

German PEN Awards the Hermann Kesten Prize to Egyptian publisher Mohamed Hashem

Born in 1958 in Tanta in the northern Nile Delta, it was in 1998 that the Egyptian publisher **Mohamed Hashem** established the independent publishing house *Merit* together with a group of intellectuals led by the famous writer Ibrahim Mansour (1935-2004), who since the early sixties had gathered the progressive intellectual elites of his country round himself. Since then, Mohamed Hashem has served as both *Merit's* owner and managing director. Mohamed Hashem belongs to the Egypt reformist movement *Kefaya* (Enough!) and was instrumental in founding its affiliated initiative 'Writers and Artists for Change'. He is a member of the Egyptian Socialist Party and has also made his mark as a reporter and author of numerous novellas and short stories, with his novel *Open Playgrounds* appearing in 2004.

In 2006 Mohamed Hashem was bestowed the *Jeri Laber International Freedom to Publish Award*, created in 2002 by the *Association of American Publishers* and named in honour of Jeri Laber, the founder of the international NGO *Human Rights Watch*. In the same year Hamdy el Gazzar (b. 1970), one of the authors whose books are published by *Merit*, was awarded the renowned *Literature Orize of the Cairo Sawiris Foundation*.

In this year of the Arab revolts for freedom, the German P.E.N. Centre honours Mohamed Hashem with the *Herman Kesten Award 2011*. As a publisher, Mohamed Hashem has created an world of thought in which the Arab reform movement has found its intellectual breeding ground. Situated close to the Tahrir Square, his small publishing house has been called a 'Kaaba for the intellectuals'.

The prize-giving ceremony will take place on 15th November, 2011 at 7 p.m. in the Kammerspiele of Staatstheater Darmstadt. The eulogy will be delivered by Stefan Weidner. Dedicated to the spirit of the PEN International Charter, the Kesten award has previously been won by – among others – Anna Polikkovskaya, the group Memorial, and the imprisoned Chinese writer Liu Xiaobo, who became Peace Nobel laureate of 2010 shortly after receiving the award. The prize sum of € 10.000 is donated in equal parts by the Hessian Ministry for Science and Arts and the German P.E.N. Centre.

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