



**AMERICAN  
UNIVERSITY  
OF BEIRUT**

**OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**The American University of Beirut announces the establishment  
of the Rada and Mutaz Sawaf Center for Arab Comics Studies**

The American University of Beirut (AUB) announced the establishment of the Rada and Mutaz Sawaf Center for Arab Comics Studies on November 18, 2022. The mission of the new center is to research, teach, and promote comics from the Arab world and preserve their heritage, with the aim of embracing this medium and its canons as an integral feature of contemporary Arab art, placing it on a global stage. As part of its mission, the center will organize the prestigious annual pan-Arab Mahmoud Kahil Awards, now in its eighth year, honoring, showcasing, and promoting talents from the region to a wide audience, through the launch of a book, exhibition, and the award ceremony.

The Rada and Mutaz Sawaf Center for Arab Comics Studies at AUB is being established through a generous \$5 million irrevocable trust established by AUB alumnus and trustee Mutaz Sawaf (BArch '74) and his wife Rada Sawaf, that will provide perpetual financial support for the center. It will be a research hub for the study and teaching of this Arab cultural heritage, producing referential resources and supporting historical and analytical studies and documentation of past and present comics in the Arab world.

“Comics and graphic novels are among the most powerful new media of expression of the last 100 years or so,” said AUB President Fadlo Khuri. “Under Professor Lina Ghaibeh’s leadership, the American University of Beirut has become seriously engaged in studying and exhibiting this phenomenon. Mutaz and Rada Sawaf’s generous support and guidance has resulted in a transformative gift, and the Center for Arab Comics Studies at AUB is now a most impressive reality. It is fitting that Trustee Sawaf’s lifelong passion for and expertise in cartoons and comics culminates in the establishment of this powerful,

first-of-its-kind center at his alma mater, where we are confident Lina’s astute leadership will position us on the global map of academic comic book programs.”

Arab comics, cartoons, and illustrations have been enjoyed by generations in the Arab world. They were especially popular in the 1960s and 1970s when they reached “an unprecedented high level in both quality and productions,” says Associate Professor of Design Lina Ghaibeh, who teaches animation, illustration, and comics at AUB. The medium has witnessed a resurgent growth in recent years particularly in the work that is being created for adults. Several regional festivals dedicated to this art have been running annually such as the Festival International de la Bande Dessinée d’Alger (FIBDA), Cairo Comix in Egypt, and the Tunisian Tazarka. There has also been an increased interest in the history of Arab comics internationally. Part of the credit for the increased interest is due to the efforts of Ghaibeh and her colleagues, and the Mutaz and Rada Sawaf Arab Comics Initiative, which was established at the American University of Beirut in 2014.

A generous philanthropist who has funded many initiatives at the university, Sawaf is an accomplished cartoonist and obtained a certification in animation from the Bob Godfrey Studio, London in 1975. He has a soft place in his heart for Arab comics. “Since my early school years at IC and later, at AUB, I have visited the AUB library to hunt for old books about comics, artists, etc. It was my early passion to establish an award to promote Arab comics at AUB,” says Sawaf. “I’ve studied animation and architecture and realize that working in comics in the Arab world won’t pay your bills, so I concentrated on architecture as my late father advised me to do. He was right, but I am right about the importance of Arab comics in Arab countries. I hope that this center will fulfill my – and my wife, Rada’s – dream.”

“The establishment of this center will allow us to do many of the things we have dreamed about – and that are so important – to ensure that the rich heritage of Arab comics is researched, preserved, and shared and to support and promote current and emerging artists,” says Ghaibeh. Center activities will also include providing an accessible repository of the rich heritage of Arab comics through special library collections and archives; building programs and teaching courses on comics; and organizing conferences, awards, exhibitions, workshops, lectures, and other events pertaining to Arab comics in particular, and the field of comics in general. By producing and encouraging research on regional comics, the center seeks to offer alternative narratives from and about the region.

“Trustee Mutaz and his wife, Rada, have been true partners of AUB for many years,” commented Chairman of the AUB Board of Trustees Philip S. Khoury. “Their impact can

be felt throughout our university and at the medical center. I know this center is very dear to Mutaz's heart, which makes it even more meaningful for all of us.”

**ENDS**

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**Note to Editors**

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 800 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 8000 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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