



ISAAC FANOUS (1919 – 2007) - FATHER OF NEO-COPTIC ICONOGRAPHY

On Sunday 14 January 2007, Egypt lost the renowned iconographer Isaac Fanous. Born in Cairo in 1919, Fanous almost single handedly resurrected the sacred art of the Copts in the 20th century. This earned him the name "Father of Neo-Coptic Iconography".

Isaac Fanous started his career as an architect. His passion for art soon led him to enrol in the Faculty of Arts (Cairo) where he studied sculpture. A turning point in his career as an artist was the opportunity in 1966 to study icons and icon restoration at the Ecole du Louvre (Paris, France). Under the tutelage of the distinguished Russian iconographer and iconologist Leonid Ouspensky he was imbued with a passion as an artist and a theologian. In 1954, when the Department of Coptic Art was established in the Coptic Orthodox Higher Institute of Coptic Studies (Abassiya), Isaac Fanous was at first appointed Instructor and later Professor and Head of the department, a position he held until his passing. His obituary aptly reflects his perception of his life's works as a ministry:

"Neither count my life unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and a ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the Grace of God."

Isaac Fanous' contemporary school of iconography came about as part of the general renaissance of Coptic culture which began during the Patriarchate of H.H. Pope Kyrillos VI (1959-1971). It was however, when he was studying the artefacts in the Coptic Museum of Cairo and the Egyptian Museum that he recognized a strong sense of continuity in artistic expression. Thenceforth he sought to create a modern concept of iconography which attempted a fusion of Pharaonic, early Christian and 18th and 19th century Coptic imagery, as well as Post-Byzantine iconography. This was to become a new "face" of Coptic iconography.

The series of icons of St. Mary and the Divine Child he wrote over several decades illustrated here are a reflection of Dr. Isaac's creative and transformative journey. For example, the 1958 icon is reminiscent of early Coptic folkloric art. Increasingly he used sharp vertical lines similar to ancient Egyptian murals and their two dimensional figures. The large dark eyes are a hallmark of early Coptic art. Each gesture in Coptic icons has a precise significance related to our Church's tradition, dogma and/or the Holy Bible.

With his right hand Our Lord is depicted as giving His blessing and with His left hand he is holding the scroll or the Bible. The 1977 and 1988 icons are recognized as prototypes of the one St. Luke is purported to have painted and known as the Hodegetria or "She who shows '... the Way, the Truth and the Life' ". (John 14:6) – by her right hand's gesture the Theotokos is "presenting" to us Our Lord.

St. Mark's Coptic Museum is blessed to have in its collection six of Dr. Fanous' icons dating 1964. The icons were specially commissioned by His Grace the late Bishop Samuel, Bishopric of Public, Social and Ecumenical Services for St. Mark's Church in Toronto. A visit to the Museum will offer many more insights about Isaac Fanous' Neo-Coptic school of iconography.

Isaac Fanous' legacy to Coptic art is not solely confined to the spiritual beauty of his works but in his dedication of training an entire new generation of Coptic iconographers. He is noted to have urged his students that the artist must adapt the values of the past to create a *living* art. They must go forward, create and not imitate him. This is indeed the challenge of Dr. Fanous' legacy.



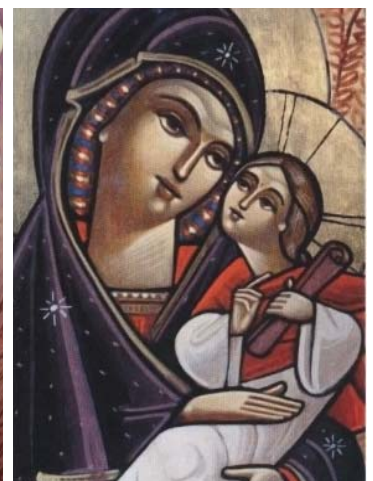
St. Mary and The Divine Child -1958



St. Mary and The Divine Child -1977



St. Mary and The Divine Child -1988



St. Mary and The Divine Child -1998

DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS

Gracy Saeed, is one of the Museum's dedicated team of volunteers.

Over the years, Gracy has helped us photograph our artefacts for the inventory, she now serves as a Museum Interpreter and regularly updates the Museum's email list serve. She has also promoted our Museum to groups outside our Church.



*The Museum is always in need of helping hands, minds and hearts. We have, for example, two interesting research projects for 12th grade or University students. If you would like to serve as volunteer, or have suggestions for future newsletters, please write us at:
stmarkmuseum@yahoo.com*

“The Museum at St. Mark’s Church means a lot to me. It has helped me grow into becoming who I am today as a Copt in particular. One would never get bored looking at what the Museum has to offer, even if it means visiting more than once. I learn something new every time I serve as a Guide/Interpreter. It’s like stepping into a GIANT history book and encountering things as if I was there at the time. Although everything in the Museum is beautiful, my favourite are the traditional and really old artefacts and

art pieces. I like seeing the impact they have made on our history and who we are today. Everything in the Museum is so precious, not only in value but because it makes me proud as a Copt and specially to present to visitors so many things that represent who I am. I believe that as a part of the youth congregation, it is our responsibility to start taking control and work to keep the tradition and the value of our Church alive so that the next generation will be able to learn about this complex, yet beautiful culture.”*Gracy Saeed* said.

**DON'T MISS THE
COPTIC FESTIVAL
AT ST. MARK'S COPTIC
ORTHODOX CHURCH**

**SEPTEMBER
7, 8 & 9**

**THE MUSEUM WILL BE
OPEN THROUGHOUT
THE FESTIVAL!**

Activities Highlights

- ∂ On February 2, 2007, the *Lovers for Coptic Heritage Society* in Cairo awarded Father Marcos and Helene Moussa a certificate in recognition of their “outstanding work in the field of Coptic Heritage.”
- ∂ Helene Moussa attended the 13th conference of the *Association francophone de coptologie* in Marseille, France, June 6-9, 2007 at which time she was also formally accepted as a member of this organisation. Twenty-nine Coptologists from different European countries and Australia, Canada and Egypt, including four Copts, presented their most current research on a wide range of topics.
- ∂ On June 17, the Museum received a group of twenty members of the First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ontario. Jack Rizkalla, Museum Interpreter, received them and was applauded enthusiastically at the end of the one hour Museum tour.
- ∂ On June 20, a team of Museum Interpreters received visitors who attended the Outreach programme organised by St. Mark's Church.
- ∂ On June 21 Helene Moussa was invited to speak to the faculty and students of the Near and Middle East Institute of Christian Art, Leiden University, The Netherlands. Her talk was on our Museum and on Marguerite Nakhla and the folkloric movement of Egyptian artists in the early 20th century. The Institute offered several valuable publications on Coptic art for our Museum's Reference Library.
- ∂ On July 21, the Museum organised its bi-annual programme and visit to the Museum for the Seniors Group at St. Mark's Church. Mrs. Nehal Azmy, Museum Interpreter, gave a presentation on the Museum and on Dr. Isaac Fanous' legacy before taking the seniors on a tour of the Museum.