



## FIRST EXHIBITION OF COPTIC VISUAL ARTISTS June 14-25, 2011

On Wednesday June 15, 2011 *Hidden Treasures: Canadian-Coptic Visual Artists in Southern Ontario* held its opening reception at the University of Toronto Art Centre (UTAC). After roughly two years of planning, submission viewing, jury meetings, artist interviews, and final selections, the works of thirteen Coptic artists were hung, and displayed on the walls of UTAC for a duration of two weeks. The exhibition featured various mediums and genres of artworks created by the artists from Southern Ontario whose Canadian home and Coptic heritage was their only commonality. From Neo-Coptic icons, to contemporary portraits, landscapes, political artworks, animation works, and a performance video artists of different generations, educational backgrounds, and work experience presented works that were a reflection of their faith, heritage, dwellings, and voices while speaking the various languages of visual culture. Each artist brought a new flavour to the eclectic exhibition and added to the creative richness of the history of the art of the Copts, resulting in an exhibition that became a testament to the resilience, adaptation, and continuity of the creative traditions of the Egyptians.

Sponsored by St. Mark's Coptic Museum, the exhibition launched a discourse about what it means to be a Coptic artist living in Canada,

and at the same time made visible undiscovered artists. With over five hundred guests who attended the show, the exhibition became a place of dialogue for Coptic artists to talk about their practices and share their work with the Canadian public for the first time. This was yet another milestone in the scholarly trajectory St. Mark's Coptic Museum has taken to bring to the fore modern and contemporary art by Copts as a living example of the continuity of the art of the Copts — an art historical narrative that still remains to be explored and written.

In 2009, the Museum published Marguerite Nakhla: Legacy to Modern Egyptian Art. Written by Father Marcos A. Marcos, Dr. Helene Moussa, and Carolyn Ramzy, the book explores the career and socio-political context of the renowned modern Coptic artist whose works are collected by the Museum. The publication takes a comprehensive look at Nakhla's work and the way she became a pioneer of modern Egyptian art through her practice of "folkloric art"—a term used by artists of the first decade of the 20th century to distinguish themselves from Western "high art" and to root their art in Egypt's long cultural history.

With a mission to educate on the continuity of Coptic culture, St. Mark's Coptic Museum also published a catalogue to accompany *Hidden Treasures*. The catalogue includes an essay written by Dr. Helene Moussa (Volunteer Curator) linking the exhibition to the modernist art movement in Egypt and the debates surrounding it, and Sandy Saad (Visiting Curator) outlining the curatorial trajectory of the exhibition as an expansion of the history of the art of the Copts. The catalogue features the artists' biographies and their conceptual framework.

As St. Mark's Coptic Museum persists to actively maintain the continuity of the art of the Copts, who knows what we will discover next...

*Sandy Saad*

### Hidden Treasures *Canadian-Coptic Visual Artists in Southern Ontario*

|                        |                |
|------------------------|----------------|
| Bassem Abdelmalak      | André Guindi   |
| Ghada Bebawy           | Seham Guirguis |
| Mina El-Gebaly         | Salwa Iskander |
| Marina Fathala         | Shera Mekhail  |
| Akram and Fadia Gabra  | Marina Saad    |
| Ghattas Girgis Ghattas | Sandy Saad     |

June 14 - 25, 2011

Hidden Treasures is an exhibition that introduces the works of thirteen contemporary Coptic artists living in Southern Ontario. The genesis on the exhibition was inspired by St. Mark's Coptic Museum's continuing endeavours to showcase Coptic artists who are pushing the boundaries of artistic practice.

## MUSEUM ACTIVITIES

The Museum organized two activities this summer as a follow up to *Hidden Treasures*:

### **Mosaic Classes**

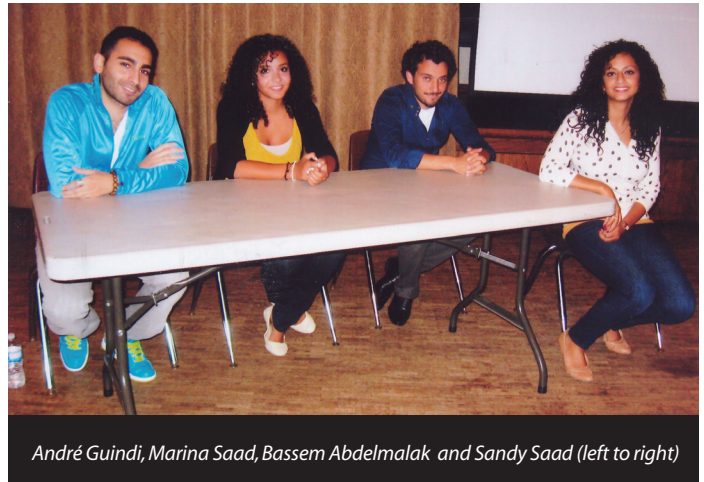
Sixteen participants from thirteen years of age to seniors registered for a six session introductory mosaic workshop with Akram and Fadia Gabra. Participants selected their own designs to learn the old Roman technique of making mosaics on a 12' by 12' wall décor. Stay tuned for the exhibition of their works!

Akram and Fadia Gabra have been creating mosaics as team for over ten years. In addition to classes in their Etobicoke studio, they teach mosaics at various school boards, in hospitals, seniors' homes, and most recently in prisons. Their mission is to enable people to love and respect mosaic art. They certainly succeeded in this mission!

### **Coptic Artists Discuss their Career Choice**

On Wednesday August 31 St. Mark's Coptic Museum presented a panel discussion titled *The Coptic Artist in Their Communities* to the Graduate Group at St. Mark's Church.

*Hidden Treasures: Canadian-Coptic Visual Artists in Southern Ontario* sparked many questions about the place of artists in the Coptic Community. Becoming an artist is rare profession in the Coptic community. Four of the artists, Bassem Abdelmalak, André Guindi, Marina Saad and Sandy Saad spoke to the challenges and opportunities of choosing art as a profession. An animated discussion among themselves and with attendees unravelled the many myths about art as a hobby (or for women only) rather than a profession. The panel's own career paths and that of other artists in the *Hidden Treasures* exhibition revealed the diverse opportunities and professional fields an artist can pursue, such as teaching, art therapy, curator, filmmaking, book illustrator, iconographer, an agent of change and peace. But perhaps what stood out the most in the discussions was the sense of calling each one of the artist felt about their career choice and how acting on this calling is a service to society's cultural well-being.



André Guindi, Marina Saad, Bassem Abdelmalak and Sandy Saad (left to right)

A career as an artist is but one of many avenues to follow ones passion!

For more information on the exhibition, the Museum has published a catalogue. The catalogue includes a biography of each of the thirteen artists and sells for \$10.00.

### **COPTIC STUDIES, U of T**

This coming academic year the U of T Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations (NMC) will be offering two courses in Coptic Studies.

The instructor is Dr. Ramez Boutros

**Fall term 2011:** NMC342H1F History of Egyptian Monasticism

**Winter term 2012:** NMC367H1S

Archaeology & Architecture of Egyptian Monasticism

For more information check NMC website:

<http://www.utoronto.ca/nmc/index.htm>

### **MUSEUM REFERENCE LIBRARY**

The Museum Reference Library is now housed in the room next door to the Museum — a space shared with the Bookstore and reception room for special visitors hosted by St. Marks' Church.

The Reference Library's collection focuses on publications on the art of the Copts across the centuries, as well as supporting historical, theological and archaeological publications. We are also gathering bibliographies from university professors in various fields of Coptic Studies. If you have a particular journal article you need for your research, we will do our best to accommodate.

We expect that the ever expanding library will continue to serve students, academics, researchers and interested readers. The space is conducive to reading and reflection! Call or email the Museum for an appointment.