

Grand opening for Festival of Egyptian Culture in Frankfurt



(Left to right) Mohamed Gamal, Mona Said and Ashraf Moussa.

By **Mariam Hamdy/Special to Daily News Egypt** **November 22, 2011, 6:08 pm**

On Nov. 19, Tutankhamun and his tomb made their debut in Frankfurt. Along the river Main, in an impressive hall on Mainzer Landstrasse set up especially for the event, Semmel Concerts, Germany's leading concert promoter, has organized a festival that celebrates Egyptian culture in a way that even Egyptians themselves will find it challenging to match.

Conceived in 2008 as a celebration commemorating Howard Carter's archeological success in unearthing Tutankhamun's tomb, this year Frankfurt is witnessing more than just what Egypt's history has to offer. Initiated by Christophe Scholz, Semmel Concert's project manager, this year's festival will celebrate Egyptian culture in its entirety. Hosting contemporary art, literature, music, film and stand-up comedy, the festival will run until April 2012 with every month hosting a different set of writers, filmmakers, artists, musicians and comedians.

The purpose built hall in which the entire six months event will be hosted is simply magnificent. Covering 4,000 square meters, the space is seamlessly organized, with audio books that are wirelessly connected to that which they are explaining. When you move from one artifact to another, your audio book picks up the signal and explains what it is you're looking at, regardless if the previous chapter has been completed or not. The space is complete with a cafe and bar, as well as a gorgeous gift shop with merchandise ranging from books and stationary, to masks and toys.

The simulation rooms where the tombs and their contents are set up are simply awe-inspiring. The level of detail employed in every single artifact is exquisite, created with the help of professors and designers specialized in ancient Egyptian history. Such an exhibition offers something that the real tombs, relics and even museums worldwide can't: the chance to see ancient Egyptian artifacts the way the archeologists found them and, more importantly, the way they were left by the ancient Egyptians. That in itself provides an unparalleled educational experience as well as genuine aesthetic pleasure.

Preceding the ancient Egyptian section of the festival — the reason why this year's exhibition is considered quite different from Semmel Concert's earlier productions — is the contemporary Egyptian photography exhibition titled "To Egypt with Love." Hosted by Safar Khan Gallery in Zamalek, and curated by its owner Mona Said, the current collection at Frankfurt features the best works assembled of two exhibitions of the same titles ("To Egypt with Love" and "To Egypt with Love 2"). The artwork is the photography of artists Alaa Taher, Bassem Samir and Hossam Hassan, complimented by a video by Khaled Hafez.

The latter is what crowned the exhibition as contemporary and relevant. The inclusion of a video project in terms of medium translates our current artistic production as far from the conservative or the traditional. The subject itself is another matter. It must be handed to Mona Said for her choice of artist, as Khaled Hafez's work cannot be more appropriate for presentation of Egypt in the festival — both ancient as well as modern.

The video is aptly titled the "A77A project: On Presidents and Superheroes," the definition of which cannot be sufficiently translated for those who are not fluent in swearing in Egyptian dialect. The more polite interpretation of the work is that the four-letter word is the second half of the Arabic word 'to step down' (Atanaha), written in the phonetic manner where the double 7 is equivalent to the 'h.'

That particular word was famously uttered by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the audio of which is presented in the video's



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soundtrack, when he announced that he was to step down on June 9, 1967 after the defeat in the Six-Day War. The video opens with a painting by Khaled Hafez, featuring one of his composites showing a human body with the head of Anubis, the Ancient Egyptian God of Death and Afterlife. In 3-D animation, the creature moves out of the painting and into local surroundings in Egypt, creating an overall ironic commentary on our social, economic and most certainly, political situation.

The video fits in perfectly in terms of content, but for those who haven't visited Egypt or know much of its vistas that are featured in the video, the ancient Egyptian god walking around in an urban setting is aesthetically fitting as it is comic.

The opening was a crowded event, attracting nearly 450 attendees, with a list of who's-who in Frankfurt, as well as the Dieter Semmelman, the Semmel Concerts producer of "Tutankhamun - His Tomb and His Treasures," Ashraf Moussa, consul at the Egyptian Consulate in Germany, and Mohamed Gamal, director of Egypt Tourism in Germany.

At the beginning of the evening, talks by all those involved in the project were given, followed by a walk through the exhibition space, then a relaxed meet and greet for the length of the event. As homage to contemporary Egypt, Ramsi Lehner, Egyptian musician and DJ, mixed an hour's set of electronic music with a fusion of Egyptian beats.

Once again, it has to be handed to the producers that they would scout such talent from our contemporary Egyptian scene, as Lehner is one of the few Local DJs whose sets are of international sound quality as well as acclaim. He was tremendously well received by the visitors, all of whom conservatively bobbed their heads to the music while clearly resisting the urge to dance.

The overall setting was truly brilliant, as one was being surrounded by modern and ancient Egyptian art, with music that translates that hybrid into an excellent ambiance.

The event will continue to host brilliant Egyptian talent across the board, with yet another traveling Art exhibition hosted by London's Mica Gallery titled "From Facebook to Nassbook," as well as the highly anticipated "Egyptian Art Today" by Safar Khan Gallery, which will include original art works by Nermin Hammam, Khaled Hafez, Marwa Adel and Ahmed Kassem to name a few.

For those visiting or transiting in Frankfurt, the Tutankhamun exhibition and the Festival of Egyptian Culture cannot be missed. A festival as such is much needed during the tumultuous and confused times Egypt is currently living, and its conception and development reminds us of how much our efforts are appreciated worldwide, and that we should never stop trying.



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