

Nude

1922

Oil on canvas

92 x 65 cm (36.2 x 25.6 in.)

American University of Beirut

Donation of Dr Samir Saleeby

KHALIL SALEEBY

1870 -1928

Lebanon's most English mountain boy

Born in 1870 to village landowners in Btalloun, Khalil Saleeby was strongly discouraged by his relatives to pursue an artistic career. Although he would always remain a child of the mountains, he began traveling at an early age, starting with the journey from his village to Beirut. There, he was educated in English-speaking schools by Protestant missionaries and attended the Syrian Protestant College (which later became the American University of Beirut).

At odds with both his village and his country, twenty-seven-year-old Saleeby emigrated to Britain, vowing to make ends meet on his own. He studied painting in Edinburgh, where he met prominent artists, such as John Singer Sargent, the American painter known for his sensual portraits of European high society.

The latter would become an important influence on Saleeby; indeed, it is following the older painter's advice that Saleeby pursued his international ventures in the United States. He exhibited in Chicago, and met his wife Carrie, a Philadelphian. The newlyweds returned to Edinburgh and in 1900 settled in London.

Saleeby made a name for himself in Europe, mainly as a portrait painter. He often went to Paris, to attend the classes of the Symbolist painter Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, and met Auguste Renoir, to whom he professed a singular admiration. At that time, Renoir had abandoned Impressionism to paint in a more sensual style that reverberated in Saleeby's paintings. Saleeby exhibited his work in Salons and well-known galleries such as that of the art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, one of the chief promoters of the Impressionists. His classical style brought him much praise in Europe, and in 1899 he was awarded the gold medal of the Edinburgh Salon for his *Venus de Milo*. Yet, his roots were bound to call him back. He returned to Beirut, setting up a studio on Bliss Street, next to the American University, where he taught painting to promising students such as the painter César Gemayel. Saleeby moved into a house in Beirut's Kantari district and built a second home, Cliff House, on a hill overlooking his native village of Btalloun.

It was in Cairo, where Saleeby spent part of World War I, that he painted his masterpiece *Heliopolis Palace*, as well as portraits of various cultural and political figures. Saleeby's style bore more of his personal touch with time, though remained marked by the academic tradition and Impressionism. His work reveals his appreciation of the human body's beauty; not only in his many portraits of villagers, dignitaries, friends and family, but also in his homages to

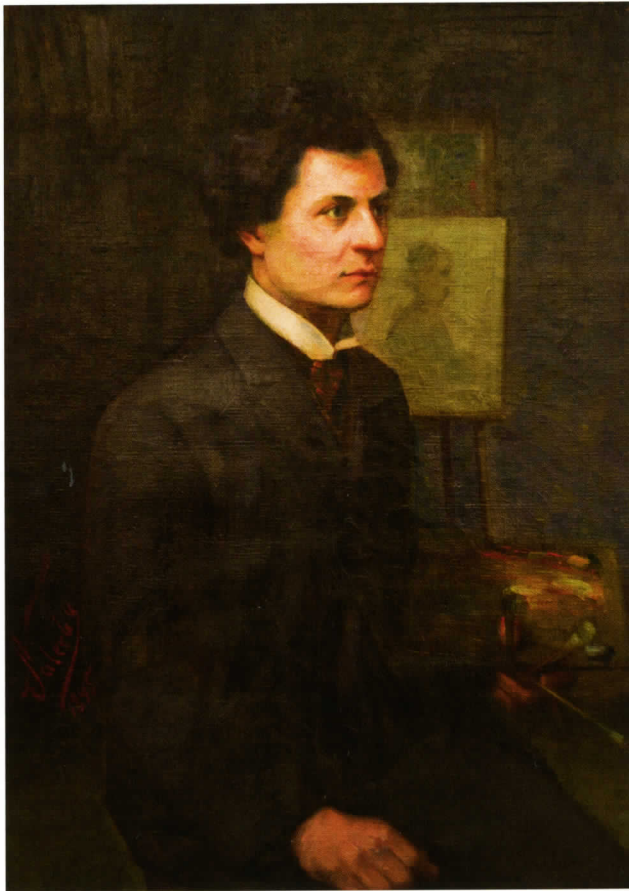
Whether painting people or landscapes, Saleeby sought to uncover the subject's true beauty through his brilliant palette of luminous and natural colors.



Carrie, his muse. A portrait of her, *L'Angélique*, received much attention at the Paris Salon of 1922, certainly for its artistic qualities, but also because of its much talked-about theft (it was found within two months).

Whether painting people or landscapes, Saleeby sought to uncover his subjects' true beauty through a brilliant palette of luminous and natural colors. He strove to reveal the way light could transform materials and textures, accentuate the softness of a woman's skin, or the weightlessness of tree leaves. Unlike Lebanese painters of previous generations, Saleeby had little interest in religious painting. Instead, and to the great dismay of many of his contemporaries, he often dedicated himself to more controversial themes, such as the nude.

Saleeby's life ended tragically in 1928 when men of his village killed the painter and his wife. The criminals' motives remain a mystery. Some believe the assassination stemmed from a dispute over a water source, whereas others think the painter was targeted for painting nudes. The details remain as hazy as the tragedy stays poignant.



Self-portrait

1895

Oil on canvas

81 x 58 cm (31.9 x 22.8 in.)

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Heliopolis Palace, Cairo II
1914

Oil on canvas
100 x 81 cm (39.4 x 31.9 in.)
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Presumed Portrait of Lady Hester Stanhope

1922

Oil on canvas

64 x 53 cm (25.2 x 20.9 in.)

Ramzi and Afaf Saïdi Collection



Maronite Woman

1923

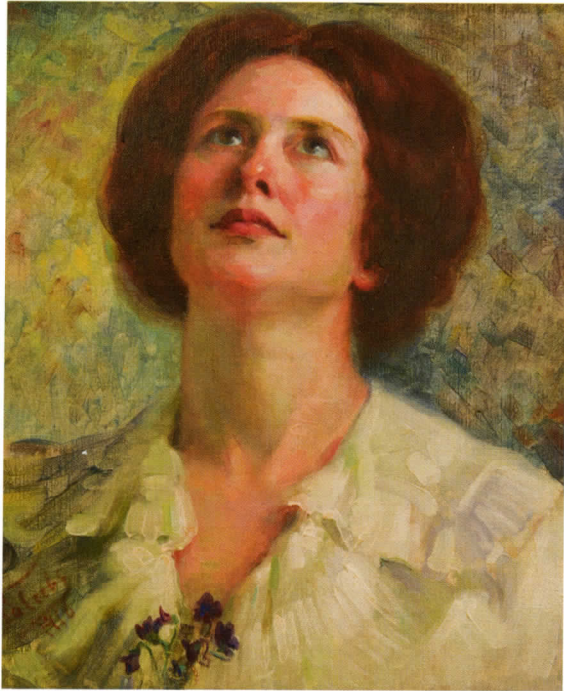
Oil on canvas

60 x 50 cm (23.6 x 19.7 in.)

Agial art gallery, Beirut



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1 **Infinity**

1916

Oil on canvas

46 x 38 cm (18.1 x 15 in.)

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2 **Intimate Confidence**

1916

Oil on canvas

46 x 38 cm (18.1 x 15 in.)

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3 **Carrie Life Size**

1922

Oil on canvas

200 x 100 cm (78.7 x 39.4 in.)

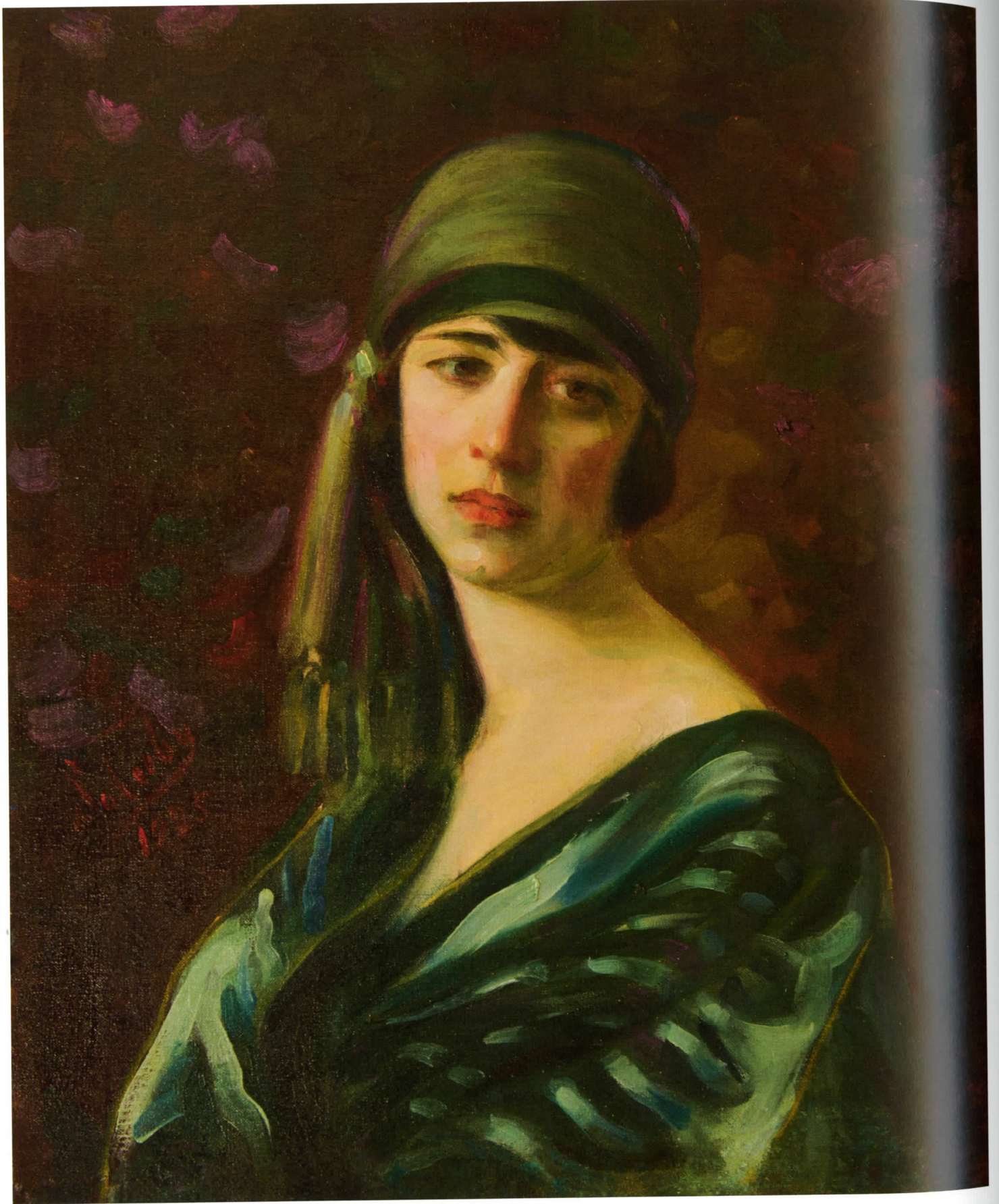
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Princess Nassab
1902

Oil on canvas
100 x 80 cm (39.4 x 31.5 in.)
Ministry of Culture Collection, Lebanon
Exhibited at the Beiteddine Museum



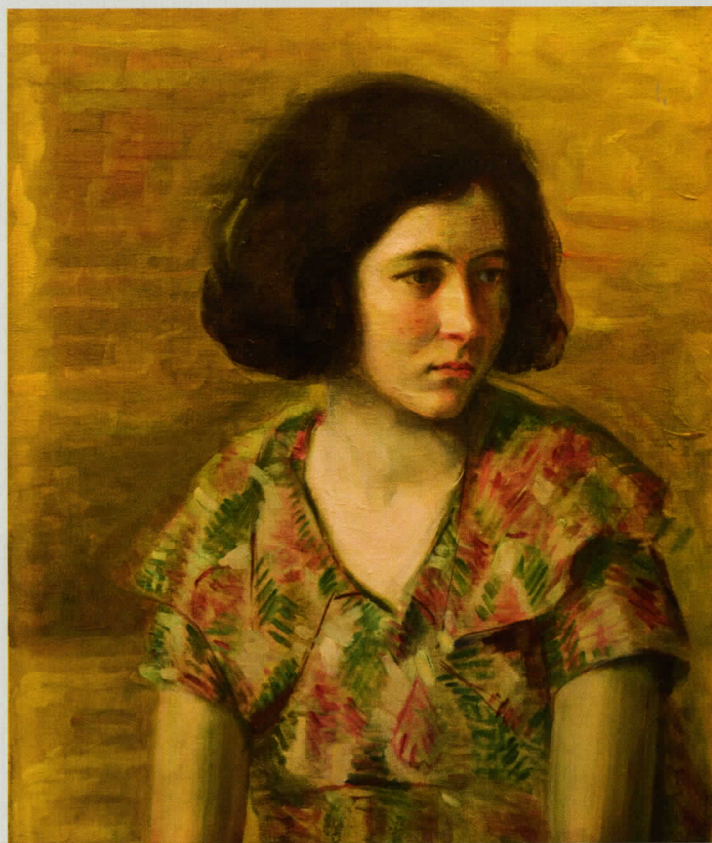
The Green Turban
1925
Oil on canvas
60 x 50 cm (23.6 x 19.7 in.)
American University of Beirut
Donation of Dr Samir Saleeby

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Sharpening the senses and unveiling the truth, rank first in the evolution and development of fine arts. The artist cannot accept the concealment nor the distortion of reality, for utter authenticity is his essence and absolute frankness his prime quality.

Khalil Saleeby

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The Model

1925

Oil on canvas

60 x 50 cm (23.6 x 19.7 in.)

American University of Beirut

Donation of Dr Samir Saleeby