



Art Direction Perihan Kharma
Photography Alaa Taher

SHERWET SHAFEI

STRAIGHT FROM THE ART

Sherwet Shafei is one of Egypt's most renowned art collectors and curators. Her private collection of Egyptian art is unrivalled anywhere in the world, and over the years her own home has become a priceless testament to Egypt's cultural heritage. This year, that heritage, intermingled with this inspiring woman's personal journey of artistic discovery, will be available to the public for the first time in an incredible coffee table book entitled *Twentieth-Century Egyptian Art: The Private Collection of Sherwet Shafei*. Featuring her complete collection, and slated for international publication by the AUC Press at the end of this month, this book will expose the international art community to Egyptian art as never before. eniGma's **Hoda Metwally** was invited into Shafei's home for an exclusive sneak peek at this unique book ...

Walking into Sherwet Shafei's house is like being knocked over the head with a history book. From floor to ceiling, the walls are plastered with paintings; and that's just the canvases. Sculptures – ranging from the gorgeous to the gripping – also pepper the rooms.

Shafei's new book, *Twentieth-Century Egyptian Art: The Private Collection of Sherwet Shafei*, is slated for official release at the end of January 2011. With over 250 paintings, sculptures and art works featured in the book – some never seen before by the public – the making of this book was painstaking to ensure each of her incredible works of Egyptian art were displayed in their full unbridled glory. It's the first book of its kind to ever come out of Egypt. A heavy, deliciously deep coffee-table book featuring the entire private collection of one of Egypt's most famed private art collectors and the woman behind Zamalek's internationally respected Safar Khan Gallery.

As we huddle round the book, eniGma's photographer Alaa Taher (something of an art aficionado himself) and our Art Director Perihan Khamra offer all sorts of intelligent commentary about the textures and strokes of Mahmoud Said's *La Fille En Rose* – which is featured on the cover of the book – as well as the plethora of pieces repeated on the walls before me. "I know it seems like a lot," says Shafei, noting my awe. "But every single piece has a story. I am a lover of art and when I see something of beauty I know I must have it."

Her collection – featuring works by everyone from Hamed Nada and Seif Wanly to Youssef Sida and Saad Elkhadem – has been a lifetime in the making and now the world will get an in depth look into that story of her life, through

these works of art. Stand out pieces include Nahmeya Saad's *Nude* and Ragheb Ayad's *The Dancing Horse and the Musicians of Upper Egypt* as well other Mahmoud Said masterpieces.

The book is something of a treasure, packed with pieces from Egypt's most renowned artists but also exclusive excerpts from Shafei herself. "That was the hardest part for me," she says. "I had to sit alone for many hours and trail through my mind to remember the personal stories behind each piece: where I found it, how I first came across it or why I fell in love with it. I never kept any sort of diary so that was the most challenging and interesting part of the process."

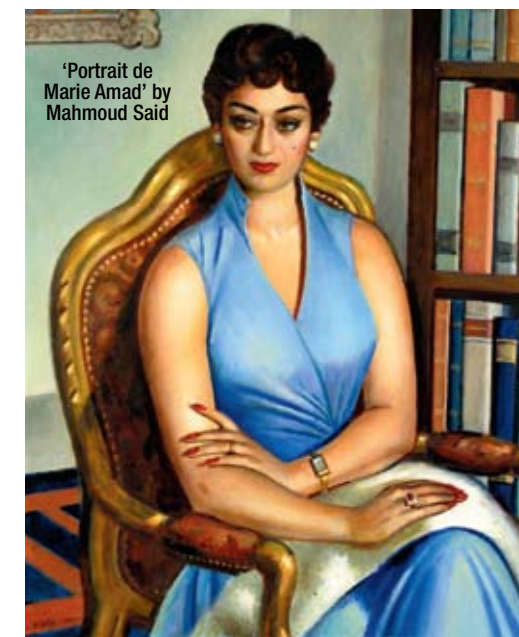
As we talk, turning through the pages of the book, Effat Naghy's *The Doll* is just one of the many pieces that prompts another indicative conversation. In the book, Shafei offers readers this explanation: *A masterpiece of assemblage, in which Naghy has used old fragments of wood for the background, onto which she has placed the doll, originally purchased from an old barbershop in Upper Egypt... Naghy was very attached to this assemblage, which hung in the entrance to her villa in Hada'iq al-Qubba in Cairo.*

"I worked with AUC Press on every last detail of the layout," adds Shafei. "I approved and disapproved and did whatever it took to get it right. In the end it was all worth it; not just for me but because the whole world will get to see these pieces," she says.

Michael Jeha, Managing Director of Christie's Dubai says this book couldn't have come at a better time. "Art collectors everywhere have shown a very real interest in Egyptian art. We recently sold Mahmoud Said's *Whirling Dervishes* for \$2.5 million, which is the highest price ever paid for a Middle Eastern painting," he reveals.



'The Dancing Horse and the Musicians of Upper Egypt' by Ragheb Ayad



'Portrait de Marie Amad' by Mahmoud Said

"And Mrs. Shafei's personal collection is a fantastic example of why that is happening."

Shafei's collection has art aficionados everywhere chomping at the bit, but that's hardly why she's made this book. "There are paintings I would never sell and there is no price for which I would even consider it," she explains. "Egyptian art alone is so important. It is important to history, it is important to art and it is important to me. That's why this book is so important," she says.

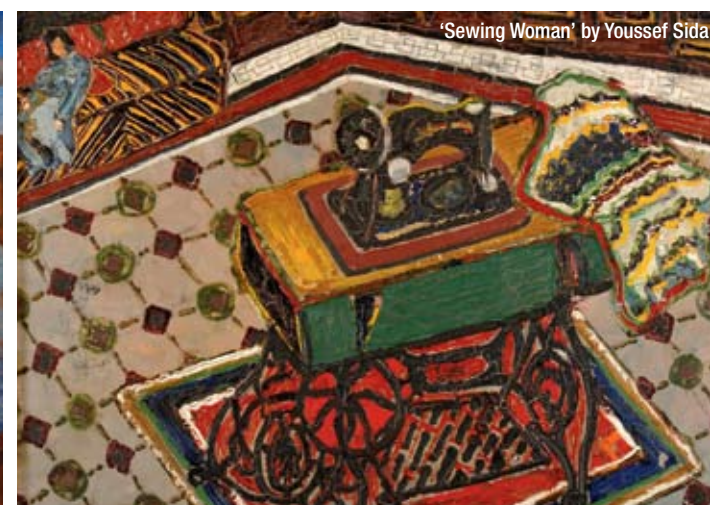
In the past, only the world's most discerning art collectors would have had access to all the pieces in Shafei's collection, but with her new book, the whole world will get a private peek at her inspiring life's work and the unique look of contemporary Egyptian art. ■



'Danseuse Assise' by Seif Wanly



'The Donkey' by Mahmoud Said



'Sewing Woman' by Youssef Sida