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849 words

**The Art and Liberty Group (1939 – 1947)**

*Jama’at Al-Fann Wal-Hurriyyah* was established on January 19, 1939 in Cairo by Georges Henein and Ramses Younan with the participation of Fouad Kamel and Kamel El-Telmissany. It comprised of a core group of Egyptian and non-Egyptian intellectuals and artists who aligned themselves primarily with Surrealism. While many of the artists who were affiliated with the Art and Liberty Group did not work in a Surrealist style, at least not in what is conventionally defined as Surrealist based on the movement’s aesthetic considerations within its originating European context, they seem to have been attracted, or at least sympathetic towards its leftist revolutionary project. In response to the political structures at play in both, Europe and Egypt, the Group adopted and transformed the tactics of their European Surrealist contemporaries to break out from the institutionalized systems of artistic production and exhibition structures. Through the signing of manifestos, the circulation of various publications and the mounting of several exhibitions and conferences, the Group members distanced themselves from a previous generation of local artists whom they perceived as perpetuators of an imported European academicism or the construction of national identity. Although short-lived, the Group’s various activities provided artists with the opportunity to implement a number of both, creative and political projects alike that resonated with a rejection of what they perceived as a conservative middle class morality that fostered bourgeois art.

Prior to the official founding of the group, its main protagonists and many of its members had co-signed on the 22nd of December, 1938 a manifesto entitled “Long Live Degenerate Art”. The declaration condemned the persecution of artists and intellectuals in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Echoing their solidarity with their international peers, they separated themselves from “Les Essayistes”, a local literary club belonging to the Society of Fine Arts (founded in 1919), which, in late March 1938, organized a salon in honor of the Futurist poetry of the Alexandria-born F. T. Marinetti who had been a loud supporter of Mussolini. Through the Group’s various activities, artists could implement a number of both, creative and political projects alike that resonated with a rejection of what they perceived as an imported and stale salon-like artistic academicism that was employed to develop a national art style that made use of a Pharaonic vernacular. The adamantly spoke out against the coercion of artists within the boundaries of national and geographical affiliation, citing figures such as the leading sculptor Mahmoud Mokhtar, considered by many as the father of Neo-Pharaonism, arguing that artists must be free to borrow from any sources they like, in order to create an art that is able to instigate personal enlightenment and social change.

Through different types of manifestos, bulletins and journals that they published between 1938 and 1955, a series of formal and informal conferences and meetings they organized mainly between 1939 and 1947 in their headquarters and five main group exhibitions they staged from 1940 to 1945 out of a total of eight the last of which was held in Cairo in 1960, the Group signified a moment of dissent that sought to criticize the alignment of art and the construction of national identity. By the early 1950s and since 1948, all of the core members of the Group had left Egypt either due to officially sanctioned exile or voluntary immigration. Georges Henein shifted into Journalism writing predominantly for *L’Express* and *Jeune Afrique* in Paris. Kamel El Telmissany moved to Beirut, Lebanon and developed a career as a filmmaker. Overall, despite its short life, the Art and Liberty Group is an important movement that illustrates the ambitions of a younger generation of artists active in Cairo on the eve of the Second World War who championed artistic freedom and social engagement over the alignment of art with nation building projects.

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List of Publications by the Art and Liberty Group:

*The Art and Liberty Bulletin*, 2 issues, March 1939 and May 1939.

*Don Quichotte*, 6 issues, 1939 – 1940.

*Al-Tatawwur*, (Evolution) 7 issues from January 1940 to September 1940.

*- La Part du Sable*, 4 issues, 1947, 1950, 1954 and 1955.