

Exhibition: *Now Showing: Youssef Nabil's I Saved My Belly Dancer*

Dates: August 24, 2025–January 11, 2026

Location: Resnick Pavilion



(Image captions on page 2)

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Now Showing: Youssef Nabil's I Saved My Belly Dancer*, the first public presentation of the film since it entered the museum's collection in 2025. The exhibition is centered around Nabil's film, *I Saved My Belly Dancer* (2015), which marks its 10th anniversary this year. Tahar Rahim, who resembles Nabil, embodies the artist's alter ego, while Salma Hayek stars as the titular belly dancer. For Nabil, the dancer represents both a remembered and an imagined memory of Cairo. He states, "I wanted to talk about belly dancing as an art form that is probably unique to us [Egypt]. It's our dance. I've always loved it. So, I wanted to talk about saving the idea of belly dancing in my memory, more than anything."

This exhibition is curated by Linda Komaroff, Curator and Department Head, Art of the Middle East, LACMA.

The installation of *Now Showing* intends to evoke the type of mid-20th-century movie theater, including retro seats, contemporaneous with the Egyptian films that inspired the works in the exhibition. The space contains a photographic portrait of the director, hand-colored by Nabil's mentor, Van Leo, and vintage movie posters. Additionally, the exhibition features photographs, based on the film, created by Nabil's signature practice of hand-painting on silver gelatin prints rendered dreamlike by the unearthly intensity and tonality of the color palette. This is a revival of a mid-20th century technique associated with such Cairo-based photographers as Van Leo (Levon Alexander Boyadjian (1921–2002)).

This presentation continues LACMA's history of exploring how film and popular culture interrelate with traditional areas of art from all periods and cultures. Over the past 30 years, the museum has acquired time-based media objects in nearly every curatorial department, including Nam June Paik's *Video Flag Z* (1986), Matthew

Barney's *REPRESSIA (decline)* (1991), Bill Viola's *Slowly Turning Narrative* (1992), and Mariko Mori's *Miko no Inori* (1996), as well as works by Tacita Dean, Stan Douglas, Pierre Huyghe, Christian Marclay, Steve McQueen, Bruce Nauman, and Diana Thater.

About Youssef Nabil

Born in Cairo in 1972, Youssef Nabil began his career as a photographer in 1992, shooting his friends and creating scripts for them to perform, inspired by films from Egypt, Europe, and Hollywood. He developed a distinctive style by hand-painting gelatin silver prints reminiscent of glamorous celebrity portraits from the 1940s and '50s, a technique he mastered through his friendship with renowned studio photographer Van Leo (Levon Alexander Boyadjian (1921–2002)). In 2003, Nabil left Cairo for an art residency in Paris, where he began taking self-portraits, addressing more personal issues of identity and displacement. Nabil continued his artistic practice in New York, where he lived from 2006 to 2018. His artistic practice addresses universal themes of absence, nostalgia, and cultural identity, while maintaining strong connections to his Egyptian heritage. Nabil has continued to draw inspiration from cinema, making portraits of contemporary film stars and artists, such as Catherine Deneuve, Omar Sharif, and Marina Abramovic. He also makes video works, collaborating frequently with actor Tahar Rahim. Currently, he is working on his first feature film, which will be multilingual and partially filmed in Egypt. Today Nabil resides between Paris and New York.

Credit: This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. lacma.org

Image captions (left to right): Youssef Nabil, *I Saved My Belly Dancer #XXIV*, 2015, courtesy of the artist, © Youssef Nabil; Youssef Nabil, *I Saved My Belly Dancer #II*, 2015, courtesy of the artist, © Youssef Nabil; Youssef Nabil, *I Saved My Belly Dancer #XXV*, 2015, courtesy of the artist, ©

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