

# **EGYPTIAN ART OF THE 20TH CENTURY AND ITS ROLE IN THE EGYPTIAN SOCIETY (CONCERNING THE ARTS OF PAINTING AND SCULPTURE**

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## *Abstract*

This thesis is a contribution to the research of the Egyptian Visual Arts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Egypt has long tradition of pre-Islamic and Islamic arts. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the new phenomenon emerged - the modern Egyptian art. This term does not mean the visual art influenced by the modern Western art, but just the visual art influenced by the styles and methods of the Western Fine Art tradition, the easel painting and the plastic arts. This thesis deals with this new phenomenon, concerning the ways of introduction the Western art to the Egyptian society, the stages of development of the authentic Egyptian easel painting and plastic arts as well as the emergence of the Egyptian art criticism. The main aim of this thesis is to discuss whether and how did the modern artistic expression reflect the political and social development of the Egyptian society on the one hand, and how did the society perceive this kind of art, on the other hand.

The literature on modern Egyptian art in European languages is not numerous and we can hardly find any literature or periodical articles in Czech language. This thesis is based on the available Western literature and on the Arabic resources, monographs and numerous newspaper and journal articles. I have spent a full academic year 2005/2006 in the Faculty of Fine Arts in the Helwan University in Cairo and I have had many opportunities to visit current exhibitions and to interview with some Egyptian artists and art teachers.

The Western fine art methods were introduced to Egypt during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as one of the engineering sciences that should have enhanced the modernisation and westernization of the society. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the modern art became a part of growing Egyptian national consciousness, as could be seen particularly in the style called Pharaonism. This ideology emphasized authenticity of the Egyptian nation and the artists were drawing inspiration from the pharaonic heritage. The question of the national authenticity of the visual art continued

to be the top challenge in every subsequent stage of the modern Egyptian art (in the sixties the roots were unearthed in the Arabhood, later in the seventies in the Islamic culture, constantly it is searching for it in the folklore).

The modern Egyptian art has been recognized as a potential political force. Pharaonism advocated Egypt's right of self-determination. With the outbreak of World War II the Egyptian modern art movement raised its voice against the fascism and Nazism. Later especially the Nasserist regime has paid great attention to modern art as a tool of propaganda. Since that time until the present the state and artists are deeply interconnected. The modern visual art pointed out the most important questions concerning the Egyptian society - social injustice, patriotism, Arab solidarity, emancipation of women. The Egyptian Muslims' attitude to the modern art is rather pragmatic. Despite some discussions concerning the prohibition of using the visual representation of living creatures in art, the visual art is accepted as a useful means of edification.

This thesis concludes that by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the modern art, i.e. the Western style art, appeared alien to the Egyptian society and was introduced by the authorities. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century it gained support of the intellectuals and gradually started to play an important role in the society, even though the majority of Egyptians were not interested in this phenomenon. But they were influenced by its social and political effects. By the early 21<sup>st</sup> century the modern art is an integral part of the Egyptian society.