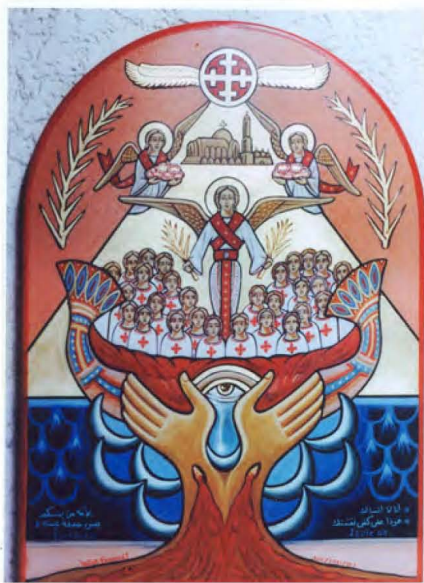




Newest Museum Acquisition "Martyrs of Maspero" (2011) by Victor Fakhoury



The Museum's most recent acquisition combines three of several criteria considered in the selection of the Museum's collection and responds to the Museum's motto "Coptic Art – A Living Tradition."

A theme or work of historical and cultural value

The Martyrs of Maspero, now in St. Mark's Coptic Museum, is the second in a series of five narrative icons in which Victor Fakhoury has sought to record the events that affected the Church in Egypt following the popular uprisings unleashed by the 25 January 2011 revolution.

In The Martyrs of Maspero, Victor Fakhoury conveys his deep shock — a feeling shared by all Egyptians, Christian and Muslim alike — at the violence directed toward Christian demonstrators when twenty-eight of them were crushed by military and security forces tanks on 9 October 2011. On this day, several thousand devout Christians were peacefully demonstrating in front of the Egyptian state television and radio station in the Maspero district, Cairo. They were expressing their anger at the attacks on Christians in different parts of Cairo, the Delta area, and in Upper Egypt; the burning and destruction of churches; as well as the massacre of dozens of victims during these attacks. The anger of the demonstrators was especially directed towards the inaction of officials toward the perpetrators of this violence.

Originality of theme and representation

Fakhoury's series of five icons is an innovation that totally departs from classical iconography in that it narrates a sequence of contemporary events in the life of the Coptic Church, beginning with the so-called Arab Spring and the 25 January 2011 revolution in Egypt.

In The Martyrs of Maspero, Victor Fakhoury presents the martyrs at the centre of the scene, held in the hands of God. All twenty-eight of them, dressed in white tunics with a red cross on the chest, are in a typically Pharaonic-style boat.

This icon is particularly striking because it is replete with ancient Egyptian imagery as a way of emphasizing the historical roots of Egyptian Christianity. While there are many layers of spiritual and cultural interpretation to this icon, Fakhoury however inscribes on it two biblical passages that explain the main thrust of his spiritual message:

- The hands of God as depicted on the icon here refer to Isaiah 49:16: "See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands."
- Zachariah 2:8 is the biblical reference for the tears emanating from the eye of God: "For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'He sent me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye.'"

Show-casing contemporary Coptic art and artists

Because ancient artefacts may not always be accompanied with information about the artist, St. Mark's Museum makes a special effort to record information about contemporary artists in its collection and their perspective on their art. Briefly, Victor Fakhoury was born in Cairo in 1960. He graduated with a bachelor of arts in classics from Ain Shams University in Cairo (1983) and a diploma from the faculty of fine arts (painting department) at Helwan University (1993). In 1996, he graduated with a master's degree in Coptic art (drawing, sculpture, painting, iconography) from the Higher Institute of Coptic Studies, in Cairo. He worked several years under the tutelage of Dr. Isaac Fanous. Victor Fakhoury has exhibited his works extensively in Egypt and in Belgium, Germany and France.

At the same time as Fakhoury is loyal to Coptic traditional iconography's two-dimensional representations, intensity of colours, stylized lines, oval-shaped faces, black lines surrounding almond-shaped eyes, and the use of gold leaf to evoke the Divine Light, he is also a contemporary Coptic artist, influenced by modern movements, such as cubist and abstract art. Above all, his art recalls the imagery of his ancient Egyptian artistic heritage. He incorporates ancient representation with traditional Coptic themes — The Martyrs of Maspero the representations and themes are rebirth and renewal. In this way, ancient Egyptian artistic heritage "nourishes" contemporary art and is not just used for decorative purposes.

To fully appreciate the artistic rendition of this icon requires a special visit to the Museum!

COPTIC STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



Fady Anees and Mary Shehata members of the executive of the U of T St. George and Scarborough campus Coptic student organizations have taken the initiative to participate in the U of T endowment campaign to raise funds for a permanent position in Coptic Studies which will enable students to earn a degree in Coptic Studies. One of the associations' planned activities is to seek the support of U of T Alumni — on December 21 and January 4 they were gathering names of alumni and interested members at St. Mark's Coptic Church.

H.H. Pope Tawadros II statement (translation below) at the General Meeting for Sunday School and Youth Group Counselors September 14, 2014 (Mississauga) in response to a question on the importance of learning Coptic language is certainly a stimulus for action:

“Since our heritage has been originally documented in Coptic, it is important for us to learn the Coptic language, if only the basics, in order to preserve our heritage. Coptic language is so important that many universities offer courses in Coptic Studies and establish [permanent] teaching positions and a Chair. An example of this is right here in Toronto, at the University of Toronto where you have these programs. This is very important.”

Free Public lecture:

When: Thursday March 12, 2015 from 12.00 to 1.30pm

Where: Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations (NMC), Rm 214
4 Bancroft Avenue, Toronto

Lecturer: Professor Ariel Shisha-Halevy from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, eminent scholar in Coptic Language and particularly on Coptic grammar.
Lecture topic: “The Epic of Coptic Linguistics: a Brief Personal View” will cover some descriptive, biographical and historical highlights of this ‘extraordinary’ language, in its two major aspects: the “latest Egyptian” Phase and as a special language type.
See Professor Shisha-Halevy's CV with publications:
http://ling.huji.ac.il?ariel_shisha-halevy

Canadian Society for Coptic Studies (CSCS) Eight Annual Coptic Studies Symposium

is scheduled for Saturday April 18, 2015 at the University of Toronto St. George Campus. Scholars in Coptic and Ethiopian Studies will present topics linking Ethiopian Christianity to Coptic Christianity. Papers will be in the following areas of research: church history; monasticism; literature; liturgy; translations; architecture; archaeology and art history.

The convenors of the symposium are Dr. Ramez Boutros, Lecturer, NMC, U of T & President of the CSCS and Professor Michael Gervers's, Professor of History, Department of Historical and Cultural Studies at U of T Scarborough, who has had long-term involvement in Ethiopian Studies.