

The Art Centre

Cotton Tapestry

by Ikram Nosshi

Fine Cotton Weaving

In 1977 Yoanna wanted to form a new group of children of her own involving a new craft activity. A few years earlier her father had taught girl cotton weaving on a horizontal loom. The results were very beautiful but she stopped working due to family problems. Yoanna copied the looms, built her own atelier and advertised in the village that she was going to start a new group.

In no time she had 12 boys and girls learning the art of cotton weaving. The new group had to be content with working with white and blue threads only while Yoanna taught herself how to dye cotton with natural dyes in order to provide them with more colours. Since then Yoanna has added twice to the group which is now made up of 17 weavers with three age groups of various ages (18, late 20s and late 30s).

“What I learned with the children is that after a few years, when they have mastered the technique, each one finds a subject that he/she prefers and comes back to every now and then. My role is not to let it become a repetition but push them to explore it more. For example, one weaver doesn't want his work to be defined by direction or contour of design. Another loves geometric designs and is always surprising me with his own interpretation of his surroundings by choosing subjects like traffic signs, temples & columns or the alphabet...etc. I have learnt not to interfere in his work. Yet another weaver is fascinated by people. She lost her hearing when she was 16 and since then her power of observation became very acute. She also has a very subtle sense of humor which is apparent in her weaving. Many of her subjects are scenes from everyday life such as a fight, a feast, tourists...etc.”

The Batik and cotton group all together make 23 artists aged between 18 and 50. The group includes a grandmother, a grandfather and young boys and girls starting their life. Some can barely write their names, some have diplomas, some are young mothers working to support their families while others are financially secure with houses and cars but what they all have in common is that they enjoy very much what they do. The center for them represents not only security and a good income but also a place where they find themselves through self- expression.

Natural vegetable dyes for the Wool and cotton

Ramses re-introduced natural vegetable dye plants to his weavings yarns. He admired their natural beauty and strongly believed that artisans must have control on the basic materials which they use in their crafts to secure their needs.

Vegetable dyes always existed in Egypt and played a fundamental role in the coloring of textile fabrics. Always going back the basics and sustainable approach, Ramses planted Madder, whose root yields an orange red, Reseda (weld), an annual flower that gives different shades of yellow, pecan trees, whose leaves give beige, Eucalyptus trees whose leaves give light yellow and olive green. Blues are obtained from Indigo and hence are the shades of greens by immersing the yellow yarns into the indigo.

Twice a year, in autumn and spring, each group of weavers will get together to dye the wool and cotton yarns in a joyful atmosphere. These new colors shall appear in their tapestries. This festival of colours takes four days, at the end of each day, while the weavers are eating together in the garden, the wool yarns hung around them in a celebration of bright blues, greens, reds and yellows.

Ramses Wissa Wassef was not just trying to protect an old crafts, which seemed likely to disappear because of industrial competition and social changes, he hoped to revitalize the crafts and techniques that were disappearing, by reintroducing them to the modern daily life.