
A Transcultural
History of Modern Art
in Egypt:
Flâneuses et flâneurs des deux mondes

Amina Basil Diab

PhD

University of York

History of Art

September 2019

Abstract

This thesis is an investigation of modernism in Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century. I argue that modernism has been doubly overlooked, first by the nationalist narrative, produced under President Gamal Abdel Nasser and second by recent revisionist scholarship that have predominantly focussed on the avant-garde movements of the 1930s onwards. This thesis takes a wider historical lens to investigate experiments of modernism from the early 1900s. It adopts a transcultural lens to investigate the cosmopolitan artistic and cultural milieu of Cairo. By placing the artists, art patrons, art critics and artworks in a global network wherein peoples, ideas and objects were in a constant flux to and from Egypt, I seek to uncover a lost history of Egyptian modernism.

Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	2
<i>Table of Contents</i>	3
<i>List of Figures</i>	7
<i>Note on Transliteration, Translation and Images</i>	10
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	11
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	12
<i>Declaration</i>	14
1. INTRODUCTION	15
1.1 From the Academic to the Nationalist: Towards a Specifically Egyptian Art?.....	20
1.2 Literature Review.....	25
1.3 Setting the Scene.....	34
1.4 Local Reactions to Fascism.....	37
1.5 Société des Amis de l'Art and the Salon du Caire.....	43
1.6 A Fluid Matrix and Shifting Connections.....	44
1.7 The Lasting Effect: Francophonie in Egypt.....	47
1.8 A Community Beyond Borders: The Francophone Press Narrating the Art World.....	48
1.9 Chapter Breakdown.....	51
2. Sources.....	52
2. CHAPTER ONE: SEARCHING FOR MOHAMED MAHMOUD KHALIL: A TESTIMONY OF ARTISTIC PATRONAGE AND COLLECTING	57
2.1 Who Was Mohamed Mahmoud Bey Khalil?.....	63
2.2 Literature Review.....	68
2.3 <i>The Dictatorship of the Arts: A Caricature</i>	75
2.4 The Collection and its Dissemination.....	79
2.5 Paul Gauguin in Gizeh.....	91
2.6 A Patron to Egyptian Art.....	94
2.7 A Widely Visited Art Collection.....	100

2.8 Richard Mosseri: To Hire a Keeper of Collection	103
2.9 MMK As President of <i>the Société des Amis de l'Art</i>	105
3. MoMAC and the <i>Comité Consultatif</i>	114
3.1 Egypt at the <i>Exposition Universelle</i> of 1937 in Paris.....	117
3.2 Conclusion	121
3. CHAPTER TWO : VALENTINE DE SAINT-POINT : 'LA MUSE POURPRE' MOVES TO EGYPT	123
3.4 VSP and Futurism	123
3.5 Reviewing the Literature.....	128
3.6 An Avant-garde Saint-Pointiste.....	131
3.7 On Valentine and Futurism.....	132
3.8 On Dancing: <i>Métachorie</i>	134
3.9 ' <i>La muse pourpre</i> ' : A Mediator between Avant-garde, Nationalism and Islam	137
4. <i>Le Phoenix</i> (1925-1927)	140
4.1 Imperial Excesses of the Occident	144
4.2 Cries of Distress from the Orient.....	145
4.3 VSP and Egyptian Nationalism	146
4.4 Valentine and René Guenon	148
4. CHAPTER THREE: 'FUTURISTI DI CAIRO' AND MARINETTI'S RETURN TO EGYPT	151
4.5 Marinetti and Egypt	157
4.6 Marinetti: A Life in Futurism	158
4.7 An Evolving Futurism	160
4.8 Formations of Egyptian Futurism	161
4.9 Nelson Morpurgo.....	162
5. Marinetti Returns to Egypt, A decade Apart	166
5.1 Moscatelli at Work, Translating.....	167
5.2 Chez Grassi: In Honour of Marinetti	170
5. CHAPTER FOUR: MAHMOUD SAID: THE MAKING OF THE 'FATHER' OF EGYPTAIN ART.....	173
5.3 Adam and Eve	174
5.4 The 'Father' of Modern Egyptian Art.....	182
5.5 Patronage and the <i>modello</i>	186
6. CHAPTER FIVE: ART AND LIBERTY AND SURREALISM IN EGYPT.....	202
5.7 Literature and Exhibition Review	203
5.8 Georges Henein: A Cultural Hyphen	206

5.9 Salon of Maria Cavadia.....	209
6. Amy Nimr: Artist and Patron of the Arts	211
6.1 Lee Miller Moves to Cairo.....	214
6.2 The Neo-Orientalist Group (1937).....	215
6.3 Ramses Younan: Early Forays into a Philosophy of Aesthetics	216
6.4 “Long Live Degenerate Art!”	220
6.5 Echoes of a Manifesto	223
6.6. Art and Liberty Coming Together	224
6.7 A First General Assembly.....	226
6.8 The <i>Art et Liberté Bulletin</i>	227
6.9. <i>Al-Risala</i> Debate	229
7. A Search for Freedom	234
7.1. <i>Salon des Indépendants: A Riposte in the Arts</i>	238
7.2 La Séance Continue	242
7.3 Art and Liberty in Practice.	244
7.4 Younan and ‘Subjective realism’	247
7.5 <i>La Nature Appelle le Vide</i> (1944)	249
7.6 Drawing into the Abyss.....	257
7.7 Fouad Kamel	259
7.8 Amy Nimr: Sketching Skeletons.....	261
7.9 Canons of War Approaching.....	262
During the war, Henein maintained contact with the outside world. He acted as a hyphen of cultural mediation, resisting and violently rejecting the status quo. His weapon was the written word. He corresponded with Benjamin Péret in Mexico and participated in the New York surrealist magazines <i>VVV</i> and <i>View</i>	263
In a letter to Calet, from 10 March 1945, he wrote: “I ask myself when will an intellectual breathing space resume to allow people renewed exchanges, that wouldn’t be an exchange of refugees, of the wounded and of cases of explosives. That is without even mentioning the possibility of moving around, to wander around freely, from one continent to another. After this war, we may notice that borders have terribly regained strength.”	263
8. Inji Efflatoun: Early Surrealist Compositions	263
8.1 Crackdown on the Left and a Cohesiveness Disbanded	267
7. CONCLUSION	271
BIBLIOGRAPHY	276
Archives Consulted	276
Egypt.....	276
France.....	276
United Kingdom.....	276
Primary	276

Periodicals	276
Manifestoes.....	276
Secondary.....	277
<i>APPENDIX</i>.....	290
Kamel el-Telmisany, Manifesto of the Neo-Orientalists (1937)	290
Letter: Lee Miller to Roland Penrose (1938)	291
Letter: Lee Miller to Roland Penrose (1938)	291
“Vive l’art dégénéré ». London Bulletin, n°13, 15 avril 1939, p.16-17. 1938.....	292
Long Live Degenerate Art! (1938).....	293
George Henein, “Portrait de Lee”, Désraisons d’Être, (1938)	294
“L’art Indépendant en Égypte” (Indépendant Art in French), Bashir Sebaie archives (1941)	295
Georges Henein, Those Who Belong to Two Universes, (1962).....	296
Georges Henein, A Tribute to André Breton (1966)	298

List of Figures

Figure 1 Opening of the 1 st Salon du Caire, organised by the SAA and inaugurated by King Fouad I, 1927, Cairo. Courtesy of the Chafik Charobim Estate.	58
Figure 2 Members of Art and Liberty during the 2nd Salon des Indépendants 1941, Cairo. .	59
Figure 3 Emilienne Hector Luce. Image from Nantes Mondain	64
Figure 4 Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil Villa, No.1 Kafour Street. Barry Iverson	65
Figure 5 Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil, Emilienne Luce, Ismail Sidqi, Sir Miles Lampson at a dinner, 1940.	71
Figure 6 Mohamed Hassan, La dictature des Beaux-Arts 1939. Archives of Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil, Cairo.	75
Figure 7 Paul Gauguin, La Vie et la mort, 1889. Collection of Mahmoud Khalil and Emilienne Luce, Cairo.	91
Figure 8 Abdel Hadi el-Gazzar, Green Fool, 1951. Courtesy of the Abdel Hadi el-Gazzar Foundation, Cairo.	93
<i>Figure 9 Interior of MMK's Villa featuring Mahmoud Said's Banat Bahari. 1936</i>	95
Figure 10 (Right) Mahmoud Said, Banat Bahari.1936. Private collection	95
Figure 11: Amy Nimr, Travail (Panneau Décoratif), 1922.....	96
Figure 12: Study of Gauguin's La Vie et la mort by Samir Rafi. 1945. Fonds Samir Rafi', courtesy of Mohamed Said.	99
Figure 13: Guests admiring the collection display at n.1 Kafour Street (Images, n.973, 1 May 1949)	101
Figure 14: Villa for Mohamed Mahmoud Bey MMK, Gizeh, Cairo, Arrangement of the painting gallery,' 1927. Fonds Joachim Richard.	102
Figure 15: Catalogue of the Exposition Française du Caire: Beaux-Arts et Arts Décoratifs, 8 February 1938, Grand Palace of the Royal Agricultural Society in Guezireh Cairo.	114
Figure 16: Installation shot, Grand Pavillion featuring Mahmoud Said's Baigneuse (c.1925–35) seen on the top-left.	120
Figure 17: Mahmoud Said, Baigneuse (c. 1925–35), oil on canvas.	120

Figure 18 Banquet in honour of F.T Marinetti hosted by Carlo Grassi at Villa Nedda, Zamalek, Cairo, 1938.	124
Figure 19 Valentine de Saint-Point in her studio Rue Tourville, Paris.	127
Figure 20 Portrait of Valentine de Saint Point.	128
Figure 21 Valentine de Saint-Point in her studio Rue de Tourville, Paris (1914), Agence Meurisse.....	130
Figure 22 Le Phoenix Revue de la renaissance orientale cover.....	142
Figure 23 Excerpt from questionnaire “Enquête sur la Syrie,” Le Phoenix, n.3 February–March 1926.....	143
Figure 24 Morfina! Theatre tickets, Azbakeyya Garden, 16 October 1921.....	161
Figure 25 Nelson Morpurgo, Il Fuoco delle Piramidi, Cover, (Milan: Edizioni Futristi di « Poesia » 1923).....	166
Figure 26 Nelson Morpurgo, “Amore,” Il Fuoco delle Piramidi.	166
Figure 27 Jean Moscatelli, "Tandis que Marinetti vient en Égypte," 17 March 1938, Images.	169
Figure 28 Al-Ahram, 16 March 1938, Announcement of Marinetti’s Conference at the Ewart Hall, AUC.	170
Figure 29 Mahmoud Said, Adam and Eve, oil on panel, 1937, Private collection.	175
Figure 30 Gustav Klimt (1862–1918), Adam and Eve, 1917-1918, Osterreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna, Austria, Bridgeman Images.	178
Figure 31 Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), Adam and Eve, 1504, The Morgan Library and Museum.	179
Figure 32 Mahmoud Said, Ma femme au châle vert, 1944, Mahmoud Said Museum, Alexandria.	184
Figure 33 Mahmoud Said, Portrait de Jasper Brinton, oil on panel, 1944.	184
Figure 34 Mahmoud Said, Les derviches tourneurs, 1929, watercolour and brush.	187
Figure 35 Mahmoud Said, Les derviches tourneurs (esquisse), Oil on panel, Private Collection, Christie’s Image Ltd.	187
Figure 36 Mahmoud Said, Les derviches tourneurs, oil on panel, 1929. Private collection. Christie’s Image Ltd.	189
Figure 37 Mahmoud Said, La Ville (1ère esquisse), 1937, oil on panel, Residence of the Ambassador of the A.R.E to the Kingdom of Sweden.	190

Figure 38 Mahmoud Said, La Ville (esquisse), 1937, oil on panel, Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil and Emilienne Luce Museum, Cairo.	191
Figure 39: Mahmoud Said, La Ville, 1937, oil on panel, Museum of Modern Art Cairo.	192
Figure 40 Mahmoud Said, La Femme aux boucles d'or (1933), Oil on canvas, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.	200
Figure 41 Amy Nimr, Sketch, pencil on paper. Courtesy of the Slade Art School, 1919, London.	212
Figure 42 Ramses Younan, La nature appelle le vide, oil on canvas, 1944. Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art, Cairo.	249
Figure 43 Henry Moore, Stringed Figure, 1938, cast 1960. Courtesy of the Henry Moore Foundation.	251
Figure 44 Ramses Younan, Untitled, oil on canvas, 1944. Collection: Mathaf, Doha.	252
Figure 45 Ramses Younan, Contre le mur, oil on canvas 1944. Collection Younan Family.	253
Figure 46 Henry Moore, Recumbent Figure, Stone, 1938. Tate Modern, Courtesy fo the Henry Moore Foundation.	254
Figure 47 Ramses Younan, A la surface du sable, pencil on paper, 1938. Collection of MoMAC.	257
Figure 48 Ramses Younan, La conscience de la terre, pencil on paper, 1954.	257
Figure 49 Fouad Kamel, Untitled, oil on canvas, 1942. Private Collection, Cairo.	259
Figure 50 Amy Nimr, Untitled, 1943, oil on panel.	261
Figure 51 Inji Efflatoun, Composition Surrealiste, 1942.	265
Figure 52 Inji Efflatoun, Untitled (Girl with Monster), 1942.	266

Note on Transliteration, Translation and Images

In this dissertation, I have used a simplified form of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) system to transliterate words from Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), excluding the diacritical marks. I have only used the ‘ to represent the consonant ayn, and ’ for the *hamza* glottal stop. For names of figures transliterated from Arabic, I have maintained standard or previously used versions. Many of the art works I have analysed have dual titles, in both French and Arabic. For the most part, I have used the French version to simplify the prose and chose not to translate these into English. All translation from French and Arabic to English are my own except when stated otherwise. I have included the original texts in the footnotes when the wording in the original language was important or when the translation was complex.

The difficulty in sourcing adequate reproductions of images and basic information about works of art is a reality faced by all researchers of Modern Egyptian art and arguably Middle Eastern art at large. As a consequence, I had to make use, in some instances, of reproductions of images, whose quality leaves much to be desired or that fall short of information about dimensions, location or ownership.

List of Abbreviations

AL	Art and Liberty group
MMK	Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
MoMAC	Museum of Modern Art, Cairo
SAA	<i>Société des Amis de l'Art</i>
SE	<i>La Semaine Égyptienne</i>
SFA	School of Fine Arts, Cairo
VSP	Valentine de Saint-Point

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to more people than I can list. This project would not have been possible without the help of my fierce friends and colleagues who have been a continuous source of inspiration and support. To Imane for her patience in responding to all my quests for sources and for helping me navigate Egypt's archival maze. Ola Seif and the team at the Rare Books and Special collection have been of kind assistance throughout. The librarians of the British Library who have seen it all, I thank them for their patience. Thank you to Mai El Dib, Aleya Hamza, Emad Abu Ghazi, Mona and Tarek Adel, Mai and Ahmed Heikal and Nabil El Araby for their generosity.

I am hugely grateful to Sherene Seikaly, who taught me during my undergraduate studies. You believed in me before I believed myself and quite literally put me on this track of exploring the history of art in Egypt more than a decade ago now. My two supervisors have been a source of constant source of wisdom and support. I thank you for believing in me and in this project when I didn't.

To Mary, – my work-wife in Science 3, you have made this journey better, in so many ways. To Frankie, Lena, Mirra, Verde and, Sofia, I offer gratitude and love.

To my family back home, who have been a constant source of support throughout this journey– especially my mother who has lived it all, every day.

Finally, I dedicate this to Mansour— I know you will be very proud.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not been presented for an award at this or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

1. INTRODUCTION

My thesis revisits the history of Egyptian modernism in the first half of the twentieth century. It is both a transnational and a social history of modern art in Egypt that looks at the established structures, of artists, artworks, art movements, art patrons, art institutions and publications, through which modernism is legible. My aims are twofold. First, I revisit the history of Egyptian modernism in the first half of the twentieth century by adopting a transnational lens. I place Egyptian art, artists and patrons in a global network wherein people, ideas and objects were in a constant flux to and from Egypt. These transcultural routes began with exchanges of artistic practices and methods of painting and became more and more radicalised and ideologically driven by the 1920s. Second, I challenge existing models of rupture adopted in revisionist narratives, that pit the art establishment against the ‘avant-garde.’ In their place I choose a lens of continuity to highlight the contact, overlap and diagonality of art practices and practitioners; instead of viewing these ‘generations’ as inherently distinct and in opposition, I find that placing them in conversation reveals considerable overlaps, relationships and exchange that are absent from existing narratives. In other words, it uncovers a richly nuanced landscape dotted with ambivalence and contradiction, to be found in cultural and artistic production. Ultimately what binds the artists, art patrons, art critics and the public is a shared corpus of art ideas, art movements, art writing and artworks that flowed into, around and out of Egypt. In this cultural vortex, art interlocutors were engaged in the flow of ideas and materials at hand that together formed and defined the parameters of a cosmopolitan modernism, and that we have yet to uncover

fully. As Kobena Mercer reminds us, modernism was always already multicultural, “it is simply our consciousness of it that has changed.”¹ The opening of the field of art history to global considerations foregrounds the issues of nationalist art histories. Locally, they challenge the widespread use of notions such as nationalism, tradition and authenticity to police the canon of Egyptian art, and transnationally, it examines the network through which artworks (which tend to be durable, material objects), movements and ideas (conceptual) and artists, art critics and patrons who circulate between the well-trodden route of Egypt and the West, in particular France, Britain and Italy to a lesser extent.

In particular, I investigate the multivalent manifestations of futurism and surrealism in Egypt, as well as the adoption of the “genre of the nude” as an index of modernity, and the ways these artistic practices as well as practices of patronage were transferred, adopted and adapted by local agents to fit the local milieu. But as the actors, objects and ideas show, this entanglement between Egypt, and the Global South in general, and the Global North were not unidirectional. Instead, questions of translation, adaptation and hybridity have always characterised these reckonings with modernity, in colonial contexts. The cases of Egyptian art exhibitions in Paris, the travel of Egyptian art students to Paris or Rome and the reckoning of Egyptian artists with surrealism show that entanglement was not unidirectional. The cultural exchange, transfer, adoption, assimilation, and adaptation that characterise these artistic endeavours lie at the heart of my thesis. The five cases presented here articulate boundless cross-cultural dialogues that swiftly dislodge geometries of centre and periphery. I borrow Kobena Mercer’s method of “dialogical modes of cross-cultural translation,” which is brought from cultural studies to art history, to make sense of the relational networks through

¹ Kobena Mercer, “Art History after Globalization: Formations of the Colonial Modern,” in *Travel and See Black Diaspora Art Practices Since the 1980s* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016) 251.

which art travels in circuits.² The origins of this ethos of dialogics are traced back to Mikhail Bakhtin, who remarks:

There is neither a first word nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogical context (it extends into the boundless past and into the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) Nothing is dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. The problem of great time³

My dissertation sits at the intersection of transnational art history, cultural studies and postcolonial theory to offer revisions to the canon of Egyptian modernism and contribute to the growing literature, to decentre the traditional paradigms of modern art history.⁴ I attempt to offer a nuanced portrait of the cultural landscape of Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century by identifying key actors, intermediaries and processes of knowledge transfer.⁵ I challenge the generational approach that has until now, characterised the way the narrative has been written – both the post-1952 nationalist and more recent ‘revisionist’ narratives. The former celebrates the first generation, such as Mohamed Nagui (1888–1956), Mahmoud Mokhtar (1891–1934), and Ragheb Ayad (1892–1982) as the forefathers of Egyptian art, while the latter dismisses them as elitist or as imitators of European traditions. In both instances, the generational divisions are maintained. But a close examination shows a much more nuanced artistic landscape. For example, following the death of Mokhtar in April 1934, *Les Essayistes* organised a poetry evening, followed by the publication of a special issue to commemorate the life of the artist. Arabophone and francophone intellectuals from literary and artistic milieus contributed to this issue. In an issue published a week later, Francesca Rondinelli has found a mention of *Les Essayistes*’ obituary on Mokhtar describing it as “the sincerest [tribute] to the famous sculptor, while also being the most complete documentation

² Kobena Mercer, “Introduction,” in *Travel and See Black Diaspora Art Practices Since the 1980s* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016) 10.

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, « « Towards a Methodology for the Human Sciences,” in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 170.

⁴ Mercer, “Introduction,” in *Travel and See Black Diaspora Art Practices Since the 1980s*, 28.

⁵ Nadia Radwam “‘Dal Cairo a Roma’: Visual Arts and Transcultural Interactions between Egypt and Italy”, *Asiatische Studien - Études Asiatiques*, 70 (4), 1111, [10.1515/asia-2016-0034](https://doi.org/10.1515/asia-2016-0034).

of his work”.⁶ To my mind, to adopt a *longue durée* approach and move beyond the narratives of rupture offers a more nuanced cultural mapping. It is vital to establish these genealogies and sense of continuity between the pioneers and later generations; not with the purpose of making sense of the whole harmoniously but to celebrate the ambivalence and contradictions that lend any artistic and cultural landscape its richness and density.

Certainly, there are more overlaps than current narratives allow. MMK and the *Comité des Beaux-Arts* on one side and the younger artists particularly AL, on the other, bear more similarities than previously accounted for. Because of their *francophoneness*, both groups paradoxically met the same fate: they were ostracised from the narrative of Egyptian art history. They soon became exiled in their own country, and many ended up leaving Egypt, in a sort of self-imposed exile. Other examples include interactions between Mahmoud Said, Amy Nimr, Mahmoud Mokhtar, Hamed Abdalla, Samir Rafi’, Ramses Younan, Georges Henein, Inji Efflatoun and Ahmed Rassim, who conversed and exhibited together. Records of the Museum of Modern Art in Cairo (MoMAC henceforth) point to an active acquisition committee that was acquiring artworks across generations.⁷

The approach of the transnational has been applied across fields of social sciences and the humanities since its earliest use by scholars in the political sciences. Consequently, it was applied in history, literature and cultural studies and has belatedly been adopted by art history. My approach to the transnational is a pragmatic one, in the sense that I use it as a tool for (re) adjusting our vision. As Sven Beckert puts it, “ideally, transnational history is a ‘way

⁶ Francesca Rondinelli, “Continuité et Rupture dans *Un Effort*: Revue Culturelle et Intellectuelle de l’entre-deux guerres,” *Presses Allophones de Méditerranée* (Alexandrie : Centres d’Études Alexandrines, 2017), 96.

⁷ *Salon du Caire*, exhibition catalogue 1930, 7-8, Fonds Louis Hautecoeur, Bibliothèque de l’Institut de Paris, France.

of seeing.”⁸ By asking myself questions about the past of art history in Egypt and its formations, I am compelled to take a wider view and to acknowledge the entanglements, networks and relationship that move beyond the unit of the nation-state and its boundaries.

My study broadly falls under the praxis of postcolonialism, with its engagement of experiences of colonialism in Egypt, and its effects on our perception of Egyptian modernism at the local level and the way it complicates our understanding of the canon of modern art history. Post-colonial theory offers powerful critiques of modernity by showing how the terms of the debate are necessarily Eurocentric. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* initiated the field of postcolonial studies and stands as the most powerful account of the colonially conditioned modes of knowledge production by the West, which discursively represented the East in a subordinate state of ‘Other.’⁹ Said’s notions of Orientalism have faced substantial critiques, on the grounds that it reinforces the binarism between East and West and coloniser and colonised, which the author had set out to overcome. In my adoption of a loose transnational lens, my approach is post-Saidian in the sense that my case studies and interlocutors confidently interrupt the geometry of centre and periphery inherent in *Orientalism*. Mahmoud Khalil was sure of his mastery of the terms of modernity, so was Younan when he critiqued automatism and translated concepts to fit the local milieu. Taken together, my five cases offer a possible path of a global history that vitiates the power of the master narrative and its interest in centres.¹⁰

⁸ C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, Patricia Seed, “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *The American Historical Review*, Volume 111, Issue 5, December 2006, Pages 1441–1464, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.111.5.1441>

⁹ Edward W Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

¹⁰ For more on the writing of art history see James Elkins, *The End of Diversity in Art Historical Writing: North Atlantic Art History and Its Alternatives* (Berlin ; Boston, 2020).

The work of decolonization is not over. At the height of the global Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, we saw increasing calls from activist groups for the decolonization of ‘world culture’ museums and other public institutions and monuments. Museums are heeding to the calls to decolonise and address the colonial structures and approaches of their institutions. By attempting a corrective art history on the national level, by taking a wider view grounded in the transnational, I also seek to identify the underlying structures of power that have inscribed the artistic production as local, derivative or belated and consequently excluded it from the paradigms of the history of modern art. For example, why did it take so long for the art of Ramses Younan, characterised by a tremendous force, to be noticed by the curators of Tate Modern, as a major arbiter of the modern art canon? As will become apparent in the analysis of the writings, artists, art critics and patrons were highly cognizant of the pitfalls of operating within a global modernist network; one of their central preoccupations was in fact to be seen as mere imitators.

Here is a good place to pause to define the three cognate terms at the heart of the debate—modern, modernization and modernity—before moving into my analysis. I use ‘modern’ to refer to the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century period, ‘modernity’ to describe the experience of living in an industrialised and capital world, and ‘modernism’ as the expression of living in modernity, as manifested in visual arts, in literature and architecture.

1.1 From the Academic to the Nationalist: Towards a Specifically Egyptian Art?

In 1950, the francophone weekly magazine *Loisirs* published an article entitled “*Vers un art spécifiquement égyptien?*” (Towards a specifically Egyptian art?). It begins with an exploration of Mahmoud Said’s oeuvre, alongside a reproduction of two of his paintings. The first painting *Danseuse* represents a belly-dancer with a *takht* (music ensemble) in the

background. The second painting is an eponymous landscape of al-Mandarah, situated in East Alexandria. The juxtaposition of a landscape and a portrait of a belly-dancer is an attempt by the author to cover Said's entire *oeuvre*. By this time, Said's status as one of the fathers of Egyptian art was well-recognised. But what makes Said's work quintessentially Egyptian? How did *Danseuse* or *La Ville* become iconic paintings, how did they come to hang at the entrance of the Museum of Modern Art in Cairo?

The editors interviewed a sample of Egyptian artists, including Zaynab Abdel Hamid, Abdel Hadi el-Gazzar and Samir Rafi' who coincidentally are heralded as pioneers of Egyptian art: "Do Egyptian artists recognise the role that art plays in the development of Egypt? Are there any signs of an evolution, a movement of art groups or individual artists that suggest the growth of a *specifically* Egyptian art?"¹¹

Rafi's response is revealing, indicating a transformation in the historiography pre and post-1952:

In Egypt, art goes in two directions: pulled by foreign influences on the one hand, and free from all foreign influences on the other. These two attitudes are extreme. To reach a universal art, art must take its roots in Egypt, in the Egyptian reality while making its own foreign cultural and technical contributions, [...] Only this way can art reach one of its essential goals of becoming a universal language.¹²

In this discussion, the paradox of the avant-garde appears: by its very nature, it belies the tension inherent in any movement that purports to break from the establishment and claims

¹¹ « *Vers un art spécifiquement Égyptien?* » *Loisirs*, no. 21 (March 1950) : 82. « *Croyez-vous que les artistes égyptiens sont conscients d'une participation de l'art dans la marche en avant de l'Égypte ? Y aurait-il une évolution ou un mouvement des groups d'artistes, ou des cas individuels, qui laisserait espérer l'épanouissement d'un art spécifiquement égyptien ?* »

¹² Samir Rafi', « *En Égypte, l'art se fraye dans deux chemins ; aimanté par l'apport étranger d'une part, pur de toute influence étrangère d'autre part. Ces deux attitudes sont extrêmes. Pour atteindre un art universel, l'art doit prendre ses racines en Égypte dans la réalité égyptienne et faire sien l'apport culturel et technique étrangers, dont il subit nécessairement l'influence. L'art est comme une racine qui prend souche dans une terre délimitée mais prolifère, s'étend et fait de nouvelles floraisons dans un circuit de sève. De cette manière seulement l'art atteint à un de ses buts essentiels qui est d'être un langage universel.* » *Ibid*, 82.

freedom as its goal. Ultimately, these subjects belonged to the same cultural milieu, frequented the same salons and were predominantly francophone. How do we make sense of these cultural interactions? How do we make sense of Henein's work, as a writer rebelling against his own class, but still writing for them in the same journals and circulating within the same circles? All of them were preoccupied with the questions of modernity and of "being-in-the-world" but crucially, they were confident in mastering the tools and language of the global debates, which they applied successfully and became interlocutors and agents of modernism.

Understanding the anti-nationalist sentiment in the anti-colonial cosmopolitan context in Egypt is another concern of the present study: how do we make sense of AL's anti-nationalist rhetoric? Beyond their expressively anti-nationalist rhetoric, at heart, members were loyal and filled with a sense of solidarity with the Egyptian nation. Younan's *Goddess Nut* or again *La Nature appelle le vide*, which lament the destruction of the homeland are signs of this solidarity. The ambivalence and contradiction inherent in all cultural interaction lends historical texture to our stories; we should celebrate them. Burying them runs the risk of generating sanitised narratives constituted of distinct and opposing groups. It is on this level of metanarrative that I take issue with Bardaouil's findings on the manifestation of surrealism in Egypt and Egyptian modernism at large. As will become clearer, I find his adoption of an ethos of rupture, as the basis of his interpretation, problematic in that it attempts to limit the intellectual freedom of the field of study. To adopt a dialogical framework for understanding this historical juncture in Egypt calls for an openness and ease with the ambivalent, the uncategorised and the undefined, and more importantly pay heed to a type of knowledge quest that is always in *media res*.¹³

¹³ Kobena Mercer, "Introduction," in *In Travel and See* (New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2016), 30.

Studies in the field of Middle East history that adopt a global lens also inform my argument. Ilham Khuri-Makdisi's *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism* argues "that this world region was deeply connected to other parts of the world, through webs of people, information, capital and commodities".¹⁴ Makdisi's study is a textured historical account that shows how the processes of adaptation are intelligible in local frameworks that give meaning to novel imported concepts— be they intellectual, artistic, economic or beyond. Overall, it reconsiders existing dichotomies of local/global and authentic/foreign and finds useful ways to move them onward. The theoretical framework offered by Cyrus Schayegh, Liat Kozma and Avner Wishnitzer in *A Global Middle East: Mobility, Materiality and Culture in the Modern Age* is relevant too. This volume focusses on the "complex theme of mobility as a key feature of globalisation" and illustrates the ways in which agents were engaged in the flow of ideas and materials.¹⁵

The opening of two ambitious but highly controversial exhibitions, '*Primitivism' in 20th-Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984) MoMA, New York and Jean-Hubert Martin's *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989), Centre Pompidou, Paris brought the terms of the debate about non-Western art forward. They marked a moment when the discursive terrain which preserved the monocultural authority of the art canon was disrupted. These shows are usually celebrated as ushering the beginning of post-coloniality and the drive towards decentring art history.¹⁶ The question that had vexed the major arbiters of the canon

¹⁴ Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 9.

¹⁵ Cyrus Schayegh, Liat, Kozma, *A Global Middle East: Mobility, Materiality and Culture in the Modern Age, 1880-1940*. (London: I.B Tauris, , 2015), 9.

¹⁶ Okwui Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition" *Research in African Literatures* 34, no. 4 (2003): doi:10.1353/ral.2003.0097, 68; Annie Cohen-Solal, ed.,

of modern art, specifically the status and the place of non-Western in the historiography was broached for the first time. Nonetheless the approach was full of ambiguities and did not reduce the gap of art production between the ‘West and the rest.’ In Beaubourg, Martin problematically chose to refer to non-Western artists as ‘magicians,’ as a way of out of the conundrum about their status in modern art. Beatrice Prunel offers a corrective, remarking that “the show did not provoke any real questioning of or reflections on colonial heritage until the 2010s.”¹⁷ Instead, she finds the repercussions were felt in the art markets first, before the art historians followed suit, a decade later.¹⁸ This certainly applies to Egypt and the region at large, where artists like Mahmoud Said and Parviz Tanavoli commanded record prices at auction, before academia took notice.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the shows can be credited for creating the first events of contemporary global art.

Since these exhibitions, art historians and global museums such as Tate Modern have adopted transnational perspectives to account for alternative modernities, that have hitherto been excluded from the Western canon. More recent efforts include the upcoming exhibition entitled *Surrealism Beyond Borders*, at Tate Modern and the Metropolitan Museum (October 2021–2022), which aims to decentre the movement’s focus away from Paris and to reassess the international relationships that have long suffered from neglect. The newly inaugurated Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational at Tate Modern embodies this ethos too: it aims to “[develop] its collections and programmes beyond Western Europe and North America by exploring multiple art histories from different part of the world. [...] by

Magiciens de la Terre: 1989, 2014: retour sur une exposition légendaire, exhibition catalogue, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 2 July–8 September 2014, Paris: Editions X. Barral, 2014.

¹⁷ Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel. “Art History and the Global: Deconstructing the Latest Canonical Narrative.” *Journal of Global History* 14, no. 3 (2019), 430. doi:10.1017/S1740022819000196

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 431.

¹⁹ The situation of the art market in Egypt suffers a great deal because of this sequence of arrival of the market before the research was produced.

highlighting the interconnection, exchange and flow of artists and ideas”.²⁰ My Collaborative Doctorial Award studentship based at the University of York and Tate Modern is part of the museum’s strategy to decentre modernism and diversify the canon of art history. Titled ‘Re-displaying the Modern: A History of Art Exhibitions, Artistic Networks and Institutions in the Middle East and North Africa’ the mandate of the project was broadly construed to examine the art practices and institutions in the Middle East.

1.2 Literature Review

In 1936, poet and art critic Ahmed Rassim (1895-1958) published *al Zellal: Safha men al-fann fi Misr* (The Shadow: A Page on Art from Egypt).²¹ The work is an engagement with ideas of artistic production and the role of art for society. Each chapter centres around an artist, whose work is put in conversation with artists and artistic trends in Egypt and beyond. *Al-Zellal* presents an early foray into art writing in Arabic that precedes the efforts of Aimé Azar, the author of what is generally considered the first major book on modern Egyptian art. Before turning to Azar, let us pause to outline Rassim’s role in the development of literary and artistic criticism. A francophile and francophone, Rassim’s poetry, exhibition reviews and short stories appeared across a number of journals.²² He regularly reviewed the *Salon du Caire* as well as the *Salon des Indépendants*, organised by the Art and Liberty group. In fact, Rassim was one of the main patrons of the early avant-garde club *Les Essayistes* (or *al-muhawellun*) founded in 1924 and its weekly cultural journal, *Un Effort*. It was here that

²⁰ Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational Tate Modern <https://www.tate.org.uk/press/press-releases/tate-announces-opening-hyundai-tate-research-centre-transnational>.

²¹ Ahmed Rassim, *al-Zellal: Safha men al-fann fi Misr* (The Shadow: A Page on Art from Egypt), 1936, Publisher unknown. Rassim published a second book that same year entitled *Illa fann misri* (Towards an Egyptian Art), that is now so rare that I have been unable to find it.

²² An anthology of his writings was recently published, *Ahmed Rassim: Le Journal d'un pauvre fonctionnaire et autres textes*, ed. Daniel Lançon (Paris: Denoël, 2007).

George Henein, freshly back from Paris, began his writing career. When the magazine faced financial difficulties in the 1930s, Henein began to finance it. The connections between the writers often go unnoticed and are significant in mapping out the cultural landscape of the first half of the twentieth century.²³

Aimé Azar's *La peinture moderne en Égypte* is often considered as the first comprehensive study dedicated to Egyptian modern art.²⁴ The 400-page volume is in fact a compilation of a series begun in 1948 and each chapter was published separately. The first edition of *La Peinture Moderne* was published in French in 1951.²⁵ The Arabic translation was published a decade later, alongside a new French edition. Published at the height of nationalisation, the latter displays a newfound emphasis on ideas of authenticity, nationalism and *Egyptianess*. The nation pervades as the unit of analysis, and strict generational lines, grouping artists by age, are upheld. These categories generated concepts such as the '*pioneers*' to describe the first generation of artists (not coincidentally, all of them were men, as women were not yet accepted into art schools), the '*restless*' as members of the avant-garde Art and Liberty group, and finally the '*independents*,' as the name suggests were not affiliated to an art group (such as Hamed Abdallah), as well as '*women artists*,' in order to neatly present the development of Egyptian artistic practices.²⁶ These classifications form the basis of subsequent narratives that persist today. Not only are these categories misleading in capturing the reality of the artistic landscape, but they also overlook collaborations between artists of

²³ In a commemorative issue for Ahmed Rassim, in March 1959, Henein writes, "*Hommage à un seigneur qui fit vœu de poésie*" (A tribute to a master who vowed to poetry) in *La Revue du Caire*, vol. XLII, n°224–225 (March 1959): 36–41.

²⁴ Aimé Azar, *La peinture moderne en Égypte*, (Modern Painting in Egypt), Cairo : Les Editions Nouvelles, 1961.

²⁵ Aimé Azar, *La peinture moderne en Égypte*, (Modern Painting in Egypt), Cairo : Les Editions Nouvelles, 1951

²⁶ The artists under study were all men. Here and elsewhere the persona of the professionally trained artist is the domain of male artists. Women artists are seen as amateurs who take up art as a hobby or a pastime. In Azar, they are grouped under one chapter, *Les Femmes Peintres* (Female Painters).

different age groups, as well as the influence and afterlives of art practices that transcend artificial temporal boundaries. One example lies in expressions of surrealism among Egyptian artists. During the first half of the twentieth century, a swath of Egyptian artists experimented with surrealist aesthetics through painting, drawing and photography: from Mahmoud Said, Kamel el-Telmissany, Ida Kar, Ramses Younan to Inji Efflatoun, Abdel Hadi El-Gazzar, Samir Rafi' and Antoine Malliarakis (known as Mayo), all these artists engaged with surrealist thinking in their work, yet more often than not, fell under different groupings in Azar's narrative. Mayo, a Greek artist born in Port Said and who studied at the Beaux-Arts in Paris, is indeed one of the early proponents of surrealism in Egypt, producing and exhibiting works of surrealist sensibility from as early as the 1920s. In Azar's account, the dialogue, as well as the contradictions of artistic interactions go unnoticed. What we are left with, is a sanitised chronological list of artists, grouped together by age and artistic style. While Azar's documentation is an important source for all researchers addressing the fields of artistic production in Egypt, it suffers from a number of issues: most problematic is his emphasis in the second edition, on the nationalist character of the art, particularly post-1952. Nationalism became a lens through which to read and judge Egyptian modern art. Authenticity, *asala* in Arabic, is another core concept which saturated artistic discourse. It is worth bearing in mind that the same lens of authenticity was used by colonizers, who used it to ground artists from the Global South, within their local boundaries; indeed, the myth of an original modernism is present in the model of derivativeness that sees artists from the Global South as copyists, whose only claim to originality is through a localized authenticity.²⁷

²⁷ Sara Angel Guerrero-Rippberger, *30 Degrees from the Northern Tropic: Art, Region and Collective Practices from Urban Latin American and Arab worlds* (Diss, University of the Arts London, 2017), 12. <https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/12038/>

The *coup d'état* staged by the *Free Officers* in July 1952 overthrew the monarchy and established a revolutionary republic. By 1956, Gamal Abdel Nasser rose to power as President of Egypt and implemented socialist reforms. At least in its earliest period, the regime was marked by an end to foreign domination and a strong sense of solidarity with other states fighting against imperial powers. This support for anti-imperialism and decolonisation found expression in the movements of pan-Arabism and treaties with non-aligned countries, signalled by the Bandung conference of 1955. In seeking national independence and political and cultural pan-Arabism, Nasser excluded any foreign languages, in an attempt to strengthen the Arabic language and culture.²⁸ Nationalization and nationalist politics heralded by the regime affected all fields. Writing about the exclusion of elite women from the nationalist history, Beth Baron reminds us that women were not the only group excluded, the pattern was almost universal.²⁹ The state became heavily invested in the public sphere. By the 1960s, Nasser launched a project of re-writing history, characterised by a robust rhetoric of tradition and authenticity.³⁰ Typical of populist regimes, Nasserism sought to 'make history,' and instigated an extensive project of *(re)-writing history*.³¹ In 1958, Nasser established the Supreme Council on Arts and Letters (*al-majlis al-a'la li-ri'ayat al funun w-al- adab*) under the Ministry of Culture, known today as the Supreme Council of Culture. This institution quickly granted the state full monopoly of all cultural production and assured the control and mobilisation of intellectuals.³² This project had sweeping implications

²⁸ Andrea Flores Khalil, *The Arab Avant-Garde: Experiments in North African Art and Literature* (Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 2003), xxv.

²⁹ Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley, California; London: University of California Press, 2005) 220.

³⁰ For more on Nasser's historiography project, see Donald Malcom Reid, *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from World War I to Nasser* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2015) and Elliott Cola, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) and Yoav di Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth Century Egypt* (UC Press, 2009).

³¹ Yoav di Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Past*, 257.

³² Deborah A. Starr, *Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt: Literature, Culture and Empire* (London: Routledge, 2009), 40. *Entre Scribes et Écrivains: Le champs littéraire dans l'Égypte contemporaine*, Richard Jacquemond discusses the implication of the state's monopoly over literary production in *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past*:

for the way history in Egypt has been and continues to be written. There is a large corpus of literature on the way Egyptology has been affected by Nasser's project of historiography, but few studies have grappled with the effects of the nationalist narratives on the history of art. From the 1950s onwards, AL artists were excluded from the narrative, because they were deemed too Westernized or not Egyptian enough.

Thamanun sana min al-fann 1908–1988 (80 years of Art) by Kamal al-Malakh and Rushdi Iskandar is a foundational text for studies of Egyptian art history.³³ Published in 1991, it offers a chronological and comprehensive account that begins with the opening of the School of Fine Arts in 1908, founded on the French system of the Beaux-arts. Suggesting 1908 as the beginning of the fine arts in Egypt is a problematic landmark, as it simply glosses over a range of earlier artistic practises. Indeed, as early as 1891, the *Salon d'art des Orientalistes* was inaugurated under the auspices of Khedive Tewfiq, father of Abbas Hilmi II and organised by the Greek painter, Theodore Jacques Ralli. The annual salon lasted until 1904, when Ralli left for Paris. Although no Egyptian artists participated, the salon cultivated a taste for Orientalist art among the Egyptian elite. *Le Cercle artistique* on 27 Maddabegh Street in downtown Cairo, was one of its first locales.³⁴ As will become clearer, serious artistic activities which spanned a number of Egyptian metropolises, visibly predate the opening of the School of Fine Arts. Generally, the narrative presented in *Thamanun sana* revolves around watershed moments in Egyptian history: these include the nationalist uprisings of 1919, the coup d'état of 1952 and the Six-Day War of 1967. While it is certain

Historians and History Writing in Twentieth Century Egypt (California: UC Press, 2009). Yoav di Capua offers an intellectual history that discusses the evolution of history writing in the twentieth century from early 1900 to the 1960s, including a section on Nasser's project.

³³ Rushdi Iskandar and Kamal al-Malak, *Thamanun sana men al-fann 1908–1988* (Eighty Years of Art) (Cairo: al Hay'a al-Misriya al-'Amma lil-Kitab, 1991).

³⁴ Mercedes Volait, "27 Maddabegh Street: Prelude to an Art Movement", *al-Rawi magazine*, no.8, [2017], <https://rawi-magazine.com/issues/issue-8/>.

that major political events have in fact affected art production, I find this lens of rupture used to make sense of the developments of modern art in Egypt restricting for it presents us with a teleological and sanitised narrative of events. Instead, in this dissertation, I try to establish artistic and social genealogies that permeate those temporal lines.

In this typical nationalist narrative, which centres around colonial institution-making and holistic views of political history, the degree of *Egyptianess* is measured through themes of land, the peasants who work the land, the Nile River and Ancient Egypt. Within this logic, Said's portrayal of the sex-workers of the Anfushi neighbourhood in Alexandria in *La Ville* (1936) and El Gazzar's *A Mad Woman* (1957) depicting the folktale of *Umm al-shuur* (mother of all hair) can both be heralded as 'authentically Egyptian' for the way they recreate recognizable spaces, tap into perceived traditions and herald certain recognisable subjects. To a certain extent, al-Malakh and Iskandar shaped the master narrative of art history in Egypt, and the majority of studies replicated their chronological model: *Modern Egyptian Art* (2005) by Liliane Karnouk and *À la recherche d'une modernité arabe* (1996) by Sylvia Naef are two such examples.³⁵ By focussing on styles as mere expressions of national identities among Egyptian artists, these narratives fail to account for the complexity, fluidity even contradictions of artistic discourses that transcend simple chronological and national boundaries. The outcome of such narratives posits artistic production supported by state institutions, to which other more avant-garde work is inherently opposed. Predictably, AL, the eclectic group of artists, writers, poets and intellectuals who came together to sign the 'Long Live Degenerate Art' manifesto in 1938 has been historically perceived as too Westernised. As a consequence, the group has not been sufficiently studied, till recent

³⁵ Liliane Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art*, Cairo: American University Press, 2005 and Silvia Naef, *À la recherche d'une modernité arabe* (Searching for an Arab Modernity), Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1996.

revisionist efforts, or altogether excluded from the narrative. Chapter 5 takes stock of such accounts, in order to resituate the efforts of the group and retrace their seminal role in the advancement of modernism in Egypt and beyond

More recent studies seek to do justice to lost histories of the avant-garde in Egypt. These focus on the period from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s. In *The Politics of Art in Modern Egypt: Aesthetics, Ideology and Nation-Building*, Patrick Kane critiques this chronological approach.³⁶ He addresses the social horizon of Egyptian aesthetic experience between 1908 and 1966, by re-situating it within its grounds of contestation with the state, the agrarian labour crisis and mass political movements. The importance and novelty of Kane's Marxist reading lies in his comparative reading of artistic experience in conjunction with the historical and political context of political discourse. He explores the visual arts as a locus of a struggle between the state and peasant labour. I take issue with Kane's focus on identity politics at the expense of visual analysis; swiftly we lose sight of the artworks.

Another scholar and curator at the forefront of this revisionist wave is Sam Bardaouil, who curated the travelling exhibition, *Art et Liberté: Rupture, Liberty and War* and produced the accompanying monograph, *Surrealism in Egypt: Art et Liberté 1938-1948*.³⁷ In his reassessment of the Art and Liberty's foundational manifesto, *Long Live Degenerate Art* (LLDA henceforth, (1938)) Bardaouil argues that the group was reacting to a rise of local fascism. He analyses the relationship between their visual and literary production and explores their novel exhibitionary practices and rhetoric. By so doing, he argues for AL's role as active catalysts in expanding local horizons of artistic and intellectual experiences, while

³⁶ Patrick Kane, *The Politics of Art in Modern Egypt: Aesthetics, Ideology and Nation-Building* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2013).

³⁷ Sam Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt : Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016).

simultaneously contributing to the global movement of surrealism. Bardaouil maintains that the group successfully created a visual and pictorial language that is internationally engaged yet locally oriented.³⁸ In light of his work, surrealism in Egypt has received unprecedented attention from art institutions around the world. As Dina Ramadan deridingly comments, 2016 was the year the world “discovered” Egyptian surrealism.³⁹ The names of Georges Henein, Amy Nimr, Mahmoud Said, Ramses Younan and Mayo, among others, have belatedly received attention as agents of modernism. In 2017, a painting by Younan, *Inspiration by the Sea* (1963) joined the collection of Tate. Today it hangs in the “In the Studio: International Surrealism” display room, alongside works by the original Paris-based group and other international artists.

While the merits of Bardaouil’s research project are undeniable, my thesis takes issue with its fundamental premise: to reclaim AL from the state of oblivion, a blow it suffered following 1952, Bardaouil goes to great lengths to uncover the group’s local relevance in order to reclaim its place in the Egyptian narrative. The backdrop is a supposed rise of local fascist sentiments, particularly in the Société des Amis de l’Art (SAA henceforth), epitomised in the figure of the society’s president, Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil (MMK henceforth). Members of AL are seen as violently opposed to the ‘official art establishment’ and the SAA. I find this a sanitised portrayal that not only fails to account for the colonial reality of Egypt, living under British occupation, but also glosses over the contact and overlaps between these two supposedly distinct groups. Briefly touched upon in Chapter 1, I return to the relationship of AL with the Academy and offer a reappraisal of their activities in Chapter 5.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 202.

³⁹ Dina A. Ramadan, “Between the Local and the International: Egyptian Surrealism in the 1940s,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 77 n.2, September 2018, 108. 10.1080/00043249.2018.1495539

Une Renaissance transnationale des beaux-arts et des arts appliqués (A Transnational Renaissance of Fine Arts and Applied Arts (2017)) by Nadia Radwan is a solid addition to the field.⁴⁰ Written in French, Radwan's book has not received the attention it deserves.⁴¹ This recent work re-evaluates the *ruwwad* (pioneers) as an embodiment of transcultural exchange between Egypt and Europe and a reflection of the values of the *nahda* (renaissance) project. It investigates the challenges faced by the pioneers in engaging with new genres and techniques, while also developing a new 'national style' that would comply with the *nahda*. Radwan's exploration of this key moment of Egyptian modernism is closely aligned with my investigation. While our case studies differ, the adoption of a *longue durée* and a transnational approach to recuperate modernism's cross-cultural genesis echo each other.

Lastly, the recent publication *Modernism on the Nile: Art in Egypt between the Islamic and the Contemporary*, by Alexandra Seggerman takes stock of Egyptian modernism too. Seggerman adopts a constellational framework to study modern art in Egypt. She puts forward the term 'constellational,' which can be traced to Okwui Enwezor,⁴² as a model that implies a specific and finite number of connections and a framework to examine the interconnectedness of Egyptian modernism, existing side by side. Seggerman's approach is similar to mine, in the way it adopts a wider lens to revisit Egyptian modernism with the aim of not simply creating an additive peripheral modernism, nor striving to incorporate it into the Euro-American canon, but to create a pathway to a broader and more inclusive understanding of modernism. Here the focus is on the artwork as the primary vehicle in the story. In my

⁴⁰ Nadia Rawdan, *Les Modernes d'Égypte: Une Renaissance transnationale des beaux-arts et des arts appliqués* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2017).

⁴¹ It is worth noting the divide that exists between French and English scholarship on literary and artistic production in Egypt. Since the majority of players were Francophile and francophone, they have been the subject of more studies within the French academe. For obvious reasons, this phenomenon particularly holds true within studies on literature and art criticism written in French. In all, there is a timid acknowledgment of Egyptian francophone writers in English scholarship, but more research needs to be done.

⁴² Okwui Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition." *Research in African Literatures* 34, no. 4 (2003): 57-82. Accessed February 2, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4618328>.

analysis, I take into account a more diverse sum of sources, balancing the textual discourse with the artistic production. As will become clear throughout, questions of modernization and modernity and the relationship to the past have been the subject of countless debates in the flourishing press, in Egypt and in the Arab region as a whole, starting from the late eighteenth century. The number of published manifestoes by artist collectives points to the importance of the written word, in the battle to modernise and enact a modern subjectivity, in the face of encroaching colonial powers. Taking these sources into consideration is essential for a reappraisal of Egyptian modernism. Seggerman argues for the importance of Muslim networks to global modernism.⁴³ While the work of diverse, major Egyptian artists during this era may have appeared to be secular, she argues, it reflected the subtle but essential inflection of Islam, as a faith, history, and lived experience, in the overarching development of Middle Eastern modernity. As will become clear in my study, the art interlocutors of the first half of the twentieth century, provided a model for secular modernization, in the face of Western encroachment, and in my survey of their artistic and intellectual production, religion did not appear in the discourses, at least in the period under study.

1.3 Setting the Scene

Because some readers may not be familiar with the history of modern Egypt, let me turn to a brief overview of the historical developments that are important as the backdrop of the developments in the visual arts that I examine here. Egypt's colonial context is unique in the way two colonial powers overlapped and vied for control: the British colonial administration and the Ottoman Empire, through the rule of Mehmet Ali. By 1914, Cairo and Alexandria were well incorporated into the world economy. The modernization project known as the *tanzimat* (reform) was launched by Mehmet Ali (1769–1849) and intensified under the rule of

⁴³ Alexandra Dika Seggerman, *Modernism on the Nile: Art in Egypt between the Islamic and the Contemporary* (North Carolina: UNCP, 2019).

Khedive Ismail (r.1863–79). Increasing revenues from cotton, particularly during the American Civil War, were channelled to fund these public works. Infrastructure projects – railways, telegraph lines, roads, ports, bridges, irrigation canals, dams, hospitals – were launched. Banks and international businesses were established. Investments in cultural institutions – professional societies, schools, libraries, a museum, theatres, and an opera house– were made. Together with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, urban life in Egypt was transformed. Cairo, Alexandria and Port Said became easily accessible. Similar to developments in Beirut, capital, commodities and people flocked to these cities.⁴⁴ As Yoav di-Capua points out, by the turn of the century, there were 260,000 Italian, French, Maltese, Armenian, Ottoman Jewish, British and Greek people living in Egypt.⁴⁵

The cotton revenues were not enough, however, to fund the projects and Ismail was forced to rely on European credit. Pressure to repay the debt led to a declaration of bankruptcy in 1879 and the establishment of the Public Debt Administration two years later. In 1882, the British occupied Egypt and remained there until 1956. In 1914, Egypt was declared a protectorate. When, in early 1919, leaders of the Wafd party delegation seeking to present Egyptian demands for independence at the Paris peace talks were arrested and deported to Malta, unrest broke out.

What came to be known as the revolution of 1919 forced the British to unilaterally declare Egyptian independence. The 1919 uprising, led by Wafd party leader, Saa'd Zaghlul was a resistance and reaction to British imperialism. Zaghlul was an important figure in Egyptian politics and was part of the *effendiya* generation that emerged with the creation of a modern

⁴⁴ Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Berkeley University Press, 2010), 3.

⁴⁵ Yoav di-Capua, “*Nahda*: The Arab Project of Enlightenment,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Arab Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 9, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139021708.006>.

type of bureaucratic state that included professional and administrative sectors.”⁴⁶ The emergence of the *effendiya* group is a product of Egypt’s integration into the capitalist system and the ensuing introduction of western education that altered the social and economic structures. The *effendiya* were frustrated by the British presence that obstructed channels of social mobility and accorded high administrative positions to foreigners only. As mentioned above, this group of newly-urbanised professional bourgeoisie distinguished itself from the rest of society by its modern education, cultural capital and dress code– they wore western suits and the Egyptian *tarboush* (fez). They were open to cultural and intellectual change and were largely responsible for making the revolutionary calls of 1919 and the subsequent social movements from the 1930s–1950s. More importantly, they dominated politics, culture and the imagining of the nation. Following the events of the first two decades, the nationalist movement intensified as British control tightened.

On 22 February 1922, the protectorate was annulled. But ‘four points’ were reserved for further negotiations: the security of British Empire communications in Egypt; Egypt’s defence against foreign aggression or interference; protection of foreign interests and minorities in Egypt, and the status of Sudan.⁴⁷ In effect, these stipulations curtailed the meaning of independence and meant that Egypt remained a veiled protectorate. It was not until 1936 that the four points were renegotiated. On 26 August 1936, the Anglo-Egyptian treaty was signed, which officially marked the independence of Egypt. The Montreux Convention of 8 May 1937 led to the abolition of the capitulations system and put an end to the economic and judicial privileges enjoyed by foreigners heretofore. The Mixed Courts, which heard cases involving foreigners, was part and parcel of this system. The date of their

⁴⁶ Omnia Shoukry “Egypt’s Three Revolutions: The Force of History behind this Popular Uprising.” *Jadaliyya*, 6 February 2011. http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/569/egypts-three-revolutions_the-force-of-history-behi

⁴⁷ Arthur Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt: The Formation of a Nation-State* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2004), 111.

closure was set for 15 October 1949, following a transitional period of twelve years.⁴⁸ On 26 May 1937, Egypt was officially admitted into the United Nations.

On the eve of the Second World War, Egypt broke diplomatic ties with Germany and Italy. But the government refused to declare war, arguing that it was not its battle. Nevertheless, in accordance with the Anglo-Egyptian treaty and the military obligations of support to its ally, the country was placed under martial law and *de facto* cooperated with the British war effort; though *de jure*, Egypt remained non-belligerent.⁴⁹ The headquarters of the British Eighth Army was in Cairo and as such, the city saw the arrival of thousands of soldiers, as well as European refugees fleeing the war. A similar influx occurred in Alexandria. It was during this time that E. M. Forster, Lawrence Durrell, Olivia Manning arrived. Cairo and Alexandria became safe havens for the war refugees and exiles: the influx of foreigners into cosmopolitanism.⁵⁰

1.4 Local Reactions to Fascism

Let us now return to the decade preceding the outbreak of war, mapping out the socio-political situation, in order to engage critically with the historiography of Egyptian history generally and art history specifically. The master narrative of Egyptian history sees the 1930s as a decade of crisis. Politically, it is seen as plagued by parliament instability and manoeuvring by autocratic elements supported by the monarchy. Economically, it is seen as impacted by the depression. Socio-politically, it is described as troubled by increased

⁴⁸ Nathan J. Brown, "The Precarious Life and Slow Death of the Mixed Courts of Egypt", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 1 (1993): 48. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/164157>.

⁴⁹ Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 6.

⁵⁰ For an account of the Alexandrian cosmopolitanism as a quasi-colonial discourse see Hala Halim, *Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism: An Archive* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

disillusionment and a turn towards other authoritarian models. And lastly, intellectually and culturally it characterised as undergoing a ‘crisis of orientation.’⁵¹ The narrative maintains that intellectuals moved away from liberal and secular ideas and turned towards traditional and religious ideologies rooted in an Arabo-Islamic past.⁵² It follows that more and more Egyptians came to see Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany as effective alternatives to a failing parliamentary regime. In 1928, the Islamist social reform movement, known as the Muslim Brotherhood was founded by Hassan el-Banna (1906–1949). The movement’s growing network threatened the palace and the Wafd party.

The roots of this narrative can be traced to Nadav Safran’s *Egypt in Search of Political Community*, published in 1961. Safran argued that intellectual life in Egypt turned from a progressive to a more reactionary phase, and with it, towards more authoritarian concepts of government.⁵³ Supposedly the liberal years of the 1920s come to an abrupt end when intellectuals turned towards more traditionalist ideas and adopted Islamist themes in their writing. This narrative gained currency in the literature and went unchallenged for many years.

That there were fascist sympathizers in Egypt in 1930s is certain and resonates with recent developments in the historiography regarding the transnationalism of fascism.⁵⁴ But the situation on the ground was certainly more nuanced. As Jankowski and Gershoni find, public discourse, by and large, rejected the rhetoric of European fascism, finding fault in its

⁵¹ Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt*, 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3. Further, the authors point out that the following the 1952 coup, the military co-opted the pro-axis narrative in order to extend the reach of its anti-British sentiments and activities.

⁵³ Nadav Safran, *Egypt in Search of Political Community* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1961).

⁵⁴ See Arnd Bauerkämper and Rossolinski Grzegorz, *Fascism without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017) and Alcalde Á (2020). The Transnational Consensus: Fascism and Nazism in Current Research. *Contemporary European History* 29, 243–252. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777320000089>

totalitarian nature, repressiveness and violence.⁵⁵ Nonetheless revisionist art histories adopt this ‘crisis of orientation’ narrative. To my mind, the lack of critical engagement with the period from late 1920s to the 1930s is a by-product of this master narrative. In other words, art practices and discourses of this period are relegated to a backwater during which authoritarian and fascist ideas allegedly prevailed within art institutions. Patrick Kane’s criticism of the *nahda* (renaissance) paradigm is articulated through this prism. He maintains that the “resort to European fascist political ideology by supporters of Egypt’s large landholders led to a corollary emphasis in aesthetic discourse and cultural form by pro-regime supporters in the Academy and adjunct institution of arts. [...] The elite as the interpreters of the *nahda*, invented the division between academic and folk art.”⁵⁶ Sam Bardaouil also adopts the narrative uncritically and finds that fascist sentiments had seeped into the art establishment. Taking cues from the revisionist intellectual history outlined above, I will return to the shortcomings of such art history narratives later. For now, suffice to say that the latter glance over a more nuanced cultural landscape and pit the ‘art establishment’ against an ‘avant-garde’ that flourished in the following decade.

The modernization of Egypt, nationally, scientifically and technologically, led to a cultural renaissance, that was formulated in the *nahda* project, which as mentioned above, literally translated as renaissance or revival. The Arab renaissance was the ideological component to modernisation, which marked an era of protean cultural and intellectual production to build a modern Arab society based on “the pre-eminence of positivist, rationalist and scientific thought

⁵⁵ Their research covered daily newspapers, weekly and monthly journals, books, pamphlets, illustrations, and caricatures. Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt*, 11.

⁵⁶ Patrick Kane, *The Politics of Modern Art in Egypt*, 2.

in the service of the idiomatic ‘civilisation and progress.’”⁵⁷ A celebrated example of a *nahda* work is *Nahdet Misr* (Egypt’s Awakening), by sculptor Mahmoud Mokhtar (1891–1934), considered the pioneer of modern Egyptian sculpture. Mokhtar enrolled in the School of Fine Arts in 1908 and was trained by French sculptor and first director of the school Guillaume Laplagne; upon graduating in 1911, he received a scholarship from the founder Prince Yusuf Kamal and was sent to the Beaux-Arts in Paris. He remained there for several years and regularly exhibited at the Salon des Artistes Français. Today the pink granite *Nahdet Misr* statue is still situated by the entrance of the Cairo University in Gizeh, it depicts a rising sphinx and an unveiling woman. The erect front legs of the sphinx express his awakening, seemingly in response to the woman’s touch. The young woman standing next to the sphinx is a *fellaha* (peasant) and is captured removing the veil with her left hand, while her right-hand rests on the sphinx’s shoulders. The peasant’s bold action of removing the veil is reminiscent of Huda Sha’rawi, an Egyptian feminist leader and founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union, who publicly removed her veil at the Cairo railway station in 1923, upon her return from an International Women Suffrage Alliance Congress in Rome. This act introduces a modern and liberated woman, capable of contributing to the progress of the modern nation. But more importantly, the figure of the peasant is in line with the *nahda* project and its use of the peasantry as source of national identity and authenticity. The statue garnered much public attention, and its unveiling was extensively covered in the media. Proponents of the *nahda* paradigm appropriated the statue as a tool for national revival. They highlighted its role in bringing together the past and the future; Minister Mustafa Nahhas declared:

All sections of the Egyptian nation, parliament and people celebrate the commemoration of [the nation’s] revival by means of a sculpture that from today will become a glorious symbol which imbues all Egyptians, whatever their affiliation, with the inspiration of a revival for all generations to come. [...] [This monument] is a thread that links the various stages of Egyptian history, its past, its present and its future, a symbol that draws its glory from the past, its energy

⁵⁷ Stephen Sheehi, ‘Modernism, Anxiety and the Ideology of Arab Vision’. *Discourse* (Berkeley, Calif.) 28, no. 1 (2006), 73. doi:10.1353/dis.2008.0008.

from the present and its hope from the future.⁵⁸

As Gershoni and Jankowski note, Mokhtar joined other contemporary Egyptian nationalists and intellectuals who believed that “the peasant majority represented the rootedness, the continuity, the stability and the undying inner strength of the Egyptian nation.”⁵⁹ This group of newly urbanised professional bourgeoisie came to be known as the *effendiya* and indeed Mokhtar’s oeuvre and trajectory were characteristic of this group.⁶⁰

When the School of Fine Arts (SFA) opened its doors on 12 May 1908, it was located in Darb el Gammamiz, a palace that belonged to Prince Youssef Kamal. Its genesis stemmed from conversations between Prince Youssef Kamal and Guillaume Laplagne (1874–?), a sculptor in the Egyptian royal court. Prince Kamal financed the institution until 1928, when it was transferred to the Ministry of Public Works and became part of the University of Cairo. The school contained four departments: painting, drawing, sculpture and architecture. Members of faculty included Guillaume Laplagne (director of the school and sculpture department until 1918); Paolo Forcella, (painting and drawing departments); Boris Fordman-Cluzel (sculpture department); Jean Coulon (decoration department); Henri Pieron (architecture department); Mikail Farag (mathematics within the architecture department) and Mohamed Effendi Zohdi (Arabic calligraphy within the drawing department). Drawing formed the foundation, with students attended drawing classes for at least two hours each day. After completing the five classes of the second level of drawing, students went on to specialise in painting, decoration, sculpture or architecture, according to their taste and their abilities.⁶¹ Writing in the quarterly magazine of the Institut de France in 1911, Laplagne

⁵⁸ Quoted in Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Commemorating the Nation: Collective Memory, Public Commemoration and National Identity in Twentieth Century Egypt*. (Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2004), 75.

⁵⁹ Jankowski et al., 48.

⁶⁰ Lucie Ryzova, “Egyptianizing Modernity through the New ‘Effendiya’: Social and Cultural Constructions of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy, in *Re-envisioning Egypt: 1919-1952* p138-140.

⁶¹ “*Madrasat al-Funun al-Jamila al-Misriyya*” (The Egyptian School of Fine Arts), in Dar al-Qutob, *Abdin Archives*, Cairo, as quoted in Dina Ramadan, “The Aesthetics of the Modern: Art, Education and Taste in Egypt 1903–1952”, PhD Diss. (Columbia University, 2013), 102.

expressed his concerns over a curriculum that relied heavily on French and Italian curricula. The goal was not to produce imitators of European art. He adds, “[the school’s] aim is more delicate and more beautiful, it must form Egyptian artists.”⁶² It was seen as vital to offer life-drawing classes with indigenous models, in order to familiarise students with the Egyptian lines and form and allow them to capture their characteristics.⁶³

The only criteria for enrolment were the following: prospective students must be aged over 15 years old and under 21 years old. They could not be enrolled beyond the age of 25 for painters, sculptors, calligraphers and decorators, and 26 for architects. The presentation of a birth certificate for admission and being accompanied by a parent or bearing a written authorisation from them was required. Prospective students sat a written examination of elementary level and underwent a medical examination.⁶⁴ Until 1926, the students’ fees were fully covered by the Prince, who was also the rector of the University of Cairo at the time. But although the school’s admission policy was open to all, regardless of nationality or religion and tuition was free, restrictions applied along gender lines. Women were not eligible to enrol in the school until 1952. The first generation of female artists were privately taught at home or studied abroad. These artists were taught mostly by male artists; for example, Tahia Halim was taught by Hamed Abdallah and Inji Efflatoun by Kamel el-Telmissany. As seen elsewhere, the study of the nude in life drawing classes was held up as the main reason women could not enrol.

⁶² Guillaume Laplagne, « *L’Art en Égypte: Ce qu’il fut, ce qu’il doit être* » (Art in Egypt : What it was, what it must be), *Bulletin de l’Institut Égyptien*, vol. 5, 1911 (Cairo: Paul Barbey, 1912), 17.

⁶³ Laplagne, “L’Art en Égypte,” 17.

⁶⁴ Wathai’q Abdin DW 0069-004464, *École égyptienne des Beaux-arts. Fondée par S.A le Prince Youssouf kamal* [s.d.] as quoted in Elka Corraera-Calleja, « Nationalisme et modernisme à travers l’œuvre de Mahmud Mukhtar (1891–1934), » PhD Diss. (Aix Marseille Université, 2015), 58.

1.5 Société des Amis de l'Art and the Salon du Caire

Let us now turn to artistic activities and exhibition-making in Egypt from the early part of the century. Founded in 1923, the Société des Amis de l'Art (*gama'iyya muibbi al-funun al-gamila*) [SAA henceforth] organised the *Salon du Caire*. Usually staged in the summer (between the months of June and July), the salon brought together an array of Egyptian and foreign artists living in Egypt as well as artists from abroad. I consider the role of the SAA and the annual salon in the first chapter on MMK.

The *Comité des Beaux-Arts* (Committee of Fine Arts) was founded by the Ali Shamsi Pasha, Minister of Public Education in 1927. A curator working in the Drawing Department at the Louvre, Louis Hautecoeur, was hired by the Egyptian government to head this newly founded committee. It comprised the Antiquities Services, the Arab Art Museum, Arab Monuments Committee and the School of Fine Arts.⁶⁵ The Museum of Modern Art in Guezireh was an initiative launched by the *Comité*, with the mission of offering young artists the opportunity to study artworks. The mission was foremost pedagogical; it was inaugurated by King Farouk on 9 February 1931.

The history of Egyptian art is articulated around nationalism, frameworks of identity, authenticity and *Egyptianess*. Critics of the *nahda* paradigm find that it maintained strict divisions between high/low fine/folk arts and favoured an elitist art form made up of landscapes and portraiture. But a look at the sum of the *Comité*'s activities offers a different reading that moves beyond these divisions. Beyond the branch of Fine Arts, the Ministry of Education instituted other committees to develop other fields: the Antiquities Services, the

⁶⁵ F. P. Watson, Financial Adviser, Letter to the Ministry of Finance, 2 March 1929, Cairo, F/O 19166/8, National Archive, Kew. For more on the Antiquities Services, see, Elliot Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2007).

Museum of Arab art and the School of Applied were set up to develop the arts in Egypt. Private initiatives by art patrons also emerged. In 1925, Shaarawi invited French artist, Jean Coulon, from the SFA, to build and manage a pottery and ceramic factory in Rod el-Farag. After founding an embroidery school and a carpet making workshop, this third vocational school aimed at saving folk art practices that were under threat of disappearing.⁶⁶ In July 1929, the Parisian bimonthly journal *L'art Vivant* featured a review of an exhibition organised by Shaarawi at the Grand Depot, Galerie d'Art Legedé on 21-23 Rue Dourot in Paris. The author tells of Sharaawi's tenacious efforts to restore art practices that had fallen out of favour, concluding, "let us insist on the fact that the works produced in Rod El Farag are essentially popular artworks executed according to the traditions of the forefather of Egyptian pottery."⁶⁷ Shaarawi's efforts to regenerate folkloric art practices are critical for our understanding of the *nahda*. The pottery and ceramic produced by the school were included in the national collections, notably the Museum of Modern Art in Guezireh and regularly featured in the annual Salon. Writing about the Guezireh Museum in *La Bourse Egyptienne* (1933), Charles Terrasse points out the decorative art objects from the Rod el-Farag pottery school on display in the galleries.⁶⁸

1.6 A Fluid Matrix and Shifting Connections.

The reality was far more complex than the literature has allowed thus far. On the urban level, the local geographical matrix clearly reveals the connections between artists and writers from different generations. The Maison des Artistes, an artistic hub for artists and intellectuals alike

⁶⁶ Sania Sharawi Lafranchi, *Casting Off the Veil: The Life of Huda Shaarawi, Egypt's First Feminist*, (London: I.B Tauris, 2012), 125

⁶⁷ C.A. "La Renaissance des Arts Oubliés : La céramique arabe d'Égypte à Paris, » *L'art Vivant*, no.114, 15 September 1929, 722.

⁶⁸ Charles Terrasse, "Le Musée d'Art Moderne," *La Bourse Égyptienne*, numéro spécial 15 February 1933, unpaginated.

in Darb el-Labbanah, situated at the foot of the Old Citadel and near the Sultan Hassan Mosque in Cairo, was such an example. It was often compared to its sister house in Place de Terte in Montmartre, with its similar steep steps like those leading to the Sacré Coeur. In 1951, in a special edition on Arab Art in *La Femme Nouvelle* magazine, artist Mohamed Zaki writes: “like its sister in Paris, one must ascend to reach it.”⁶⁹ The house was run by French artist Beppi Martin, a teacher at the SFA and member of *La Chimere* group. Martin leased studio spaces and apartments to some familiar names, including Nagui, Mokhtar and Ragheb Ayad, as well as Younan, Ida Kar and Edmond Belali, Angelo de Riz and the younger artists Abdel Hadi el-Gazzar and Youssef Kamal who shared a studio. The Maison became an important artistic hub, where artists from different generations congregated and worked in the same space, and thus showing how these generational lines were, in reality, more porous than has typically been relayed.

Earlier efforts by artists, art patrons, art critics and art movements have not been given due attention or put in conversation with later developments in the arts. Let me now introduce the protagonists of my thesis. I have chosen to refer to them collectively as *flâneurs* and *flâneuses* – borrowing the expression of Sarane Alexandrian who used it to describe Georges Henein, via Guillaume Apollinaire and later Walter Benjamin– to investigate their experiments with modernism that spanned two continents.⁷⁰ In his seminal book *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin describes the *flâneur* as the archetypal modern spectator of the city, based on the poems in Charles Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal*.⁷¹ Similar to the ambulatory gaze

⁶⁹ Mohamed Zaki, “La Maison des Artistes,” *La Femme Nouvelle, SEdition Special : Arab Arabe*, Decembre 1951, 65.

⁷⁰ I borrow the expression *flâneur des deux mondes* from Sarane Alexandrian, who used it to describe Georges Henein. Certainly, Alexandrian has himself borrowed the expression from Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Le flâneur des deux rives* (Paris: Editions de la Sirène, 1918). Sarane Alexandrian, *Georges Henein (Poètes d’aujourd’hui)* (Paris: Seghers, 1991).

⁷¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass and London, Belknap Harvard, 1999)

that the Benjaminian *flâneur* casts on the city of Paris, the agents of modernism under study wandered cities and crossed national and other borders. The stories of these transnational lives illustrate the mobility of modernity.

Politician and art patron MMK was president of the SAA for almost three decades. He played a significant role in the developments of the arts in Egypt, through the annual *Salon du Caire*, exhibitions of foreign (mainly French, but also Belgian and Italian) art in Egypt and exhibitions of Egyptian art in Paris. Together with his wife Emilienne Hector Luce, they amassed a remarkable collection of paintings, sculptures and fine art objects. The couple bequeathed their house and their collection to the nation following their deaths. Mahmoud Said was a judge in the Mixed Courts of Alexandria and a Sunday painter until he retired at the age of 50 and took up painting full time. Today he is heralded as the father of modern art in Egypt and one of the *ruwwad* (pioneers). Valentine de Saint-Point (VSP henceforth) penned the first feminist futurist manifesto in 1913, alongside F.T Marinetti and Ricciotto Canudo in Paris. In 1924, she moved to Cairo permanently, where she took up anti-colonialism against the British occupation of Egypt and the French in Syria. Her early avant-garde activities in France were remodelled to resonate with the Egyptian context. Her activities bore fruit on local negotiations of modernism. When VSP arrived in Egypt, a Futurist movement had been operating in Cairo for four years. Led by Italian lawyer Nelson Morpurgo, the activities of the group *per se* were short-lived but he continued as the solitary proponent until 1953, upon his departure from Egypt. Morpurgo was F.T Marinetti's host on the occasion of his two returns to Egypt in 1929 and 1938. I will also discuss the encounters between the futurists and the surrealists--- and their reaction to Marinetti's futurist speech. Members of the Art and Liberty group are the last protagonists of my thesis: Georges Henein, Ramses Younan Kamel el-Telmissany and Fouad and Anwar Kamel were the core members.

But other actors who animated the activities, in particular female artists and patrons, such as patron and poet Maria Cavadia, photographer Lee Miller and artists Amy Nimr and Inji Efflatoun have not been given due attention in relation to the group. My focus is both local and transnational and therein lies the paradox of the approach to transnational studies, which places emphasis on micro-histories and particularly biographies, in order to uncover the ways these global entanglements were influenced and worked out at the local and personal level.⁷² Much though the biographical information dotted across the chapters may, from time to time, feel tedious and interruptive, I find it crucial to piece together this obscured history of modernism.⁷³

1.7 The Lasting Effect: Francophonie in Egypt

The lasting effect of ‘Napoleon’s long shadow’ and the concomitant influence of francophone culture on many fields of study gave French a unique position from the nineteenth century onwards, particularly with the start of the British occupation in 1882.⁷⁴ To speak in French became a strategic choice; it was not only to opt for a certain culture, but it was also a conscious political choice, in opposition to the language of the colonizer. France intensified its cultural diplomatic efforts in what was perceived as fertile ground in Egypt. Sustained efforts in the fields of Egyptology with intensive excavation missions led by French teams, the control of the Antiquities Service, the strong French presence in museums (Museum of Arab Art, Coptic Museum, and the Egyptian Museum), primary and secondary

⁷² Eve Rosenhaf and Robbie Aitken, ed. *Africa in Europe Studies in Transnational Practice in the Long Twentieth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 9.

⁷³ For more on the genre of biography and its links to transnational history see, Desley Deacon, Penny Russell, and Angela Woollacott, *Transnational Lives : Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700-present*. (Basingstoke Palgrave Macmillan Transnational History Series., 2010).

⁷⁴ I borrow the expression of ‘Napoleon’s long shadow’ from Omnia El Shakry, who in turn borrowed it from Joshua Schreier, in the context of Algeria. Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of knowledge in Colonial and Post-colonial Egypt*, (Stanford: Stanford University press, 2007), 3.

schools as well as the SFA, were typical of France's efforts to exert diplomatic power abroad.

⁷⁵ By the turn of the century, French had established itself as the *lingua franca* for the arts and culture and there began to form an indigenous francophone literary tradition.⁷⁶

Alongside poetry and fiction, art reviews, museum pamphlets and exhibition catalogues were published in both French and Arabic. For example, for over three decades, the catalogues of the *Salon du Caire* were bilingual. This was also the case with AL's writings, as exemplified by the first manifesto 'Long Live Degenerate Art,' penned in 1938. From the start, bilingualism appears as a defining character of these cultural agents and their activities, but a bilingualism that demetaphorises the relationship between language and national identity.⁷⁷

Throughout the thesis, I explore this thread, by interrogating the use of French (orally and in writing) to foreground the way in which these 'agents of modernism' made sense of their choice, both philosophically and politically.

1.8 A Community Beyond Borders: The Francophone Press Narrating the Art World

Daniel Lançon puts forward the publication of the francophone magazine, *L'Égypte Nouvelle*, first published in 1923 by José Caneri as the beginning of a favourable era, in the relations in visual culture, between Europe and Egypt.⁷⁸ In the early issues, Lucien Lepine and Juan Sintès penned a regular column about the developments in the visual art around the world. Sintès, a Spaniard who lived in Egypt for thirty years, was a caricaturist whose drawings also

⁷⁵ For more on the colonial history of the field of Egyptology, see Elliot Colla, *Conflicted: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁷⁶ Scholarship on Egyptian francophone literature is extensive, as documented in detail in Jean-Jacques Luthi: *Introduction à la littérature d'expression française en Égypte, 1798–1945* (Paris: École, 1974), *Le Français en Égypte: Essai d'anthologie* (Beirut: Naaman, 1891) and Kober, Marc, Irène Fenoglio, Daniel Lançon, and Robert Solé. 1999. *Entre Nil et sable : écrivains d'Égypte d'expression Française (1920-1960)*. (Paris : CNDP, 1999).

⁷⁷ Andrea Flores Khalil, *The Arab Avant-Garde: Experiments in North African Art and Literature* (Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 2003), xx

⁷⁸ Daniel Lançon, "L'Égypte Nouvelle (1922–1926) ou le pari d'une modernité risquée" in *Presses Allophones de Méditerranée*, (Alexandrie : Centres d'Études Alexandrines, 2017), 60.

appeared in *Le Progrès Egyptien* and *La Semaine Égyptienne*, as well as Arabic journals such as *al-Ithnanayn* (Monday). The Salon du Caire of 1923, the collection of Mahmoud Khalil, the works of Mohamed Nagui are some of the subjects for articles published in issues of *L'Égypte Nouvelle*. In a special issue on Egypt of *La Bourse Égyptienne* (1933), Charles Terrasse lists the main private collections in the country, noting those of Mahmoud Khalil, Henry E. Barker, Alexandre Benachi, Baron Empain, Oswald J. Finney, Carlo Grassi, Huda Shaarawi, Charles de Menasce and others. For each of the twenty collections featured, a commentary accompanied photographs of highlights from the collections.⁷⁹ Taken as a whole, the special issue on Egypt impresses as a remarkable effort to cover all the areas of the arts, libraries, museums, and art societies in Egypt to inform its readers of artistic activities and patronage taking place. The content of these collections is just another indicator of the porousness of borders.

Images is another francophone magazine that contained a weekly column on fine arts, with a focus on contemporary artists. Its cultural agenda rubric, “*Mondanité*” announced upcoming conferences, exhibitions, and performances. Just like the artworks, these papers acted as platforms of cultural mediation, which transcended the borders of the nation-state. The francophone press, which covered cultural, literary, artistic, theatre, sports, finance as well as politics, did not only cover events in Egypt. On the contrary, the content that made up the francophone press covered world-wide events and sought to bridge Egypt with the world. Of note is *La Semaine Égyptienne*'s slogan: “To communicate to Egyptians the principal manifestations of social, intellectual, and moral activities in the countries of the

⁷⁹ Charles Terrasse, “Les beaux-Arts en Egypte. » *La Bourse Égyptienne*, Special edition on Egypt, 15 February 1933, unpaginated.

Mediterranean and Western Europe, and to Europeans, that of Egyptian life [...] to facilitate a mutual comprehension between peoples.”⁸⁰

As we will explore in Chapter 5, AL equally relied on the printed word to disseminate its ideas, in Egypt and in Europe. The means included their journals, *Don Quichotte*, *al-Tattawor* and *La Part du Sable*, the publishing house, *Editions Masses*, which published their exhibition catalogues, writings such as Iqbal al-Alaily’s *Vertu de l’Allemagne* (1945), in addition to translations of key texts from French. As will become clear throughout the thesis, this francophone print culture played a pivotal role in diffusing new ideas about modernization and modernity that transcended the boundaries of a finite nation-state, as understood in an Andersonian sense.⁸¹ Instead, as suggested by Mercer in *Cosmopolitan modernisms*, Anderson’s notion of an ‘imagined community’ can securely be extended to a ‘global scene,’ “whose members may never have known each other personally yet share a corpus of ideas on modernity.”⁸² In a similar vein, I find the idea of ‘virtual cosmopolis’ proposed by Partha Mitter, useful to make sense of the developments in Egypt, where the flourishing of a local francophone press created the conditions for communication and the circulation of ideas.⁸³ This interspace of cross-cultural encounter and cross-germination becomes even more vital during the war years, when travel was halted, and the written or printed word were the only viable means of communication.

⁸⁰. Translated from the original : ““Faire connaître aux Égyptiens les principales manifestations de l’activité sociale, intellectuelle, et morale des pays de la Méditerranée et de l’Europe occidentale, et aux Européens celles de la vie égyptienne [...] afin de faciliter la compréhension mutuelles des peuples.» « Appel, » *La Semaine Égyptienne*, n.14, 5 April 1928, 12

⁸¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, 1991), 6

⁸² Kobena Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (London: Cambridge, Mass.; London: Institute of International Visual Arts ; MIT Press, 2005), 11.

⁸³ Keith Moxey and Partha Mitter, “A “Virtual Cosmopolis”: Partha Mitter in Conversation with Keith Moxey,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (September 2013), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43188838> 384.

1.9 Chapter Breakdown

The first chapter explores the role of MMK in the formation of the Egyptian art canon. MMK was the president of the *Société des Amis de l'Art* for over three decades (from its inception in 1923 until his death in 1953), a member of the Fine Arts Committee for the Museum of Modern Art and the Commissaire General of the Egyptian Pavilion at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1937. Yet, his role in the advancement of the arts in Egypt and Egyptian art abroad has been hitherto understudied or actively ignored. This chapter takes cues from Mercedes Volait's study of Orientalist collections in the Middle East and her search for "the ambivalences, selective sorting systems and misunderstandings at the core of all cultural interaction."⁸⁴ The focus here is on patronage in Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century and the role Khalil played in developing artistic practices and institutions. Chapter 2 explores the trajectory of VSP from France to Egypt and her engagement in anti-colonial politics. Her combination of religious mysticism and anti-colonial politics presented a different take on modernism that reverberated in Egypt and France during this period. As this chapter explores, VSP placed herself as a cultural mediator in Cairo's cosmopolitan milieu. Chapter 3 pursues the exploration of modernism and turns to the activities of the Futurist movement in Egypt. It explores the local reverberations of the movement and the ways it opened the conversation to a new kind of modernism in Egypt. While connections between Fascism and futurism cannot be swept aside, I argue for the significance of this romanticised aesthetic in Egypt in helping to create a stimulating artistic and intellectual milieu. The coexistence of futurism and surrealism in Egypt in this period is remarkable and points to transcultural routes that have been obscured hitherto. The chapter explores the

⁸⁴ Mercedes Volait, "Middle Eastern Collections of Orientalist Painting at the Turn of the 21st century: Paradoxical Reversal or Persistent Misunderstanding?" Francois Pouillon and Jean-Claude Vatin (ed), *After Orientalism: Critical Perspectives on Western Agency and Eastern Re-Appropriations* (Leiden: Brill Academic, 2014), 253.

collaboration, opposition and ambivalence that characterise the interaction between Morpurgo and other agents of this cosmopolitan milieu, notably Valentine de Saint-Point, Jean Moscatelli, and Georges Henein. Chapter 4 turns to artist Mahmoud Said and places his *oeuvre* in conversation with artistic trends inside and outside Egypt. It adopts a transnational and a gendered lens to probe his status as the father of Egyptian art. Said's work has typically been viewed through a nationalist lens which places it as 'authentically' Egyptian. Instead, this chapter looks at his preparatory sketches, *modelli* and drawings in order to examine the way in which the artist engaged with issues of gender and Egyptianess. I focus on the way he treats the human figure and depicts nudity as an index of modernity. This approach offers a better understanding of Said's work within a larger historical framework and reveals his role as an intermediary in the history of modernism in Egypt, between the pioneers and the generation of AL. Lastly, I reach the Art and Liberty group in Chapter 5. This eclectic group of young artists experimented with surrealism and sought to revolutionise artistic practices in Egypt. Instead of seeing the group in violent opposition to all what came before it, this chapter challenges the narratives of 'rupture' and offers a more nuanced portrayal of AL in conversation with the contemporary cultural milieu, as a continuation of past experiments. It is only by exploring these various reckonings with modernity, which were taking place in the very same neighbourhood of downtown Cairo, that we can gain a deeper understanding of Egypt's history of modernisms and securely place it in global perspectives.

2. Sources

The state of archives in Egypt are not well cared for. Archives are perceived as storage spaces for the safeguarding of material, but research and public engagement are not priorities and are rarely seen as an important part of the work of institutions. Continually, researchers face a bureaucratic maze in trying to gain access. These time-consuming pursuits are not guaranteed

success, and, from personal experience, these have more often than not, led nowhere. The same rationale governs the way museums are run in Egypt. After many visits to the Department of Fine Arts in Gizeh, letter-writing and call-making to officials to request access to a number of closed institutions, I managed to gain access to one institution only: the stores of the 'Museum of Mahmoud Khalil and his Wife,' currently housed on the Guezireh Exhibition Grounds in Zamalek. This large space on the island of Zamalek houses the Opera House, the Museum of Modern Art Cairo (MOMAC), the Palace of Arts and the Hanager Arts Centre too. The partly shut MOMAC holds its stores on-site, but for reasons unknown, access to those stores offered a different set of challenges. Multiple meetings with the previous director Doha Mounir and the current one, Tarek Maamoun were unsuccessful. I was repeatedly informed about the absence of archives and museum catalogues. This seemed unfathomable given the mass of Egyptian bureaucracy. But time constraints dictated, and I settled on the displayed collection of the museum. A visitor's experience at the Museum of Modern Art in Cairo is a peculiar one: visitors are asked to leave their national identity cards at the door and enter their I.D. numbers manually into a large logbook. More often than not, security personnel will follow you around during the visit. In all, it is not a welcoming experience, and few would return.

The works on display are a chronological capsule of Egyptian, predominantly male artists from the early 1900s up until today. Works by Georges Sabbagh, Ragheb Ayad, Youssef Kamel, Kamel el-Telmissany, Fouad Kamel, Inji Efflatoun, Amy Nimr, and Abdel Hadi el-Gazzar can be viewed. The selection occupies a small section of the ground floor in a large three-floor institution. Two paintings I examine are on display: Mahmoud Said's *La Ville* (1937) hangs by the entrance and Ramses Younan's unexpectedly small-sized *La Nature appelle le vide* (1944) sits quietly in a corner.

To write histories that are different than the ones written so far, historians have to look beyond the state operated archives, in archives on the market and in private institutions. My archival research relied on private collections of patrons, such as Emad Abu Ghazi, artists' estates, private institutions such as the *Centre d'études Alexandrines* (CeAlex), the Dominican Institute in Cairo, the Rare Books and Special Collections archives of the American University in Cairo. I also scouted Cairo's used books' markets, the well-known *Sour al-Azbakeyya* (the wall of Azbakeyya) and befriended Hani, a third-generation book dealer who generously and consistently uncovered material for me. Catalogues of the *Salon du Caire* dating from the 1930s were sent to me via WhatsApp.

One of my most valuable research trips was to the Fonds Louis Hauteceur, who served as the Director of the Committee of Fine Arts (*Directeur du Comité des Beaux-Arts*) in Egypt between 1927 and 1930, housed at the Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France in Paris.⁸⁵ It seems unfathomable to retrieve details on the history of art in Egypt, all the way in France, but what I found was an archive replete with material tracing the development of Fine Arts in Egypt, the national collections, and fine arts education.

⁸⁵ As a civil servant, Hauteceur successively or simultaneously exercised several professions, including professor of art and architectural history (École du Louvre, École des Beaux Arts), architectural historian (the seven-volume *L'Histoire de l'Architecture classique en France*), art and architectural critic (Editor-in-Chief of *L'Architecture*), exhibition curator (international exhibitions, Venice Biennales), museum administrator (Musée du Luxembourg and instigator of the Musée national d'art moderne) and state administrator (Director of Fine Arts in Egypt and France). For more on Hauteceur, see Caroline Poulain, *L'Action de Louis Hauteceur au Secrétariat général des Beaux-Arts (1940-1944) : La permanence des Beaux-Arts dans la fracture de Vichy* (École des Chartres, 2001) and Antonio Bruculeri, *Louis Hauteceur et l'architecture classique en France : du dessin historique à l'action publique*, (Paris: Picard, 2007). In May 2017, a conference entitled "Re-reading Louis Hauteceur" was organized at the École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Normandie, Rouen/Darnétal.

In all, I consulted a vast and various of sources, that range from primary and secondary sources, magazines, manifestos, diaries, through institutional means and informal ones, as well as interviews that I conducted with family members and art interlocutors mainly in Egypt. The in-depth archival research alongside secondary material from across the fields of art history, postcolonial theory, cultural studies, cultural history, history, anthropology, have allowed me to critically engage with the history of modern art in Egypt and modern art history at large. On the one hand, my enquiry is grounded within the local socio-political economic and cultural context of Egypt. On the other hand, it participates in the growing field that aims to decentre the canon of art history. By favouring a transnational approach to the study of modernism in Egypt, my thesis uncovers a rich and vigorous artistic landscape that reckoned with a global artistic network of people, objects and ideas.

Postcolonial cultural analyses has been concerned with the elaboration of theoretical structures that place in context the previous dominant Western ways of seeing things. I am aware of the limitations or the paradox of working from within the institution of Tate, of my hybrid, interstitial position, of being not entirely from here or from there. And this is what captivated my attention about members of Art and Liberty and sustained my interest in their activities for over a decade. I vividly recall coming across Samir Gharib's booklet on Egyptian surrealism at the American University in Cairo library back in 2008, and the excitement over the idea of a group of francophone young artists and writers, like me, reckoning with such important philosophies such as surrealism in the making.⁸⁶ As a history undergraduate student, the curious absence of their names could not be ignored. The uncontainable world of Art and Liberty was opened up to me from this tiny booklet. And so began my journey to uncover the lives of these artists and writers, who in turn opened my

⁸⁶ Samir Gharib, *Le surréalisme en Egypte et les arts plastiques*, (Cairo: Prism Art Series, 1988).

eyes to the vast and still fragmentary history of modern art in Egypt. As noted above and examined in-depth in the following chapters, I retell the history of modern art in Egypt from a richer array of perspectives and relational networks that show how modernism from the very beginning was engaged in dialogue, exchange and translation, to join the efforts to create paths for epistemological shifts in the historiography of modernism.

2. CHAPTER ONE: SEARCHING FOR MOHAMED MAHMOUD KHALIL:

A TESTIMONY OF ARTISTIC PATRONAGE AND COLLECTING

In the exhibition *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)*, at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in December 2016, two large black and white photographs adorned each side of the room: the first (Figure 1) showed well-known figures from the Egyptian political elite. King Fouad I stands at the front of the room and behind him at his left Prime Minister Nassim Pasha and Saad Zaghlul, the father of Egyptian nationalism. To his right is Mohamed Mahmoud Bey Khalil (MMK henceforth), along with Etienne Mériel, the President of the Conseil administration du Crédit Foncier, Said Zulficar Pasha, the Grand Chamberlain and Aly Maher Pasha, among other members of the Société des Amis de l'Art (SAA henceforth). The room is filled with visitors, who all pose for the camera. The men wear a *tarbush* –a typical attire of the *effendiyya*.⁸⁷ The three women in the crowd are wearing hats. Among them Huda Shaarawi, the prominent Egyptian feminist leader and founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union may be standing at the back on the right -hand side. The photo is in fact somewhat misleading, as it does not clearly show the strong participation of women in the activities of the group. The SAA counted the *Comité des Dames* (Lady's Committee), an active arm of the organisation that ensured women's participation during the iterations of the *Salon du Caire*. It was presided over by H.R.H. Princess Semiha Hussein (1889–1984), artist and patron and granddaughter of Khedive Ismail Bahiga Toussoun. Vice-

⁸⁷ For more on the *effendiya*, see Lucie Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

Presidents were Mrs. Izet Bey Choukri and Mrs. H. Gaillard; secretaries were Mrs. Foucart, Ms. F. Cheta as well as fifteen members including, Huda Shaarawi, Emilienne Hector Luce and Maria Cavadia, who also played a pivotal role as patron of the Art and Liberty group.⁸⁸ The date is 1927 and it is the inauguration of the fifth *Salon du Caire* organised by the SAA, under the patronage of Prince Youssef Kamal, who founded the organisation in 1923.



Figure 1 Opening of the 1st Salon du Caire, organised by the SAA and inaugurated by King Fouad I, 1927, Cairo. Courtesy of the Chafik Charobim Estate.

⁸⁸ I return to Maria Cavadia in Chapter 5.



Figure 2 Members of Art and Liberty during the 2nd Salon des Indépendants 1941, Cairo.

Fast forward to 1941, the second photograph (Figure 2) shows a younger generation of artists and writers: the Art and Liberty group. It was taken during the opening of the second exhibition: *Le Salon des Artistes Indépendants*, organised by the group between 13 and 25 March 1941. In this highly staged photograph, reminiscent of the photos of the French surrealists, the men are in Western dress too. There are no women among the group. None of them sport the *tarbush*, a supposed embodiment of bourgeois conservatism. But they look more relaxed, some cast mischievous looks. They gather around an empty easel and chair to poke fun at the art world. There is an intended playfulness that contrasts strongly with the seriousness of the *Salon du Caire*'s group photo.

The supposed confrontation between the conservative bourgeoisie, represented by the SAA and the avant-garde and rebellious group AL group is the scaffolding on which hangs the flawed revisionist narrative of Egyptian modern art. This revisionist narrative, found mainly in

the Anglo-American scholarship, chooses to overlook the formative role of the SAA altogether and its president MMK because of their alleged conservative and traditional ideologies and academicism. As the owner of works such as Paul Gauguin's *La Vie et La mort*, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's *Femmes au piano* (1898), a large collection of sculptures by Auguste Rodin, including a cast of *Le Penseur*, one of the sculptor's most important works, MMK can hardly be described as traditional.

MMK (1876–1953) is cast aside in the history of modern art, as a collector and patron, in Egypt and internationally. Since his death in 1953 in Paris, little has been written about his seminal role in the development of the arts in Egypt, his dynamic political career, and much less as patron of one of the most important collections of French art, outside of France. *Les Oubliés du Caire*, the title of the exhibition organised at the Musée d'Orsay in 1994 that brought together pieces from his collection and from the MoMAC collection encapsulates it—the works and their collector have indeed fallen to oblivion.

The bold purchases made in the first half of the twentieth century force us to question traditional art histories and underscore the patron and by extension the SAA's participation in the consolidation of the international reputation of French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. Instead of accepting French art as canonical, along with the ideas of an Enlightenment universal civilization that it indexed, this collection challenges the accepted paradigms of the formations of modernism and evades binary models of centre and periphery. Here, as in the other cases under study, this co-constitutive dialectic is boundless in past and future and porous in delimitations. Put simply, by making these purchases, transporting them to Egypt and showing them to a local audience, MMK participated in the making of the canon of modern art. But as Kirsten Scheid accurately points out, “the bind in which the

colonized find themselves vis-à-vis modernism, of which they are partners in production, but not partners in ownership, is a legacy that has not left the region.”⁸⁹ This chapter takes stock of this legacy. The collections he gathered for himself and for the Egyptian national collection are emblematic ones that remain understudied and undervalued, in the canons of Egyptian modern art and modern art *tout court*. Literature in Egypt portrays him and his collection as Westernised and out of touch with the Egyptian reality. The multiple roles in the arts, as (Vice)-President of the SAA and a founding member of the Guezireh Museum of Modern Art (later the Museum of Modern Art in Cairo or MoMAC) have been denigrated. His patronage of the arts in Egypt has been branded elitist, academic, fascist, and unsupportive of local efforts. In this chapter, my aims to revisit the narrative operate on a local level to highlight the collection’s position in the formation of the Egyptian art canon and modernism, under the exegesis of the *nahda* discourse; and to account for its role in consolidating the canon of modern art.

Taking the paradigm of the *nahda* (renaissance) as the defining model of modernity, I look at how MMK chose to display a modern and independent Egypt to the world in 1937. His case lends itself to a wider argument about Egyptian modernism that moves beyond the lens of the nation-state as the fundamental unit of investigation. Instead, it sees Egyptian modernism as a process of cross-cultural exchange and transfer (or a multi-focal process) that repudiates models of centre and periphery. The enquiry into artistic exchange and transfer is at the centre of MMK’s experiment.

The first section considers existing narratives by looking at the collectors’ portrayal in the literature, with a focus on a caricature by Mohamed Hassan entitled ‘*La Dictature des Beaux-*

⁸⁹ Kirsten Scheid, “The Agency of Art and the Study of Arab Modernity” 11.

Arts ' (1939). The second section turns to the history of the collection to ask questions about its composition – notably the presence of both Impressionist and Post–Impressionist art as well as Orientalist art; a Gauguin next to a Delacroix or a Puvis de Chavannes and an Ingres. This section asks: What were the motives behind these acquisitions? How did MMK amass the collection? How did it expand the horizons of Egyptian artistic experiment? The visits of Egyptian art students to MMK's residence, alongside the circulation of a collection catalogue and imagery in the press are explored. The appointment of Richard Mosseri, as curator of the collection, is an equally under-studied fact that this section probes. The third section turns to MMK's role as a patron of the arts in Egypt, notably in relation to the establishment of Guezireh Museum in 1931, his position as President of the SAA and general director of the *Comité Consultatif des Beaux Arts* (Fine Arts Advisory Board) within the Ministry of Education. While focusing on MMK's role, this last section simultaneously sheds light on the direction of these institutions.

In more ways than one, MMK and the SAA embodied all the bourgeois tastes and morals, which younger members of AL rebelled against. Yet I argue that both can be described as *flâneurs* and *flâneuses des deux mondes*, and of the same two worlds of Cairo and Paris. I argue that it was the same logic of postcolonial nationalism that began to reject cosmopolitanism modernism, and that informs the curious absence of MMK, Luce and the members and affiliates of AL (although recently reappraised) from the official history of modern Egyptian art. By equal measure, these members are shunned because of their cultural *rapprochements* to France. Their cosmopolitanism was deemed dangerous and out of step with the postcolonial state.

The cosmopolitan worldview and the breadth of MMK and Emilienne Luce's art collection deserves more attention. This chapter takes issue with the abovementioned narratives and foregrounds their role in the development of Egyptian modernism, as well as one of the most important collectors of the 20th century. This role was affected through his tenure of SAA from 1923 until his death in 1953; first as vice-president under Prince Youssef, then as President from May 1932. By sustaining cultural links with France, both locally and internationally, MMK introduced and exposed Egyptian artists to novel artistic practices, through two channels: the annual *Salon du Caire* and two major exhibitions of French art in Cairo (in 1929 and 1938), in which artworks from his collection were loaned. He also gave art students exposure in international art circuits, notably in the annual *Salon* as well as in Paris at the Egyptian pavilion of the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques appliqués à la Vie moderne* of 1937 (International Exposition of Arts and Applied Technics in Modern Life, more commonly known as the *Exposition Internationale*) and the exhibition *France-Égypte* at the Pavillon Marsan of the *Musée des Arts Décoratifs* in 1949.

2.1 Who Was Mohamed Mahmoud Bey Khalil?

Born in 1876 to an Egyptian father and a Greek mother, MMK attended the Collège des Frères in Bab el-Louq, Cairo.⁹⁰ From a young age, he developed an admiration for France. After graduating, he travelled to Paris to pursue a law degree at the Sorbonne in 1897. During this stay, he met Luce, a young dancer from Nantes. Luce was born in 1881 in Paris. Little is known about her early life. She studied music at a conservatoire in Paris and at the age of twenty, she began a career in the French theatre as a dancer and operetta singer and adopted the stage name 'Zoro.' In November 1901, the *Nantes Mondain*, a weekly cultural journal ran a front-cover feature on her. A photograph shows a young Luce dressed in a short white

⁹⁰ MMK did not attend the Lycée Français du Caire (LFC), as has been typically indicated, since the LFC was established in 1922.

dress, with flowers in her hair and holding a dancing stick. It is hard to tell what type of dancer she was. The feature in the *Nantes Mondain* is the only source I found on her early life in France.⁹¹ But still, a survey of this publication gives us an idea of her standing at the time. Octave Beliard, the author of the feature was a French essayist and editor of the *Nantes Mondain*. In other issues, he features dancers, opera singers, contralto singers and comedians. The fact that Luce was featured amidst these other performers suggests that, for at least a brief period, she held a significant following in the French theatre.⁹²



Figure 3 Emilienne Hector Luce. Image from Nantes Mondain

MMK was a great admirer of the theatre and regularly attended plays and operas in the French capital. Exactly how the couple met is unknown; it is likely at the theatre in Paris during MMK's studies at the Sorbonne. In 1903, they married, and together moved to Cairo.

⁹¹ Octave Béliard, "Mlle Emilienne Luce," *Nantes Mondain*, n.6, 9 November 1901, 1.

⁹² There is an imaginable connection between Luce and de Saint-Point, who had both of them been dancers in Paris in the early 1900s and subsequently moved to Cairo.

But throughout their lives, the couple maintained strong ties with France, and in effect shared their time between Cairo and Paris.

The couple first lived at 11 Kasr El Nil Street and in 1928 moved into n.1 Kafour Street on the Nile bank in Gizeh (Figure 4). Their house became an important cultural address, where Khalil and Luce organised numerous events to develop the artistic scene in Egypt and broaden the reach of their collection.⁹³ They hosted a cultural salon and every first Thursday of the month was reserved for their ‘at home.’ In December 1929, the couple hosted the *Comédie Française* company at n.1 Kafour Street. *Images* covered the event and published the list of invitees– it included friends, government and foreign officials, artists as well as members of the Cairene press.⁹⁴



Figure 4 Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil Villa, No.1 Kafour Street. Barry Iverson

⁹³ The house was built in the French-style of a *hotel particulier* by Raphael Suares (1846–1909), chairman of the Suares Freres & Cie. Bank in 1905. Khalil acquired it from Prince Omar Halim, who had bought it when Suares died.

⁹⁴ “Mondanités,” *Images*, 22 December 1929, 41.

Upon his return to Cairo, MMK had established a law firm near his house on 6 Telegraph Street and simultaneously embarked on a career in politics. He joined the nationalist liberal party the *Wafd* (Delegation) and became a member of parliament. Meanwhile, he also sat on the board of a number of stock companies. Like other members of the bourgeoisie, MMK was part of a network of Muslims, Copts and Jews who collaborated in a number of stock companies in different fields.⁹⁵ He sat on the board of *La Société générale des sucreries et de la raffinerie d'Égypte* (1897), a company half owned by the French, under the scheme of the Crédit Foncier.⁹⁶ MMK is known to have been close to his Jewish business allies. As Joel Benin reminds us, “the President of the Senate was affectionately known by his friends as Mahmoud Mosseri because of his close ties with the Jewish Mosseri family.”⁹⁷ These strong connections to the Jews of Egypt directly challenge the accounts that speak of his fascist inclinations or describe him as a fascist altogether, by referencing his visits to the Vichy Club in Cairo or his close ties to the authoritarian rule of Prime Minister Ismail Sidqi. I will review this literature below, both the primary one in the form of caricatures published in the press and in the secondary literature, mainly in the revisionist narratives of Patrick Kane and Sam Bardaouil, who base their arguments on Khalil’s alleged dictatorship over the arts, fascist inclinations and fascination with Mussolini’s regime.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Joel Benin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*. Berkeley: University of California Press, c1998 1998. <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft2290045n/>

⁹⁶ The Sugar Company, the Tobacco Company as well as the Water Companies were all administered by French officials to control Egypt’s debt since the beginning the nineteenth century. See Samir Saul, *La France et l'Égypte de 1882 à 1914: Intérêts économiques et implications politiques* (Paris: Comité pour l’histoire économique et financière de la France : 1997).

⁹⁷ E.I Politi, *L'Égypte de 1914 à Suez* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1965) 122, as quoted in Benin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, 261-2.

⁹⁸ See Sam Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017); Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath eds, *Art Et Liberté : Rupture, War, and Surrealism in Egypt*, Centre Georges Pompidou Host Institution, Tate Gallery, Tate Liverpool, Düsseldorf . Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, K20 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf, Mncars, Musée National Centre D'art Reina Sofia, Museo Nacional Reina Sofia, Museo Español De Arte Contemporáneo, Spain. Ministerio De Cultura, C.N.A.C, Cnac, Cnac GP, C.N.A.C.G.P, (1938-1948) Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2016; Patrick Kane, *The Politics of Art in Modern Egypt: Aesthetics, Ideology and Nation-Building*. (London: IB. Taurus, 2013).

In 1937, MMK became Minister of Agriculture in the cabinet of Mustafa Nahhas. This was an important position in the context of the global decline in the price of cotton, following the Wall Street crash of 1929. Although he rose in the party to become one of the leading figures, he abandoned his affiliation in 1939 and was appointed Speaker of the Senate by the King. The term lasted for two years, and MMK was elected twice between 8 May 1938 and 9 September 1942. Although his ministerial resignation is often linked to his decision to take up the position as Speaker of the Senate, concurrently the cabinet of Nahhas was dismissed on 31 December 1937 by the young King Farouk.⁹⁹

In recognition of his contribution to French Egyptian relations, MMK was presented with the insignia of the *Grand Cordon de la Légion d'honneur* and earned a seat at the Institute de France and a membership of the Institut d'Égypte. Further, for his efforts to strengthen cultural ties following the Exposition France-Égypte at the Pavilion Marsan in Paris, he was first elected 'Correspondant Libre' on 20 October 1948 then 'Associé Étranger' of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris. MMK died in Paris on 23 December 1953. He received his rites at the Paris Mosque and was given a state funeral. The funeral was attended by General Catroux, de Bourbon-Busset the director of Cultural Affairs, representing the Quai d'Orsay, Louis Hauteceur, director of the *Comité Générale des Beaux-Arts* in Egypt (1927–1931) and well as former members of the French Academy.¹⁰⁰ Several obituaries were published in the French Press, including *Le Figaro*. Back in Egypt, the French ambassador and later PM Couvé de Murville commented that “France has lost its best friend ever in Egypt.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Kane, *The Politics of Art in Modern Egypt*, 32.

¹⁰⁰ Samir Raafat, *Cairo: The Glory Years: Who built What, When, Why and For Whom?* (Alexandria: Harpocrates Publishing, 2003), 251-2.

¹⁰¹ As quoted in Raafat, *The Glory Years*, 252.

2.2 Literature Review

A survey of the literature yields two studies in Arabic dedicated to MMK, his patronage of the arts and the collection. The first one dates from June 1950 and is a special issue of *Sawt al-fannan* (The Voice of the Artist) magazine. The booklet focusses on the collection, rather than the patron himself.¹⁰² The second is a thirty-page bilingual booklet (in French and Arabic) by writer Mohamed Salmawy and artist and critic Mustafa al-Razzaz published in 1995.¹⁰³ The content presents an overview of MMK's activities, collection and museum. Here the authors make a case for the significance of his role. Al-Razzaz writes:

MMK had an important role in the artistic direction in Egypt. He also played a particular role in the life of modern Egyptian art. By carrying out unprecedented projects to strengthen the artistic movement and pressuring the government to allocate budgets for acquisitions, exhibitions, associations, missions and artistic projects [...] His close relationship to Amir (Prince) Youssef Kamal was an occasion to strengthen his ties to the School of Fine Arts and contribute to resolving some of its issues. He is thus an important guardian of the artistic movement in Egypt.¹⁰⁴

This account captures MMK's role in the arts succinctly. Curiously, though published following the *Musée d'Orsay* exhibition of October 1994–January 1995, the exhibition is not at all mentioned here. The booklet is out of print today.

Few Egyptians know about the museum and the content of its large French and Italian Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collection of art in the vicinity of the capital, I

¹⁰² I return to this catalogue below in the overview of the collection.

¹⁰³ Mohamed Salmawy and Mustafa al-Razzaz, *Mohamad Mahmoud Khalil: L'Homme et le Musée* (Cairo: Ministry of Culture, 1995).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 29.

am usually met with surprise. The frequent closures of the museum are partly to blame. Over the years, two thefts of the very same painting were reported: Van Gogh's *Poppy Flowers* (also known as *Vase and Flowers*, 1887) was stolen in 1978, returned in 1980, and stolen again on 21 August 2010. At the time of the last theft, the security cameras and alarms were broken. The painting has not been recovered yet.¹⁰⁵

In Arabic art history books, MMK is briefly discussed. In *Thamanun sana men al-fann 1908–1988* (Eighty Years of Art), Rushdi Iskandar and Kamal al-Malakh describe his 'fascistic' inclinations and his support for European artists at the expense of Egyptians.¹⁰⁶ As noted before, art history surveys, particularly the ones written in the 1960s and 1970s, during the Nasser era, frame the narrative within a nationalistic socialist discourse. As such the elite's monopoly over the art establishment, its cosmopolitan orientations and close ties to France are habitually scorned and MMK's patronage is described as Eurocentric, controlling and even dictatorial.¹⁰⁷

This brings us to a key problem with a large portion of the literature written in English, which relies on these Arabic narratives, written post-1952. A number of scholars claim that MMK presided over the arts in a dictatorial manner for over three decades: Kane describes him as "the fascist-leaning director of the Art Connoisseurs Society."¹⁰⁸ Elsewhere Kane affirms:

¹⁰⁵ Muhsin Sha'lan, the first under-secretary at the Ministry of Culture at the time and former Head of the Fine Arts sector, was found guilty and sentenced to a year in prison on charges of negligence and incompetence in the performance of his duties. He died while serving his prison sentence. Al-Ahram Online, "Egyptian artist Mohsin Sha'lan dies at 63," 10 February 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/25/93859/Arts--Culture/Visual-Art/Egyptian-artist-Mohsen-Shaalan-dies-at-.aspx>.

¹⁰⁶ Rushdi Iskandar and Kamal al-Malak, *Thamanun sana men al-fann 1908–1988* (Eighty Years of Art) (Cairo: al Hay'a al-Misriya al-'Amma lil-Kitab, 1991), 83.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Kane, *The Politics of Art in Modern Egypt*, 46

Among the institutions of art used by the conservatives, the Art Connoisseurs Society was founded and run by its chief patron land baron and art collecting magnate, Muhammad Mahmud Khalil, whose fascist politics, support for the dictatorship of the Sidqi regime in the 1930s, and preference for Eurocentrism in all modes of the arts was the target of ridicule and resentment from both liberals and the left.¹⁰⁹

MMK was criticised for his Eurocentric preferences, which offended numerous artists and provoked satires of his autocratic and dictatorial styles. One famous satire was the caricature produced by artist Mohamed Hassan in 1939. It depicts MMK standing on a pedestal, raising the fascist salute, and surrounded by other members of the *Comité des Beaux-Arts*, including the artist himself. Bardaouil writes: “Khalil was also notorious for his open fascist leanings. From the early 1930s and well into the war, MMK was quite forthright about his admiration for Mussolini and the fascist party.”¹¹⁰ It is worth pointing that Bardaouil fails to reference this statement. He goes on: “[Khalil] was called upon regularly to exclusive functions at the Vichy Club wartime Cairo residence [...] So outspoken was Khalil about his political leaning that in 1942, Sir Miles Lampson (later Lord Killearn) British Ambassador to Egypt, described him as a “poisonous snake that makes propaganda for the enemy and spreads defeatism.”¹¹¹ These remarks must be understood within the context of the British and French rivalry in Egypt, whereupon the two imperial powers were vying for control over the arts and culture. MMK’s rapprochement to France and activities to facilitate cultural exchange between the Egypt and France were perceived as a threat by the British colonial administration in Egypt.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Bardaouil, *Surrealism and Egypt* 27.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*



Figure 5 Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil, Emilienne Luce, Ismail Sidqi, Sir Miles Lampson at a dinner, 1940.

The origin of Lampson’s remark can be traced back to the “List of Personalities from Egypt,” (1941) report he prepared for Minister of Foreign Affairs, Anthony Eden. The report aimed at identifying Egyptian personalities with whom to collaborate.¹¹² When MMK was recommended for high office, the ambassador tried his best to stop this decision. The report describes him as “a man of medium intelligence, who has engaged in conspiracy plots and acts as though he was PM.” The report continues, “a venomous serpent who propagates enemy propaganda and defeatist talk, who may well have Italian leanings.”¹¹³ Even Salmawy and al-Razzaz, writing in 1995 warned against the veracity of the view this document expressed and agreed that it should be taken with a grain of salt. The British diplomat went as far as to suggest that Prime Minister Nahhas Pasha places Khalil under house arrest. Nahhas

¹¹² See “France and England in Egypt: The Anglicisation of Egypt,” in *The Last Khedive of Egypt : The Memoirs of Abbas Hilmi II*, edited by Amira Sonbol (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1998), 225-240.

¹¹³ “List of Personalities in Egypt,” Cairo, Lampson to Eden (Foreign Office), 22 July 1941 Cairo, F/O 371/27431, National Archives, Kew, UK

declined but seemed to dislike him too, writing: “MMK is a senator and a completely worthless creature and therefore not deserving of incarceration.”¹¹⁴ This quote is not referenced in either Raafat or Bardaouil’s books. The disdain that Lampson felt towards MMK becomes surer if read in the context of the British and French forces vying for control in Egypt, particularly in the cultural spheres.¹¹⁵ MMK’s rapprochement to France aggravated British officials, who feared the increasing French control of cultural affairs. The Gallicism exhibited by French officials within the art establishment was a cause for concern repeatedly expressed in letters from the Foreign Office.¹¹⁶

Salmawy warns of accounts produced following the 1952 coup d’état, which he cautions are “tainted with romanticism.”¹¹⁷ Such accounts are typical of the Nasserist era and the regime’s project of re-writing a nationalist history of modern Egypt.¹¹⁸ A standard critique levelled against MMK is the lack of support he offered to Egyptian students. This position is based on an account by artist Ahmed Sabry (1889–1955), when he was invited to MMK’s home in Gizeh– the date of the visit is unknown. Ahmed Sabry relates:

We took a tour of the host’s palace and saw all the paintings and sculptures he owned: they were all by French artists, particularly of the French modern school. Once we sat down for tea, I asked Mahmoud Bey: Why does your collection lack any works by Egyptian artists? He replied: I did not find what deserves to be purchased in their works. I found his reply

¹¹⁴ Raafat, *Cairo: The glory Years*, 251 and Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 27.

¹¹⁵ This attitude must also be re-contextualised within the general British sentiment towards Egyptian public opinion and the “supercilious attitude towards Egyptians – what [Sir Miles Lampson] once termed the ‘timorous Egyptian mind.’” Israel Gershoni, *Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism: Attraction and Repulsion*. First ed. e-book (Austin: University of Texas Press, Austin, 2014), 172.

¹¹⁶ *Egyptian “École de Beaux-Arts, »* F/O 141/518/5, NA, Kew

¹¹⁷ Mohamed Salmawy and Mustafa al-Razzaz, *Mohamad Mahmoud Khalil: L’Homme et le Musée* (Cairo: Ministry of Culture, 1995), 33.

¹¹⁸ For more on Abdel Nasser’s historiographical project to re-write a ‘nationalist’ history of modern Egypt, see Elliot Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2007).

extremely humiliating: I got up immediately and left the palace, in great angst. The reception was thus interrupted, and the rest of the invitees were left bewildered.¹¹⁹

In Salmawy and al-Razzaz's study, the reference of the story is not clear.

Notwithstanding, it seems that Sabry was speaking up from as early as 1928. A letter from Louis Hautecoeur dated 13 January 1928, written in response to a telegram sent by Sabry to the Minister of Education and subsequently communicated to the author, offers valuable insights about the origins of Sabry's hostility.¹²⁰ Similarly, the telegram accused the *Comité Consultatif* of failing to acquire works by Egyptians students and not offering them support. Hautecoeur writes back and challenges Sabry's position, with a list of the relevant works acquired by the committee. In terms of support, he relates the *Comité's* strategy to distinguish between encouragement and acquisition. Hautecoeur explains that certain young artists are simply not ready to figure in the national collection. A Special State encouragement unit was tasked with supporting them through a reward system.¹²¹ Sabry ends the letter by condemning the committee for acquiring works by Austrian, French, Armenian, Swedish, Italian, English artists. Hautecoeur characterises Sabry's stance as a call for xenophobia and highlighted that the works drew inspiration from or directly depicted Egyptian subject-matters.¹²² Certainly, by this time, MMK headed the acquisition committee. Sabry's attack of the *Comité* mirrored his criticism of MMK and the absence of Egyptian artists in the collection.

¹¹⁹ Mohamed Salmawy and Mustafa al-Razzaz, *Mohamad Mahmoud Khalil*, 32.

¹²⁰ Letter from Louis Hautecoeur to the Minister of Education dated 13 January 1928, MS 6882, no.311, Fonds Louis Hautecoeur, Bibliothèque de l'Institut de Paris, France.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, no. 312-3.

¹²² *Ibid.*

To return to the secondary literature, neither Kane nor Bardaouil relate Sabry's case in full or substantiate it with sources. Instead, it is hastily concluded that MMK disliked and failed to support Egyptian artists. Bardaouil writes: "MMK's lack of appreciation for modern Egyptian art was no secret, and he did not shy away from expressing his disdain, publicly scorning most Egyptian artists of the time and expressing his predilection for European art."¹²³ He continues by referring to an account by an artist published in *Un Effort* in May 1935, where the author complains about "the impossibility of securing any financial support from the patron Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil for local Egyptian artists, whose works he would never allow into his home."¹²⁴ The following remark by Henein is another example: commenting on the impossible eventuality of MMK acquiring works by Egyptian artists, the author writes: "if this ever happens, there would be, as Henein would say a reason to *'se taper par le derrière* (give oneself a rap on the knuckles)."¹²⁵ In Huda Sharaawi's biography, Sania Sharaawi Lanfranchi references this anecdote in passing too. Writing about Sharaawi's insistence on buying Egyptian artists such as Ragheb Ayad, Yusuf Kamil and Mahmoud Said; she states: "her Egyptian patriotism held sway in her artistic choices." And further added, "much though she admired Western art, she left it to great collector Muhammad Mahmud Khalil, who *despised* Egyptian painters to acquire the works of Western artists."¹²⁶ Simply put, these accounts fall short because they confuse MMK's personal choices with his public engagements. In other words, his decision to collect Western artists for his private collection should not be a measure to evaluate his commitment to the development of the arts in Egypt and the support he offered to train artists. Subscribing to the *nahda* reformist discourse to modernise the nation, MMK believed in the educational mission of the arts as an

¹²³ Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 26.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 36.

¹²⁵ Unknown author quoting Henein, as quoted in Sam Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt* (London: IB. Tauris, 2016), 26.

¹²⁶ Sania Shaarawi Lanfranchi, *Casting off the veil: The life of Huda Shaarawi, Egypt's first feminist* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 200.

essential component to a modern subjectivity. The majority of his projects were operated on the institutional level– the exhibition space of the *Salon du Caire* and the museum collection, in his role as President and on the committee of acquisition respectively. These two institutions offered Egyptian artists various platforms to display their work, as well as view and interact with works of artists from Egypt and abroad.

A clipping from a Parisian journal, *Le Bulletin de la Vie Artistique* on the School of Fine Arts (SFA thereafter) in Cairo offers a corrective. The article reports: “To award the prizes to the laureates of the School of Fine Arts in Cairo, the Government of Egypt has chosen the big art collector, M. Mahmoud-bey, well known to French artists.”¹²⁷ MMK’s involvement with the school lucidly undercuts his assumed disdain for Egyptian artists.

2.3 *The Dictatorship of the Arts: A Caricature*

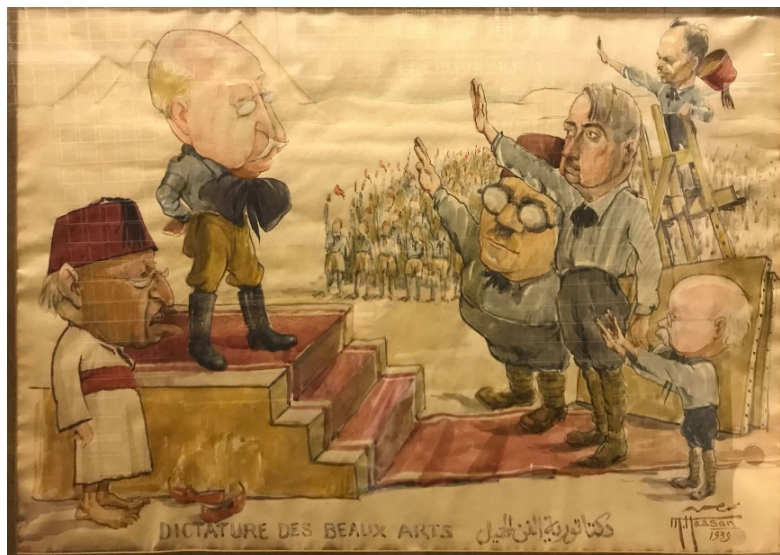


Figure 6 Mohamed Hassan, *La dictature des Beaux-Arts* 1939. Archives of Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil, Cairo.

¹²⁷ Pascal Forthuny, « A l'École des Beaux-Arts du Caire, » *Le Bulletin de la vie artistique*, n.11, 1 June 1921, Paris ark:/12148/bpt6k6158707m

Elsewhere, MMK is described as the ‘dictator’ of fine arts, as seen in a caricature of the President of the SAA standing on a pedestal and surrounded by members of the Société hailing the Nazi salute. Predictably the caricature, created by Hassan in 1939 is entitled “*La dictature des Beaux-Arts*” (*The Dictatorship of the Fine Arts*. Before considering the caricature, I will say a few words about its creator, whose artistic and professional careers have not been sufficiently examined thus far, to contextualise its making. Like Khalil, Hassan was actively involved in the arts for over four decades, first as an artist then as a government official, working in the public arts sector.¹²⁸ He played a role in the same art institutions and circulated in the same artistic circuits. Born in May 1892, Hassan was among the first graduates of the SFA who completed their studies in 1911, alongside Ragheb Ayad, Youssef Kamal, Mahmoud Mokhtar and Ahmed Sabry.¹²⁹ During his lifetime, he held several government posts, including director of the School of Applied Arts (1937), Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts (1939–41), Director of the Egyptian Academy of Arts in Rome (1952) and finally director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Alexandria (1958–1961). What is fascinating here is that Hassan became the director of the School of Applied Arts in 1937, the same year of the *Exposition Internationale* in Paris, in which Egypt participated. Although he did not join in an official capacity as a member of the organising committee, his role becomes evident on a closer examination of the catalogue. As explored below, students from the

¹²⁸ Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 36.

¹²⁹ Hassan is born in 1892, and not 1906, as Bardaouil indicates, who he confuses with another artist named Hassan Mohamed Hassan. Upon graduating, Hassan earned a first government scholarship to join the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts in London. Between 1917 and 1919, Hassan studied painting, industrial design, stained glass and specialised in metal art. On his return to Egypt, he took up a teaching position at the School of Arts and Decoration, located in the *Saray* (palace) Fadel Pasha in al-Hamzawy district of Cairo. He remained there until 1925, when an argument broke out between him and the director, Mr. Stuart about the management of the school. But because of the British officials’ adamant position to retain the school’s administration, in light of the French control over the SFA, it became impossible for Hassan to pursue his role as the Deputy Director. To distance him from the school, the Ministry of Education awarded him a scholarship to study at the *Academia di Belle Arte di Roma*, alongside Ragheb Ayad and Youssef Kamel. The trio spent three years in Rome between 1926 and 1929, where they attended the studio of Roman painter Umberto Coromaldi (1870–1948).

School supplied the furniture, stained glass work and wrought iron of the pavilion.¹³⁰ Further Hassan was a member of the administrative council of the SAA by 1938 and sat alongside MMK on the “*Comité de Préparation de l'Exposition Française du Caire*” that year. Another instance of Hassan’s collaboration with MMK is during the 1947 International Exhibition of Contemporary art in Cairo. On the one hand, he was part of the organising committee and the jury and on the other, he participated with four sculptures, seven paintings and one caricature. Aside from the generational gap, Hassan was very much a member of the art establishment to which MMK belonged.

From the far right, the drawing shows artist Pierre Beppi–Martin, Rémond and the artist himself, standing beneath the pedestal. Hassan is the rotund one wearing glasses and a *tarbush*. It is significant that Hassan included himself in the caricature.

All three raise the fascist salute to MMK who looks down at them from a pedestal. The three Great Pyramids in the background ground the scene in Egypt. A large crowd of men, in shorts, shirts and *tarbush* stands at the back, waving red flags. There are several aspects to pull apart, notably the fact that as a caricature, the satirical nature of reality is pushed to extremes. The President of the Senate at the time is represented here as a fascist dictator. The first reproduction I came across appears in a special issue of *al-Emara* magazine (Architecture) on the Fine Arts in Egypt.¹³¹ We can assume that this was the first reproduction of the caricature in the press, since it was executed the same year. It is worth noting that MMK penned an article in this same issue on the fine arts in Egypt –this feature discussed below, has not been cited before. According to Bardaouil, the caricature re-appeared in *al-Musawwar* on 31 January 1947. The caricature was (re)-published a number

¹³⁰ Catalogue *Égypte: La participation Égyptienne à l'exposition internationale de Paris 1937*, 91-92.

¹³¹ Bardaouil indicates that the caricature was exhibited in the *Salon du Caire* of 1939. Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 25.

of times in several magazines between 1939 and 1947 (and again in 1962) in al-Malakh and Iskandar's survey of Egyptian art. More importantly, a detail, hitherto unnoticed, is the fact that the original of the caricature is *in* the collection of MMK. The catalogue of the 1939 *Salon* lists two 'Caricature' works by Mohamed Hassan. The content of these works is not specified. But it is probable that '*La Dictature des Beaux-Arts*' was one of these two, at which point it was acquired by MMK.

In the secondary literature, the caricature is used to signal MMK's fascist inclinations and dictatorial approach. In *Surrealism in Egypt*, Bardaouil writes: "the alignment of personalities in Hassan's caricature is telling of a contemptuous rift between the *Société des Amis de l'art* on one hand, represented by its *totalitarian* President MMK, and the official artistic establishment."¹³² I find this reading problematic and biased. Bardaouil does not delve into this alleged rift between the Société and the official artistic establishment. In fact, a closer look shows more overlaps than divisions between the two institutions. MMK himself directed the *Comité Consultatif*, alongside Georges Rémond, as the *Contrôleur General des Beaux-arts* (director of the governmental Office of the General Administration of Fine Arts) and later as a member of the *Comité*, while also holding membership of the Société. The same is true of Hassan, who held positions that straddles both these institutions

While the caricature has been used to highlight MMK's dictatorial attitudes, the recontextualization of its production allows for alternate readings. I maintain that the prevalence of this document in the press is proof of the patron's status and formative role in influencing art policies in Egypt. The *Salon du Caire*, organised every year, (even in 1937 when Egypt was participating in the *Exposition Internationale* in Paris), is a testament to

¹³² Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 27.

these efforts. As President of the SAA from 1923 until 1953, MMK showed an unwavering commitment to the arts. These large-scale events involved the collaboration of a number of parties; from artists, art patrons (foreign) museums, an administrative committee, a jury, the press and visitors over a period of two weeks. Read thus, the caricature could be interpreted to show how encompassing MMK's role was.

2.4 The Collection and its Dissemination

In his memoirs dating from February 1903, MMK writes: "I had to pay LE 400 for a painting of a woman which Emilienne purchased today... I cannot imagine myself (sic) paying such a price for a single painting... But Emilienne thinks that we are winners... Who knows, it might be true."¹³³ The painting referred to here is *Jeune femme au noeud de tulle blanc* (1882) by Auguste Renoir. It is a simple portrait on a plain background, with cold tones characteristic of the artist's palette circa 1880s. The curators of the 1994 exhibition at the Musée d'Orsay compare it to two Renoir's works: *Femme au jabot blanc* (1880) or the famous portrait of *Richard Wagner* painted in 1882.¹³⁴ To acquire a Renoir, a living artist in 1903, with his vigorous brushwork was quite a bold purchase at the time. It can hardly be considered the norm and it points to the patrons' vision. Intriguingly, the first purchase made by Samuel and Elizabeth Courtauld, two decades later, in 1922 was also a painting by Renoir. It is the first of five paintings by Renoir, which the Courtauld couple acquired over a period of 50 years.

¹³³ MMK, diary entry dating February 1903, Paris, "J'ai dû payer 400 LE pour un tableau représentant une femme qu'Emilienne a acheté aujourd'hui ... je ne peux m'imaginer qu'on puisse payer ce prix pour un seul tableau... Mais Emilienne dit que nous sommes gagnants dans l'affaire... Qui sait c'est peut-être vrai. » as quoted in Mohamed Salmawy and Mustafa al-Razzaz, *Mohamad Mahmoud Khalil, l'Homme et le musée* (Cairo : National Centre of Fine Arts, 1995) 13.

¹³⁴ Catalogue entry, Auguste Renoir *Jeune Femme au noeud de tulle blanc*, 1882 in *Les oubliés du Caire : Chefs-d'œuvre des musées du Caire*, exhibition catalogue, Musée d'Orsay 5 October 1994 - 8 January 1995 (Paris : Association Française d'Action Artistique : Réunion Des Musées Nationaux, 1994), 165.

Before delving into MMK's collection, I find it helpful to point out that patronage and collecting practices in Egypt were not unique to the patrons under study. In a special issue dedicated to the arts in Egypt, *La Bourse Égyptienne* featured the important collections in the country. Charles Terrasse, the newly appointed 'Contrôleur Général des Beaux-Arts,' penned two pieces: the first focusses on the public collection of the Guezireh Museum and the second presents a survey of Egypt's renown private collectors. Over ten pages, the latter are presented in alphabetical order; each entry includes a brief description, alongside black and white reproductions of artworks or house interiors. Carlo Grassi's collection was featured.¹³⁵ Mohamed Sultan, Fortune Martino, Leon Rolin (1871–1950), Moïse Levi de Benzion are some of the other important names discussed in the issue. In Alexandria, those included the collections of Sir Henry Barker, Alexandre Benachi, Emanuel Constanino, Jacques Motassian, Charles de Menasce, Mox Rolo, Gregoire Sarkissian, Edwin Goar and Moïse Levy de Benzion. The collection of de Benzion, which included Courbet's *Portrait de l'Artiste ou l'Homme à la pipe* (1877), was auctioned during a *succession de feu* in Cairo on 14 March 1947.¹³⁶ It was during this auction that MMK acquired *Portrait de l'Artiste* and *Les Lavandières* and the MoMAC acquired the *Paysage: Les Bords de l'Oise*, all by Charles-

¹³⁵ Carlo Grassi (1886–1950) amassed a large collection of art, which included *Scène de l'Inquisition* by Goya, works by David, Andrea del Sarto, Titian, Rousseau, Tintoretto and a portrait of Mme Grassi by Courbet. Upon the patron's death, his wife bequeathed the collection to the Galeria d'Arte Moderna in Milan (GAM), in memory of their son Gino Grassi who died in the battle of al-Alamein during WWII. As the leader of the Italian community in Cairo, Grassi hosted regular soirées in Villa Nedda situated on the island of Zamalek. Notably, he held the dinner banquet in honour of Marinetti on 22 March 1938. Six days later, *La Semaine Égyptienne* covered the visit and included photos not only of the dinner guests but of the interior of the Villa, showing some of the collection (Villa Nedda, at 14 Mohamed Mazhar is today the Embassy of Morocco).

¹³⁶ The collection of Moïse Levy de Benzion is noteworthy. De Benzion was a Sephardic Jew born in Alexandria in 1873. He lived between Egypt and France and owned an important collection of antiquities and art. In downtown Cairo, he ran an eponymous Egyptian department store until it was bombed during the Cairo Fire of 25 January 1952. The collection in the Château "La Folie" in Draveil (Seine et Oise), was heavily plundered by the Nazis in 1943 and nearly 1000 items seized. For more on de Benzion's collection, see *Catalogue des tableaux, aquarelles, dessins, bronzes, objets d'art, pierre dure, porcelaine & bronze de Chine, ivoires, antiquités Égyptiennes & Gréco-Romaines, bijoux anciens, monnaies Gréco-Romaines, tapis, meubles, lustres, appliques, argenterie, livres, etc. etc. ; dont la vente aura lieu à la Villa Benzion à Zamalek: Succession de feu M. Moïse Levy de Benzion, Vendredi 14 Mars 1947 et jours suivants à Zamalek, 6, Rue El Amir Omar, 6 ; grande vente aux enchères publiques* (Cairo: 1947).

Francois Millet.¹³⁷ These transfers, even if among an elite circle, shed light on the existence of a local art market and patronage practices.

Another important collector was Prince Youssef Kamal also gathered Islamic art as well as European art, included works by Delacroix and Courbet. Interestingly, the catalogue of the Musée d'Orsay exhibition of 1994, *Les Oubliés du Caire, Chefs d'œuvres des musées du Caire*, notes that the *Bouquet de fleurs dans un vase de grès* by Delacroix (1847) was purchased by Prince Kamal at Bernheim-Jeune on 4 September 1919 and remained in his collection until 1952, whereupon it was transferred to the Guezireh Museum.¹³⁸ The catalogue adds that the work was also shown during the commercial *Exposition d'art français du Caire, 1827–1927*, inaugurated on 31 December 1927 in the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Cairo. Yet the same work appears as part of MMK's collection in this special issue of *La Bourse Égyptienne*. Whether this is a mistake in the provenance history, or the painting changed hands following the exhibition of 1927 is unclear.¹³⁹ Notwithstanding its first owner, the fact that *Bouquet de fleurs dans un vase de grès* ended up in the national collection, shows how these art interlocutors were lending their works to temporary exhibitions to widen their reach and expand the artistic horizons of the public

These movements reveal two things: firstly, the existence of a thriving art market in Egypt where paintings circulated beyond the closed doors of private homes. As has been traditionally upheld, access to these artworks was not restricted to a certain group. They were being sold in the public domain. A wider audience had access to the collections, both through

¹³⁷ *Les oubliées du Caire*, 74.

¹³⁸ *Les oubliés du Caire : Chefs-d'œuvre des musées du Caire*, 52.

¹³⁹ This type of provenance history is extremely needed in the developing art market of the Middle East. It requires investigative work because of the scarce resources but enough information is available to begin preliminary work such as that quoted above.

temporary exhibitions, notably the annual *Salon du Caire*, the permanent MoMAC Museum display starting from 1931, as well as the wide circulation of reproductions in the press.

Artworks were changing hands, from private to private as well as private to public hands.

A survey of the Egyptian press, particularly the francophone press shows a rich history of patronage and art collecting. Nelly Vaucher-Zananiri was writing on collections of art in Egypt: an article entitled “*Les grandes collections égyptiennes*,” was published in the Parisian art magazine *L’art Vivant*, as early as 15 January 1929.¹⁴⁰ *La Bourse Égyptienne*’s (1933) feature about the ‘important collections of art’ in Egypt is another example. Alongside a short description of the collections’ contents, images of the works are also featured. Equally the circulation of these images in the press is indicative of the web of influence, inspiration, and dialogue that I attempt to evoke. MMK and Luce’s collection (KLC) was certainly one of the most extensive collections in Cairo during the first half of the twentieth century. Let us now turn to its history.

Today the KLC is part of a large national collection of art that is displayed in the MoMAC (previously Guezireh Museum), the Diplomatic Club, Manial Palace and its adjacent museum (founded in 1938), the Beit el-Senari House, El-Amir Taz Palace, Abdin Palace, as well as other state buildings, including the Presidential Palace and Egyptian embassies around the world. Upon MMK’s death in 1953, Luce drew up a will, which stipulated that on her death, the villa at N.1 Kafour Street, its garden, annexes and all its content would be bequeathed to the state and converted into a national museum. Luce died on 19 March 1960. Shortly after, the “Museum of Mohammed Mahmoud Khalil and his Wife” was inaugurated in 1962, by

¹⁴⁰ Nelly Zananiri-Vaucher, “Les Grandes collections égyptiennes » *L’Art vivant*, 15 January 1929, 92.

President Gamal Abdel-Nasser and Minister of Culture Sarwat Okasha.¹⁴¹ Whether the name of the museum was agreed in the will is unclear. What remains is a problematic nomenclature that casts a shadow over Luce. Her name does not appear in the registries and, more often than not, she is referred to as ‘wife.’ When used, it is misspelled as ‘Lock.’ Yet, there is ample evidence to suggest Luce’s decisive role in the formation of the collection, which was, from the start, conceived as a joint effort. Many of the purchases were made by Luce herself, for example Monet’s *Nymphéas* was “acquired by Mme Mahmoud Khalil 24 September 1920,” and Degas *Femme à sa toilette* was “acquired by Mme Khalil, 1 October 1920” from Bernheim-Jeune.¹⁴² Both works are highly significant pieces in the oeuvre of the artists; Monet was still alive at the time of the purchase and Degas had recently died, three years earlier. *Nymphéas* was acquired by Durand-Ruel and Bernheim-Jeune directly from the artist in 1913 and signals Monet’s monumental work of *Nymphéas* of L’Orangerie. Degas’s work forms part of the group of pastels, which the artist exhibited in the last Impressionist exhibition of 1886 in Paris, depicting nude women in intimate settings, bathing, brushing their hair and dressing. At the time, opinions were divided, some criticised the series for its

¹⁴¹ Before his death, MMK drew up a will dated 20 December 1953, in which he entrusted one third of his estate to his wife in addition to a quarter of his assets. The bequest of 1953 did not include the mansion of n.1 Kafour Street since MMK had already granted its deeds to his wife in 1947. Under *Shari’a* Islamic law, the rest of MMK’s estate became *waqf* (a charitable endowment). The reasons behind the foundation of the museum are contested and involve long familial feuds. I will briefly recount it here. After MMK’s death, news of his engagement to Soaad Rashed and a child transpired. Paternity was proven and court cases ensued where Rashed made claims on the estate for herself and the presumptive heir. She won the case and received an allowance for the child. To protect the art collection and preventing it from going to MMK’s son, Mohamed Amr, Luce drew up a will bequeathing the art collection and the mansion to the state. In a sensationalist article titled, “House of scorned Woman” Samir Raafat maintains that it was Luce’s anger that gave the Egyptian nation one of its most prized art collections. I disagree with this characterization and maintain that MMK built his art collection with the aim of turning it into a museum. <http://www.egy.com/giza/98-04-30.php> The collection is not only made up of paintings and sculptures but includes an extensive range of *objets d’art* and a large library. In “*Que deviendra cette collection*” published following MMK’s death in 1953, the author writes: “it seems that the deceased has left a will bequeathing the villa of Guizeh as well as the art collection that it contains to Mme Mahmoud Khalil, on the condition that the bequest passes onto the Egyptian state, after her death.” (*Images*, December 1953, unpaginated).

¹⁴² *Les oubliées du Caire*, 159 and 136 respectively.

voyeuristic manner and obscenity, but consensus was reached on their aesthetic value and their realistic representation of the female nude.¹⁴³

The couple maintained strong relations with prominent galleries and auction houses in Paris. Bernheim-Jeune, Durand-Ruel, Georges Petit, Hotel Drouot and Galerie Allard were the main galleries where they acquired works. Geneviève Lacambre points out, they specifically avoided Paul Guillaume, the buyer for Edvard Brandès, who was too audacious for their taste.¹⁴⁴ A dedication on the back *Confidences* (1920) by Edmond Aman-Jean shows that the couple knew the painter personally– (*Hommage à Madam Mahmoud Bey*).¹⁴⁵

Acquisitions intensified in the 1920s and 30s. During these years, the couple made frequent trips to Paris, particularly around the *Exposition Internationale*, when MMK spent most of the year there, to set up the pavilion.

The collection is formed of approximately 300 paintings, 80 statues. Worth mentioning are the seven paintings by Renoirs, five by Monet, six by Pissarro, eight by Delacroix, three by Gauguin, three by Sisley, four by Courbet, two by Degas, as well as several maquettes by Rodin and numerous sketches– some of these sketches were direct acquisitions, while others were offered by the art dealer, alongside the purchase of a painting or sculpture. The collection can be divided into schools, primarily Orientalist, Barbizon, Impressionist, and post-Impressionist. Artists include Boudin, Bourdelle, Carpeaux, Chasseériau, de Chavannes, Corot, Courbet, Daubigny, Daumier, Degas, Delacroix, Fromentin, Gauguin, Gérôme, Marilhat, Monet, Moreau, Millet, Pissarro, Rodin, Renoir, Rousseau, Sisley, Toulouse–Lautrec, Troyon and Van Gogh. Highlights include Van Gogh's *Genistas and Wild Poppies*

¹⁴³ *The Courtauld Collection: A Vision for Impressionism [exhibition catalogue]*, ed. Karen Serres, (Fondation Louis Vuitton and Paul Holberton Publishing, 2019) 129.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁴⁵ Edmond Aman-Jean, *Confidences*, catalogue entry *Les Oubliés du Caire*, 186.

(1887)¹⁴⁶; Courbet's *Portrait de l'Artiste* (or *L'homme à la pipe*, circa 1849)– a work praised by art critic Jules-Antoine Castagnary as an “oeuvre of first order;”¹⁴⁷– Delacroix's *Une descente au tombeau* (or *L'ensevelissement du Christ*, 1834) ; Monet's *Nymphéas* (1906), *Le Pont sur l'étang aux nymphéas* and *Westminster (L'Aiguille de Cléopâtre)* ; Gauguin *La Vie et la mort* (1889) and Sisley *La Seine à Billancourt: le Point du jour* (1877). Two crucial points stand out: the first is the wide scope of the collection, with its range of different schools and movements, paintings, sculptures and a range of *objet d'arts*; the second is the fact that they had begun collecting Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art in the early 1920s, when the place of artists like Renoir, Pissarro, Gauguin and Sisley was not yet fully consolidated in the French modern art tradition. This wide-ranging scope suggests that from the start, they sought to form a collection for a future museum.¹⁴⁸ Before delving into the analysis of the collection and examining the reasons behind acquiring Orientalist works, I find it useful to offer a brief overview of Orientalist art collections in Egypt, notably the collection of Khalil Cherif Pasha (1831-1879).¹⁴⁹

One of the earliest art collections from Egypt was made by Cherif Pasha. His life and the collection he amassed in Paris are well researched.¹⁵⁰ He is remembered for commissioning Gustave Courbet to paint *L'Origine du monde* (1866). An Ottoman-Egyptian diplomat from Mohamed Ali's court, Khalil travelled to Paris to study at the *Ecole Militaire Égyptienne* then

¹⁴⁶ This painting has been stolen from the museum in 2010 and till the time of writing, remains lost. In fact, Van Gogh's *Genistas and Wild Poppies* was stolen twice; the first time in 1978 and retrieved ten years later in Kuwait and the second time on 21 August 2010.

¹⁴⁷ Jules-Antoine Castagnary, *Salons*, Paris 1892, t. I, p29–30 as quoted in *Les Oubliés du Caire*, 81.

¹⁴⁸ In an interview with Marwa Fathi, the director of the MMK and Luce Museum, she also expressed her belief in MMK's plans to build a museum to house his collection (Conversation with Marwa Fathi, April 2018, Cairo).

¹⁴⁹ It is worth pointing out that there is no familial relation between Khalil Cherif Pasha and MMK.

¹⁵⁰ For more on Mahmoud Khalil Bey, see Michèle Haddad, *Mahmoud Khalil Bey, un homme une collection* (Paris: Les éditions de l'Amateur, 2000); Roderick Davison, “Halil Serif Pasha, Ottoman diplomat and statesman,” *Journal of Ottoman Studies*, 2 (1981), Istanbul, 203–221; Deniz Türker, “The Oriental Flaneur: Mahmoud Khalil Bey and the Cosmopolitan Experience,” unpublished dissertation, History of Art, Yale University, 2005.

took up his first post as the *Commissaire* of the *Exposition Universelle* in 1855 in Paris. There, he formed a large art collection which included works by Ingres, Delacroix and Courbet; notably a version of Ingres's *Le Bain Turc* (1862, oil on canvas— a different version than the one commissioned by Napoleon around 1848 and returned soon afterwards because it shocked the Empress).¹⁵¹ There are similarities between the professional trajectories and the art collections of Khalil Cherif Pasha and MMK. The two men maintained strong (cultural) connections to France, and both participated in the organisation of international exhibitions in Paris, almost a century apart (1855 and 1937 respectively). Khalil Bey's story is an exception in this under-studied phenomenon of Orientalist art in Middle Eastern collections.

Mercedes Volait has recently made forays into the subject. Volait looks at a number of collections from the region, in an effort to understand the changes in the market of Orientalist art and questions the recent surge in acquisitions by patrons from the Middle East.¹⁵² A survey of collections reveals two *topoi*: the nude and the Orientalist landscape. She suggests 'national' tropism as the motive behind these acquisitions and finds that the painting subject is what 'nationalises' a work.¹⁵³ In the case of KLC, the author asks: "What explains the presence of Orientalist painting in an otherwise primarily Impressionist collection? A concern for balance? Acquisition opportunities? Were [Mahmoud Khalil]'s purchases due to national sentiment, a system of identification?"¹⁵⁴ To make sense of the pieces, she applies the lens of 'national' tropism; for collectors, it is ultimately the subject of the artworks that matters. A

¹⁵¹ Francis Haskell, "A Turk and his Pictures in Nineteenth-century Paris," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol.5, n.1, Patronage (1982),45 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1360103>

¹⁵² Mercedes Volait, "Middle Eastern Collections of Orientalist Painting at the Turn of the 21st century: Paradoxical Reversal or Persistent Misunderstanding?" Francois Pouillon and Jean-Claude Vatin eds., *After Orientalism: Critical Perspectives on Western Agency and Eastern Re-appropriations* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publisher, 2014), 256.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

statement by MMK published in *Images*, a French cultural journal, confirms Volait's findings: commenting on recent acquisitions made in Paris, MMK declares that "Every time I see an artwork that concerns Egypt, I rush to acquire it."¹⁵⁵ In this manner, *Le Nil (haute Égypte)* (1876) by Eugène Fromentin depicting the site of Kôm-Ombo on the banks of the Nil in Upper Egypt and *Oedipe (or Le Générale Bonaparte en Égypte)* (circa 1886–1890) by Jean-Léon Gérôme at the foot of the Sphinx, are some of the pieces that MMK acquired in Paris and hung in his home in Cairo. But as mentioned above, this practice of collecting Orientalist art was not novel or unique to the Khalil and Luce at the time. In fact, Orientalist art collections were prevalent among the royal family and the elites in Egypt, as well as the Eastern Mediterranean more widely. From the early eighteenth century, a strong link between the royal court and fine art is established. It began with the first ruler of modern Egypt, Mohamed Aly Pasha (1769–1849) who maintained contact with artists of the Orientalist school, residing in Egypt or passing through, and regularly commissioned them to produce landscapes and portraits.¹⁵⁶ Emil Mériel, Vice-president of the SAA, and other members of this group were also acquiring Orientalist art.¹⁵⁷

What sets the KLC apart is the pursuit of contemporary and avant-garde works, by French artists. From the 1903 onwards, they acquired artworks by Courbet, Monet, Pissarro, Sisley,

¹⁵⁵ "Cette collection est un musée, » (This collection is a Museum), *Images*, n.973, Vol.1 1 May 1948, 6.

¹⁵⁶ *Les Oubliés du Caire*, 254.

¹⁵⁷ He bequeathed most of this collection to the MOMAC before 1935. The works have been locked away in stores since 1963. In 1998, a selection from the museum's collection, alongside works from the KLC were briefly put on display for the opening of the Cairo Palace of Arts in 1998. Works by Eugène Fromentin, Theodore Frère, Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, Narcisse Berchere, Theodore Chassériau, Henri Regnault, James Tissot and others were exhibited for two weeks. In the exhibition catalogue, the curator Ahmed Nawar (then director of the Department of Fine Arts) highlights the role of the Orientalists who spent time in Egypt, and who influenced artistic trends. Curiously, Nawar goes as far as establishing a direct link between their presence and the birth of modern Egyptian art— a position that breaks with the nationalist historiography that finds 1908, with the opening of the School of Fine Arts, as the beginning of modern Egyptian art. Exhibition catalogue, *The Works of Orientalists (Ma'rad A'mal al-Mustashreqen)* (Cairo: General Book Organization, 1998), 9. The same selection of works was exhibited at the Aisha Fahmy Palace in Cairo in October 2020. More research needs to be carried out on the

Gauguin, Van Gogh and Rodin from galleries and auction houses in Paris. Acquiring works such as *La vie et la mort* (Life and Death) by Gauguin or *Le penseur* by Rodin can hardly be described as traditional and academic, as revisionist narratives contend.¹⁵⁸ The works in the collection captured modern life, in experimental techniques.

Parallels can be drawn between the KLC and other international collections that were formed around the same time. The French impressionist collection of Danish brewing-magnate Carl Jacobsen (1842–1914) formed a few years earlier housed at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Calouste Gulbenkian’s collection in Lisbon or the collection of Japanese patron Magosaburo Ōhara (1880–1943) in Kurashiki are in the spirit. In fact, Ohara and MMK often vied for the same works in the Parisian galleries. For example, a photograph of Courbet’s *La mer en automne* (1867) which appeared in MMK’s archive, was later purchased by Ōhara and now forms part of the Ōhara Museum’s collection. Similar to the KLC, Ōhara’s was the first collection of Western art to be exhibited in Japan. The basis of the collection consisted entirely of nineteenth and twentieth centuries French paintings and sculptures. Works by the same artists figured in both collections, notably by de Chavannes, Pissarro, Degas, Monet, Gauguin, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec, Rouault and Rodin. Another comparable collection is the Samuel and Elizabeth Courtauld collection, which bears numerous similarities in terms of compositions, timeframe and manner of acquisition.¹⁵⁹

MMK subscribed to the *nahda* reformist discourse of nation-building in the Arab world, faced with the hegemony of the West and colonialism. Cairo and Beirut were the hubs of ideological debates and transformations that were being generated in the shadow of relentless

¹⁵⁸ See Kane and Bardaouil.

¹⁵⁹ See catalogue *The Courtauld Collection: A Vision for Impressionism [exhibition catalogue]*, ed. Karen Serres, (Fondation Louis Vuitton and Paul Holberton Publishing, 2019).

offensive of European imperialists seeking to justify colonialism, on representing the Oriental subject as lacking in knowledge, morals, order, rationality, science and discipline.¹⁶⁰

Typically, the ‘pioneers’ of the Arab renaissance adopted Comtean positivism rationalism and scientific thought, characterised by a language of objective clarity and precision, to spearhead the reorganisation and progress of modern Arab society.¹⁶¹ The *nahda* discourse is critical to our understanding of modernism. The pioneers of the *nahda* believed in the role of the arts to educate the public and enact a modern subjectivity to lead the country to independence. To analyse the collection in the context of the *nahda* discourse, as an agent of modernity, leads us to a number of theories. The collection was formed with an educational mission at its heart and the belief in the role of the arts in improving society. Writing in a special issue on the arts in *El-Emara*, MMK states “irrespective of progress in the sciences and the spread of its knowledge among the people, there is no better way than the fine arts in improving society, refining the public’s taste and raising its literature.”¹⁶² By acquiring works by Realists, Symbolists, Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, MMK appreciated the rebellious spirit and the creative freedom of the artists, who sought to convey impressions of the environment in which they lived. The narrative is turned on its head when we consider these bold purchases that can hardly be described as conservative.

As the President of the SAA and the Salon, he is the symbol of major arbiter of the canon ‘official taste and cultural strategy. If, as the historiography would have us believe, modern art in Egypt, was from its outset articulated around nationalism, and frameworks of identity and authenticity, all executed in an academic style, how do we make sense of the decision to acquire works with prominent symbolist themes, such as works by Puvis de Chavannes,

¹⁶⁰ Stephen Sheehi, “Modernism, Anxiety and the Ideology of Arab Vision,” *Discourse* (Berkeley, Calif.) 28, no. 1 (2006), 85. doi:10.1353/dis.2008.0008.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Mahmoud Khalil, “*Tarhib wa-Ta’yid*” (A Welcoming and Supporting Note), *Sawt el-Fannan*, June 1950, 3.

Moreau, Rodin, Gauguin and others? Symbolism was prominent at the end of the century and involved a revolt against traditional conventions in literature, poetry and art, particularly the conventions of naturalism.¹⁶³ Concerned with the crisis of modern society tumbling into decay, Symbolists turned to an exploration of the spiritual self, to dreams and mythology to reveal more profound meanings. This preoccupation with the psychological land signalled a turn to a more radical modern art. Sheehi shows how Arab Romantics coeval with MMK, resorted to Symbolism; their choice was a poignant ideological act that was far from a lagged gesture of imitation of a pedestrian movement.¹⁶⁴

Egyptian modern art history is typically articulated around nationalism and frameworks of identity, authenticity and derivativeness.

¹⁶³ Karen Serres, ed., *The Courtauld Collection: A Vision for Impressionism [exhibition catalogue]*. (Fondation Louis Vuitton and Paul Holberton Publishing, 2019) 55.

¹⁶⁴ Sheehi, 'Modernism, Anxiety and the Ideology of Arab Vision', 81

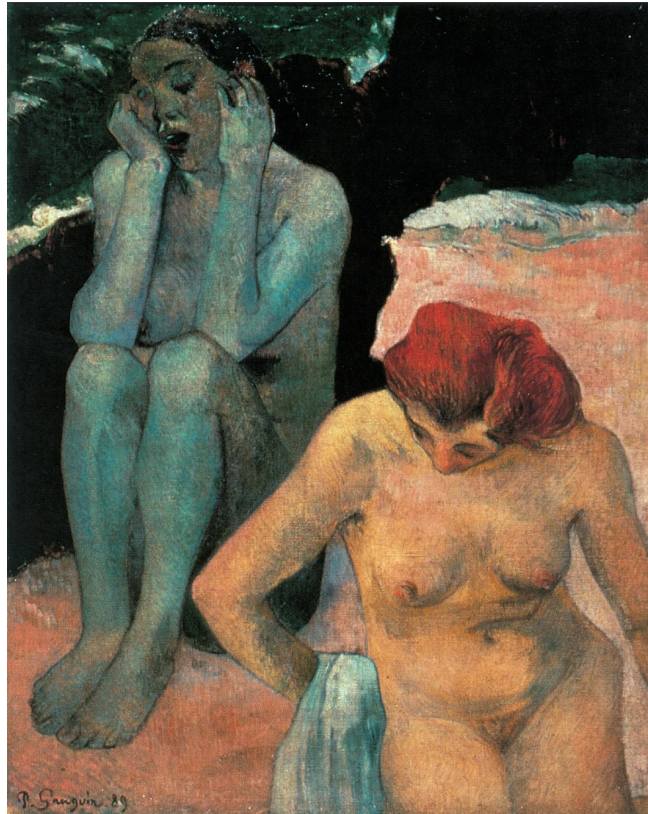


Figure 7 Paul Gauguin, *La Vie et la mort*, 1889. Collection of Mahmoud Khalil and Emilienne Luce, Cairo.

2.5 Paul Gauguin in Gizeh

The collection includes two iconic works by Gauguin. Before turning to one these works, a few words are in order about the artist, to better situate his inclusion in the collection.

Considered a Post-Impressionist artist, Gauguin rejected all the signifiers of Western rationalism, progress and objectivity.¹⁶⁵ He used flattish areas, warm colours and strong outlines to simplify figures and objects. Linda Nochlin explains that he resorted to these visual devices to reject what he conceived of as the lies of illusionism and the ideology of

¹⁶⁵ Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth Century Art and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 49.

progress.¹⁶⁶ He painted *La Vie et la mort* in the autumn of 1889, during a trip in Pont-Aven and Le Pouldu. It was produced two years before his first trip to Polynesia, undertaken between 1891 and 1893. Although a major work, this painting has remained absent from the artist's exhibitions, - including the exhibition at Tate Modern (2010–2011) even though when painted, *La Vie et la mort* caught the attention of art critics. Writing in the *Politiken* on 16 April 1895, Johannes Jorgensen wrote a favourable review. He describes the painting as “the solstice in the artist's career.”¹⁶⁷ It was first shown in Copenhagen on 26 March 1893, during an exhibition organised by the Danish wife of the artist, Mette-Sophie Gad and then shown again years later in 1933, at Galerie Zak in Paris. The provenance history does not indicate an exact date for MMK's acquisition, but it may be assumed that he purchased it from the sale of *La Collection Edouard (sic) Brandès*, Gauguin's brother-in-law, in Paris in 1933.¹⁶⁸

In *La vie et la mort*, Gauguin begins to abandon the naturalist style, which he had employed previously. Instead, he treats his figures in a symbolist manner, visible in the subject's posture and colour palette. It is the moment when Gauguin moves away from Degas's naturalism and begins to develop his own symbolism, visible in the subject's posture and a new colourful palette, which came into full maturity in Polynesia. In *La vie et la mort*, two nude female figures - rare in the artist's oeuvre up to this point - are gripped by their own thoughts. The artist's viewpoint is concealed. They are not aware of his gaze or of ours. The woman seated in the foreground is drying herself, performing this intimate gesture with her eyes pointing downward. Her auburn mane is the colour of 'life.' She sits in stark contrast to the green skinned woman in the background, with almost-sky-blue hair.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ As quoted in the catalogue entry of Paul Gauguin, *La Vie et le mort* in *Les Oubliés du Caire*, 174.

¹⁶⁸ Edvard Brandès was a Danish politician, who was Mitte Gauguin's brother-in-law.

The woman seated behind her is crouched on a black rock. This rock is said to allude to the *Roches Noires* (Black Rocks) near Pont-Aven and carries the same superstitious associations. According to local myths, malicious cries rise from the rocks; serpent sirens that lead to humankind's death. Pulled back behind her ears, her hair merges into a black mass of cloud that engulfs the background. It is as though death has come knocking on her door. She sticks her fingers to her ears and holds her face in agony. Her entire body-language is one of suffering: curled up on herself, her eyes are shut and mouth agape, as if crying out or trying to block out temptation. Her cadaverous figure is based on sketches that Gauguin executed of the Chachapoya mummies of Peru during a visit to an exhibition at the Musée de l'ethnographie du Trocadéro in 1889 (now the Musée de l'Homme), which were also displayed at the World Fair in Paris. The posture of the figure corresponds exactly to the position of Peruvian mummies, with the legs and arms drawn inward, the head tilted and held by the hands. ¹⁶⁹



Figure 8 Abdel Hadi el-Gazzar, *Green Fool*, 1951. Courtesy of the Abdel Hadi el-Gazzar Foundation, Cairo.

¹⁶⁹ Gauguin saw the exhibition of the Chachapoyas mummies with Edvard Munch in 1889, who also used it as inspiration for *The Scream* (1893). Wayne Andersen. *Gauguin's Paradise Lost* (New York : Viking Press, 1971), 186.

The green tinted figure recalls Abdel Hadi el-Gazzar's *Green Fool* (1951) whose subject is painted in a comparable shade. Gazzar had most likely seen Gauguin's *La Vie et la mort* during a school visit to MMK's residence, since he produced it over a decade before the opening of the museum. Another classmate had the chance to see the painting: in 1945, Samir Rafi' produced a pencil study of *La Vie et la mort*. This year, both Gazzar and Rafi were in their final year of study at the SFA. Contrary to the narrative concerning MMK's elitism, the study is an example that shows one of the ways the couple supported Egyptian artists and the development of art. In fact, a survey of the collection reveals more Egyptian artists than has typically been accounted for. I now turn to this portion of the collection.

2.6 A Patron to Egyptian Art



Figure 9 Interior of MMK's Villa featuring Mahmoud Said's Banat Bahari. 1936

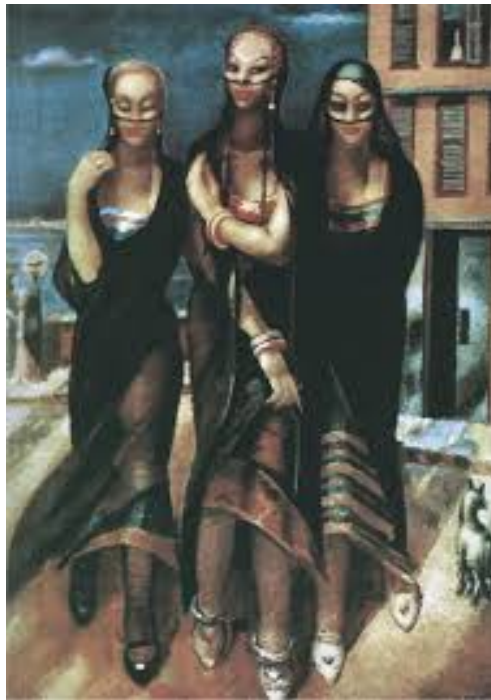


Figure 10 (Right) Mahmoud Said, Banat Bahari. 1936. Private collection

MMK's collection included around thirty works by Egyptian artists. Visits to the stores have allowed for the identification of works by Youssef Afifi, Tahar el-Amri, Said el-Sadr, Mohamed Hussein, Youssef Kamel, Amy Nimr, Georges Sabbagh, and Mahmoud Said. As

mentioned before, documentation about the collection remains scant, and in official museum catalogues published by the Ministry the focus is on the works of Western artists to the exclusion of Egyptian artists. The consequences of these omissions in the historiography are obvious and sustain narratives of MMK's Eurocentrism. Exploring these works, and particularly works in the format of studies and *modelli*, highlights the close ties sustained between MMK and local artists.



Figure 11: Amy Nimr, Travail (Panneau Décoratif), 1922.

One such example is *Travail* (Work) by Amy Nimr (1898–1974). Dated 1922, it is an early work by the artist, who graduated from the Slade in 1919. Although the work looks like a study, the fact that it is signed and dated suggests that the artist considered it a finished work. The drawing features five young peasants working the land. The models resemble the ones Nimr often featured in her work – men and women from Upper Egypt. In the nationalist discourse, the figure of the peasant was put forward as the rightful heir to the land, in an

effort to draw a continuous line between past and present. At work harvesting the land, they are each absorbed in their own task. They are dressed in the traditional peasant garb the *gallabiya* and carry their harvest in large woven baskets. Nimr gives great attention to the lines and folds of the men's clothes. The warm colours and clear outlines of the composition produce a sense of movement and rhythm. The background is left empty. An inscription on the bottom reads "*panneau décoratif*" (decorative panel). It may be assumed that the work formed part of a larger composition and that it was commissioned by MMK. Whether it was actually executed, in a private residence or in a public space, is unknown. In my research, I have found no reference to indicate the latter. Nonetheless, there are several reasons why this work is significant: it signals both the patron's interest in Nimr's artistic career early on as well the consolidation of MMK's role as patron, through the support he lent to young artists. Later, Nimr participated regularly in the *Salon du Caire*, as well as in independent exhibitions, such as the *Salon des Indépendants* organized by AL. In 1930, on the occasion of her first participation in the *Salon du Caire*, the Museum of Guezireh purchased one of her works.¹⁷⁰ I return to Nimr in Chapter 5, to examine her role in disseminating avant-garde artistic ideas and in her involvement with AL.

Works by Mahmoud Said also feature in the collection. Of note is the *modello* of one of Said's most important pieces: *La Ville* (1937), commissioned by MMK on the occasion of the *Exposition Internationale* in Paris that year. I offer an in-depth analysis on the painting and its study in the next chapter. In a photograph of the house interior featured in the catalogue published in 1950, I noticed another painting that is no longer part of the collection today: *Banat Bahari* (*Girls of the Sea*, 1935).¹⁷¹ This is another of Said's important paintings,

¹⁷⁰ « Liste des Gravures, Musée d'Art Moderne, 1930, » MS 6882, N.308, 3, Fonds Louis Hautecoeur, Bibliothèque de l'Institut de Paris, France.

¹⁷¹ Al-Gabakhang, *MMK collection, Sawt al-fannan*, special issue.

depicting the Alexandrian women of al-Anfushi neighbourhood, which the artist became interested in and represented in a series of works. They appear again in *La Ville* (1936) and in *Le Chat Blanc* (1948). According to the catalogue raisonné, *Banat Bahari* entered the MoMAC collection in 1951.¹⁷² Yet the 1950 catalogue introduction notes that the author visited the house in 1947. This painting raises a number of questions: When were the photographs taken? When and why did *Banat Bahari* depart the KLC? Did Khalil gift it to the museum before he died? *Sawt al-fannan* reports that MMK donated 60 paintings to the museum. Though the list of works is not disclosed, the transfer of *Banat Bahari* most likely occurred on this occasion. Investigating this bequest is crucial to our understanding of the collection and its constitution. From a news entry in *Sawt al-fannan*, we learn that MMK donated a number of his Orientalist works, including by Jean-Leon Gérôme, to the Diplomatic Club because he considered these to be decorative.¹⁷³ The donation of 1950 to the MoMAC, on the other hand, is more significant: given MMK's affiliation to the institution and its mission to create a platform for displaying Egyptian art, this transfer may explain the move of artworks by Egyptian artists from MMK's collection.¹⁷⁴

I now turn to one more work on paper produced by artist Samir Rafi'. It is a study of Gauguin's *La Vie et la mort* produced between 28 December 1944 and 1 January 1945,

¹⁷² *Mahmoud Said*, plate 156, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 353. A replica of the painting dated from 1948 came into the hands of Egyptian art dealer, Sherwet Shafei (Safarkhan Gallery, Cairo) in the 1990s, who recently sold it to an Egyptian collector

¹⁷³ "Tarhib wa-Ta'yid," (Announcements), *Sawt el-Fannan*, June 1950, n 3, as quoted in Dina Ramadan, "The Aesthetics of the Modern: Art, Education and Taste in Egypt 1903–1952", PhD Diss. (Columbia University, 2013), 143.

¹⁷⁴ The movement of these pieces from private to public collections warrants further research. In Egypt, numerous art pieces transferred to national collections have not ended up on public display, and instead are stored away from the public. Many of the most important museums today arose from private collections, including the Galleria d'Art Moderna Milano (GAM), the Wallace Collection, the Frick Museum, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and the Courtauld Gallery. Many national museum collections are also indebted to loans from private collectors. The relationship between 'private' collections of art and the changing dynamics of their display in 'public' exhibitions has been the subject of a growing literature situated in the history of the art market and collecting. This transfer raises questions about the porous nature of these private/public boundaries and about the changing meaning according to the art object's status.

during a visit to MMK's home. At the time, Rafi was a student at the SFA. Inscriptions indicate that the drawing was prepared on a visit organised by artist Saad al-Khadem, for drawing classes. It is a reproduction of the painting, with annotations on the subjects' psychology and the colour palette. I found this document among the personal papers of the artist. It is part of a large collection of over one thousand documents contains unseen works on paper, studies, diaries and letters by the Rafi'. For our purpose, it brings MMK's collection to the fore, showing that the latter was made available to art students, who had the opportunity to spend a few days observing and copying the work.

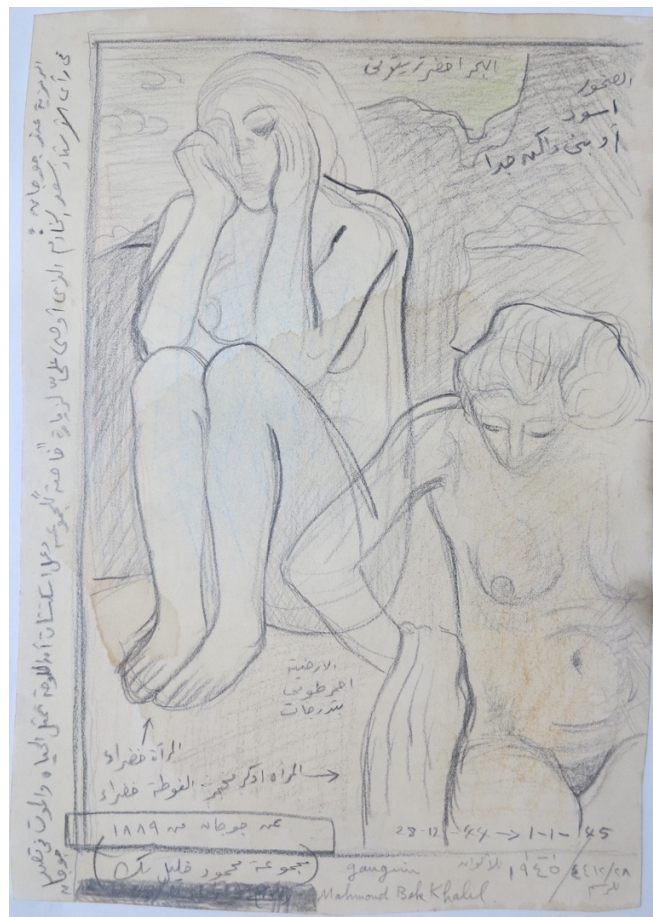


Figure 12: Study of Gauguin's *La Vie et la mort* by Samir Rafi. 1945. Fonds Samir Rafi', courtesy of Mohamed Said.

2.7 A Widely Visited Art Collection

The catalogue prepared by Mohamed Sidqi al-Gabakhanghi became the basis of subsequent catalogues. As mentioned above, it took the form of a special issue in the magazine *Sawt al-fannan* (The Voice of the Artist) published in June 1950. *Sawt al-fannan* described itself as the “first monthly magazine for the fine arts” published in Arabic in Egypt.¹⁷⁵ The magazine was part of the network of institutional structures, which operated on the rhetoric of the *nahda* to reform the nation and educate its subjects. Artist and art critic, al-Gabakhanghi was part of a core group of art interlocutors, affiliated to the museums, the SFA and the exhibition spaces. His first visit to view the collection took place on 13 April 1947. Initial discussions had included a French version of the catalogue, under the supervision of George Rémond. But this version did not materialise and instead an Arabic version was published in 1953. The decision to publish the catalogue in Arabic only points to the Ministry’s efforts to nationalise history and shed signs of Westernization. It While the decision to publish the catalogue in Arabic is not unexpected, given the date of publication follows the revolution of 1953, it still stands in contrast to the majority of bilingual material (Arabic and French) published by SAA and the Ministry of Public Works previously.

The catalogues of the KLC were published by the Ministry of Public Works between 1962 and 1995. The catalogues feature black and white reproductions of the artworks. The circulation of imagery in the catalogues and in the press lends the collection a life of its own, beyond the walls of the MMK household.

¹⁷⁵ There were numerous general cultural journals being published in Arabic at the time, including *al-Ahram*, *al-Akhabar*, *al-Hilal*, *Ruz al-Yusuf*, *al-Majallah al-jadida*, *al-Risala*, and *al-Thaqafa*. *Sawt al-fannan*, first published in Arabic only, in May 1950 had a clear educational mission to shape public taste. It became bilingual (Arabic and French) a few months later to establish an international presence. For more on the role played by the magazine in developing art criticism and art writing in Egypt, see, Dina Ramadan, “The Aesthetics of the Modern: Art, Education and Taste in Egypt 1903–1952”, PhD Diss. (Columbia University, 2013).



Figure 13: Guests admiring the collection display at n.1 Kafour Street (*Images*, n.973, 1 May 1949)

There were also many features on the collection in the Egyptian French-language press.

Images published two articles on the collection. The first « *Une très importante collection de peinture Française, celle de S.E Mahmoud Bey Khalil au Caire,* » is an overview of the

collection and the second « *Que deviendra la collection MMK?* » asks what will happen to the collection following MMK's death. The images feature the collection and invitees admiring

the artworks. One shows the French painter Roger Chapelain-Midy and his wife admiring a painting by Gauguin. The same set of photographs were re-used in the second article. Here

Mériel turns our attention to Khalil's wish to convert the house into a museum. The author

refers to MMK's wish to "gift part of my collection to an institution."¹⁷⁶ The fate of the collection is pushed to the fore and becomes a topic of national debate.¹⁷⁷



Figure 14: Villa for Mohamed Mahmoud Bey MMK, Gizeh, Cairo, Arrangement of the painting gallery, ' 1927. Fonds Joachim Richard.

The 1927 drawing by architect Joachim Richard offers a glimpse into the MMK home and the type of display the patrons realised. The symmetrical display is striking. At the centre of the wall is a large impressionist painting— it may be *Réception au Château de Versailles* by Eugène Lami (1874), still in the collection today. The symmetrical display shows a curatorial exercise that upholds a holistic vision to the presentation of the collection. Here the symmetry prioritises the sum of the collection's pieces. Each work on the wall is valued in relation to its neighbour and cannot stand alone. It is not clear whether the paintings that are featured in the drawing were part of the collection. Richard's architectural drawing was intended to design the gallery space only. Still images from the interior of the house featured in *Images* (1949) show the same type of double-hung and symmetrical display seen in the drawing.

¹⁷⁶ "Cette maison est un musée, » (This House is a Museum), *Images*, Vol.973, n.1, 1 May 1948.

¹⁷⁷ Etienne Mériel, « Que deviendra la collection MMK ? » ("What would become of the MMK collection?"), *La Femme Nouvelle*, July 1948, 16.

2.8 Richard Mosseri: To Hire a Keeper of Collection

In the late 1920s, MMK hired Richard Mosseri (b. 1897–?) as the curator of his collection. Mosseri came from a prominent Greek Jewish family in Egypt. Called back from Paris, he came highly recommended by his Cairene cousins with whom MMK maintained close banking relations through Banque J. Nessim Mosseri & Cie. When he returned to Cairo, Mosseri served as the bank's proxyholder. Similar to MMK, Mosseri was well-acquainted with the Parisian art scene. His new role with MMK focused on the management and expansion of the collection. Mosseri remained affiliated with the Khalils for over two decades. He was tasked with finding relevant artworks in Egypt and abroad and organising the purchases. In a sense, Mosseri was the keeper of the collection, he initiated contact with the galleries in Paris and maintained the records. In fact, Salmawy and al-Razzaz mention that he held the certificates of authenticity and when he moved to Paris post-1952, he took these with him.¹⁷⁸ Supposedly the certificates were lost and never seen again.

Mosseri was also involved in the SAA and the *Comité Consultatif*. He served as Secretary under Secretary-General, Fouad Abdel Malek, on the administrative committee of the SAA and the *Salon du Caire*. The exact date of when Mosseri joined the SAA is unknown. In my survey of the Salon's catalogues from 1923 onwards, his name appears as Secretary for the first time in 1939.¹⁷⁹ On the local scene, Mosseri appears engaged with the efforts of young Egyptian artists and showed support for AL. His review of AL's *V^{ème} Salon des Indépendants* (1945) in *Le Progrès Égyptien* is noteworthy. He recounts:

¹⁷⁸ Salmawy and al-Razzaz, *Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil*, 14.

¹⁷⁹ Catalogue, XIXth, *Salon du Caire*, April–May 1939. Due to scarce historical resources on Egyptian Jews, it is difficult to uncover biographical information about Mosseri. He certainly left Egypt for France in the 1960s, following the Suez Crisis of 1956 and the departure of Jews from Egypt. For more on the departure of Egyptian Jews from Egypt in the 1960s, see Joel Benin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

These independents, a mixed grouping of young painters and photographers fertile and persevering in spirit, do not allow themselves to be deterred by the sarcasm, or even less by any difficulties. They move forward, encouraged by those who are of similar disposition– and they are many. This time, the presentation is more sober, let's say less eccentric than that of last year. To garnish this long bare hall, they came up with the idea of covering the tables with Spanish shawls or with petals of bougainvillea; the decorative effect is as much discreet as it is delicate.¹⁸⁰

Although the young members of AL were critical of the establishment and endeavoured to 'épater la bourgeoisie,' Mosseri still praised their efforts. The fact that he draws parallels to previous iterations confirms his regular attendance of the show.

The review still captures a sense of ending. It is their fifth and last exhibition in 1945.

Following the first *Salon des Indépendants* organised by AL between 8 – 28 February 1940, the museum acquired a series of surrealist works. In a letter to his friend Henri Calet, Henein wrote:

Did I tell you that the Independent Art exhibition was a brilliant artistico-seismic shock? The bourgeois of the region have still not recovered. Besides they don't have the slightest reason to recover from it. On the other hand, couples were able to make love in the showrooms and the Museum of Modern Art was obliged for the first time, to acquire surrealist paintings, as a result of the exhibition's brilliant success.¹⁸¹

Henein does not specify the list of paintings acquired, except for one portrait of himself by el-Telmissany. Although the above review was written five years later, Mosseri certainly influenced the direction of the museum's collection. The acquisitions mentioned by Henein, were realised following AL's first exhibition. But participating artists, such as Amy Nimr and Mahmoud Said were already represented in the national collection. By 1930, five paintings

¹⁸⁰ Richard Mosseri, « Le Salon des Indépendants, » *Le Progrès Égyptien*, 7 June 1945, 2.

¹⁸¹ Letter dated from February 1940, Georges Henein and Henri Calet, *Lettres (1935-1956)*, Grandes Largeurs. No. 2-3 (Paris: Association Henri Calet, 1981) 47-48.

by Nimr and three by Said were included. Later, in 1939, “*Les nouvelles acquisitions du musée,*” announced the purchase of works by these two artists, among others.¹⁸²

Mosseri’s review of the 1945 exhibition is often used in the literature to offset the loud criticism waged against AL and highlight the group’s exhibition-making strategy. They sought “to reform the artistic and political stagnation of the bourgeoisie classes.”¹⁸³ What is fascinating is the fact that the identity of the author is, more often than not, unaccounted for. In reference to the review, Bardaouil introduces him just as a critic.¹⁸⁴ Recognising that Mosseri is MMK’s assistant, and a member of the museum’s committee sheds light on the development of art practices and patronage. It challenges previous narratives about the SAA’s lack of support for Egyptian artists and presents MMK (in his public and private roles) in a different light. These connections narrow the gap between members of AL, museum officials and ultimately MMK. This is one example, among others in this thesis, of where the protagonists intersect.

2.9 MMK As President of *the Société des Amis de l’Art*

MMK was one of the founders of the *Société des Amis de l’Art* (SAA) in 1923, with Prince Youssef Kamal, Emile Mériel, Youssef Cattau Pasha, Ali Ibrahim Pasha, Mohamed Taher Pasha, Henri Neus Bey, Sir John Home, Sir Robert Rolo, Aldo Ambron, Charles Boeglin, Ali Chamsi Pasha, and G. Fouad Abdel Malek. The administrative council was made up of Prince Youssef Kamal as President and Emile Mériel and MMK as vice-presidents, Cattau

¹⁸² “*Les nouvelles acquisitions du musée,*” (The Museum’s New Acquisitions), *La Revue du Caire*, 2nd Year, N.10, May 1939. The unparalleled degree of transparency is worth pointing out: details of the museum’s acquisitions were regularly published in the papers. The latter gains more significance when compared to the current situation. The vast majority of the public collection remains locked away from the public. The lack of updated catalogues means that the majority of Egyptians are unaware of what the museums’ collections contain. Even for research, as I have discussed at length elsewhere, it is near impossible to access required material.

¹⁸³ Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 178.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 177.

Pasha as treasurer, Fouad Abdel Malek and Charles Boeglin as secretaries. As mentioned earlier, Prince Youssef Kamal stepped down from the society in 1932 and was replaced by MMK who remained President until the end of his life in 1953. The SAA still exists today but activities are minor, if non-existent. For the purpose of this section, I treat the existence of the SAA from the period between 1923 to 1952 distinctly from the second period leading to today. In this second phase, the SAA was nationalised by the state. The Lady's Committee was headed by Princess Semiha Hussein, the granddaughter of Khedive Abbas Hilmi II. She was a sculptor herself and often exhibited her work in the *Salon*. As mentioned above, Emilienne Luce was also a member.

When created, the society's mission was twofold: first to introduce foreign art and artists to young Egyptian artists, who did not necessarily have the opportunity to visit the museums in European capitals, and second to offer them a platform to exhibit their work for both European and Egyptian audiences.¹⁸⁵ The SAA began as a private initiative, separate from the state, but the majority of members were government officials, MPs or members of the royal family. The society operated on donations from committee members and allocated an annual budget to organise the annual salon and art conferences. With the establishment of the *Comité Générale des Beaux-Arts* (General Committee of Fine Arts) in 1927 ties between the two began to emerge: that year the Ministry of Education invited the SAA to host the exhibition of French art in the Grand Palais at the Royal Agricultural Society in Gizeh. MMK served as the *Commissaire Générale*. As Fouad Abdel Malek writes, "we must not forget that the SAA is responsible for the creation of the Museum of Modern Art, in which the former was housed

¹⁸⁵ Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil, "La Société des Amis de l'Art, » *La Revue du Caire, Peintres et Sculpteurs d'Égypte* (Painters and Sculptors of Egypt), Special issue November 1952., 106.

for over a year.”¹⁸⁶ The society served as an intermediary between civil society and government institutions.

The history of the annual *Salon du Caire* is tied to the SAA. In fact, it predates it since the first iteration of the salon took place in 1920, at the initiative of Fouad Abdel Malek. Having recently graduated from the School of Fine Arts in Munich, he returned to Egypt in 1919, with a mission “to encourage the arts and develop the industry.”¹⁸⁷ He founded the *Conservatoire égyptien pour l’art et l’industrie* (Egyptian Conservatoire for the Arts and Industry), and, under the patronage of Princess Semiha Hussein and the *Comité des Dames*, he organised the first salon at the *Conservatoire* on 21 Boulaq Avenue.¹⁸⁸ The first exhibition organised by the SAA took place in 1924, at the former premises of the Savoy Hotel in Cairo: « *L’Exposition du Livre Français et de la Gravure* » lasted for two weeks.¹⁸⁹ The salon moved from the Institut Français d’Archeologie in 1925, to the pavilion of the Ministry of Education in 1926, and then to the Palais Tigrane on 4 Nubar Pasha Street from 1927 to 1930. It finally relocated to a permanent site in the Fine Arts Palace in Guezireh in 1930.

The *Salon du Caire* was modelled on the *Salon des artistes français* in Paris.¹⁹⁰ It functioned on an open-call basis. But unlike its French counterpart, which only exhibited works by students of the *École des Beaux-Arts*, the *Salon du Caire* was open to everyone, professional

¹⁸⁶ Fouad Abdel Malek, “La Société des Amis de l’Art, » *La Bourse Égyptienne*, Special issue 15 February 1933, unpaginated.

¹⁸⁷ Catalogue of the Salon du Caire 1923, 31–32.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁸⁹ A second iteration of the *Exposition du Livre français* was organised in March 1929 in the Fine Arts Palace, as advertised in the catalogue of the 1929 *Salon*.

¹⁹⁰ The *Salon du Caire* was not the first of its kind in Egypt. From 1891 – 1904, the *Salon d’art Orientaliste* was organised by the Greek artist Theodore Ralli, under the auspices of Khedive Tewfiq. The majority of participants were Orientalist artists. Egyptian artists did not participate in the event. The annual salon cultivated a taste for Orientalist art among the royal family and the elite. For more on this salon, see Maria-Mirka Palioura, “Archival Testimonies of the Cairo Salon’s Early years (1891–1904)” in *The Arab Salon in the Arab Region: Politics of Taste Making*, ed. ed. Nadia von Maltzahn and Monique Bellan, (Beirut: wBeirut, 2018) 93–112.

and amateur artists alike. For example, members of the royal family frequently exhibited their work. Artworks were selected by a jury made up of members of the society. What was (and not) accepted into the *Salon* established the parameters of the art canon in Egypt. In other words, the SAA policed the borders of artistic taste. The *Salon* created a new platform to display and discuss art. It allowed artists in Egypt to become part of a larger network of established and young career artists, both nationally and internationally. It regularly included Egyptians and foreigners residing in Egypt or in passage. A survey of the catalogues draws attention to the cosmopolitan nature of the event. Next to each participant's name, his/her nationality was indicated, these included Egyptian, Greek, French, Italian, English, Austrian, Armenian, Turkish, Maltese, Belgian, Hungarian, Swiss, Russian, Palestinian, Lebanese and Czechoslovakian artists.

The ratio of Egyptian and foreign artists varied every year. A selection of Egyptian artists included Ragheb Ayad, Georges Sabbagh, Cléa Badaro, Sanad Basta, Aly Kamel el Dib, Mohamed Hassan, Youssef Kamal, Amy Nimr, Mohamed Nagy, Marguerite Nakhla, Nahmia Saad, Mahmoud Said, Labib Tadros and Ramses Younan. The regular participation of Younan from 1930 to 1939 is significant and sheds light on the way artists in Egypt had to navigate the public and private art spheres.¹⁹¹ In 1939, he exhibited three works: *Les trois éléments*, *Quartier de l'Ezbekieh* and *Femme au gant*. *Les trois éléments*, a work on paper, illustrated the three elements of the self as explained by Freud– the id, superego and ego– and was reproduced in Younan's article *Ghayat al-fanan al-mu'asir* (The Aims of the Modern Artist).¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ The forthcoming *catalogue raisonné* Ramses Younan, ed. Sylvie Younan and Morad Montazami (2019) dates the artist's participation in the Salon to the period between 1933 to 1938. In my survey of the salon catalogues, I uncovered the above-mentioned earlier and later participations. The implication of the latter complicated our understanding of the SAA and AL and their interactions. I return to Younan in Chapter 5.

¹⁹² Ramses Younan, "Ghayat al-fanan al-mu'asir," (The Aim of the Modern Artist), *Studies in Art (Dirasat fi al-fan)* (Cairo: Maktabat al-'Usra, 2011), 31

The participation of Egyptian artists was a priority for the committee. In *La Bourse Égyptienne*, Secretary General Abdel Malek points to the steady increase of the participation of Egyptian artists. He reports that in 1921, 26 Egyptian artists displayed 101 works and by 1932, these numbers had risen to an impressive 89 artists showing 245 works.¹⁹³

Interest in the salon was also on the rise. Numbers of visitors saw a steady increase every year. According to a review of the exhibition of French art in *al-Musawwar*, the number of visitors reached 50,000 in 1930.¹⁹⁴ Although these numbers should be taken with a grain of salt, they still indicate a growing interest in the arts. Attendance of the show became a marker of modernity and progress. Concurrently, local papers were publishing art reviews and the genre of art criticism developed.

The salon also created a primary and secondary art market. The number of artworks were constantly rising; by 1935, over 600 pieces were exhibited.¹⁹⁵ Artists were displaying and selling their works directly, and art collectors were offering artworks from their collections for sale. For example, in the catalogue of the 1929 *Salon du Caire*, a number of paintings by Georges Sabbagh belonged to Fares Nimr (Amy Nimr's father). Copies of the catalogues are not complete, and it is not always possible to ascertain the exact movement of paintings. But the fact that the names of the owners were indicated under each painting (except when the painting originated from the artist's studio) is evidence of a growing art market in the first

¹⁹³ Fouad Abdel Malek, « La Société des Amis de l'Art, » *La Bourse Égyptienne*, unpaginated.

¹⁹⁴ *al-Musawwar* of 30 December 1930 as quoted in al-Gabakhangī, *Tarikh al-haraka al-fanniyyah*, 10.

¹⁹⁵ Morik Brin, *Peintres et Sculpteurs de l'Égypte Contemporaine* (Painters and Sculptors of Contemporary Egypt) (Cairo : Les ami de la Culture Française en Égypte, 1935), 56.

half of the twentieth century in Egypt.¹⁹⁶ Starting from 1927, the *Comité Consultatif* began to purchase artworks from the salon.

For over three decades, the SAA animated the art scene in Egypt, notably through the annual salon. This event became a locus for the formation of artistic taste and definitions of fine arts in Egypt during the first half of the twentieth century. Further, the SAA planned a series of events showcasing Egyptian art abroad and Western art in Egypt. Abroad, MMK steered the committees of the *Exposition Internationale* of 1937 (discussed below) and the *Exposition France-Égypte* at the Pavillon Marsan in 1949 in Paris. As a ‘friend of France,’ he collaborated with curators from the Louvre, the Petit Palais and the Musée du Luxembourg to put together these large-scale exhibitions. At home, these included commercial exhibitions of Belgian art, two exhibitions of French art– the first one in 1927–1928 and the second, a miniature of the *Exposition Internationale* in 1938– Persian art, North African art, sculptures by Rodin and other contemporary French sculptors, British art, American art, Persian miniatures and Turkish carpets.¹⁹⁷

While these international art exhibitions expanded local artistic horizons, they were nonetheless state-sanctioned cultural propaganda initiatives. In the aftermath of the First World War, Western European states embarked on extensive cultural diplomatic campaigns through the arts. In Egypt, France and to a lesser extent, Belgium were at the forefront. Artists became cultural ambassadors.¹⁹⁸ The selected artworks were by living artists

¹⁹⁶ Catalogue, *Salon du Caire*, 1929

¹⁹⁷ Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil, “La Société des Amis de l’Art, » *La Revue du Caire*, special issue November 1952, 106.

¹⁹⁸ For more on the role of exhibitions abroad, see Céline De Potter, « *Du temps où les artistes étaient nos ‘meilleurs ambassadeurs’ : art et politique étrangère dans les relations Belgique – France de 1919 à 1939* » (A Time when Artists were our ‘Best Ambassadors’: Art and Politics in Franco-Belgian Relations from 1919–1939), <http://journals.openedition.org/pyramides/221>

predominantly and were aligned with the official taste of the host country. That is to say, in Egypt, the selection criteria was set by the *Comité* and the SAA. A report by the bureau of the Association Belge, revealed how Egyptian officials advised against artworks that were deemed too modern or avant-garde.¹⁹⁹ But still, a survey of the catalogues shows expanding aesthetic parameters. Another remarkable exhibition was organised by the British Council, under the auspices of the SAA in January 1945. *Contemporary British Art* showed works by Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, Edward Burra, John Tunnard among others.²⁰⁰

The second exhibition of French art (1938) in Cairo is also noteworthy. A collaboration between the *Comité Français de l'Exposition du Caire*, with Jean Zay, the French Minister of Education and Fine arts and Louis Hautecoeur as chief Curator— and the SAA – with MMK as president alongside Roger Bréval, Mohamed Hassan, Mohamed Naghi, Georges Rémond and Fouad Abdel Malek, this commercial show brought together an impressive group of contemporary artists. As Georges Sabbagh pointed out, “all the artistic movements were featured, the classics, to the cubists, all the way to the surrealists” and he added, “the artworks present here are of our time. They reflect our age, its needs and its necessities as seen and remodelled by our artists of our time, all contemporary and as such able to express the current era according to his/her personality and temperament.”²⁰¹ The three pioneers of

¹⁹⁹ Report, Association belge de propagande artistique à l'étranger : compte-rendu du Bureau – Bruxelles, le 7 février 1927 (Archives diplomatiques de Belgique, Bruxelles, 11 818 bis) as quoted in De Potter, « Du temps où les artistes étaient nos ‘meilleurs ambassadeurs’ »

²⁰⁰ The exhibition of *Contemporary British Art* opened on 10 January 1945 and lasted for nineteen days. For example, the surrealist-influenced *Painting 1942* by Tunnard featured among the works. I return to this exhibition in chapter 5, in the relation to the Art and Liberty group.

²⁰¹ “*Les arts français en Égypte : Merveilles du goût contemporain*,” (French art in Egypt : Marvels of Contemporary Taste), *Images*, 12 February 1938, unpaginated and “*L'exposition Française du Caire: Ce que nous dit le peintre G.H. Sabbagh* » (The French Exhibition in Cairo : What the painter G.H Sabbagh tell us), *Le Journal D'Égypte*, 8 February 1938, MS 6882, no. 41, Fonds Hautecoeur. Notable artists included Georges Braques (*Guéridon avec compotier*), Pierre Bonnard (*Chiens*), Marc Chagall, Roger Chapelain-Midy, Maurice Denis, André Derain (*La Dormeuse*, 1926), Georges Dufrenoy, André Dunoyer de Segonzac, Othon Friesz, Henri Matisse (*Odalisque sur Coffret Rouge*, 1927), Juan Gris, Jean-François Laglenne, Marie Laurencin, Jean Lurçat, Fernand Léger, Jacques Lipchitz, Chana Orloff, Amédée Ozenfant, Fernand Leger (*Nature Morte* 1928), André Lhote (*Algérienne*) ; Henri Manguin, Georges Rouault, Jean Puy, Paul Bernard Vera (*Après le bain*), Ossip Zadkine and Maurice de Vlaminck

Fauvism, Andre Derain, Raoul Dufy and Henri Matisse were shown in Cairo. In total, 136 artists participated, and 450 paintings exhibited amid 10,000 objects.²⁰² The press coverage of the exhibition was extensive, both nationally and internationally, and the fact that all the works were by contemporary artists, was a focal point of the media coverage.

Till now, this exhibition of French modernist works shown in Egypt has not been discussed in the literature. To my mind, it represents a crucial part of the story of modernism in Egypt and the canon of the history of modern art more generally. Events like these were executed on a large scale and involved a strong audience and wide media coverage. The fact that in 1938, three members of Fauvism, André Derain, Henri Matisse and Maurice de Vlaminck exhibited their work in Egypt points to modernism's cross-cultural past. The diplomatic role of these French exhibitions abroad and the criteria used to select the works are clear and must be read as efforts to consolidate the canon of modern art, under the French colonial ideology of the '*mission civilisatrice*.' The power of exhibitions, and particularly world-exhibitions, has been the subject of numerous postcolonial studies, that have revealed the structures of colonial powers at play in these spaces.²⁰³ Furthermore, the role of exhibitions has been proven to be inextricably linked to the history of modern art. Okwui Enwezor explains how the forum and medium of exhibitions has been fundamental "in explicating the trajectory taken by artists, their supporters, critics and the public in identifying the great shifts that have marked all encounters with modern art and advanced its claim for enlightened singularity

²⁰² As a miniature of the *Exposition Internationale*, the Cairo edition included books, furniture, architecture, tapestry, glasswork, orfèverrie, ceramic, brassware, ironworks, marquetry masterpieces, theatre decoration, menswear, Lanvin finery clothes and jewellery also. Catalogue, *Exposition Française du Caire, 1938: Beaux-Arts, Arts Décoratifs*, École Bibliothèque des Chartres <http://bibliothequekandinsky.centrepompidou.fr/clientBookline/service/reference.asp?INSTANCE=INCIPIO&OUTPUT=PORTAL&DOCID=0413452&DOCBASE=CGPP>

²⁰³ Timothy Mitchell, *Questions of Modernity: Contradictions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) ; "The World as Exhibition," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 2 (April 1989) ; and *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

among other cultural avatars.”²⁰⁴ If we stretch the point and are willing to suspend confidence in the relationship between these given centres and peripheries, as Kristen Scheid suggests, then these instances of soft power and propaganda outside of the ‘metropole’ may be read as moments when modern art was coming to realization and assuming its centrality.²⁰⁵ That is not to propose that modernism and the history of modern art was being created in the colonies and then reimported to the metropole, as post-colonial theorists working in other fields have proposed.²⁰⁶ Rather, I find these historical junctures and localised paths of modernity useful in decentring the historiography and highlighting the cross-culturality of modernism. In other words, they complicate the conception of modernity as the sole preserve of the West. They do so by outlining an interspace of encounter in *media res*, where modernity was in a perpetual process of becoming and in this way, positively escaping the temporal binarism of ‘first the West then the rest.’ By taking seriously the role of the SAA organisers, who assumed a sense of parity in what they perceived as a ‘global’ project of modern art, the *Exposition Française* may serve as an example that calls for an epistemological shift in the historiography.

²⁰⁴ Okwui Enwezor, “The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition,” *Research in African Literatures* 34, no. 4 (2003): 59, [10.1353/ral.2003.0097](https://doi.org/10.1353/ral.2003.0097).

²⁰⁵ Kirsten Scheid, “The Agency of Art and the Study of Arab Modernity,” *MIT- Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies (MIT-IJMES)* 7 (Spring 2007), 8.

<https://www.aub.edu.lb/fas/soam/soan/Documents/Articles-Faculty/THE%20AGENCY%20OF%20ART-%20Scheid.pdf>

²⁰⁶ See examples of this in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991) and Ann Laura Stoler, “Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no.1 (1989): 134-6.

EXPOSITION FRANÇAISE

BEAUX-ARTS

.....
:::: ARTS ::::
DÉCORATIFS

Ouverture le 8 Février 1938

GRAND PALAIS

SOCIÉTÉ ROYALE
D'AGRICULTURE
GUEZIREH
LE CAIRE



Imp. F. E. NOURY & FILS - Tél. 54888 - Le Caire



Figure 15: Catalogue of the Exposition Française du Caire: Beaux-Arts et Arts Décoratifs, 8 February 1938, Grand Palace of the Royal Agricultural Society in Guezireh Cairo.

3. MoMAC and the *Comité Consultatif*

On 27 January in 1927, a royal decree ratified the establishment of the *Comité Consultatif des Beaux Arts*.²⁰⁷ The committee was responsible for strengthening the arts, researching new pedagogical methods in the arts, building museums and museum collections, as well as setting up exhibitions and cultural missions abroad. In this section, I turn to just one aspect of its mission: to build a national art collection to be housed in the Guezireh Museum of Modern Art. Members argued that students of the SFA and the School of Applied Arts required examples of modern paintings and sculptures to study. Louis Hauteceur, a curator at the

²⁰⁷ “Décret Instituant un Comité Consultatif des Beaux-Arts, » (Decree Instituting an Advisory Committee of Fine Arts), *Journal Officiel du Gouvernement Égyptien*, Year 54, n.8, unpaginated.

Musée du Louvre, was hired to lead the *Comité Generale des Beaux-Arts*.²⁰⁸ From December 1927 to December 1930, Hautecoeur held the post of *Directeur du Comité des Beaux-Arts* (general director of the Department of Fine Arts). On 11 April 1929, the composition of the *Comité* was amended to include an acquisition committee, a scholarship committee, and a special state encouragement unit. To maintain agreement, it was decided that all three committees would be administered by the same eleven members.²⁰⁹ These included Hautecoeur, Inspector of Fine Arts, four art enthusiasts elected by the Minister, as well as an architect, a painter, a sculptor. MMK was elected director of the *Comité Consultatif*, a position he held until he died. Emile Mériel and Richard Mosseri were also elected members.²¹⁰ The committee searched for works in Egypt and Europe.

The Guezireh Museum of Modern Art was inaugurated on 8 February 1931, a few months after Hautecoeur's departure from Egypt. The first phase gathered a careful selection of artworks from Italian Primitives, French, English, Flemish and Dutch schools as well as Egyptian. Three rooms in the basement showed Egyptian artists and artists residing in Egypt. George Sabbagh was strongly represented, so was Amy Nimr, Ragheb Ayyad, Ahmed Sabry and Mohamed Sabry. Two sculptures by Auguste Rodin *Le Penseur* and *Grande Main Crispée* were placed on the staircase alongside several landscapes by Thomas Gainsborough. Further afield, galleries were divided by art school: Old French School, Contemporary

²⁰⁸ Hautecoeur worked as *Conservateur adjoint au département des peintures et des dessins du Musée du Louvre* (Associate Curator at the Musée du Louvre in the drawing and painting department). Hautecoeur played a pioneering role towards an artistic renaissance in Egypt. Under his leadership, reforms were implemented, a new school of fine arts was inaugurated, exchange programmes abroad and awards were set up and art teachers from France and Italy joined the movement.

²⁰⁹ Louis Hautecoeur, « Encouragement aux artistes, » (Encouragement of Artists), 3 January 1928, MS 6882, no. 11-12, Fonds Louis Hautecoeur, Bibliothèque de l'Institut de Paris, France. In his project proposal, Hautecoeur maintained that the state should only acquire works that are worthy of figuring in the national museums in order to maintain its standing. For the artists whose works are not yet mature, he proposed an encouragement system to reward artists who demonstrate a real effort but whose works are not of standard still, through scholarships for students in need to study at the SFA and/or abroad or financial compensation.

²¹⁰ In *La Revue du Caire* (1952) referenced above, MMK signed his article, as Corresponding Member of the Académie Française, President of the SAA and director of the *Comité Consultatif des Beaux-Arts*.

French School, Orientalism and Impressionism. With Edgar Degas' *Portrait d'Homme*, the viewer was brought to the present.

The similarities between the personal and museum collections highlight MMK's influential role. For example, the painting *Tigre couché près de son antre* (1863) by Eugène Delacroix appears in the KLC (acquired before 1928), while an engraving of the same work, *Tigre couché dans le désert* (n.130), is in the collection of the Guezireh Museum (acquired in 1930).²¹¹ Another artist whose work appears in both collections is Pierre Puvis de Chavannes: *Christ mort* (1850), his first entry to the *Salon de Paris* of 1850–1851 was acquired by the museum (though later transferred to the Mahmoud Mokhtar Museum in Gizeh), while *Jeunes Filles à chevelure* (undated) appears in the KLC. Likewise, a small version and a larger one of *Le Penseur* (The Thinker) by Rodin appear in the KLC and the museum, respectively. The overlaps between the two collections are countless. Eugène Carrière, Eugène Fromentin, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir are some of the other artists whose works appear in both.

Under the “*Akhbar al-fann*” (Art News) rubric in *Sawt al-fannan*, we learn that MMK donated sixty oil paintings from his collection to the Guezireh Museum in 1950.²¹² MMK and other members of the Diplomatic Club also habitually donated artworks to the museum and the club. Fearing confiscation by the Free Officers, members (particularly foreigners) bequeathed some or entire collections to the club. Some of these transfers can also be traced in the catalogue of *Les Oubliés du Caire*: to give one example, *Oedipe ou le Générale*

²¹¹ « Liste des Gravures, Musée d'Art Moderne, 1930, » MS 6882, no. 308, 3, Fonds Louis Hautecoeur, Bibliothèque de l'Institut de Paris, France. And Catalogue entry : Eugène Delacroix, *Tigre couché près de son antre* (1863), *Les Oubliés du Caire*, 49.

²¹² *Sawt al fannan*, June 1950 as quoted in Dina Ramadan, *The Aesthetics of the Modern, Art, Education and taste in Egypt 1903–1952*, unpublished dissertation, Columbia University, 2013, 143

Bonaparte d'Égypte (1863 or 1868) by Jean-Leon Gérôme was given by MMK in the early 1950s.²¹³

3.1 Egypt at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1937 in Paris

As seen above, the activities of the SAA intersected with the *Comité des Beaux-Arts* repeatedly. This manifested itself once again in 1937, when Egypt was invited to participate in the *Exposition Internationale des arts et techniques appliqués à la vie moderne* (International Exposition of Arts and Applied Technics in Modern Life) in Paris – commonly known as the *Exposition Internationale*. On 22 August 1936, Egypt signed the Anglo-Egyptian treaty in Montreux, which effectively marked its official independence. 1937 marked a turning-point in Egyptian history.²¹⁴ In Paris, it denoted Egypt's first participation in an international exhibition as an independent nation.²¹⁵ On this occasion the *Pavillon d'honneur* was dedicated to Egypt, 'Mother of the Arts and Techniques.'²¹⁶ In his capacity as 'Commissaire General de l'Égypte,' MMK led the events– from the 'laying of the foundation stone' in November 1936, throughout the inaugural events that began on 25 May 1937 and lasted until 25 November 1937. At the time, MMK was also Minister of agriculture. The exhibition catalogue is a large publication of over 90 pages written in French and contains an exhaustive description of the content of the two pavilions dedicated to Egypt: the Grand Pavilion and the Honorary Pavilion. In the first pages, MMK announces:

²¹³ The exact date is unknown, but the catalogue indicates that until 1949, it remained in private hands. *Les Oubliés du Caire*, 106–107.

²¹⁴ In 1937, Kamel el-Telmissany published the *Neo-Orientalist* manifesto and Hencin published his article "Le Bilan du Surrealisme" (A report on Surrealism), which was later diffused on national radio. A year later, Egypt participated in the Venice Biennale for the first time and the group of artists and intellectuals, who would later form the Art and Liberty, published their first manifesto, "Long Live Degenerate Art," in December 1938.

²¹⁵ For more on the history of the *Exposition Internationale* see James D. Herbert, *Paris 1937: Words on Exhibition* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998).

²¹⁶ Catalogue, *Égypte : La participation Égyptienne à l'exposition internationale de Paris*, ed. Robert Vaucher (Paris : Tissot & Tripet), 6.

The guiding principle of the Egyptian General Commission was to offer an image of a young independent Egypt, full of zeal and faith in its destinies, resting on a dual tradition, pharaonic and Arab, and to present this whole in a modern setting, without concerns for archaeology [...] We also wanted that all that was to be shown, even the details of decorations were Egyptian and made in Egypt by Egyptian artisans or artists: murals, metalwork, glasswork, sculptures, paintings, textiles, carpets and furniture.²¹⁷

The *Grand Pavillion* and the *Pavillion d'honneur* presented a synthesis of the intellectual, artistic, industrial, agricultural and commercial life of the country and its civilisation. The Grand Pavillion contained a mix of Ancient Egyptian artefacts as well as objects from modern day Egypt: textiles presented by Société Misr, sculpture and ceramic by contemporary Egyptian artists, a stand by the Royal Agriculture Society showcasing displays of cotton and seeds from Egypt, and works from the School of Applied Arts in Gizeh, such as metalwork, ceramic, glasswork, and glasswork. Samples showcasing Arab techniques of glass, ceramic, wood and copper were also sent by the Musée de l'Art Arab. A number of museums collaborated: Guezireh Museum, Musée de l'Art Arabe, Musée de l'Art Copte as well as the Musée du Louvre, which lent objects from their Egyptian collections. Although a fair of applied art and technology, the pavilion displayed a strong range of modern art. Paintings by Mahmoud Said, Mohamed Nagui, Nahmia Saad, Ragheb Ayad, Labib Tadros and Youssef Kamel as well as sculptures by Mahmoud Mokhtar were shown. For the occasion, Nagui painted a large fresco on the interior of the Grand Pavillion: *Isis pleurant ou La crue du Nil* which depicts the grand myth of Isis crying and praying for Osiris's body while fertilising the lands of Egypt with her tears.

La Ville (1937), Said's renowned painting commissioned for the occasion, was displayed in the *Pavillion d'honneur*. The large panel depicts a street scene, albeit not a typical one, in Alexandria; at its centre stands three women from the popular neighbourhood of *al-Anfushi*.

²¹⁷ Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil, *La participation égyptienne à l'Exposition Universlle de Paris 1937* (Paris: Tissot & Tripet), 5-6.

The women wear sheer veils, draped over their mouths. This trope of (un)/veiling appears throughout Said's oeuvre. Its display in the honorary pavilion denotes the painting's significance. A year later, it was reshowed at the XXI Venice Biennale, on Egypt's first participation. Today, the painting hangs at the entrance of the MoMAC. The process whereby *La Ville* has come to be viewed as *the* quintessentially Egyptian modern painting is explored in the next chapter. *Baigneuse* (c.1925–35) by Said was also exhibited in the *Grand Pavillion*. Depicting a nude woman standing alone by the banks of the Nile, *Baigneuse* (c.1925–35) is another atypical scene.²¹⁸ For our purpose, the display of a nude *fellaha* (peasant) bathing in the Nile marks the genre of the nude as an index of modernity. In a compelling study, Kirsten Scheid explores “why nudity, as a form of novelty and contemporaneity, became an index and instrument of modernizing” and “illuminates the convergent process by which some artists cultivated universal modernity as a tangible concept and urgent injunction.”²¹⁹ She finds that fine art nudes were an important element of nationalist painters' membership in *al-‘asr al-hadith* (the modern era). In other words, the genre of the nude became an agent of modernization. By placing the peasant in a typical Egyptian landscape, Said was appropriating the universal genre of the nude to make a statement about Egypt's modernity. Similarly, Mokhtar's sculpture *La Fiancée du Nil*, on view in the garden of the honorary pavilion epitomises the ethos of modernization. The figure is slim and deprived of voluptuousness, a decision by the artist to stay clear of themes of the odalisque and thus of orientalism.²²⁰ The same rationale behind these aesthetic choices applies to the curatorial ones.

²¹⁸ The display of *Baigneuse* in Paris does not figure in the entry of the catalogue raisonné. According to the catalogue, the painting's first appearance was in Rome in 2004. See “*Baigneuse*” P.86, Catalogue Raisonné, *Mahmoud Said*, ed. Hossam Rashwan and Valerie Hess (Milan: Skira, 2016), 284.

²¹⁹ Kirsten Scheid, “Necessary Nudes: *Hadatha* (novelty) and *Mu‘asira* (contemporaneity) in the Lives of Modern Lebanese,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 42, 2010, 209.

²²⁰ Nadia Radwan, “Ideal Nudes and Iconic Bodies in the Works of the Egyptian Pioneers”, ed. Octavian Esanu (ed.), *Art, Awakening, and Modernity in the Middle East: The Arab Nude* (Routledge, 2018).pdf



GRAND PAVILLON. Un coin de la galerie supérieure réservée
aux Sociétés Mises

Figure 16: Installation shot, Grand Pavillon featuring Mahmoud Said's Baigneuse (c.1925–35) seen on the top-left.



Figure 17: Mahmoud Said, Baigneuse (c. 1925–35), oil on canvas.

There are many layers to unpack in the display. The decision to include objects from Ancient Egypt in parallel with modern day objects embodies the spirit of the *Nahda* (renaissance) paradigm. What is striking is the disregard of divisions between high/low and fine/folk art – a common criticism levelled against the ‘art establishment’ in the post-1952 era. Contrary to what some scholars maintain, the borders between fine arts, applied arts and crafts were unguarded. Thus, blurred arguments about the SAA’s elitism and penchant for imported ideals of fine arts at the expense of folk art and crafts appear reductive. There are parallels between the pavilion’s ethos and ‘official taste’ on the one hand and the spirit of young Egyptian artists calling for a revival of crafts, on the other. The *Neo-Orientalist* manifesto (1937) penned by el-Telmissany comes to mind: “We believe that our strictly oriental ideas and personal sensations are disposed to generate real art in order for us to feel an authentic oriental emotion, free from occidental conceptions. It is this sentiment that drives, in the domain of art, the potter artisan from Said, the braider of Charkieh, the ivory-cutter of Assiout, sculpture of copper in Khan Khalili.”²²¹

3.2 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the period of the 1920s and early 1930s through the lens of one protagonist. MMK believed in the role of art in society and played a crucial part in spearheading an artistic awakening in Egypt. He demonstrated that artists were responsible for ushering in Egypt’s renaissance, by encouraging them to draw from Ancient Egypt and present this heritage to the people.²²² For three decades, he drove the activities of the SAA

²²¹ Kamel el-Telmissany, “Manifesto of the Neo-Orientalists,” Cairo, 1 January 1937.

²²² Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil, « *al-Funun al-Gamila fi Misr*,” (The Fine Arts in Egypt), *el-Emara* (The Building), Issue 7–8, 1939, 329.

and the *Comité* by organising an annual salon and international art exhibitions. By their very nature, these exhibitions reckoned with global artistic discourse and pushed local horizons of artistic experiment. They drew increasing interest from the public, who came to view their attendance as key to modern subjectivity.

MMK's acquisition of such works speaks to his commitment to a humanist vision, based on the belief in the importance of experiencing art. He strove to make the experience of art accessible to the broadest public possible, and to form a national collection. The above has taken cues from recent developments in the field which are re-evaluating 'the pioneers' as an embodiment of transcultural exchange, to investigate private or state led art patronage.²²³ To conclude, I argue that SAA and the *Comité* lay the building blocks of artistic experimentation in Egypt. They fostered an artistic drive, grounded in a transcultural exchange of ideas, artworks, artists, art critics and patrons. Their activities facilitated the circulation of artworks and artists from and to Egypt, and, as a result, generated an artistic ecosystem that was relevant and present both nationally and internationally.

²²³ Emily Burns and Alice Rudy Price eds., 'Mapping Impressionism in Transnational Contexts' (just published by Routledge); Alexis Clarke and Frances Fowle eds, 'Globalizing Impressionism: Reception, Translation and Transnationalism' (Yale, 2020); and Christel Force ed., 'Pioneers of the Global Art Market: Paris-Based Dealer Networks, 1850-1950' (Bloomsbury, 2020).

3. *CHAPTER TWO : VALENTINE DE SAINT-POINT :
'LA MUSE POURPRE' MOVES TO EGYPT*

3.4 VSP and Futurism

Very close to Nelson Morpurgo's futurist headquarters in downtown Cairo, Valentine de Saint Point (VSP), the first futurist woman to be accepted into the executive board by Marinetti in Paris in 1910, had, in 1924, moved into the same neighbourhood. When *La Semaine Égyptienne* published Morpurgo's translation of a collection of poems entitled *Pour mes femmes* in 1932, VSP published a favourable review in the same newspaper.²²⁴ Additionally, her poem "*Dans le Temps*," appeared in the same issue as Jean Moscatelli's portrait of Nelson Morpurgo.²²⁵ But when F.T Marinetti returned to Egypt for the first time in 1929, she refused to see him. On his second return, almost a decade later, VSP made an appearance. A photograph from the banquet hosted in honour of Marinetti shows VSP sitting alongside Nelson Morpurgo, Nedda Grassi and others.²²⁶ Unlike how many scholars have depicted her life in Egypt, VSP was an active player in the cultural and artistic milieu.

²²⁴ I have not been able to locate a copy of this issue of *La Semaine Égyptienne*, so I rely on Maria Elena Paniconi's mention of it.

²²⁵ *La Semaine Égyptienne*, n.41, October 31, 1932, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library. <https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3578384>

²²⁶ Dinner banquet at Carlo Grassi's Villa Nedda in Zamalek in honour of Marinetti as featured in *La Semaine Égyptienne*, March 26, 1938 p.21.



Figure 18 Banquet in honour of F.T Marinetti hosted by Carlo Grassi at Villa Nedda, Zamalek, Cairo, 1938.

VSP, né Anna Jeanne Desglans de Cessiat Pelletier, was born in Lyon in 1875.²²⁷ Poet, writer, dancer, painter, art critic, playwright and journalist, Saint-Point's life is a fascinating series of transformations that begins in France and ends in Egypt, with passages through Italy, America, Morocco, Turkey and the Levant. Name change went hand-in-hand with the many transformations that punctuated VSP's life. She changed her name to Valentine de Saint-Point when she first moved to Paris at the age of 24 to marry Charles Dumont.²²⁸ By 1924, when she moved to Cairo she changed her name again to Rawhiya Nour el-Deen (*Zelatrice de la lumière divine*). Details about this name change are unknown, whether she converted to Islam in Morocco or upon her arrival to Egypt in 1924 is also unclear.

What motivated VSP to abandon her new dance form that she called *métachorie* activities and convert to Islam? How did she make sense of this new identity in her writing? And how did she position herself vis-à-vis the intellectual avant-garde scene in Cairo? To borrow François Hartog's expression, how do we make sense of these multiple 'regimes of

²²⁷ VSP is often referred to as the great-grand-niece of the French poet Dalfonse de Lamartine. The connection to Lamartine is not evident. VSP's maternal grandfather was Emmanuel de Cessiat, the brother of Valentine de Cessiat; both the children of Marie Cécile de Lamartine, Dalfonse's sister. Valentine de Cessiat was Lamartine's niece, who appears in his writing and by the end of his life, she took care of him and dealt with his large financial debt. She is the addressee of over 200 letters written between (1851–1854), published in *Correspondance Dalfonse de Lamartine: Lettres à Valentine de Cessiat (1841–1854)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2014). Following VSP's admiration for Lamartine, we can assume that she renamed herself after Valentine de Cessiat.

²²⁸ Dumont was a professor of philosophy and shortly after their union, he became a popular political figure in Paris and rose to a ministerial position, in the finance of public works. Their marriage ended in 1904.

historicity' in VSP's life?²²⁹ My aim is not to find an overall motivation or telos. In fact, VSP herself expressed this worry in 1924 in *Le Secret des inquiétudes* (The Secret of Worries). She wrote: "I am only worried that I will never be able to present my oeuvre in its entirety. It will always be seen as mutilated; there will always be parts for its full expression."²³⁰ Elodie Gaden likens her trajectory to a 'subtle chameleon.'²³¹

In this chapter, I chart the three decades of VSP's activities in Cairo, through her writings in French in several local publications, such as *La Femme Nouvelle*, *La Revue du Caire*, *La Semaine Égyptienne* (*SE*) and her own magazine, *Le Phoenix*, which ran for two years, before it was shut down by the Egyptian authorities. By exploring the works and activities of VSP in Cairo, one important thread appears: the juxtaposition of the avant-garde on one side and nationalist militancy and Islamic devotion on the other. How did VSP reconcile these two ideals during her life in Egypt and how did she manage to keep a foot in these two worlds -- among the nationalist elite, which included figures like Mahmoud Khalil and Saad Zaghlul, as well as the avant-garde intellectual scene of Cairo, which included intellectuals and writers of *SE*.

This chapter unveils this hitherto unknown period of VSP's life in Egypt that stretches over three decades from 1924–1953. More often than not, this 'second life' as Rawhiya Nour el-Deen is mentioned in a footnote and limited to biographical information about her activities. The publication of *Le Phoenix: Revue de la Renaissance Orientale*, between 1925–1927, the cultural review she founded, which sought to bring together Christian and Islamic civilizations and contribute to the renaissance of the Orient, is often mentioned in passing. Eight issues were published before it was banned by the authorities, with pressure from the French government.²³² Eventually, VSP's activities which aimed to "establish understanding, agreement, or in one word, unity, between the Orient and the Occident" put her in trouble with the French diplomatic authorities. The ban of *Le Phoenix* in 1927 is one example of the repercussions that she faced. The portrayal of her life as a recluse in Egypt are arguably a by-product of the trouble she faced with the French diplomatic authorities. As Daniel Lançon

²²⁹ François Hartog, *Régime d'Historicité: Présentisme et expérience du temps* (Paris : Seuil, 2012).

²³⁰ Valentine de Saint-Point, *Le Secret des inquiétudes* (Paris : A. Messein, 1924).

²³¹ Elodie Gaden, "Valentine de Saint-Point (1875-1953)", *Nuit blanche, magazine littéraire* (127), 14.

²³² Copies of *Le Phoenix* and other writings during her time in Egypt are difficult to find in archives in Egypt and to a lesser extent in France. A complete copy of *Le Phoenix* is available online on Gallica, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France's online platform: <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb32839248c>.

points out, following the threats “she pursued her self-exploration in a private manner, which we must respect.”²³³ VSP’s desire for a cultural rapprochement between the Orient and the Occident put her in conflict with the French and British authorities. She was closely watched by the secret service and repeatedly accused of anti-French propaganda and espionage. In 1927, when she was vehemently criticising the French occupation in Syria, she was threatened with enforced repatriation to France if she pursued her political activities.

Although her time in Cairo spans three decades, not enough has been written about this period of her life. Most studies focus on the first part of her life in Paris, at the heart of the city’s avant-garde scene.²³⁴ Studies discussing her time in Cairo treat it as distinct from her earlier life. This narrative sees the young VSP -- who championed the *métachorie* dance in Paris, Milan and New York in the early twentieth century -- becoming unrecognisable. *Métachorie* is the neologism that she used to describe her dance practice. This new type of dance sought to surpass existing ideas and forms of choreography. From *meta-choros*, it implies the inclusion of self-reflection on a meta-level of theory.²³⁵ Günter Berghaus writes, “[i]n 1924 Valentine de Saint-Point moved to Cairo, where after a short but intensive political engagement for an ‘oriental renaissance,’ she withdrew from public life and lived in misery and isolation until her death in 1953.”²³⁶ Typically, VSP’s time in Egypt, which spanned three decades (1924–1953) focuses on her solitary existence in her downtown flat in Cairo on Emad El Din Street. A *topos* of metamorphosis permeates the existing literature: the Parisian ‘*muse pourpre*’ (the crimson muse) transforms into a recluse, upon settling in Cairo. Within the confines of her apartment, she delves into studies of mysticism and Sufism alongside her

²³³ Daniel Lançon, “*Les Orients de Valentine de Saint-Point*” (The Orients of VSP), ed. Elodie Gaden, and Paul André Claudel, *Valentine de Saint-Point : Des feux de l’avant-garde à l’appel de l’Orient* (Presses universitaires de Rennes, collection “Interférences”, 2019) , 250.

²³⁴ Some of the most important studies on VSP include, Adrien Sina, *Feminine Futures – Valentine de Saint-Point – Performance, Dance, War, Politics and Eroticism* (Dijon: Les Presses du Reels, 2011). Maria Sideri, “The Meta-dance of Valentine de Saint-Point: The Occult and the Erotics of Vibration”, *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*, 6 (2016): 437–448; Günter Bergaus, “Valentine de Saint-Point: Performance, War, Politics and Eroticism”, *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*, 6 (2013): 3–5.

As part of the colloquium on VSP organised in Nantes in 2017, an online bibliography on VSP was put together by P-A Claudel and Elodie Gaden: <http://www.colloque-saint-point.univ-nantes.fr/ressources-1413484.kjsp>.

²³⁵ Brandstetter, *Poetics of Dance : Body, Image and Space in the Historical Avant-gardes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 299. Henri Le Bret, *Essai sur Valentine de Saint-Point. Notes sur une évolution. Gestes métachoriques de V. de Saint-Point* (Nice : Editions de l’Aloes, 1923), 32. Le Bret’s *Essai* is a fascinating small volume written as early as 1923. It is the first ever work on VSP published during her lifetime. The book surveys her projects, ideologies and writings; he is the earliest commentator on VSP’s work.

²³⁶ Günter Berghaus and Valentine de Saint-Point, “Dance and the Futurist Woman: The Work of Valentine de Saint-Point (1875–1953)”, *The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, vol.11, n.2, 31. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1290682>.

companion René Guénon.²³⁷ This description is typical of the way VSP's time in Egypt is presented. In this chapter, I turn to VSP's life in Cairo to investigate her intellectual trajectory. Different from the rest of my protagonists, VSP made the opposite journey. She moved from Paris to Cairo. From her new homeland, she reached back to France and the Occident at large to defend the Orient, and she placed herself as a 'cultural mediator.' In conversation with an Egyptian intelligentsia, predominantly Francophile and francophone, VSP regularly contributed to the French press, writing reviews and poetry. She also published three books – *La Vérité sur la Syrie* (1928), *La Caravane des Chimères* (1934) and *L'Égypte Florissante* (1940).



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 19 Valentine de Saint-Point in her studio Rue Tourville, Paris.

The scholarship that investigates VSP's time in Egypt centres around these moments of confrontation with the French and Egyptian authorities. This may be because of the available material or lack thereof, particularly around her time in Egypt. But an exploration of VSP's activities in Cairo offers an alternative picture. While her fierce rhetoric certainly subsided following the threats, VSP continued to voice her opinions in writing, with the publication of *La Vérité sur la Syrie* in 1929. It was possibly following the death of René Guénon in 1951,

²³⁷ For more on Guénon, see Xavier Accart, *L'ermite de Duqqi, René Guénon en marge des milieux francophones égyptiens* (Milan: Archè Edizione, 2015) and from the same author "René Guénon : vu par les milieux littéraires francophones égyptiens", *Le Souverain caché*, *Politica Hermetica* n.14, 2000 (178–198).

that she began to renounce her social and intellectual activities. Guenon had been her companion throughout her time in Egypt.

In this chapter, I examine VSP's activities in Cairo by putting the latter in conversation with her life in Paris, at the heart of the avant-garde scene. The basis of VSP's battle against European imperialism during her time in Egypt can be traced to her earlier avant-garde activities in Paris. I explore VSP's two futurist manifestos (penned in Paris in 1912 and 1913), followed by her *métachorie* dance, in order to make sense of her novel position at the intersection of nationalism, Sufism and the avant-garde in Cairo.



Figure 20 Portrait of Valentine de Saint Point.

3.5 Reviewing the Literature

Recently we have witnessed a resurgence in literature about VSP. In May 2017, Elodie Gaden and Paul-André Claudel organised the first colloquium entirely devoted to her in

Nantes, France. “*Valentine de Saint-Point à la Croisée des Avant-Gardes*” (VSP at the crossroads of the avant-garde) sought to bridge the divide between studies on VSP in France, Italy, and Egypt. During a two-day event, panellists discussed VSP’s aesthetic formations and literary beginnings, feminist engagement in France and her *métachorie* dance activities. More often than not, VSP is relegated to a minor position in the Parisian avant-garde and does not consistently appear in the anthologies. The symposium focused on VSP’s overall trajectory from her early beginning in Paris in the 1910s until her death in Cairo in 1953. The organisers expressed the need to move away from Paris as the locus of VSP’s activities. Instead, they offered a panoramic reading of her itinerary, which encompasses her activities within the Futurist movement, her feminine action, artistic experimentation in dance and poetry, political engagement, as well as her spiritual experimentation with Islam. One paper only focussed on VSP’s time in Egypt, “*L’Action politique de Valentine de Saint-Point en Égypte et sa confrontation avec la diplomatie française*” (VSP’s Political Activism in Egypt and her Confrontation with the Egyptian Authorities). In this paper, Frédérique Poissonier investigated VSP’s mission to stimulate an ‘Oriental renaissance.’ Poissonier reads the letters VSP wrote to her editor Jacques Reboul in parallel with administrative reports from the diplomatic archives at the Quai d’Orsay in Paris. The letters shed light on the repercussions that the mission had on her life and the trouble it engendered in the complex geo-political climate.

The three most important writings on VSP are Fawzia Zouari’s *Valentine de Saint-Point un itinéraire de l’Occident à l’Orient: 1875–1953* (VSP : A Journey from East to West, 1875–1953); Elodie Gaden’s *Écris littéraires de femmes en Égypte francophone: ‘La femme nouvelle de 1898 à 1961, Jihane d’Ivray, Valentine de Saint-Point, Out-el-Koloub, Doria Shafik,’* (Literary Writings by Francophone Women in Egypt: *La Femme Nouvelle* from 1898–1961, Jihane d’Ivray, VSP, Out el-Koloub and Doria Shafik) and Daniel Lançon’s “Valentine de Saint-Point, Égerie de l’Orient Arabe et Musulman,” (VSP: Muse of the Arab and Islamic East).²³⁸

Most of the primary material is in French. Much of the secondary material on VSP is in French too (and to a lesser extent in Italian) within the field of futurist studies. As a French

²³⁸ Lançon has written extensively on francophone literature in Egypt and, notably, supervised Elodie Gaden’s dissertation on women’s writing in Egypt.

national, writing in French, VSP is anchored in French scholarship and there is still a certain divide between the French and English scholarship.



Figure 21 Valentine de Saint-Point in her studio Rue de Tourville, Paris (1914), Agence Meurisse.

Fawzia Zouari was the first scholar to re-discover VSP. In her dissertation, written in the comparative literature department at the Sorbonne, Zouari's research focused on VSP's itinerary from West to East in the early 1920s, starting in Morocco and ending in Egypt. Alongside the dissertation, the author published a fictionalised biography of VSP entitled *La Caravane des Chimères: Poèmes* (1934). In fact, *La Caravane des Chimères* was the title of a collection of poems by VSP, published by SE in Cairo in 1934 and dedicated to Lamartine.²³⁹ The collection was displayed in two exhibitions: its first appearance was in the "Literature Poésie" section at the *Exposition du Livre Français en Égypte* that took place in May 1946, organised by the Société des Amis de l'Art; the second time, in Paris during the France-Égypte exhibition, also organised by the SAA in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ The collection of poems was published by *La Semaine Égyptienne* in 1934. Fawzia Zouari, *La Caravane des Chimères* (Paris : Olivier Orban, 1990).

²⁴⁰ Catalogue of the *Exposition du Livre Français en Égypte*, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Mai 1946 (Cairo: Institut Français, 1946), 117 and Catalogue of the *Exposition France-Égypte*, Pavillon Marsan, Musée des arts décoratifs.

“En débattant du Futurisme” (Debating Futurism), based on the dissertation, appeared in *Entre Nil et Sable* (2001) and is one of the earliest articles to place VSP firmly within the Egyptian context. It discusses VSP’s arrival in Cairo and her position vis-à-vis the local chapter of Futurism.²⁴¹

I follow in these footsteps and continue to explore VSP’s activities in Egypt and the way she combined religious mysticism and anti-colonialism as a different take on modernism.

3.6 An Avant-garde Saint-Pointiste

The great–great niece of French Romantic poet and statesman Alphonse Lamartine (1790–1869) was an active member of the early twentieth century Parisian avant-garde scene. Following in Lamartine’s footsteps, she began her life as a poet and a painter in Paris. Her key works published in France included *Poème de la Mer et du Soleil* (1905), *Poèmes d’Orgueil* (1908), *La Guerre*, *Poèmes-drames idéistes des spectacles de Métachorie* and *La Soif et les mirages*.

Shortly after her divorce from Charles Dumon in 1904, she began hosting a literary salon in her studio in rue de Tourville. These soirées were a locus of artistic activity and a meeting place for the literary Parisian circle. Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, Guillaume Apollinaire, Jean Cocteau and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti are some of those who attended. It was perhaps presence of Auguste Rodin (1840–1917), the ‘great master of sculpture’ that lent the salon its prominence. Early on in her life, she posed for Rodin and Alphonse Mucha (1860–1939), and during the war, she worked as an assistant in Rodin’s studio. He called her the “goddess of the flesh that inspired my marble.”²⁴²

Valentine’s vision, her desire to bring the civilisations of East and West closer together had begun to form in the early 1900s. The beauty of the Mediterranean which she had visited and discovered through Lamartine’s poetry, grabbed her. The latter had appeared a year earlier in

²⁴¹ Fawzia Zouari, “ En débattant du Futurisme” (Debating Futurism), ed. Marc Kober, Irène Fenglio and Daniel Lançon, *Entre Nil et Sable : Écrivains d’Égypte d’expression françaises (1920–196)* (Paris: Centre National de Documentation pédagogique, 1999) 79–84.

²⁴² “ *La déesse de chair pour mon inspiration de marbre* ” As quoted in Abel Verdier, “ Une étrange arrière - petite-nièce de Lamartine : Valentine de Saint-Point (1875-1953) ”, 538, <https://doi.org/10.3406/bude.1972.3498>.

La Nouvelle Revue (1879–1940), a renowned French literary magazine that ran for over sixty years and published the works of poet Gustav Kahn and poet and playwright Jacques Normand among others. VSP's poem "Cyrnos" was a eulogy to the sun, sky, vegetation and perfume of Corsica.²⁴³ As a '*Fleur de la Méditerranée*,' (flower of the Mediterranean,) she envisioned Cyrnos in Corsica as a spiritual and artistic centre "where two civilisations, East and West, who are today enemies or indifferent to one another," would come together and face these uncomfortable truths."²⁴⁴

Writing in 1923, Henri Le Bret was already reporting on VSP's dream of building a "*Temple de l'Esprit*" (Spirit of the Soul) at the centre of this island. The influence of her great-uncle Lamartine coupled with her disillusionment with the West can be seen as two factors which at this moment coalesced to propel her turn Eastward and interest in occultism, spirituality and Sufism. In 1905, she published another article in *La Nouvelle Revue*, entitled "Lamartine Inconnu," where she aligns her vision of the world with Lamartine's.²⁴⁵

3.7 On Valentine and Futurism

Scholars of Futurism have studied VSP as a doyenne of a feminist Futurism, one that celebrated virility, violence and strength. She is placed firmly within Futurist studies and seen as a close ally of Marinetti in early twentieth century Paris. She was also the first woman to be admitted into the Futurist group. From a "Direzione del Movimento Futurista" (directorate of the Futurist Movement) which VSP included on the back page of the Italian edition of her *Futurist manifesto of Lust*, her name appears as 'La Poetessa' under the rubric '*Azione Femine*' (Feminine Action). Among the other rubrics of '*Poesia*,' '*Pittura*,' '*Musica*' and '*Scultura*' and the names of the members, she is the only woman in the group. A key moment in this history is her reading of the "*Manifeste de la Femme Futuriste*" (Manifesto of the Futurist Woman) at the Galerie Giroux in Brussels on 3 June 1912. Her attack on Futurism and its "scorn for women" impressed the leader of the movement, who was in attendance. Marinetti offered to publish the manifesto. She penned her second "*Manifeste Futuriste de la Luxure*" (Futurist Manifesto of lust) in 1913. The two were translated into twenty-three

²⁴³ Valentine de Saint-Point, "Cyrnos" *La Nouvelle Revue*, Paris. 26th year, Vol. 31, 1904, 502.

²⁴⁴ As quoted in Henri Le Bret, *Essai sur Valentine de Saint-Point. Notes sur une évolution: Gestes métachoriques de V. de Saint-Point* (Nice : Editions de l'Aloes, 1923), 38.

²⁴⁵ Valentine de Saint-Point, "Lamartine Inconnu, Lettres inédites", *La Nouvelle Revue*, Paris, 1 January 1905, 3.

languages. The manifestos rebelled against the literature that depicted women in a weak, sentimental and submissive fashion, and instead championed virility, strength and violence. Although her participation and association with Futurism was short-lived – she had cut ties with the futurist movement by the end of 1913 – her reading of the manifestos became an important feature of the futurist movement and its traveling performance, which was staged in art galleries, cabarets, and clubs throughout Europe, including London, Berlin and Rotterdam.²⁴⁶

On 11 January 1913, VSP's second manifesto, "The Manifesto of Lust", was published as a leaflet and distributed on the streets of Paris. The manifesto of the futurist woman glorifies virility, empowerment, and militancy. It agrees with Marinetti's founding manifesto on the need for war, violence and destruction but condemns its deep scorn for women. VSP's woman is a *Surfemme* who rejects the bourgeois social ideals of motherhood and family. VSP is quick to dismiss the subservient gendered roles of bourgeois ideals, particularly women's roles in childcare and the domestic sphere. She blames feminism for women's subjugation and argues that the futurist movement in fact compromised women's position and restricts their success. Its focus on women's tenderness, charm, spiritual and intimate emotions are to blame. This sentimentalism is to blame for women's weakness, because "it knots up the strength and makes it static." She adds:

But no feminism. Feminism is a political error. Feminism is a cerebral error of woman, an error that her instinct will recognize. [...] We must not give women any of the rights claimed by futurists. To grant them to her would bring about none of the disorders the Futurists desire but on the contrary an excess of duties.²⁴⁷

VSP had distanced herself from the futurist movement as early as 1914. In fact, her participation in the futurist movement was short-lived. Shortly after the publication of the second manifesto (1913), VSP denounced her affiliation with the movement. On 7 January 1914, she wrote a long letter to the editors of the *Journal des Débats* urging them to retract erroneous information which described her as a futurist:

²⁴⁶ Lucia Re, "Valentine de Saint-Point, Ricciotto Canudo, F.T. Marinetti : Eroticism, Violence and Feminism from Pre-war Paris to Colonial Cairo", *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, Vol. 24, n.2 (2003), 52

<https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/qua/article/view/9220/6183>

²⁴⁷ Valentine de Saint-Point, "Manifesto of the Futurist Woman (Response to F.T. Marinetti)", Paris: 1912.

I am not a Futurist, nor will I ever be one: I never belonged to any school. My literature, dramaturgy and artistic oeuvre has proven it abundantly. Two years ago, I only gave permission to Mr. Marinetti to publish some of my personal views, which I declared and defended during two lectures. If Futurism welcomed these moral opinions, it does not follow that I adopted its stances on art. I did not deny my past nor engage my future and I remained independent in all my artistic endeavours [...] I rely on your courtesy to publish this necessary correction in its entirety, without having to insist in any other way.²⁴⁸

As Adrien Sina points out, instead of reading VSP's work through a futurist lens, it is worth considering *action féminine* as her own brainchild and not merely a branch of the Futurist movement.²⁴⁹

3.8 On Dancing: *Métachorie*

Ricciotto Canudo and VSP worked closely together. Their collaboration inspired her to develop a new form of dance which she called *métachorie*. This art form went beyond dance and aspired to synthesise all art forms. In her conference on *métachorie*, she explained that “it was not a dance as such, since dance was a just another art form, a sensual rhythm.” She continues, “*métachorie* is a drama of emotion or an evolution of ideas which are always interpreted in their most general sense and not in their material detail which an ordinary dancer would suggest.”²⁵⁰

Later this same year, she presented these new movements to the public; first on the stage of the Comédie des Champs-Élysées and later at the Metropolitan Opera House (then located on Broadway between 39th and 30th Streets) in New York on April 3, 1917.²⁵¹ The performances were advertised in the papers such as *The Herald* and the *New York Post*. The

²⁴⁸ “ Je ne suis pas futuriste et je ne l’ai jamais été : je n’ai jamais fait partie d’aucune école. Mon œuvre littéraire, dramatique et picturale le prouve surabondamment. J’ai seulement permis, il y a deux ans, à M. Marinetti, la publication de quelques-unes de mes opinions personnelles que j’ai affirmées et défendues dans deux conférences. Si le *Futurisme* accueillait ces opinions morales, il ne s’ensuit pas que j’adoptais les siennes sur l’art. Je ne reniai pas mon passé et je n’engageai pas mon avenir et je restai, en tout art, absolument indépendante [...] Je compte sur votre courtoisie pour publier intégralement cette rectification nécessaire, étant certaine de n’avoir pas à insister autrement ” in “Échos”, *Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires*, 7 January 1914, 3. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k485157s/f3.item>

²⁴⁹ Adrien Sina, *Feminine Futures, Valentine de Saint-Point: Performance, Dance, War, Politics and Eroticism* (Paris : Les Presses du Réel, 2011), 17.

²⁵⁰ VSP, “ Conférence sur la Métachorie ”, (Montjoie, Janvier 1914).

²⁵¹ Henri Le Bret, *Essai sur Valentine de Saint-Point. Notes sur une évolution. Gestes métachoriques de V. de Saint-Point* (Nice : Editions de l’Aloes, 1923), 32. Le Bret’s *Essai* is a fascinating study on VSP and her work, which charts the different projects and writings of the author. It is the sole complete work written during the artist’s lifetime.

New York printed programme survives: “*Festival de la Métachories*” began promptly at 8.30pm. It was her first trip to New York and, like other artists and intellectuals in Europe, she travelled to escape the violence of the war. From Satin’s survey of these reviews, we learn that the audience in attendance were either invited or had secured tickets directly from the dancer. The event was large in scope and the audience had extended into the theatre boxes, balconies and gallery.²⁵² In surviving photographs, VSP appears wearing extravagant costumes, reminiscent of Oriental belly-dancers’ costumes).²⁵³ She wore a veil that covered her head. Her performance was accompanied by a poetry reading, this time in translation, recited by Wallace Cox. The choice of poems was typical: section IV was plainly entitled “*Poèmes de Guerre*.” In futurist fashion, themes of battles, victory, martyrdom, blood and ancestry were celebrated. But as though forecasting her move to Egypt, the three poems she read investigated mystery, spiritualism and nature.

The dance moves were seemingly not impressive, the vocabulary was very simple. Based on reviews from the time, Brandstetter tells us that the “dancing mainly comprised various movements of the arms, twists of the torso small steps forward and backward and frequent forward bends.” The kinetic vocabulary resembled gymnastics. She linked her dance to strictly geometric and often symbolic shapes such as the triangle or rectangle. Her dances were highly ritualistic and of synaesthetic quality. Patrizia Veroli observes a following of Kandinsky’s idea of form as a vehicle of esoteric meaning.²⁵⁴ The author likened them to the Egyptian dances of Sent M’ahesa. Le Bret writes: “*Métachorie* is not really a dance, if one adheres to the common notion that dance is a plastic art form, a rhythmical movement of flesh” and adds that “she imparts all the muscle and nothing with the flesh.”²⁵⁵ Apart from a traditional dance vocabulary, VSP added three novel elements to her *métachorie* dance: firstly, an olfactory element (fragrance was sprayed into the room as the audience walked in), secondly, images were projected on stage, and lastly, at the start of the show, a text on the notion of *métachorie* was read aloud by actor Georges Saillard. During the show, another actor, Edouard de Max, stood behind VSP and recited three poems by the artist: *Poèmes d’Amour*, *Poèmes d’atmosphère* and *Poèmes de guerre*. Taken together, these three poems

²⁵² “Valentine de Saint-Point,” 4 April 1917, *New York Post*, as quoted in Leslie Satin, 6.

²⁵³ Report in the *New York Herald*, 4 February 1917, as quoted in Leslie Satin, “Valentine de Saint-Point,” *Dance Research Journal*, Vol 22, No. 1 (Spring 1990), 2.

²⁵⁴ Patrizia Veroli, “The Futurist Aesthetics and Dance,” ed. Günter Berghaus, *International Futurism in Arts and Literature* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 423.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 309.

brought VSP closer to the Futurists, in the way they evoked sun, war and masculinity. In *métachorie*, VSP effaced all references to sensuality in order to liberate the dance from any connotations with female corporeality. As Brandstetter affirms, it was not a question of prudishness.²⁵⁶ Instead of a focus on the flesh, her dance moves evolve entirely on the “affirmation of muscle.” The use of the veil is also unusual: while wearing a veil to cover the head, the body is exposed. VSP upsets the often-used demarcation of veiling and unveiling of the time – such as in the dance of the Bayadère, odalisques and Salomé. For VSP, *métachorie* is an abstract art that does not rely on the soul but resides totally in the mind: *un art tout cérébral*.²⁵⁷ In her essay on the dance, she stressed the cerebral element that is born from spiritual experiences, as a dance that exists before and beyond the realisation of the performance itself. She objected to Isadora Duncan’s emotional subjectivity, arguing that subjugating dance to music, mimicry or instinct contributes to its downfall and it is relegated it to a secondary art form.

Taken together the *Manifeste de la femme futuriste* (1912) and *métachorie* encapsulated VSP’s celebration of women’s heroism and the *surfemme*. It was a novel aesthetic form and a new position for women in art.²⁵⁸

Disillusioned by the atrocities of the Great War, VSP left Paris in 1916 and began a tour of Europe. She first travelled to Spain where she joined a notable colony of exiled artists, writers and scientists in Barcelona who had fled Paris and other cities for the same reasons. Together with Ricciotto and Jeanne Canudo, Albert Postel du Mas and Daniel Chennevière (pseudonym for Dane Rudhyar), Valentine spent the summer in “an avant-garde swarm in Barcelona” which congregated around Galeries Dalmau. Between the end of 1915 and the summer of 1916, a flood of artists descended on Barcelona. Arthur Cravan and his lover Renée Bouchet, who arrived with Cravan’s brother Otho Lloyd and his wife Olga Sacharoff; Kees van Dongen, Marie Laurencin and her husband Otto von Waëtjen; Sonia Delaunay,

²⁵⁶ Gabriele Brandstetter, *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image and Space in the Historical Avant-gardes* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 302.

²⁵⁷ In 1914, VSP’s text on Metachorie appeared in the January edition of *Montjoie!* She would perform the piece for the last time three years later at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 309.

Robert Delaunay, and Francis Picabia and his wife Gabrielle Buffet were among some of these artists.²⁵⁹

Shortly after the death of her lover Ricciotto Canudo from malaria, VSP decided to leave Paris in 1923 and set off on a spiritual path. She was accompanied by her former lover's wife, Jeanne Canudo and Vivian Postel du Mas (né Albert), an *homme de lettres* and founder of the Synarchic Empire Movement, whom she had met at the Theosophical Society in Paris.²⁶⁰ Before Egypt, she briefly stopped in Morocco, where she was initiated to Sufism and converted to Islam.²⁶¹ She adopted the Muslim name Rawhiya Nour el-Deen (*zelatrice de la lumière divine*, partisan of divine light). In effect, she continued to use her original name, as seen – for example – at the end of the poem “*Dans le Temps*” (In Time) published in *SE* (1932). In her writings, she portrays herself as a theologian rather than a convert. The fact that she is buried in the cemetery of Imam al-Leissi in Old Cairo is the only evidence of her conversion to Islam.²⁶²

3.9 ‘*La muse pourpre*’: A Mediator between Avant-garde, Nationalism and Islam

She arrived in Egypt in December 1924 at the age of 49. Her aesthetic ideologies and principles had moved away from Futurist theoreticians. She quickly became a spiritual militant and became involved in local political activism, and adopted the local struggles in an entirely new way. VSP moved into Mattariah, at 6 Rue Balsam, where she often hosted dinners and parties, and her house was open to the public every Tuesday and Friday between 3–6pm. With ex-minister, Ahmed Chafik Pacha, Jeanne Canudo and Vivian Postel du Mas, she established the *Cercle Idéiste* in December 1925, which promoted children's literacy and

²⁵⁹ Jordi Falgàs, “Gleizes and Picabia at Galeries Dalmau: Too green for our teeth” in ed. William H. Robinson, Jordi Falgàs and Carmen Belen, *Barcelona and modernity: Picasso, Gaudi, Miró and Dalí* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2006), 319.

²⁶⁰ It was Valentine who renamed him Vivian. By 1930, Du Mas and Canudo were back in Paris and heading the Synarchic Empire Movement (MSE), whose aim was to abolish parliamentarianism and replace it with synarchy. David Livingstone, *Transhumanism: The History of Dangerous Idea* (Create Space: 2015), 126.

²⁶¹ An article in *Le Phoenix*, indicates that the *Ligue Orientale (al-rabita al-sharqqeya)*, one of the associations VSP joined upon her arrival to Cairo, included Moroccan intellectuals that had taken refuge in Egypt starting 1923. Hypothetically, there may be a link between the migration of Moroccan intellectuals and VSP's decision to move to Egypt. But in the newly published monograph on VSP, there is no mention of the trip to Morocco. Ed. Paul André Claudel and Elodie Gaden *Valentine de Saint-Point : Des feux de l'avant-garde à l'appel de l'Orient* (Rennes, Press Universitaires de Rennes, 2019).

²⁶² In the recently published study on VSP, Alessandra Marchi's contribution sheds light on her interest in Islam, see “La conversion à la spiritualité musulmane de Leda Rafanelli et Valentine de Saint-Point,” *Valentine de Saint-Point : Des feux de l'avant-garde à l'appel de l'Orient*, 251–268.

a pedagogy based on theosophic principles. Lectures on the failures of Western civilisation and the faults of colonialism were presented. The mission bore a resemblance to the previous concepts of her *métachorie* dance or “dance idéiste” which, as discussed, sought to critique the failures of Western civilisation. Canudo and Du Mas were accused of disloyalty by the French legation, were expelled from Cairo and returned to Egypt.²⁶³ Lucia Re observes that VSP was allowed to remain, perhaps to spare her ex-husband, Charles Dumont, embarrassment.²⁶⁴ The endeavour was short lived; the Egyptian authorities shut it down.

VSP was also the head of the *Ligue Internationale pour L'Éducation Nouvelle* in Egypt. The headquarters of this association was at the centre of Cairo, located on 13 Antikhanna Street, neighbouring the numerous cultural and artistic institutions covered in this dissertation. In the second issue of *Le Phoenix*, the mission is announced: “Substitute the principal of authority with the principal of freedom in education; and as such ready the child to want and realise a supremacy of the soul in life.”²⁶⁵ The main organs of the association were situated in Paris, London and Rome.

Straightaway, she published a document announcing her goals in the “new homeland.” As Lançon remarks that she did not speak of a “land of exile,” but of a second homeland.²⁶⁶ The figure of the tourist and his/her superficial vision was denounced. Central to the document was the opposition between the refined oriental civilisation and the young dynamic Western civilisation. She followed this with a defence of her residence in Egypt, insisting on its utopian principles of the eighteenth century: modern Egypt, now in the last stages of her renaissance and heir to a number of influences spanning East and West, must find its spiritual path. She viewed Egypt as a future “model nation” of the real “Mediterranean civilisation.” She hoped for the emergence of a strong “national faith of mystical essence” and observed:

I think Egypt will be able to draw strength from its past millennium and its ancient glory to meet its fate [...] I am the one who trusts its profound soul, a sacred soul that dreams mysteriously under the Sphinx's broken face, and believes it shall remain ever more pulsating,

²⁶³ Lucia Re, “Valentine de Saint-Point, Ricciotto Canudo, F.T. Marinetti: Eroticism, Violence and Feminism from Pre-war Paris to Colonial Cairo,” 63

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 63.

²⁶⁵ “Substituer au principe d'autorité le principe de liberté en éducation ; ainsi préparer l'enfant à vouloir et à réaliser dans sa vie la suprématie de l'esprit” *Le Phoenix*, no.2, January 1925, 99.

²⁶⁶ Daniel Lançon, “*Les Orient de Valentine de Saint-Point : Militance politique contrariée et spiritualisme utopiste*,” 227.

amidst the strong beats of the fertile Nile and in the great cry for freedom that its revived ancient people are sending out to the world.²⁶⁷

VSP's desire for an Egyptian renaissance bears similarity with the *nahda* project. Both use the trope of the glory of the past as a model for Egypt's revival, and call for a leap into Ancient Egypt to bring its past glories to the present. The extract above was published twice: the first time in the French newspaper *La Liberté* and then in her edited volume *L'Égypte Florissante* in 1940.

The volume traces the development of Egypt in the previous 15 years, focusing on a remarkable list of highly influential figures, ranging from intellectuals to government officials and militants. In the introduction, she explains that the only way to lend the book credibility is to invite the “sons and daughters of Egypt” to contribute to the publication, as the only figures who can legitimately comment on the new spirit of Egypt. She obtained contributions from remarkable characters in Egypt, such as Sheikh El Marghi, the Chancellor of the University of al-Azhar and artist Mohamed Nagui, who by this time, was the director of the School of Fine Arts (the first Egyptian to attain this post in 1937). Huda Shaarawi also contributed. She was equally involved in the arts and played a central role in the funding campaign of Mahmoud Mokhtar's *Nahdet Misr* sculpture, unveiled in 1928. She was an adamant supporter of cultural life and activities to improve women's lives. Indeed, VSP was familiar with Shaarawi's activism, prior her arrival to Egypt, even. Sania Lafranchi observes that VSP had planned to ask Shaarawi for financial help to establish a francophone magazine when she first arrived in Cairo.²⁶⁸ Those plans never materialised. But this contribution is an indication that the two women remained in contact. A year before the volume's publication, VSP wrote to Shaarawi to ask for permission to reproduce her work in *La Revue du Caire* (I return to the correspondence in detail below).

²⁶⁷ Je crois que l'Égypte saura puiser dans le souvenir de son millénaire passé et de sa gloire ancienne la force de ne pas manquer à son destin. Elle apparaît bien comme le giron d'où sortira un jour, produit des mondes ancien et moderne, le monde nouveau, produit des deux civilisations : la Civilisation –Une et l'Âge d'Or. Je suis celle qui fait confiance à son âme profonde, à l'âme sacrée qui rêve mystérieusement sous le visage mutilé du Sphinx, de même qu'elle s'avère toujours plus vivace dans les rythmes puissants du Nil fécond et dans le grand cri de liberté que lance à la face du monde son vieux peuple rajeuni ” Valentine de Saint-Point, “ L'Évolution de l'Égypte, ” *L'Égypte florissante* (Le Caire : Paul Barbey, 1940) 6-7, as quoted in Daniel Lançon, “ Valentine de Saint-Point, égérie de l'Orient arabe et Musulman, ” Daniel Lançon, *Les français en Égypte: De l'Orient romantique aux modernités arabes* (Saint-Denis: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2015)

<http://books.openedition.org/puv/2072>

²⁶⁸ Sania Sharawi Lanfranchi, *Castling off the Veil: The Life of Huda Shaarawi, Egypt's First Feminist* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 118.

Literature laureate Taha Hussein's contribution to *L'Égypte Florissante* deserves attention equally. Hussein was the Dean of the Arabic Literature at the University of Cairo and became Minister of Culture in the last Wafd government before the overthrow of the monarchy in 1952. He was a highly influential figure in the field of Egyptian modernism and Arabic literature. Hussein studied literature at the University of Montpellier and spent a few years living in France. In 1938, he published his controversial book, *The Future of Culture in Egypt (Mustaqbal al-thaqāfa fi misr)*. It expounded his belief that Egypt shared a heritage with countries of the Mediterranean and advocated for the assimilation of modern European culture. VSP and Hussein both laboured for a cultural rapprochement between the Orient and the Occident. Seen in this light, Hussein's contribution to *L'Égypte Florissante* is unsurprising. MMK's text commented on the artistic renaissance in Egypt. It resembles MMK's call on artists to draw inspiration from the past and their duty to explain this past to the public²⁶⁹ The choice of contributors was a conscious move by VSP to place herself within a certain secular, nationalist dialogue. To a great extent, Huda Shaarawi, Mohamed Nagui, Taha Hussein and MMK were proponents of the *nahda* paradigm and believed in the role of a cultural and artistic revival for Egypt's independence.

4. *Le Phoenix* (1925-1927)

Only a year after she moved to Cairo, VSP founded the francophone magazine *Le Phoenix: Une renaissance orientale*. By this time, the francophone press in Egypt had reached high numbers; by 1930, 50 out of the 183 periodicals published in Egypt were in French (of which 15 were dailies).²⁷⁰ Her readers, although based in Egypt had to be francophone to access the magazine. The headquarters of the magazine were based downtown, at 2 Antikhanna Street (now Mahmoud Bassiouny Street). Within the geographical matrix of downtown Cairo, VSP was very near to Nelson Morpurgo and the headquarters of the Art and Liberty group. The Société des Amis de l'Art was also located her street – near the *Institut Français d'archéologie orientale* (IFOA) and Mahmoud Mokhtar's studio. As Mercedes Volait notes, Mokhtar's studio was a rallying point too. Following their first Salon du Caire organised in 1923, the society took up residence in an abandoned palace on Antikhanna Street, across

²⁶⁹ Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil, "al-Funun al-Gamila fi Misr" (The Fine Arts in Egypt), *el-Emara* (The Building), Issue 7–8, 1939, 329.

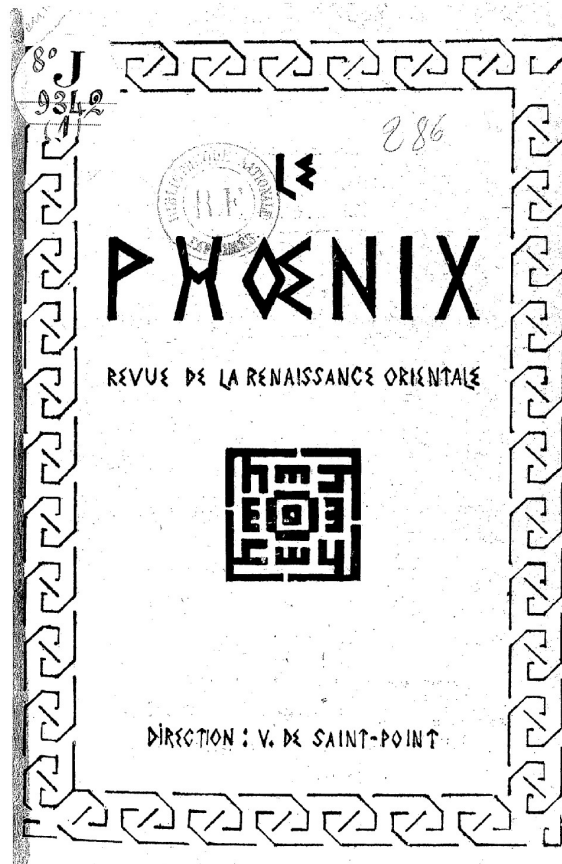
²⁷⁰ Daniel Lançon "La Semaine Égyptienne, de 1926 à 1939 ou la littérature comme ailleurs", 2011, 1 [hal-00872925](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022292500000000).

from the Egyptian Museum (Robert Maurice Nahman's antique shop was also located on this same street).²⁷¹

Published on the 7th of every month, the magazine ran regularly for almost 18 months, between November 1925 and June 1927. The aims of *Le Phoenix* were listed on the second page of the first issue: "'Le Phoenix' aims to present and explicate the Oriental Renaissance to the Occident." The mission added: "To accelerate this Renaissance on all levels of social and political life; to develop the free cooperation between the Orient and the Occident for the largest global progress".²⁷² Each issue was comprised of a large corpus of text (around 100 pages) written in French. It is unlikely that the majority of articles were originally written in French. We can assume that some of the texts were written in Arabic and translated to French by VSP, with the help of colleagues. VSP's proficiency in Arabic is unclear. She admits to not reading the Koran in Arabic and having to depend on weak translations into French. The authorship is varied, which included a range of writers from Egypt, Syria, and France.

²⁷¹ Mercedes Volait, "27 Madabegh Street: Prelude to an Art Movement", (translated from French by Ola Seif), *Rawi*, Vol. 8 Fall 2016, n.8 <https://rawi-magazine.com/articles/27madabegh/>

²⁷² *Le Phoenix, Revue de la renaissance orientale*, no.1, December 1925, 1.Gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 22 *Le Phoenix* Revue de la renaissance orientale cover.

Le Phoenix placed a strong emphasis on events in Syria. News from Damascus of the revolt by multiple factions against the French forces, permeate the publication. In issue n. 5 (February–March 1926), a sequence of three articles signed ‘*Un Occidental*’ (A westerner) are published: “*Lettre de Syrie*”; “*Lettre de Damas*,” and “*Petit Chronique de Damas*” covering the period from 13 December 1925 to 11 January 1926 (signed *Un Occidental*). In a footnote, the author alerts us to the fact that though the chronicled events above date from December 13, the situation has been, more or less, the same for the last three months.

The editorial decision to focus on Syria ties carefully with VSP’s vehement calls against the French occupation. “*Enquête sur l’état actuel de la Syrie*” published in a later issue calls on the readers to share their views on the situation. The 8-page questionnaire is divided into four sections: overall questions about the situation in Syria, followed by religious, political, and economic ones.²⁷³ The questions are detailed. They range from “What was the general public

²⁷³ “*Enquête sur l’état actuel de la Syrie et sur les revendications syriennes*, ” (*Report on the Current State in Syria and the Syrian Demands*), *Le Phoenix*, n.3 February– March 1926

opinion in Syria before the insurrection? After the insurrection?” to “What are the possible religious politics in case of independence – representation or non-representation of religious minorities? Protection of their interests; how? Recognition or not of religious communities?”

- 5° En cas d'Indépendance effective et au sujet de la Constitution désirée par chaque parti, tâcher de préciser le type envisagé, par exemple:
- a) Syrie unifiée?
 - b) Syrie fédérée?
 - c) République parlementaire? Laquelle ?

Représentation par deux Chambres et Chef d'Etat irresponsable (type français) ?

Représentation par deux Chambres et Chef d'Etat responsable (type américain)?

Représentation par une Chambre (fédérale) et chef d'Etat responsable (type suisse)?

Représentation par Chambre Unique (unitaire) et chef d'Etat responsable (type turc) ?

d) Royauté constitutionnelle avec deux Chambres et roi irresponsable (roi héréditaire type anglais)?

e) Royauté constitutionnelle avec Chambres de représentants, mais roi électif à vie et chef responsable ou plutôt exécutif (type ancienne Pologne)?

Note: Dans l'un ou l'autre cas de royauté quel roi serait désiré: arabe? et quel? étranger? et quelle nationalité?

f) République ou Royauté synarchique: fédérale avec représentation *professionnelle* hiérarchisée et Gouvernement de *compétences* soit:

Une Chambre consultative non législative;

Un Conseil d'Etat législatif spécialiste, élu par la Chambre professionnelle;

Un Conseil des Ministres de spécialistes comme Exécutif responsable choisi par le chef de l'Etat;

Le Chef de l'Etat responsable (Roi plébiscité élu à vie; ou Président élu à temps par la Chambre.

Figure 23 Excerpt from questionnaire “Enquête sur la Syrie,” *Le Phoenix*, n.3 February–March 1926.

The tone is militant and explicit. As the publication progresses, the tone of criticism becomes sharper and more urgent. The magazine also included letters from readers. In issue n.2, “*Lettre de Damas*” (Letter from Damascus) is a critique by a reader who points out false reporting on the number of victories as well as an exaggerated number of losses in Damascus. This type of reader engagement is not unusual. Other magazines from the time, such as *SE*, *La Femme nouvelle*, and *Un Effort* regularly featured correspondences. Still, it is evidence of *Le Phoenix*'s diffusion in a certain francophone milieu. The letter is over ten pages and is signed by ‘*Un Occidental*’ who argues that the situation on the ground had not been sufficiently mirrored in the previous issue. The ten-page letter offers revisions to the situation on the ground, “the exact portrait of the moral state of the city [of Damascus] which no paper

mentions; this has been going on for over two months now; that is enough for now, otherwise everyone would become clients of an alienated house.”²⁷⁴

In “*La Faillite de la Civilisation Occidentale*” VSP addresses her Oriental readers as “Mes Frères d’Orient” (My Brothers of the Orient). Throughout the text, VSP invokes her brothers of the Orient. This is not surprising given that the paper was originally delivered at the Conference of the *Ligue Orientale (Al-rabitta charqiyya)* on 13 November 1925. It expresses the guilt she feels as a Westerner for the violence that is carried out in her name in the Orient. She had recently returned from Syria and witnessed the massacre in Damascus on 22 October 1925.²⁷⁵ She continues: “I accuse Western civilisation of having failed to deliver the highest mission which it was tasked with, throughout the latest stages of World History.”²⁷⁶ This mission was for the conscious ‘universalisation’ and “unification” of humanity.²⁷⁷ Her tone is furious. But although she accuses the West of failing to unify and universalise, she urges the Orient to take matters into its own hands: “It is up to you, Orientals, to recognise this historic and present situation, so as not to miss destiny, in the way Europe did.”²⁷⁸ She is urging the Orient to seek the Truth distinct from the Occident. By liberating itself from the shackles of the West, she argues, the Orient will be open to receiving wisdom from Asia and understanding the real eternal truths that the Occident is unable to offer.²⁷⁹

4.1 Imperial Excesses of the Occident

²⁷⁴ “*Lettre de Damas*” (Letter from Damascus), *Le Phoenix*, n.2, 7 January 1926, 67.

²⁷⁵ The bombing of Damascus in 1925 was part of a wider resistance to the French occupying forces that became known as the ‘Great Syrian Revolt.’ The French responded violently by using airplanes to bomb villages suspected in aiding the revolts. In Damascus, following an attack on French troops by the rebels, the French retaliated by launching a vast bombardment of the city. Between 18–21 October 1925, Damascus was under fire from airplanes and tanks, which killed hundreds of inhabitants and left the city in ruins. See Luis Paulo Bogliolo, “Damascus, 1925: The Bombing of the City, Humanitarian Relief and Petitioning for Syrian Independence to the League of Nations”, *Online Atlas on the History of Humanitarianism and Human Rights*, ed. Fabian Klose, Marc Palen, Johannes Paulmann, and Andrew Thompson, <http://hhr-atlas.ieg-mainz.de/articles/bogliolo-damascus>.

²⁷⁶ “J’accuse la civilisation occidentale d’avoir manqué à la plus haute mission à laquelle elle a été appelée, durant les derniers cycles de l’Histoire mondiale.” Valentine de Saint-Point, “La faillite de la civilisation occidentale,” *Le Phoenix*, n.1, 7 December 1925, 21. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k55292734/f13.image>

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 21. “C’est à vous autres, Orientaux, de savoir reconnaître ce fait historique et actuel, afin de ne pas manquer au Destin, comme l’Europe y manqua.”

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

The *Ligue Orientale*, an association founded in Cairo, opposed the British occupation and used Islam as a rallying cry. The religious common denominator placed the *Ligue* in alignment with various anti-colonial efforts. Among the supporters of the *Ligue Orientale* were leaders and intellectuals from the Maghreb who had taken refuge in Egypt. This is an interesting connection, given VSP's arrival in Egypt from Morocco in the same year as the *Ligue's* first conference was organised, in November 1924. This arrival of Maghrebin intellectuals in Egypt gives context to VSP's choice to move to Egypt. She was not on her own as much of the literature has hitherto suggested. She was also accompanied by Vivian Postel du Mas and Jeanne Canudo. The aim of *Ligue* was to form a powerful bloc in the Middle East to stand against Western colonialism. Egypt was granted the leadership of the *Ligue*. Ahmed Zaki, surnamed the *chaykh al-'uruba* (the priest of Arabness) insisted that Egypt must be at the forefront of this bloc of neighbouring Arab countries instead of lagging behind the West.²⁸⁰ In her speech addressed to the *Ligue* and subsequently published in *Le Phoenix*, VSP makes a similar case for unification. She urges the countries of the Middle East to stand together in the face of the Occident, which she claims has been broken up voluntarily by European powers. The call for unification becomes louder and bolder. Further down she writes: "Yet, a broken-up Orient is hopeless: a unified Orient is unbeatable. Unify, my friends, my brothers, unify, herein lies the secret of the Oriental renaissance [...] Come."²⁸¹

4.2 Cries of Distress from the Orient

The magazine covered the region as a whole, with news from Palestine, Hedjaz, Iraq, Persia, Turkey and beyond. Book reviews featured prominently in the publication. A review of *Les Mandates A et leurs applications en Orient* (The Mandates A and their Applications in the Orient) by Gabriel Menassa signalled the importance of League of Nations' meeting on Syria, Mesopotamia and other Oriental nations. It familiarized the reader with earlier treaties such as the Sykes-Picot agreement (signed on 16 May 1916), the Balfour Declaration (1917) and the San Remo conference (20 April 1920). It then followed with a set of questions about the mandates and the French and British rule in the Middle East: what is the recognised

²⁸⁰ Al-Jindi A., *Ahmad Zaki al-mûlaqqab bi chaykh al-'ûrûba* (Ahmad Zaqi, dit "Chaykh de l'arabité"), Le Caire, série A'lâm al-'arab n° 29, 1964, 135, as quoted in Hassan Muhammad Hassan, "Choix culturels et orientations éducatives en Égypte, 1923–1952", *Égypte/Monde arabe*, no.1 18–19, 1994, consulté le 26 mars 2019 : <http://journals.openedition.org/ema/68>.

²⁸¹ Valentine de Saint-Point, "La faillite de la civilisation occidentale", 32–33.

power of the mandatory states and who are, by definition, the A mandates? What is the right of diplomatic representation of mandate nations? Are they eligible to join the League of Nations? In issue number 5, Vivian du Mas reviewed *La Genèse de l'Esprit National Égyptien (1863–1882)* by Mohamed Sabry; it positioned the book *vis-à-vis* his previous publications and offered a short summary of the books' argument on the period of Khedive Ismail's rule and the *tanzimat* (reform) program he initiated. The review ended with a reproduction of the book's conclusion in its entirety.²⁸²

In the second issue, Emin Eddin launches a timely series on the history of the Caliphate in Islam, published barely a year after Kamel Atatürk abolished the Caliphate in Istanbul in 1924. Eddin lists the four caliphates and their leaderships.

VSP clashed with the Egyptian and French authorities over the content of the magazine. The authorities felt threatened by her activities and perceived her to be an agitator of the *status quo*. By 1928, she was forced to abandon her activities altogether, under threat of expulsion. VSP disappeared from public life because of pressure from the Egyptian and French authorities to end her agitational activities against the occupation in Egypt and mandate Syria.

4.3 VSP and Egyptian Nationalism

This movement naturally was condemned and attacked by the French and English authorities; she also critiques the French Mandate in Syria. By the end of 1927, she came under virulent attack by the French authorities who saw her as a political threat. Under threat of expulsion, VSP was forced to abandon her public agitation and militant activities. She was forced to put an end to the magazine and decided to leave for Paris until things calmed down. She returned to Paris temporarily in November 1927. This did not prevent her from writing a preface for Foulad Yeghen's book, *Saad Zaghloul: Le Père du Peuple*, in 1927.²⁸³ In this preface, VSP

²⁸² V.M., OR GABRIEL MENASSA " *La Genèse de l'Esprit National Égyptien (1863–1882)*", *Le Phoenix, Revue de la Renaissance Culturelle*, n.5, February–March 1926, 88–98. The identity of the author is not revealed here or in subsequent issues (in issue n.6). But when the author writes, "since the analytical method employed is 'Occidental,' the Western reader will be comfortable in this familiar scientific landscape employed in this work, whilst easily picking up the historic wealth explored by the Oriental soul, which he/she had left unnoticed." (90

²⁸³ Foulad Yeghen, *Saad Zaghloul: Le 'Père du Peuple' Égyptien* (Paris : Les Cahiers de France, 1927). It is worth mentioning that VSP's book, *La Vérité sur la Syrie par un témoin* was also published by Les Cahiers de France two years later.

writes: “If we have accepted placing our names at the beginning of this volume (which by no means adds any value to it), it is because it plays a role in our project as the mediator between the Orient and the Occident, to make known the personalities – or better the individuals – and the works from the Occident, and in the Occident those of the Orient.”²⁸⁴ This preface reminds the reader of VSP’s engagement with Egyptian nationalism and its leaders.

Yeghen’s biography of Zaghlul was published in Paris in 1926 – the same year of Huda Shaarawi’s visit to the French capital to attend the 10th Congress of the International Alliance of Women (IAW). Yeghen, a young poet at the time, was Shaarawi’s protégé. In *Casting off the Veil: The Life of Huda Shaarawi, Egypt’s First Feminist*, Sania Sharawi Lafranchi (Huda’s granddaughter) writes about her efforts to increase knowledge of Egypt abroad. Huda argued that the dearth of information contributed to the persistence of the British occupation – a point she and VSP agreed on. Accordingly, a decision was made to double the efforts to inform the West about the Oriental world. For example, the translation of writers not previously available in Western languages was suggested. The same author of the book on Zaghlul was tasked with this project.²⁸⁵ As such it is no coincidence that Yeghen’s biography on the leader of the Egyptian nationalist movement was published in Paris the same year of Shaarawi’s visit. Arguably more effective than the translation of Egyptian authors into Western languages, the celebration of Zaghlul’s heroism (intended for a French public) was a strategic move to gain sympathisers for the Egyptian liberation cause.

The choice of the prefacer is also key: VSP embodied this role of mediator between the Orient and the Occident. As quoted above, she articulates this (desired) role in the first few lines of Yeghen’s preface. The intended readers of this book would have been familiar with VSP, who had left Paris only two years before in 1924. Placed within this context, the preface gains more importance. It reveals a friendship and trust between Shaarawi and VSP as well as an appreciation of VSP’s role as a mediator. To return to Lafranchi’s biography of Shaarawi, her exploration of the connection between Valentine and Huda falls short. Although Yeghen’s book is quoted in the bibliography, the connection with Shaarawi’s effort is not

²⁸⁴ Valentine de Saint-Point, “Préface” in Foulad Yeghen, *Saad Zaghlul : Le Père du Peuple Égyptien* (Paris : Cahiers de France, 1927). “Si nous avons accepté de mettre au début de ce volume, notre nom qui ne lui ajoute aucune valeur, c’est qu’il fait aussi parti du rôle par nous choisis d’être le médiateur entre l’occident et l’Orient, de faire connaitre en Orient les personnalités ou au mieux les individualités et les œuvres d’Occident et en Occident celles de l’Orient.”

²⁸⁵ Sania Sharawi Lanfranchi, *Casting off the Veil: The life of Huda Shaarawi*, 150.

established. Discussing VSP's proposal to fund a French magazine that would serve as a link between the East and the West, Lafranchi concludes that, "Huda said she was interested in Valentine's proposal in principal, though the collaboration was never in the event destined to take place in the way Valentine had hoped."²⁸⁶

On 8 December 1939, VSP wrote to Shaarawi asking for an interview and permission to reproduce her work in an issue of *L'Égypte Nouvelle*. After a short break, the French daily and weekly magazine owned by Jose Caneri, was relaunching. VSP wrote: "[w]e would be thrilled to dedicate a long report to your oeuvre. Would you grant me an interview to discuss what you would like to publish and the questions that you would like asked?"²⁸⁷ VSP was familiar with Huda's social reform work for women's education and her writings which featured in *L'Égyptienne*, edited by Ceza Nabarawi. In her response, Shaarawi adopted a humble tone, explaining that it "would be very embarrassing to give you all this information myself" and points out that Caneri, who "defended my poetry so eloquently at the Paris exhibitions [in reference to the 1937 *Exposition Internationale*] would be able to guide you better on this point."²⁸⁸ It is unclear whether the report was published or not.

4.4 Valentine and René Guenon

Narratives about VSP in Egypt have portrayed her life as a solitary one, describing her living in her flat in downtown Cairo, near Abdin Palace, with her companion René Guenon. In the epilogue of *La Caravane des Chimères*, Zouari recounts that "for some considerable time, she had given up on [the contemporary] world which she judged vain and had taken refuge in prayer, meditation and conversation with her friend René Guenon, the French philosopher who also converted to Islam."²⁸⁹ While the two met regularly, Valentine did not renounce her literary and social life. Since his arrival, Guenon who became known as Abd al-Wahid Yahya, had taken refuge in his apartment in Doqqi and was famously hard to meet. Valentine

²⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 118. There is further evidence of correspondence between the two women, which Lafranchi mentions in her book – these may be found in the Huda Shaarawi archive, housed at the American University in Cairo.

²⁸⁷ Valentine de Saint-Point, Letter to Huda Shaarawi, 8 December 1939, Huda Shaarawi Papers, Rare Books and Special Collections, American University in Cairo.

²⁸⁸ Huda Shaarawi, Letter to Valentine de Saint-Point, Huda Shaarawi Papers, Rare Books and Special Collections, American University in Cairo.

²⁸⁹ Fawzia Zouari, *La Caravane des Chimères* (Paris : Olivier Orban, 1990), <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4801275f/f15.image.texteImage>.

acted as a link with the outside world and particularly helped him publish his work. While the two led concomitant lives in Cairo, VSP had arrived in Cairo seven years before him. They knew each other in Paris and upon his arrival, Guenon relied on her to introduce him to the Egyptian francophone milieu. Studies on Guenon (far greater in number) regularly mention her role. Interestingly, the role that Valentine played in furthering Guenon's position in Cairo has not been addressed in the context of her life. As Xavier Accart writes, "the principal figure was Valentine de Saint –Point, who played, until her death [in 1953] the role of intermediary between Guenon – with whom she was very close – and the francophone literary milieu, of which she was an important player." Her relations with Guenon never ceased; every week, in his solitude Guenon would stop by Valentine's apartment and spend long hours with her. He spoke little, Valentine wrote in her diaries.²⁹⁰ The two remained close until Guenon's death in 1951.

They did not move to Cairo at the same time, as is often indicated in the literature.²⁹¹ René-Jean-Marie-Guenon, also known as by his Muslim name, Abd al-Wahid Yahya was introduced to Sufism in 1912. He moved to Cairo in 1930 following the death of his wife in Paris and converted to Islam upon his arrival. As we know, VSP had by this time settled in Cairo and become an important figure in the francophone literary milieu. By this time, she had founded and then terminated the publication of *Le Phoenix*, and had delved into studies of mysticism and Sufism.²⁹² Both Muslim converts, they explored Sufism and mysticism together.

The narrative that portrays VSP as a reclusive figure in Egypt is found wanting, by that time, VSP has reached the age of 76. She had been active in Egypt for over three decades – her activities spanned a range of forms, including the founding of a magazine, the publication of a collection of poems, directing the International League of Education and organising a celebration of the centenary of Lamartine at *Les Essayistes* in 1934. She died on 28 March

²⁹⁰ Daniel Lançon and Xavier Accart, *L'Ermitte de Duqqi: René Guenon en marge des milieux francophones égyptiens* (Paris : Arché, 2001), 186.

²⁹¹ Notably Fawzia Zouari. Like VSP, Guenon also changed his name (when he converted to Islam) to Cheikh Abdel Wahed Yehia. Daniel Lançon wrote about René Guenon's life in Egypt as a recluse. For more on Guenon see Daniel Lançon and Xavier Accart, *L'Ermitte de Duqqi: René Guenon en marge des milieux francophones égyptiens* (Paris : Arché, 2001) and "René Guénon, diaphane au Caire", 219–232 in *Les Français en Égypte: De l'Orient romantique aux modernités arabes* (Paris : Presses Universitaires Vincennes, 2015).

²⁹² In "The Simple Life of René Guénon" Paul Chacornac briefly mentions VSP as being by his side on the night of his death, but no details of their friendship are mentioned. In "René Guenon vu par les milieux littéraires francophones Égyptiens", Xavier Accarat points out that VSP was informed of Guenon's.

1953, a couple of months after the Free Officers' *coup d'état* that overturned the Egyptian monarchy. The obituaries published in both the local Arabic and francophone press described VSP's life in Cairo as solitary and confined. In the epilogue of *La Caravane des Chimères*, Zouari reports (as noted above) that she had taken refuge in prayer and meditation, conversing often with her friend René Guenon. The obituary goes on, "For Cairene society, she had become just a magician with occult and definite powers", adding that, "[VSP] had died in silence and anonymity."²⁹³

As this chapter highlights, these binary accounts are flawed. Similar to the character of Mahmoud Khalil Bey, VSP equally played a role of cultural mediator that spanned multiple spheres of intellectual life. She was ultimately an outsider trying to be an insider. She became well-versed in issues of gender, politics and ethnicity. Using French as the *lingua franca* of Egypt, she carved out an intellectual space for herself and became a recognised voice within Egyptian cosmopolitan society. Her attendance at the banquet hosted in honour of Marinetti in 1938 and the prominent contributors to *L'Égypte Florissante* are evidence that VSP commanded a certain standing and succeeded in her role of cultural mediator between Egypt and the West. I would like to end this chapter with another participation by the artist: in the exhibition *France-Égypte* organised by MMK and the SAA at the Pavillion Marsan in Paris in 1949, VSP's poetry was included in the "literature from Egypt" section. Those trajectories of VSP's work to and fro Egypt continue until today.

²⁹³ Fawzia Zouari, *La Caravane des chimères* (Paris : Olivier. Orban, 1990), 345.

4. *CHAPTER THREE: 'FUTURISTI DI CAIRO' AND MARINETTI'S RETURN
TO EGYPT*

On 12 October 1921, a group of Italian writers, lawyers, politicians, poets and artists living in Cairo signed the “*Noi Futuristi Italiani*” (We are Italian Futurists) manifesto. The members of the ‘*Movimento Futurista di Cairo*’ included Nelson Morpurgo (1899–1978), Natale Luri, Saverio Gritelli, Rodolfo Piha, Renato Servi, Enrico Pirro, Pietro Luri, Rambaldo di Collalto and Renzo da Forno. Morpurgo, an Italian born in Cairo, was the founder and leader of the group. The Cairo chapter was the first Futurist group that formed outside of Italy and arguably the earliest avant-garde movement in the region.

In this chapter, I explore the manifestation of futurism in Egypt in the first half of the century to reassess the ways in which, successfully or not, the movement grounded itself in the cultural and artistic networks of the capital and the port city of Alexandria. I place Futurism and its main instigators in conversation with agents of the avant-garde in Egypt and consider how Nelson Morpurgo was himself an agent of modernism and the activities of the Futurist. To this end, the first section of this chapter explores Marinetti’s connections to Egypt. The second section turns to Morpurgo and investigates the activities of the ‘*Movimento Futurista di Cairo*.’ And finally, the third section explores Marinetti’s two return trips to Egypt, almost a decade apart– the first one in 1929 and the second in 1938.

The Futurist movement in Egypt has not received due attention in the literature. The language barrier of Italian and French, and the difficulty of locating the sources are some of the reasons. The collection of Nelson Morpurgo’s papers at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the Yale University Library is the only comprehensive collection available online. Elsewhere Maria Elena Paniconi refers to a collection of papers in the hands of Morpurgo’s family in Italy. But those are hard to access.²⁹⁴ Accounts of the movement

²⁹⁴ In a recent article on Futurism in Egypt, Maria Elena Paniconi points to the personal archive of Morpurgo which have recently been inventoried as “Archivio Morpurgo– Fondo Cherini.” Maria Elena Paniconi, “Italian

appear in the literature on Futurism occasionally, but these are more often than not biographical, focusing on the life of Morpurgo. In the surveyed English literature on Futurism, there is no mention of the other members who signed the manifesto. In art history scholarship in Arabic, Futurism is not discussed at all; the foundational text of *Thamanun Sana min al-Fann* (80 Years of Art) does not mention the movement.²⁹⁵ Similar to the ways in which the Art and Liberty group have been ostracized from the literature due to their *francophoness*, one finds the *Futuristi di Cairo* left out from the nationalist literature post-1952.

The earliest study I found, which places the movement in conversation with the local context is “*En Débattant du Futurism*,” (Debating Futurism) by Fawzia Zouari.²⁹⁶ The essay centres around F.T Marinetti’s two visits to Egypt in 1929 and 1938 and chronicles the reactions they triggered. Zouari finds that while the first visit in 1929 did cause some local reactions, the reverberations were minimal and short lived. By the time of his second return in 1938, a number of developments placed Marinetti and Futurism in an unfavourable position: Marinetti had joined the Royal Academy of Italy earlier in the year (March 1929), Marinetti and the Futurist movement as a whole had moved closer to Mussolini’s fascist regime.

Other studies have focused on the life of Nelson Morpurgo and his futurist activities. In “Futurism in Egypt: Nelson Morpurgo and the Cairo Group,” (2013), Przemyslaw Stozek traces the life of Morpurgo and the activities of the group.²⁹⁷ This is the first detailed study of the movement itself in English that offers biographical information on Morpurgo and explores his literary production.²⁹⁸ Still it does not put it in conversation with the cultural milieu of the time and fails to give a sense of the movement’s reception or engagement with

Futurism in Cairo: The language(s) of Nelson Morpurgo Across the Mediterranean,” *Philological Encounters* 2 (2017), 159–179.

²⁹⁵ Rushdi Iskandar and Kamal al-Malak, *Thamanun sana men al-fann 1908–1988* (Eighty Years of Art) (Cairo: al Hay’a al-Misriya al-‘Amm lil-Kitab, 1991).

²⁹⁶ Fawzia Zouari, « *En Débattant du Futurisme* » ed. Marc Kober, *Entre nil et sable : Écrivains d’Égypte d’expression française*, (Paris : Centre national de documentation pédagogique, 1999).

²⁹⁷ Przemyslaw Stozek is a Polish scholar of the avant-garde and popular culture. He writes mainly in Polish about avant-garde movements in Poland, modern and contemporary art and the relation between Marinetti and Polish Futurism. He runs a futurist blog and is on the editorial board of the *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*.

²⁹⁸ The essay is published on Performa’s online platform, but the references are not included. With the exception of some credited images, such as the special issue on Futurist *Ana Mali*, from the Morpurgo collection at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the source of the group photo, for example, or the book cover of *Il Fuoco delle Piramidi* are not included.

other movements. Instead, it appears as isolated and operating solely within the Italian community.

Maria Elena Paniconi published two articles on the group: “Nelson Morpurgo and the Futurist Movement in Egypt”²⁹⁹ It is interesting to compare the two versions; the Italian text “*Nelson Morpurgo e il ‘Movimento del Futurismo Egiziano’ fra internazionalismo, cosmoplita e appartenenza coloniale*” covers in depth the workings of the group and its engagement with the local milieu. Paniconi uses Homi Bhabha’s interstitial theory to locate the Egyptian Futurist movement and its negotiation of multiple spheres: the *Madrepatria*, the expat community (composed mainly of Italians and Greeks but also French and English from the occupation and the war efforts), the Italian colony in Egypt and the reality of the Egyptian host country. The author concludes that “for reasons of political and aesthetic opportunities, Futurism in Egypt, to quote Jurj Hunayn (or Georges Henein in French) on a radio transmission, was basically destined to remain ‘*une commodité toute italienne.*’”³⁰⁰ I take issue with this position. Although it is harder to delineate the group’s parameters, I find its activities’ reverberations clear. Morpurgo was completely bilingual in Italian and French and operated in the same francophone literary and artistic circles of downtown Cairo.

The most recent attempt to rewrite the Futurist movement into the history of modern art in Egypt and place it in conversation with the literary, artistic and cultural milieu of the time is in Bardaouil’s *Surrealism in Egypt*. Chapter 2 “Fascism at Home: Towards a New Reading of Art and Liberty’s Founding Manifesto of December 22, 1938,” discusses the alleged fascist sentiments within the official art establishment, such as the Société des Amis de l’Art (SAA), as well as Morpurgo’s futurist activities in Egypt.³⁰¹ This account poses a number of challenges; most importantly it conflates fascism and Futurism, and presents the Futurist movement in Egypt in allegiance with fascism.³⁰² While the relationship between Futurism

²⁹⁹ Maria Elena Paniconi, “Nelson Morpurgo and the Futurist Movement in Egypt,” *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies* (2016) and “Italian Futurism in Cairo: The Language(s) of Nelson Morpurgo Across the Mediterranean,” *Philological Encounters* (2017). These two articles are based on an earlier Italian version by the same author published in 2013 following a conference at the Università degli Studi di Macerata entitled *I Linguaggi del Futurismo*.

³⁰⁰ Maria Elena Paniconi, “*Nelson Morpurgo e il ‘Movimento del Futurismo Egiziano’ fra internazionalismo, cosmoplita e appartenenza coloniale,*” in *I Linguaggi del Futurismo*, ed. Diego Poli and Laura Melosi (Macerata: Global Print, 2013).

³⁰¹ Sam Bardaouil *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 48–84.

³⁰² *Ibid*, 81.

and Fascism is undeniable, I find the above narrative obscures Futurism's reverberations on the local artistic and intellectual scene. Ultimately the alternative transcultural route of Futurism into Egypt is more significant. I argue that the importation of this romanticised aesthetic into Egypt opened the space for a new kind of modernism to emerge. Without ignoring the connections between Futurism and fascism, this chapter shifts the focus instead on the working of Futurism in Egypt and its relationship with Surrealism and future members of the AL. There are many overlaps that have not been hitherto accounted for. The fact that Henein and Morpurgo were friends, for example, complicates the relationship between Futurism and fascism in Egypt. In addition, Bardaouil's portrayal of Marinetti as a 'fascist delegate' in Cairo and the way he subsequently depicts the relationship between the two movements as a 'local battle' is overstated. As mentioned above, this consolidates the presence of a local fascist threat which the author then uses to make the argument for AL's local grounding.

Further, the author critiques the literature of the 1980s, mainly written in French, which begins with the premise that the Art and Liberty group (AL from now onwards) formed in reaction to the rise of fascist forces in Nazi Germany and Italy. In this narrative, the signing of the manifesto in December 1938 is posited as a direct reaction to events outside of Egypt. Bardaouil rejects this narrative and uncovers home-grown fascist forces inside the SAA and Futurism. He reveals that on the eve of the Second World War, fascist sentiments seemed to be swirling out of control in Egypt and adds: "the argument that it was predominantly an external concern and affiliation that led to AL's manifesto and their entire *raison d'être* becomes less and less convincing," once the interconnected ethical considerations, political loyalties and artistic sensibilities continue to emerge.³⁰³

Bardaouil goes on to present a comprehensive account of the rise and development of Surrealism in Egypt to illustrate the ways in which this movement was born out of a reaction to an alleged rise of fascism in the country.³⁰⁴ The account begins on 4 February 1937 when Georges Henein presented a lecture entitled "*Bilan du Mouvement Surréaliste*," (Appraisal of

³⁰³ *Ibid*, 61.

³⁰⁴ In the introduction and later in chapter 6, I disagree with Bardaouil's stance about the rise of fascism in Egypt. As Jankowski and Gershoni reveal, most of the shapers of Egyptian public opinion were by and large unreceptive to Fascism and Nazism, largely rejecting the ideas and practices that characterise European fascism. Jankowski and Gershoni, *Confronting Fascism*, 11.

the Surrealist Movement), at *Les Essayistes*.³⁰⁵ Henein presented the same lecture with minor changes, at the Atelier of Alexandria on 1st March 1937, and it was broadcast on the radio by Egyptian State Broadcasting. The text was published in *La Revue des Conférences Françaises en Orient* in October 1937. The talk begins with the origins of Surrealism through Arthur Rimbaud, Comte de Lautréamont and Alfred Jarry, followed by the Dadaïstes and stresses the significance of its principles: “absolute non-conformity that opposes them to institutions and regimes that are charged with oppressing individuals who rebels against their evil power.”³⁰⁶ (in Chapter 6, I return to the content of the talk). For our purposes, the last section of the talk is relevant. Henein declared:

Ladies and Gentlemen, before bringing this talk to a close, I would like to put the dots on the i's. An ill-informed part of the public confuses Surrealism with other movements such as Cubism and Futurism, which it never showed solidarity to. Certainly, Pablo Picasso acts as a link between Cubism and Surrealism, certainly Breton and his colleagues regard the heroic enterprise of cubist painters with great interest and sympathy. [...] To the extent that it changed our vision of things, Cubism constitutes the natural preface to Surrealism. [...] Nothing of this kind with Futurism. The exhibitionist character of Mr. Marinetti, the artificial and spectacular dynamism that he advocates, have earned him the legitimate scorn of surrealists.³⁰⁷

Aeropittura (aeropainting) is described as decorative art rather than art itself: “Futurism is also purely Italian, while Surrealism, if it had elected Paris as capital, did not take long to spread across the planet.” Surrealism’s global appeal is a plea for universalism. The talk received extensive coverage. We can assume that Henein’s views about Marinetti and Futurism reached a wide audience, who may have attended the talks in 1929, heard the radio broadcast or read about it in the press.

Further, Bardaouil goes to great lengths to draw a direct analogy between Marinetti’s second return to Egypt in March 1938 and the writing of the manifesto *Long Live Degenerate Art* (LLDA) to “fully complete our grasp of the local connotations and resonance that AL’s manifesto.”³⁰⁸ In parallel, he introduces the heightened activity of paramilitary youth organizations, such as the Blue Shirts (a youth subsidiary of the Wafd) and the Green Shirts (Muslim Brotherhood youth group) to corroborate this argument. Yet a look at the bilingual text signals an adhesion to FIARI (*Fédération Internationale des Arts Révolutionnaires*

³⁰⁵ « Bilan du mouvement surréaliste, » n.8, 1^{er} année, 1^{er} Octobre 1937, *Revue des Conférences Françaises en Orient*, as reproduced in ed. Pierre Vilar, *Georges Henein, Œuvres : Poèmes, récits, essais articles et pamphlets* (Paris : Denoël, 2006), 365–378

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 374.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 375.

³⁰⁸ Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 60.

Indépendants) to defend against the rise of totalitarianism in Europe. The manifesto ends with a call to take up the challenge and unite in support of degenerate art: “Let us work for its victory over the new Middle Age that is rising up in the very midst of the West.”³⁰⁹

Though I certainly agree that AL were locally relevant,³¹⁰ I find Bardaouil’s account of the perceived rise of fascism in Egypt, notably in the figure of MMK and the SAA, and the rise of an increasingly fascist Futurist movement in Egypt, less convincing. As discussed in the introduction, *Confronting Fascism* reconsiders the narrative that finds Egypt turning to fascist Italy and Germany in the years preceding WWII, along the axiom of ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend.’³¹¹ Through a survey of the daily newspapers, as well as in weekly and monthly journals of opinion, in books and pamphlets written in this period, and illustrations and caricatures, the authors find a more complex picture than the assumption that disappointment with the functioning of democracy in Egypt led to the growing appeal of authoritarian or fascist alternatives. Gershoni and Jankowski point out in the introduction that “liberal ideas about both politics and society continued to be expressed with considerable vigour by Egyptian intellectuals and publicists” and add that “the infatuation with authoritarian or fascist concepts of political organisation was the exception rather than the norm in Egyptian public discourse, even when fascism was at its political zenith in Europe.”³¹² By the 1930s, it is clear that most of the shapers of Egyptian public opinion were by and large unreceptive to Fascism and Nazism and largely rejected the ideas and practices that characterised European fascism.³¹³ I find the narrative of the local manifestations of Futurism and its alignment with Italian fascism is overstated and constructed in order to ground AL’s first manifesto locally. With this in mind, Bardaouil’s account appears as a sanitised portrayal of Egypt’s cultural and artistic milieu on the eve of WWII.

In the process, it is fundamental to take into consideration the differences between Nazism, Fascism and Futurism to explore the movements resonance in Egypt. By so doing, we gain a better understanding of the intellectual breadth, complexity and cosmopolitanism of this intellectual milieu that placed Cairo at the centre of pressing international debates. Thus, this

³⁰⁹ “*Vive l’art dégénéré!*” (Long Live Degenerate Art!) Manifesto, (Cairo: December 22, 1938).

³¹⁰ Bardaouil is by no means the first one to make this argument. Samir Gharib, Patrick Kane, Alexandra Seggermann among others have made this argument before him.

³¹¹ Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in Egypt in the 1930s*, (Stanford University Press, 2009). 2

³¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

chapter untangles Futurism and fascism and, instead, focusses on the workings of Futurism and its relationship with Surrealism and the future membership of the AL. There are many overlaps that have not been hitherto accounted for. For example, interactions between Henein and Morpurgo complicate this relationship. In addition, I find Bardaouil's portrayal of Marinetti as a 'fascist delegate' in Cairo and the way he subsequently depicts the relationship between Futurism and Surrealism as a 'local battle' is overstated. This is premised on a "pronounced Fascist-Futurist correlation, which by [1938] unlike in 1929, was apparent to many of those who attended [Marinetti's] talk certainly to Henein and his ilk."³¹⁴ Bardaouil's argument consolidates an alleged presence of a local fascist threat which he then uses to make the argument for AL's local grounding.

4.5 Marinetti and Egypt

Recently a number of works have emphasized the role Egypt played in Marinetti's literary production. These accounts stress the role the coastal city of Alexandria played in his *oeuvre* and place Egypt as the birth of his *sensibilità italiana* (Italian sensibility). Nadine Wassef explores the use of Egyptian street language and the African and Arabic components of Marinetti's language.³¹⁵ She argues that Marinetti's hybrid biography has thus far been ignored in favour of his Italian colonial identity.³¹⁶

When discussing F.T Marinetti, Giovanni Lista stresses the complexity of character of the founder of Futurism, whose personal and literary formation took place between two centuries, two languages (possibly three with Arabic) and three cultures. Lista maintains that "we have to address the figure of Marinetti with an openness to contradiction which means to assume a multitude of points of views."³¹⁷ I extend this approach to the study of Futurism in Egypt. It is vital to account for the multiplicity of positions, contradiction and ambivalence of these cultural interactions. How were future members of AL, such as Georges Henein, Jean Moscatelli and Santini invited to the banquet at Villa Nedda, hosted in honour of Marinetti, at

³¹⁴ Sam Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 80.

³¹⁵ Nadine Wassef, "Mafarka Before Being a Futurist: The Intimate Egypt in the Writings of F.T Marinetti," ed. A.J Goldwyn, R.M Silverman, *Mediterranean Modernism: Intercultural Exchange and Aesthetic Development*, (US: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 30.

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, 30–1. Marinetti's hybrid cultural identity and the influence of Egypt on his writing deserves more attention.

³¹⁷ *F.T Marinetti: L'Anarchiste du Futurisme, Biographie*, (Paris: Seguiet, 1995), 11. An example here is Jean Moscatelli's supposed defection to fascism in 1936 and his arrest during the entire war period.

Carlo Grassi's house in Zamalek in 1938? A few years before joining AL, Jean Moscatelli defended Marinetti in the Egyptian press, publishing two articles praising Futurism.

4.6 Marinetti: A Life in Futurism

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti was born on December 22, 1877 in Alexandria. His father Enrico Marinetti and mother Amalia Grolli moved to Egypt in 1865 upon an invitation by Khedive Ismail. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 attracted a growing number of foreigners to Egypt. During this time, foreigners living in Egypt came under the jurisdiction of their own nation, embodied in the consular tribunals. Enrico Marinetti worked as a legal adviser for foreign companies and specialised in commercial law.³¹⁸ He then joined the Mixed Courts that were established in 1875. These replaced the existing legal system wherein foreigners dealt with their respective consulates to resolve legal disputes. Instead, all legal disputes were channeled to one institution, where Egyptians and foreign judges heard the commercial and civil cases involving foreigners.³¹⁹

F.T Marinetti spent his early school years in Alexandria and attended the Jesuit School of St Francois Xavier. Creating chaos in the classroom and refusing to conform, he was expelled from school. In 1894, he was sent to Paris to sit his exams and fully certify his baccalaureate. Soon afterward Marinetti moved to Italy where he studies law, following his father's wishes. He received his degree in 1899, but never practices law. Instead, he pursued his interest in poetry, music and drama.³²⁰ From his student years, Marinetti began to publish verses and prose in magazines, particularly French ones such as *La Nouvelle Revue*, *La Vogue* and *La Plume*, as well as essays and critical articles on the importance of art and literature for the advancement of modern civilization. With a group of bohemian artist friends, he denounced the Milanese cultural establishment as stale and dormant. Carlo Carrà, a friend of Marinetti's,

³¹⁸ As part of the Khedive's modernisation and reform projects in the fields of education, the military and infrastructure (*tanzimat*), the arrival of foreign companies to Egypt necessitated more lawyers and a new legal system to accommodate them. F.T Marinetti, *Critical Writing*, 6.

³¹⁹ The Mixed Courts were established in 1875, a year before Marinetti was born and served to pipeline legal cases involving foreigners to one institution. Thus far, I have been unable to locate sources on the composition of the Mixed Courts. But owing to his close connection to the Khedive and the fact that he was summoned from Italy at around the same time as the creation of these institutions, we can assume that Enrico Marinetti worked in the Mixed Courts. This institution is at the crux of the country's modernisation project. Many came in contact with it in their day to day life, since it tackled matters of personal status and commercial rights. [This is all rather tangential to your purpose.]

³²⁰ The majority of male artists, writers and patrons discussed here have followed legal paths: Mahmoud Said, Georges Henein, Nelson Morpurgo, F.T Marinetti have studied law and French law in particular.

found that the art world is “dominated by works that had no other scope than that of satisfying the frivolous and corrupt taste of society.”³²¹

On 20 February 1909, Marinetti published “The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism” on the front page of the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, one of the most widely circulated newspapers in Europe. To do so, Marinetti had recourse to an Egyptian contact, an old friend of his father’s and an ex-minister Mohamed Pasha El Rashi. The seventy-year old resided in Paris and owned a large number of shares in the newspaper.³²² Marinetti managed to deploy him by persuading his only daughter to help. The manifesto denounced the *passéisme* of present society and called for the glorification of war for its “hygienic properties, militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying and scorn for women.” Article 10 goes on to state: “we will demolish museums and libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice.”³²³

Futurism put forward a global ideology that did not limit itself to the arts, such as Cubism for example, but included politics, literature, cinema, dance, photography and cuisine. In the organigram of the direction of the movement, FT. Marinetti occupied the hierarchical summit within this group. The executive was divided into four sections, represented each by a number of male artists: *poetry, painting, music, and sculpture*. As Adrien Sina points out, this classification was anchored in the classical past, which was surprising for an avant-garde movement that purported to transform and question everything.³²⁴

³²¹ Carlo Carrà, “Prime battaglie futuriste, Guerre sola igiene del monde” as quoted in ed. Günter Berghaus, *F.T. Marinetti: Critical Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), xviii.

³²² Bardaouil incorrectly relates that the Egyptian Pasha owned shares in the Italian magazine *Gazzetta dell’Emilia* in Bologna and writes: “The first paper to pick up the manifesto in Italy, further to its initial appearance in *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909 was in Bologna, where the manifesto received pride of place on the paper’s front cover. It is not a coincidence that the paper [*Gazzetta dell’Emilia*] was co-owned by the Egyptian Pasha Mohamed El Rashi, a colleague of Marinetti’s father and long-time family friend.” *Surrealism in Egypt*, 60. The Manifesto first appeared in Italian papers but did not receive great attention compared to its later appearance on *Le Figaro*’s front cover.

³²³ « Article 9. Nous voulons glorifier la guerre- seule hygiène du monde- le militarisme, le patriotisme, le geste destructeur des anarchistes, les belles idées qui tuent et le mépris de la femme [...] Article 10. Nous voulons démolir les musées, les bibliothèques, combattre le moralisme, le féminisme et toutes les lâchetés opportunistes et utilitaires. » *Manifeste du Futurisme, (The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism)*, F.T. Marinetti, February 20, 1909, *Le Figaro*.

³²⁴ *Valentine de Saint-Point: Des feux de l’avant-garde à l’appel de l’Orient*, ed. Paul André Claudel and Elodie Gaden (Rennes : Press Universitaires de Rennes, 2019), 201.

4.7 An Evolving Futurism

Between 1909 and 1912, Marinetti and adherents to the group published no fewer than thirty manifestos.³²⁵ This gives a sense of the movement's rapid transformation. By the time of Marinetti's third visit to Cairo in 1938 the movement had undergone major changes, it is important to keep this in mind when discussing the movement in Egypt, which appeared almost a decade after its establishment in Italy. Another distinction worth pointing out is between Nazism and fascism. Culturally these two movements differed; Hitler consolidated his power through the promise of resurrecting a glorious past, while Marinetti, rejected the shackles of this very past that he blamed for the ossified cultural and political institutions. The attack on degenerate art in Germany was not imported to Italy.³²⁶

Further by 1920, Marinetti had rejected fascism in writing. The relationship between Futurism and fascism is more complicated than how it appears in Bardaoui's analysis. Although Marinetti joined the fascist ranks and allied himself with the party, notably when he was elected as a fellow of the Royal Academy in 1929, the fascists did not endorse Futurism and its leader. The rejection of their anti-clerical and anti-monarchical proposals during their second conference in Milan in 1920 engendered a rift with the fascists. There was indeed a widening gap between fascism and Futurism, which as Hultén explains, lies in "the futurist anarchic element that rebels against all state hierarchies."³²⁷ By the time of Marinetti's visit to Cairo, Futurism was no longer the all-encompassing ideology it had once been. It receded in the face of fascism's advances. What remained was the official poetic technique of '*para-liberalismo*' which Marinetti expounded at the Ewart Hall at the American University in Cairo.³²⁸ According to Hultén, *aeropoesia*, "although possesses some undeniable merit,

³²⁵ *F.T Marinetti: Critical Writings*, xix.

³²⁶ I will explore this divergence further when discussing the "Long Live Degenerate Art Manifesto" published by Art and Liberty in December 1938. Thomas Bey William Bailey, "Futurism as '*Entarte Kunst*': The Sound Too Intense even for Dictators?" <http://www.tbwb.net/futuristi.html#>

³²⁷ Pontus Hultén, *Futurism and Futurisms* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 512.

³²⁸ Coincidentally on November 24, 2015, the Sharjah Art Foundation in partnership with the American University in Cairo hosted a conference entitled *The Egyptian Surrealists in Global Perspectives* in the Ewart Hall, the very same room where almost fifty years earlier the Egyptian intelligentsia welcomed Marinetti for his third and final visit. In 2015, scholars gathered to discuss the evolution of AL and their relationship with their international counterparts, talks covered a broad range of topics such as Egyptian surrealist photography, Caribbean dialogues with Surrealism and Realism, Leonora Carrington and Edward James in Mexico among others. It seems that the organizers themselves were unaware that the first outpourings of Egyptian Surrealism were felt in this room, when Georges Henein interrupted Marinetti's talk and denounced his fascism. <http://sharjahart.org/sharjah-art-foundation/events/the-egyptian-surrealists-in-global-perspective>

seems repetitive and weary.”³²⁹ By this time, the technique was outdated. Henein too was wary of its merits; in his talk of 1937, he described it as decorative art.³³⁰

4.8 Formations of Egyptian Futurism

The first phase of the movement begins in 1922 with the signing of the first manifesto and loosely lasts until Marinetti’s visit in 1929. The members were all Italian and all men: the lawyer Natale Luri, the author Renato Servi, Rudolfo Piha, Saverio Critelli, Enrico Pirro, Pietro Luri, Rambaldo di Collalto and the painter Renzo da Forno joined Morpurgo. He was the promoter of the group and organised most of its events. There is no evidence that other members participated or organised events. Perhaps, Renzo da Forno is the exception.³³¹ A futurist painter and designer, his illustrations appeared in Morpurgo’s *Per le mie donne* (*For the Women in My Life*, 1933).³³² In 1921, Morpurgo issued the first futurist publication in Cairo entitled “*Revista Futurista*.” Unfortunately, no copies have survived.



Figure 24 *Morfina!* Theatre tickets, Azbakeyya Garden, 16 October 1921.

³²⁹ Pontus Hultén, *Futurism and Futurisms*, 514.

³³⁰ Georges Henein, “*Bilan du Surréalisme*,” *Oeuvres*, 375.

³³¹ Renzo was the nephew of Amelia da Forno, the Venetian impressionist artist, who resided in Alexandria and opened an art studio, which offered private lessons. Mahmoud Said was one of the early pupils.

³³² Renzo da Forno was the nephew of the Venetian painter Amelia da Forno Casonato (1878–1969) who opened an art studio in Alexandria and offered classes to the Alexandrian community (among her students was Mahmoud Said).

By 1933, Morpurgo was undertaking a solo endeavour. The founding members of the group had disbanded. There was no official break from the movement, but their names no longer appear. For the next three decades, Morpurgo actively promoted the movement in Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said and Ismailia, through theatrical performances, exhibitions, radio shows, debates and cultural events.³³³ The activities come to an end when he moves permanently to Rimini in 1956.

4.9 Nelson Morpurgo

Nelson Morpurgo (1899–1978) was born into an Italian family in Cairo. His family came from Istria on the Adriatic coast and had emigrated to Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century. His father, Carlo Morpurgo had established a law firm in Cairo serving the growing Italian community. From 1914, the introduction of the Capitulation system granted foreigners judicial guarantees and placed issues of personal status such as marriage, divorce inheritance and guardianship under the jurisdiction of their respective countries.³³⁴ As such, following the *Tanzimat* (reform programme), a growing number of foreigners migrated to Egypt. In 1917, the Italian community in Egypt counted about 40,000 and by 1939 numbers grew to 60,000. Morpurgo spent his early years of elementary school in Athens and Padua before moving to the Liceo Manzoni in Milan.³³⁵ He earned two degrees in jurisprudence from Paris, in 1924, then Rome, in 1933. Like all Italians living in Egypt, Morpurgo spoke fluent French. From his position in the Mixed Courts, we can assume that Morpurgo was also proficient in Arabic. Indeed, Arabic references appear in his writings. For his encounter with Marinetti, Morpurgo used the word *maktub* (written in Arabic) to describe fate or something that has to happen. In his memoirs, he recalled how shortly after his arrival to Milan, he called Marinetti then showed up on the footstep of his house:

In Arabic, there is a past principle of the verb *ekteb* (to write) that is *maktub* (written or ‘it was written,’) meaning that it has to happen or that was written in the book of fate [...] In those years Milan began its battle for the intervention in the world war [...] We were students and as explosive as powder kegs [...] always organising demonstrations for the intervention and for Irredentism, which sometimes could be very childish. We prepared some kind of labels with gummed paper, containing insults addressed to all: The Central Powers, to Wilhelm II and to Franz Joseph I, to the Vatican, to the Sultan of Turkey [...] A day when there was a great deal of tension, I phoned, for whatever reason Marinetti. I must have been very

³³³ Maria Elena Panicioni “Nelson Morpurgo and the Futurist Movement in Egypt,” *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*, 2016; ed Günter Berghaus, 22.

³³⁴ Philip Marshall Brown, “The Egyptian Capitulations,” *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 12, N. 4 (Oct 1918), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2187786> 81.

³³⁵ Günter Berghaus, *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*, (2016).

persuasive, because in the afternoon, a quarter of an hour before school restarted, I saw him popping around the corner of Via Lanzone, together with Boccioni, Russolo, Carrà and a fifth whom I have never seen again. I ran towards them and escorted them to the students, who were waiting at the gate of the Manzoni High School, followed by some fellow who had joined them. I shouted “Viva Marinetti! Long Live Futurism! Long Live Italy!” Marinetti looked around, smiled at us, shook the hands of students and walked away with his team. The only one brimming over with excitement was me. The next day, I went to the Red house in Corso Venezia and made contact with Marinetti. That’s roughly how and when I met Marinetti and joined the Futurist movement.³³⁶

The Red House or the *Palazzo Rosso* at 61 Corso Venezia was Marinetti’s residence and the headquarters of the movement. Morpurgo spent time in the house, preparing collages, posters and pamphlets for Marinetti and reading futurist poetry. Later he would invoke this time spent with Marinetti in Milan to legitimise his affiliation to the movement.³³⁷ This was the beginning of a friendship that would last many decades and span two continents. Morpurgo was only fifteen at the time of their first meeting. The age difference of more than twenty years is noticeable in his description of the meeting, when Marinetti and a group of Futurists showed up at a school demonstration, organised by Morpurgo and others. Morpurgo relates how Marinetti shook the hands of the pupils and walked away.³³⁸ For the young Morpurgo, these years were formative for his futurist ideas.

Although of different ages, Morpurgo’s fascination was heightened by the shared Italian descent and connections to Egypt. The two kept up a long correspondence over many years. These letters are in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. The invitations extended to Marinetti, one decade apart are evidence of their lasting friendship. In “*Incontro con Marinetti*” (Meeting with Marinetti), Morpurgo relates how the two did not see each other often, but on these occasions, the meetings were *tête-à-tête* and at times lasted for an entire day. He adds that discussions often revolved around literature and art.³³⁹ By 1914, Morpurgo had joined the Futurist movement in Milan and participated in the interventionist and Irredentist movement. Following Marinetti’s example, Morpurgo enlisted in the war

³³⁶ Nelson Morpurgo, “*Primo Incontro con Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*,” from the Nelson Morpurgo Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, translated and quoted by Maria Elena Paniconi, “Nelson Morpurgo and the Futurist Movement in Egypt,” in *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*, ed. Günter Berghaus, 25.

³³⁷ Maria Elena Paniconi, “Italian Futurism in Cairo: The Language(s) of Nelson Morpurgo Across the Mediterranean,” *Philological Encounters*, 2 (2017), 166.

³³⁸ Maria Elena Paniconi, “Nelson Morpurgo and the Futurist Movement in Egypt,” 25.

³³⁹ Nelson Morpurgo, “Primo Incontro con Marinetti,” eds, Sergio Lambiase and Gian Battista Nazzaro, *F.T. Marinetti Futurista: Inediti, pagine disperse, documenti e antologica critica* (Naples: Guida, 1977), 365. The inclusion of this document in Marinetti’s anthology is significant. For the centenary of Marinetti’s birth, Morpurgo participated in a conference organised in Campidoglio, where he read *Amore, Marinetti’s parole in liberta* (words-in-freedom).

efforts as a volunteer. It was during his time in the Italian Expeditionary Corps in Palestine that he founded the *Teatro del Soldato* and staged his first plays.³⁴⁰ His passion for theatre was beginning to develop.

Shortly after the end of WWI, Morpurgo returned to Cairo in 1920 and joined his father's office. He began working at the Appellate Court as a lawyer in the Mixed Courts, where he specialised in marital law, divorce and matters of personal status. With heightened pressure from the Egyptian nationalist movement to abolish the capitulation system, the hitherto extra-territorial rights granted to foreigners became restricted to matters of personal status.³⁴¹ The trajectories of Morpurgo and Marinetti are comparable: while Marinetti pursued his primary education in Egypt and then spent his life in Europe; Morpurgo on the other hand, completed his entire education abroad then returned to Egypt. Sensing the turbulent political situation, Morpurgo joined the *Albo degli Avvocati di Forlì* (Register of Certified Lawyers) in 1951. Shortly after the 1952 *coup d'état* led by the Free Officers, Morpurgo settled permanently in Rimini in 1956.³⁴² For over two decades, he pursued his futurist activities and wrote for the magazine *Futurismo Oggi*.

In Cairo, he was part and parcel of the legal system that underpinned the cosmopolitan societies of Alexandria and Cairo. As an Italian, Morpurgo represented his compatriots, particularly in matters relating to marriage disputes. He also became affiliated to the Italian consulate, while also maintaining his own chambers in downtown Cairo. From the invitation letters to events organised by the futurist group, the address for his office and the group were the same, at 25 Cheikh Abu El Sebaah Street; for example, this address is included on the invitation cards of the *Morfina!* show, Morpurgo's trilogy in three acts which he produced at the Teatro del Giardino in the Azbakeyya Garden on October 16, 1921. His occupation in the Mixed Courts afforded him a certain social capital among both the Italian and Egyptian community. In the same manner as Mahmoud Said, Morpurgo's professional career and artistic practice helped place him in a favourable position within the cultural and intellectual

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 366.

³⁴¹ The "Montreux Convention Regarding the Abolition of the Capitulations of Egypt" signed in May 1937 began this process of abolishing the capitulatory rights of foreigners in Egypt, which would come to end completely in 1949.

³⁴² Maria Elena Paniconi, "Nelson Morpurgo e il 'Movimento del Futurismo Egiziano' fra internazionalismo cosmopolita e appartenenza coloniale," *I linguaggi del Futurismo*, Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi (Macerata, 15-17 Dicembre 2010), *Quaderni linguistici letterari e filologici IV 2013* (Macerata: Global Prints, 2010), 214.

milieus of Cairo and Alexandria. More importantly, he was successful in using this position to promote his movement and entertain an extensive program of events. He was passionate about theatre and directed a series of plays at the Azbakeyya theatre, including *Mme Butterfly* and *Morfina!* (October 16, 1921).

Il Fuoco delle piramidi is an important work in words-in-freedom, published in 1923 during the second period of Futurism.³⁴³ At the time, Morpurgo was still in Milan, studying for his law degree. The work was introduced by Marinetti:

Nelson Morpurgo reveals himself as an original powerful free-word poet with the typical signifying virtues. His pages of words in freedom are splendidly synoptic. He nails into the page that often resemble an engineering project [...] He does not fear the jumbles and the strange mixes, he even demonstrates a rare fortune in linking together abstract ideologies and turbid sensations of material.³⁴⁴

The title makes a link to Egypt: the fire of the pyramids is an energy that Morpurgo draws from in his poems. There are no direct references to the pyramids or Egypt in the poems themselves. *Amore* is a calligramme poem that resembles the three Great Pyramids of Gizeh. It is worth pointing out the significance of Egypt's rich historic heritage in relation to Futurism's call to rid the country from the shackles of the past. There are no direct links made here about Egypt's heritage weighing down on its present, let alone Futurist calls for destruction. But we can safely say that in his writings, Morpurgo drew inspiration from Egypt.

³⁴³ Nelson Morpurgo, *Il Fuoco delle piramidi* (The Fire of the Pyramids) (Milano: Edizioni Futuriste di Poesie, 1923).

³⁴⁴ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "introduction to *Il fuoco delle Piramidi*, by Nelson Morpurgo, as quoted in Maria Elena Paniconi, "Italian Futurism in Cairo: The language(s) of Nelson Morpurgo Across the Mediterranean," *Philological Encounters*, 2, (2017), 161. For a study of Morpurgo's *Il Fuoco delle Piramidi*, see Maria Elena Paniconi, "Italian Futurism in Cairo," 160–4.

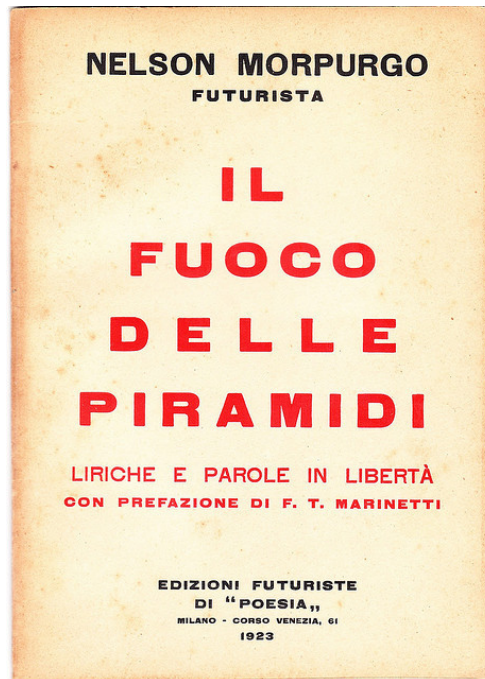


Figure 25 Nelson Morpurgo, *Il Fuoco delle Piramidi*, Cover, (Milan: Edizioni Futuristi di « Poesia » 1923).

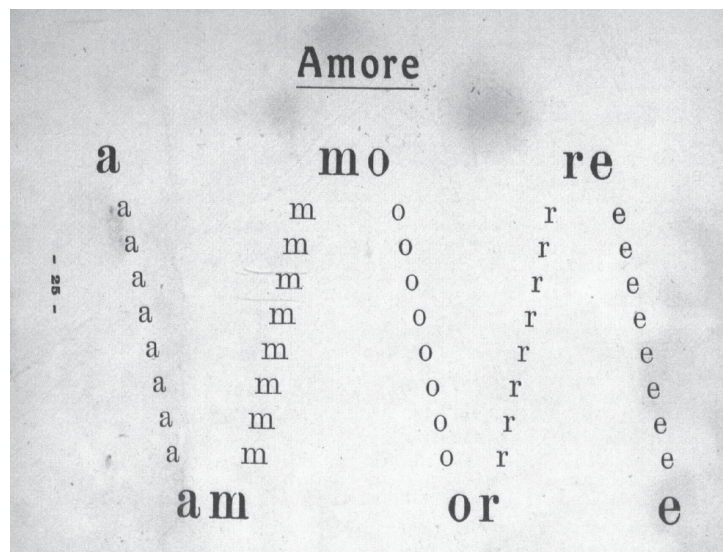


Figure 26 Nelson Morpurgo, "Amore," *Il Fuoco delle Piramidi*.

5. Marinetti Returns to Egypt, A decade Apart

Marinetti's first visit to Egypt took place in 1929. Earlier in the year, he had been nominated as Secretary to the *Classe Arti e Lettere* (Art and Literature Section) in the *Reale Accademia d'Italia* (The Academy of Italy).³⁴⁵ The academy was created by royal decree in January 1926

³⁴⁵ "1929 Inaugurazione Accademia d'Italia," Comitato Nazionale per il IV Centeranrio della Fondazione della Accademia dei lincei. Consulted on April 12, <http://www.lincei-celebrazioni.it/i1929i.html> Gabriele d'Annunzio was also a member of the Royal Academy of Italy- his poem was the subject of Marinetti's talk in Egypt. The academy was created by royal decree in 1926 but was not inaugurated until October 28, 1929.

with the aim of legitimizing the fascist regime abroad at home and abroad. This was his first official visit, as he represented Italy at the 37th Congress of the Association of International Literature and Art (15–22 December 1929). In the late 1930s, Mussolini's regime initiated a propaganda campaign in Egypt and the region at large to influence public opinion.³⁴⁶ He held lectures in French and Italian at the Circolo Italiano, the Teatro Alhambra, the Kursal Theatre and again at al Diafa Literary club. By then, Marinetti's fascist leanings were well known.

Alongside his official visits, Marinetti was hosted at the *al-Diafa* club by Nelly Zananiri–Vaucher. He presented to a small audience. Records of his talk did not survive. A review of the surviving francophone press shows little coverage as well.³⁴⁷ Given Futurism's stance on women and misogyny, it is curious that he was invited by Zananiri–Vaucher, an active feminist journalist who was claiming a new position and role for women in Egyptian society. As Morpurgo had already published the first manifesto, we can only speculate that he and members of the movement were present at this time.

5.1 Moscatelli at Work, Translating

In 1932, *La Semaine Égyptienne (SE)* published a translation of Morpurgo's *Per le mie donne* by Jean Moscatelli (1905–1965). In October 1932, Moscatelli published a portrait of Morpurgo in the same magazine, as a preface to the publication of the book. He traced Morpurgo's footsteps out of Cairo to Italy then France for his studies, and finally his return to Egypt. Throughout the article, Marinetti and the Futurist movement generally are related in favourable terms. There is no mention of the fascism, even though by this time Marinetti had already joined the Royal Academy of Italy. He accounts for his efforts against the bourgeoisie's attachment to the past.

Although he did not undertake it himself, the translation of *Per le mie donne* into French (*Pour mes femmes*) is a clear example of Morpurgo's efforts to reach a cosmopolitan

³⁴⁶ As Gershoni and Jankowski point out, the Egyptian attitudes towards Fascism and Nazism did not evolve in a vacuum. For example, an Arab propaganda Bureau was created in Rome and in 1934 Radio Bari started to broadcast fascist propaganda to Arab-speaking countries, including Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford: Stanford University press, 2010), 16.

³⁴⁷ I have been unable to locate new sources and rely here on Fawzia Zouari, « *En débattant du Futurisme* » *Entre Nil et Sable*, ed. Irène Fenoglio, Marc Kober, Daniel Lançon (Paris : CNDP, 1999). 79-84.

readership whose *lingua franca* was French. To add another layer, Morpurgo did not translate the text himself, instead the translator was none other than Jean Moscatelli. The edition was published by *SE*, a French weekly journal founded by Savro Stavrinos. The core of the journal was to propagate and discuss new philosophical, literary and artistic ideas. It was one of the main francophone journals, to which Morpurgo, Valentine de Saint-Pointe, Henein, Moscatelli, Maria Cavadia among others contributed. Moscatelli (1905–1965) who translated Morpurgo's poems, was born in Cairo and held Italian citizenship. The Italian anarchist was a principal figure in the Franco-Egyptian arts and literary community from the late 1920s until its dissolution in the late 1950s. He regularly contributed to French magazines such as *SE*, *Un Effort* and *Images*. The majority of his work consisted of reviews such as *Les Pieds en l'air* in the satirical magazine *Goha* and *Arrhes Poétiques* in *SE*. He published his first collection of poems *Neurasthenie* in 1926 under his Italian name Giovanni. Curiously, he briefly defected to fascism in 1936, and voiced his support for Mussolini, and as a result, he was placed under house arrest in Cairo during in the interwar period. It is interesting to trace his multiple or ambivalent affiliations. On 17 March 1938, Moscatelli published an article in *Images*, entitled *Tandis que Marinetti vient en Égypte* (And While Marinetti comes to Egypt).³⁴⁸ The author explains that Futurism owes its origin to Egypt since the leader of its movement was born in Alexandria. As such, the country could not escape the spread of the movement. In this article, he celebrated the futurist movement and its leader Marinetti, as “the great international poet.” He goes on to comment on the movement's influence on later avant-garde movements such as Cubism, Dadaism, and Surrealism. As mentioned, Henein disavowed these links. Moscatelli discussed the Futurist activities organised by Morpurgo, notably a futurist-inspired version of Puccini's *Mme Butterfly* that was staged in the Azbakeyya theatre. The change in position is interesting. Bardaouil recounts that Moscatelli joined Henein and Santini in denouncing Futurism and fascist Italy's advances in neighbouring Libya and Ethiopia. It is significant that Moscatelli was able to dissociate himself from Futurism and move towards Surrealism swiftly. To my mind, the significance of Futurism in Egypt at this period lies in this very moment of negotiation. The confrontation of the movement's ideas created a space where, for at least a brief moment, Futurism and Surrealism coexisted in Egypt. And as a result of this coexistence, stimulating debates about artistic movements, freedom of thought, individual liberties took place.

³⁴⁸ Jean Moscatelli, “*Tandis que Marinetti vient en Égypte*” (And While Marinetti comes to Egypt), *Images*, 17 March 1938.



Figure 27 Jean Moscatelli, "Tandis que Marinetti vient en Égypte," 17 March 1938, Images.

Marinetti's second visit took place in March 1938. An examination of this visit, nine months before the publication of the "Long Live Degenerate Art" manifesto is key to our understanding of the rise of Surrealism in Egypt in 1938. At the core of his talk, Marinetti presented Futurism as the origin of all vanguard movements. In that sense, it was in direct response to Henein's talk a year earlier, where he repudiated all ties between Surrealism and Futurism. During his visit, Marinetti gave two talks. The first on Gabriele d'Annunzio in Italian which was presented in Cairo, in the Ewart Hall, and in Alexandria. The talk was repeated at the Circolo Italiano of Ismailiya and the Casa degli Italiani of Port Said.³⁴⁹ The second talk on "Poesia Motorisata" was also presented in Cairo and Alexandria. *La Revue des Conférences* published the content of the talk a few months later in November. In Alexandria, he was introduced to the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy (1866-1933) by Anastasio Catraro.³⁵⁰ An account of this trip was first published in *Gazzetta del popolo* in Turin on May

³⁴⁹ Nelson Morprugo, "Marinetti in Egitto" (1938), GEN MSS 493, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript library, Yale University Library, 3.

³⁵⁰ Chris Michaelides, "When Cavafy met Marinetti," British Library blog, November 24, 2014. <http://blogs.bl.uk/european/2014/11/when-cavafy-met-marinetti.html>

2, 1930 and was later included in the volume *Il fascino dell'Egitto*, a collection of essays on his trip to Egypt published in 1933.³⁵¹

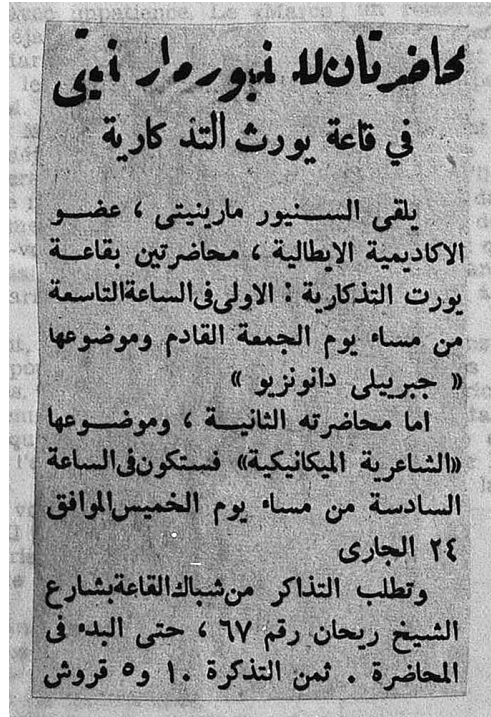


Figure 28 Al-Ahram, 16 March 1938, Announcement of Marinetti's Conference at the Ewart Hall, AUC.

5.2 Chez Grassi: In Honour of Marinetti

Following the lecture at the Ewart Hall in the American University in Cairo, Carlo Grassi, the leader of the Italian community in Cairo hosted a futurist evening in his Villa Nedda in Zamalek. Born in Greece, he moved to Cairo in the late 1800s and became one of the largest producers and dealers of tobacco in the region. He opened the Grassi tobacco shop at 19 Maddabegh Street (Sherif Street today) in downtown Cairo— the same address as the headquarters of AL. On the same street, at number 27 stood Nahman's gallery, a famous antique store. Further along, were Morpurgo's legal chambers and the movement's headquarters on Sheikh Abu El Sabah Street. The geographical matrix of downtown Cairo appears again to highlight the closely-knit arena these protagonists operated in. Downtown

351 Marinetti's brother, Leone died at the age of twenty during his studies in Italy. Marinetti's parents were still in Alexandria at the time. Following the incident, they left Egypt to Italy and settled in Turin. By the time of Marinetti's first visit in 1928, more than two decades had elapsed since his departure to Paris in 1894 (the same year as Leone's death). He no longer had connections to the city of Alexandria. In *Il Fascino dell'Egitto*, he tries to remember old neighbourhoods and recreates his footpath in the city. The account is also a commentary about the changes in the city of Alexandria.

Cairo was the intellectual hub of the city which comprised bookshops (al-Midan bookshop), bars (Tommy Bar), cafés (Groppi Café), literary salons and clubs (*L'Atelier du Caire*), the *Lycée Français du Caire* (Foyer du LFC) among others.

In previous art history literature, Arabic, French and English, Grassi is not discussed. It is not entirely surprising since the connections with the Surrealists and Futurists are not obvious. Bardaouil is the first to mention Grassi in the context of Egypt. He invokes a dubious source to make the argument of the correlation between fascism and Futurism.³⁵² Grassi is portrayed as a fascist. More generally, the event is described as a 'banquet of fascist-leaning futurists,'

Like the rest of the Cairene intellectual elite, Carlo Grassi lived on the opposite bank of the Nile, on Gueziret al-Zamalek (Zamalek Island). Villa Nedda, named after his wife Nedda Mieli, still stands today as the Embassy of Morocco. On the same street, writer and art patron Marie Cavadia, and her husband, then MP Mamdouh Mostapha Pasha Riaz lived a few doors up. As president of the Cairo Fascio, Grassi was the leader of the Italian community in Egypt as well as the president of Italian Chamber of Commerce. He appears in the history of the Futurist movement upon Marinetti's second visit in 1938. According to Morpurgo's account, there were a total of 150 guests present at the 'Futurist Soiree' at Villa Nedda, including artists, writers, painters, poets and journalists from the Egyptian, French, Italian, Greek and Armenian communities. Georges Henein, Jean Moscatelli, Taha Hussein, Ragheb Ayad and other members of the Egyptian intelligentsia were invited. Artist Ragheb Ayad had spent four years studying art in Italy, in the school of futurist artist Ferruccio Ferrazzi.³⁵³ He was familiar with Futurism, in fact some of his works bear imprints of the movement. Ayad was in Venice for the biennial of 1926 when the Futurists exhibited their work. Morpurgo relates how the evening ended with readings of Futurist poetry.

Zouari explains that this visit activated strong debates and conversations locally; it came close to a court case.³⁵⁴ Marinetti was even warned prior to his lecture about the disruption that his position may generate. In *La Bourse Égyptienne*, Gabriel Boctor relating the visit a few years later, writes that "[Marinetti] was warned that he colloquium will be agitated

³⁵² Ernest Ialongo, "Filippo Tommaso Marinetti: The Futurist as Fascist, 1929–1937," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 18, no.4, 2013 and Ernst Ialongo, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti: The Artist and his Politics* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015).

³⁵³ Maria Elena Paniconi, "*Nelson Morpurgo e il 'Movimento del Futurismo Egiziano*," 231.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 83.

because his opinions are not shared by the majority of the people,” but Marinetti refused to see reason.³⁵⁵ Zouari sees this as a sign of the evolution of the debate between East and West: from a philosophical, to a civilizational and spiritual debate, Futurism, in the context of heightened nationalist and independent movements, stirred an ideological and political debate.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ Gabriel Boctor, *La Bourse Égyptienne*, Décembre 16, 1944 as quoted in Zouari, « *En Debattant du Surréalisme*, » 83.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 85.

5. CHAPTER FOUR: MAHMOUD SAID: THE MAKING OF THE 'FATHER' OF EGYPTAIN ART

“In reality art in general does not have a nationality, nor does it recognise borders or restrictions. It is futile to restrain it to limited origins or measure it with special standards ... for each developing nation must have an art that expresses its feeling and its inherent instincts.”³⁵⁷

This chapter moves beyond a nationalist framework to study Said’s artistic production and adopts a wider lens which places the local in negotiation with the global. Notions of ‘authenticity,’ ‘homeland, and ‘identity’ have been at the centre of art criticism and writing particularly post-1952. In addition to looking at Said’s work with a transnational lens, this chapter presents a social history of his work. It adopts a gender-based lens to analyse the representation of women across his work, in the commission for important art events, including the *Exposition Internationale* in Paris (1937) and the Venice Biennial (1938), to the series of nude paintings, the formal portraits of family, friends and colleagues as well as paintings of religious themes. By adopting a gendered perspective, I argue that Said’s position as an intermediary between early attempts at modernism in Egypt and Art and Liberty’s efforts becomes clear.

How does Said, with his representations of female nudity in public spaces such as *La Villa* come to embody Egyptian art? What is intrinsically Egyptian and authentic about Said’s subjects? Said was the first to be awarded the State Merit Award for the Arts by President

³⁵⁷ Mahmoud Said, “Art in Egypt,” *Memorial Book on the Occasion of the Golden Jubilee*, translated by Suzy Beltagy

Abdel Nasser in 1960. This chapter asks how Said has come to be known as the father of Egyptian modern art. It unpacks the art making process, the exhibitions he participated in, the circulation of his work in the Egyptian press and abroad and how art critics were writing about him from as early as 1927.

5.3 Adam and Eve

A useful example of Said's combination of European painting and ideas of Egyptian identity is *Adam and Eve* (1937), which recasts the eponymous figures of the biblical story of creation. Together with *La Famille* (1935–1936) and *L'Exode* (1941), *Adam and Eve* is one of three pieces that explore a couple's relationship in the entire oeuvre of Said.³⁵⁸ It is also one of his rare works recalling religious iconography, typically depicted by the Old Masters. By doing so, Said contends with a lineage of classical artistic traditions, spanning from Albrecht Dürer, Titian, Peter Paul Rubens, Michelangelo, Lucas Cranach the Elder to Corot, Renoir, Cezanne, Fernand Leger, Picasso among others. What is striking is how the artist adapts the biblical story and transports it into the Egyptian countryside.

Painted in 1937, the same year the artist executed some of his most important works— such as the monumental painting *La Ville*, exhibited at the Egyptian Pavilion of the 1937 *Exposition Internationale de Paris* and standing in the main hall of the Egyptian Modern Art Museum in Cairo today— *Adam and Eve* shows Said at the height of his artistic maturity. His deft fusion of Western artistic traditions spanning Italian and Flemish Primitivism, Renaissance art, Impressionism and modern art, together with Ancient Egyptian art and local subject matters produces a transcendental work, typical of his style.

³⁵⁸ A version of this analysis was published in Sotheby's catalogue entry, auction October 2017.

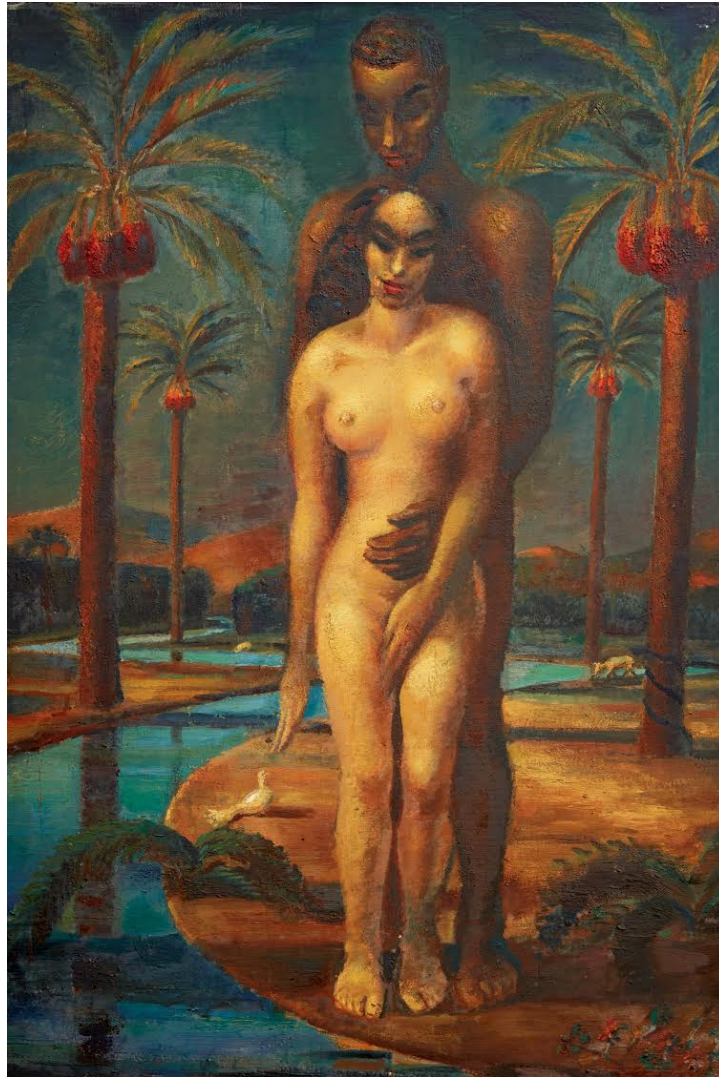


Figure 29 Mahmoud Said, Adam and Eve, oil on panel, 1937, Private collection.

Set by the Nile River, as the place of the birth of civilization, the Garden of Eden is transformed into a lush Egyptian oasis. Tall palm trees bearing ripe red dates border the undulating water of the Nile river— a ubiquitous trope in Said’s paintings standing as a symbol of life for Egyptians. Paralleling each other and casting their shadow onto the deep turquoise water running through the scene, the palm trees establish a rhythm within the geometric composition. The architectural composition is reminiscent of early renaissance paintings that Said would have seen during his travels through Europe. Sand dunes roll into the horizon of a gradient violet-blue sky. The view is soaked in a radiant yet artificial light that magnifies the lyricism of the scene. The viewer is transported to a mystical garden,

where perceptions of time and space are temporarily suspended. This stillness, reigning over the lovers' embrace, sets the scene for a prelapsarian moment, before the Fall of Man or the moment of temptation. Predictably, the black serpent coils around the forbidden tree, recast now as a palm tree behind the couple. Although the concept of original sin does not exist in Islam, Said's composition undoubtedly points to this moment of grace in Christianity, before they are expelled from the garden of Eden.

The eponymous figures stand tall at the centre of the painting, they seem to have grown too large for the space they inhabit. The skewed sense of scale is not peculiar to this painting. The subjects are often placed at the centre and are enlarged out of proportion. *La femme aux boucles d'or* discussed below, is a typical example. The artist regularly places his subjects at the centre of the composition presenting statuesque figures with angular builds and well-rooted feet, which are the artist's nod to Ancient Egyptian sculpture. Their angular facial features, thick eyebrows and eyes shadowed in kohl recall the Amarna style of Akhenaten's reign. Said repeatedly drew inspiration from this period, as we will see below, in *L'Invitation au voyage* or again in *La Ville*.

Adam and Eve is set in a quintessentially Egyptian countryside. In many ways, this biblical representation is a eulogy to the peasantry, considered the rightful heirs of the Egyptian land. The two figures stand in a recognizable *contrapposto* position, where the weight is carried on one leg and the other leg is bent. Considered the perfect pose for the human figure and the quintessential resting one, the *contrapposto* was revived during the Italian renaissance to create harmonious and balanced bodies. The combination of elements from Ancient Egyptian art with this classical pose bestows on the heroines a certain divine quality.

Interlacing his arms around her, Adam embraces Eve from behind and places his hand on her stomach. This recurrent motif of fertility is also echoed in the ripe red dates towering above them. Their linking arms resonate with the coiling serpent on the forbidden tree. His gaze is cast downward, and his chin is placed on Eve's cocked head. In fact, we do not meet their gaze at all, as they are both looking downward, seemingly entranced in their eternal bond. A sense of tranquilly and calmness reigns over them. Pushed to the foreground, Eve obscures the equally nude body of her counterpart. While it is not surprising that Eve is the main figure of the composition since representations of the female nude feature in a large part of Said's oeuvre, it is worth mentioning that the artist's experiments with the female nude was not commonly accepted in Egyptian society at the time, even less so, among Said's aristocratic milieu.

Eve's bodily contortions and nude breasts are comparable to the rest of Said's sensuous approach to the female nude— for example in *L'endormie* (1933), depicting a reclining Rubenesque body bathed in glowing light. Yet her pale porcelain complexion, highly contrasted with Adam's darker skin tone, sets her apart. Adam is a depiction of the Egyptian peasant who works the land. Eve is at the centre of this bright magical light that bathes the Egyptian oasis. The striking contrast in skin colour between Adam and Eve is not peculiar to Said. Indeed, we discern a visual interaction with Gustav Klimt's unfinished *Adam and Eve* (1917).

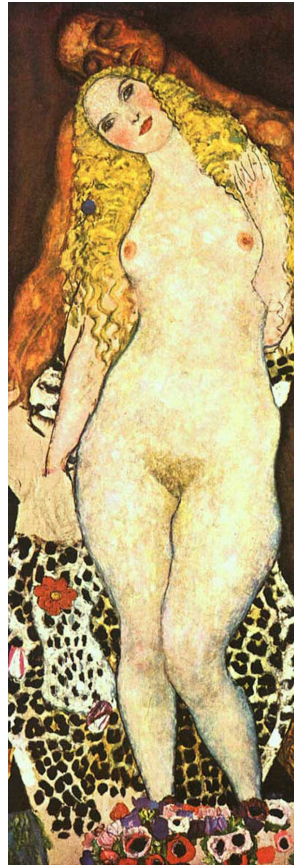


Figure 30 Gustav Klimt (1862–1918), Adam and Eve, 1917-1918, Osterreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna, Austria, Bridgeman Images.

Further, Eve's bodily language using her hand to cover her pubis, which ostensibly draws attention to the very part being covered, pays homage to the Knidian Aphrodite, the first statue of a nude goddess created in 350 BCE. The Venus Pudica is indeed the powerful Western pose at the origin of the terms of passivity, vulnerability and shame that continues to define feminine sexuality. But Said's Eve, though casting a downward gaze, counterbalances this passivity and shows her as a powerful character through her radiance and tactile body. Eve's other arm, which would traditionally cover her breast, hangs to her side and her finger firmly points to a dove, a standard symbol of peace, resting on the ground. In his free adaptation of the biblical story, Said also included two white goats in the background, which are typically connected with Venus, and are symbols of burning lust and sexuality. A fox also creeps into the scene and hides behind the fallen palm trees. While the garden of Eden was

not inhabited by animals, it is worth mentioning that, as early as 1505, Albrecht Dürer departed from the garden evoked in the Genesis, and included an elk, ox, cat, rabbit, mouse and goat in the *Adam and Eve* engraving.



Figure 31 Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), *Adam and Eve*, 1504, The Morgan Library and Museum.

The internal light that emanates from Eve and simultaneously bathes the entire composition lends the scene a surreal, nostalgic and even eternal air. Said was heavily influenced by Rembrandt's 'magical light' and techniques of chiaroscuro. A quest for this internal light was at the centre of his artistic practice. In a letter to fellow artist Pierre Beppi-Martin, he explains:

What I am looking for is radiance rather than light. What I want is internal light, not surface light, that blazing and deep light of some of the Limoges enamel works that can be found in the Cluny Museum, or in the stained-glass windows of the Chartres cathedral or the one in

Barcelona. Surface light pleases for an hour while internal light captivates slowly, but once it appears, it imprisons us, it possesses us.³⁵⁹

To understand how Said could come to imagine his practice in connection to this European heritage, we need to explore his background further. He is considered one of the *ruwwad* (pioneers) of Egyptian art, among others such as Ragheb Ayad, Mohammed Naghi, Ahmed Sabry, and Mahmoud Mokhtar. The *ruwwad* played an instrumental role in the advancement of modern Egyptian art and are the first generation of artists who succeeded to combine Western art traditions with Egyptian subject matter. Born in 1897, into an aristocratic family, Said grew up in the cosmopolitan port city of Alexandria. He was the son of Muhammad Said Pasha, who was Prime Minister of Egypt twice in 1919 and the uncle of Queen Farida of Egypt, the wife of King Farouk. For the first few years, Said was privately tutored at home. He then attended the prestigious Victoria College and the Jesuit School in Alexandria and El Saidiya School in Cairo. His secondary schooling was at al-Abassiya School in Alexandria, where he received the Baccalaureate diploma in 1915. Said was fluent in Arabic, French and English. Following his father's wishes to pursue a legal career, Said joined the French College of Law. He graduated in 1919, the same year as the first Egyptian nationalist revolution, led by the Wafd party against the British occupation. The occupation and the continued presence of British colonial authorities in Egypt until 1952 present an important backdrop to understanding the artistic production. The demands for independence and the end of the occupation dominated national debates. The *nahda* (renaissance) paradigm and its stipulations of a cultural renaissance, both in terms of literary and artistic production, was at its height by the advent of the revolution.

³⁵⁹ Letter Mahmud Sa'id, Letter to Pierre Beppi-Martin, San Stefano, Ramleh, Alexandria, 16 December 1927, as translated from French and quoted in Elizabeth Miller, *Nationalism and the Birth of Modern Art in Egypt*, (unpublished dissertation), University of Oxford, 2012), 212.

In July 1922, shortly after graduating from law school in Cairo, he was appointed Deputy District Prosecutor at the Mansourah Mixed Courts (*al-mahakim al-mukhtaltah, tribunaux indigènes*), where he adjudicated on cases involving disputes between Egyptians and foreigners. In 1927, he was promoted from president of the mixed Public Persecution Service of Alexandria to judge at the Mixed Tribunal of Mansourah.³⁶⁰ By 1937, he attained the position of first judge in Alexandria.³⁶¹

In a letter to art critic Paul Vanderborght, dated 30 April 1935, Said expressed his regret in missing an opportunity to “chat with you for an hour or two about the things that interest me so much and take me away from the dusty atmosphere of my case files.”³⁶² Said struggled to find time to focus on his artistic practice. During his professional career, he spent his free

³⁶⁰ Royal decree, no.1 of 30 December 1927, (*Al Waqai'ia al-Masriya*, 5 January 1928, no.2), as quoted in *Mahmoud Said*, (Milan: Skira, 2016), Vol.2, 887.

³⁶¹ *Le Journal des tribunaux mixtes : Bulletin d'informations judiciaires*, Alexandria : *La Gazette des tribunaux mixtes d'Égypte* (1921–1949). In 1875, Egypt's legal and judicial systems which involved foreigners were reformed. New codes and courts were put in place; these included the Mixed Courts in 1875–1876 and the Native Courts (*al-mahakim al ahliyyah, tribunaux indigènes*) in 1883–1884. The former adjudicated civil and commercial cases between foreigners and between foreigners and Egyptians. Real property litigation, the bulk of which was concerned with *awqaf* (s.g. *Waqf*, pious endowment in Islamic law). The Native Courts, as their name indicated, were the courts for Egyptians; these adjudicated criminal cases involving Egyptians and foreigners and all civil and commercial cases between Egyptians, in which no foreigners were involved. Any cases that pertained to issues of family and inheritance were handled by the Islamic Court system and the respective religious minority courts (Coptic and Jewish). Leonard Wood, *Islamic Legal Revival: Reception of European Law and Transformations in Islamic Legal Thought in Egypt, 1875–1952*, (Oxford, OUP, 2016), 25. Since the early eighteenth century, the port city of Alexandria attracted immigrants -- mainly merchants and traders -- from across the Ottoman empire, as well Europeans mainly from Italy, France, Malta and Greece. The capitulations, which were part and parcel of the system of the Mixed Courts, granted nationals of certain countries a set of privileges that effectively exempted them from Egyptian law and judicial institutions. They became a subject of heightened political tension between Egypt and Britain, especially following the 1919 revolution. With the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936, an agreement was reached to abolish them in stage and it was in 1949 that these courts finally ceased to exist. Nathan J. Brown, “The Precarious Life and Slow Death of the Mixed Courts of Egypt,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 25, No.1 (Feb 1993), 33–53 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/164157>

³⁶² Letter to Paul Vanderborght, dated 30 April 1935, on letter headed paper “*Tribunal Mixte d'Alexandrie*,” Archives Paul Vanderborght, Musée de la Littérature Brussels, ML 07738 Égypte et Proche-Orient, as reproduced and translated in Valérie Didier Hess and Hussam Rashwan, *Mahmoud Said*, catalogue raisonnée, (Milan: Skira Editore, 2016), Vol. 2, 800.

time, mainly on the weekends, and during the four months of the court's summer recess, producing art.

Between 1919 and 1921, Said attended art courses at the Académie Julien and the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris. Even though Said had attended art courses in the private studios of the Venetian Impressionist artist Amelia Casonato Daferno and later with the portraitist Arturo Zanieri in Alexandria, he had not yet studied how to draw the human body. It is worth pointing out the difference in the development of art education between Cairo and Alexandria, which also bears consequences on the history of art in these two cities. The opening of the School of Fine Arts in Cairo in 1908 serves as a turning point for artistic production in the city. In that sense, Alexandria has no equivalent because the city had no School of Fine Art at the time. Students attended lessons in the private studios of foreign artists. The study of the human body from live models was not taught in these studios, which focussed solely on still life. It was during his time in Paris, that Said began to draw from live models for the first time. He also used this time to travel extensively across Europe to study the works of the Old Masters, during which he gained a large repertoire of Western artistic traditions. Said was especially drawn to the works of the Italian Primitives and the Venetian Renaissance paintings. In 1947, when he turned 50 and shortly after the death of his father, who may have pressured him into a legal career, Said decided to retire and dedicate himself entirely to his art practice.

5.4 The 'Father' of Modern Egyptian Art

In 1951, the SAA organised a retrospective exhibition for Said at the Modern Art Museum in Guezireh, which gathered 145 paintings including *La Ville*. With this show, Said reached the

pinnacle of Egyptian art. In 1959, he was awarded the *Prix d'état* by the Supreme Council of Art, Literature and Social Sciences. A year later, another retrospective was organised at the Museum of Fine Arts in Alexandria, on Menace Street in Moharram Bey area, on the occasion of the eighth anniversary of the 1952 *coup d'état*. It brought together 120 works by the artist. That same year he was also awarded the Medal of Merit by President Abdel Nasser– the first artist to receive it. Four years later, on the occasion of the 12th anniversary, the governorate of Alexandria organised another retrospective in the same venue. The show took place between 25th July and 1st September 1964 just two months after the artist's passing in April. This time, 137 works were brought together. In 1997, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the artist's birth, a reproduction of *La Ville* was printed on postage stamps in Egypt. Said's status as the father of Egyptian art is unchanged. In 2016, Valerie Didier Hess and Hussam Rashwan published a catalogue raisonné, the first of its kind to be published on an artist from Egypt or the region at large. The catalogue is spread across two volumes: the first volume includes Said's paintings accompanied by newly commissioned academic texts as well as reproductions of studies, translated from Arabic and French dating from the 1920s–1960s.³⁶³

Said's forty year-long career encompasses a wide range of styles and genres, including portraiture, a large series of nudes (approx. 40) and stylized landscapes. Hess's analyses of Said's artwork are articulated around issues of class and social differences. The different types of artworks are divided along an axis of class difference. The formal portraits of family members are contrasted with the paintings of nude models in the private space of the studio. Markers of class, such as the choice of dress, accessories and skin colour are highlighted. For example, in *Ma femme au châle vert*, his wife Samiha Riaz looks gracefully away from the

³⁶³ Didier and Rashwan, *Mahmoud Said*, catalogue raisonné, (Milan: Skira Editore, 2016)

viewer, she wears a green shawl with gold embroidery that covers her body. Other formal portraits of family members, friends and colleagues, such as the American judge Jasper Brinton contrast with the eroticised depictions of the female nude.



Figure 32 Mahmoud Said, Ma femme au châle vert, 1944, Mahmoud Said Museum, Alexandria.

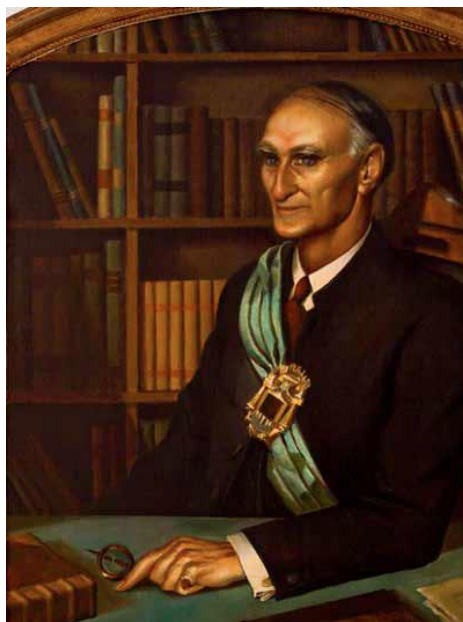


Figure 33 Mahmoud Said, Portrait de Jasper Brinton, oil on panel, 1944.

Patrick Kane writes about Said's representation of women, notably in *Banat Bahari* (1935) and *El Zar* (1939), that the artist "emphasized the feminine and the mystical as a means of countering the authoritarian trend in politics and culture." Kane adds that his paintings "emphasize women as subjects that counter the trends towards the militant patriarchal sculptural projects of Muhammad Hassan and others of the same period."³⁶⁴ To my mind, this type of argument glances over the imbalanced gender relations at play in the presentation of the female subjects. While Kane's study, the unpublished dissertation of Elizabeth Miller, as well as the studies in the catalogue raisonné have undoubtedly deepened our understanding of Said's artworks, they fail to investigate the gendered relations impregnated in the works. This becomes an imperative in the context of how women's roles in society lie at the crux of national debates from the 1920s. Female bodies became sites of political contestation within which nationalist narratives and projects of modernisation were drawn.³⁶⁵ Questions of education, hygiene, fitness and child rearing dominated the local press. Meanwhile, mysticism and explorations of the spiritual were focused on male figures. Paintings such as *Le Vieux Cheikh* (1927), *La prière* (1934) and *El Zikr* (1936) depict male figures performing devotional acts, or religious themes more generally, such as in *La pêche miraculeuse* (1933). I now turn to the sketches and final composition of *El Zikr* to map out the artistic process and address the ways Said engaged with issues of gender and Egyptianess at every stage. By doing so, we can gain a better understanding of his *oeuvre* and the way the artist negotiated the artistic and socio-political conditions of the time.

³⁶⁴ Patrick Kane, "Egyptian Art Institutions and Art Education from 1908–1951," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol.44, No.3 (Fall 2010), 53.

³⁶⁵ For a study of representations of Egypt as a woman and the way women's bodies were pushed to the forefront of political debate see Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley, California; London: University of California Press, 2005).

5.5 Patronage and the *modello*

But before turning to *El Zikr*, let us briefly pause to outline the significance of the *modelli*. Said prepared *modelli* for most of his monumental paintings. *EL Zikr* (1936), *La Ville* (1937), *L'Inauguration du Canal de Suez* (1947) and other monumental paintings were first executed in the form of a *modello*. This technique is used to produce complex compositions. These *modelli* (or *esquisses*) were usually presented to patrons for approval before the artist moved on to the final composition. Their complexity and technique varied according to the subject matter and context of its production. *Les derviches tourneurs* (The Whirling Dervishes, circa 1928–9) represents the dervishes of the Mevlevi Sufi order, performing the devotional practice of whirling, as a form of *zikr* (remembrance of God).³⁶⁶ For this painting, Said prepared a small format (16.5cmx10cm) sketch in watercolour and brush and India ink on paper, likely for his own use. Said was experimenting with the layout. In the first sketch, the dervishes are represented vertically. With extended arms and tilting heads, the three men occupy the entire pictorial space. In this sketch only, the man dressed in red is seen from the back. The artist may have used this colour distinction to signal that the figure has turned his back.

³⁶⁶ The painting *The Whirling Dervishes* hit auction record, for the artist and for Middle Eastern art more generally; in 2010, the painting was sold at Christies (London) for USD 2,546,500.



Figure 34 Mahmoud Said, *Les derviches tourneurs*, 1929, watercolour and brush.



Figure 35 Mahmoud Said, *Les derviches tourneurs (esquisse)*, Oil on panel, Private Collection, Christie's Image Ltd.

This use of red is abandoned in subsequent compositions. The use of watercolour brush and India ink adds to the movement and lends it immediacy. The black outline brushwork is rough and quick; there is a sense of harmony among the three figures. Their whirling cloaks form a circular outline which accentuates the sense of movement. They appear in a trance and

form one entity. The light cast on their cloaks bestows the men with a certain strength of character, it grounds them in the scene and simultaneously elevates them to mystical figures.

The second sketch was a small format in oil paint. In comparison to the earlier version, the coordination is lost. Said experimented with a horizontal layout. The three dervishes are spread apart. Each one looks immersed in his own practice. Their gazes are directed downward. While each one is looking in a different direction, none of them catch the viewer's eye. A *Sufi cheikh* dressed in a brown cloak is seated on the floor behind them. Although in the background, he holds a central position: he is an observer of the performance as though a surrogate of the artist. In this way, we can think of the *Sufi cheikh* as an intermediary between the viewer and the performer. The composition is very insular, there are no indicators from the outside world. Unlike the final composition, where a row of windows and blue sky is added, here the background is sparse. The warm colour palette and the rays of light captured on the men's dresses add to the scene's remoteness. Said has already begun working on the light in this work, especially as it is cast on the men's white cloaks. It bestows the men a certain strength and divine character. With male characters, the artist uses this golden light to convey a certain masculinity, that is grounded in spirituality. This is fully realised in the final composition.



Figure 36 Mahmoud Said, *Les derviches tourneurs*, oil on panel, 1929. Private collection. Christie's Image Ltd.

For the final work, Said reverts to a vertical format. The dervishes have grown in number to six men who are all moving in the same direction. Their gazes are still directed inwards, in line with the movement of their cloaks. The addition of a wooden ring separates the men from the musical ensemble seated under the arches. In fact, it is easy to miss the men seated behind. They almost blend in with the pillars in the background. The row of windows atop signals the outside world. Yet the light basking the scene, markedly on the whirling cloaks is an artificial light that results from a chiaroscuro technique. The men are in a trance. The light cast on their cloaks bestows the men their strength. One discerns a typology in Said's work that falls along gender lines. In depictions, falling beyond spiritual themes, male subjects are performing activities such as fishing or working the land (*Les Chadoufs* (1934)), where their masculinity lies at the crux. Frequently the men are depicted performing devotional acts and appear totally absorbed in their practice. It is as though the subjects are protected from the

male gaze because of the sanctity of their performance. This axis of masculinity and spirituality is important to keep in mind, particularly in relation to Said's depiction of female subjects.



Figure 37 Mahmoud Said, *La Ville (1ère esquisse)*, 1937, oil on panel, Residence of the Ambassador of the A.R.E to the Kingdom of Sweden.

The first *modello* of *La Ville* was produced in 1937. On the back, the inscription “*1ère esquisse pour le panneau La Ville*” indicates clearly that it was produced in preparation for the exhibition. Today the painting is on loan from the Museum of Modern Art in Cairo (MACA) and on display in the Residence of the Ambassador of the A.R.E to the Kingdom of Sweden.³⁶⁷ The second *modello* of *La Ville* is in the MMK collection. It is similarly inscribed on the back, “*Esquisse du panneau peint par Mahmoud Said, San Stefano Alexandrie, Égypte, 1937.*” This is significant for a number of reasons. As General Commissioner of the Egyptian Pavilion in the *Exposition Internationale* in Paris in 1937, it is most likely that MMK commissioned Said to produce the painting for the occasion. *La Ville* was first shown

³⁶⁷ Mahmoud Said, plate 193, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 391.

at the *Exposition* in 1937 in Paris. Its second appearance abroad was during the Venice Biennial of 1952.³⁶⁸ The date the painting was acquired by the MACA is unknown but owing to Khalil's role on the museum's acquisition committee, it is likely that *La Ville* was moved to the museum on the conclusion of the *Exposition*. The painting was on loan to the Museum of Fine Arts, Alexandria from 1951 until at least 1964 according to its provenance history.³⁶⁹ I find it more plausible to assume that the use of the *modelli*, at least in this particular case, performed its traditional role. The appearance of the *modello* in MMK's collection attests to the fact that it was commissioned specifically for the Pavilion. As we will see below, the alterations that were made reveal an engagement with themes of Egyptianess and gender.



Figure 38 Mahmoud Said, *La Ville (esquisse)*, 1937, oil on panel, Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil and Emilienne Luce Museum, Cairo.

Today, *La Ville* is one of Said's major paintings, hanging in the entrance of the Museum of Modern Art in Cairo. Before discussing the patronage and the context of its creation, let us

³⁶⁸ In 1952, the Egyptian pavilion moved to a new building, that had previously served as the Swiss pavilion. This move coincided with the arrival of the Free Officers in power.

³⁶⁹ Mahmoud Said, 393.

first turn to the composition and ask how this image of three women standing at the centre al-Anfushi neighbourhood in Alexandria, by the Mahmoudia Canal, has become such an iconic oeuvre of Egyptian art?



Figure 39: Mahmoud Said, *La Ville*, 1937, oil on panel, Museum of Modern Art Cairo.

The painting is set in Said's native Alexandria. Although titled *La Ville*, it is not obvious what makes the composition characteristic of the city. In fact, other elements point to a compositional image that blends the two big cities of Cairo and Alexandria. The citadel of Qaitbay in the neighbourhood of Anfushi near the Necropolis is replaced by the Citadel of Mohamed Ali in Cairo, the quintessential seat of power built by the founder of modern Egypt. In this composition, the Citadel sits atop the Alexandrian Mahmoudia Canal or the corniche in Ras el Tin. Water is a recurrent feature of the artist's artworks, it ranges from references to the Nile, the Port of Alexandria on the Mediterranean Sea to canals such as the Mahmoudia in Alexandria or the Grand Canal in Venice. This is not a typical scene of Egypt. The scene is set in the centre of an urban space, which is typically a gendered one.

The main subjects are the famous *banat bahari* (women of the sea) of Alexandria. They are recognisable inhabitants of the Anfushi neighbourhood, in the north-west of the city, and roamed the streets as entertainers or sex-workers. Said regularly featured them in his paintings— for example in *Le Chat Blanc* ([1937]-39) and *Banat Bahari* (1935).³⁷⁰ These women were often of Turko-Circassian origin. This is more visible in the earlier sketches where their light hair and fair skin are more noticeable. As we will see below, the artist changes their features to make them look more Egyptian, by bestowing on them, predominantly, Ancient Egyptian features. The triangular axis of the composition places the three women at the centre, as the painting's focal point. The composition forms almost a circular arena, where they stand at its centre. Their seductive yet menacing gazes are not directed towards us. The female subjects are rendered in an eroticised manner. Altogether, their red full lips, the kohl rimmed eyes, the hand gestures, the jewellery and dress depict a romanticised version of these women. They wear long colourful dresses and drape sheer black *shawls* over their shoulders. Known as *mellaya laf* (*shawl*), this typical black garment is worn by belly dancers in Egypt to perform a folkloric flirtatious dance of 'reveal and conceal'. Certainly, the veiling and unveiling trope at play here, summons a corpus of Orientalist pictorial language. Early literature on Said problematically described him as the 'Oriental Lord,' without contextualising his work in a post-colonial critique of Orientalism. While this falls beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to be reminded of the larger historical framework; one which includes Orientalist painters who travelled to the Middle

³⁷⁰ Today *Banat Bahari* is on display at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Cairo, supposedly on loan from the Museum of Modern Art in Cairo since 1972. But in the photos of MMK's house reproduced in Gabakhang'i's catalogue, *Banat Bahari* appears in the study. Another interesting point to note is that while life drawing was being banned from the School of Fine Arts in Cairo and Alexandria, under the directorship of Maher Rae'f, *Banat Bahari* made its way to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 17 January 1972. Simultaneously, as part of the Islamic conservative turn that swept the region following the loss of the 1967 war against Israel, Said's nude series and other paintings displaying nudity were being taken off the walls of museums in Cairo and Alexandria. But ironically these paintings were being taken down the walls of public institutions and transferred to other official buildings, away from the public eye, such as in this case, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

East from as early as the nineteenth century in search for a dormant, idle and untouched place.³⁷¹ To return to the three female subjects, their voluptuous features and heavy jewellery heightens their seductive form. The light cast on their bodies and dresses also attracts the viewer's attention. They stand in a position reminiscent of the *Venus pudica* posture; they attract attention to those very parts they set out to cover. The women look away from the scene, as though aware they are being observed by the bystanders on every side as well as the neighbours standing in the balconies of the houses towering over them. The male gaze underscores the scene.

There are some transformations between the three compositions. The skin colour of the three women changes in the final composition. In the latter, Said paints them in a darker skin tone than in the first two sketches. Skin is correlated with markers of class. By doing so, Said brings them closer to the Egyptian peasant, the *fellah* and *fellaha* that are regarded as the descendants of Ancient Egyptians and the rightful heirs of the land. The man riding the donkey in the *modello*, an identifiable *fellah* figure is replaced in the final composition by a Neo-pharaonic woman. Adorned with a headdress, angular facial features and thick eyebrows, she is inspired by the 14th century BC Amarna Kingdom of Akhenaten. It is not novel for Said to revisit this period of Ancient Egypt. The two women in *L'invitation au Voyage* (1932) are perhaps the most obvious descendants of their pharaonic forefathers. In *La Ville*, this woman in the foreground is shutting her eyes; she appears absorbed in thought and removed from the scene. This solemn presence conveys a certain sculptural aura, as though suspended in time. This change from the *fellah* to an Ancient Egyptian woman is telling for

³⁷¹ See Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1991) and Edward Said, *Orientalism* Said, Edward W. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

two reasons: first, it shows Said's effort to link the present to the Ancient Egyptian past and by including the little boy on her lap, Said takes on the theme of motherhood.

The topos of the neo-pharaonic figure is comparable to the visual rhetoric of *Nahdet Misr* (The Revival of Egypt, (1928)) by Mahmoud Mokhtar. The sculpture representing a rising sphinx and a *fellaha* (peasant) standing tall behind him removing her veil is a nod to Huda Shaarawi's act of removing her veil in 1923 upon her return from the International Women Suffrage Alliance Congress in Rome. The unveiling of the sculpture on 20 May 1928, in its former site in Bab al-Hadid opposite Cairo's main train station of Ramses, garnered thousands of visitors, both Egyptians and foreign dignitaries. The sculpture was moved to a square opposite the Cairo University Gate, near the Gizeh Zoo in 1955. *Nahdet Misr's* place as an iconic Egyptian art artefact remains undisputed. Both artworks project back onto Ancient Egypt, and simultaneously engage in the national debate around the role of women in nurturing the children of future generations. In the context of its first appearance at the *Exposition Internationale, La Ville* agreed with the rest of the pavilion's leitmotif of an Egyptian renaissance. Indeed, the Egyptian pavilion was deliberately conceived to emphasize links to the Ancient past. That year, as we have noted, Egypt was also selected as the guest for the '*Pavilion d'Honneur*.' A look at images of the interior of the pavilion show the prominence of neo-pharaonism: an entire wing of the pavilion was dedicated to a reproduction of Philae temple of Aswan.

The brushwork is finer and crisper in the final composition of *La Ville*. Said uses a rich colour palette, with variations of ochre. Although placed in a bustling square, the scene seems suspended in time. Indeed, this sense of stillness pervades a number of Said's works, particularly with artworks that explicitly make references to the past in order to establish

continuity. Some critics read this otherworldly quality as a rejection of modernization and reflecting the influence of the French Symbolists. There are a number of counter-arguments to this idea that are discernible first and foremost in Said's visual vocabulary: most of his subjects are recognisable native figures; the peasant who has worked the land ceaselessly is considered the descendant of the Pharaohs and rightful heir of the land. The *nahda* narrative placed the *fellah(a)* at the centre of its project of revival.

We find four typologies of women in Said's oeuvre: the mother, usually represented as a *fellaha* (peasant), holding a child, so as to deepen the links to the motherland, the sex-workers that roamed the streets of Alexandria and benefitted from the port city's openness, then women in religious iconography, such depictions of Eve, and finally formal portraits of family and friends. The repeated treatment of themes of motherhood and religion, such as in *Adam and Eve* (1937) and *La Famille* (1937) and *L'Exode* (1941), has been put forward by scholars such as Hess and Radwan to argue for Said's opposition to change and resistance to modernisation.

The nude's series, of which he produced around 40, depict women from lower Egyptian classes - mainly sex workers and domestic servants. He painted the women in a studio he shared with Greek artist Aristomenis Angelopoulos in the popular neighbourhood of Ras el-Tin; and not in his home, since this practice would not have been tolerated. The intimate space of the studio, where the models are depicted naked and reclining on sofas, stands in stark opposition to the formal setting and dress of his portraits of family members, colleagues and friends. It is worth mentioning that Said's position afforded him the freedom to undertake these artistic explorations without censorship. The models he used were from lower social backgrounds and as such embodied *bint el balad* (the daughter of the homeland). Said's

social background meant that he did not often interact with people from lower social backgrounds in his daily life. Further, it was not deemed socially acceptable for the artist to hire models in his own studio, based in his family home. In these eroticised compositions, the socio-economic power imbalance between the artist and the models is extreme. Although it would have been socially unacceptable to model, these women modelled to earn an extra living. The notion of professional models did not exist in Egypt at the time. More often than not, these women were servants, cleaners or homeless women that roamed the streets. In one letter to Ahmed Rassim, Said expresses his fascination with a poor girl he met on the streets at night, gathering cigarette butts.³⁷²

There is a stark discrepancy between the way he painted the sitters in the private space of the studio and the formal portraits. The life models remained anonymous more often than not. With the publication of the catalogue raisonné, the editors have uncovered some photographs of the models used by Said and attempted to name some of them. Hamida is one of the sitters, who, following Said's death, started modelling for the School of Fine Arts in Alexandria. Nabaouia, Faiza, Tawhida and Hayate are some of the other sitters who Said depicted. Curiously, the sitters' first names were added in the catalogue of the 1951 retrospective in Guezireh, but were retracted once again, shortly thereafter.³⁷³ These titles were limited to a mere '*fille*' (girl) or *femme* (woman). Race is also another problematic layer to these works that deserve attention. The *négresse nu* was depicted by Said several times. These become more problematic when compared to the titles, such as *hanem* (lady) that Said used when

³⁷² Ahmed Rassim, *al-Zellal: Safha men al-fann fi Misr* (The Shadow: A Page on Art from Egypt) (Cairo: Unknown Publisher, 1936), 16.

³⁷³ Along these lines, the efforts of the recent exhibition, *Black Models: From Gericault to Matisse* at the Musée d'Orsay, (26 March–21 July 2019) is commendable. The exhibition placed the models and the dialogue between them and the artists at the centre of enquiry. It explored the identity of these forgotten models in the history of modernity and attempted "to reinstate their names, reveal their stories and restore them a visibility." https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/events/exhibitions/in-the-museums/exhibitions-in-the-musee-dorsay-more/article/le-modele-noir-47692.html?tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=649&cHash=d2c0337768

painting formal portraits. When discussing the nude series, Hess stresses Said's quest for the model's inner beauty, she observes: "The common thread running through this wide array of anonymous female portraits is the artist's endeavour in capturing the inner and outer beauty, often deeply rooted in their inner Egyptian origins that transcends their physical appearances."³⁷⁴ I find this type of analysis which ignores issues of gender and the male gaze problematic. Hess makes forays into a gendered reading of the nude series when she discussed the issue of anonymity, however describing Said's artistic production as an effort to 'capture the inner beauty' of the sitters falls short. The social divide between the sitter and the artist is palpable. The female bodies are eroticised and out on display to the viewer.

Analysing the nude paintings cannot be dissociated from the way the female body was spoken about at the time. The female body had become a site of political contestation to be controlled and conscripted by the state's mechanism. Griselda Pollock reminds us that those gendered differences are ideologically claimed as natural and perpetuate the hierarchies between the sexes.³⁷⁵ The way women are represented in these paintings had consequences for the way the power axis along gender lines was maintained.

The extensive literature on the feminist movement in Egypt and the nationalist visual iconography emphasise the way women and Egypt became synonymous. As the bearers of the next generation, the control and education of mothers became a matter of political debate. Women were not allowed to speak for themselves and depict their roles in society. They were stripped of their agency and their role was controlled by the male master/genius figure. The

³⁷⁴ Valerie Hess, "Mahmoud Said A Brief Overview," *Contemporary Practices: Visual Arts from the Middle East*, no. 2, 2013, 172.

³⁷⁵ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art*. (Routledge Classics: London, 2003), 30.

issue of prostitution was highly debated and became an issue of national interest. British officials legalised prostitution in 1905 and had imposed heavy regulations.³⁷⁶ Under the capitulation system, foreigners were immune to Egyptian law and protected under their country's legal system. As Beth Baron points out, the owners of brothels could thus claim foreign protection and maintain their operations, even though these came under heightened attack by the Egyptian authorities.³⁷⁷ As such, the battle to put an end to legalised prostitution became a nationalist battle. Among other groups, this issue was taken up by, on the one hand, the Muslim Brotherhood and on the other the Egyptian Feminist Union. They argued that prostitution brought dishonour to women's families and by extension the nation's honour. As far as the modernisation project was concerned, the family unit and the home became controlled spaces where modern subjects and notably the woman performed her rearing duties towards the children of tomorrow. The legal battle against prostitution fell under no other system than the Mixed Court, on which Said served for over two decades. These legal cases unfolded in front of Said's eyes. Access to the archives of the court cases on which Said ruled would grant us extraordinary insights into the type of charges.

Said was invited as the guest of honour during the first *Exposition de l'art indépendant* organised by the Art and Liberty group in Cairo from 8–24 February 1940, titled “*De*

³⁷⁶ “At the end of the nineteenth century, Khedive Tawfiq, the hereditary ruler, instituted state regulation of the sex work industry—for health reasons. Almost immediately upon British occupation, the Ministry of Interior began issuing additional regulations, and in 1905 a comprehensive law legalized brothels in certain areas and mandated weekly medical examinations of women sex workers. This system remained in force until 1949. One of the most influential works of the nineteenth century, Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchatelet's *De La Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris, Considérée sous le Rapport de l'Hygiène, de la Morale, et de l'Administration* (Paris: 1837) comprehensively studied the lives of female sex workers, with an unsentimental eye— not to their moral redemption but to their more effective regulation by the Vice Squad. It served as a model of statistical method, and entwined a trinity of terms—“hygiene,” “morals,” and “administration”—which remained inextricable in the approach to sexual offences into the twentieth century. (His clinical methods also influenced the forensic doctor Ambroise Tardieu, whose investigations into “sodomy” still direly resonate in Egypt in the twenty-first century: see chapter VII.) Parent-Duchatelet's writings inflected the adoption, in Britain between 1864–69 and in its colonies later, of “Contagious Diseases Acts,” which legalized sex work but subjected female sex workers to medical inspection. These laws in turn became the pattern for regulation in Egypt under British rule.”

³⁷⁷ Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 198–9.

Mahmoud Said à Fouad Kamel”, The artist showed *La femme aux boucles d’or* (1933) for the first time, alongside works by the younger generation of artists who formed AL, including Ramses Younan, Kamel el-Telmissany, Hassia, Fouad Kamel, Aida Shehadé and A. Angelopoulos.³⁷⁸



Figure 40 Mahmoud Said, La Femme aux boucles d’or (1933), Oil on canvas, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.

Said’s exploration of the female body must be placed in conversation with later artistic practices of Art and Liberty which predominantly focussed on representation of the female body. This would not have been possible without Said’s earlier explorations and the activation of an artistic field where such dialogues and trials were developed. In that sense, I argue that Said is firmly placed as an intermediary between earlier attempts at modernism and AL. Said’s development of a visual language that is both locally relevant and internationally driven is what makes the artist’s experiment formative for the history of

³⁷⁸ Said and A. Angelopoulo shared a studio in Alexandria. It is in this studio that Said painted the models that featured in his works.

modernism in Egypt. Looking ahead, the young members of the Art and Liberty group found in Said's work a novel artistic investigation which centred on the freedom of the artist's personality and the emergence of his personal and unique style. In an essay entitled "The world of Mahmoud Said" (*'alam Mahmoud Said*), Ramses Younan commented on Said's move away from bland academicism towards a successful combination of a European art heritage with an Egyptian one. Afterwards, Younan moves to a discussion of the female subjects painted in the 1930s, which he relates to a phase dominated by the tyranny of the female:

Here he painted the "female essence" or the "goddess of femininity" – if not its devil. This "goddess" is nothing like her sisters in prehistoric, where she was the symbol of fertility or the *alma mater*, the source of the universe. She is nothing like her sisters, Isis, Hathour or Nut of Ancient Egypt, for all three were kind companions, as if a balm to the human life. She does not resemble the Greek goddesses with their ideal aesthetic, nor is she the Virgin Mary as artists have imagined throughout the ages. However, in her dominating femininity she reminds us of the female representation in Indian art; but whereas the women depicted in Indian art are generous and giving. She is definitely sly and cunning. Her devilish smile recalls that of the Mona Lisa, notwithstanding the mystery shown by the former and the pride expressed by the latter. She is closer to the female image that was crystallised by our folk talks. At times she is the *belladonna*, and at other times she is the black widow. This aspect is powerful to the extent that our minds associate the name of Mahmoud Said with the painting of the *Bahari* women. A new image to the old meaning.³⁷⁹

It is this type of negotiation that AL would pursue. Said was invited as the guest of honour during two of the group's exhibitions in 1940 and 1942. To conclude, I argue that Said's engagement with issues of gender and Egyptianess, as explored in this chapter and summarised in Younan's article above, is critical for our understanding of Egyptian modernism and the avant-garde experiments of AL. By placing Said as an intermediary between early attempts at modernism and later avant-garde experiments, we can better understand the way artists of AL fragmented and distorted the female body, "as a means of challenging and transgressing the accepted categories of high art and particularly the tradition of the nude body."³⁸⁰

³⁷⁹ Ramses Younan "The World Mahmoud Said," (*Allam Mahmoud Said*), *El Magallah*, no.89, May 1964, Cairo as translated in Hess and Rashwan, *Mahmoud Said*, Vol. 2, 658.

³⁸⁰ Alyce Mahon, *Eroticism and Art*, (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 36

6. CHAPTER FIVE: ART AND LIBERTY AND SURREALISM IN EGYPT

This chapter decentres surrealism by looking at the ways members of AL adopted, appropriated, and ultimately contributed to surrealism.³⁸¹ After a thorough investigation of the activities of artistic and cultural agents who pushed forward definitions of modernism in Egypt, we meet the avant-garde group known as Art et Liberté or *al-fann w al-hurriya* in Arabic, (referred to as AL heretofore). In the previous chapters, I have shown the multiples ways in which interlocutors in Egypt, in the first half of the twentieth century, were in concert with extensive global networks of artistic production and how, together, they formed highly engaged and productive cultural and artistic arenas. The efforts of the SAA unlocked an immense arena for avant-garde artists and intellectuals, such as those affiliated with AL to emerge on the scene. This chapter looks at the activities, initiatives and experiments of AL to explore how members engaged, adopted, and adapted ideas, practices and theories, to shed light on the vernacular intonations of surrealism in Egypt, first as a critique of local nationalist narratives that have ostracized the group and deemed it a Westernized, French imitation, and second to contribute to the ongoing efforts of decentering surrealism that make the case for the movement's protean and polycentric nature from the very beginning. The case of AL captures the ethos of transculturation, which has been a defining character of our history from the beginning, which along the way we have lost and are trying now, belatedly, to recover. The intellectuals of this generation strove, successfully, to articulate a notion of art history, whose *modus operandi* rested on dialogical modes of cross-cultural exchange, in the face of unsurmountable wars, fascism, identity politics and xenophobia.

³⁸¹ Parts of this chapter will be reproduced in Amina Diab, "'Free Art' and Surrealist Aesthetics: Resituating *Jama'at Al-Fann Wal-Hurriya* in Egyptian Art History," *NKA* (Brooklyn, N.Y.), forthcoming, November 2021, Duke University Press, 2021.

I seek to decentralise surrealism and shed light on this avant-garde experiment in Egypt. Simply put, I argue that members of the Art and Liberty were not merely copying or translating French surrealism but were actively critiquing it and articulating new ideas such as ‘Free art’ and ‘subjective realism’ that fit their local context. Its particularisms beg the postcolonial question of how do we get past the ‘othering’ of surrealisms, outside of the Parisian centre? These manifestations have historically been viewed through a model of derivativeness or temporal lag that sees modernity and modernization travel in a unidirectional course from ‘centre’ to ‘periphery.’³⁸²

5.7 Literature and Exhibition Review

By way of the real or perceived social origins of some of its members, and thus their cultural affiliation to a cosmopolitan French speaking elite, AL has always been stigmatized as an inauthentic, Westernized and alien group. From as early as 1939, the editors of *al-Risala*, a weekly cultural review, accused them of blindly imitating French surrealism (I return to an analysis of the debate below). Conversely the members of AL were aware of the obstacles they faced early on and were careful in how they presented themselves. This portrayal perpetuates the group’s isolation and discredits its legacy, particularly in the art world where it was most successful. More often than not, members of the group were judged by who they were, rather than what they did, their actual artwork or their intellectual and artistic contribution. This isolation was seemingly reinforced by their choice of language in manifestoes, articles, pamphlets and exhibition announcements. More precisely a *French linguistic taint* afflicts judgement upon the group. Arabic scholarship on Egyptian modernism

³⁸² The efforts of this chapter are in line with the aims of the upcoming exhibition at Tate Modern and the Metropolitan Museum (New York), *Surrealism Beyond Borders*, to present a geographically inclusive understanding of surrealism as a multi-centred, transcultural movement. I have been involved in the exhibition, in gathering material about surrealism in Egypt and the MENA region.

produced in the period between 1970–1990, by authors such as Ezz el-Din Naguib, Mustafa al-Razzaz, Kamal al-Malakh and Rushdi Iskandar have stigmatized the group as an inauthentic Westernised art group and its members as imitators of French surrealism³⁸³. In these books, the authors adopt a nationalist lens, characteristic of the majority of scholarship on Egyptian modern art, written in Arabic, following the military coup of 1952. Naguib writes:

The Art and Liberty was a condescending movement that was isolated from reality. The group's slogans did not stem from the conflict of contradictions within their society, but from the latest trends within Western schools, and from books they read in French. [...] The kind of surrealism that it chose for itself as an artistic creed was a purely European robe that they tried to force onto Egyptian reality without trying to explore how the two could possibly co-exist.³⁸⁴

This trope of a Westernized imported movement is a common piety in the literature of this period. The narrative sets up boundaries and judged their production based on an internal/external dynamic. The quote above exemplifies the kind of postcolonial nationalism that rejected all forms of cosmopolitan modernism. The logic above has been used to ostracise the group from mainstream narratives of Egyptian art. It subscribes to an Andersonian conception of the nation as a finite entity, in the way it sets clear boundaries around what is 'Egyptian' and what is not.

Scholars based in Western institutions have made important contributions to the study of surrealism in Egypt. These include Marc Kober, Daniel Lançon, Liliane Karnouk, Patrick Kane, Jessica Winegar and Alexandra Seggerman. Still, I find that these studies place a strong emphasis on the politics of the group, notably AL's anti-fascism, Trotskyist leanings and alignment with the *Fédération Internationale de l'Art Révolutionnaire Indépendent*

³⁸³ Iskandar, Rushdi, Kamal al-Malakh and Subhi al-Sharuni, *Thamanun Sana min al- Fann*, (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma li-l-Kitab, 1991).

³⁸⁴ Ezz el-Din Naguib, *Fajr al-taswir al-masri al-hadith* (The Dawn of Egyptian Modern Painting), (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi), 84.

(FIARI). More often than not, this approach comes at the expense of an analysis of the artworks themselves and the group's theoretical foundation.

Recently, Sam Bardaouil's monograph entitled *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, has taken new strides in our understanding of the group's project and mission. Accompanying a touring exhibition entitled *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)*, Bardaouil offers a revisionist reading of the group's foundational manifesto, LLDA (1938), analysing the relationship between their visual and literary production and exploring their novel exhibitionary practices and rhetoric. By doing so, he argues for AL's role as active catalysts in expanding local horizons of artistic and intellectual experiences, while simultaneously contributing to the global movement of surrealism. Bardaouil maintains that the group successfully created a visual and pictorial language that is internationally engaged yet locally oriented.³⁸⁵

Bardaouil's approach adopts the typical language used to write about the avant-garde, which sees rupture as the defining characteristic of all avant-garde movements, that define themselves against all that came before them. His argument rests on this paradigm of rupture to 'save' AL from oblivion, but by doing so, dangerously casts a shadow on artistic practices in the period that falls before the forming of the group. But how does the epistemological shift carried in this thesis affect our understanding of the group and Egyptian modernism? I take issue with Bardaouil's approach to police the intellectual commons of the field of surrealism in Egypt, which pits it in violent opposition to all what came before it. Certainly,

³⁸⁵Sam Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty group*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016). The exhibition was shown at the Musée national d'art moderne – Centre Pompidou, Paris until 16 January 2017; is currently shown at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (Spain):14 February 2017 – 11 June 2017 and will be travelling to Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen K21, Düsseldorf (Germany):15 July 2017 15 October 2017 and Tate Liverpool, Liverpool (U.K.): 13 November 2017 – 4 March 2018.

Henein, Younan and others were reacting to the bourgeois ideals of the cosmopolitan elite and strove for permanent revolution. But their enacted rupture must not be wholly transported to our appraisal of the group.

Before turning to the decade in which AL was most active to investigate its activities, publications, exhibitions, and aesthetics, it is necessary to identify a number of key players and events whose role, directly or indirectly, precipitated the developments in the artistic scene in Cairo from 1930s onwards.

5.8 Georges Henein: A Cultural Hyphen

Throughout his life, Henein shuttled between Paris and Cairo and played a remarkable role of cultural mediation. The oeuvre and the biography of Henein have yet to be fully grasped, particularly in English—most of the literature is in French. He was born in November 1914 in the neighbourhood of Daher in Cairo. His father Sadek Henein Pasha was a diplomat and a member of the Wafd party and his mother, Marie Zanelli was Italian and an ardent anti-fascist.³⁸⁶ From 1923 to 1930, Henein Pasha served as Egyptian Ambassador, first in Brussels then Madrid and in 1926, the family moved to Rome where they remained for the next four years. Up till then, Georges was home-schooled; but in Rome, he enrolled in the Lycée Chateaubriand. An important event, relating to the development of Egyptian art, occurred during their time in Rome: the inauguration of the Egyptian *Accademia di Belle Arte di Roma*. The negotiations secured the Egyptian government land in Valle Giulia by Villa Borghese. Together with Louis Hautecoeur and Cammilo Innocenti (director of the SFA), the three oversaw the programme and supervised the Egyptian scholars.³⁸⁷ As Hautecoeur's

³⁸⁶ *Œuvres: Poèmes, récits, essais articles et pamphlets*, ed. Berto Farhi and Yves Bonnefoy (Paris: Denoël, 2006), 994.

³⁸⁷ Louis Hautecoeur, "Rapport: Présenté S.E le Ministre de l'Instruction Publique, Au Sujet de sa mission en Europe » MS 6882, N.42–44, Fonds Louis Hautecoeur.

reports reveal, Henein Pasha was closely involved with the institution during his mandate in Italy. Although a minor at the time, Henein would have attended the opening, met with the first trio of artists— Hassan, Ayad and Kamel, or at least known of its existence. The family then travelled to Paris, where Henein joined the Lycée Français de Neuilly and later pursued studies at the Sorbonne. In 1930, they returned to Egypt. Sadek Pasha was appointed Administrator of the *Société Anonyme des Eaux du Caire* and Henein joined him as secretary shortly after. They moved into the company villa in Rod El Farag, where Henein lived until 1954. Italian was his first language, followed by French, English and Greek. He only learnt Arabic at the age of twenty but never mastered it sufficiently to use it in writing. Younan and el-Telmissany typically translated his writings into Arabic. Still, his multilingualism allowed him to navigate several worlds with ease. In cosmopolitan Cairo, French was the *lingua franca* and was frequently heard in cafés in downtown Cairo. As discussed in the introduction, French journals were prominent during this period and commanded a strong readership. Examples include *La Semaine Égyptienne*, *La Bourse Égyptienne*, *La Femme Nouvelle* and *La Revue des Conférences Françaises en Orient*— Henein contributed to these and others.³⁸⁸ He enjoyed a sinecure position which allowed him the time to write and support multiple projects. From 1947, Henein served as director of Gianaclis, a cigarette company founded by Nestor Gianaclis in 1871. He met Iqbal al-Alaily (known as Boula) in September 1939, at Nobilis, a French bookshop in downtown Cairo, where members and affiliates of AL gathered regularly. From then, the two were inseparable.³⁸⁹ Al-Alaily was the granddaughter of the famous Egyptian ‘Prince of Arab Poets’ Ahmed Chawky. Henein and Boula were part of the Egyptian intelligentsia and comfortably frequented the milieu

³⁸⁸ Of the 283 periodicals published in 1930, 50 are in French (15 of which were dailies) from a total of 109 foreign language periodicals and 175 Arabic ones. Daniel Lançon, “La Semaine égyptienne, de 1926 à 1939 ou la littérature comme ailleurs, » <http://hal.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/hal-00872925><http://hal.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/hal-00872925>

³⁸⁹ For religious reasons, Henein and al-Alaily did not marry until 1955, when they travelled to France.

they emerged from— both the conservative nationalist milieu of their elders, which they violently denounced, and the avant-garde literary and artistic scene of Cairo. Boula, who was fluent in Arabic, English and French as well as German, helped introduce Henein to the downtown Cairo literary world. Together, they frequented small cafés and bars, such as Tommy Bar, the Nobilis bookshop and the famous Swiss patisserie, Groppi.

At the time, the artistic, literary, theatrical, and musical life of Cairo and Alexandria were animated by a cosmopolitan Egyptian elite who mixed with a large contingency of displaced artists, writers and activists from the war as well as local expats of Greek, Italian and French origins, who had been residing in Egypt. As discussed earlier, the outbreak of WWII brought numbers of foreigners to Cairo and Alexandria, including the Commonwealth forces who were stationed in Egypt, with the headquarters of the Middle East Command set up in Cairo. Survivors of the Spanish Civil War or fascist Italy such as the Italian Angelo de Riz or the Bulgarian Eric de Nemès escaped to Egypt.

Henein discovered surrealism in Paris, while studying and quickly joined the group to become one of its strong advocates. The account of surrealism in Egypt typically begins on 4 February 1937 when Henein presented a lecture entitled “*Bilan du Surréalisme*” (Appraisal of the Surrealist Movement) at *Les Essayistes*.³⁹⁰ As we have shown, he presented the same lecture with minor changes, at the Atelier of Alexandria on 1st March 1937. The lecture was also broadcast on the radio of the Egyptian State Broadcasting in Cairo and Alexandria. A transcript of the presentation was later published in *La Revue des Conférences Françaises en Orient* in October 1937. The lecture explained the origins of the movement, automatic

390 « Bilan du mouvement surréaliste, » n.8, 1^{re} année, 1^{er} Octobre 1937, *Revue des Conférences Françaises en Orient*, (Revue Mensuelle, Le Caire. Directeur: Marc Nahman.)

writing, and the links with Freudian theories of the subconscious. Henein began by presenting the origins of surrealism through Arthur Rimbaud, Comte de Lautréamont and Alfred Jarry. Henein stresses the significance of its principles: “absolute non-conformity that opposes them to institutions and regimes that are charged of oppressing individuals, who rebel against their evil power.” He quotes Breton’s definition of automatism as the “dictation of thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason and outside all moral or aesthetic concerns.”³⁹¹ As noted in the previous chapter, Henein condemned Futurism and “the exhibitionist character of the manifestations of Mr. Marinetti, and the artificial and spectacular dynamism that he advocates.”³⁹² Henein also criticised *aeropittura* (aeropainting), describing it as decorative art rather than art itself: “Futurism is also purely Italian, while surrealism, if it had elected Paris as capital, did not take long to spread across the planet.” Surrealism’s global appeal is a plea for universalism.

5.9 Salon of Maria Cavadia

The places where surrealism initially developed in Cairo were the salons of the intellectual elites and émigrés. These independent salons were organised in the homes of private individuals, behind closed doors and away from the purview of official discourses. They operated as counter-salons and offered a marginal space for discussions of scientific issues as well as avant-garde ideas in the arts and literature, and as such enabled the formation of Egyptian avant-garde movements. The salon of Maria Cavadia (1901–1970) is one of those principal loci in the interspace of the cross-cultural encounter of ideas and peoples.

391 Henein, *Ouvres*, « Bilan du mouvement surréaliste », 371.

392 « Bilan du mouvement surréaliste », n.8, 1^{re} année, 1^{er} Octobre 1937, *Revue des Conférences Françaises en Orient*, (Revue Mensuelle, Le Caire. Directeur: Marc Nahman). I explore the following text in greater detail in the following chapter on Surrealism in. For now, suffice to say that Henein had begun introducing the movement as early as 1937 and from this moment had condemned the Futurist movement and the exhibitionist character of its leader, FT. Marinetti.

Of Romanian and Greek descent, Cavadia wrote in French and lived and worked in France and Egypt. She pursued her studies in Paris and during this time experimented with poetry alongside her first husband, the avant-garde cineaste Marcel l'Herbier. She also discovered surrealism and Breton's *Manifeste du Surréalisme* in 1924. During a trip to Egypt in 1929, she met Mahmoud Riad and decided to move permanently. Soon they married and Cavadia moved to El Mansour Mohamed Street, in Zamalek. Their home served as the venue for her lively salon for several years. Riad was a prominent politician and held a number of governmental positions, including under-secretary of state, Minister of Commerce and then Defence. He was also related to Mahmoud Said. These affiliations and familial ties aid in tracing the entangled histories and in mapping the interspace of encounters. These micro-histories and biographies are crucial to mapping the interspace of encounter and elucidating global entanglements.

The role of Maria Cavadia is significant in the recreation of the avant-garde scene. She offered the intellectual space of conversation in her salon, for exchange and open discussions and welcomed intellectuals, painters, musicians, dancers and foreign actors visiting Egypt, including André Gide, Roland Petit and his ballet troop. The Salon's habitués were Henein, Ramses Younan, el-Telmissany, Amy Nimr and Lee Miller. Joyce Mansour attended the Salon too; the latter was in fact the space of her initiation into surrealism, through her meeting with Henein, who encouraged her to print her first collection of poems *Cris*.³⁹³ Samir Mansour, Joyce Mansour's second husband, in an interview with Marie Laure Missir, evokes

393 Marie-Francine Desvaux-Mansour, « Le Surréalisme à travers Joyce Mansour : peinture et poésie, le miroir du désir » (PhD diss., Université de Paris 1, Paris, 2014), 31. Mansour's *Cris* (1935); *Dechirures* (1955) and *Histoires Novices* (1973), are all filled with themes of the occult, cabala and magic rituals, a provoking violence, where blood, sweat and tears are in tune with themes of love and death that shocks the reader.

Cavadia's passion for the esotericism of Ancient Egypt. There are references to a collection of surrealist short stories entitled *Peau d'Ange*, which she published in *La Semaine Égyptienne*.³⁹⁴ During the *Salon Indépendants* organised by AL, Cavadia regularly reviewed the shows in the francophone press, where she highlighted the ways in which the artists were taking risks to push the boundaries of artistic experiments. Besides the reviews, she wrote regularly in French in the local magazines such as *La Revue du Caire*, *La Semaine Égyptienne* and *L'Égypte Nouvelle*. In *La Littérature d'expression française en Égypte (1789–1998)*, Jean Jacques Luthi states: “At Marie Cavadia's house, we spoke of modern literature. She was, in Egypt, alongside Georges Henein, one of the most ardent supporters of surrealism,” and one of the leaders of the group, who engaged the surrealist conversation in Egypt.³⁹⁵

6. Amy Nimr: Artist and Patron of the Arts

Amy Nimr played an important role as an artist, patron and cultural mediator in Cairo upon her return from Europe in 1930. She was born in Cairo in 1898 to a Syrian father, the newspaper magnate Fares Nimr (1855–1951), and a British mother Ellen Eynaud, daughter of the British Consul to Egypt, and grew up in a westernised intellectual and political environment in the district of Maadi. Her father was one of the leaders of the Arab independence movement against the Ottoman Empire and founded the scientific-literary journal *al-Muqtataf* (The Selection). Nimr travelled to England to attend Cheltenham Ladies' College then joined the Slade School of Fine Art in 1916, under Walter Sickert and Henry

³⁹⁴ I have not been able to locate these.

³⁹⁵ Jean Jacques Luthi, *La Littérature D'expression Française En Égypte (1798-1998)* (Paris: Harmattan, 2000), 40.

Tonks.³⁹⁶ She studied painting and drawing from the living model, as was typical of the Slade's teaching model. A survey of the nude studies, including Nimr's, in the archives of the UCL Art Museum shows the strong focus on life drawing and physical anatomy, which lay at the foundation of the Slade's tradition of remarkable draughtsmanship.³⁹⁷ Alongside life drawing, students learned by looking at Old Master prints and drawings from the British Museum and UCL. These teaching techniques focussed on how the structure of the body determined surface form.³⁹⁸ Often, in the margins of his students' studies, Tonks would add notes and sketched examples to emphasize how the change of line builds contour and form.³⁹⁹



Figure 41 Amy Nimr, *Sketch*, pencil on paper. Courtesy of the Slade Art School, 1919, London.

396 In *Surrealism in Egypt*, Bardouil indicates that Nimr studied at the Slade between 1926 and 1929. These dates are incorrect, as shown on Nimr's student card that I accessed at the archives of the Slade. Tonks was trained as a surgeon and held extensive knowledge of anatomy. Once he joined the Slade, he devoted all his attention to teach the portrayal of the human form through the study of anatomy.

397 "Slade School of Fine Art." *Oxford Reference*. ; Accessed 20 April 2020
<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100510656>.

398 Exhibition catalogue of *Disrupters and Innovators: Journey in gender equality at UCL*, UCL Octagon Gallery, September 2018 – February 2019, 44. <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/projects/disrupters-and-innovators>

399 Annotated demonstration drawings as well as notes and sketch examples on the side students' works can be seen throughout the collection of the UCL Art Museum.

From Nimr's nude studies, we notice how she immersed herself in the study of different parts and contortions of the body. In *Standing Female Nude* (1918), a life drawing in pencil, Nimr draws a model in contrapposto, with her head slightly bent.⁴⁰⁰ The figure seems lost in contemplation, but she is firmly built and stands confidently. Three small sketches of the model's head are drafted in the margins (likely by Tonks); first in fine lines, then in a thicker contour, as though to explain how to gradually build the form of the face. In another back view study of a female nude (untitled and undated) Nimr depicts the model in contrapposto, with her arms folded across the back. The contour lines and shadowing are deftly executed. The deep understanding of the human form and its representation become apparent, culminating in Nimr's *Male Figure Seated on the Edge of a Stool* (1919), an oil painting of a life model set in the studio of the school that won first prize in the category of 'Figure Painting.'⁴⁰¹ As the title indicates, the emphasis is on the position of the life model, who is seated (again) in counterpoise but depicted from a back view. Nimr had sketched this model in different poses before and successfully rendered form through fine shadowing. In the painting, she reconstructed the shadowing technique through a thick layering of paint and visible brushstrokes to bring together a solid composition, with depth and movement. Nimr's in-depth study of both female and male nudes and the draughtsmanship that her studies reveal, are unmatched among her peers in Egypt. In this sense, her studies at the Slade were formative to the way she carried on depicting the human body and endowing her subjects with such solemn emotions and depth of form.⁴⁰²

400 Aimee J.E Nimr (sic), *Male Figure Seated on the Edge of a Stool*, n.5220, Slade School of Fine Art, UCL Art Museum, Archives consulted 21 March 2018

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid*

⁴⁰² The compositions of Mohamed Rateb Seddik (1917–1994) are the exceptions that comes to mind, notably an untitled work from 1940, depicting a group of men in a Turkish hammam. Seddik is briefly discussed later in the chapter, as one of the youngest participating artists in AL's *Salon des Indépendants*.

In London, Nimr exhibited, as part of the 30s group, with Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, Robert Medley and others at Wertheim Gallery and Warren Gallery. In Paris, she participated in the *Salon d'automne* in 1925 and then put together two solo exhibitions at Galerie Bernheim Jeune and Galerie Vignon. In Paris, she established her atelier in Villa Seurat (14eme arrondissement), in the avant-garde artistic nucleus where Mayo, Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin, and Chaïm Soutine lived.⁴⁰³ It was Nimr who would introduce Henein to Miller, during a chance encounter in the streets of Paris circa 1930. By the time of her return to Egypt, was an established artist. That same year, she married Sir Walter Smart, British Oriental Secretary serving at the time in Egypt. Nimr was a patron of The Union club, which was situated on Fuad el-Awwal Street (now 26th of July Street) in Zamalek.⁴⁰⁴ I return to Nimr below to examine her participation in the *Salon des indépendants* organised by AL.

6.1 Lee Miller Moves to Cairo

In 1934, Lee Miller, the American photographer, married Aziz Eloui, an Egyptian businessman who she met in Paris a few years earlier, through Man Ray. Miller produced some of her most famous photographs of the Egyptian desert during her time there. The couple lived in Dokki, a newly developed neighbourhood on the Western bank of the Nile. Miller played a critical role in introducing the young artists and thinkers to new artists and in furnishing them with reading material by Herbert Read and Henry Miller, among others. In this section, I use letters between Lee Miller and Roland Penrose to retrace her connections to members of the loose collective that formed AL. Details from the party that Miller hosted on

403 See Douglas Stone, *Henry Miller and the Villa Seurat Circle, 1930 to 1940* (Irvine, CA: University of California Press, 1973) for more on the history of the artistic circle at Villa Seurat.

404 Nude studies by Nimr executed during her time at the Slade were recently included in two exhibitions in London; first *Prize and Prejudice: the Slade Class of 1918* (2018) at the UCL Art Museum, which explored the journeys of some of the women artists who studied at the school and second, *Disrupters and Innovators: Journey in gender equality at UCL*, in the UCL Octagon Gallery. September 2018 – February 2019.

the occasion of the arrival of her portrait painted by Picasso, are worth quoting in full. On 9 March 1938, she wrote to Penrose:

My cocktail party was a tremendous success and so much conversation and criticism was started by it, that I was cursing Picasso and all the pictures ever painted. Two or three people even thought I showed it as a deliberate insult to them and everyone and were convinced that it was all tongue in the cheek. You must remember that there are really people here who have never seen or heard of modern pictures, and that they seem to be quite normal people otherwise - - - - except for occasions like this you'd never notice that they had never thought in their lives. In 110 people, besides my own family, there were not more than 6 who had heard of the name of any modern painter or remembered ever having seen a particular modern painting anyway. And of those 6, only 3 had ever heard of Picasso. You see, I'm in exile! The usual and so-called comic criticism was that any cheeky could do this any rainy afternoon. So in those, I had a dinner party on my hands two days later, about 20 people, all young. I brought the town out in paint and gypsum board and set them to it after dinner. To make the occasion more memorable, two boys [Henein and Younan] who knew what we were doing, after dinner, arrived in Surrealists costumes, which included gas masks, piss-pots full of flowers etc, and were really quite funny."⁴⁰⁵

Miller's descriptions of the cultural milieu in Cairo must be taken with a grain of salt. It was in fact just exactly a month earlier that the *Exposition Française du Caire: Beaux Arts et Arts Décoratifs* opened at the Grand Palace on 8 February 1938. As discussed in Chapter 1, a strong focus was placed on contemporary artists, with works by Georges Braques, Marc Chagall, André Derain, Fernand Léger and even Picasso. Nevertheless, Miller played an important role in widening the network of AL members and offering a space to engage and discuss new ideas.

6.2 The Neo-Orientalist Group (1937)

It is possible to trace a connection between the AL and the Neo-Orientalist groups, since many of the members of the short-lived Neo-Orientalists later joined AL— most notably Kamel el-Telmissany, Fouad Kamel, Kamal el-Malakh and Fathi al-Bakry. El-Telmissany was only 22 years old when he wrote "*Manifeste des Neo-Orientalistes*," published on 1 January 1937 on the occasion of the exhibition *Resurrection, Oraison et Couleurs Brunes* (Resurrections, Prayers and Brown Colours), which was organised by Les Essayistes group.

⁴⁰⁵ Lee Miller to Penrose on 9 March 1938, (unpublished letter) Cairo, Lee Miller Archive, Farley Farmhouse, Chiddingly, UK. Archives consulted 4 April 2018.

Participants included members of the newly formed group, as well as their mentor Angelo de Riz. The manifesto sought to liberate Egyptian art from Western influences and safeguard artistic personality.⁴⁰⁶ It challenged the boundaries between folk and fine arts, as well as the monopoly of the city over rural areas in the production of art.⁴⁰⁷ ‘Local art’ was put forward as the quintessential original form of Egyptian art that successfully managed to capture the inhibited and repressed emotions of the people. El-Telmissany wrote, “it is [*this*] sentiment that drives, in the domain of art, the potter-artisan from Sa‘id, the braider of Sharqieh, the ivory-cutter of Assiout, the sculptor of copper in Khan al-Khalili.”⁴⁰⁸ The Neo-Orientalists sought to move away from Western aesthetic ideals of beauty in order to reach a standard of Egyptian authenticity and originality. This little-known manifesto is significant; not only does it prove an early step to break with the Academy’s traditionalism, but it also resonates with Art and Liberty’s emphasis on ‘popular local art.’ While this endeavour was short lived, we retain the group’s attempt to negotiate a new relationship with the past, an ethos which members carried forth and developed further through AL.⁴⁰⁹

6.3 Ramses Younan: Early Forays into a Philosophy of Aesthetics

Younan was born in 1913 to a pious Coptic family in Minya. He lost his father at a young age and began working as an itinerant high school drawing teacher to support his family. He attended the School of Fine Arts in Cairo until 1933 when he refused to sit his final exam and

⁴⁰⁶ Ramsis Labib, *Al-Yassar fi al-Thaqafah al-Missriya, (The Leftist Movement in Egyptian Culture)* (Cairo: Dar al-‘Alam al-Thalith, 2005), 108-109.

⁴⁰⁷ Kamil al-Tilmissany, “Neo-Orientalists’ Manifesto,” January 1937. The Neo-Orientalists were a short-lived group that pushed for the study of popular local art in order to reach both a level of Egyptian authenticity and cultural modernity. Except for this manifesto, little is known about the activities of the group whose members ended up joining Art and Liberty. This fusion makes it possible to argue for a certain continuity of ideology, particularly in terms of the emphasis placed on ‘popular local art’ discussed above.

⁴⁰⁸ “Neo-Orientalists’ Manifesto,”

⁴⁰⁹ Henein, in Don Quichotte (January 1940): “This was the direction taken by the Neo Orientalist movement that Telmisany once espoused, before discovering that *this theory could only lead to a inevitable impasse*. All those who try or will try to found a national art conceived upon specific characters of a certain country are condemning themselves to failure and total ridicule.” Georges Henein, “*L’Art en Egypte: Kamel el-Telmissany,*” *Don Quicohte*, n.6, 11 January 1940, 2

dropped out, in rebellion against the teaching system. Younan was inspired by Hussein Youssef Amin, who had travelled extensively across Europe and introduced pedagogical methods of teaching art in Egypt, through his own teaching at the Hilmiyya Secondary School and his writings. When Younan dropped out of art school, he became an art teacher in primary schools in the Nile Delta until 1939.⁴¹⁰ It was during this period, that he penned his essay entitled “The Aim of the Modern Artist” that was published in 1938, by the Art Advocacy Group.⁴¹¹ Here Younan discussed Freud’s theories and presented his observations on the state of surrealism.

In this article, Younan accounted for the deep psychological content of great pieces of art and discussed the importance of Freud’s theories for both the producer and the viewer of art. He wrote that “any attempt to understand the nature of art, which is not preceded by a study of the human self, orientations and needs is doomed to fail.”⁴¹² After considering the three elements (or authorities), which according to Freud, make up the self— the id, superego, and ego— he commented that if we were to accept this analysis, we could assert that the symbolic expressions of a painting are connected to the conflicting psychological demands and desires of these three authorities. If a painting is detached from the inner world and only expressive of the outer one, then it would be devoid of artistic value and would be considered a work of craftsmanship. Following Freud, Younan explained that the ego (the organized and realistic part which includes one’s higher ideals, morals, knowledge and experience) has the capacity of making connections between symbols, lines, and colours of the painting.⁴¹³ Even if the

⁴¹⁰ In *Fann fi al-qarya* (Art in the Village), Younan emphasized the social value and place of art education. Ramsīs (Ramses Younan) Yūnān, "Al-Fann Fī Al-Qarya (Art in the Village)," in *Dirāsāt Fī Al-Fann (Studies in Art)*, ed. Lewis Awad (Cairo: Dar al- Katib al-‘arabi li-taba‘a wa-l-nashr, 1969). Lewis Awad and Ramses Younan, *Dirasat fi al-fann (Studies in Art)* (Cairo: Dar al- Katib al-‘arabi li-taba‘a wa-l-nashr),

⁴¹¹ Ramsis Younan, “The Aim of the Modern Artist,” in *Studies in Art (Dirasat fi al-Fann)* (Cairo: Maktabat al-‘Usra, 2011),

⁴¹² *Ibid*, 31.

⁴¹³ *Ibid*, 36.

symbols, which are created in the subconscious mind, are frequently inaccessible to the conscious mind and make it difficult for the viewer to ‘understand’ the painting, he may still be affected by it emotionally and feel its affect in his subconscious or imagination.⁴¹⁴

Younan then observed that contemporary art should not ignore the outside world: psychological conflicts, which are born of the interaction between the outside world and one’s inner self are the necessary material for the artist’s work.⁴¹⁵ The cubist artist was criticized for ignoring life and its facts, by doing so, Younan reasoned, he was effectively ignoring the raw material necessary for his work and ended up producing a shallow kind of art revolving around itself, and comparable to ornamental art. He added that the same could be said about the earlier generations of Egyptian artists who, detached from the rest of society, continued to produce landscapes and portraits devoid of meaning. The redemptive power of art is put forth as a solution to the disintegration of religious authorities and the consequent complications that ensued: abundance of machines, class war, unemployed workers, dictatorships, uniforms of fascist groups and fanaticism. Younan stated, “Art itself is a great force that has the magical ability to create symbols and find imaginary solutions. They are really imaginary, but still convincing. Art can help us organize our troubled emotions and to determine our stance from life’s problems.”⁴¹⁶ The difficult role of the artist, to descend from his ivory tower and experience the social, political and moral problems of the outside world, is recognized as a condition to produce a meaningful work of art.

Younan then turned to surrealism and presented his opinions on the ‘school’s different sects.’ He pointed out that the theoretical foundations of the school were based on Freud’s ideas of

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid*, 37.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid*, 39.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid*, 39.

the subconscious mind and his analysis of dreams, legends, humour, children's imagination and the traditions of primitive people, which together constitute very rich material for the surrealist artist. Among the surrealist artists, Younan found three 'orientations' out of which two were discredited: the first one tended to direct its effort toward combining contradictory and strange objects, then surrounding these objects with a completely unrelated medium. This Freudian technique of free association was rejected since, according to the author, it produces a fake form of art displaying the skill and brilliance of the conscious mind, but with little exposition of the imagination and desires of the subconscious mind.

The second orientation practiced automatic drawing through which "the artist tries to liberate himself from the restraints of his conscious mind so that the imagery of his subconscious mind flows spontaneously."⁴¹⁷ The artist attempts to create new mythical creatures to express the content of his inner psyche; this technique does not follow rules of design or composition since it would contradict its main principle to liberate repressed unordered desires. Similar to his stance on free association, Younan rejected automatism: he stated that this type of art "excites and disturbs, but does not offer treatment," to both the artist and the viewer, and added that automatism is untrue to surrealism's primary call for moral and social revolution.⁴¹⁸ The third orientation, which respects design and composition, was very close in meaning to 'subjective realism,' or what Younan called the 'doctrine of psychological truth.' After recognizing this orientation as the most hopeful and fruitful one, Younan ended the article with a quote by Henry Moore, which is closely related to his argument: "Abstract qualities of design are essential to the value of a work, but to me of equal importance is the

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid*, 43.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid*, 44. Although, in general, Younan rejected automatism, as discussed below, he still practiced *Decalcomanie*, a technique of automatic drawing, for a short period in the late 1940s. I place these vacillating positions as part and parcel of a process of negotiation or to borrow Winegar's term, 'reckoning' with modernity and the group's attempt to carve a new space for the arts in Egyptian society.

psychological, human element. If both abstract and human elements are welded together in a work, it must have a fuller, deeper meaning.”⁴¹⁹

This article demonstrates Younan’s critical position *vis-à-vis* surrealism and European avant-gardism in general—that was likewise maintained by members of Art and Liberty from the very early stages. Although Younan’s article is filled with jargon, which perhaps limited its readership, it did certainly present, at the time of its publication in 1938 a vanguardist and radical position, which attempted to revolutionize the conception of art and to break with the Academy’s shallow range of landscapes and portraits. This new conception lent art a moral and didactic purpose to express the artist’s inner psychological conflict as well as the viewers’ collective sufferings. Art historian, Liliane Karnouk, confirms this idea that Younan’s writings in the 1940s helped transfer the Egyptian aesthetic debate, away from the accepted norms of formalism and their level of content-interpretation, “to a mediation between content and form with styles developing from psycho-social realities seeking expression in art.”⁴²⁰

6.4 “Long Live Degenerate Art!”

On December 22, 1938, a group of thirty-seven Egyptian and foreign artists, poets, activists and intellectuals coalesced to sign the ‘Long Live Degenerate Art’ manifesto (henceforth LLDA), in which they demanded complete freedom in art and intellectual creation. Using “Long Live,” one of the most familiar tropes of manifestoes, the signatories proclaimed solidarity with what fascist and totalitarian regimes in Europe had judged ‘degenerate’ art,⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ Henry Moore, “The Sculptor’s Aims,” (1944)

http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/art/ghaggerty/Core2_1/moore.htmlhttp://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/art/ghaggerty/Core2_1/moore.html

⁴²⁰ Liliane Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art: 1910-2003* (Cairo, AUC Press: 2005), 35.

⁴²¹ The most famous case of condemnation of modern art was the ‘Degenerate Art’ show (Entartete Kunst) organized by the Third Reich’s Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda’s Chamber of Fine Arts, in Munich in 1937. More than five thousand works deemed modern, degenerate or subversive were confiscated

and opposed the elimination of art that was deemed against nationalism and race. The manifesto declared:

We believe that any attempt to confine modern art as certain people wish, to being an instrument at the service of a religion, a race or a nation is utterly absurd or is no more than a bad joke. As for us, these reactionary myths can only be regarded as imprisoning thought. As a generalized exchange system of thoughts and emotions, which are shared by the whole of humanity, art cannot but reject those artificial restrictions.⁴²²

Signatories rebelled against the conflation of art with nationalism and judged the latter as the anti-thesis of creativity, replete with societal lies and hypocrisy. Those ‘artificial restrictions’ imposed by art academies, nationalist party leaders or religious authorities, the manifesto argued, served to maintain the elite’s interests and confine artistic production in the hands of a select few. The manifesto mentions the book burnings in Vienna, the tearing up of paintings by Renoir. In Germany, the banning of works by Max Ernst, Paul Klee, Oskar Kokoschka Wassily Kandinsky, George Grosz, and Karl Hofer is condemned. The literary censorship carried out by the ‘literary improvement’ commission in Rome is also mentioned. But most notably, the manifesto makes no effort to ground its critique locally. The signatories are signalling their adhesion to a Western front that defends the rise of totalitarianism in Europe. With LLDA, members joined FIARI’s call for a revolutionary independent art. The brief joint statement from André Breton, Diego Rivera and Leon Trotsky, written in Mexico proposed FIARI as a critical response to the reactionary cultural politics of Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, and Franco. FIARI was described as a free forum of “divergent aesthetic, philosophical, and

from museums and art collections throughout the Reich and displayed as a ‘freak show of dangerous ideas and images.’ The works of Renoir, Dali, Kokoschka, Max Ernst, Marc Chagall, Otto Dix and many others were condemned and accused of being ‘crimes against culture, race, capitalism, sanity and homeland security,’ Don LaCoss, “Egyptian Surrealism and ‘Degenerate Art’ in 1939.” Of relevance here is the Nazi’s condemnation of bodily distortion.

⁴²² « Nous tenons pour absurdes et justiciables du plus parfait mépris les préjugés religieux, racistes et nationalistes à la tyrannie desquels certains individus ivres de leur toute puissance provisoire prétendent asservir le destin de l'oeuvre d'art. Nous refusons de voir dans ces mythes régressifs autre chose que de véritables camps de concentration de la pensée. L'Art, - en tant qu'échange spirituel et effectif permanent auquel participe l'entière humanité, ne peut plus connaître d'aussi arbitraire limites. » “Vive l’art dégénéré” (Long Live Degenerate Art!) (Cairo: December 22, 1938), (my translation).

political leanings”; it was to be open to all so long as there was a complete commitment to the radical freedom of all creative expression in the culture wars against the repulsive racist Nazi “New Traditionalism,” the Third International’s insipid regimes of socialist realism and proletarian literature, and all other authoritarian policing of free thought and expression. “For an Independent Revolutionary Art” concludes with a dialectical couplet that succinctly captures the goals of FIARI: “We want the independence of art for the revolution and the revolution for the extreme liberation of art to argue that the free exercise of the artistic imagination harboured a profound political dimension, acting to rearticulate the relation between perception and representation, so as to enable humanity to refashion the world in its own image.” The manifesto ends with a call to take up the challenge and unite in support of degenerate art: “Let us work for its victory over the new Middle Age that is rising up in the West.”

By joining FIARI, the LLDA manifesto joined the call to condemn the rise of fascist forces both abroad and in Egypt, where fascist sentiments were gaining currency. Gershoni and Janwowski explain that “international events in 1938-1939, produced an intensification of Egyptian concern over the malevolent intentions and behaviour of the European fascist states, along with a deepening apprehension over the implication of Fascist and Nazi aggressiveness for Egypt itself.”⁴²³ Particularly, the Munich Agreement signed in September 1938 had a deep impact on Egyptian public opinion. Regarding Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia, the authors argued, “the proximity of Egypt to the battlefield and the feeling that Egypt was now bordered on the west and the south by a powerful and aggressive European empire convinced many Egyptians that there was now a concrete Fascist threat to Egypt itself.”⁴²⁴ The

⁴²³ Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s* (California: Stanford University Press, 2009).23.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

signatories' opposition to fascist forces was not a unique stance in interwar Egypt, exclusive to members of AL. Other artists and intellectuals were responding to the rise of Fascism in Europe. In 1941, Amina and Moenis Taha Hussein, daughter and son of the literature laureate, staged *Electre* by Jean Giroudou in honour of Greece, following the attacks by fascist Italy, and soon after penned a manifesto in solidarity with France, occupied by Nazi Germany.⁴²⁵

In its original format, the leaflet included a reproduction of Picasso's *Guernica* (1937). This choice is certainly Henein's, who was an active supporter of the Spanish resistance against General Franco. Painted in 1937, *Guernica* is a powerful political statement against the Nazi's bombing of the Basque town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War and stands as a reminder of the destruction, violence and loss of innocent lives during wartime.⁴²⁶ This comes as no surprise when one considers Henein's trajectory. From his correspondence with Calet, one senses the effects of the war: "Generally, politics make me sick everyday more and more. I have a vague certainty that friends that are placed on various fronts in Spain are dying and having their lives stolen away from them too. And nothing seems more dreadful than useless sacrifice of such noble blood."⁴²⁷

6.5 Echoes of a Manifesto ⁴²⁸

The editorial board of *La Bourse Égyptienne* in Alexandria agreed to mention the publication of the manifesto. On the 2nd of January 1939, the *Journal d'Égypte* published a summary and

⁴²⁵ Daniel Lançon, "La France des Égyptiens, » ed. Marc Dambre, Michel Schmitt and Marie-Odile André, *La France des écrivains : Éclats d'un mythe (1945-2005)*, (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2001), 30 <http://hal.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/hal-00872941>

⁴²⁶ In 1937, Roland Penrose organized a tour of Picasso's painting *Guernica* in the UK and it was shown at the Whitechapel gallery among other places. The connection to Penrose via Lee Miller is significant, since Miller was involved with AL from early on and was already in Cairo by this time. We can assume that Henein and other members were aware of the exhibition.

⁴²⁷ *Lettres: Georges Henein – Henri Calet (Grandes Largeurs)*, February 1938, 23.

⁴²⁸ "Echo d'un manifeste," (Echoes of a Manifesto), *Bulletin Art et Liberté*, n.1, March 1939, 3, Bashir Sebaie Archives, consulted February 2013.

listed its signatories. *La Revue des Conférences* on the 30th of January agreed to publish the manifesto in its entirety, followed by a list of its signatories. The Greek daily, *Kiryx*, did the same in the February issue. *Al Majalah al Gedida* on 1st of January commented positively on the content of the manifesto and the formation of AL. The manifesto continued to resonate in the magazines for more than a month and a half. This continued and somewhat sustained press attention attests to the resonance of the group and the manifesto, whether positive or negative, whether a few lines, a summary, or its entirety is still a sign of its echo in Egyptian intellectual life.

Henein maintained ties with French poets, writers and intellectuals and was friends with poet Henri Calet, as evidenced in their published correspondence.⁴²⁹ Indeed when members signed the ‘Long Live Degenerate Art’ manifesto on 22 December 1938, Henein entrusted Calet to publish the text in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. The latter appeared on 1 February 1939 with the following announcement: “on the back of a reproduction by *Guernica* by Picasso, a new group in Cairo, Art and Liberty publishes a bilingual manifesto: ‘Long Live Degenerate Art,’ signed by some of the most renowned Egyptian intellectuals... The Orient is labouring for the defence of Western culture.”⁴³⁰

6.6. Art and Liberty Coming Together

On 19 January 1939, a group of artists, poets and intellectuals published a brief but crucial document that officially announced the formation of a group, making known its chosen name of “Art et Liberté” or *Jama’at al-fann wal-hurriya*. This time the document was in the Arabic

429 *Lettres: Georges Henein – Henri Calet (Grands Largeurs)*, (Association Henri Calet, Autumn–Winter 1981). A faithful correspondence began between Henein and Calet in November 1935. For over twenty years, the two exchanged letters, books, ideas and friends. The last letter dates from Mai 1956, two months before Calet’s death.

430, *Georges Henein, Œuvres : Poèmes, récits, essais articles et pamphlets* (Paris : Denoël, 2006), 1001

version, and the choice of the word *hurriya* is significant, which translates more accurately as freedom. The root of *hurriya* is *hurr* that translates as free. This distinction brings the group's mission closer in line with the aims of FIARI, and more crucially foregrounds the group's utmost aspiration to freedom. There isn't a direct line between those who signed LLDA and the group itself. In other words, AL was a loose coalition, which included a small core group, to whom numerous artists, poets, writers, intellectuals, and activists were loosely affiliated.

The document listed the group's mission thus:

- a. The affirmation of artistic and cultural liberties
- b. The discovery of works, principles, and men whose work and knowledge is indispensable in present times
- c. Maintaining close contact between the Egyptian youth and contemporary literary, artistic, and social trends in the world.⁴³¹

The first mention of the headquarters on 28 el-Madabegh Street comes later, on the occasion of the first General Assembly meeting on 8 March 1939, as discussed below. The source of this document remains unclear too, I was able to locate it as an unattached document in Bashir Sebair's archives on my visit in 2013. The only bibliographical information included was the date (19 January 1939). Don LaCoss brings our attention to its reproduction in the second issue of *Clé*, in February 1939, which means that it was included alongside LLDA manifesto, which we know from other sources, was referenced in the second issue of *Clé*, 2 February 1939.⁴³² Incidentally, Henein published "Frank Kafka, *Le Chateau*," in this issue too, where he communicates the importance of Kafka's novels, *Le Chateau* and *Le Procès*, of equal measure to *Les Chants de Maldoror*.⁴³³

431 "Aims of Art and Liberty," January 19th, 1939.

432 *Clé*, n.2, February 1939, 12, as quoted in Don LaCoss, "Egyptian Surrealism and 'Degenerate Art' in 1939," *7. Arab Studies Journal*, Spring 2010, 83.

433 Georges Henein, "Frank Kafka, *Le Chateau*," *Œuvres*, eds. Pierre Vilas (Denoël, Paris : 2001), 682.

6.7 A First General Assembly

The organization of the group was well structured; it counted a General Assembly, a secretariat, treasurer and a publishing house. But there is no indication of official membership, with admission rules, like with the French groups. On the contrary, AL functioned in an open and flexible manner. All lectures and conferences taking place at their headquarters were open to the public and participation in the *Salon des Indépendants* was open to all. As I will address below, the participating artists were loosely affiliated, and at times not at all, with the group.

On 8 March 1939, AL held its first General Assembly meeting, where Henein, Younan, el-Telmissany and Kamel presented the aims of the group. Remarkably, the meeting was attended by Penrose, who happened to be in Egypt to visit Miller. He was introduced as the leader of British surrealism and gave a brief opening lecture on the role of art and social and political engagement, where he specified that “art did not imply a limited technical activity; but indeed an ever-increasing sum of human attitudes, and it is in this way that the protection of human development is vital in order to pursue the struggle against authoritarian ideologies and regimes that are increasingly threatening.”⁴³⁴ Around thirty people were in attendance, and Henein, Anwar Kamel, el-Telmissany also gave speeches, presenting the aims of the group and discussing its projects.

An follow up session took place on March 23, 1939, and a month later (on 25 April), a general meeting, open to the public, was organised, where more than 50 people were in attendance. Henein, el-Telmissany, Georges Aziz and Youssef Afifi spoke about the

434 « Activité de ‘Art et Liberté’ » *Bulletin Art et Liberté*, n.2, May 1939, 3. Bashir Sebaie Archives, Cairo consulted February 2013.

importance and condition of poetry, the duties of the Egyptian young artists and of Freud. It is reported that this session was particularly animated, and six new members joined the group.⁴³⁵

This brief article about the group was a projection outward to a wider readership and called for more people to join them. The article also tackled the sense of doubt and the obstacles faced by the group. A concerted effort to project outwards; by listing their activities in detail with the name of the participants indicated that they were trying to build a certain credibility. Even Youssef Al Afifi, a leader in arts education and a member of the Arts Advocacy group, presented several lectures in their premises and participated in their exhibitions, as well as Salah el Dine Youssef, who also became a member of Art and liberty.

6.8 The *Art et Liberté* Bulletin

Shortly after the formation of AL, members published two issues of the “Art et Liberté Bulletin” in March and May 1939. With the same militant tone of the LLDA manifesto, the bulletins extolled the aims of the group, announced its upcoming activities and recommended books to its readers. Before turning to content, a few words on form are due: made up of five folios, the short bulletins were typed on a mimeograph and printed on standard A4 paper. On the cover page is an arresting illustration by el-Telmissany of the mythological creature, *Umm al-Shu'ur* (mother of hair, also known as the doll of the Nile) made in the artist’s usual style, in black pencil and rough fine lines. In Egyptian folktales, the doll of the Nile is said to roam the banks of the river, calling on innocent travellers to the water, only to drown them. The character would have been identifiable to a wide readership and is arguably a considered

435 *Ibid.*

choice by the editors to ground themselves locally, to appeal to readers. The first bulletin is written entirely in French.

The second issue from May 1939 differs from the first one in its bilingualism, from the title on the front page written in both French and Arabic, with the addition of an Arabic caption below. Here again the drawing is inspired from Egyptian folktales, a strange imaginary figure taking up most of the paper. The cover page is also a black and white drawing, this time the drawing is by Fouad Kamel. In an accompanying comment, Marcelle Biagini observed that *real* artists in Egypt are the ones “who ignore the rules of the Academy [and] declare their solidarity with the popular painter and the sculptor of the *Moulid* sugar dolls.”⁴³⁶ An interesting dynamic emerges between notions of local and universal art— on the one hand Art and Liberty adopted a universalist conception of art evidenced in its association with FIARI through the publication of ‘Long Live Degenerate Art’, while on the other hand, its members worked to build and sustain ties with local culture, which was deemed a necessary component of authenticity.

Along those lines, AL strictly rejected art that supported any particular religion, race or nation, national sentiment and deemed absurd any calls for regional particularism. Henein was the loudest critic of nationalist art. He explained “all those who try to found a national art conceived upon specific characters of a certain country are condemning themselves to failure and complete ridicule [...] Art has no homeland, no region. Chirico is not more Italian than Delvaux is Belgian, than Diego Riviera is Mexican, than Tanguy is French, than Marx Ernst is German, than Telmissany is Egyptian. All these men participate in a same fraternal

436 Marcel Biagini, “For a Free Art,” *Art and Liberty Bulletin*, n.1, March 1939, 2.

impulse against derisory boundaries.”⁴³⁷ Members of AL were invested in defining the negotiation and engagement with Western art, on their own terms. They were fighting for the freedom to construct their own strategies and to produce a ‘free art’ that is devoid of nationalist prerogatives. They encouraged cultural borrowings, which they did not equate with imitation or derivatives. But it is important not to read AL’s anti-nationalism as being anti-patriotic. While they opposed and ridiculed the Egyptian liberal elite’s nationalist discourse and pushed for the deprovincialization of art, they were unquestionably attached to a certain Egypt, allegorically present in all their works.

6.9. *Al-Risala* Debate

The exchange that took place from July to October 1939, between Younan, el-Telmissany, Anwar Kamel and the editors of the weekly cultural review *al-Risala* (The Message) is telling of the kind of debates that were happening in Egypt at the time and since the turn of the century. The magazine was one of the most prominent journals of the 1930s devoted to advancing Arabic literature, by promoting an Egyptian culture based on Arab and Islamic heritage.⁴³⁸ The keyword *asala* (authenticity) underpins their rhetoric of modernization and the ensuing debate that pitted *asala* against an imported modernity. Here AL was accused of being a weak copy of European art and, as we will see below, consolidating its status as derivative and imitator so early on. In other words, to see the terms of authenticity, Egyptianess and originality so clearly articulated in 1939 highlights how this debate was already happening in Egypt, at the time of AL’s formation.

437 Georges Henein as quoted in Pascale Roux “Le Langue à l’épreuve de l’histoire: Georges Henein et la revue d’une langue ouverte.” 86.

438 Elisabeth Kendall, *Literature, Journalism, and the Avant-Garde: Intersection in Egypt* (London: Routledge, 2006), 46.

In this debate, members of AL responded to the accusations levelled against them by the editors of *al-Risala*.⁴³⁹ the alleged degenerate nature of the artists' work, their blind imitation of French surrealism, their adoption of Freudian theories and their inability to provide 'artistic and scientific research' to explain the substance of the changes in art which they called for, are a few examples.⁴⁴⁰ I turn to the exchange to evince AL's location within the Egyptian cultural apparatus, thus rooting them in the social context they were operating within. In a rejoinder to having been introduced as "The Degenerate Art group" in a report by art-critic Aziz Ahmad Fahmi, Anwar Kamel, who in this case signed his name *on behalf of* AL's permanent committee, defended the groups' aims as "defending art and culture, spreading new writings, giving lectures and holding public art exhibitions, at the same time as working to acquaint Egypt's Youth to literary and social movements worldwide."⁴⁴¹ This statement identified three spheres of action wherein AL was engaged with Egyptian society beyond their reception by artists and art-critics through their manifestoes, lectures and exhibitions. It also clearly sets out their aim as directly and possibly exclusively concerned with Egyptian youth, specifically with "raising their cultural and political awareness" and to bring them *en par* with the rest of the world.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁹ To contextualise the background of *Al Risala*'s editors, who were proponents of the *nahda*, Stephen Sheehi argues that the hegemony of Arab renaissance and the concomitant positivism against which Romantics protested, underlies the reception of modernist art in the Arab world. This realisation reveals how Comtean authority was inscribed into modern Arab subjectivity and could not be easily surrendered because of the colonial condition. Critique of the *Nahda* in the form of modernism: Romantic artists and literati realized at a fundamental level that *nahdah* criteria condemned the native subject to a perpetual state of catch-up to the West. Modernism's radical critique of rationalist principles, as expressed in the plastic arts—a critique that appealed to Younan and Henein. The hegemonic presence of the rationalist criteria for civilization and progress, emerged from the Romantic unconscious. Stephen Sheehi, "Modernism, Anxiety and the Ideology of Arab Vision," *Discourse* (Berkeley, Calif.) 28, no. 1 (2006): 74, 10.1353/dis.2008.0008

⁴⁴⁰ Nasri Attalah Susa declared, "I reiterate that I looked at some of the paintings drawn by some members of the [Art and Liberty] association, and I repeat with absolute firmness that it is a degenerate art. Their paintings originate from surrealism, which is a purely French ideology primarily motivated by Sigmund Freud (an Austrian Jew) and his theories of modern psychoanalysis." And curiously added "I believe that artistic movements cannot travel with such ease from one country to another...nor can personality and inspiration." Nasri Attalah Susa, "Degenerate Art, Nonetheless," *al-Risala*, n.329 (1939), 1620.

⁴⁴¹ Anwar Kamel, "The Art and Liberty group," *al-Risala*, n.314, 10 July 1939, 1426. In the initial article "The Degenerate Art Group," published in the same issue (*al-Risala*, n.314, 10 July 1939, 1372), Aziz Ahmad Fahmi argued that art by definition is "elevated," and "high-minded" and could thus never be degenerate, unless by some personality defect of the artist.

⁴⁴² Anwar Kamel, "The Art and Liberty group," 1426.

Writing in *al-Risala*, editor Nasri Attalah Susa strongly reasserts his characterization of AL's art as degenerate, he wrote: "I have seen what the members have produced and I reaffirm, with absolute certainty that it is degenerate art [...] their artworks are inspired by surrealism, which is a purely French movement, which takes after Sigmund Freud (an Austrian Jew) and his theories of modern psychoanalysis. [...] I believe that artistic movements cannot travel with such ease from one country to another...nor can personality and inspiration."⁴⁴³ The comparisons are intended to convey the nihilistic values of surrealism, and, by extension, label AL's art as degenerate. In this respect Susa's critique of AL is waged at the level of anti-westernization and on a conservative view that equates anarchism with chaos. The charge of national inauthenticity is supplemented by Fahmi's conception of 'real art' as the natural expression of Islam's values, thus simultaneously identifying AL's art as godless or departing from *al-ummah's* (Muslim community) religion and as non-art. Don LaCoss points out that their criticisms of AL – "Fahmi's avowal that the Egyptian surrealists promulgate a sub-spiritual artistic practice based on foreign ideology, Susa's claim that they promote a "degenerate art" out of "blind enslavement" to the latest excesses of foreign art, and Sayyid's dismissal of them as purveyors of "superficial" and "deceptive" – were largely reflective of a number of international anti-surrealist discourse from across a wide political spectrum.⁴⁴⁴

443 Nasri Attalah Susa, "Degenerate Art, Nonetheless," *al-Risala*, n.329, 14 August 1939, 1620.

444 Don LaCoss, "Egyptian Surrealism and "Degenerate Art" in 1939," *Arab Studies Journal* 18, no. 1 (2010): 108. *Al-Risala* writers who spoke out against AL regarded it as a mouthpiece for "foreign" ideas that would interfere with the development of an independent "Egyptian for Egypt's sake" national style of art. What is interesting to note, though, is how the liberal-nationalist attitudes at *al-Risala* closely paralleled those of anti-surrealist critics in other nations. Surrealists' valorisation of incomprehensibility, uncertainty, irrationality, and desire drew contempt from all corners throughout the 1930s. Surrealists were denounced as Germanophiles, Bolsheviks, bourgeois snobs, and social-fascists by various commentators in France; in the US, they were mocked as silly, trendy foreign aesthetes whose theories were suitable only for high fashion and department store advertising (and, later in the 1940s, for FBI surveillance); in Yugoslavia, Romania, and Peru, surrealists were thrown into forced labour camps; in Denmark, they were vilified by the press as pornographers and jailed for morals offenses; and the Soviets condemned them as "anti-proletarian" for their criticism of socialist realism. The Japanese Imperial Higher Special Police monitored and arrested them and forced them to recant their deviant views; they were persecuted in Salazar's Portugal, Franco's Spain, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany; and they were forced into clandestine activity by constant threats of arrest and execution in Greece and Czechoslovakia. In response to a 1938 exhibition in London of Belgian surrealist Rene Magritte's work,

And yet any engagement with AL's politics and activities could hardly miss the strong *a priori* nationalist thematic and anti-imperialist component of their stance, and if there is no evidence that AL broached discussions of religion in their manifestoes, one cannot but note the absence of the militant-atheism which characterized surrealist movements at the time.⁴⁴⁵ Thus while godlessness might have been a factual, if inconsequential, description of surrealism, it does not seem to have been a valid critique of AL. With respect to charges of foreignness, AL went to great pains to assert their national concerns and goals as forming the core of their social and artistic outlook. In another exchange, Kamel reiterates the group's 'Egyptian authenticity', by identifying AL as both an artistic and a social movement rooted in the Egyptian context. This is because artistic production can never exist outside the 'field of force' of social antagonisms: "[AL] has devoted itself to finding the solutions [to Egypt's social and political woes] which can return benefits to the aggregate. It is not affected by a foreign movement; it is an Egyptian movement that will initiate new ideas which will form the basis of the country's advancement." Kamel ended this piece by challenging those who seek to define AL as a degenerate art group to visit their exhibitions and "make an informed assessment".⁴⁴⁶

The fact that surrealism is mentioned late in the debate and is brought up by Susa, and not a member of AL, indicates to what extent an adapted version of surrealism was a co-

one newspaper critic reported himself "almost persuaded to be a Nazi," since "Goebbels, at any rate, will not tolerate such stuff." In this sense, at least, the anti-surrealist writers at al-Risala were themselves more cosmopolitan than they liked to believe. Don LaCoss, "Egyptian Surrealism and "Degenerate Art" in 1939

445 For more on surrealism's fundamental atheism in the face of religious fanaticism and categorical and consistent rejection of Abrahamic tradition, see Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 1992), Guy Ducornet, *Surréalisme et Athéisme: "À la Niche les Glapisseurs de Dieu!"* (Paris: Ginkgo Éditeur, 2007) and Michael Richardson, "Religion," in *The International Encyclopaedia of Surrealism: Movements*, Michael Richardson et al., eds., (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019), 293-300, Accessed April 12, 2021. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474208024.04141>.

446 Kamel page 1521, Kamel avers that art as a form of expression "cannot emanate outside the limits of expression engendered by class struggle in the social hierarchy."

constitutive element of the group's collective identity. Later, in the September issue of *al-Risala* in 1939, Younan asks "so what is this surrealism movement?"⁴⁴⁷ His use of the word *hathihi* (this), a non-essential term, can be seen to imply a certain alienation or distance from the idea he is describing. Instead, in describing AL's various constitutive ideologies and inspirations and the breadth of their collective activity, Younan identifies them as a social, artistic, political, philosophical, psychological, and religious.⁴⁴⁸

In a later rejoinder, el-Telmissany explained that surrealism "is not a purely French movement," but a movement that is "primarily defined by the internationalism of its thinking and action."⁴⁴⁹ According to him, among the movement's leading figures— Salvador Dalí, Picasso, Paul Klee, Paul Delvaux and Marc Chagall— there was not a single French painter. "Art does not belong to any country my friend. You were wrong when you said that art movements don't travel with such ease from one country to another. It is inappropriate Sir, for Egyptian art to be based on or influenced by [the school of surrealism]? We want a civilization that marches with the entire world, we don't want to stop while others are advancing."⁴⁵⁰

El-Telmissany's insistence on the global character of surrealism was typical of the group's discourse, which remained committed to the fostering of an Egyptian school of painting free from Western influence.⁴⁵¹ In a reversing act, he proceeded to link surrealism to the local art and popular folklore, he wrote:

⁴⁴⁷ Ramses Younan, "The Surrealist Movement,"

⁴⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that Younan continues to engage with this magazine, years after in 1941, he published an article, "Poverty is a social problem" in *al-Risala*.

⁴⁴⁹ Kamel el-Telmissany, "On Degenerate Art," *al-Risala*, n.321 (1939), 1701.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵¹ Alain Roussillon, "Identité et Révolution: Lecture de l'Évolution de l'Œuvre Picturale de 'Abd Al-Hadi Al-Gazzar, Artiste Égyptien," in *Image dans le Monde Arabe*, eds., G.Beaugé and J-F Clément, (Paris, Institut du Monde Arabe, 1995), 155.

Sir, have you not seen the *moulid* sugar dolls with their four hands? Have you seen the little *qaragoz* puppets? Have you ever listened to the stories of *Umm al-Shu'ur* and Clever Hassan and their like from popular folklore? All these, Sir, are examples of surrealism. Have you been to the Egyptian museum? Many of the Pharaonic sculptures from ancient Egypt are surrealist. Have you been to the Coptic Museum? Much Coptic art is surrealist. Far from imitating a foreign artistic movement, we are creating art that has its origin in the brown soil of our country, and which has run through our blood ever since we have lived in freedom, and up until now, my friend.⁴⁵²

This significant paragraph captures the way Art and Liberty attempted to ground itself in the local cultural landscapes. By constantly reverting to the past, it attempted to forge a dialectical relationship between universalism and Egyptianess, to present itself not just as relevant both universally and locally, but perhaps universally relevant precisely because it was authentic.

To say that Coptic, Pharaonic and folk art are all surrealist is a good example of how the Art and Liberty tried to place themselves genealogically in a particular cultural landscape. They were claiming legitimacy for their expression both historically (as being an extension of older forms of artistic expression), and through their association with folk culture, they were actually reversing the whole logic (of authenticity) and claiming that local art is just the same thing they were doing and therefore, without knowing it, universal. Art and Liberty's search for an Egyptian soul, in its Pharaonic, Islamic or Coptic heritage points to the group's peculiar vanguardism—or rather, the consistent search for local relevance—since avant-garde movements typically express a break with all past traditions and deny history. These strategies helped to assert their right to exist as both *artists* and as *Egyptian* artists.

7. A Search for Freedom

The quest for a new relationship with the past must be understood within Egypt's colonial

452 Kamel el-Telmissany, "On Degenerate Art, 1701.

context. As Dawn Adès explains, regarding a similar situating in Mexico: “There were historical as well as cultural dimensions to these debates in Mexico, which sought to predicate national unity through a revaluation of the past.”⁴⁵³ A local attachment was visible in their return to images of the past and in their genealogical quest for a novel, artistic expression, in which they hoped to find solutions for the problems of society. In the work, the artists deployed a compound of image traditions of ancient sculpture and art. Furthermore, AL’s search for an Egyptian soul buried deep in the past —be it Pharaonic, Islamic or Coptic, or Mexican and beyond— points to the group’s peculiar vanguardism since avant-garde movements typically express a rupture with all past traditions and deny history.⁴⁵⁴ The ambiguity between AL’s advocacy for local art on the one hand, and a transnational artistic ethos on the other, was an ever-present theme in their writings and artworks. Moreover, the navigation between modernity and local authenticity (in the form of classicist or folkloric elements) was part of a broader social dynamic, identified as an emergent *effendi* subjectivity, wherein a young generation of middle class (mostly) men carved themselves a novel space in society and indexed a claim on modernity, which was a result of specific combinatory formations of modernisation and modernity that this group actively reached. and, more importantly, to index a claim on modernity.⁴⁵⁵ In unpacking AL’s cultural baggage, it is important to keep this dynamic in mind; but for our purpose, suffice it to say that it cogently tapped into wider debates of artistic freedom and Egyptian authenticity.

⁴⁵³ Dawn Adès, Rita Eder, and Graciela Speranza, ed. *Surrealism in Latin America: Vivísimo Muerto* (London : Los Angeles, Tate Publishing ; Getty Research Institute, 2012). 107.

⁴⁵⁴ For example, in the ‘Futurist Manifesto,’ Marinetti famously writes: “What is the use of looking behind at the moment when we must open the mysterious shutters of the impossible? *Time and Space died yesterday*. We are already living in the absolute, since we have already created eternal, omnipresent speed.” <http://vsserver1.cscs.lsa.umich.edu/~crshalizi/T4PM/futurist-manifesto.html>

⁴⁵⁵ For more on the concept of *effendi* culture see Lucie Ryzova, *The Age of the Effendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (Oxford: OUP, 2014). Ryzova explained that a strategy of a rising social formation- the *effendiya*- was to construct Egyptian society as sick and deficient and putting oneself at the centre of reform and revival (*nahda*) through various acts of claiming knowledge and representation, 21.

Al-Tatawur magazine, written entirely in Arabic, described itself as ‘the first avant-garde art and literature review for Arabic youth.’ It became AL’s main organ from January 1940 till September 1940, when state censors shut it down. The journal covered a wide-range of events, arts, politics, and ideas. The editors announced:

“We believe in permanent evolution and continuous variations, it is for this reason that we do not push the public to adopt principles of absolute rigor, that would after some time turn into dogmas. *Al-Tatawur* magazine struggles against reactionary minds, protects women’s rights in terms of freedom in life. The magazine struggles in favour of modern art and free-thinking and aims to teach the Egyptian youth contemporary movements.”⁴⁵⁶

The magazine marks a departure, as well as a turning point in the group’s rhetorical discourse, a turning point in the sense of a more local grounding, the fact that it was published in Arabic, an effort to ground themselves locally. The magazine was imbued with a heightened Marxist-socialist register and as such expressed the members’ opinions on various artistic, intellectual, social and political issues.

The core of the magazine’s program sustained the opposition to the established order and the dominant class, and as el-Telmissany added, sought to “break the bonds of polite society.”⁴⁵⁷

The opening declaration of January 1940 was significant. It stated: “We resist myths and old wives’ tales. We struggle against the inherited values that have been put into place to exploit the power of the individual in his material and spiritual life.” It continues to explain that Egyptian society in its current state had been sickened and that its creative standards had become defective. Here the authors expressed their goal to fight against reactionary forces and backwardness; and called for a rebellion against ancient and outdated ideas and customs. Although there is little discussion of artistic freedom *per se*, the general opposition to conformism and the established order, seeing them as a source of misery and detrimental to dreams and creativity, are in keeping with AL’s defense of artistic and intellectual freedom.

⁴⁵⁶ *Al-Tatawur*, n.1, January 1940, 3.

⁴⁵⁷ Kamel el-Telmissany, “On Free Art,” *Al-Tatawur*, n.1, January 1940, 33.

More specifically it articulated AL's fight against imperialism, poverty and corruption and the struggle for education, the rights of women--- since the Arab Renaissance, women can be seen as the barometer of the contemporary social condition-- and the working classes. In addition to a general criticism of the deplorable conditions of life of the Egyptian masses, AL were more specifically concerned with freedom of expression, especially with respect to social, sexual, artistic, and cultural freedom. The guarantee of freedom of thought and expression were put forth here as fundamental rights. In the magazine's first issue, Abdel Ghani Said expressed the group's concerns about the dire social and political situation in Egypt, he declared:

We believe that Egyptian society in its current state is a sick and unbalanced society. Its creative standards are defective, and its social and economic situation is dysfunctional. We can easily observe the effect of this malfunction in the widespread disintegration of the elements of power in Egyptian society. [...] The great majority of the population lives in the ugliest states of poverty, misery, and illness due to an absence of a spirit of justice in the current Egyptian system.⁴⁵⁸

Members of AL took a holistic approach to the malfunction and corruption of Egyptian society and sought to reform all spheres of life. Comparable to, or perhaps just like, AL's general discourse, there was broad consensus among the middle classes "that Egyptian society is deficient and sick [and] suffering from retardation and backwardness."⁴⁵⁹ The latter blamed poverty, injustice, ignorance, corruption, and colonialism for society's illness. Meanwhile, members of AL believed in the necessity of modifying the living conditions in such a way as to guarantee the constant evolution and the improvement of people's lives. Said condemned the successive ministries, and notably the newly established Ministry of

⁴⁵⁸ Abdel Ghani Said, "A New Direction for Art," *Al Tatawur*, n.1, January 1940, 1-8. Although this article was not a piece of collective writing signed by the group; I nevertheless read it as a sort of manifesto by way of its editorial position coupled with the author's repetitive use of 'us,' 'we,' 'our goals,' and 'our magazine' which conveys an idea of a collective subject.

⁴⁵⁹ Lucie Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 20.

Social Affairs. He described these institutions as both hypocritical and corrupt, having repeatedly and misleadingly announced their alleged interest in improving the living conditions of the ‘crushed’ working class majority.

In a letter to Henri Calet, Henein accounted for the magazine’s “impeccable moral, social and literary line,” and the favourable reception of its message by the Egyptian intelligentsia.⁴⁶⁰

Similarities can be drawn between *Al-Tatawur* and the *London Bulletin*, as the open, "independent" spirit of the two papers is very similar. Considering the close relationship between some of the British and Egyptian surrealists, and the numerous mentions of *London Bulletin* by Art and Liberty members, the similarities may not have been coincidental.⁴⁶¹

7.1. *Salon des Indépendants: A Riposte in the Arts*

The first AL exhibition named “From Mahmud Said to Fouad Kamel,” opened on the 8th of February 1940 in Cairo in the Nile Gallery on Suleiman Pasha Square (now Talaat Harb) and lasted until the 28th of February. Curated by Angelo de Riz, it showcased the work of nineteen artists, both Egyptian and foreign, living in Egypt. Among them were Younan, el-Telmisany, Fouad Kamel, Aida Shehata, Sadek Mohamed, Angelo de Riz, Moscatelli and Mahmud Said. The show also included a photography section displaying the work of Maria Hassia and Saad el-Khadem.⁴⁶² The dynamism and courage of the first show could be credited to the artists’ young age, who were all under thirty and some under twenty-five. In a bilingual catalogue, Henein introduced the exhibition: “At the time when people around the world are only concerned with the sounds of cannons, we find it is our duty to give a

460 Georges Henein, “Letter to Henri Calet,” February 16th 1940, *Grandes Largeurs: Lettres Georges Henein-Henri Calet* (Paris: Association Henri Calet, 1981), 50.

461 Don LaCoss, “Degenerate Art,” *ASJ*, 115.

462 Unfortunately, little is known about the photographic artwork displayed in the exhibitions.

particular artistic current the chance to express its freedom and dynamism.”⁴⁶³ The exhibition was the first radical step displaying Art and Liberty’s artistic departure from the Academy and its rejection of all formal criteria of public performance.

The artwork broke with the art of the previous generation of the *ruwwad* (pioneers): a rejection of both their strict rules of composition as well as the nationalist and Neo-Pharaonic themes. But as we discern in el-Telmissany’s in *Don Quichotte* on Mokhtar and the way his work was co-opted by the partisan politics, it is not neo-pharaonism as such that was their target. El-Telmissany explained that, although the artist was of the Old School, he was one of the few of his generation who was able to express his inner self and convey genuine and deep feelings and delicate emotions.⁴⁶⁴ Through a close examination of his inner psyche and mind, the artist created a poetic feeling in his work.⁴⁶⁵ Arguably, Said’s participation lent the group certain credibility in the face of the audience, but more importantly, it reveals a flexibility and openness from the part of AL towards a multitude of artistic trends. Discussing the true nature of art, el-Telmissany explained: “Art does not deserve to be eternalized if it does not shock you, with all the facts of the abstract naked soul. Art must show you your own miserable life without any form of ordination.”⁴⁶⁶ In other words, art must be tied to the human condition and offer a commentary on oppression, tyranny and poverty. El-Telmissany and Anwar Kamel both recalled for the great turnout, which they described as “greater than any other audience that attended any other exhibition in Egypt.”⁴⁶⁷ Upon Henein’s suggestion of printing one hundred invitations, Kamel recalled, “I protested saying this was not enough.

463 Georges Henein, “Exhibition Introduction,” as quoted in Kamel el-Telmissany, “The First Exhibition of Free Art,” (*al-Ma’rad al-Awel lel-Fann al-Hur*), *al-Tatawwur*, n.3, March 1940, 39.

464 Kamel el-Telmissany, “Mokhtar et le drame de l’Art Néo-Pharaonique,” *Don Quichotte*, n.5, 4 January 1940, 2.

465 *Ibid.*

466 Kamel el-Telmissany, “The First Exhibition of Free Art,” *al-Tatawwur*, n.1 41.

467 Kamel el-Telmissany, “The First Exhibition of Free Art,” 39 and Anwar Kamel, interviewed by Selma Botman for Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard, March 2, 1980, 2.

We must make a mass effort [...] and I secretly printed ten thousand invitations. I sent younger members to distribute them everywhere- universities, Al Azhar, to big figures in society.”⁴⁶⁸ Although the number of invitations should be taken with a grain of salt, it still suggests that the show was well attended. The show garnered both favourable and hostile reactions in the press, by a shocked audience who had trouble understanding the purpose and the content of the work. Both groups described it as a “symbolic violent act,” challenging societal norms and artistic methods.⁴⁶⁹ In a letter to Calet, Henein wrote, “Have I told you that the [first] Independent Art exhibit was a brilliant seismic earthquake? The bourgeois of the region have not yet recovered. Besides they don’t have the slightest reason to recover from it.”⁴⁷⁰ Though Art and Liberty’s exhibitions’ intended to engender violent reactions and did certainly shock the public, it would be reductionist to grasp AL’s efforts as simply aiming to ‘épater la bourgeoisie,’ as some of the contemporaneous reviews had done.⁴⁷¹

The second exhibition was held on 10-25th March 1941, in the midst of war and direct threats from Italo-German Axis forces in al-Alamein Desert.⁴⁷² The core members—Kamel, Nemès, el-Telmisany, Younan, Henein, and de Riz—exhibited, and were joined by a small group of international names: J. Behman, Ezekiel Baroukh, Arte Toplian, Raymond Avner, L.M. Salinas, Ann Williams, A. Chehade [Shehata], and Mehemet About. The exhibition again featured a section on photography, including the work of female photographer Hassia,⁴⁷³ a

⁴⁶⁸ Anwar Kamel interviewed by Selma Botman, 2

⁴⁶⁹ Richard Mosseri, « Le Salon des Indépendants, Le Progrès Egyptien, » June 7, 1945.

⁴⁷⁰ Georges Henein to Henri Calet, February 1940 in *Grandes Largeurs: Lettres Georges Henein- Henri Calet* (Paris: Association Henri Calet, 1981), 50.

⁴⁷¹ See Robert Knopf and Julia Listengarten, *Theater of the Avant-Garde, 1950-2000: A Critical Anthology* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011): ‘*Épater la bourgeoisie*,’ a rallying cry for the French Decadent poets of the 19th century such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud, the phrase is a call to shock the bourgeoisie and the middle classes; Knopf and Listengarten identified it with “notions of negation, rebellion, attack, destruction and rupture, the avant-garde takes an adversarial position toward the cultural and political mainstream.” 6.

⁴⁷² See Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, *Tea with Nefertiti: The Making of the Artwork by the Artist, the Museum and the Public* (Qatar: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation, 2012).

⁴⁷³ For more on the photography in Egypt at the time, see (Golia, 2010: 143).

wide variety of art production, artists from expats communities, from the Cairo School of Fine Arts, and independent studios in Alexandria. Many women also participated, as well as artists from Muslim, Jewish and Christian backgrounds.

The show was set up in a long dark corridor in the unfinished *Immobilia* building in downtown Cairo, one of the tallest at the time, with pots of paints, plaster and brushes scattered around the showrooms as if work had just been completed. Samir Gharib recounts “Black hands, nailed to the wall, indicated an open door that let out a strange singing noise. Inside, couples were dancing.” The provocation was bold and “visitors wondered if they had come to the right address.”⁴⁷⁴ A review published in the *Journal d’Égypte* expressed the public’s response, it stated:

After a million turns in a labyrinth, where inverted posters serve as Ariadne’s thread, we are finally there at the entrance of the second exhibition of independent art. First impression: we would really like to know how to get out. Some of the pictures were hung by clothespins on clothes-pegs. When I saw a clean piece of cloth and a scrap of paper hung on a wall, I remarked to my companions, ‘that’s a bas-relief of a dog chasing a horse,’ and they liked the reasonableness of the title.⁴⁷⁵

This provocation had a didactic purpose. The exhibition posited itself in opposition “to isolation of bourgeois and religious life, scholastic sheiks and the unscrupulous businessmen.”⁴⁷⁶ The catalogue stated the necessity “to sustain in the public spirit, one of these curiosities that are qualified as offensive, since they are a prelude to an awareness and an individual or collective upheaval.”⁴⁷⁷

Overall, the catalogue argued for a bilingual, international group of artists engaged with a transnational art movemens and responded also to the increased bellicosity of nations across

⁴⁷⁴ Samir Gharib, *Le Surréalisme en Égypte et les Art Plastiques*, (Cairo: Prism Art Series, 1988), 69-70.

⁴⁷⁵ Jean Bastia, “Review of the 2nd ‘Independent Art’ exhibition,” March 16th 1941 as quoted in Gharib, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 17.

⁴⁷⁶ Independent Art in Egypt (*L’art Indépendant en Égypte*) Manifesto, 2nd Exhibition, 1941. *La Séance Continue*.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

the sea. Alongside el-Telmisany, de Riz, Younan, and Kamel, as well as artists from earlier movements like Said and Alexander Angelopoulos, other names like Cecil Baldock, Louis Jullien, Isaac Levy, and Wally de Naglovaska joined too.

The third exhibition lasted from 21-30th May 1942 at the Hotel Continental in Cairo; as the catalogue stated: “This show has exceptional value in that it includes for the first time the works of some of the eminent artists of Syria and Lebanon. This is a new and gratifying indication of connection between artists of the sister lands. We extol the noble bent of these [artists] toward their friends in Egypt.”⁴⁷⁸ Although a note of appreciation was put forward praising Arab artists’ participation, the display of the work itself did not indicate the nationality of the artists, who were taken as a collective front defending the freedom and universalism of art.

The choice of exhibition spaces is noteworthy. For all five editions, the group held their shows in non-gallery spaces, namely the mezzanine level of the *Immobilier* building (still a construction site), the hotel Continental, the Nile Club on Soliman Pasha Street and the foyer of the Lycée Français du Caire in Bab el-Louq.

7.2 La Séance Continue

La Séance Continue (‘The Independent Art Exhibition catalogue’) pronounced the goals of their exhibitions, which were to combat the wave of conservative image-making within the three main institutions of art: the Academy, the museum and the Salon of Art. Through the organization of ‘*contre-salons*’,⁴⁷⁹ Art and Liberty was standing against the identity of all

478 Third Exhibition Catalogue, as quoted in Samir Gharib, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 19.

479 *Contre-salons* typically reject the academicism, conformism and practices of the official Salons of Art organized by the Academy. The most famous *contre-salon* is the *Salons des Refusés* (Salon of the Refused) held in 1863 by command of Napoleon III, for artists whose works had been refused by the jury of the official Salon. Some of the most famous works by Paul Cezanne, Edouard Manet (*Le Dejeuner sur l’herbe*), Henri Fantin-Latour

three institutions and more precisely waging a war against “the appalling seasonal surge of academic paintings.”⁴⁸⁰ As Daniel Lançon commented, the first Art and Liberty exhibition was a violent act renouncing all conformist paradigms of exhibition practices; it was like “*a rite of passage*” revealing a direction towards avant-gardism.⁴⁸¹

The manifesto signed by AL criticised those who participated in the Salons of Art. It stated: “[their] only excuse would be if they paint solely as a pastime [...] These poor souls will never understand, will never have the chance to understand, that painting too is a way of thinking, loving, hating, fighting, and living.”⁴⁸² A repudiation of the isolation of the bourgeoisie, of unscrupulous businessmen, religious life and scholastic *sheihks* was also expressed. The preliminary repudiation of academicism, conformism, conservatism, fascism, and institutional elitism were thus the fundamental points of contestation heralded by Art and Liberty.

The shows were perhaps the most significant events organized by the group that altered how art was practiced, displayed and understood by the Egyptian public. Taken as a whole, the five annual exhibitions and the abovementioned projects sought to break the walls of the elitist cultural institutions and broaden artistic experience. Twenty years later, Badr al-Din ‘Abu Ghazi, the Minister of Culture at the time, wrote, “The shows [were] a violent revolution against order, beauty and logic.”⁴⁸³

among others, were exhibited there. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/519629/Salon-des-Refuses> The art historian, Robert Rosenblum, explained that “this so-called *Salon des Refusés*, immediately took on the stature of a counter-establishment manifestation, where artists at war with authority could be seen and where the public could go either to jeer or to enlarge their ideas of what a work of art could be.” Rosenblum, Robert. and H.W. Janson. *19th-Century Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1984), 281.

⁴⁸⁰ “Independent Art in Egypt,” *La Séance Continue*, March 1941, 1.

⁴⁸¹ Daniel Lançon, “Le Caire (1934-1941): Le Défi des Avant-Gardes Européennes pour les Egyptiens et pour Georges Henein en Particulier,” in *Métropoles des Avant-Gardes*, ed. Thomas Hunkeler and Edith Anna Kunz (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 170.

⁴⁸² *Ibid*, 170.

⁴⁸³ Badr al-Din ‘Abu Ghazi as quoted in Samir Gharib, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 15.

AL campaigned for a free form of art that was neither controlled by the state nor by party ideologues, in order to allow artists to express their inner psyche without abiding by conditions of time and space. This effort to move away from the realities on the ground and offer artists the freedom to discover new territories in their artwork also resonated in the Bulletin's first manifesto. It expressed the group's dream to "validate the artist's will to move away from a reality that has become more and more undesirable [...] to change one's homeland forever."⁴⁸⁴

7.3 Art and Liberty in Practice.

Inji Efflatoun, Fouad Kamel, Amy Nimr, Kamel el-Telmisany, and Ramses Younan are some of the prominent painters who engaged seriously with the dictates of surrealism. Throughout their artwork, one sees a vacillation between the focus on the individual on one hand (in an effort to change the relationship of the individual to the world) and, on the other hand, the focus on the collective subject. In its fusion of art and life, AL attempted to alter the individual's perception of the world and liberate him from the binaries upon which the 'real' world is built. For Henein, these false binaries included the "real/unreal, conscious/unconscious, thought/action, perception/representation, work/play, humans/nature, psychic life/social life, dream from waking life etc."⁴⁸⁵ In line with AL's surrealist artistic sensibilities, the group reasoned that the present reality has become more and more undesirable. It was the group's dream to validate the artist's will to move away from the present reality, and reach a new reality, which included both the conscious and the unconscious world. They introduced techniques to bypass the strictures of the conscious

484 "Of Art and of Liberty," *Bulletin Art et Liberté*, n.1, March 1939, 1. Bashir Sebaie Archives, consulted February 2013.

485 Georges Henein's lecture at *Les Essayistes*, 1937, as quoted in Don LaCoss, "Egyptian Surrealism and 'Degenerate Art' in 1939," 2-3 <http://interactivist.autonomeia.org/node/13908>

world and access one's repressed emotions in the unconscious. This move towards the inner self transformed the aesthetic pursuit of the artists who sought to overcome the separation of reality and desire. In "Humanism and Modern Art," in *al-Tatawwur*, el-Telmissany, reiterates, "Art will not be a tool for pleasure of people to bring joy to their idle minds."⁴⁸⁶ It was along those lines, that they stood against the rigid rules of compositions adopted by the Academy, which, as discussed in the introduction, followed an imported model of instruction and upheld strict boundaries between high and low art.

AL's rejection of the traditions of the Academy was translated into an artificial reconfiguration of the human figure. This reconfiguration engaged the conflicting emotions and pains of the artists. Here it is useful to make a distinction between the way artists dealt with individual issues on the one hand and collective on the other. While my aim is not to conceptualise the notion of distortion per se, the distinction is useful to foreground the battles that artists were fighting, on artistic, as well as political, social and economic grounds. The notion of *le corps emacié* is a refutation of the academic representation of the body. As a result of starvation, the body is a cadaverous, giant body. This trope certainly raises a social and political critique against the *status quo*. As will become clear, the emaciated and deformed bodies form cries against the tragedies of war. As noted above, in the more accurate translation of *hurr*, in *al-fann wal-hurriya*, the focus is tuned to 'freedom', and AL pushed forward the notion of 'free art' as the basis for the production of an 'authentic' Egyptian art expressing both individual and collective societal issues. In writing, members elevated 'free art' to a basic right to be enjoyed by all and whose fulfilment had the potential of resolving society's ailments. They argued that the production of a deep and free art worked

⁴⁸⁶ Kamel el-Telmissany, "Humanism and Modern Art," *al-Tatawwur*, n.1 March 1939. As translated and quoted in Alexandra Dika Seggerman, "*al-Tatawwur* (Evolution): An Enhanced Timeline of Egyptian Surrealism," *Dada/Surrealism* n.19, 2013 <http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1269&context=dadasur> 15.

both on the individual level, wherein artists express their dreams, desires, illusions and pains, and the collective level to express the material and spiritual sufferings of the current times. AL worked to curb state censorship of the arts and move away from formalist techniques that produced unoriginal or nationalist art. El-Telmissany stressed that it is “a right of every individual to take his artistic share in order to improve his life.”⁴⁸⁷ They attempted to blur the boundaries between high and low art, upheld by art institutions, and link surrealism to local art and popular folklore. As noted above in the *al-Risala* debate, el-Telmissany made local connections to Ancient Egyptian Art, Coptic Art, and folktale, in order to place the group’s art in the local culture. he did so by summoning these popular characters, such as *Umm al shu’ur* and saying that these are surrealist in nature in the way they make connections with a world that moves beyond lived reality, with magical or mythical elements. To say that Coptic, Pharaonic and folk art are all surrealist is a good example of how AL tried to place themselves genealogically in a particular cultural landscape, claiming legitimacy for their expression historically, as being an extension of older forms of artistic expression. Younan also wrote:

Although it was essentially a Surrealist movement, Art and Liberty welcomed different artistic trends. It also helped relate the Egyptian artist to the contemporary world and relate the concept of art to the concept of freedom. Thanks to the surrealism movement, more attention was given to our folkloric heritage, which as a result became the inspiration of some Egyptian artists long before Tawfiq al-Hakim wrote his play, ‘The Tree Climber.’⁴⁸⁸

Through their association with folk culture, they were actually reverting the whole logic of authenticity and claiming that local art is just the same thing they were doing and therefore, without knowing it, universal. AL’s search for an Egyptian soul, in its Pharaonic, Islamic or Coptic heritage points to the group’s peculiar vanguardism—or rather, the consistent search for local relevance. These strategies helped to assert their right to exist as both *artists* and as *Egyptian* artists.

⁴⁸⁷ Kamel el-Telmissany, “On Free Art” *al-Tatwuur*, n.1, January 1940, p34

⁴⁸⁸ “Painting and Folk Tales,” *Dirasat fi al-fann* 273. (Cairo: The General Book Organisation, 2012), 273.

7.4 Younan and 'Subjective realism'

The notion of 'free art' was used interchangeably with the other notion of "subjective realism" conceived by Younan. The method of 'subjective realism' called on artists to orient their subjectivity in the real world, while exploring their inner psyche. As Seggerman notes, this is a successful "synthesis of Marxist empiricism and Hegelian idealism" which emphasizes AL's break from European Surrealism.⁴⁸⁹ The notion is embodied in Younan's iconic painting *Untitled*, 1939. The medium-sized painting, set in the artist's typical desert landscape, depicts the goddess of the sky Nut – the symbol of life and protection. Nut's extended body dominates the scene. It appears almost crucified. Emaciated bodies and skeletons dot the empty desert. In the foreground a fence denotes perspective, next to which the figure's shadows are cast in blood red. In the background, three skeletal figures seem to be fleeing the scene and walking into the unknown. The language is undoubtedly surrealist, yet the context is local. Without making it nationalist, Younan's depiction of the goddess Nut conveys Egypt's suffering. The national allegory is a thematic *a priori* and makes itself felt structurally, as Neil Larsen reminds us, in just the form of representation that "must be consciously avoided if certain more socially realistic representations are to become possible."⁴⁹⁰

Younan's painting speaks a strong surrealist language; all the staples of the deformation of the body, the desert landscape and the play with the horizon lines are manifest. But the main motif here is the goddess Nut, which cannot be more symbolically Egyptian. And this is where he brings everything together and creates this syntheses hybridization. The goddess of the Sky is suffering, she is almost crucified, with all these women, men, and skeletons (le

489 Alexandra Seggerman, "Egypt" *International Encyclopaedia of Surrealism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019),

490 Neil Larsen, *Companion to Post-colonialism*, 39.

corps emacié) ensuring that it is totally about the context, even if the language is not forced to be Egyptian.

We must keep in mind the dynamic of anti-nationalism in this colonial context, in trying to make sense of AL's calls for a permanent revolution and freedom of the arts. Although expressly anti-nationalist, members of AL remained, at the core, loyal and impregnated with a sense of solidarity to the Egyptian nation at large. This sense of patriotism is visible in Younan's painting just discussed (*Untitled* (1939) or in *La Nature appelle le vide*, a powerful painting discussed below, that laments the destruction of the homeland.

In that sense, these images cut to the core of the group's mission to create a visual and pictorial language that is internationally engaged yet locally oriented.

Members of AL were not anti-nationalist, it is important to not take their anarchism as a repudiation of the nation, as such. In fact, Younan had to pay with his intellectual position, as he was fired from his job in Paris for refusing to communicate hostilities toward Egypt on the radio during the Suez Canal crisis in 1956 and exiled back to Egypt by the French government. His entire oeuvre was delivered in Arabic. The underlying conviction of his project is that what lends art its value is situated at the intersection between his capacity to express the universal and his rootedness in his native land. In a late article, published in 1966, he stresses the importance of our past heritage, "Yet, the experience accumulated throughout the thousands of years cannot have passed in vain. That is why we must study our heritage closely, similar to the ways we examine the world's heritage. [...] We will not create an authentic art, which expresses what we truly are, as long as the latter is not the result of an interaction between these forces, and that is why we should not fear innovation, as extreme as it may seem. And those who fear that our nationalist sentiment may stray are doing nothing

short of betraying the little confidence that inspires this very same nationalist sentiment and its capacity to develop and evolve.”⁴⁹¹

7.5 *La Nature Appelle le Vide* (1944)



Figure 42 Ramses Younan, *La nature appelle le vide*, oil on canvas, 1944. Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art, Cairo.

Set in a barren desert landscape, the fragmented body parts of *La nature appelle le vide* form a gigantic structure, one that resembles an old machine gun. The arms of the body are amputated. What remains, a skull, a spine and a rib cage, a foot and a seeming pelvis, makes up the structure placed in the foreground. With little remaining flesh and bones, the spine cuts

⁴⁹¹ *Al Fikr al-mu'asir, La Pensée Contemporaine*, n,14, July 1966. Younan's "Le mouvement artistique entre le localisme et la mondialite" (1966).

through the entire composition diagonally and projects onto the skyline. The rest of the fragments are attached together by crisscrossing black strings that harshly cut through the scene. This weave lends the structure a certain weightlessness of form or even timelessness, as if suspended in time and space. Still, the dominating and disjunctive scale of the structure injects a tone of severity. Painted in 1944, the distortion or ‘desecration’ of certain body parts registers the emotional and material horrors of WWII that was felt throughout the world. As art critic Samir Gharib observes, the composition of Younan’s paintings had “a vital sense of the human body in all its transformation [...] contorted, deformed in lust, pain and death, hung by its extremities or taking the form of a rock.”⁴⁹² In this painting, the twisted and thin leg on the right that carries a maimed four-toed-foot strongly conveys this violence. Pulled on by the strings, the toes themselves are contorted and tensed. Indeed, this sense of tension emanates from the self-destructive structure and from the string pulling the parts in different directions.

Younan uses string to interlace the extremities of objects and subjects. Its use recalls Moore’s fascination with the same visual device separating forms from each other ‘in order to be able to relate space and form together.’⁴⁹³ At this time, Younan was reading and translating Moore’s writings into Arabic from as early as 1945.

492 Samir Gharib, *Surrealism in Egypt and Plastic Arts*, (Cairo: Prism Art Series 3, 1986), 25.

493 Henry Moore’s 1951 Tate exhibition catalogue written by Sylvester: The function of the string or wire is three-fold. It contrasts, in its tautness, with the curvilinear contours of the mass. It establishes a barrier between the space enclosed by the sculpture’s mass and the space which surrounds the sculpture – only, a barrier which, being a cage and not a wall, can contain the space on its open side while allowing it to remain visible. Above all, the string provokes movement of the spectator’s eye along its length and thereby increases his awareness of the space within the sculpture – especially when ... one set of strings can be seen through another, so creating a counterpoint of movement which brings to life the space around and within which the strings operate. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/henry-moore/henry-moore-om-ch-stringed-figure-rl146217#fn_2_22 Mary Moore, ‘Stringed Figure’, in Gregor Muir (ed.), *Henry Moore: Ideas for Sculpture, exhibition catalogue* (Hauser & Wirth, London: 2010), 130. For more, see Anita Feldman Bennet, ‘Surrealism, Space and String: Henry Moore’s Bird Basket’, in *Henry Moore* exhibition catalogue, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London 2004, 25–33.



Figure 43 Henry Moore, *Stringed Figure*, 1938, cast 1960. Courtesy of the Henry Moore Foundation.

In the background of Younan's painting, the dark blue and rose hues of the skyline set a dramatic atmosphere. The desert horizon blends into the skyline providing the painting with a certain depth. In this desolate space, stands a solitary naked woman. In comparison to the structure in the foreground, the figure is small in size. She has her back to us and seems to be walking away, as if to escape the destruction and leave the suffering behind her. In a similar manner, the emaciated figure in the background registers this pain. Yet in all this violence and fragmentation, the bold contouring lines of the fragmented body and the fine execution of the composition overall lends it a certain flow or even gracefulness. Typical of Younan's palette, the entire composition is painted in ochre colours, reminiscent of the Egyptian desert.

The compositions of Younan are often set in desert or desolate spaces. Figures stand alone in vast and often eerie places. Strong horizons mark the division between earth and sky.

Occasionally these horizon are set low, and heavy open skies hover over the scene. The drama is heightened. Markers of time and space are suspended. Can we even speak of a total *dépayement* (estrangement)? In the period ranging roughly from the late 1930s to the early 1950s, Younan experimented with recognisable surrealist aesthetic devices to transport the viewer to dream-like spaces. *La Nature appelle le vide* successfully renders this feeling of

internal estrangement that the surrealist regarded highly. But while the appropriation of these devices ground his aesthetic in a recognizable surrealist language, it is urgent that we rid ourselves of the run-of-the-mill model of derivativeness or the ‘*Picasso manqué*’ syndrome as dubbed by Partha Mitter, which have hitherto beset non-Western art histories.⁴⁹⁴ Painted at the height of the material and emotional destruction wrought by the war, *La Nature appelle le vide* conveys a mood of despair and emptiness. Its mockery of and break from concepts of classical beauty recalls the *raison d’être* of AL. The motif of the fragmented or emanciated body became a site of artistic, political, social and economic protest.



Figure 44 Ramses Younan, *Untitled*, oil on canvas, 1944. Collection: Mathaf, Doha.

494 Partha Mitter, “Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery,” *The Art Bulletin* (New York, N.Y.) 90, no. 4 (2008): 534 doi:10.1080/00043079.2008.10786408.



Figure 45 Ramses Younan, *Contre le mur*, oil on canvas 1944. Collection Younan Family.

A short series by Younan, which include two paintings entitled *Reclining Woman* and a third *Untitled* travel to the artist's inner psyche to express suffering. These paintings are again evidence of Younan's focus on the human body and particularly the female body. In *Reclining Woman*, an armless woman lies in solitude in the same barren landscape. She is half-naked with a black cloth draped over her shoulders, and seems submerged in thought, gazing into an empty space. Her look pierces beyond the realms of the painting. With a monochrome ochre palette, Younan again creates a heavy atmosphere of silence and loneliness, but as Bardaouil and Fellrath observed, the figure is still "defying the weight of her deformed body."⁴⁹⁵ Set in this barren desert, the reclining body is characterized by a weightlessness of form.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁵ Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, *Tea with Nefertiti: The Making of the Artwork by the artist, the museum and the public*, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art (Qatar: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation, 2012), 63.

⁴⁹⁶ Henry Moore derived his motifs from looking at ancient art in the British Museum: 'Yesterday I spent my second afternoon in the British Museum with the Egyptian & Assyrian Sculptures – An hour before closing time I tore myself away from those to do a little exploring and found – in the Ethnographic Gallery – the ecstatically fine negro sculptures – and then just on closing time I discovered the Print room containing the Japanese things – a joy to come.' Henry Moore, letter to Jocelyn Horner, 29 October 1921, quoted in Henry Moore, *Writings and Conversations*, ed. Alan Wilkinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), pp.44-5. Younan: "It is often said that modern art became international as a result of colonialism, which culturally as well as militarily invades the colonized countries, thus destroying their traditions and their arts.

One could posit the composition as a product of a cognitive process and an introspective exercise, into both the artist and the viewer's inner psyche. Typical of his style, Younan keeps a strong attention to detail and composition, which together maintain a sense of harmony. Although the body is deformed, the face is kept intact and conveys a sense of stillness and despair. This marble-like face is reminiscent of Moore's sculptures. Comparisons between Younan's *Reclining Woman* and Moore's sculptures and drawings of the same name are inevitable.



Figure 46 Henry Moore, *Recumbent Figure*, Stone, 1938. Tate Modern, Courtesy for the Henry Moore Foundation.

Younan repeatedly drew inspiration from Moore. He encountered his writings on art, particularly “The Sculptor’s Aim,” and drew heavily from it in his own seminal essay “The Aims of the Modern Artist” (*Ghayat al-rassām al-hādith*). He translates and quotes it twice

However, we should realize that modern European art has been influenced by Eastern and African arts before any Eastern or African artist was influenced by European art. Therefore, cultural invasion is not the issue. It is rather cultural resonance.”

to illustrate the orientation of ‘subjective realism’ or the ‘doctrine of psychological truth,’ in surrealism:

Objective elements of composition are essential to the value of an artwork. But, in my opinion, the psychological human elements are of equal importance. If both objective and human elements are welded together in an artwork, it would undoubtedly acquire a fuller and deeper meaning. Because a work does not aim at reproducing natural appearances it is not, therefore, an escape from life -- but may be a penetration into reality, not a sedative or drug, not just the exercise of good taste, the provision of pleasant shapes and colours in a pleasing combination, not a decoration to life, but an expression of the significance of life, a stimulation to greater effort in living.⁴⁹⁷

More significantly, Moore’s work was exhibited in Cairo in 1945 as part of the *Contemporary British Art* exhibition organised by the British Council and the SAA. It is safe to assume that Younan visited the show, which was on for two weeks at the Palace of Fine Arts at the Royal Society of Agriculture. Before returning to Younan, let us briefly pause to consider the significance of this event. As noted, the show was organised by the British Council, but it was also a collaboration with the SAA. This under-studied exhibition is a significant event in our reconstruction of the local artistic scene. The exhibition of *Contemporary British Art* was organised by the British Council, in partnership with none other than the SAA at the Palace of Fine Arts at the Royal Society of Agriculture:

The exhibition (after the previews for the *Société des Amis de l’Art* and the Press) was formally opened by H.B.M. Ambassador on January 10th at the Grand Palais of the Royal Agriculture Society and lasted for 19 days. The total attendance amounted to 35,000. The exhibition, which comprised of three sections – Graphic, Painting and Children’s Paintings– was greatly appreciated particularly the Graphic Art Section.⁴⁹⁸

The two paintings by Younan are also reminiscent of the metaphysical art of Giorgio de Chirico. Based on de Chirico’s writings, Jon Tompson explains:

Metaphysical theory was founded on the notion that everything in the visible world has two modes of existence, a routine one that is seen by people generally, and another mode, which

497 Henry Moore, “The Sculptor’s Aims,”

http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/art/ghaggerty/Core2_1/moore.html original text as translated and quoted in Ramses Younan, “The Aim of the Modern Artist,” in *Studies in Art (Dirasat fi al-Fann)* (Cairo: *Maktabat al-Usra*, 2011), 44.

498 The British Council Archives at Tate Britain, British Council Printed Reports, ref. no. TG/4/9/340/2 (April 1945), 7, as quoted in Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 190-1

[de Chirico] describes as a spectral or metaphysical manifestation, seen only by rare and isolate individuals in moments of clairvoyance.⁴⁹⁹

Enchanted by a new force, the reclining woman seems to have entered into a new mode of existence, which de Chirico described as placed beyond the coordinates of space and time. Younan was certainly familiar with de Chirico's work through textbooks and cultural journals published in Egypt. In the lecture "*L'Art dans la mêlée*" mentioned above, Henein analysed De Chirico's work and presented him alongside Picasso, as the genius who saved modern art from decline: "Take out Picasso and all of modern art disappears into the night. Take out De Chirico and the immense wave of dreams which, with surrealism's triumph, covers contemporary literature and painting, loses all its origin, all its depth."⁵⁰⁰ For Henein, De Chirico successfully depicted the defeatist sentiment of Man's inadequacy in the face of matter. The vertiginous and extraordinary perspectives in the paintings reduce his subjects to the most humiliating dimensions of their moral distress. The scene staged is one of desolation and despair. The subjects are faceless, faraway passers, slightly stretched by their shadows and absorbed by the immense rectilinear surfaces defying any human willingness. In these long colonnades, he goes on to describe the faint subjects that often appear faceless, walking into the unknown. De Chirico reduces mankind to humiliating dimensions.⁵⁰¹

499 Jon Thompson, *How to Read a Modern Painting: Understanding and Enjoying the Modern Masters* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 147.

500 Georges Henein, "L'art dans la mêlée," (Conference paper at *Les Essayistes*), *Revue des Conférences Françaises en Orient*, n.24, 15 March 1939, 263.

http://www.cealex.org/pfe/diffusion/PFEWeb/pfe_003/PFE_003_001_w.pdf

⁵⁰¹ Georges Henein, *L'Art dans la mêlée, Oeuvres*, 396-397.

7.6 Drawing into the Abyss



Figure 47 Ramses Younan, *A la surface du sable*, pencil on paper, 1938. Collection of MoMAC.



Figure 48 Ramses Younan, *La conscience de la terre*, pencil on paper, 1954.

“*A la Surface du Sable*” is a small pencil drawing on paper (22x27cm), that transports the viewer to a desolate barren space. Using a method of cross-hatching, the artist creates a skilfully detailed and profound scene composed of desert vegetation and two amorphous figures. The finesse of the line is remarkable. The main figure is a mutilated female body set in the foreground. The composition is set in the desert, with vegetation, a water source, perhaps the Nile River appears in the background. There is a strong perspective. It crosses this barren land almost unnoticed. The vegetation faces the other way, as if abandoning its surrounding. A dryness and stillness prevail. The drawings represent incongruous figures, typically biomorphic designs of wombs and one-eyed creatures. The body parts are morphing into desert vegetation, the scene is set in a dried seabed. We find Younan searching for a new myth. Alain Roussillon finds the drawing speaking to war, ugliness, exploitation, misery, and the perversity of the mind.⁵⁰²

⁵⁰² Alain Roussillon, « Parcours de Ramsès Younan: une francophonie en langue arabe » Le Caire, 1987 in *Ramses Younan : La Part du sable*, Sonia Younan ed., (Paris : les Presses du réel, 2021), 24.

7.7 Fouad Kamel

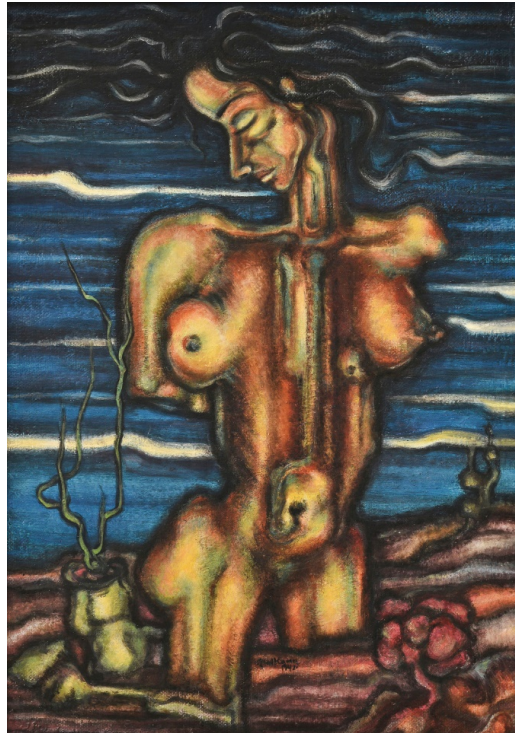


Figure 49 Fouad Kamel, Untitled, oil on canvas, 1942. Private Collection, Cairo.

The canvasses of Fouad Kamel were more figural and colourful than those of his compatriots, characterized by smooth yet distorted female and equine bodies with enormous single eyes in flat landscapes. Egyptian art critic Aimé Azar described Kamel as having a “highly pictorial temperament” in which he “maintained a strict need for balance.”⁵⁰³ Kamel was deeply concerned with the human body in all its shapes and forms. In this painting, (Figure 5), a distorted and amputated woman’s body stands at the centre of a desolate garden. The woman’s hands and legs are cut off and her body parts are deformed. Standing alone in this strange setting, the figure retains a mysterious aura. The landscape is surreal as if set in outer space, and there are no coordinates of space and time. With eyes closed the woman is looking away as if engulfed in the silence around here. In fact, she seems to blend into the landscape; her amputated legs are rooted in the ground and her hair is blending with the background.

⁵⁰³ Aimé Azar, 1954: 8.

The exaggerated and distorted forms, coupled with a strong colour palette and rough brush strokes lend the composition a disconcerting effect and skilfully articulate an attack on classical beauty. Kamil's pictorial universe certainly retains a surrealist visual language and is influenced by Freudian theories of the subconscious, wherein the viewer enters into a dream-like world. In this composition, one perceives Kamil's search for a new reality, one that moves beyond the binaries of the real and unreal, the conscious and the unconscious freely expresses the artist's inner self. Beyond the surrealist aesthetic, this composition is part and parcel of AL's discourse of the universalism of art and the importance of 'free art.' Here Kamil's distorted figure conveys strong emotions and successfully expresses the individual's repressed desires, pains and suffering.

7.8 Amy Nimr: Sketching Skeletons



Figure 50 Amy Nimr, Untitled, 1943, oil on panel.

Painted in the late 1943, the *Untitled* skeleton series evoke the tragic event of the death of Nimr's only son Micky on January 17, 1943, in a desert bomb explosion. The family were on a desert picnic in Wadi Degla, south of Cairo. Micky and his older cousin Soraya were playing in the sand and picked up a silver-black object half-buried in the ground. Soon enough the object exploded in Micky's face, inflicting fatal injuries on the young boy. Micky

died in hospital a couple of days later.⁵⁰⁴ This tragic event was perhaps the closest war had ever come and affected members of AL. Nimr never recovered from the death of her son and after a period of abstinence, began painting these visceral underwater scenes of incorporeal skeletons, impregnated with violence. The skeletons bordered in black lines are contorted and the red entrails and veins splattered across the scene capture the violence and sufferings of the artist.

7.9 Canons of War Approaching

In contrast to Futurism's promotion of war, AL condemned the 'voices of cannons.' Henein declared: "At a time when almost everywhere in the world, the only voices being taken seriously are those of cannons, it is vital that a certain artistic spirit be allowed to express its independence and vitality."⁵⁰⁵ While Cairo did not experience the war directly, the First Battle of Alamein (1–27 July 1942) fought between the Axis forces led by Erwin Rommel and the allied forces of the Eighth Army was only 310 km away. In fact, through the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936, Egypt was de facto at war under British colonial rule. By then, Cairo had become the headquarters of the British Eighth Army and not only were more than 140,000 Commonwealth soldiers stationed in the capital, but the war effort touched the lives of more than one million Egyptians, through the labour corps and army.⁵⁰⁶

The repercussions of the war were felt in everyday life. Similar to the way artists depicted the violence of the war in their artworks, the cultural magazines, notably *Images* with its frequent

⁵⁰⁴ The story of Micky Smart's death in the Wadi Degla desert is narrated in detail by Bardaouil, based on the author's interview with Soraya Antonius– the only daughter of Amy's sister Katie, who was married to Georges Antonius, the Lebanese-Egyptian historian and diplomat and author of the seminal 1938 book of Arab modernism, *The Arab Awakening*, (Interview October 2015) in Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 164.

⁵⁰⁵ Catalogue of the first exhibition of Independent Art, Georges Henein (illustrated by Jean Moscatelli), February 1940.

⁵⁰⁶ Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, with a contribution by James Gifford, *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938 – 1948)*, (Milan: Skira Editore, 2016), 29.

use of photography, echoed the current political climate and news about the war. Even during the war, *Images* continued to play both roles of informing and distracting: in this case it was a matter of informing the reader about the war but at the same time distracting him/her from that very thing.⁵⁰⁷ These magazines offer examples of the socio-political climate in which artists of the Art and Liberty operated. The violence and the loss as a result of WWII certainly reverberated in Egypt during and after the war. From the summer of 1940, none of the learned of Egypt journey to Paris. France is occupied by the Nazis and the welcoming-France is not more. Maria Cavadia relays the anxiety of war in Egypt: “the overwhelming and mysterious defeat of France throws us into complete disarray, pushing us into the extreme limit of this chaos. During the summer that followed this atrocious autumn of 1940, we moved like a blind herd, lost in swampy dunes.”⁵⁰⁸

During the war, Henein maintained contact with the outside world. He acted as a hyphen of cultural mediation, resisting and violently rejecting the status quo. His weapon was the written word. He corresponded with Benjamin Péret in Mexico and participated in the New York surrealist magazines *VVV* and *View*. In a letter to Calet, from 10 March 1945, he wrote: “I ask myself when will an intellectual breathing space resume to allow people renewed exchanges, that wouldn’t be an exchange of refugees, of the wounded and of cases of explosives. That is without even mentioning the possibility of moving around, to wander around freely, from one continent to another. After this war, we may notice that borders have terribly regained strength.”⁵⁰⁹

8. Inji Efflatoun: Early Surrealist Compositions

⁵⁰⁷ Elodie Gaden, “Le magazine *Images* (1929–1969) : Fortune d’un Hebdomadaire Illustré Mondain Francophone, » in *Presses Allophones de Méditerranée*, (Alexandrie : Centres d’Etudes Alexandrines, 2017), 76.

⁵⁰⁸ Maria Cavadia, *La Semaine Égyptienne*, No.9-10, May 1941, 9.

⁵⁰⁹ Henein, “Je me demande quand est-ce qu’un commencement de ventilation intellectuelle pourra s’établir et permettre aux peuples de renouer des échanges qui ne soient pas des échanges de réfugiés, de grands invalides et de caisses d’explosifs. Ceci sans même parler de la possibilité de se déplacer, de *flâner librement*, d’un continent à l’autre, Après cette second dernière, on s’apercevra peut-être que les frontières ont terriblement repris de poil de la bête. »

Inji Efflatoun's early works date from the 1940s, when she was just seventeen years of age. She used a surrealist visual language developed under the tutelage of el-Telmissany, who offered her private art classes at home. The classes lasted for about three years, and in an interview with Selma Botman, the artist recounted:

[Telmissany and I] met and he opened the world to me, by asking 'What is art? What is life?' My art exploded at the time; I had now found painting... I also began questioning and searching for solutions to questions that were raised in my studies and in my life. The dissatisfaction I felt was present in my paintings. Even the critics commented on this, saying that I was in a state of revolt; some hinted that it was sexual frustration.⁵¹⁰

Composition Surréaliste (1942) was exhibited in the third Independent Art exhibition. It shows a strong dynamism and radical break from the formalism of the academic traditions. The composition is also set in a desert landscape, where three fierce female creatures are placed consecutively. The creatures are moving across the desert as if induced in a deep state of trance. They also take the form of trees, with their roots spreading across the ground. There is a strong wind sweeping across the desert and lending the composition a strong sense of movement. A close look at the foreground figure and the background figure shows that the wind is blowing from different directions and pulling the figures in. The composition takes the viewer to a dream of the artist, where her emotions run high. Efflatoun uses a similar visual language that is influenced by Freudian theories. This pictorial universe, like other early compositions, conveys strong emotions and successfully expresses the painter's anxieties and fears.

⁵¹⁰ Inji Aflatoun Interview as quoted in Selma Botman, *The Rise of Egyptian Communism, 1939-1970* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 23.



Figure 51 Inji Efflatoun, *Composition Surrealiste*, 1942.

Henein noticed her talent, he wrote: “The surprise of this exhibition is the variation of the colour of verdure that mounts to delirious heights in the canvases of Inji Efflatoun [...] Maybe [her] artistic imagination is the freest and most developed imagination introduced in the exhibition.”⁵¹¹ Indeed Efflatoun’s art captured the dynamism and radicalism that AL was calling for, and succeeded to produce a deeply expressive and conscious art.

⁵¹¹ George Henein, “The Third Exhibition of Free Art,” *La Semaine Égyptienne*, 1942.



Figure 52 Inji Efflatoun, *Untitled (Girl with Monster)*, 1942.

8.1 Bread and Freedom: *al-Majallah al-Gedida*:

David Renton introduced the Bread and Freedom group as the descendant of AL, which it supposedly superseded by the mid-1940s.⁵¹² However, it seems that Bread and Freedom was in fact established by Anwar Kamel, who was also an active member of Art and Liberty. By contrast to Art and Liberty's cultural, artistic and literary aims, the younger group upheld a heightened program of political engagement and a focus on working-class rights. As Selma Botman points out, Bread and Freedom moved in a more materialist direction, and focused on Egypt's political problems, class system, the need to reform political parties and the economic relationship between capitalist and workers. "For the Trotskyists, there was a

⁵¹² David Renton, *Dissident Marxism: Past Voices for Present Times* (London: Zed Books, 2004) and David Renton, "Bread and Freedom." *Encyclopedia of Trotskyism On-Line: Revolutionary History*, Vol. 8 No. 2, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol8/no2/.html#f1>

necessary connection between national liberation and socialism. For the Communists, national liberation had to come first.”⁵¹³ Henein wrote:

The Stalinists are doing their best to bring confusion to its peak. They are openly collaborating with fascists, promoting the same outworn ‘national front of liberation’ where there is room for anyone and everything. We are going to state our position in a long document on the ‘national question’ which is due to appear within two weeks.⁵¹⁴

From mid-1945, however, state repression intensified. The Egyptian government established a Supreme Court of Security, designed to coordinate campaigns against the revolution—the Trotskyists were among the first to be struck. By December 1945, Henein’s reports made it clear that police repression had intensified, the arrests knocked their confidence. Bread and Freedom took a prominent part in the protest movement of February 1946.

8.1 Crackdown on the Left and a Cohesiveness Disbanded

On 10 July 1946 and over the weeks that followed, more than two hundred communists were arrested and among them members of the avant-garde intelligentsia, political activists, writers and journalists were sent to prison. Among them were Ramses Younan, Anwar Kamel and Salamah Musa, the Curiel brothers, Isaac Levy and his wife Lodi Galanti. Several newspapers were closed, and a number of cultural and political organizations disbanded, including Bread and Liberty. As Don LaCoss has noted:

AL was broken up by the Anglo-Egyptian authorities following members’ involvement in the 1944 British and Greek troop mutinies in Egypt, the Socialist front campaign during the country’s election and the Cairo general strikes of 1946; police crackdown targeting leftists in the earliest days of the Cold War smashed culture clubs, shut down newspaper offices and bookstores and jailed 45 members and enemies of the state, chasing others underground or into exile.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹³ Selma Botman, *The Rise of Egyptian Communism*, 15.

⁵¹⁴ George Henein, “The Third Exhibition of Free Art,” *La Semaine Égyptienne*, 1942.

⁵¹⁵ Don LaCoss, “Egyptian Surrealism and Degenerate Art in 1939,” *Arab Studies Journal* 18, no. 1 (2010): 11.

By May 1946, Henein was already in Paris. His wife Boula had received a clear threat from the British police in Egypt, after the publication of her anthology of German literature, *Vertu de l'Allemagne*, which was found to be politically controversial. She was given an ultimatum, to either cease all activities and affiliations to the group or be sent to the Turaq quarries.

Henein was the loudest critic of nationalist art; writing on Telmissany's artwork in the art column *L'art en Egypte*, published in *Don Quichotte* in 1940, Henein reasoned:

There was an enormous temptation for any young Egyptian artist to seize a trove of largely unexploited material for artistic ends, material that was the rhythm and shape of this country and that gave it form in the eyes of its own inhabitants. It was indeed possible to transfigure a whole reality one that aroused little public interest but that simply needed to be rejuvenated by a few artists who could then allow their inspiration to play upon it. This was the direction taken by the neo-orientalist movement that Telmissany once espoused, before discovering that this theory could only lead to a sad impasse. All those who try or will try to found a national art conceived upon specific characters of a certain country are condemning themselves to failure and total ridicule. Art, which is increasingly a way of uniting human feeling, must not be a way of recording local fashions, customs, ideas and visions.[...] Art has no homeland, no territory. Chirico is not more Italian than Delvaux is Belgian, than Diego Riviera is Mexican, than Tanguy is French, than Marx Ernst is German, than Telmissany is Egyptian. All these men are part of the same fraternal movement against which the parochialism of the church tower or the minaret cannot erect the slightest barrier.⁵¹⁶

Henein's cosmopolitanism and his belief in its potential to resolve many of the world's issues is noteworthy. In the preface of the anthology of his collected works, Bertho Farhi, a close friend and collaborator of Henein, writes: "Exiled in his own country, a stranger everywhere, he was the albatross of his early Arab novels, an albatross who never found a place to rest and died of exhaustion. He dreamt that cosmopolitanism, like surrealism would save the world, exhaust all incompatibilities, until things no longer seem contradictory."⁵¹⁷

The notion AL used is internationalism rather than universalism. Internationalism is a constant ideology in Henein's writings. It signals a rejection of realist anchoring, as very few

⁵¹⁶ Georges Henein, "L'Art en Egypte: El Telmissany", *Don Quichotte*, n.17, 29 March 1940, 2. (Translation my own).

⁵¹⁷ Berto Frahi, "Avant-Partir" *Georges Henein: Œuvres*, 6.

of his writings are specifically Egyptian. Generally, his narratives unfold in a space devoid of any identifiable geographical or cultural references: they could take place anywhere, and often at any time, and the names of his characters, when specified, do not point to any national belonging. In “*A propos de patrie*” (Regarding the homeland), Henein defended the right to “despise the local” and to have the “whole universe” as homeland. For him, the ‘homeland’ is a universe of dreams, an artistic and linguistic universe that he feels attached to; the universe of French artists, who according to him have a creative power that “allows us to speak of the universe using the possessive.”⁵¹⁸

But is important not to confound their rejection of nationalism, with disloyalty to the nation as such. In fact, Younan had to pay with his intellectual position, he was fired from his job in Paris for having refused to communicate hostilities toward Egypt on the radio during the Suez Canal crisis in 1956 and exiled back to Egypt by the French government. Younan’s entire oeuvre was delivered in Arabic. The underlying conviction of his project is that what lends art its value is situated at the intersection between his capacity to express the universal and his rootedness in his native land. In this article, he stresses the importance of our past heritage, “Yet, the experience accumulated throughout the thousands of years cannot have passed in vain. That is why we must study our heritage closely, similar to the ways we examine the world’s heritage. [...] We will not create an authentic art, which expresses what we truly are, as long as the latter is not the result of an interaction between these forces, and that is why we should not fear innovation, as extreme as it may seem. And those who fear that our nationalist sentiment/personality may stray are doing nothing short of betraying the little confidence that inspires this very same nationalist sentiment and its capacity to develop

⁵¹⁸ Georges Henein, “*A propos de patrie*” (Regarding the homeland), *Georges Henein: Œuvres*, 320-322.

and evolve.”⁵¹⁹ Younan proffered the entirety of his experience in Arabic, at a time when expressing yourself in the languages of the West could appear to be providing a convenient “short-cut” towards the universal, whereas what was in fact involved was precisely the forging, in the Arabic tongue, of a vocabulary of limits, able to express certain forms of cultural subversion, which had been a speciality of the Surrealists, in Rimbaud’s wake. Younan’s idea that what creates the value of the artistic—or literary, or political—message lies in the interval between its ability to express the universal and its roots in the “loam” in which it came into being.⁵²⁰ In his writings during this period, he critiqued not just artworks or art movements, but the wider philosophical and theoretical issues pertaining to the role of art and culture in society at large.⁵²¹

519 Al Fikr al-mu’asir, *La Pensée Contemporaine*, n,14, July 1966. Younan’s “Le mouvement artistique entre le localisme et la mondialite” (1966).

⁵²⁰ Alain Roussillon, *Parcours de Ramsès Younan: une francophonie en langue arabe* (Le Caire, 1987).

⁵²¹ For more on this, see Andreas Flores Khalil’s excellent article on Younan, where she positions his writings as a precursor to post-structuralism, Andrea Flores Khalil, “The Myth of the False: Ramses Younan’s Post-Structuralism avant la letter” in *The Arab Avant-Garde: Experiments in North African Art and Literature* (US: Heinemann, 2003).

7. CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed at revisiting the history of modernism in Egypt. I began with the hypothesis that modernism in Egypt has been doubly overlooked. In the first instance, the nationalist narratives written post-1952, under President Gamal Abdel Nasser set out to Egyptianise the history of modern Egypt, including the history of art, through a comprehensive historiographical project. As seen, this nationalist history was modelled along generational lines and placed artificial boundaries between different art groups. In this narrative, the *ruwwad* (pioneers) were heralded as the fathers of Egyptian art and their work was judged as ‘authentic’ and rooted in the homeland. Women were conspicuously absent from this category, even though, as noted in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5, women were a fixture in the art scene, not only as artists, but as art critics, collectors, patrons and hosts of regularly exhibited in both the *Salon du Caire* and the *Salon des Indépendants*. These narratives set out to exclude or obscure elements that were judged ‘alien,’ elitist or too westernised. I maintain that, paradoxically, it was the same rationale that excluded MMK and members of AL from the master narrative of Egyptian art history. Their close ties with France, meant that their roles in the formation of the art canon and modernism in Egypt, forgotten.

Recent scholarship has taken strides in revisiting the history of modernism and the avant-garde in Egypt, by moving away from the nation as the unit of analysis. This thesis has taken issue with the recent literature on AL and the narrative of rupture it upholds. The clearly demarcated decade of AL’s activity from 1938–1948, as upheld by Bardaouil, helped sustain such a narrative. Early on, it became clear that the portrayal of AL in violent opposition to all that came before it, was reductive and obscuring of the exchange, intersection and common

threads that existed. I set out to explore the activities of MMK and the SAA, that had not been studied, hitherto. Along the way, I uncovered an incredibly rich and thriving artistic milieu. By adopting a transcultural lens, this thesis explores the space in which Mahmoud Khalil, Mahmoud Said, Valentine de Saint-Point, Nelson Morpurgo, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Georges Henein, Amy Nimr, Lee Miller, Maria Cavadia, and others operated and offers a more nuanced and balanced account of Egyptian modernism.

Chapter 1 explored MMK's role in the arts in Egypt, through both the SAA and the *Comité consultatifs des Beaux-arts*. Existing narratives have portrayed MMK as a dictator of the arts, with fascist inclinations. I have offered an alternate reading of Mohamed Hassan's caricature, *La dictature des Beaux-Arts*, which continues to underpin the narratives on MMK. By recontextualising the work and tracing it to the collection of MMK, the patron's status and formative role in influencing art policies in Egypt became apparent. More generally, the case of MMK lends itself to a wider argument on Egyptian modernism that moves beyond the lens of the nation-state as the fundamental unit of investigation. For nearly three decades, MMK, through the SAA, organised an annual salon in Cairo, as a series of exhibitions of foreign arts in Egypt as well as two exhibitions of Egyptian art in France. These offered a platform for artists in Egypt to negotiate their position locally and internationally, and equally activated novel artistic discourses in Egypt. Attendance of the shows became markers of modernity and progress. By looking at MMK, the SAA, the *Comité* and the Museum of Guezireh through the exchanges they sustained with Europe, mainly with France, it becomes clear how artists in Egypt, including members of AL and those before and after them, were the product of this artistic *nahda* (renaissance).

Chapter 2 investigated a different take on modernism presented by VSP in Egypt. It traced her activities in Cairo, after her permanent move in 1924. Unlike previous scholarship, this chapter demonstrated that VSP led a very active life in Cairo, as shown by her prolific writing career in francophone magazines in Egypt such as *La Semaine Égyptienne*, *L'Égypte Nouvelle* and her own *Le Phoenix*. As discussed, her poetry was included in the exhibition of French books in Egypt organised by the SAA and later in the exhibition *France-Égypte* organised by the SAA at the *Musée des arts décoratifs* in Paris in 1949. In many ways, VSP embodied the ethos of cultural exchange and transfer that lies at the crux of my investigation of modernism in Egypt. Additionally, her anticolonial politics and engagement with the Egyptian and Syrian nationalist causes had strong local reverberations. Her project centred on defending the oppressed in the name of humanist values. She placed herself as a cultural mediator in between East and West and crossed paths with the other protagonists of this thesis, notably MMK, Moscatelli, Morpurgo and Henein during Marinetti's trip to Cairo in 1938.

Chapter 3 turned to the activities of the Futurist movement in Cairo. As we have seen, this group was composed of Italian men residing in Egypt but by the end of the 1920s, it became largely the effort of one person, Nelson Morpurgo. While we cannot dissociate fascism from futurism, this chapter uncovered the significance of this romanticised aesthetic in activating artistic debates in Egypt. The two visits of Marinetti to Egypt were crucial to these debates. The leader of the Futurist movement, as we have seen, was born in Egypt. Indeed, these two visits that he made almost a decade apart in 1929 and 1938, must be viewed as returns. Marinetti's connections to Egypt and how it appears in his writing is an area that deserves more attention. This chapter revisited Bardaouil's account of the rise of local fascism in Egypt as the backdrop for the emergence of AL. As chapter 1 claimed also, Egyptian public

opinion was largely unreceptive to fascism and Nazism and denounced totalitarianism, repressiveness and violence. Alternative transcultural routes of Futurism into Egypt opened the space for a new kind of modernism to emerge. The confrontation of the movement's ideas created a space where, for at least a brief moment, Futurism and Surrealism coexisted in Egypt.

Chapter 4 addressed the *oeuvre* of Mahmoud Said to shed light on the ways his representations of women engaged with issues of gender and Egyptianess. This chapter uncovered, on the one hand an axis of masculinity and spirituality in the way Said represented his male figures, which stood in stark opposition to representations of the female body. I found that Said typically depicted male subjects performing religious acts such as in *El Zikr*, *La Prière* and *Les Derviches Tourneurs*, whereas the typology of female representations was much more diverse. Putting the formal portraits of family and friends aside, the Saidian female subjects were eroticised representations of women, both in public spaces (the square) or in the private confines of the studio. More generally, this chapter placed Said as a pioneer of art in Egypt, who opened the grounds for a new aesthetic of modernity. His exploration of the female body as a socio-political representation of the modern forged the way for artists, notably members of AL to further explore the genre of the nude as a tool for socio-political critique. In that sense, Said is firmly placed as an intermediary between earlier attempts at modernism and the way AL predominantly focussed on representation of the female body.

Finally, we reach the much-anticipated AL, with whom this investigation of modernism in Egypt began. Up to this point, this thesis recreated the playing field out of which AL emerged and continued to operate. This chapter demonstrates that AL did not appear out of nowhere

nor was it antithetical to the other trends I have explored. Put simply, AL's art is representative of Egypt at that moment in the way that it refers to contemporary concerns and simultaneously draws on the pre-history of the Egyptian avant-garde outlined throughout. By placing it in conversation with other players, this chapter investigated the members' adoption of Surrealist aesthetics and the way it proceeded to pick and choose elements that fit the local context. Members of AL represented the female body and used pictorial devices of distortion and fragmentation to level socio-economic critiques. The nationalist ideologies and avant-garde cosmopolitan ideologies are presented in opposition or operating in tandem, coexisting uneasily at times or violently clashing at others. But the conclusions of this chapter show that the anarchism and anti-nationalism of AL cannot be taken literally. Members of AL opposed the manipulations of the arts by the state and defended artistic freedoms (as a basic universal right). But they were also driven by a patriotism to push the nation forward and maintain engagement with international artistic, intellectual and political debates of the time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archives Consulted

Egypt

Rare Books and Special Collection, American University in Cairo
Archives of the Museum of Mahmoud Khalil and his Wife, Cairo
Archives of the Museum of Modern Art, Cairo

France

Fonds Ramsès Younan, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
Fonds Louis Hautecoeur, Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France, Paris

United Kingdom

Amy Nimr, Archives of the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL Art Museum, London
Rare Books and Music, British Library, London
Lee Miller Archives, Farleys House, Sussex
Ida Kar Archives, National Portrait Gallery, London
Tate Library and Archives, Tate Britain, London
National Archives, Kew, London

Primary

Periodicals

Al Majalla al-Jedida
Al-Risala (The Message), 1939
Al-Tatawwur (Evolution), 1940–2
El-Emara (The Building), Issue 7–8, 1939, 329.
Images
L'Art vivant (1925)
L'Égypte Nouvelle
La Bourse Égyptienne
La Revue du Caire
La Semaine Égyptienne
Le Journal d'Égypte
Le Phœnix
Revue des Conférences Françaises en Orient
Sawt al-Fanan (The Voice of the Artist), 1950–2
Le Salon du Caire, Société des Amis du Caire, issues 1930–197

Manifestoes

“Neo-Orientalists’ Manifesto” by Kamil Al-Telmissany, January 1937.
“*L’Art Indépendant en Égypte*” (Independent Art in Egypt), 2nd Exhibition, *La Séance Continue*,
February 1941.
“Long Live Degenerate Art,” Cairo, December 22, 1938.
“*De l’art et de la liberté*,” (Of Art and Liberty), *Art and Liberty Bulletin*, no.1, 1939.

Secondary

- Abaza, Mona. *Changing Consumer Cultures of Modern Egypt Cairo's Urban Reshaping, Social, Economic, and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia*, V. 101. Edited by Inc ebrary. Leiden/Boston: E.L. Brill, 2006.
- . *Twentieth-Century Egyptian Art: The Private Collection of Sherwet Shafei*. Private Collection of Sherwet Shafei. Edited by Sherwet Shafei. Cairo; New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2011.
- Abaza, Mona and Shafei, Sherwet. *Twentieth-Century Egyptian Art: The Private Collection of Sherwet Shafei*. Cairo: American University in Cairo, 2011.
- Abbās, II and A. E. A. Sonbol (1998). *The last Khedive of Egypt : memoirs of Abbas Hilmi II*. Reading, Ithaca Press.
- Ades, Dawn. *Dada and Surrealism*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1974.
- Ades, Dawn, Rita Eder, and Graciela Speranza. *Surrealism in Latin America: Vivísimo Muerto*. Vivísimo Muerto. London: Los Angeles, California: Tate Public; Getty Research Institute, 2012.
- Ades, Dawn, and Whitney Chadwick. *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1998.
- Al-Gabakhangī, Sidqī, *Moqtanayat Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil (The collection of Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil), Sawt al-fannan*, special issue, 1953.
- Al-Janabi, Abdel Kader. "The Nile of surrealism: Surrealist activities in Egypt." *Egyptian Surrealism* (1987): 14.
- Alcalde, Ángel. "The Transnational Consensus: Fascism and Nazism in Current Research." *Contemporary European history* 29, no. 2 (2020): 243-52. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777320000089>.
- Allen, Woody. "A Brief Yet Helpful, Guide to Civil Disobedience". Without Feathers. London: Sphere Books, 1974.
- Allmer, Patricia. *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism*. Munich; London: Prestel, 2009.
- . *Lee Miller: Photography, Surrealism, and Beyond*. Manchester University Press, 2016.
- . "Apertures onto Egypt: Lee Miller's Nomadic Surrealism." *Dada/Surrealism* 19, no.1, 2013.
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects". *Identity: A Reader*, ed. Du Gay, Paul. London: Sage Publications, 2014.
- Amirsadeghi Hossein and Maryam Homayoun Eisler, *Art and Patronage: The Middle East*. London: Thames & Hudson, c2010., 2010.
- Armbrust, Walter. and I. ebrary (2000). *Mass mediations [electronic resource]: new approaches to popular culture in the Middle East and beyond*. Berkeley; London, University of California Press.
- Armbrust, Walter. "The Formation of National Culture in Egypt in the Interwar Period: Cultural Trajectories." *History compass* 7, no. 1 (2009): 155-80. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2008.00571.x>.
- Azar, Aimé. *La Peinture Moderne En Égypte*. Le Caire : Les Éditions nouvelles, 1961.
- Badran, Margot. *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

- Baraka, Magda. *The Egyptian Upper Class between Revolutions, 1919-1952*. Edited by Antony St and Centre s College. Middle East. Reading: Published for The Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford by Ithaca Press, 1998.
- Bardaouil, Sam. "Dirty Dark Loud and Hysteric": The London and Paris Surrealist Exhibitions of the 1930s and the Exhibition Practices of the Art and Liberty Group in Cairo." *Dada/Surrealism*, (19) 2013.
- . *Surrealism in Egypt : Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*. Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group. I.B. Tauris, 2017.
- Bardaouil, Sam and Fellrath, Till. *Tea with Nefertiti: The Making of the Artwork by the Artist, the Museum and the Public*. Qatar, Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation, 2012.
- Bardaouil, S. a. (2017). *Surrealism in Egypt: modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, I.B. Tauris.
- Bardaouil, Sam author editor, Till editor Fellrath, institution Centre Georges Pompidou host, institution Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia host, institution Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen host, institution Tate Gallery Liverpool host, Gallery Tate, et al. *Art Et Liberté: Rupture, War, and Surrealism in Egypt (1938-1948)*. Tate Liverpool, 2016.
- Baron, Beth. *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics*. Berkeley, California; London: University of California Press, 2005.
- Barrett, Jennifer. *Museums and the Public Sphere*. Chichester: Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- Bauerkämper, Arnd, and Grzegorz Rossolinski. *Fascism without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2017.
- Bayly, C. A., Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed. "Ahr Conversation: On Transnational History." *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1441-64. <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.111.5.1441>. <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.111.5.1441>.
- Béhar, Henri. *Mélusine n. 3 : Marges Non-Frontières. (Charies Du Centre De Recherches Sur Le Surréalisme)*. Lausanne : L'Âge d'Homme, 1982.
- Benjamin, Roger. *Orientalist Aesthetics [Electronic Resource] : Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880-1930*. Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880-1930. Berkeley, Calif. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999.
- Bercé Yves-Marie. *Le Souverain Caché [Actes Du Xve Colloque International ... Les 11 Et 12 Décembre 1999, à La Sorbonne, Dans Le Cadre De L'école Pratique Des Hautes Études / Textes De Yves- Marie Bercé ... Et Al.]*. Lausanne: Age d'homme, 2000.
- Berghaus, Günter. "Valentine De Saint-Point: Performance, War, Politics and Eroticism." *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies* 3, no. 1 (2013): 3-5.

- Boctor, Gabriel. "La Peinture En Égypte Moderne." *African Arts* 3, no. 1 (1969): 28-87.
- Boisson, Boidard, and Cristina. "Georges Henein Ou Le Courage D'être Surréaliste En Égypte". Cádiz: Universidad de Cádiz, Servicio de Publicaciones, 1991.
- Bornier, É. (2020). "Propos sur l'art : Georges Henein ou une certaine idée de l'esthétisme." *Nouvelles études francophones* 35(1): 1-11.
- Bornier, Évelyne. "Propos Sur L'art : Georges Henein Ou Une Certaine Idée De L'esthétisme." *Nouvelles études francophones* 35, no. 1 (2020): 1-11.
- Botman, Selma. *The Rise of Egyptian Communism, 1939-1970*. Contemporary Issues in the Middle East. New York: Syracuse, University Press, 1988.
- Boullata, Kamal. *Palestinian Art 1850-2005*. Palestinian Art from 1850 to the Present. London, Berkeley, California: Saqi, 2009.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. [Routledge Classics. Edited by Tony Bennett. London: London: Routledge, 2010.
- . *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Edited by Randal Johnson. Polity Press, 1993, 1992.
- Bowler, Anne. "Politics as Art: Italian Futurism and Fascism." *Theory and Society* 20, no. 6 (1991): 763-94.
- Brandstetter, Gabriele. *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image, and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes*. Translation from the German by Elena Polzer. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Brinton, J. Y. *The Mixed Courts of Egypt*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.
- Brown, Nathan J. "The Precarious Life and Slow Death of the Mixed Courts of Egypt." *Int. J. Middle East Stud.* 25, no. 1 (1993): 33-52.
- Burke, Carolyn. *Lee Miller*. London: Bloomsbury, 2005.
- Cassuto-Roux, Pascale. "Georges Henein, La Réhabilitation Du Métis." *Horizons Maghrébins - Le droit à la mémoire* 52, no. 1 (2005) : 63-72.
- Caws, Mary Ann, and Rudolf Kuenzli. *Surrealism and Women*. Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT Press, 1991.
- Celik, Zeynep and Kinney, Leila. "Ethnography and Exhibitionism at the Expositions Universelles". *Assemblage* (13) 1990.
- Chadwick, Whitney, and Dawn Ades. *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation / Edited by Whitney Chadwick; Essays by Dawn Ades ... [Et Al.]*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: MIT Press, 1998.
- . *Militant Mus: Love, War and the Women of Surrealism*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2017.
- Cheah, Pheng, and Bruce Robbins. *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*. Cultural Politics (Minneapolis, Minn.); V. 14. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- Chouinard, Daniel. "Sur la Préhistoire du Manifeste Littéraire (1500-1828)". *Étude Française*, (16) 1980.
- Conley, Katharine. *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Women in Surrealism*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996.
- Conley, Katharine, and Pierre Taminiaux. *Surrealism and Its Others*. Yale French Studies; No. 109. New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Contarini, Silvia. *La Femme Futuriste : Mythes, Modèles, Et Représentations De La Femme Dans La Théorie Et La Littérature Futuristes (1909-1919)* Paris : Presses Universitaires de Paris 10, 2006.

- Cooper, Harry. Review of Prosthetic Gods, Hal Foster. *The Art Bulletin* 88, no. 1 (2006): 194-97.
- Dadi, Iftikhar. "Ibrahim El Salahi and Calligraphic Modernism in a Comparative Perspective." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 3 (2010): 555.
- D'Alleva, Anne. *Methods & Theories of Art History*. London: Laurence King Publishing, 2012.
- Danchev, Alex. *100 Artists' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*. London: Penguin, 2011.
- Danto, Arthur C. *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*. A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts; 1995. First Princeton classics edition: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Davies, Clare. "Arts Writing in 20th-Century Egypt: Methodology, Continuity, and Change." *ART Margins* 2, no. 2 (2013): 19-42.
- Decret Instituant un Comité Consultatif des Beaux Arts*, » (Decree Instituting an Advisory Committee of Fine Arts), *Journal Officiel du Gouvernement Egyptien*, Year 54, n.8
- Derrida, Jacques. "Declarations of Independence". *Otobiographies: Nietzsche's Teaching and the Politics of the Proper Name*. Paris, Galilée, 1984.
- Desvaux-Mansour, Marie-Francine. "« le Surréalisme À Travers Joyce Mansour : Peinture Et Poésie, Le Miroir Du Désir » Phd. Diss.," Paris: Université de Paris 1, 2014.
- Di-Capua, Yoav. *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth Century Egypt*. Berkeley, California; London: University of California Press, 2009.
- Di-Capua, Y. (2015). The Intellectual Revolt of the 1950s and the 'Fall of the Udabā ',". *Commitment and Beyond: Reflections on/of the Political in Arabic Literature since the 1940s*. Friederike Pannewick, Khalil, Georges, and Albers, Yvonne (eds.). Wiesbaden Reichert Verlag. 41: 89 – 104.
- . "Nahda: The Arab Project of Enlightenment." 2015, 54-74.
- Dickie, George. *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974.
- Dika Seggerman, Alexandra. "Al-Tatawwur (Evolution): An Enhanced Timeline of Egyptian Surrealism." *Dada/Surrealism*, (19) 2013.
- Don, L. (2010). "EGYPTIAN SURREALISM AND "DEGENERATE ART" IN 1939." *Arab studies journal* 18(1) : 78-117.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (2000). "Multiple Modernities." *Daedalus* (Cambridge, Mass.) 129(1) : 1-29.
- Egyptian "École de Beaux-Arts*, » F/O 141/518/5, National Archives, Kew
- Don, LaCoss. "Egyptian Surrealism And "Degenerate Art" In 1939." *Arab studies journal* 18, no. 1 (2010): 78-117.
- El Shakry, Omnia S. *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- . "Barren Land and Fecund Bodies: The Emergence of Population Discourse in Interwar Egypt." *International journal of Middle East studies* 37, no. 3 (2005): 351-72. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743805052116>.
- Elias, and Chad. "The Museum Past the Surpassing Disaster: Walid Raad's Projective Futures." In *Dissonant Archives: Contemporary Visual Culture and Contested Narratives in the Middle East*, edited by Anthony Downey. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015.
- Elkins, James. *The End of Diversity in Art Historical Writing: North Atlantic Art History and Its Alternatives*. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2020.
- Enwezor and Okwui (2008). *Mega Exhibitions: The Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form. Other Cities, Other Worlds: Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age* Huyssen and Andreas. Durham, Duke University Press: 147-178.

- "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 3 (2010): 595.
- "The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition." *Research in African Literatures* 34, no. 4 (2003): 57-82. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ral.2003.0097>.
- Evans, Jessica, Du Gay, Paul and Redman, Peter. *Identity: a reader*. London: SAGE, 2000.
- Evans, Trefor E. editor. *The Killearn Diaries 1934-1946: The Diplomatic and Personal Record of Lord Killearn (Sir Miles Lampson) High Commissioner and Ambassador Egypt* S.I. Sidgwick and Jackson, 1972.
- Exposition du livre français en, Égypte. *Exposition Du Livre Français En Égypte : Catalogue*. Le Caire : Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1946.
- Fenoglio-Abd el Aal, Irène, Marc Kober, and Daniel Lançon. *Entre Nil Et Sable : Écrivains D'Égypte D'expression Française (1920-1960) / Sous La Direction De Marc Kober Avec Irène Fenoglio Et Daniel Lançon*. Paris: Centre national de documentation pédagogique, 1999.
- Forthuny, Pascal « A l'École des Beaux-Arts du Caire, » *Le Bulletin de la vie artistique*, n.11, 1 June 1921, Paris <ark:/12148/bpt6k6158707m>
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, 1969.
- Gascoyne, David. *A Short Survey of Surrealism*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1982.
- Gershoni, Israel. *Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism: Attraction and Repulsion*. E-book Central. First ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014.
- Gershoni Israel (1999). "Egyptian Liberalism in an Age of "Crisis of Orientation": Al-Risāla'S Reaction to Fascism and Nazism, 1933–39." *International journal of Middle East studies* 31(4): 551-576. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800057093>
- . *Commemorating the Nation: Collective Memory, Public Commemoration, and National Identity in Twentieth-century Egypt*. Chicago Studies on the Middle East. Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2004.
- . *Redefining the Egyptian Nation 1930-45*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- . *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s*. California: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Gharib, Samir. *Surrealism in Egypt*. Cairo: Prism Art Series 3, 1986.
- Gifford, James. "Late Modernism's Migrations: San Francisco Renaissance, Egyptian Anarchists, and English Post- Surrealism." *Textual Practice* (2015): 1-25.
- Goldschmidt, Arthur. *Modern Egypt [Electronic Resource]: The Formation of a Nation-State*. E-book Central. 2nd ed. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2004.
- Goldschmidt, Arthur, Amy J. Johnson, and Barak A. Salmoni. *Re-Envisioning Egypt 1919-1952*. Cairo; New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2005.
- Greeley, Robin Adèle. *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*. New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Hafez, Khaled. "Over Two Decades of the Cairo Biennale. Uniqueness, Life Cycle and Effect on Current Contemporary Local Art Practices." Paper presented at the Art Criticism and Curatorial Practices in Marginal Contexts, Addis Ababa, 2006.
- Halim, Hala. *Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism [Electronic Resource]: An Archive*. 1st ed. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.
- Hamida, Muhammad Mahdy. "History of Artistic Groups in Egypt (*Tarikh al-Jama'at al-Tashkiliya fi Masr*)".
- Handbook on the Economics of Cultural Heritage / Edited by Ilde Rizzo, Anna Mignosa*. Edited by Ilde Rizzo and Anna Mignosa. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2013.

- Harney, Elizabeth, and Ruth B. Phillips. *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism*. Objects/Histories: Critical Perspectives on Art, Material Culture, and Representation. doi:15219726.
- Hartog, François. *Régimes D'historicité : Présentisme et Expériences Du Temps*. Librairie Du Xxie Siècle. Paris: Seuil, 2003.
- Hassan, Salah M. "African Modernism: Beyond Alternative Modernities Discourse." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 3 (2010): 451-73. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2010-001>.
- Haus der Kulturen der Welt. *Disorientation: Contemporary Arab Artists from the Middle East : Literature, Film, Performance, Music, Theatre, Visual Arts = Zeitgenössische Arabische Künstler Aus Dem Nahen Osten*. [in eng;ger] Zeitgenössische Arabische Künstler Aus Dem Nahen Osten. 1. Aufl. ed. Berlin: Berlin : Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2003.
- Hautecoeur, Louis « Liste des Gravures, Musée d'Art Moderne, 1930, » MS 6882, N.308, 3, Fonds Louis Hautecoeur, Bibliothèque de l'Institut de Paris, France.
- Hawas, May. "From the Hashish in Breton to the Hashish in Golo: Genre Fluidity and International Imaginaries in Egyptian Surrealism." *Journal of world literature* 2, no. 3 (2017): 320.
- Henein, Georges. *L'esprit Frappeur (Carnets 1940-1973)*. Paris: Encre, 1980.
- *Grandes Largeurs: Lettres Georges Henein-Henri Calet*. Paris: Association Henri Calet, 1981
- "De l'Art et de la Liberté, » *Art et Liberté Bulletin*, (1) 1939.
- « Bilan du Mouvement Surréaliste », *Revue des Conférences Françaises en Orient*, (8) 1937.
- « De l'Irréalisme, » *Un Effort*, (51) 1935
- « Echos d'un Manifeste, » *Art et Liberté Bulletin*, (1) 1939.
- « Hommage à un seigneur qui fit vœu de poésie : Ahmed Rassim. » *La Revue du Caire*, (224- 225) 1959.
- « L'Art dans la Mêlée » *Revue des Conférences Françaises en Orient*, (24) 1939.
- « L'exposition du groupe Art et liberté » *Don Quichotte*, (9)1940
- « L'Intellectuel dans la Mêlée, » *Art et Liberté Bulletin*, (2) 1939.
- « Le Salon du Cairo Women's Club, » *La Semaine égyptienne*, (9-10) 1945
- « Les expositions de Mme Ben Behman au Cairo Women's Club, » *La Semaine égyptienne*, (3-4) 1945
- « Les livres qu'il faut [a]voir lus, » *Art et Liberté Bulletin*, (1) 1939.
- « Saint Louis, » *Poètes en Égypte : Anthologie*, edited by Jean Moscatelli, Cairo, Les Editions de
- *Œuvres : Poèmes, Récits, Essais, Articles Et Pamphlets / Georges Henein ; Édition Établie Par Pierre Vilar Avec La Collaboration De Marc Kober Et Daniel Lançon. Georges Henein Désormais / Par Yves Bonnefoy. Avant-Partir / Par Berto Farhi*. Edited by Pierre Vilar, Marc Kober and Daniel Lançon, Paris: Denoël, c2006., 2006. l'Atelier, 1981.
- Hess, Valérie Didier editor, Hussam editor Rashwan, and Maḥmūd Sa'īd. *Mahmoud Saïd : Catalogue Raisonné / Edited by Valérie Didier Hess and Hussam Rashwan*. Milano, Italy : Skira, 2016.
- Heyberger, B. "S. Naef, a La Recherche D'une Modernité Arabe. L'évolution Des Arts Plastiques En Égypte, Au Liban Et En Irak." *Arabica*. 45, no. 3 (1998): 293-95.
- Heyworth-Dunne, J. *Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*. 1968.

- Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge Heritage*. Edited by Inc ebrary. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Hopkins, David, and James Boaden. "Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage? The North American Reception of Dada and Surrealism." *A companion to Dada and Surrealism* / (2016): 72-415.
- Hultén, Pontus. *Futurism and Futurisms*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1987.
- "International Yearbook of Futurism Studies." *International yearbook of futurism studies*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).
- Irbouh, Hamid author. *Art in the Service of Colonialism: French Art Education in Morocco, 1912-1956*. London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005.
- Jachec, Nancy. *Politics and Painting at the Venice Biennale, 1948-64: Italy and the Idea of Europe*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.
- Jankowski, J. P., et al. (1997). *Rethinking nationalism in the Arab Middle East*. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Jankowski, James P., Israel Gershoni. *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Jaron, Steven. *Edmond Jabès : The Hazard of Exile*. Oxford: Legenda, 2003.
- Jones, Leslie. *Drawing surrealism*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2012.
- Kalmbach, H. (2020). *Islamic knowledge and the making of modern Egypt*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Kalmbach, Hilary. *Islamic Knowledge and the Making of Modern Egypt*. Cambridge Core. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Kane, Patrick. "Art Education and the Emergence of Radical Art Movements in Egypt: The Surrealists and the Contemporary Arts Group, 1938-1951." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44, no. 4 (2010): 95-119.
- . "Egyptian Art Institutions and Art Education from 1908 to 1951." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44, no. 3 (2010): 43-68.
- Kane, Patrick M. *The Politics of Art in Modern Egypt: Aesthetics, Ideology and Nation-Building*. Library of Modern Middle East Studies; 105. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2013.
- Kar, Ida. *Ida Kar: Bohemian Photographer*. / Clare Freestone, Karen Wright. Edited by Clare Freestone and Karen November Wright. London: London: National Portrait Gallery, 2011.
- Karnouk, Liliane. *Modern Egyptian Art, 1910-2003*. New revised ed. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005.
- Kassab, Elizabeth Suzanne. *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Kendall, Elisabeth. *Literature, Journalism and the Avant-Garde: Intersection in Egypt*. London: London: Routledge, 2006.
- Keshmirshakan, Hamid. *Contemporary Art from the Middle East: Regional Interactions with Global Art Discourses*. International Library of Modern and Contemporary Art; 18. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015.
- Khalil, Andrea Flores. *The Arab Avant-Garde: Experiments in North African Art and Literature*. US: Heinemann, 2003.
- Kholeif, O. *Imperfect Chronology: Arab Art from the Modern to the Contemporary Works from the Barjeel Art Collection*. Prestel Publishing, 2015.
- Khuri-Makdisi, Ilham. *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914*. Berkeley, California; London: University of California Press, 2010.

- King, Anthony D. *Culture, Globalization, and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*. NED - New edition ed. Minneapolis, 1997. doi:10.5749/j.cttsqb3.
- Knopf, Robert and Listengarten, Julia. *Theater of the Avant-Garde, 1950-2000: A Critical Anthology*. New Have: Yale University Press, 2011.
- Kober, Marc. "The Magic Powers of Ancient Egypt: Georges Henein, André Breton and Horus Schenouda." (2013).
- Kozma, Liat. *Policing Egyptian Women: Sex, Law, and Medicine in Khedival Egypt*. 1st ed. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011.
- Kozma, Liat editor, Cyrus editor Schayegh, and Avner editor Wishnitzer. *A Global Middle East: Mobility, Materiality and Culture in the Modern Age, 1880-1940 / Edited by Liat Kozma, Cyrus Schayech, Avner Wishnitzer*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015.
- *A Global Middle East: Mobility, Materiality and Culture in the Modern Age, 1880-1940 / Edited by Liat Kozma, Cyrus Schayech, Avner Wishnitzer*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015.
- Labib, Ramsis. *Al-Yasar fi al-Thaqafa al-Misriyya*. Cairo: Dar al-'Alam al-Thalith, 2005.
- LaCoss, Don. "Egyptian Surrealism and 'Degenerate art' in 1939" *Arab Studies Journal* 18, no. 1 (2010): 79.
- Lançon, Daniel. "Le Caire (1934-1941): Le Défi des Avant-Gardes Européennes pour les Égyptiens et pour Georges Henein en particulier". *Métropoles des Avant-Gardes*, ed. Thomas Hunkeler and Edith Anna Kunz, 2011.
- Lançon, Daniel. *L'orient Des Revues (Xixe Et Xxe Siècles)*. Grenoble: Ellug, Université Stendhal, 2014.
- Lanfranchi, Sania Sharawi. *Casting Off the Veil: The Life of Huda Shaarawi, Egypt's First Laplagne, Guillaume* « *L'Art en Égypte : Ce qu'il fut, ce qu'il doit être* » (Art in Egypt : What it was, what it must be), *Bulletin de l'Institut Egyptien*, vol. 5, 1911 (Cairo: Paul Barbey, 1912)
- Le Bret, Henri. *Essai Sur Valentine De Saint-Point. Notes Sur Une Evolution. Gestes Métachoriques De V. De Saint-Point. Bois Gravés De F. Cappatti*. Edited by Valentine de Saint-Point. Nice : aux Éditions de l'Aloès, 1923.
- Lenssen, Anneka, Sarah A. Rogers, and Nada M. Shabout. *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents*. Primary Documents Publication Series, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018.
- Lenssen, Anneka. "Inji Efflatoun: White Light." *Afterall* 42, no. 1 (2016): 84-95. <https://doi.org/10.1086/689806>.
- Leroy, Claude. "La Fabrique du Lecteur dans les Manifestes". *Littérature*, (39) 1980.
- Leslie, Richard. *Surrealism: The Dream of Revolution*. New York: New Line Books, 2005.
- Logol, Jeanm author. *L'Égypte Et La Deuxième Guerre Mondiale*. Croisade Anti-Axiste En Orient. Edited by former owner Allied Circle. Le Caire : Imprimerie E. & R. Schindler: 1945.
- Luthi, Jean-Jacques. *En Quête Du Français D'Égypte : Adoption, Évolution, Caractères*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005.
- *Introduction À La Littérature D'expression Française En Égypte, 1798-1945*. Paris: Éditions de l'École, 1974.
- *La Littérature D'expression Française En Égypte (1798-1998)*. Nouv. éd. remaniée. ed. Paris: Harmattan, 2000.
- Lyford, Amy. *Surrealist Masculinities: Gender Anxiety and the Aesthetics of Post-World War I Reconstruction in France*. Berkeley, Calif. ; London: University of California Press, 2007.
- Mahon, Alyce. *Eroticism and Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2005.

- Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso. *Il Fascino Dell' Egitto a Cura Di Luciano De Maria*. Edited by Luciano De Maria. Milano: Mondadori, 1981.
- Marsot, Afaf Lutfi Sayyid. *Egypt's Liberal Experiment, 1922-1936*. California: University of California Press, 1977.
- Martens, David, and Andrea Oberhuber. "L'avant-Gardisme Aristocratique De Valentine De Saint-Point." *Esprit Créateur* 53, no. 3 (2013): 50-63.
- Massad, Joseph. *Desiring Arabs*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007.
- Mediterranean Modernism: Intercultural Exchange and Aesthetic Development*. Intercultural Exchange and Aesthetic Development. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, New York, 2016. doi:10.1057/978-1-137-58656-8
- Mehrez, Samia. *Egypt's Culture Wars [Electronic Resource]: Politics and Practice*. University Press Scholarship Online. Edited by Press Oxford University. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008.
- Melucci, Alberto. "The Process of Collective Identity". *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Mercer, Kobena, and Arts Institute of International Visual. *Cosmopolitan Modernisms / Edited by Kobena Mercer*. London: Cambridge, Mass.: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2005.
- Mercer, K. a. (2016). *Travel & See: Black diaspora art practices since the 1980s*, Duke University Press.
- Mercer, K. (2020). *Art History after Globalization: Formations of the Colonial Modern*. New York, USA: 248-261.
- . *Travel and See: Black Diaspora Art Practices since the 1980s*. North Carolina, 2016.
- Mériel, Etienne "Le Salon de l'Art Indépendant," *La Bourse Égyptienne*. No.126, May 28 1942
 —— "Les Exposition : Au Musée de l'Art Moderne, Samir Rafi," *Le Progrès Égyptien*. No.126, April
- Miller, Elizabeth. "Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Egyptian Modern Art." *ARTMargins (Cambridge, Mass.)* 5, no. 1 (2016): 59-79. https://doi.org/10.1162/ARTM_a_00141.
- Miller, Lee photographer. *Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain / Edited by Eleanor Clayton*. Edited by Eleanor editor Clayton and host institution Hepworth Wakefield. London: Lund Humphries in association with The Hepworth Wakefield, 2018.
- Mitchell, Timothy. *Colonising Egypt*. Berkeley; Oxford: University of California Press, 1991, c1988.
- *Questions of Modernity [Electronic Resource]*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Mitter, Partha. "Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery." *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (2008): 531-48.
- Moore, Henry. "The Sculptor's Aims." *Unit One* (1934): 30.
- [Morpurgo, Nelson](#) *Il Fuoco delle Piramidi*, (Milan : Edizioni Futristi di « Poesia » 1923).
- Mound, G. "The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry. By Joel Beinin." *The European legacy, toward new paradigms*. 7, no. 2 (2002).
- Musée, d'Orsay. *Ingres, Courbet, Monet, Rodin, Gauguin: Les Oubliés Du Caire : Chefs-D'œuvre Des Musées Du Caire : [Catalogue De L'exposition] / Musée D'Orsay 5 Octobre 1994 - 8 Janvier 1995*. Paris : Association Française d'action artistique : Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994.
- M. Richardson, D. Ades, K. Fijalkowski, S. Harris and G. Sebbag eds., *The International Encyclopaedia of Surrealism: Movements*. London, Bloomsbury Visual Arts. Vol I-III <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474208031.02643>.

- Nada, Hamed. *Negm al-Fann al-Mu'assir*. Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma lil-Kitab, 2012.
- Nadav Safran. *Egypt in Search of Political Community: An Analysis of the Intellectual and Political Evolution of Egypt, 1804-1952*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961.
- Naef, Silvia. "Reexploring Islamic Art: Modern and Contemporary Creation in the Arab World and Its Relation to the Artistic Past." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 43 (2003): 164-74.
- . *A La Recherche D'une Modernité Arabe : L'évolution Des Arts Plastiques En Égypte, Au Liban Et En Irak*. Arabiyya ; No 13. Genève: Slatkine, 1996.
- Nead, Lynda. *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Nelson, Robert S., and Richard Shiff. *Critical terms for art history*. University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Newvision : Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century / Editors Hossein Amirsadeghi, Salwa Mikdadi, Nada Shabout*. New Vision: Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century. Edited by Hossein editor Amirsadeghi, Nada M. editor Shabout and Salwa editor Mikdadi. London, United Kingdom: TransGlobe Publishing, 2009.
- Nochlin, Linda. *The Politics of Vision : Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1989.
- Paniconi, Maria Elena. "Italian Futurism in Cairo." [In eng]. *Philological encounters 2*, no. 1-2 (2017): 159-79. <https://doi.org/10.1163/24519197-00000019>.
- Partha, Chatterjee. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Vol. 4, 2020. doi:10.2307/j.ctvzgb88s.
- Penrose, Roland Sir. *The Road Is Wider Than Long. An Image Diary from the Balkans, July-August, 1938*. London: London Gallery Editions, 1939.
- Peters, Olaf, Bernhard Fulda, Ruth Heftrig, Mario-Andreas von Lüttichau, Karsten Müller, Jonathan Petropoulos, Ernst Ploil, et al. *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937*. Munich; London; New York: Prestel, 2014.
- Piquet, Caroline "La Semaine Égyptienne: Revue Littéraire et Artistique 1926-1951," PhD diss., (Panthéon Sorbonne University).
- Platt, Susan Noyes. "Modern Arab Art Formation of Arab Aesthetics by Nada Shabout and Belonging and Globalisation Critical Essays in Contemporary Art and Culture by Kamal Boullata (Ed." 35-36. Oxford, UK, 2008.
- Platteau, Jean-Philippe, and Robert Peccoud. *Culture, Institutions, and Development: New Insights into an Old Debate [Electronic Resource]*. Routledge, 2010.
- Pollock, Griselda. *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888-189: Gender and the Colour of Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1992.
- . *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art with a New Introduction by the Author*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession* (1991): 33-40.
- Raafat, Samir W. *Cairo: The Glory Years*. Alexandria, Egypt: Alexandria, Egypt: Harpocrates, 2003.
- . *Maadi, 1904-1962: Society and History in a Cairo Suburb*. Cairo: Palm Press, 1994.
- Radwan, Nadia. "Dal Cairo a Roma. Visual Arts and Transcultural Interactions between Egypt and Italy." In *Asiatische Studien - Études Asiatiques*, 1093, 2016.
- . "Les Arts Visuels De L'Égypte Moderne, Méthodes De Recherche Et Sources : L'exemple De Mahmud Mukhtâr (1891-1934)." *Quaderns de la Mediterrània* 15(2011): 51-61. <http://www.iemed.org/publicacions/quaderns/15/QM15original/7.pdf>.

- Les Modernes d'Égypte : Une Renaissance transnationale des beaux-arts et des arts appliqués* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2017).
- Ramadan, and Dina. "The Aesthetics of the Modern: Art, Education and Taste in Egypt 1903-1952." Columbia University, 2013.
- "Between the Local and the International: Egyptian Surrealism in the 1940s." *Art journal* (New York. 1960) 77, no. 2 (2018): 106-08. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.2018.1495539>.
- Rassim, Ahmed. *Le Journal D'un Pauvre Fonctionnaire Et Autres Textes / Ahmed Rassim ; Préface D'Andrée Chedid ; Édition Établie, Annotée et Présentée Par Daniel Lançon*. Edited by Daniel Lançon and Ahmed Rassim. Paris: Denoël, 2007.
- "Georges Sabbagh," *La Bourse Égyptienne*, Dec 14, 1936
- al-Zellal: Safha men al-fann fi Misr* (The Shadow: A Page on Art from Egypt), 1936, Publisher unknown.
- On Mahmoud Said, *La Semaine Égyptienne*, 31 January 1936
- Re, Lucie. "Valentine De Saint-Point, Ricciotto Canudo, F. T. Marinetti: Eroticism, Violence and Feminism from Prewar Paris to Colonial Cairo." *Quaderni d'italianistica* Vol 24 No 2 (2003): 33-69.
- Reid, Donald Malcolm. "Cairo University and the Orientalists." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 1 (1987): 51-75.
- Renton, David. *Dissident Marxism: Past Voices for Present Times*. London: Zed Books, 2004.
- Rogers, S.A., and E. van der Vlist. *Arab Art Histories: The Khalid Shoman Collection*. Khalid Shoman Foundation, 2013.
- Rosemont, Franklin and Kelley, Robin. "Introduction: Invisible Surrealists". *Black, Brown and Beige: Surrealists Writings from Africa and the Diaspora*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009.
- Rosenblum, Robert and H.W. Janson. *19th-Century Art*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1984.
- Rosenhaft, Eve, and Robbie Aitken. *Africa in Europe. Migrations and Identities*. NED - New edition, 1, 1 ed. Vol. 2, Liverpool: Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013.
- Roussillon, Alain. "Identité et Révolution : Lecture de l'Évolution de l'Oeuvre Picturale de 'Abd Al-Hadi Al-Gazzar, Artiste Égyptien". Image dans le Monde Arabe, ed. G.Beaugé and J-F Clément. Paris, Institut du Monde Arabe, 1995.
- Roux, Pascale. "La langue à l'Épreuve de l'Histoire et Henein, George. Le Rêve d'une Langue". *Revue Critique de Fixxion Française Contemporaine*, n.3, December 2011.
- Rushdi Iskandar and Kamal al-Malak, *Thamanun sana men al-fann 1908–1988* (Eighty Years of Art) (Cairo: al Hay'a al-Misriya al-'Ammal-Kitab, 1991).
- Ryzova, Lucie. *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- "Egyptianizing Modernity through the 'New Effendiya.'" In *Re-envisioning Egypt, 1919-1952*. Edited by Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J. Johnson, Barak A. Salmoni. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005: 124-163
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995.
- *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays*. London: Granta, 2012.
- Saint-Point, Valentine de. *La Vérité sur La Syrie. Par Un Témoin*. Paris : Librairie du Luxembourg, 1929.

- Scheid, Kirsten. "Necessary Nudes: Hadātha and Mu‘āšira in the Lives of Modern Lebanese." In *Int. J. Middle East Stud.*, 230a-30a, 2010.
- Seggerman, Alexandra Dika. "Mahmoud Mukhtar: 'the First Sculptor from the Land of Sculpture'." *World Art* 4, no. 1 (2014): 27-46.
- Seggerman, Alexandra Dika. "Revolution and Renaissance in Modern Egyptian Art, 1880-1960." Yale University, 2014.
- Seggerman, A. D. (2019). *Modernism on the Nile: art in Egypt between the Islamic and the Contemporary*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.
- Selim, Samah. *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985*. Routledge Curzon Studies in Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures. New York; London: Routledge Curzon, 2004.
- Shaarawi, Huda. *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist, 1879-1924*. Edited and translated Margot Badran. New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1987.
- Shabout, Nada M. *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics*. Gainesville: Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007.
- *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007.
- Shalem, Avinoam. "Man's Conquest of Nature: Al-Gazzar, Sartre, and Nasser's Great Aswan Dam." *Journal of Contemporary African*, no. 32 (2013): 18-29.
- Sheehi, Stephen.. "Modernism, Anxiety and the Ideology of Arab Vision." *Discourse (Berkeley, Calif.)* 28, no. 1 (2006): 72-97. <https://doi.org/10.1353/dis.2008.0008>.
- Sina, Adrien, and Performa. *Feminine Futures : Valentine De Saint-Point : Performance, Danse, Guerre, Politique Et Érotisme*. Performance, Danse, Guerre, Politique Et Érotisme. Dijon]: Presses du réel, 2011.
- Smith, Bonnie G. *Global Feminisms since 1945*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Smith, Terry. "The State of Art History: Contemporary Art." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010): 366-83.
- Somigli, Luca. "Towards a Theory of the Avant-Garde." PhD diss., State University of New York, 1996.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Critical inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985): 243-61. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448328>.
- Starr, Deborah A. *Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt: Literature, Culture, and Empire*. London: Routledge, 2009.
- Stewart, D. (2020). Transnational Exchanges in Latin American Art, Literature, and Visual Culture. 55: 621-630.
- Stewart, Danielle. "Transnational Exchanges in Latin American Art, Literature, and Visual Culture." 621-30, 2020.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule." [In eng]. *Comp Stud Soc Hist* 31, no. 1 (1989): 134-61. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500015693>.
- Suleiman, Susan Rubin. *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*. Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- Turiano, Annalaura, and Joseph John Viscomi. "From Immigrants to Emigrants: Salesian Education and the Failed Integration of Italians in Egypt, 1937-1960." *Modern Italy* 23, no. 1 (2018): 1-17.
- Türker, Deniz. "The Oriental Flâneur: Khalil Bey and Cosmopolitan Experience." Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007.

- Downey, Anthony ed. *Uncommon Grounds: New Media and Critical Practices in North Africa and the Middle East / Edited by Anthony Downey*. Edited by Anthony editor Downey. London: I.B. Tauris, 2014.
- Verdier, Abel. "Une Étrange Arrière-Petite-Nièce De Lamartine : Valentine De Saint-Point (1875-1953)." *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* (1972): 531-45.
- Volait, Mercedes. "27, Rue Madabegh: Une Mémoire Presque Enfouie De La Vie Artistique Du Caire D'antan." In *Étudier En Liberté Les Mondes Méditerranéens : Mélanges Offerts à Robert Ilbert / Sous La Direction De Leyla Dakhli Et Vincent Lemire*, edited by Leyla editor Dakhli, Vincent editor Lemire and Robert Ilbert: Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 2016.
- *Fous Du Caire : Excentriques, Architectes & Amateurs D'art En Égypte, 1863-1914 / Mercedes Volait*. Archange Minotaure, 2009.
- "Middle Eastern Collections of Orientalist Painting at the Turn of the 21st Century: Paradoxical Reversal or Persistent Misunderstanding?" In *After Orientalist: Critical Perspectives on Western Agency and Eastern Re-Appropriations*, edited by François Pouillon and Jean-Claude Vatin, 251–71: Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- Volk, Alicia. *In Pursuit of Universalism: Yorozu Tetsugoro and Japanese Modern Art*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2010.
- von Maltzahn, N. and M. Bellan (2018). *The art salon in the Arab region : politics of taste making*. Beirut, Orient-Institut.
- Von Maltzahn, Nadia, and Monique Bellan. *The Art Salon in the Arab Region : Politics of Taste Making*. Beirut Texte Und Studien ; Bd. 132. Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2018.
- Weinstein, J. "The Artist and the Camera." *Apollo: the international magazine of art and antiques*. 152, no. 464 (2000): 57-58.
- Winegar, Jessica. *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt*. Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures. Stanford University Press, 2006.
- "Cultural Sovereignty in a Global Art Economy: Egyptian Cultural Policy and the New Western Interest in Art from the Middle East." *Cultural Anthropology* 21, no. 2 (2006): 173-204.
- Review of *Contemporary Egyptian Art* by Liliane Karnouk. *Int. J. Middle East Stud.*, 304-06, 2000.
- Wood, Paul. *The Challenge of the Avant-Garde: Art and its Histories*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Yéghen, Foulad. *Saad Zaghlouï, Le "Père Du Peuple" Égyptien ... Avec Une Préface De V. De Saint-Point*. Edited by Valentine de Saint-Point. Paris, 1927.
- Younan, Ramse s. "The Aim of the Modern Artist". *Studies in Art (Dirasat fi al-Fann)*. Cairo, Maktabet al-'Osra, 2011.
- Young, R. (2001). *Postcolonialism : an historical introduction*. Oxford, Blackwells.
- *Dirasat fi al'Fann (Studies in Art)*, edited by Lewis Awad. Cairo: Dar al- Katib al-'arabi li-taba'a wa-l-nashr, 1969.
- *La Part du Sable*, Paris: Zaman Books, Les Presses du Reel, 2021
- Young, Robert. *Postcolonialism : An Historical Introduction*. Edited by Adrian provenance Leftwich. Oxford: Blackwells, 2001.
- Zouari, Fawzia. *La Caravane Des Chimères*. Paris: Olivier Orban, 1990.
- Zuhur, Sherifa. *Colors of Enchantment: Theater, Dance, Music, and the Visual Arts of the Middle East*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001.

APPENDIX

Kamel el-Telmisany, Manifesto of the Neo-Orientalists (1937)⁵²²

We believe that our personal, strictly Oriental ideas and perceptions are likely to give rise to a genuine art form only if we experience an authentic Oriental sentiment, freed from Occidental conceptions.

In the field of art, it is this sentiment that drives the artisan potter of Upper Egypt, the straw mat maker of El Sharqiah, the ivory carver of Assyut, and the copper chiseller of Khan el-Khalili.

It is the same sentiment felt by the simple man who plays the *ghab*⁵²³ and tirelessly repeats an eternal melody: the groaning of the Egyptian *sakia*⁵²⁴ whose monotony has survived successive ages and civilisations.

It is also this oppressed and pent-up sentiment that the Oriental dancer tries to express through the sensual order of her movements, so as to free her being from the disgust that emanates from her dreary existence and from the secular traditions to which she remains enslaved.

This sentiment is none other than the inspiration contained within the Nile Valley, that inspiration that has persisted unchanged throughout the centuries, since the feet of the first Pharaonic artist tread upon this brown earth.

The goal that I have pursued here and I try to achieve in each of my works is to one day think like the young peasant girl who fashions “ her doll and it’s camel” out of clay – that doll with the surprisingly long face – and also to think like the Egyptian child who makes the doll out of cloth, and to achieve the elevation of the soul of the elementary- school artist who finishes the *mawlid*⁵²⁵ sugar doll, complete with its own character and personality, and steeps it into local art, that local art that I consider to be the apex of our country’s contemporary art.

I hope one day I would be like that anonymous man who, while a slave at Tura, sculpted figures of animals he had probably not seen out of rock. That man communicated the purest message of his Oriental soul to us.

⁵²² Kamel El-Telmisany, “Manifesto of the Neo-Orientalists,” January 1937, translated from French by Emma Ramadan in *Modern Art in the Arab World* in Anneka Lenssen *et al.*, (Durham : Duke University Press, 2018) 86–87.

⁵²³ *Ghab* : Egyptian reed flute.

⁵²⁴ *Sakia* : Mechanical basket device used to raise water from the Nile.

⁵²⁵ *Mawlid*: Dolls made of moulded candy, traditionally made and sold for the annual celebration of the Prophet.

My wish is to attain the spirit of the artist who gives the noble and the elongated form from the head of a daughter of the Nile to the knob of the cane he is sculpting.

For me the great artist is the unknown artisan who works in silence, far removed from academic influences. The one whose images illuminate the walls of popular cafe's, reproducing the adventures of Abou Zeid al-Hilali and al-Zanati Khalifa, the ones whose drawings decorate the facades of houses of pilgrims returning from Mecca, and which are the culmination of myths whose philosophy will remain perhaps forever incomprehensible to us.

If you perceive in my work a serious and mysterious, even peculiar, expression outside all classical beauty, an expression that stems from this wretched side of me, and that is merely the reflection of our repressed Oriental sentiments, therein lies my breakthrough. I will consider myself an artist only if I manage the first elements of this new local art.

Letter: Lee Miller to Roland Penrose (1938)⁵²⁶

Darling,

I got assorted documents in several languages, various coloured inks, all herald the arrival of the famous portrait, described incidentally as 'One oil painting framed.' My god it can be anything. From a Reubens to a sketch of a Christmas calendar.

I'm giving a cocktail party as a *vernissage* next Sunday, which gives six days for argument tomorrow at the customs office and for choosing a suitable place to hang it. And if everything goes quickly, I will even have a day to gloat over it all by myself.

I really do intend to return. As on my very mature thinking, I think a double life is what I was meant to live. Half here and another half there. And dividing my halve sup into little bits. I've spent so much of my life having it torn in this and that, between one nor 100 men. And still loving them all. This would be. All the foregoing letters seem to be more than slightly hysterical. It was written several weeks ago believe it or not and I've neglected you for all this time. With the exception of the snake charmer picture postcard. There is really have been lots of adventure and certainly a great deal of excitement. Even so that I've managed to forget you for a lot of the time. I'm not in the least ashamed to say in fact I am really grateful otherwise life would've gone on being just the same old hell, with little variation.

Letter: Lee Miller to Roland Penrose (1938)⁵²⁷

'My cocktail party was a tremendous success and so much conversation and criticism was started by it, that I was cursing Picasso and all the pictures ever painted. Two or three people even thought I showed it as a deliberate insult to them and everyone and were convinced that it was all tongue in the cheek. You must remember that there are really people here who have never seen or heard of modern pictures, and that they seem to be quite normal people otherwise

⁵²⁶ Lee Miller to Penrose on 4 March (unpublished letter) Cairo, Lee Miller Archive, Farley Farm House, Chiddingly, UK. Archives consulted 4 April 2018.

⁵²⁷ Lee Miller to Penrose on 9 March 1938, (unpublished letter) Cairo, Lee Miller Archive, Farley Farm House, Chiddingly, UK. Archives consulted 4 April 2018.

- - - except for occasions like this you'd never notice that they had never thought in their lives.' In 110 people, besides my own family, there were not more than 6 who had heard of the name of any modern painter or remembered ever having seen a particular modern painting anyway. And of those 6, only 3 had ever heard of Picasso. You see, I'm in exile! The usual and so-called comic criticism was that any cheeky could do this any rainy afternoon. So in those, I had a dinner party on my hands two days later, about 20 people, all young. I brought the town out in paint and gypsum board and set them to it after dinner. To make the occasion more memorable, two boys [Henein and Younan] who knew what we were doing, after dinner, arrived in Surrealist costumes, which included gas masks, piss-pots full of flowers etc, and were really quite funny."

“Vive l’art dégénéré ». London Bulletin, n°13, 15 avril 1939, p.16-17. 1938⁵²⁸

On sait quelle hostilité la société actuelle regarde toute création littéraire ou artistique menaçant plus ou moins directement les disciplines intellectuelles et les valeurs morales du maintien desquelles dépendent pour une large part sa propre durée, -- sa survie.

Cette hostilité se manifeste aujourd’hui dans les pays totalitaires, -- dans l’Allemagne hitlérienne en particulier, par la plus abjecte agression contre un art que des brutes galonnées promues au rang d’arbitres omniscients, qualifient de « dégénéré ».

Depuis Cézanne, jusqu’à Picasso (et sur le plan littéraire depuis Henri Heine jusqu’à Thomas Mann) tout ce que le génie artistique contemporain a donné de meilleur, tout ce que l’artiste moderne a créé de plus libre et de plus humainement valable est insulté, piétiné, proscrit.

Nous tenons pour absurdes et justiciables du plus parfait mépris les préjugés religieux, racistes et nationalistes à la tyrannie desquels certains individus ivres de leur toute-puissance provisoire prétendent asservir le destin de l’œuvre d’art.

Nous refusons de voir dans ces mythes régressifs autre chose que de véritables camps de concentration de la pensée.

L’Art, -- en tant qu’échange spirituel et affectif permanent auquel participe l’entière humanité, ne peut plus connaître d’aussi arbitraires limites.

Dans Vienne livrée aux barbares, on lacère les toiles de Renoir, on brûle les ouvrages de Freud sur les places publiques. Les plus brillantes réussites des grands artistes allemands tels que Max Ernst, Paul Klee, Kokoschka, George Grosz, Kandinsky, Karl Hofer (Prix Carnegie 1938) sont mises à l’index et doivent céder la place à la platitude et à l’ineptie de l’art. national-socialiste.

A Rome une commission dite de « bonification littéraire » vient d’achever sa malpropre besogne en concluant à la nécessité de retirer de la circulation « tout ce qui est anti-italien, antiraciste, immoral et dépressif ».

⁵²⁸ “Long Live Degenerate Art” Manifesto, 22 December 1938, translated and reproduced in Rosemont, Franklin and Robin D. G. Kelley, *Black, Brown, & Beige : Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora* (Surrealist Revolution Series. Austin, 2009) 148–149.

Intellectuels, écrivains, artistes ! Relevons ensemble le défi. Cet art dégénéré, nous en sommes absolument solidaires. En lui résident toutes les chances de l'avenir. Travaillons à sa victoire sur le nouveau Moyen-Âge qui se lève en plein cœur de l'Occident.

Ont signé le présent manifeste les artistes, écrivains, journalistes, et avocats dont les noms suivent :

A. Angelopoulo, Armand Antebi, Abd-el-Khalek el Azzouni, Zakaria el Azzouni (membre du Conseil de l'Ordre du Barreau d'Alexandrie), Marcelle Biagini, Albert Cossery, Henri Dumani, Ahmed Fahmy, Annette Fedida, L. Galanti, Samy Hanoka, Hassia, Georges Henein, Albert Israel, Germaine Israel, Anouar Kamel, Fouad Kamel, Edouard Levy, Malanos, Alexandra Metchcouevska, Marcel Nada, Fatma Nimet- Rachid, Mohammed Nour, A. Politis, Edouard Pollack, Angelo de Riz, A. Revaux, Sami Riad, Mohammed Seif-el-Dine, Hassan Sobhy, Laurent Salinas, Emile Simon, Scalet, Telmisany, Nadave Silber, Kamal William, Ibrahim Wassily.

“Vive l'art dégénéré ». London Bulletin, n°13, 15 avril 1939, p.16-17. 1938

Long Live Degenerate Art! (1938)

It is well known that modern society looks with aversion on any innovative creation in art and literature which threatens the cultural system on which that society is based, whether it be from the point of view of thought or of meaning.

Such feelings of repugnance are clearly visible in countries of a totalitarian nature, most particularly in Hitlerian Germany, where free art has met with extreme hostility and is now termed “Degenerate Art” by those ignoramuses.

Artists from Cezanne to Picasso have been vilified, and the work that is the product of modern artistic genius with its sense of freedom, energy, and humanity has been abused and trampled underfoot.

We believe that the fanatical racialist, religious and nationalistic path which certain individuals wish modern art to follow is simply contemptible and ridiculous. We think that these reactionary myths will only serve to imprison thought.

Art is, by its nature, a constant intellectual and emotional exchange in which humankind as a whole participates and which cannot therefore accept such artificial limitations.

In Vienna, which has now been abandoned to the barbarians, a painting by Renoir has been torn into pieces and books by Freud have been burnt in the public squares. Works by great German artists such as Max Ernst, Paul Klee, Karl Hoffer, Oskar Kokoschka, George Grosz and Wassily Kandinsky have been confiscated and replaced by worthless National Socialist art.

Similarly in Rome, a committee has recently been formed “for the purification of literature”! It has taken up its duties and has decided to withdraw everything that is “anti-Italian, anti-racist, immoral and depressing.”

Intellectuals, artists and writers: Let us stand together and accept the challenge! We must align ourselves alongside this “Degenerate Art,” for in such art reposes the hopes of the future. Let us work to support it so that it will prevail against the new Middle Ages which they are trying to resurrect within the heart of Europe.

This statement has been signed by artists, writers, journalists, and lawyers. Their names are as follows:

Ibrahim Wassily; Ahmed Fahmy; Edouard Pollack; Edouard Levy; Armand Antebi; Albert Isra'il; Albert Cosseri; Kamel al- Telmisany; Alexandra Mitchkovski; Emil Simon; Angelo Paulo; Angelo de Riz; Anwar Kamel; Annette Fadida; A. Politis; L. Galanti; Germaine Isra'il; Georges Henein; Hassan Subhi; A. Rafu; Zakariah al-Azouni (from the Union of Law yers); Sami Riyadh; Sami Hanouka; Scalet; Abdul Khaliq al-Azouni; Fatima Na'amat Rashed; Fouad Kamel; Kemal Wiliam; Laurent Salinas; Marcelle Biagini; Marcel Nada; Malanos; Muhammed Saif-al-Doen; Muhammed Nur; Nadif Selair; Hassia; Henri Dumani. Cairo, December 22, 1938

George Henein, “Portrait de Lee”, *Désraisons d’Être*, (1938)⁵²⁹

This head that ties instead of cuts
This head that shines all around
Like ivy on a glacier
This head that ripples throughout the night
Without knowledge
Of all the truth that can be committed
To the top of its eyes

Watch this head pass that becomes woman
And abandon us by way of traces
Of hard fists of laughter
And crazy curtain rises
On not a living soul
Because the sentinel just succumbed
Between the condolences of the foreign woman
Of the petal mask
That killed her with a simple password

By now the palace is violently void
And any foundling
Has the right to be born there at will

But the unpicked petals of the verb blondness
Mistakes itself for the sails of a decisive voyage
Where the return can only happen
Through the mountain chain of collapsible crystals

⁵²⁹ “Portrait de Lee”, George Henein; 14 October 2015, translated from French by Jean Colombain and Maria Golia

In whose transparence eyelashes tremble
That yesterday were birds
And tomorrow may be nests
Through scarlet aquariums
Where choir infants never stop drowning
Through the nocturnal jackal plantation
And perfectly drunk deserts
Victims of their own mirages
Peopled with prostitutes their sex engulfed in sand

The port flag is half-mast
The eye of the great lighthouse sees only the horrible past
And still no one knows the news
The passenger has disappeared

But there's another island on the map

“L’art Indépendant en Égypte” (Indépendant Art in French), Bashir Sebaie archives (1941)⁵³⁰

Independent art in Egypt has, in the current state of affairs, three primary objectives:

1. To respond by all means at the appalling seasonal breaking of academic painting, which does not conceal any intellectual platitude, any aesthetic filth, no mundane undress. It is necessary to state here that the advertising of any American shoemaker is infinitely more moving than the best of the canvases exhibited at the annual Cairo Salon. The only seemingly valid excuse that the authors of these paintings can be reduced to making is that they paint to pass the time. These unfortunate people will never have the chance to understand, that painting is also a way of thinking, of loving, of hating, of fighting and of living.
2. To maintain in the minds of the public one of those curiosities that are rightly called “misplaced” because they are generally the prelude to many realizations, many individual or collective disruptions.
Too many people still accept the vital questions of their time receiving an X or Y or Z solution without even considering whether - regardless of the solution thus given to them, these questions could not have been asked otherwise.
From surprise to another, the insatiable curiosity of children can be re-created. Ex: why is society made this way rather than another? by who? and for how much time? etc.
3. Integrate the activity of young artists from Egypt into the great circuit of modern art, passionate and eventful art, rebellious to police, religious or commercial orders, of art whose pulse we feel is beating. in New York, in London, in Mexico, everywhere where the Diego Rivera, the Paalen, the Tangyu, the Henry Moore fight, everywhere where men fight who have not yet despaired of the total liberation of human consciousness.

⁵³⁰ “L’art Indépendant en Égypte” (Indépendant Art in French), Salon des Independent II, exhibition catalogue, La Seance Continue, 10– 25 March 1941. Bashir Sebaie archives, Cairo consulted 24 January 2013

Georges Henein, *Those Who Belong to Two Universes*, (1962)⁵³¹

Literature on the Orient has long obscured and intimated Oriental literature. Oriental intellectuals have roamed like perplex strollers through others' books, as if hoping to find in them something other than an image, mostly futile, of their still unexpressed world. First, there was on their part this natural movement of curiosity which led the villager to his first photographer. But this curiosity soon decanted into a sort of professional interest in the western literary apparatus. In books dedicated to the Orient - novels, essays, travel stories – and, more generally, in the extraordinary profusion of a production he realizes is not limited to describing life but also has the power to modify it, the oriental intellectual discovers, all exoticism ceasing, a framework, a range of nuances, a force of elaboration, a critical organization - all things which appear to him both as unexpected supports and as “elements of emancipation”. Whether reading Rimbaud or James Joyce, here he gets excited and carried away and rushes towards this expanded knowledge of oneself that is also a recipe for action on words. It is the whole field of renewed expression that seems to open up before him.

Imitative mannerism

This phenomenon is far from having as clear a relationship with the colonial process as it is sometimes claimed.

During the so-called Arab Nahda period – national awareness which spanned roughly 1880-1920 – there was a powerful and catchy eloquence, while literary creation remained negligible.

In fact, it is not by a simple imitative mannerism that the Lebanese, Egyptians, North Africans, began to write in languages other than theirs – in French or in English – but because they found in these languages a certain articulation which was for their mind a novelty and a necessity. It is therefore not a question of a choice of convenience, but, one might say, of "structural appropriation".

We are in the presence of two simultaneous events which one would be wrong to take as absolutely contradictory. On the one hand, the Arabic language resurfaces and asserts itself as a bond of passion and an instrument of Independence; on the other, the need for modernity, the impatient search for a cadence, for an interior rhythm, the desire to suddenly reach the universal, influences the approach of many writers and arouses in them this second cultural affiliation which makes them tributary to a foreign language.

All things considered, it is the same in the pictorial domain. Among the many examples that should be cited in this regard, I particularly remember that of the painter Abdel Hady el Gazzar. This young Egyptian artist had made his talent known and appreciated by drawing on the popular symbolism of the motifs that he poetized or dramatized, as the case may be. People praised the “authenticity” of his inspiration and his desire to remain in close harmony with the sensibility of the street, with the “mouled” village, with the superstitious signs of the past and the magical provocations inscribed at the bottom of a door.

⁵³¹ Georges Henein, “Ceux qui appartient à deux univers » (Those Who Belong to Two Worlds), *Jeune Afrique*, September 1962, in *Œuvres : Poèmes, Récits, Essais, Articles et Pamphlets / eds. Pierre Vilar, Kober, Lançon* (Paris: Denoël, c2006) 671–675 (translation my own).

Then suddenly, without warning anyone, El Gazzar turned his back on this iconic imagery and rushed into non-figurative painting where we immediately saw that his temperament was receiving the baptism of a new birth. The mutation was startling. It can be compared to the feverish tumult that seizes a boy confined for a long time in a static landscape, the moment he meets the Ocean.

Let us also mention that Khadiga Riaz – granddaughter of Ahmed Chawky, the last great classical Arab poet – also chose informal painting where she shines with a brilliance that will soon perhaps surprise Europe.

Abdel Hadi el Gazzar, Khadiga Riaz, Ramses Younane, Fouad Kamel did not renounce anything of their ethnic background, nor of their origins, any more than writers like Ahmed Rassim, Albert Cossery, or, among our Algerian and Moroccans friends, Kateb Yacine and Driss Charaibi. They wanted to break the stillness of the form or the shell of the concept, to deprovincialize intelligence, “enter into freedom” as you enter a religion.

A burgled vocabulary

Whether this crossover of imported or adopted languages calls into question something more than individual attractions, we have been warned of by the recent undertakings of Egyptian writers who strive to exploit, by reshaping it, a dialectal Arabic in which they believe they can find satisfactions resorting to classical Arabic no longer provides. In this regard, Loutfy El Khouli’s theater is far from being convincing, but one cannot doubt that there exists, today, for the Arab writer, a problem of instrumentation which torments him and incites him to shake up language. In many cases, he is reduced to trying to translate himself into his own language after having robbed the neighbor of his vocabulary. Not that the tool he has is imperfect. On the contrary, it is wonderfully fit to serve.

But those who aspire to direct communication with the masses are angry with its edges, its subtleties, the formal constraints that ensure its rigor and beauty. Hence, the manipulations that tend to promote a summary and popularized language - paradoxically artificial since it is not manufactured by the people, but by those who want to be heard by them – which is not certain at all to flatter the worker’s ear. On the other hand, there are those eager to fit into the mainstream of most modern thought. Hence cosmopolitanism.

It is significant that double cultural affiliation frightens, on the whole much less the purists of the language than the autarkists, the builders in closed fields who give infinitely more importance to the barriers rather than the building, and for whom the existence of a homogeneous community is the precondition for any planning endeavor. Should the community not present itself, from the outset, as homogeneous, some will try to make it as such by all good means of state surgery.

When we dream of dreaming

From the first Egyptian revolution, in 1919, Wacyf Boutros Ghali, a great militant of the national struggle, condemned to death by an English military court, a companion of Saad Zaghloul, appears to us as the very embodiment of dual affiliation. A scholar in both languages - Arabic and French - he published in Paris his works on the chivalrous tradition of the Arabs. Having become Minister of Foreign Affairs, he did not neglect his cultural interests and continued, until his end, to offer us the comforting image of a true kind man of spirit.

Ahmed Rassim had a very comprehensive knowledge of Arabic and we have many texts of him in this language. His poetry on the other hand, all shrouded in nostalgia and suavity, profoundly oriental in feeling, needed the discreet murmur that the French language dispenses to those who know how to solicit it.

Albert Cossery ignores written Arabic. But his books, while transcending the local picturesque and making their place in literature everywhere, teach more about Egypt than the novels of Lawrence Durrell. They have the merit of emphasizing an element rebellious to description, a 'je ne sais quoi' that is difficultly captured which is this particular and capricious elongation of the time during which the Oriental savors his life ...

The word savoring may be a bit misleading, and I explain myself. The European exercises life because he imagines it as an activity, as a use of energy. For the Oriental – whether he savors or repudiates it – it takes on the aspect of a malicious dialogue with time, and it sometimes happens that the latter seems to give up the game, that its persecution ends and that the man who dreams of dreaming slowly gives up on waking up.

Albert Cossery admirably illustrated this ability to thwart reality and its obligations, to treat the concrete as a phantom, and this is what makes him so great. Wacyf Boutros Ghali, Ahmed Rassim, Albert Cossery, each of the other two are as different as it is possible to be. They have only one thing in common: their lack of inhibition in the face of the problem of dual affiliation.

The metis's rehabilitation

Every writer is an adventurer of language. As for his terroir, it is just as much his secret being as it is the lives of others, of everyone else. And that is precisely why he is a candidate, whether he likes it or not, for cultural miscegenation. As long as we examine dual affiliation without any hint of controversy, it is difficult not to give it the character of an intellectual "revival" which animates debate and strengthens vision. In a torn world, in constant conflict with itself, an entire category of writers is readily held in suspicion for reasons of vagrancy. They are unlikely to find favor in societies where intransigence is rising. Their fault would be serious, indeed, insofar as it is serious to challenge the absurd partitions that divide intelligence.

But it could be, just the same, that the future favors the free flow from one culture to another, without necessarily having to go through the Unesco office. And that would be, finally, the metis's just rehabilitation.

Georges Henein, A Tribute to André Breton (1966)⁵³²

"Prose That Shines Above All Others"

André Breton is dead. This poet who gave us the prose that shines above all others lived in the fragile and sorrowful intransigence of souls in love with the morning dew. He ever refused to

⁵³² Georges Henein, "A Tribute to André Breton," *Jeune Afrique*, no. 300 (October 7, 1966); trans. Myrna Bell Rochester, in Franklin Rosemont and Robin D. G. Kelley, *Black, Brown, & Beige : Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora*, Surrealist Revolution Series (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009)

submit to the petty dictates of society. He never settled with the forces of decomposition. He was the last Druid, emerging from the forest to declaim the brilliance of the world. In the rat's maze of our present where only the cheesy psychology of the peddlers of leisure wins out, he appeared as the provocateur of accomplishments, as one who ceaselessly demanded more; as one who tired only of slaves.