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Villa Kamel Bek Abdel Halim by Charles Ayrout (demolished). *Al Emara Magazine*.

**Center for Architecture to Reopen with Launch of
Cairo Modern Exhibition
October 1, 2021 – January 22, 2022**

The Center for Architecture's first exhibition since closing in March 2020, Cairo Modern shines a light on a lost chapter in architectural Modernism.

Members of the press are invited to two curator-led tours of the exhibition on Friday, October 1, 11:00 am and 4:00 pm. Please RSVP to Camila Schaulsohn, cschaulsohn@aiany.org.

New York, NY, September 21, 2021 – The **Center for Architecture** is excited to announce the reopening of its space with the launch of [Cairo Modern](#) with a celebration taking place on [Friday, October 1, starting at 4:00 pm](#). The exhibition, curated by **Mohamed Elshahed**, Independent Curator, features 20 demolished, extant, and proposed projects from Cairo dating from the 1930s to the 1970s.

Though known primarily for its ancient Egyptian monuments and its thousands of minarets, Cairo is also a city of eclectic Modern constructions, concrete expressionism, and turn-of-the-century revivalism, structures that reflected the aspirations of the bourgeoisie that formed after Egypt's 1919 Revolution, who embraced the Modernist home as the materialization of new

notions of class and identity. *Cairo Modern* seeks to shine a light on this oftentimes forgotten chapter of Modernist production by presenting a variety of projects, ranging in function from residential to administrative, by Egyptian architects including Sayed Karim, Charles Ayrout, and Mahmoud Riad.

Beyond the 20 projects in Cairo, the exhibition includes the designs for the never-built Egyptian Pavilion for the 1939 New York World's Fair.

Cairo Modern will also feature a timeline, contextualizing important political, cultural, and architectural events in Egypt and internationally. In addition, the exhibition will present covers of *Al Emara* Magazine (1939-59), considered the first Arabic-language magazine on contemporary architecture, both local and international. Due to scarcity of sources, the magazine serves as the primary record for architectural production in Egypt during the years of its publication.

Cairo Modern accompanies the publication of Elshahed's book [*Cairo Since 1900: An Architectural Guide*](#), the first comprehensive survey of the city's modern constructions, featuring 226 buildings built from 1900 to the present.

"This project is personal and political," says curator Mohamed Elshahed. "In writing *Cairo Since 1900* and curating this accompanying exhibition, I am responding to the very textbook I read as a student in New Jersey, *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, writing and making visible a history that was invisible in the narratives I was meant to subscribe to, even as I was omitted from them."

Rethinking Global Modernism

By highlighting under-recognized works, *Cairo Modern* serves as a call to action, prompting audience members to rethink the significance of global Modernism in architectural history. Although Modern heritage has been facing the wrecking ball around the world, the situation is particularly dire in locations where the "legitimacy" of this architecture has not been established. The readings of western historians, who often consider these structures simply as diluted versions of Euro-American Modernism, have had a profound impact on the preservation of architectural memory in postcolonial societies. Buildings carrying layers of social and material history have disappeared, creating serious gaps in local architectural narratives and in our understanding of global Modernism. In many cases, the images of demolished buildings used in this exhibition are the only surviving evidence that such structures existed at all.

A vignette on Frank Lloyd Wright's trip to Cairo while working on his plan for Greater Baghdad further illustrates this point, drawing a contrast between the functionalist, modern design ethos of Egyptian architects practicing in the 1950s to the work that international architects proposed for Middle Eastern cities, which often drew on inspiration from an imagined and even exoticized past.

Cairo Modern will be on view at the Center for Architecture from October 1, 2021 to January 22, 2022.

Curator: Mohamed Elshahed, Independent Curator
Exhibition Designer: Rami Abou-Khalil, AIA, RAIC
Graphic Designer: Ahmad Hammoud

About Mohamed Elshahed

Mohamed Elshahed is a curator and architectural historian focusing on modernism in Egypt and the Arab World. After undergraduate studies at the College of Architecture and Design at NJIT, he earned his Master's from MIT's Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture and a PhD from NYU's Department of Middle Eastern Studies. He is the curator of the British Museum's Modern Egypt Project and Egypt's winning pavilion, *Modernist Indignation*, at the 2018 London Design Biennale. In 2019, *Apollo Magazine* named him among the 40 under 40 influential thinkers and artists in the Middle East. Elshahed is the author of *Cairo Since 1900: An Architectural Guide* (2020) and *Revolutionary Modernism: Architecture and the Politics of Change in Egypt, 1936-67* (Arabic, 2021). He founded Cairoobserver, a platform for architectural and urban discourse in Egypt, in 2011.

This exhibition is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



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About the Center for Architecture

The Center for Architecture is the premier cultural venue for architecture and the built environment in New York City, informed by the complexity of the City's urban fabric and in dialogue with the global community. The Center shares a home with the AIA New York Chapter and has the unique advantage of drawing upon the ideas and experiences of practicing architects to produce thought-provoking exhibitions, informative public programs, and quality design education experiences for K-12 students. It also leads New York City's annual month-long architecture and design festival, Archtober. The Center for Architecture's aim is to further public knowledge about New York City architecture and architects, foster exchange and collaboration among members of the design, development, building, scholarly, and policy sectors, and inspire new ideas about the role of design in communities by presenting contemporary and practical issues in architecture and urbanism to a general audience. www.centerforarchitecture.org