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BEYOND THE TYPICAL: INJI EFFLATOUN'S EXHIBITIONS IN THE USSR IN 1970 AND 1975

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ABSTRACT

This paper will discuss the Egyptian artist Inji Efflatoun (1924–1989), whose first exhibition in Moscow in 1970 took place during the leadership of Gamal Abdul Nasser, and whose second, in 1975, was organized while Anwar Saadat was the president. They were very different in content, structure, complexity, and ambition, and probably in the political and social messages they sought to convey. Their content and political context will be examined here, based on archival material, as well as on Soviet newspapers and journals.

INTRODUCTION

The geopolitical region of Egypt acquired strategic importance for the USSR from the 1950s, and in addition to political, economic, and military activities, both the USSR and Egypt allocated substantial resources to cultural diplomacy. This paper will discuss the Egyptian artist Inji Efflatoun (1924–1989), whose first exhibition in Moscow in 1970 took place during the leadership of Gamal Abdul Nasser, and whose second, in 1975, was organized while Anwar Saadat was the president. They were very different in content, structure, complexity, and ambition, and probably in the political and social messages they sought to convey. Their content and political context will be examined here, based on archival material, as well as on Soviet newspapers and journals.

The exhibition organizers in the Soviet Union had to address multiple challenges, from setting the opening date to selecting exhibition artworks and tackling issues of censorship, since Efflatoun's paintings were hardly compatible with the expected standards of Soviet art. In the context of socialist realist ideology in art in the USSR I will try to solve the mystery of how and why these Egyptian artworks slipped through the Ministry of Culture's censorship. This essay addresses the process of the exhibition's preparations and realization, and its artistic content, which was far beyond the typical. I will also explore Efflatoun's art evolution, her encounters with the Soviet public,

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