



*A strategic East-West contemporary art installation  
featuring premier and emerging Egyptian, Middle Eastern and Western artists using  
the world's most ancient symbol of harmony, that originated in Egypt, the "Key of Life" (Ankh)  
as a message of hope for a harmonious, peaceful and tolerant world*

## **Introduction**

THE KEY was a strategic East-West peacebuilding art exhibition/installation that used the globally recognized ancient Egyptian symbol of the Ankh as the canvas for a contemporary message of hope for a harmonious, peaceful and tolerant world.

Organized by CARAVAN, THE KEY showcased the work of 40 premier Egyptian, Middle Eastern and Western visual artists, focusing on a modern three-dimensional fiberglass portrayal (1.20 meter in height) of the ancient "Key of Life," known in Egypt as the Ankh, the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic character that read "life", seen as the oldest known symbol of pluralism, tolerance and harmony.

This blending of the old with the new stimulates contemplation of values over time - how peaceful coexistence was once possible and, despite current misunderstandings can be once again. The focus of the exhibition was on "the key" for all peoples in the East and West, living in a peaceful and harmonious world. This cultural endeavor with the Ankh at its heart was a powerful means to unite people of different backgrounds. Sales income from THE KEY went to supporting a local Egyptian charity that assists the poorest of the poor. The Founding Sponsor of THE KEY was SODIC, a major real estate firm in Egypt.

THE KEY exhibition opened in Cairo, Egypt (where the Ankh symbol originated) and was subsequently showcased at St. James's Piccadilly in London, England and at Riverside Church in New York City, USA.



*The unpainted fiberglass sculpture of the "Key" that was used by the artists (designed and sculpted by noted Egyptian artist Dr. Reda Abdel Rahman)*

THE KEY had three primary focuses:

- 1) **An Artistic Focus**---a ground-breaking art exhibition involving premier and emerging contemporary artists
- 2) **A Peacebuilding Focus**--using the ancient symbol of the Ankh that represents pluralism and tolerance, building bridges between the Middle East and West
- 3) **A Charity Focus**—supporting a strategic Egyptian charity assisting children among the poorest of the poor, providing them hope and a future through the sales of the art work.

The exhibition/installation's set-up varied depending on the venue, from being displayed on plinths to hanging at slightly different heights and angles, with the viewers walking in, under and around the hanging "keys of life".

### **Strategic Need**

The world we live in today is fast-paced and is one where stereotypes and media hype can overshadow fundamental truths that stand regardless of background or faith. People all over the world have the same needs and want to live in peace. For generations the Middle East has been a place of turmoil and now, more than ever, it is vital that the growing Western misconceptions and apprehensions about the region be addressed. In the ever-widening divide that exists between the Middle East and West, we have found that art is a vehicle for understanding and imagination.

It is essential that people of different cultural backgrounds have the opportunity to gain an insight into the world and values of "the other." Art has always been a means of expression for the artist and a soul enriching and shaping experience for the viewer. At CARAVAN we have experienced the transformative power that art can have, changing perceptions and speaking directly to the global unconscious.

The premier artists invited to participate in THE KEY all shared the ethos of the project; to engender harmony and peace among people of different nationalities, heritages and faith backgrounds so that we can all coexist and benefit from our diversity. This project is a starting point, around which additional programs are held at each venue (i.e. music, workshops, talks, panels, concerts, etc.). Also, the educational aspect of the exhibition was maximized with school visits and downloadable resources for teachers.

THE KEY grabbed the imagination and inspired the audiences to realize what is possible, what is precious and how we can all play our part in shaping our world into one where understanding and compassion are valued above all.



### **History and Symbolism of the Ankh (Key of Life)—A Symbol of Harmony**

The Ankh, the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic character that reads "life" represented the concept of eternal life, something seen within Ancient Egypt that all peoples had in common. Over the millennia the Ankh has been adopted and modified by many cultures and religions. Widely regarded as a symbol of early religious and cultural pluralism, the Ankh is today a globally recognized symbol invoking harmony, and the tolerance of diversity as in Ancient Egypt.

*The Ankh in Western jewelry*

In the West the Ankh is one of the most recognizable of all ancient symbols.

The Ankh is also a symbol of hope; a hopeful future. The new logo for the Ministry of Tourism in Egypt is based around the Ankh. The “Key of Life” symbol has also been taken as the logo and theme for Egypt’s future.



*Egypt's Ministry of Tourism's logo*



### **Participating Artists**

The 40 artists participating are from Egypt, the Middle East and the West and include women and men, from well-known contemporary artists to some emerging younger artists, and artists that use a variety of artistic mediums, and that come from the various religious backgrounds represented throughout the Middle East.