

## **Research Summary- Defining objectives, methods and findings**

During the summer of 2014, I spent 10 weeks in Egypt conducting qualitative research on the contemporary arts, having conversations with artists, gallery owners, curators, and art managers. I was deciphering what encourages the cognitive artistic process, concepts and themes are prevailing in art spaces, and techniques and mediums are popular and desired in the arts in Egypt. This research spans the period between 1982 and 2011, the rise and fall of Mubarak's regime, and the cultural policies that transpired; it looks at how the practical opportunities for artists have transformed and development, and I explore how cultural policies have created and restricted artistic autonomy and the semblance of creative freedom within the plastic arts of Egypt.

A few of the noted cultural brokers I spoke with are artists Rami El-Dozi, Hassam El-Shark, Mahmoud Hamdi and Shady El-Noshokaty; arts managers Tariq Maamoun, Mohammed El-Khamis and Iman Nabil; gallery owners William Wellis, Hamdi Reda and Stefania Argarano, and curator Ania Szremski. The interviews focused on the individual experiences in the plastic arts in Egypt, and I sought to develop the research from personal perspectives that when pieced together incrementally build a larger picture of Egypt's art scene, which is primarily centralized in Cairo, and to a lesser extent Alexandria. Higher education in the plastic arts takes place in Cairo, Alexandria, Minya, and Luxor, which have faculties of fine art in their respective universities.

In Egypt, I found that artists were actively participating in art events, and engaging in personal development by attending various art workshops hosted throughout the Cairo. However, there is an overall disillusionment and uncertainty with the political transformation and the current state of the arts. Private galleries are no longer expanding at the same rate, the state sponsored institutions are in a state of flux, and students of art want to see the educational system reformed to include up-to-date information on the art history, theory, criticism and technique. However, the opportunistic artist grabs all available opportunities regardless of ideology, and many artists look to private and public art institutions for chance.

## **Short Article- Description of the Research Undertaken**

Transformations in Production and Exhibition in the Arts in Egypt During Mubarak' Reign

A study of the arts is a study of culture, people and representation within a cohort of cultural brokers. This research unfolded within the cultural enclaves of Cairo, Alexandria, and Minya; it is a study of artists, and their social engagements and reflections on personal motivations and values. Their perspectives on art display the dynamic viewpoints that inform the ebbs and flows of visual culture and contemporary art history in Egypt, emphasizing that the arts are a field that need

continuous investigation and reexamination. My research involves the contemporary arts of Egypt during the rise and fall of Mubarak, and the immediate aftermath of the effects of social transformation on the plastic arts. Some of the noted artists this research focuses on are Amal Kenawy, Shady El-Noshokaty, Huda Lutfi, Nermin Hammam, Hani Rashed, Farouk Hosni, Mostapha El-Razzaz, Doa'a Aly, and Aliaa El-Greedy; however, the research included interviews with many more artists, gallerist, and arts managers who have contributed to framing an overview of the direction, development, and network of artist and the contemporary art scene. Artist's artworks display, analyze and reflect their cultural and historical space, and in this research how artists produced during in the lead-up to and the aftermath of political transformation is interpreted and displayed in their socio-cultural and socio-political arena.

The arts are one avenue for people to engage contemplate, and debate social and political culture from multiple perspectives. My interest in the Arts of Africa began in the mid-1990s, but it was focuses on how African art has influenced American art and culture, and after years of studying African art from this perspective, I realized that I had little perspective to what was happening in the cultural enclave and in the arts on the continent. Artists, such as Ghada Amer, Youssf Nabil and other who live and work in the diaspora, define much of the dialogue that frames contemporary African art in Western discourse and little emphasis is placed on what is happening within the cultural centers of Africa. Adrian von Roques comments that many artists with a Western recognition have lived the cultural enclaves of the West, and have adapted to its art (2007).

My examination into the arts in Egypt took root in the early 2000, when I became aware of artists associated with Townhouse Gallery, and from this initially examination my interest and research has expanded, to include the public arts, private arts, and alternative and experimental art spaces. Egypt's public arts have cultivated many artists who are forging ahead with their creative practices, which are supported by the public and public art institutions, foreign national cultural programs, NGOs, and grant funding organizations. However, before the rise of revolutionary art and the graffiti movement, studio art practices were stifled by the social perception that art is too distanced from greater society, and artists function as an agent for the ruling elite and the tourist market. The sub-layering and sub-culturing of art resulted in the lack of critical debate, and the age grade hierarchical system has stagnated the role of art criticism that stimulates dialogue and engages art and artists with society and culture.

This research investigates the role of the artist, and their relationship to socio-cultural and socio-political Egypt, and it overviews political and technological transformations that saw an infusion of new opportunity and technology that offered alternative and feasible opportunities of artistic advancement. Artists in Cairo started exploring and incorporating new technical mediums to create photographic works, video installations, audio installations, and web based art. The new mediums demanded a re-evaluation of the traditional gallery space, and alternative sites of exhibition emerged that provided artists a

new platform for exhibition, which allowed them to engage, explore, and redefine themselves. The growing accessibility of technological mediums allows artists to restructure and better engage their social network, gallery and audience. Mixed-media installation artists Shady El-Noshokaty, Amal Kenawy, and Doa'a Aly produce innovative installations that are not about pure aesthetical perception, and they engage a human temporality.

Artist in Egypt engage the transnational arts through the Internet, residencies, workshops, art fairs, and biennales, and this networking and exhibiting has facilitated awareness of the arts in Egypt. The socio-political transformation in Egypt has made the arts more visible; it created alternative dialogues on art and culture in society, and forged demand for research into the contributions that artists make in articulating and documenting socio cultural thought. Artists are creating a visual chronology of conceptual, social and political transformation, and they present a record of progress and change within Mubarak's regimes.

In the United States, discourse on African art is understudied, and the examination of the contributions being made by artists who live and work on the continent is minimal. The direction of art exhibitions within Egypt is significant for individual and collaborative artistic opportunity, and they are important in fostering cultural and social exchange between diverse groups of people. In 2000, gallerist Karim Francis stated, "artists in Cairo are isolated from one another. There is a lack of solidarity between them, there are not artist's associations, there is no exchange of ideas. I think that an atmosphere of mutual support and exchange in Cairo is crucial, not only for art but for artists as well" (Oguibe 2000, 86). Since 2000, many alternative and artist run art spaces and sites of exhibition have emerged in Cairo and Alexandria, a few notes spaces are the Contemporary Image Collective (CIC) was founded by a group of artists and photographers, Darb 1718 was founded by artist Moataz Nasreldin, and Gudran was founded by two artists from Alexandria. Each space operates as a creative and cultural space where artists converge to develop artistic practices, host cultural and art related engagements, and create discourses on visual culture. It is evidence that artists are organizing to expand creative dialogues.

The state-run art schools have a great influence in cultivating artistic though, representation and dislike in Egypt, however, there is a great perceptual divided between the governmental (public) and private arts that has created a hegemonic power struggle for who best defines Egyptian art. This analysis has some affect on artists, but for the most part artists are able to freely move through the public and private arts, and they seek exhibitions spaces that are a good fit for their work, and they to not prescribe to any one doctrine held by any gallery space. Private galleries such as Mashrabiya Gallery, Medrar, Townhouse, Gudran and Artellewa are providing alternative exhibition and work spaces to that of state sponsored programs and venues, which has allowed artists to reform their social and political role and responsibility.

This research is constructing an understanding of how artists are

responding to the fluctuating dynamics of the sociocultural and sociopolitical arena; it is not purely about aesthetics, tradition and beauty, it incorporates a critical debate, and it depicts the reigning culture from the time of production. The research methodology was qualitative. I immersed myself within the arts, working closely with artists, curators, galleries, museums, and the public to examine the dialogues that have been provoked by artists, and to develop a greater understanding of the role of art and artists in society.

Adrian von Roques, Karin. "The Present out of the Past Millennia: Contemporary Art from Egypt." In *The Present out of the Past Millennia: Contemporary Art from Egypt*, edited by Karin Adrian von Roques and Dieter Ronte. Berlin: Kunstmuseum Bonn, 2007.

Oguibe, Olu. "Cairo: Interview with Karim Francis." *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*. ProQuest Direct Complete, 2000 Fall/Winter.