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Egyptian surrealism: a piece of modern art history is unveiled  
Pompidou before moving to Madrid, Dusseldorf and Liverpool  
(<https://judithbenhamouhuet.com/report/egyptian-surrealism-of-modern-art-history-is-unveiled-at-pompidou-before-moving-to-madrid-dusseldorf-and-liverpool/>)

There is **not one surrealism**, but in fact **many** surrealisms.

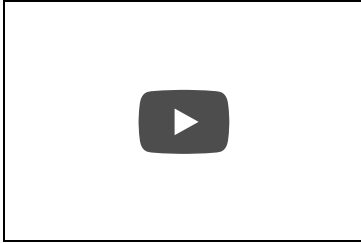
Proof if required is to be found at the **Centre Pompidou** where that most Belgian of surrealists, the painter **René Magritte**, is in the spotlight until  
Also at the **Pompidou until 17<sup>th</sup> January** is another completely overlooked piece of that avant-garde movement.

The unmissable show reveals how **Cairo**, a far cry from the face that the Egyptian capital presents to the world today, was **animated by a group of politically engaged artists**.

The show consists of **130 paintings** sourced from **15 countries**.

It is the **first museum exhibition to tackle the subject of Egyptian surrealism**, and has been put together by **Sam Bardaouil**, who wrote a **dis**  
**surrealism**, in association with the independent curator, **Till Fellrath**.

Here they talk about the idea behind the exhibition:



In the **1930s**, the Egyptian capital, still under British rule, was a **cosmopolitan, rebellious and outward-looking city** where French was the *lingua franca*. It was in this context that in **1938** a group of **intellectuals**, who were often as comfortable writing as they were painting, created **Art and Liberty**, and in one of its manifestos '**Long live degenerate art**', in a direct **challenge to Nazi edicts**.

The movement's leaders were the poet **Georges Henein** (1914-1973) who spent time in Paris with the surrealist theoretician, **André Breton**, the painter and filmmaker **Kamel el Telmisany** (1915-1972). The overwhelming majority of the **relics of this movement** have been **lost** in the mists of Egyptian history.

**Bardaouil and Fellrath** had even locate photos and documents in local antiques dealers to retell this **forgotten history**.

More broadly, and much to their credit, the **Pompidou exhibition advances research in Middle Eastern modern art**, a field where knowledge remains patchy.

Before paring back its involvement in art, **Qatar**, and in particular the **Mathaf museum**, offered a glimmer of hope that significant research efforts in the field are finally getting the green light.

**Egyptian surrealism** distinguishes itself from **French surrealism**, whose founder was **André Breton**, through its desire for **social justice**, influenced well as by its expression of a **lively local culture** that makes reference to **ancient Egypt**.

The result is breathtaking, giving rise to **several masterpieces** by names unfamiliar to us.

Such is the case with **Samir Rafi** (1926-2004) who was based in Paris from 1954 and whose '**Nus**' (1945) depicts a **war zone** where fragments of nature are **concealed by great shocks of red hair**. Cannons, black birds, silhouettes in flight, a glowering sky... It's an imaginary and **apocalyptic vision**... The cartoonist **Sheikh Hassan Al Thani**, a member of the Qatari royal family.

**Mayo** (1905-1999) hung around with the leading lights from **Montparnasse** between 1923 and 1927 also lived occasionally in **Cairo**.

In 1937 he painted the remarkable '**Coups de Bâtons**,' composed of pastel-coloured stretched forms in movement, like bodies torn to pieces that suggest a violent game.

As for **Ramses Younane** (1913-1966), he elaborated a theory called '**subjective realism**' illustrated in a painting from 1939 which could be a **mix of Yves Tanguy** but illustrates the myth of the Egyptian goddess **Noor**. This canvas is also owned by **Sheikh Hassan Al Thani**.

In 1940 **Georges Henein** wrote from Cairo, 'At a time when almost everywhere in the world people are only heeding the sound of cannons, **it is necessary to have a certain artistic spirit the chance to express its independence and vitality**.'

The words still hold true 77 years later.

Until 17 January. [www.centrepompidou.fr](http://www.centrepompidou.fr/) (<http://www.centrepompidou.fr/>)

The show will travel to Reina Sofia in Madrid, K20 in Dusseldorf and Tate Liverpool.

- January 4, 2017

Laurent -Marcel Salinas



Manifeste "vive l'art dégénéré"



Samir Rafi



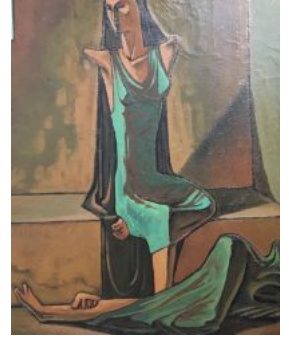
Mayo



Ramses Younane



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Ramses Younane

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