

Farghali Abdel Hafiz

*Past And Present Encounter*

14 January - 3 March 2013





Farghali Abdel Hafiz

*Past And Present Encounter*

14 January - 3 March 2013

shabibiqay

*"My art is simply about connecting the past, the present and the future. The representations in my paintings are symbols of particular things from each of these times."*

*Past And Present Encounter* celebrates Farghali's long career with eight new works from his latest series, as well as four earlier paintings outlining the development of his work from the late 1970s to the present day. One of Egypt's most established artists, Farghali Abdel Hafiz's career spans six decades and several continents. Born in 1941 and a graduate of the Academy of Fine Art in Florence, he represented Egypt in several biennials, including Sao Paolo in 1985, Venice in 1972, 1987 and 1993, and China in 2002, and in 1996 he was the General Curator for the Cairo Biennial. He was a founder of the Axis Group in 1981, one of the most influential art movements in Egypt in the Post-Modern period. He has held over twenty international exhibitions in Europe and the United States.

Few artists identify as strongly with their environment as Farghali Abdel Hafiz. As a recent graduate from the Cairo Institute of Art Education in 1962, he was one of a group of artists who visited old Nubia during the construction of the Aswan High Dam, soon to wash away beneath the waters of Lake Nasser, almost destroying an entire culture. In the group were some of Egypt's most prominent artists, including Abdel Hadi El-Gazzar and Tahia Halim. All of them were affected by the spirituality of the place and the impending sense of loss.

In 1984 Farghali set up his studio in Dahshur, home to a number of major pyramids from the Old Kingdom. Living and working there has undoubtedly had a profound effect on his art and his psyche- the pace of life has changed little for centuries. Farghali lives and breathes the place through his work, which provides him with a quiet and spiritual environment and a sanctuary from the nearby urban sprawl. Originally from Dariout in Middle Egypt, Farghali is familiar with the naïve qualities of its local art: echoes of folk art reverberate throughout his oeuvre. Farghali fuses bold oil stick outlines and bright, unmixed acrylic colours with materials taken directly from his surroundings- straw, sand, mud and clay. He takes these natural materials from around Egypt, from as far afield as Marsa Matrouh on the Mediterranean coast to Aswan in the South. The immediacy and raw authenticity of his sensual and highly textured canvases is partially offset by his concentrations of finely wrought details. Movement is ever present in his works: the fluidity and surety of line blurs the distinction between figurative and abstract, lending them an aura akin to a dream sequence. It is these contrasts that make Farghali's painted surfaces so compelling.

Farghali Abdel Hafiz is himself a dreamer, more concerned with the essence of things rather than their mundane appearance in the real world. His work helps him express his deep concern with the wellbeing of individuals and societies as a whole. Looking both to high and low culture, he often infuses into his work a social or political message, always worn lightly. Playing with ideas of Egyptian culture, history and exoticism, he weaves them together to create his harmonious world where modern life and ancient history can comfortably co-exist.

A central tenet in Farghali's philosophy is fascination with the female. Much of his work, celebrates feminine prototypes or particular women that he admires. Almost all of his paintings include a strong female figure. He thinks of the city as being a woman, and his earlier work from the 1970s and 1980s, he represented this through his doll-like effigies, which later transformed into his freely drawn monumental figures.

Along with the emancipation of women, cultural integrity, the contrast between rapid urbanization and rural arcadia, the abiding mysticism of cities and the countryside are just some of the social and philosophical themes that preoccupy Farghali. He explores these through a concurrent set of motifs- figures of women instilled with a pharaonic grandeur, Upper Egyptian and Nubian faces, and horse-drawn carriages and donkey carts which contrast with modern modes of transport. The complexity of Cairo has long fascinated him, with its remnants of pharaonic civilization overlapping with that of the Islamic, European and post-colonial periods. Living as he does in rustic surroundings, just beyond the outskirts of Cairo, Farghali is in a perfect position to contemplate the city and the country, the ancient and the modern.

Since its second revolution, Egypt has been held in the midst of a series of changes, the outcome of which cannot be predicted. With a disputed constitution and protests repeatedly breaking out throughout the country, Farghali's current work is a reaction to these crises, to reflect both his concern, but also his optimism that the positive aspects of the country will continue. Stylistically his new work develops the themes and techniques he had recently been exploring, but replacing the mud and straw of the past with coloured desert sands. The connotation of the eight new works he presents in this exhibition has become more political- unsurprising given the country's recent events - yet the message is subdued and optimistic. This latest series incorporates collaged photograph portraits, which highlight twentieth century Egyptian political and cultural figures, from a time when Egypt was rightly proud. These are the important matters for Farghali - art, culture and freedom of thought - the essence of his idea of Egypt and which he hopes will live on.

William Lawrie  
Dubai, January 2013



*Fountains of Art*, 2012  
(Mahmoud Mokhtar, Tahia Halim and Inji Efflatoun)  
Acrylic, oil stick and sand on canvas laid down on  
board  
120 x 60 cm  
47 1/4 x 23 5/8 in





*Passion & Serenity*, 2012  
(Rushdi Abazza)  
Acrylic, oil stick and sand on canvas  
laid down on board  
120 x 60 cm  
47 1/4 x 23 5/8 in



*Faces from Egypt*, 2012  
(Ahmed Orabi)  
Acrylic, oil stick and sand on canvas  
laid down on board  
120 x 60 cm  
47 1/4 x 23 5/8 in





*Egyptian Pedigree*, 2012  
(Abbas El Akkad and Tharwat Okasha)  
Acrylic, oil stick and sand on canvas  
laid down on board  
120 x 80 cm  
47 1/4 x 31 1/2 in



*Humanity and Earth, 2012*  
(Hind Rustom)  
Acrylic, oil stick and sand on canvas  
laid down on board  
80 x 60 cm  
31 1/2 x 23 5/8 in



*Egyptian Spirituality*, 2012  
(Leila Mourad)  
Acrylic, oil stick and sand on canvas  
laid down on board  
150 x 110 cm  
59 1/8 x 43 1/4 in





*Egypt... The Philantropist*, 2012  
(Abdel Halim Hafez and Salah Jaheen)  
Acrylic, oil stick and sand on canvas  
laid down on board  
200 x 300 cm  
78 3/4 x 118 1/8 in







*Cultural Dimension*, 2012  
(Saad Ardash and Karam Mutawe)  
Acrylic, oil stick and sand on canvas  
laid down on board  
200 x 120 cm  
78 3/4 x 47 1/4 in

# Past

The works in this exhibition show some of the many facets that have made Farghali one Egypt's most charismatic painters. Alongside the eight recent paintings, four works from earlier periods have been chosen to show both the seminal moments in his artistic development and both the continuity and the diversity of his work.

*Thrust* is a rare work from 1978. First exhibited in 1978 at the Goethe institute in Cairo with others from the series and then shown with the Axis Group in the old Mahmoud Khalil Museum (now the Islamic Ceramics Museum in Gezira), it is still remarkably fresh in conception and execution. It demonstrates how Farghali's use of symbolic forms and intense colour began early in his career. From the late 1970s through to the early 1980s his works are characterized by highly reduced anthropomorphic totems, whose concentration of line, tone and colour contrast with the flat areas of colour that surround them. The centre of the canvases is cut away to reveal an orifice, from which these totems protrude. Part human, part insect and also with connotations both sexual and pharaonic, Farghali calls these figures *arayis* (dolls).

Farghali Abdel Hafiz has represented Egypt at several editions of the Venice Biennale and *Stupid Terrorism*, executed in 1992, is the last from a series of twelve works shown in his solo exhibition in 1993 at the Egyptian Pavilion. The artist kept this work, while the rest went to public and private collections.

The Venice exhibition was entitled *From North to South and East to West* and among its themes were an exploration of important figures that had an impact on the civilization as a whole (mainly cultural figures) and critiques on current events. Whilst others from the series represented figures as diverse as Dante, Marco Polo, Amunhutb (the Egyptian architect), Pavarotti and Sayed Darwish, and others recalling Chinese civilization, this one is markedly more political. 1992 saw the first attack by militants on foreign tourists in Upper Egypt. On September 30 a spokesman for the main militant movement, the Gama'a al-Islamiya warned tourists not to enter the province of Qena in Upper Egypt, which includes some of Egypt's most famous Pharaonic temples and tombs. The attacks began on 1 October, when a Nile Cruiser carrying 140 German tourists was fired on, injuring three of the Egyptian crew. On October 21 militants ambushed a tourist bus, killing one British woman and injuring two British men. The woman was the first foreigner to die in militant related violence in Egypt. At the time Farghali was making this series his work had reached a high point in his experiments with the texture. The surface is thickly encrusted with mud and straw and the works incorporate mud bricks in high relief.

Farghali moved from Middle Egypt to Cairo when he was just fifteen and the big city has always held his fascination. It is his belief that each city has a unique soul, and that to understand a city is to understand its past and present. Only then can one try and make sense of its future. *Cairo I, The 66th Dynasty Papyrus No. 6000001, Third Millenium*, (2000), is from the series of 12 Papyrus from the 66th Dynasty Exhibition which shows how Farghali perceived Cairo at that time as overcrowded with people, traffic and donkey carts. The accompanying verse describes his imagined conversation with the Sphinx upon seeing present-day Cairo:



...Sphinx.. This is Cairo.. The present capital city of the country.

I Invite you to visit it after three years of our first encounter.. Do you recall?

Yes I remember everything... Observe everything... and pity lovely Cairo... Its cultural situation is deteriorating... It is so noisy and its standards of aesthetics and cleanliness have declined...Laxity and carelessness prevail..

... Easy ... Sphinx

... Don't you have cultural, educational and media institutions...

... Yes ... we do ...

... Oh my Son... We taught civilization to humankind... Aren't you ashamed?

... Be merciful Sphinx....

... When it comes to civilization... you cannot be careless...

... Be patient... Sphinx... we do have our positive side...

... Yes ... when it comes to civilization... we cannot be careless...

...Let me salute the beloved Nile...

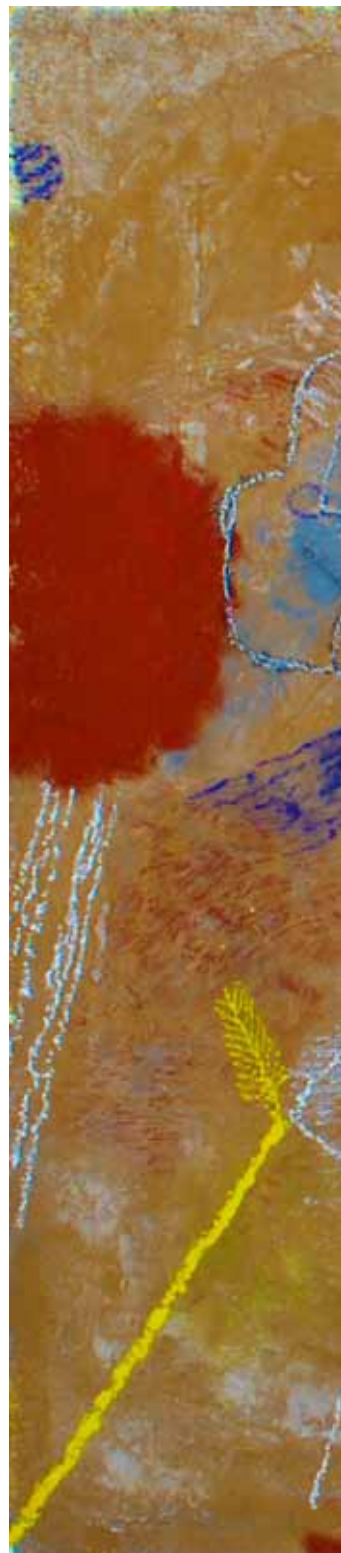
Then the Sphinx returned to his place at the edge of the desert.

At the time this exhibition, with its overt criticism of the status quo upset the authorities. This work in particular caused outrage, to the point that it was confiscated for a time. Farghali later wrote about that exhibition in his catalogue "The Egyptian Woman" and had this to say:

*"Art is a positive humanistic endeavour that has the potential to fire a sense of hope and optimism, endowing it with a commitment to provide, metaphorically speaking, a harbour in an ocean of human feeling. With this in mind, the Egyptian Papyri collection was the product of a dialogue between myself and an ancient civilization represented by the Sphinx. The accompanying dialogues themselves explore concepts shaping Egypt's status and civilization according to my own understanding. Although ostensibly Egyptian in subject matter, the themes have a universal application that makes them of interest to all human beings. As such the papyri and other artworks in that particular collection were instrumental in shaping what I considered a humanistic approach to art".*

Farghali's humanist approach becomes apparent in his later works. He dwells on the positive aspects of what he sees around him, especially within Egypt. From 2008-2010 his works concentrated on the Nile, the river that is the essence of Egypt, sustaining her and the source of her beauty. By this stage Farghali's outlines are bolder, his colours brighter and his lines more rounded, as exemplified by his work *The Nile*, 2008 one of the first pieces in this new phase. He refines and develops this style in his recent paintings.

*Stupid Terrorism*, 1992  
Acrylic, oil stick, mud, straw and mud  
brick on canvas laid down on board  
200 x 200 cm  
78 3/4 x 78 3/4 in





*Thrust*, 1978

Acrylic, mud and sand on canvas laid  
down on board

90 x 90 cm

35 3/8 x 35 3/8 in





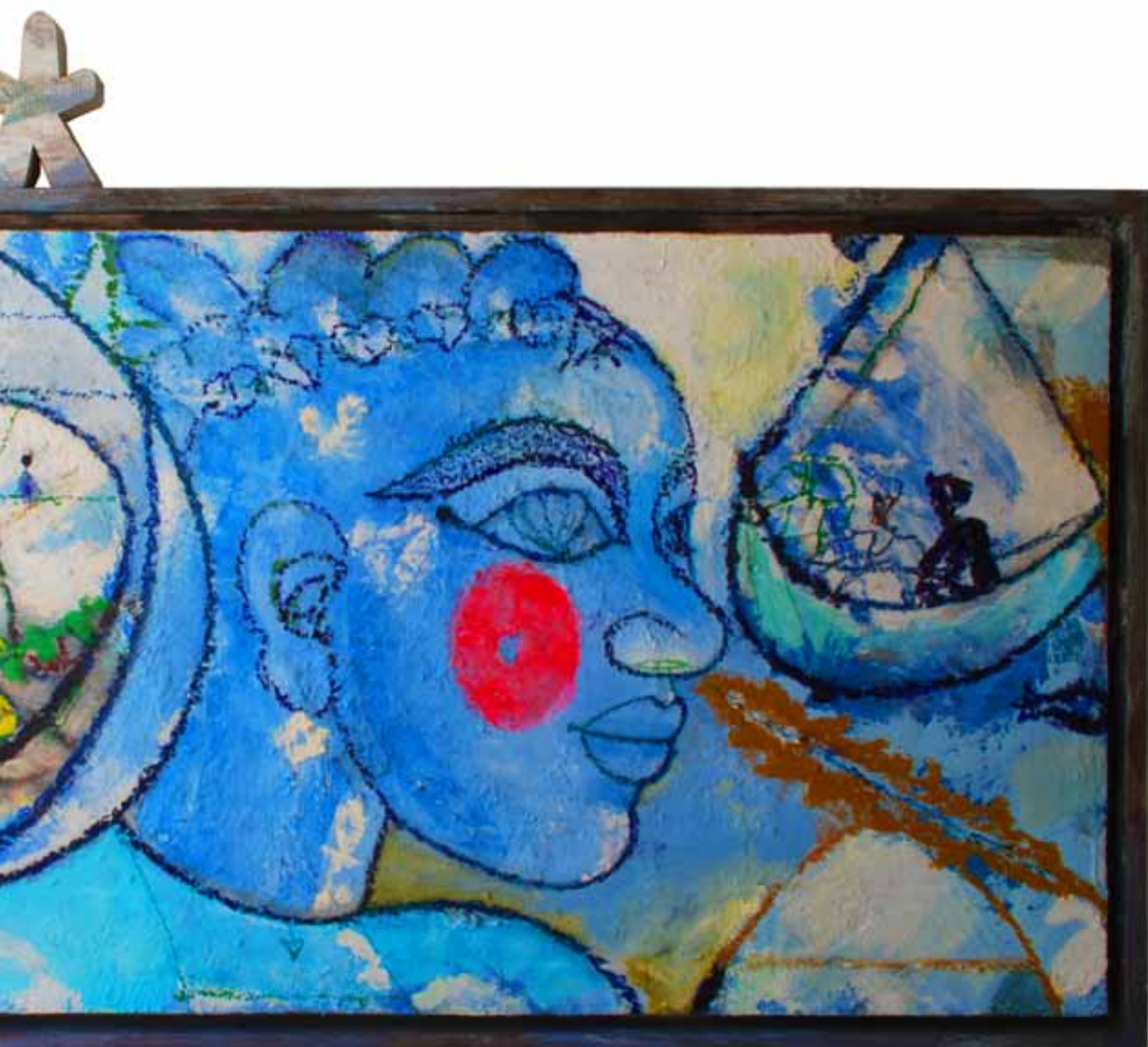


*The Nile*, 2008

Acrylic, mud, sand and oil stick on canvas laid down on board, in artist frame

60 x 120 cm

23 5/8 x 47 1/4 in





*Cairo I, The 66th Dynasty Papyrus No.  
60000001, Third Millenium, 2000*  
Acrylic, oil stick and sand on canvas  
laid down on board, in artist frame  
60 x 120 cm  
23 5/8 x 47 1/4 in





# Biography

Born 1941, Dairout, Middle Egypt  
Lives and works in Dahshur, Egypt

## EDUCATION

1965 – 1967 Academy of Fine Arts, Rome- Florence, Italy  
1962 Institute of Art Education, Cairo, Egypt

## EXHIBITIONS

2013 *Past And Present Encounter*, Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai, UAE  
2012 *Paris*, Zamalek Art Gallery, Cairo, Egypt  
2010 *The Nile*, Zamalek Art Gallery, Cairo, Egypt  
2009 *Istanbul*, Zamalek Art Gallery, Cairo, Egypt  
2008 *Egyptian Woman*, Zamalek Art Gallery, Cairo, Egypt  
2007 *London*, Zamalek Art Gallery, Cairo, Egypt  
2006 *Aswan*, Zamalek Art Gallery, Cairo, Egypt  
2005 *The Life on the Banks of the Dead Sea*, Zamalek Art Gallery, Cairo, Egypt  
  
2004 *Alexandria*, Zamalek Art Gallery, Cairo, Egypt  
2003 The First International Art Biennale of Beijing, China  
2003 *Florence*, Zamalek Art Gallery, Cairo, Egypt  
2002 MUVIM Museum, Valencia, Spain  
2002 *Cairo*, Zamalek Art Gallery, Cairo, Egypt  
2000 Gezira Museum of Art, Zamalek, Cairo, Egypt  
2000 *100th Anniversary of the Historical Old Cataract Hotel*, Eugenie Salon, Aswan, Egypt  
  
1995 Akhnaton Art Gallery, Zamalek, Egypt  
1993 *One-man show*, International Biennale of Venice, Venice, Italy  
1989 Egyptian Academy for Arts, Rome, Italy  
1987 International Biennale, Venice, Italy  
1985 *One-man show*, Sao Paolo Biennale, Brazil  
1983 2nd exhibition of the Axis Group, Manesterly Palace Art Gallery, Egypt  
1982 Egyptian Culture Center, Paris, France  
1981 1st Exhibition for the Axis Group, Mahmoud Khalil Museum, Egypt  
1978 Goethe Institute, Cairo, Egypt  
1974 Barioni Art Gallery, Florence, Italy  
1973 Venti-Tre Art Gallery, Brescia, Italy  
1973 Marscroni Art Gallery, Florence, Italy  
1972 International Biennial of Venice, Venice, Italy  
1972 Lo-sprone Art Gallery, Florence, Italy  
1969 Akhnaton Art Gallery, Kasr El Nile, Egypt  
1965 *The Group of Five Artists*, Museum of Fine Art, Alexandria, Egypt  
1964 Akhnaton Art Gallery, Kasr El Nile, Egypt  
1963 *The Group of Five Artists*, Cairo, Egypt

## AWARDS

1988 First Prize in Painting, International Biennale in Cairo, Egypt  
1976 First Degree State Prize and Order of Sciences and Arts  
1976 State Prize, Painting



- 1969 First Prize in Graphic Arts at the Alexandria Biennale for Mediterranean Countries  
1969 Honor Certificate for the International Exhibition, Bulgaria  
1966 First Prize in Sculpting Salon, Cairo, Egypt  
1963 First Prize in Pioneer's Exhibition, Cairo, Egypt  
Has received several gold medals and honorary certificates in national and international exhibitions

#### MEMEBERSHIPS

Member in the Association of the Friends of Fine Art in Florence, Italy  
Member in the Association of the Friends of Fine Art in Cairo, Egypt  
Member of the Writers and Artist Atelier of Cairo  
Member in the Syndicate of Artists, where he was elected during the 1980s as General Secretary  
Member in the Ghoury Artistic Association  
Member of Jury Committees of the Incentive State Awards  
Previously a member in the Plastic Shaping Committee in the Higher Council of Culture (1981-1997)  
Previously a member of the Egyptian Higher Council Administration of Aida until 1997

#### PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Museum of Modern Arts, Cairo, Egypt  
National Museum of Jordan, Amman, Jordan  
Villaggi Contemporary Art Museum in Catania, Italy  
National Museum of Belgrade, Serbia  
Museum of Egyptian Modern Art, Alexandria, Egypt  
Museum of Faculty of Arts, Menia, Egypt  
Museum of Faculty of Art Education, Cairo, Egypt  
Arab Fund for Development Collection, Kuwait  
Opera House Collection, Cairo, Egypt  
El-Ahram Collection, Cairo, Egypt  
Conference Hall Museum of Cairo Collection, Egypt  
El Shona Collection, Alexandria, Egypt  
Roma Balqaa Art Collection, Amman, Egypt  
Mahmoud Said Museum, Alexandria, Egypt  
Museum of Fine Arts, Alexandria, Egypt  
International Bank Collection, Cairo, Egypt  
Misr Development Bank, Cairo, Egypt



The publication of this catalogue coincides with an exhibition of the same title at Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai 14 January - 3 March 2013. Copyright © 2011 Lawrie Shabibi, writer and artist. This exhibition is held in collaboration with Zamalek Art Gallery, Cairo and is generously supported by EFG-Hermes.



