

**Romancing the Stone**  
**8<sup>th</sup> International Sculpture Symposium, Aswan, Egypt**  
**January 15<sup>th</sup> –March 15<sup>th</sup> 2003**

*"Feelings are by far more abrasive and much stronger than engineering or mechanical means of dealing with stone as material. Without feelings, stone sculpture would have never existed".*

*Adam Henein*  
*World Renowned Sculptor*

In addition to its monumental significance as a an open-monument museum, including the islands of Philae, and Abu-Simbel, 45 natural preserved islands, Aswan also encloses the high-dam - Egypt's most prosperous economic and industrial achievement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Aga Khan awarded Nuba museum 2001, the Aga Khan retiring home and mausoleum, the gate to Nuba- the land of gold. The tanned city is also celebrated for its annual hosting one of the most global artistic attractions; the International Sculpture Symposium.

***The Symposium - The Story:***

Born in 1929, graduated in Fine Arts 1953, and personally challenged by the inability to work with stone when young, Adam Henein, never gave up the dream. During the seventies of the twentieth century, and while working in Paris, he was once invited to join in a stone sculpture symposium on the Yugoslavian Adriatic. There, he has witnessed artists from all around the world involved in a group work. He learned the stone techniques, used the tools and again, the dream in reminiscence was in foreground. Back in Paris, proposed the idea to Farouk Hosny – director of the Egyptian Cultural Center there (now Egyptian Minister of Culture), for the purpose of revitalizing the stone sculpturing in Aswan, cradle of Egyptian sculpture and home of granite stone quarries.

After 19 years of day-dreaming, the first symposium presumed. Challenged by numerous unexpected beaurocracy, Henein succeeded in founding a commissionaire for the symposium. His aim was to choose local infamous artists, give them the chance to get exposed and work with foreign artists. Offended by his choice dynamics, Henein then had to propose a parallel workshop, to which he would invite promising Egyptians of varied academic backgrounds -graduates of Fine Arts, Applied Arts, college of Art-Education, and others-, out of whom he expects fruitful outcomes for the up-coming symposia. The outcome of the workshop was a total surprise; once the timid young artists had the chance to interact with foreign artists, they become motivated. Their works are exhibited and criticized, constituting a committee with a devoted vision that would gradually change the art of sculpture and thus the artistic movement of the country.

The case worldwide is not so different. There are plenty of unknown artists who strive to the lights. Those artists have no chance to work on this monumental scale in true settings. This event has proved to dramatically change the sculptors attitudes once back to their countries, where a state of self-assessment takes place. The location, the history the stone craftsmen, the quarries, the civilization, the interaction with the

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Egyptian artists, the joint works, etc. Year after the other, the number of "stone sculptors" increased as well as another number who willingly contact the symposium commissionaire to join in this vital event on their own expenses.

*"Here, you feel that the artwork has a life of its own, it is as though it grows from the earth" describes Adam Henein. The works, some of which get used in the landscaping of squares, some of which are moved to decorate buildings and the rest are kept in an open museum, atop of Philae island in Aswan, counting a number of approximately 90 works. The returns for the country and for the ministry of Culture are also paramount.*

Contradicting with the typical sculpture exhibitions and workshops with lots of materials, wood, metal, waste, polyester, hard paper, etc., here, there is no one single school of thought. Works are a combination of figurative, abstract, composition and symbolic. The only unity is that of material, which reflects in the harmony of the overall resultant works. Differences pertain to the attitude or the approach to dealing with designs. The differential significance is that of stability oriented designs of the Egyptians against the dynamism oriented designs of the foreigners. This contrast in their designs reflect the most significant characteristics of cultural attributes; the introvert versus the extrovert. Apart from such personality characteristics, the only criterion for the works is the value it possesses, what one dominates of original conceptions and can let out.

Site design and landscaping are to include such works of art, the monumental scale works have a lot to do more than to be kept for specialist and interested viewers. Sculptures had always to do with urban design, utilizing the art can... to be put in squares, in prestigious as well as in indigenous buildings.

Darrel Petit, educated as architect and urban planner, working in projects that are a combination of architecture and sculpture. Now, specialized in granite. Worked in the quarries all over the world; Norway, Japan, India,...

He not only designs but works with his hands as well. Working in collaboration with the craftsmen, learning specific techniques, different ways of "romancing the material"... *"Back to the studio, influenced by the contextual open the senses to what is up, develops the ideator inside the mind ,, the symposium sets me up".*

*"I have long heard of the symposium through international sculpture magazine, july-august 2002. introduced my work to Adam, the Norwayan design team of the bibliotheca Alexandrina. With admiration to the material, raw and powerful, my works of balance have a physical sensation; not addressing the intellects but the body rather than the head".*

Patrice, *"I love Adam. As for the symposium, I had a chance to complete I work that I have started the last year. It's more of a place than that of an object. Back at home, I use volcana lava for my sculptures, it is a less hard material than granite, and it has a fascinating texture when broken. I work for private collections, exhibit in galleries".*

Here, the "meditation" place of his,.... Description. Surrounded by the sounds of swashing wind, the sounds of hammers and chisels, nature is related in unity to the blending sculptured site. *"My enigma was; did I destroy the mountain or harmonize*

*the environment?" says Patrice. "For me, the location is more important, through my work, I try to integrate the man-made with the natural landscape". He adds*

Not only Patrice who has chosen to work in the open air museum, Rania Shaalan too, Egyptian sculptor, wanted to work where she would exhibit her work. *"I wanted more open area, more inspiring ambience" says Rania. "Throughout this non-verbal conversation between the stone and myself, there was self-healing, I learned a lot more about myself, my capabilities, and I have survived embedded intents that I couldn't previously comprehend,".*

*"At first I felt helpless; it took me several days to get acquainted with the stone, but with Patrice as my teacher and advisor, I was taught how to approach, measure, and handle my material" expresses Rania.*

The works of Hesham Abdallah, Egyptian Sculptor, is basically about the contrast between the unpredictable moment between the foolish movement and the wise still. According to him, his pieces reflect his very character; on the edge between the boundaries of the extremes.

Stone craftsmen are imperative for this symposium. Experts with the material, they look for this annual event to parade case their talents and proficiency

*"In the end, I'd like to conclude that the overall experience of the symposium is centered on "acquaintance with others, with different characters and cultural backgrounds" concludes Rania Shaalan.*

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Artists joining in this symposium are: Andrzej Lemiszewski-Poland, Patrice Belin-France, Ganine Kortz Waintriop – Germany, Jumber Jikia- Georgia, Khalid Farhan,- Bahrain, Darell Petit - Canada, Leonard I. Rachita – Romania, Hisham Abdallah, Egypt, Hany Faisal- Egypt, Mazin Ismail- Egypt. Sculptures joining in the workshop accompanying the symposium; Ihab Ellaban – Egypt, Ahmad Askallani – Egypt, Ahmad Rafik Nassar- Palestine, Shaaban Abbas – Egypt and Neithan Doss –Egypt. Rania Shaalan, outsider on her own expenses.

Sponsored by the Cultural Development Fund, Ministry of culture, Egypt. Aswan governorate, quarries authority and private quarries. General Samir Youssef, Governor of Aswan.

The Symposium Supreme Committee:

H.E. Mr. Farouk Hosny – Minister of Culture: Chairman

Artist Adam Henein – World Famous Sculpture: Commissar

Mr. Kamel Zohery – Writer

Dr. Ahmad Nawar – Artist, Head of the National Center of Art

Mr. Salah Shaquir – Director of the Cultural Development Fund

Dr. Sobhi Girguis – Artist, Professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Cairo

Dr. Ahmad Setouhy - Artist, Professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Alexandria

Dr. Mohammed Taha Hussein – Artist, Head of Fine Arts Committee at the Supreme Council of Culture

Mr. Salah Marie – Cinema Director, Professor of Interior Design, Cinema Institute

Mr. Kamal El-Gewaily – Head of the Egyptian Council of Plastic Arts Critics  
Mr. Antoin Ryadh – Businessman

Numerical Facts:

Since its first round until the seventh, the numbers mounted up to:

- Number of countries collaborated: 25
  - Number of foreign sculptors: 64
  - Number of Egyptian sculptors: 22
  - Number of works produced: 87
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