DUST:

PHOTOGRAPHING COLONIAL ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IN EGYPT

XENIA NIKOLSKAYA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the possibilities and limits of architectural and interior photography as a complex method for the investigation, interpretation, and preservation of Egypt's colonial architectural heritage from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This research is applied on a cohesive collection of original photographs produced in the period from 2006 to 2011, covering more than 30 locations in Egypt, including Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor, Minya, Esna, Port Said, and villages in the Delta. This body of work was published as a monograph under the title *Dust: Egypt's Forgotten Architecture* (Stockport, UK: Dewi Lewis, 2012), and was widely distributed internationally. *Dust* was the subject of curatorial attention, with exhibitions of the book's photographs hosted by major cultural institutions, including The State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art Museum in Doha, Qatar; and the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, France.

The practice-led research focuses on a brief but remarkable period of Egyptian history. It makes a unique contribution to the field of interior and architectural photography in Egypt by identifying and mapping the country's colonial architectural heritage and proposing a new narrative that disrupts and modifies the ways these spaces are seen today. *Dust* interpreted architectural heritage by employing an ethnographic research method that combines history, political economy, and social developments with architecture studies, while offering an understanding of how Egyptian people treat heritage in everyday life. The *Dust* project is particularly timely for Egyptian culture as the country experiences a transitional phase, raising awareness about the significance of preserving and closely studying national architectural heritage. It sparked a new interest in the subject matter in Egypt among local photographers and architects, as well as city planners, historians, and the wider public who were

exposed to colonial architecture through the pages of *Dust*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Dust: Egypt's Forgotten Architecture (2006–2012) is a practice-led research project that explores the possibilities and limits of architectural and interior photography as a complex method for the investigation, interpretation, and preservation of Egypt's architectural heritage from the colonial period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This critical commentary reviews and contextualises the book *Dust: Egypt's Forgotten Architecture*. Published in 2012 by Dewi Lewis Publishing, *Dust* is composed of 69 photographs taken in Egypt; specifically, in Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor, Minya, Esna, Port Said, and villages in the Delta. Egypt's colonial architecture is rapidly succumbing to the ravages of time, the destruction of historic buildings accelerated by the ongoing real-estate boom and overpopulation crisis. These factors lend particular urgency to the documentation of this urban space. Since I began the project in 2006, a number of the spaces featuring in the book have been demolished or repurposed.

1.1 Background to research

The project started with the Serageldin Palace, which I entered in January 2006 by accident. Shooting through the years 2006 to 2011, I gained exceptional access and photographed over 30 locations. Looking back, the timing was perfect. President Hosni Mubarak's regime was coming to an end and possibilities abounded.

I first came to Egypt in 2003 as a member of the Russian Archaeological Mission in Memphis. The sight of the gigantic sculpture of Ramses II standing in the rain in front of the train station is still deeply impressed on my mind. Today, the

monolithic statue of Ramses is no longer standing over Ramses Square. It is now part of the holdings of the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM). Egypt's Pharaonic heritage is the main attraction for foreign visitors, but it is not the only historical period that the country is famous for.

Egypt, one of the most densely populated countries in the world, has a colonial history that stretches back centuries, being occupied from the second century and achieving full independence only in 1952. The relationship between Egyptians and foreigners, whether experts or plain *khawagas*,[1] is a complicated, "love-hate" one. Everything foreign is good by definition and extremely desirable, but at the same time the foreign presence irritates.

In fact, the foreign contribution to Egyptian architecture is significant. Architecture is a brilliant example of the Egyptian struggle for identity as a "repository of time" (Hosni 2012, p. 4). Between 1860 and 1940, Cairo and other large cities witnessed a major construction boom that gave birth to extraordinary palaces and lavish buildings. It was an era of relative liberalism, characterized by freedom of the press, a constitutional parliamentary system, and a cosmopolitanism "that contrasted with confessional dependency of the Ottoman system and the belligerent nationalism of Nasser" (Hosni 2012, p. 3). Today many of these buildings sit empty and neglected. Some were nationalised while others were abandoned soon after the 1956 war with Israel, when a massive exodus of foreigners and Egyptian Jews took place.[2] I photographed the remnants of Cairo's "golden age." Cairo was considered the most Europeanized, great city of the period, but it was, in fact, only a moment in the tumultuous chronicle of Cairo's long history. *Dust*

[1] *Khawaga* means "foreigner" in Egyptian colloquial Arabic.

[2] In his 1992 book, Charles Issawi noted that in 1918 foreigners made up 25 per cent of the population of Port Said.

depicts the “period of an exotic eastern consumption of Mediterranean culture,” to use Mikhail Piotrovsky’s eloquent description (Piotrovsky 2015). In a way, history repeats itself today as the Egyptian government sets about constructing a “new capital,” located 65 km east of Cairo. In trying to make its own version of Oscar Niemeyer’s Brazilia, the Egyptian government copies another failed model of Western urbanism.

Dust contributes new ways of documenting and interpreting architectural heritage to the field of architectural photography by employing an ethnographic research method (Smith and Dean 2009) that combines history, political economy, and social developments with architecture studies. This practice-led research project is particularly timely for Egyptian culture at this transitional stage in the country’s history, as it raises awareness about the significance of preserving and closely studying national architectural heritage. *Dust* offers a testament of Egypt’s social and economic developments on a large scale while affording an understanding of how people treat heritage in everyday life.

Following the traditional coffee-table format, *Dust* affords new knowledge to a range of audiences interested in Egyptian history, architecture, colonial studies, and urban planning. The monograph starts with an introduction in which I describe the starting point for the project, my artistic background, and my inspiration and references. The book contains 69 colour plates followed by an essay by On Barak, “Egyptian Dust: The Social Life of Endangered Spaces,” which provides a brief overview of the colonial history of Egypt and examines its relationship with the concept of time. The essay does not describe the images but, like the perfect soundtrack for a movie, sets the tone. The book closes with an index of the photographs and additional information about the buildings.

Dust was widely recognized in international media, including

prominent outlets like *The Telegraph* (2012) and the BBC's "Forum" (2013), as well as professional photographic magazines, including *The Images* (Cornet 2012), and the art institutions Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, Qatar, and L'Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris. Interest in the subject of heritage preservation and study continues to grow.

Dust influenced several Egyptian photographers, Nour El Massry and Karim El Hayawan among them, and other creative practitioners who are "repeating" the *Dust* aesthetic of emptiness, mystery, and illumination that resembles Dutch painting. Real-estate agents, too, have started to capitalise on their rundown properties to rent them out to photographers and filmmakers as shooting locations. The Egyptian real-estate company Al Ismaelia, which gave me access to some of their buildings in 2010, now promotes "Downtown Cairo" as a marketing tool. But the irony is that the average Egyptian would never swap a new, gated community outside of Cairo or Alexandria for this decaying beauty, though stakeholders try to persuade us that the "golden age" is not over.

Six years of work on the project and the book, as well as public appreciation and critical responses from media writers and presenters, colleagues, and academic institutions have enhanced my knowledge of abandoned colonial architecture in Egypt, shaping my research and raising new research questions.

1.2 Research questions

The *Dust* project grew out of the following research questions:

- How can photography document endangered colonial architecture in Egypt and create a new narrative about history and heritage preservation?
- How can photographic documentation of architectural

heritage contribute to the discourse of Egyptian urban development?

1.3 Aims

The *Dust* project had the following aims:

- To investigate and analyse archival photographic material (from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries) that documents different aspects of Egyptian colonial architecture.
- To explore apposite photographic strategies which re-visualise and revive forgotten aspects of Egyptian colonial architecture.
- To create a new artistic narrative that transforms the way that these spaces are seen and disseminate this narrative in the field of contemporary architectural and interior photography.

1.4 Objectives

Archival and contemporary contextual research:

- To explore existing strategies of architectural and interior photography.
- To investigate aspects of historical (Egyptian and foreign) photographic processes through collections-based research.

Practice: Methodology, narrative, and aesthetics:

- To recognize and collect unknown buildings from the relevant time period.
- To explore the narrative possibilities of ambient light, different viewpoints, and composition in telling the story of Egyptian colonial architecture.

Book: Narrative, dissemination, and impact:

- To develop contemporary photographic interpretations of forgotten Egyptian colonial architecture.

- Raise awareness about endangered architectural heritage and disseminate knowledge about this historic period and its fast-fading architectural legacy.
- Re-contextualise colonial architectural practices and trends in light of contemporary attitudes, historical shifts and urbanization praxis.

Exhibitions:

- To offer a platform for public discussion on Egyptian architectural heritage.
- To question perceptions of Egyptian architectural heritage in different contexts and venues and for different audiences.
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2. PRACTICE-BASED METHODOLOGY

The aim of this practice-based project was to document disappearing colonial architecture in Egypt in order to create a new narrative that disrupts and modifies the ways these spaces are interpreted and investigated. During my work I employed an ethnographic approach (Smith and Dean 2009), with direct observation functioning as part of the field research, similar to the multi-layered approach formulated by Liza Drakup (Drakup 2017).

The first stage of this methodology involved a series of interviews with architects, artists, and city historians, including the Cairo-based artist Paul Geday and Alexandria-based architect Mohamed El-Sheikh who helped me create a map of venues with historic significance and identify interesting buildings I came across. The website and book of local historian Samir Rafaat (2003) and the work of French scholar Mercedes Volait (2005) on Egyptian colonial architecture provided background research for the selection of case studies. Whether or not I tried to enter a building that I had come across during my walks depended on whether or not I thought the interior would be of interest. Finding archival photographs of the buildings I photographed was particularly difficult. As was also the case with Egyptian archives, the situation with the buildings' owners is complicated. With the exception of Mahmoud Sabit, no other owner I contacted seems to keep track of photographs, architectural details, or plans of their building. I photographed Sabit's house in 2007, and he managed to dig out a few old pictures of the once-grand house.[3] Mahmoud Sabit is a descendant of a once-important family and is a unique source of knowledge on the history of modern Egypt. The photograph of his house (Figure 1) contributes to the discourse of Egyptian urban development for it illustrates the

[3] Conversation with M. Sabit in Cairo on 24 April 2018.

adaptation of once-grand house to the current needs of its inhabitants and the economic reality. In this photograph one can see well kept deteriorating interior of the living room of Sabit's house. Sabit's persistence to inhabit his family residence is a rare case of the live-in maintenance and a testament his daily struggle to raise awareness of architectural heritage. As soon as other owners gave up their buildings, the fate of these properties was clear.

Figure 1. Xenia Nikolskaya, "Qasr al-Doubara (Mahmoud Sabit house), Cairo, 2008.

This stage involved consulting photographic and non-photographic sources, including collecting existing images and books. The author of *The Cairo House*, a semi-autobiographical novel, is Samia Serageldin (2000).[4] She was the niece of the last owner of the Serageldin Palace, which I photographed in 2006, 2010 and 2011. She was a good starting point. Samia was the first person I interviewed in 2006, and she gave me useful, not publicly accessible information about her family's mansion in

[4] Fuad Pasha Serageldin became secretary-general of the dominant Wafd Party and held cabinet posts before the 1952 Revolution.

Garden City and the family history. Other significant interviews followed: Ola Seif, curator at the Rare Books and Special Collections Library (RBSCDL) at the American University in Cairo (AUC), introduced me to the work of Beniamino Facchinelli and Theodor Kofler; Heba Farid, a historian of photography at AUC, and Shaimaa Samir Ashour, an architect and assistant professor at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology & Maritime Transport, briefed me on Egyptian archives; Amr Talat, a historian and photography collector, introduced me to the Max Karkégi archive; and Nadezhda Sinyutina, curator at The State

Hermitage Museum, gave a unique perspective on Candida Höfer's photographic strategies. As an expert in colonial architecture, Ahmad Al-Bindari provided significant commentary about the architects and suggested relevant publications[5], while Soheir Zaki Hawas, Professor of Architecture and Urban Design, Faculty of Engineering, Cairo University, suggested I research Egyptian cinema in order to study interiors of the period.[6]

The second stage involved field trips in the form of city walks and location scouting. This was particularly difficult during the period from 2006 to 2010 due to a ban on the use of GPS in Egypt and the lack of accurate paper maps. Some locations were found simply thanks to a friend's courtesy: people who knew I was photographing old buildings suggested I visit their family villas, farms, or offices. At the same time, I tried to find information about these buildings in books and online. This also proved a complicated task because of the multiple ways of transliterating Arabic names (in classical and colloquial Arabic) into English and the constant changing of Cairo street names. The book *Street Names of Central Cairo* would have been a great help in this

[5] Conversation with Ahmed Al-Bindari in Cairo on 7 May 2018.

[6] Conversation with S.Z. Hawas in Cairo on 19 April 2018.

endeavour, but unfortunately it appeared only last year (Davies and Lababidi 2018).

However, sometimes during my walks I would spot a building and intuition, combined with my knowledge of the history of architecture, would urge me to go inside. Like the methodology Liza Drakup formulated in her practice-based doctoral thesis on photographic strategies for visualising the landscape and natural history of Northern England (Drakup 2017), my methodology for this project was emergent, systematic, and multi-layered, but also involved serendipity and intuition.

My photographic practice is closely linked to archaeology and heritage documentation because of my earlier work as a field photographer for The State Hermitage Museum, the Russian Academy of Science (Centre for Egyptology in Cairo), and the conservation lab at the Art Academy in St. Petersburg. I have a long history of photographing artifacts of all kinds. It has equally been shaped by academic studies in the history of art and photography at the Art Academy in St. Petersburg. All this background knowledge and experience equipped me for stage three.

The third stage was to gain access to the buildings. The difficulties I faced at this stage were partly a result of public ignorance about my subject of interest and partly the consequence of military law, which had been in force in the country since the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1982.[7] During the upheavals surrounding the removal of President Mubarak, and later President Mohamed Morsy, state television and radio warned Egyptians that foreigners were spies, increasing suspicion of photographers and journalists.

[7] Military law was lifted for a brief period in 2012, before being imposed once more after the removal of the Islamist President Mohamed Morsi.

At this stage of my research, in early 2011, I received substantial help from the film-location manager Eddie Idriss, who had a Cinema Syndicate ID that “opened all doors”. Some of the buildings, such as Mohamed al-Qarniya Palace in Downtown Cairo (Nikolskaya 2012, p. 67), had been nationalised decades before and used as public schools. As they were not designed as schools, many were eventually abandoned and had been vacant for decades, becoming the target of looters and vandals. In many cases, the underpaid state workers or just the doormen (*bowabs*) who were tasked with “watching” these properties became dealmakers in selling the properties’ decorative features to antique dealers in Egypt and the Gulf (Fahmi, 2013). To enter the Villa Casdagly in Garden City, Cairo, for example, took me a full 18 months from when I first asked to go inside and when it actually happened. When I tried to gain access for the first time in 2009, the former palace was still being used as a school; in November 2011, during the uprising that following the removal of President Mubarak, it was set on fire.

When all the stress related to gaining access to the buildings was behind me, I could then focus on stage four: the photography. The abovementioned challenges dictated the technical methods of the project. In the early stage I was using medium-format colour negatives (6 cm x 7 cm, 6 cm x 9 cm), but after moving to Cairo in 2010 to fully focus on the project, I realised I could not rely on local development process labs and I needed something more suitable for the conditions of shooting, like a full-frame digital camera. Most often, I used a tripod, but there were situations when I could only rely on a monopod, because the tripod was too visible. Sometimes the use of a monopod caused technical imperfections in the image, but the patina of imperfection in those photographs made them akin to personal records, which was a conscious departure from the kind of architectural and interior photography discussed in the literature review. I retained the geometrical, straightforward composition,

which was easy to control through the camera display, essentially applying large-format strategies to the digital camera. This helped me in the editing process because the post-production stage was minimal.

My use of solely available lighting served this purpose as well. My intention was to create a feeling of uncertainty and suspense in a single frame, in order to express the complicated circumstances of these properties. Hence, lighting conditions were chosen to be as theatrical as possible, inspired by Vermeer's paintings. To maintain coherence, I always pursued the same lighting conditions. As a result, I had to revisit certain locations several times, such as the Serageldin Palace, which I visited in 2006, 2009, and 2011, and the El-Dorado Theatre in Port Said, where I went back four times during one week in order to catch the lighting that would best expose the interior details of the building and make the image more vivid. After settling on the aesthetic that I believed would be appropriate for the uncertain conditions of the buildings I photographed — dramatic suspense — I began looking for particularly dramatic light settings, and some of the photographs were excluded from the final selection because they lacked this quality. I wanted to share with the viewer the same suspense I experienced when I first entered these forgotten, haunted places. Due to my early education, I am inspired equally by cinematography and painting.

In the final stage of the research I extended the methodology by experimenting with different forms of disseminations: exhibitions were one of the most important forms of it. It was done in order to test the extended outcome of my research. The show in Townhouse Gallery in Cairo (2012) created a new narrative valuable for heritage experts and urban planners, meanwhile Doha show (2013) was art-oriented. Other examples will be discussed further in chapter *Impact and Dissemination*.

I completed the *Dust* project using an ethnographic approach that was executed in various stages: interviews and reference sourcing, field trips, acquiring access, photography and exhibitions. The whole work was done during a very particular moment in Egyptian history. For almost 30 years, the Mubarak-led regime was characterised by policy stagnation and neglect of the past century's heritage. But thanks to the human factor and the generosity of friends, I was able to complete my work. My photographic practice, related to archaeology and heritage documentation, equipped me with the right tools to gain the best possible quality during the most imperfect conditions.

3. CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

3.1. Introduction

There are several important books dedicated to Middle Eastern photography and Egyptian photography in particular. Maria Golia's *Photography and Egypt* (2010) is the most comprehensive work on Egyptian photography from 1839 to the present day. Golia writes about both foreign photographers who worked in Egypt and Egyptians, focusing on local photographic studios, the early days of Egyptian photojournalism, and illustrated media. Golia's book is based on significant research she carried out in Egyptian archives and is critical for understanding the history of depicting Egypt. However, she does not explore architectural photography in particular. Ken Jacobson's *Odalisques and Arabesques* (2008) is the classic work on Middle Eastern "Orientalist photography," concentrating on photographs taken in the East or created in the West as a result of Eastern influences and providing detailed biographies of the photographers cited. Serra Erdem, in her unpublished master's thesis "Views of Egypt' by Georgios and Constantinos Zangaki: Examining a Late Nineteenth-Century Photographic Album at the Art Gallery of Ontario" (2009) gives a very detailed study of the Zangaki brothers' art and career, especially in

relation to the development of the photography industry in Cairo and Port Said, and with a specific focus on *Views of Egypt*, a collection of nineteenth-century photo albums at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

For many years Soheir Zaki Hawas's book about Khedivial Cairo (2002) was the sole reference on colonial architecture from the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but this work largely provided architectural plans and drawings that Hawas had produced with her students rather than photographs of colonial architecture. The key expert in Egyptian colonial architecture is French scholar Mercedes Volait, at the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (INHA). In 2017, Volait published an important article directly relating to the subject of architectural and interior photography in Egypt in the period 1839–1950s, **"**A Unique Visual Narrative of Historic Cairo in the 1880s: Unveiling the Work of Beniamino Facchinelli" **(**Volait 2017), in which she calls Facchinelli, who worked with Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe, "Cairo's Atget". Her thesis will be explored further below. In 2013, Facchinelli was already the subject of research by another scholar, Ola Seif of the Rare Book and Special Collections Digital Library (RBSCDL) at the AUC. Though both scholars work with the same recently discovered photographic collection of his work at INHA, Seif's (2013) focus is the field of Cairo topography and Facchinelli's activity as the Comité's photographer; it has been the most relevant reference for *Dust* research. A 2012 article in the Egyptology magazine *Kemet* by Lucy Gordan-Rastelli sheds light on the new discovery of Kofler's aerial photography. In addition, the Alinari archive catalogue, dedicated to the 150th anniversary of the birth of architect Antonio Lasciac, celebrates his work in Egypt and presents a significant collection of attributed architectural photography from this period. Unfortunately, I came across them only while working on this thesis, as most of these publications came out after the *Dust* book had been published.

Only foreign institutes in Egypt digitalise and publish their archives to make them accessible to the public, with the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale (IFAO) and the Rare Books and Special Collections Digital Library (RBSCDL) at the AUC being two significant ones. Private Egyptian collections are also a good source of information regarding photography history, but institutions like the Geographical Society and National Archive unfortunately do not have digital catalogues. Working with Egyptian photographic archives poses certain difficulties. Lucie Ryzova titled her 2014 article "Mourning the Archive" as a way of describing her experience with working with Egyptian archives. Her observations are extremely sharp and matter of factly describe the current situation: there are few public institutions devoted to photographic collections and existing ones, like the Alexandria Library, strip the images of their provenance, authors, sources, and context, frequently mislabelling them and systematically claiming all entries as the property of the Alexandria Library (Ryzova 2014, p. 1050). Although Ryzova's article was published in 2014, my recent personal experience with the Alexandria Library catalogue was very similar. The other problematic issues she describes are the physical deterioration of historical collections, the public's confusion of digital copies with physical originals, and the territorial attitude of the collectors: "The treasure must retain its mystique to maximise its potential market value" (Ryzova 2014, p. 1040). Her remarks eloquently describe the challenges I faced in contextualising this research historically.

Evaluating contemporary practice in the field of interior and architectural photography, *Dust* can be compared with Simon Norfolk's aftermath work in Afghanistan and Robert Polidori's photographs from Havana. Though Lennart af Petersens's aesthetic is very different from mine, his methodological

approach of meticulous documentation of disappearing urban environment is very similar to the methodology of *Dust.*

The contextual review is divided into two parts: the first part, "Architectural and Interior Photography in Egypt 1839–1950s," focuses on material that is contemporaneous with the buildings I photographed and the architects who designed them, thus establishing a visual and methodological archaeology for *Dust*; part two, "Contemporary Architectural Photography," explores and contrasts strategies and methodologies used by other contemporary photographers with those employed in *Dust*.

3.2 Architectural and Interior Photography in Egypt 1839–1950s

Between 1860 and 1940, Cairo and other large Egyptian cities witnessed a major construction boom that gave birth to extraordinary palaces and lavish architecture. The boom was spurred by the country's rapid economic development, fuelled by the cotton industry, the construction of the Suez Canal in 1869, and the growth of international tourism as the first of Thomas Cook's steamers made their way up the Nile in 1870. As a result of these combined developments, Egypt became the ultimate tourist destination in the second part of the nineteenth century, and soon after the "most photographed" country (Golia 2010). However, until the twentieth century, Egypt was predominately photographed by foreign photographers who were either closely connected to archaeology or aimed to depict the Egyptian capital as a European-looking city.

The domination of the local photographic scene by foreign photographers was, according to Donald Malcom Reid, a result of colonial museology (2015, p. 1) and a tax policy that favoured foreigners and penalised nationals. In the introduction to a book of Egyptian postcards by Alian Blottiere, released by the local publishing house Zeitouna, Cairo-based photographer and

collector Barry Iverson (Iverson, 1993, ix) explained the foreign monopoly in the photographic field: foreign resident photographers enjoyed tax immunity and paid lower import duties on photographic equipment and supplies than their Egyptian counterparts.

Foreigners were not just governing Egypt, but were in charge of all areas connected to the country's antiquities and archaeology. Analysing the photographic documentation of the Tutankhamen tomb discovery, Christina Riggs, in a recent lecture at the University of Pisa, explained: "Archaeology would not exist without colonialism and colonialism is a part of archaeology" (Egittologia UNIPI, 2017).

In the second half of the nineteenth century several important cultural institutions and museums were founded in Cairo, their architecture reflecting both the fashion of the period and the nature of the collections within (Reid 2015, p. 6). The antiquities field was divided between several European countries. The Egyptian Museum was founded in Bulaq in 1863 by the Frenchman Auguste Ferdinand Mariette. Together with the Egyptian Antiquities Service, the goal was to collect pharaonic artifacts: the museum would become in effect a French archaeological protectorate. The Khedival Library (now National Library) was the domain of German directors from 1873 until the First World War. The Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, which opened in 1892, had three successive Italian directors until 1952. Austro-Hungarian influence was also present in the Museum of Arab Art, which opened in 1884. Egyptians were only in charge of their own Coptic Museum, which was founded in 1908 by Murqus (Marcus) Simaika (Reid 2015, p. 6).

Most of the photographic material from this period was connected to archaeology, as "photography and archaeology were sibling disciplines that influenced and improved one another when

growing up" (Golia, 2010, p. 31). This section of the literature review will focus on photographers whose work was closely connected to archaeology and heritage preservation, especially architecture and institutions that were operating in Egypt from the advent of photography in 1839 to the 1950s.

The first photographer who systematically photographed Egypt's monuments was Maxime Du Camp (1822–1894), commissioned by the Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in September 1849 (Golia 2010, p. 17). Du Camp and other photographers learned the calotype process from French photographer Gustave Le Gray (1820–1884), who spent the rest of his life in Egypt, earning his living by instructing the sons of the khedive in drawing and through commissioned portraits of members of the ruling class.

In 1849, Du Camp and Gustave Flaubert hired a boat to take them up the Nile as far as the second cataract, exploring the archaeological sites along its banks. In July 1850 they left Egypt for Palestine, Turkey, and Greece. Du Camp's calotypes, printed by Louis Désiré Blanquart-Evrard, were published in 1852 in the album *Egypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie: Dessins Photographiques,* which made him internationally famous. Du Camp preferred a frontal view and midday light and sometimes included people to provide a sense of scale (Figure 1). His prints were not as sharp as daguerreotypes but "rendered the texture of weathered stone and sand-engulfed ruins with a hint of tactile veracity, an effect that enhanced the atmospheric quality of the images" (Golia 2010, p. 18).

Figure 2. Maxime Du Camp, French, “Ensemble du Temple d’Isis à Philae,” April 1850, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In 1851, the introduction of a new photographic process, known as wet collodion, offered a new perspective on the representation of Egyptian monuments. The former owner of a grocery shop and a Quaker, Francis Frith (1822–1898) travelled to Egypt for the first time in 1856 (Nickel 2004). His mode of transportation was a covered wagon, which doubled as a darkroom. Sometimes he used the tombs as a darkroom to sensitize his plates. He produced several albums with pictures of Egypt and the Holy Land. Between 1858 and 1862, he published eight photographically illustrated books with more than 400 images. The books made him one of the most successful photography businessmen in the history of nineteenth-century photography. Frith followed the aesthetic footsteps of fellow British artist David Roberts (1796–1864) who “corrected” his drawings in order to present a more “perfect” image (Golia 2010, p. 27). Roberts created imaginary pictures that were perfectly beautiful but did not reflect that actual appearance of the subject matter. With the help of a new medium — photography — Frith wanted to show the reality of the monuments and challenge Roberts’ aesthetics.

His approach was very similar to that of Du Camp but with one key difference: Frith was particularly interested in places described in the Old Testament, and his journey to Egypt was a kind of pilgrimage.

Figure 3. Francis Frith, English, “Cairo from the Citadel First View,” 1857, Tate Museum.

Among the most well-known foreign photographers based in Cairo was the French photographer Ermé Désiré (b. 1830), who arrived in Cairo in 1864 and actively worked there until 1885. Désiré’s particular interest was in photographing genre scenes in the streets of Cairo and Alexandria, resulting in the now famous *Souvenirs du Caire* (1865), an album of 52 photographs printed in *carte de visite* format (17.5 cm x 24 cm–22.5 cm x 31.5 cm, albumen paper prints). Besides genre scenes, Désiré photographed some of Egypt’s architectural landmarks, including the Great Pyramid, the interior of the Sultan Hassan Mosque, the fountain at the Khan al-Khalili Bazaar, the Great Mosque of Caliphs, and part of the Cairo panorama.

In 1866 Désiré undertook, over several weeks, a meticulous visual report of the Suez Canal's construction, documenting the project mile by mile. He moved along the canal on a boat equipped with a photographic darkroom and made a series of collodion negatives. A set of more than 72 photographs of the construction of the Suez Canal is now kept at the National Maritime Museum in Paris.

Figure 4. Ermé Désiré, French, "Grande tranchée à Chalouf. Travaux pour l'extraction du sous-sol pierreux," 1867, Musée National de la Marine, Paris.

The photographs offer a highly detailed documentation of the Canal's construction, including pictures of the construction of the canal equipment, administrative buildings, docks, and boats. All photographs were taken from the same angle with the same lens. The consistency of his viewpoint in every photograph is similar to my approach in *Dust*, where the majority of the pictures are taken from a central perspective and from a point of view that is higher

than eye level. The documentation of such a remarkable event in the country's modernisation gives Désiré a significant position in the history of Egyptian photography.

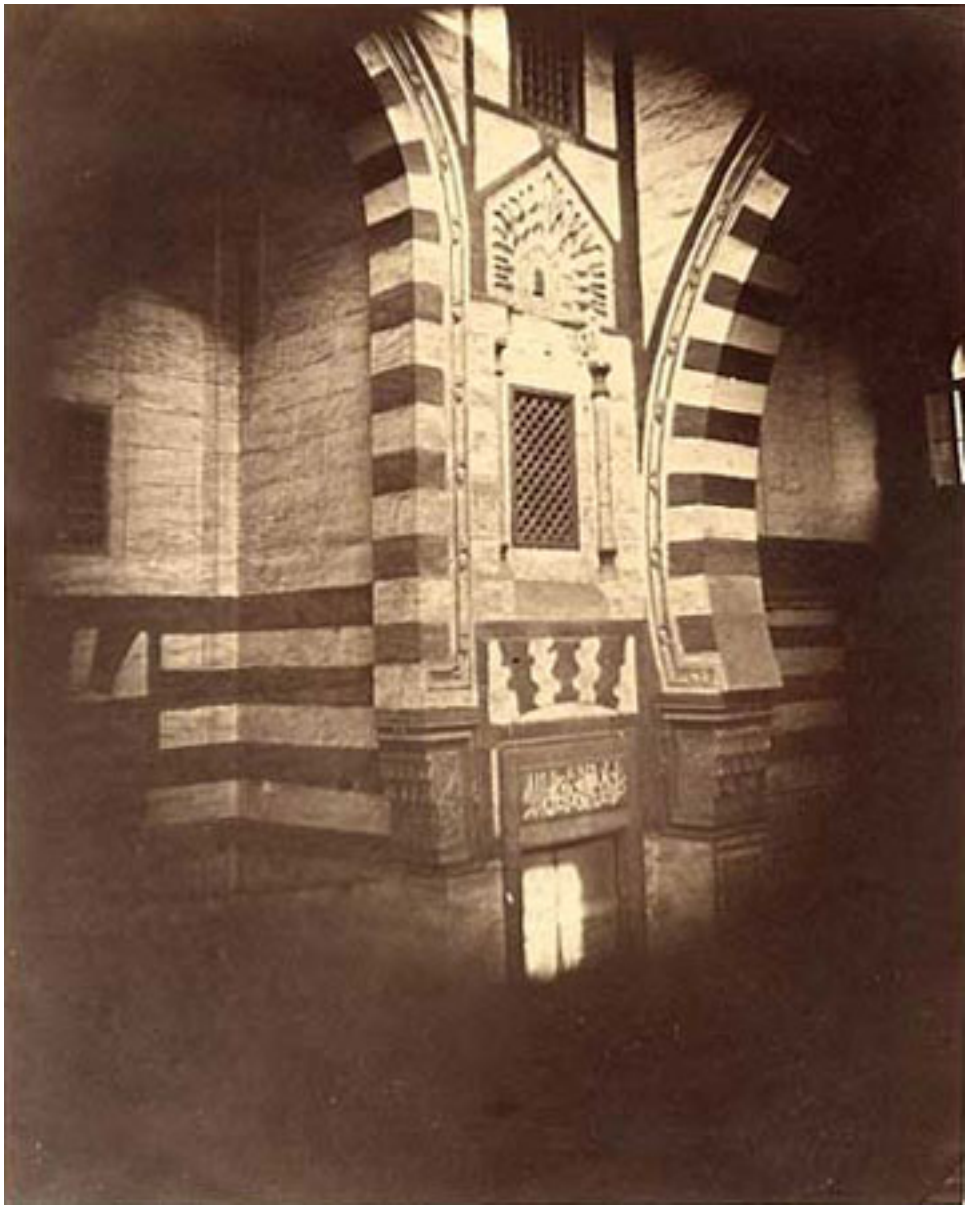

Figure 5. Ermé Désiré, French, "Cairo," circa 1865, Gallery 19–21.

Désiré was not the only one who covered the construction of the Suez Canal: the Greek Zangaki brothers — Georgios (ca.1845–1895) and Constantinos (ca.1845–1916) — produced several impressive views of the Canal, and cities like Ismailia and Port Said along the Canal, which was, by 1880, the gateway to Egypt for foreign travellers (Erdem 2009, p. 26). The Zangaki brothers started their photographic business by opening a studio in Port Said in 1870. Having documented the opening of the Suez

Canal, they described themselves as “Canal” photographers and called their studio “Oriental Photographers: Zangaki Brothers, Views of the Canal and Orient” (Erdem 2009, p. 28). Their approach was more commercial, following the postcard aesthetic of the 1890s, and their work soon transitioned from albumen prints to actual postcards. Many of their images were reproduced later under other names, including Arnoux and Lekegian. The photograph of the Victoria Hotel in Figure 5 represents the typical Port Said trade architecture style, which was influenced by South American architecture: a gigantic wooden construction with galleries around the façade, very few of which survive today. This particular style of multiple tiers is depicted in the interior of El-Dorado Theatre in *Dust,* one of the few remaining authentic interiors that reflect the economic prosperity of that time. El-Dorado Theatre was constructed to provide entertainment for the Canal employees.

Figure 6. Zangaki brothers, Greek (Georgios, ca. 1845–ca. 1895, and Constantinos, ca. 1845–1916), “The Hotel Victoria Exchange, Ismailia, Egypt,” 13 August 1880. Barry Iverson Collection.

In 1881, European archaeologists, historians, and philanthropists with a mission to preserve and document Islamic and Coptic vernacular architecture as a response to the neglect and occasional destruction of Medieval Cairo created the Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe, Comité hereafter (Seif et al. 2013). The destruction of Medieval Cairo had begun earlier in the nineteenth century, under the regime of Muhammad Ali and his successors, who attempted to modernize Egypt through development projects, including the construction of new city areas that followed a European urban style. The Comité issued an annual publication entitled *Comités Bulletins* and assigned photographers to systematically produce "before and after" photographs of monuments during the modernisation of the city and its streets, focusing on a wide range of Islamic architectural monuments.

Figure 7. Gabriel Lekegian, Armenian, “Old Cairo Houses,” 1890s, Lusadaran: Armenian Photography Foundation.

One of the most important photographers whose work was affiliated with the Comité was Gabriel Lekegian (ca.1887–1925), whose studio was located in front of the Shepherd’s Hotel in the heart of Cairo’s European district. For nearly three decades, until the early 1920s, the Lekegian studio held an exceptionally prominent position in Cairo, producing thousands of images depicting the everyday life, nature, and architecture of Egypt. As well as depictions of famous landmarks like the Pyramids, the temples in Luxor, and the Nile, Lekegian also produced hundreds of photographs showing daily life in Cairo. His subjects were more diverse than other photographers working in Egypt at the time, perhaps owing to the fact that Lekegian arrived in Cairo

from Constantinople as an artist specialising in watercolour painting. Following his employment as the official photographer of the British army in Egypt, Lekegian received numerous commissions to provide “reportage” shots of state building operations in the region, such as the new Nile barrage and Cairo’s reconstruction. These are Lekegian’s least known but perhaps most exceptional works as early forms of documentary photography. According to Jacobson (2008), documentary photography in the Middle East dates from the early 1860s. Lekegian’s photographs of Cairo streets show a multifaceted and rapidly changing environment. His interest in the humanitarian side of this environment, how people treat the buildings and monuments and the modern social condition, links his work to *Dust.*

There were other photographers connected to the Comité. One of the lesser-known ones whose approach resembles my methodology in *Dust* was the Italian photographer Beniamino Facchinelli, whose work was at first mistakenly credited to Lekegian (Seif 2013). Facchinelli worked in Cairo from the 1870s until his death in 1895. His most well-known work was produced during the period of 1875–1895, particularly the album *Sites et monument du Caire* (1893), commissioned by Ambroise Baudry and now housed in the Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art (INHA) in Paris (Seif 2013, p. 5). Facchinelli made some 1,200 views of Cairo’s streets and monuments throughout his photographic career. Departing from postcard aesthetics, these snapshots of everyday life were distinguished for their documentary style. As such, they provide a unique record of the architectural universe. Some are more aestheticised, as the photographer had a particular interest in graffiti, zoomorphic imagery, and Hajj paintings; others depict urban Cairo before its major restoration in the early twentieth century. His photographs pay attention to ordinary structures rather than offering exotic pictures of vacant landscapes and ancient ruins. Facchinelli’s images appear

sincere and speak to contemporary tastes. He always used a very wide lens in order to capture the entire scene and preferred an elevated camera angle while shooting. Volait (2017, p. 29) calls Facchinelli “Cairo’s Atget” because it was Facchinelli who started to document the changing nature of the Egyptian capital, 20 years before his French counterpart.

Figure 8. Beniamino Facchinelli, Italian, “Loggia or *maq’ad* overlooking a courtyard inside a house, Cairo,” 1870–1899. Victoria & Albert Museum.

Ola Seif, photography and cinema collections curator and reference specialist at the Rare Books and Special Collections

Library at AUC, shed new light on Facchinelli's work in 2013. Distinguishing Facchinelli from other Cairo photographers, she wrote:

Facchinelli respected that compositional perspective but balanced it by revolutionarily introducing in the foreground another core of attention which was the vigorous dynamism happening in the alley as opposed to the standard emptiness that Frith or Hammerschmidt presented in their photographs (Seif 2013, p. 5).[8]

Part of Facchinelli's Egyptian work is held by the INHA in Paris and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, but the most significant part of the collection remains in the Alinari Collection.[9] Facchinelli's fascination with vernacular architecture on the verge of disappearing directly connects his work to *Dust*.

The Alinari Collection links the present study to another architect and the photographers he worked with: Antonio Lasciac (1856–1946), the Italian architect, musician, engineer, and city planner, and the photographers who documented most of his works in Egypt, Artistide Del Vecchio and photographers of the Atelier Reiser.[10] Volait (2008)[11] claimed that Facchinelli's and Del Vecchio's archives of Lasciac architecture were purchased by the Alinari photo enterprise almost simultaneously and as such got wide public exposure in 2006, in connection with the 150th anniversary of Lasciac's birth. Of the photographs in *Dust*, I was

[8] Wilhelm Hammerschmidt (German, born in Prussia, died 1869) settled in Cairo around 1860 and opened a shop selling photography supplies, according to Getty (1984).

[9] The Alinari Collection was founded in Florence in 1852 by Leopoldo, Giuseppe, and Romualdo Alinari. See www.alinari.it.

[10] The Atelier Reiser belonged to German photographer Andreas D. Reiser (born in Munich in 1840, died in Helwan, Cairo, in 1898). His son, Lucien, and his partner, Anton Binder, continued the Atelier Reiser in Cairo and Alexandria until 1914.

[11] This information was provided to me by Mercedes Volait in our e-mail conversation on 19 June 2018.

able to find only one archival photograph that showed the original appearance of a historic building; this was a photograph of Prince Said Halim's Palace, taken by Atelier Reiser in 1899.

Figure 9. Atelier Reiser, Cairo and Alexandria, German (1840–98), "Prince Said Halim's Palace, Cairo," 1899. Alinari Collection.

Figure 10. Xenia Nikolskaya, "Prince Said Halim's Palace, Cairo," 2007.

Antonio Lasciac came to Egypt to work in Alexandria after the British destroyed much of the city with cannon fire in 1882. He was also a political refugee because he refused to work under the Hapsburg regime. He was the personal architect of Prince Said Halim and built the palace in the Maruf district, which I photographed in 2007. His membership in the Comité was an important experience, and although there are no records to verify his collaborations, he mostly likely worked with Facchinelli and Lekegian (Kuzmin et al. 2015). Reiser used available light during his photo shoots and put a great focus on capturing details. His style is classic architectural photography, without people in the frame.

Van Leo (1921–2002) is probably one of the most famous Egyptian photographers of the last century. Born into an Armenian family (his real name was Levon Boyodjian), he was a master of portrait photography. He opened his studio in January 1941 and most of the studio's clientele were soldiers and officers of the Allied army. In the 1960s, Van Leo produced work for the entertainment industry that made him famous, especially pictures of the young Omar Sharif and Rushdy Abaza.

Figure 11: Van Leo, Armenian-Egyptian , “Casino Badi’a at the Opera Square,” 1946. RBSCDL.

The art and life of Van Leo is quite well known locally and internationally because he donated his entire archive to the AUC, where he had been a student. His collection numbers over 19,000 negatives and 16,000 prints. Among these photographs there are street scenes, views of architecture and interiors, largely promotional pictures for the tourist industry (hotels and grand views of Cairo like the Opera Square in 1946), and entertainment venues such as cinemas and nightclubs. Most of the places he documented no longer exist. This is largely due to conservative ideas brought to Egyptian society from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, so this somewhat unknown side of his work is very valuable today. Van Leo left us a vibrant picture of a now-vanished environment: Cairo’s nightlife and entertainment industry from the 1940s to the 1960s. *Dust* is related to his work in that it similarly focuses on a rather narrow stratum of the Egyptian social environment, which is also disappearing.

New revelations in the photographic history of modern Egypt have come from the recently discovered archive of Max Karkégi

(1931–2011). In 1956, Karkégi, an Egyptian collector and history enthusiast of Syrian origins, purchased a collection of books, photographs, and postcards from the Egyptian-Jewish collector Rishar Moshery, who was leaving because of the Arab-Israel war.[12] The collection is dedicated to the Khedieval period — that is, the second part of the nineteenth century. Karkégi collected similar material over many years. In 1961, his property was confiscated on political grounds and in 1963 he left for Paris, never to return to Egypt. With the help of a friend, his collection, including 2,000 books and 30,000 postcards, was transferred to Paris, where it is now housed at the INHA Library in Paris.

Although Karkégi was not interested in collecting particular names, we can find some famous photographers in his collection, including Emile Bechard and his pictures of the Ezbekieh garden and its pavilions taken in 1874, and Wilhelm Hammerschmidt's pictures from 1864. The stamped postcard of the Khedivial theatre in Port Said, gives us another example of photographic documentation from the time of construction. The Khedivial theatre seems to be the same building that I photographed in 2010,[13] but according to my sources its called El-Dorado Theatre. Although the postcard depicts the exterior of the building and I photographed the interior, there is a strong compositional resemblance focusing on the geometry of the open galleries and pillars. The Karkégi archive is important not only because it is digitised and thus accessible by scholars, but because, in the popular format of postcards, the collection sheds light on the development of Egypt's architectural and photo industry, documenting important new buildings and mapping photographers and studios active in Egypt at that time.

[12] This detail, naming Rishar Moshery, was provided to me by Amr Talat during an interview in Cairo on 22 June 2018.

[13] Karkégi's website www.egyptedantan.com is still accessible but is no longer updated.

Figure 12. Unknown photographer, “Le theatre khedivial de Port Said,” 1909. Karkégi Archive. INHA

Figure 13, Xenia Nikolskaya, “El-Dorado Theatre, Port Said,” 2010.

An analysis of architectural and interior photography in Egypt from 1839 to the 1950s allows the categorisation of photographers, according to their methods, approaches, aesthetics, subject buildings and locations, and dissemination, into three groups. The first category includes photographers

preoccupied with archaeology and ancient monuments, like Francis Frith. The second category comprises photographers capturing modern architecture, like Artistide Del Vecchio's documentation of the construction of the Said Halim Palace, Maxime Du Camp's record of the Suez Canal construction, and the Zangaki brothers' work around the Canal Zone. The third group of photographers is connected to the Comité and focused on endangered architectural heritage. The photographs of this latter group are directly related to my work in *Dust.*

The work and approach of Facchinelli, in particular, is very closely connected to the *Dust* approach, especially his interest in vernacular endangered architecture, the consistency of viewpoint, and the use of wide-angle lenses. Reviewing all architectural and interior photographs from the period 1839–1950 currently available in public and private collections in Cairo, France, and elsewhere, it becomes apparent that apart from some limited applied uses, none of the abovementioned photographers had a specific interest in photographing interiors per se with a view to creating a historical and cultural narrative, as was done in *Dust*. This makes the *Dust* project original in the way it captured endangered architecture, both well-known sites and undistinguished, ordinary buildings, and talked about these buildings' fates.

3.3 Contemporary Architectural Photography and Ruin Pleasures

In recent decades architectural heritage has been an attractive subject for art photographers. One of the reasons behind this interest seems to be a return to the fascination with post-Renaissance European art with ruins, as exemplified by the work of Claude Lorrain and Caspar David Friedrich, both of whom considered Greek and Roman remains to symbolise the greatest civilisations. This part of the contextual review will discuss examples of modern and contemporary architectural photography and the concepts of ruin pleasures and ruin worship in earlier times, and the ruin-porn phenomena in the age of Instagram. The discussion will focus on architectural and heritage photography and its cultural significance, starting from the 1950s to the present day. Case studies will include celebrated art photographers like Candida Höfer and lesser-known photographers whose work is more closely related to the *Dust* book, including Bernard Guillot and his works in Cairo and Lennart af Petersens, with an emphasis on his documentation of the demolition of a historic neighbourhood in Stockholm.

Any discussion of contemporary architectural photography must begin with two pivotal figures who influenced an entire generation: Bernd Becher (1931–2007) and Hilla Becher (1943–2015). For more than 40 years, the German photographers, husband-and-wife collaborators, recorded the industrial past as personal memories. They started in 1959 by documenting everything connected to the steel industry in Germany — those huge buildings that dominated and defined the childhood of Bernd Becher in the Ruhr area and rapidly began to disappear in post-war Germany. In an interview with the SFMOMA - San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2015), Hilla Becher defined their methodology: they first determined which buildings were most likely to be demolished first. They were not, however,

interested in documenting buildings designed by famous architects. They used soft light to distinguish the building from the sky and maintained the same lighting conditions so that all their prints have a similar range of black, gray, and white tones. The consistency of the lighting conditions and points of view allowed them to create typologies: they were able to print nine or 12 similar images of water towers, for example, which they framed and placed together on the wall as an installation that bears stylistic and conceptual similarities with minimalist seriality (Zhou 2015). In the early stages of photographing for the *Dust* series, I too decided to maintain consistent lighting conditions, avoiding harsh shadows and making use of the soft light coming from windows. Working with available light while shooting interiors is the only appropriate way to truly capture the subject: introducing any extra light, in my opinion, would ruin the architect's original design and alter the sense of the space.

The Bechers' style was marked by detachment, precision, and repetition, but their method was meant to be a reaction to the Soviet realist style of photography, in which monumental buildings reflected the grandeur of the state (Liesbrock 2010). At the beginning of their career, the Bechers' work was considered by their colleagues as "too documentary," as Hilla Becher commented during her interview for SFMOMA (2015). "We tried to focus on understanding the subject as close as possible to what its subject wants to be," she explained (2015).

Figure 14. Bernd Becher (1931–2007) and Hilla Becher (1943–2015), German, “Pitheads,” 1974, Tate Gallery.

The Bechers’ influence at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf (Dusseldorf Art Academy) since the 1970s is evident in the work of their former students who practice large-scale photography; namely, Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, Thomas Struth, Axel Hütte, and Thomas Ruff. They taught their students to choose a rich subject, adopt a uniform style of picture making, and make/take a large number of pictures to study it. Candida Höfer is one of their remarkable students who will be discussed here.

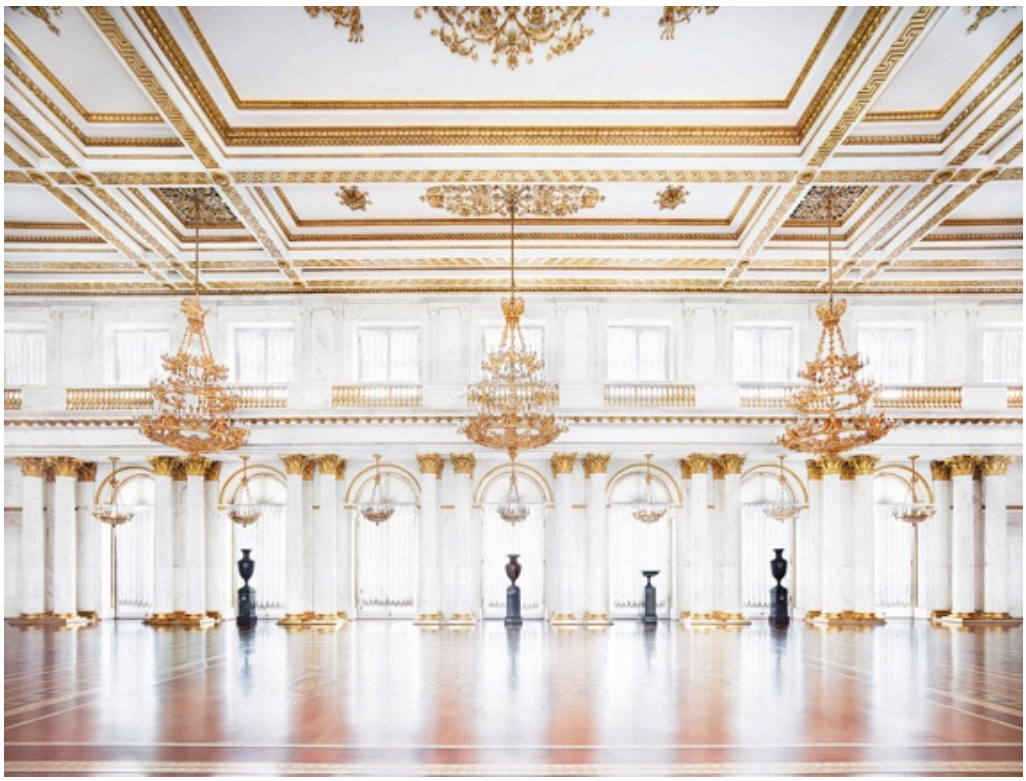

Figure 15. Candida Höfer, German, “Hermitage Museum,” 2015. Köln/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Candida Höfer (b. 1944) started her career in the 1960s, and beginning in the 1980s focused on her ongoing series *Spaces*. Höfer has concentrated on public spaces inside hotels, museums, concert halls, palaces, and other buildings. Just like *Dust, Spaces* purposefully lacks a human presence. In her book *Architecture of Absence* (Höfer 2004), the artist selects busy public and institutional spaces that are connected to storage and cultural memory (Sinyutina 2015) and deprives them of human presence. In doing so, she creates a distance that allows the viewer to analyse the relationship between the spaces and their absent creators or inhabitants (Sinyutina 2015). In contrast, the emptiness of *Dust* is a consequence of human activity: the spaces are empty because they could not find their purpose in the new social and economic situation; the aesthetic and lifestyle of the “new owners” do not fit the Khedieval style. The conditions of modern Egypt that made *Dust* possible are well described in the best-selling Egyptian novel *The Yacoubian Building* **(**Al Aswany 2004). After foreigners and rich Egyptians left their

vacated apartments were occupied by military officers and their families, people from a different social strata and often from a rural background.

Using large-format photography to capture details and a systematic method like the Bechers, Höfer seeks to photograph famous architectural landmarks around the world: the Louvre, the Uffizi Gallery, the Royal Portuguese Library in Rio de Janeiro, La Scala opera house in Milan, and many others, turning them into epic structures and giving them a cosmic patina. Höfer's defining compositional choice is her point of view, usually from above, using only available light (Sinyutina 2015). Her pictures are manifestations of the human spirit through the documentation of opulent and culturally important buildings and interiors. Höfer always works with famous structures and spends time removing from the interiors all traces of human presence. In this way she shows us these familiar landmark spaces in an idealised way.

In diametrical opposition to this practice, *Dust* is primarily a form of photographic archaeology. I discover and collect buildings by photographing, creating a narrative that gives these places a new status. Höfer emphasises geometrical compositions and the symmetry of the buildings. From an interview with the curator of her Hermitage show in 2015[14], I learned about her working methods: how she prepares the space by putting the furniture in order, removing random details and playing with curtains to achieve the best lighting conditions. Shooting *Dust*, I never changed the interiors I photographed: for me the space was like a crime scene — everything was important the way it already was.

[14] Interview with Nadezhda Sinyutina took place in Saint Petersburg on 9 November 2018.

Karen Knorr, a German-born photographer living in the UK (b. 1954), first started inserting animals into architectural sites in her project *Fables* (2003–2008), where she placed animals in museum interiors, drawing attention to the intact gap between nature and culture. Subsequently, this rather special approach developed through other works. But the most popular project and the most relevant to *Dust* and its post-colonial discourse is India Song (2008–2017). Knorr photographed the interiors and the animals separately, and then combined the images using Photoshop. The animals were photographed in sanctuaries, zoos, and cities and were then presented as inhabiting palaces, mausoleums, temples, and holy sites (Knorr 2015). The artist thus deceives the viewer with these fanciful scenes of animals inhabiting human palaces.

Although these images could be read as humorous and fairytale-like, they spur deeper reflections once the viewer scratches the surface: through her *India Song* series, Knorr manages to link the imagery of the famously zoomorphic Ramayana culture of northern India with current social and political issues, pointing to gender representation and its metaphors, post-colonialism, and the aesthetics of power. She interrupts Höfer's straightforwardness with playful interaction, composing deliberately beautiful and whimsical works. Her attempt to escape traditional Orientalism relates her work to *Dust*, although all of her images are painstakingly arranged and composed, in contrast with *Dust's* spontaneity.

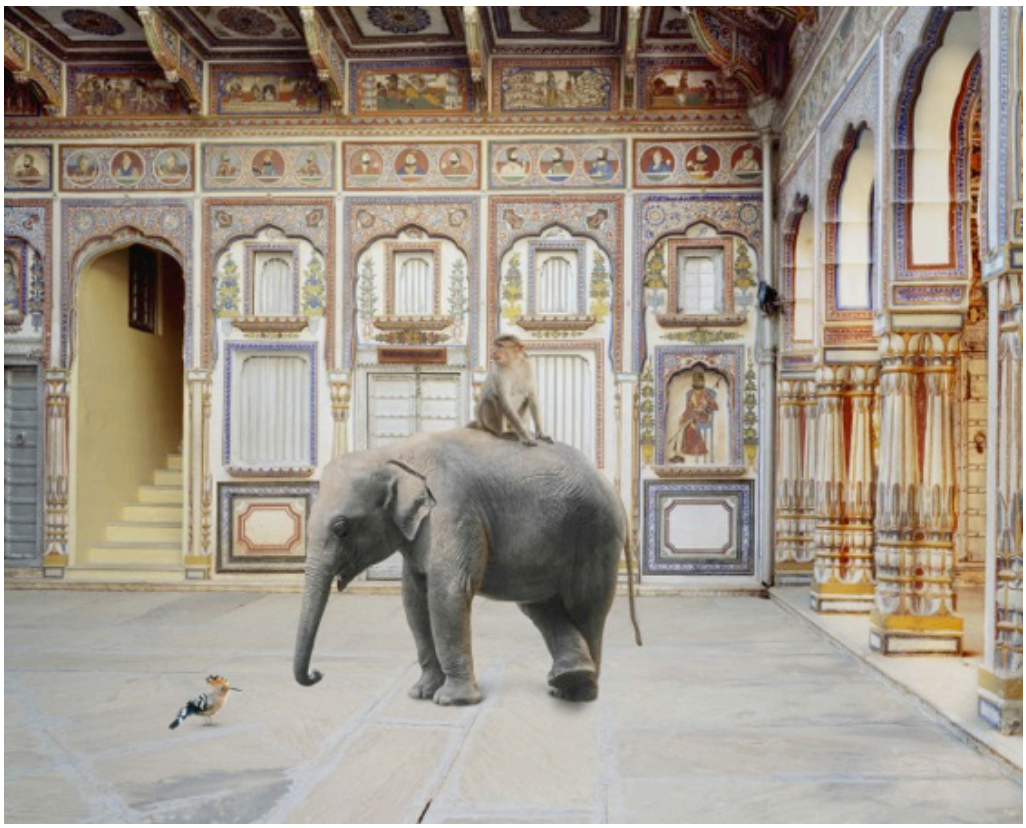

Figure 16. Karen Knorr, “Conqueror of the World, Podar Haveli, Nawalgarh,” from the *India Song* series, 2003–2008.

Rose Macaulay thoughtfully describes people’s fascination with ruin in the book *Pleasure of Ruins*. Macaulay carefully studied this “strange human reaction to decay” (Macaulay 1953, p. 15). Her work covers the archaeological and architectural aspects of the sites, as well as their literary associations. Starting from the Roman period, she defines several “ruinpleasures”, like triumph over an enemy (Macaulay 1953, p. 1) and the poetic pleasure of ruins as such. *Ruinpleasure* is a complex feeling, encompassing the egotistic satisfaction of surviving and knowing the eternity of God, as well as the minor pleasures of looking and being portrayed against the ruin (today’s selfie). Authorities often use ruins as an instrument of political communication. Macaulay relates the story of how the British Council in Tripoli in 1816 purchased the famed Roman ruins of Leptis Magna in present-day Libya as a gift to the future King George IV. The stones were shipped to London and lay in the British Museum courtyard until 1826, when George IV had them erected at Virginia Water, a large man-made lake on the edge of Windsor Great Park

(Macaulay 1953, p. 36). And let's not forget the Mariinsky Orchestra concert in Palmyra in May 2016 after the recapture of the city by Syrian forces (Harding 2016). These are both examples of *ruin fascination* in political context.

Ruin worship is not to be mistaken for *ruin porn*. The former began with Petrarch's poetry and medieval and early-Renaissance art. In religious painting, starting from the Quattrocento period, ruins were often included. In literature, Poliphili, the main character of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*,[15] dreams about his beloved Polia and is transported in his dreams to various magical locations, including a large variety of architectural ruins, where he sees magical creatures.

Figure 17. Benedetto Bordone, Italian (1455/1530), *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili,* 1499. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In the paintings of Piranesi and Huber Rober, "ruins were accepted as part of scenery, like trees and water" (Macaulay 1953, p. 20). In the medieval and Renaissance eras, people

[15] *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, published by Aldus Manutius in 1499, was praised for its typographical design and early-Renaissance woodcut illustrations.

were so fascinated by ancient ruins that they sometimes reconstructed them, as in the case of the park of the Duke of Urbino at Pesaro, according to Giorgio Vasari (Macaulay 1953, p. 16). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ruin pleasures gave way to the love of Gothic.

The photographic genre of *ruin porn* is fascinated with manmade structures of recent decades, which are usually difficult to access. As discussed by Tim Strangleman (2013), *ruin porn* or *smokestack nostalgia* or *haikyo,* the cult of modern ruin in Japan (Thoms 2017), over-aestheticises and fetishises the destruction of abandoned industrial and plant buildings. And because it is photography of hidden structures it often confused with voyeurism. *Dust* has been mistaken for *ruin porn* by fellow photographers because of the few locations I photographed have a reputation for being difficult to enter, though my interest in these structures is not their inaccessibility but their aesthetic and history. While *Dust* does not focus on factory buildings or industrial architecture, viewers might confuse my subject matter with that of *ruin porn*, based on the similar issues of negotiating access. I would argue, however, that my work is different.

Strangleman (2013) offers a critique of the trend, calling it *smokestack nostalgia* that turns post-industrial space into “coffee-table books”, the glossy objects of art consumption. The focus of urban explorers on aesthetics and the beauty of ruins act as a selective obituary, Strangleman says, ignoring the people who once populated these sites.

Keeping in mind Macaulay’s research (1953), one can see that *ruin porn* has roots in Roman civilisation and is clearly not solely a twenty-first-century phenomenon. With the advent of social media like Instagram, ruin porn has gained popularity, often related to, or the product of, the urban explorers’ movement, sometimes known as industrial tourism.

Contemporary art photographers following the trend naturally find inspiration in early twentieth-century industrial architecture. Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, in their most famous work, *The Ruins of Detroit* (2005–2010), provide an artful commentary on architectural decline and demonstrate a new fascination with ruins that is part and parcel of a new cultural trend that has given rise to several coffee-table books. *The Ruins of Detroit* (Marchand and Meffre 2010) is so popular that the publisher has now printed six editions to meet demand. Marchand and Meffre met in 2002 in Paris, where they both live. Working together, they began to build their own typologies of ruins: theatres in North America, Hashima Island, and Budapest courtyards.

Figure 18. Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, “Ballroom, Lee Plaza Hotel,” 2006.

Marchand and Meffre work mostly with ruins: *Detroit* (2005–2010), *Gunkanjima Island* (2008–2012), and *Theaters* (2005–). Over the years their compositions have developed to become less diverse than at the outset: from close-ups, exteriors,

interiors, and geometrical aspects to strictly geometrical. Like most architectural photographers, they maintain consistent lighting conditions, to be able to expose the best of the architecture: they never use sharp shadows, always perfectly lighting up the architecture. In *The Ruins of Detroit*, Marchand and Meffre mourn the former glory of industrial palaces, the fading symbols of economic prosperity. Their images are gothic — at once scary and beautiful — but lack any reference to the history of the site. It is an apolitical, aesthetical *ruinpleasure,* a bit of egotistic satisfaction in surviving. Marchand and Meffre drew inspiration from many of the previously mentioned artists, but especially from Robert Polidori's work.

Polidori (b. 1951) is a Canadian photographer celebrated as a master of human habitats, environments, and architecture. He is known for creating meticulously detailed, large-format photographs. He works with 4-inch x 5-inch and bigger colour sheet negatives. With his straightforward poetic of common places (Klein 2007), in the 1980s, he began documenting the restoration of Versailles and has continued to photograph the ongoing changes over a 20-year period. The *Versailles* series brought him fame and developed his style. Like Höfer, Polidori enjoys grandiosity, but he is not threatened by its imperfection; his *Versailles* series shows the transition of the architecture and its relationship with the human presence. In his 1985 photograph, "Velours Frappé, Salles du VIIème, Versailles," for example, (figure 19) he shows the ladder and radio belonging to the workers, thereby "humanising" the grand structure. The large format (the size of the prints are 152 cm x 127 cm) allows the viewer to fill in the fine details.

Figure 19. Robert Polidori, Canadian, “Velours Frappé, Salles du VIIème, Versailles,” 1985.

In terms of composition, Polidori’s approach is to look at a panorama from above, with the perfectionism of Höfer, but subject-wise he gravitates towards the aftermath photography of Norfolk, who will be mentioned later. Polidori has worked intensively in different countries, “documenting the paradoxically beautiful wreckage,” as Jeff L. Rosenheim says in the introduction to Polidori’s book *Katrina* (Polidori and Rosenheim 2008).

Figure 20. Robert Polidori, “Havana,” 2001.

In Polidori’s *Havana* (Polidori and Rodriguez 2001), the Cuban capital looks and feels like Cairo: full of diverse architectural styles and showing signs of political and economic turbulence. But if Polidori’s *Havana* is openly decaying and potentially lost, Egypt and Cairo in my photographs are in a liminal state of uncertainty. Polidori’s Cuban work is not as consistent in its choice of composition as *Dust*. Seeking above all to discover Cuba, Polidori is interested in portraits, interiors, and the exteriors of buildings, aiming to create the atmosphere of the place and understand phenomena.[16] In *Dust*, I tried to draw attention to a certain neglected period of Egyptian history and a certain type of building. Polidori’s methodology and working style is rather different: the production is expensive and the shooting period extensive, and he relies on two assistants due to the massive size of the large-format camera. When I worked on *Dust*, I relied on myself alone, and my equipment was chosen with an eye to fitting everything in one bag, in order to be

[16] Polidori worked in Cuba in the late 1990s, a time of economic hardship and the ongoing American embargo. He was one of the first photographers from the “West” who was able, thanks to his Canadian passport, to work in Cuba.

discreet. Polidori's *Havana* is rich in content and colour, but it glorifies decay so much that it recalls *vanitas* Dutch painting. Kira Dolinina, in her review of The Hermitage exhibition (Dolinina 2015), called *Dust* "undiluted *vanitas*".

The Englishman Simon Norfolk (b. 1963) calls himself a landscape photographer but architecture plays a big part in his work, especially ruins. He came to large-format photography from journalism. His first book, *For Most of it I Have No Words: Genocide, Landscape, Memory* (Norfolk 1998), was dedicated to places that have witnessed genocide. Norfolk developed an interest in battlefields as part of the landscape in Bosnia and Uganda. Using Bakhtin's (1981) theory of the aesthetic visualization of time, Norfolk reconnects the evidence in the landscape to the story of human disaster. His most significant work in Afghanistan (2003) delved deeper, beyond the sensationalism of ruins. Norfolk's work points to archaeological remains that are the only indicators of the suffering caused by modern war.

Norfolk's work is a classic representation of aftermath photography – visual documentation of consequences of war and natural disasters. He is more of a humanitarian worker, raising awareness of the human tragedy rather than just documenting it. Norfolk juxtaposes the beauty and the horror, seen for example in the "Balloon-seller of Kabul" picture in Figure 20: a brightly coloured festival accessory that had been banned under the Taliban is placed next to the modern ruins of something that used to be a tearoom. This odd contrast will keep the viewer alert of the dark side of human history. The artist provides a deeper understanding of what the media only glances at, demonstrating an interest in how these two worlds can coexist. He works with natural, afternoon light and painterly skies that emphasise reality and transfers it into the aesthetic of a classical painting, which is close to the intent of the *Dust* aesthetic.

Figure 21. Simon Norfolk, English, “Balloon-seller of Kabul,” 2001.

Returning to photographs of Cairo, I should say that interest in the photographic representation of Egypt’s architectural heritage has significantly fallen in the new millennium. The self-portraits by French artist and photographer Bernard Guillot (b. 1950) taken in the Hotel Maffet in Cairo during 1977–2003 are possibly the only examples in recent times. His long-time project culminated in the book, *Le pavilion blanc*, published in 2003 by Filigranes Editions (Guillot 2003). Black-and-white pictures taken over three decades at the same hotel in Downtown Cairo evoke an air of frozen time, preserved in a capsule. Guillot places people in his photographs, but they are phantoms rather than human beings.

Figure 22. Bernard Guillot, “Hotel Maffet Astoria, Room 2,” 1998.

“Bernard Guillot looks as intently for traces of time in aged walls as he does in archetypal architectures,” argued Stehle-Akhtar (2007), about the long-exposed images of the forgotten hotel in Downtown Cairo. He managed to visualize this still time in his photographs using multiple exposures, thereby creating the feeling of a dream-like place. The late 1990s and early 2000s in Egypt were a period of economic and political stagnation. The country was living under military rule, imposed in 1981 after the assassination of President Sadat. Tourism and foreign trade rebounded in the mid-2000s, due to decisions to support small and medium business. Guillot’s work faithfully reflects the situation of the country: the beginning of decay, as old owners had not quite left and new ones had not yet arrived, an “oscillation between appearance and disappearance,” according to Stehle-Akhtar (2007).

While Guillot inhabits his images with imaginary, ghost-like characters in order to emphasise the idea of emptiness, Lennart af Petersens, Swedish photographer (1913–2004) discovered the city through its inhabitants. My ethnographic approach relates *Dust* to the work of Petersens, which focused on Stockholm's Klara quarter in the 1970s, now no longer extant in the same form. Today this is an area around Sergels torg, the central public square in Stockholm that was built on the site of a seventeenth-century neighbourhood. Petersens's work is a hybrid of architectural, environmental, and documentary photography. A kind of ethnographic field diary, it is a meticulous narrative of a disappearing city he loved so much. If in many other cases, photographers, including myself, feared future destruction, Petersens knew with certainty that destruction was coming and was commissioned by the Stockholm City Museum, where he was a staff photographer from 1942 until 1978, to record the Klara quarter before its destruction.

The museum was undertaking a complete documentation of the soon-to-disappear area. Petersens's main task was to document the capital, not least during the city's upheaval. Day after day Petersens wandered the neighbourhood, meeting people and documenting vernacular architecture and the environment: from shoemakers' workshops to apartments, pharmacies to liquor stores (Petersens and Bedoire 1985). His photography is classic black-and-white, medium format, and very personal, like a visual diary: he actually knew the people he photographed and interacted with them on a daily basis. Petersens was never after the landmarks per se, but was interested in urban development and city memories. His story of Klara parallels the story of *Dust*, with one key difference: in the 1970s in Stockholm the socialist government wanted to do good for people and create new modern spaces, while in Egypt it was a combination of corrupted

capitalism and the lack of heritage regulation that brought those buildings to ruin. Yet the results are surprisingly similar.

Figure 23. Lennart af Petersens, “Klara,” 1960s, Stockholm City Museum.

The development of architectural photography over the last 30 years was governed by three main factors: the predominance of colour; an upsurge in interest in the genre by museums, galleries,

and collectors; and, more recently, the introduction of digital technology (Elwall 2004). To put *Dust* into the context of contemporary architectural photography, the closest reference in style as well as inspiration, would be the work of Norfolk in Afghanistan and Polidori in Havana. Bernard Guillot is an important reference for Egyptian photography and photography in Egypt, but he stands alone in his intimate genre of personal memories that happened to exist in disappearing architectural locations. Though Petersens's aesthetic is very different, his methodological approach to document a disappearing urban environment is very similar to the methodology of *Dust*. Höfer deliberately depopulated her interiors, whereas *Dust's* emptiness is a result of historic circumstances. The playful attitude of Knorr's work that questions the Western perception of the Orient is similar to *Dust's* attempt to give viewers a different, unexpected image of the Orient.

4. DUST

This chapter focuses on the six-year project *Dust* (2006–2012), which captured Egyptian colonial architecture from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The work was presented in the format of a book, *Dust: Egypt's Forgotten Architecture*, published in 2012 by Dewi Lewis in Stockport, UK. This chapter situates the project against historical and contemporary photographic practices while detailing my methodological approach and work strategies, and the book itself.

4.1 The project

4.1.1 Context and background

In the context of contemporary architectural/interior photography practice, *Dust* occupies a particular niche. It offers a unique approach to representing architectural heritage by emphasising the historical circumstances of the place through the project's ethnographically informed methodology. *Dust* is a kind of ethnographic photography located somewhere between Norfolk's images of the aftermath of war in Afghanistan, focusing on social and political disaster and depicting the layers of history of these buildings, their use, and abuse, and Petersens's documentation of buildings on the verge of disappearance in Stockholm in the 1960s and 1970s.

A friend once told me, "Cairo in your pictures looks like the result of a nuclear holocaust." By saying this he was referring to the scale and consistency of the disaster in Egypt and the amount of forgotten/abandoned places I had managed to collect. In comparison with Höfer, who photographs well-known structures and spends time removing all traces of human presence from the

interiors, the emptiness of *Dust* is a *consequence* of human activity: it is an absent portrait of the generations whose presence remains visible in these interior capsules though the people themselves are missing. Most relevant to *Dust* and its post-colonial discourse are Knorr's series *India Song* (2008–2017), which also reflects on empty old palaces, temples and forts of Northern India. Knorr's images are arranged and composed, with postproduction and Photoshop intervention in contrast with *Dust's* spontaneity. Knorr adds the life to her empty spaces by placing exotic wild animals (photographed earlier) into this sterile environment. Meanwhile, the images in *Dust*, while appearing to be empty rooms, always retain a human presence in the form of forgotten objects or photographs.

While architectural artifacts of the colonial era may not have survived, their artistic representation lives on in movies, photographs, books, and paintings. Ahmad Hosni, in his review of the *Dust* book, wrote, "Buildings have to turn into monuments, or ruins, if they are to work on the collective imaginary" (Hosni 2015, p. 3). The buildings presented in *Dust*, instead of turning into ruins or monuments, became invisible even to the city's inhabitants. Kobrin's theory (Kobrin et al. 2013) about Egyptian colonial architecture, that the buildings were provincial copies of outdated architectural models, may explain one of the possible reasons for the neglect of the structures and why they never acquired a new future in Egypt. As if I were an archaeologist, I rediscovered these buildings and again brought them to light: the creation of a new artistic narrative around them gives them a future, or at least hope for a future. The spaces might have fallen into ruins but they now constitute a newly discovered fragile object. To use an archaeological analogy, *Dust* is a "secret chamber." As Mikhail Piotrovsky, director of The State Hermitage Museum and curator of the exhibition *Dust: Cairo's Forgotten Architecture* (2015), once suggested, *Dust* portrays the death of Europe that started in its colonies:

> “Decrepit architecture is wonderful, but not long-lived. Either it collapses, or it is restored or reconstructed, losing the charm of its authenticity. This happens in all great cities. [. . .] The aesthetics of a withering away is one of the forms of propaganda of renewal. When the renewal takes place, it is not only the document that remains — there is also an artistic memory” (Piotrovsky 2015, p. 8).

Dust was intended as an honest record of people’s attitudes to property, heritage, and history. Egyptian government cultural officials were sometimes critical of the *Dust* project because it does not give a “shiny” picture of the country. In 2007, the Egyptian Cultural Centre in Moscow was very keen to host an exhibition of the project in its space. After finding out that there was not a single image of the pyramids in the selection of photographs, however, the invitation was withdrawn. Cairo Press Centre employees were also not supportive of requests to visit certain locations because of the structures’ poor condition.

Dust also paints a picture of decolonisation: what was once the aesthetic norm is today a strange relic. Kira Dolinina, art historian associate professor at European University, Saint Petersburg and prominent art critic, reviewed the exhibition at The State Hermitage Museum. Under the title “Death by Uselessness,” she writes:

> “This is a great tragedy of colonialism, the collapse of Orientalism as a vision of the East through the prism of western culture, the death of this same culture. Death by uselessness. Death at the hands of the enemy. A city to which Napoleon brought Europe, the city of the Khedive Ishmael [. . .] this oasis of European civilization that was washed away by revolution in an instant” (Dolinina 2012, p. 11).

Starting from January 2006 and over multiple trips to Egypt, followed by my relocation to Cairo in 2010, I developed an interest in “European-looking” buildings in Egypt, particularly Cairo, and their history and current state. I was scouting these buildings in order to gain access to photograph them. Initially, I was driven by curiosity, but I came to realise that these structures are in great danger and one way to preserve them is through description and photographic documentation. I would compare my approach to that of an archaeologist recording an archaeological site.

As an outsider, I had no personal relationship to this time and place. This is unlike the experience of the Bechers, who had a long personal history with their subject matter. Nevertheless, visiting Cairo for the first time, I had a constant feeling of déjà vu: the city looked like St. Petersburg “occupied” by strangers. If the Arabic signage and people in *jellabeyas* were removed, it could be easily mistaken for my hometown, which is also a product of Western culture. Built in 1703 as an important seaport and navy base, St. Petersburg was dubbed the “window to Europe” by its creator Peter the Great, and it still remains the most foreign city in Russia. Kobrin’s aforementioned theory of outdated architecture brought to Egypt could apply to the foreign architects who built St. Petersburg, such as Trezzini.[17] While all of them received fame and appreciation abroad, they produced nothing remarkable back home. This special relationship between the foreign and the native is not unique to Egypt and can be applied to Russia as well. In fact, there are many parallels with my Soviet background in *Dust*. As Dolinina (2012, p. 11) writes:

> “It's no accident that attempts to somehow adapt these deserted palaces to the needs of the revolutionary folk were complete failures — in Leningrad, in the imperial palaces, the

[17] Domenico Trezzini (c. 1670–1734) was a Swiss-Italian architect who built some of the most significant buildings in St. Petersburg, including the Peter and Paul Fortress and the Cathedral in 1704..

young pioneers of communism could sing and dance, but in Cairo there is only dust, the dust of the city and the dust of the desert, layer after layer, concealing an alien past from the eyes of the people".

My outsider perspective provided me with the tools to document these structures with a scientific approach devoid of sentimentality. When I first began to exhibit some of the *Dust* images, I was constantly asked why I had not worked with my own Russian heritage. The answer is that it would be too painful and certain elements too close to my personal memories. It is likely that seeing decaying Russian architecture in St. Petersburg inspired many ideas for the *Dust* project.[18]

My plan was to photograph buildings that had been abandoned, in part due to complicated inheritance and property ownership rules in Egypt. Because of Islamic law, reserved for family matters, a male heir usually inherits double that given to a woman. Additionally, disputes between relatives are common; inheritance court cases can last for generations. The rental property market is also complicated: as a result of Nasser's socialist politics, rental contracts leave landlords with no income to maintain these buildings. These are some of the reasons why the ownership and maintenance of historic buildings can remain in a state of limbo for decades. These types of buildings shaped my selection methods.

[18] Between 2006–2009, I worked as a photographer with the Russian interior designer and scholar Yanina Parunova, who was collecting the architectural measurements of art deco interiors in St. Petersburg.

4.1.2 Methodology and work strategies

Figure 24. Xenia Nikolskaya, “Amin Hagagi Palace, Esna,” 2010.

Over the years, I tried different ways to arrange access to the buildings: using official channels (this will not get one further than the Pyramids in Giza), friends’ connections and working guerrilla style. Working with a cinema location manager turned out to be very useful. Photographers, especially foreigners, are constantly suspect and seen as spies, not just in Egypt but worldwide. At his lecture at the Metropolitan Museum in September 2009, Robert Frank confessed that he was arrested several times while working on *The Americans*. In the course of working on *Dust*, I had three interactions with Egyptian police in the period 2006–2010, but fortunately the regime at that time was not overly intimidating.

For the first two years of the project, I was simply fascinated by the alien yet so familiar aesthetic of the Khedieval architecture of Cairo. I produced many images — buildings, street scenes — but the subject matter remained too vast to grasp. In the book introduction, I described the decisive moment in my work, when I was able to formulate my vision for the project: on a visit to the

Metropolitan Museum in New York City, on a day closed to visitors, I had the chance to see *The Milkmaid* by Jan Vermeer very close. As I wrote:

> "In the picture she is alone [. . .] but she does not appear sad. In the background, on a fine ceramic tile, we can see Cupid shooting his arrow. The story is complete: she is thinking of her lover. At that moment, I realised my theme: absence" (Nikolskaya 2012).

In my body of work, I began to create an absent portrait of time, and the absence came to be one of the main selection criteria as I edited. I eliminated all outdoor shots and focused my attention solely on interiors. My goal was to build a case study of architecture as the "repository of time" (Hosni 2012, p. 4), reflecting political and economic stagnation. Palaces that have been turned into schools or churches into cultural houses are quite a common practice, one that is not dependent on geography. Since the building exteriors signalled the architectural style and contained information indicating the place and time of the photograph, I purposefully tried to eliminate all images with Arabic signage or anything that might ground the image in a particular temporal or geographic location, with only one exception. The final picture of the book, "Classroom, Prince Said Halim's Palace, Cairo, 2007" (Figure 25), portrays a space that was once a palace but was later adapted to the needs of a classroom. Blackboards are hung on either side of a blocked door at the height of a small child, and an official portrait of President Mubarak is hung over the doorway. The grand proportions of the room are contrasted here with the cheap lamps and class equipment. The last day that I worked on the selection of my photographs was 11 February 2011, the day that Mubarak stepped down.[19] For this reason, I chose the classroom

[19] When I revisited the place in spring 2011, after the so-called '25th January Revolution', the portrait of President Mubarak had been set on the floor.

photograph as the final image in the book. It was important to acknowledge the political context: Mubarak's removal from office after 29 years in power. The hope was that this would mean an end to Egypt's stagnation and, in theory, an end to my work recording Cairo's abandoned buildings.

Figure 25. Xenia Nikolskaya, "Classroom, Prince Said Halim's Palace, Cairo," 2007.

If the vision for the project was not clear at the outset, the title — *Dust* — was set with the first picture of "Red Living Room, Serageldin Palace," taken in 2006. It is an image of what used to be a lavish dining room, featuring a fireplace with a grand mirror above it, dark red curtains, and silk wallpaper, all coated with a layer of dust so thick that it left traces like fresh snowfall. "*Dust*, in its banality, is an unexpected syntagm to the concealed monumentality of these spaces," as Ahmad Hosni writes (2012, p. 4). The element of absence in one of the most densely populated countries in the world, particularly given the monumentality of these structures, was intriguing, and I sometimes wonder if anyone else noticed it. *Dust* emphasises the contrast between giant private and public, extremely crowded

spaces in the Egyptian context. *Dust* was not just the discovery of buildings, but of spaces and times locked in these locations.

Figure 26. Xenia Nikolskaya, "Red Living Room, Serageldin Palace, Cairo," 2006.

The actual dust, fine particles of solid matter, is so visible in the pictures that it gave the book its title, and also symbolised my 'archaeological' approach. Dust literally and metaphorically preserves this heritage, preventing people from entering and destroying it. Dust creates a filter similar to Instagram's Gingham filter, giving a vintage effect by taking some colours out and reducing highlights and saturation, setting off colours in a particular attractive way, like an old painting. Dust could also be the beginning of actual cultural layers, if one imagines the buildings remaining neglected and turning into ruins. In the introductory text to the 2012 exhibition at the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo, curator Alexandra Stock wrote:

> "*Dust* presents an entwined dualism: dust as materiality that layers the city, literally tracing the passage of time, upon urban

> objects but also as a temporal metaphor that registers these changes on the level of memories, both past and present" (Stock 2012).

If Höfer deliberately removes the human presence in her large-scale architectural photographs, I look for human traces in the form of forgotten objects or photographs. These are as important for me as the place itself, like evidence at a crime scene. The shopping bag hanging on the stairs, for example, in the picture of "Amin Hagagi Palace, Esna" (Figure 24) — a photograph that depicts a blue staircase lit from above — suggests elderly inhabitants who used to do their daily grocery shopping without leaving their apartment. For years I have been asked if I moved or arranged items in the picture, but this "crime-scene" atmosphere was one of the criteria I used to select locations, an attempt to catch the atmosphere of uncertainty or horror created by dramatic lighting conditions. I specifically sought out eerie or disturbing places that resembled sets from Alfred Hitchcock movies, trying to extend the cinematographic genre of horror into the fine art of photography. The lighting conditions in my photographs heighten the psychological depth of the main character — in my case, architectural elements — though unlike stage lighting, I did not deliberately create these conditions. Not surprisingly, Dolinina commented:

> "The fact that the subjects in this endless Cairo 'still life' are the remains of European culture in an Islamic land gives it an entirely desperate character" (Dolinina 2012, p. 11).

Unlike Höfer's or Knorr's work, *Dust* embraces imperfection, not only in locations but also in the lighting conditions. Yellow tungsten light, typically unwelcome in photography, sometimes mixed with daylight, is one of the main light sources here, since some of the buildings, including their shutters, were closed or under renovation. The limitations of available light sources are an important aspect in the *Dust* photographs. Colour dominance

was an important factor, as well, in order to maintain a sense of suspense. Egypt has a specific light: outdoors one can only photograph in early morning or late afternoon; otherwise intense shadows give photographs unnecessary contrast, which is a challenge for colour photography. Indoors, however, one can photograph all day long simply by moving around in the space to find the right light.

My technical approach was largely dictated by the possibility of access. I tried to be as invisible as possible while maintaining the distinct quality expected from architectural and interior photography: a full-frame digital camera with a 21-mm lens, sometimes just a monopod, because this can be hidden inside the bag, rather than a tripod. If I used a tripod, I tried to use the smallest aperture (f.16/22/32) and a long exposure of several seconds, which allowed me to create sharp objects and, sometimes blurry, deep-coloured backgrounds. I was operating a digital camera as a large-format camera, framing and focusing on an LCD screen. The centrally focused composition was easy to maintain by holding the camera pressed to my stomach while photographing, so the majority of images were landscape oriented. Most of the images were not subjected to postproduction manipulation. In a few cases of extreme contrast between highlights and shadows, as in “Broken Piano, Bagous Palace, Cairo, 2011” for instance (Figure 27), I had to make some adjustments for the print: I minimised the highlights to reintroduce the details, and brought the shadow detail up in order to reveal the details that were in the shadows. But my general approach was to avoid Photoshop’s touch, to respect the original condition I found the buildings in.

Höfer, Knorr, Norfolk, and Polidori all work with large-format cameras that allow them to reach technical perfection in their works. *Dust* serves as a diary of a technically imperfect, spontaneous, artistic field trip. The methodology used was not as

meticulous as that of Petersen's black-and-white record of the last days of a neighbourhood in Stockholm, but it served the subject matter.

Figure 27. Xenia Nikolskaya, "Broken Piano, Bagous Palace, Cairo," 2011.

4.2 The book

This section discusses the workings behind the making of the book, namely the editing process, storytelling strategies employing captions, layout, and design, and its dissemination.

The work on the book took me five years, from January 2006 to February 2011, plus a further year spent approaching publishers, fundraising, editing the text, and supervising the printing of the book at EBS Printing House in Verona, Italy. The most intensive period of photography was in 2010. I moved to Cairo on 1 January 2010 and spent that year editing and shooting: after each day's shooting I returned to my apartment with a significant number of images, which I then edited on my computer. Each day's selected final ten or so images were printed in a small size and posted on a metal board. When it became clear that I had to exclude all exterior pictures, the dilemma was then how to choose among hundreds of similar interior pictures representing the same period. The selection process entailed many hard decisions. After struggling through many difficulties to create the image, every photograph is dear to the creator's heart.

I chose images that conveyed a web of disparate, dissonant information, and showed multiple layers of history: images with a narrative. A case in point is "Barbie Room" (Figure 28). Stickers of Barbie dolls from chewing gum packages covered one of the walls of what was once the American Embassy in Cairo. The Villa Casdagly was the private home of a wealthy merchant before being used as the American Embassy during World War II, and was later transformed into a school. In 2010, the school closed and the building, according to some, was about to be taken over by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but the upheavals of 2011 changed the building's destiny. It took me 18 months to get inside the building, at which point I saw how children had transformed the building in line with their own tastes. Pink stickers, attached

perhaps to “improve” the once beautiful interior décor, made for a shocking display of reality versus failed plans.

Figure 28. Xenia Nikolskaya, “Barbie Room, Villa Casdagly, Garden City, Cairo,” 2010.

Another example of a layered narrative is the image of “Tiring Department Store” (Figure 28), which shows the interior of a historic department store in Cairo. The picture was taken on the upper floor of the department store, where we still can see the original shape of the dome. Dividing walls were, however, added to the once-open space to provide storage rooms and workshops. It was a result of the new economic policy of Sadat, who encouraged private business in the late 1970s. Daylight, coming through the glass elements fixed on the dome that were to enrich the interior décor, was blocked by these temporary constructions that became permanent. We also see a line of filth along the entire perimeter of the room, about one-metre high, all that remains of the years when employees rested their backs against the wall. Dozens of small shops were housed in the building. Thick layers of paint also testify that spaces were used multi-purposely, with different heights of furniture, the painters not bothering to shift the furniture as they painted the walls. Here

we see how economic and daily needs take over the original purpose of the building.

Figure 29. Xenia Nikolskaya, “Tiring Department Store, Cairo,” 2010.

There were many images that did not make it to the final book selection, one of which was “Geographical Society, Cairo,” 2010 (Figure 30). Though the period and the lighting conditions were perfect, the interior of the Geographical Society represents an Oriental style of architecture, which did not fit into my theme of colonial architecture.

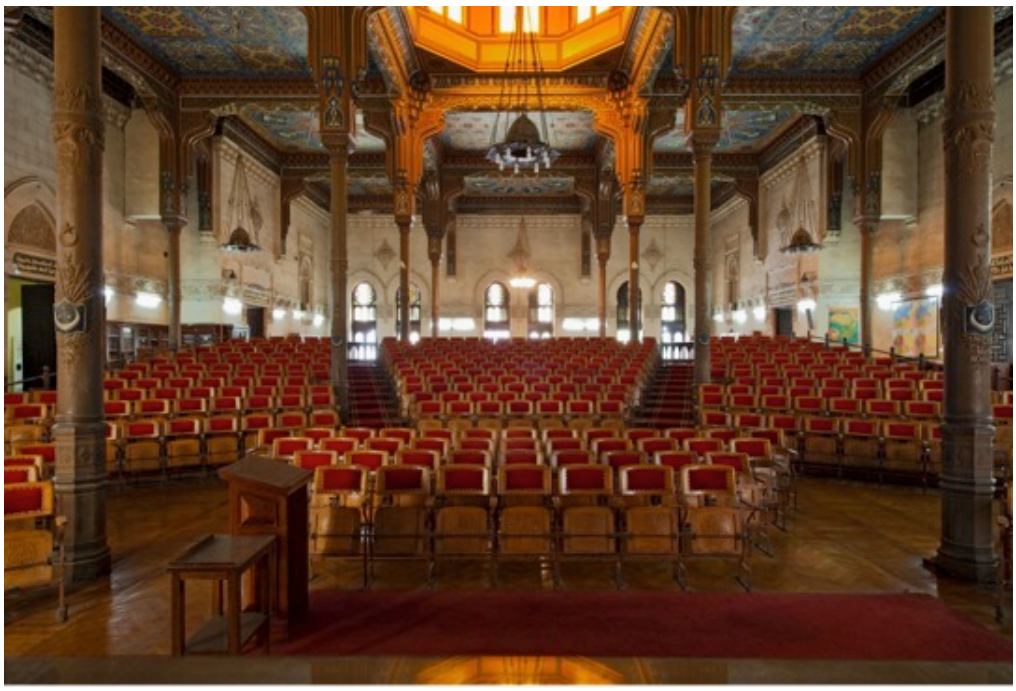

Figure 30. Xenia Nikolskaya, “Geographical Society, Cairo,” 2010.

I first approached the American University in Cairo Press (AUC Press), the most influential publishing house in the region, in 2008. Unfortunately, no agreement was reached with AUC Press, and while I was looking for a new publisher, I came across *Afghanistan: Chronotopia* (Norfolk 2003), published by Dewi Lewis, which looked like a perfect reference or prototype for *Dust.* Norfolk’s images of the aftermath of the war in Afghanistan include a lot of architecture and juxtapose horrific evidence of war with scenes of beauty. With the Arab Spring in full swing, the timing of the project was fortunate, and Dewi Lewis was very interested, as my photography reflected on the current political and economic situation in the Middle East. When I approached Dewi Lewis in 2011, I already had a set of 69 images, which I had arranged based on colour. Each subseries of photographs, if they were coming from one location, had a story, an narrative left behind by people who had long gone.

The narrative of the book is provided by the sequence of images — one long shot arranged by colour transitions, with images matched by colour: red and brown, green and blue. The narrative

starts in Cairo with the picture “Wall Decoration, al-Shams Café, Cairo” (2008), which shows the interior of a classic Cairo coffee shop, and travels through several Egyptian cities and ends up again in Cairo in Said Halim’s Palace. Photographs taken of the same location were placed together.

Figure 31. Double spread in *Dust*, X. Nikolskaya.

Aside from the cover, which was my idea, Dewi Lewis was responsible for the format and design of the book: generous white space and the absence of any decorative design elements, just images and accompanying text or captions. I liked the way the *Afghanistan: Chronotopia* book treats the subject matter in a most respectful way, design-wise. The *Dust* images carry quite a lot of information as well, so I did not want design elements to divert the readers’ attention from the photographs.

The book’s dimensions and layout mimicked the photographic albums that people purchased while travelling in the Orient in the nineteenth century, albums like *Souvenirs du Caire* (1865) by Ermé Désiré, a landscape-oriented collection of carefully composed images. As the majority of the *Dust* pictures are landscape oriented, so the format of the book was landscape oriented as well. The size of the book, 24 cm x 30 cm, made it possible to place photographs as big as possible on the page so viewers can see the details. The book contains 69 coloured plates, followed by a picture index with information I collected

about the locations photographed. The photographs' captions include only the date and location. This because, as I mentioned before, when I first exhibited the photographs from *Dust*, people could hardly believe that these pictures were taken in Egypt. I wanted to maintain this contrast between the "foreign-looking" buildings in the pictures and the captions giving the locations.

Dust is the ultimate symbol of Cairo. On Barak writes in his afterword:

> "It is impossible to destroy dust. All that one can do is to try preventing it from settling, move it around, redistribute it, keeping it in constant circulation" (Nikolskaya and Barak, 2012, p. 113).

Genuine Cairene dust was even integrated into the cover design of the book: the print from the "Red Living Room, Serageldin Palace" (Figure 25) was left on a shelf for two weeks where it accumulated a layer of dust. I then swiped the picture and photographed the print again, to enhance the *Dust* feeling. The trick was a success — everyone who picks up the book in his or her hands first wipes the cover to remove what appears to be a layer of dust.

Figure 32. The cover of the book, X. Nikolskaya.

4.3 Conclusion

Since *Dust: Egypt's Forgotten Architecture* was launched in the spring of 2012, it has become a collector's item: most of the book's copies are sold out, but request is still growing. Photographs from the project have been exhibited at several important venues. *Dust* provided documentation of Egypt's fading and forgotten architectural heritage from the second part of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. The book bears long-term witness to the country's on-going economic and social changes. *Dust* is the product of ethnographic photography, focusing on social and political turmoil and showing the layers of history represented by these buildings.

Dust creates an absent portrait of time with the only human traces in the form of forgotten objects and faded photographs left behind by the former residents. *Dust* embraces technical imperfection and the spontaneous approach, partly dictated by access restrictions and available light, and partly by a desire for *Dust* to serve as a personal diary of archaeological discovery that departs from the canons of classic architectural photography. The *Dust* project is a fusion of photographic genres: it seeks to capture issues around architectural heritage preservation, ethnography and social and politico-economic conditions in Egypt from an art perspective. The contributions that *Dust* has made to these fields will be explained in the next chapter, which is dedicated to the impact and dissemination of the project in book and exhibition formats, in art and academic contexts.

5. IMPACT AND DISSEMINATION

This chapter will signpost important milestones of the *Dust* project's dissemination and the impact of both the book and the exhibitions.

The *Dust* project was completed in January 2011 and the book was published in March 2012 by Dewi Lewis, with an introductory text by On Barak, senior lecturer in the Department of Middle Eastern and African History at Tel Aviv University. While on my Fulbright scholarship in the USA in 2009, I met On Barak at Princeton University. I was fascinated with his research about the Egyptian sense of time, which referenced timekeeping practices during the colonial era, and I felt that my pictures correlated with his research. In his book about the history of steamer and railway transportation in the modern Middle East (Barak 2013), Barak argues that the introduction of modern transportation and communications in colonial Egypt led to the development of unique timekeeping practices. These practices unsettled the modernist obsession with punctuality and contributed to a particularly Egyptian sense of time that continues to this day. He talks about the infamous Egyptian "five minutes", a commonplace reply to the question of "How long?" the claim to "five minutes" never, of course, being honoured. He mentions that colonial-era train schedulers adapted themselves to the Egyptian sense/senselessness of time. I believe that the locations that became the locus of my work fell into their neglected state, in part, because of this idiosyncratic Egyptian sense/senselessness of time.

The book was circulated through the publisher's network and distributed on Amazon. Copies of *Dust* were available at bookstores at the Tate Modern in London, the Arab Institute in France, and the Fotografiska museum in Stockholm, among other cultural venues. AUC Press distributed the book as well. Today, the *Dust* book has become a collector's item, with almost the entire first edition of 1000 copies sold.

Since 2012, *Dust* has received critical and curatorial attention internationally, resulting in eight solo exhibitions at major cultural venues and galleries, including the Dmitriy Semenov Gallery, St. Petersburg, Russia, and Hotel Diplomat, Stockholm, Sweden, in 2006; Palkin Gallery, St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2007; Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt, in 2012; Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm, Sweden, in 2013; The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2015; Museum of the Radvilas Palace, Vilnius, Lithuania, in 2017; and Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, in September 2017 as part of the Biennale of Photography in the Contemporary Arab World.

The solo exhibition at the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo, curated by Alexandra Stock, was timed to the book's release in May 2012. It included 22 prints of three different sizes (40 cm x 50 cm, 70 cm x 90 cm, and 100 cm x 150 cm), filling the space of the gallery, which is located in an old apartment building, similar to the subject matter of *Dust*. The book and the exhibition are two different types of communication: an exhibition is usually intended to attract a wider audience. The narrative in the book guides the reader, while in an exhibition space the viewer makes their own decisions about how to see the works and in which order. In my experience in the Arab world, people often walk from right to left, so the installation of the works had to reflect this. The first time *Dust* was shown in Cairo, I was aware of the possible public reaction, so images were chosen to appeal to more popular tastes.

The timeliness of *Dust* encouraged the Townhouse Gallery to organise an architectural heritage symposium ("Tracing Time"), which took place at the Rawabat Theatre (a sister venue of the Townhouse Gallery), to accompany the exhibition. The symposium received significant attention from the public and Egyptian media, and for many people it was an eye-opening

experience. Many questions were addressed to me and the other participants, from queries about certain buildings and architects to enquiries about whether or not I had moved the furniture, or why I had not cleaned the dust before the photo shoot.[20] The reaction of the general public reminded me of my Soviet childhood, when only the beautiful side of life was recognised and negative aspects of it were silenced.

Figure 33. *Dust* exhibition with "Cinema Radio" at Townhouse Gallery in Cairo, 2012.

The lack of organised Egyptian photographic archives made the *Dust* images very popular among Egyptian photographers and heritage-related people, reactivating an interest in the depiction of architectural heritage, especially after the events of January 2011, also known as the Arab Spring or Revolution of 25th of January. Heritage preservation became a relatively safe area for many, formerly political, activists. And *Dust* was considered an important reference. The "Tracing Time" symposium in Cairo, May 2012, in the context of the *Dust* exhibition in Townhouse Gallery had a significant impact on the Egyptian heritage community, raising awareness of the importance of architectural

[20] The "Tracing Time" symposium was held on 12 May 2012 at the Rawabet Theatre of Townhouse Gallery in Cairo. The speakers were Shaimaa Samir Ashour, Dr. Vittoria Capresi Docomomo, Mohamed Elshahed, Xenia Nikolskaya, Ola Seif and May Al-Ibrashy.

heritage throughout Egypt. Soon after the Arab Spring, organisations like Save Alexandria, Save Port Said, and Save Minia were established with the goal of preserving and documenting Egyptian architectural heritage beyond the more well-known pharaonic and Islamic monuments. *Dust* played an important role in the emerging heritage discourse in Egypt: for example, an article in *The Outpost* magazine by Samir Fahmi (2013) discussed the issue of heritage preservation in Egypt after the Arab Spring and interviewed Mohamed Elshahed and me as experts on the situation in Cairo. It looked specifically at the *Dust* experience with Villa Casdagly, which was looted shortly after I photographed it.

The exhibition produced for Townhouse Gallery in Cairo was shown in Medelhavsmuseet (Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities) in Stockholm in 2013. The museum selected the former Egyptian gallery for the *Dust* exhibition. The exhibition opening was followed by a lecture by writer On Barak and a guided tour by me.

Dust was exhibited in 2015 at The State Hermitage Museum as a solo show. It was titled *Dust: Cairo's Forgotten Architecture* and was curated by the museum director and Orientalist Mikhail Piotrovsky. Piotrovsky decided to focus on Cairo so some of the photographs in the exhibition were not taken from the book. In the 1960s, Piotrovsky spent some years in Cairo as a young professional, and his memories of the city are very similar to my experience 50 years later. The exhibition of 40 images in four different sizes (822 mm x 1102 mm, 1102 mm x 1562 mm, 1102 mm x 1682 mm, and 2402 mm x 1002 mm) was displayed in the three rooms of the newly renovated General Staff Building. A reproduction of an 1874 map of Cairo from the Hermitage collection was printed in large size and mounted on the wall, with all the *Dust* locations marked.

The style of the exhibition reflected the classical tradition of Russia's most famous museum. The photographs were displayed as large-sized prints within simple frames. My exhibit was only the third time that The Hermitage had ever shown the work of a photographer, the two previous artists being Irving Penn and Annie Leibovitz. The exhibition was more of a dialogue with art history: comparative studies of Egyptian colonial architecture from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries and the background of similar development in St. Petersburg after the 1917 Revolution. In his introductory text to the catalogue, Piotrovsky wrote: "Nikolskaya has preserved a special Cairo for us, and she has done it in a way that only a Petersburger could, in a way that only someone who knows the charm of the decay that we suffered and adored" (Piotrovsky 2015, p. 8).

Figure 34. *Dust* exhibition at The State Hermitage Museum, 2015. Xenia Nikolskaya.

Dust was a part of a touring group exhibition titled *Tea with Nefertiti: The Making of the Artwork by the Artist, the Museum, and the Public*. *Dust* was selected for inclusion as an example of contemporary "Orientalist" art. The exhibition celebrated the 100-year anniversary of the discovery of the Nefertiti bust, and was a

reflection by contemporary artists on phenomena such as Egyptomania. The exhibition was first shown at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar, in 2013, and later that same year at L'Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France. The following year, in 2014, it was shown at the Institute Valencia d'Art Modern (IVAM), Spain, and Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst, Munich, Germany. *Tea with Nefertiti* was critically discussed in accompanying exhibition catalogues.

The curatorial decision by Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrat[21] for the *Tea with Nefertiti* show was to produce light boxes measuring 2 m x 3 m instead of traditional prints, to enrich this multimedia exhibition. The size of the images and the lighting created the illusion of the actual space, allowing viewers to participate in my experience of discovering these places.

Figure 35. *Tea with Nefertiti* exhibition with "Sakakini Palace" at the Institute Valencia d'Art Modern, 2014. Xenia Nikolskaya.

At the Biennial of Contemporary Arab World Photography in Paris in 2017 the *Dust* project was exhibited in an individual space at the

[21] Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath are independent curators and academics and the co-founders of Art Reoriented, a multidisciplinary curatorial platform based in Munich and New York.

European House of Photography with natural light through a big vitrine window. The size of the works was 50 cm x 60 cm. Curators Gabriel Bauret and Cristianne Rodrigues, together with me, made a selection of 25 images. Even though a few of the images from *Dust* are always more popular than others, the choice for every exhibition is very different. The second Biennial selected artists who had worked on long-term projects and focused on the topics of changing identity within the Arab world. In each genre artists were introducing banned subjects like exploration of gender or, in the case of *Dust*, hidden territories: the forgotten colonial heritage. Because the *Dust* project lies between art and documentary photography, and raises the topic of abandoned heritage, it was situated within the discourse of contemporary Arab photography. The *Dust* project reflects contemporary issues in the Arab World. According to Radhouane Addala, a Tunisian journalist based in Stockholm: "Xenia Nikolskaya is touching aspects and topics that the Arab World is living with: the past is ignored and the vision of future is not clear. The Arab World is going through a transition but there is nobody to dust it off."[22]

Each of these exhibitions shaped the audience's perceptions in various ways. At each venue, the meaning taken from the images was different. The Cairo 2012 exhibition had a strong effect on Egyptians: the shocked reactions, a kind of disbelief that these abandoned sites exist, were a testament to the public's lack of knowledge of this heritage. Doha and the other Nefertiti shows juxtaposed *Dust* with contemporary art pieces and historic artefacts in the same space. The Hermitage exhibition created a privileged museum narrative of comparative analysis of the fate of Russia's post-revolutionary architecture with that of Egypt's, and the Biennale in Paris was aimed at a sophisticated audience that was familiar with Orientalist discourse and had their own relationships with this heritage as citizens of countries that were former colonisers.

[22] Interview with Radhouane Addala, Stockholm, Sweden, 25 April 2019.

In 2018 I re-evaluated my archive and selected a series of photographs from the material that did not make into the final edition of the *Dust* book. “Dust Outtakes” will be shown in Shelter, the new art centre in Alexandria, run by Sigma Real Estate, in the fall of 2019, to be followed by a discussion and seminar.

The *Dust* project was also disseminated through formal academic channels, including the First International Conference of Photography and Theory, Limassol, Cyprus, in 2010; the New Moscow Cinema School in 2013, where students were keen to discuss my lighting techniques and fascinated with the idea of using actual architectural landmarks as a movie location; a Rutgers University lecture in 2009 that as part of the Fulbright program attracted a large student audience; and a lecture in March 2018 at the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo (NVIC), which addressed a more professional public of archaeologists and scholars. On Barak invited me to talk to his students at Tel Aviv University in 2013. It was an overwhelming experience to talk to Israeli students of Middle East and colonial studies who may never have a chance to visit Egypt. It reminded me of when I was a student at the Art Academy in St. Petersburg in the early 1990s, looking at black-and-white slides of ancient Egyptian art and never imagining I would one day visit the actual sites.

During 2010–2012, as an adjunct faculty member at the Performing and Visual Arts Department of AUC, I introduced students to my work and conducted several field trips to Downtown Cairo and Port Said. A common theme of these workshops was the genuine surprise by all parties that such things existed and curiosity about how I had managed to gain access. The discussions also prompted new types of questions about photographic documentation of architectural heritage as a method for heritage preservation. My goal was to help students

to recognise this heritage and to use it as subject matter for their creative work.

Dust was selected by the Scientific Committee of the Fourth International Conference of Photography and Theory (ICPT 2016) to be exhibited at NiMAC in Nicosia on 2–4 December 2016, while a selection was published in the *Uncommon Cairo*, an arts guidebook edited by Heba Habib and Isabelle Mayault (Uncommon 2004). The photograph of Radio Theatre from *Dust* was used as the cover for Kobrin's recent book (2018), in which he dedicated one of the essays to the *Dust* project. Kobrin's essay was first published in *Neprikosnovennyy Zapas* (Kobrin 2013), a Russian literary magazine.

Dust was also the subject of commentary in architectural magazines: the *Arkitectur* (2013) and the *Arkitekten* (2013), both Swedish, two interviews with me to coincide with the exhibition at Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm, in 2013. In 2017, photographs that were not included in the final *Dust* selection were used to illustrate a story about the Baron Palace in Heliopolis in *8 Magazine* (Humphreys 2017). The photography magazine *Images* (2012) also published a story about the *Dust* book release. Much of the Egyptian media covered the 2012 exhibition at the Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, including: *Al Ahram*, *Egypt Today*, and *Egypt Independent*, which carried thoughtful comments by Helen Stuhr-Rommereim (2012). My most recent interview in Egypt regarding my book was for *Mantiqti* magazine in 2018. Among important international publications, there were interviews with Nathan Thornburgh for *Roads and Kingdoms* (2013) and *The Telegraph* (2012) and a guest appearance on BBC Radio 4's "The Forum" program to talk about *Dust* on 24 June 2013.[23] Academic publications like *Afterimage* (Hosni 2012)

[23] See BBC Radio 4 (2013) "The Forum," panel discussion, "Dust and Ash," 23 June. Accessed at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p019v1cb.

also published reviews of the *Dust* book. These interviews and publications were aimed at members of the public who have a particular interest in history and heritage.

My approach to architectural heritage photography also led to collaborations with the UNESCO office in Cairo and Takween Integrated Community Development, an Egyptian company, on the project Rediscovering Esna's Cultural Heritage Assets (RECHA Project), and the Russian Egyptological Centre in Cairo, for which I photographed archaeological and architectural heritage sites.

Among Egyptian photographers, the *Dust* book spurred interest in taking photographs and in locations similar to the ones I had photographed. *Dust* was the topic of several workshops for photographers I conducted in Egypt and abroad, among them: "Light as a Subject Matter and an Artistic Medium," Contemporary Image Collective, Cairo, Egypt (2010); "Places and Spaces," PHOTOWEEK II, organised by the US Agency for International Development, Cairo, Egypt (2011); "City on the Water," Alliance Française, Port Said, Egypt (2012); "PhotoUA Festival Photographer of the Year," Kiev, Ukraine (2016); "How to Make a Photo Book," Photopia, Cairo, Egypt (2018) and "Advanced Photography Workshop," Carpe Diem, Cairo, Egypt (2018).

Al Ismaelia for Real Estate,[24] mentioned above, helped me access two of their properties in 2010. Today the company frequently provides film crews and photographers access to their properties for shooting locations, while encouraging cultural activities at their properties, like Cairo Photo Week, an initiative started in 2018, and the Downtown Contemporary Arts Festival (D-CAF), which launched in 2011.

[24] Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment, an Egyptian company, was founded in 2008 with the goal of acquiring and restoring Downtown Cairo properties.

Figure 36. Instagram account of Cairo Photo Week, advertising the event's locations in Downtown Cairo, November 2018.

Moreover, numerous photographers, both Egyptian and foreign, have approached me for help or advice on accessing these buildings. Egyptian photographer Nour El Massry created a series of collages using the *Dust* pictures.

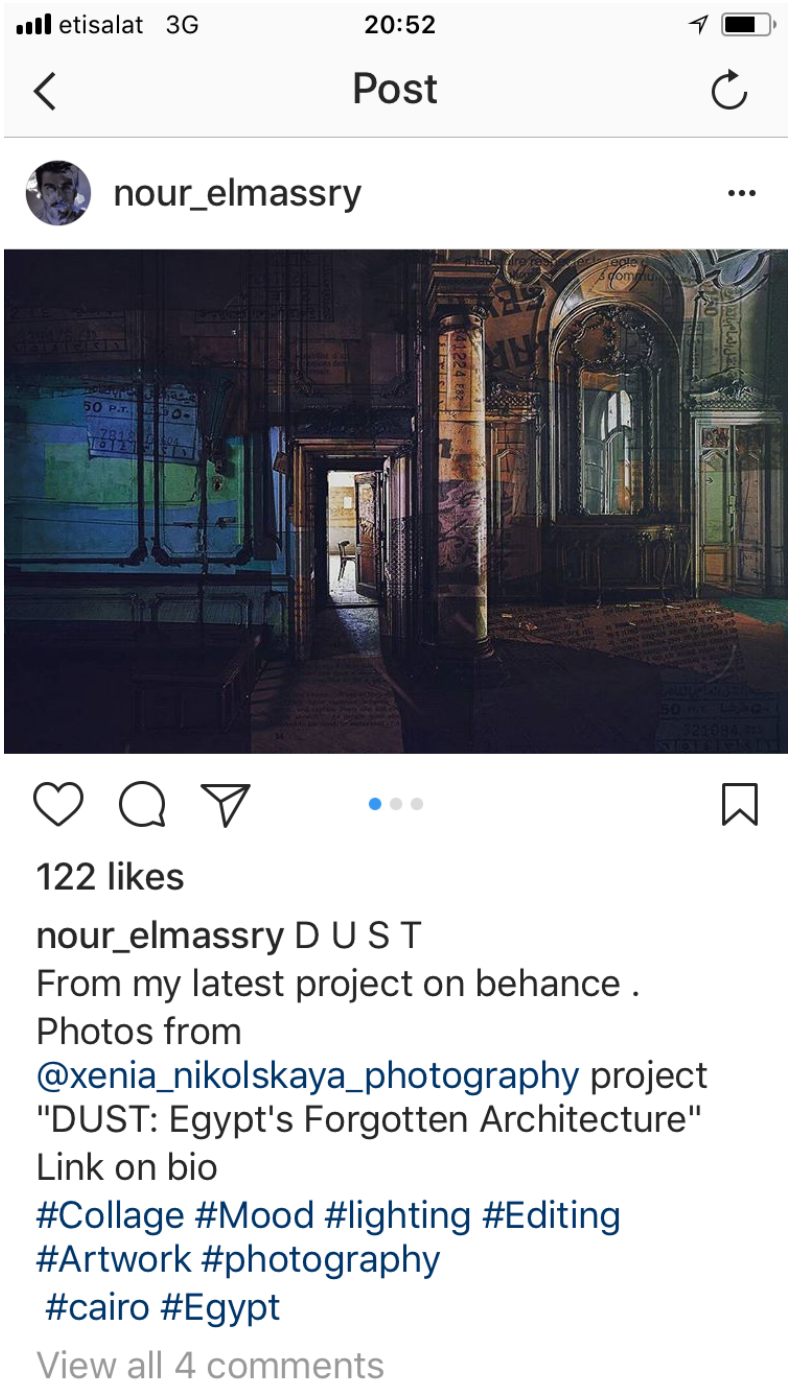

Figure 37. Instagram account of Nour El Massry, 2018.

Karim El Hayawan, a Cairo-based photographer and architect, did a project about budget hotels in Cairo called *Forgotten Rooms*, strongly influenced by the *Dust* aesthetic. In 2018, I edited the book *Downtown Cairo: the Stories and the Stories Within*, featuring photographs by three Egyptian photographers working in Downtown Cairo and heavily influenced by *Dust* and its exploration of unusual places. One of them, Bilo Hussein, who

photographed old cinema theatres for the project, specifically cited *Dust* as an influence on her work.[25]

For some years, local historians have led walking tours through historic parts of Cairo and Alexandria. Among these tours, are Cairo Walks, Friday Walks, Kemo Cultural Walks, Walk Like an Egyptian, and Saturday Walks. These walks are led by historians and history enthusiasts like Ahmad Al-Bindari, Michael Mitchell, and Karim Badr. The aim is to raise awareness of the cultural heritage by visiting and documenting sites off the conventional tourist routes that are threatened with demolition. The privately owned art consultancy firm Art D'Égypte is working to organise annual pop-up shows in historic venues like the Egyptian Museum and Manial Palace.[26] Given the critical, curatorial and academic attention that *Dust* received in Egypt and internationally, it would not be unreasonable to assume a correlation of this novel interest in local heritage and modern Egyptian history to the project's wider impact.

When I started the project in 2006, I did not know where it would take me, nor that it would attract interest from such diverse social groups and specialists of many kinds. Photographing old buildings has become a trend among creative practitioners and the general public. The project created an interest in architectural heritage of this period in different Egyptian cities and abroad and raised awareness of the need for heritage preservation. The word *dust* itself has come to define Egypt's forgotten architectural heritage.

[25] Conversation with B. Hussein in Cairo on 18 September 2018.

[26] Manial Palace was build by Mohammed Ali Tewfik, an uncle of King Farouk, between 1899 and 1929.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The research project *Dust: Egypt's Forgotten Architecture* (2006–2012) sought to map Egyptian colonial architectural heritage from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that was, at the time, "invisible" to local populations, due to real-estate frenzy and an on-going overpopulation crisis. *Dust* rediscovered and re-contextualized these abandoned buildings, creating a new artistic and historic narrative that modifies the way these structures are now currently perceived, while raising awareness about the importance and conditions of this architectural heritage. *Dust* encouraged real-estate companies to invest and capitalize on Egyptian colonial architecture, resulting to a rebranding of "Downtown Cairo".

Dust has now become a reference book for artists, conservationists, urban researchers, architects and other interlocutors invested in the preservation of these architecturally and historically significant buildings. The project is a testament to architectural survival and represents a documentation of the remarkable effects of decline and decay. It acts as a clarion call to take note of what remains and strive towards its preservation and is an indicator for further conservation and documentation efforts.

6.1 Contribution to knowledge

Dust contributes to the field of architectural photography and photography of endangered spaces in particular as an artistic field trip diary that is the result of a multi-layered, ethnographically informed methodology that combines observation, data collection, field research and documentation.

It offers a unique way of documenting and interpreting hidden gems of Egyptian architecture (such as the El-Dorado Theatre in

Port Said and the Amin Hagagy Palace in Esna). It does so by employing an innovative research method that combines history, political economy, and social developments with studies of architecture. This practice-led research is particularly timely as it raises awareness about the significance of the preservation and close study of national architectural heritage.

Dust offers a testament to Egypt's social and economic developments on a large scale while offering a new understanding of how people treat heritage in everyday life on a smaller scale. With Egypt undergoing a momentous shift in its history, *Dust* has come to illustrate the economic stagnation that has engulfed Egypt over the past three decades. This project underlines the significance of documenting a country in its transformative phase, and highlights the urgency of reflecting on Egypt's history in order to understand its future.

Dust created new knowledge about Egyptian architectural heritage, and has encouraged a younger generation of researchers and activists to discuss these issues of heritage preservation. *Dust* activated discussion and debate around the subject of endangered buildings in different art and cultural contexts in Egypt and abroad.

My approach to architectural heritage photography in Egypt has made me an expert in the field. Over the past two years I have offered consultancy support to different architectural companies and organization, including Takween Integrated Community Development, the architectural hub known as Megawra, and the Cairo office of UNESCO.

6.2 Future research

An ethnography-informed methodology, such as the one used to produce *Dust,* can be employed by researchers in other contexts. The methodology combines a variety of elements, including history, political economy, and social development, with architecture studies. It enables an understanding of the urban situation and of how people treat their heritage in everyday life. The method developed in this practice-led research can be implemented in other geographical locations with a similar political and economic history, like Algeria or Tunis, for example, or even the suburbs of St. Petersburg, which still have a lot of forgotten villas. The *Dust* method can be used to document endangered buildings: their renovation, reuse, or demolition.

In 2013, I started working on a side project called *The Land In Between* in Abkhazia, the separatist part of Georgia, focusing on the related subject of architecture as a repository of time. Abkhazia is a country of ruins, a geographical palimpsest, with 5,000 years of history. Buildings and once-great states have sunk into oblivion, their names forgotten and their original purposes lost, and soon to be reclaimed by nature. Working in Abkhazia I use the same ethnographic approach that includes interviews and reference sourcing, field trips, history research and photography. My ultimate goal is to produce a book dedicated to the architectural heritage of the country.

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APPENDIX A

Monograph

Nikolskaya, X. (2012) Dust: Egypt's Forgotten Architecture. Stockport, UK: Dewi Lewis

Exhibition Catalogues

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Solo Exhibitions

2019 *Dust. Egypt's Forgotten Architecture,* Shelter Art Space, Alexandria, Egypt

2017 *Dust. Egypt's Forgotten Architecture*, Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, France, September-October 2017.

Dust. Egypt's Forgotten Architecture, Museum of the Radvilas Palace, Vilnius, Lithuania, 9 March – 16 April 2017

2015 *Dust. Cairo's Forgotten Architecture*, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia, 15 March – 15 May 2015

2013 *Dust*, Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm, Sweden, 16 February 2013 - 28 April 2013.

2012 *Dust*, Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt, 6 May – 13 June 2012

2007 *Dust*, Palkin Gallery, St. Petersburg, Russia

2006 *Dust*, Dmitriy Semenov Gallery, St. Petersburg, Russia
Dust, Hotel Diplomat, Stockholm, Sweden, 17 November - 16 December 2006.

Group Exhibitions

2014 *Tea with Nefertiti*, Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst, Munich

2013 *Tea with Nefertiti*, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, València, Spain

Tea with Nefertiti, L'Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris

2012 *Tea with Nefertiti*, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar

2011 "Bursa International Photo Festival," Bursa, Turkey

2010 *Futuropolis*, Saad Zagloul Cutural Centre, Cairo

2009 *Hit it big!* Mason Gross Gallery, Mason Gross School of Art, Rutgers University, USA

2008 *Contemporary Perspectives*, Selection Art Fair, Dmitriy Semenov Gallery Basel, Switzerland

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Presentations and Lectures

2009 Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, USA

2013 New Moscow Cinema School, Russia
Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm, Sweden
Department of Middle Eastern and African History, Tel Aviv University, Israel

2015 The Stare Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia

2018 Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo (NVIC), Egypt