

***SURREALISM  
IN EGYPT:  
ART ET  
LIBERTÉ  
1938 - 1948***

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**Tate Liverpool**

Tate Liverpool's latest exhibition offers a fascinating, much-needed lesson in art history. Surrealism In Egypt: Art Et Liberté 1938-1948 rejects the Eurocentric focus on Paris and places Cairo at the heart of the movement. Curators Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath bring together over 100 paintings, photographs, films and texts from Art Et Liberté, a radical collective of artists and writers based in Cairo. It's the first time that such a multifarious study of the group has been exhibited in the UK, and is a rare chance to discover an overlooked chapter in the history of surrealism.

At the end of 1938, a group of young radical artists and writers joined together and signed a manifesto, Long Live Degenerate Art, which appears at the start of the exhibition. Art Et Liberté was thus formed: a political, surrealist collective rebelling against colonial rule and the rise of fascism in Egypt. The group rejected Egyptian nationalism, and joined an international network of surrealist artists in the global fight against fascism. Fellrath points to Cairo as the perfect backdrop for the group's creation: the combination of a

**PLAYLIST**

art world invites protest.

***"A rare chance to discover an overlooked chapter in the history of surrealism"***

1	Lose Love XamVolo	3:43
2	Black Coffee MC Nelson	1:57
3	Valerie The Zutons	3:56
4	Sissy Fists Queen Zee	2:23
5	Carson Rachael Jean Harris	5:21
6	Old Soul XamVolo	3:07

The exhibition is divided thematically; the relatively short time-span of the group enables this close study. One repeated motif is the tortured and broken female body. Art Et Liberté remove the erotic male gaze from surrealism, swapping the sexualised, lusting woman for the bloody and wounded. This is the bleak reality of objectification: one that locates women's suffering at the heart of the world's degradation. Inji Efflatoun's paintings place the female body in nature, intertwining the suffering of women with the decay of the landscape. Women resemble twisted and deformed trees, their bodies rooted to the ground but burning alive. Her work is disturbing and undoubtedly feminist.

Art Et Liberté's greatest contribution to the

subjective realism. This new form of surrealism still championed the unconscious, free expression of the imagination. They used recognisable, contemporary symbols, alongside these surrealist techniques, to add a political and local significance to their work. For example, Ramses Younan's Untitled 1939 places the Egyptian Goddess Nut in a surrealist setting and the typical arch of her body becomes a broken, bloody back. Art Et Liberté's works are thus internationally linked to the global surrealist network but also undeniably Egyptian.

Bardaouil and Fellrath are the co-founders of Art Reoriented, a curatorial platform that champions a multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural approach. Projects such as these are vital for widening our understanding of global art history and expanding our focus beyond Europe and America. My knowledge of surrealism is limited but I found this exhibition to be accessible, varied and unique. Art expert or not, Surrealism In Egypt is the perfect way to spend a lazy afternoon.

*Surrealism in Egypt: Art et Liberté*  
1938-1948 runs until 18th March



**Ramses Younan,  
Surrealism, Tate Liverpool** **SHARE**



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