



**New York-based
Egyptian photographer
Youssef Nabil recalls the
technicolour dreams of
Hollywood on the Nile**



SKIN: What's it all about?

Youssef Nabil: I have been inspired by cinema in Egypt since my childhood. I remember when I was a kid and watching old Egyptian movies, I used to ask my mother about all the actors and where they were. Most of the time the answer was that they were all dead. It was a strange idea for me to watch and love all these beautiful dead people. I think it did something to my subconscious. Later on in my work, when photographing people, I always thought of how to make those moments eternal, before they died or before I died. Later, when I moved from Cairo to Paris, I spent a lot of time with myself and I started asking questions about my life and existence. I decided to talk about them in my self portraits.

SKIN: What attracts you to people?

YN: I love people. I love meeting them, but I also love watching them. What attracts me could be their work, the character of their face or simply because I liked them when we first met.

SKIN: What repels you?

YN: I think I can always find something beautiful in everyone... but I would say that I don't enjoy meeting someone who doesn't have a certain sense of humour about things.

SKIN: Do you have a favourite person you've shot and coloured?

YN: Each portrait is different and tells a different story. I can't think of a favourite really.

SKIN: What person, living, would you like do a portrait of that you haven't already?

YN: Elizabeth Taylor, who recently saw my work in Los Angeles.

SKIN: What person, not living, would you like to do a portrait of?

YN: Frida Kahlo, Um Kulthum, Ana Mendieta, Bette Davis, Nefertiti.

SKIN: What compels you to hand-colour portraits?

YN: I grew up looking at old Technicolor movies, old hand-painted movie posters and hand-coloured family portraits; the technique was common in Egypt in the 70s until I started my career in beginning of the 90s. I had it around me so much that I decided to keep in my work.

SKIN: You say in your biography "My relationship to my whole life is the same, for me it's about coming to a place which is not yours, then having to go." Is it still?

YN: Yes, that's the way I've always felt.

SKIN: Do you have a favourite place in the world?

YN: I have several favourites. Alexandria in the winter... I like walking around the Pyramids. For some reason I miss Havana – I became attached to it. I love most Mediterranean cities.

SKIN: Where in the world would you like to do a self-portrait that you haven't yet?

YN: I never thought of it that way. Self-portraits come to me... they are long projects.

SKIN: What do you believe?

YN: I believe in everything. For now I would like to believe that one day, during my lifetime, I would see peace in the Middle East.

SKIN: If you had the attention of the entire world for 60 seconds, what's the one thing you would most like to say?

YN: Global warming. Global warming. Global warming.

SKIN: Any other thoughts/feelings/words you'd like to express?

YN: Right now, while answering these questions, I'm listening to Jackie DeShannon's song "What the World Needs Now is Love". I think I would like to pass this message to politicians all around the world.

Top portrait: My Frida, Cairo 1996 Handcoloured gelatin silver print
Bottom portrait: Self portrait, Naples 2003 Handcoloured gelatin silver print