

# Who is My Neighbor?

By Roland Prime

An East/West gathering of 45 premier Middle Eastern and Western Artists using the Arts as a bridge for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue-February 3-12, 2011

*We live in a fractured world. I've always seen it as my role as an artist to attempt to make wholeness.*

Anish Kapoor, Contemporary Indian Sculptor

The horrible religious massacres in churches in Baghdad this last November, with the perpetrators then threatening Christians here in Egypt, served as a troubling reminder that inter-religious tension is still a living reality in the Middle East. However, a beacon of hope shines forth from a southern suburb of Cairo.

Following on from the success of the interfaith CARAVAN Festival of the Arts held at St. John's Church in Maadi/ Cairo over the last two years, a new and broader artistic CARAVAN Festival of the Arts 2011 with the theme of "My Neighbor" is now being planned. **The goal of the CARAVAN Festival of the Arts in February 2011 is once again to build bridges between East and West, Muslim and Christian, through the visual arts, as well as with literature, film and music.**



Curator and participating British artist, Roland Prime

The CARAVAN Festival of the Arts is under the patronage of the historic St. John's Church in Maadi, Cairo, which was founded in 1931, to serve English-speaking expatriates living in Egypt. What makes this exhibition so unusual is that the exhibition actually takes place within the church, a first for Egypt.

"Our experience has shown," says Rev. Canon Paul-Gordon Chandler, author and the American priest of St. John's Church and founder of the Caravan Festival of the Arts, "that art is a universal language

that has the ability to dissolve the petty differences that divide us. In this increasing chasm of misunderstanding and discord between the Middle East and West, our day calls for a whole new kind of movement: one that builds on what the two hold in common. And we take to heart the profound words of the 14th century Persian poet and mystic Hafiz, when he wrote 'Art is the conversation... Art offers an opening for the heart. True art makes the divine silence in the soul break into applause. Art is, at least, the knowledge of where we are standing... In this Wonderland... We are partners straddling the universe.'"



Opening Night of 2009 inaugural Caravan art exhibition



English artist Lucy Westwood.



Rev. Paul-Gordon Chandler with Egyptian actor Omar Sharif at 2010 Caravan Art Exhibition

The initiative over the last two years has generated significant attention from the international media and surpassed all expectations. The last *CARAVAN Festival of the Arts*, held in January 2010, was opened by the Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, and the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Ali Gouma. Sheikh Ali Gouma concluded his address with these words; "Both religion and art elevate the sense of humanity. Thus we aspire for art to be used as a tool to enhance our religiosity and our humanity." In addition to the visual art exhibition, a film event was held with a brilliant talk by the renowned Egyptian actor Omar Sharif (with a screening of his interfaith movie, *Hassan and Morqos*), a literature night with a talk by Tahir Shah from Casablanca, Morocco, the New York Times best-selling Anglo-Afghan author of *The Caliph's House*, and a closing musical concert with the world renowned Iraqi oud (Middle Eastern lute) master Naseer Shamma.

As the popularity of the Caravan exhibition has grown so has the response from the global artists' community. While the majority of the visual art will be painting, the exhibition will also be including printmaking, photography and sculpture.

Opening on February 3, 2011, 45 premier Middle Eastern and Western visual artists will come together for this professional artists' exhibition which will be held inside the church, to each submit one piece of work that reflects the title, "*My Neighbor*". As the previous years have shown it will be an exhibition that has a diverse range of artists ranging from one of Egypt's leading contemporary artists,

Mohammed Abla, to rising star Reda Abdel Rahman, to expatriate artists Britt Boutros Ghali and Roland Prime to name but a few. Many thousands are expected to attend and there will be considerable Arab and Western media coverage.

On February 3rd at 7 PM, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar in Cairo, Sheikh Ahmed el Tayeb, will officially open the festival. Also, the New York Times bestselling Iranian-American author, Reza Aslan, will be delivering an opening address.

In addition to this visual art exhibition, during the week of the 2011 Caravan Festival of the Arts, there will also be a focus on literature, film and music (see weekly program below), making for a truly extraordinary "Arts Week" here in Maadi.

**All attendance is free of charge, but 20% of all art sales go to Middle Eastern charities assisting the poor.**

*Roland Prime is an Exhibition curator and participating British artist*

## MOST IMPORTANT

### WEEKLY PROGRAM of the *CARAVAN Festival of the Arts* February 3-12, 2011

(Held at St. John's Church/Maadi...corner of Port Said Rd & Rd 17)

#### Opening Night of the Art Exhibition - 3rd February, 7.00 PM

Opening presentation by New York Times bestselling Iranian-American author, Reza Aslan, and the Grand Imam of Al Azhar in Cairo, Sheikh Ahmed el Tayeb, on the theme of "My Neighbor—East & West," with all 45 artists present (the exhibition will then be open through 12 February).

#### Literature Night - 5th February at 7.00 PM

Talk and book-signing by Reza Aslan, world renowned bestselling Iranian-American author. Title of Lecture: "Beyond Fundamentalism: Confronting Religious Extremism in the Age of Globalization".

#### Film Night - 7th February at 7.00 PM

Talk by Khalid Abdalla, British-Egyptian film actor (star of *The Kite Runner*, *United 93*, and *Green Zone*), followed by film screening.

#### Musical Concert - 9th February at 7.30 PM

A performance by Mohammed Antar, world renowned Ney (Middle Eastern Flute) player.

***CARAVAN Festival of the Arts: My Neighbor*, February 3-12, 2011,  
[www.oncaravan.org](http://www.oncaravan.org)**

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