

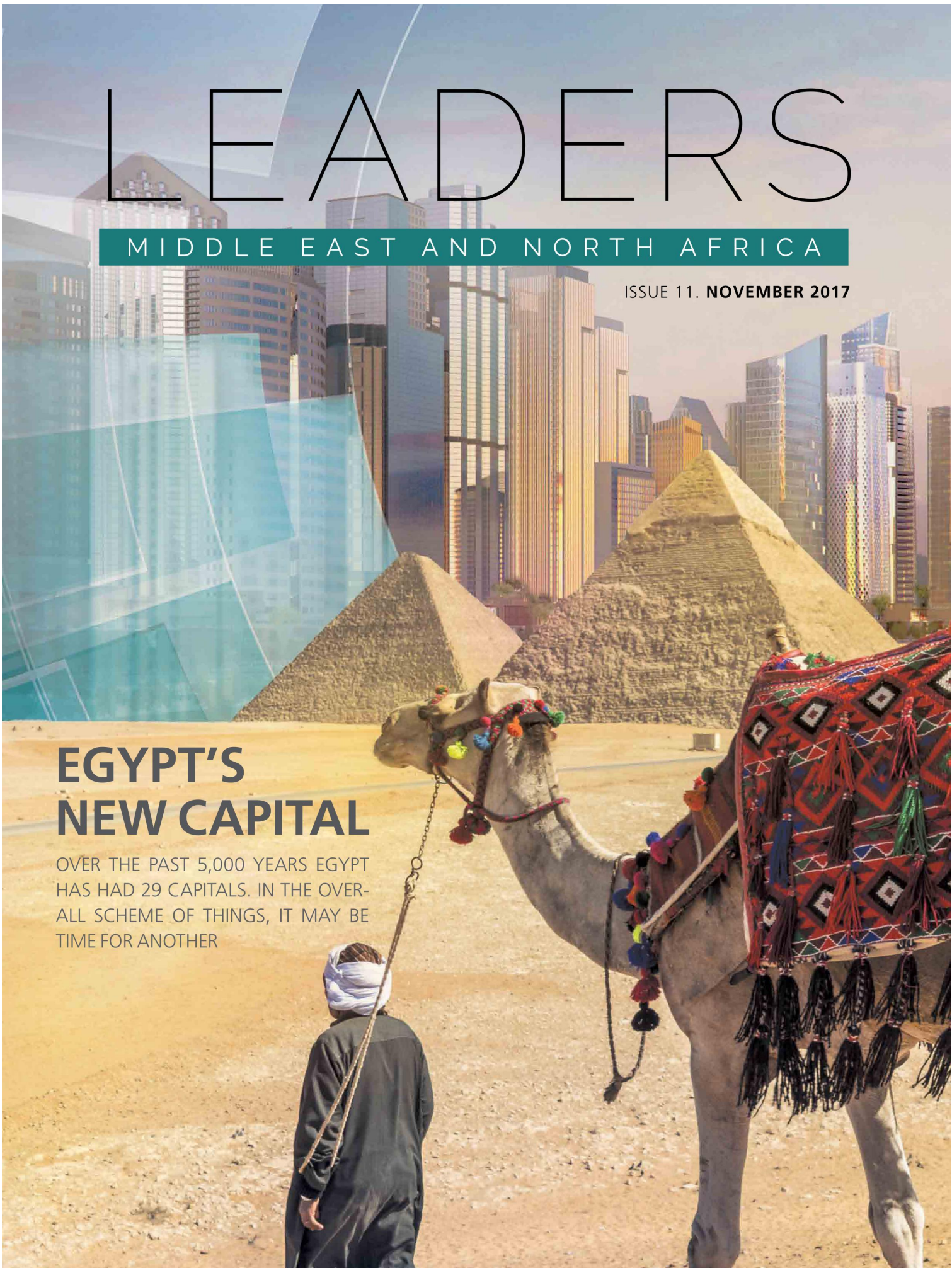
# LEADERS

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

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## EGYPT'S NEW CAPITAL

OVER THE PAST 5,000 YEARS EGYPT HAS HAD 29 CAPITALS. IN THE OVER-ALL SCHEME OF THINGS, IT MAY BE TIME FOR ANOTHER



# I AM: BUILDING BRIDGES

**I AM, a visual art exhibition celebrating the work of Middle Eastern women artists, began its tour of the United States at the American University Museum, Katzen Arts Center in Washington DC, September 5 – October 22, 2017. In 2018, the exhibition will move from Washington DC to Jackson Hole, Wyoming (January/February), Cincinnati, Ohio (April/May), Seattle, Washington (June/August), Nashville, Tennessee (September/October) and Burlington, Vermont (October/November). The exhibition premiered in May 2017 at Jordan's National Gallery of Fine Arts in Amman under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah before moving in July to St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London's Trafalgar Square**

Organized by CARAVAN, an international non-governmental peacebuilding organization that focuses on building bridges through the arts, I AM showcases the insights and experiences of Middle Eastern women as they confront issues of culture, religion and social reality in a changing world. Speaking about the exhibition in a podcast, the founder and president of CARAVAN, Reverend Paul-Gordon Chandler, an author, interfaith advocate, social entrepreneur, art curator and a U.S. Episcopal priest who has lived and worked in the Middle East for many years, said the I AM exhibition originated from "a desire to creatively and positively build on the message of the highly acclaimed book written by former US President Jimmy Carter, who is much loved and respected in the Middle East. In this regard, the I AM exhibition focuses not on what women are missing and often do not have, such as equal rights, but rather on what they inherently do have and how fundamentally essential their contribution is in freeing our world from sectarian strife of any kind. I AM, as the title implies, shows the uniqueness of the individual, as well as one's identity within the community and the world. It thus expresses the tension between the unique and the shared - unique beliefs, values and methods of worship paired with shared goals and desires for oneself, one's community and the world."

Curated by Janet Rady, a specialist in Middle Eastern contemporary art who sits on the advisory council of CARAVAN, the I AM exhibition features 31 acclaimed and emerging women artists of Middle Eastern and North African heritage covering a broad geographic area of 12 countries, from Morocco to Egypt to the Arabian Gulf. Each artist was invited to create an original two or three-dimensional work in any still art medium: painting,

drawing, collage, photography, digital art, mixed media and sculpture.

Among the exhibition's featured artists is **Manal Deeb**, an Arab American visual artist out of the Washington DC area. "Golden" is a mixed media and acrylic painting on canvas that depicts a transformation from darkness to light. The painting combines portrait, acrylic painting, Arabic calligraphy, and detailed texturing and





layering. Manal studied studio arts at UIC, Chicago, and Psychology of Art at GMU, Fairfax, VA. Manal has contributed work for the causes of Arab females, women rights in general, and the Palestinian cause. She is a residing artist at the Workhouse Arts Center in Lorton, Virginia and her artwork was recently selected as one of the curated 2016 Direc-

tors' Collection at the Center. Her studies of fine arts and psychology have provided her with the ability to work on her artwork as a self-therapy tool while presenting projects with vital messages reflecting women rights for living a productive and enlightened life.

"Bird of Paradise" by **Taiba Faraj** was

inspired by verses of the Sufi poet, Jalal-al-Din Rumi: "My soul is from elsewhere, I'm sure of that, and I intend to end up there. This drunkenness began in some other tavern. When I get back around to that place, I'll be completely sober. Meanwhile, I'm like a bird of paradise, sitting in this aviary. The day is coming when I fly off." Taiba graduated from the University of



Bahrain with a degree in banking and finance. In 2012 she decided to leave finance in order to pursue a career as a creative calligrapher. As a committed calligrapher and artist from the age of 12, Taiba has moved on from traditional calligraphy on paper with bamboo pen and ink to working on canvas with brushes and sponges. She has strived to create backgrounds on canvas that evoke the effect of marbled paper. Effectively modernizing her calligraphy practice with this transition to canvas, Taiba works with random letters as well as verses from the Qur'an and poetry.

**Hanaa Malallah** studied Fine Art in Baghdad. In 2005, her thesis on Mesopotamian art gained her a PhD in the Philosophy of Painting. In 2006, she left Iraq for an artist residency at the Institute du Monde Arabe in Paris and in 2008 she was awarded a fellowship at SOAS in London. From 2011 to 2013 she held a fellowship at

the Chelsea College of Art in London. She currently works as associate professor at the Royal University for Woman in Bahrain. Featured in the exhibition is "I Have Learnt Something You Did Not Know" drawn with black and red ink on paper. Whether painted, drawn in pen and ink or appearing as taxidermy, the hoopoe bird, "hudhud" in Arabic, which is native to Asia, Africa and parts of Europe, has inspired much of Malallah's artwork. The hoopoe has been depicted in art and literature since ancient times. Due to its crown-like crest, it has often been described as a leader or a king of birds. It is also important in Islamic tradition, because it appears in a number of religious texts, most notably in the Holy Qur'an. It has been seen throughout history as sacred, wise and protective. Malallah relates to the hoopoe bird because of its historic association with moral and spiritual guidance, and legends

of dangerous journeys undertaken by the bird. The artist equates these journeys to her own artistic journey, in which she undertakes to seek the truth in order to survive. In her work, the hoopoe has become a symbol of survival itself.

Among the glowing reviews of the I AM exhibition was one by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdulla of Jordan in which she succinctly expressed the importance of the exhibition: "For isn't this the joy of art -- its ability to speak to us all about what is both familiar and unfamiliar? To be a language that transcends borders and barriers. To be the consummate diplomat, traveling the world, overcoming race, religion and rancor, building bridges of respect and understanding between us all, North, South, East and West."

To learn more about the I AM exhibition, visit [www.oncaravan.org](http://www.oncaravan.org)