Ahmed Bassiouny

Written by **Dr/ shady Elnoshokaty** translated from Arabic by **Dr/ Yousef ragheb**

Born in Ismailia-Egypt on October 1978 and was killed due to gun wounds inflicted by snipers of the Egyptian Police Forces in Tahrir Square on the 28th of January during the start of the 25th of January 2011 revolution.

_ He has a wife two children (Adam 6 years old) and (Salma 1 year Old).

_ Graduated from the faculty of Art Education-Helwan University in the year 2000 and worked as an assistant teacher in the department of drawing and painting in the faculty.

_ Acquired his masters degree in the Creative Potential of Digital Sound Art, and he was working on his PhD Thesis about The Visual Aspect of Open Source Programming in Relation to the concepts of digital art.

_ He is also one of the most important artists of the new generation of young contemporary Egyptian artists. His practice varied greatly and evolved rapidly in a short amount of time in the past 10 years. His early large scale expressionistic paintings won him the first prize in painting in the 2001 Salon of Youth. Then his work took a turn towards a more experimental direction involving new media and multimedia installations between the years of 2001 and 2005.

_ Bassiouny focused his academic study on digital sound art during his preparation of his masters thesis between the year 2002 and 2006. At the same time he started organizing the independent experimental workshop for digital sound art at the faculty of Art Education-Helwan University- 2006 among the other experimental workshops for media and creativity supervised by artist Dr. Shady El Noshokaty. Bassiouny started participating in those workshops since the first workshop in 2000 when he was still a student.

_ Bassiouny introduced his independent workshop as the first academic program in sound art experimentation in Egypt. He created this program that gives the students a chance to acquire the creative skills that are important to perceive sound as a raw material in relation to imagination, as well as the methodology to merge the audible material to virtual images that students can manipulate and change its state and nature through the usage of digital audio equipment and software.

_ Bassiouny depended on the weight of his personal performance to attract a great number of students to this new medium in Egypt. He was a catalyst in the evolution of the concept of sound art in every new workshop to include live sound performance in the summer of 2009 and 2010. During those two workshops he taught the students the power of compound natural sounds and how to transform environmental ambient sound into abstract shapes and forms in the mind of the audience which would acquire an almost architectural nature that is being built up in a direct live performance in front of a live audience utilizing all available technologies of live sound performances.

_ Bassiouny gave a great attention to the power of group learning and the importance of interaction and the merge of experiences as well as experimentation in the execution of ideas. Most of the ideas were a result of direct brainstorming to evolve through group interaction into a sound piece that tickles the mind and senses when heard in a live performance studio.

_ In parallel Bassiouny's creative production resulted in a series of contemporary artworks that depended mainly on the language of interactive art and this appeared in his first joint project with fellow artist Magdy Moustafa titled "The City" in March 2007. This project won them the Grand prize of the 13th Salon of Youth. The work was exhibited in the hall of Mahmoud Mokhtar museum. This project included many levels of multimedia starting from projections

within an installation that is fueled by an interactive live performance between the visitors and the artists throughout the duration of the exhibition. The City is an audio visual journey that reincarnates the real experience of being on Cairo's streets into a virtual realm inside the exhibition space. Each part of the real Cairo map is translated topographically on the walls and through recorded environmental sounds coming from strategically placed speakers on the virtual map. The viewers were invited to interact in an audible dialogue with the artists. The dialogue would be captured by microphones and processed digitally by the artists. In the center of the room sits a live performer sewing bits and pieces of the city map creating a new city, in general the artwork was an experience that could only be perceived through all the senses in relation to the subjective experiences of the viewer.

_ In 2007 Bassiouny produced his first experiment in interactive digital media in his independent project that came as a part of the group project "Stammer an Interactive Experiment" organized by Shady El Noshokaty as one project in the exhibition Occidentalism created by Karim Francis. In this project Bassiouny introduced an idea that depends on the interaction of the visitors with their own personal portrait that is captured by a surveillance camera and projected on hundreds of unlit light bulbs and as soon as the visitors enter the hall they are able to control the amount of illumination of the light bulbs through the volume of their voice, if they speak in a high volume the lamps would illuminate brightly thus over shadowing their image projected on the same bulbs, thus fueling a power struggle between the viewer and the system having only two choices, either to stay silent and let his personal image appear ,or produce any sound and the image would disappear within the high brightness of the lamps.

_ Bassiouny participated in an exhibition titled " The body invisible presents " in December 2009 in Mawlawiyah Palace with a conceptual performance titled " Symmetrical System" where he covered a large area of the ground stage with a liquid rubber material mixed with colors to simulate human skin. Bassiouny appears on stage wearing a blue costume imitating slaughterhouse workers along side a female performer wearing a dark baroque like dress with very intricate fine details. Bassiouny starts to develop a surrealistic dialogue with the rubber surface, sometimes the interaction is calculated precisely in other times it becomes purely expressionistic as if his body is trying to recreating itself to become one with the surface with the influence of the architectural nature of the stage that was originally intended for ancient Sufi dancers. On the other hand there is a tension in the relation with the female performer that moves slowly like a puppet around him trying carefully to invade his space. The work insinuates the nature of those contradicting relations between two different cultures that might want to secretly unite to discover a common language through that area of the virtual body.

_ Bassiouny grew more interested in the study of digital interactive media and by that he became one of the very few people in the contemporary Egyptian art movement working in that field and this is due to the lack of any academic programs that teach this specific field of art in addition to the vast amount of mandatory software and hardware knowledge that accompanies the practice of interactive art.

_ He participated in the first Egyptian/Spanish interactive art workshop, then in the "Egypt Lab" workshops in cooperation with Medrar Contemporary Art Foundation in Egypt and the "Hangar foundation" for technological production in Barcelona 2008-2009. These workshops focused on multimedia interactivity through open source programs like pure data and the integration of external hardware circuitry like the Arduino electronic platform. Open source programming is the type of programming based on sharing experiences between different programmers to develop certain free of charge software in an attempt to counteract the influence of mega software production companies.

_ These programs have immense flexibility in controlling and mixing between different types of sensors, haptics, and audio visual equipment. Bassiouny produced two of his major art

project using open source programming. The first project was " Thirty days of running in place" which was exhibited in the " Why not " exhibition in January 2010. The work was exhibited in a specially constructed room outside the palace of arts in the garden of the Cairo Opera House. The room was enclosed in transparent plastic sheets where Bassiouny would perform daily for one hour wearing a plastic suit designed specially for this project covering him completely with digital sensors that calculate the amount of sweat and the number of steps while he jogs around the room. The data is then transferred wirelessly to the computer that projects it onto a large screen with a graphical grid and geometrical color and shapes that change according to the physiological changes in his body as he moves creating an interactive relation between the living body and the digital system in an aesthetic manifestation of color and shape.

_ Bassiouny's last project was an interactive piece titled " ASCII doesn't speak Arabic" exhibited in the "Cairo Documenta" which is a big independent art show organized by a large group of young Egyptian contemporary artists in December 2010 for two weeks in one of the old hotels downtown. This project was also produced by open source programming to control the interactive process. The viewer's moving image would be projected live in the form of ASCII language on one screen but this time in Arabic alphabet and the system assigns Arabic letters to each viewer's head within the screen parameter. The viewer then can choose to push the letter assigned to him and project it to the other screen using bodily gestures by swinging his head to the side in a process that can include several viewers who have to synchronize their movements to compose words or sentences of a coherent meaning on the opposite screen. This project examines the relationship between body language and verbal communication and on the technical level Bassiouny had to overcome the obstacle of ASCII applications that are not compatible with Arabic alphabet with the help of one of the famous Spanish programmers who specialize in that field.

_ As the creative musician he is, Bassiouny was invited to participate in one of the most important festivals for digital music and sound art in Egypt the "Live 100" in May 2009-2010. Bassiouny's musical vocabulary varied from a minimalist approach to a conceptual one when he presented his work in cooperation with one of the Egyptian folk singers "Abou Asala" creating a hybrid type of music fueled by the cultural contradiction between the folk singing and the digital minimalist music of the electronic age. This experiment received wide accreditation from the audience and the critiques alike when it was performed at the "Darb Foundation for Contemporary Art" in 2010. It was also planned for him to perform in July 2011 in one of the most prestigious digital music festivals in the world "SONIC" in Barcelona and this month has been dedicated completely to his music on 100radiostation.com commemorating his death and accrediting his unique talent.

"No one would argue how uniquely talented an artist, a teacher, a musician, and a revolutionary Basiouny was. His talent propagated relentlessly in all directions. He was one of the most dedicated people to his gift and to his students. And on a personal level he was one of the kindest gentle and endearing people I have ever known. You might not be with us in person today but you will live in our hearts and minds forever. Rest in peace our beloved brother."

Shady El Noshokaty

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