

"Curating a Revolution": Egyptian Artists Cry Out for Mubarak's Resignation

Par Ben Davis

Publié: 01 Février 2011

With Egypt bursting into full revolutionary upheaval over the last week, and the 30 year dictatorship of **Hosni Mubarak** tottering under the pressure of mass protests, the raging velocity of current events has given artists little time to react. Yet culture has been pushed into the spotlight, with Egyptian antiquities chief **Zahi Hawass** [putting out a statement condemning the looting at the nation's museums](#). Concern that the nation's art be protected from the masses has become a major preoccupation of media reports, with even **Metropolitan Museum of Art** director **Thomas Campbell** [voicing worries about the effect an uprising might have on the nation's patrimony](#). Meanwhile, former **Egyptian Museum** head **Wafaa El-Saddik** [threw the blame back on Hawass's culture authority itself](#), suggesting that the museum's own underpaid guards may have looted the museum.

Meanwhile, the few contemporary artists who have managed to have their voices heard are squarely in the anti-Mubarak camp. Despite the Internet blackout in Egypt, "[Iran Inside Out](#)" curator **Sam Bardaouil** has managed to contact a few artists in Egypt, and has been spotlighting their voices on his Facebook page. Earlier today, for instance, Bardaouil posted a message from artist **Amal Kenawy** — whose work has been seen at the **Dak'art** and **Sharjah Biennales** — after speaking with her in Cairo. "No more intimidation! Our fear is gone," reads Kenawy's message. "On the streets no one is thinking 'I am a Christian or Muslim, Brotherhood or Baradei! We are all one. I am honored to be part of this and for my son to witness a new era and have a better future. Mubarak is gone! We will march tomorrow!'"

Even though Egypt's hated secret police are known to crack down viciously on dissent, the arts have played a leading role in the country recently, for instance in organizing solidarity between Egyptian Muslims and Coptic Christians. On January 7, in response to terrorist bombings of churches on New Year's Eve, Muslims from across the country [attended Coptic mass to act as "human shields" against further bombings](#). The initiative was partly spearheaded by **El-Sawy Culture Wheel**, a prominent arts venue in the country.

[View Slideshow:](#)

Whether true or not, Wafaa El-Saddik's assertion that the Egyptian Museum was looted by its own guards resonates with [a widespread theory on the Egyptian street](#) that Mubarak has deliberately attempted to foment chaos in order to justify a crackdown, and that looting has been carried out by out-of-uniform police.

Another missive on Bardaouil's Facebook page comes from Lebanon-born, Cairo-based artist **Lara Baladi**, founder of the "[Nomadic Artists](#)" [culture summit event](#), which has brought artists and journalists to Cairo's **Townhouse Gallery**. Baladi strives to refute the government-sponsored media's narrative focusing on the danger of criminal gangs: "The police are dressed in civilian clothes and looting to discredit the protesters," she asserts. "But the people are strong, cleaning the streets, helping each other find food. The police opened the prisons setting the inmates free. We are being tear gazed [sic] even in our homes. But we are strong! We want Mubarak Out!"

An [eye-opening account posted on New York art Web site Hyperallergic](#) by Syrian journalist **Danny Ramadan** firmly put Hawass's story in the context of Mubarak propaganda: "People in the streets... do not believe a word the current regime says, and Hawass is no different." (The prominent antiquities official was today appointed to a new position in Mubarak's reorganized cabinet.)

Yet even Hawass's statement on the looting also cuts against the narrative that seeks to paint the masses as pitted against culture. "What is really beautiful is that not all Egyptians were involved in the looting of the museum," he writes. "A very small number of people tried to break, steal and rob. The Egyptian people are calling for freedom, not destruction. When I left the museum on Saturday, I was met outside by many Egyptians, who asked if the museum was safe and what they could do to help."

For his part, Sam Bardaouil spoke to the excitement of the popular movement felt by art circles throughout the Middle East. "Please call your article: Curating a Revolution," he wrote when contacted by **ARTINFO**, "with the curator being: 30 years of oppression."

Entrez votre email ici

