Based on extensive periods of research and enquiry, Wael Shawky’s work tackles notions of national, religious and artistic identity through film, performance and storytelling. Whether instructing Bedouin children to act out the construction of an airport runway in the desert or organizing a heavy metal concert in a remote Egyptian village, Shawky frames contemporary culture through the lens of historical tradition and vice versa. Mixing truth and fiction, childlike wonder and spiritual doctrine, Shawky has staged epic recreations of the medieval clashes between Muslims and Christians in his trilogy of puppets and marionettes – titled Cabaret Crusades: The Horror Show Files (2010), The Path to Cairo (2012) and The Secrets of Karbala (2015) – while his three-part film, Al Araba Al Madfuna, uses child actors to recount poetic myths, paying homage, rather than mere lip-service, to the important narratives of yesteryear.

Wael Shawky was born in Alexandria in 1971 where he lives and works. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at ARoS, Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Aarhus, Denmark (2018); Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Yinchaun, China (2017); Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy (2016); Fondazione Merz, Turin, Italy (2016); Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria (2016); Fondazione Merz, Zurich, Switzerland (2016); MATHAF, Doha, Qatar (2015) and MoMA P.S.1, New York, NY, USA (2015); K20 Düsseldorf, Germany (2014-15); Serpentine Galleries, London, UK (2013-14); KW Contemporary Art Institute, Berlin, Germany (2012); Nottingham Contemporary, UK (2011); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, USA (2011); Delfina Foundation, London, UK (2011) and Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella, Italy (2010). He has participated in the 14th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey (2015); the 11th Sharjah Biennial, UAE (2013); Documenta 13, Kassel, Germany (2012); the 9th Gwangju Biennial, South Korea (2012); SITE Santa Fe Biennial, NM, USA (2008); the 9th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey (2005); and the 50th Venice Biennale, Italy (2003). Recent awards include the inaugural Mario Merz Prize (2015); the Award for Filmic Oeuvre created by Louis Vuitton and Kino der Kunst (2013); the Abraaj Capital Art Prize (2012); the Schering Foundation Art Award (2011), as well as The International Commissioning Grant and an award from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, in 2005. In 2010, Shawky founded the educational space MASS Alexandria.