

1519

Spanish expedition led by Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan sets off on the 1st successful circumnavigation of the globe (Magellan killed on route)

1854

Battle of the Alma: first major battle of Crimean War. British and French alliance defeat the Russians



1990

Both East and West Germany ratify reunification

2001

In an address to a joint session of Congress and the American people, US President George W. Bush declares a "war on terror"

Keeping Arabic lettering alive in the digital age



'Mark my walls'

...ore we feel we're losing it, the e trying to hold onto it." is a self-professed devotee of love it," she says — and is sad to digitized fonts are starting to take hand-written signage even in and. Calligraphy used to be huge in k in the day," she said. "I grew things were still very much being hand: All the movie posters, all rds... but now everything's been and they've replaced everything

with fonts — often badly designed fonts. So there's definitely a feeling of nostalgia when you see hand-painted signs. There's just a different quality. It's more human. You're more connected to it. And I think it needs to be documented before it goes extinct."

"Khatt: Egypt's Calligraphic Landscape" is a stunning attempt to do just that. The book is split into four sections: On The Move, which is all about trucks and transportation; Text Sells, about advertising; Mark My Walls, which covers various uses of lettering, from simple warning signs and directions to graffiti; and Manifested Glory, which focuses on religious quotations and adornments.

"I knew Egyptians were in love with type, but I realized just how much it is a part of everyday life in Egypt and how much pride they take in it (through this book)," says Hamdy. "When you gather the images together, you just realize it's everywhere; even the street sellers and the little hole-in-the-wall shops have some kind of calligraphy or typeface on their shops or on their walls. It's very rich."

On the move

"Buying a truck is expensive in Egypt, not something many can afford, and therefore the object of great envy," writes Noha Zayed in her essay "Trucks: A Moving Canvas," for the book. "The truck is the driver's most-prized possession: it is his source of livelihood and it is how he feeds his children. It is also his eternal companion ... Driving a truck in Egypt is a dan-



Arabic calligraphy used to be huge in Egypt, back in the day. I grew up when things were still very much being written by hand: All the movie posters, all the billboards... but now everything's been digitized and they've replaced everything with fonts — often badly designed fonts. So there's definitely a feeling of nostalgia when you see hand-painted signs. There's just a different quality. It's more human. You're more connected to it. And I think it needs to be documented before it goes extinct

BASMA HAMDY

gerous business, both economically and physically. Egyptian roads are among the most dangerous in the world, and life and limb are at stake on every trip, along with the investment of the truck itself.

"It is rare to see a truck of any size that

is not richly decorated. The decorations' first objective is safety and protection from the evil eye, hence the use of written verses from (religious texts), or invocations for protection," she continues. "All are attempts to protect the truck and its driver from the dangers of the road, envy, and the misfortunes of destiny."

This truck, photographed on the Cairo Ring Road, has an abundance of text, reading: "This isn't an abundance of money, this is to challenge the scoundrels / 'With my almighty glory I will be generous with the helpless so that the conceited will wonder (sacred Hadith) / Doctor Reham, The pampered Ayah, Ali Pasha, and the young Aziz Pasha (the names of the driver's children) / In the name of the Prophet, Praise the Prophet."

Text sells

Advertisements are painted on walls all over Egypt's urban areas. The book seems to suggest that even the smallest grocery store would be considered incomplete without some kind of lettered adornment. While some are simply descriptions of the shops themselves — as with this example from Sohag, which reads "Al-aseel for mobile phone maintenance" (along with an illustration that perfectly sums up the dangers of using a "modern" image on your tech-store signage, as it rapidly becomes outdated; like all those outlets that added "2000" to their name a few years before the millennium) — others make lofty claims ("Loved by millions" on the shutters of a shabby, run-down store), offer consumer warnings ("The original Shahin, beware of similar names"), or spout sweetly naïve

self-justification ("We have decorated it for the viewer").

Mark my walls

"There is a nostalgia associated with handwritten lettering that can never be replaced with a digital alternative. A nostalgia that is potent in Egypt," writes Hamdy in "Language and Message," her essay for the book. "You can see it in the faces of the people on the street ... and read it in the words that adorn everything you see, words that weave the rich and complex tapestry that is Egypt." In this image, a man smokes a shisha underneath the background scrawl, "Manlihood is not easy."

Manifested glory

Quotations from holy books and exhortations to god are some of khatt's most important functions on the walls of Egypt. Hajj paintings are a subset of their own within that group. In villages along the Nile, Egypt's pilgrims will often commission local artists to paint the walls of their houses celebrating their journey to Makka.

"I think it's rooted in ancient Egyptian art. I think that's where they get the inspiration from," Hamdy tells Arab News. "These painters... I don't think there are many left, but it used to be this tradition that the father would pass on to their son, and there would be one painter in each village that would paint the houses. It's like a mark of pride: 'I'm now a Hajji.'"

This house is decorated with the phrase: "May Allah accept your Hajj and forgive your sins / Hajj Mohamed Abdelaziz Mustafa, 2015."

ALS

Farah Al-Qasimi's first solo US show set to open

and understood and she is known for borrowing Renaissance paintings

nts. structured like a rowing a jinn — a tradition. Deliv- TV-style mono-camera beneath a interweaves her Portuguese and the modern-day in the UAE. The

alment play Al-Qasimi's of portraits, faces of her ng intimate k of a clear, compositional ing features oke, a well-ously pat-bery — while entuate the objects inhabit



Farah Al-Qasimi's photo titled 'Um Al Naar' (Mother of Fire) (still), 2019

video also explores the influence of the European presence in the region and the use of Euro-centric practices for the display of historical artifacts.

Curated by Henriette Huldish, the director of exhibitions at the MIT List Visual Arts Center, the exhibition marks the first time Al-Qasimi's work has been shown in a solo exhibition in the US — it is set to wrap up on Oct. 20.

The artist lives and works between New York and Dubai and has seen her work ex-

hibited in The Third Line gallery in Dubai, Jameel Arts Centre in Dubai and the San Francisco Arts Commission, among other locations.

Al-Qasimi received her MFA from the Yale School of Art and has participated in residencies at the Delfina Foundation in London; the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine; and is a recipient of the New York NADA Artadia Prize and the Aaron Siskind Individual Photographer's Fellowship.



Farah Al-Qasimi's photo titled 'Living Room Vape' (2017)