

Moustafa Rahman

Egypt: mosaic artist, cook, and restaurateur

Object: The symbols of Alexandria that adorn his restaurant, Mombar

ىل امع آل نيرخ آل اري دقت رظتن أ ال
اذه و ايحش ىنعت مي ىنف ، ةي نفل ا
ىن فيكي

(Arabic)

[My art is what I do to satisfy myself, not to get praise.]

My uncle, my brother and my sister were all engineers. I thought with engineering I could build things with my hands and invent things. I ended up mostly fixing things. I came to the U.S. in 1985 from the city of Alexandria to study electrical engineering at NYU. My brother came about ten years before me, and he opened the first Egyptian restaurant in 1989. I worked selling copy machines from a small office on Steinway Street, and I started decorating the office with my art. I built my restaurant as an art project. It took me seven years. Mombar is an Egyptian dish we serve, a stuffed sausage. I see cooking as an art too—I was inspired by my mom's and my grandmother's dishes.

For the restaurant I decided to mix old civilizations with modern art. My home city of Alexandria has Greek, Roman, and Islamic cultures—and I included all of their symbols: a Greek column and Islamic windows with a lotus flower and the pyramid from the Pharaohs' time. I also included hands on the door, which my grandmother held out to protect her home. I put in the eye of God, Horus. All around you see the eyes of God watching over everybody. The blue in the eye represents the sky. I also use the eight-pointed star you see on all Islamic architecture. You're not allowed to draw a human image in Islam, so I use the star as a symbol of holy life, and it repeats like a flower in the garden. Egypt is a great civilization, and I wanted to make that very clear. New York is a big pot. Anyone who says he's just American is lying—except the American Indians.



Bio:

Moustafa Rahman was born in Alexandria, Egypt. He came to New York in 1985 to study electrical engineering at NYU. He opened a business selling and fixing office equipment on Steinway Street in Astoria, Queens. In his spare time, he pursued his artwork, creating mosaics and laying tile. After seven years he opened his restaurant, Mombar in the same space, down the street from where his brother had already opened his own restaurant in 1989. He continues to serve authentic Egyptian food and provide an important meeting place in the community. Mombar was the first restaurant to be listed in Zagat's under Egyptian cuisine. Other Egyptian restaurants call themselves Middle Eastern restaurants. (Thanks to Judith Sloan and Warren Lehrer's Crossing the Boulevard.)