

I am very honoured, to collaborate to this emotional tribute, and I would like to warmly thank the Prince Claus Fund for their interest in the work of my uncle Van Leo. I also thank the Arab Image Foundation for their sensitive and intelligent work at spreading of Van Leo's work to a wide audience.

In 1967, I was nine years old, when I kissed my uncle for the first time in Paris. Léon did not go unnoticed in the capital's streets, you will have to imagine him, wearing daily a suit and a bow tie, which at the time was already extremely old-fashioned. He was uneasy and we, the children, with my brother and sisters were amazed at seeing him insecure, even cautious before crossing streets. To sum up, he was our uncle from Egypt, mysterious and weird.

Later, during my first trip to Egypt, I discovered Léon as a photographer. Then I realized that, with my parisian manners, I didn't fit in the Oriental world. At the time, I was greeted by my entire family, Angèle my great-aunt, my cousins Aghstrigh and Herminé, because Léon was enjoying in a female world. It was in 1981.

I became a photographer myself, and during successive trips in Egypt, I thoroughly discovered the artist and was fond of him.

There are two artistic options, constituting the work of Van Leo. First, one he accomplished with my father, his brother, and that he was to continue, after their fraternal break up, and on the other hand his personal researches of

selfportraits and nudes, kept concealed from his client's commissions. With fundamentalist fears, my uncle, prudently, destroyed his nude negatives. In 1994, on one of my visits, Van Leo had just previously burnt down all those nude negatives. That had occurred, when I went to retrieve my father's negatives, abandoned since 1960.

In 2002, feeling his death was coming soon, Léon called me and revealed me his secret life. Recognition of his work excited him, and especially, the Prince Claus Award comforted him in his artistic doubts.

It was only long after, that I became aware of the amazing number of self-portraits he had realized, seeing them in numerous newspapers and magazines. This identity work should be comprehended, as the great conclusion of a real psychological torment. Selfportrait is like an existential investigation. Eventually, during a sitting, he could turn out as an emblematic, or hieratic figure, and even being costumed as a transvestite. Today, I am grateful to him, for not having showed me his self-portraits's photos. I can only feel it, as a schizoid work, outside of real life. We don't enlarge our self image, without incurring risks!

Uncle Leon's cycle of selfportraits, now objectively I consider, pays homage to modernity, and abolishes time. On some of his intimate shots, time is dematerialised to the point, that Léon the photographer becomes a young man of the twenty first century.