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ديفا DIVAS

من أم كلثوم إلى داليدا
From Oum Kalthoum to Dalida

Exhibition Conceived by Institut du monde arabe
Under the patronage of the Ministry of Culture

Divas invites us to discover the lives and careers of the greatest artists of Arab music and cinema from the 1920s to the 1970s. Following successful presentations in Paris, Amsterdam, and Amman, the exhibition now arrives in Beirut to honor the legacy of iconic female singers of the Arab world and the enduring impact of their art.

Stars like Oum Kalthoum, Asmahana, Fairuz, Warda, Dalida, Taheyya Kariokka, Samia Gamal, Laila Mourad, Sabah, Souad Hosni, Faten Hamama, and Hind Rostoum are for the first time reunited and honored in an ambitious exhibition. Coming from modest families or part of the upper-class, orphans or exiled, Muslim, Christian or Jewish, their unique histories bear witness to the cultural and social diversity of the Arab World. The exhibition pays tribute to these powerful women who contributed to transforming the arts by excelling in them, and allowed Egypt to shine upon the Arab World. Breaking with traditions, they gave women an unprecedented place in the press, in the fields of music, dance, singing and cinema. Thanks to their talent, they led the oftentimes male-dominated crowd to ecstasy during concerts to hold their breath in movie theaters. Beyond their artistic genius, they incarnated the ideals of Arab society and some fervently defended their political positions. They knew how to take advantage of the century's technological evolutions, the coming of age of the record, the radio and the cinema. Going beyond borders, they conquered the hearts of the Arab public, from Damascus to the Casablanca, from Paris to Algiers.

Their fight for emancipation still resounds in today's creations. The exhibition ends with installations, most of them never exhibited before, by Lebanese and international artists that bear witness to the durability of the divas' legacies in contemporary art and music.

Thanks to the families of these divas, to their friends but also to passionate collectors, unique works were reunited here for the first time. Mirroring the intimate and public portraits of these exceptional artists, this is a political, intellectual and social story of the Arab world that takes shape, interrogating the place of women in Arab societies.

THE PIONEERS AND THE ROARING TWENTIES IN CAIRO

In the beginning of the 20th century, Egypt went through important political, societal, artistic and technological transformations. The Nahda (intellectual renaissance) was then at its peak and Cairo was a cosmopolitan city at the center of the Arab world's artistic activity. Born within the bourgeoisie, a movement opposed to British colonialism, wishing to break with the past, advocated for nationalist ideas and dreams of modernity. Women actively supported these uprisings and got engaged in other fights to advance their freedoms. Others held a defining role on the artistic revolution that was unfolding. First women to go onstage, they contributed to the emergence of concert halls and cabarets in the capital. They actively participated in the changes that took place in music and were at the heart of the emergence of an Egyptian cinema. Veritable pioneers, they paved the way for the great Arab divas as artists but also as entrepreneurs and business women. We now pay tribute to their talent and their visionary acts that have been forgotten today.

THE FEMINIST CAUSE IN EGYPT

In the 1920s in Cairo, personalities like Hoda Chaaraoui, Ceza Baraoui or Safia Zaghoul, fought for women's emancipation and were engaged in anti-imperialist movements. They took position as soon as 1919 by protesting in the streets against the English presence. These upper-class born feminists focused their actions on issues such as the veil, education, women's right to vote, marriage and divorce legislation. Some, such as the famous Palestinian-Lebanese writer May Ziadeh, would hold a "salon" where intellectuals and politicians came to discuss. By letting men in the private sphere, they upset traditional codes. They were journalists, writers and founders of newspapers, and used Arabic and French, English more rarely, to spread their ideas. The 1920s were the years of the first public unveilings that will come to shake the place of women's bodies in the city.

WHEN WOMEN GO ON STAGE

At the end of the 19th century in Egypt, musicians would perform for particular occasions in closed upper-class circles. These so-called classical representations of music use classical Arabic and base themselves on improvisation. In 1906, a veritable revolution saw the day with the advent of the 78-rpm record. The structure of songs got shorter in order to adapt to this new support. In parallel, concerts halls called "casinos" multiplied in the streets of Cairo and music then became accessible to all. A veritable industry, carried by production houses, started to offer more entertaining genres. Women, the new actors of the musical scenes, gained the status of moutribat (singers) and played an important role by interpreting a light genre of music called *taqtuqa*. All these factors contributed to bringing singers to the forefront where they gained public recognition.

MOUNIRA EL MAHDIYYA (1885-1965)



Named after El Mahdiyya, the village in Egypt where she was born, and known under the name of Sett Mounira (Madam Mounira), the singer recorded her first vinyl as early as 1906. Early in this century, she gave numerous representations of classical music in the singing cafés of Cairo and the cabarets of the Azbakiyya's garden. As early as 1914, she initiated the transition towards so-called variety songs that made the music more accessible to the wider public. In 1916, she began a career in theatre. She became the first Muslim woman to go on stage, dressed as a man in the play *Saladin*. In the 1920s, then at the peak of her glory and referred to as *Sultanat al-Tarab* (the Sultana of singing), she was recognized in Egypt and across the Levant as the most famous singer of her time.

BADIA MASSABNI (1892-1975)



Of Syrian-Lebanese origins, Badia Massabni settled in Egypt where she began an artistic career. Veritable pioneer in the field of dance and spectacle, she opened the first cabarets in Alexandria then in Cairo. In 1929, she created the very famous Casino Badia and formed a dancing troop alongside it whose members went on to become the greatest musical comedies stars from the 1940s onwards. She modernized traditional dances and defined the *sharqi* style codes that will become popular in movies: garments made with rhinestones, pearls and sequins, movements made of arabesques and ripples. In 1936, she produced her film *The Music Hall Queen* that inaugurates the golden age of dance in Egyptian cinema.

ROSE AL-YOUSSEF (1879-1947)



Born in Lebanon, Fatma, her real name, is an emblematic figure of Egyptian cinema in the interwar period. She arrived in Alexandria at age 12 and discovered theatre in Cairo a few years later, first as a costume designer then as an actress. She soon became the greatest star of Egyptian theatre as part of Youssef Wahbi's notorious Ramses company. She then quit the company over a disagreement with him and created her own intellectual salon in Cairo in the 1920s. In 1924, she founded the famous cultural and political magazine *Rose al-Youssef*. Famous for its press caricatures, it became very popular and influential. This weekly magazine is still running today despite the death of its founder in 1958.

FROM THE STAGE TO THE BIG SCREEN: THE PIONEERS OF CINEMA

In the beginning of the 20th century, Egyptian musicals were a very masculine environment. Women were underrepresented and the actors and actresses are often of Syrian-Lebanese origins, whether Christian or Jewish. Mounira al-Mahdiyya was the first Muslim woman to appear on a theatre's stage in 1916. In just a few years, numerous female artists successfully defied the male-dominated world of entertainment. As they reached stardom, their pictures invaded the press and the shows' posters put them in the spotlight. They appeared modern and unveiled. The first entirely Egyptian feature, *Laila* in 1927 (by and with Aziza Amir), already showed ties with theatre; many great pioneers of cinema have started their careers on stage. In its beginnings, Egyptian cinema was carried by private enterprises where each star owned their own company. The "actresses-producers", Aziza Amir (Isis film), Assia Dagher (Lotus film), and Bahiga Hafez (Fanar film) were then notorious personalities in these circles. With the advent of talking cinema in 1932, films were structured around singing, similarly to theatre.

AZIZA AMIR (1901-1952)



Aziza Amir grew up in high culture circles and opened in the 1920s in Cairo a salon where personalities of the art and literary worlds would gather. In 1925, she started a career in theatre and joined Yussef Wahbi's Ramses company. She played several roles until 1935, the year of her final appearance on stage. Aziza Amir played a central role in the emergence of cinema in Egypt as a producer, an actress and a filmmaker. In 1929, she created the first Egyptian feature film, *Laila*, where she played the lead role. She participated to the scriptwriting process and directed filmmakers Wedad Orfi and Oustiphane Rousty. The success of *Laila* led her to found her own production house, Isis films.

ASSIA DAGHER (1908-1986)



Born in 1908 in Lebanon, Assia arrived in Egypt in 1923. Early on, she developed a passion for cinema. Her debut was as a wide-eyed 19-year-old girl with pale skin and proud posture, a further mark of distinction for the legendary *Laila*. An ambitious woman, she became a producer by founding Lotus film in 1929. A first feature film *Desert Beauty* was released that same year, produced by and starring Assia. She played in more than twenty films and basked in glory but aware of the limits of her acting that she put her career on pause. As a producer, she gave chances to her niece Mary Queeny and her husband Ahmad Galal who would later found the famous Galal Studio. Her successes would earn her the Egyptian nationality. Her genius and her sensitivity made her the country's most ambitious producer in the 1960s.

BAHIGA HAFEZ (1908-1983)



Born in an Egyptian aristocratic family, Bahiga Hafez is one of Egyptian cinema's major figures. In 1930, she played the lead role and composed the music of the film *Zeinab* by Mohammed Karim. Her strong personality, skills in music and editing as well as her knowledge of dubbing led her to create her own production company Fanar Films in 1932. She showed an absolute virtuosity when, in 1937, she handled all steps in making the film *Laila*, the desert girl, which was later selected to participate in the Venice festival in 1938: screenplay, musical score, costumes, lead role. At the end of her career, music connoisseurs would gather in her house which became a place of high culture.

THE GOLDEN VOICES

During the interwar period, the music industry became a major actor in the artistic scene and participated to the advent of the interpreter as a star. When Egyptian cinema started talking in 1932, it took an interest in these singers and placed them at the center of a new star-system, while Egyptian radio (1930) broadcasted their songs in the entire Arab world. Carried by these new entertainment economies that could reach a wide audience, exceptional women asserted themselves as the ambassadors of Arab identity. Their names are Oum Kalthoum, Asmahan, Warda, and Fairuz. They come from different horizons and paths. They sing the freedom, exile, pain, love and pride of being Arab. Thanks to their fieriness, their talent and their aura, all of them have become, sometimes against their will, icons of the Arab world. These determined women were ahead of their times, some even rebellious. They were able to overcome their condition as women and asserted themselves through their stage intelligence and their ability to incarnate the aspirations of entire nations.

OUM KALTHOUM (1898 ? 1975)



Born at the turn of the 20th century in Tamay al-Zahayira, a small village on the Nile's delta, Oum Kalthoum began her formation by chanting the Quran. Disguised as a boy, she sang alongside her father and stunned the crowd with her voice. In 1923, in Cairo, the brilliant and ambitious young woman emancipated herself from her family. Surrounded by great musicians and intellectuals, she changed up her repertoire and underwent a transformation: a diva had just bloomed. In 1926, she recorded her first song "En kont asameh" (If I forgive you), with lyrics by her friend and eternal suitor, Ahmed Rami. Since then, success would never leave her side. She sang of desire, love, pain and abandonment. Starting in 1934 and

for twenty-seven years, every first Thursday of the month, she gave a concert broadcasted live on Radio Cairo. She sang and the Arab world listened. Oum Kalthoum is "the Star of the East". On stage, her knack for improvisation and the unmatched power of her voice meant her songs could last for more than an hour, leading the audience to ecstasy. A discreet woman, she tightly controlled her public image. El-Sett is a musical and political legend. Her engagement alongside Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser turned her into the ambassador of pan-Arabism. Oum Kalthoum's destiny is that of a young girl from the countryside that rose higher and higher through her talent and her willpower until becoming the greatest singer of the Arab world.

WARDA (1939 - 1912)



Born to a Lebanese mother and an Algerian father, Warda al-Djazairia ("the Algerian rose") began her career at the age of nine, in her father's oriental cabaret in Paris, the TAM TAM (which stands for Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco). From the very beginning, her songs bore witness to her engagement in Algeria's independence struggle. In 1956, she was forced into exile with her family which was accused of hiding weapons for the FLN (the Algerian National Liberation Front). Aged 18, after three years spent in Lebanon, she settled in Egypt where she quickly met with success. The musicians Mohammed Abdel Wahab and Riad al-Soumbati recognized her talents and wrote songs for her. It's only in 1962, after the independence of Algeria, that she finally discovered

her country of origin. After she got married, her husband asked her to disappear from the music scene, which she did for ten years. In 1972, Algerian president Houarri Boumedienne invited her to sing for the commemoration of Algeria's independence. She then launched herself into a new career in Egypt, married composer Baligh Hamdi, and became a diva admired throughout the Arab world. Her musical style perpetuated Oum Kalthoum's legacy, and integrated innovative sounds from the Maghreb. Marked by exile, Warda's career, between Paris, Beirut, Cairo and Algiers bears witness to the cultural unity of the Arab world.

ASMAHAN (1917 ? 1944)



A Druze princess of Syrian-Lebanese origins and whose beauty and green eyes fascinated people, Amal al-Atrache was born on a boat between Izmir and Beirut. After the death of her father in 1924, her mother Alia settled in Cairo with her children. The family then experienced poverty, all the while socializing with the city's influential musicians. Amal and her brother Farid demonstrated virtuoso talents at a very early age. Having become Asmahan (the Sublime), she started performing in Cairo's concert halls in the early 1930s. Thanks to her exceptional voice and her control over vocal improvisations, she quickly rose to success. However, her older brother Fouad could not stand to see her leading a dissolute life and, in the name of Druze tradition (a Muslim religious sect), forced her to marry her cousin, Hassan al-Atrache. Her existence would then be

marked by several depressions, the incompatibility between her quiet housewife life in the Druze Djebel (in south-west Syria) and her artistic career. Back in Cairo, she supported the Allies during the Second World War. In 1944, while she was filming her second film, *Love and Revenge*, the filmmaker Youssef Wahbi had to change the ending because of the actress's sudden death. The diva's fulgurant career, her rebellious image as a woman against the tide of her times, and the mysterious circumstances of her death, drowned in a car accident, still ignite passions to this day.

FAIRUZ (1935)



Nouhad Haddad was born in Beirut in 1935, to a modest Christian family. Her voice is a gift that did not go unnoticed. In 1947, Halim el-Roumi, director of the Lebanese radio, became fascinated with this young woman and dubbed her Fairuz (turquoise). Thanks to him, Assi Rahbani, her future husband, and his brother Mansour discovered the voice that will carry their musical revolution. From now on, Lebanon will carry its own weight. They impose a new style, blending Lebanese folklore with occidental rhythms. Fairuz could sing anything. For her, they will write songs, operettas and theatre plays. The trio held "Lebanese Nights" at the Baalbek Festival, an internationally renowned event. Her singing became more tragic after 1967. She captured the world's attention after interpreting "El Qods" (Jerusalem) following the defeat of Arab troops after the Six-Days War. Fairuz became an icon. The reserved but strong-willed artist incarnates, for everyone in the Arab world, tolerance and love. In 1975, Lebanon sunk into the nightmare of the civil war. Fairuz refused exile but decided to go silent. For nineteen years, she will not sing in Lebanon anymore. Her career continued internationally and after the death of her husband Assi Rahbani in 1986, it's her son Ziad who will write songs for her. On September 17, 1994, Fairuz went back on stage in a wounded Beirut, finally reunited with the Lebanese public that has never ceased to cherish her. Her last public appearance was at the funeral of her son, composer Ziad Rahbani, whose recent passing marked the end of an era that had bound their names together in Lebanon's cultural memory.

ALONE ON STAGE

This space presents Oum Kalthoum, Fairuz, and Warda in concert. The talent of the three singers can be measured by the quality of their stage performances. Genius performers of exceptional charisma, they are able to lead a crowd to tarab. To understand the meaning of this term, one must pay attention to the singer's performance who, through repetition, variation of the same sentence, and creativity in her improvisation gets close to musical ecstasy. Oum Kalthoum is the greatest representant of this phenomenon. She herself would enter a sort of trance that would sometimes provoke intense reactions in people, some of them even throwing themselves at her feet. The Oum Kalthoum concert presented here was directed by Youssef Chahine in 1969, the only filmmaker to ever shoot the diva in colors. These never-seen-before images were re-edited especially for the exhibition with their original soundtrack.

ACTRESSES WHO CAN SING A TUNE

The 1940s bear witness to the rise of Egyptian cinema marked by the success of Misr Studio, which was created in 1935 by the economist Talaat Harb. Without any rival, Egyptian cinematography, Nilwood, swarmed the Arab cinema market. With almost 225 musicals between 1945 and 1965, this is the golden age of musicals. Egyptian cinema is, before anything else, singing and dancing! Films are looking to entertain the public: the scripts are simple and serve the musical episodes. Characters love, fight and reconcile. This fructuous enterprise put exceptional actresses, singers and dancers under the spotlight. Samia Gamal and Tahiyqa Kariokka popularized the oriental dance. Laila Mourad and Sabah excelled in the field of singing. Hind Rostom, Souad Hosni, Faten Hamama and many others shone onscreen, whether it be in musicals or melodramas. Dalida also got discovered thanks to Egyptian cinema, before flying out to France. Cinema was also a political project, that exported an Egyptian social model to the entire Arab world. While musicals were omnipresent and offered mainstream roles, the filmmakers of Egyptian Realism will also count on these exceptional actresses to film their masterpieces.

INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

These artists have imposed without necessarily planning to, an aesthetic where the woman's image on the big screen is a veritable revolution in and of itself: glamorous, sensual, ingenious or whimsical... the iconography has nothing to envy to American tabloids. Evolving in a bourgeois and cosmopolitan environment, these women incarnated a certain freedom in their careers and in their lives. The star system and the immense passion the public dedicated to these women for decades mustn't hide the sometimes-harsh consequences of their public exhibition. Behind the lights and the glitter, all have revealed issues tied to their lifestyle choices and the moral judgment that some did not hesitate to express.

SABAH (1927-2014)



Of Lebanese origins, Sabah is one of the greatest singers and actresses of "the golden age" of Egyptian cinema. She appeared in over a hundred films and sung over 3500 songs. She played in films alongside famous actors and musicians such as Farid al-Atrache, Abdel Halim Hafez, Farid Chawki and Rouchdi Abaza. In the 1960s, the Rahbani brothers wrote several musicals for her that will become the highlights of the Baalbek festival. Sabah also turned towards cabarets and recorded her single "Allô Beyrouth" which will become the most seen clip on the scoptoners of Paris' Arab cafés, hence contributing to the spread of Lebanese music throughout the world. Extremely popular, she is also one of the first Arab artists to play at

the Carnegie Hall in New York, at the Olympia of Paris and the Sydney Opera. Her smile, her golden locks, her sparkling look and her whimsical dresses turned her into an icon of the Arab world, whose generosity still lives in the heart of the Lebanese people. Many of her unforgettable looks were created by Lebanese designers Papou Lahoud and William Khoury, whose dresses are included in the Nilwood section of this exhibition.

HIND ROSTOUM (1931 - 2011)



Dubbed "The Marilyn of the East", she is known as one of the most beautiful women in the Arab world and one of its greatest actresses. She shot her first film when she was sixteen, *Flowers and Thorns* (1947), but had to wait until 1955 to land her first lead role in *Girls of the Night*. A dancer and an actress of hypnotic beauty, she worked with the greatest directors and incarnated in 1958 the unforgettable Hanuma in Youssef Chahine's Cairo Station. This exceptional actress was also a woman with character. From the pin-up to the lover, the mother to the devout, Hind Rostoum played several roles and incarnated different sides of femininity. Comfortable with vaudeville and melodrama alike, she liked to put

forward the range of her acting but it's as a great seductress that she continues to shine in the hearts of Arab cinema's lovers.

SAMIA GAMAL (1924-1994)



She began her career in 1935, in Badia Massabni's dance company. She quickly became a solo dancer and excelled in the field of oriental sharqi dance, contributing to the popularization of the genre. Her particular style blended influences from Hollywood, South America, and classical ballet. She formed a mythical couple, on screen and in real life, with singer Farid al-Atrach and filmed her greatest successes with him between 1944 and 1949. Her dance numbers in Madame La Diablesse(1949) by Henri Barakat still bear witness to her great technical mastery. After their separation, she launched a tour in the United States and definitely retired from cinema in 1972.

FATEN HAMAMA (1931-2015)



Beloved by the public, she is an icon of Egyptian cinema that she graced with her talent for half a century. She began her career at the age of seven and appeared in over fifty-seven films, until 1993. She acted for the greatest Egyptian filmmakers such as Ezzedine Zoul-Fikar, Henri Barakat and Youssef Chahine. Able to interpret any role, she appeared in popular melodramas, musicals and realist, political films. She met actor Omar Sharif thanks to Youssef Chahine who reunited them in 1954 for *Hellish Sky*. They would go on to live a passionate love story and remain one of the most legendary couples of Egyptian Cinema.

LAILA MOURAD (1918-1995)



She started her career when she was fifteen years old. A singer with a wonderful voice, she was spotted by composer Mohammed Abdel Wahab who chose her in 1938 for his film Viva Love! Her photogenic beauty seduced the greatest of filmmakers. Togo Misrahi offered her the role of Laila that she interpreted in the eponymous series of films between 1940 and 1947. She then became the essential actress of musicals. In 1945, she married the filmmaker Anwar Wagdi and converted to Islam. This tumultuous relationship will be marked by three divorces and crowned four of the actress's greatest films including *Young Girls' Flirts* in 1949. Under the nationalist regime of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, her Jewish origins compromised her career.

Despite her great popularity, Laila Mourad decided to retire from the stage in 1949. She remains to this day one of the most beloved actresses of Egyptian cinema.

SOUAD HOSNI (1942-2001)



Emblematic actress of Egyptian cinema, she is known as the "Cinderella of Arabic screens". She began her career at the age of fifteen in a musical comedy by Henri Barakat called *Hassan and Naima* (1959) then appeared in seventy-five films, going from comedy to crime films and melodramas. This mischievous and smiling brunette came to perfectly incarnate the dreamed youth of the 1970s. She became famous in the entire Arab world thanks to *Beware of Zouzou* (1972). This musical remained in the cinemas for over one year. She also is the icon of Egyptian Realism with two great roles in *Cairo 1930* (1966) and *The Second Wife* (1967) by director Salah

Abou Seif. This eternal romantic will get married five times. Her tragic death in 2001 during her exile in London continue to fuel her legend.

TAHEYYA KARIOKKA (1915-1999)



A legend of Egyptian oriental dance, she began her career in Cairo in Badia Masabni's cabaret after having fled from her family at age twelve. There, she quickly became a solo dancer. She introduced rhythms from Latin America to her performances, notably the carioca (samba). That's how she found her stage name. A dancer and an actress, she acted in more than a hundred and twenty films. She often played the roles of seductive women. A confirmed actress, she appeared at the summum of her art in *The Leech*, presented in 1956 at the International Film Festival of Cannes. She finally put an end to her dancing career in 1963 in order to direct her own theatre company. Her dance, characterized by a slow sensuality made her famous; her beauty and volcanic character made her legendary. She married fourteen times and in 1953, was arrested and imprisoned three months for her communist activities.

DALIDA (1933-1987)



Iolanda Gigliotti was born to an Italian family in Cairo. In 1954, she won the Miss Egypt contest. This title opened the doors of Egyptian cinema for her. That same year, she played a vamp in the film *A Glass, a Cigarette* then *Femme Fatale* in *The Mask of Tutankhamun, the Gold of the Nile*. She then left for Paris where she began a career in singing. It's basked in glory that the international star covered an Egyptian folk song in 1977, "Salma Ya Salama". Its success in France and the Middle-East was staggering. Her second recorded single "Helwa Ya Baladi" was met with similar enthusiasm. Dalida's cinematographic dream will have to wait 32 years before coming

to fruition, and Egypt will be the one to offer it. The great Egyptian filmmaker Youssef Chahine chose her to be the heroine of the heartbreaking film *The Sixth Day* (1986). In Arabic, she played Saddika, a laundress, which was an unexpected opportunity to break with her glamorous singer persona.

CONTEMPORARY SECTION

In this section, we have included Lebanese and regional artists to highlight the lasting influence of the divas. *Works such as The Three Disappearances of Souad Hosni* by Lebanese director Rania Stephan, alongside Chant Avedissian, Lamia Ziadeh, Mohamed Abdouni, Shiran Neshat, and Fouad El Khoury, collectively reflect the lasting impact and inspiration left by these timeless divas.

THE 1970S: THE END OF A “GOLDEN AGE”

Egypt's defeat to Israel in 1967 followed by the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1970 mark the decline of the pan-Arab dream. The economic crisis that came after the two oil shocks (1973 and 1979), the Lebanese war (1975-1990) and the rise of a religious conservative movement also mark an important turn in the political, societal and artistic history of the Arab world. The cultural preeminence of Egypt and Lebanon was disrupted, while Gulf monarchies began to rise. From an artistic viewpoint, musicals disappeared and the great representants of Arabic music such as Oum Kalthoum or Mohammed Abdel Wahab passed away. The closing of many cinemas in Cairo and Alexandria symbolizes the end of Egyptian cinema's "golden age".

THE LEGACY OF DIVAS

The great divas of the 1930s-1970s have enriched the musical and cinematographic heritage of Arab countries. Their legacy has been present for many years in visual arts, music, literature and cinema. Contemporary art has shown an interest for the aesthetic universe of the 1940s-1960s. The "golden age" films of Egyptian cinema were often riddled with kisses and sensual oriental dance scenes, leading the artists to question the evolution of women's role in society. In their works, they do not only translate a feeling of nostalgia towards this era but also refer to it in order to question contemporary society. Divas are sometimes erected as icons and become symbols of women's emancipation. This era is also sometimes subject to criticism by artists that see in it a certain tendency to the instrumentalization of women's bodies in musicals. For several years now, DJs and beatmakers have been sampling or remixing certain musical excerpts from this "golden age". Heritage is the basis of a common identity and culture, transmitted from generation to generation. Divas then benefit from a new fandom and their songs are listened to in the nightclubs of Cairo, Beirut, Casablanca or Paris. While some musicians recognize that they grew up listening to this music, they also renew its style by exploring new registers and asserting themselves in the international musical scene. This legacy lives on also through fashion designers such as Elie Saab who filmed a tribute to the divas exhibited here, affirming their continuous presence in the fashion world.