

RAMSES WISSA WASSEF (1911-1974)

Architect born in Cairo, the eldest son of WISA WASSEF (Pasha), the sometime speaker of the Chamber of Deputies.

In 1938 he joined the staff of the Higher School of Fine Arts at [Cairo University](#). He was chairman of the department of architecture and [art history](#) from 1965 to 1969, when he resigned to devote himself to research.

His style was reconciled to past tradition, to the climate, and to natural materials. He excelled in designing brick vaults and domes, a form inherited from early dynasties, and in creating oriental stained glass windows from plaster and colored glass chips, for which he won the National Arts Award in 1961.

He designed a Coptic school in QASR AL-SHAM' in [Old Cairo](#) and the junior school of the French Lycée at Bab-al-Luq. He collaborated with Hassan Fathy on the village of al-Qurnah near Luxor. The best-known works of Ramses Wissa Wassef are the two Coptic cathedrals of Zamalek and Heliopolis, his own house at 'Ajuzah in Cairo, the complex of [tapestry](#) workshops at Harraniyyah, the chapel of the Dominican convent at 'Abbasiyyah, and the Moukhtar Museum at Gezira.

The Harraniyyah workshops were the culmination of Wassef's [philosophy](#) that children have innate artistic creativity. Choosing the medium of [tapestry](#) weaving he experimented, with parental consent, with selected children from the elementary school at Qasr al-Sham'. He felt weaving to represent a balanced fusion between [art](#) and manual labor. The looms were vertical and simple to handle; wool came from local sources and was dipped in natural dyes. Inspiration came from within each child.

The experiments proved successful. From the first show organized by UNESCO in Paris in January 1950, [exhibits](#) were shown in Switzerland,

Sweden, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, France, Germany, England, Italy, and the United States.

In September 1983 he was posthumously awarded the Agha Khan “Grand Prix” for the [architectural](#) ensemble conceived, created, and executed by him at Harraniyyah village in the province of Giza.

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