



December - 2020

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### *Mission*

*The Title, Mahalla, refers to the word mahalla used in many languages and countries meaning neighborhood or location originated in Arabic mähallä.*

*Mahalla as a title for the festival is a metaphor for a space of diversity and inclusion in the field of arts and culture.*

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## The Wandering Tower

The 2020 global crisis gives no other option than reinventing the ways to practice transnational communication and to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic by using real events combined with remote tools during the Mahalla Festival 2020. The main venues are located in Istanbul, but events are accompanied by international contributions and participations. The Festival has participants and partners in and from Austria, Afghanistan, Canada, Cyprus, Eritrea, Germany, Holland, Iraq, Malta, Russia, Switzerland, Syria, and Turkey. The inspiration for the topic is a piece of Literature with its own miracle story.

For a long time it was unknown to the general public that Sergei Prokofiev also had literary ambitions. After Lucian Plessner came across these stories during a guest performance in Moscow, he was able to translate and publish these stories in German, with the support of Oleg Prokofiev and has since given readings with these stories - in over 30 bookstores, the SWR Literature Night, the LitCologne, the Beethoven Orchestra Bonn and other forums.

(Sabine Küper Büsch, Co-Curator, Mahalla Festival)

## Istanbul - Dec 15 - Dec 29, 2020

A Festival of music, literature, contemporary art, debates and several activities combining events that invite local and international participants to mobilize visitors to explore communities under new aspects.

### Conceptual Framework

*The Wandering Tower* is the title of a surrealist short story by Sergej Prokofiev from the times of vivid migration movements on the edge of the world wars. Prokofiev's mother fled to Istanbul after the October Revolution and was interned at the Princes' islands by the Ottoman government. The First World War was about to end. The Middle East had been an important front.

The son had traveled parallel with the Trans Siberian Express Train from Russia over Japan to the USA to pursue his career as a composer and

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musician. This trip lasted 18 days in those times. The Wandering Tower was written during this travel. While the newly expanded railway networks and information technology spurred cultural exchange opportunities, the military and ideological conflicts triggered forced migration. Later on Prokofiev traveled to Istanbul to pick up his mother for moving on to France and Germany. Motives from the trip and the region influenced a couple of short stories. The world was on the cusp of a global catastrophe, a time when central classical works of art were being created around the world.

*The Wandering Tower* tells the story of a French Assyriologist, who spent his life studying the mystery of the Tower of Babel. When he announces a groundbreaking scientific discovery after a trip to Mesopotamia, the Eiffel Tower jumps out of its foundations at night and races eastwards through France, marauding. He wants to go to Babylon. When the tower causes tremendous destruction the Assyriologist suddenly gets aware of his mysterious involvement as the cause of the disaster. He destroys his notebook with all the results of his recent scientific discoveries, which he was planning to announce.

The Festival is quoting the title as a metaphorical frame for **Mahalla 2020/2021**. The tower of Babel is connected as a motive to the search for the origin of language and the access to the divine. And it is connected to a region, where the first known Epics emerged with the Pyramid Texts and the Epic of Gilgamesh. It triggered an endless production of stories and art productions, whose motifs are often similar, but whose diversity reflects the richness of human existence. In our interpretation, the Wandering Tower is satirically questioning the search for a monolith truth: a one and only religion, an ideological order or meta- code defining all meanings.

As the ambitions for dominance of political, ideological and economical powers is an ongoing phenomena in our globalized, digitalized, post-factual age, the Mahalla Festival uses the pandemic crisis to invite to join a space for the exchange of ideas and intellectual discourse in artistic productions and discussion rooms.

The Festival in Istanbul is organized by the Istanbul based association **DIYALOG** with a support of the Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany.

## Artistic Forms of Expression

The Festival calls for new artistic practices and narratives on the topic's migration and borders, communities and diversity, new city cultures, mobile citizenship and future demands. We invite cultural initiatives and artists to revise the concept of classifications and border settings in historical, political, esthetical and discursive dimensions. Patterns of identity classified in races or ethnics, gender roles, language conventions, melody-forms, storylines, choreographies and visualization conventions can be quoted, transformed, ridiculed or overtaken.

The main topics identity, exile and migration are alignments. The participants of the Festival are able to pick up the idea of transforming dystopia in any kind of form or media. The main task is to reflect how communication styles are working out narratives about identity, cultural references, territorial borders, the right for or restriction of mobility, the possibilities of personal development and the participation in public representations connected to the results of communication in a globalized

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world characterized by a certain dualism regarding the access to resources, mobility, technology and safety. The concept for the artistic production is free for metaphorical interpretations in any direction.

## Objectives of the Festival

Mahalla is a traveling Festival of Contemporary Art, Music, Theatre, Film and Literature, with several ancillary events running alongside it.

The general vision of the Festival is to question a dystopian reality of excluding “the other” in the form of the migrant, the poor, the opposite sex, the animal, the environment, and the unknown. The Title, Mahalla, refers to the word mahalla used in many languages and countries meaning neighborhood or location originated in Arabic mähallä. from the root meaning ‘to settle’, ‘to occupy’ derived from the verb halla (to untie), as in untying a packhorse or camel to make a camp.

After Mahalla Istanbul 2017 and Mahalla Malta 2018 the Festival was supposed to travel to Arbil in Northern Iraq in 2019. It was canceled due to the instability in the region and security obstacles. Cyprus was the new destination foreseen for 2020, but it was canceled as well as a location due to the pandemic crisis and the closed borders between the two parts of the divided island. Istanbul will serve now as the central location with connected destinations from Canada, Europe and Asia.

30 Years after the “East-Block” dissolved and the wall in Berlin was demolished, we have other blocks, borders, fences and walls imprisoning people. The Mahalla Festival is questioning these realities and picks out the sources of migration. The artistic program and the discourse platform explore the potential of art and culture to blow up chains in the mind. The Festival is building up a network and an infrastructure in the locations it performs to fight dystopian realities with utopian visions and to trigger transformative change for a sustainable one-world-future.

## Provisional Events

**Virtual Art Fair Contemporary Istanbul, 19.12.2020 - 06.01.2021**

Affiliated exhibition of the Mahalla Festival:

Mehmet Kaçmaz (TUR), Yasın Baran (TUR), Che Seibert (DEU)

Online

Three photographers participate with works from Istanbul, Ankara and Germany, which interpret the traveling tower motif.

Online-Event

**Searching Traces, 17.12.20, 16:30**

Screening of Short-Films produced in the Mahalla Videoworkshop 2020 in Gaziantep, Istanbul, Cappadocia, Malta, Russia, Holland, Canada, Finland and Italy. Event of the Mahalla-Video workshop screening the works of emerging filmmakers. Two workshops on the production of short films in the single-shot-mode were planned as one-week events in Istanbul and Gaziantep for spring and summer 2020. During the pandemic the group met weekly on Zoom and expanded its territorial coverage. The weekly meetings continue until today. The participants are from Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Malta, Macedonia, Eritrea, Holland, Germany, Italy, China, Canada and Russia.

Location: Beyoğlu Sineması, Video-Recording without audience

**In Between, 17.12.20, 18:30**

Poetry reading by Poet Khaled al Said (TUR/SYR/PAL) and film premiere of the short film "In Between". Filmmaker Khaled Tanji (SYR/PAL) shot the film in Büyük-Valide-Han in Istanbul. A young actress performs various metaphorical scenes that reflect the catastrophic effects of the war in Syria on women. The film uses lyrical quotations from the recently published poetry-book "noone flatters the neighborhood's women" by Khaled al Said on the same topic.

Location: Beyoğlu Sineması, Video-Recording without audience

**Online Zoom-Events:****The Wandering Tower, 18.12.20, 17:00**

Artistic practice in pandemic times. Challenges and prospects. Discussion with different Local and International participants about their recent projects: Che Seibert, Mehmet Kaçmaz, Yasın Baran, Sophie Hirsch, Murat Germen, Thomas Büsch, Sabine Küper-Büsch  
Online

**The Mahalla-Share-House, 19.12.20, 17:00**

The Festival is dedicated to the spirit of sharing ideas to raise value by the optimization of common minds open to generate new styles, production manners and distribution forms as well a ways to strengthen the creative economical sector by new forms of international corporations. We want to talk about co-creative cooperation possibilities.

Kutaiba Hajira (CAN), Seval Dakman (TUR), Christian Manns (DEU), Sabine Küper-Büsch (DEU/TUR), Mathilde Melek An, Katharina Swoboda (AU), Margerita Pulé (MAL), Rafael Pascual-Leone (MAL)

**WILHELM SCHERÜBL, WALKING A CITY I HAVE NEVER VISITED. 20.12.2020, 18:00**

Virtual rooms created by the Austrian artists during a residency, he was supposed to spend in Istanbul. Due to the Pandemic he stayed in Vienna and communicated with artists in Istanbul, who walked him around virtually.

**SERGEJ PROKOFIEV WITH LUCIAN PLESSNER, 22.12.20, 18:00**

Narration with solo guitar

Music program with works by Sergej Prokofiev, Reading from the short stories.

Location: Hamam, Beşiktaş Belediyesi,

**THE WANDERING TOWER: LANGUAGE, SPACE AND TIME****Art Walk, 25.12.20, 12:00**

Mahmut Çelayır, TR/D, Demet Yalçınkaya, TR, Presentation in their Studios  
Art Walk on one weekend with visit to the Studios of the artists Antonio Cosentino (TUR) and Mahmut Aydın in the same neighborhood. Video-Documentation.

Projektion-Installation:

2/5 BZ

Installation of Music-performance by Serhat Köksal. The projection of two Music performances will be placed as Loop. Broadcast in the virtual world.

Nora Byrne, (USA/TR), Drawings

Real Event with limited Participation, Life-Upload as Online-Event

**Mahalla Video-Workshop** , 27.12.20, 20:00

Talk and Screening with Participants of the Mahalla Video-Workshop

Location: Zoom-Event, Discussion with the audience

**In Between**, 28.12.20, 18:00

Poetry reading by Poet Khaled al Said (TUR/SYR/PAL) and film premiere of the short film "In Between". Filmmaker Khaled Tanji (SYR/PAL) shot the film in Büyük-Valide-Han in Istanbul. A young actress performs various metaphorical scenes that reflect the catastrophic effects of the war in Syria on women. The film uses lyrical quotations from the recently published poetry-book "In Between" by Khaled al Said on the same topic.

Location: Zoom-Event

Discussion between the artists and the audience

Please check out the Mahalla Festival for updates and dates:

<http://mahalla.inenart.eu/>

Istanbul, December 3, 2020