

ADAM HENEIN

Man of Stone, Flesh and Spirit

Photographs: George Fakhry Text: Nile El Wardani



Mr.Henein's sculpture

It is 1937, an Egyptian boy of 8 years with azur green eyes and a slight stature enters the Egyptian Museum on Tahrir Square for the first time in his life. Immediately he is overpowered by the massiveness of the sculptures of Pharaohs surrounding him, making him feel as though he has been transported to a world beyond. They seem to be holding up the sky.

“I found myself in a magical world. I was immersed in colors, forms and stones I could never even have imagined before I entered the museum. It changed my life forever” remembers Henein.

At school he found his first piece of clay. Young Henein sculpted his impression of the pharaoh Akhnatoun. “It was great to me because I made it. My father displayed it in the vitrine of his silver shop in Cairo’s Bab el-Shaariya neighborhood and voila I was a sculptor.”

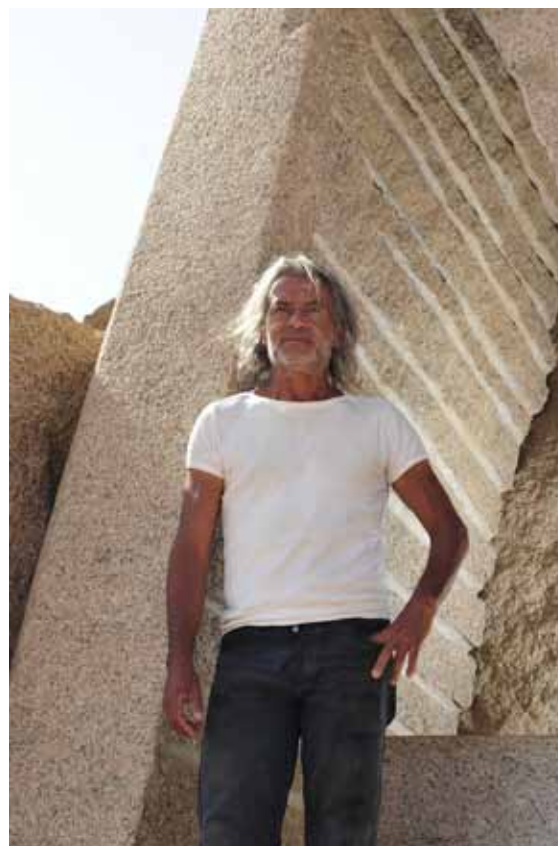
Seventy-six years later, Henein has emerged as one of Egypt’s great sculptors carrying on an Egyptian tradition that span thousands of years since the time of the first dynasty of ancient Egypt. In fact, Henein is one of the world’s most celebrated sculptors having exhibited throughout the Arab world, Europe and at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.



Khaled Zaki - Egypt



Francois Weill - France



Patrice Belin - France



Ahmed Moussa - Egypt





After completing his studies at the Fine Arts Academy in Cairo, he spent years in upper Egypt (Luxor and Aswan) where he lived amongst the stone and mineral landscape of this ancient land. This transformed him even more as he learned to sculpt nature with his own hands. In the quarries of Egypt and the boney boulders of Elephantine Island, Henein found his peace and his pieces of stone that he would transform into his own expression of Egypt.

Henein traveled to Paris in 1971 to participate in an exhibition of contemporary Egyptian artists at the Musee Galliera. This was to be a short stop on his way to Mexico where he planned to study pre-Columbian art. He felt there was a connection with the ancient Egyptian forms, simplicity and energy. However this plan was not written in stone and Henein did not leave Paris before 25 years had passed (1996). He drank up everything that was art during those years, working passionately in his small atelier near Porte de Sevres.

He discovered and admired the work of Western sculptors; Aristide, Brancusi, Despiau, Maillol, Marini, Henry Moore and others. Such exposure led him to understand the pared down essence of sculpture in a modern idiom, which became characteristic of his own work. As a result, Henein's sculpture exhibits the twofold impression of the highest





Harruku Yamashita has participated in the Aswan Symposium for five years. Coming from Japan, she is one of the few women sculptors who work in stone. Harruku's artistry has matured during her time in Egypt working under such mentors as Adam Henein. She is inspired by Egypt and "loves the effect of wind, sand and power" on her sculptures.



Harruku Jamashita has spent five years in Aswan sculpting what she calls a "petrified forest" which will grace the entrance of the open-air-sculpture-museum.







Amina Atif represents the young Egyptian generation who are breaking all the stereo-types. Working in stone in the Egytian heat is not what her mother did nor had in mind for her.



Islam Ebada, one of Egypt's promising young artists says that his "sculptures are something from God; a dialogue between the soul and the stone."

traditions of Antiquity combined with modernity of the 1940-50s. Yet these weighty traditions did not diminish his authenticity.

Henein has a gentle low-key humor and a unique quality of childhood which is often present in his work. He remembers that; "I was aware of what was going on elsewhere in the world. But at the same time I felt that all this did not really concern me too much. I measured everything I saw by the standard of ancient Egyptian sculpture which had become the basis of my judgement (from childhood). As a result of this I never actually went in for Surrealism or Cubism or other movements." Aristotle told us that; "The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance." Being a true descendent of the builders of the pyramids and the first sculptors of goddesses, gods, queens and kings, Henein's art is above all else aesthetic and spiritual.

During his years in Paris, Henein traveled regularly to Italy for the pleasure of art and research. He befriended the caster Mariani in Pietrasanta and returned often. Sitting amongst stone statues of the pharaohs, gods and goddesses of ancient Egypt in Torino's Egyptian Museum, Henein felt that he had returned home and was visiting his family. He saw them performing the same habits and sitting on the same chairs, as if time had not passed.

In Italy Henein often met with Farouk Hosny, former Egyptian Minister of Culture. There, over twenty years ago they dreamt of founding an international sculpture symposium in Egypt, the birth place of sculpture. Only



This monolithic Romanian arch carved from Egyptian granite in Aswan is the work of Romanian artist Roth Gabriel Atilla.

time would tell if such a dream could come true.

When Henein returned to his homeland, he was regarded as an artist of international stature. In Egypt he was able to sculpt the monumental works that he had only been able to dream of in Paris. For Henein, Egypt's origins never change, only the surface changes. "These are the things I search for all my life. I live to find these things, my Egypt, my ideas, my character, my thoughts and myself. Every day I wake up and I start to play and I look for this moment. When I do a good job, I have found my feeling of Egypt."

The knowledge he took with him of ore and carving techniques impressed his Egyptian colleagues. He was asked by Farouk Hosny, Egyptian Minister of Culture to help fulfill this dream and so the work began to establish the Aswan International Sculpture Symposium. Mr. Antoine Riad, proprietor of the Basma Hotel, situated high above the banks of the Nile in Aswan, understood the vision and donated his land, hotel and hospitality to bring the first group of sculptors. The ambiance created by the Egyptian and international sculptors and those who streamed into Aswan to watch them work at the Basma Hotel site was electric. I was lucky enough to be among them and I remember the great happiness and satisfaction the artists felt working hard in the sweet spring air of Aswan by day. After a long day of chiseling, grinding and modeling the artists would sit together smoking shisha by the light of the moon and enjoying the Egyptian hospitality.

Henein has served as artistic director of the Aswan International Sculpture Symposium for the past 17 years and has made Aswan a coveted destination for the world's greatest sculptors who dream of having the chance to enter Egypt's

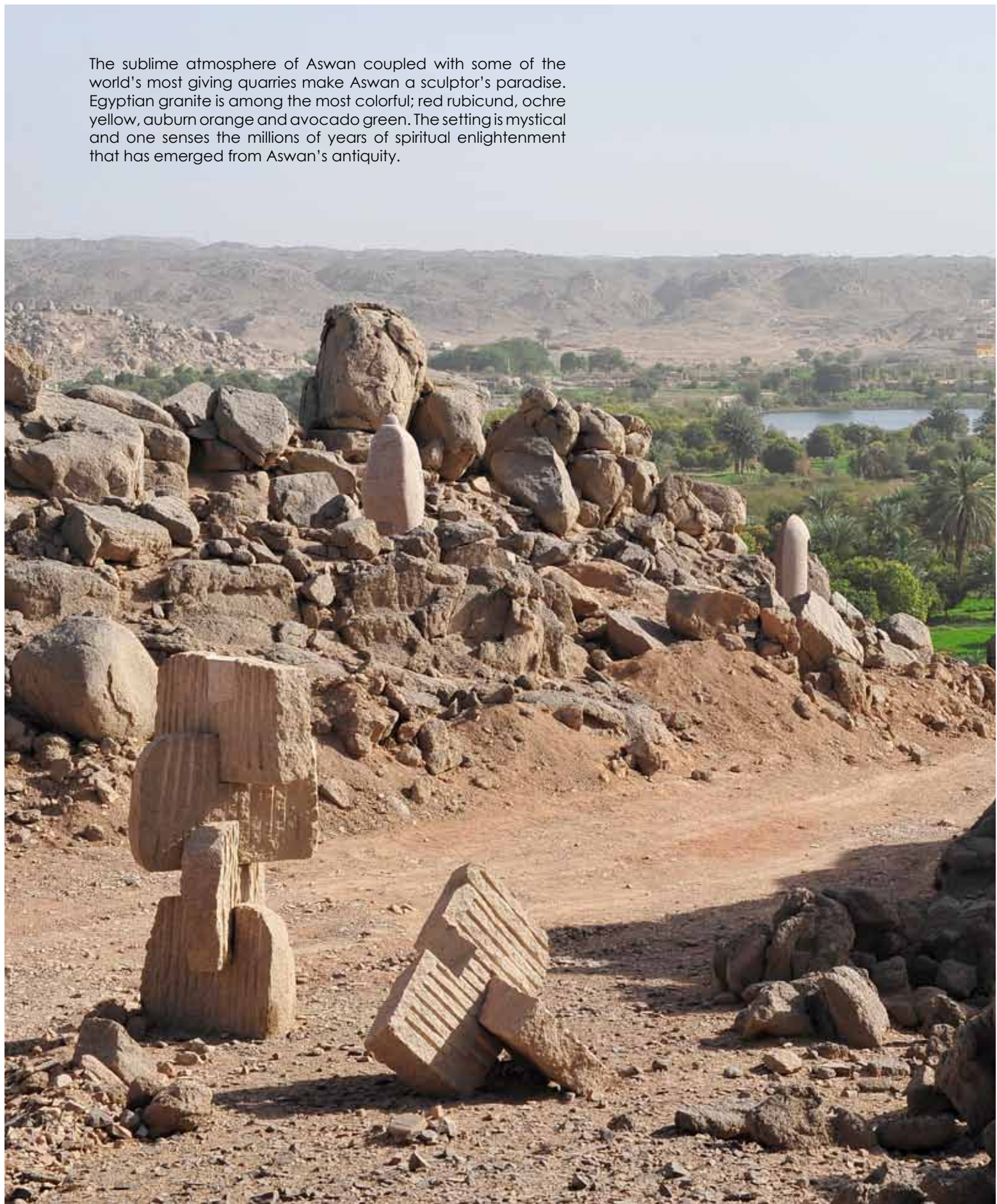


Obelisque founder & publisher, Lamia Hassanein to the left attended the Symposium in Aswan. Artists Hany Faisal, Ahmed Moussa, Islam Ebada from Egypt and Haruku Yamashita from Japan.





The sublime atmosphere of Aswan coupled with some of the world's most giving quarries make Aswan a sculptor's paradise. Egyptian granite is among the most colorful; red rubicund, ochre yellow, auburn orange and avocado green. The setting is mystical and one senses the millions of years of spiritual enlightenment that has emerged from Aswan's antiquity.

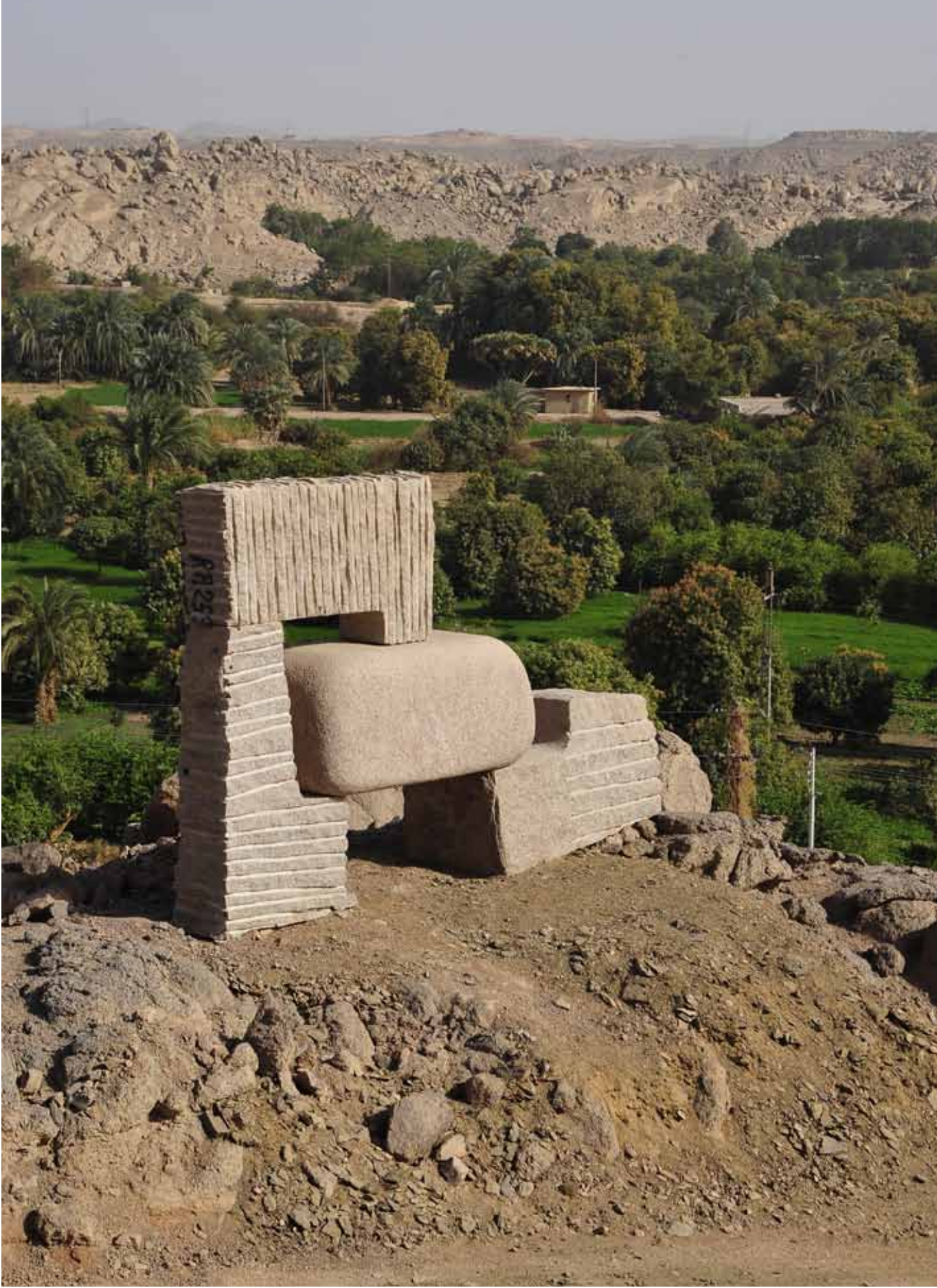




infamous quarries to select monolithic stones that speak personally to them. Henein tells me that, “Great sculptors see their master piece first in their heart and second in the stone.”

Henein’s idea born in Italy more than 20 years ago, has crystalized beyond imagination, birthing an international symposium and an open-air-sculpture-museum which will be inaugurated soon. It took a team of dedicated art experts and supporters that included artist Salah Maraai in cooperation with the former Aswan governor Salah Mesbah, former Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni and directed by Adam Henein. The number of sculpted pieces has exceeded 250 works of which 137 are permanently installed at the museum, 27 are decorating the city of Aswan and 24 others are spread across Egypt from the South to the North. They have been created by more than 50 Egyptian and 132 foreign sculptors representing 44 different countries.

In addition, more than 50 up-and-coming young Egyptian artists have participated in workshops given by the master sculptors over the years. The Aswan International Sculpture Symposium has given birth to nu-



merous young artists who have established professional studios and represent Egypt internationally. Henein understands the power of such artistic outreach and has doubled the number of young Egyptian artists invited to the Aswan symposium this year.

Henein, now at the height of his maturity, has personally created a cadre of works of more than 20,000 pieces over his life time. Also a painter, Henein has painted and sculpted works as tiny as his thumb and oeuvres as large and heavy as a camel. His minuscule paintings done on papyrus have an ageless aura of former millennia. The gran-

The open-air-museum combines of more than 50 Egyptian and 132 foreign sculptors representing 44 different countries. The enormous abstract piece (left) was sculpted by Latvian artist Jeanzems Baulus. On the right is a modern depiction of a Pharonic throne. It combines the representations of the crowns of upper and lower Egypt in a totally abnormal scale and placement than that found in ancient Egypt sculpture. This is a testament that art is fluid and that every artist chooses the conversation through the stone he chooses. The landscape below is adorned with oeuvres sculpted by international artists over the past six years. Mohamed Abdulla sculpted the upper left sculpture. Together these works provide the art lover with an awe-inspiring eclectic abstract panorama of Upper Egypt.



Romanian artist Nikolai Flifing has played with our senses making what we experience as soft; a bed and our laundry from stone. He has defied nature hanging a wet stone dress to dry in the Egyptian sun. Behind the abstract scene is a stone door which leads to wherever one's imagination wishes to go.















ular surface of the material combined with the warm hues of natural pigments bound with gum arabic with a pinch of lime (as the artist describes), might be mistaken for ancient wall paintings or frescoes. The same impression attends his small sculptures. A small sculpture representing a father and his two sons sitting upright on a rectangular base combines a lyrical earnestness, whimsy and gratitude mixed with low-key wisdom. Friedrich Nietzsche told the world years ago that, “The essence of all beautiful art, all great art, is gratitude.”



Henein's garden is filled with gratitude for life. There you will find seated timeless mega sculptures of gods, animals and granite ships that will sail one to the great beyond. All this is found in his home and atelier in Harraniya, where he still has a glimpse of the Giza pyramids, despite the urban sprawl that has encroached upon him.

He reminds me that, "There is nothing new. In art, there is no time." During the past few years he has earnestly been arranging for his own legacy to be set in stone. He has transformed his home into a museum, building an attractive modern four-story edifice that houses a good portion of his work. The architecture is timeless yet modern and Henein has taken great care to make sure that it is accessible to all with ramps that ascend to the top. We at Obelisque have been fortunate enough to have an early glimpse of the Adam Henein Museum, which will open in early 2014 to much fanfare. The museum will certainly become a destination for art lovers the world over.

Friedrich Nietzsche reminded us that "The essence of all beautiful art, all great art, is gratitude." Henein is a man of maturity yet still childlike, full of gratitude and having an astutely artistic persona, he experiences life and work through the lens of a highly sophisticated sense of make-believe. Yet he is a man with a vision that builds bridges across the world, between nations and people through the elements of stone, flesh and spirit. After all, this is what each of his sculptures is made of.

Francois Weill has come from France and has turned Aswan into his playground, sculpting massive tons of pink granite and fixing them on to pivots that rotate, spring and see-saw in the clear skys of Nubia. Weill plays with balance, light and mass to make icons to the sun god Ra.





TRAVEL

ASWAN

Photo: George Fakhry



The Old Cataract Hotel in Aswan is the epitome of Egyptian hospitality and the center piece of Aswan. One the world's most prestigious hotels, the Sofitel Old Cataract is a luxury 5-star hotel in a 19th-century Victorian palace on the banks of the river Nile. It rises grandly from a pink granite shelf at the edge of the Nubian Desert with views of Elephantine Island.

This stylish property blends Pharaonic treasures with French art de recevoir and sophisticated interiors by Sybille de Margerie in the historic



Palace embellished with old world Moorish arches, ruby red chandeliers, plush Persian carpets, soft armchairs and hand-carved furnishings.

The Old Cataract was built in 1899 by Thomas Cook to house European travelers. The second half of the 19th century was synonymous with prosperity and refinement in Egypt. Steamships and railroads carried curious travelers deep into Egypt. The most privileged among them were welcomed at the brand new Old Cataract, an elegant Victorian palace offering state-of-the art amenities and luxurious décor.

For over a century, prominent figures from all over the world have been drawn to the inherent graciousness and quiet energy of the Old Cataract. Guests have included King Farouk, President Anwar Sadat, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, Howard Carter, Margaret Thatcher, Jimmy Carter, Princess Diana, Queen Noor, the Agha Khan, the Duke of Connaught just to name a few.

Journeying through the Middle East and the Old Ottoman Empire in the late 1920s, Dame Agatha Christie discovered not only a lasting fascination for Egypt, but also an inspirational setting for a mystery. Indeed, she drew on her stay at the Old Cataract for her world famous novel *Death on the Nile*. The 1977 film of the novel was shot at the hotel.

Sir Winston Churchill was one of the earliest guests of the Old Cataract, he attended the inauguration of the Aswan Dam. Fascinated by the inspiring decor, he returned to the Old Cataract during his many subsequent trips to Egypt.

In this very place Jean Claude Ellena, moved by the magnificent setting, created the very delicate fragrance *Jardin sur le Nil* just a few years ago for Hermes.



Enveloped in legend, the first relates to its name Old Cataract, which refers to the ancient belief that the collision of the river Nile with the northernmost granite barrier of land is actually the point where the civilized world reaches its end. From this site ancient Egyptians witnessed the once flourishing cult of Khnum, god of the cataract and inundation. The location of the Old Cataract marks the end of the fertile Nile valley and the beginning of the vast Nubian Desert.

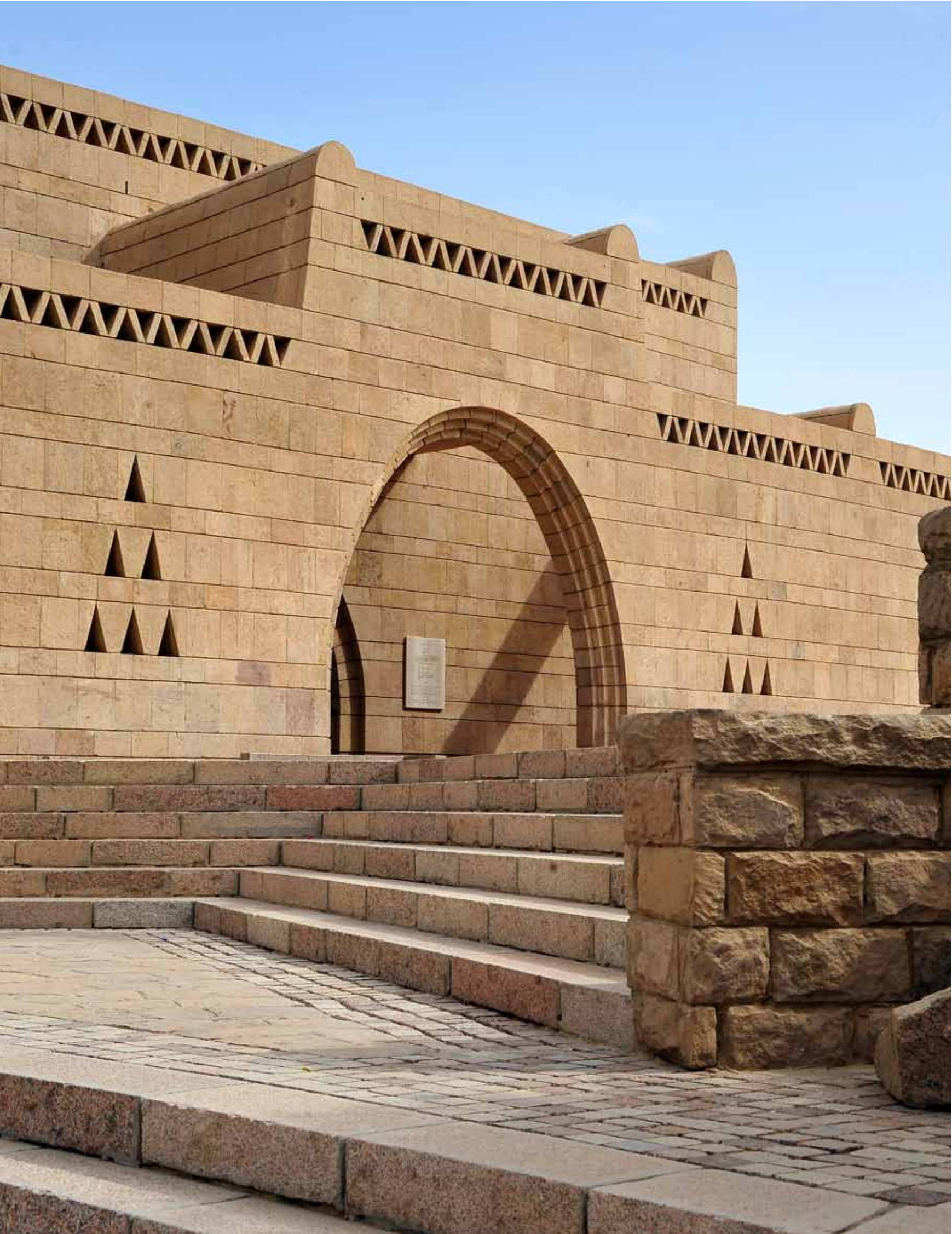




Having hosted uncountable historic events for over eleven decades, the palace underwent three years of renovation orchestrated by French designer Sybille de Margerie. The original beauty, grandeur and Egyptian atmosphere have been restored and eloquently enhanced with an inimitable French touch. A new infinity pool naturally links the old and new wings and invites complete relaxation.

Literally hanging over the banks of the Nile River, this jewel of the Nile, is a short walk to the Nubian Museum and the Aswan Open-Air Sculpture Museum. Both promise to inspire and reinvigorate the art lover in you.

In the early 1960's, when Egypt built the Aswan High Dam, Egyptologists and archaeologists worldwide heeded UNESCO's appeal to salvage the monuments of Egyptian Nubia before the rising waters of Lake Nasser submerged them forever. Thousands of objects were salvaged and important temples were moved to higher ground. UNESCO was encouraged in the 1980's to plan a new Nubian museum in Aswan where the objects could be stored and exhibited. It was universally felt that they should be kept as close as possible to their principal places of origin. Designed by the late Egyptian architect Mahmoud al-Hakim,





the Aswan Nubian Museum opened in November 1997. The architecture of the Museum and the enclosure walls are intended to evoke traditional Nubian village architecture, as it was along the Nubian Nile before the region was flooded by Lake Nasser. The Museum won the Agha-Khan Award of Architecture 2001.

Built along the life-giving waters of the Nile, Aswan - formerly Sennet - was named for a goddess of openness and exchange. Still characterized by a generous spirit and openness to travelers, the city harbors riveting vestiges of ancient times and is the gateway to the Nubian Desert.

We encourage you to travel to Aswan this winter and indulge yourself in this art lover's paradise. For even greater inspiration, travel to Aswan in the spring during the symposium, where you can interact with the internationally renowned sculptors at work. It is a slow process molding one's dreams from granite so you will have plenty of time to get to know these modern day Rodins and read "Death on the Nile".Ω



Youssef Nabil

Flammarion



9 Hand-colored gelatin silver print 26 x 39 cm each

Self Portrait, Marseille, 2011

Courtesy **Galerie Nathalie Obadia**, Paris/Bruxelles

In a conversation that alternates between a familiar joviality and sobering gravity (and takes place, we are told, in a “king size bed with very dark blue covers”) Youssef Nabil thoughtfully reminds his friend Marina Abramovic that once we die, “we will only leave films and photographs behind us.” In his *Ontology of the Photographic Image*, the critic and theorist Andre Bazin posits that a “mummy complex” lies at the origin of the arts, in which “the preservation of life” is sought through the “representation of life.” The ancient Egyptians, seeing survival as contingent on the maintenance of a corporeal body, looked to stave off death by placing terracotta figurines as stand-ins for the embalmed subject. While Bazin recognizes that the ontological conflation of image and object is a thing of the past, photographs certainly function to remind us of a subject and thus, “preserve him from a second spiritual death.” This sentiment appears to be at the root of most of Nabil’s artistic production, collected in his eponymous third monograph, spanning twenty years of work by the Egyptian-born New York based artist.

Flammarion has produced a gorgeous book that opens with an enlightening interview between Nabil and noted critic Hans Ulrich Obrist. This is followed by a dialogue between Nabil’s good friend and the subject of many of his photographs, Marina Abramovic, who offers many of her own insights into Nabil’s work. There are over 100 plates reproduced on the leathery pages of this beautiful, extensive volume. It is a testament to Nabil’s appeal across the global art scene that the texts