

Story of the Stamp: 1947 Exhibition of Contemporary Art

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In March 1947, Egypt hosted the International Exhibition of Contemporary Art in Cairo - a philatelic and cultural landmark event that aimed to place Egypt at the crossroads of ancient heritage and modern art.

To mark the event Egypt issued four beautiful stamps (SG 334-337) on 9 March 1947, each of them showing an iconic ancient figure or monument. The stamps celebrated Egypt's artistic past but also reflected its hopes for cultural modernity. They were issued as charity stamps with half the face value contributing towards exhibition costs.



The stamps combine Egypt's ancient artistic brilliance and its modern creative vitality

The 5+5 millièmes stamp features the Triad of Mycerinus, the westernized name of Pharaoh Menkaure. Its three schist statues, unearthed by the Egyptologist George Reisner in Menkaure's valley temple near his pyramid at Giza, highlighted Egypt's reverence for the sculptural sophistication of the Old Kingdom.



The FDC echoes the style of the exhibition set

identification of Ramesses II's titles in the vast temple complex. Choosing this spectacular ruin for a stamp indicated Egypt's pride in its monumental architectural legacy.

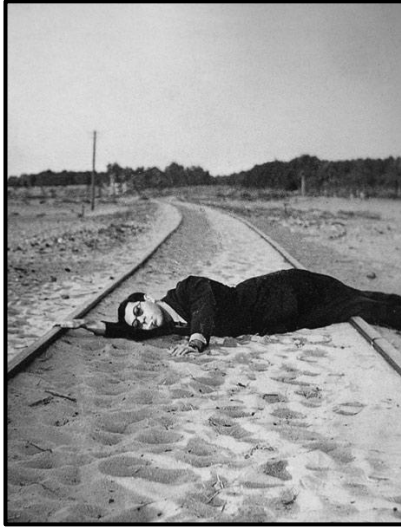
The 30+30 millièmes stamp bears the famous bust of Queen Nefertiti, a masterpiece of painted stucco-coated limestone. Excavated in 1912 at Tell el Amarna by a German team, it portrays Akhenaten's Great Royal Wife with timeless elegance. Its presence symbolized aesthetic refinement and Egypt's global artistic influence.

The 15+15 millièmes stamp shows the Temple of Ramses II, widely known as the Ramesseum, on the west bank of the Nile across from Luxor. Its name was coined by Jean François Champollion, whose 1829 visit led to the first



Mahmoud Mokhtar's 'Reveil de l'Egypte' unites ancient and modern

The 50+50 millièmes issue shows the funerary mask of Tutankhamun, discovered by Howard Carter in 1925 in the Valley of the Kings. The image conveyed Egypt's unrivalled mastery in gold craftsmanship and the everlasting allure of its royal burials. The decision to highlight ancient rulers for a contemporary art event presented Egypt as a centre of ancient creativity whose visual language resounds across the centuries and a modern cultural hub, playing an active part in a worldwide artistic conversation. This was especially visible in Cairo of the 1940s.



Active between 1938 and 1948, Art et Liberté (the Art and Freedom group) was a Cairo Surrealist and antifascist collective led by such figures as Georges Henein (poet and author, *see left*), Kamel El Telmissany (artist and film maker), Ramses Younan (painter and writer), and Inji Eflatoun (painter and activist). The group championed artistic freedom and political criticism, and redefined Egyptian modernism during this turbulent decade.

At the same time artists including Mahmoud Saïd and Mahmoud Mokhtar followed the Neo Pharaonic Revival, blending modern artistic techniques with Pharaonic motifs, reinterpreting ancient Egyptian symbolism to express modern national identity.

Egypt's 1947 Exhibition —and the stamps issued to celebrate it— beautifully encapsulated a moment when the nation asserted both its ancient brilliance and its modern creative vitality.