



**The Man in the Green Vest**

c. 1964

Oil on canvas

40 x 30 cm (15.7 x 11.8 in.)

Courtesy Audi Foundation and Mrs Amal Traboulsi



# ELIE KANAAN

## 1926-2009

### The tailor of color

Elie Kanaan was born in Lebanon in 1926 and began to paint as an amateur towards the end of his adolescence. His artistic career took flight in great part thanks to the Lebanese ambassador to UNESCO, Charles Ammoun, who showed great enthusiasm for Kanaan's paintings, and helped organize his first exhibition at the French Cultural Center in 1950. Its success convinced Kanaan to dedicate himself fully to painting. Almost sixty years later, he still hesitated to admit to his talent, believing an artist to be first and foremost an artisan who must remain humble: «I am a worker just like everyone else, like those who work with steel or stone.»

Renowned for the power of his colors, Kanaan also compared himself to a jeweler – he believed «the colors are like the facets of a gemstone.» Just like jewelers fashion diamonds and rubies, he used lines and shapes to bring out colors and light. Unsurprisingly, Kanaan's favorite artists were the Fauvists, whose strong, expressive, and free colors he admired.

According to his moods, colors will express joy, anguish, melancholy, or become calls to meditation...

To be closer to his role models, Kanaan chose Paris for formal art studies. Thanks to a scholarship, he enrolled at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière at the end of the nineteen-fifties. The Parisian light and atmosphere dramatically changed his conception of art. Faced with Paris's grey weather – a sharp contrast to Lebanon's vivid colors – he unearthed blues, browns and reds hidden beneath the monotonous veil of the city. He learned to appreciate the dull atmosphere; indeed, it is in winter and in the shadow of a rainy day that he felt most able to give himself fully to painting, entering a trance in order to dance with color. According to his moods, colors will express joy, anguish, melancholy, or become calls to meditation...

Kanaan remained loyal to his Lebanese roots. He felt that «for an artist, it is difficult to adjust to the blinding light of Lebanon,» but still challenged himself to paint there. He began a successful career in his native country while handing on his passion for art to younger generations, university as well as high school students. Brush in hand, Kanaan passed away in Beirut in 2009.





**The Mediterranean**  
c. 1994  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 80 cm (39.4 x 31.5 in.)  
Ramzi and Afaf Saïdi Collection





**The Beacons of Dinar**

c. 1997

Oil on canvas

100 x 100 cm (39.4 x 39.4 in.)

Courtesy Audi Foundation and Mrs Amal Traboulsi





**Christmas of the Poor**

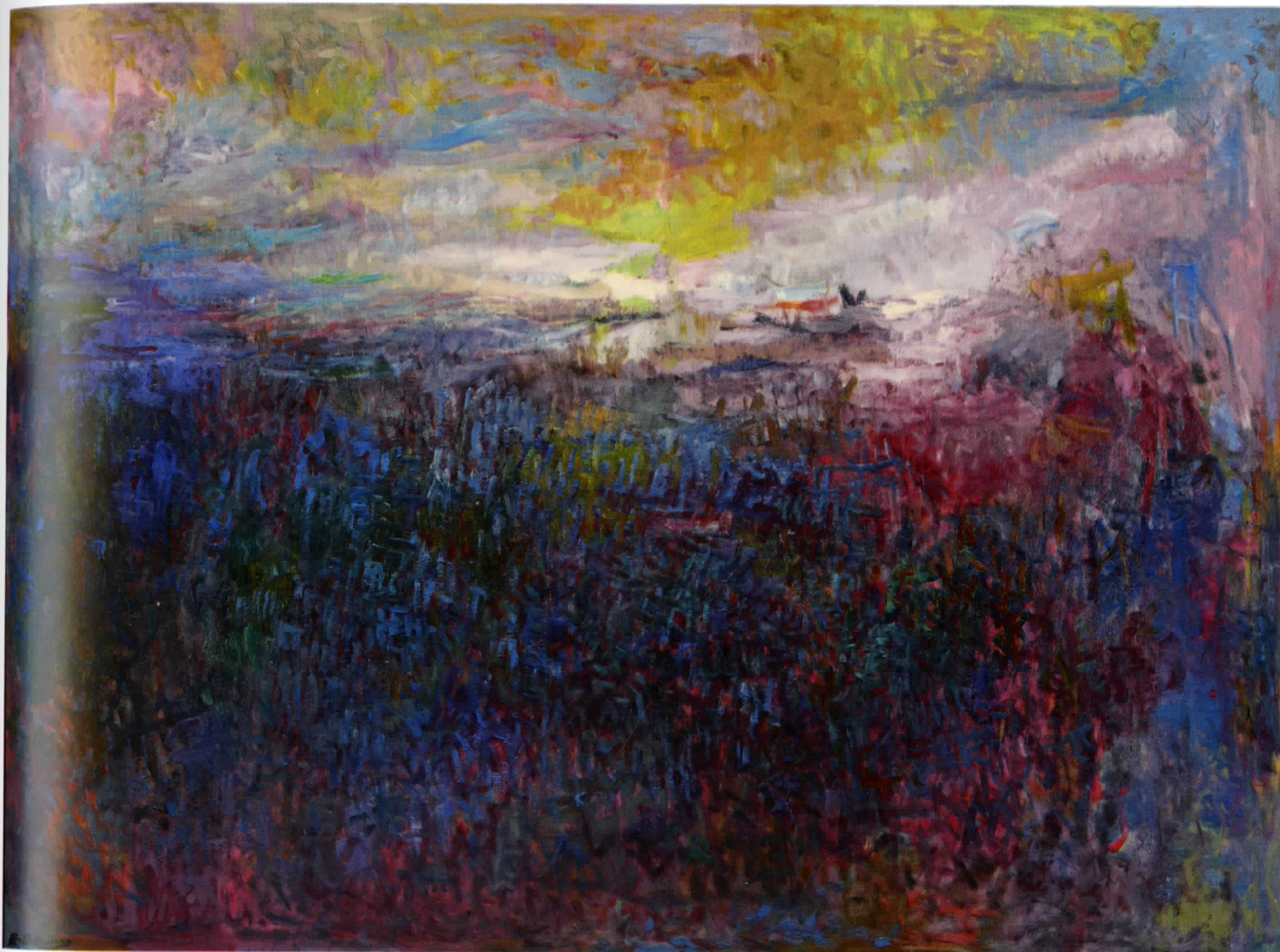
c. 1970

Oil on canvas

100 x 80 cm (39.4 x 31.5 in.)

Courtesy Audi Foundation and Mrs Amal Troubsi





## EXHIBITIONS AND PRIZES

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*Kanaan exhibited at the Sursock Museum's Salons in the sixties. He received the Zalfa Chamoun Prize from the Lebanese Ministry of Education (1956), the Dante Alighieri prize (1957), the first prize from the Lebanese President (1968 and 1974), the painting prize at the 1957 Spring Salon, UNESCO prizes in 1958 and 1966 in Beirut, the Prix Vendôme and the prize of the TMA Grand Concours in 1967. His solo exhibitions took place in Beirut, Lausanne and Paris. Kanaan also took part in group exhibitions, fairs and biennales around the world, from Europe to the Middle East to America. A retrospective of his works took place at the Villa Audi in Beirut in 2011.*

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**Evening Dress**

**c. 2007**

Oil on canvas

120 x 160 cm (47.2 x 63 in.)

Courtesy Audi Foundation and Mrs Amal Traboulsi