Understanding Recent International Curatorial Interest in Egyptian Surrealism: Considerations in Museological Approaches to non-Western Modern Art

Name: Maissan Hassan

Student Number: s2078821

Student Email: maissan.ali.mohamed.ali.hassan@umail.leidenuniv.nl

Supervisor: Dr. M. Keblusek

Second Reader: Dr. M.H.F. Hoijtink

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Introduction

Ten years ago, googling the term 'Egyptian surrealism' would only render a handful of results. This is no longer the case. In 2019, one would be overwhelmed with hundreds of webpages referring to a surrealist movement that was active in Egypt during the 1930s and 1940s, and particularly to the group of artists who called themselves the Art and Liberty Group (hereinafter *Art and Liberty*).[1] Many of these websites would be found to belong to established European museums, international news outlets and, to a lesser extent, academic journals.

In 2016, *Art and Liberty* appeared on the international museum scene by way of two travelling large-scale survey exhibitions. In September 2016, *When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938 - 1965)* (hereinafter the Cairo Exhibition) opened in the Palace of Arts, a State-sponsored exhibiting space that is located opposite the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art in the Cairo Opera House complex.[2] Afterwards, the exhibition travelled to the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA). In October 2016, the world-famous Centre Pompidou in Paris hosted *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)* (hereinafter the Paris Exhibition), which would later travel to other renowned museums of modern art in Madrid, Düsseldorf, Liverpool and Stockholm.[3]

Two fascinating aspects are to be observed in this recent emergence of the legacy of *Art and Liberty*. First, there is the very abruptness of interest in a relatively obscure art group that was active in country whose contributions to modern art are rarely highlighted. Second, this interest emerged via two different coinciding large-scale exhibitions, taking place on two different continents, and, even more intriguingly, promoting opposing views of their subject. While the Cairo Exhibition presented the legacy of *Art and Liberty* through a postcolonial

[1] The group called themselves in Arabic *Gamāʿat al-Fann wa al-Ḥurriyah* and in French Art et Liberté. The title "Art and Liberty" is used in recent exhibitions. Sometimes, the group is referred to as the "Art and Freedom Group" or in Arabic *Gamāʿat al-Fann wa-l-Hurriyya*.

[2] The Cairo Opera House complex is a cultural complex located in Downtown Cairo, near Tahrir Square. The complex includes several cultural institutions such as the new Opera House, the Museum of Egyptian Modern Art, the Palace of Arts, the National Center for Translation, the Supreme Council of Culture and Hanager Arts Center.

[3] Sharjah Art Foundation, "When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938-1965," *Sharjah Art Foundation*, accessed 17 December 2019, http://sharjahart.org/sharjah-art-foundation/exhibitions/when-arts-become-liberty-the-egyptian-surrealists-1938-1965; Bardaouil and Fellrath, *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)*, 2.

interpretation with nationalist undertones, the Paris Exhibition adopted an interculturalist approach that was, as explicitly proclaimed by the exhibition's co-curators, antithetical to any postcolonial or nationalist perspective.

Though it appears that no academic research has been conducted on the subject, several commentaries addressed the coinciding exhibitions in 2016. In a review published in *Art Journal,* Arabic Studies scholar Dina Ramadan wrote: "The year 2016 was when the art world 'discovered' the Egyptian Surrealists."[4] In another review, art historian Anneka Lenssen remarked that the two exhibitions grew out of the "art world of galleries, museums, and auction houses."[5] Lenssen highlighted the possibility that commercial motivations were behind these exhibitions, noting that the attention paid to *Art and Liberty* "arises not from academia per se." [6]

In her article "Art and Liberty: Redefining the Canon or the Next Record Sales?," artist Sama Waly confirmed that the "growing commercial interest" at the works of Egyptian surrealists has indeed gone hand in hand with this recent curatorial interest in Art and Liberty.[7] However, Waly also called attention to the potentially positive role of private patronage in the art ecosystem in the Arab Region. She noted that "private patronage" is not only the "largest driving force" for collecting art in the region, but could also be a major contributor towards a much-lacking "institutionalization and democratization of collections."[8]

Despite this recent curatorial interest in *Art and Liberty* in the past few years, available literature on the group's legacy remains relatively limited. In such literature, the surrealist group has often been singled out as the "cosmopolitans" in the history of Egyptian modern art. Cosmopolitanism as a label is employed to mask inherently contradictory sentiments about modernity in general. On the one hand, it is celebratory, posited against pre-modern backwardness. On the other hand, it denotes otherness or foreignness, posited against authenticity. This is evident in how art critic Ezz el-Deen Naguib described *Art and Liberty* in his

[4] Ramadan, "Between the Local and the International: Egyptian Surrealism in the 1940s," 106.
[5] Anneka Lenssen, "Surviving Fascism? 'Art and Liberty' in Egypt, 1938-1948," *Print Plus -Modernism/modernity*, Vol. 1, Cycle 4, 8 February 2017, accessed 17 December 2019, https://modernismmodernity.org/forums/posts/surviving-fascism-art-et-liberte
[6] Ibid.
[7] Sama Waly, "Art and Liberty: Redefining the Canon or the Next Record Sales?," *Jadaliyya*, 3 May 2017, accessed 17 December, 2019, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/34251
[8] Ibid.

Arabic-language survey book on Egyptian modern art published in 1985. In Naguib's words, as translated by one of the Paris Exhibition co-curators:

> "For despite their slogans that loudly advocated a commitment to matters of reality and the public to the extent of accusing anyone who would abandon such issues with treason, the Art and Liberty group was a condescending movement that was isolated from reality. The group's slogans did not stem from the conflict of contradictions within their society, but from the latest of trends within western schools, and from books that they read in French. [...] The kind of Surrealism that it chose for itself as an artistic creed was a purely European Robe that they tried to force onto Egyptian reality without trying to explore how the two could possibly co-exist." [9]

In her survey book *Modern Egyptian Art: The Emergence of a National Style* (1988), art historian Liliane Karnouk assigns the same label to *Art and Liberty*. For Karnouk, the surrealist group constituted the "second Generation" of Egyptian modern artists who were active between 1935-1945; sandwiched between two generations of "nationalist" artists. The members of *Art and Liberty* were preceded by the "first generation", frequently referred to as "the Pioneers", who rose to artistic prominence at the turn of the 20th century and are commonly celebrated for employing a neo-pharaonic style with nationalist undertones. The surrealists were succeeded by the "third generation", whom Karnouk calls the "folk realists", and who were active between the late 1940s and 1970s and were known for drawing on Egyptian local culture. According to Karnouk, *Art and Liberty* deserve to be highlighted as a separate generation, as they uniquely "raised the issues of both internationalism and regionalism in modern art… [and] challenged nationalism and artistic academicism", therefore "[alienating] the majority of the public. "[10]

In the 1980s, as the Egyptian State found itself mired in a bloody clash with Islamist political forces, which took the shape of an existential threat upon the assassination of Anwar El-Sadat (1918-1981), the traditional nationalist discourse began to shift focus from anti-

[9] Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, 174-175; Naguib, 84-86.
[10] Karnouk, 29, 5, 47, 34.

imperialism to highlighting historical associations with Western forms of high art, as a mode of cultural resistance. In this context, Egyptian art critic Samir Gharib aimed at viewing *Art and Liberty* in a more favourable light. Targeting a primarily Egyptian but also Arab readership, Gharib wrote the first monograph on Egyptian surrealists, *Al-suryāliyya fī miṣr* (Surrealism in Egypt), which was published in Arabic in 1986 by the Egyptian State's official publisher: The General Egyptian Book Organization.

While celebrating the multinational composition of the surrealist group in his book, Gharib defended their purported loyalty to Egyptian and Arab nationalism. He claimed that the rift which broke out in 1948 between prominent members of *Art and Liberty*, on the one hand, and French surrealists, on the other, was the culmination of growing pan-Arab nationalist sentiments on part of the Egyptian artists, in the aftermath of the creation of the State of Israel and French official and public support thereof.[11]

Critic Michael Richardson questioned the appropriateness of the cosmopolitan label, often used to refer to *Art and Liberty*, and in particular to the founder of the group, author and critic George Henein (1914-1973). In his article "The Foolishness of Living: Georges Henein Between Worlds" (2013), Richardson argued that Henein could be considered a forerunner of prominent postcolonial thinker Edward Said. According to Richardson, Henein foreshadowed Said in identifying the dichotomy of "the idea of the West and that of the Orient".[12] Richardson asserted that the Egyptian surrealists reflect a state of "in-betweenness," as Henein's writings show a sense of alienation from both Egyptian and French societies.[13] Furthermore, Richardson suggested that the legacy of *Art and Liberty* is best understood in light of the notion of exile. [14]

Art and Liberty's political legacy is another recurring theme in relevant academic literature. Scholarly emphasis on the political views of specific members, or of the group as a whole, is the result of *Art and Liberty*'s engagement with the politics of their day, especially their staunch anti-fascist activism. In an article published in 2010, historian Donald LaCoss argued against labelling the collective a "surrealist group". [15] For him, the name 'Art and Liberty' was an

[11] Gharib, 34.
[12] Richardson, 8.
[13] Ibid., 7.
[14] Ibid., 3.
[15] LaCoss, 84.

umbrella for a leftist political alliance which included "radical activists" as well as artists and writers.[16] In a concise timeline of the group's activities, art historian Alexandra Dika Seggerman noted that *Art and Liberty* embodied a departure from the predominant "nationalist rhetoric".[17] Moreover, with evidence from the group's published journal in Arabic, Ramadan demonstrated that *Art and Liberty*'s involvement in politics was intertwined with their artistic practice.[18]

Promoted by lack of academic research addressing the recent curatorial interest in the Egyptian surrealists, this thesis intends to contribute to the debates on *Art and Liberty.* This study aims at understanding the phenomenon that is the resurrection of *Art and Liberty* in the international museum scene. Two intriguing aspects of this phenomenon are identified. First, there is the very suddenness of interest in an art group that has been practically off the radar of any modern art museum. Second, this interest manifested itself not in one, but two different large-scale exhibitions held almost simultaneously on two different continents, and, more importantly, advancing contrasting views on the legacy of *Art and Liberty*.

Aiming at explaining the two aspects of this phenomenon; the thesis raises two main questions: 1) What could be the driving factors behind the rise to prominence of a relatively unknown art group that was active in the first half of the 20th century in a region that is rarely highlighted for its production of modern art? In simpler terms, why *Art and Liberty* in particular? and; 2) How exactly was the legacy of *Art and Liberty* addressed by two exhibitions which are seemingly unaware of each other's existence, and how could the divergence of their approaches be explained?

The significance of this thesis stems from both chosen topic and approach. So far, views on why and how Egyptian surrealists emerged on the international museum scene were mostly communicated in the form of relatively short commentaries. While few of these commentaries were written by art historians and scholars of humanities, the exhibitions on Egyptian surrealists have not yet been the subject of an in-depth academic study. While contributing to the academic examination of how the legacy of *Art and Liberty* is presented and exhibited, this research also aims at highlighting a different vantage point in the larger debate about the group. By positioning

[16] Ibid.
[17] Seggerman, "Al-Tatawwur (Evolution): An Enhanced Timeline of Egyptian Surrealism," 3.
[18] Ramadan, "The Aesthetics of the Modern: *Art, Education, and Taste in Egypt 1903-1952,*" 164.

itself within the growing interdisciplinary field of museum studies, the thesis advances an approach that has been largely neglected, or at least not fully integrated, in the ongoing debate. Furthermore, the thesis aspires to provide insights into the processes of including historically marginalized, especially non-Western, artworks into the canon of modern art.

In this research, the recent curatorial interest in *Art and Liberty* is examined as part of the larger contemporary international museum scene. Inspired by the description of museums provided by scholars of museum studies Kylie Message and Andrea Witcomb, this thesis addresses the 2016 exhibitions on *Art and Liberty* as "sites of conjuncture where different disciplines, theoretical approaches, and practices meet."[19]

Furthermore, this study is informed by two different, though connected, debates in the field of museum studies: the first relates to re-examining the role of present-day museums in processes of canonizing art, while the second relates to the intersection between politics and museums.

With regard to examining existing canons, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's insights into how museums denote artistic, sociohistorical and cultural significance are instrumental. In her seminal book *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (2000), she highlighted the potential of present-day museums to actively engage in rethinking the already-instated canons.[20] Noting the power of museum exhibition in "[making] formerly invisible histories visible," she called for analyzing museums with an approach that examines the power structures which are manifested in, and to a large extent strengthened by, museum institutions.[21] A 'canon of art', which is defined by Gill Perry as a "body of works deemed to be of indisputable quality within a particular culture or influential subculture", is believed to be formed through dynamic processes.[22] Therefore, by examining the process of making a certain legacy visible, in this case the legacy of *Art and Liberty*, this research sheds light on aspects of the ongoing processes of broadening the Western canon of modern art.

[19] Message and Witcomb, xliv.
[20] Hooper-Greenhill, 21.
[21] Ibid., 19
[22] Perry, 12; Langfeld, 18.

On the other hand, the field of museum studies has witnessed a steady rise in the integration of political and sociological questions in critiquing the role of the museums since the late 1980s. In fact, a growing body of museum studies notable for increased awareness of sociopolitical factors has been commonly referred to as the new museology. In 2006, museum studies scholar Sharon Macdonald even identified a "second wave" in this new museology. While still concerned with the politics of museum, this second wave also reflects a keen interest in weaving the questions of the museum politics with methodological concerns and museological practices.[23] Writing in 2013, Message and Witcomb pinpointed a third wave, in which questions of social engagement and policy-making are key. In response to concerns that political questions are overshadowing fundamental theoretical and methodological discussions in the field, Message and Witcomb argued that political questions are inseparable from museum work.[24]

While shaped by the above-mentioned literature in the field of museum studies, this thesis further draws on other bodies of scholarship in art history, particularly in sub-fields which are relevant to Egyptian modern art. Secondary literature on the history of *Art and Liberty* and published archival materials are consulted. References to literature in Arabic are kept to a minimum and are used only in cases where no English-language sources are available. References to available English translations are also provided when possible. As there is no academic literature addressing the recent curatorial interest in *Art and Liberty*, non-academic articles in cultural magazines and websites are referenced, with priority given to articles written by academics and art critics. For data on the exhibitions under study, references are also made to photos, videos and published catalogues. Personal notes, taken during a visit to the Cairo Exhibition in 2016, as well as, an academic research paper I previously wrote during my pre-master's program, are also consulted. References to available recorded statements by exhibition curators are included as needed.

Following this introduction, this research comprises three chapters and a conclusion. Chapter I offers an account of the overall context of the phenomenon under study, that is the sudden visibility of *Art and Liberty* in the international museum scene. In Chapter I, a brief

[23] Macdonald, 1-2.
[24] Message and Witcomb, xxxvi, xxxviii.

background on the history of *Art and Liberty* and on the two exhibitions subject of the study is provided.

Chapter II explores the first of the two main questions addressed in the thesis, i.e. What could be the driving factors behind the rise to prominence of a relatively unknown art group that was active in the first half of the 20th century in a region that is rarely highlighted for its production of modern art? In Chapter II, the sudden visibility of *Art and Liberty* is investigated by proposing three factors which could be construed to have jointly led to the emergence of the legacy of Egyptian surrealists. These factors are: 1) recent debates within the discipline of art history regarding the rethinking of what constitutes part of the discipline's canons, particularly its canon of modern art; 2) changing museological trends in modern art museums, making them more welcoming to displaying previously-neglected non-Western modern art; and 3) the local context of socio-politically informed artistic practice in Egypt triggering an interest in *Art and Liberty*, though manifested in much smaller scale, prior to the 2016 exhibitions.

Chapter III examines the study's second main question, i.e. How exactly was the legacy of *Art and Liberty* addressed by two exhibitions which are seemingly unaware of each other's existence, and how could the divergence of their approaches be explained? In Chapter III, I attempt to analyze the contrast in the interpretations advanced by the Cairo and Paris Exhibitions is carried out. This analysis starts with an exposition of three aspects of this contrast: 1) the selection and contextualization of exhibited artworks; 2) the interpretation of *Art and Liberty*'s political actions; and 3) self-identification by subscribing to a specific theoretical position, in the case of the Paris Exhibition, and the lack thereof in the case of the Cairo Exhibition. Next, a justification of this contrast is pursued, with three possible reasons suggested, namely: 1) the inherent nature of the historical legacy of *Art and Liberty* as a politically engaged art group in times of political turmoil in Egypt, which inherently allows for multiple, possibly contradictory, readings; 2) differences in theoretical dispositions between the curatorial teams of the two exhibitions; and 3) competing agendas of the sponsors backing the exhibitions.

Chapter I. Background

This chapter aims at summarizing the context in which the phenomenon under study took place. As such, it provides a brief background on the history of the Egyptian surrealist group *Art and Liberty*. It then proceeds with a description of the two large-scale exhibitions which featured them in 2016, including synopses of the exhibitions themselves, as well as a brief description of the organizations behind them and how they were received in reviews.

I.1. *Art and Liberty* in the Historical Context of Egypt

The *Art and Liberty* Group was formed during a time that has become commonly known in the historiography of modern Egypt as the liberal era, spanning the years between 1922 and 1952. In 1922, the Egyptian Kingdom was established following the declaration of Egypt's independence from British rule. Though no longer governing the country officially, the British Crown retained a large military presence and thus remained a major player in Egyptian politics. In 1936, the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty practically ended British presence, seemingly paving the way for equal relations and thus alleviating anti-colonial sentiments. However, when the Second World War (hereinafter WWII) broke out, British military presence in Egypt was restored to occupation levels. This, along with heavy-handed political intervention brought about by the circumstances of global conflict, stoked nationalist sentiments to their pre-independence heights.[25]

Although several authors and curators use the title *Art and Liberty* to refer to Egyptian surrealists, it is important to consider art historian Patrick Kane's remark on the difficulties in tracing a "single form, or style or group identity" manifested by the group due to the changeable nature of their practices.[26] Ramadan portrays a similar image of *Art and Liberty*, stating that the group was "not exclusively" a surrealist movement.[27]

While being aware of the possible nuances surrounding Egyptian surrealism in the 1930s and 1940s, one could identify several key events and figures in the complex life of the *Art and Liberty* Group. A key event is the publication of 1938 manifesto titled *Vive L'art dégéneré* (Long

[25] Botman, "The Liberal Age, 1923-1952," 285, 298.
[26] Kane, *The Politics of Art in Modern Egypt: Aesthetics, Ideology and Nation-Building*, 14.
[27] Ramadan, "*The Aesthetics of the Modern*: *Art, Education, and Taste in Egypt 1903-1952*," 155.

Live Degenerate Art), a statement condemning the Nazi oppression of modern art in Europe, of which the group was acutely aware, as well as the rising local fascist sentiments in Egypt.[28] Published in both Arabic and French, the manifesto was signed by some thirty artists, journalists and lawyers (Fig. 1.). Key figures in the group included poet and critic Georges Henein (1914-1973), filmmaker Kamel El-Telmisany (1915-1972), poet and political activist Anwar Kamel (1913-1991), painter and writer Ramses Younan (1913-1966) and painter Fouad Kamel (1919-1973) (Fig. 2.). The group also included Cairo-based surrealist non-Egyptian members such as the Egypt-born Greek-French painter Mayo (1905-1990), the Hungarian illustrator Eric De Nemes (1910?-??), and the Hungarian-born photographer Étienne Sved (1914-1996).[29] It should be noted that several members of *Art and Liberty* were francophones, like the majority of people who were active in the art scene at the time.[30] The bilingualism of cultural circles in Egypt during the 1930s and 1940s is often highlighted, by Ramadan, for example.[31]

In fact, the very first publication by *Art and Liberty*, was a bulletin in French printed in March 1939.[32] The second bulletin, however, was published also in Arabic. In January 1940, the group published their first Arabic journal *al-Tatawwur* (Development).[33] Due to government censorship and several financial difficulties, the journal was discontinued after the seventh issue which was published in September 1940.[34] Besides their own publications, members of *Art and Liberty* were avid contributors to several prominent leftist journals of their time. For instance, Georges Henien and other surrealists wrote in the French-language magazine, *Don Quichotte*, founded in 1939 by early communist activist Henri Curiel (1914-1978).[35] Between 1942 and 1944,

[28] The manifesto is archived online, see: Art and Liberty, "Manifesto: Long Live Degenerate Art," *SurrIV*, 26 April 2012, accessed 17 December, 2019, https://surriv.wordpress.com/2012/04/26/manifesto-long-live-degenerate-art/. A longer list of more than 35 signatories in the copy of the manifesto reproduced in Bardaouil and Fellrath, *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)*, 68-69.
[29] Bardaouil and Fellrath, *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)*, 216.
[30] For more on the Westernized ambience of Egyptian cities during the interwar period, see Gershoni and Jankowski, 16-17.
[31] Ramadan, "*The Aesthetics of the Modern*," 177-178.
[32] Seggerman, "Al-Tatawwur (Evolution): An Enhanced Timeline of Egyptian Surrealism," 11.
[33] A variation in translating the Arabic word *al-Tatawwur* has been noted. The title of the journal was translated as "evolution" by scholars including Alexandra Dika Seggerman. In this thesis, I use Patrick Kane's translation; "development".
[34] For a discussion on state censorship of *al-Tatawwur*, see Ramadan, "*The Aesthetics of the Modern Art, Education, and Taste in Egypt 1903-1952*," 161-162.
[35] Seggerman, "Al-Tatawwur (Evolution): An Enhanced Timeline of Egyptian Surrealism,"12.

Ramses Younan was the editor of the established journal *al-Majalah al-Jadidah* (The New Journal) founded in 1929 by renowned socialist and secularist activist Salama Moussa (1887-1958).[36]

Art and Liberty held five exhibitions under the overarching title of "Exposition de l'Art Independent" (Exhibition for Independent Art) between 1940 and 1945. In these exhibitions, the group employed several creative exhibitory techniques, such as hanging a black veil over some paintings and using mannequins in exhibition installations. This was highly unusual for an audience that was accustomed to conventional practices used in established venues such as the Art Salon of the *Société des Amis de l'Art* (Society of the Lovers of Fine Arts).[37] From the very beginning, the spokespersons for *Art and Liberty* posited the surrealist group in direct opposition to the previous generation of Egyptian artists, who have now come to be called the *Pioneers*. As noted in an edited volume about the history of surrealism worldwide, *Art and Liberty* sought to "respond in everyway possible to the appalling wave of academic painting".[38]

Upon the end of WWII, the public atmosphere in Egypt had again become predominated by the nationalist struggle against the British, however, it also became heavily influenced by an increasing awareness of social issues, particularly the massive divide between the urban, literate middle class and the majority of Egyptians who lived in rural areas under abject conditions. This gave a certain sense of priority to political engagement within nationalist and socialist questions. In 1946, *Art and Liberty* mostly gave way to *Bread and Liberty*, an activist Trotskyite group comprising many of the original members of the surrealist movement.[39] The same year also saw the founding of the *Contemporary Art Group*, which attracted several young members of *Art and Liberty*. Members of the *Contemporary Art Group* were much more interested in placing themselves within the local national context, rather than being part of an international cultural scene.[40]

By the end of the 1940s, *Art and Liberty* had become practically defunct. In 1952, Egypt was taken over by the Free Officers' Movement, a military coup with massive popular support

[36] Ramadan, "*The Aesthetics of the Modern: Art, Education, and Taste in Egypt 1903-1952*," 164.
[37] Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, 182, 183, 178.
[38] Antle, 7.
[39] Hassan, "When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938- Present)," 69.
[40] Kane, *The Politics of Art in Modern Egypt: Aesthetics, Ideology and Nation-Building*, 94.

that would be later known simply as the "Revolution". The following year A socialist revolutionary regime was established after the monarchy was overthrown, centered around Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970), a charismatic leader who embodied the dream of Egyptian, and later pan-Arab, national independence, but also a strongman who ruthlessly crushed any opposition and ruled the country with a Soviet-Style all-powerful State.

Ironically, Ramses Younan and Georges Henien, the two figures who were primarily associated with *Art and Liberty*, followed two divergent paths, though still intertwined with the notions of nationalism, internationalism and, most poignantly, exile. Younan, who had spent a short time in prison over his political activism, fled to France in 1946. He remained in Paris, where he worked for the Arabic section of the French National Radio, until he decided to resign over French intervention in Egypt in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis in 1956. He ultimately returned to Egypt where he struggled to find space within the State-controlled cultural sector.[41] On the other hand, Henein, who had cut ties with French Surrealism over conditions of collaboration in 1948, stayed in Egypt until the early 1960s. Failing to cope with State hegemony over politics and culture under Nasser, he moved to France in 1962. Many sources conclude that he was actually forced into exile.[42]

I.2. Cairo and Paris: Two Exhibitions in 2016

In the autumn of 2016, hundreds of never-seen-before artworks by, and archival documents on, *Art and Liberty* were shown in two travelling survey exhibitions. In this section, I provide a background on these two exhibitions. It is important to note that both exhibitions presented displaying the legacy of *Art and Liberty* as attempts to broaden the Western canon of art that has generally neglected non-Euramerican modern art.[43]

I.2.1. The Cairo Exhibition

When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938 - 1965) opened in September 2016 in Cairo and travelled in 2017 to the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea

[41] Seggerman, "Al-Tatawwur (Evolution): An Enhanced Timeline of Egyptian Surrealism," 18.
[42] Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, 233-234; Bardaouil and Fellrath, *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)*,
[43] Hassan, "When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938- Present)," 76; Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group, 237.*

(MMCA) in Seoul. The exhibition was sponsored by several well-established institutions, led by U.A.E.-based Sharjah Art Foundation; a leading regional art and cultural heritage patron which is legally independent but backed by the Government of the Sharjah Emirate. The Sharjah Art Foundation was set up in 2019 by Hoor Al Qasimi, a member of Sharjah's ruling family, who is also a curator and the current Director of the Foundation. Other collaborating organizers included the American University in Cairo (AUC); a private English-language research university which was founded in Cairo in 1919 and the Ministry of Culture in Egypt. In addition to Al Qasimi, the curatorial team included art historian Salah M. Hassan; Director of Institute for Comparative Modernities at Cornell University, artist Ehab Ellaban; Artistic Director of the Egyptian State-run *Ufuq* (Horizon) Gallery in Cairo; and artist Nagla Samir; Associate Professor of Practice at AUC.

The Cairo Exhibition opened in September 2016 at the Palace of Arts, an Egyptian State-sponsored gallery space located in the Cairo Opera House complex. Held in Cairo for a period of only one month, the exhibition was promoted on Sharjah Art Foundation's website as the "first major exhibition" showing for the "first time" several artworks by members of *Art and Liberty* and other modern artists in Egypt.[44]

The Cairo Exhibition comprised three main sections with the following titles: Art and Liberty, The Contemporary Art Group, and The Afterlife of Egyptian Surrealism. The displayed objects included paintings, drawings and a few sculptures spanning decades of modern art in Egypt from the late 1920s to the 1990s.

Other than the short introduction available on Sharjah Foundation's website, visitors were not provided with further information on the exhibition. There was no exhibition catalogue, brochure or floor plan. While exhibitions at the Cairo-based Palace of Arts often have no accompanying catalogue, most are usually smaller in scale than *When Art Becomes Liberty*.[45]

Following the month of display in Egypt, a catalogue was published to accompany the Cairo Exhibition in its trip to Korea. The catalogue comprised more than 250 pages, printed on

[44] Sharjah Art Foundation, "When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938-1965," *Sharjah Art Foundation*, accessed 17 December 2019, http://sharjahart.org/sharjah-art-foundation/exhibitions/when-arts-become-liberty-the-egyptian-surrealists-1938-1965.

[45] Ismail Fayed, "Whose surrealism? On When Art Becomes Liberty," *Mada Masr*, November 21 2016, accessed 17 December, 2019, https://madamasr.com/en/2016/11/21/feature/culture/whose-surrealism-on-when-art-becomes-liberty/.

high quality 14cm X 20cm size paper, with more than 150 pages of small-size color reproductions along with short descriptive labels. All text was provided in parallel English/Korean format. Despite its clear connections to the Arabic language, through its subject, first venue and sponsor, the Cairo Exhibition provided no material in Arabic, with the exception of the physical labels on the walls in display areas during its time in Egypt.[46]

Like the exhibition itself, the published catalogue offers no explanation of the curatorial decisions behind including and grouping artworks. The reproductions included in the catalogue were divided into five sections: "Egyptian Surrealism in Global Perspective," "Art and Liberty Group (1938-1945)," "Egyptian Surrealism and Photography-Focus: Van-Leo," "The Contemporary Art Group (1946-1965)," and "The Afterlife of Egyptian Surrealism (1965-Present)."

Several questions were raised regarding the conditions surrounding the collaboration behind the exhibition. For instance, some commentators were surprised to see a State organ like the Egyptian Ministry of Culture hosting in one of its venues a large-scale exhibition on the history of the infamously subversive *Art and Liberty* Group.[47] Cairo-based curator Alexandra Stock explained the challenges facing large-scale curatorial projects in Egypt such as the "notoriously opaque bureaucracy concerning state-owned art works in the country, and possible hold ups at customs that can take months, if not years for art arriving from outside Egypt."[48]

Furthermore, it should be noted that the Egyptian State has been censoring exhibitions in recent years. In fact, Stock herself curated an exhibition under the title *Occupational Hazards*"organized at Apexart gallery in New York City in 2019, which was inspired by an incident in 2016 where the Egyptian Customs Authorities destroyed an artwork called "Passport for the

[46] Sharjah Foundation mentions on its website that a "two-volume publication" on the conference and the exhibition will be published. Except of the catalogue accompanying the exhibition Korea, Sharjah Foundation did not announce other relevant publications by the time of writing this thesis. I tried to contact Sharjah Foundation via email but did not receive an answer.

[47] Fatenn Mostafa Kanafani, "The permanent revolution: From Cairo to Paris with the Egyptian surrealists," *Mada Masr*, 11 November 2016, accessed 17 December, 2019, https://madamasr.com/en/2016/11/11/feature/culture/the-permanent-revolution-fromcairo- to-paris-with-the-egyptian-surrealists/; Fayed, "Whose surrealism? On When Art Becomes Liberty," *Mada Masr*, 21 November 2016, accessed 17 December, 2019, https://madamasr.com/en/2016/11/21/feature/culture/whose-surrealism-on-when-art-becomes-liberty/.

[48] Alexandra Stock, "When Art Becomes Liberty- The Egyptian Surrealists (1938–1965)," *IBRAAZ*, 6 January 2017, accessed 17 December, 2019. https://www.ibraaz.org/reviews/122.

Stateless" by artist Ahmad Hammoud, due to its resemblance to official travel documents.[49] Being aware of the bureaucratic challenges and concerns of state-censorship facing art exhibitions, it was intriguing for one to see the legacy of *Art and Liberty* being celebrated in a state-sponsored venue.

I.2.2. The Paris Exhibition

After opening in Centre Pompidou in Paris in October 2016, *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)* travelled to various prestigious modern art museums in Europe. Starting from the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, the Paris Exhibition was also hosted by the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen: K20 in Düsseldorf and Tate Liverpool, ending its journey in Moderna Museet in Stockholm in the summer of 2018. The Exhibition was curated by a curatorial duo, Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, who had curated several shows of contemporary and modern Arab art in prestigious venues in Europe, North America and the Middle East. Although the Paris Exhibition was not held in Cairo, the independent Townhouse Gallery hosted a one-day symposium to discuss the exhibition in April 2018, convened by co-curators Bardaouil and Fellrath. The event featured talks by Egypt-based curators, scholars and collectors as well as museum professionals from the Centre Pompidou, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen: K20, and Tate Liverpool.

The exhibition was funded by Sheikh Hassan bin Mohamed bin Ali Al Thani, a member of the Qatari royal family and collector of modern Art originating from the Arab Region. Notably, Sheikh Hassan Al Thani's personal collection became the backbone of the collection of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art founded in Qatar in 2010. The exhibition was also funded by the Hamburg-based Montblanc Cultural Foundation, founded by the German company of luxury goods in 1992; and the Cairo-based Sawiris Foundation for Social Development, a philanthropic platform established in 2001 by the Egyptian Sawiris family of prominent businessmen. The exhibition presented more than 100 artworks and 200 archival documents. The exhibits were loans from 60 individual and institutional collectors from more than 12 countries.[50]

[49] Apexart, "Occupational Hazarda: By Alexandra Stock," *Apexart,* accessed 17 December, 2019. https://apexart.org/exhibitions/stock.php

[50] Bardaouil and Fellrath, *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)*, 4-5.

The exhibition was divided into eight main sub-sections which the co-curators called "Chapters", whose titles were based on English translations of publication titles and aphorisms written by members of *Art and Liberty* in either French or Arabic. The Paris Exhibition was accompanied by a published catalogue made available in different editions in five languages: Arabic, English, French, German and Spanish. The catalogue featured more than 200 pages printed on high quality paper with a comparatively larger scale of 24cm X 28cm. As was the case with the Cairo Exhibition catalogue, the Paris Exhibition catalogue also included reproductions of artworks, however, the larger size allowed for significantly more elaborate features. Furthermore, despite the fact that the Paris Exhibition catalogue included a considerable amount of critical text, the exhibition was also accompanied by the publication of *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art Liberty Group*, a monograph of more than 350 pages written by co-curator Sam Bardaouil based on extensive archival research.

The Paris exhibition received mostly positive reviews in several established outlets such as the *The Guardian, Financial Times*, *The ARTnews* and *Harper's Bazaar Arabia.*[51] The exhibition was commended for shedding light on a forgotten chapter in the history of modern art beyond Europe. It was also praised for extensive scale and impressive curation. There were, however, quite a few critical reviews. For instance, critic Jonathan Jones of *The Guardian* argued that the displayed artworks were mere imitations demonstrating the westernization of non-European artists. It should be noted that this criticism is directed at *Art and Liberty* themselves, rather than the curators of the Paris Exhibition, whose only fault would be to have chosen "second-rate imitations of a modern French style."[52]

[51]Laura Cumming, "John Piper; Surrealism in Egypt: Art et Liberté 1938-48 –Review," *The Guardian,* 19 November 2017, accessed 17 December 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/nov/19/john-piper-surrealism-in-egypt-tate-liverpool-review; Maya Jaggi, "Surrealism's Egyptian Moment," *Financial Times*, 17 April 2017, accessed 17 December 2019, https://www.ft.com/content/5a301964-1e0f-11e7-b7d3-163f5a7f229c; Charles Ruas "'Long Live Degenerate Art': In 'Art et Liberté,' an Egyptian View of Surrealism Addresses Contemporary Issues," *ARTnews,* 6 March 2017, accessed 17 December 2019, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/reviews/subjective-realism-an-egyptian-view-of-surrealism-as-an-expression-of-contemporary-issues-7905/; Katrina Kufer, "Unveiling A Forgotten History," *Harper's Bazaar Arabia,* 28 April 2017, accessed 17 December 2019, https://www.harpersbazaararabia.com/art/exhibitions/unveiling-a-forgotten-history

[52]Jonathan Jones. "Was There More to Egyptian Surrealism than Suggestive Mosques and Rotten Meat?," *The Guardian*, 27 November 2017, accessed 17 December 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/nov/27/surrealism-in-egypt-tate-liverpool

Chapter II. The Emergence of *Art and Liberty* on the International Museum Scene

In this chapter, I try to understand the reasons for the sudden visibility of Egyptian surrealists on the international museum scene in 2016. I have identified three factors which have contributed to the emergence of *Art and Liberty*'s legacy in large-scale international exhibitions: 1) a process of rethinking the canons that has been ongoing within the academic discipline of art history for the last few decades; 2) shifting trends in museological practice towards including non-Western modern art; and 3) a local context of social and political activism in Egypt which triggered an earlier interest, though on a much smaller scale, in *Art and Liberty* as a historical example of political dissent.

II.1. Rethinking Canons in Art History

In the past few decades, the discipline of art history has been facing the challenging task of rethinking its canons, particularly its canon of modern art. It had become agreed upon that the Eurocentric views of the discipline of art history have to be revisited. Revisiting the Western art canon ushered in conceptual paradigms that are more attentive to the complexities of producing and perceiving art. With rising debates on global and intercultural perspectives, the discipline of art history is becoming more receptive to including histories of non-Euramerican modern art within its canon. Therefore, the sudden visibility of Egyptian surrealists on the international museum scene could be understood as a manifestation of shifts occurring within the discipline of art history itself. In the following section, I underline some of the academic trajectories that could have directly or indirectly contributed to the sudden revival of *Art and Liberty.*

Scholarly efforts to address the Eurocentric biases of academic art history could be categorized under two main currents: Global Art History and the World Art Studies.[53] A notable contribution to the former is the *Stories of Art* by art historian James Elkins, which explores the exclusion of non-Western art in the dominant narratives in art history scholarship as pursued by Western academia.[54] In his introduction to the 2007 edited volume *Is Art History Global?*, Elkins

[53] Newall, 8.
[54] Elkins, *Stories of Art*, xi.

argued that the hegemony of Western art historiography is inescapable, as non-Western art historians follow Western conceptual frameworks, research methodologies and analytical tools.[55]

Elkin's skepticism as to the possibility of breaking away from such hegemony is questioned by World Art Studies, spearheaded by art historians Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme. Theoretical and methodological contributions under the umbrella World Art Studies are of special significance to the discussion of recent curatorial interest in *Art and Liberty*. The concept of interculturalization is particularly important. In the introduction to their edited volume "World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches", Zijlmans and Van Damme defined interculturalization as "the processes of visual artistic exchange between two or more cultures or contexts, including their preconditions, nature and consequences."[56] It will be shown later in the thesis that this concept was evoked several times in both the display and accompanying monograph of the Paris Exhibition.

Questioning Eurocentrism has specifically resonated in two sub-fields that are related to the discussion of Egyptian surrealists, namely: modern art in the Arab/Middle East Region and surrealism studies. Though no direct connection could be established with the two exhibitions of 2016, recent developments in the sub-field of Arab/Middle Eastern modern art studies show that the academic climate has become more attentive to the history of modern art in the region in general, thereby making room for the history of Egyptian surrealists.

In addition to being grounded in the discipline of art history, this sub-field draws heavily on other interdisciplinary fields such as Arabic studies and Middle Eastern Studies. This is evident in the affiliation of the Association for Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab world, Iran, and Turkey (AMCA), founded in 2010, with the much larger Middle East Studies Association in North America (MESA), whose annual conference is considered to be the trend-setter in the broader field of Middle East Studies, and even in area studies in general.[57] AMCA collaborated with the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in publishing the anthology *Modern Art in the Arab*

[55] Elkins, "Art History as a Global Discipline," 19.
[56] Van Damme, 29.
[57] Association for Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab world, Iran, and Turkey, "Mission," accessed 17 December 2019, http://amcainternational.org/about/.

World: Primary Documents in 2018, an edited volume of English translations of 125 texts by Arab artists, writers and critics including several texts by members of *Art and Liberty*. Through this anthology, included texts became accessible, in most cases for the first time, to English-speaking researchers and practitioners.[58] While a commendable step in itself, many scholars have highlighted the need for further research to address evident historical and methodological gaps in this emerging field.[59]

While the sub-field of surrealism studies was initially conceived as discipline focused on Euromerican surrealist art, increasing attention is being given to the study of non-European surrealisms. This has contributed to bringing *Art and Liberty* to the limelight, with a prime example being "*Wonderful Things": Surrealism and Egypt*, a 2013 issue of *Dada/Surrealism*, a journal published by the University of Iowa.

Dedicated to exploring the history of the surrealist movement in Egypt, this issue aimed to promote much-needed academic research on the topic. Highlighting the fact that it is the first of its kind, the editors of the issue, art historians Donna Roberts and Patricia Allmer, positioned it as an attempt to demonstrate "the extent of the significance of Egypt as both motive and location of surrealism, often overlooked in scholarship on the movement."[60]

Approaching the legacy of *Art and Liberty* from a position grounded in surrealism studies raises several intriguing questions on the processes of introducing non-Western art into existing paradigms of the Western art canon. Efforts to insert non-Euramerican art histories in the canonized modernist template are often criticized for being additive in nature, i.e. falling short of taking into account the specificities of such histories. However, it could be argued that this criticism does not apply in the case of *Art and Liberty*; after all, they were self-identified surrealists and were acknowledged by others as part of the international surrealist movement.

The examples mentioned above from the two sub-fields are by no means an exhaustive list of all scholarly efforts dealing with the history of Egyptian modern art and/or *Art and Liberty*. Rather, they are only intended as indicators of a larger academic climate that is becoming more receptive to *Art and Liberty* in the context of ongoing efforts to include often-neglected non-

[58] Lenssen, Rogers and Shabout, 18, 21.
[59] Naef, "Writing the History of Modern Art in the Arab World: Documents, Theories and Realities," 115.
[60] Roberts and Allmer, 8.

Western modern art. However, a much-debated concern remains, that is: how best to approach such art from an established Western academic standpoint? In other words, should non-Western modern art be integrated into existing paradigms, such as a global, or globalized, surrealism in this case? Or would it be more beneficial to deal with non-Western artworks produced in modern times as a different body of work that requires the development of new paradigms?

As articulated by Zijlmans, the dilemma is whether to "include" or "other" non-Western Art. Her proposed solution is a synthesis of both approaches, suggesting they be pursued at the same time.[61] Despite the attractiveness of this suggestion, and perhaps its applicability to other examples of non-Western art, one could argue that the case of *Art and Liberty* could be presented as a successful example of integration of non-Western art into the existing paradigm of international surrealism.

II.2. Shifting Trends in Museological Practice

The recent scholarly debates on rethinking the Eurocentric biases of the academic discipline of art history have been coupled with an ongoing conversation in modern art museums on how to address the reflections of these biases in museum collections and exhibitions. In this section, I explore the extent to which the recent curatorial interest in *Art and Liberty* could be linked to this conversation.

Between October 2013 and January 2015, a massive exhibition with the title *Multiple Modernities: 1905-1970* opened in Centre Pompidou. Relying on permanent collections of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, *Multiple Modernities* aimed at shifting perception of the Eurocentric canon of modern art by showing artworks from different countries across the world. In the display, 1000 artworks from various regions, including the Middle East, were exhibited. A notable example of an artwork from Egypt was *Arous el-Nil* (La fiancée du Nil) (Fig. 3.), a 1929-sculpture by Pioneer artist Mahmoud Mukhtar (1891-1934). Mukhtar is often celebrated for his neo-Pharaonic works, which have become an essential component of nationalist public imagery, with many of his sculptures occupying central squares in Cairo and Alexandria.[62]

[61] Zijlmans, 292.
[62] Centre Pompidou, "Multiple Modernities: 1905-1970-Press Kit," 33, *Centre Pompidou*. 12 September 2013, accessed 17 December 2019,

Multiple Modernities was accompanied by an exhibition catalogue with critical contributions deconstructing how the Western canon of modern art has been narrated.[63] *Multiple Modernities,* and indeed the Paris Exhibition, could be understood as an example of Centre Pompidou's recent efforts to redefine the Western canon of modern art. It should be noted, however, that unlike the nationalist references evoked by Mukhtar's sculptor in *Multiple Modernities*, the Paris Exhibition underscored anti-nationalist sentiments in Egyptian modern art. There is much difference between the two in scale and scope, it is doubtful that Centre Pompidou would have hosted an exhibition on Egyptian surrealists if *Multiple Modernities* had not opened three years earlier.

Art historian Sylvia Naef argued that there is also another important difference between *Multiple Modernities* and the Paris Exhibition, in terms of their approach to how to integrate non-Euramerican modern art in Western modern art museums. Naef interpreted the Paris Exhibition as an example of a shift in preference by the Centre Pompidou's management for temporary exhibitions with an in-depth focus on non-Euramerican modernist experiences over permanent exhibitions attempting at constructing a unified global history of modern art.[64]

In another essay, Naef observed an increasing trend of survey exhibitions hosted by museums in Europe and North America on the history of modern art from the Arab/Middle East Region. Between 2012 and 2015, she identified five large-scale exhibitions hosted by museums such as the Whitechapel Gallery in London, the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris and the New Museum in New York. These exhibitions, Naef explains, bring knowledge on the history of modern art to a museum scene which has been preoccupied with contemporary, as opposed to modern, art from the region for several decades.[65] This trend could point to a general atmosphere of welcoming untold stories of Arab modernism, such as that of *Art and Liberty*.

Nevertheless, there is a key difference in scope between the exhibitions described by Naef and the 2016 exhibitions on *Art and Liberty*. According to Naef, "[c]ommon to all these

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https://www.centrepompidou.fr/fr/content/download/14570/129106/version/15/file/PRESS+KIT+MULTIPLE+MODERNITIES.pdf.

[63] Gauthier, 32.

[64] Naef, "Writing the History of Modern Art in the Arab World: Documents, Theories and Realities," 125-126.

[65] Naef, "Exhibiting and Writing on Art from the Middle East-Some Recent European and North American exhibitions and their Catalogues", 78.

exhibitions was the intent of presenting the art production of a whole region, or of a whole country […]."[66] In contrast, the Cairo Exhibition and the Paris Exhibition sought, or claimed, to limit their scope to the experience of *Art and Liberty* in particular. This might be attributed to the appeal of the subject of the 2016 exhibitions, and the ability to link it to a globally recognizable art movement, which makes it easier to introduce them to international audiences.

There remains an interesting question about the extent to which the visibility of *Art and Liberty* might pave the way for future thematic exhibitions that go beyond the national and regional surveys.

II.3. Local Political Activism and the Independent Art Scene in Egypt

In this section, I explore a third possible factor which could have contributed to the sudden visibility of *Art and Liberty* on the international museum scene. The trajectory of interest in *Art and Liberty* can be traced to their revival as a historical example of political dissent, through efforts by the independent art scene in Egypt. Most prominently, interest in Egyptian surrealism could be directly linked to *The Prestige of Terror*, an exhibition/installation which took place in Cairo in 2010.

Based on archival research carried out by London-based artists Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin during an artistic residency in Cairo, *The Prestige of Terror* started as an art intervention with the title *Special Exhumation of the Egyptian Surrealist Movement* at the Townhouse Gallery in Egypt.[67]

It should be noted that the Townhouse Gallery had been, and continues to be, a significant contributor to the independent artistic and cultural scene in Egypt. Established in 1998 in Downton Cairo, the gallery operates as a non-profit non-governmental organization primarily relying on funding from international organizations. Art historian Kerstin Pinther noted that it is common for galleries to operate as NGOs in many counties across Africa.[68] As a non-governmental organization supporting independent art in Cairo's public space, the Townhouse

[66] Ibid.
[67] Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin. "The Prestige of Terror," *Broomberg & Chanarin*, accessed 17 December 2019, http://www.broombergchanarin.com/prestige-of-terror. In this thesis, following the current description on Broomberg & Chanarin website. I use the title *The Prestige of Terror* to refer to the exhibition that took place in Cairo and to the stand-alone installation resulting from this exhibition.
[68] Pinther, 112.

Gallery has suffered from state censorship over the years. In 2010, during times of political turmoil with events leading to the 2011 January Revolution, an exhibition addressing the status of psychiatric hospitals in Egypt was censored. This exhibition was due to open during the first week of Broomberg and Chanarin's residency in the Townhouse.[69]

The Prestige of Terror was conceptualized against this backdrop of government censorship. In addition to an art installation inspired by the artists' archival research (Fig. 4.), *The Prestige of Terror* included an intervention in the neighborhood surrounding the Townhouse in Downtown Cairo (Fig. 5.) Prompted by the limited availability of information on *Art and Liberty* at the time, Broomberg and Chanarin started their project with an "empty gallery" at the Townhouse in which they made an open call for information and archives on the Egyptian surrealist movement.[70]

After identifying relevant archives, the artists chose several statements written or appropriated by members of *Art and Liberty*. These statements were printed on paper using similar methods and machines to those that were used by Egyptian surrealists during the 1940s.[71] In addition to being the core of Broomberg and Chanarin's art installation in the Townhouse Gallery, these posters were hung on several walls next to the various venues which hosted the original *Art and Liberty* exhibitions in Downtown Cairo between 1940 and 1945.[72] The project also included a website which served as a public resource for sharing the research done by Broomberg and Chanarin.[73]

In an edited publication titled *Speak, Memory. On Archives and Other Strategies of (re)activation of cultural memory*, from a 2010 symposium with the same title, Broomberg and Chanarin described how they conceptualized an art exhibition/ installation that would unearth the forgotten legacy of Egyptian surrealists:

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[69] Broomberg and Chanarin, 58.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Parts of the process of printing were video-taped and displayed in the exhibition in Cairo in 2010. See Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin. "Prestige of Terror from Broomberg and Chanarin on Vimeo," *Broomberg & Chanarin*, accessed 17 December 2019, http://www.broombergchanarin.com/the-prestige-of-terror-film.
[72] Broomberg and Chanarin mentioned that *Art and Liberty* held five annual exhibitions between 1941 and 1947. According to Bardaouil, *Art and Liberty* held five major exhibitions between 1940 and 1945. See Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt*, 182.
[73] Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, *Egyptian Surrealism.* http://egyptiansurrealism.com. The website was functioning since the project in 2010 until Summer 2019. Last accessed by the author on 5 June, 2019.

> "Townhouse Director William Wells offered us the vacant space. We suggested a show on censorship, which didn't go down too well. It was probably that same day that we read a short paragraph in Maria Golia's remarkable *Photography and Egypt* about a local surrealist movement. We were both surprised that we had never heard of the group or their founder, George Henein, who had been a close friend of André Breton. The few images of the group that appeared in her book were intriguing. We therefore accepted William's offer and the show opened two weeks later with an empty gallery and a simple text inviting others to come forward with any information about the group or its collaborators. We were interested in any information about a movement that had seemingly been written out of Egyptian history. Over the coming month we used the gallery space as a receptacle for everything that we found."[74]

Broomberg and Chanarin's words show that their interest in *Art and Liberty* was instigated by research, curiosity to find more on a group which "seemingly been written out of Egyptian history," and a gallery made available, ironically, by State-censorship. Broomberg and Chanarin's work could be understood as an artistic intervention positioned within the nexus of the artistic and the political in Egypt at the time. Artistically, Broomberg and Chanarin's exhibition was presented as a late episode of a previously discontinued surrealist practice in Cairo, or as the "6th 'Art and Freedom [Liberty]' show", as described by the artists.[75] Politically, the exhibition was presented, to a large extent, as an act of digging up a deliberately-covered history of an art group against the Egyptian state control in an independent, non-profit and non-governmental gallery known for its socio-political agenda.

When it was displayed in Cairo under the original title *Special Exhumation of the Egyptian Surrealist Movement*, Broomberg and Chanarin's participatory exhibition received mixed reviews. On the one hand, the artists were praised for reigniting the memory of *Art and Liberty*

[74] Broomberg and Chanarin, 58.
[75] Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin. "The Prestige of Terror," *Broomberg & Chanarin*, accessed 17 December 2019, http://www.broombergchanarin.com/prestige-of-terror.

in Cairo's cultural circles and for doing so "with great elegance."[76] On the other hand, the exhibition/installation was criticized for being "too superficial"; an attack to which the artists responded by arguing that they did not approach Egyptian surrealists from a position of scholarly historical analysis but rather from a position of artists in-residence who had just "parachuted in[to]" the Egyptian context. [77]

It should be noted that the main output of the event held in Cairo was an installation of several prints which was later renamed *The Prestige of Terror* (Fig. 6.) Evoking the memory of *Art and Liberty* as an example of a voice engaged with the international politics of the time, the title was borrowed from Georges Henein's *Prestige de la terreur*, a statement condemning the atomic bombings in Japan.[78] Afterwards, *The Prestige of Terror* installation took on a life of its own as a stand-alone artwork in international art exhibitions and fairs. The artwork was later acquired by the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens (EMST) in 2014 and exhibited in *documenta* 14 - Kassel 2017.[79]

Though, curiously, it was not explicitly referred to by the curators of the two large-scale 2016 exhibitions, *The Prestige of Terror* installation was perhaps the main factor behind introducing the legacy of *Art and Liberty* to the international museum scene. The co-curators of the Paris Exhibition, Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, described *The Prestige of Terror* installation as one of their "favorite pieces" in the 2012 at the international Art Dubai fair.[80]

Before concluding this chapter, it should be noted that some reviews have emphasized that the recent revival of the legacy of *Art and Liberty* came from the "art world of galleries, museums and auction houses."[81] It is implied that interest in *Art and Liberty* is driven by a rise in the demand

[76] Anneka Lenssen, "Surrealism without Surrealists: Reviving the Unconscious in Arab Modern Art," video, 44:21, *Darat Al-Funun,* 22 February 2011, accessed 17 December 2017, http://daratalfunun.org/?event=surrealism-with-surrealists-reviving-the-unconscious-in-arab-modern-art.
[77] Broomberg and Chanarin, 61, 63.
[78] Fijalkowski and Richardson, 261.
[79] documenta 14, "Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin," accessed 17 December 2019. https://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/22247/adam-broomberg-and-oliver-chanarin
[80] Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, "Excavating the Past, Illuminating the Present, *Canvas Daily-Art Dubai Edition*, 22 March 2012, accessed 17 December 2019, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56e1e3e24d088e6834d4fbf4/t/591c2a1c44024368be650244/1495018014396/ARTICLE+17+-+Canvas.pdf. Art Dubai is an international art fair in the United Arab Emirates, founded in 2007.
[81] Anneka Lenssen, "Surviving Fascism? 'Art and Liberty' in Egypt, 1938-1948," *Print Plus -Modernism/modernity*, Vol. 1, Cycle 4, 8 February 2017, accessed 17 December 2019, https://modernismmodernity.org/forums/posts/surviving-fascism-art-et-liberte

for, and consequently the commercial value of, works by modern Egyptian artists.[82] While the observation itself may be true, it can hardly be argued that financial motivations were a significant factor behind the 2016 exhibitions. As will be explained later, both exhibitions were backed by abundantly resourced sponsors, who could indeed benefit from a perceived increase in the commercial value of their exhibits, but only insofar as this contributes to their prestige.

In this chapter, I explored three different factors that possibly explain the emergence of the legacy of *Art and Liberty* on the international museum scene. Following this analysis, two main conclusions could be identified. First, the academic and museological efforts to revisit the Eurocentrism of Western canon of modern art have contributed to creating a good moment for shedding light on an example of long-neglected histories of non-Euramerican art. While it remains a matter of debate as to what are the best ways to approach these histories, the case of *Art and Liberty* could be construed to successfully demonstrate the possibility of integrating non-Western art into existing paradigms within the canon of Western art. One has to see whether future developments in the sub-field of Arab/Middle Eastern modern art studies would bring about other methodological tools and conceptual lenses to shed light on different aspects of the legacy of *Art and Liberty* in the future. Second, the visibility of non-Western art is, at least for the moment, dependent on the extent to which such art could be made relevant to global audiences, whether by being presented as part of a familiar movement or by being shown to speak to contemporary questions of political activism.

[82] Sama Waly, "Art and Liberty: Redefining the Canon or the Next Record Sales?," *Jadaliyya*, 3 May 2017, accessed 17 December, 2019, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/34251

Chapter III. Why Two Different Exhibitions?

In this chapter, I examine the second aspect of the recent international curatorial interest in *Art and Liberty*, i.e. the contrast between the interpretations advanced by the Cairo Exhibition and the Paris Exhibition for the legacy of *Art and Liberty*. This chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first section, I outline three facets of the divergence of narratives promoted by the two exhibitions. To do so, I examine curatorial strategies employed and the accompanying textual productions. In the second section, I examine three possible explanations for this divergence.

III.1. Contrasting Views: How were they manifested?

In the following section, I outline the contrast in interpretations of *Art and Liberty*'s legacy as manifested in three aspects of each exhibition: 1) selection and contextualization of exhibited artworks; 2) interpretation of *Art and Liberty*'s political actions; and 3) self-identification as subscribing to a certain theoretical position, in the case of the Paris Exhibition, and the lack thereof in the case of the Cairo exhibition.

III.1.1. Selection and Contextualization of Exhibited Artworks

The stark contrast between the Cairo and Pairs Exhibitions was clearly manifested in how each exhibition selected and contextualized exhibited works of art. An evident example of such contrast relates to how each exhibition contextualized the work of *Art and Liberty*'s successors; the *Contemporary Art Group*. Founded in 1946, works of the *Contemporary Art Group* are often hailed as exemplary of the nationalist sentiments dominating Egyptian modern art during the second half of the twentieth century.[83] Their paintings are usually celebrated for incorporating motifs from the Egyptian local culture.[84] An examination of how each of the two 2016 exhibitions articulated the relationship between *Art and Liberty* and the *Contemporary Art Group* provides valuable insights on the difference between these exhibitions.

In the Cairo Exhibition, the *Contemporary Art Group* was presented as direct heirs of Egyptian surrealists, with seamless progression along a linear history of modern art in Egypt.

[83] Williams, 438.
[84] Kane, *The Politics of Art in Modern Egypt: Aesthetics, Ideology and Nation-Building*, 94.

Among the prominent artworks on display at the Cairo Exhibition were the large paintings *Charter* (1962) (Fig. 7.) and *Peace* (1965) (Fig. 8.) by the Abdel Hadi Al Gazzar (1925-1966), a prominent member of the *Contemporary Art Group*. The former derives its title from the *National Charter,* a constitution-like document introduced in 1962 by then-President Gamal Abdel-Nasser, embodying the key ideological elements of Nasserism, including State-socialism and pan-Arab nationalism.[85] Both paintings include broadly recognizable visual references to the dominant political rhetoric in Egypt during the 1960s, such as strong ties between Muslims and Christians, industrial modernization, and unity of peasants and factory workers.[86] These two paintings continue to enjoy the status of nationalist icons until this very day, which is reflected in their prominent placement in their permanent home, the Museum of Modern Art in Cairo.[87]

Both paintings were included in the display of the Cairo Exhibition without any problematization of their heavy nationalist undertones. More intriguingly, they are included in the catalogue of the exhibition under the title "The Afterlife of Egyptian Surrealism (1965-Present)."[88] The labelling of these two paintings as surrealist artworks serves as a key indicator of the, perhaps deliberate, vagueness of the Cairo Exhibition's definition of the surrealist movement in Egypt. This may be attributed to influence by a State-nationalist view of the history of the Egyptian modern art, seeking to force a linear narrative on actions and artworks that would otherwise not belong together.

Contrary to the continuity implied in the catalogue of Cairo Exhibition, the Paris Exhibition argued that the *Contemporary Art Group* should be viewed as antithetical to *Art and Liberty*. The differentiation made by the co-curators between the two groups echoes Georges Henein's position condemning the nationalist inclinations of the *Contemporary Art Group*, as quoted by Bardaouil in *Surrealism in Egypt.*[89] In the introductory text for the exhibition section titled "The Contemporary Art Group: 'An Egyptian Art'", Bardaouil and Fellrath wrote;

[85] Podeh and Winckler, "Introduction: Nasserism as a Form of Populism," 27-28.
[86] Williams, 442-443.
[87] Kane, "Art Education and the Emergence of Radical Art Movements in Egypt: The Surrealists and the Contemporary Arts Group, 1938–1951," 119.
[88] Mari and Hassan, 211-213.
[89] Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, 233-234.

> "[…]as far as *Art and Liberty* were concerned, they feared that these younger artists, who at one point provided them with the blank pages on which they could inscribe the words of their next chapter, were becoming a mouthpiece for a new form of nationalism."[90]

Bardaouil and Fellrath's words portray members of the *Contemporary Art Group* as artists who started as mentees of Egyptian surrealists before turning against them, compromising their artistic integrity for the sake of nationalist propaganda. In an exhibition section titled "Subjective Realism," the Paris Exhibition featured several paintings by Al Gazzar. Unlike the Cairo Exhibition which displayed Al Gazzar's monumental nationalist paintings from the 1960s, the Paris Exhibition selected earlier works from the period 1945-1950.

A notable example from the exhibition is Al-Gazzar's 1950 painting *mahasseb ll-Sayyidah (The Beloved of Sayyidah)* (Fig. 9.) The title of the painting refers to the worshipers attending Mawlid Sayyidah Zeinab, an annual religious Sufi festival held around the shrine of Zeinab, a grand-daughter of the Prophet of Islam, also revered a saint. Including Al Gazzar's earlier works under this section could be interpreted as the Paris Exhibition's attempt to show that the *Contemporary Art Group*'s renowned style of employing local motifs is owed to their predecessors in *Art and Liberty*.

The "Subjective Realism" section included also several paintings by Ramses Younan as examples of *Art and Liberty*'s innovative incorporation of motifs from the Egyptian culture and history (Fig. 10.) According to Bardaouil and Fellrath, *Art and Liberty* drew on pharaonic, Coptic and Sufi symbols as a way to "create their own negotiated form of Surrealism".[91] In fact, the title of the section itself is borrowed from Younan's essay "The Objective of the Contemporary Artist", originally published in Arabic in 1938, in which he commends "subjective realism or psychological realism."[92]

Although neither Younan nor the exhibition's co-curators provide a sufficient elaboration on the meaning of this term, Bardaouil argued in his monograph that Younan had advanced a new definition of surrealism that would bridge the gap between intentional absurdity and

[90] Bardaouil and Fellrath, *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)*, 149.
[91] Ibid., 149.
[92] Younan, 93.

automatism.[93] Bardaouil's celebratory tone of the term 'subjective realism' despite its ambiguity raises a question about the extent to which the Paris Exhibition sought to critically interrogate the legacy of *Art and Liberty*.

Furthermore, the Paris Exhibition claimed that the difference between the two groups is evident in how each group incorporated elements from the Egyptian local culture in their work. The co-curators argued that, unlike members of the *Contemporary Art Group* who incorporated local symbols to serve a nationalist agenda, *Art and Liberty* artists creatively integrated the local culture in their artistic and literary practices.[94] It should be noted that the terms in which this differentiation is made are not very clear, at least as far as could be derived from the artworks themselves rather than their specific historical context. It might be argued that the narrative of "break and betrayal" is somewhat also forced onto the interpretation, though not to the same extent as the linear interpretation of the Cairo Exhibition.

This divergence between the two exhibitions regarding the selection and contextualization of artists and artworks is also blatantly evident in their presentation of photography work by Lee Miller (1907-1977), Ida Kar (1908-1974) and Étienne Sved (1914-1996), who are respectively American, Russian and Hungarian by birth. In their commentary on similar or even the same work by the three artists (Fig. 11. and Fig. 12.), the two exhibitions advanced directly opposed interpretations. The Cairo Exhibition introduced the photographs as an example for how surrealist photographers drew on local motifs from the Egyptian culture. In the exhibition catalogue, Hassan wrote:

> "…most interestingly, they [Kar and Miller's work] are rooted in the Egyptian context, where ancient Egyptian sites and typical desert landscape, along with rural and urban architectural escapes, become central to their surrealist juxtapositions and visual vocabulary."[95]

[93] Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, 143.
[94] Ibid., 149, 127.
[95] Hassan, "When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938- Present)," 73.

For Hassan, being inspired by landscape in Egypt is evidence of connection between the photographs and the Egyptian culture. Conversely, Bardaouil and Fellrath interpret the same photographs as intending to question Egyptian nationalism, writing:

> "…*Art and Liberty* artists like Ida Kar and Étienne Sved, in a number pf photographs and photomontages, would make use of Pharaonic elements in playful compositions that, instead of colonialism, evaded the associations with Egyptian nationalism."[96]

In addition to arguing that that these surrealist photographs are intended to subvert both nationalist and colonial appropriation of ancient Egyptian visual elements, Bardaouil and Fellrath claim that Étienne Sved's work (Fig. 13.) exemplifies *Art and Liberty*'s socio-political mission.[97]

Bardaouil and Fellrath claim raises several questions. Indeed, the playful way in which ancient Egyptian visual elements were employed by Kar and Sved in their 1940s photographs is different from earlier celebratory nationalist art, with a prominent example being the iconic sculpture *Nahḍat Misr (Egypt's Reawakening)* (Fig. 14.) completed in 1928 by Mahmoud Mukhtar. It is not immediately clear that the surrealist photographs could be interpreted as intentional attempts to subvert the nationalist imagery, let alone evidence of *Art and Liberty*'s anti-nationalist political views. Furthermore, while the Paris Exhibition suggests that Kar was at one point part of the Egyptian surrealist milieu, it remains uncertain whether it could be said that her work could be considered representative of *Art and Liberty*'s artistic and political practices.

III.1.2. Interpretation of *Art and Liberty*'s political actions

The Cairo Exhibition and the Paris Exhibition also advanced different interpretations of the political actions of *Art and Liberty*. Each exhibition promoted a distinctive reading of the group's founding manifesto *Vive L'art dégéneré* (Long Live Degenerate Art), drawn up in 1938. In the Cairo Exhibition, a transcript of the manifesto in both Arabic and English was presented on a wall panel near the entrance the exhibition. However, no contextual information was provided to the

[96] Bardaouil and Fellrath, *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)*, 191
[97] Ibid.

visitors. In the exhibition catalogue, the manifesto was primarily framed as a response to the European context of the rise of Fascism and Nazism. Hassan wrote in the catalogue:

> "Issued against the rise of fascism in Europe and the Nazi opposition to modern art, the statement lamented the hostile attacks against the censorship of what the group believed was 'the ultimate expression of freedom, strength and human feeling."[98]

Hassan's description fails to mention that the manifesto could also have been drafted in response to rising fascist sentiments in the local political and cultural context in Egypt at the time. During the 1930s, not only were para-military fascist groups visibly active in the country's public sphere, such groups were sometimes publicly supported by key figures in the art scene, such as politician and collector Muhammed Mahmud Khalil (1877–1953).[99] Khalil was co-founder and president of the influential Société des Amis de l-Art (Society of the Lovers of Fine Arts), founded in 1924, which hosted the prestigious Cairo Art Salon. Leading pioneer painter Mohamed Nagy (1988-1956), expressed strong admiration for intellectuals who were affiliates of the fascist party, such as Alexandria-born poets Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944) and Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888-1970). The Egyptian Academy in Rome, founded in 1929, played a significant role in maintaining strong cultural and political ties between Egypt artists and fascist Italy.[100]

Furthermore, public discussions on pedagogical reform between the 1920s-1940s, including art education, were heavily informed by theories of the fascist Italian philosopher Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944).[101] A large number of public sculpture projects was initiated by supporters of the Egypt royal family during the 1930s, for which funding was sought from representatives and members of the ruling fascist regime in Italy.[102] It should be noted that positions towards fascism, and Nazism, before and during WWII were informed by a multitude of factors that are well beyond the scope of this thesis, but would be addressed again in the

[98] Hassan, "When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938- Present)," 64.
[99] Kane, *The Politics of Art in Modern Egypt: Aesthetics, Ideology and Nation-Building*,22.
[100] Radwan,1110, 1108.
[101] Kane, *The Politics of Art in Modern Egypt: Aesthetics, Ideology and Nation-Building*, 33.
[102] Kane, "Egyptian Art Institutions and Art Education from 1908 to 1951," 52.

section dealing with possible explanations of the difference in interpretations advanced by the two exhibitions.

Upon its publishing, *Art and Liberty*'s manifesto seems to have struck a dissonant chord among the nationalist writers of Arabic-language Egyptian magazine *al-Risala* in the late 1930s. In his article "Egyptian Surrealism and 'Degenerate Art' in 1939" (2010), LaCoss noted that Egyptian surrealists were attacked as offering misrepresentations of freedom as chaos and blindly following Western trends. *Art and Liberty*'s members El-Telmisany, A. Kamel and Younan responded to claims of being mere imitators of surrealists in France by publishing essays in defense of the internationalism of the surrealist movement, outlining the group's vision of surrealism as an artistic practice and socio-political project.[103]

Considering the extent to which Fascist ideas were tolerated, and possibly influential, in Egyptian cultural circles in the 1930s, one has to question why the Cairo Exhibition chose to consider *Art and Liberty*'s anti-fascist statements to be merely drawn up in response to a European political context that is depicted as completely detached from Egyptian local politics. Furthermore, the Exhibition did not address nationalist antagonism to the group since its formation, as exemplified by the attacks of *al-Risala*.

Unlike the Cairo Exhibition, the Paris Exhibition chose to position the 1938 manifesto within the Egyptian political and cultural climate of the time. In the Paris Exhibition, the manifesto was displayed under the section with the title "The Voice of Canons", which is borrowed from the catalogue of *Art and Liberty*'s first exhibition in 1940 (Fig. 15.)[104] The exhibition incorporated archival documents in order to highlight the rising fascist sentiments in Egypt at the time. In this section of the Paris Exhibition, news clippings of para-military marches organized by fascist groups in Cairo in 1936 were on display (Fig. 16.) In his monograph, co-curator Bardaouil stressed that *Art and Liberty*'s anti-fascist manifesto is a condemnation of rising fascism, primarily in Egypt.[105] Furthermore, Bardaouil highlighted how Egyptian surrealists, led by Henein, strongly denounced fascism during a public lecture delivered by Marinetti in Cairo in March 1938.[106]

[103] LaCoss., 90, 97-98, 102.
[104] Bardaouil and Fellrath, *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)*, 65.
[105] Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, 69.
[106] Ibid., 80.

While the Cairo Exhibition did not explicitly address *Art and Liberty*'s political legacy in its display, the Paris Exhibition heavily underscored the socio-political local context in which the Egyptian surrealists worked, in several sections of the display. The exhibition section titled "Fragmented Bodies" included paintings on such subjects as socio-economic inequalities and political oppression in Egypt at the time.[107] In a recorded video that was played at the exhibition in Stockholm, co-curator Fellrath suggested that these paintings could be labelled as "activist-art".[108] A notable example is the 1937 painting *Coups de Bâtons* (Fig. 17.) by the Greek-Egyptian artist Antoine Mayo (1905-1990), which shows a brawl in a street café in Cairo. In the same video, Fellrath interprets that painting as an act of condemnation of the use of force by the police to disperse the crowd.[109]

The section titled "Writing with Pictures" aimed at showing connections between literary production, in which social and political allegiances are naturally more evident, and works by members of *Art and Liberty*, such as 1940 paintings by Fouad Kamel (1919-1973) (Fig. 18.) were inspired by a socially critical novella by Egyptian-French writer Albert Cossery (1913-2008). While the latter was not a member of *Art and Liberty,* both F. Kamel and Cossery were signatories of the group's 1938 manifesto.

The contrast in interpretation of *Art and Liberty*'s political legacy is further exemplified by how each exhibition explains the rift between members of the group and the French surrealists led by André Breton (1896-1966). On the one hand, in the catalogue of the Cairo Exhibition, Hassan notes that this rift in 1948 was due to *Art and Liberty*'s condemnation of Breton's support of the newly established State of Israel.[110] Hassan echoes Gharib who argued that members of Art and Liberty were motivated by pan-Arab sentiments in their conflict with Breton.[111] On the other hand, Bardaouil questions the validity of Gharib's argument. He claims that Gharib,

[107] Bardaouil and Fellrath, *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)*, 87
[108] Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, "Art et Liberté: Fragmented Bodies."*Moderna* Museet, video, 3:46, 8 June 2018, accessed 17 December 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zv3F1dOPzKQ
[109] Ibid.
[110] Hassan, "When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938- Present)," 67.
[111] Gharib, 34.

motivated by his own nationalist disposition, has misquoted his sources and failed to present archival documents to support his interpretation.[112]

III.1.3. Self-identification as Subscribing to Certain Theoretical Positions

The contrast between the two exhibitions was further manifested in the self-identification on part of the Paris Exhibition as subscribing to a defined theoretical position, as opposed to the lack of such self-identification on part of the Cairo Exhibition.

The scarcity of analytical input was notable throughout the Cairo Exhibition. Text was sparsely utilized, mostly limited to brief introductions of the sections and short labels with basic descriptive data placed next to the objects on display. With no critical curatorial statement, there was little room left for considering multi-layered narratives on the history of surrealist art in Egypt. The conceptual framework behind the exhibition was further muddled by the ambiguity of the criteria used for selecting the objects on display, which spanned decades of Egyptian modern art. The curatorial logic behind the display was hardly communicated. As noted by Alexandra Stock, the displayed objects were arranged in "a seemingly arbitrary order".[113] In another review published in 2017, a harsher judgment is passed on the exhibition as a whole, suggesting that the curators "basically threw the works up on the zigzagging walls."[114]

Failing to provide explicit reference to the theorical frameworks informing the exhibition, the co-curators left visitors with the only possibility of accepting the familiar reading of displayed work, which would be the nationalist one in most cases. Furthermore, being a show that is taking place in a State-sponsored venue in Cairo, the Exhibition could only serve to affirm nationalist-inclined views of the history of the Egyptian modern art. Additionally, it could be significant that co-curator Hassan has referred to postcolonial paradigms in his previous work, it might be construed that the Cairo Exhibition was partly shaped by the same paradigms.[115] In fact, Hassan

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[112] Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, 231.

[113] Stock, Alexandra. "When Art Becomes Liberty-The Egyptian Surrealists (1938–1965)." IBRAAZ. January 6. accessed 17 December. 2017.https://www.ibraaz.org/reviews/122.

[114] Jonathan Guyer and Surti Singh, "The Double Game of Egyptian Surrealism: How to Curate a Revolutionary Movement," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, April 17, 2017, accessed 17 December 2019. https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-double-game-ofegyptian- surrealism-how-to-curate-a-revolutionary-movement/.

[115] Hassan, "Some Reflections on Postcolonial Modernity / Postcolonial Realities and Architecture of the Muslim World," 270.

employs language along the lines of postcolonial theory in the exhibition catalogue, framing the Cairo Exhibition as an attempt to shed light on a non-Western modernist group who participated in what he calls the "anti-fascist global protest and decolonization".[116]

Conversely, the Paris Exhibition was explicitly positioned as adopting an antithetical approach to a postcolonial analysis of the history of the Egyptian modern art. As clearly stated in his monograph, Bardaouil frames his work as an alternative to the nationalist as well as the postcolonial reading of *Art and Liberty*.[117] In the catalogue, Bardaouil writes that:

> "[It] is mandatory that *Art and Liberty* are presented neither within an orchestrated 'Arab' art history that reinforces the notion of periphery and otherness, nor within the dialectics of Orientalism and Postcolonial Studies".[118]

Bardaouil also argued that the legacy of *Art and Liberty* is best understood in light of an intercultural perspective, as advanced by Zijlmans. Moreover, he suggested that the writings of Younan on internationalism indicate that Younan is a forerunner of Zijlman's notion of interculturalism.[119]

However, it is perhaps Zijlmans' conceptualization of the flexible center/periphery model that appears to exert the most significant influence on the curatorial approach taken in the Paris Exhibition. In her discussion of the formation of an art-historical intercultural perspective, Zijlmans proposes viewing the center/periphery model as a flexible model.[120] This will be further explored below in the section on possible reasons behind the differences between the two exhibitions. However, it is important here to take note of its direct reflection in the Paris Exhibition.

In the exhibition section titled "Tribute to Georges Henein", Bardaouil and Fellrath provide a curatorial articulation of how to best position the legacy of *Art and Liberty* within a broader global context. The section displayed a diagram of the network of correspondence

[116] Hassan, "When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938- Present)," 61.
[117] Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, 237.
[118] Bardaouil, Bardaouil, "The Art and Liberty Group: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938-1948)," 47.
[119] Ibid., 238, 239.
[120] Zijlmans, 296.

exchanged among surrealist writers and artists across several cities such as Cairo, Beirut, Tokyo, Paris, Copenhagen, London, New York and Buenos Aires (Fig. 19.). This installation could be situated within a long tradition of using diagrams to communicate the history of modern art, e.g. Alfred Barr's 1936 seminal diagram on abstract art (Fig. 20.) and the network diagram in the 2012 exhibition *Inventing Abstraction*: *1910-1925* in MOMA in New York (Fig. 21.)

Unlike these examples, however, the diagram in the Paris Exhibition does not foreground information on artistic practices or particular individuals. Instead, it shows lines connecting geographic locations signifying a transnational network of surrealist artists and authors. Interestingly, the diagram visually emphasizes Cairo's position by using a larger font and circle, thereby making the Egyptian capital central in this network map of different cities across the different continents. This central placement of Cairo could be construed as an attempt to unsettle the dominant notion that the center needs to be the West. Indeed, co-curator Fellrath stated that this diagram is meant to prompt visitors to rethink the position of Paris as the only center of modern art during the 1930s and 1940s.[121]

Along the same lines, Bardaouil argued in his monograph that the case of *Art and Liberty* unsettles the Paris-centered surrealist canon. He noted that members of the group thought of themselves as "partners within a fluid movement comprising of international networks."[122] Though the exhibition catalogue did not feature an image of the diagram, agreement with Zijlmans' notion of a flexible model of center/periphery is explicitly highlighted.[123]

III.2. Possible Explanations of Contrasting Views

As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, there was stark contrast in the interpretation of the legacy of *Art and Liberty* between two exhibitions in Cairo and Paris. In the following section, I explore three possible reasons for this contrast: 1) the inherent nature of the historical legacy of *Art and Liberty*; 2) the difference of the theoretical dispositions of the curatorial teams of the two exhibitions; and 3) the competing agendas of the main sponsors backing the exhibitions.

[121] Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, "Art et Liberté: Georges Henein,"*Moderna* Museet, video, 3:41, 8 June 2018, accessed 17 December 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hx7Lr4eED6E
[122] Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, 241.
[123] Bardaouil, "The Art and Liberty Group: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938-1948)," 44.

III.2.1. Inherent Susceptibility to Multiple Interpretations

The historical legacy of *Art and Liberty* as a politically engaged art group in times of political turmoil in Egypt allows for multiple, and possibly contradictory, readings. The examination of the historical and political complexities of Egypt during the 1930s and 1940s is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is necessary to draw attention to the political context in which *Art and Liberty* operated and to mention a few examples on the extent to which their actions could be interpreted in multiple ways.

As mentioned earlier, *Art and Liberty*'s entire life coincided with an era commonly known as the liberal epoch of Egyptian modern history, which spanned the years between 1922 and 1952, and during which Egypt was an independent constitutional monarchy under varying levels of British control. In the 1930s and 1940s, the political scene in Egypt witnessed the rise of several fascist and para-military groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928, and Young Egypt, founded in 1933. At that time, a large segment of Egyptian intellectuals conflated anti-British nationalism with being pro-fascist, which gave rise to common proclamations of support for Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy during WWII. As explained earlier in this chapter, pro-fascist sentiments resonated in the Egyptian art scene. As Middle Eastern Studies scholar Selma Botman noted, "fascism was seen as a militant form of nationalism."[124]

In this context, *Art and Liberty*'s 1938 manifesto, in which the group publicly condemned Nazism and Fascism, could be interpreted as commentary on the home-grown fascist threat. However, as opposition to the British occupation was conflated with support for fascism and Nazism, opposition to fascism, home-grown or international, could as easily be construed as support for British imperialism.

Moreover, *Art and Liberty*'s encounters with the British Embassy in Cairo at the time could seem perplexing. On the one hand, the Egyptian surrealists had a strong relationship with their British counterparts. The group's fifth exhibition in 1945 included several works by British surrealists who visited Egypt to participate in a government-sponsored Contemporary British Art exhibition held by the British Council and formally inaugurated by the British ambassador.[125] This

[124] Botman, *Egypt From Independence to Revolution*, 1919-1952, 40-41.
[125] Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, 174-175, 190.

encounter could be interpreted as an exemplary case of transnational cultural exchange, as Bardaouil did, or as evidence for the group's sympathetic sentiments towards the British presence in Egypt. On the other hand, the British Embassy was keen on restraining the group's leftist-leaning, and possibly Trotskyite, political activism. It was reported that the British embassy was one of three parties, in addition to the Ruling Palace and Islamic authority of Al-Azhar, pushing for the censorship of the group's politically-charged Arabic journal *al-Tatawwur* (Development), which lasted for only seven issues in 1940.[126]

This is just to give one example of how any act, artwork or statement, no matter how explicit, be variably interpreted based on pre-conceived notions of the intentions of a group of artists of nuanced convictions such as the members of *Art and Liberty*. Additionally, there are two major issues which further complicate any attempt to interpret the actions of the Egyptian Surrealists. First, much of the historical facts of what really happened at these turbulent times remains contested to this day, with bearings on current conflicts and attitudes. Second, in-depths academic research on the history of *Art and Liberty* remains lacking.

III.2.2. Different Theoretical Frameworks

As mentioned earlier, the curatorial logic of the Cairo Exhibition seemed muddled. This was possibly intentional considering the contested legacy of *Art and Liberty* with its probable connections to contemporary politics, particularly that the exhibition was held at a State-sponsored venue. Though not articulating a clear position, it can still be argued that the Exhibition was influenced by co-curator Hassan's background in postcolonial studies.

Moreover, the Exhibition seemed to be in line with, or at least not opposed to, the nationalist perspective of the history of Egyptian modern art. A brief examination of this perspective is instrumental to fully appreciate its potential influence on the Cairo Exhibition. While Arabic-language art-historical writings are generally limited in number and do not follow Western established academic standards of referencing and citation, art historian Silvia Naef argues that they define "a sort of 'canon'" for art historians and museum practitioners working in Egypt.[127]

[126] Ramadan, "*The Aesthetics of the Modern Art: Art, Education, and Taste in Egypt 1903-1952*," 161.
[127] Naef, "Visual Modernity in the Arab World, Turkey and Iran: Reintroducing the 'Missing Modern'", 1006, 1011.

Such writings do not employ Western art-historical interpretative models in studying artworks. Rather, as art historian Clare Davies highlights, they advance interpretations guided by the extent to which art could be exploited for asserting the Egyptian and pan-Arab national identities, usually through highly symbolic language that serves ideological purposes.[128] Since the 1930s, a key feature of this canon has been the use of the two labels 'Egyptian' and 'modern' to classify artworks into two distinct, though overlapping, categories. By the 1950s, artists who were perceived to be 'foreign' were increasingly removed from Arabic-language surveys of Egyptian modern art history.[129] Interestingly, while it is expected that the views of Egyptian art scholars and practitioners would be shaped, or at least influenced, by the dominant style in their national canon, Davies affirms that this style sometimes finds its way to the work of Western-trained academics who study Egyptian modern art.[130]

This analysis has two implications. First, even without making explicit statements, any museological practice that seeks to situate itself within this canon, or at least to be tolerated in its sphere of influence, would be informed by normative assessments of artworks based on criteria of authenticity and loyalty to a preconceived national identity. As such, it is inconceivable that artworks could be displayed in a State-sponsored art venue in Egypt without evoking such normative assessments. This is especially true in the case of *Art and Liberty*, considering their historical entanglement with the basic questions underpinning the formulation of this canon.

Second, bearing in mind how it is constituted and the fact that it dominates the local study of Egyptian modern art to the exclusion of any other narrative, the influence of the Egyptian nationalist canon goes beyond the boundaries of Egypt and the Arab Region and could resonate in the work of Western-trained academics and practitioners. A natural sphere where such influence could manifest itself is postcolonial studies, which emphasize assertions of national identity posited against emulation of colonial ideals.

This sheds light on some of the curatorial choices made in the Cairo Exhibition, particularly with regard to the contextualization of surrealist photography and of the Egyptian surrealist

[128] Davies, 35.
[129] Miller, 26, 39. For more on rising anti-Western sentiments during the forming of a national Egyptian identity, see Gershoni and Jankowski, 38.
[130] Ibid., 39.

manifesto. Most peculiar is the ambiguous position in interpreting *Art and Liberty*'s political activities concerning colonialism, nationalism and fascism in Egypt in the 1930s.

While foregrounding the group's anti-colonial actions, the exhibition catalogue failed to raise any questions as to whether such actions were motivated by home-grown Egyptian nationalism or by anti-imperialism anchored in internationalist leftist sentiments.[131] Though earlier literature had highlighted the centrality of *Art and Liberty's* Trotskyite convictions to their political activism as well as to their artistic practice, the Cairo Exhibition did not problematize these convictions nor did it seek to understand it within the context of the fervent local and global socialist scene of the time.[132]

Moreover, by failing to mention local fascism as a possible motivation for *Art and Liberty*'s manifesto, the Cairo Exhibition made the manifesto appear primarily as a response to a non-Egyptian context of rising fascism and anti-Semitism in Europe. As noted earlier in this chapter, this could partly be attributed to the inherently complex nature of the historical legacy of *Art and Liberty*, which renders it susceptible to multiple interpretations. However, the choice of one interpretation over another is dependent on preconceived theoretical positions which are largely determined by awareness of, and attitude towards, the nationalist perspective.

The Paris Exhibition stands in stark contrast in terms of both the unambiguous assertion and substance of its theoretical position. On several occasions, the curatorial team have proclaimed that they have embraced an interculturalist perspective, explicitly distancing themselves from "the dialectics of Orientalism and Postcolonial Studies".[133]

In his monograph, co-curator Bardaouil argued that the group's legacy is best understood in light of the notion of internationalism.[134] Drawing on extensive archival research, Bardaouil demonstrated that members of *Art and Liberty* did not view themselves as opposites, or subordinates, to their European counterparts, but rather as equal members of one and the same

[131] Hassan, "When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938- Present)," 69.
[132] LaCoss, 84 and Ramadan, "*The Aesthetics of the Modern*: *Art, Education, and Taste in Egypt 1903-1952*,"152.
[133] Bardaouil, Bardaouil, "The Art and Liberty Group: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938-1948)," 47.
[134] Bardaouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art Liberty Group*, 237.

international art movement.[135] Bardaouil even contends that Ramses Younan anticipated Zijlmans' idea of interculturalism.[136]

In order to understand how the intercultural perspective and the notion of interculturalization can be of significance to interpreting the legacy of *Art and Liberty*, they need to be briefly described. As stated earlier, intercultural perspectives have been formulated under the larger umbrella of World Art Studies; one of two major currents in an ongoing academic debate on rethinking the Western art canon. The definition of interculturalization, advanced by Zijlmans and Van Damme, highlights the significance of cultural exchange in the production and reception of visual art. [137]

In her 2007-article "An Intercultural Perspective in Art History: Beyond Othering and Appropriation," Zijlmans elaborated on how such an intercultural perspective could deal with several problematic issues regarding the delimitation and expansion of the Western art canon, including the common center/periphery model used for understanding relationships among contemporaneous artists working in different geographical locations. Despite being inherently hierarchical, a feature which is presumably undesirable, Zijlmans does not call for abandoning this model entirely. Instead, she suggests that it be employed flexibly, by considering the center to be "where the action is (was), as seen from the perspective of the art in question."[138]

As such, a flexible center/periphery model could be very useful in understanding the complex geopolitical nexus of *Art and Liberty*'s legacy, and thus formulating nuanced narratives to explain their multilayered political activism and artistic practice. In other words, Zijlmans's notion of a flexible center/periphery model allows for constructing a story in which relations between Egyptian surrealists and their European counterparts, whether British or French, is acknowledged and highlighted without necessarily suggesting that the Egyptian surrealists blindly moved in the orbit of European modern artists.

Most important, the notion of shifting centers invites the imagination to explore other possible sites for intercultural exchange across the globe, beyond any presumed duality such as

[135] Ibid., 241-242.
[136] Ibid., 239.
[137] Van Damme, 29.
[138] Zijlmans, 296.

Cairo vs. Paris or East vs. West. Accordingly, such model does not only contribute to unsettling the already-established power dynamic between Western and non-Western art in the canon, it could also point to other routes of interculturalization across several locations beyond the West. It should be noted, however, that the Paris Exhibition rarely engages with interculturalization beyond the Cairo-Paris dichotomy. Moreover, by positing the intercultural perspective as antithetical to postcolonial paradigms, Bardaouil ignores that despite their differences, both perspectives contest the hegemonic power of the West.

Meanwhile, Bardaouil's unbridled attack on postcolonial studies should not be overlooked. The Paris Exhibition catalogue and monograph seem to reduce the entire academic field to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which, though seminal, does not fairly reflect the complexity of four-decades worth of subsequent academic research. Most significantly, the co-curators totally ignored the contribution of postcolonial scholarship in shedding light on non-Western art within circles of Western academia and museum practice. Additionally, a question arises whether Bardaouil's bias against postcolonial approaches could have contributed to the muted treatment of *Art and Liberty*'s complex relationship with British colonialism in the Paris Exhibition and accompanying publications.

III.2.3. Competing Sponsorship Agendas

Several reviews of the 2016 exhibitions seem to suggest that the contrast in curatorial narratives between the two could be attributed to the competing agendas of their main sponsors who are affiliated with the governments of the U.A.E. and Qatar. Both governments are entangled in a complex geopolitical struggle for regional influence. A detailed description of the origins and manifestations of this struggle is well beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, it is of paramount importance to take into consideration that in the context of polarized regional politics, the U.A.E. is a leading player in a coalition that also includes, among others, the government of Egypt under the current regime which took over in 2013, while Qatar was a strong ally of the former Egyptian regime.[139] To avoid speculative or reductive generalizations, however,

[139]Ulrichsen, 217-18.

it is best to limit the discussion here to ramifications for the regional art and culture scene as it relates to the particular subject of this research.

In the last decade, the governments of the U.A.E. and Qatar, through their official organs as well as other affiliates, have been engaging heavily in cultural patronage. In 2018, Michael B. Greenwald, fellow at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, described the context of this engagement as a "new war" for dominance in the region.[140] Throughout the decade, the two countries have been racing to be the leading Arab cultural hub.

Against this backdrop, the Sharjah Art Foundation was established in 2009 in the U.A.E. The Foundation, which is the main sponsor of the Cairo Exhibition, describes itself as "[providing] both national and international leadership in the production and presentation of contemporary visual arts."[141] In 2010, the Qatari government established Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, which boasts "the world's largest specialized collection of its kind."[142] The seed collection of Mathaf was donated by artist and collector Sheikh Hassan bin Mohamed bin Ali Al Thani, who is a grandson of the former King of Qatar.

In her recent book *Modernism on the Nile: Art in Egypt Between the Islamic and the Contemporary* (2019), Seggerman observed that sponsors from the oil-rich Gulf countries are steering interest in Arab modern art, in both scholarship and museum practice, through financing "new collections" and "new histories."[143] In her review of both exhibitions, Wali had expressed her optimism that private patronage, a term she employs to refer to "collectors in the region", could bring about much-needed reforms to the regional art scene.[144] While concurring that the involvement of such abundantly-resourced patrons could be beneficial, Seggerman cautions that funding "from the United Arab Emirates or Qatar necessarily informs the perspective taken."[145]

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[140] Michael B. Greenwald, "The New Race for Contemporary Arts Dominance in the Middle East," Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, October 2018, accessed 17 December 2019, https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/new-race-contemporary-arts-dominance-middle-east

[141] Sharjah Art Foundation, "Mission and History," accessed 17 December 2019, http://sharjahart.org/sharjah-art-foundation/about/mission-and-history

[142] Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, "About Us," accessed 17 December 2019, http://www.mathaf.org.qa/en/about-us

[143] Seggerman, *Modernism on the Nile: Art in Egypt Between the Islamic and the Contemporary*, 218.

[144] Sama Waly, "Art and Liberty: Redefining the Canon or the Next Record Sales?," *Jadaliyya*, 3 May 2017, accessed 17 December, 2019, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/34251

[145] Seggerman, *Modernism on the Nile: Art in Egypt Between the Islamic and the Contemporary*, 218.

It may be observed that an exhibition sponsored by a U.A.E.-backed institution would be greatly facilitated, if not co-sponsored, by the Egyptian government, whereas a Qatari-sponsored exhibition would not be afforded the same treatment. As such, the Cairo Exhibition could be held in Cairo, and would be informed by semi-official Egyptian nationalist narratives. On the other hand, the Paris Exhibition would find it easier to distance itself from such narratives, or even contradict them.

However, aside from this rudimentary observation, there is no sufficient evidence to support specific influence on part of the sponsors on the narratives adopted by either exhibition. In-depth academic research is required to examine the extent of influence exerted by Gulf-based patronage on academic production and museological practices concerned with Egyptian and Arab modern art, including the recent revival of *Art and Liberty.*

Conclusion

After decades of being absent from displays in museums in Egypt and elsewhere, the legacy of the Cairo-based surrealist group, self-styled as *Art and Liberty*, became suddenly and prominently visible on the international museum scene. For decades, beyond a handful of specialists concerned with the history of Egyptian modern art, almost no one had known about this group, comprising both Egyptian and Egypt-based artists active in the 1930s and 1940s.

However, the autumn of 2016 saw the end of this near anonymity, with two travelling survey exhibitions showing hundreds of never-seen-before artworks and archival document. Only one week apart, the exhibition *When Art Becomes Liberty* opened at the Cairo Opera House Complex in Cairo and the exhibition *Art et Liberté* opened at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Both exhibitions were large-scale events sponsored by major international cultural foundations and organized by leading curators of art from the Arab region. Each had an interesting journey of its own. The Cairo Exhibition went to the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea, while the Paris exhibition travelled across renowned modern art museums in Europe. Both claimed to be the first large-scale exhibition on *Art and Liberty*.

Two intriguing aspects are to be noted in this abrupt emergence to the forefront of the international museum scene. First, there is the very suddenness of interest in an art group that has been practically off the radar of any modern art museum. Second, this interest manifested itself not in one, but two different large-scale exhibitions held almost simultaneously on two different continents, and, more importantly, advancing contrasting views on the legacy of *Art and Liberty*.

This research aimed at exploring possible explanations of both aspects, seeking insights into the dynamics of integration of historically marginalized, especially non-Western, art into mainstream art history and museological practice. This was addressed through two main questions: 1) What could be the driving factors behind the rise to prominence of a relatively unknown art group that was active in the first half of the 20th century in a region that is rarely highlighted for its production of modern art? In simpler terms, why *Art and Liberty* in particular? and; 2) How exactly was the legacy of *Art and Liberty* addressed by two exhibitions which are seemingly

unaware of each other's existence, and how could the divergence of their approaches be explained?

Regarding the first aspect of this puzzling phenomenon, I argued that there are three factors which have coalesced to bring attention to the legacy of Egyptian surrealists.

First, the academic discipline of art history has been going through a process of rethinking canons, particularly its canon of modern art. There has been a growing consensus that the Eurocentric views underpinning the entire discipline need to be revisited. This process ushered in new conceptual paradigms that are more attentive to the complexities of the production and perception of art as a global and panhuman activity, which has in turn created space within the canon for non-Western modern art in general. In this vein, Egyptian surrealism has been specifically highlighted through the two academic sub-fields of Arab/Middle Eastern modern art studies and surrealism studies.

Second, in a related but different context, changing trends in the international museum scene have created an environment that is not only accepting but also eagerly welcoming of non-Western modern art. Three years prior to hosting the Paris Exhibition, Centre Pompidou pursued a groundbreaking approach to revamping their permanent collection of modern art. In 2013, the *Multiple Modernities* display opened with more than 1000 artworks originating from 47 countries. One key idea underlying the exhibition, as stated in its catalogue, is that the story of modern art is no longer an exclusively European one. It is difficult to imagine that the Paris Exhibition would have taken place in the prestigious Centre Pompidou hadn't *Multiple Modernities* paved the way first.

Third, the local context of growing political and social activism in Egypt, with its burgeoning independent art scene, stirred interest in earlier artistic modes of dissidence, with *Art and Liberty* standing out as an inspiring model and a peculiar find. In 2010, the surrealist group was brough to the surface by the art exhibition/installation *Prestige of Terror.* Unlike the two exhibitions of 2016, *Prestige of Terror* was neither a large-scale event nor a multilateral collaboration. More importantly, no artworks by members of *Art and Liberty* themselves were included, perhaps because such works were not accessible at the time. Instead, *Prestige of Terror* was the work of two Europe-based photographers on a residency at the independent Cairo-based Townhouse

Gallery. In addition to Cairo, *Prestige of Terror* was later exhibited, inter alia, in Art Dubai (2012), an annual international fair which was visited by the co-curators of the Paris Exhibition.

Following this analysis, two main conclusions could be reached. First, better visibility of non-Western modern art in general is dependent on the creation of an environment that is favorable to its integration within established scholarship and practice. It remains contested whether non-Western modern art should be approached in terms of re-integrating a part of the canon that had been unfairly excluded, or as a different body of work that cannot be accommodated within existing paradigms. The case of *Art and Liberty* seems to support the former, or at least provide a successful example of such re-integration. Second, the visibility of a specific non-Western modern oeuvre is also dependent on the extent to which such oeuvre can be connected to other contexts of relevance to contemporary audiences, such as political activism or belonging to a familiar art movement. Therefore, it is essential for scholarship and practice to pursue such connections, both by adopting a multi-disciplinary approach and seeking transnational collaborations, taking into consideration independent art and culture scenes.

As indicated above, a second fascinating aspect of the resurrection of *Art and Liberty* is that it actually happened twice at the same time. However, the difference between the two exhibitions of 2016 went beyond their different locations, as they employed contrasting narratives in their presentation of the legacy of Egyptian Surrealism. The Cairo Exhibition adopted an overarching postcolonial narrative with a nationalist undertone, while the Paris Exhibition promoted an interculturalist interpretation. As demonstrated in the thesis, this divergence was manifested in various aspects of each exhibition, including: 1) the selection and contextualization of exhibited artworks; 2) the interpretation of *Art and Liberty's* political actions; and 3) self-identification by subscribing to a specific theoretical position, in the case of the Paris Exhibition, and the lack thereof in the case of the Cairo exhibition.

Three possible reasons could be postulated to explain this divergence. First, the historical legacy of Egyptian surrealists inherently renders itself to multiple interpretations. In addition to their artistic activities, members of *Art and Liberty* were engaged in political activism at a time of great turmoil. The 1930s and 1940s in Egypt were particularly problematic. Traditional anti-colonial nationalism was muddled with fascist tendencies and views. Public condemnation of Nazi

oppression of art could have been, and indeed was, construed as support for the British occupation. Even more complex is having or not having any position towards the creation of the State of Israel.

Second, the curatorial process of each exhibition was informed by a different theoretical framework which is closely related to the complex historical and political realities of Egypt and the broader region. The Cairo Exhibition attempts to avoid taking any hard positions. However, in line with a nationalist perspective emphasizing authenticity and national identity, the group's political actions were expressly interpreted to be primarily driven by the anti-colonial struggle against the British, failing to even mention their antagonism to home-grown fascism. In contrast, the Paris Exhibition championed *Art and Liberty* as the only anti-nationalist art group, setting out from an interculturalist perspective to promote Egyptian surrealists as equal members of the international surrealist movement in its struggle against fascism locally and worldwide. Interestingly, the Paris Exhibition attempts to dismiss any possible influence of colonialism on the group's political actions, therefore downplaying their leftist activism against imperialism.

Third, several reviews of the 2016 exhibitions suggested that their adoption of different narratives can be attributed, at least partially, to the fact that they were funded by two main sponsors backed by governments that are competing for influence on a much larger geopolitical scale, with cultural patronage being the latest introduction into their toolbox. Nevertheless, such suggestions should be taken with a grain of salt, as scholarly research on the cultural aspect of this competition is limited and falls short of explaining the origins of curatorial interest in Egyptian surrealists in the first place.

The main conclusion of this discussion is that incorporating non-Western modern art into contemporary Western scholarship and museological practice is a formidable undertaking posing serious challenges, both conceptually and practically. While seeking more inclusiveness is a commendable trend, it should always be borne in mind that what constitutes non-Western modern art for one person, is a charged act of political dissent for another, not in only in a historical way, but also in a tangible sense that has ramifications for present-day realities. Museum practitioners, especially those who are primarily familiar with Western modern art,

need to be aware of the multiple trajectories involved in unearthing and displaying non-Western modern art.

This thesis has highlighted the complexity of displaying the works of Egyptian surrealists in an international museum scene which serves as a juncture for academic debates, museological trends, regional politics and national history. The discussion of the recent visibility of *Art and Liberty* demonstrates how stories of non-Western modern art reverberate in different fields and geographic locations. As these stories travel, they take multiple forms and trigger different meanings.

Several questions remain: How can researchers and practitioners of museums contextualize non-Western modern art in ways that highlight what this art means to its makers as well as its original and potential audiences? How do museum practitioners display multi-layered legacies of non-Western modernisms in which colonial histories, contemporary politics and sponsor agendas overlap? How could efforts to highlight non-Western modernisms be the starting point for transnational collaborative museological projects? To what extent could these efforts engage with global audiences?

Illustrations

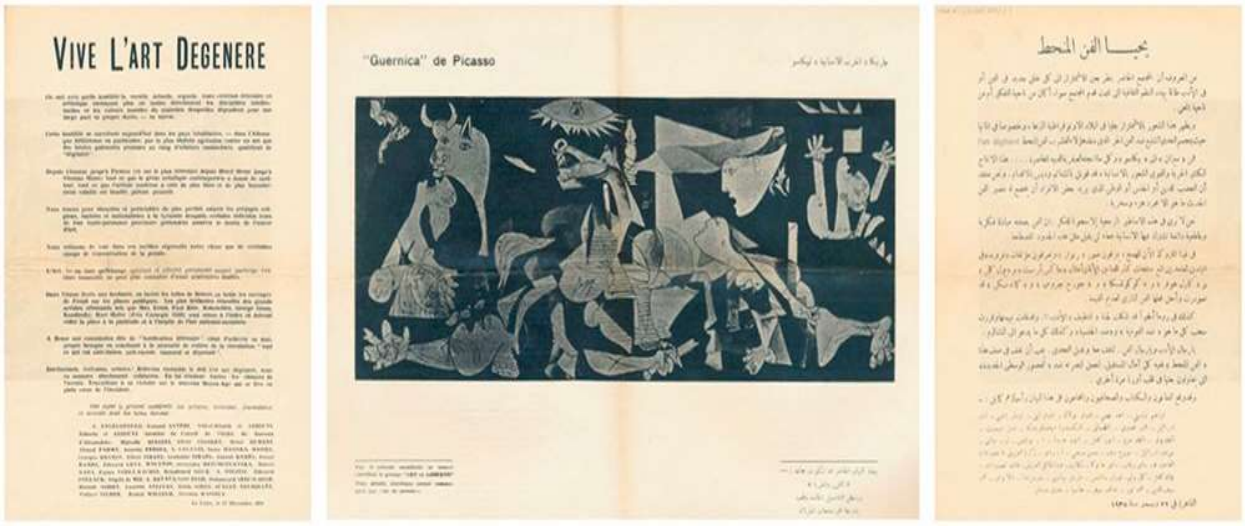

Fig. 1. Art and Liberty, *Vive L'art dégéneré (Long Live Degenerate Art)* manifesto, 1938, (Edinburgh, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Archives, via *Mada Masr*).

Fig. 2. Photo of members of *Art and Liberty*, Cairo, 1941.

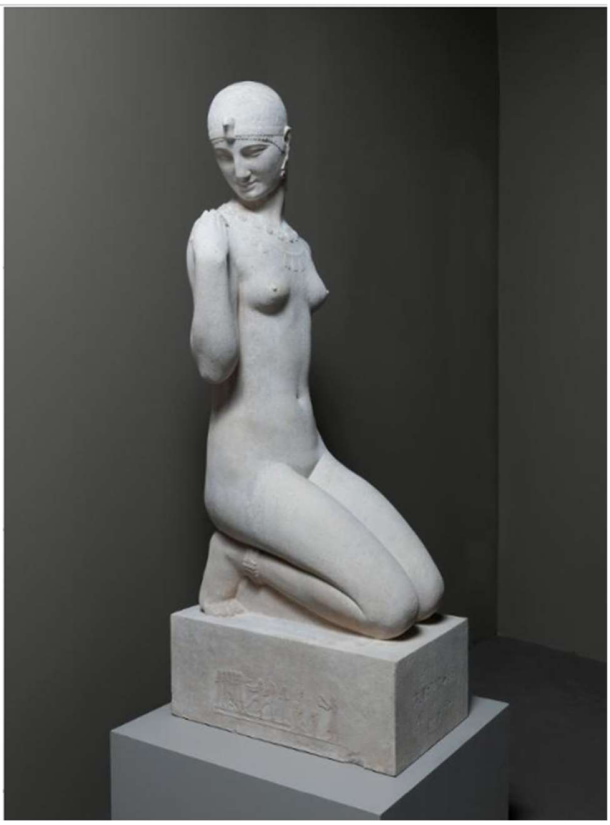

Fig. 3. Mahmoud Mukhtar, *Arous el-Nil* (La fiancée du Nil), 1929, granite, 149 x 60 x 37 cm, weight: 370 kg, (Paris, Centre Pompidou, inv. nr. JP 66 S).

Fig. 4. Exhibition view, *The Prestige of Terror*, The Townhouse Cairo, Egypt, 2010.

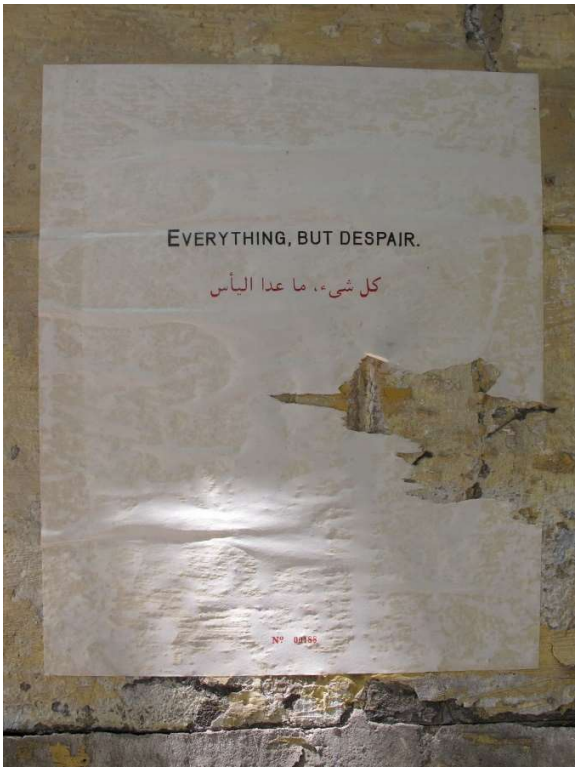

Fig. 5. Street view, *The Prestige of Terror*, Downtown Cairo, Egypt, 2010.

Fig. 6. Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, *The Prestige of Terror*, 2010, seventeen prints 21.5 × 28 cm each, (National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens- EMST)

Fig. 7. Abdel Hadi Al Gazzar, *Charter,* 1962, oil on wood, 182x122 cm, (Cairo, Museum of Modern Art)

Fig. 8. Abdel Hadi Al Gazzar, *Peace,* 1965, oil on wood, 80x170 cm, (Cairo, Museum of Modern Art)

Fig. 9. Abdel Hadi Al Gazzar, *Mahasseb ll-Sayyidah (The Beloved of Sayyidah),* ca. 1965, oil on cardboard, 60.5x 92 cm, (Cairo, Yasser Hashem Collection)

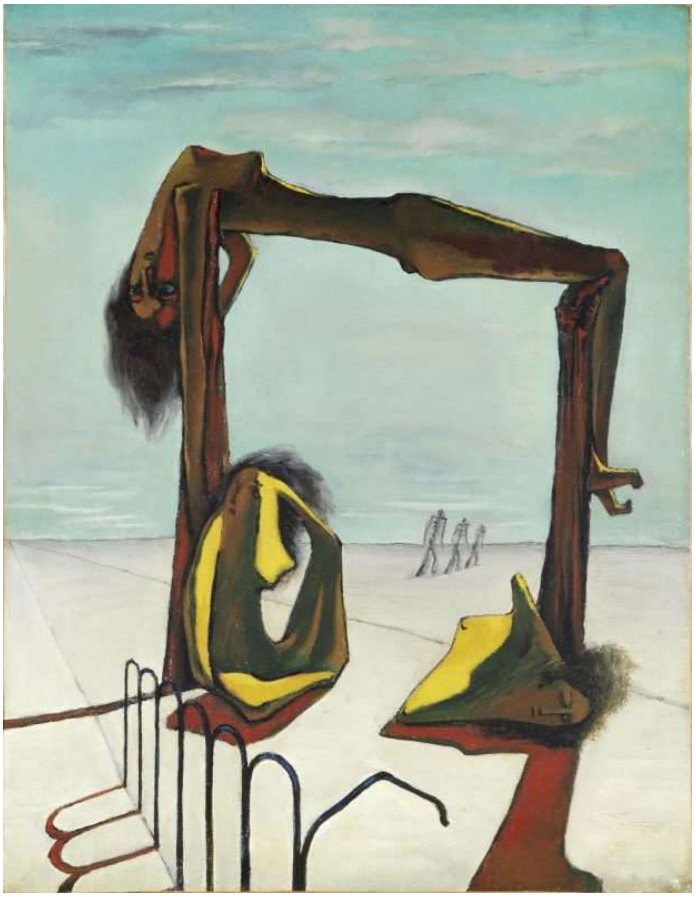

Fig. 10. Ramses Younan, *Untitled,* 1939, oil on canvas, 46.5x 35.5 cm, (Doha, H.E.SH. Hassan M. Al Thani collection)

Fig. 11. Lee Miller, *Portrait of Space, Al Bulwayeb, Near Siwa, Egypt*, 1937, print from vintage gelatin silver print, 30.5 x 27.5 cm, (East Sussex, Lee Miller Archives)

Fig. 12. Ida Kar, *Still Life*, Egypt, c. 1940, vintage bromide print, 23.4 x22.8 cm, (London, National Portrait Gallery)

Fig. 13. Étienne Sved, *Untitled,* c. 1945, vintage gelatin silver print, 6x6 cm., (Chalon-sur-Saône, Musée Nicéphore-Niépce)

Fig. 14. Mahmoud Mukhtar, 1920-1928, *Nahḍat Misr (Egypt's Reawakening),* (Cairo).

Fig. 15. Installation view, *Vive L'art dégéneré (Long Live Degenerate Art)* manifesto, in *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)* Exhibition, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid.

Fig. 16. Installation view, news clippings of para-military fascist groups on display, in *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)* Exhibition, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid.

Fig. 17. Antoine Mayo, *Coups de Bâtons*, 1937, oil on canvas, 167x243 cm, (Milan, Private Collection)

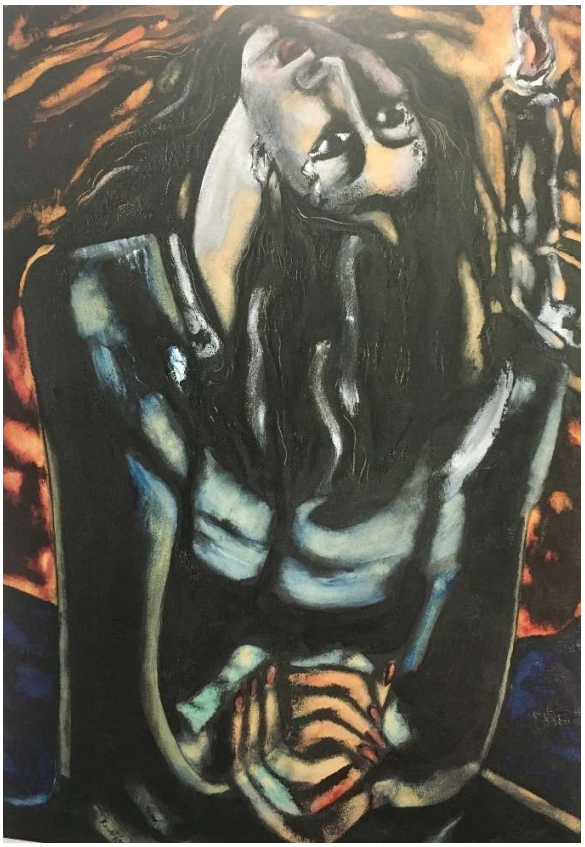

Fig. 18. Fouad Kamel, *Untitled*, 1940, oil and mixed media board, 47.5 x33.3 cm, (Private Collection)

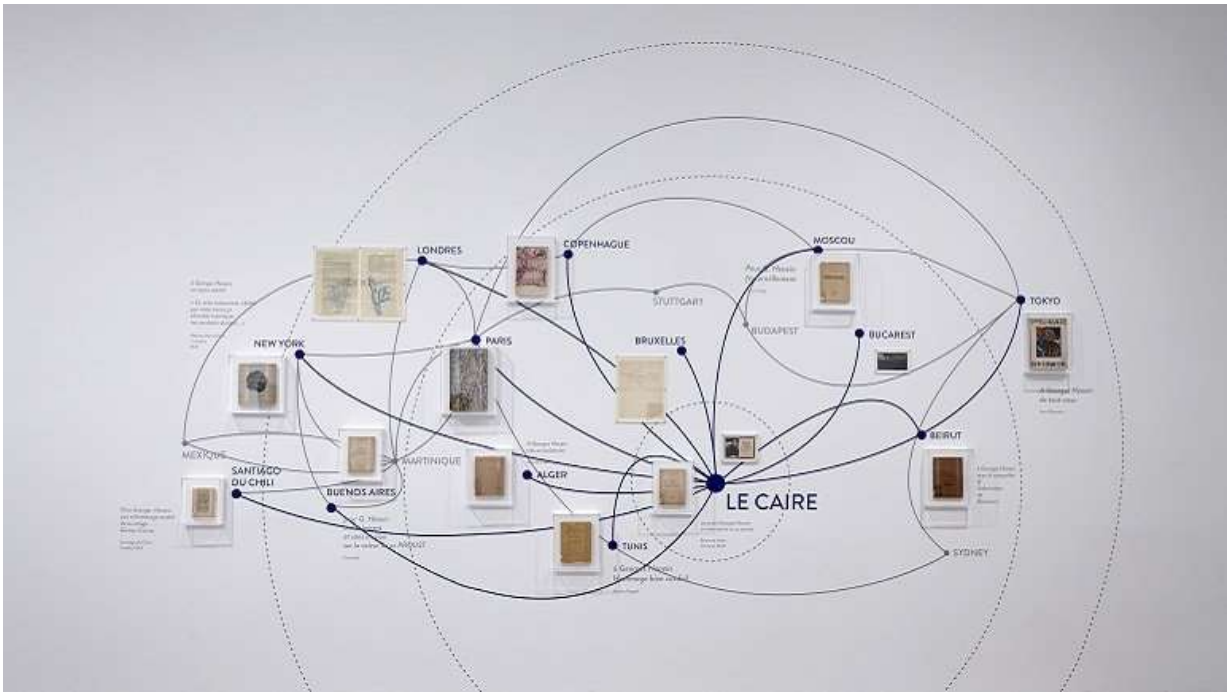

Fig. 19. Installation view, "Tribute to Georges Henein," in *Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938–1948)* Exhibition, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid.

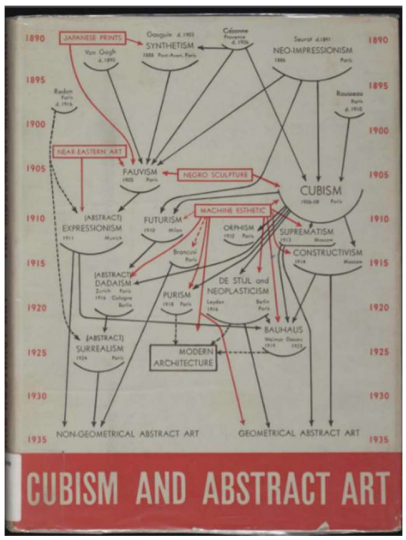

Fig. 20. Alfred Barr's flowchart on modern art movements, in *Cubism and Abstract Ar*t, Ex. Cat. New York: MOMA, 1936.

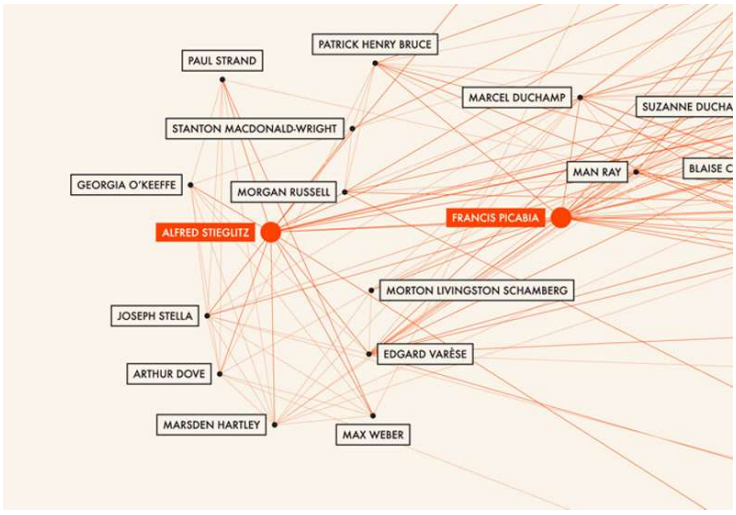

Fig. 21. Network of modern artists, in *Inventing Abstraction:1910–1925*, MOMA, 2012.

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Fig. 13. Downloaded 17 December 2019.
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Fig. 14. Photo taken by Alexandra Dika Seggerman, Seggerman, “Mahmoud Mukhtar: ‘The first sculptor from the land of sculpture’,” 37.

Fig. 15. Downloaded 17 December 2019.
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Fig. 19. Downloaded 17 December 2019.
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Fig. 20. Downloaded 17 December 2019.
https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2748_300086869.pdf

Fig. 21. Downloaded 17 December 2019.
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