunities for the display and screening of their works once completed. As of 2026, projects are expected to be presented for a limited period in Marseille, after which they remain the full property of the artists. Although the networks and partnerships fostered through the program may facilitate additional opportunities for distribution, these models rely heavily on transnational circuits, as well as on the capacities, networks, and efforts of the participants.

From the participants' perspective, there was little expectation or emphasis on the possibility of presenting their work within the MENA region. During the interviews, this dimension remained largely absent, reflecting both the restrictive conditions imposed by censorship and the broader impoverishment of cultural infrastructures in the region. However, this absence raises important questions regarding access to distribution networks for participants in art programs like Tae'thir. It suggests the need to consider more systematically the potential for engaging with local cultural networks across the MENA region, while remaining attentive to the political and security risks such engagement may entail.

While the creation of a safe space for co-creation and relational exchange is a central achievement of Tae'thir, the development of sustainable networks of circulation across Mediterranean cultural infrastructures could become a key pillar of its long-term impact.

Strengthening such networks would not only expand the visibility of artistic works but also contribute to grounding them within the contexts they seek to address. In this sense, moving beyond a predominantly transnational model toward a more integrated approach, linking local and regional circuits, would align more closely with the project's broader ambition of mobilizing artists, building solidarity networks, and promoting the circulation of people, ideas, and cultural production across the Mediterranean.

4. Community Building and Collective Artistry

The concept note titled “Comment se constitue et se maintient une communauté d’artistes et créateur·ice·s de contenus autour des droits humains en Méditerranée [How is a community of artists and content creators around human rights in the Mediterranean formed and maintained]?” presented by Master 2 students in Paris 8 University, proposes that building a sustainable community within the Tae’thir project requires moving beyond its temporary institutional framework toward reinforcing long-term relational, structural, and symbolic connections among participants.⁴⁷ It emphasizes that community durability should be grounded in shared artistic and emotional bonds, fostered through co-creation processes, mentorship, and informal interactions that extend beyond formal program activities.

Such propositions resonate to a large extent with the remarks of the interviewed participants about the limited time frame that would not allow strengthening existing networks or sufficient personal and material circulation. The majority of the interviewees noted that en-

⁴⁷ Augustin Fabvier, Mohea Beauchamp, Esther Chanon, Emma Daran, et Ania Megherfi, “Note de cadrage: Projet collectif 2025–2026 — Comment se constitue et se maintient une communauté d’artistes et créateur·ice·s de contenus autour des droits humains en Méditerranée ?” [Concept Note: Collective Project 2025–2026 — How Is a Community of Artists and Content Creators Formed and Sustained Around Human Rights in the Mediterranean?] (Université Paris 8, Master 2 «Mondes méditerranéens en mouvement», janvier 2026), rapport non publié, en partenariat avec le Réseau Euromed France REF.

couraging collective collaboration through artistic creativity would be the ideal path for the development of mutual support systems among participants. The concept note, similarly, highlights the need to map and mobilize institutional, relational, and cultural resources to support both collective dynamics and individual trajectories after the project ends.

In terms of a plan of action, the concept note identifies four key dimensions of sustainability:

- Structural (maintaining stable networks and relationships).
- Functional (ensuring continued exchanges and collaborations).
- Symbolic (reinforcing a shared sense of belonging and identity).
- Adaptive (allowing the network to evolve, integrate new members, and redefine its modes of action).

The majority of my interviewees expressed that they would welcome post-project initiatives that would facilitate continued collaborations that might help them develop hybrid forms of organization that combine individual artistic development with collective engagement and cooperation.

5. Findings and Conclusion

The findings of this research highlight a set of tensions and possibilities that emerge from the Tae'thir project as a conceptual art program operating at the intersection of artistic co-creation and promoting a human rights culture. These findings can be understood through four main dimensions: Affective mobilization, cognitive liberation, art as a public space, and art as a form of dialogue and community building.

1. Affective Mobilization

One of the central findings of this research is the role of art as an emotional vehicle, capable of generating empathy and, potentially, action. Through the Tae'thir framework, artists are encouraged to engage with human rights issues not only at an intellectual level but also through affective and experiential dimensions. This reflects the idea that artistic practices can mobilize audiences by creating emotional connections to social and political realities.

Participants' feedback suggests that this affective dimension is closely linked to their preference for practice-based learning and artistic experimentation. Rather than engaging with abstract theoretical discussions, many participants found that working directly on their projects allowed them to develop practice-based and meaningful connections with the themes they address. In this sense, affective mobilization becomes a key pathway through which artistic work can contribute to social awareness and engagement, moving beyond traditional forms of advocacy.

Affective mobilization could also be strengthened through the selection process itself and through greater diversity in the artistic genres included in Tae'thir. For example, performance-based arts—such as music and singing, acting, dance, and storytelling—appear to be less represented in the selected projects compared with documentary filmmaking, video art, and online content rooted in reality-based forms. It is understandable that the

program's emphasis on individual projects, together with limited budgets, may favor these more manageable formats. However, performance-based artistic practices offer powerful tools for bridging the gap between forms centered on the visualization of reality and those capable of provoking imagination, emotional identification, and fictive expression.

Encouraging projects that draw on and reinterpret inherited fictional and artistic archives—including film, theatre, folk narratives, drama, and literature—could provide participants with an important avenue for transforming their critical perceptions into creative works that cultivate “collective affect” and resonate with broader audiences in both local and transnational artistic scenes

Encouraging projects that draw on and reinterpret inherited fictional and artistic archives—including film, theatre, folk narratives, drama, and literature—could provide participants with an important avenue for transforming their critical perceptions into creative works that cultivate “collective affect” and resonate with broader audiences in both local and transnational artistic scenes. Such approaches may deepen the capacity of artistic works to evoke empathy, stimulate emotional engagement, and foster what this research describes as affective mobilization.

Greater attention to the affective dimension of artistic production could also become an integral component of both the training sessions and the mentoring program. When lectures and discussions address emotional meaning in artistic works, affective messages, and coded sensations, they can help participants rethink their creative approaches and identify shared emotional ground with their audiences. By shifting the focus from the moralistic or rights-based messages embedded in artistic works to the affective and aesthetic tools through which similar messages can be conveyed, training and mentoring sessions may

more effectively move beyond the dryness of abstract theory toward the persuasive and emotionally compelling possibilities of artistic practice.

This also suggests expanding the spectrum of topics that could form part of Tae'thir participants' interests and, similarly, of human rights concerns. These topics may include the everyday lives of youth in MENA societies; the right to love relationships and to access and inhabit public spaces; family life in its daily dynamics and embedded cultural values; and the worlds of educational institutions, including schools and universities, with all the issues they encompass that touch upon human rights themes. Such subjects are deeply rooted in ordinary social experience and directly affect broad sectors of society.

Approaching cultural and social themes that resonate with majoritarian practices and lived realities reveals a greater role for the arts as vehicles of expression and communication. It also strengthens their function as essential generators of "collective affect," capable of mobilizing audiences toward universal human rights values without addressing them in patronizing or moralistic tones. By grounding artistic production in everyday experiences and widely shared emotional concerns, conceptual art programs can foster more organic forms of engagement, allowing human rights principles to emerge through identification, empathy, and creative reinterpretation rather than through direct advocacy alone.

2. Cognitive Liberation

A second key finding concerns the role of artistic practices in enabling forms of cognitive subversion. Artists operating in authoritarian environments such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Lebanon often develop tools such as irony, satire, symbolism, and layered visual and auditory languages in order to bypass censorship and express critical perspectives.

These practices are not only responses to external constraints but also ways of overcoming internalized censorship. By experimenting with different forms of expression, artists create spaces in which dominant narratives can be questioned and reinterpreted. This aligns with

the idea that artistic practices can contribute to cognitive liberation by expanding the ways in which individuals perceive and understand their social realities.

However, the findings also suggest that the transnational context of Tae'thir may partially alter this dynamic. While it provides a safer environment for expression, it may reduce the necessity for these coded forms of resistance, raising questions about how such practices can be sustained and translated across different contexts.

While the technical dimension of artistic production has become more abundant and accessible, the development of an artistic perspective capable of freeing itself from hegemonic narratives and of addressing fundamental questions beyond “popularized themes” or “dominant” and “fashionable” visions may have become more challenging.

However, cognitive liberation also concerns artists' perceptions, tastes, and interpretations of reality. It is not limited to the ability to express dissent but extends to the capacity to question inherited aesthetic preferences, dominant narratives, and habitual ways of seeing the world. According to Kim West, the ideal of autonomous art has become increasingly difficult to sustain in a world where art has been progressively “democratized” and “demythologized.” The widespread availability of digital technologies for artistic production and post-production has made user-friendly tools accessible to a growing number of creators and reduced the exclusivity once associated with technical mastery. While the technical dimension of artistic production has become more abundant and accessible, the development of an artistic perspective capable of freeing itself from hegemonic narratives and of addressing fundamental questions beyond “popularized themes” or “dominant” and “fashionable” visions may have become more challenging.

In this context, cognitive liberation requires more than technical training or thematic awareness. It involves expanding artists' intellectual and aesthetic horizons and exposing them to historical experiences in which artists deliberately challenged established conventions and dominant systems of representation. Tae'thir's lectures and discussions could therefore benefit from revisiting the diverse artistic movements and schools that opposed prevailing artistic norms and redefined the relationship between art and society. A broader engagement with art history and with the trajectories of artists across modern history—beyond a narrowly Western-centered perspective—could provide an inspiring and emancipatory experience for participants. Such an approach would demonstrate that artistic innovation often emerges from critical struggles against aesthetic orthodoxy, political repression, and social conformity.

This perspective could also open the door to topics that many artists in the MENA region may hesitate to address because of internalized censorship and deeply rooted beliefs. These topics include archaic religious interpretations and their impact on social organization and cultural life, artistic movements under dictatorships in Latin America and elsewhere, the historical organization of artists through unions and syndicates, and the experiences of artists who led nonconformist currents against dominant artistic trends in their own societies. Engaging with such examples can help participants recognize that challenging established norms is not an exceptional act, but a recurring feature of artistic history.

By incorporating these dimensions, conceptual art programs such as Tae'thir can strengthen the process of cognitive liberation by encouraging artists to rethink not only what they wish to say, but also the assumptions, tastes, and aesthetic hierarchies through which they perceive their reality. In this sense, cognitive liberation becomes both an intellectual and artistic process: a movement toward greater autonomy in thought, imagination, and creative practice.

3. Art as Commons / Public Space

The research also highlights the role of art as a form of commons and as a public space that extends beyond formal, legal, and institutional frameworks. Within Tae'thir, artistic production becomes a means of making visible the issues that may otherwise remain marginalized or silenced.

Through training sessions and lectures, mentorship, and collective exchange, the project fosters forms of engagement that go beyond individual artistic trajectories. Participants develop shared experiences and emotional bonds, which contribute to the formation of a community centered around common values and concerns.

At the same time, the findings point to limitations in the circulation and distribution of artistic works. The lack of opportunities for display within the MENA region and the reliance on transnational networks suggest that the public dimension of these works may remain unevenly distributed. This raises questions about the extent to which art can function as a shared public space if it is not accessible within the contexts it seeks to address.

4. Art as Dialogue and Community

Finally, the findings emphasize the role of art as a space for dialogue and for reframing social and political issues. Through their projects, artists engage with themes such as political and social freedoms, identity, war and destruction; contributing to the construction of alternative narratives that challenge dominant discourses.

Rebuilding artistic communities and expanding networks across the Mediterranean remains a fundamental cornerstone of Tae'thir and other art programs. Reclaiming public spaces, and establishing durable connections with associations, cultural organizations, and

collaborative frameworks of action is a main guarantor of an enduring influence and social impact in the MENA region and within its societies.

Conclusion

This research set out to examine how conceptual art programs such as Tae'thir project can contribute to societal emancipation through the intersection of artistic practice and human rights advocacy. The findings demonstrate that Tae'thir operates as a hybrid structure, combining elements of institutional governance with spaces for creative experimentation and critical engagement.

The contribution of Tae'thir lies in its ability to create a space where artistic practices can generate both affective and cognitive transformations. However, its long-term impact depends on its capacity to strengthen connections between local and transnational contexts

From a theoretical perspective, the project reflects Yúdice's notion of the "expediency of culture," as artistic practices are mobilized within structured frameworks aimed at achieving social and political objectives. However, Tae'thir also creates conditions for what Jacques Rancière describes as "dissensus," by enabling artists to produce alternative forms of perception and meaning that challenge dominant distributions of the sensible.

The findings suggest that the main challenge for conceptual art programs lies in navigating the tension between structure and autonomy. While institutional frameworks provide essential resources and support, they may also impose constraints that limit artistic programs to theoretical assumptions or shape their activities according to predefined objectives. Similarly, the transnational nature of such programs offers opportunities for expression and

collaboration but may also create a disconnection between artistic production and local contexts.

In response to these challenges, this research proposes a shift in the design of conceptual art programs: from a model centered on individual projects and theoretical deliberation toward one that envisions a space for co-creation, long-lasting network-formation, and cognitive emancipation engaging diversified methods.

Ultimately, the contribution of Tae'thir lies in its ability to create a space where artistic practices can generate both affective and cognitive transformations. However, its long-term impact depends on its capacity to strengthen connections between local and transnational contexts, to support sustainable networks of collaboration, and to foster forms of artistic engagement that remain rooted in the realities they seek to transform.

6. Annexes

1. Note on Tae'thir Project

Tae'thir operates against a backdrop of increasing repression, shrinking civic spaces, and heightening sociopolitical tensions across the MENA region, where traditional forms of human rights intervention face growing limitations. In this context, the project proposes an alternative approach that mobilizes artists and digital content creators as key actors in shaping public discourse and fostering new forms of engagement with human rights issues.

The project is implemented over a three-year period (September 2023 – August 2026) and is structured around two main cycles. The first cycle (2024–2025) brought together twenty participants from ten Mediterranean countries, while the second cycle (2025–2026) included twenty-four participants from eleven countries, resulting in a total of forty-four artists and digital creators. Participants, aged approximately between twenty-two and thirty-five, were selected through open calls organized around thematic frameworks: “What sustains human life?” for the first cycle and “Resisting resignation” for the second. These themes function as conceptual entry points, inviting participants to explore complex sociopolitical realities through artistic production. The diversity of participants’ backgrounds and artistic practices (varying between photography, poetry, video art, filmmaking, audio/video installation, podcasting, animation and design, digital illustration and visual art, etc.) reflects the project’s emphasis on multidisciplinary and transnational exchange.

The program offers a rare opportunity to explore essential themes linked to human rights issues and the particularities of the MENA region from a theoretical perspective and through open deliberation. Selected expert lecturers deliver a series of online workshops (training sessions) aimed at strengthening participants’ knowledge of human rights tools and mechanisms through a combination of theoretical lectures followed by interactive feedback

sessions. While the lectures explore the intersections between art, human rights, politics, and social practices, the feedback sessions provide space for critical reflection, dialogue, and participant engagement, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

The training sessions are structured around three core thematic areas—patriarchy, censorship, and criticism—through which participants examine how power structures, social hierarchies, and control mechanisms shape both artistic production and public discourse within the region. By addressing these themes, the program emphasizes the dual role of art as both a space that can reproduce dominant systems and a potential site of resistance and transformation, encouraging participants to critically engage with their contexts and mobilize artistic practices as tools for questioning norms and social taboos, amplifying marginalized voices, and contributing to more inclusive and reflective cultural processes.

The selection process in Tae'thir is based on a structured evaluation system combining qualitative and quantitative criteria. Applications are assessed through a two-stage process involving the review of written submissions and individual interviews. Candidates are evaluated according to three main criteria: the quality and relevance of the proposed artistic or content creation project (clarity, coherence, feasibility, and alignment with the project's themes), the applicant's profile (creativity, motivation, and the capacity to articulate complex ideas), and the quality of their previous work or portfolio. This evaluation is supported by a scoring system that allows for comparative assessment while ensuring diversity in artistic approaches and thematic concerns. The process also considers intersectionality, originality, and the potential of projects to engage critically with human rights issues.

In parallel to training sessions, the project's mentoring system assigns participants to experienced professionals who support the development of their projects through iterative feedback and structured sessions. As highlighted in the project's documents, the mentoring program is "structured around an evolving dynamic, designed to guide young creators through the comprehensive and coherent development of their projects." Its main pillars integrate "professionalization" and "technical" aspects through three personalized men-

toring sessions, covering the development of “un dossier artistique,” access to funding, and discussions on production and distribution processes.

The governance of the Tae'thir project is further structured through the presence of an Advisory Board composed of researchers, artists, and human rights activists with expertise in the Mediterranean context. The Advisory Board, working on a voluntary basis, plays a key role in providing strategic guidance, contributing to the selection of mentors, supporting the conceptual orientation of the project, and facilitating connections between participants and broader professional networks.

The project incorporates a second layer of evaluation through a funding mechanism designed to support the production of selected artistic projects. Participants submit developed project proposals that are assessed by a selection committee composed of eight representatives: four from the consortium organizations and four external experts from the cultural and artistic fields. Projects are evaluated based on a detailed grading system that includes thematic relevance (30 points), potential impact (30 points), originality and innovation (25 points), and feasibility (15 points). Additional considerations include the participant's level of engagement throughout the program and the diversity of selected projects in terms of media, themes, and approaches. This process results in the selection of a limited number of projects for financial support, while others may be conditionally approved or require further development. Some Tae'thir participants, in direct interviews, viewed the funding mechanism as controversial, explaining that it generated tension among participants during the internship week in Marseille.

2. Selected Excerpts from CIHRS Publications on Art, Culture, and Human Rights

Culture and the Arts

Culture Is Not Well

Ahmed Abdel Moati Hegazy



Culture and the Arts

The Culture of the Silencer

Helmy Salem



Culture and the Arts

**The Sacred and the Beautiful:
Difference and Convergence
between Religion and Art**
Dr. Hassan Talab



Literature

**Nubian Writers and Racist
Critics**

Haggag Adoul

Foreword by Ahmed Abdel Moati Hegazy



Literature

Repression in Arab Novelistic Discourse

Abdel Rahman Abu Ouf



Literature

The Naked Lunch Novel before American Courts

Ramsis Awad



Literature

Negative: A Narrative from the Memory of Women Political Prisoners

Rosa Yassin Hassan



Literature

The Jurisprudence of Literary and Intellectual Trials: A Study in Discourse and Interpretation

Wafaa Sallawi



Poetry

The Sorrows of Hammurabi: Poems for the Freedom of Iraq

Helmy Salem
Foreword by Dr. Ferial J. Ghazoul



Poetry

More Than One Sky: The Diversity of Religious Sources in the Poetry of Mahmoud Darwish

Sahar Sami



Poetry

**Modernity, the Sister of
Tolerance: Contemporary Arabic
Poetry and Human Rights**
Helmy Salem



Poetry

**The Other in Popular Culture:
Folklore and Human Rights**
Sayed Ismail Dheifallah
Foreword by Dr. Ahmed Morsi



Drama, Cinema, and Theatre

**Unfinished Circles: Writings on
Sudanese Drama**
Al-Sirr Al-Sayyid



Drama, Cinema, and Theatre

Cinema and People's Rights
Hashem El-Nahas



Drama, Cinema, and Theatre

**The Art of Claiming Rights:
Egyptian Theatre and Human
Rights**
Nora Amin



Visual Arts

**Artists and Martyrs: Visual Arts
and Human Rights**
Ezz El-Din Naguib

