

## ***Egypt, The Eternal Spirit of Its People*** **A Retrospective Exhibition in the United States**

We have seen the banal photographs shot by tourists in Egypt: camels, palm trees, antiquities, and poverty. More recently the media has focused on scenes of chaos in Egypt. The ferocious, spreading conflict in the Middle East region leaves us with a sense of despair.

After seeing television footage of the angry faces and violent confrontations in Tahrir Square in 2011, Mr. Jonathan was determined to show the world the other face of Egypt - the warm, tolerant people he had lived with from birth in 1921.

In 2015, an opportunity presented itself through an invitation by Dr. Seregeldin, director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, who had been given a DVD of Jack Jonathan's retrospective exhibition *Egypt, The Eternal Spirit of its People*. He immediately understood the message it conveyed. In photographs shot at the time of the first Egyptian revolution in 1952, he saw the faces of determined, hardworking, salt of the earth Egyptians living in peace with each other. "We need this exhibition in Egypt," he said to Jack in a phone call in June of 2014.

Three generations after the 1952 revolution many Egyptians are out of touch with that spirit of acceptance and harmony. They want to move beyond the violence. Proud of their history, they are looking to their past to find a way to a more peaceful future. One young Egyptian interviewed in Tahrir Square in 2011 said to the reporter, "*Do not worry. We may be in conflict and chaos, but above all, we are proud of being Egyptians and that will bring us all together at the end.*"

Dr. Seregeldin understood that his countrymen needed to see these images of the lives of their grandparents. Modern Egyptians who saw this exhibition were entranced to see what Egypt was like before the revolution of 1952. Can their country once again become a place hospitable to a diversity of people? Could Egypt become a stabilizing center of this region so racked by conflict?

The photograph below is a striking example of the change in Egypt since 1952. Photographed in 1950, this cityscape shows a Coptic church in the foreground, a Jewish Temple in the middle, and the Mohammed Ali Mosque on the horizon. Now there are only a handful of Jews praying in that temple. The Coptic churches are under attack.

*People of the Book, Living in Harmony*



Our country is facing unrest and violence on many fronts: religion, race, gender, nationality, and political viewpoints. Like people all around the world we are struggling to open our hearts to diversity. We too, need the reminder that there was a time when even “the people of the book” lived in harmony in many places in the world.

**This exhibition is not just about the Eternal Spirit of the Egyptian people.**

**It is about the humanity in all of us.**

April 25, 2017