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GALLERIES—CHELSEA

YOUSSEF NABIL

This Cairo-born, New York-based photographer's local debut includes pictures made between 1993 and 2009, but their style is so retro that you might guess they were made a good fifty years earlier. Nabil is nostalgic for an Egypt he never knew, captured here in stylized images of glamorous movie-star types, posed as if for forties film stills. The effect is kitschy and campy, all the more so because the black-and-white prints have been hand-colored in a range of muted pastels. They're charming but slight compared to a more recent series of self-portraits, in which Nabil turns his back to the camera and contemplates both a famous international landmark and his place in the world. Through Dec. 4. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)

Time Out

New York

December 16–29, 2010

Youssef Nabil

★★★★★

Yossi Milo Gallery, through Thu 23
(see Chelsea)

Inspired by pulpy Egyptian movie posters and film stills from the 1940s and '50s, Youssef Nabil's photographs evoke a lost age of romance and melodrama. Hand-tinted using watercolor and pencil, his originally black-and-white photos retain their idealized, vintage feel even when the artist's own image intrudes.

Producing formal portraits alongside more fanciful compositions, Nabil conjures a part-imagined world in which aspects of the contemporary Middle East are filtered through the pop-cultural aesthetic of pre-revolutionary Cairo. Sometimes, as in *Catherine Deneuve, Paris*, his subjects are recognizable; elsewhere, as in *Sweet Temptation, Cairo*, he employs friends and relatives as charismatic but unnamed stand-ins.

There's a camp, kitschy feel to many of these images that suggests a likeably muted take on Pierre et Gilles. Check out *Rania, Cairo*, in which a reclining glamour-puss is



Catherine Deneuve, Paris

guarded by a statue of a snarling leopard; or *Lonely Pasha, Cairo*, in which a wistful, fez-wearing idol clutches a rose to his breast.

In a set of self-portraits, Nabil drops the fantasy to reflect on his own sense of dislocation as a resident of Paris and New York. Inserting himself into various international locations, from Hollywood to Istanbul, he faces away from the camera, an anonymous outsider in a parade of adopted homelands (only in one, *Funfair-Self-Portrait, Paris*, does he turn to reveal an anxious expression). But while the emotions conveyed in this series will be familiar to many viewers, it's in his more imaginative mode that Nabil is most affecting.—*Michael Wilson*