



They roamed the streets of Cairo, photographing and meticulously documenting its public space ornaments, which decorate the wide range of shops and coffee houses of the city. As an artist living in Cairo, however, their stance on the aesthetics of Cairo's public ornaments surprised me, for I have always found these ornamental structures hanging on top of the shops' entrances to be rather ugly and devoid of any aesthetic value. During my conversation with Guido and Karin I explained how I felt about these sculptural ornaments. For me they were not only unattractive, I told them, but they also seemed to disturb the architectural integrity of the city's old buildings. Based on their research on Islamic art and architecture, they explained to me how they see a close association between these ornaments and the muqarnas structures commonly used in old mosques and schools built during the Mamluk period in Egypt. They showed me how these structures could be viewed as "Gatekeepers," iconic structures that were commonly used as safeguards to the entrance of old European buildings. Gatekeepers, they explained, protect and attract at the same time. They monitor areas of transition.

Their incisive perceptions were eye-openers to me, and I was willing to look at these ornaments in a new light. Shortly after, as I was doing my regular rounds in the city, I took notice of the ornamental front of a juice shop, and immediately made the association between this facade and the old muqarnas style. For the first time I began to see how these shop facades around the city seemed to imitate and popularize a style that has been formerly restricted to religious buildings only.

ABOVE STREET LEVEL (extract), Huda Lutfi (2010) ¹⁹⁾

2006, 26th of July Street, Building 30, Apt. 68, Cairo, photo souvenir 2009, ANNE

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