

Egypt Video Collection

Cairo: 1001 Years of Art and Architecture

Written by: Caroline Williams, Produced by: Gray Henry and Dar Nun
97 minutes, color

This video takes the viewers on a journey through Cairo's architectural and artistic history. It is best for viewers who especially have an interest in architecture, as many small details are focused on in the video. It is divided into four major parts, with the third part being subdivided into seven more parts. Part I, "The Grandeur of Cairo," (16 minutes) is an overview of the old Medieval city of Cairo, highlighting several of the major artistic and architectural attractions that will be gone into detail later in the video. This also includes several cemeteries, mosques, saints' burial sites, and even the Khan-al-Khalili bazaar. Part I alone is perhaps sufficient for those viewers who simply want an introduction to Islamic architecture, and who are not interested in the details. Part II, "The Word, the Vine and the Star: Spiritual Dimensions of Islamic Art in Cairo," (20 minutes) looks at the ornamental decoration found in several of Cairo's mosques. This includes a look at calligraphy, arabesque, geometric forms, color, light, and how all of these elements are put together to express spirituality. Part III, "Survivors in Stone: 1001 Years of Islamic Architecture in Cairo," (51 minutes) is the part of the video that looks at art and architecture of Cairo in detail by historic period. Part III is subdivided into 7 more parts:

- I: The mosque of Ahmad ibn Tulun (4 minutes),
- II: The Fatamids (9 minutes),
- III: The Ayyubids (4 minutes),
- IV: The Bahri Mamluks (11 minutes),
- V: the Burji Mamluks (11 minutes),
- VI: The Ottoman Era (6.5 minutes), and
- VII: The Muhammad Ali Dynasty (4 minutes).

Each subdivision of Part III provides a very detailed look at the architecture for that period and how it was changed in the next period. Finally, Part IV, "Some Saints of Cairo," (10 minutes) discusses the lives, deaths, and burial sites of several Cairene saints, including a Sufi prophet and a woman directly descended from the prophet Muhammad. The video concludes with several "inspirational quotes," including several from the Quran. This video gives the viewer a great background on the history of artistic Cairene architecture and its spiritual meanings.

El Moulid

(1990) 40 minutes/subtitled

Vividly captures the festive and religious mood of the very popular seven-hundred-year-old Moulid (birth) of the 13th century Muslim Wali, Sayyid Ahmad Al-Badawy, held annually in Tanta. The video analyzes the Moulid's structure and symbolism and reveals various levels of religious experience.

Egypt & Syria '94

Roos-Eefsting Productions (1994)

17 minutes, color

This video is made of footage shot and narrated by one of GVSU's professors, Barbara Roos. The video serves to give the viewer a very brief and simple introduction to the types of lives people in the Middle East live each day. Islamic fundamentalism is briefly discussed and the narrator tells the viewer that it is not a common thing to find in Egypt or Syria. Next is footage shot in the Egyptian Coptic Christian monastery of St. Bishoy. One monk explains what the monks do on a day-to-day basis and what it takes for a person to become a monk. Also shown is a ceremony taking place in the monastery to honor the founding saint. The video then shows a variety of women in Egypt and Syria, in both traditional and modern dress. The video explains the reasons for the resurgence of Islam and other changes, especially in women's dress. The demographic and environmental problems of Egypt and Syria are also briefly discussed. This video has excellent footage of the modern Middle East and gives the viewer a good introduction to life in this region.

Four Women of Egypt

Woman Make Movies (1997)

85 minutes, color

This video focuses on the friendship and experiences of four Egyptian women. The video consists of footage shot in Egypt of four women reminiscing and telling stories of how they came to be friends, along with a good amount of footage from the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's. The women speak in Arabic and French, therefore English subtitles are used. The women all met one another during the time of Nasser and the revolution of 1952. They discuss their feelings and actions during that time of political strife in Egypt, including several prison stories. One woman tells the story of her marriage and the eventual assassination of her husband and how this changed her life. Also emphasized by the women is the significance of the Aswan Dam, and how the Egyptians expected their lives to improve drastically due to its construction. Although the four women are close, they disagree on many issues, especially religion. One woman is Christian while the other three are Muslim. They also differ in their dress and their political opinions, which is emphasized in their discussions. This video gives the viewer a good idea of what public opinion, especially that of women, was at the time of the revolution. The stories told by the women along with historical footage provide an excellent political background on Egypt.

The Land

Arab Film Distribution, 1969

130 minutes, color

This film focuses on the story of how one Egyptian village reacts to the uninformed decisions by a distant landowner. The villagers survive off their land, and when a distant authority changes the laws of how to tend the land, the village becomes chaotic. The

mayor informs the village that the irrigation period has been changed from 10 days to only 5 days. Every villager knows that this is not enough to maintain their crops, but the villagers disagree over how to deal with the news. Conflict arises between friends and within families, as well as with government officials. The role of women is also examined by following the stories of several female villagers as they search for husbands, who can give them a successful future. The women long to leave the village to live in Cairo, which is then thought of as almost paradise. This film gives the viewer a good idea of what village life outside of Cairo was like, as well as how distant rule and colonialism hurts those being ruled. This is a classic Egyptian film by one of its most talented directors.

The Planting of Girls

(1999) 37 minutes/subtitled

Although Female Genital Mutilation is forbidden by law in Egypt and banned in public and private hospitals and clinics, official statistics show that nearly 96% of women in Egypt are still circumcised. This controversial-yet-level-headed documentary examines why FGM is practiced, the reactions to it and its medical, historical, cultural and sexual significance—all from women's perspectives and in women's voices.

Umm Kulthum, A Voice Like Egypt

Arab Film Distributions, 1996

67 minutes, color/B&W

This video is available for viewing at the GVSU library only. It gives the history of Egypt's most famous performer: a woman by the name of Umm Kulthum. The narrator gives a history of her life. This also contains many interviews with Egyptians and other Middle Easterners. Actual footage of Umm Kulthum's performances are shown. Subtitles are used during the performances and interviews. The story of Umm Kulthum's life has a humble beginning. She went from being a poor girl who had to dress up as a boy in order to perform, to being the Arab world's all-time favorite musician. Umm Kulthum began by singing for locals in her village and soon after began to become well known among wealthy Egyptians as a great entertainer. Umm Kulthum's popularity peaked as she became the voice of Egypt during its political strife and revolution in 1952. She quickly became a favorite of the new Egyptian president, Nasser, and became politically involved with the country's affairs. Following Egypt's 1967 defeat, Umm Kulthum was devastated and raised a tremendous amount of money for her country. The video follows Umm Kulthum's career through Egypt's eventful 20th century history, until her death in 1975. Even today her music is played on Egyptian radio daily at 5 p.m., which shows her incredible importance and popularity. This video gives the viewer a good sense of this woman's prominence in Egypt's cultural history.

Living With the Past
VHS 56 minutes [2001]

Across the globe monument preservation often means that surrounding neighborhoods are demolished and people are displaced. Not so in Cairo, where efforts are underway to not only rescue endangered monuments but to improve the standard of living of the affected communities, in this case the people of Darb al-Ahmar. Video follows several restoration projects in progress in that neighborhood.

Bisha: The Awesome Fire Test
VHS, 52 minutes

Bisha is a riveting exploration of an unusual custom—trial by fire. The film also delves into other aspects of Bedouin culture—the role of honored elders, the exorcism of demons, rituals of mystic sects, and other practices of the Bedouin law system.

The Yacoubian Building
DVD, 2006

An eye-catching construction, the Yacoubian Building in Cairo was long regarded as the last word in comfort and elegance. Nowadays the veneer has cracked and the shine has dulled to reveal the truth underneath the façade. Through interwoven stories of a number of the residents, the film paints a portrait of corruption, fundamentalism, prostitution, homosexuality, and drugs in central Cairo and creates a vibrant but socially critical picture of contemporary Egypt.
