

Free Art Expression Between Theory of Spontaneity and the Establishment of The Haraneyya Center

Hussein El-Hajj



Cover of the Zine: *Waiting in the Market* - Sayeda Missac (20 years) - Source: The Egyptian Education Bureau, *Spontaneity in the Art of Young Egyptians: an Exhibition of Painting, Sculpture, Tapestry*; London, 1950.

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine Habib Gorgi's ideas on spontaneous art education and Ramses Wissa Wassef's founding of the Haraneyya Center, two notable instances in the history of art education in modern Egypt. In order to provide context for the two, the paper outlines key developments in primary and higher education in the first half of the 20th century. It, then, examines the relationship between Gorgi, Wassef and Haraneyya in light of art education theories implemented in formal institutions of learning at the time.

Introduction

Modern Egyptian art movements took shape during the last days of British occupation. After Egypt had a unilateral declaration of independence in 1923, questions around Egyptian identity, tradition and modernity were prominent on the national liberation agenda. These questions involved a critique of the education offered inside and outside formal schooling systems and art education was no different. Critics interested in a more contemporary material and symbolic art production questioned prevailing art education approaches, especially for their emphasis on technique vis-a-vis a conceptual and historical grounding of art.

As this paper will show, Habib Gorgi's theory about spontaneity in learning art in the 1930s accompanied developments in art education worldwide. His and Wassef's responses to the above-mentioned questions around identity, Egyptianess and the role of art education positioned them, at the time, as progressive thinkers and affiliated them with a growing movement that called for free artistic expression internationally.

In order to examine the relationship between art education in formal schools and Habib Gorgi's theories and Ramses Wissa Wassef's teachings in Haraneyya, the paper starts with a historical overview of key developments in art education and policy in early 20th century Egypt. An introduction to Gorgi and Ramses Wissa Wassef will follow culminating in a closer look at what made both Gorgi and Wassef's ideas in art education notable within their time and context.

A brief history of the emergence of public art education in Egypt

Formal art education in Egypt started with the beginning of the 20th century, spearheaded by colonial western powers. Only after the 1919 revolution in Egypt, do we come to see a movement for Egyptianizing formal schooling on all levels with changes in staff and curricula. The Department of Decorative Industries inside the Royal School of Arts and Crafts was established in 1909 but its role was reimagined with new historical developments. It was founded along the same logic as The Department of Mechanics and The Department of Urban Planning which were both part of The School of Operations established in 1868. The school,

founded during the Ottoman occupation of Egypt, aimed to prepare craftsmen in urban planning and engineering to enter a growing 'modern' workforce of skilled labor. It, then, expanded to include a wider selection of specializations with the addition of The Department of Decorative Industries. There were three branches in the new department: Textile, dyeing and carpet-making; engraving, carving and carpentry; and decorative and fired metals.

In the 1918 - 1919 academic year, under British occupation and in the wake of a revolution, the department became its own school, independent from The School of Operations. It was renamed as The Egyptian School of Arts and Crafts and William Stewart was appointed its dean. In 1928, ten years after the school's founding, Stewart left Egypt to be followed by John Edney. With changes in outlook and policy, in 1928 the school was renamed again as The School of Applied Arts and new departments were added. These included pottery and photography. In 1934, in the wake of a wide movement to Egyptianize education, Mohammed Hassan Al Sherbini was appointed as the first Egyptian dean of the school. Al Sherbini began increasing the number of Egyptians working in both administration and teaching staff after years of having Europeans occupy these posts.¹

Concurrently, education in the plastic arts witnessed similar developments. On May 12th 1908, The School of Fine Arts was inaugurated with the support of Prince Youssef Kamel. At its founding, the school had strong ties to the bourgeois and aristocratic classes in Egypt who were most involved in rallying for it. The founding staff was comprised mostly of French and Italian teachers. Two years after its founding, in 1910, it came under the supervision of The Ministry of Education (named *Maa'rif* at the time). Mohammed Nagy became its first Egyptian dean in 1937. Before him, it had three foreign deans: Guillaume Laplange headed the school from 1908 to 1918, Marie-Gabriel Biessy from 1918 till 1927 and Camillo Innocenti from 1927 to 1937.²

Looking at art education in primary schools, again, one sees developments taking place as Egypt moved from Ottoman occupation to British occupation to the 1919 revolution. Formal schools moved from one pedagogical approach to another which was motivated by questions around art education in general and worldwide debates at the time but also questions of Egyptian national identity. During colonial rule, as the English supervised formal education, top-down supervision ensured that all students learn through templates how to draw. They would mimic and copy with accuracy 2-dimensional line drawings, inspired from ancient compositions or popular designs. Teachers would prepare these samplers for their students who in turn were asked to either imitate them in a private notebook or magnify them on a proportionally suitable sheet of paper that teachers would distribute in class. Samplers gradually

¹ كتاب (80 سنة من الفن)، تأليف: رشدي اسكندر وكمال الملاح وصبحي الشاروني، الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، 1990. ص 59، 60.
² المصدر نفسه - ص 16 ، 17 ، 44.

advanced in their difficulty as students gained the necessary skills.³ Speaking of his experience as a teacher at the time of British rule, Habib Gorgi writes in his 1939 book *Art Education*⁴: "I started teaching drawing in primary schools in 1915. The program was limited to a few exercises where students would copy straight and curved lines, geometrical shapes and designs and industrial objects. They would use a printed layouts and a pencil only."⁵ The ability to reproduce with accuracy and the skills needed to be able to do so was most important, while notions of expression or individuality were not particularly present at that time.

With 1923, there was a new turn in teaching the basics of art in schools in Egypt as a memorandum was issued by The Ministry of Education. In it, new techniques such as still life drawing and drawing from memory were added into the curriculum. Together with teachers and colleagues from the ministry, the head inspector for art education at the time, Pierre Olmer, was able to creatively interpret the implementations of the new memorandum allowing for more ambitious pedagogical approaches that allowed students greater freedoms.⁶ The then dean of the School of Fine Arts, Italian painter Camillo Innocenti was also involved in conceptualizing new art education techniques in schools in an effort to equip prospective students in the School of Fine Arts with the necessary foundational knowledge. Art departments in each school became equipped with pots, glass vessels, vases, cups, drums and other objects that teachers prepared for students to draw in different positions and arrangements in still life drawing sessions. In some cases, a teacher would ask students to memorize a particular arrangement or a scenery and draw from memory.

Influenced by international debates around art education at the time, two years later, in 1925, crafts education was introduced to classrooms in primary schools as well. In 1931, a foundational book on teaching hand crafts was published by the Ministry of Education under the title *The Thinking Hand in Hand Crafts (Al-Yad Al-Mofaqqera fe Al-Ashg'al Al-Yadawya)*. It was authored by Abdullah Ali Haggag, Mahmoud Youssef El Razaz, and Mohamed Shafik El Genedy who were all members of The International Union for Drawing, Art Education and Practical Arts as well as The English Crafts Association. Writing in the introduction to the book, they state:

When we saw the need of craft teachers to have a book that makes their mission easier and unifies their path, we put together this book in its three parts. [...] we depended in what we wrote on a lot of the westerners' writings, as they have set precedent and have made it through long distances in the road of this art before we even moved towards it.

³ كتاب (أصول التربية الفنية)، تأليف محمود البسيوني، دار المعارف، الطبعة الثانية 1975. ص 17 ، 18.

⁴ "بدأت عملي في تدريس مادة الرسم بالمدارس الابتدائية عام 1915، وكان البرنامج مقصوراً على بعض التمرينات في نقل الخطوط المستقيمة والمنحنية والأشكال الهندسية والزخارف وبعض الأشياء المصنوعة، يرسمها التلاميذ من نماذج مطبوعة وكان ذلك بالقلم الرصاص فقط"

⁵ كتاب (التربية الفنية)، تأليف: حبيب جورجى، 1939. ص 2 ، 3.

⁶ كتاب (التربية الفنية في خمسين عاماً: 1930 - 1980)، تأليف زينب محمد علي، الهيئة المصرية للكتاب، 2006. ص 15 ، 16.

This is why they were more aware of its hidden components and more knowledgeable of its routes.⁷

The many changes in formal art education in schools shows that different kinds of art education were developed and they all gradually led onto tracks towards higher education in arts or crafts.

Yet, the driving force for change was almost always top down, introduced by (European) government officials and systematically integrated in the formal schooling system by teachers. By the 1930s there was an effort to “Egyptianize” institutions of learning and teaching through increasing the number of Egyptians working in them. Yet, curricula remained mostly inspired from and dominated by classical European theories and histories of art. Perhaps one reason for the continuation of colonial hegemony over art curricula could be the wave of scholarships which enabled a significant number of Egyptian artists in the beginning of their careers to continue their education in Europe and come back to hold key positions in arts and crafts schools and the Ministry of Education. Although many challenged their European education and attempted to ground their art in an understanding of Egyptian or Arab identity, it remained the case that they were constantly in reference to European art history and art movements.

⁷ كتاب (اليد المفكرة في الأشغال اليدوية)، تأليف عبد الله علي حجاج ومحمود يوسف الرزاز ومحمد شفيق الجندي، لجنة التأليف والترجمة والنشر، الطبعة الثانية 1934. ص 2 ، 3 .
«لما رأينا حاجة القائمين بتعليم الأعمال اليدوية إلى كتاب يسهل عليهم مهمتهم ويوحد طريقتهم، وضعنا هذا الكتاب في أجزاءه الثلاثة. (...) وقد اعتمدنا فيما دوناه على كثير مما اتبعه الغربيون في تأليفهم، لأنهم السابقون، وقد قطعوا مسافات بعيدة في مضمار هذا الفن قبل أن نحرك إليه ساكنًا، فكانوا بخفائهم أكثر دراية وبمسالكه أعلم. وساعدنا على ذلك ما اكتسبناه من الخبرة مدة تدريسنا لهذه المادة وإشرافنا عليها»

Before the formation of the formal art education system, the guild system in Cairo took responsibility for teaching crafts and arts. However, after 20 years of the decline of the craft making in the late 19th century because of the British colonialism, the Egyptian civil society tried to retain craftsmen through establishing Muhammed Ali Design School which was built by an Islamic association in Alexandria in 1904.



The inside cover of *The Thinking Hand in Handcrafts* - Second Edition 1934

Egyptian artists and educators: between a school in Rome and a conference in Paris:

The 1930s and 40s saw a flourishing in art education and related-debates in Egypt, due in large part to scholarships at all levels of education and to an increase in the numbers of self-organized art groups and associations. Artists were developing their skills and ideas in addition to thinking critically about their relationship to a eurocentric canon. Older Egyptian artists and art educators passed on knowledge to younger generations allowing for engaged ideas around art, its practice, its value and relationship to society and for serious debates around arts relationship to the state and power.

The early graduating classes from art school suffered from relatively stagnant and uninspiring curricula, taught by western and in a few cases Egyptian professors. Writing in mid 1960s, looking back at his time as a student, the surrealist artist Ramses Yunan stated that “[i]t was unfortunate for our nascent art movement that it was helmed by academic professors who were still asynchronously hanging onto realism and impressionism.” That said, the availability of scholarships allowed early career Egyptian artists - then students in the academy - to continue their studies abroad and subsequently contributed to the emergence of progressive, radical, art collectives and associations. A different field of practice was taking shape at the time. One of the early signs of a more contemporarily engaged artistic field was the founding of the Art and Liberty Group (*Jama’at Al-Fan Wal Horeyya*) in 1937, of which Yunan was a member, and through which Egyptian artists joined the ranks of the international surrealist movement, contributing to it and interpreting it within their local context(s).

Scholarships to study abroad in France and Italy mostly allowed Egyptian artists to develop their skills and get exposed to various schools of thought and art histories. It all began when Prince Youssef Kamal, the founder of the Egyptian Fine Arts School, sponsored sculptor Mahmoud Mokhtar to study in Paris in 1911. Many other wealthy families followed suit offering similar scholarships to students. In the early 1900s, the government even dedicated twelve thousand Egyptian pounds to scholarships for students to study abroad. In 1929, the Egyptian academy in Rome opened its door allowing more artists and art students to travel and study in Europe. In the presence of uninspiring stagnant curricula in formal art schools, these opportunities offered artists a way to develop their thinking and skills albeit in reference to, or in constant struggle with, both a eurocentric vision of art and its praxis and the proximity to the Egyptian aristocracy. Many of the artists educated abroad, of non-aristocratic backgrounds in some cases but support financially by the aristocracy, came back to Egypt to occupy key positions in the government and the aforementioned art schools. This all added to a complicated set of relations between various systems of power operating within the fields of art. There was a constant flow of ideas to and from Europe and a local public debate around the import these ideas have locally.⁸

Art groups like Art and Liberty and others established since the 1920s played a significant role in twentieth century art history. In 1928, Mahmoud Mokhtar established *Jama’at Al-Khayyal* (The Imagination Society) which included a number of government-supported, influential thinkers and writers at the time like Abbas El-Akkad and Mai Zeiada. In the same year, Habib Gorgi together with a group of art educators including Youssef Al-Afifi and Hussein Youssef Amin among others founded *Jama’at Al-Daa’ya Al-Fanya* (Art Advocates Society). The Art Advocates Society published in 1938 a book by Ramses Yunan titled *The Purpose of the Contemporary Painter* which was a key influence to many of the early surrealist Egyptian artists who were at the time in the beginning of establishing the Art and Liberty Group.⁹ Kamel El Telmesany and Fouad Kamel, leaders of the Egyptian surrealist movement, were among Youssef Al-Afifi’s students in Al Saadeya School and his teaching no doubt contributed to their

⁸ كتاب (الفن المصري الحديث في القرن العشرين)، تأليف مصطفى الرزاز، طبع قطاع الفنون التشكيلية بوزارة الثقافة، عام 2007، ص. 20.
⁹ Karnouk, Liliane; *Modern Egyptian Art: 1910 - 2003*, The American University in Cairo Press, New Revised Ed. 2005.

formation as leading artists later on. Hussein Youssef Amin, another founder of the Art Advocates Society, continued his life as an arts educator, establishing in 1946 *Gamaat Al-Fan Al-Moa'ser* (Contemporary Art Group). His students from different secondary schools joined *Gamaat Al-Fan Al-Moa'ser*, including names that then would become key avant-garde artists of their generation such as Abdel Hadi Al-Gazzar, Samir Rafi, Hamed Nada and Ibrahim Massouda. In many of these groups questions around the collective unconscious and identity galvanized young artists toward imagining new visual practices as we see in the works of Al-Gazzar or the Art and Liberty Group.

In 1937, a group of art education officials from the Ministry of Education attended The Eighth International Congress for Art Education held in Paris. Upon their return, and inspired by discussions there, they decided to change how art and especially drawing is taught in schools. As the conference tackled questions of free expression in art education, the changes that took place in art curricula and teacher training programs aimed to move into the direction of free expression in art education. A new department for teaching drawing was established in The Institute for Teachers' Education at Orman the same year of their return (1937). Special attention was given to hand crafts along with drawing and new pedagogical techniques were taught to the graduating classes of art teachers. A union for art teachers was formed in 1932¹⁰ including representatives who attended the Paris conference and others who were interested in advocating for the new ideas around art education.

Following the implementation of theories of free expression in art curricula in schools, a student exhibition for primary and secondary schools was organized in 1939 by representatives from the teachers' union.¹¹ The exhibition garnered attention and later on King Farouk and men of the Egyptian nobility at the time showed support by offering scholarships and by regularly visiting subsequent student exhibitions. In the 40s, the government increased its dedicated budget for education from 1% to 13% which allowed for even more resources to go into advancing art education in schools and allowed educators like Youssef Afifi, Hanin Gorgi and Youssef Amin to experiment with and apply new pedagogical theories at the intersection between art and education. Habib Gorgi started developing his ideas around spontaneous art education at this time of relative prosperity and wide support for art and its education from affluent classes and the government.

¹⁰ مجلة الإتحاد الدولي للرسم والتربية الفنية، السنة الثامنة، 1 أكتوبر 1939
¹¹ كتاب (التربية الفنية في خمسين عامًا: 1930 - 1980)، تأليف زينب محمد علي، الهيئة المصرية للكتاب، 2006. ص 32 ، 33 ، 34 .



صورة تاريخية توضح مؤسسى الجماعات الفنية . فى الوسط أمام المنضدة الرائد حبيب جورجى يقف خلفه على اليسار الرائد يوسف العفيفى وعلى يمينه الفنان شفيق رزق سليمان وإلى يساره الرائد حامد سعيد الصورة مهداة من المهندس الفنان بديع جورجى نجل الرائد حبيب جورجى

Historical picture showing the founders of the Art groups, in the middle in front of the table Habib Georgi, and .Youssef El-Affi stands behind him in the left, and on his right Shafik Rizk Soliman, and to his left Hamed Saeed

Egyptian Modern Art in the 20th Century, by El-Razzaz, Mostafa; Ministry of Culture, 2007.

From the theory of spontaneous art to the establishment of Haraneyya center:

Habib Gorgi Al Taweel (1892-1965) studied to become a teacher at the Higher Institute for Teachers, specializing in Mathematics at first which he later changed to a specialization in teaching art. After graduating in 1915, Gorgi started working as a teacher. Between 1920 and 1922, he travelled to London upon a recommendation from the then English inspector for art education in primary and secondary schools. He stayed there for two years where he studied techniques for teaching art and especially aquarelle coloring. Upon his return, he joined the teaching faculty at the Higher School for Teachers in their art education department. In 1937, he was one of the representatives Egypt sent to the Eighth International Conference for Education Through Art held in Paris. There, he presented a paper titled *The Assumed Errors Common in Beginner Drawings and its Relationship to a Revival in Racial Art*¹². In the paper, he argued for

¹² Viola, Wilhelm; *Child Art*, University of London Press, 1948. - Chapter 2: Child Art and Primitive Art - p. 17, 18.

the uniqueness of drawings done by Egyptian students and for the drawings' relationship to ancient Egyptian art. This paper is the foundation for his theory on spontaneous art education.

In 1938, still under the influence of the conference in Paris, Habib Gorgi published his first book in Arabic titled *Art Education* in which he documented his experiences working with pre-school and school-age children. He hosted in his house six children and teens where he would leave them to express themselves spontaneously through drawings in the beginning and then through weaving. Later, he would give them clay and leave them to shape it into figures that represent and express their ideas. He would observe the figures the children made and take note on what ideas they express and how.¹³

In 1943, members of the affluent classes supported Gorgi financially to continue his school and experimentations with art education. The number of students increased and included names as Samira Mohamed Hassan, Sayeda Massak, Yehia Abo Seree' and Bodour Gerges. Together, the students worked on five exhibitions in Cairo and in 1950, with support from the UNESCO, had exhibitions in Paris and London. Habib Gorgi's school became an important reference to others coming after him including Mahmoud El-Bassiouny who applied Gorgi's theories in art education in the Hadayek El Qobba school where he was conducting research for his master's thesis on children's art and education. The thesis was presented for a master's degree at the Art Department In Ohio State University in 1947.¹⁴

Ramses Wissa Wassef Michael (1911-1974) was the son of a prominent lawyer who was an active member in the Egyptian nationalist movement and a leader in powerful political parties at the time such as El Wafd and El Watany. Michael's father was a patron of the arts acting as an honorary president for *Jama'at Al-Khayat* (The imagination Society) and as president of the Fine Arts Association in addition to hosting a cultural salon that was frequented by major artists of the time such as Mahmoud Mokhtar. Ramses showed a talent for art at an early age which earned him the nickname 'artist' among his family. He was especially infatuated with Mokhtar and wanted to pursue it after graduating high school.

In the early 1930s, he graduated from the Lycée Français du Caire. Although he wanted to study sculptor, his father convinced him to study architecture instead. He traveled to Paris to continue his education at the École des Beaux-Arts majoring in architecture. With the death of his father soon after in 1931, he decided to pursue sculptor alongside architecture, studying at The Académie Julian. At the time, he was attracted to avant-garde practices in art and architecture which then shaped much of his thinking around his own practice as an artist and

¹³ كتاب (80 سنة من الفن)، تأليف: رشدي اسكندر وكمال الملاخ وصبحي الشاروني، الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، 1990. ص 143 ، 144 ، 145.

¹⁴ El-Bassiouny, Mahmoud; "Child Art and Education", A Thesis Presented for the Degree of Master of Arts. Ohio State University, 1947 - P. 27.

Mahomud El-Bassiouny is one of Yousef Al-Afifi's students and an important theorist who wrote about art education in Arabic. He published more than 30 books about art and art education, also he was specialized in academic teaching of art education field.

architect. He earned his degree in architecture with distinction in 1935 with a graduation project that presented designs for a Potters house in old Cairo and, in the same year, also earned his diploma in sculptor. Returning to Cairo soon after in 1938 he started teaching classes on the history of art and architecture in the School of Fine Arts.

In 1940, he designed the building of a school in one of the old neighborhoods in Cairo, *Hay Misr El-Kadeema*. The school was an extension building to a charity organization which served the neighborhood. The school year started before the building was completed which gave Ramses Wissa Wassef the opportunity to observe the children as they attended classes. He convinced then the school's superintendents that he would teach art to the students in the after hours twice a week. He brought in wool, local dyes, weaving looms and taught students how to design and weave woolen tapestries. After four years of working in the school, Ramses Wissa Wassef and the school's supervisors had a fallout because they still wanted students to learn how to copy and enlarge Coptic icons while Wissa Wassef had other interests as a teacher.

Three students, Fayek Nichola, Mariam Harmina and Fotna Fekri, continued to work with Wissa Wassef outside the school. Before the building of the Haraneya center in 1951, he hosted the students in a garage space in his house in Al-Giza and worked in 1947 on designing another potential school for handicrafts in Hadayek El-Qobba , another neighborhood of Cairo, and met Habib Gorgy for the first time in the Institute of Coptic Studies.¹⁵ Yet it is only with the building of the Haraneya center that his early ideas for working with school children got a chance to develop further.

In 1948, he married Habib Gorgi's daughter Sophie. He partnered with Gorgi in the UNESCO sponsored exhibitions in Paris and London and soon after decided to buy a piece of land in the small village of Haraneya on the outskirts of Cairo to build a school. From 1950 till 1955, he taught fifteen boys and girls from the surrounding village how to weave carpets. He would take them to his workshop so they could watch Fayek Nichola, his oldest student, use the weaving looms, dyes and wool. The children would become intrigued and Ramses Wissa Wassef would directed this curiosity toward them making their own weavings.¹⁶

In 1956, the first exhibition of weavings by the children from the Haraneya center was held in Cairo, Alexandria and Ismailia. In the following year, the first international exhibition was held in Basel with other exhibitions following around Europe. At the time as well Wissa Wassef started increasing the number of buildings in the Haraneya center. He build a house for himself, extra workshop spaces for making carpets and kilim and built a house for artist and sculptor Adam Henein. After a career that saw him build many handcraft schools around Cairo beginning in the mid 1930s, Haraneya was often seen as the most complete of all of them, a site where Ramses Wissa Wassef had full liberty to develop his ideas around art and crafts education. As a result, it

¹⁵ كتيب (زمانيات مصرية.. مئة سنة عمارة: رمسيس ويصا واصف)، مركز طارق والي للعمارة والتراث، 2015. ص 17، 18
¹⁶ الفيلم الوثائقي (أيوب الحرانية: رمسيس ويصا واصف في عيونهم)، إخراج طارق والي وأمنية خليل، إنتاج مركز طارق والي للعمارة والتراث، 2012.

remained a landmark - an experiment that extended over a significant period of time and had a theoretical backdrop.



Ramses Wissa Wassef and Sophie Habib Gorgy - from Cairo Observer online platform (<http://caiobserver.com/>)

Free expression between theory and practice:

Theories on free expression in art education were an important reference point to Habib Gorgi's theories of spontaneous art. Like free expression, Gorgi's theories countered many of the prevailing ideas around art education at the time. Although he and Ramses Wissa Wassef continued their formal education in Europe, they were both invested in rethinking what it means to teach art to children. At the same time Gorgi was conducting his research and beginning to test his new theories on spontaneous art education, Herbert Read published his landmark book *Education through Art* in 1942 causing a great stir in art education circles in Europe. Gorgi was thus part of an international debate, thinking about local conditions as they coincided with or went against some of the rigid or moralizing ideas around art education at the time.

With that said, it is difficult to see Gorgi and Ramses Wissa Wassef's ideas and practices around art education as examples of unguided native art. Native art usually comes out of settings where the artist has no teacher or senior acting as supervisor.¹⁷ It is art that does not

¹⁷ كتاب (الفن الفطري في مصر)، ضحى أحمد، سلسلة الكتاب الأول، المجلس الأعلى للثقافة، 2001. ص 120، 122، 123.

gesture toward any particular end beyond that of artistic expression and is not directed in any way.¹⁸ This was not the case with either Gorgi or Wissa Wassef.

Ramses Wissa Wassef gave guidance and training especially in the early phases of initiation into the craft. Ramses and Sophie Habib discussed and chose projects by students which they were interested in helping develop.¹⁹ Speaking about his practice in *Woven by Hand*, dated 1972, he writes:

I wanted to examine the relationship between technique and art, and re-examine the usual definitions of “artist” and “craftsman”. If the word “artist” is used for someone who creates, and “craftsman” for someone who merely reproduces, how is one to explain the many artists who are mere imitators but who are not called craftsmen, or the whole populations of craftsmen in the past, who were real creators but whom it seems paradoxical to call artists? Does the distinction lie in the fact that the artist manages to win personal fame, while the craftsman remains anonymous? All these definitions involve all sorts of prejudices that must be eliminated. Similarly, classifications into major and minor, fine, decorative and applied arts are unacceptable.²⁰

Ramses Wissa Wassef was interested in working with his Haraneyya students to shape a new approach in teaching crafts within the traditional context of a workshop.

Gorgi’s interactions with the children remained, by contrast, part of an academic study on spontaneous art education and its applicability. He was interested in linking ancient Egyptian art with that of the children he taught at his school. He presented his students with clay that they would freely shape into three dimensional figures. Wissa Wassef and Gorgi both differed in the type of material they presented to students but more importantly perhaps they also had different aims for the teaching settings they created. Gorgi remained interested solely in his academic research, a teacher with no aim other than his students engaging in spontaneous artistic expression. Ramses Wissa Wassef became a master, albeit progressive in some of his ideas, to disciples in a workshop. What is intriguing is that Gorgi did not practice sculptor and remained mostly a painter but taught his students to do sculptor with no guidance from his part. Ramses Wissa Wassef learned weaving and how to design and shape pottery even before establishing Haraneyya. It was important for Wassef to provide guidance as students got initiated into the new techniques taught at Haraneyya.

None of Habib Gorgi’s students took sculpture as a profession except for Sayeda Massak. Gorgi did not sell any of his student’s works and they were later added to the museum that Ramses Wissa Wassef built for Gorgi in Haraneyya. The first generation of students in Haraneyya

¹⁸ Which is : No preliminary sketches or cartoons, and no copying from other works of art. No external aesthetic influences. No critical interference from adults.

¹⁹ Wissa Wassef, Ramses; *Woven By Hand*; Hamlyn, 1972. P. 13, 14, 15.

²⁰ Wissa Wassef, Ramses; *Woven By Hand*; Hamlyn, 1972. P. 8.

continued working after Ramses Wissa Wassef's death under the guidance of Sophie Habib. Their work was sold in many outlets across Egypt and internationally.²¹



First and last tapestry made by Wissa Wassef (1940) - from *Ramses Wissa Wassef Art Center - A journey in creativity* Website (<http://www.wissawassef.com/>)

Conclusion:

With the beginning of the 1950s and compulsory free education in Gamal AbdelNasser's time, teachers with no training in art education were recruited from technical crafts institutes to fill a shortage in qualified art educators for schools across the nation. This made it difficult to find teachers with the necessary background to develop practices that take free expression or spontaneity as their theoretical basis. In addition, the coopting of the rhetoric of free expression within the nationalist agenda of Nasser's time after the 1952 coup d'etat made it even harder to tap into any progressive potential such an approach to art education once symbolized.

The move toward free expression in art education in the 1930s, following the conference in Paris and the hype around Herbert Read's theories, occurred in Egypt amid a wider move to also Arabize and Egyptianize (art) education institutions. The exchange of ideas, discourses

²¹ "The Hidden Power", By John Feeney, Article appeared on pages 20 - 27 of the January / February 1982 print edition of Saudi Aramco World.
<http://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/198201/the.hidden.power.htm>

and praxis between Egypt and Europe at the time through meetings, conferences and exhibitions played an important role in challenging prevailing ideas around art education and in pushing educators to find suitable articulations of progressive ideas within their local context(s). Arguably, it is within this interest to find local, Egyptian, articulations of international discourses and praxis around art education, that one might situate Habib Gorgi's spontaneous art theories and Ramses Wissa Wassef's Haraneyya center. They both operated outside of the formal education system and adopted as backdrop debates around free expression. They reached international fame for attempting to ground free expression as a discourse in a local context marked by questions around identity and tradition. In one case, this meant going back to ancient pharaonic references and in another it meant going back to the medieval site of a workshop.²²

Looking back, it appears that Gorgi's interpretations of free expression pedagogies or Wissa Wassef's practical experimentations did not find a way into the formal education system. They both remained rather isolated outside formal schooling and their work around art education as praxis and discourse did not gain wider rearticulation later on, although remaining still important landmarks in the history art education locally and regionally.

²² The Egyptian Education Bureau, *Spontaneity in the Art of Young Egyptians: an Exhibition of Painting, Sculpture, Tapestry*; London, 1950.

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