

ALEXANDRIA LIGHT is an installation referencing the social - political environment of Alexandria, Egypt at a critical moment in it's history (2009), through the filter of the city's historically significant structures: the Pharos Lighthouse - one of the wonders of the ancient world, and the Great Library and Museum.

Founded by Alexander the Great in circa 332 BC, set by the Mediterranean sea, Alexandria was once the centre of knowledge for the world. The city was crossed by two main thoroughfares: the Canoptic Way, running from the Gate of the Sun in the East to the Gate of the Moon in the West, and the Street of the Soma running from North to South.

The Library was the first major seat of learning, a heliocentric solar system was first envisaged in Alexandria, by Aristarchus and there Euclid discovered the rules of geometry. Iron was considered divine, and this later influenced the discoveries of Isaac Newton.

The great buildings were destroyed by variously fire, earthquake and the encroachments of the sea and the city has been built over countless times.

In Alexandria Light the apparatus of the state, the corruption of the traditional food culture and the obliteration of the deep historic are signalled in an immersive environment in which tropes of sun and moon and of intellect and matter signal the tensions between Alexandria's suppressed histories and the combustible contradictions of it's modern incarnation; the collective

unconscious and the urgency of the quotidian. Elements interplay formally and conceptually and from micro to macro within the installation.

Elements include wall mounted, floor based and free standing sculptures; a bookwork; a museum of artifacts and a triptych of paintings:

**PHAROS** : a freestanding wooden structure replicated from an improvised lighting stand I saw in Alexandria during my residency. It has the look of a gallows. An image of the original is included in the Artist Book *Eskendereyya* ( see below). The measurements, proportions and materials have been accurately replicated, identical lamps - new and old, were sourced, as were the lamp holders, nails etc. and the cables were twisted by hand. The light bulbs were lowered to human level and a metal sign dubbing the structure PHAROS was introduced.

The original Pharos Lighthouse was illuminated by the sun reflected in a system of mirrors by day, and at night by fires.

**MUSEUM** : A collection of found, made and altered objects, as an archaeological museum of Alexandria's unconscious history and it's current manifestation, and chiming with the other elements in the installation. Elements include:

'three spoons' - the intimacy and politics of food; the suppressed significance of the triple. The crossbar of an Ankh is implied by the installing of the spoons on a pencilled line.

'Blood tin': First aid; Alexandria / Egypt is hurting.

A wall mounted Label "of those fed in the museum", is translated

from Strabo, the Greek historian, geographer and philosopher. As well as food for the mind, the great museum of Alexandria included a dining room for the philosophers who studied there.

ESKENDEREYYA: An Artist Bookwork comprising loose pages of Fabriano Artistico paper with inkjet and hand applied inks, in a drop spine box bound in black book-cloth and gilt blocked ESKENDEREYYA (vernacular Arabic: 'Alexandria').

Set on a custom made stand with a shelf for the cotton handling gloves.

The prints are photographic images of constructed set-ups and observed situations, each with a coloured circle: 'sun' or 'moon' as the enduring tropes of Alexandria's histories.

The texts are fragments from Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra set in Gill Sans 18pt.

A parallel artist bookwork is an open ended project in the Bibliotheca Alexandrina / the new Library of Alexandria, where Rose Frain was a resident artist in 2008.

THE SUN, THE MOON, THE LITTLE O THE EARTH : triptych of paintings

( o/o/c with iron filings)

The title is taken from Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra:

" His face was as the heav'ns and therein stuck

a sun and moon, which kept their course and lighted,

the little o the earth."

Recently, Archaeologists retrieved from the sea bed in Alexandria, a pylon from the temple of Isis, the moon goddess, which had originally been attached to Cleopatra's palace complex.

THESE TWO TOGETHER: extrapolating the human subject from the Pharos piece (see above), two old security lamps have been reversed, suspended on steel hooks and wired together; abject, perhaps undergoing torture. The lights wax and wane / appear to breathe.

HEARTH: a slate slab with an empty black iron cooking pan, graphite powder, brass nails, dust.

The fires of the home; of the Pharos Lighthouse; of the Lares and Penates- the Roman household gods- all extinguished.

Quotidian improvisations and the difficulties of subsistence. Recent demonstrations when people took to the streets in Alexandria and Cairo to protest against the rising price of the State and US subsidised Baladi breads.

THREE DANCING: found specula objects shaped and variously wrapped in black cloth, gilded, and as plain mirror glass.

Historic stages / libidinal states. Perhaps 'the symbolic, the imaginary and the real'.

Rose Frain 2009

