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Moroccan illustrator using comics for #MeToo campaign

Young Moroccan cartoonist Zainab Fasiki draws on a whiteboard in a Casablanca studio where she is holding a workshop that mixes art with a homegrown illustrated #MeToo campaign. "We are here to change this rape culture, which says the victim deserves what they get while the criminal is innocent," says Fasiki, 26, her eyes flashing with indignation. A dozen students and professionals have joined forces with Fasiki, a pioneer in comics and illustration in Morocco, in response to a web series titled #TaAnaMeToo that depicts women's real-life ordeals.

As part of the series—"Ta ana" means "Me Too" in Moroccan Arabic dialect—she illustrated the harrowing testimony of a 22-year-old woman who for years was raped by her brother, to the indifference of her parents. Unlike in the broader #MeToo movement, the Moroccan women who have agreed to share their stories for the campaign have preferred to remain anonymous. Series producer Youssef Ziraoui says rape victims in Morocco not only have to deal with a sense of "shame" and the risk of being cast out by their families, but can face charges for sex before marriage under Moroccan law if they go to the police.

The participants in the Casablanca workshop are looking for creative comebacks to some of the toxic reactions the



Zainab Fasiki, a Moroccan cartoonist and activist for women's rights, poses with her latest book entitled 'Hshouma' in the western Moroccan coastal city of Casablanca. — AFP photos

campaign has elicited. "Choose a negative comment and respond to it," Fasiki says, as the group gets to work on tablets or with paper and pencil. Fasiki, who calls herself an "activist" (an artist and activist), says art is "a major instrument of change". "Images have power, particularly on social media."

'Revolution, resistance'

The illustrator, her dark hair cropped in a short bob, says she became a feminist at age 14, when she began to feel that often "being a woman is a sin" in the

North African country. "There is a culture where men correct women, keep an eye on them—it's a patriarchal system," she says. "Men treat us as if we weren't humans who are responsible for our choices." She is pushing through her illustrations for "changes to laws written by men, for men, to control women's bodies", she adds. The self-taught Fasiki says her artistic training involved reading comics as a child, drawing in her bedroom as an adolescent, and "meeting authors at comics festivals" when she was old enough to travel.



Zainab Fasiki, a Moroccan cartoonist and activist for women's rights, attends a workshop in the western Moroccan coastal city of Casablanca.

Fasiki became known on social media for her nude self-portraits and for illustrations showing "the female body as it is, without taboos". Her book "Hshouma" (modesty) — a term she says covers "the culture of shame" around women's bodies in Morocco—took her to a wider audience, in a country where sex education is also taboo. "Some feminists think that drawing the naked female form doesn't serve the cause," she says. "I think it's a revolution—a form of resistance in the face of a patriarchy-based history."

Stifling talent

Fasiki says she was unable to find a local publisher for "Hshouma", and the book's first edition was instead published in Paris in 2019. Florent Massot, her French publisher, told AFP the book had had "good sales" in Morocco. "Zainab is very courageous," he said. "She is always very positive even though she gets insulted a lot on social media." Fasiki is preparing for an exhibition at a contemporary art museum in Tetouan, and will also be teaching at a fine arts school in the northern Moroccan city.

She says she is looking forward to countering "artists who preach against artistic nudity", and wants to "develop the female presence in art". First and foremost, that requires helping girls "escape the control of their family", says Fasiki, adding that she was influenced by French feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir and her seminal work "The Second Sex". "When I started to publish (my work) on social media, my family told me, 'either you stop or we don't consider you a member of the family anymore,'" she says. But she was undeterred. "This type of control over children, who are doing nothing wrong apart from living their passion, has destroyed thousands of talents," she says. — AFP



'Game of Thrones' play in the works for 2023

"Game of Thrones" is headed to Broadway, its production team announced Tuesday, with plans to bring key characters from the wildly successful cult series to the stage in 2023. George R.R. Martin, author of the literary saga that started it all, is collaborating on the theatrical piece with British playwright Duncan MacMillan and director Dominic Cooke. The play will take place during "a pivotal moment in the history of the series," read a statement from the team, which includes producers Simon Painter, Tim Lawson and Jonathan Sanford, who presented "The Illusionists" on Broadway in 2014.

"Our dream is to bring Westeros to Broadway, to the West End, to Australia... and eventually, to a stage near you," Martin said in a statement, referring to the fictional world where the tales take place. Martin said work on the project began before the pandemic. The saga's defining moment that will underpin the play is the Harrenhal tournament, which is to have taken place roughly 17 years before the first season of the HBO series. The production is to feature "many of the most iconic and well-known characters" from the books and the series, which came out over eight seasons from 2011 to 2019.—AFP

'Big Brother' still huge in Brazil, 21 seasons on

Brazilian TV is perhaps best known for its "telenovelas," but another kind of show has been captivating the country and holding a mirror up to its changing face for 21 seasons: reality franchise "Big Brother Brazil." "BBB," as it is affectionately known, is a cultural phenomenon in Brazil, with extensive media coverage devoted to every twist and a national conversation that has drawn in politicians, celebrities and even football superstar Neymar, who regularly stays up late in France tweeting about the show. The nightly series has an average audience of 40 million viewers this season-up 5.1 million from last year—and 50-percent audience share for its time slot, just after the religiously followed telenovela, or prime-time soap opera, on TV Globo, Brazil's largest broadcaster.

Branded the "Biggest of the Bigs," the 21st season is set to be the longest yet, with 100 episodes—and also the most lucrative. Sponsors' logos are

Oscars plan UK, France venues for nominees over pandemic travel fears

Next month's pandemic-affected Oscars ceremony will include venues in the United Kingdom and France for international nominees unable to travel to Los Angeles, sources familiar with the plan told AFP Tuesday. While Oscars presenters will remain at the previously announced main location in downtown Los Angeles' Union Station—just a short drive from Hollywood—producers are "planning something special" for the British "central hub," one source said. Another "satellite hub" is planned for Paris.

The Academy Awards—the biggest and final night of Hollywood's sprawling award season—had faced growing criticism after producers earlier this month said no video calls would be allowed for those unwilling or unable to attend in person. Eight of the nominated actors this year are British, including 83-year-old Anthony Hopkins for "The Father"—a play adaptation about dementia written by French director Florian Zeller, who is also nominated for his screenplay.

Under the previous plans, all nominees would have been required to travel to California despite facing potential travel restrictions, lengthy quarantine requirements and the inherent risks of flying during a pandemic—or face being left out of the show entirely. With the new policy, satellite links will now be provided for international nominees around the world who have no way of getting to Los Angeles—although video calling will still be kept to a minimum.



In this file photo the main entrance of Union Station in Los Angeles, where part of the 2021 Oscars Ceremony will take place. — AFP

omnipresent in the show's custom-built villa-turned-national fishbowl, where contestants have been filmed around the clock by 11 cameras since January 25. Three 30-second commercial spots are all it takes for Globo to cover the prize money awarded the eventual winner: 1.5 million reais (\$260,000). But beyond the numbers, BBB is a veritable institution in Brazil, one whose many fans—including world-famous celebrities such as Neymar and singer Anitta—react in real time on social media to every episode.

'Like a World Cup'

"When Big Brother Brazil comes along each year, everyone watches the same thing, and gets to talk about it, much like

Recent award shows including February's Golden Globes have been slammed for their heavy use of remote calling for nominees, particularly after the start of Daniel Kaluuya's acceptance speech for best supporting actor briefly lost audio. Oscars producers have spoken of their desire for a ceremony that "will look like a movie, not a television show," promising a spectacular introduction and planning to film proceedings in high-definition, widescreen format.

'The virtual thing'

The 93rd Academy Awards will take place on April 25, concluding a much-delayed Hollywood awards season. Organizers are still urging all nominees who are able to attend the Los Angeles ceremony in person to do so, and have asked attendees to observe a 10-day quarantine during which they will be asked to avoid crowds, gyms and restaurants. The night will feature extensive Covid-19 testing precautions for nominees and their guests.

"We are going to great lengths to provide a safe and enjoyable evening for all of you in person, as well as for all the millions of film fans around the world, and we feel the virtual thing will diminish those efforts," wrote the producers in a letter to nominees two weeks ago. —AFP

a World Cup or the Olympics," said Laurens Drillich, president of Endemol Shine Latino, the Latin American division of the production company that created "Big Brother" in the Netherlands in 1999. And just like when Brazil score a big goal in a World Cup match, BBB fans regularly burst into celebration in front of their TV screens when a favorite contestant is saved from eviction.

"We have a passionate audience that is enthralled by every episode. We see people celebrating from their windows and balconies across the country, and that motivates us to put the show out seven nights a week," said the series director, Rodrigo Dourado. BBB has been a life raft for Globo during the coronavirus



NETFLIX, 'LUPIN' AND EU RULES SPARK A TV REVOLUTION

"Lupin", a French reboot set in postcard Paris, has made Omar Sy a global star and fulfilled a long-lost dream for Europeans: the confidence to take on Hollywood. But, in a devilish twist worthy of the gentleman thief himself, the leap forward for European productions comes thanks to Netflix, a quintessentially American success story. Netflix is investing massively to become a global television player, but when it comes to making shows in Europe, the company, along with rivals Disney Plus and Amazon Prime, actually has no choice.

Since 2018, a European Union rule has dictated that platforms offer their subscribers at least 30 percent European content, and that they invest in local shows. And, while the Netflix revolution is mostly welcomed, this brave new world of binge watching and algorithmic program guides has triggered soul-searching among Europe's creators.

Greenlit in Paris

According to the company, Netflix has 100 films and series in various stages of production across the European Union with production teams and senior execu-

pandemic, which forced the broadcaster to halt production on its signature telenovelas and resort to reruns of greatest hits. "It works because it's a reality show that manages to plug directly into the Brazilian tradition of telenovelas, which have always reflected the country's reality at any given time," said Michel Alcoforado, an anthropologist and founder of the consumer research consultancy Consumotoca. "You can't understand BBB without understanding the 'B' for Brazil." Unlike a telenovela, however, BBB has a democratic element, with the audience empowered to vote on who remains in the house and choose the eventual winner.

Breaking the contestant mold

This year, the show is being broadcast to a deeply divided country, riven by two years of non-stop confrontation under far-right President Jair Bolsonaro and a pandemic that has claimed more than 300,000 lives in Brazil while exacerbating its inequalities. At such a deeply polarized time, "BBB has revived a national conversation on fundamental issues for society such as racism, machismo or LGBT rights, which had disappeared from dinner table discussions," Alcoforado told AFP. The show wasn't always a platform for discussing diversity.

"All the contestants used to have similar profiles: guys with big muscles and women straight from a magazine cover," said Felipe Oliveira, a contestant on BBB's eighth edition who now works at ID_BR, an organization that promotes racial equality in the workplace. "BBB's strength is that it managed to reinvent itself. Society has changed over the past 20 years, and BBB knew how to keep up with the trend," added Oliveira, 34. "When I was on the show, I probably spent more than an hour talking about affirmative action. But they edited it out. Today, they maximize that kind of thing, like when Gil (a current contestant) spoke out against homophobia"—one of many viral moments from "BBB21." — AFP



Handout photos released in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil by O Globo TV shows contestants from Brazil's Big Brother (BBB) reality television show.

