



Twentieth-Century Egyptian Art

The Private Collection of Sherwet Shafei

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With Collector's Notes by Sherwet Shafei

Collecting Egyptian Art

In writing this introduction focusing on Sherwet Shafei's collection, I have derived immense pleasure during the process, as Sherwet Shafei guided me, slowly but surely helping me to connect the tiny pieces of a gigantic puzzle, until finally the whole canvas was complete. After every meeting, whether a formal interview or a conversation, I came away realizing I was still far from done. How many times did I return to clarify a missing point, or to ask for material from her archives, which she generously provided? How often have I made her repeat the same story, but with one more question, or a detail she might have overlooked? Her patience never faltered. I cannot count the number of times we spoke. Every time we met, Shafei was ready to explain her relationship with the many artists she knew, as well as her passion for her other lifelong work as a television broadcaster, which began under Nasser. Her amazing store of knowledge was fed by her legendary determination, using almost detective-like techniques, to track down the relatives of artists who were no longer alive, and also to identify possible collectors, who might be found among the social elite. These were illuminating encounters, whether she was giving me insights into her techniques as a dealer, or into the understanding of paintings. But from our very first meeting, the most striking impression was of her strong will and positive character.

Conducting interviews in Collector's Corner, the soberly furnished but stunning apartment above the Safarkhan Gallery, became an unimaginable learning process for me. Each time we met, she showed me a wide variety of remarkable paintings. We spent hours not only contemplating these, but tracing back how she had acquired them and discussing who might be interested in

purchasing them today. Each encounter led to more stories about the lives, often sad and neglected, of the many artists who endured want and were even regarded as insane, only to be discovered as geniuses, and their works sold for breathtaking prices—all too typically, alas, after their death.

This private space, Shafei's apartment, is where the most important deals take place. It is the main meeting point where well-to-do collectors come, take their time to gaze at works of art, and to discuss with Shafei whether this piece of art or another would best fit their collection. The Collector's Corner is the real space for significant transactions.

It is exceptional for an art gallery owner to possess a collection as large as this: for a start, Shafei has never concealed the fact that before the early 1990s, she owned hardly any valuable paintings. Neither she nor her late husband belonged to the 'ancien régime,' or even to the 'nouveaux riches' who emerged during the Open Door economic policy of Anwar Sadat. They belonged to the educated middle-class that provided Egypt with its most senior civil servants. Members of the ancien régime often lament the fact that during Nasser's time they were forced to sell off their family heirlooms in order to survive. The higher civil servants, by contrast, did well under Nasser. Certainly, there existed an emerging consumer culture, but the conspicuous consumption and displays of wealth that had been witnessed among the happy few during Sadat's and later Mubarak's time were somehow publicly shunned. And Shafei, along with many like her in the 1960s, had neither sufficient capital nor aspiration for the collection she owns today. She was a successful and efficient high-level state employee in state television broadcasting until her retirement, and her husband, Ahmed Saïd Amin was a prominent journalist who became a television celebrity. Both were members of the intelligentsia associated with cultural production within the confines of the Nasserite state.

Shafei recalls very well the first painting she purchased, in the mid-1980s: a Hamed Nada entitled *Night and Day*, which she was proud to get for LE1,500. Today, her marvelous collection contains some two hundred and fifty works, including the statues and metal artwork of Salah Abdel Kerim. And this is in addition to the exceedingly numerous national and international sales she has transacted during the past three decades. Shafei's collection holds great interest for art historians because

it represents a cross-section of Egyptian art. It is one of the most extensive and interesting private collections of Egyptian art I have encountered in Cairo and embraces a wide variety of works, including those of the early orientalist who lived and taught art in Egypt.

The development of this collection marked the beginning of Shafei's 'second life,' or rather her second career, which was a turning point in her life. Ironically, this began when she retired and became, in her words, *hurraṭ nafsi* (liberated), free to do what she pleased with her time, no longer a functionary in the state-run television broadcasting system. Yet her many years of experience working in such a national institution during the post-colonial Nasserite period equipped her with the culture and the trained eye for finding Egyptian art. The official cultural channels of the Nasserite state provided her with the ideal networks and the intellectual ammunition that would later serve in her second life as a private businesswoman.

The success story of Shafei as a businesswoman, as it unfolds in the following pages, started in the early 1990s. It coincided with the gradual opening up and globalization of the economy, the neoliberal orientation of the ruling elites, and the liberalization of arts. The emergence of capitalist tycoons, emulating perhaps the early American family capitalists like the Fords or the Rockefellers, did foster a new culture of luxury, leisure, and lifestyles that differed from the previous 'state capitalist' classes that had emerged during Nasser's time. Liberalization of the economy and the arts went hand in hand with the appointment of the painter Farouk Hosni as minister of culture. Farouk Hosni came to the ministry in 1987 with the image of an artist-intellectual, or the painter-minister: his own paintings are exhibited in five-star hotels such as the Four Seasons, and in smart private galleries. He has been an advocate of encouraging the arts, and of greatly increasing the number of museums, all under the auspices of the state. He has encouraged young artists to create their own salons.⁴

In the words of Jessica Winegar, the minister of culture

instigated new arts programs throughout the country, started a series of annual exhibitions (including biennials and triennials) in a variety of media, and allocated more

funds for government prizes and acquisitions. By 1999, the annual budget of the National Center of Fine Arts was almost 20 million Egyptian pounds (approximately \$6,000,000 at the time), and nearly 1,500 artists exhibited annually in individual and group shows in state galleries and museums, many of them newly constructed.⁵

It is therefore possible to say that the early 1990s turned out to be a golden age for younger-generation artists, who received support from the Ministry of Culture as well as from private galleries.

Most importantly, the revival of the arts coincided with the appearance of well-to-do clients and collectors, who had acquired second or third residences, often in the large beach resorts that spread along the Northern Mediterranean coast and the Red Sea. Others were in gated and walled-off communities that multiplied in satellite cities in the desert, looking like an imported American dream but with Egyptian panache. The promotion of large villas and condominiums with swimming pools, gyms, and golf courses, advertised and promoted a new vision of leisure related to space. For the rich, more space in these satellite and resort cities was created, and more design was needed to occupy this space. Art became a major way of displaying wealth, status, and knowledge, with a touch of culture. More than ever, new opportunities were created for spaces to be filled with works of art. Art also provided the ascending Cairene elites with a means of socializing: it became chic to see and to be seen at openings, receptions, and auctions. The rich were then able to purchase large collections of contemporary Egyptian art.

This explains why Shafei opened an extension of the Safarkhan gallery some years ago in the lavishly constructed al-Gouna beach resort on the Red Sea, where it seems to be doing well. Al-Gouna can hardly compare with any other place in Egypt. Constructed by Orascom, one of the most powerful financial groups in Egypt, al-Gouna lagoon consists of conglomerates of fancy villas, whose sophisticated interior decoration is featured in all the advertising.

These transformations in lifestyle coincided with rich Egyptians discovering a 'reinvented' Islamic architecture epitomized in the works

of the architect Hassan Fathy through his disciples Rami al-Dahan, and Abd al-Wahed al-Wakil. Not only did Egyptian painting gain prominence, but so, too, did Egyptian arts and crafts, and even ethnic clothing and design, albeit with certain refinements applied to rediscovered regional apparel. Some popular and peasant traditions that were once shunned by the upper classes have been revalorized under the new conditions of global markets. Tourism and the tourist industry played a significant role in investing these artefacts with value as authentic indigenous traditions, sought after for their originality. Among the rich, the process of 'orientalizing the orientals' was expressed in the rediscovery of orientalist paintings, paralleling that of Bedouin styles and Arabesque furniture and décor. Obviously, commercial strategies were one main reason behind the 'remake' of culture. Also, as the old classes declined, new classes rose, and the cosmopolitan European culture, once synonymous with colonial culture and lifestyle, underwent transformations and additions with the advent of post-colonial nationalism. That was followed by a cultural Disneyfication, compounded by the conservative Islamization of consumer lifestyles that gained ground under the influence of the oil-producing countries.

Tourism was not insignificant in the flowering of the local art market. Shafei recognizes that American and European tourists contacted her because they liked the numerous paintings displayed in the Four Seasons hotel. Shafei is optimistic about the art business in Egypt. She says: "There are so many newly constructed houses along the Red Sea, all along the Mediterranean coast, the hundreds of new satellite cities, the Qattamiya Heights, the new hotels and restaurants All these villas and condominiums need to be furnished. It is clear that the younger generation wants to furnish its salons with Egyptian painters They are in great demand today."

The city of Cairo has consequently witnessed the multiplication of private art galleries in recent years. The emerging world of well-to-do collectors flourished. Art investment funds came into existence. Egyptian artists who figured in Dubai Sotheby's and Christie's catalogs became internationally known stars. This went hand in hand with the rising popularity of stylish interior design and highly sought-after designers. It was

followed by an effervescence of architecture and interior design magazines, such as *Magaz, al-Beit, Obelisque*, and *ASK*. These were significant in advertising good taste for the rich.

Art auctions picked up in Cairo. Townhouse Gallery, for example, launched the first silent auction in 2007 and the first live auction in 2009, with thirty artists donating their work for charity. The 2009 auction was well attended by affluent Cairenes. Parallel to the blossoming of the art market, forgeries multiplied. Newspapers were constantly writing about scandals concerning forgeries of Abdel Hadi el-Gazzar, Ragheb Ayad, Mahmoud Saïd, and Hamed Nada. These were being sold to the new rich at rocketing prices by so-called established gallery owners as well as ambulant salesmen.

It was Shafei who gave me illuminating insights into the creative channels of forgery: there were specialists in Alexandria whose method involved cutting and pasting from several digitized works by artists such as el-Gazzar, to come up with brilliant forgeries. They reassembled motifs inspired by various canvases, to be sold as unknown or rediscovered pieces.

I continued to interview Shafei exclusively for this book in 2008. Each time we met, I realized new doors were opened, leading to more ideas and perspectives I had overlooked. Shafei introduced me little by little to books from her rich library: the works of Aimé Azar, Gabriel Boctor, Morik Brin, Saad el-Khadem, Ramsis Younan, the personal correspondence of Mahmoud Saïd, the writings of Badr Eldin Abou Ghazi, and Moukhtar el-Attar, and the numerous catalogs of the Museum of Modern Art. Shafei opened the inner workings of the art market to me. She indirectly told me about the competitive world of most art dealers and the maneuvers by some to discredit others by insinuating that they dealt in forgeries. She was generous in putting me in touch with her clients.

Modern Egyptian art and artists, their history and chronology, have been the subject of four important works: Aimé Azar's classic *La peinture moderne en Egypte* (1961), Liliane Karnouk's *Modern Egyptian Art* (2005), Jessica Winegar's *Creative Reckonings* (2006), and most recently *New Vision, Arab Contemporary Art in the 21st Century*, edited by Hossein Amirsadeghi, Salwa Mikdadi, and Nada Shabout (2009), but the sociology of the art market in Egypt is under-researched and doubtless needs further

exploration, as does the study of emerging private art collections in Egypt. The emergence of art investment funds in Egypt and the impact of Dubai auctions upon Egyptian artists also need further research. How the vertiginous price difference between Cairene galleries and Christie's in Dubai has led to the fetishization of artworks by the younger generation is yet to be studied, as is the dilemma faced by the artist whose price has rocketed in Dubai, hindering him from selling at a lower price back in Cairo.

The only two books on private collections in Egypt of which I am aware are an Arabic publication by the Saudi Arabian collector Mohamed Saïd Farsi (whose art supplier was Sherwet Shafei),⁶ and the inventory of Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil's collection, formed in the early twentieth century, and now in the Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil Museum.

Marketing Good Taste

What makes the work of art a work of art and not a mundane thing or a simple utensil? What makes an artist an artist and not a craftsman or a Sunday painter? What makes a urinal or a wine rack that is exhibited in a museum a work of art? Is it the fact that they are signed by Duchamp, a recognized artist (recognized first and foremost as an artist) and not by a wine merchant or a plumber? If the answer is yes, then isn't this simply a matter of replacing the work-of-art-as-fetish with the 'fetish of the name of the master'? Who, in other words, created the 'creator' as a recognized and known producer of fetishes?

—Pierre Bourdieu

Very soon it became evident to me that Shafei was one of the most experienced and intelligent gallery owners in town. She deserves the credit for being one of the masterminds who have shaped the taste of collectors to recognize and appreciate quality in Egyptian art. By marketing the pioneers, Shafei created an independent market with extended networks. One can debate at length what taste and good taste ought to be among the elites, but the idea of setting standards in taste is not particular to any

elite. In fact, Michael North argues that the concept of taste—he uses the German word ‘Geschmack’—was very much debated in literary circles as early as the eighteenth century, in relation to poetry and rhetoric. It became closely associated with words like ‘gusto’ and ‘bon goût.’ North argues that good taste in art is a socially defined phenomenon that emerges from communication processes.⁸

Already, in the eighteenth century, there were painters who were famous and highly valued in European court society. Certainly, this triggered the wish for emulation, and the standards trickled down to the bourgeoisie.

In this context, it is worth asking at what point Egyptian art became an object of speculation and capitalist investment. That good taste in Egyptian painting came to be associated with the pioneers of the early 1900s who laid the cornerstone of Egyptian identity, is explainable as part of the mood of rather fashionable nostalgia for the ‘glorious’ pre-1952 era. This sometimes amounted to the invention of a pedigree by the new rich, who deliberately frequented auctions to buy objets d’art, furniture, and paintings from the declining former haute bourgeoisie. Parallel to that, soap operas and television serials, the *musalsalat*, romanticized that bygone period by idealizing the ‘dolce vita’ lifestyle of ex-King Farouk and members of royalty. According to Shafei, there was evidently a wish to emulate what she defines as the powerful “effect of the intellectual,” and aspiring connoisseurs identified nostalgically with the era of the pashas. Therefore the works of the pioneers of modern Egyptian art, and the next generation of artists, like el-Gazzar, were turned into classics. Their prices rocketed, and it is more and more difficult to find the works of such artists on the market now.

The 1952 Revolution aspired to change the existing class structure by nationalization, sequestration, and successive waves of agrarian land reform. The petit-bourgeois Free Officers have often been blamed for destroying the formerly cosmopolitan culture of Cairo and Alexandria, which was mostly dominated by a tiny minority of landed feudalists and the foreign community living in Egypt. One clear consequence was that wealthy private collectors, patrons, and galleries withered away, to be replaced by the omnipotent state as the monopolist of culture. Liliane Karnouk comments on that period:

Individual collectors, patrons, and art-gallery owners had been left, if not impoverished, at least in circumstances severely straitened, and many had emigrated. Initially, private galleries like Alladin, A.D.A.M., Cultura, Gallion, Goldenberg, and Alban apparently continued, but there is no information available about their activities after 1956.⁹

State cultural domination in the 1950s and 1960s meant further dependence of intellectuals on official state culture, leading to further constraints on freedom of expression. The return to privatization and the globalization of Egypt that took place with Sadat’s Open Door policy and continued under Mubarak, led to the consolidation of neoliberal agendas through the fostering of a culture of businessmen, although it led to class polarization and increasing poverty. Globalization coincided with the massive migration of Egyptians of all classes to the oil-producing countries. The last three decades have also witnessed the marked Islamization of society, extending to public space, attire, lifestyle, and leisure spending, even to parliament, and a fierce and growing opposition, epitomized in the increasing influence of the Muslim Brothers in the public sphere.

Regarding art, the question remains: would privatization and the emergence of new collectors, auctions, and galleries imply the return of a new form of cosmopolitanism? And if so, would it be comparable to the pre-1952 cosmopolitan culture? I am not sure this question can be answered here. However, there is certainly a strong wish among some rising elites, in equally strong reaction to the powerful wave of Islamization, to identify with pre-1952 cosmopolitan Egypt. In that regard, cosmopolitan Alexandria has always occupied a special space in literature, cinema, and art. As Liliane Karnouk puts it:

Some point out the spirit of place, attributed to the influence of the distant past, the presence of Cavafy, Forster, Durrell, and especially the artistic legacy of Mahmoud Said, Seif Wanly, the Naghys, and the Alexandrian Biennale.¹⁰

Can one measure the trickle-down effect of Durrell, Cavafy, and Forster in today's Egyptian cultural scene? Certainly, there is nostalgia for Alexandrian cosmopolitanism as a counterreaction to expanding Islamization. But nostalgia is all about selecting memories and embellishing a remote past. And here cosmopolitanism is reimagined but without its less attractive colonial component. For after all, colonial times undeniably produced the kind of cosmopolitanism that excluded the majority of Egyptians. This could perhaps also explain the rediscovery by the new rich of the significance of the works of Mohamed

Naghy, Effat Naghy, Saad el-Khadem, Seif and Edham Wanly, and Mahmoud Saïd—all of whom, not by coincidence, were Alexandrians and cosmopolitans.

The wish to own paintings by these artists might provide the feeling, or rather the semblance, of belonging to a cosmopolitan culture that has certainly withered—along with Alexandria itself, transformed by the wholesale destruction of its Belle Époque architecture and the visual impact of growing numbers of face-veiled women. Perhaps, also, the subject matter of these pioneering cosmopolitan artists helps generate nostalgia for a vanished culture and lifestyle, and accounts for their recent popularity. For example, Mohamed Naghy was a great traveler whose sojourns in Brazil, Abyssinia, Greece, France, and Italy had a seminal impact on his art. Seif and Edham Wanly depicted a cosmopolitan Alexandria with a clearly Mediterranean, or rather European flair, with its beaches, ballet dancers, and galas. Emy Nemr, Effat Naghy, Georges Sabbagh, and Seif and Edham Wanly were all trained by and in close contact with Italian, French, and English teachers and influences, and spent long sojourns in Europe and other parts of the world.

Yet one cannot understand the rediscovery of these cosmopolitan pioneers without looking at the intermediary art dealer behind the discovery. Let me now move onward to Shafei's gallery and her biography, through which I will try to relate her trajectory to the larger social and cultural field in order to contextualize the significance of her work.

Safarkhan, Zamalek

Safarkhan is centrally located in Brazil Street on the residential island of Zamalek. This inner suburb of well-to-do Cairenes has witnessed in recent years a burst of fancy, trendy art galleries and designer shops. Nonetheless, for veteran Zamalekites, Safarkhan, which was among the first private galleries in Zamalek, is a landmark notable for its sober but aesthetically appealing façade, which is attractive to the passerby with its eye-catching woodwork, and of course its exhibitions. The premises were first created in 1968 by Roxane Petridis, wife of the Communist Shuhdi 'Atteya al-Shafei' who died in 1966. Safarkhan started as an antique shop selling woodwork and Islamic artworks, among other items. The gallery's



Safarkhan is centrally located in Brazil Street on the residential island of Zamalek.

current website advertises that its décor is by one of the best known contemporary architect-designers, Nabil Ghali,¹¹ notable for his minimalist yet aesthetically appealing lines. The Islamic touch, exemplified by an integrated fountain and the outer woodwork façade, are eye-catching. The name is of course an allusion to the *musafir* of the past, the caravanserai that hosted merchant travelers. After her retirement from Egyptian television in the late 1980s, Sherwet Shafei became an associate to Petridis.

Exhibitions began in the late 1980s. The first exhibitions were inaugurated by the art historian and former minister of culture Badr Eldin Abou Ghazi. The success story started with the exhibition of artworks by two pioneer painters, Hamed Nada and Ragheb Ayad, the prices of which have multiplied many times since.

Among the pioneers, both Ragheb Ayad and Mahmoud Saïd's works hold a special place for Shafei because the sale of their works played a critical role at the start of her career, as well as in her financial success. These two pioneer painters were her stroke of luck. Shafei reads both artists as having given special attention to the value of labor and to life among the destitute and the peasants. Shafei argues that Ayad's uniqueness was in reinventing a particular pharaonic aesthetic vision, which he blended with the founding of Egyptian expressionism. But it was their Egyptianness, hybridized with cosmopolitanism, that dominated their concerns.

After Roxane Petridis passed away, Shafei transformed Safarkhan in 1995 into an art gallery, expanding it to accommodate more exhibitions of the pioneers of modern Egyptian art, and complementing these with next-generation artists like Gamal el-Saguini, Abdel Hadi el-Gazzar, Youssef Sida, Hamed Nada, Salah Abdel Kerim, El-Hussein Fawzi, Hamed Abdallah, Zakaria el-Zeini, and Armenian artists like Ervand Demirdjian. However, Shafei's mission was multifold. First, her aim was to revive interest in dead and mostly forgotten artists like Saad el-Khadem, Effat Naghy, Kamal Khalifa, Shaaban Zaky, Sami Rafei, Zohra Efflatoun, and Nahmeya Saad. Second, to highlight the works of contemporary artists like Mamdouh Ammar, Gazbia Sirry, Nazli Madkour, Leila 'Izzet, Saleh Reda, Anna Boghiguiyan and Raouf Raafat. Third, Shafei insists on promoting a cosmopolitan outlook by exhibiting works by foreigners and Egyptians living abroad, such as Katherine Bakhom, who lives in

France. Fourthly, "for a change," as Shafei says, and to bring in fresh blood, Safarkhan has recently exhibited works by young graduate students from the American University in Cairo and the Faculty of Fine Arts. Shafei's success lies in her openness to the younger generation of artists, and in her continuous research and exploration for "discoveries," both old and new.

Sherwet Shafei's Trajectory: From Arts as State Culture to the Privatization of Art

As mentioned before, Shafei comes from an 'ordinary,' middle-class background. Her father was a police officer, but quite a rebellious person. He taught Shafei one main thing in life: how to speak her mind. Shafei was



Sherwet Shafei at home with her collection.

quite proud to tell how her father refused to welcome Sidqi Pasha, who visited the town of Tanta while he was chief of police there, because he considered him a British collaborator, and thus a traitor. This was during the pre-1952 colonial period, and it led to her father being made to take early retirement, an incident that marked the family deeply.

Shafei had two sisters, but her mother decided early on to invest mostly in her and provide her with the best education available, because she thought her the most intelligent. While Shafei's sisters were sent to Arabic and French schools, her mother sent Shafei first to a French school, then to the American Girls' College in Cairo, exposed her to the world of culture and a liberal education, widening her horizons and developing her interest in the history of art, drama, and economics. Shafei went on to study English literature at Cairo University, graduating in 1956. The 1950s and 1960s were the golden age of Cairo University, especially for young women like Shafei, who benefited from exposure to modern ideas as the doors of education opened to the emerging middle classes, with particular emphasis on giving opportunities to women. Education had just become free for her generation. Even though intellectuals and academics suffered a wave of repression in the early days of the 1952 Revolution, Cairo University still had space for western-trained nationalist intellectuals. Shafei thus enjoyed the turmoil and excitement of Cairo University just after Egypt's independence, a most exciting experience for a young middle-class Egyptian. She recalls that she had the privilege to be taught by the pioneers of modern Egyptian literature like Luwis Awad, Fatma Musa, and Rashad Roushdi. The horizon was open, and the atmosphere liberal. "I did a lot of sports . . . we wore shorts, and we used to hire bicycles from Zamalek and ride them to the pyramids." (Both the wearing of shorts and the riding of bicycles by women are unthinkable now.)

As a graduate of Cairo University, Shafei was on track for a bright career within the institutional channels of the Nasserite state. For us, however, the interest of this career is that, during the 1960s and 1970s, it equipped her with connections in the world of art. Her career under Nasser was the prelude to her success in penetrating the private market in the late 1980s.

Shafei's dream was to become a diplomat after her graduation in 1956. However, though she passed the Diplomatic Service entrance exam, she was instead drafted into the State Information Department for two years: clearly, prejudice still made it difficult for women to penetrate the diplomatic field. Shafei's employment in the State Information Department, then headed by 'Abdel Qader Hatem, coincided with the effervescence of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity conferences that followed the famous 1955 Non-alignment Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in which Nasser and some of the Free Officers participated. Shafei recalls being assigned to escort the prominent veteran American journalist Dorothy Thompson to Nasser's villa in the Qanatir district, when she came to Cairo in the late 1950s to interview him.¹²

Shafei vividly recalls Nasser's extremely sober villa, and how both she and Thompson were received by his private secretary, Mohammed Ahmed, together with the then Free Officer Zakaria Mohieddin (later to become minister of interior). As they waited, a simply dressed gentleman came downstairs, whistling. It was Gamal Abdel Nasser. His powerful, in a way frightening, hawk-like eyes remain vividly in her memory. It was an unforgettable encounter. Nasser, Shafei recalls, had a charismatic presence that was impossible to ignore. Dorothy Thompson interviewed Nasser for about four hours. She was impressed by his good command of English and his extensive reading. From Shafei's descriptions one can sense her own admiration for Nasser, which remains to this day.

The Afro-Asian People's Solidarity conferences brought President Nehru's great-aunt, Mrs. Ramashwary Nehru, to Cairo, and Shafei became her permanent escort during her stay in Egypt. It was a highly enriching experience: Shafei met and interviewed many state officials, journalists, and highly placed members of the military such as Hassanayn Haykal, Zakaria Mohieddin, and several Free Officers. This experience seems to have contributed to building her self-confidence. Furthermore, because of the friendship established between Mrs. Nehru and Shafei, she accompanied Mrs. Nehru on her trip to Syria in 1957. That was a great opportunity to meet politicians like Michel 'Aflaq, Salah al-Bitar, and 'Afif al-Birzi. In Damascus she got to know her future husband, Ahmed Sa'id Amin, who was working for the Middle East News Agency (MENA).

Shafei's husband went on to have an important career in journalism in MENA, later becoming the first editor-in-chief of the news department in Egyptian Television (ETV). Shafei insists that it was mainly because of his visionary prescience that the television company decided to keep and archive all its newsreels and recordings of the speeches and cultural and political events in the 1970s. Previously, such recordings were routinely destroyed due to lack of space. Shafei maintains it is thanks to her husband that Nasser's speeches and Umm Kulthum's performances have been preserved. Shafei was promoted and appointed to the radio broadcasting service, where she worked from 1958 to 1960. When ETV was inaugurated in 1960, Shafei was among the first to be employed there.

Working for Egyptian State Television

Shafei started in television broadcasting by devising and presenting an art program in 1960, which she co-organized with the prominent painter Salah Taher. She continued to have a weekly program on art from 1960 to 1986. During these years, she was promoted to become director of a channel. *Jawlat al-funun* (Journey through the Arts) was the name of her program, which turned out to be her real schooling in the history of art. It took lengthy preparation and much reading. Each program was presented like an exhibition, with the paintings displayed in a large hall for the cameras to wander around. Shafei's challenge was to provide a well-researched introduction, accompanied by interpretation of the paintings. The program was broadcast live and required intensive background work. It also allowed her to invite experts like former minister and art historian Badr Eldin Abou Ghazi (who would later inaugurate exhibitions in her own private gallery), as well as other prominent intellectuals who specialized in the history of art. Abou Ghazi's critical writings on art and culture had a big influence on Shafei. Shafei is proud that early in her career, in the 1960s, she invited Mahmoud Saïd to speak on her program before he died; she recalls him as extremely well bred, soft-spoken, and shy. She presented works by Ragheb Ayad, Youssef Kamel, and Salah Abdel Kerim, among many other painters, and organized a program around Abdel Hadi el-Gazzar. Her close friendship with the Egyptologist and journalist (and incidentally, her neighbor in Zamalek) Kamal al-Mallakh

widened her horizons. Shafei recalls how his weekly articles on art and culture in the semi-official newspaper *al-Ahram* were a must-read for her. Kamal remained her close friend and inspiration until his death.¹³

These personal encounters oriented Shafei toward new tastes and discoveries in the younger generation of painters. Al-Mallakh, according to Shafei, was a bon vivant, witty and sardonic, a close friend whose guidance, over the years, developed her appreciation of Egyptian culture and art. In particular, it was he who led her to search for the works of the Alexandrian brothers Seif and Edham Wanly. Shafei recalls very well visiting their house in the eastern port of Alexandria.

Another dear friend and teacher was Moukhtar el-Attar, whose writings on the history of art and Egyptian artists became a main reference for her. Moukhtar el-Attar also worked in broadcasting. He had an art program on television with Sherwet Shafei, a daily radio program on art, and produced documentary films on Egyptian artists such as Ragheb Ayad, Seif Wanly, Gamal el-Saguini, 'Abdel 'Aziz Darwish, Hassan Mohamed Hassan, Shaaban Zaky, and many others. His publications were numerous, but the ones Shafei found indispensable were his three substantial volumes on contemporary Egyptian and Arab artists.¹⁴

El-Attar essentially helped Shafei discover and track down little-known painters like Shaaban Zaky, Youssef Sida, Mohamed Ismail, and others. It is possible to argue that Shafei's personal itinerary in the 1960s coincided exactly with the state monopoly of all cultural activities through the public sector. It was through her work in state television that she built a large and significant web of contacts and relations with artists and intellectuals.

However, Shafei's initial motive in creating a gallery was cultural and educational, to present stimulating artworks and provide information to the interested public. In 1975 Shafei became director general of all cultural programs at ETV and in 1980 she reached the top position as head of Channel Two (the cultural channel). By that time, Shafei had the authority to decide on the presentation and staging of speakers on television, and directed a large number of state employees. In 1983 François Mitterrand decorated Shafei for her achievements in developing the relationship between Egyptian and French television.

Every alternate year, Shafei attended the the Venice Biennale as a reporter for ETV. She also went to Cannes to purchase television serials and documentaries for Channel Two—and we must remember that in those years, traveling to Europe was not as easy as it is today for the majority of Egyptians, who were not allowed at that time to leave the country with more than LE5. The western capitalist world was looked upon with suspicious eyes. The country had adopted socialism, and the 1956 Tripartite War, nationalizations, and sequestrations had caused many foreigners to leave. From the late 1950s and early 1960s onward, Egypt redirected its relationship toward the Soviet Eastern Bloc to further freeze its relations with the western world. Under Nasser's socialism, nearly all the European and American films screened in Egypt were imported, sponsored, filtered, and quite often, censored, by the state. The Venice Biennale gave Shafei a rare opening to the outside world. The Biennale inspired her to enter the field of television documentaries, and she launched a series called *Safahat min al-tarikh* (Pages from History), reports of her travels and ethnographic discoveries from all over Egypt, showing all the monuments, temples, churches, and mosques she visited. This was another enriching experience. However, by the time of her retirement she was happy to leave. Over the years there had developed a strong disagreement with one of her directors, and she was getting tired of working for the Egyptian state apparatus.

Shafei's retirement coincided with her husband's death after a long struggle with cancer. This loss left a profound vacuum, which Shafei filled by reinventing what she calls her second career. She had more time, and her friendship with Petridis developed into a collaboration to expand Safarkhan from its original role as an antique shop. Shafei began with a corner in the shop where she exhibited paintings, among other items. Recalling this early period, Shafei has said, "I have no shame when it comes to searching for artworks in the streets, not even after being director of a television channel with three hundred persons under my control; all that had no meaning, it was all nonsense. . . . It is how to search for art that counts, and persistence. . . . I read a lot, I read Moukhtar el-Attar. He had written about promising young painters who were unknown at that time, and I searched for them. I knew what

I was looking for. . . . I had the eye and the knowledge, this was my trump card. I was ready to go to the ends of the earth to find what I wanted."

Shafei divides her experiences as an art dealer into three phases. During the first period she roamed and searched on an individual basis in the market, and her success began with private sales to individuals. In the second phase, she focused on bringing to light the pioneers of modern Egyptian art and the generation that followed them. The third phase was to pursue a role in discovering young talents, for the simple reason that the market was becoming saturated with the pioneers.

I had organized an exhibition of the pioneers. Mohammed 'Awad, a friend of mine from Alexandria, sent me his friend the Saudi millionaire Sa'id Farsi who purchased the entire exhibition. There was a material reward and I do not hide that this was a great incentive. . . . I started to feel the importance of the material reward and it increased my interest and incited me to work harder. . . . in acquiring art.

Clearly however, this would not have been possible had not Shafei started to purchase paintings, stock them, and resell them after a well-calculated interval. This is typical of any art dealer or intermediary. Shafei's success lay in her ability to judge what to buy, when to buy it, and when to sell it.

The Next Generation

Shafei's searches led her to travel to Alexandria to visit Mahmoud Saïd, who had a villa in San Stefano quarter, and Effat Naghy, whose Italianate villa was located in the Muharram Bey district. Shafei recalls the villa vividly, because the first time she visited Naghy, in the late 1980s, she was struck by the beauty of the garden and the quantity of objects Naghy had collected over the years: a huge collection of folk artefacts, talismans, amulets, witchcraft items, pharaonic and Roman statues, and paintings. Several of her paintings depict *al-rajul al-maskhut*, a dwarfish male figure belonging to popular culture. Shafei stayed with her several days after pur-

chasing some paintings; she recalls that Naghy's villa was like a treasure trove, and describes the artist as a Francophile, isolated in an ivory tower, who had acquired her knowledge of Egyptian and African folk art and magic, not by making grass-roots contacts (she was not good at that), but by thorough archival research. Effat shared these interests with her husband, the artist Saad el-Khadem.

Effat Naghy's husband, Saad el-Khadem,¹⁵ was also an artist, but is best known for his long and thorough research on the history of traditional dress in the Middle East. He also wrote a book about his wife's brother, Mohamed Naghy, another artist with a strong interest in folk culture. Saad el-Khadem traveled all over Egypt, to country towns such as Minia and Akhmim, collecting all kinds of objects ranging from tools to donkey carts, textiles to talismans—all of which were in their villa. Shafei explains that when Effat Naghy died, after experiencing financial difficulties in her old age, her villa was nearly torn down by the state, but this was prevented due to the efforts exerted by the High Council of Preservation of Old Buildings in Alexandria.

As more and more of the works by the early modern painters were sold, Shafei started looking again into her files and documents. "The more I sold the pioneers' works, the fewer there were left, so I turned my attention to artists who were less well-known." This meant the generation that followed the pioneers, which included artists like Nahmeya Saad, Shaaban Zaky, Kamal Khalifa, Ervand Demirdjian, and Mohamed Ismail.

Nahmeya Saad was a painter-decorator who died at the untimely age of thirty. According to Aimé Azar his works were not numerous, but in 1937 he was commissioned to do two huge paintings for the main façade of the Egyptian pavilion at the Exposition Internationale in Paris.¹⁶

Shafei rediscovered him and is proud to own several of his paintings, which she managed to acquire from members of his family.

Shafei says it was from Sidqi el-Gabakhangî's work on Egyptian art that she discovered Shaaban Zaky. It took considerable research to track him down, but one of her younger employees, who was acquainted with the town of Helwan, helped her to trace his family. Shafei recalls visiting his house in Helwan about fifteen years ago to meet his nephew, who was the sole inheritor of his paintings. Shaaban Zaky a railroad station employee,

was a self-taught artist, apart from some distance education courses in art from Chicago University. He was a friend of Saad el-Khadem and Hidayet Chiraz and a close friend of the 'poet of the Nile,' Hafez Ibrahim (1872–1932). Zaky became known in Cairene art circles for his articles in the Egyptian magazine, *Apollon*.

To Shafei's amazement, Zaky's house was filled with his abundant output. His library, too, remained intact. She had discovered a treasure. Over the years, a few at a time, she bought about thirty paintings from Shaaban Zaky's nephew, which she would exhibit later in her life. In 1999 *al-Musawwar* magazine published an article by Moukhtar el-Attar entitled "al-Ra'id al-mansi Muhammad Shaaban Zaky (1899–1968)" (Shaaban Zaky, the Forgotten Pioneer (1899–1968)).¹⁷

The article was prompted by Sherwet Shafei's exhibition of works by Shaaban Zaky, some of which, the writer said, were being shown for the first time in Safarkhan. He added that Shafei had managed to obtain significant documents and personal letters that shed new light on Zaky's life. Zaky became known through his illustrations for *'Abir sabil* (A Wayfarer), a poem collection by Abbas Mahmud al-'Aqqad. Another illustration of his, accompanying a poem about sleep by Abu Shadi, was published in the magazine *al-'Usur*.¹⁸

He also wrote essays on the philosophy and pedagogy of art, and was one of the founders of Gam'iyyat Muhibbi al-Fann (The Society of Art Lovers) whose president was the renowned art collector Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil. Moukhtar el-Attar pointed out that while Zaky had been recently discovered by rich collectors like the Saudi Mohamed Sa'id Farsi, none of his paintings were to be found in the Egyptian Museum of Modern Art.

And what about Kamal Khalifa (1926–68)? According to Liliane Karnouk, "his legacy is small" though he turned out to be "a major figure during the new expressionist 1980s."¹⁹

Shafei, on the other hand, maintains that Khalifa left an abundant output (including, she asserts, numerous sketchbooks), much of which she succeeded in purchasing from his sister 'Adalat, who lived in Cairo's Bab al-Luq district. Khalifa remained quite poor to the end of his life. Shafei organized at least four exhibitions of his work and sold numerous

watercolors, not only to rich collectors, but also to intellectuals, who as a group seemed most to appreciate his work.

Shafei then moved on to search for the works of Youssef Sida. She recalls that his widow refused to meet her for four or five years, until as a result of Shafei's persistence they finally met in 1996. Shafei purchased many of his paintings and eventually obtained his widow's endorsement for an exhibition, which took place in April 1999. "It was a great success, until his children told me to stop selling his work and so I did."

As for Shafei's close friend, the sculptor Salah Abdel Kerim (1925–88), she describes him as a genius, "the incarnation of modernity itself." Earlier, Salah Abdel Kerim had designed the Channel Two logo specifically for her. After obtaining a diploma in Italy he specialized in theater design and went on to produce spectacular glass and metal work. She recalls the following:

Salah Abdel Kerim exhibited at the Biennale of San Paulo in 1963. . . . His welded metal sculpture appeared in a Larousse art dictionary. His work *Form and Energy* was exhibited along with works by Picasso and Müller. I remember that his exhibition at Safarkhan on January 16, 2001 produced a long queue of people unable to enter the packed gallery. Abd al-Kerim had many students, he was very generous, and he had a great impact. He was the friend of the poet and writer Salah Jahin, who wrote a poem entitled "*Agabi eli khalla el-hadid yitkallim*" (My Wonder at He Who Made Metal Speak). He worked with secondhand welded iron, *hadid al-khurda*. He was the costume designer for several Tawfiq al-Hakim plays and was such a creative person.

Abdel Kerim's widow Catherine was initially quite resistant to the idea of selling her husband's work, but again, Shafei showed persistence. "I made an exhibition of all his metal sculpture. I finally persuaded his French wife Catherine to let me put on the exhibition and it was done to coincide with the publication of a book about the artist." The minister of culture and the French embassy both collaborated in the production of this book.

Mahmoud Saïd Takes Part in Shafei's Second Life

The Artist

There is in each hand that refuses to obey
There is in each man's hand who carves out a story
The body of a woman who refuses to die.²⁰

—Henri El Kayem

The Town

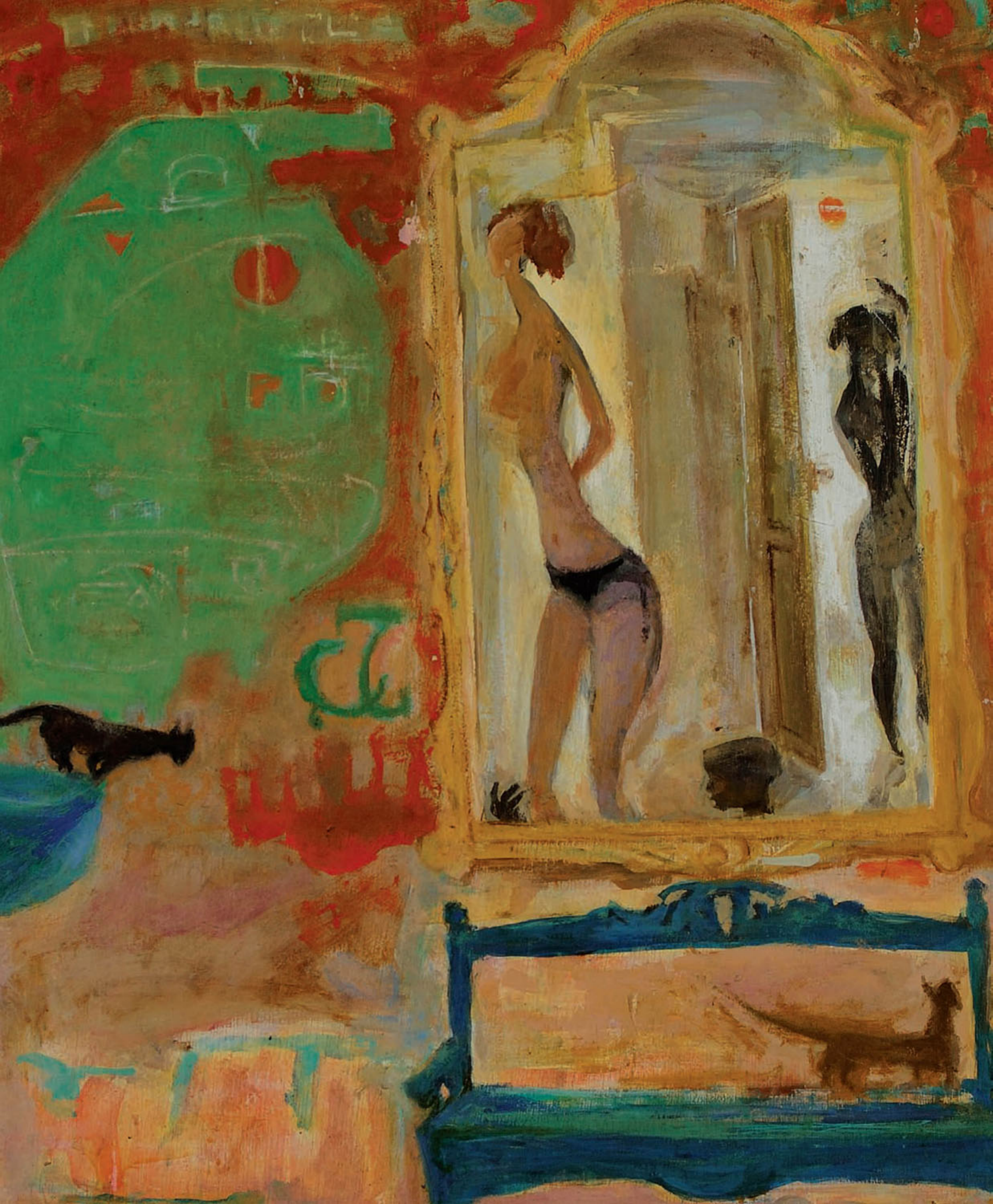
When the towns have lost every trace of our dwellings,
every fanciful outline of our pastimes (nothing in the night
will warn of the shadows' ascending glide), when the towns
have shut themselves up with their screams, when women
at long last show their mettle, the gorgeous Girls of Bahari
will again pass in the night.²¹

—Henri El Kayem

What I am searching for is inner light, not surface light.²²

—Mahmoud Saïd, in a letter addressed to Monsieur
Martin, 1927, Courtesy of Sherwet Shafei.

When Shafei visited Mahmoud Saïd in his villa in the San Stefano district of Alexandria, along with a television crew and the program's team leader, Salah Taher, she was much impressed by the artist's civility and modesty to everyone, whether it was the cameraman, mechanic, or driver. She also recalls how he took her on a tour around the villa and showed her his voluminous production and his artistic preferences. Gabriel Bocator's short biography of Mahmoud Saïd mentions that,²³ like his fellow-artists Sherif Sabri and Ahmad Rasim, he came from an upper-class Egyptian family ("grandes familles égyptiennes"). All three learned painting, not by attending the established art schools, but by taking private lessons with the Italian painter Arthuro Zanieri, who lived in Alexandria. Bocator recalls visiting Saïd in his villa in San Stefano, which the artist had hardly altered after inheriting it from his father. At that time, Saïd, who had studied law, was working as a judge in the mixed courts; however, he had clearly opted for a life dedicated to art.²⁴



The Collection

with collector's notes *by Sherwet Shafei*



SAID
1947

The Pioneers

It was out of the hard work and persistence of the pioneers that modern Egyptian art was born. Credit is also due to Prince Youssef Kamal, who in 1908 both financed and founded the School of Fine Arts in Darb al-Gamamiz. Particularly important in this regard is the role of the great sculptor, Mahmoud Mokhtar, who revived the art of sculpture in Egypt following its disappearance four hundred years after the pharaonic era. The pioneers, under the tutelage of French and Italian professors, founded the schools of impressionism and expressionism, the techniques of which were passed down to subsequent generations of artists. The pioneers undertook the mission of reviving the Egyptian personality and spirit in their art. They also recorded the great political events that took place in Egypt at the beginning of the twentieth century, following the 1919 revolution under the leadership of Saad Zaghloul. Mahmoud Moukhtar's monumental *Egyptian Awakening* in front of Cairo University stands as solid proof of this. It was due to the pioneers that modern Egyptian art found international acclaim and recognition: Mokhtar received an award from France and some of his works are on display in French museums; Mohamed Naghy founded the Egyptian Academy of Fine Arts in Rome; while Mahmoud Saïd has succeeded in creating his own powerful school of art, since his works have become some of the most sought after by an Egyptian artist in the world to this day. In brief, the pioneers paved the way for a new generation of Egyptian artists.

Page 30: Hamed Nada, *In the Mirror* (detail). Oil on wood, 1979. See page 137.

Opposite: Mahmoud Saïd, *The Donkey* (detail). Oil on wood, 1927. See page 39.



Mahmoud Mokhtar (1891–1934)

The dawn of an Egyptian renaissance.

Left: Mahmoud Mokhtar, The Jar Bearer.

Sculpture, 14 x 39 x 14cm.

Beauty and grace are personified in the Egyptian *fellaha* filling her jar from the waters of the Nile. For Mokhtar she symbolized Egypt, the power of the sculpture lying in its fluid movement through minimal lines, the *fellaha*'s anatomy nevertheless evident through her garment. The pioneers were intellectually committed to the portrayal of daily Egyptian life in their art, particularly that of working women, as we shall see with Mahmoud Saïd and Ragheb Ayad.

Mahmoud Saïd (1897–1964)

The legendary artist.

“Where magic is renewable every day in his work”—from the private diary of artist Ramsis Younan, who was fascinated by Mahmoud Saïd and visited him monthly.

Right: Mahmoud Saïd, Naima. Oil on canvas, 85 x 108cm, 1925

Saïd produced four paintings when he was close to death: *Naima*, *The Prophet*, *Before the Burial*, and *After the Burial*. This is a monumental structure portraying Naima in the form of a pyramid, her posture akin to that of a Madonna mourning her beloved. Saïd was known for his inclusion of architectural forms in his compositions. The background is a stunning composition of the cemeteries of Bacos in Alexandria, the light in the background showing exceptional artistry and accomplishment. Saïd was a spiritual man, and a minaret is always in evidence in the background of his paintings.









1968





R. AYAO
1961

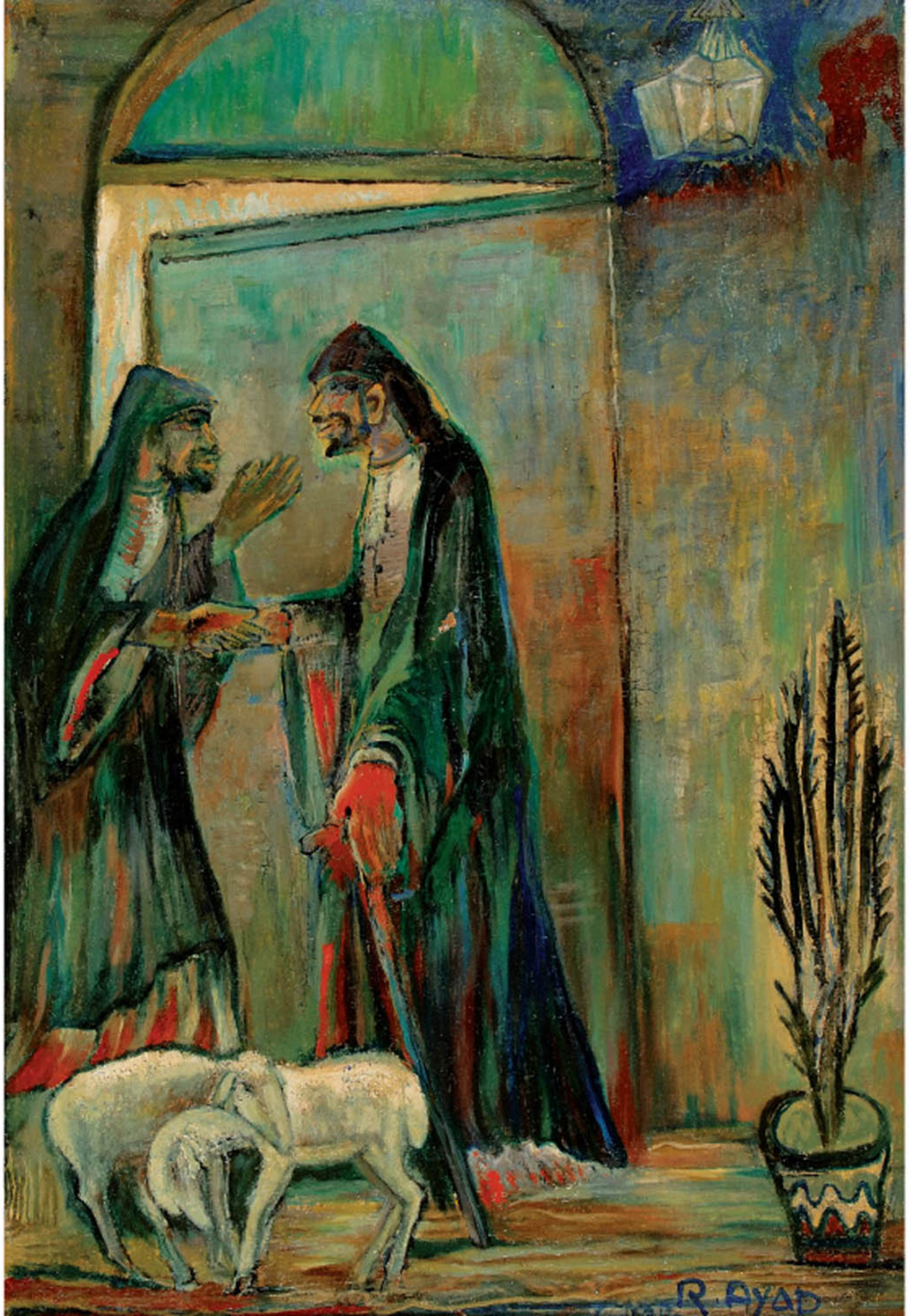


Above: **Ragheb Ayad, *Chanting***. Oil on wood, 46 x 55cm, 1961.
 Note the old musical instruments used by the priests, set against the simple yet magnificent architecture of the old Coptic churches of Egypt. Ayad's message in this painting seems to be that despite the harshness and solitude of the monk's life, there is nevertheless contentment, serenity, and a strong belief in fate.



Right: **Ragheb Ayad, *Laboring by the Nile***. Oil on wood, 54 x 100cm, 1980.
 Ayad painted this just two years before he passed away. He renders this oil painting in the style of a pencil drawing. The same pharaonic style of rows is used, beginning with the Nile, the *sacra*, and the two oxen followed by the peasant working the land.

Opposite: **Ragheb Ayad, *Encounter***. Oil on wood, 62 x 92cm, 1980.
 A lively conversation between two monks in front of a monastery. The same relationship is echoed between the two lambs in the bottom left of the painting.





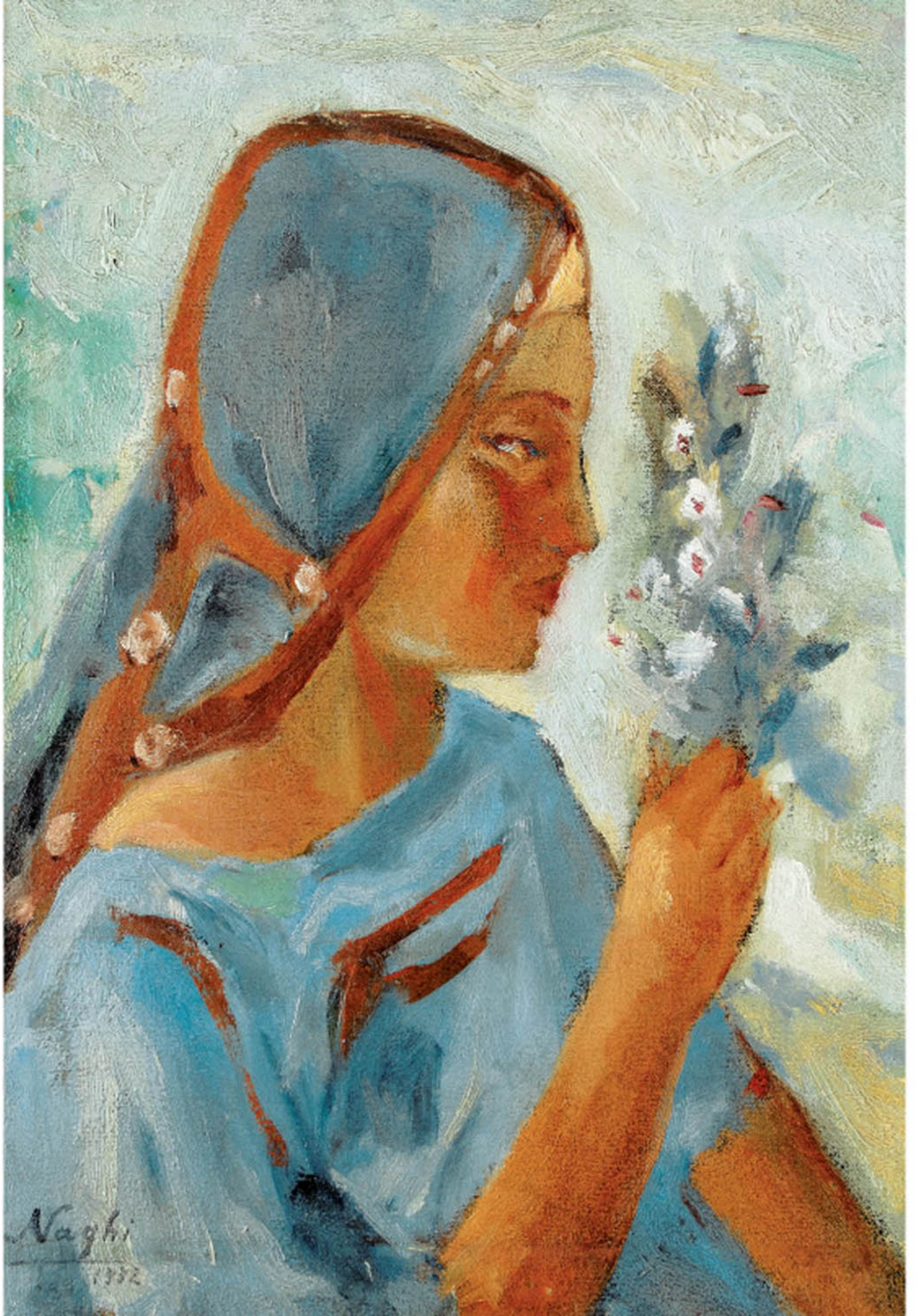
Ragheb Ayad, *Music of the Pharaohs*. Oil on canvas, 300 x 86cm, 1935.

A strong composition of Egyptian musicians, with an emphasis on their musical instruments and their transparent attire, painted in a row similar to the bas-relief of pharaonic temples. The faces are the exception because they are typical Ayad characters, the ones we see repeatedly in his drawings and paintings.



Ragheb Ayad, *The Dancing Horse and the Musicians of Upper Egypt*. Oil on board, 70 x 50cm.

The horse holds center stage in this painting, a vivid example of Ayad's expressionist inclinations. Its movement is majestic and graceful, the eyes of horse and rider appearing to meet in a dialogue of appraisal, while the musicians are absorbed in enchanting the horse with their music.



Naghi
1952



The Innovators

The innovators pushed out the boundaries inherited from the pioneers by introducing artists to new schools of art and techniques while making their own unique mark on each. It was due to El-Hussein Fawzi that the art of lithography was formally introduced into several art schools and academies in Egypt, its influence appearing in newspapers and publishing houses of the era. Another innovator was Georges Sabbagh, who was the first Egyptian to become integrated into the French art world at the beginning of the twentieth century. Emy Nemr was, similarly, a path breaker in the world of surrealism. Marguerite Nakhla, who recorded everyday Parisian life in her paintings nonetheless had a substantial impact on the next generation of Egyptian artists. This generation was followed closely by another: Effat Naghy excelled in the domain of assemblage and the use of different chemicals in her paintings. It was also during this era that artists began to define the elements of their paintings with the use of sharp-edged contours and we see this in the works of Ezz El Din Hamouda, Youssef Sida, and Saad el-Khadem. Salah Abdel Kerim used wrought iron and vehicle parts to make marvelous sculptures that received international awards. The efforts of Egyptian artists to record the land and people of Nubia before it was flooded by the Aswan High Dam were seen in the art of Tahia Halim, Seif Wanly, and Edham Wanly. Popular beliefs and folk tales and the revival of the Egyptian national conscience emerged in the works of Abdel Hadi el-Gazzar and Hamed Nada. The trend toward abstraction in this period can be found in the work of Fouad Kamel. Kamal Khalifa led the way in the realm of post-expressionism, while Mohamed Ismail's marvelous works took a deconstructionist approach.

Left: Effat Naghy, The Doll. Assemblage with antique fragments and semi-precious stones (detail), 1970. See page 85.



Youssef Sida (1922–94)

Sida is among the greatest of Egyptian artists and one of the first to join the Association of Modern Egyptian Art, headed by Youssef el-Afifi, in the 1950s.

Above: Youssef Sida, La Blanchisseuse Umm Sayyid. Oil on canvas, 108 x 112cm, 1959.

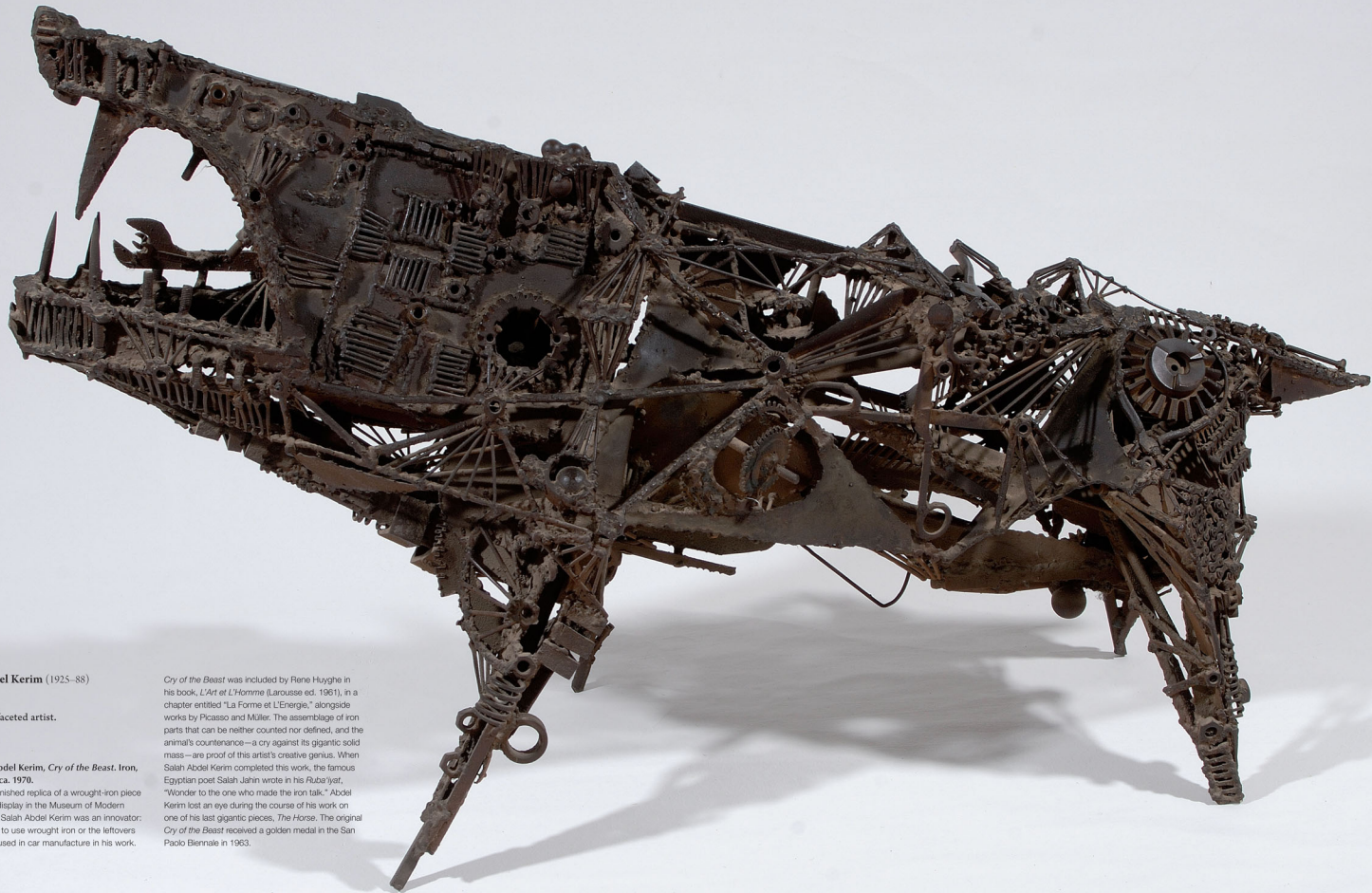
This painting was exhibited in 1959 as part of the Biennale of Alexandria III. The artist's skill is evident in his portrayal of the woman washing laundry. The choice of angle displays all the elements she requires to carry out her task, from the gas stove, the container of boiling water, and the soap, to the *qubqab* (old wooden slippers), lovely bathroom tiles, and not least her son, Sayyid, asleep peacefully beside her and covered with her *milaya laff* (traditional wrap). The artist employed bright colors, straight from the tube,

without mixing them. Another example of a great artist's focus on the daily lives of common Egyptians.

Right: Youssef Sida, The Divorce. Oil on canvas, 80 x 108cm, 1959.

Sida's preoccupation with the status of the common Egyptian woman is often evident in his art, as here, where women are seen holding their divorce documents. The anguish in their faces and their children's misery is accentuated by the dominance of black and the accompanying bright, hard-edged colors.





Salah Abdel Kerim (1925–88)

The multi-faceted artist.

Left: Salah Abdel Kerim, *Cry of the Beast*, Iron, 165 x 75cm, ca. 1978.

This is an unfinished replica of a wrought-iron piece currently on display in the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art. Salah Abdel Kerim was an innovator: the first artist to use wrought iron or the leftovers of iron parts used in car manufacture in his work.

Cry of the Beast was included by Frene Huyghe in his book, *L'Art et L'Homme* (Larousse ed. 1961), in a chapter entitled "La Forme et L'Energie," alongside works by Picasso and Müller. The assemblage of iron parts that can be neither counted nor defined, and the animal's countenance—a cry against its gigantic solid mass—are proof of this artist's creative genius. When Salah Abdel Kerim completed this work, the famous Egyptian poet Salah Jahin wrote in his *Ruba'iyat*, "Wonder to the one who made the iron talk." Abdel Kerim lost an eye during the course of his work on one of his last gigantic pieces, *The Horse*. The original *Cry of the Beast* received a golden medal in the San Paolo Biennale in 1963.



Seif Wanly (1906–79)

The Alexandrian painter who remained faithful to his city, melting pot of the different civilizations of the Mediterranean and one-time model of cosmopolitanism. His paintings reveal a heightened sensitivity to his subject matter, omitting many of the details in human figures and in objects to convey a bold expression of his cultural milieu as well as that of the common life.

Above: Seif Wanly, The Theater. Oil on wood, 41 x 27cm, 1950.

Right: Seif Wanly, Danseuse Assise. Oil on wood, 72 x 74cm, 1949.

Seif Wanly was a big fan of the theatrical scene in Alexandria during the 1950s and 1960s, even becoming a close friend of some of the ballerinas and maestros. In this painting he depicts the dancer resting on a bench after a strenuous rehearsal. The light overweighs the ballerina, who is the painting's focal point. There are few details but emphasis is placed on the desire to ease the pain in the dancer's feet. The artist's power lies in the ballerina's compelling expression and the use of a highly condensed color scheme to draw attention to the painting's subject.



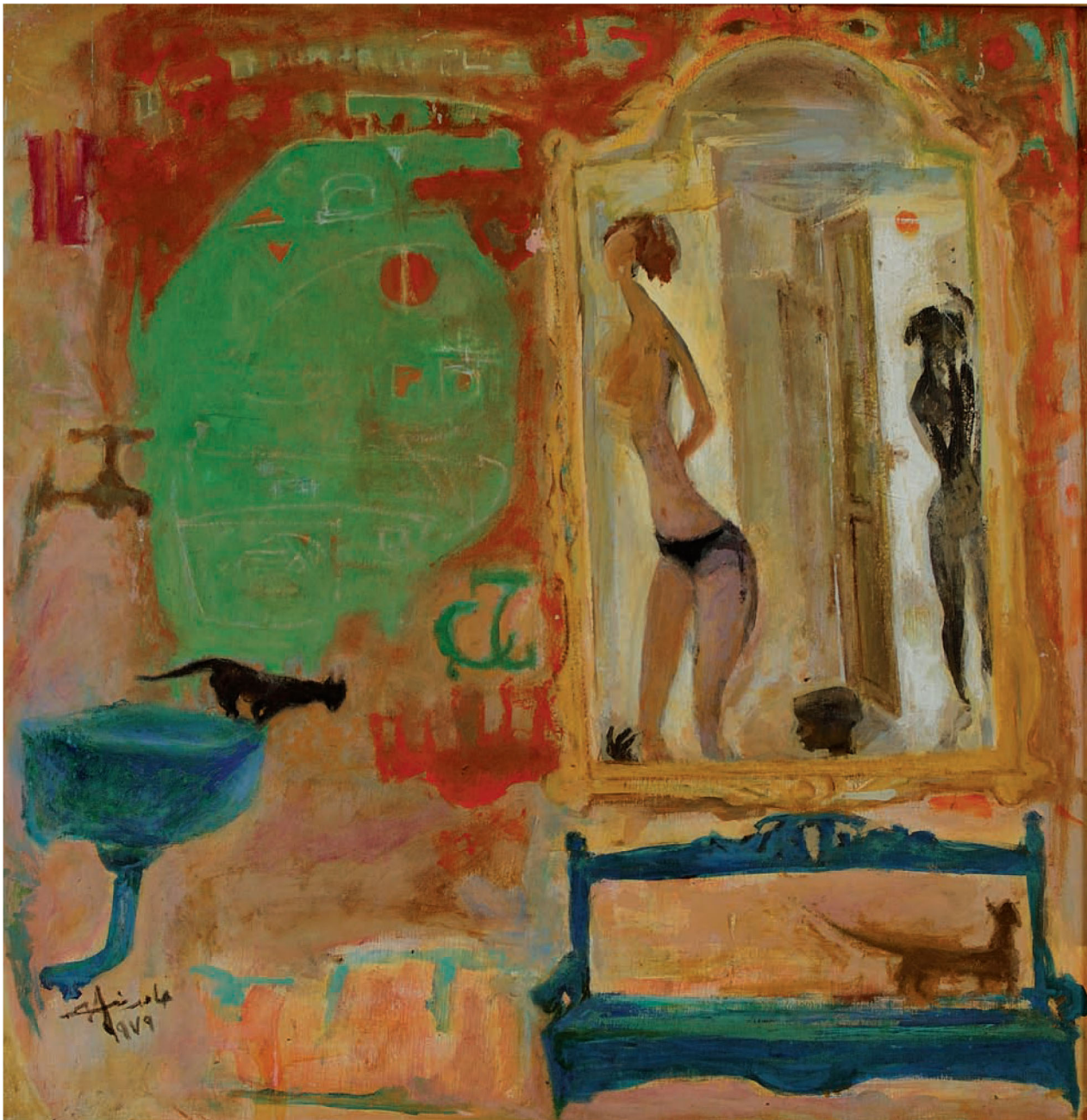


Edham Wanly, *Procession of Mulid al-Nabi*. Oil on wood, 40 x 27cm, 1952.





H. Mardak

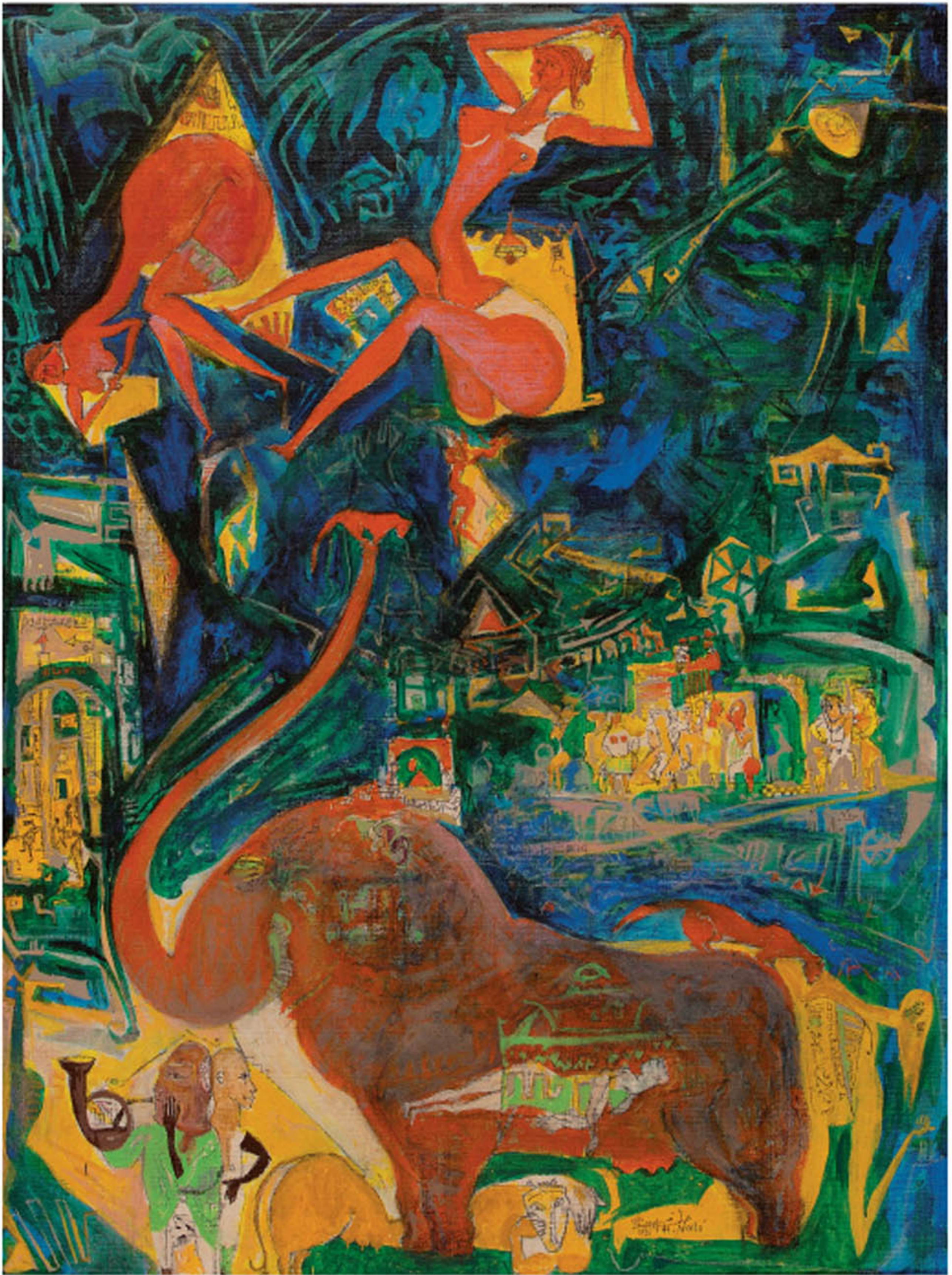


Left: **Hamed Nada, *Dialogue***. Oil on canvas, 55 x 75cm.

Another work of art by Nada featuring a rich background full of symbols and textures like that of old murals. The rooster at the top is announcing a new day. The human figures are completely distorted and the whole composition is starkly allegorical and replete with popular mysticism.

Above: **Hamed Nada, *In the Mirror***. Oil on wood, 70 x 70cm, 1979.

The world of Hamed Nada is shown in two parts in this painting. In the right part we find two female figures enclosed within a mirror's frame, with only the head and hand of a man trying to reach one of them. Beneath the mirror we find the all-pervasive bench with the cat at play on it. The left side of the painting is a colorful and magical piece of art, rich with symbols. The two Arabic letters stand for the word love, and the sink and the tap represent the continuity of life.







From the Orientalists to Egypt's Foreign Artists

It was through the orientalists that we became aware of the essence and magic of the orient and the way in which they discovered and translated that essence to their works. They were enchanted by the light of the orient, and the civilization, traditions, and architecture of Egypt whether it was pharaonic, Coptic, or Islamic. They recorded their work in magnificent paintings, sculptures, and lithographs. The works by orientalist and foreign painters who lived in Egypt include some by Ervand Demirdjian, Pierre Beppi-Martin, Roger Bréval, Charles Boeglin, Nicola Forcella, and Milo De Ross. Their works recorded scenes from everyday life in Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor, and Aswan as well as the Nilotic scenery that was predominant in their work. Scenes of café life and market places provide examples of how Egyptians as well as foreigners lived in Egypt at the turn of the twentieth century. These artists highlighted the beauty of the Egyptian countryside and similarly depicted the various parts of Fatimid Cairo, its souks, mosques, *wikalas*, and alleyways, in an enchanting manner that remains their most enduring legacy to the world of modern Egyptian art, at both the local and international levels.

*Opposite: Milo De Ross,
The Ruins of Thebes (detail).
Watercolor. See page 208.*

Twentieth-Century Egyptian Art

The Private Collection of Sherwet Shafei



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