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The Governmental Efforts in Emphasising Identity through Art Projects

“Siwa Oasis studios as a case study”

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Abstract

Within each culture, the multi-source origins play an essential role to form its distinct moral and aesthetic values which emphasize the cultural identity. These values were accumulated through ages. That's why, every single cultural tributary should be traced, to demonstrate the extent of its impact on specific city identity formation.

The Egyptian government pays due attention to Siwa Oasis because of its special historical and cultural characteristics. It happens in co-operation with one of the Culture Ministry sectors "the General organization for Cultural Palaces", that adopted the idea of reviving the project of city studios. Such initiative has been established before at the city of Luxor. For example, a financial and logistic support was provided for the initiative in a similar context.

From this standingpoint, this paper provides a historical study about Siwa Oasis since its inception at the Ancient Egyptian era and through the Greco-roman, the Coptic-Islamic era, and the Arab influences till now. Also, I will review the Siwa studios grant: procedures, different sessions and the most interesting aspect of it which is the exhibitions.

The historical and cultural overview will include: the Significant monuments in the city, location and environment, population and their language, traditions, and custom, and finally, the Siwa Oasis features nowadays.

Reviewing the project stages will include: how to apply? On what bases the participants was chosen? Also, information about the time schedule, the site-visits, etc. Finally, I will analyze some artworks from 2009 till now in order to emphasize the importance of such activity on the cultural map.

1. Introduction

What is the significance of the Siwa Studios grant, as stated in the word of Mohammed Saber Arab, former Minister of Culture, in the exhibition catalog of session 2014? He stated that "It is in moment, like this, where people fighting against time to survive the heritage from the fever of redrawing the geography and re-writing the history."¹(Exhibition catalogue:2014) The only way to counter the downsides of globalization and the dominance of oriented cultural invasion is to adhere to identity and to preserve the heritage generally, whether morally or physically. Thus, the Ministry of Culture, represented in the General Organizations for the Cultural Palaces / Exhibition and Studios Department affiliated with the General Department of Fine Arts and

Environmental Crafts. The ministry initiated its events by launching the activities of Siwa Studios in 2008 after the demolition of Luxor Studios, it relocated the activity to Marsa Matrouh governorate. That is considered as one of the most important activities of the ministry which emphasizes on preserving the Egyptian cultural heritage with its local diversified characteristics. Most importantly, all of which is united in one historical origin since Ancient Egyptian, pre-dynastic era.

Western Sahara depressions in general and Siwa Oasis, in particular, are characterized by its various cultural features where Ancient Egyptian culture, the culture of Central Africa and the Arabian culture with their multi tributaries are melted. The choice of Siwa Oasis as permanent headquarters for the continuation of such events stem out from several reasons reflected in the importance of the oasis and its history and charm nature that represent constant inspiration source in all areas of the arts. For example, it's "The Sunset Oasis" as named by the great novelist Bahaa Taher in his novel that was awarded the International Prize for Arabic Novels 2008 (Taher:2008). To the north and near Marsa Matrouh city on the border between Egypt and Libya, "Sidi Barrani" is a city that was chosen by the writer Mohamed Salah al-Azab to be the place where events of his novel in 2010 revolve around. The reality in the novel is blended with fiction, myth with history and the city with the Sahara. The novel has the same name of the city " Sidi Barani " (Al-Azab:2010).

The desert environment, or rather the extreme local environments has been always an inspiration for Fine artists over history. This paper addresses, First; life in and around the oasis and similar environments in terms of history, and the most important impacts throughout the ages, the customs and traditions of its inhabitants, and their daily life aspects. Second; it is to monitor their impact on the participating artists in the grant as a source of inspiration and creativity in Fine arts. However, the participation in the grant provides an opportunity for the artists of different fields to have such unique experience. This is considered as a promising opportunity for plastic artists to enrich their visual memories with its topographical, architectural and botanical characters as well as its diverse relationship. For example, the contrast of bright sunlight reflected on the silver sand surface and the gloomy darkness of the desert in contradiction with the lunar nights. Artists will experience different scenes of the oasis during the visit, and their memory will be enriched by the details of its sophisticated aspects, which constitute a selective memory to transmit and translate those scenes to color relationships, spaces and lines in a various artistic works. Each of which carries aesthetic values derived from the rich nature of the oasis to produce differentiation in artistic works according to artists differences.

2. Research problem:

1. Have the government efforts, represented in the ministry of Culture projects (Studios), managed to preserve the cultural heritage and emphasize the Egyptian identity?
2. Was it successful choice to designate Siwa city as the headquarters of the event?
3. Are the artistic works in the consecutive project sessions since 2008 contributing to providing a comprehensive picture of the oasis and helping in emphasizing its identity?
4. Is there any integration between the different roles of the governmental agencies to preserve the heritage of the oasis and its identity?

Research Objectives:

1. Introduce Siwa Oasis through the various cultural stages and its moral and physical heritage.
2. Monitor the steps of applying to Siwa studios grant, its procedures, and classification of artistic works in various sessions.
3. Analyze samples of artistic works in different sessions.
4. Conclude new recommendations to develop the idea of the project and ensure better achievement of desired goals.

Research hypotheses:

1. The success of governmental efforts to emphasize identity in the Egyptian cities, Siwa Oasis as a case study.
2. The sufficiency of all steps of the project procedure and its role in the success of the idea of the project.

Research Methodology:

The historical method / Descriptive and analytical approach.

The first point: Siwa Oasis over different cultural stages and its moral and material heritage

1. Location

Siwa Oasis Located in Egypt's Western Sahara, fig.1, 300 KM South from Marsa Matrouh City and to which is affiliated administratively, it's considered the Western gateway of Egypt. The importance of the location is stemmed out from its proximity to the Egyptian-Libyan border. Approximately, it is 65 kilometers away and it is considered as a natural extension of the Oasis Jaghbub, 820 kilometers far from the southwest of Cairo. "In 2002 a governmental decree was issued to transfer 7800 kilometers of lands inside the Oasis and its surrounding lands into a natural reserve."⁴ (Nofal:2014) A lower surface level in the oasis is up to 18 meters below the sea level in some places and the height of the highest level in the surrounding plateau is 240 meters above the sea level. It has been stated among the most 9 isolated places on earth in some studies. In the ancient history, the location has been always a strategic and important site in the old trade routes across the Sahara. Some small oases and depressions located at different distances from Siwa oasis and the affiliated areas with it, for example fig.2 :

"Gerbet", "Shayata", "Um Ayisha", "Al Malfi", "Al Grag", "Bahrain", "Noamesah", "Setra" and depressions like : "Tamirh", "Tabaghbagh" and "Al Jarah"⁵(Aldumery:2016) .

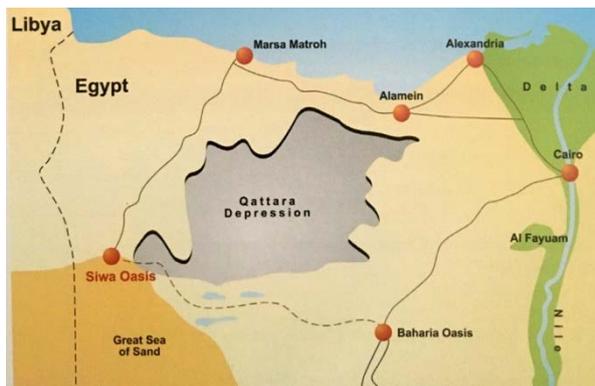


Fig.1, Siwa Oasis Map

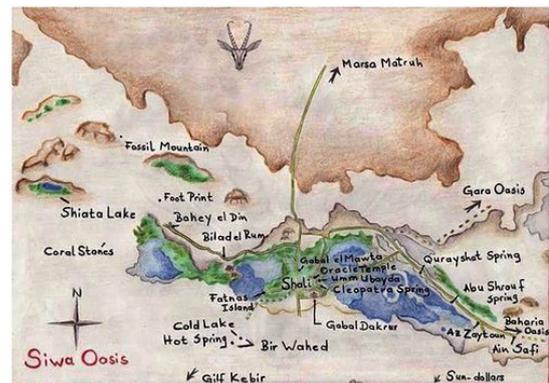


Illustration of small oases and depressions affiliated to Siwa Oasis

2. Origin of the name-etymology

Siwa was given many names such as Pnta or Tha, this name was found in written texts in Edfu temple, "a famous text of the seven oases"⁶(Fakhry:1993) that demonstrate delegates from North and South oases offering sacrifices and gifts for Pharaoh kings. Later, the oasis has been named after the oasis of Amon or country of Alamounian as stated by Herodotus 450 BC. That was the case until the reign of the Ptolemies and during the Roman rule, who named it the oasis of Jupiter Amon. Yacoubi "the historian" has referred to it as a tribe of barbarians "Suh" or "Zuo" in his book (countries), and Idrisi, the geographical, referred to it as "Centraih" in his book (Nozhat El-moshtaqe fi Ekhteraqe El-Aafaq). The same name was mentioned in Maqrizi plans, which he called in other places "Al Aqsa Oasis" means far away, and even Ibn-Khaldun referred to it as "Tesoh", a name of a branch of the Zenata tribes inhabiting North Africa.

3. Population and language

There are several archaeological evidence for the existence of human communities in prehistoric times, especially the Old Stone Age, and the primitive Ages. They were always trying to reach the valley to stabilize it, but the people of this remote region from the Nile Valley remained outside the boundaries of any territorial or central government until the fifteen century. BC ; " the era of New kingdom" (Aldumery:2016). The origin of those people were a mixture of Thnw tribes (often of African descent) and the tribes of Tmhw (often Indo-European descent). Both were tribes that inhabited the western Delta and Western Sahara in the ancient history. They have been mixed with Berber tribes "Amazigh" and the Libyans of the same origin of the Mediterranean people of the Nile Valley. The current population is considered as the natural extent to the population of the Western Sahara through Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco and Mauritania down to the shores of the Atlantic ocean in the west and sometimes mixing it with the tribes of Central Africa. At the mean time, the number of the oasis's inhabitants is 25 thousand people who are always boasting about their Arab roots as they were a mixture of several tribes that settled in the oasis and branched out into several tribes. After that, they bear similar names with Arab tribes across the Western Sahara of North Africa. The People also speak the Amazigh language with the local accent, it's the language of Berbers in North Africa, which is divided into several accents for each region, and among which there is the language of Siwa people known as the "Siwa" or "Tesiout". It is a verbal-unwritten\ oral language although there are some pictorial signs of it in the archaeological evidence.

4. Oasis history in different Ages

Historical evidences indicate the existence of organized communities in the Oasis since the primitive Ages. In a published report in Archeology Researches in Western Sahara magazine, about three main territory (Siwa- Al Jara- Alarj), Wahat Bahria, the line of west Delta Desert, there were evidences of Archeological Remains from Prehistoric times, especially the Modern Stone Age including a remaining of a Semi-Circular architecture Structure in "Shayatt" Oasis (Tassie:2009)

For Example, the First dynasty antiquities and the tombs of the kings of Oasis rulers of the Sixth Dynasty were discovered. Yet, there were no conclusive evidences that the Oasis was under control of ancient Egyptian rulers until the twenty-sixth family where king Ahmus II "Ip Ra" or "Amazis" built the inspiration Temple on Aghurmi rock that made the Siwa Oasis famous as one of the five major depressions in the Egyptian Western Sahara throughout history. Thanks to its temple which is known by its prophecies in the ancient world as one of the most important inspirational centers¹, especially after the realization of the prophecy about the end of the Persian army and its defeat. The Persians had invaded Egypt before and their rule was ended the twenty-sixth family.

In the year 331 BC, Alexander the Great visited the Temple of Amun as Siwa Oasis was the center for its worship (Zeus-Amun) who sent messengers to Alexander the Great to peacefully guide him on the road to the temple "Oracle temple". That story happened when Alexander lost his way in the desert, according to several sources. Alexander was welcomed by Amun priests who took him to the holy of Holies as he was revealed to be the son of "Zeus-Amun", and he was crowned as the king of Egypt and Greece and he was given the title of "Alexander of two horns", a metaphor for the (Amon, who took the ram horn as a sign). There are no proofs to believe that he was buried symbolically for temporary period in a cemetery in Siwa. Perhaps a commitment by the first Ptolemy to implement Alexander's will in terms of his relationship with the God Zeus-Amun in Siwa⁹(Darwish:2009). The God Amun took several names and forms in Western Sahara and Libya throughout history. Sometimes he's confused with the "Baal Hammon" ¹⁰(Aldumery2016) the Libyan God, he is "Amun-Ra the God of Thebes " in some sources or Amon - Zeus in the Trinity "Amun- Baramun- Libyan Hera" in other sources, as his worship has spread until building the temple in the reign of the twenty-sixth family BC. Therefore, the interest in the oasis increased in the era of the Ptolemy and Romans, the successors of Alexander the Great, and even some of them had carved their own tombs there at (mountain of the Dead) or (Gebel al Mawta).

The interest in the oasis Temple and its prophecies throughout ages decreased, and there is no events worth mentioning till the sixth century, when Constantine ordered the closure of all (pagan) temples in Egypt. Thus, Siwa and its temple disappeared from history except some references to it in the era of the Islamic rule of Musa bin Nusayr in the eighth century, in the eleventh century in the writings of Arab geographer Idrisi and in the Maqrizi of the fifteenth century, who mentioned that the inhabitants of the oasis were 600 persons². That brings us to Siwa manuscript. It stated that "forty men from seven families built the city of Shali -that means (the city) in Siwan language- in 1203 on a fortified site on the mountain. They surrounded it with a wall and one gate, and no buildings were allowed outside the wall. Later throughout ages, several gates were opened and they have built their homes on the cliff. The manuscript didn't mention any differences in the origin between these families, descents. By the time, they have splitted into two main tribes; Eastern and Western. They are mostly concentrated in the current Siwa city, which represents the Oasis Centre, and they formed a closed group working in agriculture, trade and receiving commercial convoys and pilgrims convoys. They do not mingle with the outside world except for a little and they form with each other semi-centralized government under the leadership of "Elders" (leaders of families) as mentioned in the records of European adventurers who visited the oasis.

The oasis has been conquered by Mohamed Ali soldiers in 1820, and its people were forced to pay taxes. They were subjected to the authority of the Basha as a strange appointed governor with his security forces to maintain order. History mentioned several wars and disturbances between tribes in the east and the west. Disciplinary delegates were sent to the Oasis by Khedive Abbas, Khedive Saeed and Khedive Ismail till the visit of Khedive Abbas II to the Oasis, who completed some land reclamation works and restored water springs in addition to providing help to the people of the town. All restoration works were stopped by the beginning of the First World War and by that time the Western Sahara, and the Siwa Oasis in particular, became the scene of conflicts and activities of El-Sanusi religious order,¹¹(Fakhry:1993). It was established by Al-Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali al-Sanusi, the founder and owner of the most important Islamic advocacy centers in the Western Sahara and Libya. Western tribes on the oasis converted to Sufism (Senussi); however, the eastern tribes embraced Sufi (Al-

¹ Many researchers believe that, the cult of Amon were scattered since the twenty-one Dynasty and a temple dedicated to Amun was there.

² A manuscript about the origin and history of the families of Siwa and some of its old rituals, and their history through ages, kept with one senior family there

Madenia). Both had made an alliance with the Turks against England and Italy till the end of the First World war. Thereafter, the Oasis had a period of tranquility and peace as a result of interest in it again, as well as reconstruction done by King Fouad. Then, things were back to deterioration during World War II. The Italians and Germans troops conquered the Oasis, where they have settled for several months, that forced people of the city to hide in the (Gebel Al Mawta).The economic situation was worsen until the war ended and once again the Oasis restored calmness during the reign of king Farouk. Political and economical stability continued till July revolution 1952 and the Oasis became affiliated dministratively to Marsa Matrouh governorate till now.

5. Customs and traditions

For decades, Siwa Oaisi remains an isolated place from the outside world. It is the fact that made its people strongly attached to each other and proud of their family affiliations. Customs and traditions of the Oasis people are much like all Bedouin communities habits. it's a significant conservative community, especially with regard to dealing with strangers. The Oasis was an important point in the trade routes across the desert (Forty Path), Therefore, its people, mainly the menm have necessary negotiation skills in buying and selling, and –thus- some flexibility, especially at the mean time. However, that flexibility vanishes when it comes to women. Until recently, it was forbidden to the Siwan women to go out of the house, and if allowed in emergency situation, this must be in the company of her father or her brother or her husband. "If a women is glimpsed by a visitor; it is usually as a black shadow slipping from house to house; there is little opportunity to observe the true beauty of the traditional costume of the oasis"¹²(Bilancetti:2012). Women cloths in Siwa are rharacterized by rich chromatography resulting from knitting and needle works and various motifs and symbols on black (Gelbab) fig.3. In addition to that, silver jewelry inlaid with precious stones such as (Al-Adrim and Al-Aghro) and big bracelets such as (Al-Damlag and Al-Dablag)¹³(Moanes:2006) where Clothes model and ornaments are expressing their marital status.fig.4. Men cloths, land owners, are characterized by robes, pants and belt, while labors wear shirts with wide sleeves up to the knee, a coat and turban. Oasis people is subjected to customary system based on Islamic law (Sharia) with a tribal background. Accordingly, society is split into a tribal sheikh , Al-Awaql (delegate for each family), members of the tribe and "Alzaqalh" (labors or servants who gained stature in the Siwi community over time). They have their own festivals and celebrations beside the traditional Islamic ones. The famous one what is known as "Al-Seiaha" and it takes place in October.



g.3, Example of embroidery women clothes and silver jewelry.



van women wearing the Trafottet.
by author

photo taken

6. The distinctive environmental elements in Siwa Oasis

Distinctive site of the Oasis and its history had a great impact on the formation of the daily life elements. Topography of the place, the nature of the plant and the animal life. The nature of the soil had affected the urban planning of the Oasis in different aspects. Architecture style, construction methods, activities of the population, the used tools and instruments led to change in the styles of furniture, clothing, jewelry, etc. It occurred because the different nature of the Oasis vary completely from the Nile Valley. "Its general outlook, the architecture of the houses, the clothes, the features of its inhabitants, their language, their attitude toward strangers and their way of life inside and outside their houses- all reminded us that we are no longer in Nile Valley"¹⁴(Bilancetti:2012).

Among the most important elements:

Natural Springs: there are approximately 220 Springs, water temperature in some of them reaches 50 °c. Circular Springs are often surrounded by constructed short wall of stones. Its real beauty appears in the reflection of sunlight on the surface of the blue oblique greenish waters due to the accumulation of algae on its walls as

well as a reflection of the tall palm trunks around it. The successive air bubbles continuously flow out of the warm water. The most famous one is (Juba) or " Ain El Shams" as described by Herodotus. Fig.5

Salty lakes: There are five salty lakes which were formed as a result of agricultural drainage and lower surface of the land. It's characterized by a high degree of salinity that does not allow the existence of sea life. Its sole economic value is limited in withdrawing the agricultural drainage water and the extraction of high-quality types of salts. lakes are located in the middle of the vast desert, surrounded by hills and carved tombs on the top of mountains. All of them formed an exquisite multi-colored scene during the daylight hours, as a result of sunlight reflections on a full of minerals water surface. The most famous one is "Shayatah". Fig.6



Fig.5A&B. Ein Wahid natural springs, Siwa oasis, photo taken by author

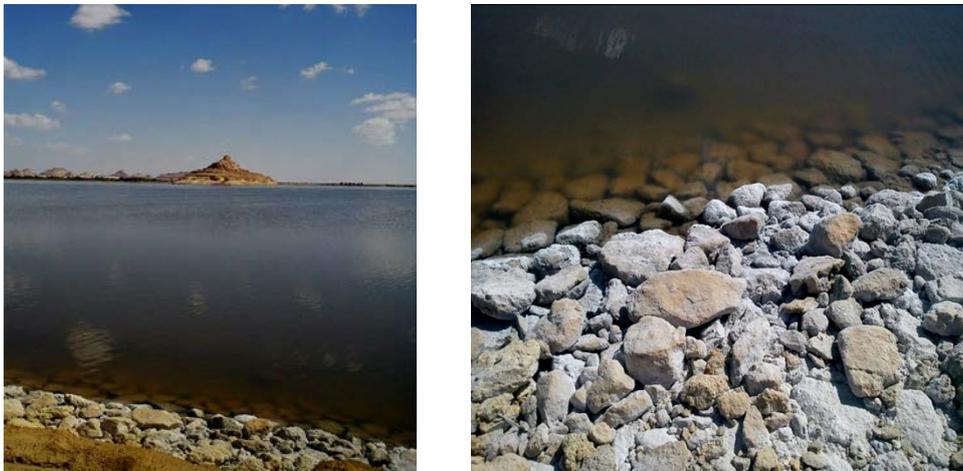


Fig.6A&B. Salty lake, Siwa oasis, Shayata, photo taken by author

- Hills and sand dune: They are surrounding the oasis from all direction, and they are characterized by the wildlife plants and animals. Antelope and some local birds exist in large numbers as well as migratory. Dunes have varied forms due to the wind, while small rocky hills were induced due to the erosion and the type of soil that is affected by its proximity to groundwater. The Great Sand Sea in south of Siwa which was an ocean in ancient times is considered one of the most important and most beautiful places in Siwa. There are scattered remnants of fossils, plants ,snails, fossilized coral reefs,15(Castellani:2009) fig.7 sediments of gravel and rocks as well as calcified salts.

- Palm and olive groves : Siwa known by its palm cultivation to produce dates of the finest types, dry and moisture, a Special festival is held for the main crop on October each year. Olive trees are classified into three distinct types and the finest olive oil is extracted from them. Also, there is an archaeological hand juicer that exists since 1920. The two crops are considered as basic income resources for the inhabitant of the Oasis. Belgrave said "One can imagine the magnificent ceremonies and the awe-inspiring rites which were solemnized among the shady vistas of the tall palm trees" .fig.8



Fig.7, Scattered remnants of fossils, Great sand sea.



Fig.8, Date palm groves.

7. important archaeological and modern sites

- **Shali Castle:** Shali means the city in Siwan language. It is located on a high plateau that include the remains of the old castle, some Greek and Romanian cemeteries, the ancient city gate and antique mosque that were constructed in the thirteenth century. They have used an environmental substance called "il-karsheef", fig.9A, which is a mixture of saturated salt,fig.9B, mud and soft sand, that when dries, it becomes similar to cement in its firmness,16(Centurini:2008). Moreover, they use palm trunks as columns and architraves. People had to abandons the city after heavy rains in 1926 - which rarely occurs – because it caused considerable damage and cracked the buildingsprompting the residents to flee the low surface of the plateau to build the new city. The one we see nowadays. It worthy of mentioning that the restoration process is ongoing to maintain many of them in collaboration with various cultural foreign organizations.fig.10

- **The Oracle Temple (Inspirations) :** According to the written texts in the sanctum, the history of the current existing building since the rule of Amasis II (Amaris twenty-sixth dynasty) is dedicated to the worship of Amun, as stated before. Although Some modifications and additions were made in later times17(Darwish:2009) , "Amasis II knew the importance of securing the western borders and built temples in Siwa, Baharia and Kharga where the Persian king Cambyses who sent an army to destroy it "18(Fakhri:2007)fig.11.



Fig.9A,(Il-Karsheef) B,(Natural salt) photo taken by author.



Fig.10, Shali Castle remains.

- **Umm Obeida Temple (Aghurmi) :** was built during the reign of (Nkhtanbo II) from the thirty dynasty who dedicated it to the worship of Amun and a cartouche of his name on the archaeological remains exists. Temple is located south to the Inspiration temple, the main gate on the same axis. It had been subjected to an earthquake in 1811 and then bombing in 1897 by Mahmoud Azmi commander of the border guards in Siwa in order to use its Stones for other modern buildings, which worsened its very bad condition now.fig.12

- Mountain of the Dead (Gebel El Mawta) : archaeological location back to the twenty-sixth dynasty and possibly earlier, encompasses the ancient tombs of Old Egyptian-style over the higher hill of its conical shape that lie outside Siwa city. It has been restored and opened to visit in the current era and includes the tombs of ancient Egyptian and Greeks and Ptolemy, Romans and was used by the people of the city to bury their dead until near times. Among the most important tombs (Niperpathot, Crocodile, Mesu-Isis, Si-Amun)19(Castellani:2009).fig.13

- Heritage Documentation Center and Siwan House: The governorate in collaboration with senior families in Siwa cooperated with the project "Siwa and Tangier:toward a better life"20(Aldumery:2012) where a model of Siwi house was built by its old method and materials and includes models of furniture, clothing, jewelry for different occasions and ornaments, it's considered as one of the most important projects that documenting the Siwi heritage. Also, it include the art studio.fig14.

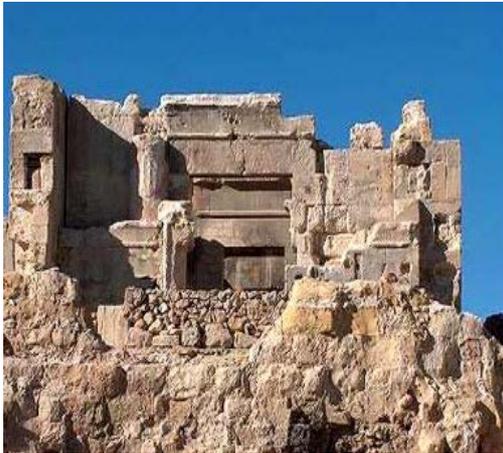


Fig.11, Temple of the Oracle of Amun.

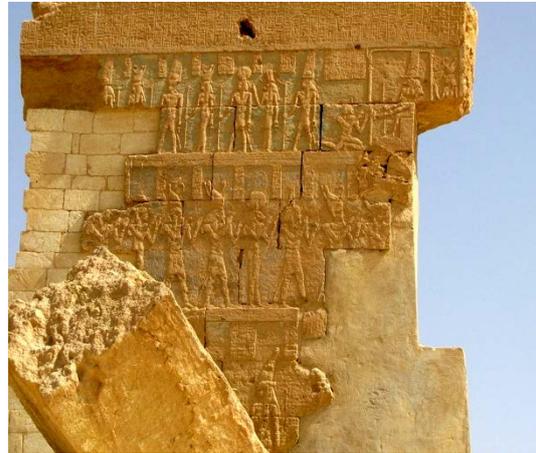


Fig.12, Last standing ruins at Umm Obeida Temple.

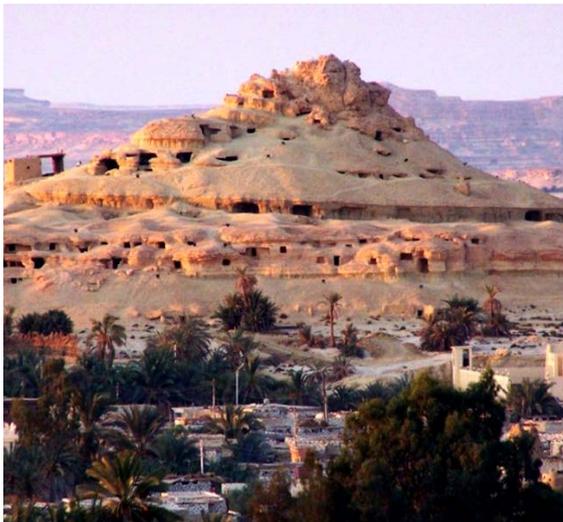


Fig.13, Gebel El Mawta.



Fig.14, Heritage Documentation Center and Siwan House.
Photo taken by author.

Second point : Grant of Siwa Studios and its procedure

1. Choosing Siwa as the headquarters of the grant

"Siwa Oasis" had been chosen as a headquarters for a new Ministry of Culture grant for Fine artists in 2008. It resembles Paris studios " (Hassan Fathy). It represents an extension or alternative to Luxor studio project which was demolished. Luxor studio has been established in 1942 by the Ministry of Education to provide an opportunity for plastic artists, Fine Art School Students and the talented and amature students (Liberal Studies Department) for two years full-time study grant with a monthly bonus in order to help them practicing artworking. Also, experiencing the archaeological sites, visits and cohabitate the local environment with it's rich and special vocabularies inspires the artists' visions during the stay there. It also nourish the visual memory with new vocabulary carrying different aesthetic values in themselves and in a harmony with the rest of the elements.

Furthermore, it will induce his feelings and imagination that he can use later whether directly or indirectly in his artwork.

Two apartments affiliated to Matrouh Governorate were allocated and furnished to be the residency of the artists during the grant which lasts for a week in the present, (the grant was 10 days in the first two years). A nearby place have been chosen to be used as a studio within "Heritage Documentation Center and Siwan House " for those artists who wish to complete their work during the grant. The landscape of the oasis as well as the archaeological sites dominate and impose all senses of both residents and visitors. The grant is intended to emphasize the affiliation of these unique sites in Egypt with artists, to develop the awareness and aesthetic sense of the recipient who attend these exhibitions and to promote the community and developing its ideas in general.

Supervisors of the grant, officials of culture Ministry and commissaries of exhibitions always stress on the role of artistic works of Siwa studio. It attempts to invest and market our cultural heritage locally and internationally in addition to its role in promoting tourism and supporting the external relationships. And, definitely, it highlights Siwa as a unique tourist destination.fig.15- fig.16.



, Distinctive scenes from Siwa Oasis old town ruins.



Fig.16, Siwa Oasis night Scene

2. Applied Procedures since inception

The officials of the activity in the General Department of Fine Arts and environmental crafts of specialists nominate the names of those artists who have participated in the art movement, through their tours in various exhibitions. Then, they communicate with them to introduce the idea of the grant and its conditions. They also request samples of their artworks to be presented to a specialized committee. This committee is annually formed by the department, combining officials from the Ministry of culture who have artistic expertise to choose the participants taking into consideration some selection criteria in all sessions. The criteria cover the following:

- To have candidates from different ages.
- To have candidates from different governorates.
- To have naive artists who did not receive an academic art education.

If the selection committee has chosen the ten male artists and ten female artists, the department starts to coordinate with them to determine an appropriate date for all participants. These procedures had been followed in the previous six years with the exception of 2016 session when the department added another procedure; establishing a page on Face book to advertise the grant.

3. Groups division

The groups are divided in two phases; one for female artists and the other one is for males. It takes place at a time between August and March of the next year, the period of a moderate weather at the oasis.

4. Terms of the grant

The ministry of culture bear all accommodation, subsistence and travel costs. Artists pledge to hand over, a minimum of one large size artwork or two of a small size, 60 * 60 cm at least, in a period not exceeding one month after the return.

5. Year of session, number of participants, gender and venues of exhibitions³ Fig.17

³ Session of Year 2011: Exhibition was postponed and then held in 2012 and Session of Year 2012 grant was cancelled due to instable security situation in Egypt after January Revolution.

Fig.17

Year of Session	Gender		Number of exhibition	Place of exhibition
	Male	Female		
2009	9	9	2	The exhibition was held twice, Marsa Matrouh Culture Palace / Salah Taher hall in the Egyptian Opera House.
2010	10	10	1	Nahdet Misr-Isis hall in Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum.
2011/12	10	10	1	Nahdet Misr-Isis Hall in Mahmoud Mokhtar Museum.
2013	10	10	1	Mahmoud Mokhtar Cultural Center.
2014	10	10	1	Mahmoud Mokhtar Cultural Center.
2015	10	10	1	Hanager Center for Arts.
2016	10	10	1	Hanager Center for Arts.

6. The Prizes

The Ministry of Culture present a Prize in the name of "Cleopatra Award" for Siwa studio only since 2013, it can be split equally awarded to two artists. Sometimes, the Ministry awards an honorary prize as well as a prize from private entities such as banks.

7. Grant Program

visiting the tourist and archaeological sites in oasis accompanied by a tour guide in coordination with one of the officials of culture ministry office there. There is no specific program as it goes with sole discretion of the participants⁴.

Third Analysis of artistic work samples in various Sessions

This paper proposes to describe and analyze some artistic works produced through the grant (two artworks from each session) and selected by the author. It also presents some introductory words of the artists in the selected exhibition catalog which reflects the extent of interaction between the artists and Siwa oasis. It unveils such experience, the impact and vulnerability that have occurred between the artists and the surrounding environment, artistically and morally.

- Ahmed Abdel Karim 2009 "Mountain of the Dead is symbolic and have signs of particular connotations in topology letters written by the time itself across ages. These symbols and signs are living organisms, that did not stand solid, but it had been new forms by wind and rain. They have nothing but to obey the companionship in its loneliness in day and night, which in very quiet way, calling from far and near "inspiration temple " ... we had moved through the soft sleepy sands, high in the cosmic vacuum horizon like beautiful women and dunes of desert, as a strong challenge to artists " Are you able to talk and paint me " ?

-Zainab Salem 2011/2012 "artist live among us but not like other human beings, he is capable to pause the time, recall the place, depicting the fantasy, touch the thoughts, raise emotions and takes us with him in the world of Art ".

-Reda Abdelrahman in 2013, "we have been keen as one group, 90% of which belongs to the contemporary Egyptian art movement to perform unconventional artworks and to transfer the Siwa current reality via its present features with its variables blending between past and present, I acknowledge that this journey is one of the most important artistic ones I've made in Egypt and abroad. "

-Heba Saleh in 2016 "based on the international writer Naguib Mahfouz, Globality is dumping in locality ... Siwa grant represents a resources investment of our beloved Egypt, rediscover and marketing attempt domestically and internationally."

-Artworks analysis:

Figure (18)

The artist presented a snapshot of the traditional internal architecture scene in the oasis, which is characterized by simplicity. She tried to imply the textures of different surfaces of natural building materials and eco-

⁴ An interview with artist Badawi Mabrouk, director of studios and exhibitions department at General Organizations for Cultural Palaces.

architecture. It's an abstract scene where the usual dust colors of walls are turned into hot colors, like the hottest desert. The relationship between shadow and light is turned into gradualness and harmony instead of contrast. It is the same contrast between wall's material and the wood trunks.

Figure (19)

Ahmed presented a surrealist scene where he blends the natural environmental elements inspired by olive groves, palms and human body (women). He drew her lower torso only, without intimation to any sensuality as she was sitting on a seat of palm fronds of a local model. It is seen as a tree in an inspiration and wonderful mix of mother goddess, Isis the donor of life, and an ordinary Siwan conservative woman who hides her face. He used hot colors in painting the interlocking plant branches that added warm and vivid sense in opposition to the static dimension of the atmosphere caused by stably seated woman.

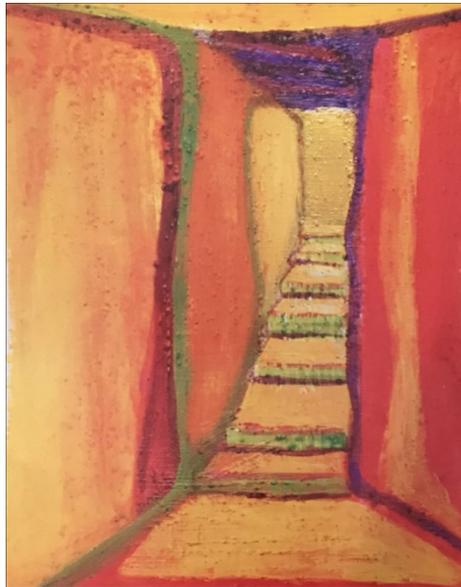


Fig.18,Rania El Helw, oil painting, 2009.

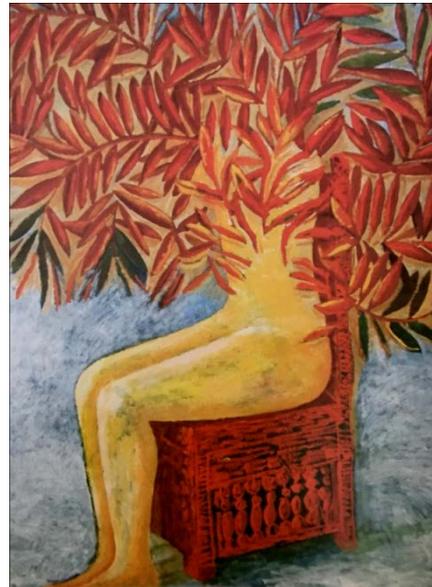


Fig.19,Ahmed Abdelkareem, oil painting, 2009.

Figure (20)

The artist depicted a natural landscape scene of oasis houses are which located on top of the hill in an abstract form. its color is depicted into two opposites; warm and cold. It is figurative of the barren and fertile land. The scene was free from natural elements, except a little girl carrying a traditional pot of the oasis. She stares at the ponderer in innocence and amazement, and the artist stressed the outline of the forms by using black lines (gestural line) in a sense of being expressive and close to the fauvism movement. Colors were not employed in descriptive way as well as drawing elements were flat and decorative.

Figure (21)

Artist portrayed natural landscape inspired by the remains of the ancient city of Shali with external gestural lines, which are dancing in harmony with music and cool color fading into the background. I do not find expression truer than those words describing the inhabitants of the desert and their architecture: "the man of this age had played architectural melodies on the strings of the surrounding nature, his architecture embedded in the desert itself and frequent or congruence continuously... the environment with its natural condition is constant, or almost ... Yes, societies had been changed, civilizations were rolled ...architecture has transformed but, the desert remained .. the man remained and approach remained"22(Wali:1996).



Fig.20, Khaled Serour, oil painting, detailed, 2010.



Fig.21, Nermin El-Masri, pastel on paper, detailed, 2010

Figure (22)

The artist portrayed a group of oasis-inhabitants who abstractly perform various gestures in a complex composition inspired by desert, whether on raw material or in clothes style. The figures have been portrayed as hieroglyphic characters pictorial in ancient Egyptian temples. They stand monolithically in horizontal strips as if they are offerings carriers. She also used cool colors such as blue in multiple degrees, and this yellow-colored spot mediates the work like the sundown light.

Figure (23)

In this abstract symbolic artwork, the artist drew some signs inspired by the prehistoric caves graffiti on a walls which are decaying through ages. He used natural colors and elements, like dried plant leaves on streaky surfaces. They are confronting us with hidden forces, like (talisman) intriguing our imagination to reveal and decrypt its code. Other elements give an impression of mass architecture dorned with local decoration, resembling fence. It is colored gradually to deeply suggest the mysterious architectural space.



Fig.22,Shaima Mahmoud, sand painting,2011/12



Fig.23, Ayman Hilal, painting on mixed media, 2011/12.

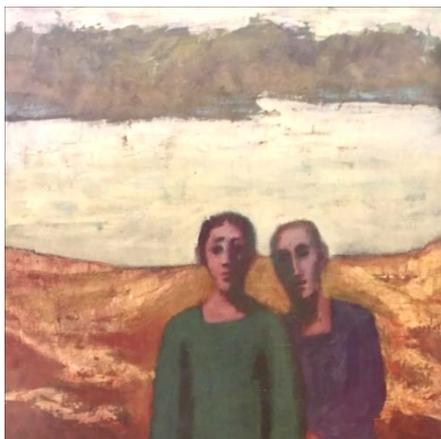


Fig.24, Ashraf Ruslan, oil painting, 2013.



Fig.25, Sally El- Zeiny, drawing with ink and watercolor, 2013.

Figure(24)

Artist presented bilateral, green and dry, male and female, earth and sky, in extended horizontal spaces, and two figures stand vertically in contrast with them. They dressed in local clothes, colored with verdant and water hues. The background landscape is free of any natural details. They are staring at the ponderer with stupor suggesting that the time has stopped in a fleeting moment. It is as if we hear the sound of silence. As Ahmad Fakhri says, that desert in other's opinion is not only the scene of a gram stories which the Arabic writings of literature are filled with.

Figure (25)

The artist depicted a wide scene rich with different items of local environment in i.e. clothes, jewelry, plants. she presented richness in inspiration. Here are the minaret of the old mosque that covered by ceremonial marriage outfit veil. As if it announce "as in the past" happiness and joy. Flowers, fishes and the songbird were represented in their own symbolic meaning in the imagination of the artist and taking part in the event. Two children have reached the top of the staircase overlooking the spacious and open extent which reflects their pure souls All elements filled the place with lovely clutter.



Fig.26, Walid Ebaid, oil painting, 2014.

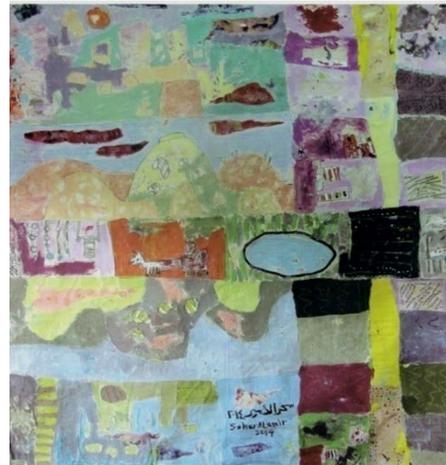


Fig.27, Sahar Al-Amir, draw on paper, 2014.

Figure (26)

Between the sound of silence and the silence of pure nature, the artist presented an artwork inspired by the spirit of the place, he is not portraying the place itself despite the realistic style that he adopted, but he express his feelings about this arid land where wild grass sparsely grew on the banks of the salty lake. Parts of it has dried up, burned by the heat of the sun. The horizon is dominant and overshadowed the desert scene, it eliminates any hope for the existence of life there.

Figure (27)

In an area between the conscious and the unconscious. The artist travels with her imagination between the natural elements of valleys, hills, lakes and springs on one side, and between anecdotes and various legends on the other side. She woven into patchwork painting that express her inner feelings toward this unknown world, full of detail, who lives in the desert. It leaves you as the first time you met it, puzzled.

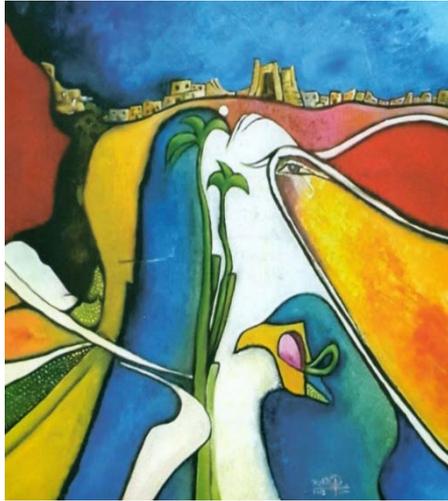


Fig.28, Ali El-Ruby, oil painting, 2011

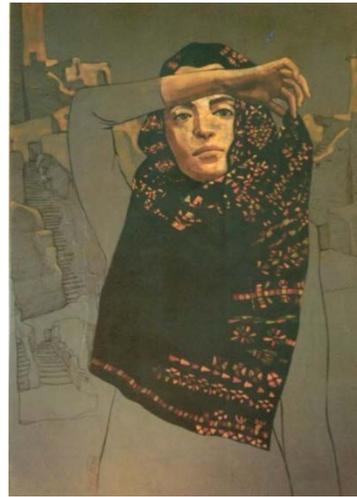


Fig.29, Asmaa El- Nawawy, drawing with pastel colors, 2015.

Figure (28)

Between reality and fantasy, the artist present the landscape of the oasis. The ancient remains of buildings stand on the edge of sand dunes at the background of the scene. Water streams, desert trails and roads had extended there. The elements have been transformed into an ancient Egyptian symbols. The artist maintained the spontaneous spirit in dealing with natural vocabulary with a tendency to depict flat space in order to border it with lines.

Figure (29)

As usual, the artist addressed a feminine model by an academic study that has the features of an Egyptian women while she pulls up her distinctive local Siwi Scarf in an attempt to hide her face from strangers. The girl stands in the foreground and occupies most of the large painting space, facing the viewer in a strong presence while in background, there are remains of the old city; Shali. The light rays of the dawn moves on the outskirts of the buildings to add mystery and majesty to the scene.

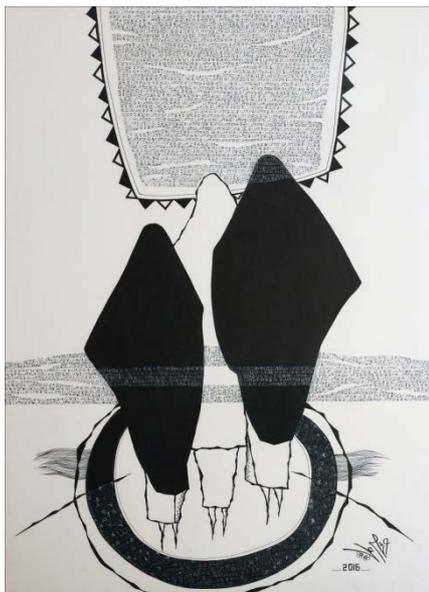


Fig.30,weaam Omar, Ink drawing on paper, 2016



Fig.31, Ahmed Saber, pen and watercolor drawing on paper, 2016.

Figure(30)

Three women stand alone in a balanced abstract composition. In the conflict between white and black, shadow and light. In the texts of ancient tales, gravestones and water springs in the middle of the desert. They stand as signs or memorials implying that maybe there was a life here before !! they look to the unknown and they have a dialogue between the Wide outside and the limited inside.

Figure(31)

Oasis lifestyle had embodied here in the tales of grandmothers at the edge of the hill surrounded by palm trees. Girls dressed with Bedouin bright colorful outfit, full of embroidery and silver jewelry, playing here and there. Among the rocks, they make up a part of the story is not yet complete. As the artist painted figures and elements by academic way, he left other parts and details swag in colored plots in dusty tones.

Conclusion

After presentation and analysis of that quantum of artworks and the studio grant procedures, it is clear now how successful the project to emphasize the identity of Siwa Oasis culture and nature, where the artworks reflected the impact of its unique environment, as well as the customs and traditions of its people by an expressive and symbolic manner. Also how far the governmental efforts achieved its goal to retain the notable cultural and natural resources, exceptional historical monuments and the outstanding diversity of environment of the Oasis.

Despite the fact that the grant is a successful art activity in general, yet there are some cons that must be addressed in its next sessions as follows :

- Announcement: The announcement of the grant is limited in social network and there is a lack of information about its procedures .
- Participants: An analysis of the data reflects that: significant number of painting artists always participate and a few number in other arts areas, such as sculpture, photography and applied arts...etc. Fig.32.
- The term of the grant: grant's term is limited in one week which is not long enough to unleash the imagination of artists and allow them to touch the oasis mood deeply and communicate with its inhabitants. Thus, it presents an artwork inspired from the nature or lifestyle in the Oasis.
- Venue and exhibition date: Only one exhibition is held as a result of the grant and likely in the Ministry of Culture Halls, in Cairo (any available one) that's why it doesn't exist permanently on exhibitions schedule. Thus, it devaluate the exhibition, and it also deprives the Siwi residents to watch the beauty of their habitat in artists's eyes, which strengthens the affiliation relationship to the Oasis and encourages them to maintain it.
- Ownership of artworks: All artworks are owned to the General Organization of Culture Palaces which dedicate some of them gradually to others government organization as gifts but there is no specific rule for dedications or for determine the recipient organization, it works case by case.
- Responsible For the grant: Officially, Ministry of Culture is the only organization who run the activity and there is no integration between various organizations that could benefit from such these grant.

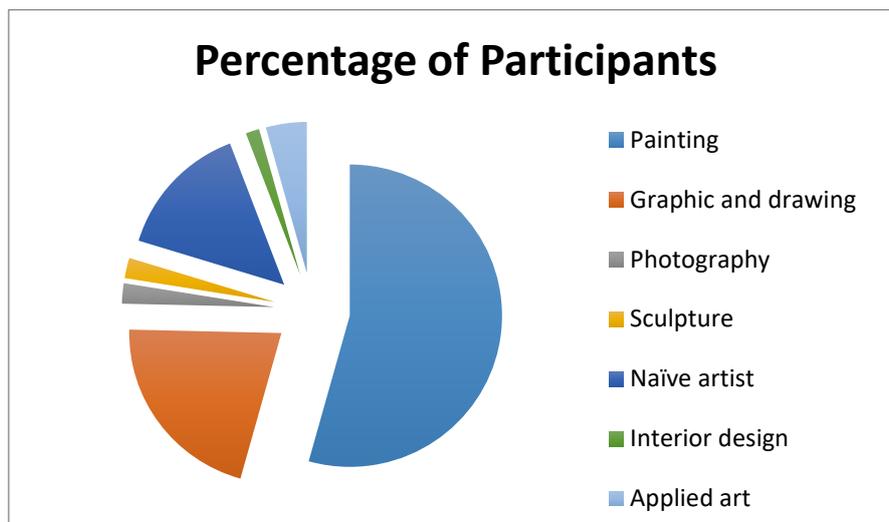


Fig.32, The percentage of participants in different art fields since inception.

Recommendations

- Announcing for the grant should be in all exhibitions halls and all organizations affiliated with the Ministry of Culture as well as universities and youth centers. It should encourage a large number of artists and talented individuals in various fields of art to participate, as well as to ensure the continuous presence of the grant on the cultural map.

- Selecting a number of artists in different artistic areas in a balanced with each session and included other areas such as applied arts, architecture, photography, handicrafts and jewelry design and other art areas .
- extend the duration of the event to allow artists to produce their artworks there.
- Determining of a fixed date and specific hall to hold the exhibition bi-annually, first in Siwa's palace culture and the second in Cairo in order to establish the existence and important of that activity on the cultural map and to ensure a large number of viewers.
- Dedicating the grant's produced artworks periodically and orderly to different organizations such as, ministries as well as Egyptian embassies abroad for optimization of such activities.
- determine fixed date and venue to hold the exhibition bi-annually, first in Siwa and second in Cairo or other governorate consecutively in order to emphasize the important of such activity on the cultural map
- Involve other organization in the responsibility of holding the grant, such as the Ministry of Tourism ,Marsa Matrouh Governorate, Cultural Development Fund and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to ensure integration between roles in addition to the provision of necessary material support with the possibility of developing the idea to include abroad artists to enrich the experience with artists from different environments. all of these will assist in the development of the Oasis on different ways and helping to emphasize its identity.

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