

First Comprehensive Exhibition of Postwar Lebanese Art at AU Museum | American University Washington DC

Maggie Barrett April 1, 2010

Convergence: New Art from Lebanon, the first comprehensive North American exhibition of art made in the aftermath of that country's tumultuous civil war (1975-1990), opens Tuesday, April 6, at the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center in Washington, D.C. It continues through Sunday, May 16.



Marwan Sahmarani's *Nights' Hunter*.

The exhibition includes nearly 50 paintings, sculptures, installations, photographs and media-based art by 29 artists—more than a third of them women—based primarily in Beirut. Reflecting the memories, hopes, dreams and political and religious realities of a culture seeking to reclaim itself, the exhibition introduces Americans to the vitality and volatility of today's art from Lebanon.

Painted images on view range from Ayman Baalbaki's giant, wrapped heads to Chaouki Chamoun's geometric fusions and desert-scapes, to Nabil Nahas's powerful, distressed "Cedars." Installation artist Nadim Karam contributes a 16-foot high kinetic tableau of a man waving at aircraft under clouds. This metal work, created especially for the Washington show, alludes to lives frequently marred by war but also grows out of the artist's plans for a soaring, cloud-like garden to be mounted on poles high above a

city.

Karam, who has also exhibited outdoor pieces in London, Sydney, and Prague, will speak about his work at 7:30 pm on Thursday, April 8, in the Katzen's Abramson Family Recital Hall. The event is free and open to the public.

Other installations in the show buck stereotypes—"Sit Down Please," Mohammed Rawas's ensemble of chairs, invites viewers to look at provocative photos of a woman with Arabic texts—or indicate displacement, such as Mouna Bassili Sehnaoui's sad figures drawn onto disembodied articles of clothing. Irony infuses Nada Sehnaoui's elegant photographic grid of multiple views of rubble.

The show, which features video art and digital animation among many diverse works, has been coselected by AU Museum director/curator Jack Rasmussen and Amal Traboulsi, a well known curator in Lebanon and the Middle East.

Presented under the patronage of H.E. Mr. Antoine Chedid, Ambassador of Lebanon to the United States and organized by APEAL (the Association for the Promotion and Exhibition of the Arts in Lebanon), a non-governmental organization, this initiative is privately funded through the generosity of several Lebanese and international sponsors.

The American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center is open from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. Admission is free. For more information, call 202-885-ARTS (2787).