



Abu Dhabi, UAE Wednesday 25 October 2017

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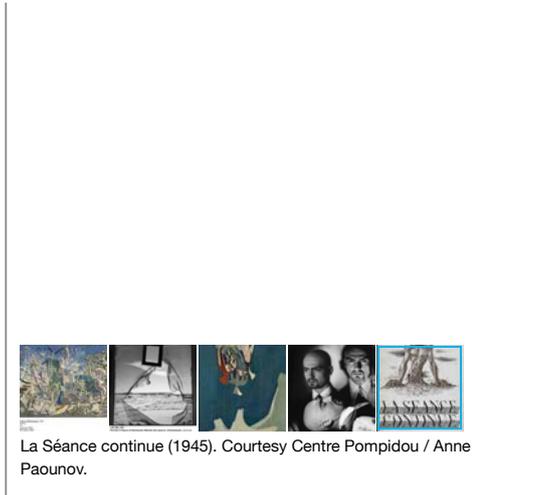
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Exhibitions: major show on Egyptian Surrealist movement to open in Madrid



La Séance continue (1945). Courtesy Centre Pompidou / Anne Paounov.

Resistance proved the irresistible rallying cry for a collective of Egyptian artists, intellectuals and writers working in Cairo as the world slid inexorably towards the Second World War. Calling themselves Art et Liberté the group united in staunch opposition against the rise of fascism and nationalism in Europe and at home, British colonial rule and Cairo's conservative art scene.

With the publication of their manifesto, Long Live Degenerate Art, on December 22, 1938, these artists and activists, including Anwar and Fouad Kamel, Kamel El-Telmissany and the poet Georges Henein, raised a distinctively Cairene voice to join the international Surrealist movement. Except that Art et Liberté were calling for a new form of Surrealism with a powerful social and moral message absent in Dali's famous depictions of the subconscious at work: they called it Subjective Realism.

On canvas, this manifesto was translated into fragmented human forms that suggested the state's torturous oppression of women and the working class, as well as widespread economic injustice. It was radical and controversial. Their call for a public seance, for example, challenged the ban on magic in religion, while photography used absurdist juxtaposition to criticise nationalist attempts to exploit the legacy of Pharaonic Egypt. It was also technically accomplished, as photographers such as Ida Kar used solarization and photomontage like their European Surrealist contemporaries.

The group staged five exhibitions from 1940 to 1945 and founded two publishing houses before it splintered into the Contemporary Art Group. The latter is unfairly credited with inventing the first truly Egyptian art.

Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938-1948), which opens at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid on February 14, brings together more than 110 paintings, artworks and photographs from 37 artists, alongside archival material, film footage and manuscripts dating from the late 1920s to the early 1950s. Many of the artworks on loan from public and private collections in Egypt and abroad are being exhibited for the first time.

This international exhibition has transferred to Madrid from the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and will move on to K20 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf and Tate Liverpool later in the year.

- Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938-1948) is showing at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, from February 14 to May 28. For more information, visit www.museoreinasofia.es (<http://www.museoreinasofia.es>)

Clare Dight is editor of The Review.



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