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AUB Unveils Paintings by Lebanese Artist Khalil Saleeby, Inaugurates New Gallery Space

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The American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanon's leading liberal arts university, inaugurated its new gallery space, the AUB Art Gallery, with the first major public exhibition of the works of influential Lebanese artist Khalil Saleeby (1870-1928), one of the founders of modern art in the Arab world, a press release said Monday.

The inaugural exhibition, which was previewed by guests at a private view held at the weekend, opens to the public on June 12, 2012 and runs until November 2012.

The exhibition is drawn from an important private collection of Lebanese art that was donated to AUB earlier this year.

Saleeby, who influenced the development of modern art in Lebanon, studied, worked and exhibited in Edinburgh, Paris, USA and Lebanon and is known for his portraits and interest in the human form. Four previously unseen paintings from the collection were recently selected for inclusion in the exhibition "Le Corps Découvert," currently on view at l'Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris until mid-July, the release added.

The exhibition in Beirut is the first time that such a large and comprehensive showcase of Saleeby's work has been made available to Lebanese and international audiences. It features more than 30 canvases and was curated by Octavian Esanu, who was recently appointed by AUB as its first curator.

"From an art history perspective, the life and work of Khalil Saleeby sketches in outline a crucial phase in the late 19th and early 20th century development of art in Lebanon," said Esanu. "Saleeby belongs to that first generation of painters who most substantially contributed to the emergence of art as a new occupation in this country."

Attending the gallery opening at the weekend were a number of dignitaries and VIP guests of the university including George Corm, university professor and former minister who is the grandson of the nineteenth century Lebanese painter Daoud Corm and son of Georges Corm, also a painter.

Corm commented on the exhibition, saying "This is a great and significant event for Lebanon. My father was a painter and he tried all his life to create a fine arts museum in Beirut, but he couldn't. I think that now, with this very bold and courageous initiative from AUB, this is a great plus to preserve the national cultural patrimony of Lebanon. I don't think one could dream of a better location and supporter to promote Lebanese paintings than AUB, which is also placing great emphasis on developing fine art education in Lebanon."

The AUB Art Gallery will host exhibitions of art from the region, taking as its point of departure the recently acquired collection of leading Lebanese artists of the early and mid-20th century. The gallery is a

temporary space created in anticipation of a major new museum of art at the university. Due for completion by 2020, it will be named the Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Museum, in honor of the parents of the donor, Dr. Samir Saleeby.

AUB President Peter Dorman said, “Following our recent loan of paintings to Paris, it gives me great pleasure to see the work of Khalil Saleeby being made available to the wider public here in Beirut. This unique collection forms such an important part of Lebanon’s cultural heritage, and AUB has made a major commitment to preserving and promoting it for the benefit of future generations. This is part of a long-term plan to create a home for modern and contemporary art on the campus of AUB. We are extremely grateful to Dr. Samir Saleeby for his visionary gift.”

AUB is also grateful for the sponsorship and support of Byblos Bank, Keystone Holding Group, UPS, Arope Insurance, Crowne Plaza and Executive magazine.

Representing Byblos Bank, the principal patron and sponsor of the event, Semaan Bassil, vice-chairman and general manager, said, “Byblos Bank is committed to continuously promote Lebanon’s cultural heritage. This special exhibition is one of many other future initiatives in which AUB and Byblos Bank will partner.”

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