Works from the collection of
Barjeel Art Foundation
Al-Seef
السيف

Works from the collection of Barjeel Art Foundation
من مقتنيات مؤسسة بارجيل للفنون
Barjeel Art Foundation is an independent, United Arab Emirates-based initiative established to manage, preserve and exhibit the personal art collection of Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi.

The foundation’s guiding principle is to contribute to the intellectual development of the art scene in the Gulf region by building a prominent, publicly accessible art collection in the UAE. Part of this objective involves developing a public platform to foster critical dialogue around modern and contemporary art, with a focus on artists with Arab heritage internationally.

By hosting in-house exhibitions, lending artwork to international forums, producing print as well as online publications, and styling interactive public programmes, the Barjeel Art Foundation strives to serve as an informative resource for modern and contemporary art locally and on the global stage.
Foreword

In the beginning of the 21st century, most artists research and work addressed contemporary social, political, ideological/and/or scientific issues. The visual research of those artists was informed by a variety of studies, inquiries, historic decisions and settlements, environmental events, scientific discoveries, surveys and polls, statistics and mathematical figures that brought the arts closer to the sciences, technology and other forms of knowledge. Subsequently, the arts obtained a documentary aspect on the one hand, and a critical aspect on the other, concerning those crucial areas and issues. Thus, the mission of the arts began to transcend mere visual entertainment and became more concerned with, and committed to, investigations pertaining to dimensions of modern reality.

Within such a context, the Contemporary Art Platform Kuwait, in collaboration with the Barjeel Art Foundation present Al-Seef, an exhibition comprised of artworks by some of the best Arab artists, all belonging to the Barjeel Art Foundation’s collection. The exhibition tackles a current and pertinent case, that of water and its main sources in the Arab world, by featuring the works of artists from across the Arabic countries, that illuminate historical events and crises that demand strategic planning and agreements among states.

This exhibition embodies the shared principles between Contemporary Art Platform and Barjeel Art Foundation in terms of contemporary artists active in the Arab and international art scenes today. This exhibition embodies the shared principles between Contemporary Art Platform and Barjeel Art Foundation in terms of contemporary artists active in the Arab and international art scenes today. The contemporary works in the exhibition provide a critical narrative perspective that observes a historic incident or delves into a legendary tale, reverberating off the many artistic orientations in the exhibition vary between modern and contemporary. The technical differences are highlighted by variations in presentation and intellectual content that intersect at the junction of these two directions. In Porto and Alicante, water is considered a vital component of its very fabric, and forms its most prominent commercial axis. The artistic orientations in the exhibition vary between modern and contemporary. The technical differences are highlighted by variations in presentation and intellectual content that intersect at the junction of these two directions. In Porto and Alicante, water is considered a vital component of its very fabric, and forms its most prominent commercial axis.

This exhibition highlights some of the most important geographical locations that acquired their status strategically due to proximity or access to a vital water resource. The Nile, for example, is one of the longest rivers in the world, and along with the Tigris and the Euphrates, the three form the most prodigious Arabic rivers, upon which ancient and deeply rooted human civilizations thrived and blossomed. This natural treasure, water, has acquired a grand significance for people and nations, to the extent that it is more than a natural resource, from which a vast economic and commercial benefit can be achieved. Furthermore, water has deeply penetrated the fabric of mythologies and is a fundamental root in the genesis of creation for some religions, as in the saying of Allah in the Sura of Light in the Koran: “Allah has created every living creature from water” (Surat An-Noor, Ayat 24). Water is quite possibly the most ancient medium used in the arts, and an aesthetic eye is the most ancient object in the arts. It is the passes for cultural and intellectual exchange with the outside world. The word Al-Seef, is the most prominent commercial axis. The artistic orientations in the exhibition vary between modern and contemporary. The technical differences are highlighted by variations in presentation and intellectual content that intersect at the junction of these two directions. In Porto and Alicante, water is considered a vital component of its very fabric, and forms its most prominent commercial axis.

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The colloquial Arabic word Al-Seef translates into English as ‘water’s edge’, and denotes geography or stretches of land located along a coast.

Historically, the development of settlements, and subsequently of civilizations, relied heavily on their proximity to a water source. Apart from aiding in sustenance, it increased opportunities for travel and trade, allowing coastal regions to enjoy increased access to wealth and power. Its role as a mediator of voyages also meant that it often facilitated political clashes and wars over larger geographical territories.

Being a valuable element of communal life, water has also become embedded into the cultural fabric of many societies. It is often the central subject of legends, rituals and in some cases even religious denominations.

This exhibition offers a window into several distinct episodes of history, where proximity to water has either shaped or played a significant role in the development of a place. Similar to shining a spotlight on select and specific areas of a stage, this exhibition highlights several individual moments of history, outlined below, which took place and unfolded in coastal regions and in the presence of eminent waters.

Text by
Suheyla Takesh
Curator, Barjeel Art Foundation
1. Establishment of folklore traditions on the Nile

The River Nile, being the backbone of ancient Egyptian civilization, has inspired myths and beliefs associated with nearly every aspect of human life along its banks. The ancient Egyptian story of creation begins with a sacred and endless body of water called "Nun," out of which a pyramid-shaped mound appeared. This painting also serves as evidence of an immense reshaping of the landscape towards the country's industrialisation. The project was also viewed as a glorious ambition of the Arab Nationalist movement, otherwise known as Pan-Arabism, which would showcase Egypt's achievements in the fields of modern technology.

2. Building of the Aswan Dam and its implications

The work of Adam Henein entitled 'Marie Nilus' (page 21) depicts a female entity with fin-like features. Those fins, as appear again, similar to mounds arising from sacred 'Nun' as recalled by the legend. "Nun" referred to a body of water called 'Nun', out of which a pyramid-shaped mound appeared. On the mound sat a god, who brought light into the world and set the process of creation into motion. This legend is evocative of a scene ancient Egyptians witnessed on an annual basis with the flooding of the Nile, as the river's waters rose and engulfed small islands and surrounding coastal areas, making them disappear from human sight. When the waters subsided, flooded lands would be covered again, similar to mounds arising from sacred 'Nun' as recalled by the legend.

The exhibited works of Ragheb Ayad, Effat Nagy and Raafat Ishak all reference the Aswan Dam, situated across the Nile banks as a canvas. He creates a composition reminiscent of hieroglyphs on a papyrus sheet, alluding to the custom of creating and given birth to the divine. Adam Henein marries the symbolic references of both stories within a single work, depicting a female entity with the appearance of a female entity that resembles a goddess. Her body is adorned with a fin-like feature, similar to the sacred mound "Nun." This symbolizes the connection to the Nile and the divine, reflecting the ancient Egyptian belief in the creation of the world and the process of creation.

The work of Adam Henein entitled 'Marie Nilus' (page 21) serves as a visual representation of the legend of creation. According to the legend, the divine god brought light into the world and set the process of creation into motion. This legend is evocative of a scene that ancient Egyptians witnessed on an annual basis with the flooding of the Nile, as the river's waters rose and engulfed small islands and surrounding coastal areas, making them disappear from human sight. When the waters subsided, flooded lands would be covered again, similar to mounds arising from sacred 'Nun,' as recalled by the legend.

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Ragheb Ayad
Aswan [detail]
1964
Oil on board
155 x 55 cm
In 2012, more than 40 years after the official opening of Egypt’s High Dam, artist Raafat Ishak transforms it into a timely reference in his work ‘Nomination for the Presidency of the New Egypt’ (page 27). This sculptural piece, visually resembling a species of scarabs that was brought to extinction during the construction of the dam.

Since 1912, Morocco has formally existed under a French protectorate, with some of its regions being controlled by Spain. At that time, the Tigris was still an important water source for irrigation purposes, supporting the development of settlements and eventually the birth of empires in its vicinity. It is believed that along the banks of the Tigris, severalThamathian and Roman civilizations flourished, changing the face of the landscape and the political circumstances along its banks, and he describes the Tigris as “a river that conceals anonymous massacred victims being released into the river’s water, turning the once placid and beautiful element of Iraq’s landscape into a terrifying sight. In more recent history, areas around the Tigris remain in political turmoil and sectarian conflict. The Iraq war having turned the river into a great reservoir of re-flooding to Egypt’s farming and agriculture, while the call for deconstruction of the High Dam - a project that was at the core of Egypt’s post-revolution modernisation and socialist regime in the 1960s - represents a metaphoric deconstruction of of re-flooding to Egypt’s farming and agriculture, while the call for deconstruction of the High Dam - a project that was at the core of Egypt’s post-revolution modernisation and socialist regime in the 1960s - represents a metaphoric deconstruction of

3. Political confrontations on the banks of the Tigris

The Tigris is one of the two great river flowing through the fertile lands of Mesopotamia - an area corresponding to modern Iraq and parts of Syria, Turkey and Iran. Known as the fertile crescent and widely recognised as the birthplace of some of the world’s earliest civilizations. Being an irreplaceable agricultural resource, the river has sustained life along its banks for millennia, supporting the development of settlements and eventually the birth of empires in its vicinity. One instance of the Tigris tangibly suffering an aftermath of political conflict occurred in 1258, during the siege of Baghdad by Hulagu Khan of Mongolia. This is when the Grand Library of Baghdad was destroyed, while scientists and philosophers were killed and tossed into the river along with countless books and historical documents, allegedly turning the water black with ink and red with blood.

In the years leading up to and closely following the Iraqi revolution of 1958, when the Hashemite monarchy was overthrown, the territories along the Tigris witnessed another surge of conflict along its banks. The military activity of this period resulted again in a large number of massacred victims. In 1961, the Tigris suffered another blow with the completion of the High Dam, which had been built on the river of the same name. With the completion of the dam, a species of scarabs that was brought to extinction during the construction of the dam.

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Nazar Yahya, an artist born and raised near the Tigris, witnessed episodes of peaceful life in Baghdad during his childhood and adolescence. Today, however, his memories no longer correspond to the tainted reality of political circumstances along its banks, and he describes the Tigris as “a river that conceals anonymous massacred victims, feeding the thik in its waters.” Yahya’s work presents in this exhibition all reference to the Tigris and the Multiple layers of history associated with its waters. The artist employs simplified symbols and isolated references to marine life to allude to the various individual aspects of the river and its past (pages 29).

4. Movement of Tanger’s inhabitants through the Strait of Gibraltar

Located at the western entrance to the Strait of Gibraltar, a stretch of water that links the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, Tanger has always been a place of strategic importance and a meeting point of many cultures. Situated on the North African coast, this Moroccan city overlooks Spanish territories across the Strait’s waters.

Since 1912, Morocco has formally existed under a French protectorate, with some of its regions being controlled by Spain. This was tantamount to a special international status and was governed by international law, attracting numerous foreign diplomats, authors and entrepreneurs to its soil. In 1956, through negotiations led by Sultan Mohammed Y of Morocco, the country’s independence was restored and subsequently the city of Tanger was reintegrated into Morocco’s rule. Tanger remained a very popular destination for visitors and in the years that followed its coastal areas began experiencing a boom of construction and rapid development of the tourism industry. However, these developments did not positively reflect on the native inhabitants of the city, causing adverse environmental and ecological impacts, as well as social reverberations and resettlement of the local population.
Following the establishment of the Senghen Agreement by the European Union in 1991, the international movement of Moroccan citizens became restricted. They continued to receive large numbers of foreign tourists, but could no longer travel abroad with ease. This resulted in a magnified desire to cross borders and elevated the Strait's status to that of a coveted escape route. It became the body of water that could lead one to, or separate one from, Spain or the UK-governed Gibraltar.

Much of Yto Barrada’s work addresses the ways of mobility and the importance of travel in the industry of tourism on Tangier. Her photographs capture intimate encounters with commonplace objects and everyday scenes, navigating between beauty and functionality. The work presented in this exhibition shows a map of the northern provinces of Tangier (page 31). A map is a representation of large-scale objects on a miniature scale and a proportion to which can be easily manipulated. It is also a representation of borders, routes, and site hierarchies. As well as this, Barrada’s map appears to be a very tangible and familiar object - a feeling accentuated by its worn-out surface and an array of photographs and postcards situated at the bottom.

5. Transformation of coastal landscapes in the Gulf

The 1970s and the decades that followed, saw a boom of modernisation, economic growth and urban development in the lands surrounding the Arabian Gulf. Prior to this time, several states within the region, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the Trucial Sheikhdoms existed under a British protectorate. The discovery of oil in the region, and the subsequent beginning of its export by Abu Dhabi in 1962, began a shift towards the eventual end of treaty – of which Bahrain and Qatar became independent.

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Artists and Artworks

Nazar Yahya

The Hook (diptych) [detail]
2010
Acrylic on Chinese paper on canvas
173 x 173 cm
Celebrated for his sculptural work in bronze, wood, clay, and granite, Henein gives solid materials an ethereal presence through the use of fluid, organic lines, which thereby capture the essence of modernist form.

Henein’s aesthetic language is witnessed in the bronze sculpture, Marie Nilus, or Mary of the Nile (1969). With poetic simplicity, Henein interweaves culturally and historically significant references to Egypt and universal themes. In Marie Nilus, he has chosen a female figure with fin-like attributes to represent the Nile River, the source of Egyptian civilization. The title references the Virgin Mary, whose maternal visual imagery is considered to draw from that of the Egyptian goddess Isis with her child Horus. Worshipped throughout the Pharaonic and Greco-Roman periods, Isis was believed to cause the annual flooding of the Nile. Bringing together representations of deities and motherhood with the life-giving source of the Nile River, Marie Nilus suggests both the transformative power of legends of creation and the shared language of those beliefs, both made possible by the waterways that connect and shape cultures.

The Nile is also the subject of the later work, Papyrus, from 1992. In this piece, Henein evokes the river through his choice of medium—papyrus is an aquatic plant supported by the Nile whose stem was used by the Ancient Egyptians for various purposes, including writing and record keeping. Henein also recalls traditions of Ancient Egypt in visual form through the bold, abstracted composition.

Henein graduated from the School of Fine Arts in Cairo in 1953. He continued his training in Munich and Paris, where he lived for 25 years. Since returning to Egypt in 1996, Henein has contributed greatly to the country’s cultural landscape, particularly in Aswan, where he founded the city’s annual International Sculpture Symposium. Henein has received numerous international awards for his work.
Ragheb Ayad is a pioneer of modern Egyptian art and most recognised for his portrayals of Egyptian peasants, an icon of the nation's cultural identity during the first half of the twentieth century. Inspired by Coptic and Pharaonic art, Ayad often organised his compositions into horizontal registers and depicted his figures in side profile, techniques that recall ancient Egyptian art. At the same time, a modernist sensibility is conveyed by Ayad's expressive use of line and his ability to create an atmospheric effect through the layering of watercolour and ink.

Along with many artists working in Egypt during the mid-1960s, Ayad portrayed the building of the Aswan Dam, a project initiated by the Egyptian government following the 1952 Revolution. In this striking image, the formal elegance of Ayad's subdued colours and soft lines, contrast with his focus on the manual labour that facilitated this project of industrial modernisation. As the workers rhythmically toil, their bodies nearly blend into the landscape, whose terrain they are in the process of radically altering. Punctuating the imminent transformation of life along the Nile is the sharp split in the composition of the landscape, a rupture in this seemingly tranquil image of labour that suggests the Dam's potential consequences.

Ayad was among the first graduating class of Cairo's College of Fine Arts (est. 1908). He furthered his training in Rome at the Accademia di Belle Arti during the 1920s. In 1930, he returned to Cairo, where he taught art and worked at the Coptic Museum and the Museum of Modern Art, becoming its director in 1950. His contributions to Egyptian art were honoured by the 1998 establishment of the Ragheb Ayad Gallery at the Gezira Art Center.
Effat Nagy’s work is inspired by Egyptian archaeological and folk artefacts, which often appear in her assemblages and mixed media pieces. Integrating a variety of materials such as crocodile skins, antique painted wood, and magic amulets, Nagy produces densely textured and colourful pieces that speak to a primitivist aesthetic rooted in 1920s Egypt. It was during this time that Nagy’s brother, artist Mohamed Nagy, called for a national embrace of Egypt’s folkloric heritage. Nagy’s husband, Saad el-Khadem, was also an artist and researcher of popular myths and visual expressions and Nagy’s work is often considered along with that of her brother and husband as sharing an aspiration towards the creation of a contemporary art that embraced and honoured the magical legends central to folklore.

In 1964, Nagy was chosen, along with a select number of artists, by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture to visit the building of the Aswan Dam, a project undertaken by the government in the decade following the 1952 Egyptian Revolution. The consequences of the project—the flooding and forced relocation of villages in Lower Nubia to Sudan, for instance, as well as labour conditions on site—can be read within a number of works produced during the period by Egyptian artists, including Nagy. Her 1966 piece, The High Dam, records a dark labyrinth of scaffolding that slices across the surface of the canvas, suggesting less a glorified achievement of modern industrialisation and more of a looming medieval fortress.

Born in Alexandria to an aristocratic family, Nagy began her artistic training in her youth with a private tutor. In 1947, she began several years of study in Rome’s Accademia di Belle Arti. In 2001, an eponymous museum dedicated to the work of Nagy and her husband opened in Cairo.
Raafat Ishak works in painting, drawing, and installation. Inspired by his cultural heritage, the artist is at once formally and socio-politically engaged, reflecting on a range of topics that include cross-cultural dialogue, immigration rights, and the current revolution in Egypt.

Nomination for the Presidency of the New Egypt, his 2012 work, is suggestive of Ishak's interest in working across artistic and socio-political histories. A long scroll, referencing Egypt's Pharaonic history, details a fictional manifesto for a post-Mubarak Egypt. Focusing on food distribution and land cultivation, the manifesto calls for the re-flooding of the Nile, a natural irrigation cycle that ended in 1970 with the completion of the Aswan Dam, a project of Egypt's 1952 revolutionary government. Yet as the words on the artwork promise a new future for the civilian population of Egypt, the manifesto itself is displayed as an aesthetic relic. Positioned on the pedestal of a black box—itself a reference to Russian modernist Kazimir Malevich's Black Square—the potential future imagined by the political party is drained of its effectiveness, transformed into an object of historical contemplation. As the promises of one political party undo those of a past government, Ishak's piece poignantly conveys the cyclical nature of revolution.

Ishak was born in Cairo in 1967. He received a Bachelors of Fine Arts in painting from Victorian College of Arts in 1990. He has exhibited widely in international shows. Currently a doctoral candidate at Monash University, Ishak is researching the possibilities between Malevich's Black Square and the Ka'aba, the black cube of Mecca. He is a founding member of Ocular Lab Inc, an artist run collective. Since 1982, he has lived and worked in Melbourne.
Themes of war, wandering, and expatriation are evident in the work of Iraqi painter, mixed media and installation artist Nazar Yahya. He creates deeply textured pieces that tend to rely on dense colours, such as sandy browns and oily blacks, as well as construction materials and other objects to reflect the deterioration prevalent in a war-torn environment.

Composed by layering different media on fabrics, the two works seen here form a poetic homage to the Tigris river: one of Iraq's most famous landmarks and the sole subject of his 2010 collection, O' Tigris, from which these pieces came. A popular choice of subject for Iraq's first generation of landscape painters, the Tigris in Yahya's work is abstracted into icons of maritime life: fish, fish hook and man. In each piece, we witness traces of the relationship between life and the river, a relationship under siege today as the river no longer sustains but serves as an informal burial ground for victims of Iraq's current violence. Through a strikingly condensed visual language, Yahya suggests a parallel between the overlapping layers of materiality and the river's own surface and layered history.

Yahya, now settled in Houston, graduated from Baghdad's Academy of Fine Arts with a degree in painting in 1987. He has held solo and group shows in Iraq, Lebanon, the United States, Britain, and across the Gulf Arab region, as well as participating in the Asian Art Biennale. His work is held in public and private collections throughout the Arab world, Europe, and the U.S.
YTO BARRADA

Yto Barrada is a photographer and video artist whose socially and politically engaged practice examines physical, national, and conceptual boundaries, particularly those between Morocco and Spain. Since the late 1990s, her home city of Tangier has been the focus for her photo and video installations, sculptures, and interventions.

The 2009 piece, Northern Provinces, Tangier continues Barrada’s exploration of the Strait of Gibraltar, the narrow strip of sea separating Africa from Europe and the Mediterranean from the Atlantic and to which Tangier is located at the western entrance. As the Strait serves to both connect and separate Morocco and Spain, this geopolitical position has been the focus of a series of Barrada’s work. In 1991, the European Union’s Schengen Agreement created a unified European zone to protect the circulation of goods and people inside it, thereby partitioning bodies into the legal categories of “inside” and “outside.” In this 2009 piece, the harsh realities of the border city of Tangier are abstracted into a map—the ultimate representation of distanced control and surveillance—and thus suggestive of an additional boundary between legal discourse and its consequential lived reality.

Born in Paris, Barrada grew up in Tangier, Morocco. She achieved a degree in History and Political Science at Paris-Sorbonne University before studying photography at the International Center of Photography in New York. Her work has been exhibited to great acclaim and she has received numerous awards, including the first Ellen Auerbach Award in Berlin in 2006 and Deutsche Bank Artist of the Year in 2011. She is the co-founder of Cinémathèque de Tangier. She lives between Tangier and Paris.
Ziad Antar has been working in photography and film since 2002. Best known for a practice that intervenes in the conventions of documentary photography, Antar infuses seemingly ordinary subjects with a nostalgic aesthetic through the use of expired film and out-dated cameras. The result is a visual practice deeply engaged with the historical and theoretical discourses of the medium of photography, rich in poetic beauty and conceptual complexity.

The photographs in Portrait of a Territory were taken between 2004 and 2011, when Antar travelled along the coast of the United Arab Emirates, documenting a long and ebbing history of sea trade and commerce; namely the monumental urban development against abandoned worksites and unrealised projects. Using a Rolleiflex camera for depth of field and a Holga for imprecise contours, Antar fractures a sense of chronological time, instead merging the ultra contemporary landscape of the Gulf within its longer maritime history. Equally manifest in these works is Antar’s interest in the intensity of light, an element integral to the photographic process. Portrait of a Territory speaks of the artist’s ongoing fascination with the everyday and the ways in which his technique transforms apparently transparent images into rich historical and formal contemplations.

Ziad Antar was born in 1978 in Saida, Lebanon. In 2001, he graduated with a degree in Agricultural Engineering from the American University of Beirut. His focus shifted to art after participating in a 2001 workshop run by Lebanese filmmakers Mahmoud Hojeij and Akram Zaatari. He continued his training at Ecole Superieure d’Etudes Cinematographique in Paris. He has exhibited his work in galleries, museums, and in book format, to much international acclaim. He lives between Saida and Paris.
Autobiographical influences play an important role in the work of Camille Zakharia, who chronicles the multitude of places he has called home since leaving Lebanon in 1985 during the Civil War (1975-1990). Through photomontage and collage, Zakharia creates dynamic, kaleidoscopic images that appear to vibrate. Often documenting personal encounters, Zakharia captures the public and private spaces of his life through the incorporation of family photographs, fragments of personal letters, and other intimate relics. Assembling vast, detailed collages that combine contemporary and historical images, Zakharia visually portrays the rupture and discord of experience.

Within this distinctive body of work, the series Coastal Promenade takes a radically different approach to photography. Commissioned by Bahrain's Ministry of Culture as part of the nation's participation in the Venice Biennale's 12th International Architecture Exhibition, Coastal Promenade uses a conventional documentary approach to present an inventory of fishing huts along the coast. These tenuous, makeshift shelters set within a seemingly desolate seascape suggest a decline of marine culture in Bahrain, a name that means “two seas” in Arabic. Addressing the nation’s changing relationship to its landscape and water amid vast urban development and land reclamation, Zakharia continues his broader exploration of the concept of home and exile.

A resident of Bahrain since 1999, Zakharia was born in Tripoli, Lebanon in 1962. He graduated with a Bachelors of Engineering from the American University of Beirut and achieved a second Bachelors of Fine Arts from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. His work has been exhibited to great acclaim throughout the Gulf Arab region, Europe and North America. In 2009, he was shortlisted for the Jameel Prize, an international award for contemporary art and design inspired by Islamic tradition at London’s Victoria and Albert Museum.
An Interview with Raafat Ishak

On his life, practice and motivation behind
"Nomination for the presidency of the new Egypt"

How did you come to be an artist?

In retrospect, I believe the decision I made to become an artist was a form of protest, motivated by the deficiency and inevitable failure of 1980s punk music.

I should also mention my own deficiencies as a new migrant in Australia with a limited English vocabulary and lack of any understanding of local customs. Art became a type of compensation, an alternative universal mean to communicate.

What became interesting in communicating did not necessarily or specifically resonate with the experience of migration. I was far more preoccupied with a type of positive redirection towards abstraction and disappointment in the deficiency of language.

As an Egyptian artist based in Australia since the early 1980s, sometimes working on themes related to your migrant experience and Egyptian heritage, how does the experience as an Egyptian living outside your motherland influence your overall practice?

I think it does in many visible and invisible ways. I have not often worked with themes of migration and Egyptian heritage. Although I'd used Arabic text in previous works, it was always a deficiency of language. Overall, I believe I was driven by a type rebellion that was perhaps subconsciously perpetuated.

My respect for all art forms and historical periods is resolute. However, the art that is increasingly relevant to my practice, except occasionally when presented on the international stage, which can be unfortunate. I have not often discussed in relation to other otherness, otherness-in-general, rather than from the specific experience of migration and Egyptian heritage.

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Which artists and periods in art history do you admire most and are inspired by?

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Endnotes:

1. Bourgeois. I am also particularly interested in the intersection of Feminism, Conceptual and Minimalist art from Avant-Garde, Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin, El Lissitzky, Marcel Duchamp, Giorgio de Chirico, Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois.

2. Which artists and periods in art history do you admire most and are inspired by?

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6. In retrospect, I believe the decision I made to become an artist was a form of protest, motivated by the deficiency and inevitable failure of 1980s punk music.
Nomination for the presidency of the new Egypt is in direct response to the current political situation in Egypt, with your work, a manifesto of a new, fictitious political party, calling to contend the elections. What do you hope is communicated through this work?

There is a certain euphoria associated with any type of nomination, whether it is an election, a government, a revolution, or a flood. It is a type of confidence and a projection of a behavior. The outcomes of Egypt’s spring revolution opened many doors that had been slammed shut for many years, in fact, for many generations. My nomination for the presidency, which was clearly never going to get very far, was a type of this kind of pseudo democracy, which the country was about to embark on. Several things are communicated through the basic action of renewing, almost a re-action. The proposition is pragmatic, and perhaps it is even economically viable to re-flood the Nile. But the proposal is not exclusively a literal manifesto… it is also symbolic; it calls for an act of cleansing and a new start. The nomination and presidency is based entirely on a radical idea, the re-flooding of the Nile River and the remaking of Egypt’s identity. The proposed manifesto is not concerned with bread prices, the reformulation of the Ministry of Interior or democracy, which the country was about to embark on. Several things are communicated through the basic action of renewing, almost a re-action. The proposition is pragmatic, and perhaps it is even economically viable to re-flood the Nile. But the proposal is not exclusively a literal manifesto… it is also symbolic; it calls for an act of cleansing and a new start. The nomination and presidency is based entirely on a radical idea, the re-flooding of the Nile River and the remaking of Egypt’s identity.
Your party's manifesto in this work is centered around restructuring food distribution, land cultivating and the significance of the Nile, which ultimately is a project “for Egyptians and by Egyptians,” contributing to a revitalized Egypt as a whole. Egypt has long struggled with cultivating enough food for its population and high unemployment, so the plan proposed seems quite practical. What kind of research went into developing this plan?

I researched the history of the construction of the Aswan High and Low Dams, and what this created in terms of agricultural output and land and water degradation. I spent a lot of time on the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation website and read a lot of literature on the impact of dams throughout the world and truly researched some academic peer-reviewed papers, mostly by Egyptian engineers and environmentalists, on developing a persuasive argument for the re-fooling of the Nile.

The manifesto is quite utopian, yet pragmatic at the same time, leading one to feel that you would be only to become the president of Egypt one day… which obviously will not happen. So, not really, but making art is operating within a politicized realm.

I used an image of a particular scarab that has become extinct after the construction of the Aswan Dam as a background to, or operating as a shadow set by Egypt's proposed new logo. The new logo retains the black, white and red stripes, but turns them upright, referring to the vertical tradition of portraiture as opposed to the horizontality of landscape. The flag hence becomes a mirror, a reflective space for the individual rather than an overarching broad ideology of the new Egypt?

I used MDF as a material, what draws you to this particular material?

I'm drawn to its hardness, flatness, cheapness and color. The MDF color recalls the desert hue, and sets the actions that take place in the paintings over a space of emptiness and unfulfillment, referring directly and unconditionally to both the Egyptian and Australian deserts. The economy of the material attracts me in that it aspires for, with some success, to draw the act object as form and material, but rather as content, or as it has to this intention.
I'm trying to complete my PhD within the next 18 months. My research is closely related to Malevich's 1913 painting of a black square and Mecca's black cube. In fact, the research is predicated on creating a work out of these two elements.

A great deal of your work involves text, including Nomination for the presidency of the new Egypt in 1960s and 1970s. Utilising an Arabic typography suggests a double layering of meaning, because Arabic is employed phonetically, so it is both Arabic and English. This suggests the possibility of an interpretation, if the script can be phonetically transcribed, and alludes to graphic design and advertising, are these intentional points of reference in your overall practice?

As you would imagine, the manufacture of a black cube hot air balloon is very expensive, so the project survives in the form of a proposal. The proposed work is a black cube hot air balloon, which would be accompanied by a banner march created and managed by another artist, Tom Nicholson, who I have collaborated with for many years and on this very particular idea.

Another project that will form part of my research is a video work, my first ever. It involves a crowd scene at a stadium, perhaps a hundred or so people, flicking around a black cube beach ball, which refuses to hover or go away, always remaining within reach of the audience. This is a deliberately frustrating and uncomfortable experience, but it is also an examination of the role of public space in contemporary culture.

I think they are intentional as tools associated with and employed by the advertising and graphic industries. But often, the text is not specific or eligible; it becomes another visual element that by default denies a specific linguistic interpretation. These strategies were often employed by the Russian Avant Garde and again by conceptual art from the 1960s and 1970s. Utilising an Arabic typography suggests a double layering of meaning, because Arabic is employed phonetically, so it is both Arabic and English. This suggests the possibility of an interpretation, if the script can be phonetically transcribed, and alludes to graphic design and advertising, are these intentional points of reference in your overall practice?

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