In August 1839, only two months after the official presentation of the new photographic method announced by François Arago at the French Academy of Science, the painter Horace Vernet, his pupil Frederic Goupil-Fesquet and his nephew Charles-Marie Boulton boarded a ship heading towards Egypt. In their luggage, they carried a new daguerreotype camera. After the invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte during the French Campaign in Egypt and Syria between 1798 and 1801, scientists turned their eyes back on Ancient Egyptian culture and created the basis for archaeological research. One outcome of this military inspired scientific endeavour was the voluminous publication *Description de l'Égypte* (1809—1829). In many aspects, the imagery of Egypt was already preordained through the ideal perspectives and vantage points used by the artists and scientists in the lavishly produced plates included in its thirteen volumes.

That was only the prologue for a genealogy of images that were then produced by the countless photographers who came to the country on the Nile. In the first years, photographic work was firmly in the hands of European photographers from France, Great Britain and the German speaking countries, followed by practitioners from Constantinople. For decades, with Cairo and Egypt as part of the new Grand Tour of the Levant and Northern Africa, large numbers of tourists from Europe and North America were attracted to the Land of the Pharaohs — as were photographers.

Especially after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Egypt’s geopolitical role changed dramatically and Cairo soon became the most photographed city outside of Europe in the 19th century. At the same time, the first package tours to Egypt were being organized and the country became more easily accessible to the common traveller. This was the time when a proliferation of photographic studies was made and the production of images to satisfy the needs of the tourists, as well as the people who remained in their home countries, got under way.

Among the exponents of early and later photography who pointed their cameras towards the cityscapes of Alexandria and Cairo, taking images of the Nile and the Suez Canal or framing the Temples of Karnak, as well as the pyramids, we find names like Gustave le Gray, Francis Firth, Francis Bedford, G. Lekegian, Abdullah Frères, Émile and Henri Béchard, Hippolythe Arnoux, Justin Kabowksi, Emé Desire, Otto Schoefft, the brothers Zangaki, the Maison Bonfils, Alois Beer, Wilhelm Burger, Fred Boissonnas and numerous others who are uncontestably linked to the photographs of Cairo and Egypt.

The exhibition consists of five topics which had — and still have — a relevance in the photographic discourse:

- **The City as Stage**
- **From a Distance so Close**
- **Building Towns and Infrastructures**
- **Edges, Suburbia, Territory**
- **Home Stories**

provide a multifaceted panoptic view of the country along the Nile that can foster and contribute to a fruitful discussion on the images and the image of cities and territories in the 21st century.
The City as Stage

The ethnographic gaze of European travellers on their journeys to the Orient already became a topos before the use of photography on their expeditions. But, with the invention of photography, the images of traders and craftsmen, as well as city life on the streets of Egyptian towns and cities, became one of the favourite visual artefacts to bring back to the West (— fig. 1, 2).

Although, in the early stage of photography, full portraits had to be staged due to the long exposure times required, the same practice was still in use at the end of the 19th century (— fig. 3, 4). Many of these images were transformed into woodcuts to make them printable and only in the 1890s did it become easier and feasible to print photographs at low costs. This triggered a previously unimaginable proliferation of imagery spreading from books to magazines, from picture postcards to souvenir albums.

The creation of Egyptian villages at World Expositions and other fairs in Europe fostered the desire to travel to the country along the Nile, which became fairly easy to do after Thomas Cook started organized travel to the Levant and North Africa in the late 1860s.

The tourist industry met the demands of the travellers by creating souvenirs for different budgets. Several photographic albums with images collected during the travels of Empress Elisabeth of Austria have survived and are now in the collection of the Austrian National Library. Out of the numerous images, a few taken by the best-known photographers of the time (Lekegian, Zangaki and Bonfils) are shown here (— fig. 5, 6, 7).

Stereoscopic images were in vogue around 1900 and, quite often, they adopted the style of amateur photography and private snapshot aesthetics to capture a non-staged urban situation while still using the urban space as a stage (— fig. 10, 11). These double images, which were viewed in specialized devices (stereoscopes), are photographed at the same instant but use two lenses with a slightly different position to create a three-dimensional effect.

More than one century after these images had been photographed in Cairo, Bas Princen captured a crossroads in a town hundreds of miles south of the city by taking two images, one shortly after the other, and merging them into a double exposure (— fig. 12, 13). While the older example works with an analytic spatial parallax the latter only represents a temporal parallax.
Olivier Cablat, a French photo-artist, launched an artistic project called *Egypt 3000* in 2012. The project comprises a trilogy of art photobooks on Egypt. The first book was called *Enter the Pyramid*. Closed, the grey cardboard cover has the shape of a right-angled triangle but, as soon as one opens the small book, its outline turns into the silhouette of a pyramid (fig. 1, 2). Cablat set up a HTML program to be used as a search tool for the notion pyramid—the iconic objects that have always been linked to Egypt and have been widely photographed (fig. 3, 4). This gathering of images ran over the span of six years from 2006 to 2012. The collected images in the book differ in quality, as well as in content.

Two years later, he produced the second book under the title of *Contemporary Archaeology*. The body of the book is a fanfold printed on both sides cover. One side depicts a compilation of objects of everyday life while the other contains a panoramic but unreal view consisting of 90 fragments of photographs, which were not used in the official documentation of the transfer of the mummy of Ramses I in March 2004 (fig. 5).

With his images, Cablat reveals the globalisation of goods, ideas and images and puts forward a new and contemporary way of seeing Egyptian culture.

Daniela Keiser

In the winter of 2008/2009 Daniela Keiser worked artistically on several photographic projects in the Egyptian metropolis with Cairo being the most extensive work. Keiser’s view onto the city is materialized in photographs taken from one vantage point overlooking a small area within a densely built urban quarter of Cairo. With this constraint, she developed a visual topography in three series: *Cinema Odeon* (fig. 6, 7), *Breakfast Lane* (fig. 8) and *Night Café* (fig. 9, 10).

Like a lighthouse, Keiser sent out her sensitive rays touching all the surfaces of the built-up physical structures. She went further and inscribed herself in the traditional supervision of Egyptian women when they looked over city life behind the beautifully handcrafted wooden screens of the mashrabiya (fig. 11, 12), the balconies on traditional houses. She transformed that traditional gaze into a modern way of contemplative observation—staying in a high-rise apartment building, protected from views from the streets below and not only looking down but also taking images of it.
When the Suez Canal was officially inaugurated on 16 November 1869, it was also the moment when representatives of European empires, kingdoms and countries gathered in Port Said not only to adorn the ceremony, but also to show their interest in — and to desire for — the new shortened trading route to Asia (fig. 1, 2).

The project’s planning dated back to the 1840s, but the actual building of the canal did not begin until 1859. Work on this Herculean project started on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea (fig. 3), but the clock tower, given to the Egyptian ruler by the French King Louis Philippe in 1845, is very prominent, and a new hunting lodge for the Khedive was transformed into a private home and eventually into the hotel that still exists today (fig. 9).

In order to make Egypt — and especially Cairo — a more comfortable place for the inhabitants as well as for Western travellers, numerous infrastructural projects were undertaken; in some cases, with the help of European planners. These included roads to the Pyramids (fig. 6), which together with bridges — helped to connect Cairo on the eastern side of the Nile with the west bank (fig. 7, 8). Mena House, a former pleasure house and hunting lodge for the khedive was transformed into a private home and eventually into the hotel that still exists today (fig. 9).

Many of the photographs from the second half of the 19th century not only depict old buildings and everyday life but also show urban design elements such as street lights (fig. 8) and recently introduced sidewalks (fig. 10).

While the clock tower, given to the Egyptian ruler by the French King Louis Philippe in 1845, is very prominent, the telegraph post is less so but still an interesting object that cannot be detected on Béchard’s image (fig. 10) although it is visible on the later Lekegian photograph (fig. 11).

Inland, another village was established under the name of Timsah in 1862. When Ismail Pasha began to reign in 1863, this was changed to Ismailia in his honour (fig. 4).
Confronting images of landscape from the 19th with those of the late 20th century, it becomes evident that photographers took different approaches to capture the vast stretches of the Nile Valley. Although historical images of the mountainous regions can also be found, the major part comprises photographs of the narrow stretch of fertile area along the Nile, and the desert with its historical sites. For the entire 19th — and well into the 20th century, an empty landscape as such was not a favoured subject; rather, landscape was seen as the necessary background for the depiction of a monument or a special topographical feature.

Fred Boissonnas was commissioned by the Egyptian government to photograph the country along the Nile. Out of the many images, taken between 1929 and 1930, he produced a luxurious book showing the newly created kingdom of Egypt to the world, including many photographs which show vast landscapes.

In 2012, the Dutch photographer Bas Princen examined the Nile Valley with his camera turning to the seemingly empty landscapes. The images, which will be published in an upcoming book, bring to light — and to a wider public — the results of civilization and cultivation of the Nile Valley.

In her visual documentary of 2006 the Austrian born and Belgium based photographer Aglaia Konrad concentrates on the outskirts of Cairo and its housing developments. Under the title of Desert Cities, she depicts areas of transition and the growth of the megacity Cairo into its surrounding territory. Although her sensitive pictures include houses, the prevailing colours of the images suggest that these buildings are more part of the existing topography and landscape than the urban fabric of the city.
Family photograph collections, as opposed to commissioned works produced by foreign photographers, offer us an opportunity to witness an image of a middle-class contemporaneity, to witness Egyptians as photographers, photographing themselves, creating images within a 'real-time'. Such collections show us how the act of photography literally took — or was 'taking' — place and how the photographs were employed in the everyday. They illustrate a modernized Egyptian middle-class using the camera to visually document their own local attachment to place and their sense of belonging, and they give us clues to how individuals invested in the photograph as a vehicle for an invented 'self' and exportable 'self-image'.

Here, two collections are curated to present how notions of territory have been represented within the vernacular tradition. By reading the spatial construction of the image, the photographs reveal social and political attitudes, possibilities of how society relates to — and identifies with — landscape from the personal, and how that translates ideologically into a visible representation of territory.

Through patterns found in the images, it becomes possible to speculate that perhaps middle-class Egyptians have an ideological relationship with 'their landscape' based on possession rather than an intimate connection to the natural world or ecological considerations. The photographs reflect a trajectory of dominance rather than a positioning from within it. They are predominantly not landscape-centric, but rather reduce it to a backdrop in front of which one sort of human activity or another 'takes place'. This 'taking of place' reveals a competitive, rather than cooperative, role of the photographer/subject. They show how these families assert their national belonging and claim the nation's territory through photographs.

This absence of an independent role of the landscape is revealing. The choice of place and the positioning of characters and actions within it are important in the way they are made visible. The photographer's and subject's ideological relationship with 'their landscape', based on possession, formulates a perceivable and, subsequently, claimed territory that later becomes the basis for an imagined national identity: it is the visual form of 'staking a claim'.

The photographs are displayed as material objects (recto only), but are not reproduced accurately within proportions of their original dimensions. They are organized as chapters in a story beginning with the rare moments of landscape-centric works (purist views of the natural world, unadulterated by human traces), then move through some ideological visual tropes grouped around actions and locations such as beaches and riverbanks, agricultural zones and horticultural gardens, ancient monuments, and the city of Cairo.