



## Isaac Fanous (1919-2007)

### Father of Neo-Coptic Iconography

Fanous almost single handedly resurrected the sacred art of Coptic icons in the 20<sup>th</sup> century which earned him the name “Father of Neo-Coptic Iconography”.

He started his career as an architect. In 1940 his passion for art led him to study sculpture at the Institute of Applied Arts (Cairo) followed by studies at the Art Education Institute (Cairo). In 1954, when the Department of Coptic Art was established in the Coptic Orthodox Higher Institute of Coptic Studies (Cairo), Fanous was at first appointed Instructor

and later Professor and Head of the department, a position he held until his passing.

A turning point in Fanous’ career as an artist was the opportunity in 1965 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, Fanous was imbued with a passion as an artist and a theologian. 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. Thereafter he sought to create a modern concept of iconography which attempted a fusion of Pharaonic, early Christian and 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Coptic icons, and Post Byzantine iconography with Coptic spirituality. This was to become a new “face” of Coptic iconography.

Isaac Fanous’ legacy to Coptic art is not solely confined to the spiritual beauty of his works but also to his dedication to train 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.



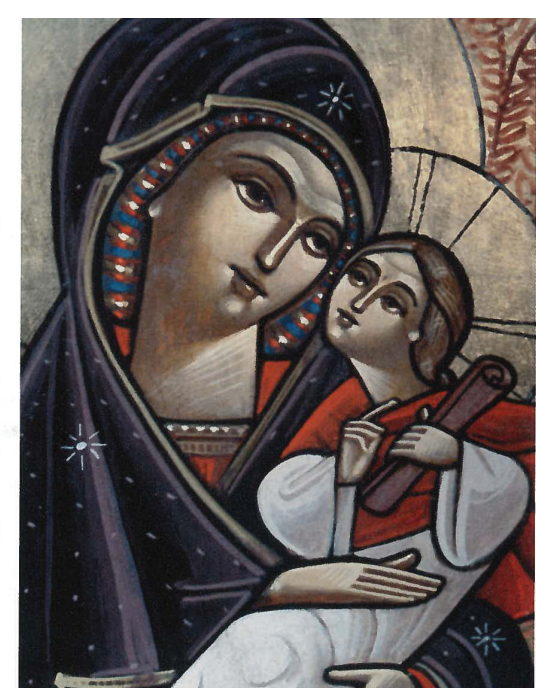
1958



1977



1980



1998

This series of icons of The Theotokos and The Divine Child Fanous wrote over several decades is a reflection of his creative and transformative journey. For example, the 1958 icon is reminiscent of early Coptic 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.