

LISSON

Wael Shawky



BIOGRAPHY

Based on extensive periods of research and enquiry, Wael Shawky's work tackles notions of national, religious and artistic identity through film, performance and storytelling. Whether instructing Bedouin children to act out the construction of an airport runway in the desert or organizing a heavy metal concert in a remote Egyptian village, Shawky frames contemporary culture through the lens of historical tradition and vice versa. Mixing truth and fiction, childlike wonder and spiritual doctrine, Shawky has staged epic recreations of the medieval clashes between Muslims and Christians in his trilogy of puppets and marionettes – titled *Cabaret Crusades: The Horror Show Files* (2010), *The Path to Cairo* (2012) and *The Secrets of Karbala* (2015) – while his three-part film, *Al Araba Al Madfunah*, uses child actors to recount poetic myths, paying homage, rather than mere lip-service, to the important narratives of yesteryear. For the Egyptian Pavilion of the 60th Venice Biennale, Shawky created *Drama 1882* (2024), a filmed rendition of an original musical play directed, choreographed, and composed by the artist, around Egypt's nationalist Urabi revolution against imperial influence (1879-82).

Wael Shawky was born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1971. He studied at the University of Alexandria before taking a Master's Degree in Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, USA in 2001. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at LUMA Arles, France (2025); Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland (2025); MOCA, Los Angeles, USA (2025); Daegu Art Museum, Daegu, South Korea (2024); Pompeii Archaeological Park, Pompeii, Italy (2023); M Leuven Museum, Brussels, Belgium (2022); The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX, USA (2021), The Louvre Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2020), ARoS, Aarhus

Kunstmuseum, Aarhus, Denmark (2018); Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Yinchuan, China (2017); Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy (2016); Fondazione Merz, Turin, Italy (2016); Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria (2016); Fondazione Merz, Zurich, Switzerland (2016); MATHAF, Doha, Qatar (2015) and MoMA P.S.1, New York, NY, USA (2015); K20 Düsseldorf, Germany (2014-15); Serpentine Galleries, London, UK (2013-14); KW Contemporary Art Institute, Berlin, Germany (2012); Nottingham Contemporary, UK (2011); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, USA (2011); Delfina Foundation, London, UK (2011) and Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella, Italy (2010). He has represented Egypt at La Biennale Di Venezia (2024); participated in the 14th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey (2015); the 11th Sharjah Biennial, UAE (2013); Documenta 13, Kassel, Germany (2012); the 9th Gwangju Biennial, South Korea (2012); SITE Santa Fe Biennial, NM, USA (2008); the 9th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey (2005); and the 50th Venice Biennale, Italy (2003).

Recent awards include the Honorary Citizenship of the City of Palermo (2017); the inaugural Mario Merz Prize (2015); the Sharjah Biennial Award (2013); the Award for Filmic Oeuvre created by Louis Vuitton and Kino der Kunst (2013); the Abraaj Capital Art Prize (2012); the Schering Foundation Art Award (2011); Grand Prize, 25th Alexandria Biennale (2009), as well as The International Commissioning Grant and an award from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, in 2005.

In 2010, Shawky founded the educational space MASS Alexandria. More recently, in 2024, he was named Artistic Director of the Doha Fire Station, where he launched the Arts Intensive Study Program (AISP) which supports the professional development of a cohort of 20 emerging Qatari and international artists. Shawky served as Artistic Director of the inaugural edition of Art Basel Qatar, which opened in Doha in February 2026.