

Panel re-examines artists' effect on Downtown Cairo

Omar El Adl / December 6, 2012 / [No Comments](#)

The panel will take place at the Goethe Institute's Downtown location from 6-8pm next Saturday

Downtown has long been a romanticised neighbourhood among artists and intellectuals. It may no longer hold the same status it once had when it was a place of high-end shops and immaculately planned streets, but Cairenes nevertheless continue to associate it with a certain nostalgia that keeps efforts to gentrify it alive. Downtown has witnessed a resurgence of initiatives flocking to the area, especially after Tahrir Square gained an even more iconic status after the 25 January uprising.

To this end, Beth Stryker and Omar Nagati are organising a panel discussion to discuss the growing effect of artists on the urban gentrification of Downtown. The panel will include Tamer El-Said, cofounder of Cimatheque, Heba Farid, founding member of Contemporary Image Collective, Bruce Ferguson, dean of the school of humanities at the American University in Cairo, Karim Shafei, CEO of Al Ismaelia Real Estate Developments, and Ania Szremski, curator of the Townhouse Gallery. The panel discussion will be moderated by Mohamed ElShahed of the Cairo Observer website.



“The goal of the panel is to discuss how art spaces participate in urban regeneration and gentrification of Downtown Cairo,” said Szremski.

“The Townhouse Gallery has a symbiotic relationship with the neighbourhood around it, especially with the shops and the cafes that surround it. Our resident artists work with the mechanics of the area and we have brought traffic to the area because most people would only come to Nabrawi street to get their car fixed so we have brought attention to the area,” she said.

Inviting institutions that own real estate such as the Ismaelia Real Estate Developments and the American University in Cairo, as well as art spaces such as Townhouse, Cimatheque and CIC, the panel aims to create a dialogue between these parties about their role in the regeneration of one of Cairo's central neighbourhoods.

The panel explores the role of artists as catalysts for urban regeneration by comparing Cairo's situation to other places where artists have proven to be a driving force behind this phenomenon. Are cities like Beirut and New York, which have experienced this process, different from Cairo? The panel also plans to explore whether involvement of the private sector in the gentrification process, by partnering with real estate stakeholders and independent artists and organisations, could be beneficial.

Appropriately, the panel will take place at the Goethe Institute's Downtown location from 6-8pm next Saturday.