

# EAST-WEST: THE ART OF DIALOGUE

AN EGYPTIAN ART COLLECTOR LAUNCHES A CROSS-CULTURAL INITIATIVE TO BUILD BRIDGES BETWEEN THE ARAB WORLD AND THE WEST.

The Shafik Gabr Foundation launched “East-West: The Art of Dialogue”, a new charitable initiative to encourage and stimulate dialogue between the Arab world and the West. The event occurred on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2012 and was attended by the Rt.Hon. Tony Blair, former UK Prime Minister.

This initiative, inspired by founder Shafik Gabr’s passion for European and American artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, who travelled to the Middle East and immersed themselves in the local culture and way of life, will sponsor exchanges between young emerging leaders in the arts, sciences, law, media and both business and social entrepreneurship from the Arab world and also the West.

By enabling them to observe and share in each others’ cultures and societies at close quarters and to create new networks and to communicate their experiences more widely, the Foundation aims to help reverse an erosion of public understanding and trust, to recover the profound commonalities and to value the enriching differences between East and West.

The multi-million pound initiative was inaugurated at the Dorchester Hotel in London. Following the speech of Tony Blair, panel discussions that in-

cluded leading figures from the diplomatic, art, business and media worlds were chaired by the BBC presenter Nik Gowing. Panellists included Sir Sherard Cowper Coles, former British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, Lord Poltimore, Deputy Chairman of Sotheby’s Europe, and Hussein Fahmy, actor and former President of the Cairo International Film Festival. Similar events will take place in Washington and New York later this year and in Paris, Istanbul and Cairo in 2013.

Mr Shafik Gabr’s collection comprises some of the finest examples of the great masters of Orientalism including Jean-Léon Gérôme, Ludwig Deutsch, Frederick Arthur Bridgman, David Roberts, Gustav Bauernfeind, David Roberts, John Frederick Lewis, Étienne Dinet and Jacques Majorelle. Over the years, the collection has become one of the most complete tributes to the world of Orientalism. The launch of “East-West: The Art of Dialogue” coincides with the publication of a new book - “Masterpieces of Orientalist Art: The Shafik Gabr Collection”, a lavishly illustrated book that reflects its importance in the art world and includes essays by some of the most distinguished experts in the field.

‘Despite the massive growth of

access to electronic and social media in recent years, Mr. Shafik Gabr said, ‘...empathy and understanding between the Arab World and the West have declined. Curiosity is ebbing and stereotypes risk hardening into caricatures. The long-term implications for relations between East and West are deeply worrying. The Orientalist traveller painters, whom I call the early globalists, demonstrated, through first-hand portrayals of the Arab World, the power of close observation to transcend stereotypes and engender empathy and informed understanding. Rebuilding the bridges that once existed is what “East-West: The Art of Dialogue” aims to achieve. I believe passionately in the power for good that can result.’

The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, the former UK Prime Minister said ‘The future of the region lies, in my view, in the creation of open societies and economies. The only solution is when people believe they can live together, regardless of their differences. I think this concept of cultural exchange is really, really important. You can’t understand some of these issues unless you understand the different cultural perceptions.’

Targeting twenty candidates aged between 24-30 years, initially drawn



from Egypt, Bahrain, the US and the UK, The Art of Dialogue programme will sponsor a series of exchanges designed to provide participants with unique insights into each others’ societies and help to promote professional and personal relationships

across cultures.

The candidates will be tasked with developing creative projects, which will bridge social and cultural divides and reach out beyond their home communities to a wider public. These projects

will be presented at a conference in Washington, DC in November 2013; a conference which they, themselves, will help to shape and organise.

For further information visit [eastwestdialogue.org](http://eastwestdialogue.org)