

El Matam El Mish-Masry (The Non-Egyptian Restaurant)



EL MATAM EL MISH-MASERY

(The Non-Egyptian Restaurant) Asuncion Molinos Gordo

El Matam El Mish Masry is an instrument for common critical analysis to help understand the reasons behind Egyptians' diminishing access to food. The project's title, (The Non-Egyptian Restaurant) makes reference to a feeling shared by many Egyptians: that they live in a country no longer their own, a country that is in "someone else's" hands.

The work involved the creation of a small restaurant in the neighbourhood of Ard El Lewa, one of the informal settlements of Greater Cairo, through witch to deal with issues related to export/import policies, as well as considering the side effects of uncontrolled growth of suburban areas on top of agricultural land.

The kitchen was open during the entire month of November 2012 and worked according to the following menus:





WEEK 1 – Exports

Cooking with Egyptian grown products exported to the international market and rarely accessible to the Egyptian population.

Meal: Baked sea bass on a bed of royal jersey potatoes seasoned with tender chives, garnished with steamed carrots and green beans. Served with tomatoes and sweet peppers salad. All vegetables are organically grown.





WEEK 2 – Imports

Cooking with ingredients that are affordable for low-income families in the area of Ard El Lewa, buying in the local market. Four women from the neighbourhood, Om Islam, Om Mohamed, Om Karim and Waefá were invited to cook the recipes according to their actual household budgets.

Meal : Koshary, a popular dish consisting of rice, lentils, chickpeas, fried onions, spicy tomato sauce and pasta made from imported wheat of low and medium quality. Egyptian vegetables grown for the domestic market are often irrigated with wastewater. Pesticides and fertilizers are used without any regulation by the state; instructions for their use are often printed in foreign languages unreadable to Egyptian farmers.





WEEK 3 – Building on farmland

As a symbolic act, we are harvested our ingredients from the land that surrounds the restaurant, which once was agricultural land. Every day the designated area grew 200 meters, until reaching 1 km on the fourth day of the week. Finding plastic, cigarette butts, or discarded chewing gums where 30 years ago were tomatoes, onions, lettuces... The found ingredients were cooked and presented merely for display purposes.

Meal: Decomposing eggplant, soda lid, plastic bag, cigarettes, gum, onionskins and orange peels.





WEEK 4 – Peasant civilization

In the fashion of an agro-archaeology exercise, we conducted a series of excavations taking as starting point the restaurant's backyard, looking for any signs of agricultural activity. In collaboration with archaeologist and Egyptologist Salima Ikram.

Meal: Fertile soil found beneath 1.5 metres of detritus, rubble, bottles and plastics.



Until the middle of the 20th century, Egypt was an international major agricultural producer, its domestic production feeding almost 100 per cent of its population. This high level of self-sufficiency started to crumble down at the beginning in the 1970s-1980s, with the application of new policies on agriculture and development. This situation continued worsening to finally collapse in the Food Crisis of 2008. As a matter of fact, lack of food was a fundamental driving force of the Revolution of January 2011.

From then on, Cairo's suburban areas have experienced a fast and incontrollable growth, which has transformed large areas of fertile soil into constructed, paved land, thus increasing even further self-sufficiency problems.

These illegally constructed neighbourhoods, with no urban planning or public infrastructures, are popularly known as "Ashguahiyat," a term meaning "leaving things to chance".

Paradoxically, the inhabitants of these Ashguahiyats are mainly peasants who have been dispossessed of their land or unable to sustain themselves with its produces. These circumstances force them to migrate to big urban centers, where they are hired as construction workers.

CONTRACTOR -

This project is based in one of these "informal" neighbourhoods or Ashguahiyats: Ard El Lewa located northeast of Giza.

جراج خالم

CITE CITE

Ard El Lewa means "the general's land".







To wach a 4 minutes video on **El Matam El Mish-masry** go to:

http://vimeo.com/59476170











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