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JRMC-460

Final Script

(MUSIC)

Van-Leo is Armenian who came to Egypt with his family and started his life here. At age 17 Leo recognized his passion to photography and he started his dream.

There was an exhibition held at AUC which showed all Leo's photos and some of his artifacts.

Before he dies he made an agreement with AUC to take everything he possess to put in the archive. He knows that AUC is the only place that would appreciate his work and knows its worthiness.

(Entrance with music) Each photographer has their own inspiration and their role model in photography.

One photographer, Dr. Shems Friedlander, who is a professor at AUC and he's not only a photographer but also a graphic designer, filmmaker and painter.

Professor Shems introduces himself.

I introduced to him about Van Leo and asked him if he knew a lot about Leo.

Prof. Shems replied *"Van Leo which his exhibit is on right now in the photpgraphic gallery is not that all interesting to me personally. But I think he's an interesting photographer as far as having documented a certain group of people in Egypt in a certain time. So he was basically a celebrity photography and so it's always interesting to see culturally and graphically and visually and we learn what kind of clothes people wore 50 years ago and how they looked and what hair dressers were and number of things like that. You can learn things historically from a photographer such as Van Leo. A lot of people here like him a great deal and I think one of the reasons they like him is that he's bringing back certain memories to them of well known people in the arts that existed here in Egypt that are no longer here and are very old now."*

Moving on with the interview I asked Prof. Shems about what he liked the most in the exhibition of Van Leo.

Prof. Shems said *"I just like the consistency of the approach he had and some experimentations he made at a time like with some of the hand colored photographs were done from the black and white pictures. I think he was really a people person, he liked to be with people, and he liked to be with celebrities."*

I then moved on to the experiment with the light that Van Leo used and asked Prof Shems about how he saw it.

Prof Shems said *"Well Van Leo experiments with light were interesting but they are in the studio, he filmed in the studio. He's a photographer that took pictures in a studio. He spent some time lighting and re-lighting."*

Going back to Van Leo, I asked Prof. Shems of his opinion about the self portraits Van Leo did.

Prof. Shems replied *"I think he probably had within him some desire to be a celebrity and to be like one of the people he was photographing and so he changed his costumes so to speak."*

Then I raised the crucial question if Van Leo inspired Prof. Shems as a person.

Prof. Shems replied *"He definitely didn't inspire me. He might have inspired other photographers but certainly not me. I think he was a photographer that did something in a place, Egypt that nobody was doing at that particular time. Therefore, he became recognized for that."*

This is the end of the interview with professor Shems after knowing his opinion about Van Leo and his work. Prof. Shems didn't see Van Leo as a great photographer so that's an opposing opinion rather than

the others who thought they loved Leo's work. It was interesting to hear his opposing opinion and knowing that he was never influenced by him or even thought his images were interesting for him. It shows that each photographer thinks of a role model according to their own interest in the style of photographs.

(MUSIC)

Another interview I had with Mr. Barry Iverson who is a friend of Van Leo, spent so many times with him and learned from him.

Mr. Iverson introduced himself as the curator of the exhibition of Van Leo.

I started first by asking him who influenced him to become a photographer?

Iverson answered "*Who was big influence in my life, probably a guy named How Gold, he was a gallery owner in Denver when I went to University and I had two big shows there. Another photographer who I admired a lot was Walker Evans and his work is characterized by documentary and he had a very interesting style.*"

Then I continued after asking the influential question to say what about Van Leo?

Mr. Iverson replied "*I got to know Van Leo starting 1997-1998 so it was much late in my. One aspect that had a great effect on me was the hand coloring. A technique which was widely used during the 50's and 60's primarily because there were no color labs and it was all black and white. It's kind of marriage of photography and painting because everyone he make become unique you can't replicate*

the hand coloring twice. Essentially it's the same image but the coloring and the costume hand coloring makes it special. Also it gives the image a very retro feel a very 50's 60's atmosphere."

I continued from the point of Portraits and asked him about what he thinks about the self-portraits of Van Leo, if he likes or not?

Mr. Iverson answered *"Well his self-portrait is very special, he broke new ground when he did self-portraits in the 40's. The main period of his self-portraits period was from 1941-1944 World War 2 periods. He played a different number of roles, he would dress up as a robber, burglar, Jesus, normal people, he crossed up as women and those were so funny. It was very risky and daring at that time to dress in that way and so we can say he was out in front and his father was always scold him. He told me that his father when he saw him doing the self portraits he would say that he's wasting all this money on the film on yourself, he should be making money."*

From the roles Leo played in the self-portraits I asked Iverson, did you think the roles he played in his self-portraits had a certain message or it's just a obsession he had he would addresses it in his own photos?

Mr. Iverson replied *"I think each self-portrait was different so he had messages in each one, I think everything has a message and if you look really close into each one, you'll see he has a message to give."*

I asked Mr. Iverson about his favourite piece of Van Leo.

He replied *"A portrait of a South African entertainer named Teddy Lane and it's fantastic with a close up on his face. He told me he applied Vaseline to his face to make it glistens and enlisted in a certain way which had a dramatic highlight and shadows."*

From the techniques Van Leo used I asked Mr. Iverson what he thinks about the techniques.

Mr. Iverson said he studied international photography and then added *"Regarding his techniques he did certain things to enhance his photographs it was primarily lighting. It was very special."*

What does Mr. Iverson see in Van Leo that made him never go outside to take photos and only shooting inside the studio?

Mr. Iverson replied *"He defined himself as a portrait photographer and they have their own world in the studio. You can control everything, I mean technically 100% control. Once you go outside you lose control of lighting and location."*

I wondered what made Van Leo famous so I asked Mr. Iverson when and how?

Mr. Iverson said *"How he became famous, well during up to the mid 40's. He started to look for the Egyptian entertainers, actors and actresses. He became very well known through the word of mouth amongst the top celebrities, actors of the silver screen. By 1952 there's one photograph that was in the recent show and it's a very interesting photograph. It's Mohamed Naguib and other officers. So why would they have chosen, why the Military at that time chosen Van Leo to come and photograph him. They could've chosen other but they chose Van Leo because he was famous at that time. They called him in looks like a camp in Abbasia and he did a location portrait of Mohamed Naguib and the whole 3 officers. So that tells you his status, his stature in the photograph world in the photograph community."*

The Final question was asking Mr. Iverson about few things he knew about Van Leo that people don't

Mr. Iverson answered *"That's a good question, he was very shy. He was very kind but you can tell that he was a top businessman also. He was always a one man show; he said that over the years he would hire assistance to help but really seems to me that he did pretty much everything. He would collect the money, take the orders and do everything and so he's a good record keeper and at the same time a good creative photographer and a good businessman and a warm heart too. He had a love-hate relation to Egypt because his brother left in the 50's. He was always a little bit jealous of his brother as he went to*

France but Leo stayed. Right till the end he always not really sure was that a good choice to his life. He loved Egypt of course, it was great for him he had a great studio, he had a great studio. But in his back of his mind he was wondering whether or not he should've left to pursue his life elsewhere but it didn't happen that way."

(MUSIC)

Here's another photographer's opinion about Van Leo's work. He's Prof. Ronie Close.

Mr. Close says *"My name is Ronie close and I am assistant professor of photography in the journalism and media department at AUC. I think the Van Leo show was the first exhibition that I saw since I came."*

I asked Mr. Close what he thinks about Van Leo's photos.

Mr. Close replied *"I think it's a very interesting social history of Egypt or Cairo in a way probably more particularly. His work spanned a very long time and it sort of I suppose encapsulates different periods in photography and also different periods of the history in Cairo or in Egypt in general. So you can kind of see in his work there are lot of studio photography that I think that he's mainly a studio photographer. The way of making photographs was very particular and it also appears that in the 1950's in particularly 1960's that there was a glamour celebrity industry in Cairo that he was very much established with photographing film stars and music people. He was a kind of celebrity photographer for here."*

I moved on to talk about the exhibition and what did Mr. Close like about the exhibition and the photos he had seen.

Mr. Close said *"It was in fact the objects and artifacts that they had and the mementos from his life so you saw this relationship between his work, between his equipment and the studio he had a little bit of a feel of a studio situation. Then you saw these personal photographs, letters, diaries and stuff like that so you got sense of his person as well."*

Moving on to talk about Leo's self-portraits which was very known about him and left a shocking experience to everyone. I asked Mr. Close about his opinion of these self-portraits.

Mr. Close replied *"For me personally I think the self-portraits were the most interesting work he made because of these reasons because they were a times comics a times slightly unusual, perhaps slightly disturbing in some ways or whatever. But there was something very, I think it was the fact that he was pursuing them for the sake of making images rather than taking them for a direct purpose or commercial a reason that made them very interesting. I think also in the exhibition just to talk a little about the work, what I think was really interesting were the hand painted images that were black and white then it been painted. It was quite shocking in a way to see that kind of work again and to think about. I think I had a sense of nostalgia for those photographs when I saw them."*

(MUSIC)

I am Shereen Kahil

Thanks for the interviewee's Prof. Shems Friedlander, Prof. Ronie Close and Mr. Barry Iverson.

Music from: Rihanna-Photographs/ downloaded from: www.songslover.com

Thank You.