

With cultural reawakening, Egypt poised to enchant the world once again

Fri, 2021-11-19 00:14

CAIRO: Egypt, the land of Tutankhamun, Cleopatra, Naguib Mahfouz and Ahmed Zewail, is witnessing a renaissance in its arts and cultural scene. A few weeks ago, the 4,500-year-old UNESCO World Heritage site of the Giza pyramids was transformed into a platform for contemporary art at “Forever Is Now.”

The exhibition, organized by Art d’Egypte, showcased the work of 10 international artists for the first time in the historic setting.

The renewal movement is backed by the government, institutional players, independent patrons, artists and curators who are pushing the cultural scene in two directions: The revival of a prolific past and the celebration of a promising future.



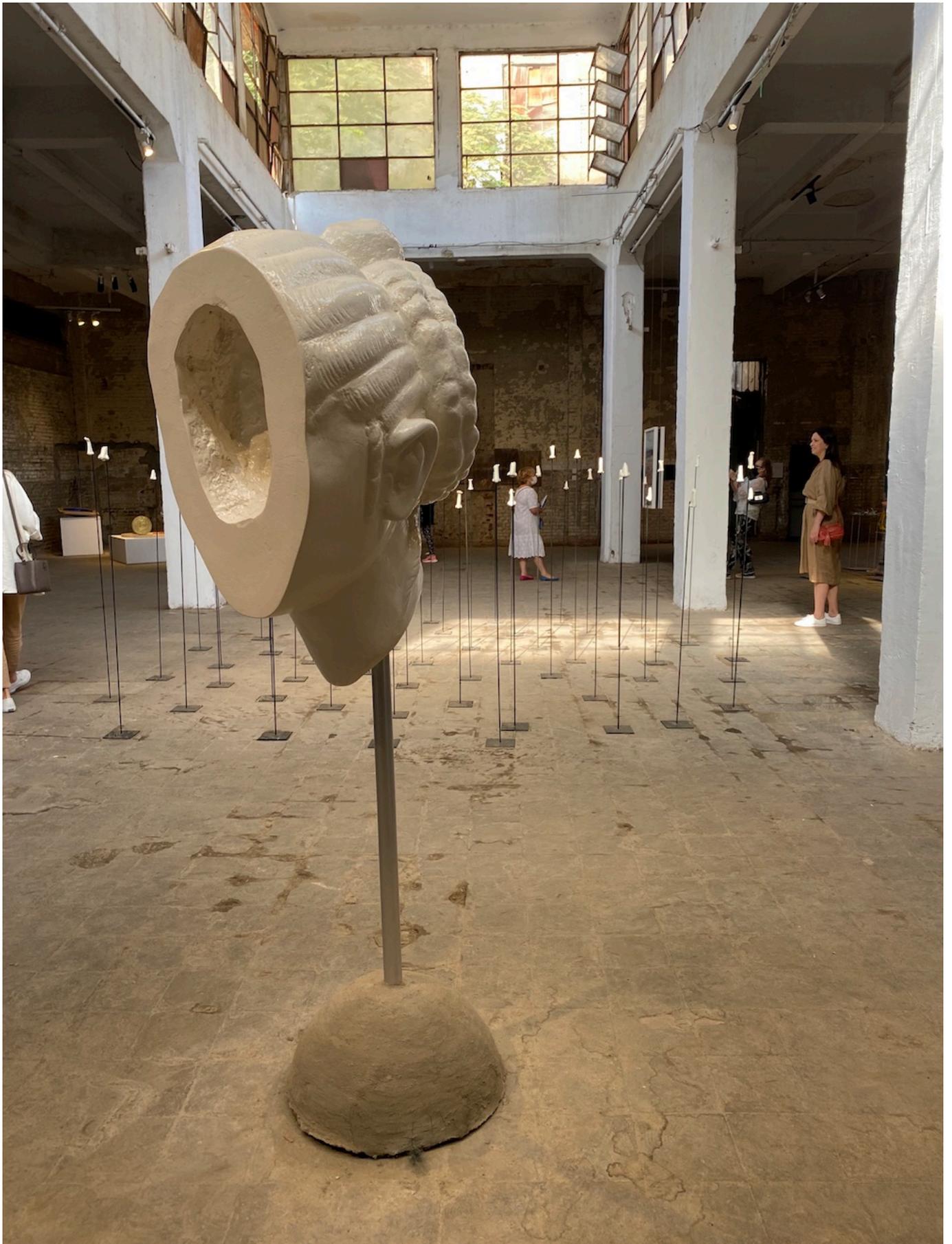
JR's Installation 'Greetings from Giza' – Credit: Hesham El Sayfi – Courtesy of Art d’Egypte. (Supplied)

Nadine Abdel-Ghaffar, the founder of arts and heritage consultancy Art d’Egypte, said: “The world knows Egypt’s artistic and cultural past. However, they are not aware of the present, the contemporary. We aim to educate, raise awareness, and bring opportunity to these places by activating spaces and involving the surrounding community.”

"Forever Is Now" presented artistic installations against the backdrop of the pyramids, and featured Italian artist Lorenzo Quinn and French artist JR – the latter accompanied by his friend and supporter American record-producer and singer Pharrell Williams.

The exhibition sought to establish a dialogue between the ancient past and the present, and to "question time as a continuum that both separates and unites civilizations."

Abdel-Ghaffar told Arab News that the display, which ended on Nov. 8, "succeeded in its mission of democratizing art by making it accessible in public spaces, attracting 20,000 visitors a day from schools, universities and people from all walks of life."



Contemporary Art displayed in old Downtown Cairo. (May Barber)

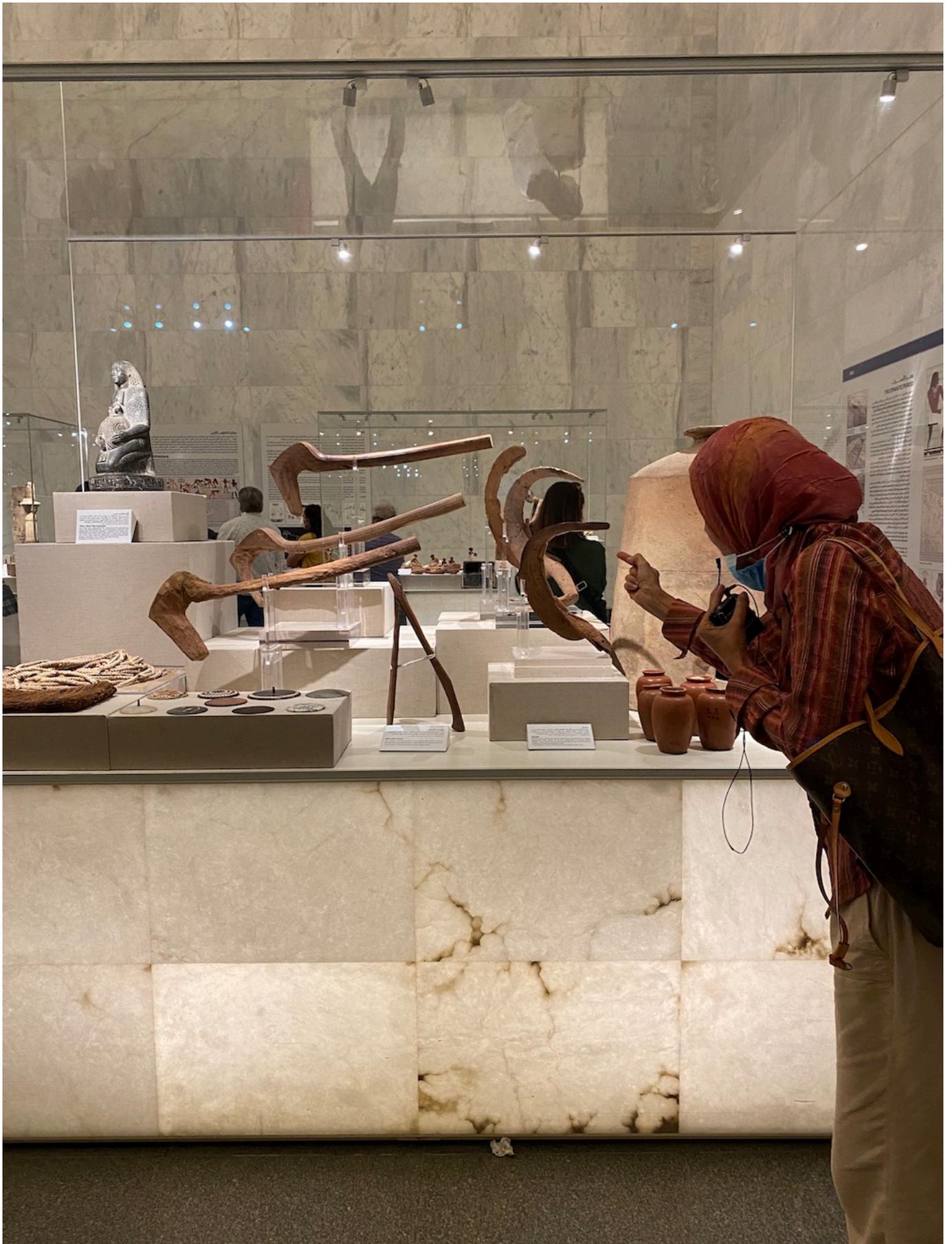
In April this year, the world watched in awe as the "Golden Parade" of 22 mummies (18 kings and four queens) traveled in decorated carriages through the streets of Cairo from the Egyptian museum in Tahrir Square to their new

home of the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization.

NMEC now showcases selections from the artifacts of the ancient Egyptian pharaohs, highlighting their contributions, such as the invention of writing and mummification.

Royal mummies carefully displayed in temperature-controlled glass cases include Ramses II, known as Ramses the Great; Thutmose III, once described as the Napoleon of Egypt; and Queen Hatsheput, one of the few women who ruled ancient Egypt.

Preserving the past is central to today's thriving Egyptian cultural scene, and lends itself to architectural restoration. Al-Ismaelia, an Egyptian real estate investment company, has joined partners in efforts to restore the capital's 150-year-old architectural legacy established by the Khedive Ismail in the 19th century.



Egyptian Guide Hiba leading a tour Inside the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization. (May Barber)

“Breathing life into design magic,” the company set out to preserve iconic buildings such as La Viennoise, a 125-year-old landmark built in 1896 by

English architect La Vienoise, and Cinema Radio Complex, built in 1932 as the center of Cairo's theater and performance arts scene. The center has hosted performances ranging from Umm Kulthum in the 1920s to recent acts by Bassem Youssef and Abla Fahita.

"In the pursuit of reviving a district and building of a community, some opt for politics and others opt for football. We opted for art and culture," Eman Hussein, deputy CEO of Al-Ismaelia, told Arab News.

Aiming to transform the downtown area into an inclusive district, Al-Ismaelia linked restoration projects with a range of art and culture exhibitions.

"When you uplift one aspect of the community, the whole ecosystem is uplifted," said Hussein.



A close exchange between French Artist JR and his friend, musician Pharell at Giza. (May Barber)

Today, the company owns 25 properties in downtown Cairo, many of which have been transformed as co-working spaces, rental accommodation, retail outlets and offices.

Al-Ismaelia's plans were put on hold amid the turmoil surrounding the 2011 Egyptian uprising before the projects resumed in collaboration with the government.

“Restoration has challenges in every step,” Hussein said. These range from acquiring the building from as many as 90 different owners all the way to licensing, infrastructure issues and operational limitations such as power supply.

However, she is pleased with the outcome, and said the district is benefiting from an authentic revival of the past, a contemporary flair, plus strong support for art, culture and homegrown concepts.



Views inside the late Egyptian Sculptor Museum Adam Henein. (May Barber)

The movement to revive the past is accompanied by a strong contemporary cultural agenda. Today, the historic old Cairo district is home to pop-up galleries and contemporary art exhibitions.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing showcases is Ai-Da, a three-legged robot that responds to the Riddle of the Sphinx with AI-generated messages and AI-informed drawings. Ai-Da’s arrival in Egypt caused controversy after the robot was briefly detained by authorities who feared that it was a spying device.

Cairo’s affluent Zamalek district is also home to established contemporary art galleries, including Zamalek Art Gallery, Art Talk Gallery and the Ubuntu art gallery.

The three-story Adam Henein Museum in the Giza district includes a sculpture

park owned by the late artist Adam Henein (formerly known as Samuel) and managed today by Inas Luca, who, as the Adam Henein Foundation director, has been “entrusted with his treasures,” as she puts it.

Henein, who died in 2020, founded the annual Aswan International Sculpture Symposium. The museum is dedicated to displaying his drawings, paintings and sculptures, including a collection previously displayed in the Metropolitan Museum in 1999-2000.



Lorenzo Quinn’s Sculpture ‘Together’ at Forever Is Now – Credit: Hesham El Sayfi – Courtesy of Art d’Egypte. (Supplied)

What is next for Egypt’s cultural scene? The country is patiently awaiting the outcome of the latest expeditions of Zahi Hawass, the archaeologist, National Geographic explorer and former minister of state for antiquities

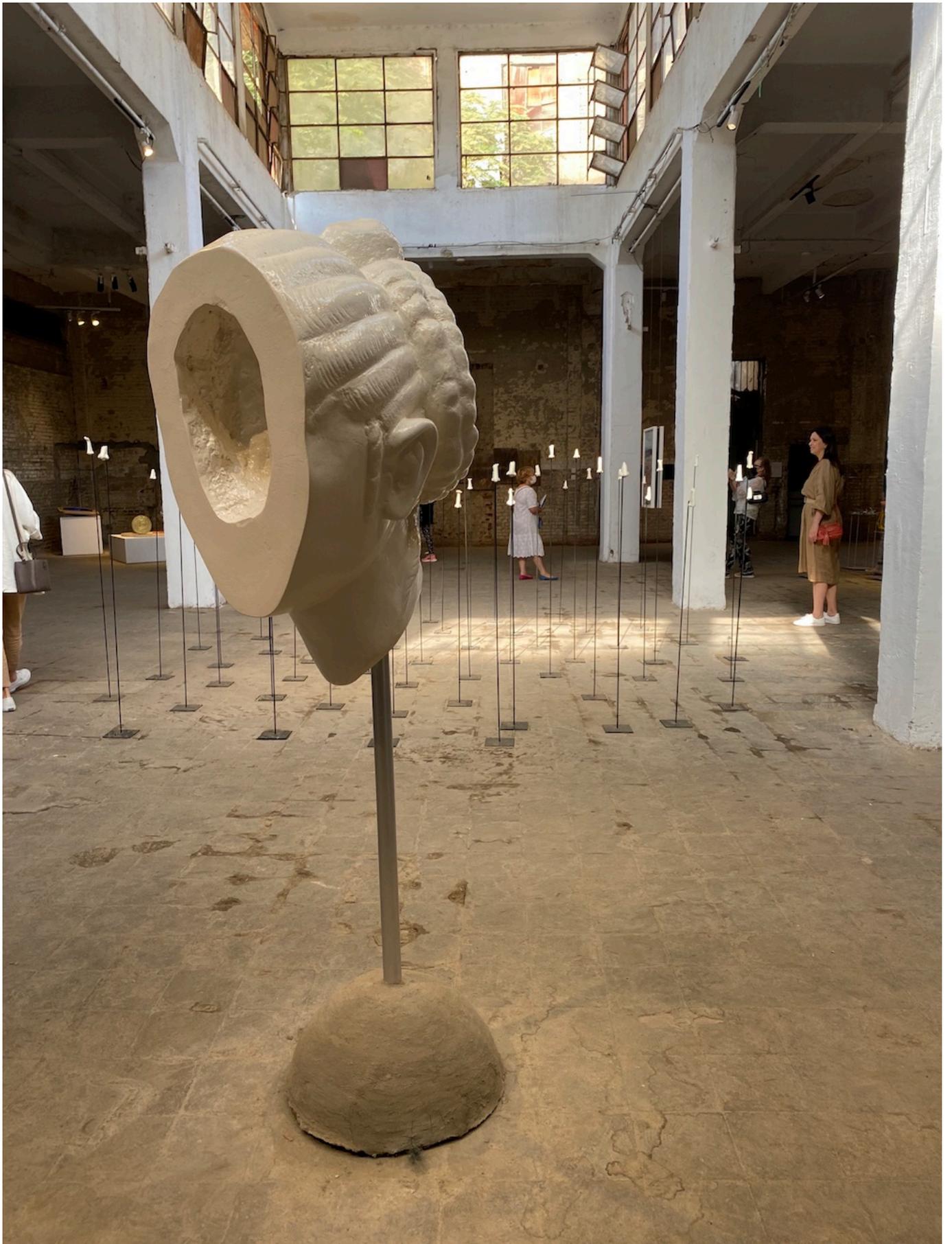
Hawass has partnered with Netflix for a five-episode docu-series to be aired next year that will unlock the mystery of the death of Tutankhamun.

The world is also eagerly awaiting the opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum, which promises to be another momentous occasion.

For a country of 105 million people and an ancient civilization that continues to influence literature, film architecture and fashion, it is evident that there is no shortage of human capital and intellectual wealth, and that Egypt is ready to enchant the world once again.

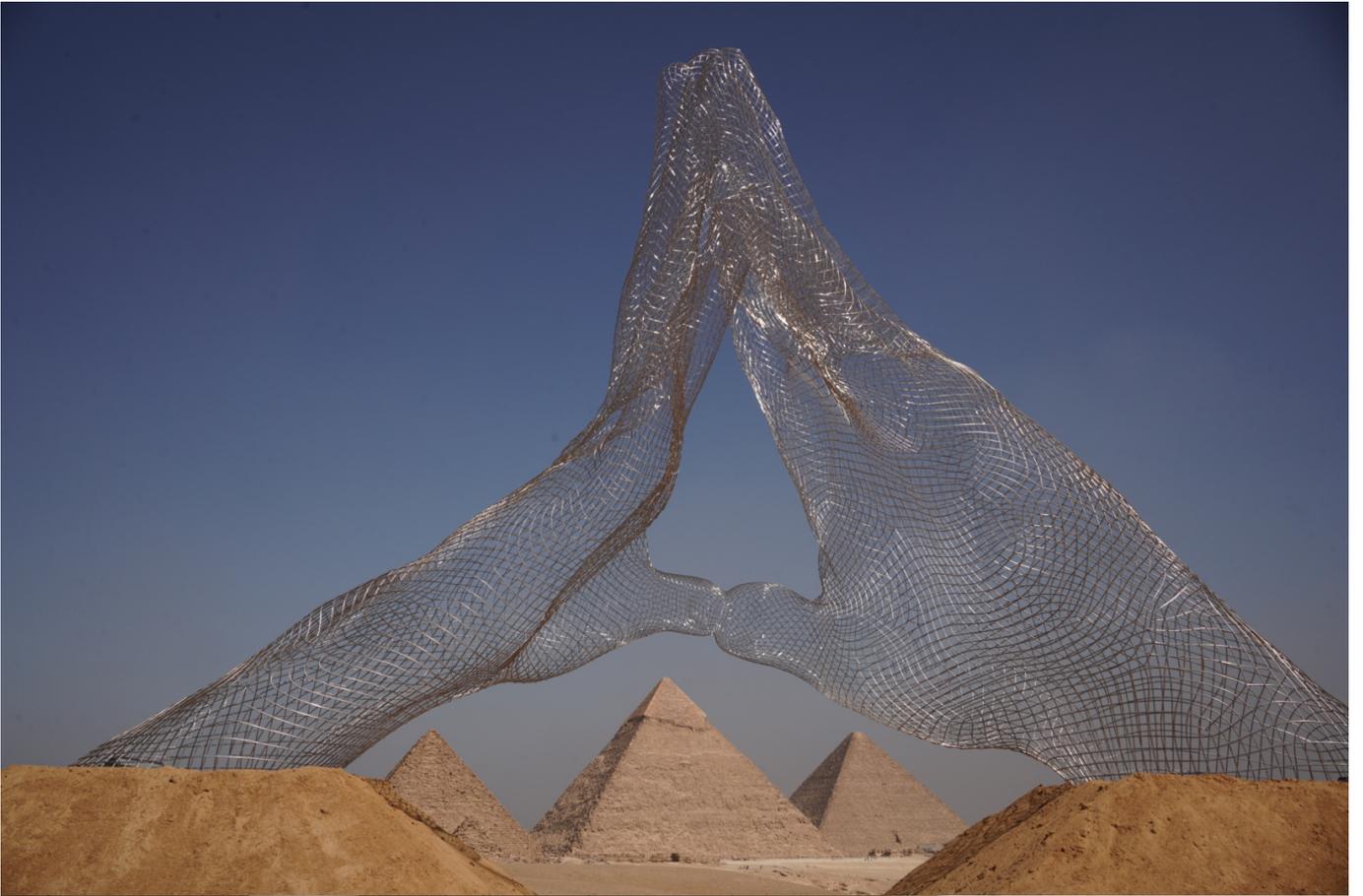
May Barber is an architect and brand management consultant focused on sustainability and purpose-driven projects.











Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Egypt](#)

[culture](#)

[Editor's Choice](#)

Egypt prepares to open first, and largest, antique reproductions factory in Middle East
Egypt retrieves 114 smuggled antiquities from France

[Kuwait detains 18 suspected of financing Lebanon's Hezbollah – media](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1637268886737614800

Thu, 2021-11-18 23:57

CAIRO: Prosecutors in Kuwait have detained 18 people suspected of financing Lebanon's powerful Shiite Muslim group Hezbollah, the newspapers Al-Qabas and Al-Rai reported on Thursday.

Al Qabas said the prosecution ordered the detainees to be held at the central prison for 21 days while investigations continue into alleged "membership in a prohibited party, money laundering and spying."

The Interior Ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment. Gulf Arab states in 2016 designated Iran-allied Hezbollah a terrorist organization.

Lebanon is facing a diplomatic crisis as Gulf states become increasingly dismayed by Hezbollah's expanding influence over Lebanese politics.

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain last month expelled Lebanese diplomats and recalled their own envoys following a minister's critical comments about the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen. Riyadh banned all imports from Lebanon.

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said the measures were driven not just by the comments by information minister George Kordahi, made before a new cabinet was formed, but rather by Riyadh's objections to the "domination" of Hezbollah.

Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia and Shiite Iran have been locked for decades in proxy conflicts across the region.

Kuwait has long maintained balanced ties between its larger neighbors, but in 2016 it convicted a group of Shiite Kuwaitis for spying for Iran and Hezbollah, accusing Tehran at the time of seeking to destabilize it. Iran had denied any connection.

Earlier this month, several of those convicted in that case were released under a pardon issued by Kuwait's ruling emir under an amnesty aimed at

defusing a domestic deadlock between the government and opposition lawmakers.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Kuwait](#)

[prosecutors](#)

[Hezbollah](#)

[Lebanon](#)

Hezbollah responsible for Lebanon's rift with Saudi Arabia, says former PM Hariri
Why Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah is unlikely to disarm voluntarily

[Aoun's party appeals against Lebanese election law amendments](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-11-18 01:18

BEIRUT: Just 72 hours before the deadline for expatriates to register to vote in the Lebanese parliamentary elections currently scheduled for March 27 next year, President Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement party on Wednesday lodged an appeal with the Constitutional Council over amendments to electoral

law recently approved by the parliament.

On Oct. 28, an absolute majority in parliament approved plans to amend the 2017 electoral laws so that parliamentary elections can be held in March instead of May. They also scrapped its provisions for the election of six members of parliament to represent expatriates and the introduction of a biometric, magnetic card that would allow voters to cast their ballots where they live rather than returning to their home towns to vote. Aoun had previously rejected these amendments. FPM members walked out of parliament in protest when they were approved.

In its appeal to the Constitutional Council, the president's team argued that the decision not to allow expatriates to have their own elected representatives in parliament has "canceled a basic and fundamental right of a special Lebanese group."

It added that "the amendment of the deadlines is a violation of the principle of separation of powers, as the parliament is not entitled to discuss the date of the elections determined by the executive authority, which constitutes a violation of the provisions of the Constitution."

The appeal also argued that "the abolition of Article 84 of the law, related to the magnetic card, which allows the voter to vote in his place of residence, will affect the credibility and transparency of the electoral process."

FPM member Alain Aoun said: "The Constitutional Council will issue its decision within a month and the FPM will abide by its decision."

He also warned against "any step that could be taken by the minister of interior that entails inviting the electoral bodies to convene before the Constitutional Council issues its decision regarding the appeal."

If the Constitutional Council upholds the appeal, then the provision of six seats in parliament to represent expatriates will be reconsidered. If not, Lebanese citizens living in other countries will have to vote in one of the 15 electoral districts in Lebanon.

The president opposes the rescheduling of the elections because of the effect he says this will have on campaigning. He also opposes the scrapping of plans for voting "megacenters" that would allow people to vote outside the areas where they are registered, on the grounds that this will negatively affect turnout among Christians in remote areas, who would be forced to return to their home villages to vote during snowy weather and pay for costly transportation to do so.

The president's appeal has caused some to wonder whether the move could disrupt the elections, causing a postponement or even cancellation. If the minister of interior sticks with the plans for a March 27 polling date, he will have to call on electoral bodies to convene before Dec. 27. It is also possible that there could be attempts to obstruct the Constitutional Council session to discuss the appeal.

Gebran Bassil, the head of the FPM, wants to maximize the number of expatriates who register to vote from their countries of residence. As of Wednesday, 180,000 expatriates had registered to vote in Lebanese embassies abroad. The deadline for registration is Nov. 20.

Hadi Abul-Hassan, secretary of the Democratic Gathering parliamentary bloc, on Wednesday highlighted concerns that personal information about expatriates who have registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to vote has been leaked to a "certain political movement that is using it for its own benefit."

He asked Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdallah Bou Habib for "an answer regarding this information and for firm measures to put an end for this farce."

Walid Fakhreddin, an expert in electoral affairs, told Arab News: "Some embassies abroad have leaked the phone numbers of expatriates eligible to vote to the FPM so that it can communicate with them, which has infuriated these expatriates, who consider that this data should have been protected."

He said that the FPM "fears losing the elections because it has lost the electoral leverage provided by former allies that broke up with it due to their rivalries, noting that the popularity of the FPM has declined inside Lebanon."

He added that it is "not only the FPM that fears losing the elections, for there are other parties that fear they will lose in light of the shift in the public mood that has deprived them of huge support."

Fakhreddin said that international support and aid for Lebanon is conditional on the successful staging of elections, which prevents the parties in power from attempting to cancel them.

"In this context, the appeal of the FPM will not obstruct the elections," he said. "However, when the decree calling for the electoral bodies to convene is presented to him, the president might try to maneuver to postpone the elections until May."

Meanwhile the Lebanese Business Councils in the Gulf has written to the minister of foreign affairs complaining that "hundreds of registration applications for residents outside Lebanon are pending because the ministry is currently refusing to register them under tourist or commercial visit visas."

The group said that "many Lebanese abroad are waiting for their official residencies to be issued, which is a process that takes a long time, which presents an obstacle to them that prevents them from performing their right to vote."

It called on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to "provide facilities to allow this category to participate in the elections."

The Lebanese Business Councils include the Lebanese Executives Council, the

Lebanese-Saudi Business Council, the Abu Dhabi-Lebanese Business Council, the Lebanese Business Council in Kuwait, the Lebanese Business Council in Dubai and Northern Emirates, and the Lebanese-Gulf Economic Relations Development Authority.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Michel Aoun](#)

[Lebanon](#)

Aoun hails new phase for Lebanon
Lebanese President Aoun: We are on the brink of forming a new government

[Israel court jails Spanish aid worker for funding militant group](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-11-18 01:14

JERUSALEM: An Israeli military court Wednesday sentenced Spanish aid worker Juana Rashmawi to 13 months in prison after convicting her of illegally funding a Palestinian militant group.

The military said Rashmawi, 63, had confessed to her role as a “fundraiser for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine,” a group blamed for

previous attacks on Israelis, a claim she rejected via her lawyer.

The court confirmed the sentence requested by prosecutors as part of a plea agreement last week that also required Rashmawi to pay a 50,000 shekel (\$16,000) fine.

Her lawyer, Avigdor Feldman, told AFP that Rashmawi could be released within two weeks based on time served.

"She has been under arrest since April and there is a chance she could be released within two weeks if the parole committee reduces her sentence by a third," Feldman said.

Born in Madrid and married to a Palestinian man, Rashmawi had been working for a Palestinian group, the Union of Health Work Committees.

Israel said the group funneled European donations to the PFLP. Last year Israel banned the health organization in the occupied West Bank.

Feldman told reporters at Ofer military court that Rashmawi "had no idea this money was brought to the PFLP."

"We decided to admit in a plea that says clearly that she did not know about the passing of money to PFLP but 'suspected' that the health organization has a connection with the PFLP," he told AFP.

He added that this agreement was intended to spare her a long trial, especially in light of a possible early release.

Rashmawi was first detained in April. Her daughter Maria Rashmawi told reporters the sentencing was "important because the uncertainty of the last months led to a lot of anguish and it was very hard to bear."

The sentencing came weeks after Israel outlawed six prominent Palestinian civil society groups, alleging they were also fronts for the PFLP – which the groups denied.

The groups are Addameer, Al-Haq, Bisan Center for Research and Development, Defense for Children International-Palestine, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees and the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees.

European donors who support the banned groups and the United Nations have asked to see concrete evidence from Israel supporting the ban.

Israeli officials said Rashmawi's conviction proved their accusations against the other six groups were correct.

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid has called Rashmawi's "admission of guilt" proof of Israel's claims that the groups served as conduits for PFLP funds.

He has urged the international community to "prevent terrorist organizations from using the veneer of civilian cover."

Feldman rejected the description and said he would demand a clarification from Israeli officials.

“She did not collect money for the PFLP,” he told reporters. “She has no connections with the six organizations that were outlawed.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel](#)

[Spanish aid worker](#)

Two Israeli police officers stabbed, Palestinian assailant killed –
policeIsrael court again delays ruling on demolition of Bedouin village

[Ten bodies found in migrant boat off Libya](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-11-18 01:05

ROME: Ten people were found dead in an overcrowded ship carrying migrants off the coast of Libya, and were believed to have suffocated, the Doctors Without Borders charity has said.

The charity said late on Tuesday that its Geo Barents rescue ship had picked up 99 survivors earlier in the day.

“At the bottom of the overcrowded wooden boat, 10 people were found dead,” tweeted the charity, known by its French initials MSF.

It described them as “10 avoidable deaths ... 10 persons who died from suffocation, after 13 hours adrift at sea. The deadly central #Med route. How can we accept this in 2021?”

Tens of thousands of people seek to enter Europe each year via the central Mediterranean, leaving from Libya and Tunisia and heading most often for Italy.

The route is deadly – 1,236 people have died in the central Mediterranean so far this year, compared with 858 in the same period of 2020, according to Flavio Di Giacomo of the UN’s Migration Agency, the IOM.

He tweeted that the Geo Barents rescue “probably avoided other victims,” saying it showed “the need to increase patrols at sea.”

MSF said there were currently 186 people on board Geo Barents, including women and children, the youngest of whom is 10 months old.

“Many of them seem traumatized by the horrendous ordeal,” it said, calling for a safe port to disembark them.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Libya](#)

[migrants](#)

Migrants in Libya fearful and angry after crackdown and killings26 dead in two weeks of clashes in Libya migrant hub