



## Reforming Public Cultural Institutions in Egypt: Egyptian Fine Arts Sector, Public Spaces and the Cairo Biennial; Interviews With Four Young Egyptian Public Spaces Managers

Collaborative Authorship\*

View from the Cairo tower onto the opera house grounds, LARA BALADI, Borg El Amal (Tower of Hope), Cairo Biennial 2008/2009. Photo- ADHAM BAKRY, The Townhouse Gallery 2008

### Introduction

The Egyptian Fine Arts Sector has been around for two decades. The last 24 months have seen dramatic changes to the National Center of Fine Arts, one of the many satellite institutions which come under the umbrella of the Egyptian Fine Arts Sector. Satellite institutions, like public art spaces/galleries and the Cairo Biennial, have not been immune to such dramatic and sometimes revolutionary changes. Most, if not all, gallery directors (with the exception of one – state who?) have been replaced by a younger generation of cultural managers, all of whom are artists, thus combining two cultural operation concepts: young management on the one hand, and artist-run spaces/institutions on another. This change can be traced to a ‘pilot’ model that appears to be unique to the Middle East, North Africa and the African continent.

### Current Introduced Practices

The change in hierarchy and structure is associated with

change in processes and policies. For the first time in recent history, the Ministry of Culture and the fine arts sector have ‘partnered up’ with international curators leading to the co-production and co-sponsorship of international exhibitions in spaces as prestigious as the Kunstmuseum in Bonn, Germany, the Palais des Arts in Marseille and the Institut du Monde Arabe (Arab World Institute) in Paris, as well as other exhibitions in Spain and Mexico.

Similarly, local exhibitions taking place in public spaces have been transformed. Adopting a new structure with higher standards, the show *What’s Happening Now* in 2007 is a perfect example of such ‘milestone’ exhibitions that are transforming the art scene in Egypt. The exhibition reflected a pragmatic research program by curator/director (and also career painter) Mohamed Talaat, at The Palace of the Arts. Occupying the entirety of the gigantic premises the space housed the work of 33 artists from all over Egypt. Performing architectural changes to the interior of the space, in order to host site-specific installations, videos, performances and

## INSTITUTION

interdisciplinary practices, this exhibition showcased, for the first time, artists who had for years boycotted the formerly decaying official establishment of the Public Sector of Fine Arts. Shown alongside independent practitioners, who were labeled as 'friends of the establishment', the art works and concept of the exhibition reflected the breaking of new ground.

The show was a resounding success. The catalogue produced has since provided the benchmark for several other exhibitions in terms of content and printing quality and several international institutions (like the Arab House in Spain) have expressed an interest in hosting the show in 2009.

This essay aims to shed light on four of the newly reformed public spaces in Egypt as well as the profile of their managers, all practicing young and mid-career artists. Including an interview with Mohsen Shaalan, the instrumental figure behind this revolution, I therefore hope to better define the shifting practices of the Fine Arts Sector and reveal the nature and sustainability of this change.

### Interview structure

Moving between questions and fusing texts based on precise translations from Arabic to English, the views of the young artists managing four public spaces in Cairo are seen below

Ihab El Laban - Horizon Gallery I have always been a sculptor and a regular researcher in the field of sculpture. I have been exhibiting nationally for over a decade, recently was spotted and have begun to be invited to international shows. A few years ago I did not anticipate becoming a cultural operator. Today, as a curator and a cultural manager, I think that I am putting out a statement as an artist by having a say in the assemblage of the exhibitions I host in my gallery.

I have always had reservations on the presentation of exhibitions in Egypt, especially site-specific works and exhibitions of an international nature. This state was not isolated. I, among many artists of my generation, always had my own constraints and reservation with overall cultural policies which I felt were neither structured nor consistent. Private

1- Similarly, Ihab El Laban, another career artist, demanding new standards for the publication industry in terms of finer quality catalogues for retrospective exhibitions of Egyptian master sculptors Adam Henein and Sobhy Guirguis

galleries were no better. For decades commercial galleries had the sole objective of selling artworks, regardless of the quality of the artist's work, or even the level of sustainable outcomes. My first assignment as a cultural operator was to change all that. In the Palace of the Arts, practically the biggest and most prestigious arts center at the time, and about I was attributed a prize for a sculpture I competed with at the annual Salon of Youth exhibition. The late Dr. Fatma Ismail recruited me and helped me achieve several of my dreams. I still owe her a lot, several years after her departure, as she inspired me, and all those who worked with her, and still does. Working with Fatma Ismail for three years, I trained in basic exhibition logistics and the skills needed for this type of operation. I proudly produced exhibitions in the likes of Naïve Art, a show that established this genre for the first time. A couple of years later I curated the National Exhibition – an all Egyptian artists annual exhibition – which crowned all of the effort exerted during my debut years.

One of the most remarkable exhibitions I did was The First Sculpture in Noble Materials Exhibition. This show had a pedagogic value as well as its expected aesthetic one. It was the first of kind, and only noble stone and bronze works were selected. We gathered many works by Egyptian artists of different generations and backgrounds, historical and contemporary, and showcased them alongside one another. The event turned out to be one of the most visited and most 'mediatized' exhibitions in Egypt's recent history.

I started to manage/direct Horizon Gallery in 2005. At first it was really difficult for me to make such a move. However, it was necessary because I had to grow, it was important for my career, plus, I had ideas that I needed to implement freely. I took a gallery that had no particular vision, had a very unstable and totally interrupted program, and that had a lot of quality issues surrounding it. Very few people had ever heard about Horizon. The name was linked to the only successful show that inaugurated the gallery seven years earlier - Fayoum Faces. When I came, it was already a seven-year old project with modest reputation. I had to reconstruct the brand and the image of Horizon Gallery by hosting quality shows and creating a structured strategic plan.

As I arrived I cancelled 90% of the planned exhibitions - events that I already doubted would have ever taken place - and started with one question: What should the gallery

exhibit? It is located within the Mahmoud Khalil Museum premises, where hundreds of historical works of international artists like Van Gogh, Claude Monet, Manet, Degas and Bonard, as well as a more ancient Rubens are located. What would be expected from such a space?

The gallery already gave premium to foreign/ international shows. I made quality my only criterion for exhibitions. It was vital to establish an image of quality for the first two years, then perhaps move to include younger names, then, at a third stage discover new names. Since the first day, I worked to create professional publications that are both elegant and of pedagogic value. I still gave premium to some international shows that would attract large audiences. I took a proportion of the exhibitions to be Egyptian Masters retrospectives. I started by Menhat Helmy, then Sobhy Guirguis, then Adam Henein. Each of those shows drew many students, press and collectors at a rate that exceeded our expectations. The books created for each of the shows transcend the nature of exhibition catalogues and proved indispensable for researchers and students.

Early this year, it came as a pleasurable surprise to me to be the artistic director of the Eleventh Cairo Biennale. I was nominated by the artist Mohsen Shaalan, the General Director of the fine arts sector. I feel really flattered to be empowered to do such an event at the age of 32. It is not an easy job to move to after artist Ahmad Fouad Selim has run it without interruption for around six episodes.

Shaalan supported me with a committee of several Egyptian artists, mid-carrer and young, many of whom lead international careers like Shady el Noshoukaty, Amal Kenawy, Khaled Hafez, Hazem el Mestikawy, Hazem taha Hussein, Naglaa Samir, Emad Abozeid, Tamer Assem and Mohamed Talaat.

The selection was based on nomination from our committee as well as different cultural organizations. In three cases, some institutions had already selected their artists a year ago, so it was practically impossible to disinvite already prepared artists and curators. We established a novel method, though we cancelled country representation. Invitations were sent directly to the artists by the biennial and we planned to solicit the support of relative embassies to sponsor their native artists.

We believe that any exhibition, anywhere in the world, is based on strong artworks and a strong artist. If we add good

marketing we could guarantee a very powerful exhibition. We were landed with a large theme - "the other". We needed proper art marketing. Egypt has a lot of brilliant artists but lacks the marketing culture. We needed to promote our artists in a professional branded way.

International institutions perform influential promotion for their artists, their works and their exhibitions; such is the work of systems, policies and procedures, plans and strategy, and the promotion that follows them. We felt, therefore, that we must collaborate with the chief editors of international art publications, writers and artists, to promote our biennial, and that we must find a barter formula to exchange invitations to find the ground for international exposure.

Mohammed Talaat  
Palace of the Arts

Back in 2001, immediately after I earned the Salon of Young Artists' prize of painting, the late Dr. Fatma Ismail, who was then the director of the Palace of the Arts, recruited me, together with Ihab el Labban and a couple of other young artists, to work with her in the Palace. Her objective was to educate and train a second row of managers/cultural operators who would assume responsibility in the proper time and drive the official establishment forwards and do it competitively.

My first responsibility as a manager was to co-curate the very same Salon of Young Artists in 2002.

After Dr. Ismail passed away tragically, already four years ago, I was given the full responsibility of the Palace, having been her last deputy for over two years. Inside the Palace, I worked in several state-sponsored projects and mega-shows. For the past two years the Palace, as well as Horizon Gallery, was a major player in the newly formed, rather "reformed", establishment under Mohsen Shaalan, who chose only young artists to manage practically all of the public spaces of the Fine Art Sector.

The Palace and Horizon were the principal venues for all regional (Middle East and Arab) and international exhibitions, hosting two Cairo Biennales and several group shows of an international nature. In 2007 the Palace organized, produced and hosted the 'first of its kind' exhibition, What's happening now?, that brought to the Egyptian public (and art scene), for the first time, Egyptian interdisciplinary art-

## INSTITUTION

ists of different generations living and working both in Egypt and in the diaspora. The show was also a reconciliation for certain artists, who had been boycotting the official establishment for several reasons and for around a decade, and who were/are moving in global circuits with successful regional international careers, like Hassan Khan, Wael Shawki, Lara Baladi, Amal Kenawy, Nermine Hammam, Huda Lutfi Shadi el Noshoukati, Sabah Naim, Hazem Taha Hussein and Khaled Hafez. Medhat Shafik came all the way from Milan for his installation. We missed having Hamdi Attia who is based in New York due to his tight schedule. From the local artists of exquisite practices, we had the Alexandrian gurus Farouk Wahba, Abdel Salam Eid and Esmat Dawstachi, as well as younger dynamic mid-career names like Howayda El Sebaei, Reem Hassan and Moataz el Safty. From the veteran Cairo scene we invited Mostafa EL Razzaz and Ramzy Mostafa, who produced installations that worked well alongside their one-time students, now successful, mid-career, international names, like Wael Darwish, Ahmed Askalani, Ayman el Semary, George Fikri, Mohamed Abol Naga, Adel Sarwat and Emad Abu Zeid.

Apart from the extreme difficulty, and the human effort in bringing these names together because they swarm in different circuits, we changed the interior architecture of the Palace for *What's happening now?* We bought 14 video projectors and a similar number of DVD players, double this number of speakers, as well as numerous light fixtures, all of which serve now as capital assets that will definitely serve in future shows. Such a show could have never been conceptualized nor produced a couple of years earlier due to the difference in thought streams and policies of the previous administration.

As I look now over the work I was part of in my past few years in the Palace, I am particularly proud of projects like *What's Happening now?*, *An Artist's Memory: The Practice of Four Modern Egyptian Painters*, *Filmmakers Retrospective: Mohamed Khan and Rafaat el Mihy*, *Musical Retrospective: Hany Shnouda and Salah Arram* and *IMAFY: International Media Art Forum for Youth*. The diversity of these exhibitions reflect the vision and mission of the Palace of the Arts, both aiming at putting the spotlight on interdisciplinary art and documenting, through a rigorous curatorial process, the serious and significant art practices of local, regional and sometimes international nature.

Naglaa Samir

Passage 35 Art Space for video and media arts

Introduction: Former creative director of Integrated Media International, one of Cairo's most reputable advertizing agencies, Naglaa Samir combines both academia and the practice of visual communication on several levels - artist, art professor and cultural operator. A graduate of Cairo's official Faculty of Applied Arts, Samir sustained only a year in the public-sector university, then resigned after her request for sabbatical had been refused. Her teaching process during the time she worked at the university was not flawless. In fact, she was considered the 'enfant terrible' because of her loud voice in claiming curriculum reform and change.

Samir continues: A few years later I completed my Ph.D. and immediately after I found my kill when I got a teaching position at a private sector applied arts school. I needed to be with students, teach, influence younger artists and get inspired myself. In the first place, I joined Cairo's then only official Applied Arts Faculty to learn from graphic designers who were also artists, like Hazem Taha Hussein, Mohamed Ardash and Mostapha Kamal. I learnt a lot from them during my years as a student, but I could not tolerate the bureaucracy of public universities, so I left. Today I teach in three art schools, including the American University in Cairo where I work alongside fabulous artists who teach through practical workshops, like Shady El-Noshokaty, who works with students on both concept and craft/technique.

In 2006, Mohsen Shaalan assumed the responsibility of head of the Fine Arts Sector, with a vision for drastic reform to the then collapsing and unpopular sector. Shaalan recruited only young managers for all public places and devised a strategy for the specialization of such spaces. He offered me the chance to establish and direct a new space for video art, Passage 35, an assignment that I have found pleasure fulfilling over the past three years. It took us six months to equip the theater-like space and get it running to host new media workshops and video art festivals. For over a year we focused on promoting and marketing the space among the younger generation of artists who work in mediums that entail technology. Today the space is quite popular and well branded for video art and new media.

In our second year, we had the ultimate objective to get young artists some international exposure. For that we invited more established artists, known for the video art medium, like Hassan Khan, Amal Kenawy, Shady el Noshoukaty and Khaled Hafez, to speak/lecture about their careers, processes, techniques and itineraries. We wanted to generate a dialogue and some cross-generational interaction, a reaction that I can claim we succeeded in attaining.

This dialogue was essential, in fact indispensable, in the fine arts sector's reform, since younger artists were either driven off by the previous administration, or were attracted by private-sector alternative spaces like The Townhouse Gallery, Contemporary Image Collective (CIC) or the Alexandria Contemporary Art Forum (ACAF). We, therefore, needed to attract young artists back to the reformed fine arts sector. A product of this reform and the Passage 35 gallery is Mohamed Allam, the 24 year-old artist who established his own organization called Medrar, and who curated/produced two group shows for artists of his generation at our gallery and at the CIC.

Emad Abdel Wahab

Karma Ibn-Hany>e Cultural Center, Ahmed Shawky Museum

Introduction: Prizewinner of two State awards in his twenties and early thirties, career painter and restorer Emad Abdel Wahab joined the fleet of young managers of public art spaces three years ago.

Wahab continues: As a student of Farouk Wahba, among others, at the Alexandria Fine Arts Centre, I learnt basic art management and curatorial practice by apprenticeship - skills that proved handy years later upon assuming responsibility of Karma Ibn-Hany>e public space.

I am adamant in managing the center in the model of 'artist-run-space', rather than the standard space management, and I focus on thematic shows with practicing/living Egyptian artists, mostly painters, of different generations. This focus helped branding the space despite its distant location from the downtown and the Zamalek island art space locations. The space demonstrates a sustainable pattern and managed to complete three seasons uninterrupted.

## INTERVIEW MOHSEN SHAALAN

Introduction: In 1988 Egyptian painter Mohsen Shaalan began working in the Art Sector when painter Farouk Hosny has been appointed as the Minister of Culture. For the following six years Shaalan was the media spokesman, he later became in charge of formalities in "Wekalet El Ghoury", head of Traditional Aircrafts Department, director of art galleries and museums, before finally becoming head of the Fine Arts> Sector, eighteen months ago.

Shaalan continues: These transitions, from one post to another, dramatically helped me to know most of the employees by name, as well as their job descriptions. Another advantage was my knowledge of the obstacles and the hardships that exist in the backstage of the sector. Being an artist, my vision was to overcome these difficulties so that the sector could serve artists of all the contemporary generations. I then came to discover that the sector and the art are not moving at the same pace. Art is based on creativity, change and development; it can't be monotonous or redundant. Before we knew it, we turned arts into redundancy. For instance, the National Exhibition is held every two years. Salon El-Shabab (Youth Saloon) is taking place every year. It started very promisingly and enthusiastically, but it eventually turned into something repetitive with no novelty. Also, when I looked towards our Egyptian museums, I saw that they were highly equipped, with international appeal, and very significant in our culture, tourism and history. However, the question was - How can we drive the local audience to visit them? Because I deeply believed in younger generation, I decided to select the promising artists to become managing directors of the public spaces run by the Art Sector. They include Naglaa Samir, Mohamed Talaat, Ihab El-Laban and Emad Abdel-Wahab who, upon their appointments, turned their spaces into cultural centers in which exist many elements, such as a theatre showing video art and performances. Recently, we staged colorful shows from Lenin El Ramly's troop, to experimental musical groups and hosted artists like Rania Shaalan and Waguih Aziz. The same concept was applied in a pergola in the Ahmed Shawky museum. We turned the pergola into an oriental music kiosk, dedicated to the music of the great Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, to reflect the artistic bond between Shawky and Abdel Wahab. Now there are cultural gatherings

## INSTITUTION

and cultural centers in every museum, plastic art showroom that hosts exhibitions, shows in the Mahmoud Mokhtar museum, Saad Zaghoul museum and Ahmed Shawky museum, alongside exhibitions at Taha Hussein house, better known as Ramatan, which previously held this kind of activity. We also have the contemporary art museum that has the Abaad showroom with a distinguished agenda. The El-Bab showroom will also be opened during the next Creativity Festival, this March, to celebrate the centennial of plastic arts.

Although we still get local accidental visitors in Mahmoud Khalil Museum, our staff is currently working on a high level with world museums, co-operating in touring pieces by Van Gogh, Gauguin or Renoir for special international events. The Art Palace in the Opera house is our main space that hosts major art events. It is currently managed by rising artist Mohamed Talaat who revolutionized its activities and made it into a cultural bridge between practices. A show like *What's Happening Now?*, whose mission it was to support all artists, particularly young artists with great talents, was my initiative to involve some of our young artists who were boycotting the national sector. However, the problem was that some of the artists ran away in favor of private showrooms and art galleries, that have unidentified funding, that influenced their creativity by taking them abroad to influence their art techniques and use of material. Some of these private spaces are feeding our young artists' minds with theories about the sector, claiming that we do not understand, or present, contemporary art. I proved them wrong by getting twenty video projectors, holding the biggest exhibition in Egypt (almost on the international arena), and empowering Mohamed Talaat in running the Art Palace.

To develop the exhibition concept, I started checking the reasons behind the good artists emerging out of our Youth Saloon. You see, all of these young artists are the fruits of Youth Saloon. So, to trigger that exhibition, I kept that notion and that feeling in mind. I met with the artists twice before they started preparing their work. The preparation stage was done workshop style over more than twenty days. They worked together in an open atmosphere, and the exhibition was the result of those workshops. In the meantime, we organized a conference for the international media which was supervised by artist Naglaa Samir, director of Mamar 35, alongside artist Ihab El-Labban, director of Ofok gallery who also monitored the recent Adam Henein exhibition held at an international

level with foreign visitors, ambassadors and delegates from all nationalities.

Back to *What's Happening Now?* - the duration of which we extended to accommodate more visitors - several foreign organizations have asked our permission to make the show travel to France, Germany and Spain.

Mamar 35 screening room, which was originally used for seminars and film showings, was remodeled to host the transformation of a young primitive talent into a fully fledged artist. Because we live in the era of visuals: animated pictures, digital pictures and the whole new technology of photography, Mamar 35 is seen as a source for generating artists. It held workshops about video art because we felt the need for young artists with this kind of knowledge. They also need to get use to video art culture. We invited professionals from the American University in Cairo and other organizations to lead those workshops. As a result, we produced at least 200 films. When I watched those movies, I was so impressed by their artistic quality. Farouk Hosny also ordered these movies to be shown in the Cairo Opera House's Creativity Center so that he can watch them.

In the area of dialogues and workshops, when I held a seminar in the closure of *What's Happening Now?*, I was amazed at the level of maturity and creativity that these young artists possess, especially Wael Darwish. The young man 'talked deep', with a lot of culture and philosophy. He was talking about 'shadows' and imagined if we were to escape our shadows, how would we live and walk.

I admit that we use to underestimate those young artists' works but, we came to realize they have more to offer. Let me tell you a story to support my viewpoint about youth creativity. When we showed a youth exhibition in the Netherlands, our Ambassador, Youssry El-Koweidy, came to visit, only to stop at an oil painting that made reference to Surat "El-Kahf" from the Holy Koran. (It tells the story of a group of people who sleep in a cave for many years only to wake up to find that the world has dramatically changed). The ambassador, a man gifted with a great artistic taste and an artist himself, was offended. He thought why this young artist would make such a reference in an exhibition located in a mall with supermarkets, shops and all this. He left the exhibition, but kept thinking about that. He returned more than once to re-think it over. Finally, he came to realize the exact message the

young artist had in mind. Youth in Egypt have been 'asleep in a cave' for too long. They missed a lot of the development in the world, and woke up to face this reality!

The key activities of the sector were developed in the Creativity Festival this year. In the application sheet sent to artists who wish to participate in the Creativity Festival, I decided to drop the requirement stating that artists should specify their practice. Instead, I added an item suggesting that each artist can participate with three works to open the space for artists to venture in new patterns (A photography artist might come up with a piece of sculpture this time!). On the other hand, still, Shaalan believes that the spaces have a problem with the visiting audience who still vary between specialists, critics, art students or simply us going to see our own or our colleagues' works. We hardly get any new audience. We rarely get visited by amateurs, or art lovers, although there are numerous. One of the ideas that hit me was about having a contemporary art festival. I mean how come we have film festivals, theatre festivals, but not a contemporary art festival? With that dream, I collected some of the year's minor activities and put them under one bigger body called the Plastic Art Creativity Festival that we inaugurated last year with an aim of spreading the word across the nation. Unfortunately, because we do not have many spacious places to host such an event, we took the opportunity of the centennial art celebration to hold the event in the contemporary art museum. Although it was a difficult task to create a visual record of all the pieces before exhibiting them, a broader number of talents will get a chance to exhibit their works.

In the upcoming period, Shaalan is preparing more than we will be able to show at the opening of El-Bab, including previously unreleased works by Mahmoud Mokhtar. As for the Youth Saloon, it will feature workshops with talent awards. Also, wall painting will be resumed this year in Cairo's Balloon Theatre and Imbaba district following last year's work in Sudan and Haram Road. We are also in the process of developing a new project called Sea symposium, for oil photography. Since we already host a granite symposium for sculpture in Aswan, the Sea Symposium will be held next June when we will commission Mediterranean artists to draw the sea and the fishermen in the Qayet Bey Castle of the beautiful Alexandria. (I would like to think of it as one remedy 'injection' to build up Alexandria).

Shaalan recently made crucial changes in regards to the Cairo and Alexandria Biennales. On the other hand, he canceled the graphic and pottery biennales.

I must first give credit to artist Ahmed Selim who curated the previous Cairo Biennales before I speak about the upcoming edition that will be curated by artist Ihab El-Labban. The Biennale is one of the most important events for the Ministry of Culture since it was established during the leadership Dr. Mostafa Moaty, as an Arab event, circa 1984. Then it expanded into an international event reaching high status worldwide (For instance, in the USA a competition is held among American artists to select representatives for the Cairo Biennale). So, with the same ideology, I decided this major art event should be run by young, rising artists to start a new aspect of the dialogue between the cultures of different countries. The new Biennale has a balanced committee with renowned members like artists Ibrahim El-Desouki, Dr. Emad Abou Zeid, sculptors like Hazem El-Mestekawy and Ihab El-Labban, younger generation artists, practicing in different media, like Amal Kenawy, Hazem Taha Hussein, and Khaled Hafez, as well as a group of young artists. Metaphorically, it is like a plastic surgery that revitalizes youth, energy and strength.

Under Shaalan's revolutionized leadership, we have involved international curators who initiated projects and have worked in partnership with the Art Sector, such as curator Karin Adrian von Roques (the Bonn Exhibition) and Sylvie Blanchet (the Mediterranean Trilogy show in Palais des Arts in Marseille). We are open to all channels of communication with all bodies. The Mediterranean Trilogy (Greece – Marseille – Egypt), we have already stopped at Greece, next Marseille and then the gathering will be in Egypt. Many international events and shows take place in Egypt. In return, Egypt participates internationally in different artistic areas, for example, the Spanish 'Al Canti' exhibition.

We were so enthusiastic and anxious to host it [HOST WHAT – THE BIENNALE?] because the fact that 30 photographers were coming to Egypt with their works is a leap in my opinion. By the end of the show, they expressed their wish to host an Egyptian event in Spain. We picked some works from 20 artists. We sent with these works three artists only for ten days: Ahmed Mohey, Gihan Soliman and Tarek Dessouky. This exchange of cultures and art is a healthy thing in our field as it gives a window to our Egyptian art. Our finance is based on the government budget in everything from

## INSTITUTION

printing flyers to hosting exhibitions. The government funds these procedures including salaries to the employees who are working for these young artists. However, we have to admit that some businessmen are supporting us. I've just met Mr. Mohamed Farid Khamis, and he announced that he is going to sponsor our Sea Symposium project.

Shalan has a critical vision towards the role of the Egyptian media in covering Contemporary Art. If we look at the press, our agenda is always published as news, not just a mere schedule. On the other hand, the newspapers pages concerned with art are very outdated, boring and limited in space. One can find twenty pages about sports, three or four about cinema and just one for fine art. Even the layout is not as attractive as the other pages. In addition, it is not a regular section. We don't have enough art critics and the existing ones base part of their evaluation on unprofessional standards. In electronic media, radio is doing a great job covering events and interviewing artists. However, nowadays, radio is not perceived as being as interesting or as entertaining as TV, cable TV and the internet. I still believe radio has its own magic and own audience. I think that radio's high standard should be adopted by TV. Art is very important in our life, colors are essential to our sight and brain. If you want to buy a shirt you don't go to a store and tell the vendor 'give me a shirt', you choose from different colors. I always say, if colors are not important, then why didn't God create us as empty frames - no colors, no meat, nature would be in black and white. Art should be used in our every day life, in our city, districts and squares. Egypt was never inartistic in the past. Take a look at our 50's movies to see how green and beautiful Ramses square was - and its fountain was working! The base of the statue was treated as a piece of art. In the old days, when they planned for Tahrir complex office building, they came up with a curved design to maintain the general scene of the square. These are lessons in respecting art, and knowing its value.

In the past, there was always a quality problem with Fine Arts publications - like catalogues and flyers - especially in the Cairo and Alexandria Biennales' catalogues. But recently, the printed material became very exquisite. For instance, the catalogue and the artwork of the recent solo exhibitions by artists Adam Henein and Sobhi Gerges. Although we didn't commission a new printing house, the new artworks are coming from specific designers working in the spaces. Mahmoud Mokhtar museum designed its own posters, Horizon show-

room did the same...etc. The core of success is in the change, and change can only happen by new fresh ideas which can only come from fresh young artists.