

Exhibition celebrates David Kurani's artwork and his 50 years of service

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In celebration of artist David Kurani's 50 years of service to AUB and the Lebanese art scene, AUB Art Galleries and Collections launched the "David Kurani: Reality, Composed" exhibition. Curated by art history students Katharine Gordon and Lama El Khatib, the exhibition displays the body of work that Kurani has produced throughout his career.

The art is displayed in a way that highlights the connection between Kurani's work—as an art student, practicing artist, art educator, set and costume designer, and stage director—and key moments in the history of AUB and Lebanon.

The opening of the exhibition took place on March 28 at AUB's Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Museum. It was attended by Kurani's friends, family, and colleagues; AUB faculty, staff, and students; as well as art enthusiasts and others who are interested in Kurani's work.

AUB President Fadlo R. Khuri, Director of the AUB Art Collections and Galleries Rico Franses, the artist David Kurani, as well as the curators of the exhibition, spoke at the opening event. The speeches were followed by a live musical performance of a piece that Kurani had written for the occasion.

Khuri commented on the importance of supporting the arts and humanities, saying, "From my perspective, I think it is very important that we support the arts and humanities through thick and thin. In particular, the fine arts are the easiest thing for societies to decide, under any

economic and political or security pressure, that we can do without. But this is the very heart and soul of a healthy society." He added that AUB's commitment manifests in its support for fine arts and the humanities, saying, "Before we invest in future endeavors in the fine arts, we have to recognize the enduring excellence of the people who kept the torch alive, like David Kurani."

David Kurani was born in the US and grew up in Beirut, Lebanon. His father was AUB's first registrar and chairman of the Education Department. "The university has always been my life, ever since I came here in 1947 at the age of two and a half. I've played in the university, I grew up in the university, and then I went to the university, before going off to my training in England," said Kurani. In addition to being involved with fine arts from a young age, which continued during his student years, Kurani also studied and worked in theater. He returned to Lebanon in 1968, combining his interests by teaching art and theater at AUB while also practicing both.

In his comment about the exhibition Kurani expressed his wish that the honoring would be thought of as "honoring all those who stayed and were faithful and kept the university alive, and running, and being a beacon of hope as well as a citadel of education during the war."

Kurani's years of dedication and service to AUB and the Fine Arts and Art History Department have influenced generations of students and professors alike, as he played a major role in the re-launching and continuation of the department.

In his comment, Franses said that Kurani has been a major contributor to the cultural scene in Lebanon for all of his life.

"David has done extraordinary service to AUB, and for the arts. He has kept the arts going for literally over fifty years. For many of those years, during the war, he was the only person who actually kept the arts alive at

AUB," said Franses. "David's been a prolific painter; he's worked in art, in painting and in theater, for all his life. And this is a chance to see his artworks over that long period, and to see his development, and to see really from an academic perspective what kind of work he's done, and to see how that fits into the cultural history of Lebanon."

In their curatorial statement, students Gordon and El Khatib write, "This exhibition engages with these dual passions, theatre and painting, which have run in parallel throughout Kurani's life. Rather than exhibiting them as a binary, the exhibition will highlight how the two activities merge and interplay in Kurani's oeuvre."

They continue, "Tracing these moments, the exhibition will attempt to capture the impact that Kurani's contributions have had at AUB, and celebrate his dedication to the institutions and figures he has encountered at AUB and abroad. Simultaneously, the exhibition will highlight his most accomplished works while attempting to both question and understand his passion for composing reality within the broader context of Lebanese modern art."

"David Kurani: Reality, Composed" continues until September 1, 2018 (Tues. – Sat., 12:00 – 6:00 pm) at the Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Museum, at the off-campus student dorms on Sidani Street in Hamra, presenting watercolors, set designs, posters and drawings.