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A glassblower sculpts the vessels at a workshop near the 15th century Sultan Qaitbay mosque complex in the "Desert of the Mamluks" (City of the Dead) area of Egypt's capital Cairo.— AFP photos

## CAIRO'S 'CITY OF THE DEAD' BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE

In Egypt's "City of the Dead", centuries-old monuments are being restored and artisanal heritage revived, turning a corner of the vast historical cemetery into a vibrant neighborhood full of life. Wood, leather and jewelry workshops have joined those of glassblowers and others near the 15th-Century mosque of Sultan Qaitbay, in the east of the capital Cairo. From the Mamluk period, the celebrated structure-featured on Egypt's one-pound notes-is surrounded by monumental tombs, dusty alleys and informal housing. Since

bish all over the streets," said 57-year-old Issem Abou Rami, who owns a small restaurant facing the mosque. "Now, a truck comes every day to collect it." Products made in the impoverished neighborhood are now sold in elegant booths under restored stone arches-and even online.

### Social development

The renovation efforts started six years ago with the refurbishment of a drinking trough for animals, and then, the reception area of a residential

people who live and work in the area," added Dobrowolska, founder of Archinos Architecture, which has worked on numerous conservation projects in Cairo. Work in the ateliers was interrupted for several weeks due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but now the workshops are again up and running, with some 50 women making leather products and jewelry, all stamped with the local brand Mishka. Aida Hassan, 45, has worked in the leather workshop for three years, and said she is happy to be earning "1,500 pounds (\$96) per month-and sometimes more". "This project has helped improve my income," she added, saying she had gone on to train other women in leatherwork. Hundreds of women and children in the neighborhood have benefited from courses and workshops on subjects as diverse as science and technology, English language and sports.

### Object of superstition

For the EU, the primary donor to the project-due to end in 2021 — the social elements of the program were key, said Christian Berger, head of the EU delegation in Egypt. "Our intention is to support this type of project that benefits immediately vulnerable groups and disadvantaged groups, projects that have a broader socio-economic impact," Berger said. The neighborhood has hosted concerts, from jazz to folk and traditional Egyptian music, and visual artists from Egypt and abroad have come to show their work.

The aim is to bring "contemporary art and culture here to enhance diversity of cultural expression (and) artistic expression, to build bridges between east and west," said Dobrowolska. Another hope of the project in transforming the neighborhood is to draw in tourists. The "City of the Dead" is sometimes an object of superstition due to its status as a necropolis, and is not a usual stop on mainstream Cairo tours. But it is the tourists who are looking for something out of the ordinary that Dobrowolska said the project is counting on. "We seek to attract tourists who are off-track from the mass tourism destinations-people who might appreciate and enjoy the unique urban character of the necropolis," she said. — AFP



Men sit at a cafe by the 15th century Sultan Qaitbay mosque complex in the "Desert of the Mamluks" (City of the Dead) area of Egypt's capital Cairo.

2014, a series of projects financed by the European Union has changed the face of this small section of the sprawling necropolis-home to many people who are unable to afford Cairo's prohibitively high rents.

Authorities began construction on a major road in July a short distance from the Qaitbay mosque, drawing strong criticism online for the resulting demolitions and evictions of residents of the "City of the Dead". A final resting place for illustrious figures, including singer Farid Al-Atrash and writer Ihsan Abdel Kouddous as well as ordinary Egyptians, the Islamic necropolis founded in the seventh century stretches over 6.5 kilometers (four miles). "Before the projects, there was rub-

complex of the sultan. The EU contributed nearly a million euros (\$1.1 million) toward the latest project, "The Heritage for the Living, in the 'City of the Dead'", which launched in 2018 and focuses on social development. The project coordinator, architect Agnieszka Dobrowolska, was a linchpin to the area's metamorphosis. She supervised the restorations of the monuments and the renovation of the workshop and their signage, as well as designed jewelry and leather products inspired by Mamluk motifs. "When we first came here, our main object was to conserve the monuments," she told AFP.

"And we quickly realized that we cannot simply conserve the monuments, in disrespect to the



A glassblower sculpts the vessels at a workshop near the 15th century Sultan Qaitbay mosque complex.

## Churchill's painting of favorite whisky goes on sale

A painting by Winston Churchill featuring the famously bibulous British World War II leader's favorite brand of whisky is to go on sale at Sotheby's auction house. The oil painting of a bottle of Johnny Walker's Black label whisky and a bottle of brandy with a jug and glasses reflects Churchill's fondness for the blend, which he often drank first thing in the morning with soda water, the auction house said. Painted at Churchill's country house of Chartwell, in southeast England, the still life called "Jug with Bottles" is expected to sell for up to £250,000 (\$330,000, 280,000 euros). Bidding opened online yesterday. Churchill, who was a keen amateur artist, created the work in the 1930s and later gave it to the American businessman W. Averell Harriman, who acted as US special envoy to Europe in the 1940s.

Harriman was photographed sitting between Churchill and Stalin in Moscow in 1942, and the gift of the painting suggests he shared convivial drinks with Churchill. The politician would give paintings to "like-minded people," said Simon Hucker, co-head of modern and post-war British art at Sotheby's. It is unclear whether Churchill knew that the wife of his son Randolph, Pamela Churchill, was having an affair with Harriman during this period, The Times newspaper reported. Pamela Churchill married Harriman decades later in the 1970s and the painting was sold following her

death in 1997. It is going back on sale after the deaths of its current owners, the US collectors Barbara and Ira Lipman.

### 'Private meditation'

A similar work by Churchill, featuring a collection of bottles and called "Bottlescape" hangs at Chartwell. Churchill "was obviously an amateur painter but he got lessons off really great painters," said Hucker. "This particular still life is actually quite unusual because he usually did landscapes." While it seems unlikely that a modern politician would depict their favorite tittle in such a recognizable way, Churchill was probably more focused on capturing the reflection and transparency of glass, the art expert said. In any case, "he didn't do these for the public, he did them for himself". Some have disputed Churchill's artistic talents, with The New York Times once describing "Bottlescape" as "truly hideous." Yet his paintings have reached high prices at auction. "The Goldfish Pool at Chartwell", which came from the collection of his daughter Mary Soames, sold for a record £1.8 million at Sotheby's in 2014. —AFP



A member of staff poses with a painting by Britain's former prime minister Winston Churchill entitled "Jug with Bottles" at Sotheby's auction house in London.— AFP

## S. Africa lauds 'Jeruselema' producer for MTV Best African Act

The South African DJ behind the global pop hit "Jeruselema" won Best African Act at this year's MTV European Music Awards, drawing praise from the country's ruling party and jubilant fans. The gospel-influenced song, recorded by producer Master KG with Zulu lyrics by Nomcebo, lifted global spirits darkened by the pandemic at the start of the year. It inspired the "Jeruselema dance challenge", which saw people across the world sharing clips of the same choreography in various settings. Master KG bagged the coveted award on Sunday night, beating Nigerian superstars Burna Boy and Rema among others. "I would love to thank each and every person out there, all over the world, for making this possible," Master KG said in a virtually recorded acceptance speech tweeted after receiving the award.

Tributes poured in on social media Monday as proud South Africans awoke to the news. "Sooooo happy Master KG beat Burna Boy in EMA category," posted one Twitter user. "It's such a big deal!!! Southy to the world," wrote another. The ruling African National Congress (ANC) party also congratulated Master KG, describing the DJ as a "musical maestro" and source of inspiration. "This

## MCDONALD'S LAUNCHING MEATLESS 'MCPLANT' BURGER

Fast food giant McDonald's on Monday announced it was launching a new plant-based burger named the "McPlant" to cater to the growing number of people who do not eat meat. The brand had fallen behind in the market to rival Burger King, which was the first to launch a vegetarian version of its iconic "Whopper" burger in April 2019 in the United States. Other chains like Dunkin' or Starbucks have also dipped their toes in the plant-based market, as consumers become more aware their health, the impact of livestock farming on the environment and animal rights.

McDonald's had already tested out a plant-based burger in Canada in cooperation with the company Beyond Meat, which specializes in vegan meat substitutes. Such substitutes, like soya, have existed for a long time but new companies like Beyond Meat and Impossible Burger have developed products that closer resemble meat in taste, texture and color. The new line will be produced exclusively for McDonald's, and will be introduced in selected markets next year. The restaurant chain has not yet said if it will renew its collaboration with Beyond Meat, only saying it will reach out to third-party suppliers as with all its other products.

Beyond Meat shares plunged on Wall Street on the announcement, down 25 percent at 22:40 GMT in electronic exchanges following the close of the New York Stock Exchange. McDonald's told investors it was also considering plant-based substitutes for chicken products and for its egg and bacon breakfast sandwiches. "We are excited about the opportunity because we believe we have a proven, delicious-tasting product," said Ian Borden, who heads McDonald's international operations.

### Classics still on menu

McDonald's still relies on its flagship products like the "Big Mac", "McNuggets" and French fries, which account for around 70 percent of its sales in its main markets. "As demand for the familiar in these uncertain times is more important than ever, the Company believes these core classics will continue to be significant drivers of growth thanks to both their popularity and profitability," McDonald's said in a statement. The company also aims to put a new emphasis on chicken-based products, which are growing faster than the market for beef products.

Following the success of its spicy nuggets in the United States, McDonald's plans to launch a crispy chicken sandwich there in 2021. To boost internet sales, which have already grown significantly since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, the group will also test a new online platform and a new loyalty program. It will also build new drive-in only outlets and have lines dedicated to customers who pre-ordered their meals online.

The group saw its global turnover fall by two percent in the third quarter due to the coronavirus pandemic. That was nonetheless better than the 30 percent drop in sales in the second quarter, and the company managed to generate a net profit up 10 percent at \$1.76 billion. Almost all of the chain's restaurants remained open during the pandemic. — AFP



Master KG performing on stage.

further confirms our longstanding belief that African artists can compete at the global stage and break the barriers created by colonialism," the ANC said in a statement on Monday. "Jeruselema" has clocked more than 100 million hits on YouTube since its release in late 2019.

Its success inspired South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa to invite all citizens to take on the dance challenge as part of Heritage Day-a public holiday in September celebrating culture and diversity. "I know I am having the biggest song in the world but that doesn't change me," Master KG told AFP on the sidelines of a concert in Malawi last month. "It doesn't change how I look at things, how I look at people, because music is music." — AFP