



AMERICAN RESEARCH  
CENTER IN EGYPT



**A SYMPOSIUM ON  
EGYPTIAN POPULAR CULTURE  
PRODUCE, CONSUME, CONSERVE**



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## ABOUT

Founded in 1948, the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE) is a private, nonprofit organization composed of educational and cultural institutions, professional scholars, and private individuals. ARCE's mission is to support research on all aspects of Egyptian history and culture, foster a broader knowledge about Egypt among the general public, and strengthen American-Egyptian cultural ties.

Through grants, fieldwork and field schools, ARCE's partnership with Egypt contributes to the shared goal of cultural heritage preservation.

Learn more by visiting [arce.org](http://arce.org).



# DOWNTOWN WALKING TOUR



## DOWNTOWN WALKING TOUR

In this morning tour, discover the new center of Downtown life, all within a rich architectural setting. The Ismaelia tour explores the many back alleyways filled with bustling coffee shops, vibrant art galleries and experimental theater spaces as well as historic bars, cafés and nightclubs that have recently sprung back to life as a new generation rediscovers Downtown. Escorting you on the tour is Ahmad Al-Bindari, an architectural historian whose work covers the documentation of the architectural heritage of modern Egypt (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries).



الاسماعيلية  
A L I S M A E L I A

## AL ISMAELIA FOR REAL ESTATE INVESTMENT

Established in 2008, Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment embarked on its mission to revive the Egyptian identity by reestablishing the 150-year legacy founded by Khedive Ismail. Al Ismaelia seamlessly blends historical legacy with contemporary living through the preservation of Downtown Cairo's urban gems and the development of mixed-use quality concepts.

Al Ismaelia aims to develop its properties and revive Downtown Cairo with the overall objective of capturing the spirit and dynamism and to attract again, life and business to the heart of Cairo. We believe in organic change that stems from the vision and aspirations of

Downtown Cairo's residents and dwellers. Our focus on the support of art and cultural activities is a reflection of our ambition for the heart of Cairo to be accessible by all members of society that feeds on the lovely, contemporary spirit of its community in the new Egypt.

ARCE and Al Ismaelia have partnered on this symposium to explore Egypt's cultural heritage on foot and through conversations with academics, practitioners, consumers, and conservators.



## SEEING COMES BEFORE WORDS... CAIRO THE MEGA-CITY

Flâneur or flâneuse is the wanderer that has no aim except observing the city. It is an urban experience described by Honoré de Balzac as "the gastronomy of the eye." Those walks paved the way towards the literature of photography and more precisely, street photography. Susan Sontag asserts "the camera has become the tool of the flâneur." Cairo is a mega-city that is continuously changing and change is the sole constant. Transformations shaped the city, creating confrontations between the literature of the memory and practicality of the present.

This discussion aims to release

the city from the closed touristification vision and to open the way for multiple narratives; the city as captured in photographs and stories. We will reflect on participant photos taken during the Friday walking tour of Downtown Cairo. Discussion topics include: the trio of "survive, adapt and grow" in light of the urban growth of cities, gentrification, the nostalgic memories of the Belle Époque, the politics of renovation and reuse, and urban sprawl and demolition.



## Shaimaa Ashour

**Assistant Professor at Arab Academy for Science, Technology & Maritime Transport; Architect**

*Shaimaa Ashour has over seventeen years of experience in the architectural profession, between teaching, field research, photography and architectural event planning. She likes to narrate stories about architecture and places; whether through teaching, writing, photography, or public lectures. She is an architect with multi-disciplinary interests ranging from Egyptian 19<sup>th</sup> and*

*20<sup>th</sup> century architecture to cultural heritage, architectural advertisement and urban history. Two editions were published of her book "The Pioneer Egyptian Architects during the Liberal Era (1919-1952)." Her PhD thesis is entitled "Architectural Advertisement in Light of the Culture of Consumption; Towards a Critical Approach Analyzing the Poster Structure for Architectural*

*Advertising Campaigns." Ashour is an assistant professor at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology & Maritime Transport. She held a seat on the Committee for Architecture at the Supreme Council of Culture under the auspices of the Egyptian Ministry of Culture from 2011 to 2019.*



# ROUND TABLES



## PRODUCING MATERIAL FOR THE PUBLIC

Academia has traditionally been fairly isolated from greater society, with even 'public' lectures happening in academic settings. However, recent trends in academic production indicate a move towards researchers and subject-experts producing material in popular, accessible venues, such as newspapers, blogs, podcasts, Twitter threads, non-academic books, and novels. This round table aims at breaking down what ethical and practical questions are involved in producing material for a public audience. What sort of audience is this and how is it limited by parameters like language and interest? How does the audience in turn shape what is produced? Who is

producing this material to begin with? Who can have opinions about popular culture and decide what is 'good' popular culture? How are producers of such material held accountable for the political or cultural implications of their work? It will also question, either directly or indirectly, whether or not traditional forms of academic output — namely books and monographs — are appropriate venues for research.



### Mohamed Elshahed

Independent Scholar, Curator, Architectural Historian

*Mohamed Elshahed is a curator and writer focusing on modernism in Egypt and the Arab World. He has held two fellowships at ARCE. His work spans architecture, design and material culture. He is the curator of the British Museum's Modern Egypt Project and Egypt's winning pavilion, Modernist Indignation, at the 2018 London Design Biennale. He blogged at Cairoobserver.com from 2011 to 2016 with six printed issues of the magazine by the same name, distributed for free in events in Cairo, Beirut and Dubai, which aimed to stimulate public debates around issues of architecture, heritage and urbanism in the region. He is the author of "Cairo Since 1900: An Architectural Guide" (AUC Press, January 2020), the first comprehensive survey of Cairo's modern architecture..*

### N.A. Mansour

PhD Candidate Princeton University; Editor Hazine blog, Podcast Producer

*N.A. Mansour is a PhD candidate at Princeton University's Department of Near Eastern Studies, where she is primarily interested in the intersection between Islamic Studies and modern Middle Eastern intellectual history, both in the Arabophone and Turko-phone contexts. Her dissertation is a global intellectual history of the Arabic-language press, looking specifically at the development of genres of press writing, the intersection between the press and Islamic publishing, multi-lingual Ottoman thought, and diaspora. Other interests include Palestinian political history, Islamic law, and Islamic institutional history. She is currently conducting archival research for her dissertation between different archives in the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. She also produces podcasts for the Middle East Studies Channel on the New Books Network, for The Maydan, and edits Hazine.info, an archives blog.*

### M. Lynx Qualey

Founding Editor ArabLit; Co-host Bulaq podcast

*M. Lynx Qualey is the founding editor of the "ArabLit" website (arablit.org), which won a 2017 London Book Fair "Literary Translation Initiative" prize. She also publishes the experimental ArabLit Quarterly magazine and is co-host of the Bulaq podcast. Her co-translation of the middle-grade novel "Ghady and Rawan" was published this summer by University of Texas Press (August 2019), and her translation of Sonia Nimms "Wondrous Journeys in Amazing Lands" is forthcoming (2020) from Interlink. She currently lives in Rabat, Morocco.*



## WHAT IS 'AMMA? WHAT IS POPULAR?

The idea of al-'amma or al-'awam (the general public) has had many meanings over the lifetime of the Arabic language. In the field of Islamic knowledge, it often refers to the uninitiated (or the illiterate), those who were not trained to be ulema, or to those who did not belong to a religious order. This round table will define what is 'amma and what is popular from different perspectives, with reference to Egypt in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It will consider what the parameters of popular culture are and what is and what is not popular culture. Popular culture is often dismissed as 'common' or 'unsophisticated.' Different words have been used to describe

'popular,' in addition to 'amma, such as sha'abi; how do these terms intersect with 'amma and 'popular?' In response, this round table will consider the importance of focusing on popular culture and how it affects our understanding of contemporary society.



### Ida Sofie Nitter

PhD Candidate, University of Pennsylvania; ARCE Research Associate

*Ida Sofie Nitter is a PhD Candidate at the University of Pennsylvania. As an ARCE Research Associate she is currently living in Cairo and conducting her dissertation research. Her dissertation focuses on tasawwuf (Sufism) in 19th century Cairo, and the religious practices associated with tasawwuf, including the celebration of mawlid, tomb visitation, the use of litanies, and studies with Sufi shoyukh. Nitter is passionate about what religious practice and Islam looked like in Cairo in the early modern period across social and economic divides. She hopes to provide a counterweight to the heavy focus on Islamic Modernism that has gained in Western academia's study of modern Egyptian history.*

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### Lucie Ryzova

Senior Lecturer in Middle East History, University of Birmingham, UK

*Lucie Ryzova is Senior Lecturer in Middle East History at the University of Birmingham, UK. She is a prize-winning historian specializing in histories of modernity and popular culture in late colonial Egypt. She is the author of "The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt" (Oxford, 2014), and many articles and book chapters. She is currently pursuing research projects on the social history of photography, reading and writing, and practices of modern selfhood in late colonial Egypt.*



# CONVERSATIONS



## BOOKS

I will focus on the history of books and printing and how mass printing in Arabic changed some things, but kept many the same, including the genres of knowledge accessible to Arabic-speakers. For this reason, studying the physical book is important: it tells us how the book was held and how the reader interacted with the text itself. I connect this historical perspective to both the contemporary book — how people today in Egypt interact with books — and the preservation of manuscripts. I pose the question of whether or not historical Arabic manuscripts should be locked away in manuscript libraries, where although they are accessible to the public, they are not available to be read in the same

way they might have been in the past. Ultimately, my goal is to talk about how books have included and excluded people over their long history and how we can work towards inclusion in the ongoing history of the Arabic book.



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**PhD Candidate Princeton University; Editor Hazine blog, Podcast Producer**

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## BOOKS

In addition to their core scholarly output, some humanities publishers publish non-scholarly books aimed at a readership beyond the academy. Popular histories, biographies, illustrated books, and guidebooks support these publishers' scholarly missions while disseminating knowledge to a non-specialist readership. Editors work with authors on these manuscripts in a spirit of creative collaboration to present them in the best possible form for publication, and books of this kind can appeal particularly to academics who want to get their ideas across to a relatively wide readership. I pose the questions, is it possible to make high-level scholarship accessible to a general readership, and if so, is that a good idea?



## Nadia Naqib

Senior Editor, AUC Press

*Nadia Naqib is a senior editor at the American University in Cairo (AUC) Press, where she acquires books on Middle East history and biography, politics, and architecture. Before that, she was managing editor (2004–2013) at the Press. She holds a BA in philosophy, politics, and economics from the University of Oxford and a master's in economic development and history from SOAS, London.*



## DESIGN

With the growing influence of the creative economy, culture is used to add value to products, services, and experiences. The 'marketization' of culture and the 'culturalization' of the market mean that culture is becoming increasingly commodified in parallel to a rise in consumer behavior that values the consumption of cultural content. I will discuss how this trend has changed the way people interact with culture. If the design is imbued with cultural codes, can such codes and forms be part of pop culture if it becomes mainstream enough? And vice versa: if a design object uses pop culture icons to add value to the product/service, does it become part of our cultural heritage over time? What is the role of design in shaping a col-

lective reconciliation of a visual pop culture? To what extent can design influence our perception of what is pop, what is culture, and what is heritage? Om Kolthoum represents a good case study for our discussion. Her evolution from a music icon to a design icon, in Egypt and regionally, is an interesting phenomenon for analysis.



## Dina Hafez

**Designer/Maker; Cultural Specialist US Embassy**

*Dina Hafez is a designer/maker best known for her colorful mixed media pieces that combine craft, graphic design, and photography. For over six years, her work encapsulates the essence of authenticity while staying contemporary and relevant. Born and raised in Cairo, Hafez is a self-taught artist whose investment in materials and techniques — processes often disregarded as “women’s work” or skilled labor — explores different amalgamations of heritage, history, memory, identity, and decolonization. She has a BA in Mass Communication from AUC and an MA in Arts and Heritage Management from*

*Maastricht University, The Netherlands. Her research focus is on the economics of culture. Besides her artistic practice, Hafez is also a Cultural Specialist working on some of Egypt’s largest cultural heritage preservation projects.*



## DESIGN

How is Islamic art perceived in popular culture and where do the People have access to it? How is art manifested in vernacular culture? What role does mainstream media previously, and social media currently, play in the promotion and consumption of art in its different forms? How did the different social media platforms develop our interaction with technology and our knowledge acquisition and retention? Did social media affect our visual memory and if so how? How can we make art “popular” and relevant to the People again? How can we train digital historians and what tools can we invent to develop this field?



## Bahia Shehab

**Multidisciplinary Artist, Designer and Art Historian; Professor of Design at the American University in Cairo**

*Bahia Shehab is a multidisciplinary artist, designer, and art historian. She is a Professor of Design and founder of the Graphic Design program at AUC in Cairo. Her artwork has been on display in exhibitions, galleries and streets in over 32 cities around the world. The documentary *Nefertiti's Daughters* featuring her street artwork during the Egyptian uprising was released in 2015. Her work has received a number of international recognitions and awards, including the BBC 100 Women list (2013), a Senior TED fellowship (2016), and a Prince Claus Award (2016). She is the first Arab woman to receive the*

*UNESCO-Sharjah Prize for Arab Culture. Shehab holds a PhD from Leiden University in The Netherlands. Her publications include “A Thousand Times NO: The Visual History of Lam-Alif” (Khatt 2010), “At The Corner of a Dream” (Gingko Library 2019), and the co-authored book “A History of Arab Graphic Design” (AUC Press 2020).*



## FILM

Histories of the cinema in Egypt provide unique arenas to explore meanings and experiences of the 'popular' in Egypt. Specifically, issues of audience attendance and exhibition practices can help us expand the lens through which definitions of the popular were framed. Most writings on the cinema in Egypt focus on the films made by locals, ignoring histories of film import, distribution lines, exhibition practices, and audiences. In this talk, we will raise questions about how we might expand the boundaries around which the cinema in Egypt is studied and what the implications of that expansion might be for our understandings of cinema and film history.



## Rosaline Elbay Ifdal Elsaket

Actor, Writer, Producer

Rosaline Elbay was born in Cairo to Turkish-Egyptian parents. She read Classics at Oxford University and completed a masters in Colonial History. She then studied at the Actors Studio New York City with Elizabeth Kemp and obtained her MFA in Acting from LAMDA. In 2018, Elbay starred in *Diamond Dust*, the feature-film adaptation of Ahmed Mourad's bestselling novel, and *Fork & Knife*, which premiered at the 2018 El Gouna Film Festival. The following year, Elbay starred as Amani in *Ramy*, which follows a first-generation American Muslim on a spiritual journey in his politically divided New Jersey neighborhood. Elbay hosted the opening ceremony of the 2019 El Gouna Film Festival.

Assistant-Director of Arabic and Middle East Studies at Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo

Ifdal Elsaket is the Assistant-Director of Arabic and Middle East Studies at the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo. Her research on the cinema in Egypt has appeared in *Arab Studies Journal* and the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. She is working on a manuscript about the cinema in Egypt from 1896-1952, and an edited book (with Daniel Biltereyst and Philippe Meers) "Cinema in the Arab World: New Histories, New Approaches."



## MODERN ART

Since the 90s in Egypt, an artistic vernacular style defined by urban artists that attempted to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western mores and values as transmitted by visual culture started to evolve. The creative visual approaches and techniques used a hybridized version of East-West visual motifs that questioned the underlying assumptions of consumer culture that had arrived with the flood of advertising (influenced by Western digital visual practices), at the same time as it defined its own home-grown aesthetics. In this conversation, I will explore the photo-based works of three Egyptian contemporary visual artists (Sabah Naim, Hazem Taha Hussein, and Nermin Hammam) and question the influence of practicing

photo-documentation and advertising techniques on their personal visual production. All three artists were born and educated in Egypt, and currently live and work in Cairo, Egypt, and the three of them have exhibited internationally in the past two decades.



## Khaled Hafez

**Visual Artist, Filmmaker; Adjunct Associate Professor of Design at the American University in Cairo**

*MD, M.Sc. AFSA, MFA, Fulbright Fellow, and Rockefeller Fellow, Khaled Hafez is a Cairo-born and based visual artist, filmmaker, and educator. He is an Adjunct Associate Professor of Design at the American University in Cairo's Art Department, instructs graduate management, marketing, and branding at ESLSCA Business School Egypt, and undergraduates at MIU. After studying medicine and fine arts in the 80s, Hafez quit clinical practice in 1966 and divided his time between creative practice at his painting/film studio, and management positions at the multinational pharmaceutical sector and the international*

*development sector. Hafez explores elements of local identity exposed to the global consumer goods culture. His art projects have been shown internationally at the Venice Biennale (Italy, 2013, 2015 & 2017), Manifesta 8 (Spain, 2010), Centre George Pompidou, Paris, Saatchi Gallery, London, and Kunstmuseum Bonn, among others.*



## MODERN ART

There are many who believe the popular taste of the past was of a higher standard than today's, but this is not necessarily true. Previously, popular taste was driven by a limited number of influences. Egyptians loved Om Kulthum and Abd El Wahab and were drawn to the charisma of Gamal Abd El Nasser. People in Egypt and around the world wore the same clothing styles: Charleston pants, micro-jupes, and hippie designs. Disco, pop and rock 'n' roll were prevalent. The Bauhaus and other classical styles predominated. Waves of popular styles invaded the world and influenced people globally to think, dress, listen and live guided by the dominant taste, within similar parameters coming from one source.

Recently, there has been a real and significant change in the influencers of taste due to the revolution in mass communication, international political changes, and the liberation of thought from any ties. Previously, the world was periodically influenced by the appearance of a new global trend but now there are new trends every day; how can we evaluate and measure their impact?

These changes trigger some questions for consideration: Has popular taste turned to the better or has it declined? Do changes or differences in taste allow us to judge or label them in a particular way? What are the signs of a drastic global change in taste? Is a return to the past for inspiration a sign of

bankruptcy for new ideas or a lack of new trends to influence taste?



## Sawsan Ezzelarab

Editor El Beit Magazine, Al Ahram

*Sawsan Mourad Ezzelarab is the editor in chief of El-Beit magazine, an interior design magazine published by Al-Ahram press. She is the youngest woman to take this post, and in record time she has made El-Beit not only a trendsetter and widespread influence on taste, but an exemplar of "soft power." Ezzelarab founded the Cairo 18 Initiative with the objective of preserving the city's identity and its status as a creative, artistic, and heritage hub. She has described the government offices' move to the New Capital as "an opportunity that must be seized to retrieve the luster of historic Cairo." Ezzelarab has curated and published*

*special issues of El-Beit including an issue on master craftsmen supporting Egyptian industry and traditional handicrafts, and one focused on women's economic empowerment. She founded the El-Beit Salon (2018), to research issues pertaining to creativity, industry and culture in the presence of the full gamut of artists and intellectuals.*



## MUSEUMS

The history of modern and contemporary Egypt is not well represented in Egyptian museums. Few museum institutions were erected in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that present to the public the material aspects of modern life such as the Railway and Agricultural museums. Both exhibit a static view on the subject matters they represent and both function as state representations of development, leaving little space for popular voices and narratives. The Agricultural Museum includes a variety of exhibits including a rare exception in the form of an anthropological display of the popular customs of peasants, the fate of which is unknown, as the museum has been closed for remodeling. Recent notable additions include the Nasser

Museum, a project that saw the refurbishment and redesign of President Nasser's residence for a presentation of the domestic life and legacy of the former president.

Beyond art, the material heritage of Egypt's transformations and development since the 19<sup>th</sup> century are not actively collected, archived, documented or displayed: No museums for cinema, popular culture, architecture, design, consumer goods (consumption), industry (production), and the plethora of other aspects of modern and contemporary Egyptian life. Can Egyptian popular and material cultures be made accessible for public discourse through museum displays? What does the lack of such institutions tell

us about the state of contemporary Egypt and its historical memory?



## Mohamed Elshahed

**Independent Scholar, Curator,  
Architectural Historian**

*Mohamed Elshahed is a curator and writer focusing on modernism in Egypt and the Arab World. He has held two fellowships at ARCE. His work spans architecture, design and material culture. He is the curator of the British Museum's Modern Egypt Project and Egypt's winning pavilion, Modernist Indignation, at the 2018 London Design Biennale. He blogged at Cairoobserver.com from 2011 to 2016 with six printed issues of the magazine by the same name, distributed for free in events in Cairo, Beirut and Dubai, which aimed to stimulate public debates around issues of architecture, heritage and*

*urbanism in the region. He is the author of "Cairo Since 1900: An Architectural Guide" (AUC Press, January 2020), the first comprehensive survey of Cairo's modern architecture.*



## MUSEUMS

Several museum artifacts are recognized as international icons of popular culture, such as the Mona Lisa, the bust of Nefertiti and the gold mask of Tutankhamun. Their images are ubiquitous and have been appropriated by artists and creatives around the globe. The extreme fame of the mask of Tutankhamun makes it the crown jewel of the museum that houses it, and millions of tourists flock to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo just to catch a glimpse of this ancient masterpiece. But what will happen to the Tahrir museum when it loses the boy-king's funerary mask to the long-awaited Grand Egyptian Museum? How will the Tahrir museum retain its visitors? What is it that makes the mask so iconic? Anybody

who has strolled around the galleries of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo knows that the building is packed with stunning artifacts, some of which can compete with the mask, in terms of artistic excellence and breathtaking beauty, yet most tourists walk past them without batting an eye. In an age when pop culture icons are created every day with the help of social media, is it possible to elevate a little-known Egyptian Museum object to the status of a pop culture icon?



## Yasmin El Shazly

Deputy Director for Research & Programs, ARCE

Yasmin El Shazly is the ARCE Deputy Director for Research and Programs. She has previously held positions at Egypt's Ministry of Antiquities including General Supervisor of the Department of International Organizations of Cultural Heritage and International Cooperation (2016-2018), Assistant to the Minister for Museum Affairs (2015-2016) and Head of the Registration, Collections Management and Documentation Department at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo (2009-2016). She was a member of the Museums Board of Directors (2010-2013). El Shazly earned her BA from AUC

(1998), and her MA (2002) and PhD (2009) from Johns Hopkins University. Abercromby Press published her PhD dissertation, entitled "Royal Ancestor Worship in Deir el-Medina during the New Kingdom" (2015). She has taught numerous courses at AUC and AMIDEAST and continues to publish academic papers. Appearances in documentaries include: "The Silver Pharaoh: Secrets of the Dead" and "Tutankhamun: The Mystery of the Burnt Mummy" (National Geographic); "The Man who Discovered Egypt" (BBC); and "Invisible Cities: Cairo" (BBC and PBS).



## MUSEUMS

The historical evolution of museums indicates that museums initially emerged for certain social strata, mainly the notable and elite. They were not intended for the general public. This was the result of the phenomenon of collectionism that spread across Europe during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Over the subsequent centuries, museums became increasingly popular, more accessible, and more 'democratic.' The role of the museum evolved, becoming more oriented to the service of society and its development. Presently, the understanding of museums comprises several social and cultural parameters. Its status reflects the concurrent values of its hosting society. In the case of Egypt, a country with such a long history, muse-

ums are mostly perceived as a repository for antiquities. While a source of national pride, Egyptian museums are perceived predominantly as a touristic asset. This perception creates a conflict in values and misunderstanding of the real purpose of the museum. In this context many questions can be raised: How does a society perceive the museum as an institution? Can a museum be understood without an understanding of its surrounding society? What level of appreciation do we have for our modern heritage?



## Karim Shaboury

Architect, Museographer

*Karim Shaboury is an architect and museographer who has been addressing museography, museums and exhibition design since 2001 when he graduated with an architecture degree. As a fellow of the Egyptian Academy in Rome in 2004, Shaboury was awarded the Egyptian "Prize of Rome" for creativity and innovation in museum architecture and museography. He completed a Master's degree in "Museography, Architecture and Archeology, Strategic Design and Innovative Management of Archeological*

*Sites" from Academia Adrianea, Rome, in 2007. His experience spans in the fields of museography, exhibition design, conservation, curation, interpretation, strategic design and the presentation of heritage and archaeology. Shaboury's built projects include: The Egyptian Academy in Rome Museum (2010); Nasser Museum, Cairo (2016); Naguib Pacha Mahfouz Obstetrics and Gynecology Museum, Qasr Al-Aini School of Medicine, Cairo (2018); and the Naguib Mahfouz Museum, Al-Azhar (2019).*



## PHOTOGRAPHY

Historically speaking, how did fine art photography emerge in Egypt, and how were its boundaries drawn to make it stand out from ordinary, commercial photography?

What photographs are deemed popular among contemporary Egyptian publics, and for what reasons? In this conversation, we will address some of these questions with particular attention to a renewed interest in an Orientalist aesthetics among contemporary Egyptian publics, as well as to the fact that it is especially the obvious, the descriptive, and the picturesque that commands the largest popularity among fine-art loving publics in contemporary Cairo. The key demand placed on photographs in this context

is to show the world as both 'real' and 'pretty.'



## Heba Farid & Zein Khalifa

**Co-founder TINTERA; Artist, Curator, Researcher and Educator in Photography**

**Co-founder TINTERA; Photographer, Photographic Consultant**

*Heba Farid is an artist, curator, researcher and educator in photography, based in Cairo. She is a co-founder of the Contemporary Image Collective (CiC), and former coordinator of the photographic heritage program for CULTNAT. She has participated in and published articles for several regional symposiums and journals on archiving and Egypt's photographic heritage.*

*Zein Khalifa is a photographic consultant and practicing photographer, based in London. From 2014 to 2016 she was Associate Director of Sales at HackelBury Fine Arts, a London based gallery*

*focusing on pioneering contemporary mid-career artists.*

*Together they founded TINTERA, a photographic art consultancy with a gallery space in Zamalek, Cairo and an office in London. Their aim is to raise the profile of both contemporary and historical photography in and of Egypt through curated exhibitions, events and research projects. TINTERA represents artists from Egypt and elsewhere, manages significant private photograph collections and advises on the acquisition and sale of photographic art.*



## PHOTOGRAPHY

Over the past century, photography has been a deeply popular medium. At the height of its popularity in the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century more people snapped themselves and exchanged photographs than wrote diaries and letters to each other. The social practices in which analogue photographs were embedded represent the prehistory of many contemporary social media practices. Yet, we are not used to thinking of photographs as 'popular' because their value has too often been constructed through an aesthetic lens. Only recently have scholars started taking ordinary, vernacular (popular) photographs seriously. In this conversation, I will approach photographs

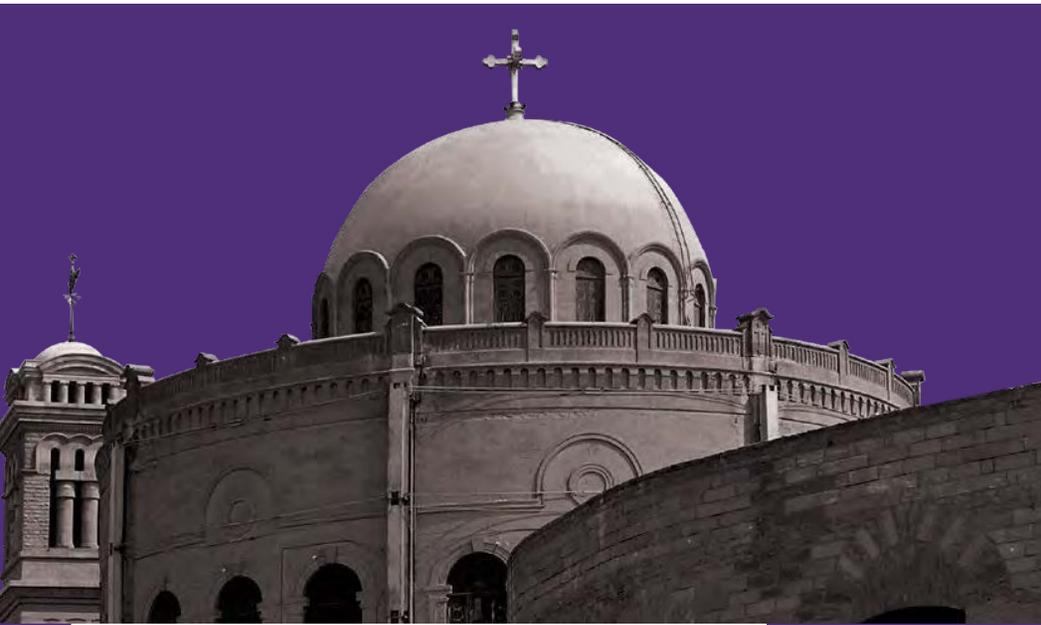
as primarily a historical source, and will focus on some of the reasons behind their popularity over the past century. This is first and foremost their derivativeness and mimicry: the point of most commercial photographic portraits was to make the sitter look like somebody else, fitting into a preconceived ideal. More recently old photographs have acquired a nostalgic value in Egypt, as visual proofs of past glories — a Golden Age of modernity — in a subtle rereading of Egypt's colonial past.



## Lucie Ryzova

**Senior Lecturer in Middle East History, University of Birmingham, UK**

*Lucie Ryzova is a Senior Lecturer in Middle East History at the University of Birmingham, UK. She is a prize-winning historian specializing in histories of modernity and popular culture in late colonial Egypt. She is the author of "The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt" (Oxford, 2014), and many articles and book chapters. She is currently pursuing research projects on the social history of photography, reading and writing, and practices of modern selfhood in late colonial Egypt.*



## POPULAR HISTORY AND LIVING RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

Historic, artistic, aesthetic, scientific, social, and spiritual values are all attested in historic religious monuments and sites. While for different interest groups some values might be more important than others, it is the blend of these values that allowed many of these buildings to survive to today. In Egypt, several Coptic and Islamic monuments have throughout the centuries carried with them associations to spiritual events or people. These then become places that today would be referred to as living heritage sites, places of intangible heritage or of popular culture. This discussion will shed light on some ongoing religious practices that are connected to

historic monuments and places in Egypt and will address the following questions: Who are the various groups to whom these buildings and these places are of significance? What made certain traditions continue and other disappear? What changes and developments occurred to some practices in recent decades, and why? How can the restoration of a living heritage site impact, positively or negatively, its popularity and the practices associated with it? Would certain traditions continue despite the disappearance of its original physical setting and fabric?



### Dina Bakhoum

Engineer, Art Historian; PhD candidate at University of Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne and Leiden University

*Dina Bakhoum is an engineer and art historian specialized in cultural heritage conservation and management. She managed restoration projects of medieval Islamic architecture in Historic Cairo for the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (2004-2012) and the American Research Center in Egypt (2001-2004). Between 2013 and 2018, she collaborated with ARCE on the Red Monastery conservation project in Sohag, Upper Egypt. Bakhoum's research interest and publications include topics such as the waqf endowment system and its relation to maintenance and repair, restoration interventions of Islamic and Coptic monuments by the Comité*

*de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe (1881-1950s in Egypt), the link between historic photographs and restoration, the Coptic museum, contemporary cultural heritage conservation projects, and capacity building initiatives. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne and Leiden University.*



## POPULAR HISTORY AND LIVING RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

Egypt is rich with historical buildings that have been considered sacred and are integral to popular religious practices for both Christians and Muslims. Sites of ritual and visitation usually have had historic and historical narratives spun around them, from the medieval period onward, and these narratives become part and parcel of the rituals themselves. The narrative and the rituals combine to make a space sacred.

This conversation will connect some of the continuing religious practices that are linked to historic monuments and sites with the historiography around them. The conversation will

poke the links and connections between the material culture and the discourses that develop around places and sites, and how these are remembered and re-imagined in different historical periods.



### Amina Elbendary

**Chair, Department of Arab and Islamic Civilization, Associate Professor of History at the American University in Cairo**

*Amina Elbendary is an associate professor of history and chair at the Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations at the American University in Cairo. She earned her PhD in Oriental Studies from the University of Cambridge in 2007. Her research interests include Arabic historiography, Mamluk social and cultural history, and Islamic political thought. She is the author of "Crowds and Sultans: Urban Protest in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria" (2015), as well*

*as "The Worst of Times: Crisis Management and al-shidda al-'uzma," in Nelly Hanna, ed., "Money, Land and Trade: An Economic History of the Muslim Mediterranean" (2002) and "The Sultan, The Tyrant and the Hero: Changing Medieval Perceptions of al-Zahir Baybars," Mamluk Studies Review 5 (2001). Her current research project focuses on popular histories of the medieval period.*





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