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| Naghi, Mohamed Musa (1888-1956) |
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| The painter Mohamed Naghi is remembered today alongside Mahmoud Mukhtar (1891-1934) and Mahmoud Said (1897-1964) as one of the core members of the so-called first generation of Egyptian artists. His early nationalist paintings executed after the Uprising of 1919 won him recognition. Paintings produced in 1931-32 while Naghi was in Ethiopia brought him further acclaim. After the system of foreign privileges was abolished in 1937, a number of Egyptian artists, including Naghi, were assigned high-ranking positions in state art institutions. A ‘Pioneer’ artist, Mohamed Naghi sought to develop a school of modern Egyptian art that was true to what he perceived as art’s universal foundations (and especially an equilibrium both formal and moral in nature) and the roots of an Egyptian identity grounded in a metaphysics of the collective. Like many of his contemporaries, his work drew on motifs referencing the art and intellectual history of Pharaonic Egypt, Egypt’s Islamic Golden Age, and a shared culture of the Mediterranean basin, as well as important contemporary literary and artistic figures. However, it was his interest in Egyptian folk art (al-fann al-sha‘abi) that would prove most influential for subsequent generations. Despite early setbacks in his dealings with the art establishment, he eventually became a powerful figure in Egypt’s new state arts sector and argued for the need for state intervention in cultivating an Egyptian artistic renaissance. |
| The painter Mohamed Naghi is remembered today alongside Mahmoud Mukhtar (1891-1934) and Mahmoud Said (1897-1964) as one of the core members of the so-called first generation of Egyptian artists. His early nationalist paintings executed after the Uprising of 1919 won him recognition. Paintings produced in 1931-32 while Naghi was in Ethiopia brought him further acclaim. After the system of foreign privileges was abolished in 1937, a number of Egyptian artists, including Naghi, were assigned high-ranking positions in state art institutions. A ‘Pioneer’ artist, Mohamed Naghi sought to develop a school of modern Egyptian art that was true to what he perceived as art’s universal foundations (and especially an equilibrium both formal and moral in nature) and the roots of an Egyptian identity grounded in a metaphysics of the collective. Like many of his contemporaries, his work drew on motifs referencing the art and intellectual history of Pharaonic Egypt, Egypt’s Islamic Golden Age, and a shared culture of the Mediterranean basin, as well as important contemporary literary and artistic figures. However, it was his interest in Egyptian folk art (al-fann al-sha‘abi) that would prove most influential for subsequent generations. Despite early setbacks in his dealings with the art establishment, he eventually became a powerful figure in Egypt’s new state arts sector and argued for the need for state intervention in cultivating an Egyptian artistic renaissance.  Naghi was born in Alexandria on January 17, 1888 to an affluent family with a record of service in the Egyptian army and civil administration. After receiving a law degree at the University of Lyon (1906-1910), he enrolled at the Institute of Fine Arts in Florence (the Scuola Libera del Nudo, Instituto di Belle Arti) from 1910 to 1914. While a student in France and Italy, Naghi frequented local museums and created reproductions of major works. With an eye to more recent developments in the arts, he also produced paintings that engaged with the work of Divisionist painters active in northern Italy in the 1890s and early 1900s. In the same period, Naghi began taking extended trips to Luxor with the aim of immersing himself in the arts of Ancient Egypt. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 forced Naghi to cut his art studies in Florence short and return to Egypt.  In 1918 he spent time at an artists’s colony in Giverny, where he hoped to apprentice himself to the eminent if now elderly Impressionist master, Claude Monet (1840-1926). The 1919 Uprising inspired his return to Egypt, where he painted ‘Egyptian Renaissance’ (Renaissance d’Égypte, also Mawkab Isis, or La Cortège d’Isis, 1919. Now destroyed. Oil paint, dimensions unknown.) which hung for decades in Cairo’s Senate (Majlis al-Shiyukh). He later described the work as a ‘first attempt at creating an Egyptian pictorial art.’ A series of paintings produced in 1931 and 1932, during a year spent in Ethiopia at the imperial court of Haile Selassie, yielded a number of subsequent high-profile exhibitions in Egypt and Europe.  In 1935, he co-founded the Alexandria Atelier, which almost immediately exerted a powerful influence on the local scene. From 1937 to 1939, he served as the head of the Higher School of Fine Arts; from 1939 to 1947 he occupied the position of director of the Museum of Modern Art in Cairo; between 1947 and 1950 he took on the post of director of the Royal Egyptian Academy in Rome. In 1953, following his return to Egypt, he co-founded the Cairo Atelier. The Naghi Museum was inaugurated at the late artist’s studio in Giza on July 13, 1968.  Link: naghi1.jpg  Mohamed Naghi, “The Artist’s Family,” or “The Village,” ca. 1937. Oil on canvas, ca. 5 x 3 m. Courtesy of the Naghi Museum. Source: Liliane Karnouk, Modern Egyptian Art, 1910-2003. (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 30. |
| Further reading:  (al-Khadim)  (Azar)  (Faraj)  (Husayn)  (Kane)  (Lackany)  (Miller)  (Naji)  (Naji, Roussillon and Roussillon)  (Najib, Dawstashi and Faraj)  (Quwaidy and Dawastashi)  (Rétrospective Mohamed Naghi à l’Occasion du Premier Anniversaire de Sa Mort)  (Yunan) |