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CONTACT

Selema Gabaly
FanSina (Sinai Art)
Bedouin Handicrafts
St. Catherine
South-Sinai, Egypt
Tel +20 100 18 65 120
www.fansina.net

Fansina is supported by the Regional Program "Economic Integration of Women in the MENA Region" (EconoWin). EconoWin is commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany and implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.



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THE ART OF SINAI





FanSina - THE ART OF THE SINAI

Bedouin Handicrafts from Egypt that Empower Women

FanSina, Arabic for 'Art of the Sinai,' is a Bedouin-run social enterprise in Egypt that produces carefully embroidered and beaded handicrafts of exceptional quality and beauty. FanSina's producers are female artisans in the mountains and valleys around Mt. Sinai and the colorful, exquisite objects they produce embody and preserve a cultural tradition that has been rescued from near extinction. The patterns and motifs the Bedouin women use in their crafts were rediscovered and rescued from the oldest women of an ancient local tribe at a time when younger generations had turned away from producing traditional crafts and had begun buying mass-produced goods from Asia rather than make their own.

FanSina is located in the small village of St. Catherine in South Sinai, Egypt. The village takes its name from the nearby Byzantine Monastery of St. Catherine, one of the oldest and most famous in the world, and sits at the foot of Mt. Sinai, the place where God appeared to Moses in the Burning Bush and the spot where the Ten Commandments were revealed. The town is also home to the Jabaleya Bedouin, a tribe that traces its lineage back to Roman

soldiers and craftsmen sent by the Emperor Justinian to build and to guard the Monastery in the sixth century.

Though traditional in their inspiration, FanSina's products have been adapted to suit contemporary everyday use: workers produce shoulder bags, backpacks, cushions, make-up bags, curtains, coasters, quilts, among other things. These objects are more than just beautiful accessories—they have a social mission as well. FanSina's fundamental aim is as basic as it is pressing and important: to provide income to Bedouin women in a deeply conservative culture which offers them almost no avenues to contribute economically to their families' survival.

Behind FanSina is a local Bedouin named Selema Gabaly; she distributes assignments among the 430 Jabaleya women who create crafts for the enterprise. Since it began in 2002, the company has developed into a vital source of income generation for Bedouin families throughout South Sinai and is now a unique and important engine of women's economic empowerment in tribal society.

