MEI
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El Marsam

المَرْسَم

Modern and Contemporary Art from Egypt

September 17–December 11, 2026
THE MEI ART GALLERY



El Marsam: Modern and Contemporary Art from Egypt is curated by Heba El Kayal and produced by the Middle East Institute's (MEI) Arts and Culture Center.

Lead funding for *El Marsam* comes from Naguib Sawiris, who has also generously loaned artworks to the exhibition. Major funding is provided by Hassan Allam and David and Gretchen Welch. The exhibition is also generously supported by Demi Angelakis Pearson and John Pearson, Teresa Barger, and Habib Gorgi.

MEI wishes to thank the donors, lenders, and supporters whose generosity made this landmark exhibition possible.

COVER IMAGE

Samir Rafi
***Les Trois Amis*, 1954**
Oil on board
27.125 x 19.25 in
Courtesy of Naguib Sawiris

BROCHURE DESIGN

Larry Issa

El Marsam

المَرْسَم

Modern and Contemporary Art from Egypt

CURATED BY HEBA EL KAYAL
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MEI Art Gallery
1763 N St NW, Washington, D.C. 20036
Monday–Friday | 10:00AM–5:00PM
www.mei.edu/arts-and-culture-center
@meiartsculture

ABOUT THE CURATOR



Heba El Kayal is a curator, writer, and researcher specializing in modern and contemporary art from the Middle East and Africa.

She holds a BA in English and Comparative Literature from the American University in Cairo, an MA in Modern Art History and Curatorial Studies from Columbia University, and a Postgraduate Diploma in Law (PGDL). She is currently pursuing a PhD at Goldsmiths, University of London, where her research investigates the ethics and politics of private collections in relation to state and institutional collections. She serves on the advisory boards of ArteEast, New York; Strauss Auction House, South Africa; and the ARAK Collection in Doha.

Heba has worked across Dubai, Beirut, New York, and London in a range of art-related roles. Throughout her career, she has consulted for auction houses and private collectors, collaborating with both emerging and established artists from the region. She frequently speaks on artist estate preservation, modern and contemporary Middle Eastern and African art, and the importance of institutional collaboration across the African continent. Her research and professional practice examine the relationships between collecting, ownership, cultural stewardship, and institutional power.

CURATORIAL ESSAY

***El Marsam: Modern and Contemporary Egyptian Art* introduces the rich, evolving landscape of Egyptian visual culture, from the 1930s to today.**

Rather than an exhaustive survey, the exhibition brings together works that illuminate key artistic movements, developments, and recurring themes that have shaped Egyptian art. Whether referencing the golden age of Egyptian cinema, the feminist movement led by Doria Shafik, the postcolonial nationalism that followed the 1952 Revolution, or the regional challenges of today, artists have examined these shifts through the development of a distinct Egyptian aesthetic informed by local visual language.

Spanning generations, practices, and perspectives, these works offer glimpses into the complex ways artists have engaged with Egypt's socio-political histories, landscapes, identities, and changing social realities. Together, they trace the continuities and transformations that have shaped the country's visual culture—from roots in ancient Egyptian, Coptic, and Islamic art, through the emergence of a modernist movement that sought to articulate a distinct Egyptian visual vernacular, to the present day.

Across painting, photography, sculpture, drawing, installation, and video, the artworks reflect artists' sustained engagement with questions of identity, memory, place, heritage, and modernity. From representations of Egypt's landscapes and everyday life to more personal and speculative explorations of history and belonging, the exhibition reveals the ways artists have continually negotiated the relationship between the inherited and the contemporary.

By including the word *Marsam* in the exhibition's title—the Arabic word for 'studio'—the exhibition aims to highlight the artist's space not only as a site of creativity and artistic production but as a context for learning, knowledge exchange and mentorship—a central tenet of the development of Egyptian visual art tradition. Many of the artists displayed in the exhibition engaged with one another as teachers, mentors and pupils, such as the modernist Hassan Soliman and his longtime student Samir Fouad, or the photographers Van Leo and Youssef Nabil. Whether these relationships existed within a studio, as with Soliman and Fouad, or were built on historic influence and inspiration, as with Fathy Mahmoud and Yasmine El Meleegy, various threads of artistic influence run through the development and history of modern and contemporary Egyptian art.

Bringing together works from different moments in Egypt's artistic history and those of the artists' personal lives, *El Marsam* invites connections across time rather than presenting a single linear narrative. The exhibition considers how images, materials, traditions, and memories are carried forward, transformed, and reimagined, offering a glimpse into the continuing evolution of Egyptian visual culture.

Crucially, the exhibition endeavors to showcase a longstanding tradition of the visual arts in Egypt, a tradition whose modernist artists have been gaining increased global recognition in museum exhibitions and publications in recent years, and whose contemporary artists today receive critical recognition both home and abroad for their unique artistic expressions and voices.

ABOUT THE MEI ART GALLERY

The MEI Art Gallery is Washington, DC's premier platform dedicated to modern and contemporary art, video, and photography from the Middle East and North Africa.

A cornerstone of the Middle East Institute's Arts and Culture Center, the gallery presents two to three exhibitions annually in collaboration with guest curators, illuminating themes and narratives from across the region. Each exhibition is complemented by artist talks, panel discussions, film screenings, and workshops that deepen engagement with the work on view and foster dialogue between Middle Eastern artists and Washington's art, cultural, and policy communities.

The MEI Art Gallery is free and open to the public on weekdays from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

ABOUT MEI

Established in 1946, the Middle East Institute is the nation's oldest organization focused solely on the Middle East and North Africa.

A nonpartisan policy and cultural institute, MEI combines rigorous analysis with public convenings, education, and programming, while also fostering cultural exchange and dialogue through its Arts and Culture Center.

LIST OF ARTISTS

Zeinab Abdel Hamid
Souad Abdelrasoul
Ibrahim Ahmed
Lara Baladi
Inji Efflatoun
Abdel Hadi El Gazzar
Yasmine El Meleegy
Nada Elkalaawy
Marianne Fahmy
Samir Fouad
Sherin Guirguis
Nermine Hammam
Huda Lutfi
Maha Maamoun
Mayo
Mohamed Monaiseer
Ahmed Morsi
Youssef Nabil
Hamed Nada
Effat Naghi
Ahmed Maher Raef
Samir Rafi
Mahmoud Saïd
Marcel Salinas
Youssef Sida
Gazbia Sirry
Hassan Soliman
Van Leo
Seif Wanly



Closed Shops, 1982
Ink and Watercolor
on hard paper
21.3 x 28.7 in
Courtesy of a Private Collection

ZEINAB ABDEL HAMID

1919–2002, Cairo, Egypt

Zeinab Abdel Hamid was a major figure among Egypt's modernist women artists. She was associated with the Contemporary Art Group, whose artists sought a visual language rooted in Egyptian culture while embracing modernity. Abdel Hamid transformed the changing Egyptian city into a dynamic subject, depicting Cairo's streets and cafés alongside ports, shipyards, and working communities. Often viewing scenes from above, she compressed and fragmented space to create energetic compositions that captured vitality and Egypt's social transformations. *Closed Shops* exemplifies her interest in ordinary urban life. Executed in ink and watercolor on hard paper, the subdued work depicts a setting at day's end, when shops have closed and city life slows. Unlike her often-celebratory works, it evokes a contemplative atmosphere. Abdel Hamid taught art at Helwan University and exhibited in Egypt and abroad. She represented Egypt at the 1958 Venice Biennale and was a finalist for the 1956 Guggenheim International Award.



***White Fish and a Woman's Face*, 2025**
Acrylic on canvas
17.7 x 25.6 in
Courtesy of the artist

SOUAD ABDELRASOUL

b. 1974, Cairo, Egypt

Souad Abdelrasoul works across painting, drawing, sculpture, and graphic design, developing a hybrid visual language in which human bodies merge with botanical, animal, and aquatic forms. Her surreal imagery and layered symbolism explore psychological and existential themes, challenging representations of the female body. *White Fish and a Woman's Face* reflects this vocabulary of transformation, and the fluid relationship between body, landscape, and psychological experience. The work reflects Abdelrasoul's interest in women's resilience and vulnerability. Water evokes the Nile as both a physical landscape and a metaphor for movement, survival, and renewal, connecting the individual body to cycles of transformation. Abdelrasoul has exhibited in Egypt and internationally since 1998. Her work is held in collections including the Chazen Museum of Art, Madison, Wis.; Worcester Art Museum, Mass.; and the Museum of Modern Art in Cairo. She was also featured in Phaidon's Great Women Painters (2022).



***Figure #54*, 2021**
From the *you can't recognize what you don't know* series, 2020–2021
Unique photo collage
9.7 x 15.4 in
Courtesy of TINTERA

IBRAHIM AHMED

b. 1984, Kuwait

Ibrahim Ahmed works across photography, mixed media, sculpture, and installation. His practice examines how social and cultural systems shape individual identity, contributing to conversations in modern Egyptian art. The featured works belong to the series *you can't recognise what you don't know*. Using photographic collages and documented performances, Ahmed cuts, layers, and reconstructs images of the male body to examine masculinity as a performed identity. Drawing on local photography studios, bodybuilding culture, mannequins, and Pharaonic and Greco-Roman sculpture, the series questions inherited ideals of manhood and the social construction of masculine power. Raised between Bahrain, Egypt, and the United States, Ahmed lives and works in Cairo. He has presented solo exhibitions across Cairo, Europe, and the United States, and participated in exhibitions including the Sharjah Art Museum, Dakar Biennial, Havana Biennial, and Biennale Internationale de Casablanca.



La Mere Noire, 2010
Diary of the Future Series
Digital photo-montage print
43.3 x 43.3 in
Courtesy of the artist
and Gypsum Gallery

LARA BALADI

b. 1969, Lebanon

Lara Baladi's practice explores myth, memory, archives, sociopolitical narratives, and history through photography, digital collage, video, sound, installation, tapestry, and sculpture. Rooted in collecting and reinterpreting images, her work transforms personal experiences and cultural traditions into visual languages. *La Mere Noire* belongs to her *Diary of the Future* series, created during her father's final months. Inspired by Arabic coffee-cup reading tradition, Baladi's father asked visitors to turn their cups upside down three times, tap twice, and inscribe them with name and date. She preserved and photographed the cups, transforming their traces into collages resembling arabesques, mandalas, and stained glass. The work connects mortality, memory, ritual, and collective experience, engaging with Egyptian traditions. Based in Cairo since 1997, Baladi has exhibited widely and her work is in museum collections in Europe, the U.S., and the Middle East. She received the Grand Nile Prize at the 2008–09 Cairo International Contemporary Art Biennale.



Oasis de Bahareya, 1987
Oil on canvas
27.6 x 19.7 in
Courtesy of a Private Collection

INJI EFFLATOUN

1924–1989, Cairo, Egypt

Inji Efflatoun was a major figure in Egyptian modernism whose practice developed alongside her feminist and communist politics. Influenced by Surrealism through her studies with Kamel El-Telmissany and the Art and Liberty movement, she developed a socially engaged visual language, focusing on women, workers, rural communities, and Egypt's inequalities. Her imprisonment from 1959 to 1963 for her social and political activism marked a turning point in her practice. After her release, her paintings adopted a brighter, dynamic palette, while maintaining her focus on ordinary Egyptians' lives and struggles. The 1955 *Untitled* reflects engagement with labor and rural life through figures, outlines, and a yellow foreground, characteristic of her brushwork. Efflatoun lived and worked in Cairo. She represented Egypt at the Venice Biennale in 1952 and São Paulo Biennale in 1953, with work held in the Museum of Egyptian Modern Art and Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.



The Snake Eater, **year unknown**
Oil on cardboard
8.3 x 26.7 in
Courtesy of Naguib Sawiris

ABDEL HADI EL GAZZAR

1925–1966, Alexandria, Egypt

Abdel Hadi El Gazzar was a pioneering figure in Egypt's modernist art movement and a leading advocate of Surrealism. As a member of the Group of Contemporary Art, his work developed through several stages. His early metaphysical paintings combined religious symbolism, folklore, and scenes from Cairo's moulid festivals. He later focused on the lives of the city's working class. After studying in Rome in the late 1950s, his art shifted towards industrialization, machinery, and Egypt's socialist projects under Nasser. *The Snake Eater* explores the human figure and humanity's symbolic and physical relationship with animals, while A Man and an Ewer reflects El Gazzar's interest in everyday Egyptian life. His distinctive symbols, including oversized hands and bulbous eyes, contributed to his style. By drawing on Egyptian traditions and daily life, El Gazzar helped redefine modern Egyptian art beyond Western conventions. Gazzar exhibited widely and received a Bronze Medal at the 1957 São Paulo Biennale.



Chamber of Commerce (Harvest), **2026**
Porcelain on Marmox board, wood, and binding
47.2 x 23.6 in
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

YASMINE EL MELEEGY

b. 1991, Cairo, Egypt

Yasmine El Meleegy is an artist and sculptor whose practice spans installation, writing, and site-specific intervention. Working with porcelain and industrial materials, she explores repair, preservation, and public monuments in Egypt. Her work considers how nationalism, labor, and collective memory embed in materials, while reflecting on porcelain's history in Egyptian art. *Chamber of Commerce (Harvest)* continues her engagement with porcelain as a historical record, drawing on Egyptian sculptor and industrialist Fathy Mahmoud (1918–1982). Inspired by his Chamber of Commerce mural of hands holding wheat, El Meleegy references Mahmoud's celebration of workers and farmers as symbols of self-sufficiency. Using shattered, reassembled porcelain from Mahmoud's factory, she transforms dinnerware into a meditation on craft, labor, and collective memory. Based in Cairo, El Meleegy has exhibited widely and received grants from the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, Mophradat, and Pro Helvetia.



The Pelican, 2024
Oil on canvas
5.9 x 5.9 in
Courtesy of the artist
and Gypsum Gallery

NADA ELKALAAWY

b. 1995, Alexandria, Egypt

Nada Elkalaawy's practice examines the boundaries between truth and fiction. Working in painting, she explores memory, presence and absence, belonging, and transformation. Drawing on family photographs, still lifes, and found images, she creates compositions where objects, shadows, and surfaces evoke histories while challenging fixed narratives. Her paintings, *The Pelican* and *the Statue*, reflect her interest in the emotional potential of domestic objects, porcelain and chinaware from homes. Through surfaces and cropped compositions, Elkalaawy isolates objects within spaces, transforming them into vessels of memory, narrative, and emotion. Her process creates a sense of nostalgia, suggesting histories embedded within domestic spaces. Emphasizing surface, scale, and detail, she brings temporalities, exploring memory shaped by perception and time. Elkalaawy lives and works between London and Cairo. She studied at the Slade School of Fine Art and Kingston University, exhibiting internationally, with residencies in Europe and Morocco.



Upon the Margins of Dream-Land, 2024
Jacquard-woven tapestry crafted from cotton
83.8 x 61.8 in
Courtesy of the artist
and Gypsum Gallery

MARIANNE FAHMY

b. 1992, Alexandria, Egypt

Based in Alexandria, Egypt, Marianne Fahmy's multidisciplinary practice spans film, installation, video, photography, sculpture, and mixed media. She explores identity, landscape, historical memory, and Egypt's environmental and socio-political futures, using seascapes and deserts as metaphors for topography and transformation. In *Upon the Margins of Dream-Land*, Fahmy imagines a future Alexandria transformed by rising seas and land subsidence, blending memory, myth, and speculative landscapes.Her film, *Laws of Ruins*, reimagines history through demolished water cisterns, considering them as sites of resistance, renewal, and collective memory. Archival and original footage connect political history with ecological change. Fahmy earned a BA in painting before joining MASS Alexandria. Her work has been exhibited widely, including at the Sharjah Biennial; MAXXI Museum, Rome; Manifesta 13, Marseille; and Havana Biennale. She received the 2021 Prince Claus Fund Seed Award.

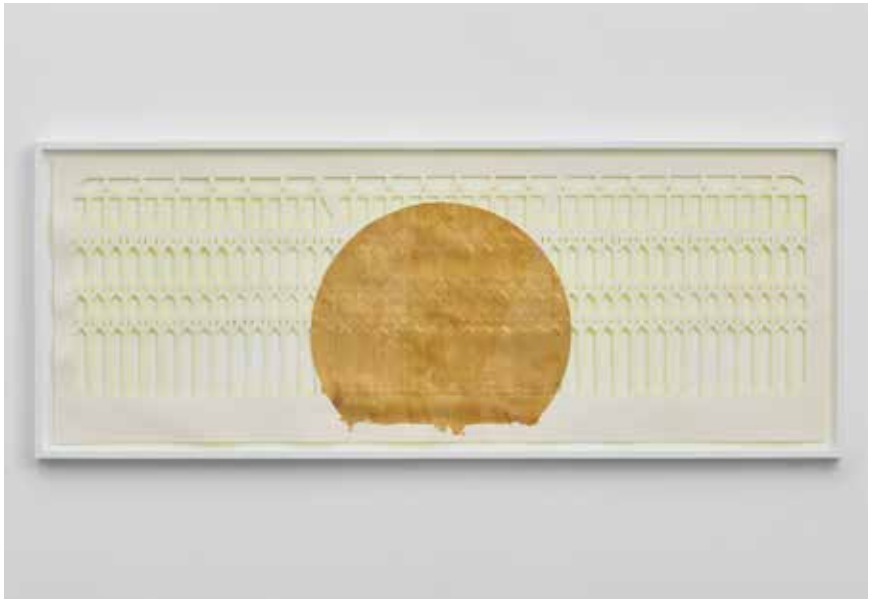


Three Brass Players, 2014
Oil on canvas, laid on board
63 x 47.2 in
Courtesy of the collection
of Samir Fouad

SAMIR FOUAD

b. 1944, Cairo, Egypt

Samir Fouad is regarded as one of Egypt's foremost watercolorists. His later oil paintings embrace an expressionist style that combines artistic heritage with modernism while remaining distinctly Egyptian. A central concern of his practice is time, which he conveys through movement—alongside his exploration of human existence and the relationship between music and visual art. *Three Brass Players* (2014) belongs to *Tonalities*, a series of musician paintings made between 2009 and 2014. The series explores the relationship between musical keys and color tones in painting. In this work, music becomes a metaphor for the human struggle against adversity: the players' frantic movements dissolve into their instruments, translating sound and energy into visual form. Based in Cairo, Fouad studied communications engineering at Cairo University before turning to art full-time in 2001. He has represented Egypt internationally and received a major retrospective from the Egyptian Ministry of Culture in 2018.



Azbakeya (Sun Disk), 2018
Acrylic and 24k gold leaf
on hand-cut paper
28 x 74 in
Courtesy of the artist and
Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

SHERIN GUIRGUIS

b. 1974, Luxor, Egypt

Sherin Guirguis's research-driven practice explores issues of power, agency, social transformation, and the recovery of marginalized histories, particularly women's. Drawing on history, architecture, craft traditions, language, and poetry, she brings overlooked narratives to light while highlighting under-recognized women's labor and contributions. *Azbakeya* (Sun Disk) extends Guirguis' exploration of Egyptian feminism through history and memory, focusing on activist Doria Shafik 1928 speech at Cairo's Azbakeya Gardens. The work references the gardens' fence through a hand-cut pattern. The sun motif draws on its history in Egypt, representing life, death, rebirth, as well as today's identity, visibility, and collective survival. Cutting paper reflects Guirguis' excavation of overlooked histories, while paint and gold leaf create tension between concealment and revelation. Based in Los Angeles, Guirguis has exhibited widely, including at Desert X AlUla; the Craft Contemporary Museum, Los Angeles; and Forever Is Now in Cairo.



The Break, 2011
Upekkha Series
Photography, digital collage
23.6 x 23.6 in
Courtesy of TINTERA

NERMINE HAMMAM

b. 1967, Cairo, Egypt

Nermine Hammam is a photo artist trained as a filmmaker at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. She turned to photography in the late 1990s, combining digital manipulation, painting, collage, and archival imagery. By reworking figures such as soldiers, icons, and wounded bodies, she disrupts their meanings and creates metaphors and symbolic associations. Her *Upekkha* Series, including *The Break* and *Dreamland I*, was created in the year following the 2011 Egyptian uprising. Hammam places photographs of soldiers from Tahrir Square within idyllic nineteenth-century pastoral postcards and eighteenth-century Japanese screens. This contrast between military power, violence, beauty, and leisure makes the soldiers appear vulnerable, introducing absurdity and visual tension. Hammam lives between Cairo and London. Her work has been exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art. She received the 2011 Freedom to Create First Prize.



The Knot, 2022
Found wooden shoe molds and flax strings
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

HUDA LUTFI

b. 1947, Cairo, Egypt

Huda Lutfi's practice draws on her background in cultural and gender history and contemporary Egyptian culture. Working with found objects and historical and spiritual references, she explores memory, identity, and Sufi traditions. In *The Knot*, Lutfi transforms discarded wooden shoe moulds from Cairo's old factories into a circular installation. Their repetition evokes the cyclical movement of Sufi dhikr chanting practice, suggesting a journey from the noise of urban life towards contemplation and stillness. In *Dawn Portraits*, Lutfi paints faces from memory in gouache and oil pastel on gold-leaf paper. Created at dawn, the cropped, androgynous portraits encourage introspection while challenging ideas of gender. Jewellery adds softness and ambiguity to their severity. The works reflect identity, memory, and Cairo's layered history. Based in Cairo, Lutfi has exhibited widely, with work held in major museums, including the British Museum, London, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.



2026, 2010
Single-channel digital video, black-and-white, sound
8 min., 21 sec.
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

MAHA MAAMOUN

b.1972, Oakland, California

Maha Maamoun is a Cairo-based Egyptian artist whose practice centers on photography and video, examining how images circulate through popular culture and shape personal and collective narratives. Through cropping, editing, juxtaposition, montage, and staged reconstruction, she recontextualises familiar images from cinema, media, and the public domain, exploring memory, history, national identity, and representation. Since 2007, the Pyramids of Giza have also been a recurring cultural and visual motif. In 2026, a time traveller recounts his vision of Egypt in the year 2026 by re-enacting a scene from Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962). His narration draws on Mahmoud Othman's Arabic science-fiction novel *The Revolution 2053—The Beginning* (2007), imagining a future that appears as an exhausted reformulation of the present. Maamoun has exhibited widely internationally at major institutions including the Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London; MoMA, New York, and at biennials and festivals worldwide.



Sanary-Sur-Mer, 1956
Oil on canvas
21.3 x 25.6 in (unframed)
Courtesy of the collection of Mr. Selim Gouda

MAYO (ANTOINE MALLIARAKIS)

1905–1990, Port Said, Egypt

Antoine Malliarakis, known as Mayo, was a Greek-Egyptian artist. Although he exhibited with Art and Liberty in Cairo, he resisted fixed affiliation, developing a personal visual language informed by realism, Surrealism, and poetry. His paintings possess a quiet, enigmatic quality, transforming landscapes and figures into vehicles for ambiguity, atmosphere, and poetic association. *Sanary-sur-Mer* presents a coastal landscape with broken strokes of blue, green, ochre, and pink to create movement across the surface while preserving the scene's stillness. Rather than documenting the landscape, Mayo transforms it into an atmospheric and psychologically charged space. Based in France and later Italy, Mayo worked as a costume designer for theatre and film. His work is held in museum and private collections, including the Museum of Egyptian Modern Art; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha; and the Barjeel Art Foundation. It has also featured in international exhibitions exploring modern Egyptian art and Surrealism.



I, Pet Lion (Galaxy Attack), 2025
Acrylic and ink on found fabric
20.5 x 14.6 in
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

MOHAMED MONAISEER

b. 1989, Cairo, Egypt

Mohamed Monaiseer is a contemporary artist whose practice examines colonial history, power, and conflict through objects and imagery from childhood play. Working across painting, embroidery, and khayamiya appliqué (Egyptian quilting), he combines the repetitive gestures of Islamic art with irregularities to question systems of control. His work considers how domination's aesthetics embed in everyday rituals, and how games, symbols, and mythology reflect political and historical structures. The *I, Pet Lion (Galaxy Attack)* series explores colonial history's influence on collective consciousness. Using found fabrics, Monaiseer transforms game and childhood imagery into metaphors for authority, warfare, and submission. The lion operates as protector and predator, highlighting power's contradictions. Referencing historical military banners and crests, the works evoke absurdities of ongoing conflicts—without naming contemporary warfare. Monaiseer lives and works in Cairo. The series was first presented by Gypsum Gallery at Art Basel Qatar in 2026.



Le Christ, 1957
Oil on wood
51.2 x 26.0 in
Courtesy of the collection of Ms. Mona Barakat

AHMED MORSI

b. 1930, Alexandria, Egypt

Ahmed Morsi is a pivotal figure in Egyptian art, working across painting, poetry, and literary criticism. His career spans modernist and contemporary phases. His enigmatic, surrealist imagery draws on symbolism, memory, dreams, and the subconscious, with Arabic poetry central to his language. Painting and poetry are interconnected, exploring existence, displacement, and human condition. *Le Christ* belongs to a period exploring symbolic, religious, folkloric, and human themes. The work reflects his interest in the human subject alluding to Fayoum portraiture, funerary paintings from Roman Egypt's early centuries CE. Morsi reworks this tradition through an enlarged face and saturated colors, anticipating his later work. Morsi lives between Egypt and the United States. He co-founded the avant-garde magazine, *Galerie '68*, and was the first Egyptian to design sets and costumes for the National Theatre. His work is held in collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York and the British Museum, London.



Say Goodbye, self-portrait, Alexandria, 2009
Exhibition print
19.7 x 29.5 in
Courtesy of Youssef Nabil and Mariane Ibrahim (Chicago, Paris, Mexico City)

YOUSSEF NABIL

b. 1972, Cairo, Egypt

Youssef Nabil is known for hand-colored photographic prints influenced by Egyptian cinema, vintage studio portraiture, and early film. A student of photographer Van Leo, Nabil incorporates references to his mentor while developing staged vignettes transforming memory into an imagined past. His work explores identity, nostalgia, exile, desire, and belonging, with Egypt reconstructed through memory and fantasy rather than presented as a place. In *Say Goodbye*, Nabil's departure from Egypt becomes a meditation on exile as he moves away from Alexandria, seen from behind, towards an uncertain horizon. The pyramid in the second work places him within an imagined Egyptian landscape, connecting identity with cultural and historical memory. Nabil has exhibited widely internationally. His works are in the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, LACMA, and the Louis Vuitton Foundation collections. His first retrospective, Once Upon a Dream, was held at Palazzo Grassi in Venice in 2020–21.



Untitled (Fishing Boats), 1984
Oil on canvas, laid on wood
33.9 x 26 in
Courtesy of the collection of Mr. Rashid Kamel

HAMED NADA

1924—1990, Cairo, Egypt

Hamed Nada was a central figure in Egypt's postwar modernist movement and member of the Group of Contemporary Art. Drawing on his childhood in Cairo's popular working-class neighbourhoods, he developed a distinctive visual language informed by folklore, spirituality, and the supernatural. His paintings combine stylised figures and symbolic imagery to explore everyday Egyptian life alongside its psychological and unseen dimensions. In *Untitled (Fishing Boats)* Nada allows figures and objects to occupy the surface almost symbolically, using distortion and simplification to give each element expressive weight. The fishing scene is a landscape of a rhythmic arrangement of interconnected forms. Nada studied mural painting at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in Madrid from 1960, returning to Egypt in 1962 to teach at the Faculty of Fine Arts. He became head of the Painting Department in 1977 and won the Grand Prize at the Alexandria Biennale in 1956 and 1962.



The Two Zodiac Signs, 1990
Oil and collage on board
49.6 x 33.8 in
Courtesy of a Private Collection

EFFAT NAGHI

1905–1994, Alexandria, Egypt

Effat Naghi was an important Egyptian modernist artist, born into a prominent Alexandrian family and sister of modernist pioneer Mohamed Naghi. Her artistic practice ranged from classical portraiture, landscapes, and still lifes to the abstract compositions for which she became best known. Her work was strongly influenced by Pharaonic art and architecture and Egyptian folk traditions, including astrology, black magic, voodooism, and talismanic writing. From the 1950s, Naghi increasingly explored spirituality, mysticism, and death through symbolic forms, abstracted Arabic script, and schematized shapes. *The Two Zodiac Signs* combines painting and collage, incorporating small scraps of paper covered swith tightly written Arabic script, evoking Egyptian black-magic practices involving spells and the burning away of fears. The work demonstrates Naghi's ability to merge modernist abstraction with Egyptian cultural traditions and visual heritage. She studied in Rome and Paris and exhibited internationally, including at the Venice and São Paulo Biennales.



Untitled, [date unknown]
Oil on canvas
33.1 x 44.9 in
Courtesy of the collection of Ms. Mona Barakat

AHMED MAHER RAEF

1926–1999, Cairo, Egypt

Ahmed Maher Raef was an Egyptian artist whose practice spanned painting, printmaking, and drawing. His early work, influenced by Surrealism and figuration, explored Egyptian rural life, popular beliefs, and working-class experiences. After studying printmaking at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, he embraced abstraction, incorporating Arabic letters and Sufi philosophy into his compositions. *Untitled* reflects the breadth of Raef's practice and his experimentation across media. Moving between figuration and abstraction, he used the human figure, geometric forms, and Arabic script to explore spirituality, psychology, tradition, and modernity. Raef returned to Egypt in 1961 and joined the Printmaking Department at the College of Fine Arts in Alexandria, becoming professor and head in 1975. He served as Dean from 1979 to 1986 before moving to the United States, where he died in New Jersey in 1999. He received the Mahmoud Mokhtar Award for Drawing in 1950 and represented Egypt at the 1980 Venice Biennale.



Les Trois Amis, 1954
Oil on board
27.1 x 19.2 in
Courtesy of the collection of Mr. Naguib Sawiris

SAMIR RAFI

1926–2004, Cairo, Egypt

Samir Rafi was a prominent figure in modern Egyptian art whose work moved between still life and Surrealist compositions. He explored themes including fertility, time, the human condition, and adversity. Figures and animals recur in his symbolic language. *Les Trois Amis* (1954) and *Man and Woman with Scorpio* (1988) reflect this interest in figurative subjects and symbolism. In *Les Trois Amis*, two men dressed as peasants or farmers sleep beside a snake, pairing human and animal figures. In his later work, Rafi Rafi depicted women alongside wolves, a motif interpreted variously as controversial imagery or, within Egyptian folklore, as a symbol of obstacles and deception. Rafi exhibited with the Surrealist group Art et Liberté from a young age and became a leading member of the Contemporary Art Group. After moving to Paris in 1954, he studied art history at the Sorbonne and continued to paint, exhibit, and write until his death in 2004.



Adam and Eve, 1937
Oil on panel
31.2 x 22 in
Courtesy of a Private Collection

MAHMOUD SAÏD

1897–1964, Alexandria, Egypt

Mahmoud Saïd was a pioneer of modern Egyptian art whose distinctive style influenced younger artists. He combined European Impressionism with ancient Egyptian traditions, including outlined figures and Pharaonic motifs drawn from vegetation, animals, and symbolism. His command of light brought vividness to scenes of the Egyptian countryside, the Nile, Alexandria, and its people. *Adam and Eve* (1937) is one of the few works to explore romantic relationships, and one of his rare references to religious iconography. He places the Biblical story within a lush Egyptian landscape beside the Nile. The statuesque figures echo the Amarna style of Ancient Egyptian sculpture, known for naturalistic, intimate representations with exaggerated almond-shaped eyes and prominent foreheads. Born into an aristocratic Alexandrian family, Saïd trained in law before studying in Paris and devoting himself to art. He exhibited internationally, including New York, Paris, and Venice, and received Egypt's State Merit Award for Arts in 1960.



Fengan Qahwa, c. early 1940s
Gouache on paper
3.9 x 5.3 in (unframed)
Courtesy of the collection
of Mr. Selim Gouda

MARCEL SALINAS

1913–2010, Alexandria, Egypt

Although born to a French mother and Italian father, Marcel Salinas was part of Alexandria's foreign-born community that identified as Egyptian. He developed a practice influenced by French painter and theorist André Lhote, and he emphasised form and color while exploring Cubism and Fauvism. *Fengan Qahwa*, meaning "cup of coffee" in Arabic, is a gouache on paper depicting a traditional Egyptian coffee pot with a cup and saucer. Through simplified, bold strokes, Salinas demonstrates his ability to articulate shape while balancing color, form, and composition. The everyday subject reflects the cultural exchange that characterised Egypt's artistic milieu in the early twentieth century. Following the 1952 Egyptian Revolution, Salinas settled in Paris, where he became an accomplished lithographer while continuing to paint. He later worked between Paris, New York, Brussels, and St. Louis. His collaborations with Picasso, Dalí, and Erté, alongside international exhibitions, attest to his significant contribution to modernist art.



Untitled, 1951
Oil on canvas laid on board
17.8 x 23.6 in
Courtesy of a Private Collection

YOUSSEF SIDA

1922–1994, Damietta, Egypt

Youssef Sida was associated with Egypt's modern art movement. His distinctive style is characterised by saturated colors applied thickly to the canvas, combining the simplicity of children's art with sophisticated expressionism. Early in his career, he explored Egyptian themes and scenes of everyday life, later turning to Arabic calligraphy and forms found in Egyptian motifs and decoration. *Untitled* (1951) belongs to this earlier period. The painting depicts a crowded artist studio or classroom, populated by figures, framed pictures, and wooden easels. Bold, unmixed outlines and color applied from the paint tube, give the scene an immediate, expressive quality. Beyond depicting a studio, the work offers a glimpse into modern Egypt's developing art world, where studios functioned as spaces for gathering, teaching, studying, and exchange. Sida earned a degree in 1945 and co-founded the Group of Modern Art in 1947. He later studied in the US on a Fulbright scholarship.



The Family, 1981
People and *Houses* Series
Oil on canvas
27.5 x 21.6 in
Courtesy of a Private Collection

GAZBIA SIRRY

1925–2021, Cairo, Egypt

Gazbia Sirry's work explores Egyptian identity and social change through the lives of women. A member of the Modern Art Group, founded in 1947, she combined Western pictorial techniques with references to Pharaonic, Coptic, and local Egyptian traditions. Her paintings frequently addressed women, working-class communities, nationalism, and social justice. Both *The Family* (1981) and *Untitled* (date unknown) center female figures. In *The Family*, the mother is the largest figure, with two children and a male figure turning their gaze toward her, emphasizing her central role within the family and, metaphorically, Egyptian society. In *Untitled*, a nude female body emerges from a whirl of abstracted faces, her exaggerated anatomy evoking a mother who births, feeds, and sustains society. Sirry's recurring depictions of motherhood reflected her own difficulty conceiving, while challenging patriarchal expectations. Based in Cairo, she studied in Europe and exhibited internationally for decades, representing Egypt in the Venice, São Paulo, and Alexandria Biennales.



Musicians, c. 1960s–80s
Oil on board
49 x 75 in
Courtesy of the Private Collection of Laila Hassan Soliman, from the Estate of Hassan Soliman

HASSAN SOLIMAN

1928–2008, Cairo, Egypt

Hassan Soliman came of age as an artist during the 1952 Egyptian Revolution, which overthrew the monarchy and ended British rule. Part of a generation of activist artists, he sought to develop a national identity rooted in Egyptian tradition, free from Western influence. His paintings of still life, portraiture, landscape, and historic Islamic Cairo are characterised by a minimal, subdued palette and sensitive use of light and shadow. In *Musicians*, Soliman depicts a troupe playing traditional reed instruments and drums associated with moulids, or saint celebrations. While these musicians usually evoke celebration and fanfare, Soliman's sombre palette and restrained composition create disappointment and melancholy. The painting was likely made in response to Egypt's defeat by Israeli forces in 1967, an event that deeply affected his generation. Soliman graduated from Cairo's School of Fine Arts in 1951 and exhibited in many Alexandria Biennales and the 1966 Venice Biennale.



Self Portrait, 1950
Print on Hahnemühle
Photo Rag
10 x 13.5 in
Courtesy of the Rare Books
and Special Collections Library,
The American University of Cairo

VAN LEO

b. 1921, Ceyhan, Turkiye–d. 2002, Cairo, Egypt

Born Levon Boyadjian in present-day Türkiye to an Armenian family, Van Leo moved to Egypt as a child and became a significant figure in modern Egyptian photography. He studied at the American University in Cairo in 1939–40 before pursuing photography professionally. His studio practice drew on cinematic lighting, Hollywood's glamour, and Egypt's emerging film industry, producing portraits of celebrities, society figures, and travellers, including Doria Shafik, Omar El Sharif, and Sherihan. Van Leo's experimental work was his self-portraiture, in which he adopted male and female personas. Around 400 photographs survive, although he destroyed many others later, fearing public criticism. His archive, donated to the American University in Cairo in 1998, contains approximately 13,000 negatives and 12,000 prints. Van Leo received the Prince Claus Award in 2000, the first awarded to a photographer, and exhibited at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; New Museum, New York; and Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris.



Untitled (Don Quixote), 1961
Oil on panel
47.2 x 35.2 in
Courtesy of the collection
of Mr. Rashid Kamel

SEIF WANLY

1906–1979, Alexandria, Egypt

Seif Wanly was a key figure of modernism, working closely with his brother Adham. His early experiments drew on Cubist and Futurist ideas, using simplified forms and dynamic compositions. Over time, his work became expressive, with vivid color and freer handling of the picture plane echoing Fauvism. Adham's death in 1959 prompted Seif's palette to become somber. *Untitled (Don Quixote)* reflects Wanly's longstanding interest in the performing arts, particularly the international theatre and ballet performances staged at the Alexandria Opera House during a period of Egyptian-Soviet cultural exchange. He repeatedly depicted performers with vibrant colors, movement, rhythm, and humor. This work is distinguished by its darker reds, greens, blacks, and greys, while retaining his mastery of Fauvist and Cubist techniques. Wanly worked primarily in Alexandria where he taught at the Faculty of Fine Arts. He received the Alexandria Biennale's First Prize in 1959 and the Egyptian State Merit Award in 1973.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

ZEINAB ABDEL HAMID
Closed Shops, 1982
Ink and Watercolor on hard paper
21.3 x 28.7 in
Courtesy of a Private Collection

SOUAD ABDELRASOUL
White Fish and a Woman's Face, 2025
Acrylic on canvas
17.7 x 25.6 in
Courtesy of the artist

IBRAHIM AHMED
Figure #6, 2020
From the *you can't recognize what you don't know* series, 2020–2021
Unique photo collage
11.8 x 8.5 in
Courtesy of TINTERA

Figure #54, 2021
From the *you can't recognize what you don't know* series, 2020–2021
Unique photo collage
9.7 x 15.4 in
Courtesy of TINTERA

LARA BALADI
La Mere Noire, 2010
Diary of the Future Series
Digital photo-montage print
43.3 x 43.3 in
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

INJI EFFLATOUN
Oasis de Bahareya, 1987
Oil on canvas
27.6 x 19.7 in
Courtesy of a Private Collection

Untitled, 1955
Oil on canvas
21.7 x 15 in
Courtesy of the collection of Mr. Rashid Kamel

ABDEL HADI EL GAZZAR
The Snake Eater, year unknown
Oil on cardboard
8.3 x 26.7 in
Courtesy of Naguib Sawiris

A Man and an Ewer, year unknown
Colored pencil on paper
7.9 x 11.8 in (unframed);
13 x 16.9 in (framed)
Courtesy of the collection of Mr. Naguib Sawiris

YASMINE EL MELEEGY
Chamber of Commerce (Harvest), 2026
Porcelain on Marmox board, wood, and binding
47.2 x 23.6 in
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

NADA ELKALAAWY
Statue, 2019–2025
Oil on canvas
5.9 x 5.9 in
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

The Pelican, 2024
Oil on canvas
5.9 x 5.9 in
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

MARIANNE FAHMY
Upon the Margins of Dream-Land, 2024
Jacquard-woven tapestry crafted from cotton
83.8 x 61.8 in
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

Laws of Ruins, 2024
4K film
15 minutes
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

SAMIR FOUAD
Three Brass Players, 2014
Oil on canvas, laid on board
63 x 47.2 in
Courtesy of the collection of Samir Fouad

SHERIN GUIRGUIS
Azbakeya (Sun Disk), 2018
Acrylic and 24k gold leaf on hand-cut paper
28 x 74 in
Courtesy of the artist and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

NERMINE HAMMAM
The Break, 2011
Upekkha Series
Photography, digital collage
23.6 x 23.6 in
Courtesy of TINTERA

Dreamland I, 2011
Upekkha Series
Photography, digital collage
35.4 x 25.5 in
Courtesy of TINTERA

HUDA LUTFI
Dawn Portraits, 2023
Gouache and oil pastels on paper
16.5 x 19.6 in (framed)
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

The Knot, 2022
Found wooden shoe molds and flax strings
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

MAHA MAAMOUN
2026, 2010
Single-channel digital video, black-and-white, sound
8 min., 21 sec.
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

MAYO
Sanary-Sur-Mer, 1956
Oil on canvas
21.3 x 25.6 in (unframed)
Courtesy of the collection of Mr. Selim Gouda

MOHAMED MONAISEER
I, Pet Lion (Galaxy Attack), 2025
Acrylic and ink on found fabric
18.9 x 14.2 in
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

I, Pet Lion (Galaxy Attack), 2025
Acrylic and ink on found fabric
20.5 x 14.6 in
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

I, Pet Lion (Galaxy Attack), 2025
Acrylic and ink on found fabric
6.5 x 12.6 in
Courtesy of the artist and Gypsum Gallery

AHMED MORSI
Le Christ, 1957
Oil on wood
51.2 x 26.0 in
Courtesy of the collection
of Ms. Mona Barakat

YOUSSEF NABIL
Say Goodbye, self-portrait, Alexandria, 2009
Exhibition print
19.7 x 29.5 in
Courtesy of Youssef Nabil
and Mariane Ibrahim
(Chicago, Paris, Mexico City)

Self Portrait with Pyramid, Cairo, 2009
Exhibition print
19.7 x 29.5 in
Courtesy of Youssef Nabil
and Mariane Ibrahim
(Chicago, Paris, Mexico City)

HAMED NADA
Untitled (Fishing Boats), 1984
Oil on canvas, laid on wood
33.9 x 26 in
Courtesy of the collection
of Mr. Rashid Kamel

EFFAT NAGHI
The Two Zodiac Signs, 1990
Oil and collage on board
49.6 x 33.8 in
Courtesy of a Private Collection

AHMED MAHER RAEF
Untitled, [date unknown]
Oil on canvas
33.1 x 44.9 in
Courtesy of the collection
of Ms. Mona Barakat

SAMIR RAFI
Man and Woman with Scorpio, 1988
Oil on board panel
27.5 x 23.6 in
Courtesy of the collection
of Mr. Naguib Sawiris

Les Trois Amis, 1954
Oil on board
27.1 x 19.2 in
Courtesy of the collection
of Mr. Naguib Sawiris

MAHMOUD SAÏD
Adam and Eve, 1937
Oil on panel
31.2 x 22 in
Courtesy of a Private Collection

MARCEL SALINAS
Fengan Qahwa, c. early 1940s
Gouache on paper
3.9 x 5.3 in (unframed)
Courtesy of the collection
of Mr. Selim Gouda

YOUSSEF SIDA
Untitled, 1951
Oil on canvas laid on board
17.8 x 23.6 in
Courtesy of a Private Collection

GAZBIA SIRRY
The Family, 1981
People and *Houses* Series
Oil on canvas
27.5 x 21.6 in
Courtesy of a Private Collection

[unknown title], [unknown year]
Oil on canvas
22.8 x 22.8 in
Courtesy of the collection
of Ms. Mona Barakat

HASSAN SOLIMAN
Musicians, c. 1960s–80s
Oil on board
49 x 75 in
Courtesy of the Private Collection
of Laila Hassan Soliman, from the
Estate of Hassan Soliman

VAN LEO
Doria Shafik, 1950
Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag
10 x 13.5 in
Courtesy of the Rare Books
and Special Collections Library,
The American University of Cairo

Omar El Sharif, 1950
Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag
10 x 13.5 in
Courtesy of the Rare Books
and Special Collections Library,
The American University of Cairo

Sherihan, 1976
Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag
10 x 13.5 in
Courtesy of the Rare Books
and Special Collections Library,
The American University of Cairo

Self Portrait in His Studio, 1942
Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag
10 x 13.5 in
Courtesy of the Rare Books
and Special Collections Library,
The American University of Cairo

Self Portrait in Paris, 1955
Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag
10 x 13.5 in
Courtesy of the Rare Books
and Special Collections Library,
The American University of Cairo

Self Portrait, 1950
Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag
10 x 13.5 in
Courtesy of the Rare Books
and Special Collections Library,
The American University of Cairo

SEIF WANLY
Untitled (Don Quixote), 1961
Oil on panel
47.2 x 35.2 in
Courtesy of the collection
of Mr. Rashid Kamel

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