



**Girl with Gramophone**  
Date unknown  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 76 cm (39.4 x 29.9 in.)  
Private collection, Beirut



# CÉSAR GEMAYEL

## 1898-1958

### Lebanese impressions, spontaneous expressions

Although César Gemayel is recognized today as one of the founding fathers of Lebanese painting, he actually became an artist almost by accident. The story goes it was the painter Khalil Saleeby who discovered Gemayel – then a pharmacy student at the American University of Beirut – and encouraged him to abandon his studies for the arts. Born in 1898 to a modest family in Ain el Touffaha, near Bickfaya, Gemayel would never qualify as a pharmacist.

A few years in Paris were crucial to his artistic training and the genesis of his work. He arrived in the City of Lights in 1927, having been granted a scholarship, and attended the Académie Julian for three years. This private institution, founded in 1868, had been frequented not only by famous French painters such as Henri Matisse, Edouard Vuillard, André Derain and Pierre Bonnard, but also by many expatriates such as Gibran Khalil Gibran.

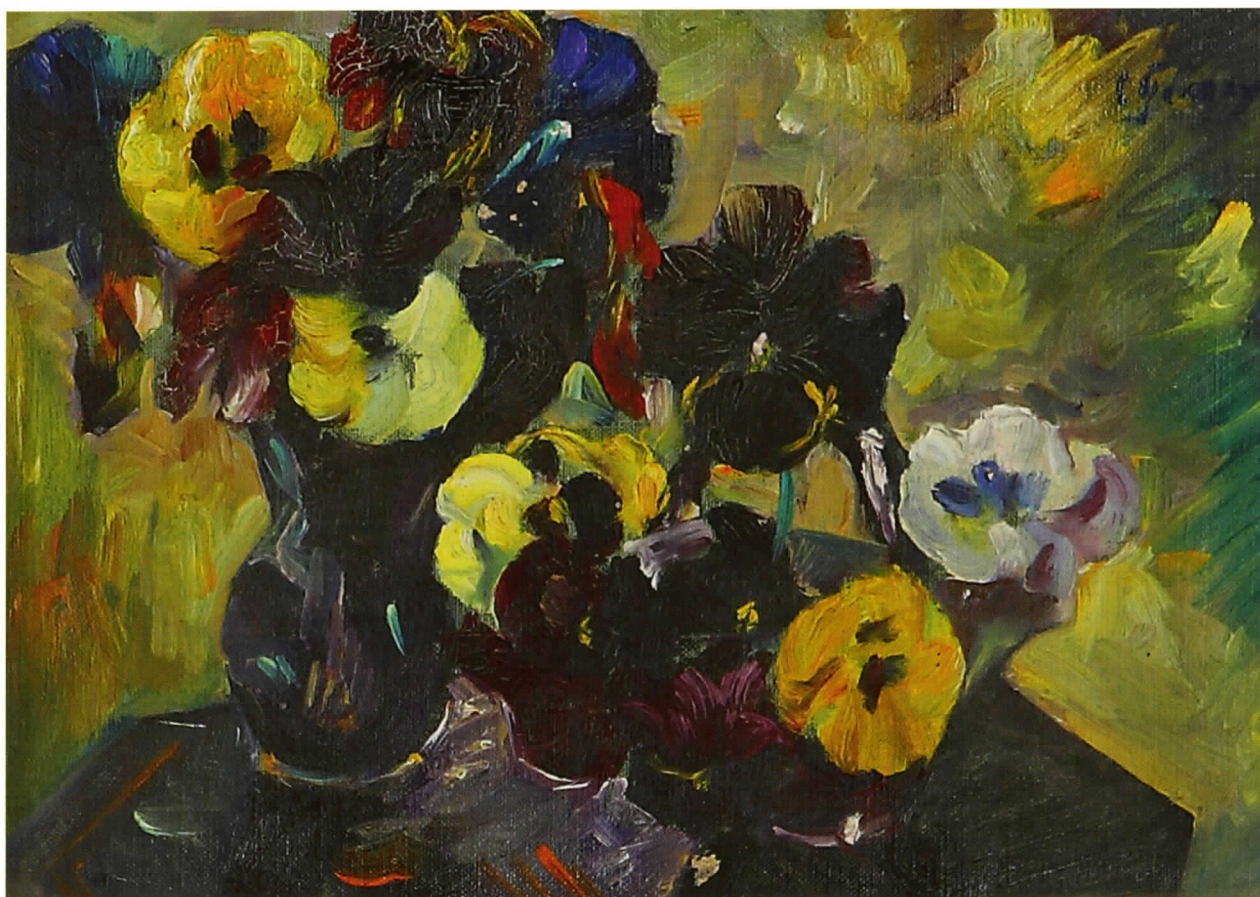
In Paris, Gemayel was exposed to styles that almost no other Lebanese painter had adhered to so far: Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, and Modernism in its wider sense. He decided to chart his own course and diverged from both pure academic painting, and from the style of Saleeby whom he had initially emulated. Instead, he moved towards the tones and gestures of Fauvism, probably inspired by his Parisian contemporaries such as Maurice de Vlaminck. Nevertheless, Gemayel, who would often be compared to Auguste Renoir, counted among his eclectic influences not only the Impressionists, but also the Grand Style of Joshua Reynolds, the Rococo of François Boucher, and even Jean-Paul Laurens, one of the last defenders of the French academic style.

One is struck by his works' delicate colors: the red of the tiles, the green of the pines, the brown of the tree trunks and the multiple nuances of flowers, bathing in a vibrant light characteristic of the Lebanese atmosphere.

Gemayel received many accolades in Paris, winning a prize in the Colonial Exhibition of 1931. Nevertheless, he decided to return to Lebanon. He became part of a generation of painters who linked different worlds (the Orient and the Occident), different eras (the French Mandate and Lebanese independence) and different conceptions of art (the classical, academic, heritage as well as avant-garde movements). Gemayel's paintings truly defy classification. He strayed away from the nineteenth-century tradition of Lebanese religious paintings, and refused to fully adhere to any given trend, in order to forge his own style in watercolor, pastel, pencil and oil. His main subject of interest remained Lebanon, its landscapes and society, although he occasionally delved into nudes and historical scenes such as *The battle of Anjar*. With great spontaneity, he painted villages, mountains and genre scenes, as well as tender and poetic portraits. In his more

sensual paintings, one can feel the love, indeed, the true passion he devoted to his subjects. His portraits are too expressive to be considered academic, his landscapes too detailed to be Impressionist. One is struck by his works' delicate colors: the red of the tiles, the green of the pines, the brown of the tree trunks and the multiple nuances of the flowers, bathing in a vibrant light characteristic of the Lebanese atmosphere.

Gemayel exhibited regularly and became a prominent figure in Lebanese artistic circles. He participated in exhibitions at the Lebanese Parliament between 1936 and 1942, and was decorated by the Order of Cedar. He left his mark on future generations by co-founding with Alexis Boutros the school of painting at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA), where he imparted his knowledge to many generations of students. A lifelong bachelor, Gemayel died after a heart attack in 1958. Seven years later, Beirut's Sursock Museum incorporated an homage to his work in its fifth Salon d'Automne, and in 1974, the Lebanese postal service dedicated to him a stamp bearing his effigy.



**Les pensées**

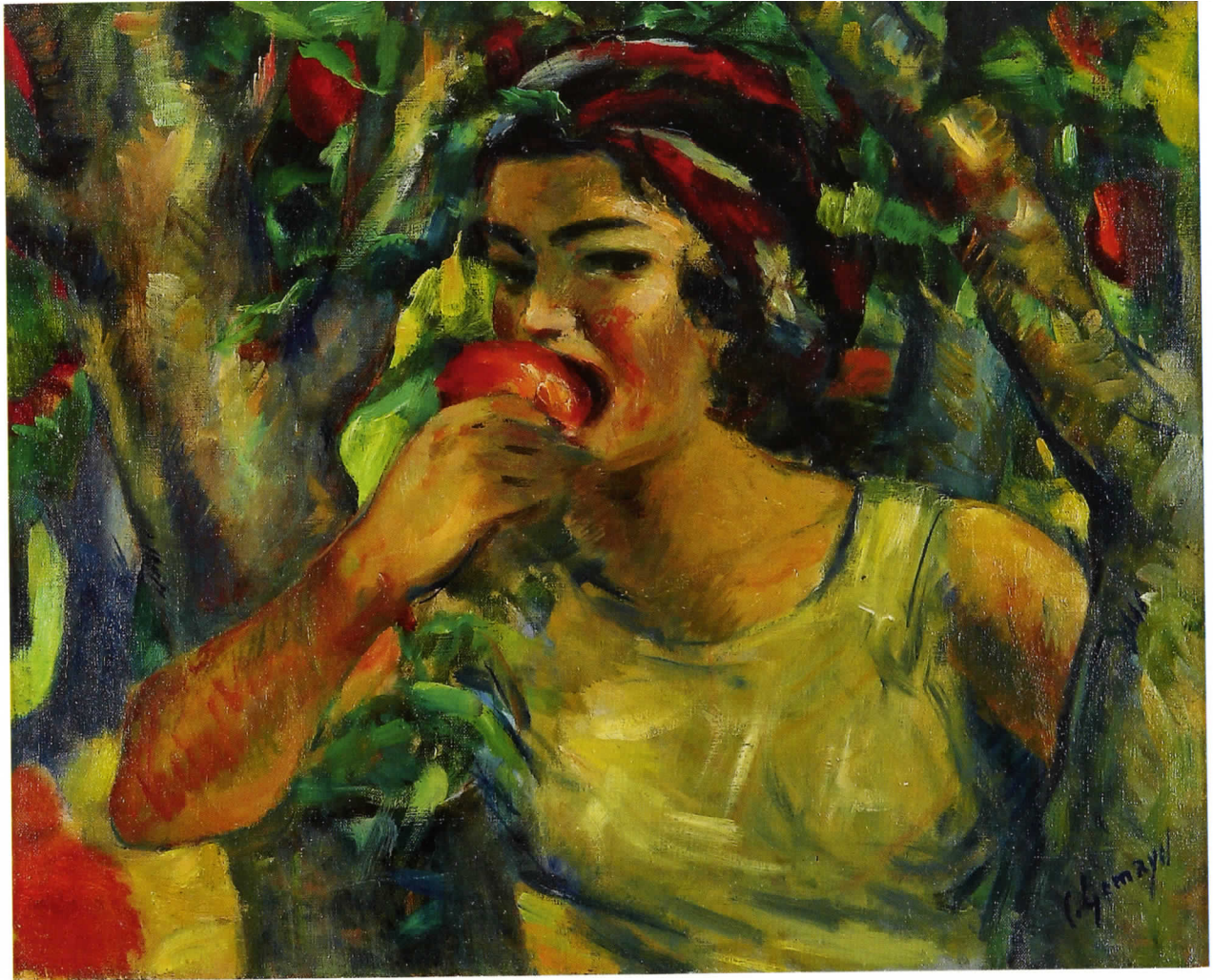
c. 1945

Oil on canvas

23.5 x 33.5 cm (9.3 x 13.2 in.)

Naji and Hoda Skaff Collection





1



2

**In the Garden** 1

1944

Oil on canvas

50 x 60 cm (19.7 x 23.6 in.)

Joseph Faloughi Collection

**Apples** 2

1948

Oil on canvas

50 x 60 cm (19.7 x 23.6 in.)

Joseph Faloughi Collection





**Dabke**

Date unknown

Oil on canvas

53 x 64 cm (20.9 x 25.2 in.)

Albert and Hiyam Khoury Collection





**The Three Bathers**

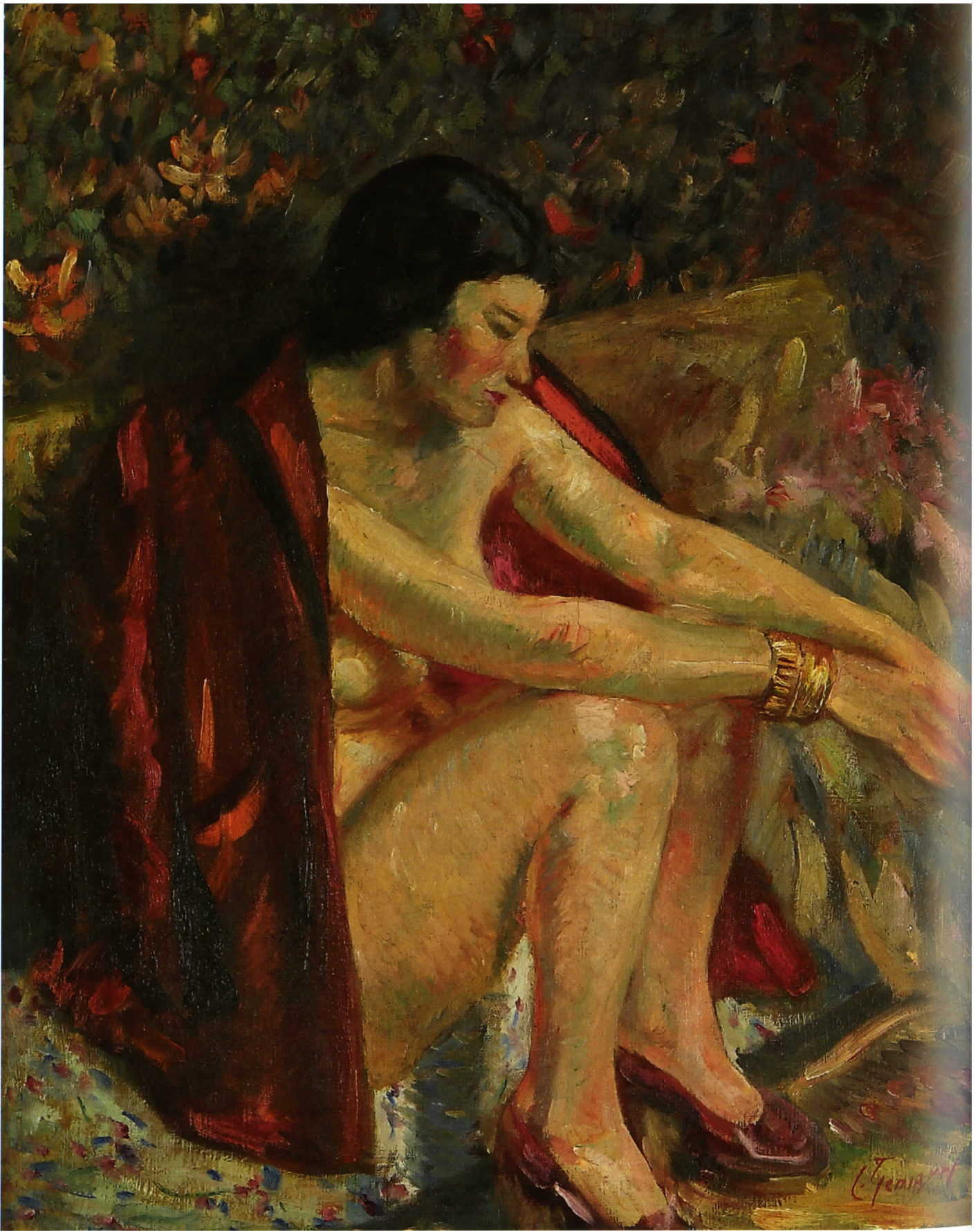
1948

Oil on canvas

31 x 40 cm (12.2 x 15.7 in.)

Private collection, Beirut





**The Courtesan**

c. 1943

Oil on canvas

64 x 50 cm (25.2 x 19.7 in.)

Naji and Hoda Skaff Collection





Flowers

Date unknown

Oil on canvas

79 x 64.5 cm (31.1 x 25.4 in.)

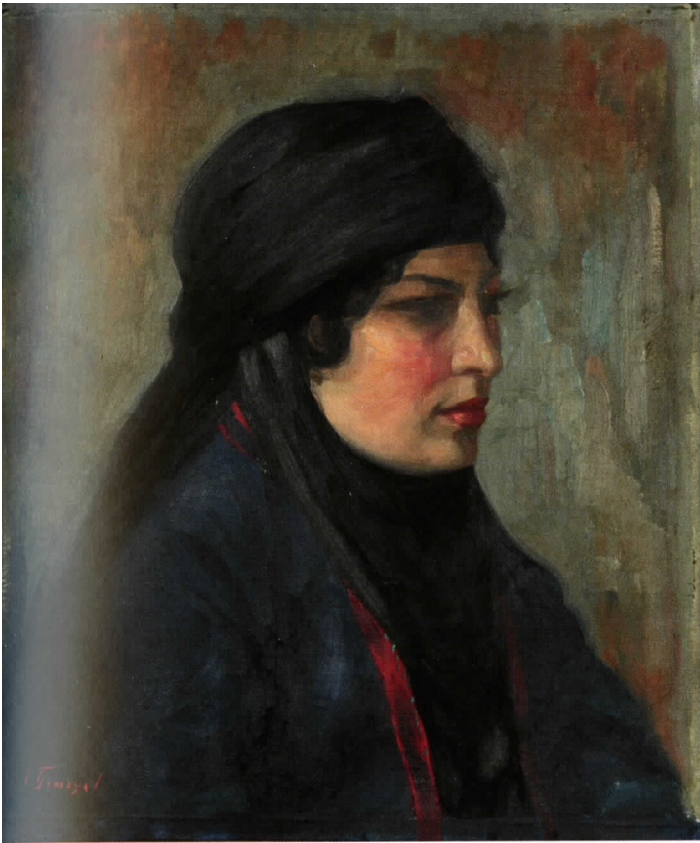
Private collection, Beirut



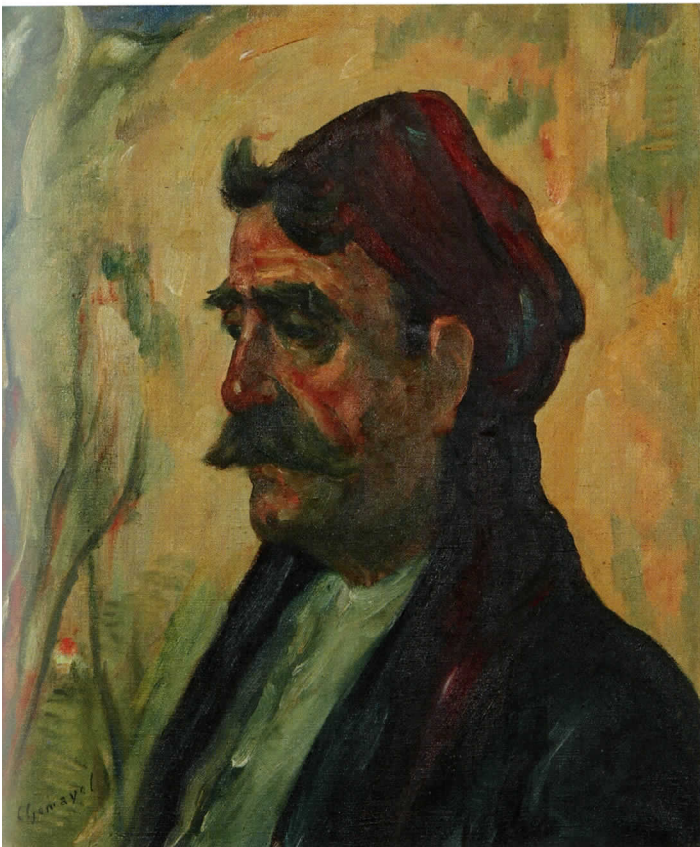


Lady in Fur  
1950  
Oil on canvas  
64 x 53 cm (25.2 x 20.9 in.)  
Joseph Faloughi Collection





1



2

**Bedouin** 1

**Date unknown**

Oil on canvas

41 x 31 cm (16.1 x 12.2 in.)

Hélène Achkar Collection

**Bou Dib el Achkar** 2

**Date unknown**

Oil on canvas

60 x 50 cm (23.6 x 19.7 in.)

Emir Jihad and Nadia Abillama Collection