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Artists and Culture Professionals

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Case Studies

CHAPTER 4

A Comparative Analysis of State of the Art(ist) (Austria) and Rawabet (Europe) Programmes



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CHAPTER 4

A Comparative Analysis of State of the Art(ist) (Austria) and Rawabet (Europe) Programmes

By **Fairooz Tamimi**

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This text explores two initiatives dedicated to supporting displaced and at-risk artists: '[Rawabet: Participation | Connectivity | Diversity](#)' which is implemented by [Ettijahat – Independent Culture](#) along with five other partners, and '[State of the ART\(ist\)](#)' which is implemented by [Ars Electronica](#). Both initiatives are significant in the contemporary cultural field for their interventions in support of artistic freedom, mobility, and survival under conditions of threat.

Methodology

This study puts a special emphasis on **artistic production grants** as a key point of this analysis, and situates both initiatives within broader support ecosystems for displaced and at-risk artists.

During the course of this study, the websites, open calls and press releases of both initiatives were reviewed but the most important element was the interviews with the professionals playing a key role in those initiatives. For Rawabet, the interviewees were Ayham abou Shakra, a writer, journalist and cultural activist who is managing

Rawabet from Ettijahat's side, and Abduljabbar Al Suhaili, a cultural practitioner, actor and Rawabet's project producer from [Transversal](#), one of the consortium members. For State of the Art(ist) the interviewees were Marita Muukkonen and Ivor Stodolsky, the co-Founders and co-Directors of [Artists at Risk](#) (AR), Finland who have been part of the jury of State of the Art(ist) since its launch.

Despite their shared commitment to vulnerable artistic communities, both organisations as well as their methods, frameworks, and strategic orientations diverge considerably.

Addressing the needs of displaced Arab artists across Europe

Ettijahat – Independent Culture was founded in 2011 and operates from Brussels, Belgium and Beirut, Lebanon. Ettijahat is working to promote independent culture across the Arab world. Its main goal is to activate the role of independent artists in enabling cultural, and social change.

Rawabet, launched in 2024, was created as a response to the increasing migration of Arab artists into Europe. Recognising the gap in institutional and cultural support for these

displaced artists, Ettijahat established Rawabet as a transnational initiative that spans six European countries: France, Sweden, Germany, Norway, Belgium, and Italy. Rawabet seeks to engage artists and cultural practitioners who have arrived in Europe from the Arab region since 2015 as well as established European artists interested in collaboration and exploring the themes of the project. This is established through designing different residencies, festivals, production grants, and showcasing

opportunities organised in Germany, Norway, Corsica/France, Italy, Sweden, and Belgium between 2024 and 2026.

To develop the Rawabet programme, Ettijahat – Independent Culture conducted a series of in-depth brainstorming sessions with **displaced Arab artists across Europe**, during which a number of urgent and recurring needs emerged, revealing the complex challenges these artists face in their new environments. The discussions underscored how increased socio-political turmoil in the Arab region over the past decade has led to unprecedented migration, placing artists in unfamiliar and often unwelcoming contexts. Participants highlighted the pervasive climate of xenophobia, the rise of right-wing political rhetoric, and the scapegoating of refugees amid economic instability as major barriers to their integration and creative expression. Many spoke about the severe limitations on freedom of expression and the shrinking space for artistic and cultural contribution, which stifles the richness and diversity of their experiences.

These conditions have deeply affected their ability to collaborate with European peers, access cultural infrastructure, and engage with broader audiences, including Arab communities across Europe. The sessions made it clear that there is a pressing need for initiatives that not only provide material and legal support, but also foster visibility, mobility, and **meaningful artistic exchange**. The insights gained through these

dialogues shaped Ettijahat’s understanding of the realities displaced artists face and informed the design of Rawabet as an inclusive and responsive cultural programme with a cooperative model, implemented in collaboration with a network of local organisations, including festivals and residencies.

Rawabet centres the **artistic production and the circulation of Arab artists** now living in Europe, emphasising integration, audience engagement, and cross-cultural collaboration.

Building on the insights gathered during Ettijahat’s extensive needs assessment and brainstorming sessions with displaced Arab artists, the selection of Rawabet’s partners was a deliberate and strategic response to the realities, aspirations, and structural gaps articulated by the artists themselves. The sessions revealed a strong demand for not only financial and logistical support but also for sustained artistic collaboration, access to audiences, and platforms that reflect the diverse practices and complex identities of migrant artists. Artists emphasised the importance of being embedded in networks that offer long-term visibility, peer exchange, and access to local cultural infrastructure. In response to these findings, Ettijahat sought out partners with complementary strengths, regional relevance, and deep engagement with both local and diasporic communities, ensuring that Rawabet could offer a holistic and responsive support structure across Europe.

A cultural cooperation project as a response

Gezmatatz Cultural Association (Genoa, Italy), **Masahat** – Open Spaces for Arab Culture in Exile (Oslo, Norway), Transversal Project (Malmö, Sweden), **VOCE** – Centre National de Création Musicale (Pigna, Corsica, France), and **coculture** (Berlin, Germany), with the leadership of Ettijahat, joined forces to launch Rawabet as

a transnational project which aims to facilitate accessibility between European audiences and Arab artists based in Europe. The programme aims to increase mobility and circulation and create opportunities for collaboration between Arab and European artists, especially around themes of refuge and migration.

This network of collaborations also aims to empower the role of artists, cultural workers, and institutions in Europe, and their role in activating trans-diasporic and transcultural spaces, as we continue to reflect on what diversity and solidarity mean in practice.

Each partner was chosen not only for their organisational expertise but also for their alignment with the needs articulated by the artists. Gezmataz brings to the partnership a longstanding commitment to supporting and producing musical practices. As a nonprofit organisation with deep roots in the local and international jazz scene, it offers production opportunities, training, and a prominent annual festival that fosters both the cultural and social role of music—elements that directly address the desire of displaced musicians for high-quality performance contexts and artistic recognition.

In Norway, Masahat plays a vital role in contextualising and celebrating Arab arts and knowledge within a European framework. With its annual multidisciplinary festival and its focus on literature, music, film, and performance, Masahat provides emerging and established Arab artists with meaningful public platforms and curates spaces that foster encounters between majority and minority populations in Norway. Its ability to bring Arab artistic production into dialogue with broader society responds directly to artists' expressed need for visibility and connection beyond the confines of exile.

Transversal Project brings to the Rawabet partnership a strong commitment to fostering artistic collaboration and professional growth. As part of its contribution, Transversal is collaborating closely with the Malmö City Theatre, hosting residencies that connect artists

with one of the city's most dynamic cultural institutions. In addition to providing space and support for artistic development, Transversal offers participating artists access to professional mentorship, tailored to their creative and career trajectories. This responds directly to the needs voiced by artists during Ettijahat's consultation sessions—specifically, the desire for deeper engagement with local cultural ecosystems and structured guidance to navigate and expand their artistic practices in exile.

VOCE brings decades of experience in music creation, performance, and education. Founded in 1978, VOCE works at the intersection of artistic dissemination, musicological research, and training, making it an ideal host for residencies focused on sonic experimentation, musical collaboration, and cultural mediation—areas of particular relevance to many of the musicians and composers identified in the needs assessment.

Finally, coculture in Berlin offers a unique focus on Syrian and Global South artists who face systemic barriers in accessing the European cultural scene. With a mission rooted in creative activism, community building, and the empowerment of underrepresented voices, Coculture enables artists to reclaim their narratives and reassert their agency through production, exhibition, and discourse. This partner's work directly supports artists navigating complex identity politics and precarious social positions, especially those seeking to influence their communities through artistic means.

Together, these partners form a diverse and interconnected network that mirrors the transnational realities of displaced Arab artists in Europe.

Background of the Austrian response to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine

Ars Electronica's State of the ART(ist) programme also seeks to support the work of diverse artists, although it grew out of the specific needs of Ukrainian artists fleeing conflict. Ars Electronica, is a world-renowned cultural institution and festival dedicated to exploring the intersection of art, technology, and society. Since its founding in 1979, it has become a leading platform for examining how digital innovation shapes contemporary culture through a range of activities, including its annual festival, a cutting-edge research lab, a permanent museum, and numerous collaborative projects. It is based in Linz, Austria.

State of the ART(ist) was conceived in 2022 as a direct response to Russia's war on Ukraine. It

quickly evolved into a global initiative targeting artists whose lives and practices are endangered due to political repression, conflict, climate catastrophe, or social inequality. Implemented by Ars Electronica with the support of the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs and Creative Europe, this initiative aims to provide international visibility, recognition, and support for artists at risk.

Unlike Rawabet, which is demographically and geographically specific, State of the ART(ist) is open to individuals and collectives worldwide, **without fixed demographic or artistic boundaries**. Its emphasis lies in curatorial validation, international presentation, and strategic symbolic support.

Support provided

At the core of both programmes are their production grants, though these function differently in scope, intent, and structure. Rawabet allocates 16 production grants valued at up to 12,000 EUR each, awarded to artists working in performance and music whose projects are to be completed between 2025 and 2026. These grants are not isolated gestures of support but are deeply embedded in a comprehensive ecosystem. Artists awarded funding, as well as other participants, participate in curated residencies, receiving **professional mentorship**, and at least four artists are guaranteed public presentation opportunities at European festivals organised in Berlin, Oslo and Genoa, every year. These presentations are central to Rawabet's mission of building audience encounters and advancing artistic circulation. In addition to the production

grants, Rawabet supports logistical needs such as travel, accommodation, and documentation, ensuring the sustainability of the projects and fostering long-term professional integration.

State of the ART(ist), on the other hand, operates a **prize-oriented model**. The main financial awards include a 6,000 EUR grand prize, two Awards of Distinction at 2,000 EUR each, and a Digital Deal Award also valued at 2,000 EUR. An additional 15 artists receive smaller presentation fees, ranging from 500 to 1,000 EUR. Though the financial amounts are modest compared to Rawabet, the **symbolic capital** they offer is substantial. Winners are featured at the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, one of the most prestigious media art events globally. Their works are exhibited physically and digitally, archived within the

Ars Electronica digital archive, and included in festival publications. Selected artists also receive travel and accommodation support. State of the ART(ist) thus functions as a **visibility platform**

that provides global recognition, institutional validation, and professional networking within an elite cultural framework.

Selection processes

The jury and advisory composition of the two programmes reflects their differing orientations. Rawabet relies on a multidisciplinary, anonymous jury composed of experts with a strong understanding of Arab artistic diasporas. This approach ensures cultural proximity and relevance, allowing evaluators to assess both artistic quality and contextual significance. The application process is multilingual, accessible in Arabic and English, with submission materials accepted in multiple languages. This inclusivity lowers access barriers and affirms the participatory ethos of Rawabet.

State of the ART(ist) utilises a rotating jury and advisory board whose members are carefully curated to align with the programme's thematic and political directions. In 2022, the jury included prominent figures embedded in geopolitical contexts of crisis, such as Björn Geldhof from Ukraine, Marita Muukkonen from Artists at Risk, and Boris Magrini with expertise in tech-art. The 2023 edition introduced new voices like Leila Nachawati Rego, who bridged digital activism and the Syrian conflict, and Lucia Pietroiusti, whose ecological curatorial lens shifted focus towards post-humanist systems. In 2024, the jury evolved further to include Kamya Ramachandran, Oyindamola Fakeye, and returning figures like Muukkonen and Stodolsky. **The advisors that year expanded to include voices from Paraguay, Nigeria, Turkey, and Iraq, with emphasis on queer, Indigenous, feminist resistance, and diasporic displacement.** This progression across three years illustrates the evolution of moving from reactive curating

to a more systemic articulation of resistance aesthetics and global solidarity.

The selected winners in both programmes reflect their respective curatorial priorities. Rawabet's 2025 winners include artists such as Bayan Rida, whose work *Je t'appelle* draws on personal narratives of Syrian migration to explore themes of memory, voice, and rupture. The selected projects are deeply grounded in the lived realities of displacement and are supported through all phases of development, from creation to presentation. In France and Sweden, Rawabet's residency programmes have enabled collaborative creation, with artists receiving mentorship, technical assistance, and opportunities for local engagement. The structure allows for iterative processes and meaningful cultural exchange.

State of the ART(ist), by contrast, presents an evolving thematic arc across its annual cohorts. The 2022 awardees included Ukrainian artists like Andriy Rachinskiy and Daniil Revkovskiy as well as Ivan Svitlychnyi, who explored memory under conflict. The 2023 laureates engaged with ecological justice and displacement. By 2024, the programme embraced speculative and technological dimensions; Nisreen Zahda employed VR to reconstruct pre-Nakba Palestine. These winners embody a trajectory from immediate crisis response to future-oriented, systemic critique. The evolution signals a deliberate curatorial shift towards envisioning artistic futures, positioning art as a tool for critical intervention.

Challenges and opportunities met by the programmes

Both programmes face distinct challenges. Rawabet must navigate the complexities of operating across multiple national contexts, and it faces challenges such as the threat of **xenophobia, censorship, logistical obstacles and funding inconsistencies**. Its residencies, though impactful, are sometimes constrained in duration, limiting the depth of engagement. Nonetheless, the strength of Rawabet lies in its partnership-based architecture, participatory planning with artists, and alignment of resources around long-term development.

State of the ART(ist) contends with its own limitations, including the relatively **modest financial scale** of its awards and the careful communication they undertake in order to protect artists who may be placed at further risk by visibility. Its global scope necessitates sensitive communication and **anonymised protocols for certain participants**. However, the presence of a recurring jury and advisory cohort fosters continuity and depth, while the festival infrastructure provides unparalleled visibility.

Rawabet represents an incubatory ecosystem rooted in displacement and exile, foregrounding development, collaboration, and integration. It is designed to address the **systemic exclusion of Arab artists** from European cultural production by offering pathways into creation, mentorship, and public engagement. Its production grants serve as both enablers and catalysts for new

work that is intended to be shared and circulated across diverse audiences. In contrast, State of the ART(ist) operates as a cultural amplifier, rewarding projects that already demonstrate maturity and **alignment with human rights discourses**. It offers critical moments of recognition that can shift an artist's trajectory and expand their platform.

Ultimately, these two models illustrate different but equally vital interventions in support of artists at risk. Rawabet is deeply embedded, gradual, and processual, while State of the ART(ist) is symbolic, global, and reflective. Taken together, they demonstrate how art institutions can respond to the complexities of displacement and repression through mechanisms that support creation, build resilience, and advocate for justice. Their coexistence enriches the field, offering varied modalities of care, validation, and cultural resistance for artists navigating the most precarious terrains of our time.

In considering future directions, organisations supporting displaced artists may draw from both models to build hybrid frameworks. The integration of funding, residencies, exhibition, and long-term networks must be paired with attention to the safety, representation, and autonomy of the artists. As displacement and repression persist globally, these programmes exemplify the **ethics and imagination needed** to ensure that art not only survives, but transforms.

To fully appreciate the breadth of the research on The Situation of At-Risk and Displaced Artists and Culture Professionals, please do consider reading the [other chapters](#) gathered in this third report, as well as the first two reports available for download: [Intersecting Temporalities: At-Risk and Displaced Artists in Transition - Volume 1 Scoping Review](#) and [Policy and Practice in the EU: Pathways, Impediments, and Patchwork Solutions - Volume 2 Cultural Policy Analysis](#).

About the Author

Fairooz Tamimi is a published author and a serial entrepreneur focused on the power of culture, innovation and diversity in making the transformation towards social justice. Currently, Fairooz is the Director of Action for Hope, a Belgian non-profit organisation founded in 2015 to support artistic and cultural initiatives in communities affected by conflict, displacement, and marginalisation, particularly in the Arab region. Before that Fairooz was the director of strategic development in Trans Europe Halles, a European network of cultural centres initiated by citizens and artists.

Fairooz worked in the Middle East as the Director of the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) and the Jordan Film Fund Manager, among other leadership roles in NGOs, private and public sector organisations. Relocating to Sweden in 2013, Fairooz worked in the public and private sectors, focusing specifically on sustainability, innovation and social justice. Fairooz is the founder of the 'Immigrants Stand up Comedy Network' and 'C/O; the first business accelerator for highly skilled immigrants in Scandinavia'. Fairooz is the 'Winner of Herbert Felix Institute Award for Openness & Diversity 2016.

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