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The School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, presents
“Histories of Now: Six Artists from Cairo”
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Featuring six contemporary Egyptian artists exploring their country’s social and political present, past and future

BOSTON, MA (January 17, 2012)— Egypt’s recent social and political upheaval, which continues to unfold daily, marks one of the most important cultural shifts to occur in modern Egyptian history. More important, however, is the culture that existed prior to these events and the innumerable questions concerning the country’s political and cultural future. Opening to Boston audiences this winter during the one year anniversary of the first mass protests in Tahrir Square, **“Histories of Now: Six Artists from Cairo”** organized by the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (SMFA), brings together work by some of the most inspiring and influential video and new media artists working in Egypt today, including a multi-channel video installation by the late Ahmed Basiony featured in the Egyptian Pavilion of the 54th Venice Biennale.

On view January 18–March 17, 2012, “Histories of Now: Six Artists from Cairo” features work by **Mohamed Abla, Hala Elkoussy, Shady El Noshokaty, Sabah Naim, Moataz Nasr** and **Ahmed Basiony**.

This exhibition is an intimate investigation of the complex social framework and collective formal engagements currently being explored by Egyptian artists. With many of these artists exhibiting in the northeast region of the United States for the first time, “Histories of Now” introduces viewers to the diversity of voices, concerns and approaches—both material and conceptual—found in today’s Cairo; six artists presenting six contrasting visions, united only by context, creative discipline and geographic proximity.

Joanna Soltan, SMFA Curator and co-curator of the exhibition, says, “These works —shaped by a culture different from our own — add rich new textures and visual vernaculars to our collective understanding of the world. Deeply rooted in Egyptian ethos, its history and its longstanding struggle, they explore the shared challenges of cultural growth (El Noshokaty), the desire to preserve cherished traditions (Elkoussy), and places (Abla, Naim), political freedom (Basiony), and spiritual transformation (Nasr).”

Ahmed Abdalla, artist, SMFA alumnus and co-curator, explains of the exhibition, “The artists exhibited here raise many questions, and some offer possible answers. Together they provide us with highly visual, insightful and nuanced views of what may become one of the most significant cultural shifts in Egypt’s history. As the country redefines itself, the effects are already having an impact far beyond its borders, possibly even redefining the intellectual, political and aesthetic movement of culture on a global level.”

Among the works on view in the exhibition is *30 Days of Running in the Place* (2011), a three-channel video installation by Egyptian-born **Ahmed Basiony** (1978–2011), who was gunned down in the violent uprising in Cairo’s Tahrir Square only four days after it began. The work, installed in the Mrs. E. Ross Anderson Auditorium, is a combination of two bodies of work, edited by Basiony’s friend and colleague Shady El Noshokaty for the Egyptian Pavilion of the 54th Venice Biennale. The first features the 2010 video documentation of Basiony jogging in place for one hour each day for thirty consecutive days, with visual data from sensors on his feet, arms, and chest projected before him as a digital display. Presented alongside these video recordings is the revolution footage Basiony was able to capture in downtown Cairo and Tahrir Square before his untimely assassination there on January 28, 2011. Together, these clips form a jarring large-scale installation that at once captures a portrait of a culture determined to run in a different direction, albeit an unknown one.

Mohamed Abla's video *Out of the Water* (2010) is based on documentary footage about the residents of Qorsaya Island as they strive to defend their homes and way of life when confronted by army-supported developers trying to push them out. **Hala Elkoussy's** video *Mount of Forgetfulness* immerses us in the Egyptian tradition of storytelling following the path of Rawi, a young man who discovers that stories are "dying" in the wake of unprecedented levels of air pollution, and resolves to save them from oblivion. **Shady El Noshokaty's** *Stammer—A Lecture in Theory* was conceived as a teacher's demonstration to students engaged in art-making and, ultimately, conceiving and producing an entire exhibition. It is centered on the notion of stammering, a failed attempt at a speech act and, by extension, that which is located between communication and its failure. **Sabah Naim's** *People of the City* (2003) is a montage of video and freeze-framed images and a poetic tribute to the people on the streets and subways of Cairo, blending familiar settings with a foreign context for viewership. **Moatz Nasr's** *Merge and Emerge* (2011) is a three-channel video installation featuring the mesmerizing dance of Sufi whirling dervishes, and is a call by the artist for spiritual solidarity in the midst of the looming dangers of division and conflict at a time of otherwise promising possibilities.

"Histories of Now: Six Artists from Cairo" is co-curated by artist Ahmed Abdalla and Joanna Soltan, SMFA Curator with additional support from Evan J. Garza, SMFA Exhibitions and Public Programs Coordinator.

January 18–March 17, 2012

Barbara and Steven Grossman Gallery + Mrs. E. Ross Anderson Auditorium, SMFA

230 The Fenway, Boston

www.smfa.edu/exhibitions

Admission is free

RELATED EVENTS

January 23, 6–8 pm

Grossman Gallery + Anderson Auditorium, SMFA

Opening reception (Free)

January 25, 6:30 pm

Remis Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Deborah and Martin Hale Visiting Artist Lecture: *Contemporary Art and the New Egyptian Identity*

A multimedia lecture and performance by Shady El Noshokaty that explores the relationship between pre- and post-revolutionary Egypt, its transformation and the importance of young artists in this change. He represented Egypt in the 1999 Venice Biennale and curated the Egyptian Pavilion for the 2011 Biennale, presenting work by Ahmed Basony, killed in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution.

\$15, MFA members, students, seniors; \$18, non-members

January 31, 12:30

Alfond Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Screening of Nadia Kamel's film *Salata Baladi (An Egyptian Salad)*

Award-winning Egyptian filmmaker Nadia Kamel's heritage is a complex blend of religions and cultures. Her mother is a half-Jewish, half-Italian Christian who converted to Islam when she married Nadia's half-Turkish, half-Ukrainian father. Prompted by the realization that her 10-year-old nephew Nabeel is growing up in an Egyptian society where talk of culture clashes is all too common, she urges her feminist, pacifist, activist mother, Mary Rosenthal, to share their diverse family history. (Free with Museum admission)

February 9, 12–2 pm

Alfond Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Screening of Tahani Rached's film *These Girls (El-Banate Dol)*

This documentary follows a band of teenage girls living on the streets of Cairo. Already at a disadvantage as impoverished and abused girls in a Muslim society, they encounter rape, drug addiction, prostitution, pregnancy

and motherhood on the streets. While the girls' troubles are not downplayed, neither are their courage, playfulness and vibrant camaraderie. (Free with Museum admission)

February 21, 12:30 pm

Alfond Auditorium, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Lecture with participating artist, Mohamed Abla (Free with Museum admission)

ARTIST BIOS

Mohamed Abla (b. 1953, Belqas, Egypt) is an artist and educator and founder of the Fayoum Art Center, Fayoum, Egypt. Abla exhibits and teaches internationally and has been exhibiting since 1979. His most recent exhibition sites include: The British Museum (2005); Gallery Hohman, Germany (2006); Zamalek Gallery, Cairo (2005, 2004, 2002); Havana Biennial (2003), Cairo Biennial (1996). He received first prize at the Alexandria Biennial in 1997.

Ahmed Basiony (1978–2011) was an important, rising young talent in contemporary Egypt before his death during the revolution in Tahrir Square on January 28, 2011. Working in a broad range of media he was, in recent years, particularly interested in sound art as well as combining audio and visual languages. A beloved educator, Basiony served as Assistant Professor of painting and drawing at Helwan University, Cairo. As his interest in sound art and interactive media grew, he founded an independent experimental sound art workshop and introduced it as an academic program at Helwan University.

Hala Elkoussy (b.1974, Cairo, Egypt) is a multimedia artist with a strong focus on film. The recipient of numerous international awards and residencies, she holds a graduate degree from the University of London and exhibits internationally. In 2004, she co-founded the Contemporary Image Collective, an artist-run initiative dedicated to the visual image, based in Cairo. Her recent one-person shows include exhibitions at: Townhouse Gallery, Cairo (2010, 2005); Goteborg Konsthall, Goteborg, Sweden (2009); and Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam (2006). Recent group exhibitions include: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, (2010); Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Cologne, Germany (2010); Maghreb Connection, Bamako Biennial, Bamako, Mali (2009); Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, UAE (2009); Kunsternes Hus, Oslo, Norway (2009); Tate Modern, London (2007); Museo Tamayo, Mexico City (2007). In the United States, Elkoussy's work has been shown at the Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis (2008) and the International Center of Photography, New York City (2006).

Shady El Noshokaty (b. 1971, Domyat, Egypt) is an artist and educator on the faculty of Helwan University and American University, Cairo. Based in Cairo, El Noshokaty works in a variety of media and exhibits internationally. His recent exhibitions include "Africa Remix – Contemporary Art of the Continent," Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf (2004); Hayward Gallery, London (2005); Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2005); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2006); and Johannesburg Art Gallery (2007). In 1999, El Noshokaty's work represented Egypt at the 48th Venice Biennale, and in 2011 he was the curator for the Egyptian Pavilion of the 54th Venice Biennale, presenting work by the martyred Ahmed Basiony.

Sabah Naim (b. 1967, Cairo, Egypt) holds a PhD (2003) and an MFA (1996) from the College of Art Education, Cairo where she currently teaches. Her one-person exhibitions include "Street Studio", B21 Gallery, Dubai (2008); Lia Rumma Gallery, Naples, Italy (2006 and 2001); and Karin Francis, Cairo (2004). Group exhibitions include: Palais des Arts, Marseille, France (2008); "Word Into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East," British Museum, London and Dubai (2007); Kunstmuseum Bonn (2006); "Word into Art," The British Museum, London (2005); and "Africa Remix – Contemporary Art of the Continent," Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf (2004); Hayward Gallery, London (2005); Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2005); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2006); and Johannesburg Art Gallery, (2007). In the United States, Naim's work has been shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver, CO. (2003).

Moataz Nasr (b. 1961, Alexandria, Egypt) is a multimedia artist and curator. In 2005, he founded Darb 1718, a contemporary art and culture center located in Cairo, whose mission is "a trampoline to advance the burgeoning contemporary art movement in Egypt." Nasr's international exhibitions include: the Egyptian Cultural Center in

Paris (2002); the 8th Cairo Biennial (2001); the Dakar Biennial (2002); the Sharjah Biennial (2005), and the “Africa Remix” internationally traveling exhibition (2005–07). In 2011, Nasr’s work was shown in Florence (Galleria Continua, San Gimignano), London (Selma Feriani Gallery and the Farm Street Church of the Immaculate Conception) and Paris (Jardin des Tuileries).

About the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston:

Founded in 1876 and accredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (SMFA), is one of only three art schools in the country affiliated with a major museum—the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Our mission is to provide an education in the fine arts—for undergraduate and graduate artists—that is interdisciplinary and self-directed. This education values cultural, artistic and intellectual diversity; it embraces a wide range of media; it stresses the development of individual vision and its relation to culture in general; it values equally the knowledge gained by thinking and doing; it is deeply engaged with the world as a whole. If the mission is constant, its practice is always transforming. For more information about our programs and partnerships, visit www.smfa.edu.

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