



# ST. MARK'S COPTIC MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

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## THE JOURNEYS OF THE COPTS AND THEIR ARTIFACTS Museum Toronto Annual Intersections Festival - March 12-24, 2018

This year's Museum of Toronto's Intersections Festival's theme was Arrivals and Departures. Participating museums, galleries and heritage centers showcased twenty-three exhibitions and events featuring stories about what it means to have "departed" and "arrived" in this place (Toronto) called "home".

For a second year in a row, our Museum participated in the Myseum festival. We partnered with the Coptic Canadian History Project at York University, founded and managed by PhD candidate Michael Akladius whose doctoral thesis is on the history of the immigration of Copts to Canada. We offered a very diverse and interactive exhibition titled "The Journeys of the Copts and their Artifacts."

The multimedia talk by Michael Akladius: "*St. Mark's Parish: Copts' Journey Through Toronto's Places of Worship, 1962-1978*" illustrated the story of Coptic immigration as very much a story of Canadian inter-ethnic, inter-denominational, and multicultural exchange and cooperation and how the success of Copts in Toronto in the 1960s and 1970s reveals a city that was in the midst of tremendous change. In the words of one such Coptic immigrant, today "Canada is my home... [and] Egypt is my native land."

Michael Akladius' talk may be heard on St. Mark's Church Live Stream: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDNjyxhFaaA>

Ten panels also gave the stories of challenges and achievements of nineteen Canadian Copts who have joined the Culture sector in Toronto and elsewhere in North America. Some arrived in Canada as seasoned artists and museum professionals or were children of immigrant parents who went through the Canadian educational system. A striking theme that cuts across all their stories is their determination to pursue a career where they could express their gifts as artists and passion for art despite the fact that such careers are not traditional professions for Copts and most of them were advised not to pursue careers



Copts celebrate Easter in High Park, 1965.

Courtesy: Elhamy Khalil



Multimedia Talk by Michael Akladius.

Photo: Eihab Saeed

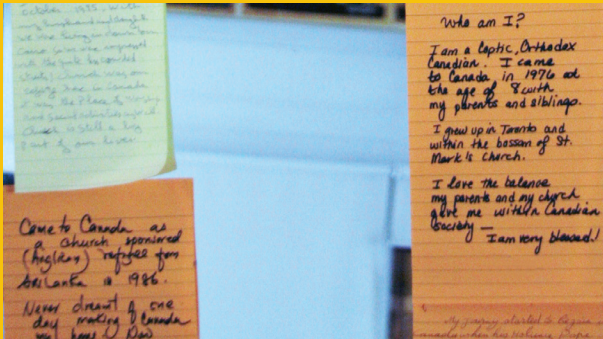


Panel tracing milestones in the "journey" of the St. Mark's Coptic Museum from 1964 to 2017. Fr. Marcos the founder of St. Mark's Coptic Museum with Helene Moussa and Mrs. Suzie Marcos. Photo: Eihab Saeed





Copts in the Culture Sector Panels. Photo: Sarah Asaad



Mirror with Visitors Stories. Photo: Sarah Asaad



Museum Interpreter Marina. Photo: Elija Nicols



Peace Planter. Photo: Sarah Asaad



Museum Interpreter Alice Hanna. Photo: Elija Nicols

in the culture sector. As one of them stated, his greatest achievement has been: “To do something I love and earn a living from it. Follow your dreams, work hard and the fruits will bear!” They had no role models but are now role models pursuing careers as iconographers, visual artists, animators, mosaics, performers, writers, a university professor in ethno-musicology, and in the museum and gallery sectors.

Visitors were also invited to write on self-stick note, and post on the mirror who they are, and how you ended up in Toronto. One of them reads, “I came to Toronto as a refugee from Sri Lanka sponsored by the Anglican Church of Canada. I never dreamt of one day making Canada my home. I now have 2 homes & many, many friends from all over the world. I am one of many!” Another visitor wrote “I am a Coptic Orthodox Canadian. I came to Canada in seventies at the age of 8 with my parents and siblings. I grew up in Toronto and within the bosom of St. Mark’s Church. I love the balance my parents and church gave me within Canadian society — I am very blessed!”

In the Museum we shared the stories of the journey of the first artifacts acquired by the Museum. Interpreter Marina Hanna (*photo on left*) describes the journey the Yota Cross painted in ca1898, who created it, and the people who accompanied it on its journey from Asiot (Egypt), to Florida (USA), to Toronto where it hung over the altar of St. Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Church, and finally to its present “home” in the Museum.

The painting of the Peace Planter tells the story of Mina El-Gabaly (artist’s pseudonym), an abstract artist in Egypt (now a Canadian citizen) who sought to find a way of how to respond as an artist and a Christian to the 9/11 attacks in the US and the ensuing destabilization in the Middle East. His surname in Arabic means “mountain climber” to symbolize that the pursuit for peace is as hard as climbing a mountain. El-Gabaly received a United Nations peace prize for his efforts in promoting peace.

Capping-off the exhibition, Mina’s story also “introduces” the Museum’s launch of an historic and unique series of nine contemporary narrative icons by iconographer Victor Fakhoury. His art masterfully chronicles events that have affected the Coptic Church and Copts in Egypt since the so-called “Arab Spring” in 2011. Fakhoury’s icons will be on exhibition for several months and may also be viewed on the Museum’s website.

